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**Lovecraft and Poe: Masters of the Macabre of
Providence**

Bachelor's Diploma Thesis

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2013

*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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Author's signature

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank, first and foremost, to Mrs Bonita Rhoads for her undying faith in me finishing this work and for her comely help whenever I needed it. Next people to thank are MS Lenka Pokorná and Petra Králová, who finally set me on the right track with my thesis and gave me the more concrete idea as to what I should explore in it. I also thank them plus Hana Šafrancová, Petra Voštinárová, Miroslav Bartoš, and Viktor Dvořák for their mental and / or editing support. My next thanks goes to Kristina Alešová who helped in times when I needed it most and for making the jungle of MLA a bit clearer to me. I also thank to the wonderful people (whom I've never met in person, sadly enough) from H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society, namely Mr Sean Branney and Mr S. T. Joshi, an expert on Lovecraft, who is able and willing to answer an e-mail by a stranger like me in less than a day, and willingly provide them with relevant information. From the non-academic sector I would like to thank to my family, my girlfriend, and Melanie King for their support and motivation. And last but not least, (who hath understanding, understand) I'd like to give one long CTHULLAP to the person without whom I would not get my hands on the copy of an early edition of Lovecraft's stories translated into Czech with afterword by Josef Škvorecký (whom I hereby thank as well *in memoriam*), without which HPL would stay just an enjoyable writer for me to read.

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1. Introduction

Cthulhu, “Hell Boy”, “Alien”, octopi from outer space, sculptures of H. R. Giger, literature of Stephen King... At least one of these things might be familiar to anyone who has ever been to a cinema, watched the TV in the night hours, likes comic books or played a computer game. None of the above stated would be around (or it would be, but in a very different manner) had it not been for H. P. Lovecraft. Willing or not, humankind is now surrounded with his ideas, or ideas spawned from his ideas (or even ideas spawned from ideas that spawned from his ideas), and it is sometimes difficult to realise where they came from. Many of them are taken for granted and seldom anyone pays attention to where they originated. Lovecraft still acts from a veiled backstage waiting for the right time to show himself to the general public that could once and for all acknowledge his greatness and the exclusivity he reached in his line of work. Since his qualities are diminished by the “low” genre he indulged himself to operate in, the Academia usually denies him the recognition he (arguably, of course) deserves. This *status quo* is truer for Europe and Czech Republic in particular, whereas in the USA the situation is better, due to an organization called “H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society” (HPLHS) and influential scholars like S. T. Joshi, who defend Lovecraft and his work, and virtually spread his word and carry on his legacy.

This thesis, showing how Lovecraft imitated E. A. Poe and used him as the basis to form his own unique literature, strives at making one of the first steps into this “hostile” environment to put through Lovecraft’s literature and open the eyes of the people who reject it thanks to its “inferior” nature. Due to the limited space this thesis offers, only the necessary and decisive details are given to make the point that what one can see first and foremost in what Lovecraft did with what he learned from Poe is the deepening of the sense of alienation and seclusion from others. Be it the tendency of getting rid of humour, leaving Earth to describe the insignificance of the human race, or showing that some knowledge is forbidden

for a reason, Lovecraft picks up on Poe's excluding an individual and cuts them off from the rest of the world as we¹ (don't) know it.

2. Theoretical part

This initial part of the thesis deals with more general background about the authors. It contains the essential events in, and the important stages of, their lives and the description of some of their most important literary works. To have all the information that is needed for the discussion in the analytical part, the theoretical part also deals with the genres of the literature of the gothic and the genuine horror literature (although it is sometimes difficult to find clear cut boundaries between similar genres (like post-modernism and post-structuralism and the like) as is the truth in this case).

2.1 Crucial facts of lives and works of the authors

Much has been written on E. A. Poe and his name rings a bell in the mind of any literary scholar, while H. P. Lovecraft might be known directly primarily to horror literature enthusiasts, and indirectly (via his ideas reflected in other writers' works) to anyone with wide enough cultural awareness (through books, films, art, or computer games including octopi from outer space, unknown cities below the ocean, the character of Cthulhu and the like). Since Lovecraft is not such a well-know writer, the theoretical part provides the reader with the essential information about his life and work needed to understand the problem at hand. This is the reason why the subsequent pages deal much less with Poe than they do with Lovecraft and why the focus weighs heavily on the latter. In any case, Poe is not excluded from this part and his life and work are subsequently paid attention to as well.

The main bulk of the information given in the following sections comes from two afterwords and a video documentary *Lovecraft: Fear of the Unknown* where writers like Neil

¹ The humankind.

Gaiman, Ramsey Campbell, and Peter Straub, or film directors like John Carpenter and Guillermo del Toro talk. One of the afterwords belongs to *Necronomicon, the Best Weird Tales of H. P. Lovecraft* (an anthology of a few dozen Lovecraft's stories) written by Stephen Jones, the second one to a smaller anthology of Lovecraft's tales translated into Czech – *Šepot ve tmě (The Whisper(er) is the Darkness)* – written by the famous Czech expatriate to Canada, Josef Škvorecký.

2.1.1 The Life and Work of H. P. Lovecraft

Literature written on Lovecraft usually does not deal with the political or historical background of the era of the writer's life. Although it is true that he lived during the Great War and had a chance to sympathise with Adolf Hitler on his way to prominence (which he did), Lovecraft was not very touched nor influenced by these events as far as his writing is concerned, for he lived in his own world, so to speak. Throughout all his life he found solace in books and lamented he was not born in the previous century, which he liked much better than the nineteenth or the twentieth. Thus, although the historical background here is not utterly irrelevant, it is less than necessary to plunge into it very deeply. Suffice to say, that the long-lasting problem of immigration in the USA was one of the things that did shape Lovecraft's worldview. He saw the multiculturalism as a problem to be solved and despised all the many different people from other regions of the world, believing them to taint the purity of the culture and inhabitants of New England (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag). He held his view self-evident that all men were not created equal and his fear of cross-breeding (which will be further discussed in the analytical part due to its importance in some of the stories) is very much connected to his attitude towards immigrants.

2.1.1.1 Perilous Childhood

H. P. Lovecraft, with full name of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, was born to the travelling salesman Winfield Scott Lovecraft and his neurotic wife Sarah Susan Phillips

Lovecraft on 20th August in Providence, Rhode Island (Jones 832). Just as was the truth for many of the characters in his short stories, there was something wrong running in Lovecraft's blood, only in this case it was no fish gene or the ancestry of devil-worshipping degenerated fishermen; it was plain syphilis inherited from his mother, who most probably contracted it from her husband. When Lovecraft was aged only 3 years, his father experienced "a nervous breakdown while alone in a hotel room and was committed to an insane asylum." He stayed there for five years and died of the same disease that caused his breakdown in the first place (Jones 832). Young Howard did not, therefore, know much of his father (for better or worse), but what was absent from the paternal influence was filled (and quite excessively so) with the influence of his mother. She was convinced her son was ugly and she did not hesitate to state this "fact" out loud as often as possible, rendering young Lovecraft convinced of it as well (Škvorecký 283), which was probably one of the most significant reasons why he was so shy and self-critical (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag). His maternal grandfather, Whipple Van Buren Phillips, may be said to have performed the role his father could not (Joshi 1996, 17). He might also be considered the first person to introduce Lovecraft to literature. It was in this childhood age that the writer compiled the name Abdul Alhazred, making it his pseudonym, as well as later using it as a name of the fictitious writer of an even more fictitious tome of forbidden knowledge – the fabled *Necronomicon*². He never excelled in school (where he did not spend much time: he was mostly educated by personal tutors) and although he was interested in chemistry and mainly astronomy (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag), his delicate health and constant pampering of his mother prevented him from finishing his studies and he embarked on what he believed to be a life of a British gentleman. He was rooted in old

² The book belongs to the concept or notion of a concept called Cthulhu Mythos which will be dealt with in the analytical part.

colonial families from both maternal and paternal side, but what he perceived as being British and gentlemanlike was always more British than the British themselves were (Škvorecký 282, 283). On top of that, he was always considerably poor and, being a “gentleman” for whom it would be unfit, he refused to do regular work for money. He, therefore, turned to writing literature, editing, ghost writing, but all for amounts of money that barely covered his life expenses. He, and his own literature, might have been richer, had he not been that much of a “gentleman”; for him it would be unspeakable not to answer a letter and equally horrible it would be had he answered only in a short manner (Škvorecký 284). This gentleman was able to write “eight to ten letters a day, each usually four to eight pages in length” (Jones 843), and, considering the number of his pen-friends including August Derleth (Lovecraft’s most fervent successor and the man, whom he basically owes his worldwide popularity he has got now), Robert E. Howard (author of *Conan the Barbarian*), Robert Bloch (the author of *Psycho*) and countless others, there was really only little time for his own literary work (Jones 843, 844). People who like Lovecraft’s stories should be glad he was not born in this century, because no one can tell what the world of social networks would do with his free time.

2.1.1.2 The Big Inspiration

As early as in the eighth year of his life “he discovered the work of a one-time fellow Providence resident, Edgar Allan Poe” (Jones 832). If there was one major influence on Lovecraft, it was Poe (although it was actually by no means the only one). It might be suggested that had it not been for Poe, Lovecraft would not have started writing what might be called the literature of adventure (Jones 833) and stories like *At the Mountains of Madness* or “The Dunwich Horror” (which both include a part suited for an action film each, although being chiefly stories of discovery and fear) would never have been written. Lovecraft never kept his wish to have been born in the previous century secret (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag) and whatever the true reason, it is more likely than not that he would be willing to give his

right arm to meet his greatest source of inspiration in person (although Poe was still alive not a hundred years before Lovecraft was born); just like many horror enthusiasts would do, should they have the chance to meet Lovecraft himself. However, those familiar only and exclusively with his works would most probably be disappointed, or disgusted even, after having a conversation with him; for Lovecraft's anti-Semitic, xenophobic attitude and opinions "*worthy of a Southerner moron*" were as much present in the letters to his friends, as they were absent (if one has open racism in mind) from his stories (apart from the "detective" story of "The Horror at Red Hook" or the very short story of "The Terrible Old Man" who murders "*the disgusting Itai*' Angelo Ricci, '*the Czech*³ monster' Joe Czanek and the '*ape-like Portuguese*' Manuel Silva"⁴ (Škvorecký 284) who "were of that new and heterogeneous alien stock which lies outside the charmed circle of New England life and traditions") (Lovecraft 2006, n.pag). In any case, Poe "remain[ed] a life-long influence upon Lovecraft's writing" (Jones 833), overshadowing the influences of other writers like Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood, Ambrose Bierce or Arthur Machen. On account of this, Lovecraft once exclaimed: "There are my 'Poe' pieces & my 'Dunsany' pieces – but alas – where are my Lovecraft pieces?" (Joshi 2004, 207) because he did not think himself and his stories original. But although he drew on the inspiration heavily, he gave the stories a new life and purpose (this will be further discussed in the analytical part).

2.1.1.3 Realization in Magazines

In his early twenties, Lovecraft started writing stories for amateur magazines. S. T. Joshi, a leading expert on Lovecraft, speculates that amateur journalism was exactly the thing that "saved Lovecraft both as a writer and as a human being," because after a long period of

³ Even though in the story the man is a Pole, not a Czech.

⁴ Italics in the inverted commas through the whole paragraph were added. The original text by Škvorecký is in Czech, the italics indicate translation into English by the writer of this thesis.

him not being sure how he should go about living the life he had, he found a group of “other people like him, trying to be writers, but not writing for money” (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag). That was something agreeable to him because, as he once wrote, “I pay no attention to the demands of commercial writing” (Jones 838). After being exposed to this new way of life, he founded an amateur magazine of his own called *The Conservative*, where his racist and xenophobic feelings were most striking and open to the public to agree with, or to dismiss. The film director John Carpenter notes that Lovecraft “found his home” among the “lot of likeminded souls,” who, having read his stories, were taken by them and started to form a group of his “followers”, which started to look very much like a “cult” of this gentleman (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag). Lovecraft also wrote in other magazines like *Weird Tales* or *Amazing Stories* (Medová 29), of which the former became his real home. *Weird Tales* was a pulp magazine founded by J. C. Henneberger in 1923. H. P. was not very fond of the idea of having his horror stories published, but Henneberger urged him to give it a try and to submit them to the then editor of the magazine, F. Baird (Jones 838). Lovecraft did not think much of the stories himself, but, surprisingly enough for him, the stories were bought and he ended up submitting even more of them; Baird, despite Lovecraft’s overt self-criticism, liked them all.

It was, if looked at from one point, Lovecraft’s own fault that at least a score of his tales sent to be printed there were initially rejected, because at one point he was asked by Henneberger to take over the position of the editor in *Weird Tales*, but he refused and Farnsworth Wright got it. Wright was not Baird and rejected stories like “The Shunned House” (Jones 840), “Cool Air”, or “The Strange High House in the Mist” (Jones 841), which Lovecraft, usually with the help of some of his friends, either got published somewhere else or tricked Wright into publishing them in the end, “having not done a single thing with it”, as the author Ramsey Campbell stated (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag). However, any rejection

would further weaken his self-confidence because he “ha[d] a sort of dislike of sending in anything which has been once rejected” (Jones 842).

2.1.1.4 Marriage and Other Horrors

His mother’s belief in Howard’s ugliness, his life as a recluse, his extreme shyness and his lack of self-confidence all converged in the young gentleman and led many to believe he was a homosexual. This idea might be supported by the fact that there are precious little female characters in his stories, and if there are any, their roles are by no means great (Škvorecký 283). However, one should not give in to this opinion before studying the matter in a wider context. Lovecraft was always surrounded by women, and women alone. After his mother died, he went to live with his aunts, Annie Emeline Phillips Gamwell and Lillian Phillips Clark, in Providence (Jones 836) and the only real father figure he’s ever had (the one of his grandfather) passed away too early. The suggestion here is that Lovecraft, voluntarily or not, wanted to get away from all the womanhood enclosing him by not including them in his works much. They had never belonged to his world, the solitary world he constructed in his mind and in his stories: the world of 18th century he loved so much to read about in the books his grandfather had shown him. He was quite comfortable staying in the house of his residence and even if he had had the need to seek company of women, he would probably not had gone to seek it because he could not possibly imagine anyone of them would be interested in him.

The unthinkable happened when Lovecraft stumbled across a divorced, seven years older Sonia Haft Greene “at a gathering of the National Amateur Press Association in Boston in 1921” (Jones 836). This energetic woman with a hat shop in New York fell in love with the younger Howard (it could possibly not have been the money or the fame, because he virtually had none) and on 3rd March 1924 she “*dragged him to the altar*” (Škvorecký 284). For the lack of a better word, it must be said that this event in his life was as funny as it was ironical.

Lovecraft was one of the last people on the planet anyone would ever expect to get married, and considering his violently xenophobic and anti-Semitic views, the lonely dreamer married an Ukrainian-born Jewish immigrant (Jones 836), committing a *Rassenschande* (Škvorecký 284), which would end his correspondence with any true Nazi enthusiast, had he had any.

Not only was the marriage new for him, he also made a vital decision to move to New York to live with Greene, who could continue with her work there. It was here, where he saw what he certainly believed to be the real state of affairs concerning the immigrants, and it was also undoubtedly here, where he got his inspiration for writing “The Horror at Red Hook”, which deals with devil worshipping immigrants in New York. The happy marriage did not last long and Lovecraft moved back to Providence to live with his aunts again. They did not approve of the marriage in the first place and when Sonia’s business in New York failed and she wanted to start over in Providence, the answers from both the aunts and her husband himself were unfavourable (Škvorecký 284). They seldom saw each other since then, and although Lovecraft, following Sonia’s wish, made the first legal steps to annulling their marriage, the process has reportedly never been finished (Jones 838) and so, until Lovecraft’s death, Sonia had not become divorced, and although claiming she was ““not *his* widow”” (italics added) (Jones 837), his widow she most probably was.

2.1.1.5 Death and Afterlife

On 15th March 1937 the man who breathed life to Cthulhu and the other deathless monsters from outer space died of cancer and Bright’s disease. His grave lies in his beloved Providence with a fan-made tombstone which reads: “I am Providence”. Had it not been for his very good friend, his “student” and his most fervent follower in one person, August Derleth, Lovecraft would probably not have become as popular as he is now. It was him and Donald Wandrei (both writers for the *Weird Tales* magazine) who founded Arkham House, a publishing company dedicated to “preserv[ing] the collective writings of their literary mentor

between hardcovers” (Jones 852). It took them a lot of sweat and years of hard work in order to keep the gentleman of Providence in minds of readers.

2.1.2 Life and Work of E. A. Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is traditionally being given inconsistent treatment by critics from the English speaking countries and from the Continent. While to Europeans his literature got through Charles Baudelaire, a Poe admirer who “saw himself” in a very similar light and likened himself to him (Hayes 10), the “Anglo-American reader”, who held to the “notion that literature should perform a moral function”, usually “questioned the ultimate value of Poe’s work” because his critics tended to rebuke him for his character, which they could not separate from his works (Hayes 9), and saw (and some still see) him as “the bad boy of American literature” (Hayes 10). It is true; for example in Czech Republic’s system of education when American Romanticism is on the programme, E. A. Poe usually stands out as the most prominent with, of course, his poem “The Raven”. Poe’s role of the American literary outcast is not difficult to explain: for a person as unlucky as Poe cannot be expected to have produced the “happy” kind of poetry or prose celebrating America and the identity of an American citizen as Walt Whitman did for instance. The subsequent paragraphs draw substantially from James M. Hutchisson’s biography of Poe and if not stated otherwise, all the facts of his life are taken from it.

E. A. Poe, born on 19 January 1809, became an orphan in a very early age and was given to a foster family of Allans. Not only did he lose his parents, he also gained a rather bad foster father, John Allan, who was never very fond of him, and their relationship got so sour that “later they became open enemies” (Hutchisson 8). It was obvious from his talents developing at schools that Poe had a knack for languages and writing poetry which was to become one of his major preoccupations, his “passion” (Hutchisson 27). He used it (among other reasons) to vent his miseries; he was “restless, at times wayward, melancholic &

morose.” It was in his school years that he started drinking (Hutchisson 18). When he finally left his foster father’s home in Richmond, he, after other ventures, came to Baltimore to live with his aunt, cousin, and his brother (who died soon afterwards).

Poe was a fervent competitor and he liked to participate in “publishers sponsored contests” that, apart from the financial gains, sought to uplift and to help the American literature to flourish. The most valuable prizes were given away not for poetry, but for fiction. That was the time (on the verge of 1820s and 1830s) when Poe turned his literary focus and “began writing short stories” (Hayes 18). In 1830s he also wrote one of the stories that would almost define his style, “Metzengerstein”. Poe made friends with John Pendleton Kennedy who helped him start his effective (meaning money-earning) career as a writer. After John Allan died, Poe moved back to Richmond to work for *Southern Literary Messenger*, a magazine that gave him a steady employment. His poverty subsided as he started earning money that was able to sustain both him and his maternal cousin Virginia whom he married in 1836. In his reviews on American writers he tended to speak more favourably of the ones from the South and he was usually very hard on all the writers in his critiques (which is maybe one of the reasons why he was considered a bitter man). Poe left Richmond and his work for some time, finding a new job in Philadelphia, where he also wrote his novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Working for *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine*, he wrote “William Wilson” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”. After some disagreements with the owner of the magazine Poe was laid off. He wanted to start a magazine of his own called “The Penn” or “The Stylus”, but his dream never came true and he returned to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (which was then run by George Graham) and wrote famous pieces like “The Black Cat” or “The Pit and the Pendulum”. Poe met Rufus Griswold, the very same Griswold who became Poe’s literary executor and who posthumously criticised and slandered Poe beyond measure. Griswold succeeded Poe as editor in the *Graham’s Magazine* and their relationship

started to deteriorate. Poe was struck by yet another disaster when his wife showed the symptoms of tuberculosis. His problems with alcoholism were getting worse as her state was rapidly worsening. He moved to Gotham and wrote “The Raven”, his probably most famous poem that “was an instant success” (Hutchisson 165). When Virginia’s medical condition got ultimately bad, Poe turned to drinking again, this time heavily so.

After her demise in 1847 he became a wreck of a man; her death, his passion for drink and other women, the poverty – all added up to make him feel miserable and caused him severe depressions. He started attacking other writers, left and right, as if he was out of mind and made “more enemies than most people could battle in one lifetime” (Hutchisson196). He was devastated and sought comfort in Frances Osgood, a married woman with whom he was attached for a long time (with Virginia’s consent), but he could not remarry, for she was not available in this sense. He tried to woo many women afterwards including one Sarah Helen Whitman, who was from Providence, Rhode Island, the same beloved Providence Lovecraft originated from. After being intent on marrying Helen Whitman he visited Providence several times (and not only visited). His miseries led him into an unsuccessful suicide attempt using opium and Whitman’s final refusal to marry him did not make him feel any better.

At the age of forty, on 7 October 1849, he died during his travels across America to find subscribers for the magazine he was never able to bring to life. The cause of his death has never been exactly found out, but theories are many. What is certain is that alcohol played its part in it.

2.2 Gothic Literature

The gothic stories and the term Gothic itself were first and foremost home in Europe. The term is derived from the name of the Goths, which, in their time, were seen as Germanic barbarians by the southern classical peoples. The meaning, however, has a lot to do with architecture. The huge gothic “cathedrals that arose all over northwestern Europe and the

British Isles from the eleventh century onward” used architectural techniques like the high arched vaults and flying buttresses, which permitted for more space to be made of the interior and for more light to get in. The older buildings could not have bigger windows for the danger of the walls falling, being unable to support the tons of heavy stone. However, even though more light is present in the Gothic cathedrals, one cannot shake off “a sense of considerable shadowiness or obscurity” (Fisher 73). These buildings produce a sense of awe and of the sublime, creating a genuine effect in one’s perception – and all these qualities pervaded other parts of the artistic spectrum, as the architectural term started to refer to a certain type of literature as well. The word became a “*synonym for something barbaric, dark, irrational and passionate*”⁵ and the Gothic also began to mean a “*dark wave, the dark side of enlightened rationalism*” (Medová 10).

The stories themselves usually take place at some mysterious old castle or secluded chateau which is usually haunted by ghosts or some hidden dirty secret; they carry a significant mood of anxiousness and secrecy, and some of the characters are cursed or otherwise blighted by powers surpassing them (which is an important note for the following discussion; these supernatural powers come in the form of ghosts, monsters or dark prophecies but they still remain in the somewhat earthly domain). Emotions are present in great amounts and the sense of terror is conveyed by characters acting their emotions to the extremes, so “*moments of screaming, crying, and fits of panic*” are not scarce; they are in abundance (Medová 11). *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole is one such example of this type of literature (Fisher 74). Another feature of a gothic story is some amount of humour employed. It is indeed the truth for Walpole, William Beckford or for Poe for that matter, that

⁵ Italics in citations of Medová were also added, the original text is in Czech and any direct citations by this author are italicised to mark translation (which is the same case as with Škvorecký).

“hyperbolic language and high-pitched emotions verge so strongly toward the ridiculous” (Fisher 76) that hardly anyone can take some parts of the stories very seriously.⁶

Having stated the information about the source of the European gothic originally being old castles and cathedrals, it must logically follow that the European gothic tradition could not have been unaltered when adopted by American writers. One has to realize the simple fact that although the former immigrants to the United States were usually Europeans, their descendants were not, and as the Americans strived to find their own identity, they could not build it with things like the cathedrals in mind because there simply were not any on the continent. The setting was forced to change, and so the castles had to be traded for old houses (which is very typical for Lovecraft) and other various tales take place in the countryside, especially in the forest (Medová 22) or on (or in) the water (which is even a more lovecraftian theme) (Fisher 75). Also the “*writing techniques and the symbols*” changed to deal with “*psychological, metaphysical, and social issues*” (Medová 21). E. A. Poe certainly ranks among the most influential writers of the American gothic. His characters experience traumatic situations and go more and more insane, step by step dissolving the reality into delusion. The narrator of the “Black Cat” is followed by a phantom of the murdered animal and gradually loses his sanity. The borderline between reality and imagination is disappearing and one can either take the descriptions literally or choose a more psychoanalytical approach and perceive the events as happening in the character’s head. (Medová 24)

To the present day, the Gothic elements in literature have not disappeared. Moreover, they are sometimes being used in ways which would make the former masters of the genre, given the possibility to read them, spin in their graves. The literature of the gothic (when self-

⁶As it is shown in the analytical part, Lovecraft is one such someone. He neither approved of comical elements in horror stories, nor did he ever want to use them in his own writings.

consciously employing humour touched upon above) has the quality a Czech proverb describes as: “*it’s so bad that it’s actually good*” (Škvorecký 281). But even this phenomenon has to operate within some limits and needs a certain level of, for the lack of a better phrase, “good taste”; and so, although the main bulk of the darkly gothic teenage romance books that are popular at the moment try to keep the shadowy gothic atmosphere, it is quite possible some of them would bring Poe, Hawthorne, or Walpole premature deaths by heart-attack.

2.3 Horror Literature

The literature that is usually referred to as “weird tale” by Lovecraft goes beyond the needs of an everyday reader because “it demands of” them “a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from everyday life.” It plays at the strings in people’s minds that are not harboured or anchored in rational thoughts, which would destroy the intended effect altogether, had they pervaded these stories. Although only a minority of readers, who are fond “of the spectrally macabre in general” (Lovecraft 1973, 12), is capable of such detachment, the possibility is always there that “sometimes a curious streak of fancy” comes to those otherwise perfectly composed and balanced, “so that no amount of rationalisation, reform, or Freudian analysis can quite annul the thrill of the chimney-corner whisper or the lonely wood” (Lovecraft 1973, 13). The horror literature (as it is mostly referred to as today) is focused on readers who expect to experience some thrill, they expect the story to shake them (or otherwise show them some disturbing and stimulating vistas; as people like E. A. Poe were aware – “controversy sells books” (Hayes 8)) and make them feel scared. Therefore, it tends to be a not very deep kind of literature that would deal with social, racial, economic or other local or global problems: it usually does not have more than one story line (especially in the case of a horror short story) and concentrates on the effect the tale should have on readers. Luckily enough, there are many stories that are not significantly inferior and horror literature

as a genre should not be considered worthless (or less in worth), even though it's overall purpose – to simply scare people for their sheer enjoyment – would justify such attitude.

3. Analytical Part

This part examines to what extent the both authors at hand are similar in their writings and how exactly they differ, utilising the information foreshadowed in the previous part of the thesis. It concentrates more closely on the stories themselves and strives to show that although the similarities are striking, Lovecraft did not simply copy Poe and that he, heavily influenced by Poe, made his pastiches into something more than plagiarism. The mentioned similarities and differences are shown in the narrative strategies of the authors, meaning mostly their style, the themes and symbols used and concepts of the worlds portrayed in their stories. The differences most widely discussed are these: a) the sources of horror – Poe's characters are going through traumatic events and are followed by supernatural occurrences (which can be "real" or merely happening in their heads) and every story deals directly with people and events happening on Earth, while Lovecraft is focused on more cosmic, extraterrestrial matters, and dreams; b) Poe's stories are disconnected, but Lovecraft's stories usually have an unified fictional mythological background and some characters appear repetitiously; c) Poe deals with insanity in detail and concentrates on it psychologically, the characters and their mental state are central themes of the stories, while, if Lovecraft's main protagonists are insane (the mad person being surely modelled after Poe's example), their mental state is not studied, but rather what made them loose their minds – their encounter with something unknown, terrible and incomprehensible to human brain – is of much greater importance; d) the approach and treatment of women is different, for while Poe liked them dead, Lovecraft mostly simply excluded them from his stories; e) Lovecraft is much more straightforward (and serious in tone) than Poe; and f) while Poe utilised humour in his stories, Lovecraft did not (intentionally) do so and disliked Poe for letting it happen in his work. Most of the

differences mentioned lead into the conclusion that Lovecraft took Poe's idea of alienation and explored it further, imprinting it not only on the individual, but also on the human race as a whole, and rendered all the heavenly bodies, including stars and the vast regions of unknown space, dangerous or indifferent towards humans and humanity.

It must be said that some information concerning the style and themes of H. P. Lovecraft are more complex and it is hard to state everything at once without making the explanation incomprehensible. That is why the information about the Cthulhu Mythos and the exploit of the fear of the unknown are fragmented; both concepts are closely connected but if explained both at once, they interfere with the logical flow of thoughts.

3.1 Style and Narrative Strategies

It would be fit first to repeat that Lovecraft became infatuated with Poe's literature in an early age and the encounter was so strong that Poe was to influence his style greatly. Lovecraft's attempts at writing poetry (his partly loosely connected thirty six sonnets compiling the only collection (if it can be called a collection at all), which was later called "The Fungi from Yuggoth", can be seen as one such proof of Poe's importance for Lovecraft's writing. None of the prose-poems deals with love, either had or lost (as is the case in for instance Poe's "Lenore" or "The Raven"); their themes are either horror-oriented or dream-oriented. The two maybe most well-known of them are "The Nightgaunts"⁷ and "Nyarlathotep"⁸. The former portrays faceless winged monsters that allegedly used to snatch the persona in the night and carry him [*sic*] "on monstrous voyagings" or "down the nether pits to that foul lake / where the puffed shoggoths splash in doubtful sleep" (Lovecraft 2008,

⁷ Robert M. Thomas has created a very suggestive painting of one of them called simply "Night Gaunt". This picture also figures in the board game "Arkham Horror".

⁸ This pseudo-Egyptian name is Lovecraft's own invention, either compiled by him or inspired by the names of Lord Dunsany's gods or other creatures, as Joshi has suggested and as will be discussed in the following section (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag).

3). It combines both the elements of fear of the unknown and dreams, which are used in abundance by Lovecraft. His stories like “Solaris” or “The Silver Key” both take place mostly in a dream the narrator is trying to stay in, for he sees it as the true or the more important reality. The latter poem is an important part of the Cthulhu Mythos and deals with an old pharaoh, who is a kind of John the Baptist harbinger character preparing this world for the coming of the “evil” alien forces.

This debate should not continue until one more concept is explained. The paragraphs above contain words like “Cthulhu”, “shoggoth” or “Arkham” without giving any further explanations to them, save the promise of them being given later on. So to be able to fully submerge into the problem of the similarity of Poe’s and Lovecraft’s styles, the following section deals with the “Cthulhu Mythos” which has the key to understanding most of the stories of Lovecraft’s.

3.1.1 Cthulhu Mythos

One of the things that sets Lovecraft apart from Poe (even though it does share a piece of common ground with Dunsany) is the concept now called the Cthulhu Mythos. One would hardly imagine any connection between the murderer in “The Black Cat” and Mr. Usher – both stories take place on this planet but that is about it. While Poe probably would not arrange it for Fortunato and the murderer in “The Tell-Tale Heart” to meet, in Lovecraft’s world it would not be impossible at all.

The Cthulhu Mythos is a phenomenon most widely discussed considering H. P. Lovecraft’s literature. It might be said it is what he is most famous for as a writer. But the description of what it is, or what it is supposed to be, is fairly elusive because even though Lovecraft was the founder of the idea, he neither coined the “Cthulhu Mythos”, nor did he ever use this name to refer to it. According to him,

[a]ll my stories, unconnected as they may be, are based on the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practising Black Magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live outside, ever ready to take possession of this earth again (Jones 845).

This description of Lovecraft's is the basic core of this idea – the Mythos is the glue that connects the stories: they all fall into the mythological structure he created. Lovecraft's fear of the unknown (which will be discussed in the following section) is also in perfect accord with the whole concept. Lovecraft swept away “the old-fashioned monsters of Gothic horror” and in their stead placed “ancient gods” who acted as “sentient creatures⁹ from distant worlds, dimensions or other planes of existence” (Jones 846), gave them names which he usually borrowed from other writers (most notably Lord Dunsany, from whom he borrowed the whole idea of “a mythical pantheon of gods” (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag)), and using a very different approach from what has been written before him, he made them the central source of horror in many of his stories of discovery, be it at the bottom of the sea (“The Call of Cthulhu”), high up in the mountains of Antarctica (*At the Mountains of Madness*), deep beneath the sands of the desert (“The Shadow Out of Time”), or on the then newly discovered planet of our solar system, Pluto (“The Whisperer in the Darkness”). Sometimes they are referred to as “gods” but later they are explained as being entities from outer space, mere extraterrestrials that were perceived as “gods” by humans; the shift is from the “really” mythological to the cosmic acting as mythological (Joshi 2008, 88). But one has to be careful if describing those beings as “evil”, because Lovecraft stated that ““common human laws and

⁹ One creature in particular, the before mentioned shoggoth, which is contained in *At the Mountains of Madness*, is of a greater interest. It bears features which a human being usually finds disgusting: it is “a terrible, *indescribable* thing” (italics added, Lovecraft is often playing with things being so out of mind that they are beyond understanding by anyone) “vaster than any subway train – a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming” (Lovecraft 2008, 499). The name of this colossus of a loathsome outlook might be a pun, because shoggoth sounds very similar to the Hebrew word for “abomination” which leads to a question whether it was intentional or not.

interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large” (Joshi 2008, 61). He placed these creatures, that are ignorant of the human race (which is a swarm of worthless ants to them) at places where humans had not set foot and invoked the all too familiar feeling of the fear of the unknown. The word “Cthulhu” refers to one (and the most famous) of his gods; it is a winged being of near human stature with an octopoid, tentacled head. There have been many debates about how to pronounce it, but, as Lovecraft has admitted, there is no “correct” or “right” pronunciation, therefore, there is no “wrong” pronunciation either¹⁰ (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag) Robert Bloch, himself a writer of weird fiction, remarked that “[t]he whole concept of a cosmology in which evil forces controlled the universe was very fresh and some of his [Lovecraft’s] characters and characterizations were quite shocking.” He also stated that “[t]he things he talked about were strange, were *novel*, were mysterious” (italics added) and while for any person these days his fiction might look hardly original, “most of the people I [Bloch] knew that had met the word of Lovecraft for the first time were quite frightened by it” (Jones 841). While reading Poe, “psychoanalytic approach” is advised, for many of his stories (“The Tell-Tale Heart”, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, “The Imp of Perverse”) usually deal with “psychopathological conditions” of the characters (Rosenheim and Rachman *x – xi*). He crafted his stories with the touch of his poetic nature but it would be hard to find any evidence that the stories have something connecting them, save their theme. In Lovecraft, it is not difficult to see or feel (however this might seem subjective) the red line that goes through all of them. This corresponds with the fact that the world shown in the stories was his own to rule and it was

¹⁰ According to Lovecraft’s friends, he proposed to pronounce it [*klu:tu:], “K-lüt-l-lüt!” or “Koot-u-lew”. (Jones 852) Today, the most frequent pronunciation to be heard is [*k’θu:lu:], the people from HPLHS, the H. P. Lovecraft Historical society, prefer it and that is probably the reason why it has been adopted by many others as well. However, it is not important to have a singular, uniform pronunciation of it; it is left to the reader to craft their own pronunciation.

that world in which the stories take place, whereas Poe set his characters in the real world, but surrounded them with supernatural gothic fright or injected them with a certain level of insanity or other mental derangement (the interpretation of the horrors Poe's characters encounter depends on how seriously one takes the situations he describes).

So far, this chapter has shown these aspects of the Cthulhu Mythos: Pantheon of mythical deities and their operation in places unknown to humankind (where the author employed his techniques to awake the uncanny fear of the unknown). There are two more factors that make the Mythos what it is (although they are both fairly close in nature, so one might take them as being identical), and although being, again, started by Lovecraft, the main bulk of it emerged only after his death. What makes the Cthulhu Mythos a perfect myth, is Lovecraft's skilful blending of the fictional with the real. One of his most well-known inventions is the *Necronomicon* which has already been mentioned in the theoretical part. Being the book of ultimate evil which contains the incantations and invocations of all the horrible monsters and creatures from the Cthulhu Mythos, it also describes them all in great detail. This fabled tome of forbidden knowledge, allegedly written by a mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, is said to be in only a few copies, of which one is placed in the library of (a fictional) Miskatonic University in the fictional city of Arkham, Massachusetts. Arkham, Innsmouth, Kingsport... all these are towns Lovecraft invented and set his stories in, in their vicinities or at least mentions them from time to time (the expedition that goes to explore the Antarctica in *At the Mountains of Madness* is dispatched from the Miskatonic University for instance). Poe does not have this given setting: the places his stories take place in are usually not that important because he concentrates on different aspects – he describes the interior of the house of Prince Prospero in “The Masque of The Red Death” in great detail but never actually mentions where it takes place geographically. If one does not try to look Arkham up in the map, they will probably believe the town exists, similar case being with the

Necronomicon. It is only one of his fictional books; in connection with it, he usually kept mentioning other imaginary titles such as Pnakotic Manuscripts, *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* by Friedrich Wilhelm von Junzt (originally invented by Robert E. Howard), *De Vermis Mysteriis* by Ludwig Prinn (invented by Robert Bloch) or *Cultes des Goules* by Comte d'Erlette (which is unmistakably August Derleth). These phantasmagorical books were referred to in Lovecraft's stories alongside with real books like *The Golden Bough* by Sir James George Frazer or *Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria* by W. Scott-Elliot (Škvorecký 286). Mixing the existing titles with the imaginary ones raised the legitimacy of anything he was writing about at the moment because it was difficult to tell the level of credibility without the necessary background. That made even the craziest topics and ideas seem grounded in acknowledged literature and heightened the terrifying effect these weird concepts had the capacity to unleash. What followed was the adoption of these pastiches by other Lovecraft's followers and the creation of an amalgamated mixture of fact and fiction very hard to separate one from another. The level of mystification was so high that when Lovecraft became more famous (after his death of course), some people wanted to order some of these titles from their bookshops, rendering the shop attendants confused and desperate because most of the books, of course, never existed (Škvorecký 287). An important thing has to be stated here: Lovecraft took the storytelling very seriously (it is good to keep in mind his attitude towards the comical aspects of Poe's stories which will be dealt with in the following section) and while he might have joked about his ideas with his friends, style-wise he would never intentionally make his stories and the topics included there funny. He, unlike Poe who leaves much space for interpretation, tries to convince the reader that yes, it sounds unbelievable, but it is the truth no matter what the reader thinks.

Ironically enough, the Mythos is in its pure self a joke, one fooling the readers. The main joke, and the final element that is to the Mythos (very much connected with the previous

one), is its openness. S. T. Joshi in his extensive study “Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos” remarks that even “the mere existence of this phenomenon has not received the consideration it deserves” because, as he also continues, it has “no parallel in the entire history of literature for such enduring and wide-ranging attempts to imitate or develop a single writer’s conceptions” (20). The Cthulhu Mythos was initiated by Lovecraft and widely expanded by his colleagues, in part during his life and in the bigger part after his death. But although all those people are now dead as well, the Mythos still lives on and keeps expanding. Stephen King continues writing his novels located in his fictional towns of New Castle, Derry or Haven in Maine, Ramsey Campbell creates horror pieces influenced by truly lovecraftian spirit, and Neil Gaiman from time to time breaths life to short pieces like “Shoggoth’s Old Peculiar” or “I Cthulhu or What’s A Tentacle-Faced Thing Like Me Doing In A Sunken City Like This (Latitude 47° 9' S, Longitude 126° 43' W)?”

One might say, therefore, that the Cthulhu Mythos encompasses a dark mythology with its “sacred” texts, special entities beyond human understanding, playing jokes at people who cannot see the bigger picture and expanding this huge lie infinitely until no one is really sure what the truth is and what the product of imagination. No one can say for sure what Lovecraft would say, could he read some of King’s novels or see the “Alien” (works heavily inspired by him), and it is also difficult to imagine if he intended the Mythos to become what it became. Nonetheless, the Czech community (which has been mentioned in the introduction as generally ignorant of Lovecraft’s influence) interested in Czech comedy theatre might be very tolerant and understanding of this kind of mystification, because what else is master Jára da Cimrman invented by Smoljak and Svěrák than another Cthulhu or Necronomicon (Škvorecký 287)?

3.1.2 Style, Themes, and the Differences

As it has already been stated, to convey the genuine sense of cosmic terror, Lovecraft was using the element of his peculiar fear of the unknown. One of his most well-known statements, which at the same time is the opening of his compact essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature”, can be almost taken as a manifesto – his program as a writer of horror fiction, because after his famous declaration: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown¹¹” he follows that “[t]hese facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tales as a literary form” (Lovecraft 1973, 12). Lovecraft does use the fear of the unknown a lot. As his characters are gazing into dark cellars, pondering the depths of unfathomable past, or staring into the mocking blackness of the infinite night sky, shivering in mad fright, they exercise the “oldest emotion” in its full extent. The technique was not unknown to Poe who uses it for example in “The Pit and the Pendulum” where “fear of the dark, [...] fear of the unknown, [and] fear of death” are at play (Fisher 85). In this age, one would probably simply say Lovecraft’s characters are afraid of the dark. However, for Lovecraft there was no such thing as empty or plain darkness (which for him would be a kind of blessing – a merciful oblivion). His darkness was indeed to be justifiably feared, as it was always swarming with horrible monsters and creatures beyond the capacity of human brain to understand.

It would be fitting to pause here in the debate over the fear of the unknown and address more thoroughly one aspect of Lovecraft’s style that has already been hinted upon several times. He is always playing with weirdness, hard-to-grasp-ness and otherworldliness using (by no means only) a specific vocabulary that includes words like “indescribable”, “unimaginable”, “unspeakable”, or “formless”. This tendency of his is clear to see in his

¹¹ This sentence might owe something to the opening of Poe’s “Metzengerstein”: “Horror and fatality have been stalking abroad in all ages” (Hayes 20).

stories and can be taken as one of the important things characterising his style (alongside with his (over)use of adjectives). The crowning event for this feature of Lovecraft's writing was the day he gave the title to one of his short stories called "The Unnamable"¹². Lovecraft is not trying to convey all the specific details of the horrors described, he merely hints at how horrible and traumatising the situation is, or only touches¹³ the ugliness and terribleness of the monsters, saying that they are so awful (in the fullest extent of the word derived from "awe") they cannot even start to be described and that they are so foreign and so different from anything any human being has ever seen that their outlook cannot be related. In "Colour Out of Space" a meteor falls from the sky and the surprised scientists from the Miskatonic university, who go to explore the visitor from space, discover a globe which has a strange colour that does not match the usual spectrum; it almost escaped the classification because "it was only by analogy that they called it a colour at all" (Lovecraft 2008, 171) (for one further example see the description of a shoggoth above in the sub-chapter "3.1.1 Cthulhu Mythos"). Lovecraft, in this sense, is usually focused on the creatures and objects that are totally and ultimately foreign to anything earthly or human. Poe, on the other hand, is much more down to earth. His characters are endowed with physical and mental abilities not unknown or unheard of in a human being and their skilfully created psychological profiles are usually well described. Also (which is of more importance here), Poe often tries to relate some sort of peculiar feeling like in "The Fall of the House of Usher" – the sentences in the first paragraph of the story are good examples of this. The narrator goes to visit a friend of his, some Mr.

¹² Some stories of Lovecraft's have titles with British spelling (e.g. "Colour Out of Space") and some with the American spelling (e.g. "The Unnamable"). It is hard to tell exactly why but the suggestion is that the editor was sometimes not stopped before changing something the author did not intend to endure to be changed.

¹³ This is true for situations and beings in the middle of the stories, not in their ends. Lovecraft had a profound thing for spilling the beans (be it the source of the supernatural terror or some other horrible realisation) in the very last sentence of any of his tales. This will be discussed further in this section.

Usher in his house. When he approaches the mansion, “a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit” as he gets “the first glimpse of the building.” He tries to give a very thorough description of what emotions are stirred in him when he “look[s] upon the scene before [him]” and experiences the feeling of “utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil” (Poe 2005, 3). The important point to be made here is that while in Poe’s case the feeling can be described quite accurately, in Lovecraft’s fiction the accounts given are very elusive and usually suggest that it is all fairly indescribable. To Poe’s emotions one can relate, they are not unknown, alien or foreign; emotions of Lovecraft’s characters are usually also imaginable but they are summoned by things that go utterly against any human comprehension (the narrator in “The Fall of House of Usher” gets the insufferable feeling just from seeing the house, Lovecraft’s professors do not even know what to think when they see the strange “colour”).

To go back to the previous discussion, Lovecraft thought in the manner of white spots on the map. In the now long ago past, the as for that time yet undiscovered countries and places on this planet were marked *hic sunt leones*. Lovecraft constructed his world in the same way with the difference that his lions always had too many mouths with too many teeth in them and instead of everyday limbs they were armed with slimy and hideous tentacles ready to snatch anyone foolish enough to try to probe the undiscovered places Lovecraft “populated [...] with monsters” (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag). He takes his characters into places like the undiscovered mountain ranges in the Antarctica (*At the Mountains of Madness*) where the expedition discovers peaks much higher than those of Himalaya and an ancient, prehistoric city on the plateau on top of one of them, or the bottom of the sea (actually he makes the buildings at the bottom rise above the surface) as is the truth for “The Call of Cthulhu” (where the aeons old monster rises from its lair, and after massacring most of the

sailors that are unlucky enough to be at the place when it happens, it sinks again), “Dagon” (which is all in all the same in this aspect, only with the difference that the monster the narrator awoke in the strange city from below the sea has probably tracked the survivor back home), or “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” (where people worshipping Dagon, an evil underwater god, mate with the deep beings from the ocean and gradually become such entities – most probably the result of combination of Lovecraft’s disgust of sea food (Jones 834) and his fear of cross-breeding (*Fear of the Unknown* n.pag)).

The last note from the previous paragraph takes the discussion into the reign of crimes, their motives and the existence or non-existence of predestination in works of both authors. It has to be said that the only story of Lovecraft’s that (if at all) can be called a detective story is the “Horror at Red Hook” discussed earlier in this section in connection with Lovecraft’s fear of cross-breeding and xenophobia. To repeat some facts, he always had the sense that immigrants would somehow taint the face of his beloved New England. His justified sense of belonging to the old British families and the alleged purity that would ensue was threatened by the armies of immigrants from other continents, be it the Europeans, Asians or Africans. And so this self-incoherent, foreigners hating, anti-Semitic best (pen)friend of many Jews and husband to a Jewish woman was inspired by the experience from many-cultured inhabitants of New York to write the story that keeps hinting at the immigrants’ impurity and ugliness. He describes the demographical bulk of people in the Red Hook as “a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian and negro elements impinging upon one another.” The place “is a babel of sound and filth, and sends out strange cries to answer the lapping of oily waves” – one should always keep Lovecraft’s fear of or disgust with anything living in the sea in mind – and it is on daily bases that “[f]rom this tangle of material and spiritual putrescence the blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky” (Lovecraft 2008, 150-151). His fear of mixing with the “alien” population culminated in him and made him create stories like “The

Shadow Over Innsmouth” or “The Dunwich Horror”. The former story’s main protagonist comes into Innsmouth, a sea town, and watches the strange inhabitants that never blink and that look extraordinarily pale and sick. During his investigation of the town he meets an old alcoholic sailor who tells him these people started (years ago) to worship Dagon and to mix-breed with the ugly creatures from the bottom of the sea. What followed was that the fish genes started to work on the people and in decades it transformed them into the same fish-men that lived in the water. The story goes on and leads into the final realisation of the visitor that he, too, has family roots in Innsmouth and that he is starting to turn into a fish-man himself. The latter story tells about Wilbur Whateley and his family. He was born to his mother who, however, did not have him with her husband, but with a demon called Yog-Sothoth. She gives birth to two children – fast growing and ugly Wilbur and his invisible demon brother (or sister, the sex is not mentioned or even relevant for that matter) of a size of a barn. The monster is killed in the end by three professors from the Miskatonic university using a special powder of Ibn-Ghazi and a mantra from the Necronomicon¹⁴. In both of these stories, it is hard not to perceive the fear of breeding with alien, foreign creatures from some incomprehensible otherworld. It does not really matter if they are subterranean sea monsters or evil demons from other dimensions; they are not human, they are different. And the differences are always as disgusting as they are frightening or dangerous. It resembles

¹⁴ This is one of the rare occasions when Lovecraft actually employs some action in his story, although he was criticised for it; the story is more accessible (Joshi 2008, 70) to the reader this way but it strays from Lovecraft’s overall style and might be the product of his works being rejected all the time (Joshi 2008, 69). Usually the whole narrative is done retrospectively by either someone writing a diary about what happened to him (“Dagon”) or giving the account of what happened as a monologue (“The Call of Cthulhu”). Rarely does he make his characters do something thrillingly noteworthy like to escape a monster-ridden hotel jumping over the roofs of other houses (“The Shadow Over Innsmouth”) or to run from a certain death by avoiding a huge monstrous shoggoth lurking in the tunnels beneath the gigantic mountain range (*At the Mountains of Madness*).

Lovecraft's attitude towards people from other countries and it is very possible it found its projection in his stories of this sort. To address the predestination in Lovecraft, if there is any, it is never induced by a prophecy, or an act of magic, or by any "divine" intervention (Lovecraft's universe was always "hostile" (or rather dangerous) and indifferent towards humans, it has to be remembered); some characters are pushed into doing or have predispositions to do horrid things because of what they are, usually not what they have done. Whateley was predestined to be evil because of his genetic heritage (he was a half-demon), the fish-men from Innsmouth were predestined to go into the ocean when they lost their ability to breathe the air because their mothers mated with the monsters below and made them ones of that kind as well. It is more likely than not that Lovecraft was afraid that something similar might happen if the "pure" New Englanders started mixing with the many different peoples from all around the world coming into the US.¹⁵

E. A. Poe's characters are not predestined to do what they do (or become what they become) because of their (genetic) heritage but because of the degradation of their moral or mental state (or both) if it can be called predestination at all because the case is rather vice versa (the crime causes the mental degradation). It is also not possible to fully juxtapose motives of the criminals in Poe's detective stories with Lovecraft's approach to motives of his "criminals", because, as Poe suggested, his detective stories were not detective per se, but should rather be called "ratiocinative" stories (Fisher 84), and because Lovecraft usually does

¹⁵ However much this element of racism might be present here and elsewhere, Joshi pleads that both readers and scholars do not pay too much attention to it here (in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth"), as the "element is largely submerged and does not affect our appreciation of Lovecraft's artistry in creating an atmosphere of clutching and cumulative horror" (2008, 95). As it has been suggested in the theoretical part (for more details see section "2.1.1.2. The Big Inspiration"), although racism and xenophobia are often present in Lovecraft stories, they usually do *not* manifest themselves strongly and are hardly the central themes in any of the stories, including "The Terrible Old Man", although they seem to play quite an important role in "The Horror at Red Hook".

not deal with crimes as understood by the regular law. Lovecraft borrowed a lot from Poe's tales of mental degradation of the "criminal". In some of his stories the character, who is the narrator of the tale, gradually goes insane while telling his [*sic*]¹⁶ whole story (as is true for "Dagon" or for "The Shadow Out of Time"). It is, however, different in many senses from Poe, because while for the older master the crime, its construction, its execution and description by the orchestrator slowly slipping into madness was most important and crucial for their decline of sanity, Lovecraft's characters are mentally disturbed by the traumatic events happening around them and they (the characters) contribute to their own insanity with nothing more than a small dosage of pure curiosity exercised in the beginning (if even that). In "The Cask of Amontillado", to show the Poe example, the crime is carefully described in every possible detail and even though some scholars disagree that the crime had a motive, there are hints in the story that prove them otherwise. In "The Cask" there is not much to actually investigate, it is hardly a detective story at all but one can do their own share of looking into the matter and find not only "who" but "why" the crime (which is more of "a successful act of vengeance and punishment rather than a crime") came to pass (Baraban 47 - 49) for it was not a meaningless murder on part of the narrator; he "had borne" "[t]he thousand injuries of Fortunato[...] as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge" (Poe 2005, 122). This is a slightly different case (where the narrator is – depends on the point of view of the reader – sane and prepares his retribution with painstaking precision and detail) than in "The Tale-Tell Heart". The narrator also carefully describes his crime but from the very beginning the reader is faced with a man who is doing nothing but trying to convince the reader (or presumably the ward or a doctor in an insane asylum) of his sanity.

¹⁶ The theoretical part has already made it clear that Lovecraft's characters were seldom ever women and if they were, they were never the main protagonists (talking from the first person or the third person perspective).

Therefore, it is perfectly correct to use the adjectives for males while talking about Lovecraft's stories.

His “sense of hearing” is no doubt “*acute*” (italics added to emphasise the sarcasm) because not only is he able to perceive “all things in the heaven and in the earth” and “many things in hell” (Poe 2005, 218), but also the sounds that do not exist, like the beating of a heart in a dead body hidden under the floor of the house. Certainly, others will argue that what he heard was his own heart, which he mistook for the heart of the man he killed, but the statement in the previous sentence does not seek to contradict this interpretation at all. It only serves to show that the sheer *believing* on the part of the murderer that the beating heart was the one of the deceased proves the mental decline of the criminal caused by the feeling (if not of guilt) that the murder was to be discovered, even though he went into great effort in order to cover it. It is starting to be apparent that two different themes appear next to each other in this discussion – the investigation of a crime and insanity. If looked at from this perspective, it also becomes clear what Lovecraft did borrow from Poe and what he left untouched. Although he sometimes wrote pastiches like “The Cool Air” (a story unquestionably borrowing from Poe’s “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar”), it was not always the case. His stories that include a person losing their sanity have the first person narrative using similar rhetoric: “I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case when my very senses reject their own evidence” – “The Black Cat” (Poe 2005, 99), “saved only by a desperate conviction of the mythical source of certain impressions, I am unwilling to vouch for the truth of that which I think I found in Western Australia on the night of July 17-18, 1935” – “The Shadow out of Time” (Lovecraft 2008, 555). For Poe, however, the reason the narrator goes insane is (arguably of course) their own fault (the committing of the crime), while Lovecraft usually has more cosmic themes in mind and plays at the string of the insignificance of humanity and the hidden horrors which the humankind is oblivious of (for their own good because, as his famous passage from “The Call of Cthulhu” suggests, it is “[t]he most merciful thing in the world” that the “human mind” is virtually unable “to

correlate all its contents [...] The piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age”) (Lovecraft 2008, 201).

When talking about style and techniques of narration of these two authors, the differences in their treatment of the female characters should also be at least mentioned. As it was stated in the theoretical part¹⁷ Lovecraft did not *like* to use women in his stories and usually gives them only the roles of birth-givers of (mostly half-human) monsters (“The Dunwich Horror”, “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”). Only to keep the thought fresh and unforgotten, the theoretical part has suggested (and it is, unfortunately, an inconclusive suggestion) that the reason for lack of female characters and elements in his stories would be that Lovecraft was surrounded by women for his whole life (his mother, then his aunts, then his wife, and then his aunts again) and probably wanted to distance himself from them (plus what really interested him were books, not women). Poe, on the other hand, had a genuinely artistic use for women, which was, famously enough, the ““death of a beautiful woman”” which he held to be ““the most poetical topic in the world”” (Dayan 180). It certainly depends on the individual tastes of a reader but in any case it is hard to consider (for example) the death of the woman in “The Black Cat” as “poetic”, for how is it more poetic to kill one’s wife with an axe and wall her up then to wall up Fortunato, thirsty for a bottle of Amontillado? There is little more to say than that one does not have to go deeper into this discussion save mentioning that while Poe uses female characters, Lovecraft usually does not and marginalises their roles when he does (there are no ““noble and good, and naturally very beautiful”” women in Lovecraft’s as opposed to Poe’s stories (Dayan 180)).

¹⁷ See “2.1.1.4. Marriage and Other Horrors”.

What Lovecraft was (not always successfully, though) avoiding was the element of humour. His intention was to convey feelings of horror, fear of the unknown, and helpless meaninglessness of the human race. He was certainly using various kinds of in-jokes which served only to acknowledge other writers and their pieces (the priest Klarkash-Ton is Clark Ashton Smith, Comte d'Erlette is August Derleth etc.). Nonetheless, Lovecraft did what he could to do away with comical elements in his writing by being serious in tone and stating that all he (or rather the personas of the stories) says is true (for the purposes of the narrative and the atmosphere of the stories). However, by doing so his style sometimes tended to be so strained and the voice so over-the-top serious that (even though it would not be his intention) some of his stories or their parts sound frankly ridiculous and invoke a faint smile at best. Poe, in accord with the Gothic tradition, was using (a rather peculiar) humour in his literature which Lovecraft "complains about" and which he dislikes in his otherwise lifetime favourite writer. He describes it as "blundering ventures in stilted and laboured pseudo-humor" (Zimmerman 63). The word peculiar is used here because what Poe is doing "is laughing up his sleeve, immunized against the social contagion of general good humor and fellow feeling" and because his "humour is very personal" one has to keep in mind that "to understand Poe's comedy" the important factor is that he was making jokes that only "he found funny" (Zimmerman 64). Nevertheless, there are certainly passages in his stories that can be very amusing to others than him like the one in "Some Words with a Mummy" where the doctor, trying to re-animate the mummified body with electricity, is kicked out of the window in a style of Laurel and Hardy by the embalmed corpse (Zimmerman 67).

The final remark to be made here is one concerning the endings of Lovecraft's stories as opposed to the ones of Poe. This section has already shown that Lovecraft was usually only hinting at the ugliness and terribleness of his monsters because he strived to make them as much alien and foreign as possible and, therefore, deliberately made all his characters unable

to convey the creatures and horrors using human language. Although this is a brilliant technique which keeps the reader in check and allows their imagination to kick in, he, sadly enough, fails to retain this kind of openness in the endings (Škvorecký 291). All the mysteries are “solved” (or explained rather) in the final sentence of most of his stories. Lovecraft was probably unable to keep anything for himself and wanted to give the full record of what is to the story. Funnily enough, if one wants to know how a Lovecraft’s story ends (what is the unexplained secret foreshadowed in the body of the story), they can just jump to the final sentence (or two) and there it is in its bare straightforwardness. And so it is in the final sentence of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” where one reads that the main character, turning into a fish-man, “shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to Cyclopean and many columned Y’ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory forever.” (Lovecraft 2008, 554) It is in the last sentences of “In the Vault”, where the undertaker Birch goes through a traumatic experience of being sealed in a tomb and emerging from it without ankles, where one finds Doctor Davis telling him: ““An eye for an eye! Great heavens, Birch, but you got what you deserved! The skull turned my stomach, but the other was worse – *those ankles cut neatly off to fit Matt Fenner’s cast-aside coffin!*”” (Lovecraft 2008, 140) In this thesis it has been said many times that Poe leaves much for individual interpretation and in for instance “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket” he leaves an open ending which is artistically and from the perspective of the narrative a better solution than actually explaining what happened. As Škvorecký stated, it is “*the lesson*” of the older master that “*Lovecraft never understood*”, learned, or utilised (291).

3.2 Theft or Synthesis?

The debate could go into more detail but as it would take up too much space here and as it is not necessary to do so (for the important information, theories and proofs, have been

laid down already), the time has come to answer the final question: did Lovecraft simply steal from Poe or did he just use what he learned from Poe's style?

One must not forget the fact that Poe was not the only author Lovecraft borrowed from. Even during his lifetime when someone created a story tinted with the ideas of the Cthulhu Mythos, Lovecraft tended to take some elements from that story and incorporate them into *his* next piece of literature. He admired Lord Dunsany and utilised his concept of a fake mythology; he liked Arthur Machen and "The Dunwich Horror" owes a lot to Machen's "The Great God Pan" (Joshi 2008, 65); he read Ambrose Bierce and borrowed some names Bierce invented (Joshi 2008, 82). This thesis, therefore, does not dare to even suggest that *everything* in what Lovecraft differs from Poe is *Lovecraft's own* genuine invention and should be treated as such. Nonetheless, one should consider Lovecraft's remarks about the literature he liked and wrote, reflect these ideas and thoughts, juxtapose them with the sources he took inspiration from, and select what is needed to contrast him and Poe. Poe's humour is something Lovecraft never wanted to copy or use because he deemed it a "pseudo-humour" that has no place in a horror story, since he was aware that "the strongest emotion" in humans is fear of the unknown and, having utilised or rather having made steps in the narrative to invoke this kind of fear in readers, knew that adding comic elements would ruin the atmosphere he was trying to build up. His artistic aim did not allow him to use comedy in his creative writing and his taste made him criticise Poe for doing so. Lovecraft's endings, although deemed by Josef Škvorecký as wrong (or of a less worth) from the artistic point of view, differ from Poe as well. It might not be the better of the solutions (explaining the horrors present or leaving the ending opened for imagination of readers) but it belonged to his genuine style and differentiated him from his main influence. He wanted to stack the feeling of horror up and up and then hit the reader with one mighty blow in the end (not always achieving the effect intended). Lovecraft sets his stories in different milieus than Poe; he

either puts them in a world that pretends to be ours (but includes fictional mythology, a whole library of fictional forbidden books, and a fictional geography as a background) or in the land of dreams (where almost everything is possible) while Poe's stories take place on this planet but concentrate mainly on the characters and their psychology. And while Poe's stories work as separate units, most of Lovecraft's tales are building a wide and expanding anthology, "so that each individual story built upon the rest and the result was more than the sum of its parts" (Joshi 2008, 15) – the basis and the essence of the Cthulhu Mythos. Lovecraft avoids women in his stories for reasons that most probably ensued from his lifetime experience and his overall attitude of "leav[ing] our humanity and terrestrialism", getting rid off of "catch-penny *romanticism*" (Joshi 2008, 16), and it is hard to tell whether he ever felt touched by Poe's "lost Lenore / nameless here for evermore" (Poe 1884).

All these differences lead to a conclusion not too surprising. Lovecraft, abandoned by his father, grandfather, and later his mother in this world, secluded to his world of books and his grandfather's library (which he had to abandon when he and his mother moved out of the premises), deemed hideous by his mother (who may not be to blame because of her mental and health state) and unsuccessful in school understood Poe's tales featuring outcasts of the society. He also felt excluded and went even further than Poe in articulating this thought. Not only did he hold to the notion of seclusion of the individual, but he also took a more cosmic view and showed the dreadful vista of humankind being insignificant and defenceless against the horrors in the vast universe. His level of alienation goes well beyond anything even Poe might have thought of in his time. Edgar's loss of both parents, gradual loss of other women he was attached to, his poverty, and his inability to reconcile with his step father melded to help his dark stories flourish. He was fascinated by the idea of bringing the dead back to living which is the point where Lovecraft picked up from him ("In the Vault", "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward") but he went further. He later mixed this feature with

extraterrestrialism and cosmicism and put forth this “forbidden knowledge” in the form of the *Necronomicon* and others of his fictional books. Everything human and earthly is marginalised and diminutive in comparison with the forces from outer space and in undiscovered places (not probed by mankind), for whom people are unimportant and as threatening as microbes to humans. People of Poe’s day were shocked by his literature because it was different from what others were writing at the time, it was disturbing. The same goes for Lovecraft who not only disturbed people but who made them scared and depressed at the same time by portraying a whole new universe to readers in which all of them could feel like uninvited guests, who have no sure foothold or stable position. Seeing this prospect, in Lovecraft’s words, “we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age” (Lovecraft 2008, 201).

4. Conclusion

The textual evidence and analysis of works of H. P. Lovecraft and E. A. Poe, studying of their lives and remarks of their critics, friends, and scholars revealed a set of points in which the literature of these authors differ and showed that most of them point towards a trend, or rather an overpowering tendency, of deep alienation, isolation, and seclusion. Poe’s characters are somehow secluded from others, Lovecraft’s characters are not only isolated from other people, they are usually overwhelmed by the alienation of the whole human race from the rest of the indifferent universe (where the stem “alien” is of importance because the more powerful and the actual ruling creatures of the world are aliens to Earth and its inhabitants – the humankind). Poe’s characters are excluded from the society but Lovecraft’s whole concept of universe secludes the whole Earth’s population from the rest of the unfathomable space and evokes the feeling of utter insignificance.

The many disasters Poe encountered in his life, the loss of everybody he cared for or loved, his endless poverty and other factors that were constantly ruining his life made him the

man he was and it is not hard to understand the reason why he was able to transfer this sense of seclusion, “perversion” and difference to his characters, his outcasts, criminals, and delusional madmen. He had more enemies than he ever had friends (who were principally those who later turned into his adversaries) and his life offered him little comfort; that he sought in the bottle. When Lovecraft stumbled across Poe’s literature, he must have been fascinated. Poe was a figure that not only Baudelaire but also Lovecraft could see connections with. They were different, they were out of pace with their time, they were not properly understood; they were as weird as their literature. Lovecraft was a recluse, hiding in his world of books, dreams and imagination, he could relate to the general notion of alienation very well and was able to take it even further. Poe was at least seeking attachments with women to soothe him when he felt desperate. Lovecraft was alone. Taken as a divine truth from his pitifully and unfortunately ill mother, he (a disturbed neurotic himself) believed himself to be too ugly to be accepted anywhere (let alone in the company of women) and books and his creative writing were the main (and for some time the only) things that helped him to vent and prevent his depressions, sadness, and nervous instability. He was deeply excluded from the society and his stories unmistakably reflect that.

As with many great works of art and great artists, the best creations came from the pens, chisels, brushes, and the like of the creators in their deepest miseries and anxieties. Lovecraft saw and understood Poe’s prominence and modelled his writing on Poe’s. To answer the question at hand, to say that he plagiarised him or that he merely stole Poe’s style without giving it any personal touch of himself would be an overstatement. Yes, Lovecraft did borrow a lot from Poe, Dunsany, Machen, Bierce, Howard, Derleth, Blackwood, Bloch... However, his artistic treatment of the little (and big) things he borrowed crystallised and formed his genuine literature for which he is known today. Lovecraft is, some scholars may argue, not so great for what he actually wrote but for the fame he received after his death.

Nonetheless, before the eventual condemning of his stories one should consider the fact that had he not been considered a great author by some, he would not get the attention he has been given (and is being given now), so it is more appropriate to assess his work and ponder that, not compare the greatness of it's worth with his fame.

It is hard to predict if Lovecraft will ever gain as much literary (and other) attention as Poe has today, but one question, the question asked by the gentleman of Providence himself, can be answered straight away: "There are my 'Poe' pieces & my 'Dunsany' pieces – but alas – where are my Lovecraft pieces?" Dear Mr. Lovecraft, do reread your "The Call of Cthulhu" and "The Colour Out of Space"; if no others, these are your Lovecraft pieces *par excellence*.

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Summary

The thesis strives to show, using textual and biographical evidence, the stylistic, thematic, and other differences between the stories of H. P. Lovecraft and the ones of E. A. Poe. The both authors substantially make use of the theme of alienation in their works but it is more so in the stories of the former, or rather Lovecraft's feeling of seclusion extends wider than Poe's.

This work is divided in two larger parts, the theoretical part that presents the important stages in lives of the authors, touches their work, and also provides with theoretical information on Gothic literature and Horror literature (or the weird tale); and the analytical part which deals directly with the stories of both authors and compares them.

The theoretical part works as a ground that sets up all the information that needs to be known to fully submerge into the discussed topic and it also serves as an introduction of H. P. Lovecraft, who is usually not very well-known, as opposed to Poe. The analytical part, the longer and more important part, brings in only a little more theoretical information, particularly on the "Cthulhu Mythos" – the key theme that is a crucial part of Lovecraft's stories – and discusses differences in the works of the authors, seeking reasons for such dissimilarities.

The theme of alienation, that is in Poe restricted to an individual's mind, in Lovecraft it is extended to the isolation of the human race, who is perpetually threatened by the larger, more powerful, alien, and indifferent universe and the beings that occupy its unseen corners.

Resumé

Bakalářská práce poukazuje na stylistické, tematické i jiné rozdíly v dílech Edgara Allana Poea a Howarda Phillipse Lovecrafta vyvozené z četby jejich děl a životopisů. Oba autoři hojně využívají motivu odcizení, což je mnohem zřejmější v Lovecraftových příbězích, nebo spíše jeho motiv odcizení sahá dál než Poeův.

Práce je rozdělena na dvě větší části. Teoretická část pojednává o důležitých momentech v životě obou autorů, zmiňuje se o jejich dílech a udává teoretické informace o gotické a hororové literatuře. Analytická část se zabývá přímo příběhy autorů a porovnává je.

Teoretická část je určena k přípravě na následující rozbor podáním všech informací k tomuto účelu potřebných, a také slouží jako představení H. P. Lovecrafta, který na rozdíl od Poea není příliš známý. Analytická, delší a důležitější část, přináší už jen něco málo teorie, jmenovitě o Mýtu Cthulhu – motivu zásadního pro Lovecraftovy příběhy. Popisuje rozdíly v dílech obou autorů a hledá možné důvody, proč k těmto odlišnostem došlo.

Motiv odcizení, který je u Poea omezen jen na jednotlivce a jeho mysl, je v Lovecraftových příbězích rozšířen na celou lidskou rasu, jež je neustále ohrožena cizím, větším, mocnějším a naprosto lhostejným vesmírem a bytostmi, které obývají jeho temné kouty, kam lidské oko doposud nenahlédlo.