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Representations of Insanity in Selected Works of Edgar Allan Poe

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Firstly, the historical / cultural context should be summarized concentrating on selected definitions and tropes of Romanticism, Gothic fiction and finally American Dark Romanticism. What social and psychological issues influenced these genres, especially in late 18th and early-mid 19th century America? Relative to this general background, more specific various definitions and figures regarding what was seen in the period as "reason" and "insanity" should be described as represented in American mass culture and particularly in American fiction and non-fiction using specific examples from essays, speeches, novels and short stories. Finally, in the longest and most important part of the BP, the background issues described earlier should be used as tools in the analysis of one or two of Poe's short stories of different genres in terms of how reason / insanity are represented. Poe's legacy in American (and other) literature in this area can also be outlined.

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V Pardubicích dne 30. 11. 2017

Filip Pachulski

ANNOTATION

This bachelor paper is generally concerned with the mental states of the characters in selected tales by Edgar Allan Poe, specifically *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*. The aim of this thesis is to analyze the two stories from a narratological point of view and determine whether or not their narrators can be considered reliable and whether or not they can be considered insane.

KEYWORDS

Poe, insanity, narratology, *The Black Cat*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, mental health

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se obecně zabývá psychickými a duševními stavy postav ve vybraných dílech Edgara Allana Poea. Cílem této práce je analýza dvou povídek, konkrétně *Zrádné srdce* a *Černý kocour*, z hlediska naratologické teorie a zjištění, zda mohou v nich figurující vypravěči být považováni za spolehlivé a zda mohou být považováni za šílené.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Poe, šílenství, naratologie, *Černý kocour*, *Zrádné srdce*, psychické zdraví

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Romanticism.....	1
2.1. Gothic fiction.....	3
2.1.1. American Dark Romanticism.....	4
3. 'Madness' in the Context of Early 19th Century America.....	6
3.1. Reason vs. Insanity or 'Madness'.....	7
3.2. Reliability of the Narrator.....	10
4. Mental State in the Works of Edgar Allan Poe.....	14
4.1. The Usage of Unreliable Narrator.....	14
4.2. The Tell-Tale Heart.....	16
4.3. The Black Cat in Comparison with The Tell-Tale Heart.....	20
5. Conclusion.....	25
6. Resumé.....	27
6. Bibliography.....	31

1. Introduction

The main premise of this bachelor thesis is the idea of connections between Edgar Allan Poe's stories featuring first-person narrative techniques and the kinds and levels or degrees of psychological disturbance of the characters in Poe's works of fiction, especially the first-person narrators with them being the vast majority of narrator's of Poe's tales. The first part of the bachelor thesis briefly outlines the historical and literary context of Edgar Allan Poe's works from the basic categorization to the tradition of Romanticism to more distinct literary movements such as American "branch" of Gothic fiction, American Dark Romanticism, which is also put in proper context as an opposition the Transcendentalists, with whom they have a shared antecedent in Romanticism. The consequent development of the genre and the influences made are also briefly outlined. The second part introduces the basic outline of the theoretical background and history of madness in literature, from historical relativity of the term 'madness' itself, through characterization of madness as opposed to reason or rationalism in proper historical context, in this case in the early 19th century America, as well as the philosophical context, which contrasts the ideas of madness and reason of Edgar Allan Poe's contemporaries Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Søren Kierkegaard, to the various ways it can be expressed in fiction with particular focus on structuralism, narratology and the theory of reliability of the narrators, namely theories presented by Gérard Genette, Wayne C. Booth, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Ansgar Nünning, etc. The main focus of the next part is shifted to the actual literary works of Edgar Allan Poe and the theme of altered mental states in them. His extensive use of unreliable narrators in his first-person narratives is illustrated as well. The presented theoretical background is then applied to two Poe's short stories, namely *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*, which are analyzed from narratological as well as briefly from psychoanalytical perspective.

2. Romanticism

The roots of romanticism can be traced back to the second half of the eighteenth century in Europe, the period of the Industrial Revolution, which it was partially a reaction to. Romanticism was also a response to the social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and the subsequent scientific rationalization of nature. The movement placed emphasis on the individual and their subjective emotions, whether rational or irrational. The artistic movement which corresponded with the Age of Enlightenment was neoclassicism. Among the main ideals of neoclassicism were reason, intellect,

common sense, and order, whereas their romantic counterparts were intuition, passionate feelings, instincts, and emotions. Romanticism was spiritually a trend opposed to the Age of Reason, or the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was characterized by "a profound faith in the powers of human reason and a devotion to clarity of thought, to harmony, proportion and balance".¹ The era saw increased interest in empirical science, with special emphasis on rational reasoning, whereas personal subjective feelings had no place in culture. Everything thing throughout the universe could be explained by reason and could be accounted for by logical interpretation. In England, the progress in technology and science brought up the Industrial Revolution. It is generally well known that the Industrial Revolution, aside from increasing the overall wealth and the living standards, also brought detrimental effects on the populace. The beauty of the natural landscape was replaced by the sight of densely packed factories and deteriorating living conditions. People grew in wealth but were not happier as they paid a steep price: in order to be modern and civilized they were forced to lose their connection with the nature, suppress their emotions and succumb to rational thinking. Mass manufacturing in factories produced goods that were identical without characteristic features of their own. Manufacturing also replaced arts and crafts as creativity and skills were removed from the actual production. The Romantics were thus an opposing force to counteract the Rational: to restore individuality and personal expression. To illustrate the differences we can examine the trope of a child which was often used in both neoclassical and romantic works of literature. However, in neoclassicism, a child was a primitive entity in need to be civilized to become a rational adult, whereas romantics saw a child as the ideal human being, who was free and unspoiled as opposed to an adult who had been affected by society, which was seen by romantics only as a source of suffering. Another common trope is the conflict between order and disorder. Neoclassical works placed great emphasis on the importance of order and everything had its place. Romanticism embraced the irrational, mystical, and supernatural, which ensued in disorder, freedom in every aspect of life. Romantic stories often took place in exotic places, which only furthered the idea of disorder.

In 1798, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published a collection of poetry called *Lyrical Ballads*, which is generally considered to mark the beginning of the English romantic movement in literature as well as a major step towards contemporary poetry. The preface, which was published in the 1800 edition, written by William Wordsworth, is considered to be the manifesto of the romantic movement: "The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though

¹ Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 237.

not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.”² Wordsworth explained that the reasoning behind adding the preface is that he felt a need to explain to an experienced reader of poetry, why the poems published in *Lyrical Ballads* were written so differently than traditional contemporary poetry.

2.1. Gothic fiction

To understand the term Gothic fiction we may begin with defining the term 'Gothic', which comes from 'Goth', a barbaric Germanic tribe from the third century. 'Gothic' was later applied to various forms of art such as an architectural style popular during the middle-to-late medieval period characterized by pointed arches, clusters of columns, etc., which was often the architectural style of the buildings where stories of Gothic fiction took place due to the architectural 'Gothic revival'. The main feature of Gothic fiction is usually the feeling of supernatural terror as an extension of the feelings associated with the romantic movement, which are mentioned above. The origins of Gothic fiction are widely attributed to Horace Walpole, who created the trope of "the Gothic house" in his novel *The Castle of Otranto* published in 1764 and Ann Radcliffe, who brought all Gothic elements together in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* published in 1791 and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* published in 1796.³ A work of Gothic fiction can be essentially defined as product of a "Gothic formula", which is a set of elements used to evoke the feelings of terror and horror in the reader.⁴ Such devices include but are not limited to castles and abbeys built in Gothic architectural style often containing secret passages or rooms, inexplicable and at times supernatural events, ancient prophecies (often connected with the medieval building and its inhabitants), women in distress, characters' altered mental state, etc. The response the writer of a Gothic story is striving to elicit from the reader is fear, universally inherent in every individual's nature, primitive and basic, existing regardless of time, place, or culture. The influence of Gothic literature can be predominantly found in two of its most prevalent themes: the supernatural and madness. When reading and analyzing Gothic texts, the commonplaceness of ghosts, mysterious illusions, and inexplicable sounds and events is apparent. Just as much of a recurring theme is, however, the theme of insanity—of phantasmagoria, anxiety, and complete mental breakdown. As the Victorian era was underway, the belief of Spiritualism started to emerge, both in practice and in infamy. The development of psychological concepts in the late Victorian era, such as *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* by Eduard von Hartmann, settled the

2 Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, 9.

3 Holland, *Gothic Possibilities*, 280.

4 Keech, *The Survival of the Gothic*, 130.

groundwork for the evolution of the ideologies which would ultimately bring about modern psychology as we know it today, such as Sigmund Freud's creation of psychoanalysis. The emergence of such psychological theories led to a heightened interest in the workings of the human mind throughout Victorian society. As the theories about the human mind started to become more and more developed, they became a more popular subject in social circles as well. As Victorian authors and artists started including such themes and motifs into their works, the Gothic genre began to form.

According to David Punter, a more diversified view towards Gothic fiction should be adopted, rather than the currently commonly held beliefs: such as "an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense" and that Gothic fiction is not merely "fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves."⁵ Punter further defines the Gothic as a set of opposing ideas against the classic: "Where the classical was well-ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a set of cultural models to be followed, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and the uncivilized."⁶ The Gothic represents disarray, chaotic, yet densely ornamented and rich in beauty, and is often set at the extremes. It represents the dark side of the consciousness, creating characters experiencing fear, frenzy, and even madness. The limits of the mind are tested, producing hallucinations, psychological chaos and spiritual trauma. There is an excess of imagination producing a distorted and wicked image of the reality. Gothic reality is at the mercy of the narrator. Whether what is said is trustworthy or not is open to doubt as narrative representation is purely subjective. The readers are expecting explanations from narrators who are in an unstable states of mind. Contradictions that cannot be resolved by the text itself are commonplace. In terms of language, Gothic fiction is rich in symbols and imagery, emphasizing the gloom and melancholy. As such, Gothic tales are prime targets for narratological analysis which is the central chosen approach to the main issue of this thesis, madness.

2.1.1. American Dark Romanticism

⁵ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Gothic fiction made its way across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States at the beginning of the 19th century, the beginning of distinctive American literature. One of the first American works of Gothic fiction was Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland: or, The Transformation: An American Tale* published in 1798. Brown influenced many successive Gothic writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, but also British ones like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.⁷ The skyrocketing popularity of Gothic fiction in America was quite paradoxical. America, an optimistic country founded upon the Enlightenment principles, the principles rejected by the original romantics, has produced a strain of literature that is haunted by an insistent, undead past and fascinated by the strange beauty of sorrow.⁸ Americans transferred the issues of the new world into fiction and thus the American Gothic contained elements of religion, puritanism, fear of European subversion, Native Americans, who were thought of as devils and witches, or slavery, which is considered a sub genre of American Gothic as many slave narratives contained Gothic elements. An example of slavery being the main theme of an American Gothic story is Herman Melville's novella *Benito Cereno*, which is a narrative about a revolt on a Spanish slavery ship captained by Don Benito Cereno, incidentally also an example of unreliable narration. The period of the mid-19th century, the latter part of the Romantic period, is known as the American Renaissance, during which American writers can be placed in one of two categories, the transcendentalists and the dark romantics. The transcendentalists followed the belief of the original romantics in the individual and their subjective emotions. However, transcendentalists also believed in innate goodness of the human spirit, whereas the dark romantics were concerned with the "spirit of perverseness" in human nature, which is discussed in much greater detail in later parts of this thesis. Such views also meant a great difference in their views of religion and God. Transcendentalists saw one's thoughts and intuition as the voice of God. The dark romantics viewed the world as dark, decaying, and mysterious and the human mind as broken. The Dark romantic movement later evolved into what we currently know as the genre of Southern Gothic with main representatives being Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, Cormac McCarthy, Carson McCullers, or Eudora Welty. Dark romantics as well as transcendentalists (term coined from "transcendental" philosophy of Immanuel Kant) valued intuition over reason, believed that true reality is spiritual. However, the view of the world of dark romantics lacked optimism. They saw mainly the dark side of human existence. Their works explored the conflict between good and evil, psychological effects of guilt and sin, and madness in the human psyche. Transcendentalists saw divine goodness and beauty beneath the everyday reality. They embraced the idealistic elements of Puritan thought. Dark romantics

7 Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 309.

8 Savoy, *The Rise of American Gothic*, 167.

embraced the dark side of Puritan beliefs such as the idea of Original Sin and the human potential for evil. The most prominent transcendentalists were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau whereas their dark romantic counterparts were Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe, whose work is the main subject of this thesis.

3. 'Madness' in the Context of Early 19th Century America

Any sort of analysis or discussion of 'madness', outside of a clinical or purely psychoanalytical perspective, must be considered from a diachronic point of view with proper attention paid to the historical relativity of the term. Early definitions of 'madness' in colonial times were rooted in religious moral codes, where any kind of dissonance of the mind was blamed on witchcraft and demonic possession and the afflicted, or the "distracted", as they were known at the time, were often imprisoned or left untreated. Mental illness was seen as an external expression of sin or a punishment from God.⁹ The idea of the Age of Enlightenment that a person was meant to be reasonable brought about the result that the mentally ill were seen as less than human due to their lack of reason. As such, the afflicted were isolated out of sight of the community. Progress in psychiatry and treatment of mental illness in the early 19th century was still questionable at best. The mentally ill were often imprisoned or kept in insane asylums in poor conditions with the sole purpose of keeping them out of the general public as any kind of medical care was provided only sporadically. When Charles Dickens visited a lunatic asylum in New York in 1842, he commented: "The moping idiot, cowering down with long, dishevelled hair; the gibbering maniac, with his hideous laugh and pointed finger; the vacant eye, the fierce wild face, the gloomy picking of the hands and lips, and munching of the nails; there they were all, without disguise, in naked ugliness and horror."¹⁰ As the nineteenth century went on, so began the era of development and scientific advancements throughout the Western world. Following the industrial revolution, the hunt for knowledge and learning significantly expanded and it was the nineteenth century that saw, among other things, the discovery of electricity and the theory of evolution. Medical advances were enormous, and the treatment of mental illness started to improve after the birth of psychiatry. Philippe Pinel, a French philosopher and doctor in a mental asylum, started a new era of mental health care when he unchained his convalescents in 1793 and created a new method of taking care of the mentally ill. This method was called the "moral treatment," a theory which hypothesized that insanity was treatable not by locking the sufferers up in chains, away from the sight of the general

⁹ McGovern, *Masters of Madness*, 24.

¹⁰ Perdlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation*, 1.

public, and punishing them for being ill, but through kindness, conversation, and the attention of a medical professional. By the 1830s and 1840s, most asylums in America were being built and operated in accordance with this treatment method, which became the earliest form of psychiatric care.¹¹

For 19th century authors, madness was a topic of an alien state of mind as well as something that could afflict any person at any time. It offered an opportunity to explore the extreme state of human mind which, in combination with the fascination with the strange and abnormal, provided writers with much inspiration. Writers drew much from the traditional gothic motif of the haunted and gloomy castle as it translated into the often grand and imposing structures of mental asylum buildings. Robert Fuller, who was a patient at one of such institutions and later wrote a memoir about his experiences called *An Account of the Imprisonment and Sufferings of Robert Fuller*, described the power of such buildings. The inner depravity of asylums, he argued, is kept secret by the grandiosity and beauty of the outer buildings. Hidden inside, one could "hear the groans of the distressed ... see inmates shut up with bars and bolts ... how they are neglected and cruelly treated."¹²

3.1. Reason vs. Insanity or 'Madness'

The term 'madness' itself carries a considerable amount of ambiguity. Contemporary dictionaries define 'madness' with a variety of meanings ranging from mental illness, through loss of reason to wild recklessness or excessive passion. Usage in the former meanings has become rather archaic, which can be accounted for by the fact that it is no longer in use as part of the medical or clinical vocabulary. The latter usage is still somewhat frequent, however, due to its predominantly metaphorical nature, the definitions are largely equivocal. The label 'insane' is often earned as a result of having different set of values or morals than the rest of the society because it is the majority that decides what is right or wrong, or in this case, what is sane or insane. As José Barchilon wrote in the Introduction to Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*: "Folly is so human that it has common roots with poetry and tragedy; it is revealed as much in the insane asylum as in the writings of a Cervantes or a Shakespeare, or in the deep psychological insights and cries of revolt of a Nietzsche... Fascinating as Renaissance men found it—they painted it, praised it,

11 McGovern, *Masters of Madness*, 41-57.

12 Clark, *Mad Literature*, 58.

sang about it—it also heralded for them death of the body by picturing death of the mind.”¹³ Insanity is essentially difference. Some kind of deviation from the status quo determined by contemporary society as it is in fact society who passes the judgment on the issue of what is 'normal' or 'reasonable'.

A considerable number of philosophers throughout centuries have offered their take on the idea of madness, ranging from Plato through Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, to Søren Kierkegaard, with the views and arguments of the latter two presented in this chapter. Georg Hegel theorized three primary forms of madness. The first of these primary forms is “Idiocy”, which, however, is not the modern idea of idiocy as being directly related to intelligence we are familiar with. According to Hegel, “Idiocy” exhibits as either a “non-awareness of the immediate present” or “a weakening of the power of the rational consciousness.”¹⁴ In other words, “Idiocy” is a more or less complete separation from reality and diminishment of facility for rationality and free will. Another one of Hegel's forms of madness is “Madness Proper”, which illustrates the creation of a subjective world in order to cope with the individual's disillusionment with the objective world. In contrast to the victim of “Idiocy”, who cannot “hold on to anything definite”, the victim of “Madness Proper” does the opposite and holds tight to that which they falsely believe to be true.¹⁵ The assumption of “Madness Proper” is that the sufferer has “the ability to act rationally” in fields other than the issue of his subjective reality.¹⁶ The sheer discontent prompts the creation of a more feasible, subjective world into which the mind of the sufferer plunges. Once the individual enters this subjective world, the mind “loses its understanding of the actual world and is at home only in its subjective ideas.”¹⁷ Due to this loss of realization, the victim is not aware of “the contradiction which exists between his fixed idea and the objective world”; which is a key difference between Hegel's ideas of “Madness Proper” and “Mania or Frenzy.”¹⁸ The other of the main forms of insanity is the aforementioned “Mania or Frenzy”. In this case, as opposed to “Madness Proper”, the individual is thoroughly cognizant of the contradiction between the real world and his subjective one and “lives with his feelings exclusively in the past and is thus unable to find himself in the present by which he feels himself alike repelled and bound.”¹⁹ The intrinsic contradiction leads to “a rage of reason against

13 Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, iv.

14 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 132-3.

15 Ibid., 134.

16 Ibid., 134.

17 Ibid., 133.

18 Ibid., 135.

19 Ibid., 135.

unreason and vice versa, and thus becomes a frenzy.”²⁰

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard objected to much of Georg Hegel's doctrine. His own theory of madness of primarily depends on a concept he calls “inwardness”. According to Kierkegaard, “man comes to understand himself thoroughly through inwardness.”²¹ He defined two primary forms of madness (or lunacy), with the first being the “Subjective Lunacy”, which is described as insanity as a delirium of inwardness. This form of madness is subjective and transpires when an individual has an disproportionate emotional interest in something, that does not require it. The notion to which the individual is fixated “infinitely pertains to the unfortunate person ... and pertains to no one else.”²² Kierkegaard offers the example of Don Quixote being the epitome of this form of lunacy.²³ Don Quixote is fixed on the perception that he is a medieval knight, even though that is not the case. This fixation is relevant to him and him only as no other person regards Don Quixote as a knight. They all see him for what he truly is. This obsession and passion does indeed indicate that Don Quixote has a mind, but that his mind has been distorted. Thus, the individual who is the subject of this type of lunacy has a mind, although it is a delusional one. The delusion of inwardness characteristic to this form of lunacy signals that the individual suffering from this type of madness experiences a subjective truth, a connection with this truth, despite it being a factually distorted truth. The other Kierkegaardian form of lunacy is “Objective Lunacy”, which is described as insanity as the absence of inwardness. In contrast with the subjective lunacy, in case of objective lunacy the individual does not have a distinctive mind. Kierkegaard poses a question: ”How can this be if the something known by the blissful person is the truth, truth that pertains to the whole human race?”²⁴ The truth that is known by the individual suffering from objective lunacy “does not in the least pertain to him”²⁵, which means that what they communicate are objective truths that they fail to incorporate within themselves. These truths are devoid because they only become existentially viable truths when the subject really internalizes them, which the individual has failed to do. Kierkegaard considers truth to be “that which the subject relates himself to.”²⁶ The truth does not have any meaning for the individual who communicates it without such concession. The victim of objective lunacy lacks any kind of relationship with truth. This subject's failure to internalize these

20 Ibid., 135.

21 Gabriel, *Subjectivity and Religious Truth*, 79.

22 Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 203.

23 Ibid., 203.

24 Ibid., 203.

25 Ibid., 203.

26 Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 206.

objective truths indicates that the individual themselves lack inwardness, and therefore lack a mind.

When discussing the concept of madness it is necessary to also introduce the other side of the issue, which is the idea of reason. Georg Hegel's concept of reason relies heavily on the thought of universals and universality. According to Hegel, "the universal constitutes the essence of a thing; when a thing is fully developed (Actual), the universal is concrete."²⁷ Reason relates to this idea of universality in that "Reason is the substance of the Universe; viz., that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence."²⁸ Reason is also "the infinite complex of things, their entire Essence and Truth."²⁹ Seeing that Hegel's universal "constitutes the essence of a thing", as well as that reason is the "entire Essence and Truth" of a thing, it can be determined that Hegel's reason is also Hegel's universal. He claims that such reason is "inherent in the world itself"³⁰ and "truly objective thought also expresses the essence of a thing."³¹ Thus truly objective thought universal as well, and seeing that reason is the essence of the universal, it is also the essence of truly objective thought. Reason, according to Hegel, is also "what possesses objectivity."³² Hegel's idea of reason is remarkably similar to Kierkegaard's idea of madness, specifically the form of objective lunacy. It is apparent that for Kierkegaard, Hegel's reason is, in fact, a form of madness. As described earlier, the subject that experiences Kierkegaard's objective lunacy communicates objective truths. Such truths apply to every single individual, which makes them universal. However, the universal for Hegel is strongly related to reason. It is the absence of mind in an individual suffering from objective lunacy, the absence of individuality, which makes such a speaker of objective truths mad.

3.2. Reliability of the Narrator

Theorist Mieke Bal defines the narrator as "the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts. The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character."³³ A popular approach to the expression of characters' thoughts, feelings, or states of mind is through a first-

27 *Hegel Glossary*, 6.

28 Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 53.

29 *Ibid.*, 53.

30 Magee, *Hegel Dictionary*, 196.

31 Cunningham, *Thought and Reality*, 9.

32 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 165.

33 Bal, *Narratology*, 19.

person narrative. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the necessary theoretical background to the subsequent analyses. Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet described the effect of the unreliable narrator: "Unreliable narrators invite readers' active participation in deciphering a narrative because they themselves misunderstand what they describe, overlook important connections, or fail to see their own, or others' motivation."³⁴ The concept of unreliable narrator itself as a narrative technique was first coined by Wayne C. Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: "I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not."³⁵ With the implied author being a kind of 'author's second self' as the "governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work."³⁶ The implied author is, however, neither the real author nor the narrator as it was developed to distinguish between the living author and the points of view conveyed in his or her work. As opposed to the narrator, "the implied author can tell us nothing. He, or better, *it* has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn."³⁷ However, the implied author can be described as occupying the same 'world' in which the narrative in question takes place and as the source of the inalienable truths and norms of the narrative world. Ansgar Nünning states, in *A Companion To Narrative Theory*, that Booth's definition of the unreliable narrator is the definition given in the majority of scholarly articles and narratological works.³⁸ Booth's definition and concept were studied by many subsequent literary scholars, however, as is the case with many narratological concepts, the theory, terminology and classification are far from unified. For example Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan defines an unreliable narrator as "one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect."³⁹ Such reasons emerge "when the facts contradict the narrator's view ... (but how does one establish 'the real facts' behind the narrator's back?); when the outcome of the action proves the narrator wrong, ... when the views of other characters consistently clash with the narrator's, ... and when the narrator's language contains internal contradictions, double-edged images, and the like."⁴⁰

Essentially, the narrator's expression of values and perceptions strikingly veering from those

34 Monnet, *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic*, 35.

35 Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 158-9.

36 Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 86.

37 Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 148.

38 Nünning, *Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration*, 89.

39 Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 100.

40 *Ibid.*, 101.

of the implied author deems him unreliable.⁴¹ Additionally, according to Booth, once a narrator is deemed unreliable, then this unreliability will be consistent throughout the work.⁴² In cases of the narrator's unreliability, there is a conflict between the way the narrator presents himself and the rest of the narrative, making the reader suspect his earnestness. Reading between the lines leads the reader to come to the conclusion that the narrator is either purposely and willingly withholding the true account of the story or is lacking the necessary ability to tell it. According to Chatman "the unreliable narrator is at virtual odds with the implied author; otherwise his unreliability could not emerge."⁴³ Rimmon-Keenan determines three possible sources of unreliability: the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his questionable morals⁴⁴. Additional factors which may contribute to narratorial unreliability occur when the narrator is young and inexperienced or afflicted with low intelligence all of which indicate cases of limited understanding and knowledge. When narrators demonstrate personal involvement the story, their portrayal of characters and events is seen as subjective. Lastly, if the narrator does not share the same set of moral values as the implied author then those values are considered suspicious. If they do have the same moral values then the narrator is indisputably considered reliable, regardless of how morally or ethically objectionable his views or actions may seem as in such a case they are in accordance with the values of the fictitious world presented in the text. In order to expose unreliability in the narrative, the reader must embrace an interpretative strategy involving reading deeper into the narrative and assuming the understanding of the unspoken moral values which are communicated by the implied author. Gérard Genette argues: "Narrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says."⁴⁵ This strategy includes the detection of textual signals pointing to cases of such narration. Ansgar Nünning formulated an extensive list of such textual signals, which was then compiled by Greta Olson in her article *Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators*: "(1) the narrator's explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse; (2) discrepancies between the narrator's statements and actions; (3) divergences between the narrator's description of herself and other characters' descriptions of her; (4) contradictions between the narrator's explicit comments on other characters and her implicit characterization of herself or the narrator's involuntary exposure of herself; (5) contradictions between the narrator's account of events and her explanations and interpretations of the same, as

41 Olson, *Reconsidering Unreliability*, 93.

42 Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 158.

43 Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 149.

44 Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 100-1.

45 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 198.

well as contradictions between the story and discourse; (6) other characters' corrective verbal remarks or body signals; (7) multiperspectival arrangements of events and contrasts between various versions of the same events; (8) an accumulation of remarks relating to the self as well as linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity; (9) an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader's sympathy; (10) syntactic signals denoting the narrator's high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc.; (11) explicit, self-referential, metanarrative discussions of the narrator's believability; (12) an admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations; (13) a confessed or situation-related prejudice; (14) paratextual signals, such as titles, subtitles, and prefaces.⁴⁶

Recently, various academics have adopted a critical stance on the conventional interpretation of the unreliable narrator with Nünning's rejection of concept of the implied author in favor of a reader-response approach being possibly the most prominent example.⁴⁷ Nünning's critique pertains to the way Booth's definition of unreliable narration relies heavily on the distance between the implied author and the narrator. He asserts that such a definition is inherently improper since the concept of the implied author itself is ambiguous: "The main objections to the concept of the implied author involve its lack of clarity and theoretical incoherence."⁴⁸ He considers the reader-response approach and the cultural foundation and values that the reader, instead of the implied author, bring to texts more meaningful when it comes to exposing unreliability of the narrative. Nonetheless, Nünning acknowledges the importance of textual signals when determining the unreliability even with the reader-response approach.⁴⁹

Hand in hand with the question of reliability of the narrator goes the theory of narrative levels first proposed by Gérard Genette in his 1972 book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. He identified the narrative level as one of three aspects forming the narrating situation with the other two being time and person. Genette argues that "any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed."⁵⁰ The level of narration differentiates between entities present in the story world (referred to as homodiegetic) and those outside (referred to as heterodiegetic). A narrator who is a member of the story world, whose existence fits into the world the story takes place in is known as a

46 Olson, *Reconsidering Unreliability*, 97-8.

47 Zerweck, *Historicizing Unreliable Narration*, 151.

48 Nünning, *Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration*, 92.

49 Nünning, *Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration*, 105.

50 Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 228.

homodiegetic narrator. A heterodiegetic narrator is one who is not a part of the story world. This includes almost all third-person narrators, and applies to omniscient kind of this narration. When the narrator has no definable identity and does not include any references to self, that narrator is considered to be heterodiegetic. The category of homodiegetic narrators is further divided based on the position of the narrator in relation to the world which they are a part of. One is the autodiegetic narrator, which is one of the most common narrating types in literature. The autodiegetic narrator is also the protagonist and is always presented in the first-person. A further distinction in the agent of narration is in cases where the narrator of the primary narrative communicates the story completely removed from the textual world. In other words, he or she is on the outside of the fictional universe of a particular text. This type of narrator is called extradiegetic. Closely related to the extradiegetic narrator is the intradiegetic one, due to always being framed by the extradiegetic narrative level. When an extradiegetic narrator starts addressing the narrative's characters, he or she becomes an intradiegetic narrator.⁵¹

4. Mental State in the Works of Edgar Allan Poe

Madness and characters' states of mind is one of the most frequently recurring themes in the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Fletcher, in his book *The Stylistic Development of Edgar Allan Poe*, suggests that Poe seems to possess "an unabashed desire to illuminate all hidden depths and crevices of the perverted psyche."⁵² Many Poe's stories can be described as a look at what suffering from a mental disorder looks like from the point of view of the afflicted. While most of his narrators do not identify as having a specific illness, many claim that they lost their mind or control of themselves, or conversely claim perfect soundness of mind even though evidence presented in the text suggests otherwise. Many of his tales have a dream-like quality to them that separates the reader from reality and often the narrator as well. Many have drug or alcohol addiction problems, and many tell their stories under the influence of one or the other. Memory, and lack of its contemporary understanding, is also a prominent topic in his fiction as can be seen for instance in the short story *Ligeia*. Various works of Poe incorporate references to known mental illnesses or present symptoms of such. Epileptic seizures, for example, are referenced in multiple stories such as *The Pit and the Pendulum*, or *Berenice*. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, members of the Usher family suffer from a genetic illness presenting itself with anemia, hypersensitivity to light, and behavioral disturbances. Modern

⁵¹ Ibid., 50.

⁵² Fletcher, *The Stylistic Development*, 115.

medicine identifies the disease as porphyria, which had yet to be described during Poe's lifetime.⁵³ Many of Edgar Allan Poe's characters set forth onto adventures that venture into the mind where disorientation often prospers. These mental explorations are intimidating, causing apathy in some, violence in others. Characters suffering from claustrophobia is also a central theme in many of Poe's tales.

4.1. The Usage of Unreliable Narrator

The unreliable narrator as a narrative technique is widespread throughout Poe's works of fiction. The vast majority of Poe's stories are told by a narrator whose point of view is, in one way or another, impaired and require the readers to make important connections themselves. Poe "often designs his tales as to show his narrators' limited comprehension of their own problems and states of mind; the structure of many of Poe's stories clearly reveals an ironical and comprehensive intelligence critically and artistically ordering events events so as to establish a vision of life and character which the narrator's very inadequacies help to 'prove'."⁵⁴ The function of Poe's unreliable narrators is to "describe but fail to recognize important elements of the story, obliging the reader to make the connections the narrator misses."⁵⁵ In his essay, *The Philosophy of Composition*, Poe explicitly stated his desire to write for the maximum possible effect on the reader. Understanding his audience and specifically accomodating his work for the audience, Poe "sought ways to gain its attention for stories that, aside from their shock value, regularly addressed compelling philosophical, cultural, and psychological issues: the place of irrationality, violence and repression in human consciousness and social institutions; the alienation and dislocations attending democratic mass culture and the modernizing forces of the time; the tug and pull of the material and corporeal; the absolutely terrifying dimensions of one's own mind."⁵⁶ George E. Haggerty suggests the idea, that Poe "is perhaps the first tale-writer to demonstrate the affective power of paranoia. Even though we realize that the narrators are mad, we are incapable of resisting the horrifying force of what in their madness they relate."⁵⁷ Signs of narrators' paranoia are evident in both short stories which are analyzed in the following parts of this thesis. However, the validity of those signs comes into question as they may not always be substantiated by the rest of the narrative. Interestingly enough,

53 Teive, *Edgar Allan Poe and Neurology*.

54 Gargano, *The Question of Poe's Narrators*, 178.

55 Monnet, *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic*, 35.

56 Baym, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 687.

57 Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction*, 105.

the word 'paranoia' itself was not in existence during Poe's lifetime. David Punter considers the concept of paranoia to be an essential part of analyzing Gothic fiction: "It seems to me impossible to make much sense out of Gothic fiction without continual recourse to the concept of paranoia. Many writers can appropriately be seen as contributors to what we might call 'paranoiac fiction', fiction in which the reader is placed in a situation of ambiguity with regard to fears within the text."⁵⁸ Guilt plays a significant role in the development of the characters' paranoia as well. In both cases it is their conscience and memories of their abhorrent actions that drives their minds into such states or vice versa. This is discussed in greater detail in the respective chapters focusing on both short stories individually. Whether or not their guilt influences the narrators' behavior or the narrative itself is examined as well.

4.2. The Tell-Tale Heart

The Tell-Tale Heart is a first-person narrative of a killer recounting his murder of an old man with whom he cohabitated. We are not informed as to how the narrative is actually received. The opening of first paragraph, which begins *in medias res*, might suggest that it is an overheard conversation not even meant for the reader to hear. The story itself offers very little information about the narrator. We do not know his name, age, nor even gender (though it is generally assumed he is a male and is referred to as such throughout this analysis.) As a result of having such limited information available we cannot assume that the world presented in the story is the same as ours. The narrative offers us such a restricted framework of the fictional world the narrator and his victim inhabit, that simply assuming their world, including the minds of the characters and their way of thinking, works the same way as ours would be ill-advised in attempting to thoroughly understand the text. The very beginning of the tale offers us a certain impression or an idea of the narrator:

"True! nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses, not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily, how calmly I can tell you the whole story."⁵⁹

These first several lines of the short story give us reasons to already be suspect of the narrative. Even the opening exclamation 'True!' ironically compels the reader immediately into doubts about the legitimacy of the following account. The shift in the focus of the narrative from 'I had been and

58 Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 101.

59 Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 208.

am' to 'but why will *you* say' from the narrator back to the reader appears to affirm the intensified claim of nervousness and yet by the end of the paragraph the narrator's indication changes to a declaration of calmness and composure. The prompt rejection of madness can also absolutely be considered as one of the reasons. The narrator feels the need to convince the reader not once, but multiple times throughout the opening paragraph of his rationality as if his soundness of mind is already being questioned. Some kind of disease which supposedly sharpened the narrator's senses is also mentioned and is relevant due to his hearing being a major part of the story.

Critic Daniel Hoffman comments on the onset of the narrative: "When a narrator commences in *this* vein, we know him to be mad already."⁶⁰ However, such a reflexive judgement significantly diminishes the scope of a possible reading of the text. The reader's view of the narrator is, with such a mindset, greatly affected by their own projection of what constitutes 'madness' or 'insanity'. The reader thus reads the text onward with the assumption that the narrator is mad and any dialogues or events presented from that point forward only affirm the reader's existing belief of the narrator's mental instability, even though we do not know anything about the narrator's character, history, relationships, essentially the entire world the tale is set in. The suggestion that the events depicted in the text are taking place in a world that is a reflection of our own and can thus be understood through a real-world lens is problematic in the sense that there is a lack of dependable evidence that the actions which are being portrayed are transpiring in a comprehensible world, or, to the same degree, in an incomprehensible one. As such, the reader adopts a presumptuous notion in relation to the location of this story. For instance, Poe's use of ordinary commonplace settings and objects such as 'old house', 'chamber', 'bed' and so on, can all be considered indications of considering the narrative as analogous to our world, admittedly quite banal ones. This facilitates the question whether, in such instances where setting is given minimal attention, a reader should routinely assume that they are observing a world that is close to, or identical to their own.

The narrator of this tale is clearly unreliable, as illustrated on this example, where the discrepancy between the narrator's statement is quite obvious: "Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye

60 Hoffman, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe*, 222.

forever.”⁶¹ He admits he loves the old man and that they do not have any conflict between them. The only thing bothering the narrator is the old man's eye which he compares to one of a vulture. This can be considered a sign of insanity as he hopes that the killing of the old man will free him from the curse of the eye. This excerpt meets several of the textual signs of unreliability laid out in previous chapters and thus the narrator is deemed unreliable.

Hoffman also offers an interesting point on the fact that the narrator describes the old man's eye as “vulture” and claims that what drove him to the murder was the eye: “Everywhere else in Poe’s work, in Poe’s mind, vulture is associated with TIME, and time is associated with our mortality, our confinement in body. The vulture-like eye of an aged man is thus an insupportable reminder of the narrator’s insufferable mortality. Could he but rid himself of its all-seeing scrutiny, he would then be free of his subjection to time.”⁶² The narrator does often seem to direct the reader's attention the temporality of the story, particularly in sentences such as “a watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine”⁶³. This sign of careful composition of Poe’s short story is itself a striking indication of its abandonment of ‘natural’ narration. Our minds as readers move at a consistent pace, chronologically, within the confines set by real-world time. Quite a few references to watches and clocks can be found in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, which, along with deliberate repetition and comparatives such as ‘quicker, quicker...louder, louder’⁶⁴ or “low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton”⁶⁵, in fact, by and large, invert the structured concept of time by manipulating our reading pace. What this achieves is a discrepancy between the consistent, invariable time which we are all familiar with and the illusory deceleration and acceleration of time in Poe’s world presented in the text. Evidently, this is a conscious effort by Poe, punctuated clearly throughout the text, to engage the reader to such an extent that they are instantaneously absorbed in the confession of the narrator, and are only able to observe it from outside of the world which is presented to us. Besides the conspicuous description indicating so, temporal discrepancy is arguably one of the most prominent examples of portraying a world which is not fully comprehensible to us. One that is clearly outside of our immediate grasp of reality. It can be ascertained that unnatural minds, such as the narrator of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, are only fully expressed and accounted for when they exist within the boundaries of a world demonstrating a certain degree of abnormality. Such

61 Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 208.

62 Hoffman, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe*, 224.

63 Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 209.

64 Ibid., 211.

65 Ibid., 211.

storytelling is often symptomatic of a stream of consciousness narrative, where the reader is not taken through the narrator's thoughts at a consistent pace.

The narrator's self-righteousness that he presents throughout the story is quite noteworthy as well. He gloats and essentially pats himself on the back during the narrative due to the excessive pride he feels. "You should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!"⁶⁶ he describes the early planning of the murder. "Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! [...] Ha!—would a madman have been so wise as this?"⁶⁷ The narrator finds humor in his recollection of the preparation of the murder as well as in the aftermath: "I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even his—could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary of that. A tub had caught all—ha! Ha!"⁶⁸ His arrogance, however, does not reach its peak until the policemen come to search his house: "I smiled—for *what* had I to fear? [...] I bade them search—search *well*. [...] I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim."⁶⁹ When the narrator starts hearing the beating of the heart he actually accuses the policemen of wrongdoing: "They heard!—they suspected!—they knew!—they were making a mockery of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. [...] 'Villains!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed! Tear up the planks! here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!'"⁷⁰ He accuses the policemen of hypocrisy even though the only hypocritical person in the story is himself as he becomes "never kinder to the old man"⁷¹ after he makes the decision to take his life. His fallacious allegation of the policemen's dissemblance stems from his own deception.

"Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim".⁷² This part of the narrative is relatively syntactically interesting. Hitherto, the narrative featured only two nameless, faceless characters with no separable traits, who were referred to

66 Ibid., 208.

67 Ibid., 209.

68 Ibid., 212.

69 Ibid., 212.

70 Ibid., 213.

71 Ibid., 208.

72 Ibid., 210.

almost exclusively by the means of deictic pronouns such as ‘I, me, his, or him’. Naturally, considering the previous narrative pattern, we would estimate that all of these pronouns relate to the old man. However, they can, as a matter of fact, be read in a variety of ways. We can contemplate presence of an outside entity that is neither the old man nor the narrator. Considering the deictic core of the narrative, it would be decidedly tenable for the ‘black shadow before him’ to be a supernatural force, such as the personification of ‘Death’, imposing on the narrator’s mind. This degree of uncertainty used by Poe allows the reader to explore other means of discerning not only the frame of mind of his characters, but also the world of the narrative. A ‘natural’ reading may evoke assumptions about this based on the reader’s previous knowledge or their personal experience in that situation, but neither of these necessarily facilitates a thorough understanding. Such reading is not questionable in a standard literary tradition, in which the author uses either an omniscient third-person narrator to demonstrate the events of the text where characters that are presented are actively engaging with the events and settings around them, or to some extent a mentally rational first-person narrator, which is obviously not the case in *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

The focal point of this analysis is the narrator and the question whether or not he can be regarded as insane or whether his act of murder and ensuing attempt to persuade the reader of his soundness of mind can, in fact, be associated with the mind of a sane man. We as readers are, throughout the text, in a position that is entirely determined by the narrator. He is the source of all information obtained by the reader, and as such he is in a position where he is able to control and modify his recollection of the events, feelings, and perceived attributes or aspects at his own discretion. All that readers get to understand in terms of events taking place throughout the story, the narrator’s actions and thoughts as well as the old man’s, is through a specific point of view, one constructed entirely by the, supposedly mad, narrator, one of which we cannot have much understanding. The narrator does not express much credibility throughout the story, his attempt to find a motive for his murder is no different: “I think it was his eye! yes, it was this!”⁷³ The abrupt shift between the indecisive ‘I think’ to the confidence conveyed in ‘yes, it was this!’ hints at a lack of conviction in the narrator’s mind. It would seem that our perception of this narrator being insane is based exclusively on the picture painted by the narrator himself. Considering the aforementioned references to the non-reality of the tale’s world, we must acknowledge the possibility of the confession itself being entirely fabricated within the context of the narrative. Meaning that starting after the conclusion of the first paragraph of the narrative, everything following the narrator’s concession of ‘I can tell you the whole story’ has every chance of being a fabrication of his mind.

⁷³ Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 208.

The statement itself can also be questioned for its unreliable quality. The narrator uses an auxiliary 'can', expressing his ability to recount the story, but never the intention of actually doing it. Yes, he can tell us the whole story. But does he? This notion is supported by Mieke Bal's take on levels of narration introduced in the earlier chapters: "When an utterance which is narrated at the second level is not perceptible, this is also an indication of fictionality, an indication that the narrated story is invented. If the narrator's realistic rhetoric seeks to keep up the pretence that it relates true facts, it can never represent the thoughts of actors other than itself."⁷⁴

4.3. *The Black Cat in Comparison with The Tell-Tale Heart*

Christopher Benfey in his essay *Poe and the Unreadable: "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart"* argues: "*The Black Cat* was published later the same year, 1843, as *The Tell Tale Heart*. It resembles the earlier story in several obvious ways, as though Poe were digging deeper in a familiar vein. It too purports to be a killer's confession, and the murder victim is again a member of the killer's household. This killer is also eager to assure us of his sanity: "Yet mad am I not - and very surely do I not dream." In both stories, furthermore, the police seem almost reluctant to pursue their investigations. The killers must insist on their guilt, even offer proof of it. In each case the discovery of the concealed body is the result of the killer 's own obsessive need to reveal its hiding place."⁷⁵ *The Black Cat*, much like *The Tell-Tale Heart*, features an unnamed narrator confessing his crimes. He tells the story on the eve of his execution for the murder of his wife as he attempts to exonerate himself from the heinous crime. The narrator again opens the narrative with a claim of sanity:

"For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But tomorrow I die, and today I would unburden my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. [...] Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects."⁷⁶

We do not know exactly how much time has passed between the events of the story and the actual

74 Bal, *Narratology*, 46.

75 Benfey, *Poe and the Unreadable*, 35.

76 Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 103.

narrative but due to the fact that it is already the day before the narrator's execution, we can safely assume that it has been a longer period of time than in the case of *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The tale is also not told to an unnamed listener but rather written with no specific 'target audience' in the narrator's mind. This might suggest that the narrator does not have a reason to mislead, lie, or embellish the events of the story. Another possible explanation for the narrative is that he is trying to claim insanity in order to avoid his death sentence. Already in the first paragraph we can find instances where the narrator contradicts himself. He alleges that the story he is about to recount is nothing more than 'a series of mere household events' and yet at the end of the paragraph he claims that he lacks the logic and calmness to tell the story plainly. As such, the narrator deems himself unreliable. Doing so may be in order to win the reader's sympathy which would further suggest the possibility of insanity defense.

As opposed to *The Tell-Tale Heart*, in this case we do actually get the narrator's explanation for the events that occurred:

"And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgement, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had afflicted on the unoffending brute."⁷⁷

The spirit of perverseness is so essential that the narrator felt the need to highlight it both to himself and the reader. With the narrator's interpretation of perverseness coming before the description of the major acts of perversity, we, the readers, are given an explanation for the transpired events, an explanation that was markedly absent in *The Tell Tale Heart*. With *The Black Cat*, as the narrator describes how he kills first the cat, Pluto, and then his wife, the reader realizes the narrator's motives for the actions. The narrator, while he is aware of the spirit of perversity operating within his mind, is unable to recognize that this spirit is the exclusive root of his behavior. Instead, much like the narrator in *The Tell Tale Heart*, he searches for a more logical and rational justification. In

⁷⁷ Ibid., 105-6.

the first tale, the narrator's excuse was the old man's evil eye. In this tale, the narrator seeks to blame his actions on alcohol ('fiend Intemperence') and the suffering brought upon him by the second cat.

The reader of *The Black Cat* is also offered some background information about the past and the character of the narrator: "From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions."⁷⁸ We learn that the narrator sensitive, compassionate child, who preferred company of animals to one of people: "There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man."⁷⁹ It can be argued that all the narrator attempts to do in this part is to paint a picture of a kind-hearted loner to the reader. However, the societal norms of 19th century America did not expect boys to be sensitive or tender-hearted and it led him to become 'jest of his companions'. The narrator also becomes completely void of his prior sensitivity by the end of the narrative. As he seemingly drifts from one extreme of mind to another it seems implausible that his behavior is caused by an outside catalyst, whether it be alcohol like the narrator claims, the cats, or his wife.

Defining perverseness, the narrator asserts that the spirit of perverseness came 'to my final and irrevocable overthrow'. Exactly what does lead to his final overthrow? An exploration of his acts reveals that he is correct when he makes the assertion, but he fails to comprehend it. It is indeed perversity that ruins him. There are four crucial events in this story carried out by the narrator that can be seen as originating from the spirit of the perverseness: the gouging out one of Pluto's eyes, the hanging of Pluto, the murder of the his wife, and the actions surrounding and leading to the revelation of the murder. The narrator fails to recognize that the perverse is controlling him early in the story. He claims that the gouging out one of Pluto's eyes is done as a consequence of excessive drinking. He returns home 'much intoxicated' and claims that his 'malevolence is gin-nurtured'. However, in the midst of the description of the gouging of Pluto's eye is a compelling phrase. The narrator tells us: "I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body, and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame." He appears to already be completely in control of the perverseness, although he does not realize it yet.

78 Ibid., 103.

79 Ibid., 104.

The first event actually described by the narrator as perverse is the hanging of Pluto. As he recounts the scene to the reader, the narrator interprets his action as being done in the spirit of perversity, which he previously described as the 'unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only.' But what actually is perverseness? Can this instinct be controlled? Does it always destroy those who give in to it? The narrator acknowledges that his perversity does exist, is active in his life, and is driving his actions. However, he fails to understand them and attempts to explain them rationally. He recognizes and expresses the true reason behind his actions, only to reject it a little while later. It is this denial of the truth that leads to his devastation, as he is powerless to handle the perverseness in his life, since he has dismissed the assumption that what is causing him to behave the way he does is the perverseness.

The narrator's following action, the hanging of Pluto, is the only act that the narrator himself recognizes as arising from the spirit of perverseness. It is with this deed that he provides the reader with the aforementioned definition and exposes how he hanged the cat: "with the tears streaming from my eyes, and the bitterest remorse at my heart."⁸⁰ He evidently recognizes what he is doing is reprehensible, but is not able to refrain from the action. The narrator's remark that killing Pluto is "a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God." The argument that the narrator is making here is that he feels condemned for having conceded to the spirit of perverseness even though he is able to identify it and acknowledge the fact that it is commanding his actions. He makes no attempt to fight it. He simply gives in and mourns his vulnerability.

The third event is the murder of the narrator's wife. He seeks to blame the murder on the cat, claiming that it was the cat he was initially aiming to slay and he only kills his wife because she interferes. However, the narrator's own words give him away again. In describing the murder, he declares he was "Goaded, by the interference into a rage more than demoniacal."⁸¹ This rage again seems to be the spirit of the perverseness, just like in the case of gouging the eye of Pluto. Once again the narrator fails to recognize it at work. Considering the fact that the spirit never ceased or left his life, it was only a matter of time until his violent deeds escalated to this level of abhorrence. Having murdered his wife and disposed of the evidence, the narrator now finds himself feeling

80 Ibid., 106.

81 Ibid., 110-1.

tranquil and self-assured for a number of days. However, just like in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the spirit of the perverseness is not done with him yet. Now he must confess to his deed as he approaches his 'final overthrow'. It becomes apparent that his "confession" itself is an act of perverseness. As the police get ready to depart, the narrator describes what is a crucial element of his confession, but does so very casually, almost in passing, with no inkling that he acknowledges the importance of the words he is uttering:

"The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness. 'Gentlemen,' I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, 'I delight to have alleayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen, this—this is a very well-constructed house.' (In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.) 'I may say an excellently well constructed house. These walls—are you going, gentlemen?—these walls are solidly put together;' and here, through the mere frenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brickwork behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom."⁸²

The equal perverseness that drove him to the killing is now driving him to confess it, despite knowing that he should not do so. He is no longer in control of his faculties. Again the spirit of the perverseness has taken control and the narrator is powerless to stop himself. He does not have any idea of what he is saying or why he is saying it, let alone what is precipitating his speech. Apparently, the spirit of perverseness is in charge once again. However, he, again, does not realize this, as he is too disturbed to think clearly. He no longer desires to present his thoughts to the reader: "Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak."⁸³ The narrator once again failed to control the perverseness which controls him and it is this defeat, and the subsequent actions stemming from it, that condemned him. It is now also clear, with the same level of excessive pride and self-confidence as the narrator of *The Tell-Tale Heart* has, that the spirit of perverseness was controlling both narrators. Even though only one of them recognized it, he was still not able to resist it. The story is written in such a way that while the narrator, in a way, 'misses the author's point,' the reader does not. It is now apparent what happened to the tale's narrator, as well as the previous one in *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Poe exposed the spirit of perverseness in action within the two narrators. While the one in the *The Tell-Tale Heart* has no idea what actually compels him to act the way he does, the narrator of *The Black Cat* realizes the root of his behavior and even identifies the catalyst. As such, both men can be deemed to be insane. The narrator of *The Black Cat* does have the mitigating factor

82 Ibid., 113.

83 Ibid., 113.

of being able to recognize the source so he can be considered insane to a lesser degree than the narrator of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, but insane nonetheless.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to analyze two short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*, in relation to the motif of madness and the ways madness is presented and communicated in the narratives. After a brief historical and cultural outline, contextualizing the works of Edgar Allan Poe and their place in literary history and tradition, a following theoretical background was presented: first was defining madness from a diachronic point of view as well as the philosophical one, where thinking of two influential philosophers, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Søren Kierkegaard, was presented as well as their arguments on what constitutes madness and reason with Kierkegaardian thinking being more individualistic and emotional on a deeper level. The following part defined a basic structuralist theory of narratology, the theory of the narrator's reliability. Definitions and arguments by Gérard Genette, Wayne C. Booth, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Ansgar Nünning, etc. were presented. Textual signs, which indicate narratorial unreliability and its implications were discussed as well alongside narrative levels and implied author/reader. The focus of the thesis then shifts to actual works of Edgar Allan Poe. The analysis focuses mainly, as the previous part suggests, on the narrators and whether or not they can be deemed unreliable, which in both cases they can. Both narratives contain the outlined textual signs needed to indentify them as unreliable and therefore they cannot be trusted. Signs of madness in both Hegelian and Kierkegaardian sense are, in various levels, present as well.

6. Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje problematice šílenství v literatuře a jeho zpodobnění ve vybraných dílech Edgara Allana Poea, konkrétně v povídkách *Zrádné srdce* (v originále *The Tell-Tale Heart*) a *Černý kocour* (v originále *The Black Cat*). Cílem práce bylo definovat jeho způsoby se zvláštním zaměřením na literární díla vyprávěná ich-formou. Dvě zmíněná díla jsou analyzována jak z hlediska strukturálního (naratologického) tak z hlediska psychoanalytického.

První část práce se zabývá historicko-literárním kontextem díla Edgara Allana Poea. Literární směr do kterého Poe zapadá je romantismus, jehož kořeny sahají do druhé poloviny

osmnáctého století. Doba průmyslové revoluce hrála na evropském kontinentu zásadní roli nejen v každodenním životě běžných obyvatel, ale také v oblasti umění a kultury. Předním intelektuálním a filozofickým směrem bylo v té době osvícenství, které upřednostňovalo racionalismus, vědu a logiku čímž se vymezovalo proti předchozímu směru barokní religiozity. Romantismus byl naopak odmítavou reakcí právě na osvícenství, jemuž byla vyčítána ztráta lidskosti a citu na úkor rozumu a pokroku. Kromě romantismu se Edgar Allan Poe také řadí do subžánru romantismu zvaného gotický román, považovaného za předchůdce moderního hororu. Průkopníkem gotického žánru byl Horace Walpole se svým románem *Otrantský zámek* (v originále *The Castle of Otranto*) vydaným v roce 1764. Koncept amerického gotického románu stál ve Spojených státech v kontrastu s tradicí transcendentalismu, jeho přednímu oponujícímu směru. Zastánci transcendentalismu se, stejně jako představitelé gotického románu, ztotožňovali s tradicí romantismu, avšak jejich pohled na dobro a lidskou duši se diametrálně lišil. Hlavní představitelé transcendentalismu byli Ralph Waldo Emerson a Henry David Thoreau, kdežto jejich gotickými protějšky byli Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville a samozřejmě Edgar Allan Poe.

Druhá část této bakalářské práce se věnuje obecné historii vyobrazení šílenství a psychologických poruch v literatuře. Tato sekce také nastiňuje obecnou definici pojmu „šílenství“ a jeho historickou relevanci v kontextu Spojených států první poloviny osmnáctého století. Jestli chceme analyzovat pojem typu „šílenství“, musíme také definovat jeho protějšek (rozum, soudnost) v rámci stejného kontextu. Poté jsou šílenství a soudnost znázorněny také z filozofického hlediska, myšlenkami Poeových vrstevníků Georga Wilhelma Friedricha Hegela a Sorena Kierkegaarda, jež oba přináší vlastní teorie. Zatímco Hegelovo šílenství se zakládá více na pravdě a objektivitě, Kierkegaardovo více závisí na jednotlivci, individualismu a vnitřnímu chápání. Následná kapitola se zabývá literární teorií naratologie, vycházející ze strukturalistických teorií. Konkrétně se práce zabývá teorií nespolehlivého vypravěče a způsobem, jakým je nespolehlivý vypravěč použit v literatuře pro vyobrazení šílenství nebo jinak změněného stavu mysli. Prvním akademikem zabývajícím se nespolehlivým vypravěčem byl Wayne C. Booth, který teorii poprvé popsal ve své knize *Rétorika Fikce* (v originále *The Rhetorics of Fiction*) v roce 1961 jako: „Pro nedostatek vhodnějších termínů nazývám vypravěče spolehlivým, když mluví nebo jedná v souladu s normami díla (tzn. v souladu s normami implikovaného autora), a nespolehlivým, když tak nečiní.“ Definice dalších vědců zabývajících se naratologií a problematikou nespolehlivého vypravěče jsou v této kapitole rovněž zmíněny (např. Ansgar Nünning, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenanová, Seymour Chatman, Mieke Bal atd.) Ansgar Nünning zkomponoval komplexní seznam textových znaků jejichž přítomnost ve vyprávění je důvodem k pochybnostem o jeho spolehlivosti.

Teorie úrovní vyprávění poprvé definována Gérardem Genettem v knize *Diskurz vyprávění* (v originále *Discours du récit*) vydané v roce 1972 je zde také nastíněna.

Následující kapitola této práce se zabývá obecným přehledem abnormálních psychologických stavů v dílech E.A. Poea. Drtivá většina jeho děl vyobrazuje jednu nebo více postav které na první pohled nejsou mentálně v pořádku. Ať už se jedná o vyobrazení některé z psychiatrických onemocnění, poruchu paměti nebo snu, či naopak tvrdí, že jsou naprosto v pořádku v případech, ve kterých nám teorie nespolehlivého vypravěče jasně naznačuje, že tak se věci rozhodně nemají. Další podkapitola se zabývá právě použitím nespolehlivého vypravěče v Poeových dílech, kde se jedná o velice rozšířený jev. Téměř všechna díla E.A. Poea dávají čtenáři různé důvody k pochybnosti o věrohodnosti vypravovaného příběhu. Následuje podkapitola pojmenovaná Paranoia a vina vypravěče, která se zabývá právě těmito dvěma stavy mysli. Jsou to právě pocity paranoie a viny, které často vedou vypravěče k iracionálnímu jednání, což má často za následek nevěrohodné popisy událostí a postav v daném příběhu, dávající čtenáři důvody k pochybnostem o nespolehlivosti vyprávění.

Následující část bakalářské práce se věnuje samotné analýze literárních děl. Jako první je zkoumána povídka *Zrádné srdce* (v originále *The Tell-Tale Heart*). Jedná se o vyprávění v první osobě v podání vraha, líčícího události vedoucí k jeho vraždě staršího muže včetně samotného činu a jeho následků vedoucí až k jeho odhalení. Jako čtenáři nejsme seznámeni se samotným způsobem vyprávění. Jelikož ale hned první věta zní jako by ležela uprostřed dialogu, dá se předpokládat, že se jedná o konverzaci, ať už záměrnou, nebo náhodně zaslechnutou. V průběhu vyprávění se kromě samotného činu o postavě vypravěče nedozvídáme prakticky žádné další informace a proto nemáme důvod předpokládat že svět implikovaného autora je stejným světem jako ten skutečného čtenáře, což komplikuje předpoklad, že se jedná o nespolehlivého vypravěče. Od této komplikace je upuštěno hned v prvním odstavci, kde nacházíme hned několik znaků nespolehlivého vyprávění. Kritik Daniel Hoffman ihned na základě prvního odstavce označil vypravěče za nespolehlivého a šíleného. Takto reflexivní úsudek je však poněkud nešťastný, jelikož značně omezuje čtenářův úhel pohledu na zbytek textu. Čtenář, který je od prvního odstavce rozhodnutý o vypravěčově šílenství, bude po zbytek textu pouze potvrzovat svůj názor, získaný velmi malým množstvím informací, tímto omezeným pohledem na dané vyprávění. Důležitým aspektem příběhu je oko starého muže, které vypravěč identifikuje jako motiv pro svůj čin. Oko je popsáno jako „supí“, což Daniel Hoffman okomentoval poznatkem, že kdekoli se v díle Edgara Allana Poea objevil motiv supy, byl spojen s časem, který je spojován se smrtelností. Může tedy vražda být pouze vypravěčovou snahou

vyhnout se oku a tím své vlastní smrtelnosti? Čas je v povídce odkazován hned několikrát. Vypravěč používá přirovnání jako „minutová ručička hodinek se hýbe rychleji než moje“ když popisuje jak se obezřetně vkrádal do starcova pokoje, nebo „jako když jsou hodiny zabaleny do bavlny“ při odkazování na tlukot starcova srdce. Vypravěč *Zrádného Srdce* se takřka celý text projevuje se zvýšeným pocitem pýchy. Hned při přípravování vraždy říká čtenáři, že by se smál, kdyby viděl, jak šikovně to měl vymyšlené. Vrah neztratil smysl pro humor nejen při přípravě na starcovu vraždu, ale i bezprostředně po ní se s úsměvem obdivuje, že po něm na místě činu nezůstala žádná krev. I toto může být chápáno jako narážka na vypravěčovu nespolehlivost, ne-li rovnou šílenství. Vypravěč se nakonec odhalí sám, když pozve vyšetřující strážníky do místnosti, kde pod podlahou pohřbil svou obět. Postaví si křeslo přesně na místo, kam starce uložit, ale po chvíli začne slyšet tlukot jeho srdce, který se zintenzivňuje a zintenzivňuje tak dlouho, dokud to vypravěč nevydrží a k činu se přizná. Ústřední podstatou analýzy tohoto textu je otázka, zda může být jeho vypravěč považován za šíleného nebo zda jeho čin vraždy a následný pokus přesvědčit čtenáře o své soudnosti může být spojen s myslí duševně příčetného jedince. Jako čtenáři jsme po celé vyprávění vystaveni jen a pouze napospas vypravěči a jeho úsudku. Ten nám sdělí jen to, co sám uzná za vhodné. Všechny události odehrávající se v průběhu vyprávění jsou ukázány čtenáři pouze z úhlu pohledu vypravěče, takže z pohledu nespolehlivého. Vezmeme-li v potaz již dříve zmíněnou tezi o „nerealitě“ vypravěčova světa, musíme vzít na vědomí i tu možnost, že celé vyprávění není nic více než vypravěčova fabulace. Toto je indikováno jak vypravěčovou promluvou z úvodního odstavce, kde čtenáři říká, že nám *může* celý příběh převyprávět. Nikdy ale nevyjádří svůj úmysl tak skutečně učinit. Toto je podpořeno teorií Miekeho Bala o úrovních vyprávění, kde tvrdí, že dané prohlášení je v druhé úrovni vyprávění znakem fiktivnosti.

Finální částí bakalářské práce je analýza druhé Poeovi povídky, *Černý kocour* (v originále *The Black Cat*) a její porovnání s analýzou předchozí. *Černý kocour* sdílí mnoho společných znaků se *Zrádným srdcem*. Taktéž se jedná o přiznání vraha a v obou případech se vrazi přiznají sami kdy odhalí tělo své oběti. Na rozdíl od *Zrádného srdce* víme, jak je tato povídka vyprávěna. Vypravěč ji píše v předvečer své popravky. Co už ale nevíme, je komu nebo z jakého důvodu tak činí. Stejně jako v předchozím případě začíná vypravěč prohlášením o své příčetnosti a soudnosti, ačkoli uznává, že neočekává čtenářovu důvěru. V průběhu příběhu nám vypravěč popíše tři morálně zavržením hodně činy. Prvním z nich je vypíchnutí oka kocoura Pluta. Vypravěč se vymluví na alkohol, ale jeho dílčí výčitky svědomí čtenáře příliš nepřesvědčí. Druhým činem je oběšení Pluta. V tomto případě si je vypravěč vědom toho, co za jeho činy stojí. Je to duch zvrácenosti. Rozezná ho, ale nedokáže se mu nijak bránit. Mezitím se objeví další kocour, vypadající přesně jako Pluto, včetně chybějícího oka,

pouze s jednou změnou. Na hrudi má bílou skvrnu, která je, jak tvrdí vypravěč, ve tvaru šibenice. Třetí případ je zabití jeho manželky a zadržování jejího těla ve sklepech. V tomto případě svede vypravěč čin na kocoura, jelikož chtěl zabít pouze jeho a manželkou byl vyrušen. Co si vypravěč neuvědomuje je fakt, že ve všech třech případech stál za jeho činy zmíněný duch zvrácenosti. Nyní, stejně jako v případě *Zrádného srdce*, vypravěč svůj čin odhalí a také ho k tomu dovede jeho přehnaná sebedůvěra, která se ukazuje být také znakem zmíněné zvrácenosti. Při návštěvě policistů, kteří přijeli vyšetřit vraždu, je vypravěč provádí sklepem a když už jsou na odchodu, tak zaklepe svou holí na zeď přesně v místě kde je tělo jeho oběti. Zpoza zdi se ozve vřískot kocoura a vypravěč je odhalen.

Cílem práce bylo definovat a identifikovat znaky šílenství za pomoci nespolehlivého vyprávění v rozebíraných povídkách. V obou případech se nachází více než dostatečný počet textuálních znaků definovaných Ansgarem Nünningem, takže můžeme dojít k závěru, že v obou případech se jedná o nespolehlivé vypravěče. Pokud chceme definovat možné šílenství daných vypravěčů, musíme analyzovat dále, jelikož lživý vypravěč ještě nemusí nutně znamenat šílený. Oba vypravěči jsou ovládnáni duchem zvrácenosti, představeným v *Černém kocourovi*. Pouze jeden z nich si je toho však vědom. Jeho problém je neschopnost se mu bránit nebo ho ovládnout. Můžeme konstatovat, že vypravěč *Zrádného srdce* je s jistotou šílený. Nezná důvody svého chování. V případě *Černého kocoura* se nejedná o tak jasné šílenství, ale je šílený také. Sice ví proč své činy provádí, ale není schopen svou mysl ovládnout natolik, aby přestal. Jeho úroveň šílenství je o poznání nižší, avšak rozhodně ne nulová.

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