

EDGAR ALLAN POE AND STEPHEN KING: AN ENCOUNTER THROUGH THE GOTHIC

Karina Moraes KURTZ*

- **ABSTRACT:** This study sheds a light in two narratives written by authors who belonged to different contexts and historical times: Edgar Allan Poe, a nineteenth century writer, and Stephen King, a contemporary writer. The objective is to analyze Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and King's "1408", by taking into consideration the gothic elements present in both narratives. The methodology is exploratory/qualitative due to the text analysis in which the research is done. One of the most important similarities found between the short stories are the supernatural horror elements, such as: the paranoia and the use of sets and plots that cause horror and fear to readers. We also find some differences, due to the centuries and the style of each writer, such as an ironic style used by King and not by Poe.
- **KEYWORDS:** Edgar A. Poe. Stephen King. Short Story. Gothic. Literature.

Introduction

This work presents an analysis of two short stories, pointing out some similarities and differences between them; a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher", which the main character narrates a story of mystery, sickness and death. All happens at the mansion of his beloved friend, Roderick Usher, presenting the house as a character. And the other short story is a horror piece by Stephen King, "1408", a story where our skeptic main character evolves in believing into the supernatural world due to a horrible suspenseful night at an evil hotel room.

With this comparison, I'll try to show how the gothic tradition has survived along the centuries as Stephen King, a contemporary writer, has been inspired by great names of the gothic such as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and H. P. Lovecraft.

Stephen King is known today as "the master of horror", and many generations are reading his stories. Today, we might say we have a revival of this genre. King has won more than seventy awards with his horror books and short stories as well, since 1976.

Different authors, raised in different places, with distinct cultural, social and personal factors, can connect through the passion for writing horror fiction. Nonetheless,

* Doutoranda em Letras. UFSM – Universidade Federal de Santa Maria. Departamento de Letras Estrangeiras Modernas – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras. Santa Maria – RS – Brasil. 97105-900 – kakakurtz@gmail.com

Artigo recebido em 18/10/2020 e aprovado em 10/04/2021.

both - King and Poe - bring life to the gothic in literature, and that still surprises a lot of people in different parts of the world, specially nowadays. The main objective of this paper is to show some similarities and differences between the two short stories. Thus, literary genres can survive as new authors rise, and bring old genres to life, inspired by them, as it is the case of Stephen King.

Reading is central in our lives, this way, reading literature enables us to discover new worlds, life experiences, emotions that help us understand our own lives. As Todorov (1939, p.23-24) observes, “Ela nos proporciona sensações insubstituíveis que fazem o mundo real se tornar mais pleno de sentido e mais belo.”

And it is because I believe that literature has the power to change our lives for better, that I decided to dedicate my research to this field. I fully agree when Todorov postulates that: “Hoje, se me pergunto por que amo a literatura [...] é: porque ela me ajuda a viver. [...] Ela nos proporciona sensações insubstituíveis que fazem o mundo real se tornar mais pleno de sentido e mais belo.” (TODOROV, 1939, p. 23-24).

This paper uses an exploratory/qualitative methodology, mostly because of the nature of this work, which includes analyzing and reflecting upon the narrative itself and the discourse used by the main characters. Also, this type of analysis doesn't use graphics of statistics to show the results. It is divided into sections: an introduction to the gothic genre and to the lives of the chosen authors, Edgar A. Poe and Stephen King. Then, it is drawn a comparison between the both short stories, showing the main similarities and differences between them. Concluding with some final considerations regarding the survival of the gothic genre and the importance of literature for our lives.

The Gothic: an introduction

The Gothic was invented almost single-handedly by Horace Walpole, whose *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) contains essentially all the elements that constitute the genre. Walpole's novel was imitated not only in the eighteenth century and not only in the novel form, but it has influenced the novel, the short story, poetry, and even film making up to the present day, according to Robert Harris (HOGLE, 2002).

According to Hogle (2002), Gothic fiction is hardly “gothic” at all. It is an entirely post-medieval and even post-Renaissance phenomenon. The author cites that the first published work to call itself “A Gothic Story” was a counterfeit medieval tale published long after the Middle Ages: Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, printed under a pseudonym in England in 1764 and reissued in 1765 in a second edition with a new preface which openly advocated a “[...] blend [of] the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern,” the former “[...] all imagination and improbability [...]” and the latter governed by the “rules of probability” connected with “common life”.

To the author:

This genre then scattered into various modes, among them aspects of the more realistic Victorian novel. It reasserted itself across the nineteenth century in

flamboyant plays and scattered operas, short stories or fantastic tales for magazines and newspapers, “sensation” novels for women and the literate working class, portions of poetry or painting, and substantial resurgences of full-fledged Gothic novels – all of which were satirized for their excesses, as they had also been in Romantic times, now that the Gothic mode had become relatively familiar. (HOGLE, 2002, p.1).

In the 1790s, the 1890s, there was a concentrated resurgence of Gothic fiction, particularly in prose narrative, highlighted by “Gothics” as Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890–91), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), Bram Stoker’s original *Dracula* (1897), and Henry James’s serialized novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) (HOGLE, 2002).

In Hogle’s viewpoint, the Gothic expanded in the 1900s into films, myriad ghost stories, a vast number of novels, television shows and series, romantic and satirical musical (as well as nonmusical) plays, and many other ways.

The late twentieth century has even seen a burgeoning in the academic study of Gothic fiction at college and university levels and in publications connected to them. There is now no question that the Gothic, particularly in prose or verse narrative, theatre, and film– all of which we here encompass in the phrase “Gothic fiction” – has become a long-lasting and major, albeit widely variable, symbolic realm in modern and even postmodern western culture, however archaic the Gothic label may make it seem. (HOGLE, 2002, p.2).

According to Robert Harris (apud HOGLE, 2004) the action in the Gothic genre takes place in and around an old castle or house, sometimes seemingly abandoned, sometimes occupied. The place may often contain secret passages, trap doors, secret rooms, dark or hidden staircases, and possibly ruined sections, passing a feeling of mystery, despair, agony and other nasty feelings.

The author also emphasizes the somber places of the genre, such as a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island, a large old house or theatre, an aging city or urban underworld. Some new recreation of an older venue, such as an office with old filing cabinets, an overworked spaceship, or a computer memory are other possible places where action occurs. There is also a combination of events that haunt the characters, psychologically and/or physically. For the author, these hauntings can take many forms, but mostly they are ghosts, specters, or monsters.

In the Gothic Fiction you may not have always physical supernatural events, that cause horror and shock you; but mostly, the presence of the psychological terror, which threatens not only the character’s life but his sanity, making him/her question himself/herself.

Edgar Allan Poe and Gothic Fiction

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S, he was an American short-story writer, poet, critic, and editor. Edgar Allan Poe's tales of mystery and horror initiated the modern detective story, and the atmosphere in his tales of horror is unrivaled in American fiction.

With his short stories and poems, Edgar Allan Poe captured the imagination and interest of readers around the world. He earned the name of "Father of the Detective Story" due to his imaginative stories and novels. His poem "The Raven" (1845) is among the best-known in national American literature. In 1827, Poe published his first book, "Tamerlane and Other Poems", and joined the army around this time. In 1829, he published a second collection "Al Aaraaf, Tamberlane", and "Minor Poems"¹.

Poe wanted to go to "West Point", a military academy, achieving this dream in 1830. In 1835, Poe worked for a magazine called the "Southern Literary Messenger". There he developed not such a nice reputation as a cut-throat critic, due to his ferocious reviews of other authors contemporary reviews.

Concerning his publications: "Poe also published some of his own works in the magazine [...] Poe's aggressive-reviewing style and sometimes combative personality strained his relationship with the publication [...]" (EDGAR..., 2021) mostly because of alcohol problems, Poe was known to be very much addicted to opium as well.

In late 1830s, Poe published *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*², a collection of stories, including "The Fall of the House of Usher", "Ligeia" and "William Wilson".

In 1841, Poe launched his genre of detective fiction with *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. In 1843, he won a literary prize for *The Gold Bug*, a suspenseful tale of secret codes and hunting treasure³.

Concerning the last days of Poe's life, the author was overcome by grief after the death of his beloved Virginia in 1847. On October 3, Poe was found in Baltimore in great distress. He was taken to Washington College Hospital where he died on October 7. His final days remain somewhat of a mystery. There are speculations that his last words were "Lord, help my poor soul". At the time, it was said that Poe died of "congestion of the brain". But his actual cause of death has been the subject of endless speculation. Some believe that alcoholism led to his demise while others offer up alternative theories. Rabies, epilepsy, carbon monoxide poisoning is just one of the conditions thought to have led to the great writer's death. Poe never had any financial success in his lifetime, but he has become one of America's most lasting writers. His works continue to bring mystery, surprise and shock just as a century ago, seducing modern readers.

¹ Cf. Poe (2011).

² Cf. Poe (2011).

³ Cf. Poe (2011).

Stephen King: the master of horror

Stephen King was born on September 21, 1947, in Portland, Maine, U.S. He prefers to be called Steve, according to Lisa Rogak, the author of “Haunted Heart: The Life and Times of Stephen King”, “Fans of King - and they are legion - will soak up this well-researched biography” (BIO..., 2009, p.1).

No, this biography is *not* authorized, the running joke among biographers is that if it is authorized, the book makes a good cure for insomnia. King does know about this book and told his friends that they could talk with me if they desired. (ROGAK, 1962, p. 6, grifo do autor).

According to Lisa, Stephen King should never have been born, his mother, Nellie Ruth Pillsbury, married with a captain in the merchant marines, Donald Edwin King, in Maine, would never bear children, so they adopt a child, David Victor, on September 14, 1945. In September 21, 1947, Stephen King was born, which Ruth considered a miracle. “He shares the birthday with H. G. Wells, author of such sci-fi classics as ‘the War of the Worlds’, who was born eighty-one years earlier.” (ROGAK, 1962, p.8).

Donald, father of Steve, was a travelling man, abandoning his wife Ruth, and the two boys when Steve had just turned two, and David, his adopted brother, 4 years old, their father told Ruth that he was going to buy a pack of cigarettes, and they never saw him again, not even Donald’s parents knew where he might be, according to Lisa.

The lives of the King’s family turned into chaos, lack of money, and health issues, according to Lisa:

The small King family would stay in a room in an aunt’s or cousin’s house or apartment until Ruth felt they were about to wear out their welcome, then they’d move on to the next sympathetic relative with a room to spare. Their perambulations took them far beyond Maine. During the first four years after Donald left and while Stephen was two to six years of age, they lived in Chicago; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Malden, Massachusetts; and West De Pere, Wisconsin. Sometimes, to Ruth’s great consternation, she had to split up the family. At one point Steve stayed with Ruth’s younger sister Ethelyn and her husband, Oren Flaws, in West Durham, Maine, while Dave stayed with Mollie, another sister, in Malden, Massachusetts. (ROGAK, 1962, p.11).

According to the author, the main reason for Stephen King to become this excellent writer, was his mother. “Ruth King rarely let her boys see her dejection at their poverty and constant moves. Instead, she dealt with their circumstances with a sense of humor and by telling stories to her sons. Both her optimism and storytelling would have a lasting influence on Steve.” (ROGAK, 1962, p. 11).

Steve had another traumatic event, early in his life, he was four years old and playing with a friend, who lived near a railroad line. he showed up at home, clearly in shock, his friend was hit by a freight train in front of him. Although Steve says in adult life that he has no record of this, Ruth believes it was a eternal shock for him to see the accident.

Steve knew he had everything to become a writer when his mother bought him a behemoth, secondhand Underwood typewriter for \$35, he started submitting his stories to the pulp thriller and mystery magazines he'd been reading for many years.

Among the piles of books that Steve had, was H. P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allan Poe, Steinbeck, Faulkner, and others. His first horror novel *Carrie*, was a huge success. His pseudonym was Richard Bachman. In 1971, he began working as an English teacher at Hampden Academy.

His books have sold more than 350 million copies worldwide and have been adapted into numerous successful films.

Stephen King has been nominated for two Edgar Awards and won one for "Mr. Mercedes" in 2015, the award is named after Edgar Allan Poe, they are presented every year by the "Mystery Writers of America", based in New York City. They honor the best in mystery fiction, non-fiction, television, film, and theater published or produced in the previous year. According to Theedgars.com: "Each spring, Mystery Writers of America present the Edgar® Awards, widely acknowledged to be the most prestigious awards in the genre."⁴ And now, in September 10th of 2015, Stephen King has received in White House the National Medal of Arts of USA.

Drawing some comparisons between the Short Stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe first published in 1839, in Burton's *Gentleman's Magazine*. It was slightly revised in 1840 for the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. It contains within it the poem "The Haunted Palace", which had earlier been published by Poe, separately in the April 1839 issue of the *Baltimore Museum magazine*. In 1928, Éditions Narcisse, predecessor to the Black Sun Press, published a limited edition of 300 numbered copies with illustrations by Alastair.

The story begins with the arrival of the unnamed narrator at the Roderick Usher's house. Roderick has sent a letter informing his friend that a terrible illness took place at the house, infirming Roderick and his twin sister, Madeleine, who later falls into cataleptic, deathlike trances.

Roderick's and Madeleine's condition can be described as a form of sensory overload known as hyperesthesia (hypersensitivity to textures, light, sounds, smells and tastes), hypochondria (an excessive preoccupation or worry about having a serious illness) and acute anxiety, having a cadaveric physical appearance, later, Roderick tells the narrator that his sister, Madeleine, is also very ill.

The narrator tries to cheer his friend Roderick with reading and listening to his improvised musical compositions on the guitar in this time of illness. Roderick sings "The Haunted Palace", then tells the narrator that he believes the house is alive, due to the arrangement of the masonry and vegetation surrounding it.

⁴ Cf. Edgar... (2021).

As the story goes on, Roderick informs the narrator that Madeleine is dead and insists that she should be entombed in the family tomb before being permanently buried. The narrator and Roderick put the body in the tomb at the vault of the house, although Madeline present rosy cheeks, as if she was still alive. Over the next day both Roderick and the narrator find themselves agitated. A storm takes place. Roderick comes to the narrator's bedroom, which is above the vault, to read stories in the middle of the night.

The narrator attempts to calm Roderick by reading aloud a novel. As the narrator reads it, they can hear sounds like cracking and ripping somewhere in the house. Roderick becomes increasingly hysterical, and exclaims that entombed Madeleine alive, which he knew. The bedroom door is open by the wind revealing Madeline standing there. She falls towards her brother and both collapse on the floor as corpses.

After that, the narrator runs from the house, and, he notices the moonlight behind him, making him to look back, as he watches, the House of Usher splits in two parts and the fragments sink into the tarn ghastly.

"1408" is the third tale in the audiobook collection titled "Blood and Smoke", released in 1999. In 2002, it was collected in written form as the 12th story in King's collection "Everything's Eventual".

The narrator does not appear as a character, only narrates the story. The main protagonist, a best seller writer Mike Enslin, who writes non-fiction works based on haunted place. He says that he spends some nights at haunted places, and then write the book. He smokes and has an alcohol problem. Mike internally feels some guilt and regrets at his books' success, due to the fact that he is a skeptic; he is not a believer in the paranormal or the supernatural that he describes in these books.

The short story shows that despite that, Mike arrives at the Hotel Dolphin on 61st Street in New York City intending on spending the night in the hotel's infamous room 1408, which would be part of his next horror book about cursed hotel rooms.

According to the hotel's manager, Mr. Olin, room 1408 has been responsible for at least 42 deaths, 12 of them suicides and at least 30 "natural" deaths, all over a span of 68 years. While Mike tries to get the key of the room from Mr. Olin, remarking that he doesn't believe there are ghosts in 1408, Olin insists there is "something evil" that resides in there. The room seems to affect various electronic devices, causing digital wristwatches, pocket calculators, and cell phones to stop functioning or to operate unpredictably.

Mr. Olin also reveals that because the 13th floor usually does not exist, so the room is listed on the 14th; which is a superstitious practice that many hotels do. According to the hotel's manager, Mr. Olin, the room is cursed by existing on the 13th floor, the room's numbers adding up to 13 making it all the worse ($1408 \rightarrow 1+4+0+8=13$). Mr. Olin pleads with Mike to reconsider, believing that a skeptic such as he is even more susceptible to the room's curse. Mike does not seem to believe anything, so he insists and wins over the key.

However, the protagonist's problems with Room 1408 begin before he even sets foot through the door. As Mike enters and examines the room, and begins dictating into a hand-held tape recorder, his train of thought immediately takes unwelcome and chaotic turns. He begins experiencing what may or may not be hallucinations and horror

images in the place of the painting on the walls. Mike even thinks that Mr. Olin may have drugged him.

Later, in the end, Mike is getting crazy and decides to set his old “lucky” Hawaiian shirt on fire while still wearing it which breaks the spell of the room long enough for him to escape. As he collapses on fire, another hotel guest, Rufus Dearborn, who was in the room 1414, is able to put out the flames. The other guest looks inside the room and something about it is tempting him to enter, but the main protagonist, warns him not to. When Mike mentions that the room is “haunted,” the door of Room 1408 slams shut.

When the narrative is about to end, the central protagonist is so much affected by his experiences, that he gives up writing. The night which he spent in that room disturbed him even when he is already out of the room.

Some similarities between “1408” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”

Both authors, King and Poe, use similar elements to construct suspense in their narratives. Despite each authors having different styles, each of them construct their stories resorting to literary devices such as: ambiguity, supernatural and gothic elements; moreover, they’re both very descriptive and there is the presence of paranoia and hallucinations, fear and humor are also aspects that Poe and King make use of.

As the reader advances through the story of Poe, it is possible to find certain elements of ambiguity in the narrative. Ambiguity as to doubtfulness or uncertainty of meaning or intention in various moments of the narrative.

Poe can be very ambiguous towards his stories, specially describing places and dates. The narrator does not inform the place nor the date in which everything happens, as we can see in the example below:

The narrator begins with: “During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, [...] I know not how it was.” (POE, 1839, p.1).

Also, the narrator mentions the effects of opium regarding his feeling towards the house, which leads us to believe he is unreliable. He feels this gloomy sensation in account of the dreary landscape around the mansion. This is compared to the sickness caused by the withdrawal symptoms of an opiate-addict, which makes his declarations dubious.

In “1408” we are able to notice points of confusion and impreciseness within the main character, Mike Enslin, over the narrative. King explores ambiguity in a different way from Poe. King makes the character be in doubt and confused, making him paranoid and dubious to the reader, as a result of the terrible hallucinations. The difference in Poe is that the narrator does not seem to me hallucinating, in fact, everything seems to be truly happening, although is quite impossible.

The protagonist also mentions several times the use of drugs and alcohol such as Poe mentions the use of opium, making the use of drugs a common object in both narratives. The possibility of being poisoned by a gas leaking from the ventilation of the room 1408 makes Mike, like Poe, an unreliable narrator:

Olin had said something about poison gas, and that was what Mike felt like: someone who has been gassed or forced to smoke strong hashish laced with insect poison. Olin had done this, of course, probably with the active laughing connivance of the security people. Pumped his special poison gas up through the vents. Just because he could see no vents didn't mean the vents weren't there. (KING, 2002, p. 495).

Mike makes a comparison to drugs with the effects that the room is causing on him:

He closed his eyes and took four long, measured breaths, holding each one in to a five-count before letting it out again. Nothing like this had ever happened to him-not in the supposedly haunted houses, the supposedly haunted graveyards, or the supposedly haunted castles. This wasn't like being haunted, or what he imagined being haunted would be like; this was like being stoned on bad, cheap dope. (KING, 2002, p. 491).

A consequence from the hallucinations was paranoia, and he begins believing that Mr. Olin tried to poison him, making the reader mistrust Mike's judgement. He starts believing that Mr. Olin had hypnotized him, and that he is going to break out of it, only after that he begins saying that it was a poison gas.

Mike also refers to his heart beating so hard that he could feel it in his neck and wrists as well as in his chest. An early conversation he had with Mr. also makes him suspicious, as

Olin had said something about poison gas, and that was what Mike felt like: someone who has been gassed or forced to smoke strong hashish laced with insect poison. Olin had done this, of course [...] Pumped his special poison gas up through the vents. Just because he could see no vents didn't mean the vents weren't there. (KING, 2002, p. 495).

He feels an awkwardness in his stomach, as if the drink he had with Mr. Olin was not good, or as if he had truly been poisoned. Hallucinations are generally vivid, substantial, and are seen to be located in external objective space. They are distinguishable from some related phenomena: a) dreaming, which does not involve wakefulness; b) illusion, which involves distorted or misinterpreted real perception; c) imagery, which does not mimic real perception and is under voluntary control; and d) pseudo hallucination, which does not mimic real perception, but is not under voluntary control.

In the short story of "The Fall of the House of Usher", the narrator mentioned the use of opium, making him an unreliable protagonist concerning visual aspects. In the end of the story terrible and unlikely facts may had happened, those facts such as: the appearance of Madeleine after being entombed and the house cracking into two parts and sinking in the tarn are very improbable facts to happen, making it, possibly, just a hallucination caused by opium or simply fear.

For example, the place where Madeleine was buried, a heavy tomb, so old, from feudal times, that the narrator and Roderick screwed the lid and closed the place, which

contained a glass of iron. Later, in the end, Roderick and the narrator saw Madeleine walking towards his brother; something impossible to happen, she wouldn't be alive this much time inside the tomb, nor she would be able to push something this heavy. The narrator mentions: "We replaced and screwed down the lid, and, having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house." (POE, 1839, p.18).

Here in "1408", we have several moments where Mike realizes that what he is experiencing are hallucinations. He sees strange things happening before he enters the room, the door itself initially appears to be crooked to the left. He looks again and the door appears to be straight - then he looks again, and it appears to be crooked, now to the right.

His problems with 1408 started even before he got into the room. The door was crooked. [...]He said The door, and that's all. If you listen to the tap, you can hear the words clearly, The door and then the click of the STOP button. Because the door wasn't crooked. It was perfectly straight (KING, 1999, p.485).

Another description of what could be hallucinations was: the breakfast menu on the night-stand changes languages; first it's in French, then Russian and then Italian. Then he closed his eyes, and opened them. There was no menu. There was a picture of a screaming little woodcut boy looking back over his shoulder at the woodcut wolf which had swallowed his left leg up to the knee. The narrator mentions that: "The wolf's ears were laid back and he looked like a terrier with its favorite toy. I don't see that, Mike thought, and of course he didn't." (KING, 2002, p. 495).

When this torment finally ends, Mike sees that the pictures on the walls have shifted into frightening visions (a still life of an orange becomes Mike's severed head, he sees pictures disappearing and reappearing, his feet sink into the carpet like quicksand, paintings come alive, etc.), and Mike's thoughts become bizarre and incoherent.

Mike describes that the pictures on the living room wall were crooked, and there were other changes. He says that he saw in one of the pictures that the lady on the stairs had pulled down the top of her gown, baring her breasts. That she held one in each hand and a drop of blood hung from each nipple. Then she was staring directly into Mike's eyes and grinning ferociously. He narrates that her teeth were filed to cannibal points.

In another picture, the rail of the sailing ship, the tars had been replaced by a line of pallid men and women, that the man on the far left, nearest the ship's bow, wore a brown wool suit and held a derby hat in one hand. Then, his hair was slicked to his brow and parted in the middle. His face was shocked and vacant. He says also that he knew his name: Kevin O'Malley, this room's first occupant, a sewing machine salesman who had jumped from this room in October of 1910.

In the picture where the fruit had been, there was now a severed human head. Yellow-orange light swam off the sunken cheeks, the sagging lips, the upturned, glazing eyes, the cigarette parked behind the right ear (KING, 2002, p.197).

The main character was certain that he had to get out of the room and blundered back into the sitting room. He became aware that his shoes had begun to make odd smooching sounds, as if the floor beneath them were growing soft. He begins to experience awful colors that had been seen by another person also, Rommie Van Gelder, who was dusting the top of the television inside the room, and all at once she began to scream. Mr. Olin asked her what was wrong. She dropped her dust rag and put her hands over her eyes and screamed that she was blind and despite this, she could see the most awful colors.

The light began to grow bright and hot, filling the room with that yellow-orange glow. Now he could see rips in the wallpaper, black pores that quickly grew to become mouths. The floor sank into a concave arc and now he could hear it coming, the dweller in the room behind the room, the thing in the walls, the owner of the buzzing voice. "Six!" the phone screamed. "Six, this is goddam fucking SIX!" (KING, 1999, p.500-501).

He tries to make a phone call, but only hears a nightmarish voice on the end of the line chanting bizarre phrases, for example: "This is nine! Nine! This is nine! Nine! This is Ten! Ten! We have killed your friends! Every friend is now dead! This is six! Six!" (KING, 2002, p. 499).

Some hallucinations with the telephone induces the reader into believing if he indeed achieve his escaping from the room, or if he is still trap inside, for example: The telephone continued to grind and spit, the voice coming from it now the voice of an electric hair-clipper that has learned how to talk: "Five! This is five! Ignore the siren! Even if you leave this room, you can never leave this room! Eight! This is eight!" (KING, 2002, p. 500)

Regarding supernatural elements in both stories, we have in the dictionary two definitions that quite apply to the stories:

First definition - being above or beyond what is natural; unexplainable by natural law or phenomena; abnormal.

Second definition - attributed to ghosts, goblins, or other unearthly beings; eerie; occult.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" and "1408" share the same unnatural elements of the Gothic genre. Both writers were concerned in showing them as supernatural occurrences, horror and suspenseful events in the timeline of the short stories.

Let's start with Poe and "The Fall of the House of Usher". As the narrator arrives at the house, he feels a discomfoting feeling, certain aspects about the house and its atmosphere, sadness and depression as he walks towards the house, we can this clearly in the example below:

[...] with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable [...] with an utter depression of soul [...] the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime (POE, 1839, p.3).

In “The Fall of the House of Usher” we notice an intense description of the narrator as he enters the mansion. He mentions a Gothic archway of the hall, the discoloration of ages had been great, minute fungi overspread the exterior of the house, a strong indication of instability, extensive decay, yet, no portion of the masonry had fallen. The narrator also refers to the place with a presence of a “[...] pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued [...]” (POE, 1839, p. 6). The narrator’s description shows a traditional gothic place and he also mentions the poem “The Haunted Palace”, which can be identified as a metaphor to the mansion itself.

As to Madeleine’s death and entombment, the narrator describes, “[...] the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death.” (POE, 1839, p.18) living the possibility of Madeleine being still alive, although she seemed dead. Another descriptive passage shows how Poe knew the technique of compression in the construction of his short stories, as well as we are able to notice the dark and gothic elements that surround his short story, such as the following passage:

[...] and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened [...] to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence. Overpowered by an intense sentiment of horror, unaccountable yet unendurable, I threw on my clothes with haste [...] (POE, 1839, p. 19).

Another horrific passage we will find in this short story is the moment when Roderick confirms to the narrator that they entombed Madeleine alive,

[...] the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! [...] Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? [...] Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door! (POE, 1839, p.25).

And by last, one of the most terrifying passages of the short story, when the narrator describes what was supposed to be Madeleine coming back from the vault that they had put her in:

There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame [...] remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold [...] with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terror he had anticipated (POE, 1839, p.25).

Regarding room 1408, we have a series of supernatural elements such as in Poe. At first, Mike Enslin didn’t feel affected by the room until he gets to its door and visualizes

it bending to the left and right, he feels and uncontrollable force “pulling” him in, a desire to enter the room. Similar to what the narrator of Poe’s short story feels with the House of Usher.

Mr Olin, the hotel’s manager affirms at some point to Mike, trying to convince him not to spend the night inside the room, that the place has no ghosts, although there is “something” evil inside of it.

We also have passages with pure horror elements in “1408”; there is a moment where Mike picks up the phone and listens to a voice speaking on the other side, saying “we have killed your friends! Every friend is now dead!” (KING, 2002, p. 499) which Mike refers to it as a nonhuman voice, something alien, the voice of the room.

The room is also filled with pictures, that causes hallucinations in Mike, making him see distorted images, such as he describes a picture by the door leading into the bedroom, a woman in the twenties with bleeding nipples and grinning cannibal-teeth, also, the door to the bedroom and the door to the hall began to collapse downward, widening in the middle and becoming doorways for beings possessed of unhallowed shapes. A very strong orange reddish bright color began to grow bright and hot, filling the room, Mike could see black pores in the wallpaper that quickly grew to become mouths, the floor sank into a concave arc and now he could hear it coming, the thing in the walls, the owner of the buzzing voice in the phone, at this point Mike panicked and sets fire to the room, and he starts to see the door of the room to become some sarcophagal inner chamber, the wall bulging outward toward him, splitting open in long cracks that gaped like mouths, making an opening to a world from which something was now approaching him. The narrator describes that Mike could hear it slobbering, an avid breath, and smell something alive and dangerous.

At this point, Mike manages to leave the room, catching fire, and he gets help from a nearby guest, Rufus Dearborn, who contains the fire on Mike’s shirt. It is interesting to observe Rufus’s uncontrollable desire to enter the room when he sees those red-orange bright colors. Hesitation on the part of the reader emerges again. Would everyone who comes nearer the room be obsessed by it? Would everyone be as much affected by it as Mike was? Each reader will come up with his/her answer.

Considering Poe’s short story, the Usher Mansion is a character itself in the short story, is undeniable, as we can see the references which the narrator makes use of to describe it. In fact, the house receives a humanized characterization, such as “[...] upon the bleak walls - upon the vacant eye-like windows - upon a few rank sedges [...] with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation [...] the bitter lapse into every-day life - the hideous dropping off of the veil.” (POE, 1839, p.3).

Also, there is no doubt that the old building causes amazement and a feeling similar to the room 1408 by Stephen King: a desire to enter, to contemplate the place in its totality. At the same time that the narrator in Usher feels amazed and disturbed by the mansion, he is fascinated by it. In the room 1408, Mike and Rufus, both characters, in different parts of the short story feel the same uncontrollable desire to enter the room, although the room presents itself with an extraordinary atmosphere and history, such as the mansion of Usher.

In Poe's short story, as well as in "1408", we have the decay of those inanimate characters. The mansion of Usher collapses after Madeleine returning from the tomb and falling into his brother Roderick laying dead on the floor. After that, the narrator flees from the house, he sees it collapsing behind him, a fissure rapidly widened in a zigzag direction, to the base, the mighty walls rushing asunder and there was a long shouting sound "like the voice of a thousand waters", and the place sullenly closed over the fragments of the mansion. In 1408, the room also presents an ending to the nightmare which Mike Enslin got himself into. The only way that he finds is to set fire to the place and himself, barely managing to escape with second degree burns.

Some differences between "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "1408"

After pointing some of the similarities between both short stories it is time to point some of the differences they present. Stephen King is known not only by his gothic horror stories, but also by his sarcastic, morbid humor which he inserts in his short stories, novels, etc. In "1408" wasn't that different, we are able to see some passages which he includes ironic sarcastic parts, such as vulgar language present in some parts of the text, as we can see in the following passage: "Six!" the phone screamed. "Six, this is six, this is goddam fucking SIX!" (KING, 2002, p.501). And the moment when the narrator describes how bad those pictures inside the room were, they were awfully regarded. Mike's taste for pictures,

[...] his minicorder [...] was no longer in his hand. He had left it somewhere[...] If it was in the bedroom, it was probably gone by now, swallowed by the room; when it was digested, it would excreted into one of the pictures. (KING, 2002, p.498).

In the "Fall of the House of Usher", language remains formal, with the absence of vulgar descriptions. There isn't any type of humor; however, according to Hayes (2002):

[...] aside from the alleged dope-ridden neurotic gratifying public tastes with the morbid paraphernalia of his Gothic tales, Poe was also a born humorist equally inspired by parody and self-mockery [...] Through a mysterious alchemy, humor was at least for him a short-lived euphoric response apt to exorcise the fiendish visions harassing his mind. (KING, 2000, p. 57).

Considering Gothic as a common genre between Poe and King, we find that both authors work with it in different ways. They resort to that genre, but not with the same writing technique and style. In one context we have a very traditional gothic author, Poe. And in the present time, we have King who, according to Rebry, offers ways of facing and coming closer to some of our deepest fears about life and death, "[...] the past and the future, technological change, other people, monsters, ghosts, and the supernatural." (REBRY, 2012, p. 359).

Final considerations

In relation to these two short stories, not only Poe and King resorted to the Gothic tradition, but also, I could verify that Stephen King read Poe and, therefore, was influenced by the nineteenth century author. Reading and studying the work of these authors, from distinct periods and contexts we are able to see how the Gothic is present nowadays, suffering modifications in terms of set and plots, technology like cell phones, cars, although it maintains the same horror elements, the supernatural happenings and the uneasy sensation of fear.

We must understand how literature helps us to evolve, we learn with it how to become better human beings to each other. In our homes, in our work, outside with society and its problems. Literature should be more than just a subject in school. It should help children understand their minds, their worlds, what life really is. For Todorov (1939, p. 23-24), literature is “Longe de ser um simples entretenimento, uma distração reservada às pessoas educadas, ela permite que cada um responda melhor à sua vocação de ser humano.” Readers must be aware that past authors have their style surviving along the centuries through modern writers, thus, new generations can appreciate this rich genre.

With this paper, my final consideration is that through the analysis and the study of these authors, students and readers in general will be exposed not only to the modern Gothic and its authors, such as Stephen King, but also to past authors, the ones who, like Poe, gave life to this style and influenced the generations to come.

KURTZ, K. M. Edgar Allan Poe e Stephen King: um encontro através do gótico. **Revista de Letras**, São Paulo, v.60, n.2, p.53-68, jul./dez. 2020.

- **RESUMO:** *Este estudo lança uma luz em duas narrativas escritas por autores que pertenceram a dois contextos históricos diferentes: Edgar Allan Poe, um escritor do século dezanove, e Stephen King, um escritor contemporâneo. O objetivo é analisar “The Fall of the House of Usher”, de Poe, e “1408”, de King, levando em consideração os elementos góticos presentes em ambas. A metodologia é do tipo exploratória/qualitativa devido à forma como o texto é analisado. Uma das semelhanças entre os textos, mais importante, são os elementos sobrenaturais, como: a paranóia e o uso de locais e situações que causam horror e medo aos leitores. Também vamos encontrar diferenças, devido aos diferentes séculos de cada autor e seus estilos de escrita, como o a ironia utilizada por King e não por Poe.*
- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Edgar A. Poe. Stephen King. Conto. Gótico. Literatura.*

References

BIO 'Haunted Heart' never tells what makes Stephen King tick. USA TODAY, 12 jan. 2009. p.1. Available: <<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/books/2013/06/28/bio-haunted-heart-never-tells-what-makes-stephen-king-tick/2468979/>>. Access: 8 sept. 2021.

EDGAR Allan Poe. Biography. Available: < <https://www.biography.com/writer/edgar-allan-poe>>. Access: 8 sept. 2021.

EDGAR' Award winners announced. Theedgars. Available: <<http://www.theedgars.com/>>. Access: 8 sept. 2021.

HAYES, K. J. **The Cambridge companion to Edgar Allan Poe**. Edited by Kevin J. Hayes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

HOGLE, J. E. **The Cambridge companion to Gothic Fiction**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

KING, S. **Everything's eventual**. New York : Pocket Books, 2002.

KING, S. **Blood and smoke**. New York : Simon & Schuster Inc., 1999.

POE, E. A. **Collected works**. San Diego: Canterbury Classics, 2011.

REBRY, N. Stephen King's Gothic by John Sears. **Ilha do desterro**, Florianópolis, n.62, p.359-366, 2012.

ROGAK, L. **Haunted heart: the life and times of Stephen King**. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1962.

TODOROV, T. **A Literatura em perigo**. Tradução Caio Meira. Rio de janeiro: Difel, 1939.