

**JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH  
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA  
ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY**

**BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

**Horror Atmosphere in E. A. Poe's stories**

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Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk a literatura – Francouzský jazyk a literatura

Ročník: 3.

2014

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## **PODĚKOVÁNÍ**

Ráda bych poděkovala vedoucí mé bakalářské práce, paní PhDr. Marianě Machové, PhD., za rady a vedení při tvorbě této práce.

## **ANOTACE**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je popsat prostředky, kterými Edgar Allan Poe vytváří hororovou atmosféru ve svých povídkách. První část práce pojednává o tématech, tedy těch nejzjevnějších prostředcích, které Poe užívá. Popisovaná jsou čtyři hlavní témata, která se v povídkách vyskytují nejčastěji a mají největší účinek na čtenáře. V druhé části se práce zabývá umístěním, zasazením děje. Třetí a poslední část práce je zaměřená na styl vyprávění.

## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this bachelor thesis is to describe the means Edgar Allan Poe uses to create the atmosphere of horror in his short stories. The first part of the thesis deals with themes as the most obvious of the means that Poe employs. The themes analyzed in this chapter recur frequently in the stories and have the most powerful impact on the reader. The second part of the thesis focuses on the setting and in the third and final part the narrative style is discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

'The horror stories of Edgar Allan Poe,' is a phrase that is familiar to a great number of people regardless their age or profession. The reason is that the stories leave a mark on the reader, they are remembered for their powerful and unique impact which is provoked by singular atmosphere – the horror atmosphere. The aim of this thesis is to reveal how this atmosphere is created and what the components that comprise it are.

The first part of the thesis discusses the themes - the most prominent components that form the horror atmosphere. The chapter does not cover all the frightful themes Poe benefits from; I have chosen to examine only four of them – those which appear most frequently and/or which have the most impressive impact on the reader: death, madness, violence, and the supernatural. There exists a common denominator of the manner in which Poe utilises these four themes; it is the fact that they breach the normal, rational order which is usually upheld.

In the second chapter, the setting of the tales is being explored. The descriptions of the surroundings and its ambience and of the rooms and mansions in which the stories take place greatly amplify the potential of the atmosphere, for they influence the reader, draw him into the story, and thus considerably heighten the effect of the atmosphere because the reader experiences more vividly the incidents of the tale.

The last part of the thesis details on Poe's narrative style. More precisely, this chapter concerns those components of Poe's narrative style that co-create and intensify the horror atmosphere. Poe is known for his work with language which he aimed at creating a singular effect. The effect of a horror story ought to be fear, accordingly, I have focused my attention on those strategies that encourage this reaction in the reader.

## 2. The Means for Creating the Horror Atmosphere

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most disputed American writers, or perhaps one of the most disputed authors in general. Reading through various works, papers, and articles (professional and non-professional) one can easily discover the inconsistency in the opinions concerning this author. There are people who admire him and people who despise him, those who appreciate his work only because they think they ought to and others who disparage his achievements for the same reason, there are people who look down upon him for the life he led, people who recognise him only as a critic, people who condemn his indulgence in death and all perverted, and many others with different opinions concerning the figure of Poe and his work. Those who have honestly devoted their time to examine Poe's stories, regardless if they are professionals from literary circles or ordinary readers, are generally consistent in the conviction that "as a craftsman and master manipulator of words he must be acknowledged as a genius of the very first rank" (Fletcher 5). All the publications seem to repeat the same statement: the stories that Poe composes "appear seamless and spontaneous" (5) but they are in fact elaborate, constructed with great diligence. The effort with which Poe constructed his works was aimed at a single goal: creating an effect. This writer concentrates on impressing the reader, on provoking whatever impact he strives for - he is "disinterested in presenting a moral message" (107) and some people go as far as to claim and believe that he completely liberated his works from meaning (Carton 133). Fascinated by the elaborateness of Poe's works, I have decided to examine the manner in which he utilises his craftsmanship to create an atmosphere of horror.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary states, 'horror,' as an adjective, stands for: "calculated to inspire feelings of dread or horror" – accordingly, the horror stories are stories that focus on terrifying the reader. I have chosen nineteen tales that are generally considered as fear-arousing and I analyzed the methods, means, and strategies Poe exploits in order to create an atmosphere of horror and thus attain the desired effect – fright. The individual components which form that atmosphere are manifold and it is not always easy to pinpoint them precisely. However, I have come to the conclusion that there are three major means of creating the horror atmosphere: the theme, the setting, and the narrative style. These devices, that I will explore more closely, are the most evident and effective means that one can discover in the horror



tales. Nevertheless, there are also other, not so conspicuous strategies which amplify the effect of the atmosphere like the description of the effects that fear has on the characters, on their psyche and body. And there can be found even less noticeable components that constitute the atmosphere, for "careful reading reveals admirable and clever method in Poe's handling of materials generally regarded as mere decoration" (Fisher 356). It is impossible to cover all the methods and I shall therefore deal solely with the three major means.

## **2. 1. Themes**

The theme is most frequently described as the single, central topic of a story; that which is the most important and prominent. However, a tale can and usually does contain several themes which vary in their importance. It is possible, thus, that a theme that in one case predominates the whole narrative will in another be employed only marginally. This also applies to the themes of Poe's stories that I am about to analyse; though they are the most prominent, generally speaking, they do not always prevail in the story, sometimes they only function as an element which intensifies the atmosphere based on the effect created by another theme. Whether main and fundamental or marginal, the themes are essential for the overall as well as for the immediate atmosphere.

The theme of death, the theme of madness, the theme of violence, and the theme of the supernatural are those which in the majority of cases serve in Poe's tales as the base of the atmosphere of horror. Regarding their semantic content, these four themes differ greatly; and yet they have the same effect on the reader - they excite anxiety, dread, and terror. The reason of this similitude is perversion. Poe makes use of them in a way as to manifest this one particular shared component. What is meant by perversion as a part of the theme's meaning is the phenomenon in its general sense; no sexual undertone, only a term which describes anything that is different from what is regarded as usual, normal, natural. This unnaturalness is what frightens the reader, for people tend to be afraid of that which violates, which goes against the natural order of things; "the principle of horror itself seems to imply that the horrific is that which suddenly interrupts or shatters the [. . .] order of the universe" (Davidson 133).

Death may be perverted in various ways; the one which Poe seems to prefer is the act of murder. Appropriate choice, for one can hardly imagine a breach of order more grave than a death of a living being by the decision of another living being. This decision is normally regarded as belonging to the man himself or God. The murderer thus proclaims by his action that he or she is superior to other men and has therefore the authority to decide about other people's lives. As far as madness is concerned, the fear is easily understandable; a perverted mind is disturbed, unpredictable. Madmen often incline to violence and other deeds beyond the comprehension of sane people, their behaviour and thinking is unnatural and therefore fear-arousing. Violence, which is usually prefigured by anger, is an immoderate reaction to some situation. The impact of this perverted behaviour is amplified by the uncontrollability and impetuosity of the individual who is reacting. The last theme I shall examine is that of supernatural. The notion by itself betrays the perversion – the unnaturalness. The supernatural describes all that is abnormal, unearthly, be it an event or a being, it is something which does not adhere to natural order and is therefore terrifying.

These four themes are those which characterise Poe's short horror stories and their atmosphere. Reading any of those tales, one will certainly find death, madness, violence, or supernatural as the foundation of the atmosphere that provokes dread.

### **2. 1. 1. Death**

Death is the theme which pervades Poe's work. One can hardly find a tale (maybe even a poem) which does not contain, allude to or is marked in some other way by death. Particularly, there is not a single story from those I analyzed that would be untouched, unaffected by it. It is thus certain that it is a theme of a particular significance and importance. Interested, fascinated or obsessed, Poe examines the theme of death as well as its effects and its influence. However, the tales are not essays on the subject, they are manifestations; the author does not explain or depict what he wants to convey, he hints and lets the reader contemplate and find the answers for himself. What I mean to say is that Poe does not directly ponder over death, instead he uses it in such a way as to produce a certain effect which makes the reader discover something about the subject.

"What are readers most afraid of? One can hear Poe ask himself; and his most effective literary creations indicate that he believed it is the subject of death" (Fletcher 97). Indeed, death is indubitably the most frequent of the thematic means intended to arouse fear. Death in itself, "the end of life, and exclusion from eternal; in a word, finality and nothingness" (109), is generally considered as a frightening and disturbing phenomenon of mysterious character; therefore a material scary enough to create a horror story. Nevertheless, there are people who do not fear death, people who perceive it as inevitable but not fearful, and people who would welcome it for multiple reasons. Being one of those individuals or being aware of their existence or simply wanting to intensify the force of the theme as much as possible, Poe does not let his characters ordinarily die or encounter death in its peaceful and mild form; he chooses the most spine-chilling instances for the reader to deal with.

And so it goes that 'the most spine-chilling instances' are those of perverted death. For as I have already hinted, Poe is not very much interested in cases such as passing of old age or heart attack; he tends to ignore death by natural causes. What draws his attention are the cases of unnatural, violent, and otherwise disturbing death. The impact of death perverted in such (or should I say 'in any?') way is much more powerful than that of a death full-stop. There is something about the violation of natural order in death which is appalling, eerie, and which therefore provokes fear in all readership regardless their reconciled or hostile attitude towards death in general.

Going through Poe's stories one finds that it is the perversion in form of murder which the author employs considerably often. The act of killing a man is a ferocious deed considered by majority of people (or rather majority of people mentally stable) as "an experience beyond redemption" (Carton 15), experience which goes against the nature. It is exactly the unnaturalness of such a death which raises the horror in the reader's mind; the idea of a man's life being terminated in an abrupt and violent way by another man (not God or simply the age of the victim) arouses anxiety and dread. The trait which intensifies the effect of the murder is the fact that Poe leaves very limited room for sympathy with the murderers; the cold-blooded, indifferent way in which they perform their appalling act is flesh-creeping. Though they do sometimes realise (consciously or subconsciously) the gravity of their crime and they try to "redeem—to rescue, recover, repent, or report—such an experience" (15) it does not in any way lessen the ghastly impact of their act. In his work *The Rhetoric of American Romance*, Evan

Carton proposes a theory that can be justly applied to many of the stories containing a murder - Carton describes the murder as the criminal's "attempt to detach" from a victim "whose close relation . . . somehow threatens his sense of autonomy"; the outcome of the crime, however, does not meet the expectations of the killer, "his deed . . . not only fails to produce the desired self-extrication but hastens the eternal entanglement with the other" (75).

Another perversion of death distinctive of Poe's work is the premature burial (this can be found in "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Premature Burial," or "Berenice"). Here the unnaturalness is obvious; burying someone who is not dead or being buried while still breathing is without doubt a serious violation of natural order and therefore a source of alarm and fright. From today's perspective the fear of being buried alive seems baseless, with regard to the advancements in health service. However, the sole idea of burying a living person or of being in the position of the one being prematurely buried is dreadful and for some people with claustrophobic predispositions it might be almost (if not thoroughly) unendurable. This motif supplemented with realistic descriptions of the anxious, often chaotic, and panic-stricken sentiments of the victim has a very imposing effect on the reader.

There is one particular theme in Poe's stories which belongs under the heading of 'death' and which functions as one of the powerful thematic means of arousing fear; it is the pestilence (appearing in "King Pest," "Shadow - A Parable," "The Masque of the Red Death"). The 'particular' about pestilence is that by employing this theme the author establishes a whole atmosphere which pervades every page of the narrative. The reader finds himself in the centre of the raging disease. This infection spreads very quickly and kills people in large numbers, in such conditions then death lurks literally behind every corner. The sentiment of not being able to escape one's own fatal destiny which is hauntingly omnipresent, the terrifying desolation of the afflicted areas, the decaying and deformed bodies, the panic and the terror of the people who face such fatality; all these combined form a unique and nightmarish atmosphere which has an impressive impact.

Other instances of death perverted may be found in the tales of Poe: the hypnagogic state ("The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"), death as a result of a natural phenomenon ("A Descent into the Maelström"), death as a consequence of an unfamiliar disease ("Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher"), or for example death by fire ("Metzengerstein"). Such instances are applied less frequently and they are often

not as distinct or emphatic in the story as the murder, the premature burial, and the pestilence. However this fact does not make them less important. They have their role in their story and without them the effect would not be as dense or powerful – marginal or essential they were embedded into the structure of the narrative for a reason and they are significant for the overall impact of the story.

I have chosen a tale of murder to manifest the power of the theme of death. The reason is that, from my point of view, murder is the most unnatural of the instances of perverted death, it is something inhuman and therefore it provokes the most intense impression. It is not solely the barbaric act, often violent and cruel, which forms the terrifying impact; there is also the figure of the murderer. A person who somehow comes to the conclusion that he has more power than a normal man, than a mere mortal – the power to decide over lives of other people. In a way, a murderer is playing God, he is intoxicated with power, and that is what makes him so dangerous as person and so fearsome as character. Poe often intensifies the impression his murderers make by twisting their mentality; this means that they are not in the right (normal) state of mind, there is some mental malfunction like anger or madness which blurs their mind and distorts their vision of reality. Their attitude towards their savage deed is therefore apathetic which renders it even more horrible. Poe's killers tend to betray themselves and expose the crime. This can be probably attributed to the fact that some kind of a remainder of sanity and morality still exists in their corrupted minds and that the culprits thus subconsciously feel that they should be punished for the crime.

The typical, unchallenged example of a tale of murder is "The Tell-Tale Heart." This short story seems to represent properly the artistry of Poe; especially his talent to excite fright on a very limited number of pages and with a very limited number of actions. The story is a first person narrative of a disturbed man who plans out and executes a murder of an old man. The very first paragraph presents to us the figure of the murderer; a nervous and very probably mad person who tries very hard to make it clear to the reader that he is perfectly sane and healthy – with such pushing persistence that he actually proves to be the very opposite. The theme of murder is introduced as early as the second paragraph: "I made up my mind to take the life of the old man" (Poe 555) along with a questionable motive which seems to confirm the mental unstableness of the main character. He insists that the reason behind his resolution to get rid of the old man is his eye, the one which resembles "that of a vulture – a pale blue eye with a film over it" (555) and which makes the narrator feel uncomfortable and frightened.

Thus the murder as the theme and at the same time the mover of the tale is set forth at the beginning and from that moment onward the reader witnesses the execution of the monstrous design. It is this strategy which forms the key part of the horrifying impact of the story. The reader is acquainted with the intention of the murderer, he knows that the narrative is leading up to the violent act and it is exactly this knowledge which creates a chilling tension and provokes a fearsome anticipation while reading the story. We can observe here that Poe is able to establish a thorough atmosphere of fright in just a few lines of text.

The body of the tale constitutes of the murderer's description of the ingenious plan he carries into effect and of the homicide itself. The narrator continues to insist that he is not in any case mad, and he tries to prove it by depicting the way he treated the old man during the period when his plan was already in motion. He boasts about the caution with which he performed his night-to-night action in the course of the seven nights when "it was impossible to do the work" (556) because the eye which put him out of countenance was always closed, and so he did not have the trigger to realize his goal. There is something appalling about the excited tone in which he relates his steps, motions, and thoughts while entering the old man's room; the reader can sense that the character cannot wait for the moment when he will be able to finally end the life of his victim. His opportunity comes on the eighth night. The detailed description of the slow penetration into the room is flesh-creeping. The reader is aware that the moment of the murder is drawing near and the way the narrator prolongs the period of expectance intensifies not only the tension and dread of the ongoing situation but also the effect of the murder itself. The aspect which complements the atmosphere of this prelude to the crime is the nervous and terrified state of the old man: "I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. [. . .] It was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe" (556). Observing through the insane and cruel eye of the narrator the obvious terror of his prey, one feels profound pity for the victim and is horrified by the indifference and arousal betrayed by the thoughts of the main character.

All the action seems slowed-down and prolix until the moment when the murderer opens a "very little crevice in the lantern" (557) and the ray of light falls "upon the vulture eye" (557). Then the action stops altogether. Just as the crime is about to be committed all the movement ceases and there are only the thoughts and the sentiments

of the character: "I grew furious as I gazed upon it. [. . .] it chilled the very marrow in my bones" (557). And then comes the sound: "such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. [. . .] It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage" (557). That sound is what sealed doom of the victim; it terrified the murderer into action. A paragraph later the old man is dead. Even after the reader witnessed the horrible deed the narrator tries once again to prove his alleged sanity this time by describing "the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body" (558). He is wondrously light-hearted and confident as he welcomes the three police officers who come to investigate a shriek which was reported to them. The narrator is "singularly at ease" (559), he has the situation under control, until he hears it: first a ringing and then a distinctive sound, "*a low, dull, quick sound – much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*" (559). Guilty of the crime and disturbed as he is, he does not realize that it is his own traitorous heart which gives him away and not a revengeful corpse. He panics and betrays himself. "I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!" (559).

The theme of murder forms the base of this story. Announced right at the beginning, it clouds up the story in a unique atmosphere of terrifying anticipation. The act itself announces the end of the narrative. For the narrator it is double-edged; he did accomplish his objective and liberated himself of the eye which vexed him so much but he also made the first step to being imprisoned and therefore losing his freedom.

Considering the other instances of the theme of death employed as a mean to excite fear, I could list all the stories and prove that in every single one of them the theme functions in a different way (though the differences might be very subtle in some cases). However, I will only deal with those which are, in my eyes, the most distinctive ones. Such story is "The Pit and the Pendulum." One of the best known of Poe's works, it makes use of the theme of death in a specific way; it presents death as a persistent and omnipresent threat in the form of death sentence. Once being condemned to capital punishment, a man can hardly escape this fatal destiny and so the awareness of the nearing death hangs over the remainder of his life as some gruesome, oppressive fog – this effect is fully exploited in the tale. The near-death experiences of the prisoner seem to rather increase the impression of inevitability of death and therefore they intensify the tense atmosphere of dread set up by the theme of death sentence. The capital punishment is also used in "The Black Cat" or "The Imp of Perverse" - two stories in

which the sentence is brought out right at the beginning for a certain effect; such information forces the reader to pause and think about the cause of the punishment, it evokes a sense of some horrible deed executed in past and introduces eeriness and suspense into the tale.

"The Premature Burial" manifests the force of another instance of death perverted – the live burial; "the most terrific of [. . .] extremes which has ever fallen to the lot of mere mortality" (Poe 666). The narrator of the story does not actually become a victim of such an act, nonetheless, Poe manages to arouse horror in the reader by drawing out "the vast number of such interments" (667) which are presented as truthful and by depicting most authentically the awful state of a living person who awakens to the revelation that he is confined to grave:

The unendurable oppression of the lungs – the stifling fumes from the damp earth – the clinging to the death garments – the rigid embrace of the narrow house – the blackness of the absolute night – the silence like a sea [. . .] – the unseen but palpable presence of the Conqueror Worm – these things, with the thoughts of the air and the grass above, with memory of dear friends [. . .] – these considerations [. . .] carry into the heart, which still palpitates, a degree of appalling and intolerable horror. (672)

This and other similar depictions and facts with which Poe furnishes the reader make the experience extremely genuine and thus very frightening.

The atmosphere created by the deadly pestilence is made use of in "King Pest," "The Masque of the Red Death" or "Shadow – A Parable." In "Hop-Frog" the murder, more precisely the mass murder, is employed as a rather sickening climax of the tale which is not expected (by the reader or the witnesses) until seconds before the king and his ministers are set on fire. The observation of the unnatural hypnagogic state in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" is a source of terrifying atmosphere as is the planned out murder in "The Cask of Amontillado." Poe wrote many other tales in which death in some of its forms is essential or at least important for the impact and the atmosphere of horror. Not unjustly is the concern with death considered by the readership as one of the characteristics of the great author.



## 2. 1. 2. Madness

As Richard M. Fletcher pointedly argues in his work *The Stylistic Development of Edgar Allan Poe*, Poe seems to possess "an unabashed desire to illuminate all hidden depths and crevices of the perverted psyche" (115); this may be supported by the fact that madness is a theme which keeps returning in Poe's stories. It recurs as a full-fledged theme which enables the author to explore the disturbed minds of his characters (Regan 171) or in hints which complicate the interpretation of the narrative because they force the reader to raise the question which (in most of the cases) cannot be resolved: "Are the perceptions true or is the perceiver mad?" (Carton 60). However, it is not my task to analyze the truthfulness of the stories or their meaning. I shall accordingly turn to and occupy myself with madness as an element which forms or helps to form the macabre atmosphere of Poe's tales.

Though the tales of madness are not nearly as numerous as those of death, they are remarkable and they stand out. The reason is that these narratives are marked by particular characters and their particular behaviour; that is to say characters whose psyche is damaged, whose vision of reality is twisted, and whose behaviour is therefore strange, often creepy, sometimes violent, simply unnatural. The stories of madness are therefore concerned with the theme of perverted mind. And it is the perversion which is again the main source of the fear and the base of the horror of the story. The madmen have been laughed at, despised, and even admired throughout the course of history. However, there is and there has always been at least an indication of fright which did then and does now creep into one's mind whenever a person stricken by lunacy appears. It is the natural reaction of a sane and rational individual; we fear that which contravenes the natural order. A madman embodies this breach. He does not follow the regulations of the society because he either does not know them or he finds them inessential, meaningless. Thus, the moral, legal, social, ethic, and other rules do not restrain him. It is the knowledge of the fact that a person, whose thinking and behaviour is so unnatural, is beyond any control which often seeds the fear inside people's minds. In other cases it can be the unpredictability of such a mind and its actions which terrifies.

People are generally used to certain standards which they perceive as normal, natural, and this perspective is transferred to their approach to literature: they are, as readers, very sensitive to the unnatural anomalies in characters' behaviour. Anomalies

which do not correspond to their idea of a normal individual and which accordingly distinguish in their minds a madman from a rational person. This sensitiveness (sometimes tending towards over-sensitiveness) intensifies the effect which madness as a theme produces. Poe derives benefit from this responsiveness. He does not tell the reader that a character is mad, he makes the madness manifest itself in actions and thoughts of the character. Sometimes it is quite easy for the reader to uncover the disorder thanks to the evident indicators like an immense effort to convince of one's absolute sanity ("The Tell-Tale Heart"), an excessive obsession with a particular object (Regan 65; "Berenice") or, for example, a liking for bizarre and at the same time eerie furnishings and art ("The Masque of the Red Death"). At other times, there are only ambiguous suggestions which leave the question open for many critics and authorities to argue over ("Ligeia").

Stories which are centred around madness as their main theme are the stories in which Poe fully exploits the effect of the subject; the fright aroused by the observation of a perverted mind and its uncontrolled actions. However, there are also tales (like "The Black Cat") in which madness appears only momentarily, as a reaction to an exceedingly stressful, emotionally intense situation. In such circumstances, the rational part of mind of the individual breaks down, switches off in a way only to start up fresh few moments later. In this way, madness serves as an intensifier of the overall atmosphere established in the narrative.

The ensemble of the stories I examined includes two stories of madness which are very well known and acknowledged: "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Fall of the House of Usher." The first tale offers a unique insight into thoughts, considerations, and rationalisations of the obviously disturbed narrator. Even though this strategy is no doubt intriguing, I have decided to give precedence to the second story for it has the unforgettable character of Roderick Usher who is considered to be Poe's "most perfect portrayal of the mingled attractiveness and repulsiveness" (Carton 72). This story is recognized by the readers for the petrifying atmosphere of immense effect which Poe managed to create by the interconnection of a number of means which arouse horror: primarily the character of the madman and his "obsessions with several varieties of fear" (Quinn 307), than the creepy building: "a castellated mansion of medieval origin" (304), and finally the narrator whose effort to block away his own fear in order to distract his friend is not entirely effective throughout the story and turns up completely inefficient

at the end. These three elements play essential part in the reader's authentic experience of the nightmarish atmosphere. Remarkably inspired by Gothic fiction, this tale clearly "fulfills, and overshoots" the aim of the genre which is merely "to arouse a sense of gloom" (Fisher 360).

The meaning of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a much debated topic within the literary circles; there is the idea that the "narrator's journey to Usher's domain is a dream-journey into his own mind" and that Usher himself represents "the incertitude of the hypnagogic state" that is to say the state "on the brink of sleep" (Miller 378). Another opinion is that Roderick Usher is the narrator's "*moi intérieur* [. . .] a part of narrator's self" (Regan 108). Nonetheless, I shall ignore the speculations about the 'profound' sense of the story and treat it as it is: a story of a man who witnesses his friend's mental decline and death. The narrator of the tale does not yet enter "the melancholy House of Usher" (Poe 317) when he informs the reader about "a mental disorder" (318) of Roderick Usher, which is in fact the reason for his visit. The madness is thus the primary impulse which has set the narrative into motion. Among other particular characteristics of the house, there are two which seem to be associated with the state of Usher; that is the "wild inconsistency between [masonry's] still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones" (319-320) which hints at the fact that Usher seems quite in order on the outside but his psyche is crumbling like the stones. The other characteristic is the "barely perceptible fissure" (320) which is believed to correspond "to Roderick's struggle against insanity," "his inability to maintain balance" (Regan 125, 133). From the moment the narrator enters the mansion "his account is concerned almost entirely with Usher, his appearance, behavior" (Quinn 307), the reader is therefore able to observe and analyze Usher's condition from up close. The first portrayal of Usher is contrasted with narrator's memories of him, he is shocked by the terrible change in the appearance and the bearing of his childhood friend. He immediately notices a particularity in his manner:

an habitual trepidancy – an excessive nervous agitation. [. . .] His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision [. . .] to that species of energetic concision [. . .] which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement. (Poe 321-322)

This is one of the manifestations of Usher's disturbed psyche perceptible on the outside; along with the "morbid acuteness of the senses" (322), the fact that he was petrified by "an anomalous species of terror" (322) - a fear of fear itself, and the "superstitious impression" (323) that the mansion is sentient and has influence over him. These are the hints which, though presented under the heading of "a mere nervous affection" (322), betray to the reader the gravity of Roderick's condition and provoke first apprehension and then full-fledged dread as the narrative continues; the more time the narrator spends with his companion, the more frightful the latter appears to be.

As the reader reaches the middle of the story, he encounters the fantastic and expressive poem "The Haunted Palace" performed by Usher. The narrator remembers and reproduces this poetic work mainly, because when he heard it from Roderick he perceived for the first time "a full consciousness on the part of Usher, of the tottering of his lofty reason upon the throne" (325). It is not only the first time that Usher seems to be aware of his damaged psyche, but also the first time the narrator declares this fact explicitly. The poem is a quite transparent allegory of madness. "The opening stanzas of this poem [. . .] make a point-by-point comparison between a building and the head of a man. The exterior of the palace represents the man's physical features; the interior represents the man's mind" (Regan 104). Thus the yellow banners, windows, and the door represent the hair, the eyes; and the mouth of a man and the "monarch Thought" (Poe 326) and the "troop of Echoes" (326) represent the reason and the utterances of the man. In the last two stanzas "the physical and spiritual corruption of the palace and its domain" (Regan 106) is described - that means the corruption of the reason and the ensuing insanity of the afflicted. Professor G. R. Thompson justly points out that "we have a poem about a disordered mind, haunted by the phantoms of madness, placed at the centre" (316) of the tale; thus there can be no objection to the fact that "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a true, exemplary madness story.

"The Haunted Palace" intensifies the eerie atmosphere, for it foreshadows the subsequent development of the tale. The content of the poem led the two men to a discussion of Roderick's already mentioned faith in the sentience of things, especially the sentience of "the gray stones of the home of his forefathers" (Poe 327). This repetition is significant because the acceptance of this belief "and his sense of intimate relationship with the objects about him" (Regan 128) is considered his "step toward

insanity" (128). The poem marks the middle of the story and also a certain transition of the narrative. However, the veritable turning point comes with the passing of the lady Madeline. Few days after the entombment, Usher's condition changes to worse. "His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten" (Poe 329-330) – this fact is important because his "activities are closely related to his sanity" (Regan 128), it is therefore clear that together with his occupations he has also neglected the reason. His condition becomes "terrifying, and it is *now*, after perhaps a week of residence in the house, that the narrator begins to feel real distress" (Quinn 307-308). Up till this moment the narrator showed only little fear or rather mild anxiety; he succeeded in suppressing the sentiments in his effort to distract Roderick. Nonetheless, he now becomes scared as he recognizes that Usher's condition "is becoming contagious" (308), he states: "I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions" (Poe 330). The reaction to his dread is to try and "find plausibly objective causes [. . .] But his effort to account for the feeling, and so explain it away, fails" (Quinn 346-347). This turn in the attitude of the narrator causes that the impact of the theme of madness is suddenly amplified; the reader was alone in his uneasiness caused by Usher's disorder but at this point he is also influenced by the narrator's "intense sentiment of horror" (Poe 330) and therefore his own fright is intensified. The culmination of the story is emblematic: "a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night [. . .] wildly singular in its terror and its beauty" (331), a madman entirely overruled by his perverted mind, and an innocent witness who is far too affected by the terror and insanity of his companion to be able to rationally apprehend the ongoing situation – "he has been subtly terrorized, to the point of hallucinating" (Thompson 337). Roderick has managed to draw him "into a *folie à deux*" (Regan 10), thus in the final scene of the tale "while Madeline's body lies quiet in the tomb, the two friends share a series of hallucinations which culminate in their believing that they see the living corpse of Madeline" (10). Usher then dies "a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (Poe 335) – in other words, a victim of "the terrible terror of terror itself" (Thompson 337) which has long haunted him. The narrator "retains sufficient *sang-froid* to get out of the house in time and witness what happened to it" (Quinn 310), witness how "the deep and dank tarn [. . .] closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the '*House of Usher*'" (Poe 336).

To sum up, the theme of madness in "The Fall of the House of Usher" first establishes an atmosphere of apprehension and trepidation. Then, with the allegorical poetic work "Haunted Palace," the impact of the theme and the atmosphere is intensified; fright joins in at this point, for the malfunction of Usher's psyche is confirmed. Finally, after the death of the lady Madeline, the turn to worse of Roderick's condition, his succumbing to madness, and the horror of the narrator create a very intense and frightful atmosphere.

In "Berenice," the theme of madness is also predominant. First, the reader is informed of "a fatal disease" (Poe 226) which has afflicted Berenice, the cousin of the narrator, and which has changed her heavily; "pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person!" (226). Afterwards, the narrator reveals his own mental disturbance which "consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the attentive" (227). The element which causes that the atmosphere of tension and uneasiness established by the figures of the two individuals with perverted psyche transforms into atmosphere of dread and, I dare say, of repugnance is the obsession. The narrator's disturbed mind obsesses over the teeth of Berenice: "The teeth! – the teeth! – they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me [. . .] I had no thoughts but for the teeth" (230). At the end of this rather sick rumination he conveys the thought which later becomes the motive of a disgusting act: "I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason" (231). This hint and the consecutive confused state of the narrator, who senses that he did something horrible but cannot remember what, create a powerful effect; the truth dawns on the reader from the very first paragraph of the final part of the story and arouses horror which is amplified throughout the subsequent paragraphs. Such and other similar deeds of a perverted mind are received with great terror because of their unnaturalness which is often regarded as worse than the violent acts of sane people.

I have already stated that madness is sometimes utilised by Poe as a mean of intensification. It is employed to underline the impact of some stressful event or situation on characters and to therefore amplify the impact of the overall atmosphere. The prisoner in "The Pit and the Pendulum" succumbs to madness as he, exhausted and desperate, observes the pendulum which slowly but steadily descends to end his life; "I grew frantically mad, and struggled to force myself upward against the sweep of the

fearful scimitar. And then I fell suddenly calm and lay smiling at the glittering death as a child at some rare bauble" (Poe 500). The horror provoked by the methods of inquisition is reinforced by this collapse of reason.

### **2. 1. 3. Violence**

Though it may seem that the theme of violence could have been included in one of the two chapters above, I have decided to stress its exceptionality by dedicating a whole separate chapter to it. The content of this section will not be the ordinary concept of violence, that is to say violence in its generic sense, but one specific strategy which Poe often takes advantage of; violence triggered by anger. It is this liaison which is exceptional. The theme of violence on its own could be classed under the heading of the theme of death, for violence in Poe's tales almost regularly stands for or results in murder; a theme with which I have already occupied myself. As for anger, this state of mind would most probably go unnoticed because it is not a trait that would be as noticeable as the others in the stories. Nonetheless, by combining the violent behaviour and the psychological experience Poe creates a singular strategy; a complex device fundamental for the atmosphere of horror in his works. Both parts of this device are equally essential. When divided, anger is merely an emotion; negative and often strongly hostile, but still only an internal response to some situation. Violence, though it has a more powerful impact because it is an external, visible action of force and often cruelty, is by itself less effective than in relation with anger. However, when these two elements are combined, they form an impressive ensemble in which the effect of one component intensifies the effect of the other.

Anger is a strong emotion of displeasure. In a situation when this feeling gains control over one's mind, the afflicted is blinded, he concentrates only on the situation or event which has provoked this intense reaction; it is therefore usual that he acts without thinking. There are cases in which rage can be so powerful that it clouds entirely the reason and it can therefore be compared with temporary madness. The reasons which provoke rage are plentiful; just like there are many different kinds of personalities, there are also many different ways of how people react to the same impulses. It is not accordingly possible to make a general statement which would summarize or classify

those causes. Concerning the consequences of this emotion, in Poe's tales the thoughtlessness of a character overruled by anger commonly leads to ruthless deeds – to violence. Now violence caused by anger is frightful because of the fact which I have already stressed – the enraged individual does not think clearly, he is hot-headed, inconsiderate, and often uncontrollable in his actions. There is a hint of revenge to every example of such violence. The character seems to be searching for an immediate punishment of that which has infuriated him; most frequently the source of this maddening irritation is in another character. This is the reason why much of the anger-triggered violent comportment leads to murder. The impact of this union is impressive because it combines the psychological, inner aspect and the physical, outer aspect; both negative and terrifying.

The general design of this composite theme is identical. Nevertheless, the particular realizations differ in many aspects and it is consequently impossible to make any more claims that would be shared by all the stories in which this theme appears. I shall therefore turn to individual tales and examine the ways in which they make use of the theme. The most convenient specimen of a story of violence is "The Black Cat." A very predictable choice, for this tale is recognized and remembered for its occupation with the theme of violence. It is one of the narratives which are introduced by the notion of death sentence: "to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul" (Poe 597); the reader is thus alerted that he is about to face some violent act for which the narrator was condemned. The apprehension and anxiety with which the reader then immerses in the story establishes a firm base for the atmosphere of fright which is later in the story intensified by the theme of violence. The narrator's recounting first evokes a rather ideal picture of a man who is known for kindness and love for animals which he shares with his wife. This image is quite promptly destroyed as the reader learns that there was a colossal change of the man's personality which made him a monster: "my general temperament and character – through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance – had [. . .] experienced a radical alternation to the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others" (598). Alcohol has transformed his tenderness into ill-temper and violence, and the warm-hearted man of the past is now sharply contrasted with the horrifying persona which terrorizes his loved ones. At first it is not explicitly stated that the violent behaviour of the narrator is triggered and encouraged by anger, he seems more or less apathetic. It is as if he



suddenly decided that he has the holy right to repel all that was once dear to him without any particular reason. However, the fact that he confesses to alcohol abuse serves as an important indicator that the cause of his cruel behaviour is that fierce emotion. It is well known that frequent or excessive consumption of alcohol leads to anger and aggression, especially in the case of men. The narrator openly admits that he ill-treats his wife and his pets save for the "remarkably large and beautiful" (598) cat named Pluto; which was spared from the violence of its master. Strangely enough, it is Pluto, the "favourite pet and playmate" (598), which first experiences the full force of violence set off by anger. The poor animal defends itself as its master comes home drunk and seizes it. This act of revolt unleashes immeasurable rage which is satisfied by a violent and repulsive deed:

The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body and more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! (598-599)

The impact of this scene is powerful; furious mind combined with violence on a mute creature horrifies even the more sturdy readers. The narrator shows some pricking of conscience as he grows sober and sees that the animal flees "in extreme terror" (599) whenever he approaches it. But the remorse is soon forgotten thanks to "the narrator's dogged assertion that he was pushed into evil and self-betrayal by the 'imp of perverse.' [. . .] radical, motiveless, and irresistible impulse within the human soul" (Regan 170) and it is replaced by irritation. The twisted justification which excuses virtually any gruesome act causes the character to go to an extreme and hang the cat, unreasonably or, from his point of view, "because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin – a deadly sin" (Poe 599). That same night, his house burns down. Only one wall is left standing, the wall which is marked by "the figure of a gigantic cat" (600). As the narrator adopts another cat which very much resembles Pluto he seems to have provided himself with a punishment for his crime. The animal reminds him of his violent deed and the narrator is terrified of it; during the day he is constantly pursued by the cat and at night he cannot sleep because of "dreams of unutterable fear" (603). This frustration suppressed the remainder (if there was some) of the good in him and he became a slave to anger; "evil thoughts became my sole intimates [. . .] The moodiness of my usual

temper increased" and there were "sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself" (603). Once again, it is the cat which gradates the rage of its master and provokes the violent reaction:

The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal [. . .] But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demonical, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. (603)

The second occurrence of the two-component theme follows the same pattern and it demonstrates its full potential. There is a lot of frightening depravedness about the act of killing a harmless animal, but to sink so low as to kill deliberately another human being and to do it practically without any hint of remorse is far worse. As I have detailed in the chapter concerning the theme of death: murder is a deed which goes against the laws of nature. It is something unnatural, perverted, and therefore terrifying to people, thus to the readership. In this case the effect of such violent act is enhanced by the preceding blinding anger as well as the ensuing indifference with which the murderer takes measures to hide the body. Regardless all the precautions he takes, the narrator of "The Black Cat," just like that of "The Tell-Tale Heart," contributes to his exposure by walling up the body of his wife along with the cat which is very much alive. Whether it was done unconsciously or because he felt somewhere in his mind that he deserved to be punished, is a question which will always provoke quarrels among the readers and critics.

I have chosen to show the effect of the theme of violence on this particular tale because it is the one in which it is clearly distinctive. The transformation of the narrator's personality, his gradual surrender to alcoholism, and the resulting anger contrast sharply with the ideal picture at the beginning. Accordingly, the turn to violence stands out distinctively, for the reader always keeps in mind the kind-hearted man who was never "so happy as when feeding and caressing" (Poe 597) his pets.

"William Wilson" is another story which, in my opinion, profits from this device. However, there is a potential problem in this case, a claim which might be seen as disputable. It is the last scene of the narrative in which the theme manifests itself. First the anger surfaces: "In a absolute phrenzy of wrath, I turned at once upon him who had

thus interrupted me [. . .] 'Scoundrel!' I said, in a voice husky with rage, while every syllable I uttered seemed as new fuel to my fury" (355). And then the infuriated narrator condescends to violence:

I thrust him furiously from me. [. . .] closed the door with an oath, and commanded him to draw. [. . .] I was frantic with every species of wild excitement [. . .] In a few seconds I forced him by sheer strength against the wainscoting, and thus, getting him at mercy, plunged my sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his bosom. (356)

Now the realisation of the strategy is exemplary when analyzed separately. The disputable point emerges when the extract is contextualized, when it is perceived as a part of the story. As the victim of the violent deed is no living person but solely a personified conscience of the narrator it might be argued that no violence did actually take place. However, I believe that it is as real as any other violence because the narrator deemed the other man to be real and therefore he was ready to kill a living being, the fact that it was just a delusion is not relevant.

In "Hop-Frog" the theme is employed in yet another way. Anger is only hinted at, at the beginning of the story, by "a low, but harsh and protracted grating sound" (903) that seems to have no source. The emotion plays an influential role but it does not explicitly surface until the climactic scene of the tale and in a very limited way; the specific sound is repeated and clarified as coming from the teeth of the dwarf "who ground them and gnashed them as he foamed at the mouth, and glared, with an expression of maniacal rage, into the upturned countenances of the king and his seven companions" (907). Only at this moment the reader fully understands the intention of Hop-Frog and realizes how powerful the rage must have been that it compelled him to come up with such a cruel plan. This awareness reinforces the impact of the following massacre which is an act of vengeance based on that violent emotion.

Having already mentioned the resemblance between "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart," it would be a pity not to make reference to the fact that the theme analyzed also appears there. The anger precedes and prefigures the murder of the story; first it is provoked by the eye which is presented as the motive of the crime and then "the beating of the old man's heart" (557) further amplifies it. Few phrases later this anger combined with fright compels the narrator to act and kill his victim.

#### **2. 1. 4. The Supernatural**

The supernatural is not a single theme such as those in the preceding chapters. It would be more appropriate to call it an ensemble, a unity which contains a great many different elements that are regarded as supernatural. These elements, as the title suggests, are characterised by surpassing the ordinary, everyday, customary reality. They surpass the rational conception of the world, they disrespect the natural laws; it is thus the perversion which defines them, groups them under the heading of 'supernatural,' and connects this ensemble with the other themes. It is also the perversion, the unnaturalness of those elements that forms much of their impact. As I have already stated several times before, one of the things people are most scared of is the violation of natural order, and the constituents of this group embody this breach. Be it an event, a person or an animal, it is always something which seems to come from a different world with different laws, exactly for the reason that it does not comply with those of our reality. Of course, the majority of those elements (if not all of them) can be explained rationally. There are people who did, who do, and who will always prefer any rational explication, however improbable it may seem, then to admit the existence of anything which cannot be accounted for logically. For such readers, the employment of the supernatural elements in a story means work, because they have to devise some kind of rationalization for them. For the other readers, who do not anxiously cling to reason, these elements function, for the most part, as intensifiers of the frightening atmosphere - elements which amplify its impact.

The supernatural can appear only as a simple event which serves as a kind of eerie surprise, or it can accompany the main character throughout the whole narrative. Employing it as distinctive occurrences, like an appearance of something fanciful, strange, causes that the reader is suddenly unsettled, made uncertain as to what is truly happening. All at once the seemingly real world in which the story takes place is not considered to be as true as it appeared. With the introduction of a supernatural element all the standard rules and conventions are undermined, the reader feels that he can no longer rely on his knowledge and experience of the 'normal,' known reality. This incertitude affects the perception of the rest of the tale. The other way in which the supernatural reappears in Poe's stories is when it permeates the narrative, when it pursues the main character throughout the whole or much of the story. Such strategy influences the way the reader apprehends the entire narrative. From the beginning or

from the point when the supernatural emerges, it shrouds the tale; the reader is thus urged to doubt, to distrust the facts of the story – the existence of events, persons, and other beings, the credibility of the narrator. The supernatural creates an atmosphere of incertitude, apprehension, and anxiety which is transformed in the course of the narrative into an atmosphere arousing dread. Not being able to trust one's own conclusions, for they are made on the basis of the rules of the actual reality and these rules are very often ignored in the stories of supernatural, the reader is left at the mercy of the reality which is replete with the unnatural that goes against his understanding of the world and therefore frightens him. The impact of the atmosphere thus created is reinforced by the fact that the narrator is regarded as unreliable, potentially mentally unstable, for it is his point of view that provides the reader with the experiences of supernatural and therefore it is quite natural that the reader should deem the narrator psychologically disturbed and consequently frightening.

The one story that is and has always been considered by the major part of the readership as a tale of the supernatural is "Ligeia." The mysterious character of lady Ligeia and the concluding events which are strange and terrifying cause that even the more rational readers tend to support the less reasonable understanding of the narrative. Naturally, there are people who would insist on finding an understanding based on reason and these, in my opinion, tend to incline to the over-interpretation of the tale. For example, the claim that Ligeia is the personified child's imagination of the narrator, with which he yearns to reconnect, and that the story is therefore "an allegory of the efforts of the poetic soul, once compromised and disrupted by exposure to the world, to overcome the world and itself, and recover the imaginative absolutism of childhood" (Miller 377) seems to me exaggerated. Thankfully, the meaning is not mine to examine, I will therefore return to the supernatural and its relation to the horror atmosphere of this "gloomy story of a love that comes back from beyond the veil in a fashion repellent to most readers" (Block 400). It is as early as the first paragraph that the reader's attention is drawn to the fact that there is something curious about the story, or more precisely about the figure of the lady Ligeia. The narrator begins with words: "I CANNOT, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia" (Poe 262), and this vagueness, the lack of well-founded information concerning his wife penetrates the whole introduction. The short stories do not very frequently provide detailed descriptions of the past or the family of the characters. It

would be normally assumed that the narrator is familiar with these facts and that he does not present them to the reader by reason that they are not relevant for the tale.

Accordingly, it is most unusual that the narrator should stress the absence of such data; in doing so, he indicates the significance of this feature and therefore highlights the extraordinariness, uncommonness of the character. The depiction of Ligeia, which follows the peculiar introduction, amplifies the sense of otherworldliness of her character. She is characterised by "the incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall [. . .] beauty of face [which . . .] was the radiance of an opium-dream – an airy and spirit-lifting vision" (263), and above all the eyes, which were "far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race" (264) and which had an unaccounted-for expression. The narrator himself describes his wife's appearance as "the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth" (264). The features of this lady are not the sole aspect which is unusual about her, it is also her learning; "it was immense [. . .] her knowledge was such as I have never known in a woman – but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, *all* the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science? [. . .] the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding" (266). By this point in the narrative, the reader is doubtlessly conscious of the quaintness that surrounds Ligeia. Her complexion, her behaviour, her knowledge; everything about her seems to shout: 'out of the ordinary,' 'abnormal,' the word 'supernatural' suggests itself by right. This supernatural character is what establishes the atmosphere of awe. The immeasurability of her beauty and her learning causes that she is seen as unearthly being, as someone or something unnatural and thus frightening.

As soon as the reader makes the acquaintance with the mysterious lady Ligeia, she dies. And the unusualness, the supernatural emerges once again in her fierce struggle, her "eager vehemence of desire for life – *but* for life" (268), and her last words: "*Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will*" (269). The narrator is overwhelmed, crushed by the passing of his wife; he cannot bear to stay where he lived with his beloved and so he moves away and buys himself an abbey, a "gloomy and dreary" (269) building, which he equips with magnificent and fantastic furnishings. Into this bizarre place, he introduces his new wife, "the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine" (270), who is accommodated in a most eccentric room. Some time passes, during which neither of the newlyweds experiences happiness which is normally attributed to the initial phase of

marriage, and the Lady Rowena falls ill. Since the death of Ligeia up until this moment, the supernatural did not in the least manifest itself. But at this point, it resurfaces by means of Rowena's illness; "in her perturbed state of half-slumber, she spoke of sounds, and of motions, in and about the chamber [. . .] of sounds which she *then* heard, but which I could not hear – of motions which she *then* saw, but which I could not perceive" (272). The account of inexplicable noises and movements revive the atmosphere of dread, the supernatural gains the upper hand of the narrative and does not withdraw. Four abnormal events intensify the tale's mysteriousness and creepiness. First the narrator senses the presence of something unseen: "as I stepped beneath the light of the censer [. . .] I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed lightly by my person" (273), then he actually sees it: "there lay upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich lustre thrown from the censer, a shadow – a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect" (273), but he does not attach much importance to it, for, as he says, he was under the influence of opium. The two following incidents are also waved aside as figments of "a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour" (274) – the narrator conveys that he "became distinctly aware of a gentle foot-fall upon the carpet" (273) and that he then saw how "as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid" (273) fell into the goblet of wine which was afterwards emptied by Rowena. The happenings of that night seem to anticipate the aggravation of Rowena's state and her consequential decease. At this point, the final part of the story, which is the most intensive, opens. For the reader who generally expects, in this story, a soft and peaceful unravelling, the conclusion is exceptionally terrifying. He witnesses how the lady Rowena, or rather how her body, repeatedly struggles to come back to life and fails. The repetition of this "hideous drama of revivification" (276) accompanied each time by a "wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse" (276) and amplified by the narrator's "unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficient energetic expression" (275) creates an atmosphere of utmost horror which culminates as "the thing that was enshrouded" (276) physically leaves the bed, finally unveiling "the full, and the black, and the wild eyes [. . .] of the LADY LIGEIA" (277).

Whether or not the character of the lady Ligeia was indeed written as a supernatural being of powerful will, who was able to reincarnate, and the story therefore

composed as an account of "metempsychosis (inhabiting the bodies of persons who had died)" (Hayes 9) is a question which will probably never be resolved. Just like it will never be possible to fully prove or deny the proposition that, commencing with the introduction of the lady Rowena, the story is for the most part a hallucination. Thankfully, these and other contradictions and disputes do not overly weaken the effect of the supernatural. No matter how hard anyone tries to rationalize "Ligeia," the supernatural does always propose itself and creates the particular atmosphere of fright.

It is possible to find the supernatural in a number of Poe's tales which otherwise differ greatly in their form and themes. "Metzengerstein," the first short story Poe published (in 1832), is one of those narratives. There the supernatural is represented by a horse; first by "an enormous, and unnaturally colored horse" (Poe 136) which is a part of a "rich although faded tapestry hangings" (136) that Frederick Metzengerstein observes at the beginning of the tale. Primarily innocent embroidery proves unearthly when Frederick discovers that it has suffered a change: "the head of the gigantic steed had [. . .] altered its position. The neck of the animal [. . .] was now extended [. . .] in the direction of the Baron. The eyes, before invisible, now wore an energetic and human expression" (137). This obscure transformation arouses apprehension and alarm, the tension is heightened as a flesh-and-blood counterpart of the steed on the tapestry appears in front of his gates. The mysterious emergence of the animal, the ensuing, obsessive relation between the stag and Frederick, as well as the termination of both in fire are the elements which form the supernatural of the narrative and therefore also the elements which provoke fear.

A story that benefits from the supernatural in another way is entitled "Morella." In this case, Poe brings the theme of doppelganger into play. A doppelganger is defined as "a ghostly counterpart of a living person" (*The Penguin English Dictionary*) and it is believed that this entity haunts people. The tale appears as an account of conjugal relationship that falls apart as the husband's affection for his wife transforms into terror. A terror so powerful that a mere glance into her eyes arouses giddiness in him, "giddiness of one who gazes downward into some dreary and unfathomable abyss" (Poe 236), and a desire for her decease. Morella dies revealing to her husband that she knew how little he cherished her and with words that remind of a prophecy: "thy days shall be the days of sorrow – that sorrow which is the most lasting of impressions [. . .] thou shalt bear about with thee thy shroud on the earth" (236). The extraordinary prediction



hovers over the remainder of the story and contributes to the frightfulness of the narrative. Having become a widower, the narrator is left with a daughter to whom Morella gave birth on her deathbed. The child, unnamed, grows up to be the exact double of her mother – her doppelganger: "as years rolled away [. . .] day after day did I discovered new points of resemblance in the child to her mother [. . .] And hourly grew darker these shadows of similitude, and more full, and more definite, and more perplexing, and more hideously terrible in their aspect" (237-238). It is not only the complexion of the two which is oddly similar, but also the "sad musical tones of speech, and above all [. . .] the phrases and expressions" (238) which characterize them. The daughter dies the moment when she is baptized with the name of her mother, and as the widower carries her to the tomb, he discovers that there are no traces of his wife's body. The bizarre resemblance between the two women, the circumstances of the daughter's passing, and the missing body are the supernatural components which create the precariousness and eeriness of the story.

Regardless the present-day's orientation towards rationalizing, these and others of Poe's tales that contain the supernatural will always have their readers who will be impressed by the effect they provoke for it is, in my opinion, in the nature of every human being to be puzzled and frightened when fronted with something inexplicable, unusual.

## 2. 2. Setting

The second most prominent means of creating a ghastly atmosphere is the setting. The themes discussed in the previous chapter form the foundation of this atmosphere while the setting is assigned the task of making the effect of the atmosphere as powerful as possible. The reader must be drawn into the story so that the potential of the story is fully exploited. Thus, the description of a place has an important role, it influences the reader, prepares his imagination for the events of the tale, it arouses a specific mood beneficial for the impact of the atmosphere. It makes it easier for the author to provoke the effect he or she aims for with the use of an appropriate setting. Interestingly enough, Poe does not always profit from this strategy, he is capable of creating a haunted atmosphere without actually describing the location, the placement of the narrative; in such cases it is one of the themes which is made the centre of attention and which is accentuated (in "The Tell-Tale Heart" the setting is left aside and it is the theme of murder and the theme of madness which are the foundations of the horror atmosphere). I do not mean to say that the true craftsmanship is to form an impressive atmosphere without the support of the setting, for creating a credible setting which would at the same time be fantastic enough to provoke awe in the reader is, quite a demanding task. One cannot overdo it, because the reader would not take it seriously, and he cannot also depict solely the common reality of everyday life, for it does not frighten people; it is therefore important to balance correctly the real and the surreal. Poe handles this admirably. Though he uses aspects that sometimes seem unbelievable, they are not artificial and they do not disrupt the ostensible reality of the tale. Thus, the settings in Poe's stories are always credible enough for the reader to believe and fanciful enough for him to be scared.

It is important to state that Poe's setting is dual; he either describes the general scene, that means the landscape, the weather, the atmosphere of the place, or he focuses his attention on a single and more determined segment of the setting – a room. The general setting prepares and partly induces the atmosphere of the tale, while the room serves mainly as a stage for action. Poe's rooms are so particular that they have earned themselves a title: 'dream-rooms,' for their interior evokes a dream-like world.

[T]he first thing to notice about Poe's dream rooms is their shape. [. . .] Poe quite explicitly identifies regular angular forms with everyday reason, and the circle,

oval, or fluid arabesque with the otherworldly imagination. Therefore, [. . .] the dream chambers of Poe's fiction are free of angular regularity (Regan 111-112). There is quite a number of other characteristics that the dream-rooms share; the furnishings which is rich, bizarre, and betrays different periods and cultures, the lighting that is artificial (censers, candles, and torches most frequently illuminate the place), and the fact that there is no fresh air and no natural sounds. The instances of the portrayal of the setting, be it in general or the room, are punctual – they appear in one or in few parts of the tale, unlike the themes that are diffused and truly run through the narrative. Nevertheless, the setting influences greatly the whole of the story and finishes the impact of the story's atmosphere.

When the narrator of a story begins his narration with the delineation of that which surrounds him, he will most surely succeed in persuading the reader into identifying with him and therefore letting the effect of the tale impress him extensively.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day an autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. [. . .] I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed tress – with an utter depression of soul [. . .] (Poe 317)

This account of a location and its ambience forms the perfect introduction of "The Fall of the House of Usher." The house, the "mansion of gloom" (318), and its dreary surroundings are the first elements to affect the narrator and the reader. If I were to totalize what Poe so skilfully draws out, I would say that every component of the setting, from the mournful walls of the house to the clouded sky, seems to express hostility; as if all was aware of and hinted at the nightmarish ordeal prepared for the narrator. Thus, the eerie atmosphere is already set though the odd story of Roderick Usher's gradual succumbing to madness has not yet begun to unfold. The oppressiveness, obscurity, and mystery of the scene strike the narrator - "a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit [. . .] There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought" (317) - and through his reaction it reaches the reader.

The character of the setting is commented upon one more time before the main character reaches the fated house. That is after his "somewhat childish experiment –that of looking down within the tarn" (319) which was supposed to help him throw off the anxiety aroused by the place. However, it proved fruitless or rather counteractive, for when he looks up at the house again, the impression is far worse than beforehand: "about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves [. . .] which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the grey wall, and the silent tarn – a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued" (319). Though the narrator affirms afterwards that he himself has shaken off all the influence induced by the setting, its effect lingers on and reinforces the impact of the events of the tale.

In "A Descent into the Maelstrom," it is the depiction of the panorama that breaks in on the introduction and establishes the atmosphere for the sailor's narrative:

A panorama more deplorably desolate no human imagination can conceive. To the right and left, as far as the eye could reach, there lay outstretched, like ramparts of the world, lines of horridly black and beetling cliff, whose character of gloom was but the more forcibly illustrated by the surf which reared high up against its white and ghastly crest, howling and shrieking for ever (Poe 433).

Continuing for some lines with rather specific information about the positions of individual islands and the depiction of the formation and decline of "the great whirlpool of the Maelstrom" (435), this description makes it very easy for the reader to imagine the place and the nature of the mighty natural phenomenon and therefore put himself in the place of the man who fell a victim to the catastrophe and lost his two brothers. The relative lengthiness and attention to detail of the description is a clever strategy; Poe demonstrates the full magnitude and power of the vortex so that, when it comes to the moment when the sailors are entrapped, he does not have to disrupt the tension of the situation by describing the attributes of the phenomenon. This is how he manages to make the best of the effect provoked by the horrifying whirlpool; by the time the maelstrom intervenes in the story, the reader is already acquainted with its might and fatality and he can therefore experience in full the hopelessness and dreadfulness of the situation. Much like in "The Fall of the House of Usher," in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" Poe also intensifies the effect of the setting by letting the narrator evince his

fear; "I threw myself upon my face, and clung to the scant herbage in an excess of nervous agitation" (440).

The general setting serves as a means of creating an imposing atmosphere of awe and this function is also fulfilled by the setting in the form of a room. Poe's room is the main stage of the action, the other places which occur in the story, if there are any, are practically omissible, and even though some of the events of the tale may be situated in those places, it is always the room which is the most important and most impressive site. The tales that contain a dream-room are entirely focused on that site; their atmosphere is built on the impact of that room. Accordingly, the general setting is left unexplored, for the room is such a particular setting with a very powerful effect, and therefore it does not require the background image in order to impress the reader. Poe's rooms are not identical. However, they all help to establish an atmosphere of identical character: an atmosphere of fright. There is always something unnatural about the way they are furnished, built, or structured, and this unnaturalness is what provokes anxiety and dread and thus further reinforces the effect of the events which take place in the room. One of the most memorable rooms that Poe created and that corresponds to the criteria I specified at the beginning of the chapter is the bridal room in "Ligeia." Furnished by the narrator under the influence of the profound sorrow provoked by the death of his beloved wife, the five-sided room is never-to-be-forgotten;

Occupying the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window [. . .] tinted of a leaden hue, so that the rays of either the sun or moon, passing through it, fell with a ghastly lustre on the objects within. [. . .] The ceiling, of gloomy-looking oak, was excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device. [. . .]

In each of the angles of the chamber stood on end a gigantic sarcophagus of black granite [. . .] The lofty walls [. . .] were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry [. . .] spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures [. . .] made changeable in aspect. [. . .] The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies – giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole (Poe 270-271).

The room is described in a very detailed way which enables the reader to truly experience the atmosphere of mystery and fright provoked by this madding setting. Poe

wrote it in such a manner so as to establish the impression that there is no safe place, that wherever the narrator (or the reader) looks something fearsome appears or, worse, something fearsome looks back. This is intensified by the fact that there is no mention whatsoever of a door, it seems thus that getting out of the room is impossible – a feeling which proves a bit claustrophobic. No natural light, weird figures that seem to be moving, odd current of air; the room is a place where a person would hardly want to spend a night. Introduced in the middle of the story, the chamber first becomes the place of the Lady Rowena's struggle for life and then the stage of the macabre events leading up to the reappearance of the late lady Ligeia.

Two other rooms are well remembered by Poe's readers: the cell in "The Pit and the Pendulum" and the 'imperial suite' (485) of Prince Prospero in "The Masque of the Red Death." The seven rooms decorated on Prospero's orders for the masquerade are all realizations of Poe's dream-room; the Gothic windows of different colours arrest the natural light and transform it into "a lurid [. . .] ghastly glow" (Regan 115), the decorations and furnishings are rich and bizarre, and, of course, no air from the outside is let in, for the inhabitants of the castellated abbey sealed themselves properly from the external world. The seventh apartment is the most impressive one – it is "closely shrouded in black velvet" (Poe 486), the window panes are "scarlet—a deep blood colour" (486), and there is the "gigantic clock of ebony" (487) which petrifies every hour the whole company by the sound it produces. While the frightfulness of these rooms comes from the unnaturalness with which they are decorated and illuminated, it is the obscurity and unpredictability which provoke dread in "The Pit and the Pendulum." The reader gets acquainted with the dungeon through prisoner's groping around in the dark; that is why all the information he has at the beginning is that the ground is "damp and hard" (493) and "treacherous with slime" (496) and that the walls "seemingly of stone masonry [are] very smooth slimy, and cold" (495). Thus, the fear of the unknown plays an important role, for the reader cannot be sure about the actual state of things – this is a rather unique strategy because normally the reader sees a lot more than the main character, as the author describes to him what the characters might not be able to apprehend. This tale, however, does not favour the reader, it is only the point of view of the prisoner that is presented to him. Thus the narrator, as well as the reader, discovers by degrees and by chance that the vault contains a circular pit and that the walls are made of metal and decorated with "all the hideous and repulsive devices to

which the charnel superstition of monks has given rise. [. . .] figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms and other more really fearful images" (498). The last aspect addressed is the ceiling of the prison dominated by the painting of the figure of Time holding the lethal pendulum. Putting aside the tortures prepared for the condemned, the prison cell creates much of the terrifying atmosphere of the story; it is dark, cold, and hostile, and just like in "Ligeia" the place provokes a sense of inescapability because there is no hint at a door of any kind.

There is a trait which connects the general setting and the room – deadliness; "everything in Poe is dead: the houses, the rooms, the furniture, to say nothing of nature" (Regan 48). It is true that when you concentrate on the components of the setting, not one seems to emanate at least a faint sign of life. The trees are rotten, the houses are mouldering, the waters are black, muddied, unnaturally still or unnaturally turbulent, the objects in rooms are richly decorated and made of expensive materials but they are lifeless, cold, they do not offer any comfort or warmth of home. This inanimate, dispassionate character of the setting is the element that greatly contributes to the formation of the horrifying atmosphere.

## 2. 3. Narrative Style

Admirers or foes, the critics who occupied themselves with Poe and his artistry agree in large numbers on the fact that his writings are the outcome of painstaking work; "the creation of a haunting melody or of an overpowering effect in prose gave him a task to which [. . .] he was willing to devote arduous and consecutive labour" (Block 390). Louis J. Block further praises Poe by declaring that "no man ever lavished upon his writings a more consistent or patient devotion" (390) – a belief supported by many who cherish Poe's work. The elaborateness of Poe's style is acknowledged in the literary circles and, naturally, among the readers. For the author himself it had a singular value because it allowed him to accomplish the goal he had always strived for: an effect which he had chosen in advance. It is known of Poe that he has always composed his works with the view of creating a particular effect; he therefore adapts the content of a tale and his style to meet that objective. As the concern of my work is the atmosphere of horror, my task in this chapter is to highlight those of Poe's stylistic strategies which reoccur in the stories I examined and whose predetermined effect is terror.

The stylistic strategy which is the most distinctive is the retrospection. The general structure of a retrospective tale is that opens with the end; the narrator begins his story with his current situation – that means he begins with the conclusion or the consequence of tale that the reader is about to explore. The narrator can be completely honest and reveal the main incident of the story ("The Tell-Tale Heart") or he can solely foreshadow, indicate but he does not fully betray anything ("William Wilson"). This retrospective narration allows Poe to exploit the anticipation and suspicion of the reader. Interestingly enough, the retrospection is almost exclusively used in the tales of murder; the fact that the reader is acquainted with the act at the beginning of the story causes that he is very suspicious of every action, thought, and decision that the character makes. I would say that the reader is scared in advance – he expects the murderer to realize his violent deed all the time and, therefore, even the normal behaviour and events are perceived in a ghastly light, in the light of the approaching murder. The dreading anticipation of the reader which grows with every paragraph does not only corrupt the reception of the events before the murder, but it also amplifies the impact of the act itself when it is finally executed.



Another strategy which is easily observable is the repetition. In some of the tales, there are incidents or moments which repeat, the repetitions are not necessarily identical. However, it is straightaway obvious that the occurrences belong together because they have identical character. Richard Fletcher, the author of *The Stylistic Development of Edgar Allan Poe*, claims that Poe "manages to establish tension . . . through the sheer force of repetitive emphasis" (114) and he is indisputably right. The repeated elements are at all times some unpleasant or dreadful experiences; thus their recurrence gradates the tension and the frightfulness of the story (this is manifested in "The Pit and the Pendulum"). The repetition of incidents is not the only one to be found in the tales, there is also the repetition of synonymous words. Poe constantly repeats "words associated in the reader's mind with [. . .] particular emotion" (Fletcher 22) and this method "serves to drive home effectual hypnotic suggestion" (105) – in other words, repeating regularly the key words and their synonyms causes that the reader succumbs to its influence and experiences the emotion strived for. The emotion which is the goal of the stories I analyzed is easy to guess, for the number of expressions alluding to or evoking fear that one can find in them is substantial.

Poe's stories do not have some general collective structure. Nevertheless, there are two patterns from which he derives benefit quite frequently. This is not surprising, for these patterns are very impressive – they have a strong impact on the reader. One of them consists of the alternation of two phases: the phase of suspense and the phase of relief. When the phase of suspense represented by some intensive situation is put an end to, the phase of relief follows and the reader breathes a sigh of relief and expects a peaceful denouement. Therefore the effect of the subsequent unexpected renewal of the phase of suspense is heightened, for it comes as an unpleasant surprise (Poe heavily exploits this strategy in "The Pit and the Pendulum"). The alternation of these two phases may be repeated several times over and therefore serve as significant component of the horror atmosphere, but it can also appear only once or twice as a marginal means of intensifying the atmosphere. The second pattern that Poe frequently exploits is the gradation. This strategy is not outstandingly original but it is efficient. The more the tension of the story increases, the more the reader succumbs to its influence, and when he reaches the climax of the tale his mind is so excited that the impact of the climactic incident is more effective than it would be without the preparatory gradation (the effect

of the murder in "The Black Cat" is amplified by the gradual deterioration of the narrator's psyche and behaviour).

There is a strategy in the tales that Poe seems rather to enjoy: the deliberate lack of explanation. Horror stories in general have the tendency to be ambiguous and hazy and in the case of Poe's stories this rule applies twice as much. It is well known of Poe (and everyone who read at least one of his stories can confirm it) that he "places a positive value on the obscuration of meaning, on a dark suggestiveness, on a deliberate vagueness" (Regan 100). When going through the tales, one is clearly aware of the fact that there is something which is intentionally withheld. This calculated ambiguity may concern various elements of a story: the characters – their intentions, reasons, background; the setting – as mysterious corridors, rooms, and buildings are characteristic of Poe; questionable natural phenomena; inexplicable incidents; and others. The outcome of this strategy is discomposure and agitation of the reader. He is uncertain, he does not know what to expect from neither the characters nor the plot because the vagueness and lack of information prevents him from deducing and making conclusions. The inability to predict the incidents of the story causes that these are awaited with anxiety and, when introduced, perceived as surprising. Their impact is therefore much amplified, for the reader is alarmed beforehand and because the main effect of a surprise is that it throws off balance. Thus, the disturbing and bizarre is made horrifying and the already dreadful is made more powerful.

These are not the only components of Poe's narrative style that help forming the atmosphere of horror. However, they are the four which I regard as the most effective. To manifest how the strategies might be realised, I have decided to present them in context – set in a tale. For this purpose I have selected the story entitled "William Wilson" – a story which "represents Poe's most open use of the theme of 'double,' and describes the conflict, within a single personality, of soul, or conscience, and worldly passion" (Miller 419). The tale is narrated in retrospect; it is the first paragraph that serves to inform the reader of the retrospective nature of the narrative. The introduction Wilson gives is rather confusing; the first thing he conveys is that William Wilson is not actually his name but that he will not betray the real name because it "has been already too much an object for the scorn – for the horror – for the detestation of my race" (Poe 337). He then states that he is dying which made him think about his life and decide to share his story. The rest of the paragraph consists of various ambiguous declarations

that hint at the fact that his life was not an exemplary one. The full meaning of the introduction unfolds gradually as the reader explores the story.

The first paragraph of the tale is also the part which introduces the vagueness into the tale. Deliberate indefiniteness and lack of explanation, this story seems to be the representation of this strategy; the whole conflict between Wilson and his double and the character of this double is very curious and obscure and it is not resolved until the very last page of the tale. The reader is made to believe that Wilson's counterpart is a real person – he sees and hears him, he can also feel him physically. It is slowly and by degrees that the reader detects the signs indicative of the factual non-existence of the double. The haziness of the tale is also reflected in the setting – especially in the house, the school, where the narrator spent some years of his childhood and met his double for the first time; "how quaint an old building was this! [. . .] There was really no end to its windings –to its incomprehensible subdivisions. [. . .] our most exact ideas in regard to the whole mansion were not very far different from those with which we pondered upon infinity" (340). The pervasive vagueness that encompasses the character of Wilson perplexes the reader and arouses fright.

The strategy of repetition is combined in this story with that of gradation. The repeated occurrences of the encounters between the main character and his mysterious counterpart gradate the tension of the tale as well as its frightfulness. During the period when the other Wilson first interferes with his life, the narrator feels threatened by him and tries to compete with him - "Wilson's essential desire is to be able to claim, and to have others recognize, his originality and singular dominion over himself and his environment" (Carton 37); he tries hard to prove his dominance though he subconsciously feels that the other is superior to him. This period ends with the narrator's and the reader's first shock and pang of fear when Wilson discovers that the countenance of the other is identical to his own. With every subsequent interference, as Wilson's behaviour deteriorates, the tension and frightfulness heightens. The first two instances when Wilson is warned and on the second occasion prevented from wrongdoing are described in detail so that it is obvious that the double is trying to dissuade him from the path of alcohol, gambling, and deception Wilson has chosen. The ensuing account of flight and of the various depraved adventures thwarted by the double, gradates the tense atmosphere and it all culminates in the masquerade scene. "The masquerade setting in the closing scene of the tale ingeniously reveals that Wilson's

whole life is a disguise from his own identity" (Regan 168); as the reader uncovers the true nature of Wilson's double he also realizes that Wilson spent his life pretending that he is someone else because he was refusing to listen to his conscience. This turning point, and surprise ending at the same, time sheds a different light on the introduction the narrator pronounced and on the story in general; it is at the end when the reader obtains all the information, that he actually becomes aware of how much the story is vague.

All the narrative strategies are aimed at one goal: Poe seeks through their medium to "lure his readers to enter, or rather to participate through hypnotism of language in a trancelike . . . state" (Fletcher 105), that way he can manipulate the reader and provoke the sensations he wants – in the case of horror stories: fright.

### 3. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to observe and analyze the horror atmosphere in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe. This writer is known for devoting time and work to his art, for contemplating factually and rationally the methods which he used to compose his works (this is explicitly expressed in "Philosophy of Composition"), and for designing the works very carefully with the view of creating singular effect. Therefore every component that Poe inserted into a story had its predetermined function and purpose. In the case of horror atmosphere, the ultimate aim of its components is to provoke fear in the reader. This capability is what I was looking for while examining the tales.

The first means of creating the horror atmosphere that revealed itself was the theme. Themes are easily recognizable, they form the surface, the obvious part of the atmosphere, and thus they represent the main constituent of its impact. Death, which marked in various ways all the stories I examined, is presented in its most unnatural forms: murder, premature burial, death as a consequence of mysterious disease or bizarre incident, death by fire, and others. The theme of madness is also a very powerful one. A madman is characterised by odd thinking and behaviour, by being unpredictable and uncontrollable, and these attributes are the source of frightfulness of such a character. The reader is provided with an insight into disturbed mind and the contrast between a normal, sane individual and the twisted vision of world that the mad character exhibits is the source of the dreadfulness of the theme. The third much employed theme is violence triggered by anger. The behaviour of a character blinded by anger is mindless and immoderate and that is why it often leads to violence which is frequently aimed at an innocent victim, and that makes it even more terrifying. The fourth theme I have chosen to present was the supernatural. The power of this group is in the disturbance of rationality – the instances of supernatural do not follow the logical rules of our reality, they are unpredictable, often inexplicable, and potentially dangerous. The effect of this theme is debatable; it does impress greatly one part of the readership, but readers who are overly rational and do not accept anything irrational dismiss it as absurd.

The setting was the other quite obvious component of the atmosphere of horror that I presented. Depicting in detail the set of the story – be it a room or surroundings –

helps to evoke in the reader's mind exactly the atmosphere that the writer strived for and therefore heighten the probability of arousing exactly the effect intended. Poe does not utilise the descriptions of setting throughout the stories, he only uses them at few parts of the tale in order to either introduce the overall atmosphere or amplify the atmosphere by presenting a dream-room – the bizarre stage of the most important incidents of the story.

The third section of this thesis concentrates on those strategies of Poe's narrative style that contribute to the creation of the horror atmosphere. I have highlighted those methods that in my opinion emphasize the most the fearfulness of the atmosphere. The retrospection enables the writer to exploit for his purposes reader's suspicion and expectations; the repetition of nightmarish incidents and of words alluding to fear intensifies substantially the impact of the horror atmosphere; vagueness and lack of explanation are employed in order to make the reader uncertain, confused, and therefore unprepared for the frightening incidents of the story; and the use of the alternation of suspense and relief or of gradation transforms the experience of the reader into something vivid and very intensive.

If we agree that mastery is when one manages to do something extremely difficult and make it seem as if it was quite simple, then I believe it is rightful to claim that Edgar Allan Poe mastered the creation of horror atmosphere, for the stories appear as simple constructions but when you look closely enough you discover that beneath that simplicity is a complex system of different components that Poe carefully chose and put together with the view of creating the desired effect – fear. The fact that there was and is a great number of readers that acknowledge the power of the impact that his horror tales have is a proof that he succeeded in reaching that goal.

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