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EDGAR POE AND 'GOTHIC' ELEMENTS IN THE 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

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DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

The present dissertation is concerned with Poe's influence upon the 20th century American fiction; in particular, it is focused on the study of Poe's complex, ambivalent attitude towards the 'Gothic' tradition in European and American literature and his writing techniques as manifested in his 'Gothic' tales, and how writing strategies and literary devices introduced by Poe in the genre of literary 'Gothicism' predetermined genre developments and modifications in the 20th century American fiction.

The question "How to define gothic" has been the necessary starting point for most conversations about this problem; the inquiry has less to do with a need for generic precision than with a genuine bafflement about what might constitute the American gothic. When modified by American, the gothic loses its usual referents. The second most-asked question about this problem – "How do you differentiate between the American and the British gothic?" – supports this theory: the canonical British gothic serves as the reference point for readers attempting to locate the less identifiable American version. As a critical category, American gothic lacks the self-evident validity of its British counterpart.

Edgar Poe played a decisive role in the process of transforming gothic conventions. It is due to Poe's writings that the American gothic takes a turn inward, away from society and toward the psyche and the hidden darkness of the American soul. The American gothic, following Poe's track, replaced the social struggle of the European with a Manichean struggle between the moral forces of personal and communal order and the howling wilderness of chaos and moral depravity. The American gothic remains first and foremost an expression of psychological states.

American gothic literature and Poe in the first place criticizes America's national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation's claim to purity and equality. The gothic disrupts the dream world of national myth with the nightmares of history. That's why the problem of Poe lies quite outside the main current of American thought. His problematic position within the American literary canon reveals his complex connections to American identity.

"An absent presence", Poe is a ghost in the critical machinery of canon formation, a figure through which much cultural work gets done. Poe most often functions as the demonized "other" who must be exorcised from the "mainstream" of "classic" American literature.

Poe's position in the corpus of American literature – let alone his status as its head – has, from the beginning, been problematized by the mythography of his own drunken corpse and by the diseased bodies and living dead that haunt his stories. In both his life and his work, Poe would seem to lie far outside the American mainstream. If he represents anything at all, it is American literature's irrational bodily impulses. The "after times" have judged Poe harshly; he remains alienated from the community of American literature's founding fathers: Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman. Many authors exclude Poe from this list because he was "bitterly hostile to democracy". As the exception to the rule – the embodiment of everything American literature is not – Poe reveals the parameters of a more "authentic" American literature. As a ghost who haunts the American literary canon, Poe becomes a necessary – and useful – evil, as Harold Bloom writes: "I can think of no American writer, down to this moment, at once so inevitable and so dubious". It is through Poe that a number of "dubious" aspects of American literature are demonized, then exorcised from the mainstream of American canon. Poe becomes the representative of a number of problems that the American literary tradition recognizes but refuses to claim. As Bloom argues, "Poe's survival raises perpetually the issue as to whether literary merit and canonical status necessarily go together". Even when Poe's diseased vision is read as symptom of a larger cultural malaise, it remains quarantined from "mainstream" America and comes to be identified with another "problem" – the South. Many critics view Poe in the context of region and race as a proslavery Southerner hostile to progress, technological development and democracy; he is also frequently viewed as a representative of dark Gothicism associated with the Southern gloom and darkness where as in Poe's writings there is no place for light, laugh and joy.

Only within the last fifteen to twenty years has the comic side of Poe come to seem in any way important for an adequate reading of his Gothic works. Critics have begun to acknowledge the importance of the narrator as character in Poe's tales and to suspect that even his most famous Gothic works have ironic double and triple perspectives playing upon them. Defending Poe's "too horrible grotesquerie" from unjust accusations critics argue that Poe evidently conceived of the term grotesque as "a genre allied primarily with the ludicrous and the ironic,

30

but curiously fusing these comic qualities with the sinister". From this perspective, it is not too difficult to see that even in Poe's allegedly "serious" tales, e. g. "The Black Cat", "Ligeia", "The Cask of Amontillado", "The Fall of the House of Usher", and "The Pit and the Pendulum", there is likely to be an undercurrent of unexpressed mockery that is either at cross purposes with, or a counterpart to, the apparent meaning or intent of the surface plot.

It is time, however, for the traditional conception of Poe as Romantic sentimentalist and Gothicism to give way to a more firmly grounded and balanced conception of Poe as a detached and ironic writer. The tradition of critical clichés about Poe's "Gothicism" is crushing. Poe's references to the Gothic novel reveal nothing but distaste for that literary genre. There is ample proof of Poe's antipathy for the tricks and excesses of Gothic novelists. Poe did use the motifs of the Gothic tradition, but his critical intentions, his sarcastic ridiculing of the Gothic hero reveal different aims and Poe's relationship with the Gothic tradition may be situated on a radically different plane. We might call it "negative" rather than "positive Gothicism". Most of Poe's "Gothic" tales are examples of his extraordinary versatility in combining amusing and horrifying elements with seemingly matter-of-fact detail.

This very technique of combining mutually exclusive and contradictory elements (Gothic and comic, imaginary/phantasmagorical and real, ironic and sinister), multidimensional, purely Poesque grotesque, the refusal of closure as well as Poe's mastery of creating the so-called "implied reader" played an essential role in the development of certain narrative strategies and devices in American modernist fiction. Thus, the myth that Poe had no influence on mainstream American writers needs to be crushed.

The Objective of the Thesis.

Thus, the purpose of the dissertation is to crush the myth according to which Poe as a literary figure remains beyond the mainstream of American literature; to investigate Poe's gothic tales against the background of national literary canon and the tradition of European gothic/black novel; to explore the peculiarities of Poe's narrative method which were later extensively used in more or less modified form in the 20th century American fiction related to the 'Gothic' tradition in this or that way; I also intend to investigate the ways in which Poe exerted decisive influence upon the disintegration of the 'Gothic' tradition with some influential American authors in the 20th century.

31

Methodological and Theoretical Basis of the Thesis is formed by numerous scientific works (scholarly articles, monographs, researches and essays) by Poe scholars, literary scholarship dealing with the problem of Poe's influence upon the 20th century American fiction; typological analysis of various works of the 'Gothic' genre is based upon the methods and principles of the 'new historicism' and comparative literary studies.

Practical Significance of the thesis.

Results of the research and the generalized conclusions can be used for the further exploration of Poe's influence on the 20th century American literary 'Gothicism' by literary scholars and historians of American literature, for lectures and special courses in American literature. The dissertation will also be interesting for students of American literature and in general for a wide circle of readers interested in American 'Gothic' fiction.

Structure of the Thesis.

The dissertation is divided into the following parts:

32

CONTENT OF THE THESIS

The introduction and the first part – '**E. A. Poe and 'Gothic' Tradition**' - are focused on the analysis of various periods in the critical reception of Poe's gothic tales. An attempt has been made in it to retrace radical shift in Poe criticism from total "negativism" up to present day critical acclaim. It is stated that recent Poe scholarship stresses the rational, grotesque and satiric elements in Poe.

In the 1st chapter of the dissertation I also address the intricate question of the American gothic the status of which is uncertain. Several factors contribute to the uncertain status of the American gothic. Unlike the British gothic, which developed during a definable time period (usually marked as beginning with Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764) and continuing through the 1820s) and has a recognized coterie of authors (Walpole, Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, Godwin, Hogg, Maturin, Mary Shelley), the American gothic, one of several forms that played a role in the development of the early American novel, is less easily specified in terms of a particular time period or group of authors. There was no founding period of gothic literature in America, and given the critical preference for the term 'romance', few authors were designated as gothicists. Identified with doom and gloom, the American Gothic serves as the nation's "other", becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wants to disassociate itself. It is able to support the irrational impulses that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideals, cannot. America's self-mythologization as a nation of hope and harmony directly contradicts the gothic's most basic impulses. The American gothic, is "a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation".

If the American gothic is difficult to understand due to its seemingly antagonistic relationship to America's national identity, it is equally difficult to classify in generic terms. Just as 'gothic' unsettles the idea of America, the modifier 'American' destabilizes understandings of the gothic. Once imported to America, the gothic's key elements were translated into American terms, and its formulas were also unfixed. Most American authors transformed and hence dislocated British models of the gothic. Combined with other literary forms and adapted to native themes, the American gothic consists of a less coherent set of conventions. Its more flexible form challenges the critically unified gothic genre and demands a reassessment of the gothic's parameters. As a result, a definition of the American gothic depends less on the particular set of conventions it establishes than on those it disrupts.

33

Any attempt to define it without showing how the terms 'American' and 'gothic' complicate and critique each other curtails the challenge to both terms.

Even the British gothic, against which the American gothic is defined, has proven oddly elusive. From early works such as Edith Birkhead's The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance (1921), to more recent studies such as Eve Sedgwick's The Coherence of Gothic Conventions (1980), an effort to demarcate the conventions of this genre has been at the heart of criticism of the gothic. The debate between Robert Hume and Robert Platzner highlights the critical need to define the "essence" of the gothic and the difficulty of doing so. While the two disagree on the central traits, they are "agreed that the 'generic character' of the Gothic novel is hard to deal with". Despite its formulaic and conventional nature, despite its easily listed elements and effects – haunted houses, evil villains, ghosts, gloomy landscapes, madness, terror, suspense, horror – the gothic's parameters and "essence" remain unclear. While easy classification seems to imply a definitional stability, the gothic genre is extremely mutable. Cobbled together of many different forms and obsessed with transgressing boundaries, it represents itself not as stable but as generically impure. One of the factors that makes the gothic so shadowy and nebulous a genre, as difficult to define as any gothic ghost, is that it cannot be seen in abstraction from the other literary forms from whose graves it arises ... The form is thus itself a Frankenstein's monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past".

Though the gothic foregrounds its generic instability, critics still insist on categorizing it. The tendency toward "general essentializing" in criticism on the gothic has to do with where this genre ranks in the canon's hierarchy. The drive to order and identify the gothic stems less from a critical desire to discover its particular essence than from a need to differentiate it from other, "higher" literary forms. The critical desire for generic classification and clarity signals a fear of contagion: the law of genre depends upon the principle of impurity. Categorical generic distinctions aim to ensure the purity of certain individual works or the stature of related genres. Associated with the hackneyed, the feminine, and the popular, the gothic lacks respectability and hence must be quarantined from other literary forms. Trying to do so most critics identify American gothic as a regional form peculiar to the South and Edgar Poe as belonging to Southern literary tradition. Critics position Poe's blackness in the proslavery South and limit his "racial phobia" to this region. Once placed in "this world", Poe's peculiar history has only to do with the South, not with the nation. Thus, Poe must be securely located in the

South and politically "pinned down" in order to be accepted as the "crazy cousin" of American literary tradition. On the other hand, as I argue in this chapter, critics must strip Poe of his Southern associations and turn him into an "antiregionalist". Instead of addressing the South, I argue that Poe focuses on the integrity of the work of art in terms of the ideal – a metaphysical ideal of 'pure' poetry, an aesthetic ideal of total unity of effect in both poetry and fiction. Through form, Poe transcends his region and its politics. Besides, Poe, who spent significant time outside of the South and sets few of his stories there, never quite fits the profile of the southern writer. Poe's southernness remains suspect.

E.A. Poe's tales of terror ("The Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque", 1846) were a major development in the creation of the modem horror story. While there is much of the Gothic in there tales - ruined abbeys, dungeons, and the presence of the supernatural - Poe invests them with anti-heroes who have an unusual psychological depth. Defending himself from accusations of hack work, Poe dismissed the Germanic (or Gothic) elements in his stories as garnish. "Terror is not of Germany", he claimed, "but of the soul".

Poe's characters are extraordinarily neurotic. Madness itself, Poe had discovered, is not all that terrifying. It is the rational mind on the brink of it that moves the reader. Such psychological complexity, rare in English Gothic (Black) novel, is an essential element of Poe's tales of terror. They are slower paced and less action-oriented with more emphasis on character development and metaphysical problems. They rely on the psychological problems of the characters to generate horror rather than the use of external, supernatural elements.

Poe did make innovations to the technique of horror fiction. He made use of first-person point of view to create an atmosphere of terror. Poe's second important contribution, oddly enough, happens to be realism. When Poe's characters suddenly enter a strange world, they react with the logical reaction of fear, which adds believability to writing that some authors fail to understand to this very day. This use of realistic reactions of confusion and horror appears in his works. His characters convey this fear of a mystical world beyond their comprehension and control.

In the first part of the first chapter I also investigate E. A. Poe's symbolist techniques in his 'gothic' tales. Different kinds of symbols may be distinguished on the spectrum between associative symbol at the one extreme and rational allegory at the other; these are designated as the 'open' and the 'closed' symbol, the latter

approaching allegory but maintaining its symbolic structure by means of its manifold relationships with an epic (i. e. narrative) context.

Poe's use of the symbol in "The Masque of the Red Death" exhibits two characteristics: for one, the multiple variation in mode of linking meaning and phenomenon between the two poles of symbolic atmosphere and objective allegory, snaking it impossible to limit Poe to only one way of using the symbol (such as the allegorical); for another, the supplementary use of different modes of connection, such as the open and the closed symbol with its many variants. The complementary use of both, or the integration of the closed symbol into the narrative context, does not allow the abstractable meaning to predominate. This is accomplished, as becomes especially dear in connection with the clock symbol in "The Masque of the Red Death", by means of the firm establishment of even the closed objective symbol within the greater unit of the mood-invested space. The more intimately a symbolic object blends with its surroundings and is fused with the context, the more it seems to be open to various interpretations. Conversely, a relatively 'closed' symbol results in the case of a static, rationally solvable system of correspondences, a system approaching allegory, which maintains, however, its symbolic structure by means of multiple references within the context. The use of different kinds of symbols in one and the same story then has a definite purpose: with the openness of certain symbols, for example, Poe knows how to counter the danger that the obvious meaning will be found to smother its insinuated one, while the closed symbol (at times in connection with a poetic allusion) causes hidden meanings to become apparent.

The second part of the first chapter – **'E. A. Poe and American Literary Modernism: 'Gothicism', Psychology and Grotesquery'** – deals with the analysis of Poe's influence upon H. James and W. Faulkner.

The narrative technique discussed in the previous chapter, psychological depth, along with the refusal of closure as well as Poe's mastery of creating the so-called "implied reader" had a decisive impact on H. James's writing technique as manifested in his "The Jolly Corner" and "The Turn of the Screw".

H. James's "The Turn of the Screw", like Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", is a kind of "terror fantasy". However, Gothic elements can be assessed in terms of an implied reader. Both works entrap the real reader in the role of implied reader by opening rather than "closing" in the conclusion. Clearly, the effect of "The Turn of the Screw" on real reader is similar to the effects of "Ligeia"

and "The Fall of the House of Usher". It leaves readers desiring closure, yet unable to find it within the tale.

Like "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Turn of the Screw" offers three modes of response: acceptance of the narrator's account; doubt about that account accompanied by the construction of possible explanations of what she reports; and, finally, a suspension between these first two modes of response.

Such a trap is trap enough, but James is more diabolical than Poe. Like Poe, he suspends the reader between two modes of response. Neither the natural nor the supernatural explanation of events is alone satisfactory. James lacks Poesque sarcastic/ironic playfulness with Gothic conventions. He is more diabolical in the way he closes off conventional escapes. In this way James surpasses Poe in realizing the potentials of "terror fantasy".

Faulkner's artistic method as embodied in his short story "A Rose for Emily" and his gothic novel "Sanctuary" is also indebted to Poe's horrible grotesquerie and curious fusion of comic qualities with the sinister. The Poesque combination of Gothic and ironic elements in "A Rose for Emily" creates "grotesque" as a sensibility accommodating the complexity of vision – the grotesque image as historical commentary.

Like Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Premature Burial", in "Sanctuary" Faulkner directly attacks the implied reader, forcing the real reader to endure psychological pain to fill the role of implied reader and to enter into an aesthetic experience of the novel. He presents horrible events, creates and violates conventional expectations, manipulates point of view, orders the representation of events and of the world in a disorienting way, and presents a virtually constant stream of powerfully disturbing images. Faulkner terrorizes the implied reader with the purpose of creating a reading experience analogous to the main characters' experiences of their world.

In the major elements of the story and in its use of conventions, "Sanctuary" intends to shock. It is difficult to exaggerate the frequency of disturbing images and their echoes in "Sanctuary". The reader can hardly turn a page without encountering an image of violence, filth, threat of pain, or death. Despite this, Faulkner really does not wish to provide a Gothic experience in which more or less purely evil monsters are temporarily loosed in the world. Terror becomes a primary means by which Faulkner creates a meaningful fictional work about characters that are extreme victims of a culture that has lost faith in any spiritual

reality. Both Poe and Faulkner are realizing full well that the psychological fear is of more importance than the physical danger.

The uncanny tale of terror seems to become more effectively horrifying as it moves toward greater psychological complexity and as ambiguity is introduced at various levels of concretization. Poe and Faulkner partake of the effects of the sensation stories but introduce greater psychological complexity in the central character and confront the implied reader with ambiguity in interpreting the events.

On the one hand, Faulkner draws on a rich Gothic tradition as well as on the central literary tradition and Poe in the first place when he discovers the value of terrifying the implied reader to reduce distance between reader and morally equivocal characters. On the other, Poe's tales "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-Tale heart" taken as paradigmatic, "Sanctuary" approaches tragedy. Most of Poe's "Gothic" tales and "Sanctuary" violate Gothic conventions and point away from the tale of terror toward classic literature.

In the second chapter of the dissertation – **"E. A. Poe and Modifications of 'Gothicism' in the 20th Century American Fiction"** - I try to differentiate between the concepts of 'literary Gothicism' and 'Gothicism in literature'. 'Literary Gothicism' is a purely gothic genre with all peculiarly gothic elements – bloody events, horrifying atmosphere, presence of the supernatural etc., while 'Gothicism in literature' implies the use of gothic elements, devices and imagery more often than not for parody and sarcastic purposes in genres other than gothic. In some cases it is not that easy to draw demarcation lines between the two.

The first part of this chapter – **"E. A. Poe and Transformations of Literary 'Gothicism'"** – contains the study of Poe's influence on H. P. Lovecraft wrote horror in the best tradition of literary 'Gothicism'. Some critics, on the one hand, repeat the usual recital of similarities to be found within their work (black cats, revenants, or similar surface resemblances); others, on another, assert that no real resemblance exists aside from superficial employment of stock characters and themes common to virtually all stories in genre. To me, it is beyond doubt that Lovecraft, like every writer of fantasy and horror fiction subsequent to Poe, was necessarily influenced by the work of his predecessor. Actually, Lovecraft's homage to Poe in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature" indicates s degree of appreciation and admiration which leaves no doubt as to the profound impression made upon him by the earlier master.

The relations between Poe and Lovecraft are not merely those of genre and influence but of similar temperaments exploring the same psychological and

philosophical terrain. Their shared doubleness implies aesthetic schizophrenia, professing classicism and practicing romanticism, worshipping natural law by day and breaking (through the vehicle of dream) its coordinates of time and space by night. The reason for this splitting is the very rigidity and defensiveness of the two writers' conscious minds that made the unconscious appear overpoweringly alien and terrifying. Even granting this, however, Poe and Lovecraft are more than victims of their own psyches; each is his most perceptive analyst, though Poe is a more gifted scribe; more than that, Poe is incomparably superior to all the writers who follow in his wake.

The second part of this chapter – **"E. A. Poe and R. Wright: 'Gothicism' in Literature"** – deals with the analysis of Poe's impact on Richard Wright's fiction. Much of writings of XX century Afro-American short story teller and novelist Richard Wright is indebted to the dual influence of realistic fiction of Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson and dark romanticism of E. A. Poe. An early debt to Poe's technique as a story teller is to be found in Wright's first preserved story. Written in 1930, its title is, significantly, "Superstition". Wright owes much to Poe's technique of describing the setting in order to suggest an eerie, dreary atmosphere. More interesting is Wright's use of Poe's habit of blending the uncanny and the natural by postulating hidden but rational laws governing the action, as is particularly apparent in "The Fall of the House of Usher". In his novel "Native Son" Wright makes use of a too obvious Gothic imagery which immediately recalls Poesque metaphors and scenes. Still more striking is the use of Poe's tale "The Black Cat" in the novel. The situations and the symbolical use of the cat are unmistakably Poesque. But the central episode of the novel – once the reader can step back from the psychological suspense and the social protest – is one long, melodramatic murder story.

In later novels, the influence of horror tales, of the dime novel all more or less indebted to Poe – on Wright's fiction dwindled greatly.

The first part of the second chapter (**"E. A. Poe and American Fiction in the 2nd Half of the 20th Century"**) - **"Perception of Poe's Gothic Tales in R. Bradbury's Usher II"** - explores the role of Poe's gothic tales in the development of science fiction. It is argued that the significance of Poe's influence on science-fiction, horror and mystery can hardly be overestimated. His influence on the genre of science-fiction ranges from its deepest roots to its newest tales. This influence had such impact R. Bradbury named one of the short stories in the "Martian Chronicles" "Usher II".

"Usher" II was omitted from the television version, probably partly because it would have been too expensive to produce; but also because it has no necessary connection with the other stories (It might just as well have been set on Earth as Mars). Bradbury has always been more of a short story writer than a novelist, and most of the stories can be read separately from their present context. They must be considered as variations on a theme rather than as chapters of a unified novel.

"Usher II" reflects the Bradburian affection for fantasy and horror literature combined. The attack on censorship which it embodies (foreshadowing the more fully-developed attack of "Fahrenheit 451") is justified by reference to fairy tales and other sentimental children's favorites; but the works being defended most passionately are the horror tales of Edgar Allan Poe. Many works by Poe are referred to in this story ("The Fall of the House of Usher"; "The Black Cat"; "The Mask of the Red Death"; "The Cask of Amontillado"). The story conveys an anti-censorship message, but Bradbury realizes full well that censorship as well as anti-communist hysteria of Senator McCarthy also hinted/criticized in the story are simply the most visible symptoms of the many political and social forces promoting common standards of behavior and culture. He castigates the postwar American society for its consumer-oriented mentality, increasingly homogenized character and total ignorance of Poe's world, the latter being a generalized symbol of "all the beautiful literary lies and flights of fancy". By defending Poe's works Bradbury warns the postwar America, becalmed in a sea of conformity and eager to wallow in the consumer culture, against the menacing influence of consumerism and standardized values encouraging uniformity and the cult of stark/bleak realism.

The last part of the dissertation – **"E. Poe and American Postmodernism"** - deals with an intricate question of Poe's influence on American postmodernist writing. Despite persisting disagreement about Edgar Allan Poe's literary achievement, no American writer of the antebellum period enjoys greater current popularity and recognizability. So I have tried to answer the question: why does his work from the 1830s and 1840s seem so fresh and compelling to readers in the new millennium?

Writing in the wake of Charles Brockden Brown, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, and James Fenimore Cooper, all of whom depicted episodes of bloody cruelty, Poe was yet the first important American writer to foreground violence and to probe its psychological origins. Poe anatomizes the psychology of revenge, flaunts atrocity, and depicts the recrudescence of American national "internal flaw".

The curious postmodernity of Poe's writing derives, however, from more than

his reliance upon sensation and violence. His fascination with madness and perverseness resonates with heightened Western/American, post-Freudian awareness of the unconscious and the irrational. Poe explores the varieties of insanity and illustrates symptomatic phobias, obsessions and hallucinations. In "Usher" he portrays a distinctly postmodern world that seems altogether solipsistic, dehumanized, and "derealized" - a realm of bizarre.

Poe's appeal to such American postmodernists as T. Pynchon and J. Barth, however, derives not only from his projections of violence or insanity but also from his articulations of estrangement and doubt. Estrangement figures importantly in Poe's narrative scheme as well as American postmodernist fiction. This tendency of Poe's writings reflects contemporary cultural and socioeconomic changes. More than a century earlier than postmodernists Poe sarcastically portrayed the alienating consequences of the market revolution. His tale "The Man of the Crowd" conveys a prescient awareness of metropolitan alienation, describes the city as a desolate, dehumanized place.

Poe prefigured the skepticism and uncertainty that spread from the 19th century into our own era. In the works of Pynchon we have grown accustomed to the black void that seems to define the condition of modern being. We may speak of a postmodern cult of death that reveals in fantasies of sadism, masochism, and annihilation; in place of a loving God, it reveres a hypostatized figure of universal destruction, similar to the one evoked in the closing sentence of "The masque of the Red Death."

Writing at the advent of the so-called post-Christian epoch, Poe gave memorable literary form to the conflicted imaginary of the modern consciousness. As instanced by his powerful hold on such celebrated postmodern authors as John Barth and Pynchon, Poe remains an inescapable presence in contemporary culture. And although academic disagreements about his achievements persists, his place in the pantheon of enduring American authors is secure.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Criticizing the view of Poe as a proslavery Southern writer common in American literary criticism I argue that Poe must be stripped of his Southern associations because instead of addressing the South Poe focuses on the integrity of the work of art in terms of the ideal – a metaphysical ideal of 'pure' poetry, an

aesthetic ideal of total unity of effect in both poetry and fiction. Through form, Poe transcends his region and its politics. In order to re-canonize Poe as a canonical literary figure within the American literary canon, his gothic tales must be analyzed in relation to European and American/National gothic tradition.

2. Poe's references to the Gothic novel reveal nothing but distaste for that literary genre. There is ample proof of Poe's antipathy for the tricks and excesses of Gothic novelists. Poe did use the motifs of the Gothic tradition, but his critical intentions, his sarcastic ridiculing of the Gothic hero reveal different aims and Poe's relationship with the Gothic tradition may be situated on a radically different plane. We might call it "negative" rather than "positive Gothicism". Most of Poe's "Gothic" tales are examples of his extraordinary versatility in combining amusing and horrifying elements with seemingly matter-of-fact detail. This very technique of combining mutually exclusive and contradictory elements (Gothic and comic, imaginary/phantasmagorical and real, ironic and sinister), multidimensional, purely Poesque grotesque, the refusal of closure as well as Poe's mastery of creating the so-called "implied reader" played an essential role in the development of certain narrative strategies and devices in American modernist fiction.

3. The characters of Poe's 'Gothic' tales are extraordinarily neurotic. Madness itself, Poe had discovered, is not all that terrifying. It is the rational mind on the brink of it that moves the reader. Such psychological complexity, rare in English Gothic (Black) novel, is an essential element of Poe's tales of terror. They are slower paced and less action-oriented with more emphasis on character development and metaphysical problems. They rely on the psychological problems of the characters to generate horror rather than the use of external, supernatural elements.

4. Poe did make innovations to the technique of horror fiction. He made use of first-person point of view to create an atmosphere of terror. Poe's second important contribution, oddly enough, happens to be realism. When Poe's characters suddenly enter a strange world, they react with the logical reaction of fear, which adds believability to writing that some authors fail to understand to this very day. This use of realistic reactions of confusion and horror appears in his works. His characters convey this fear of a mystical world beyond their comprehension and control.

5. Poe's narrative technique and psychological depth, along with the refusal of closure as well as Poe's mastery of creating the so-called "implied reader" had a

decisive impact on H. James's writing technique as manifested in his "The Jolly Corner" and "The Turn of the Screw".

Like "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Turn of the Screw" offers three modes of response: acceptance of the narrator's account; doubt about that account accompanied by the construction of possible explanations of what she reports; and, finally, a suspension between these first two modes of response. Such a trap is trap enough, but James is more diabolical than Poe. Like Poe, he suspends the reader between two modes of response. Neither the natural nor the supernatural explanation of events is alone satisfactory. James lacks Poesque sarcastic/ironic playfulness with Gothic conventions. He is more diabolical in the way he closes off conventional escapes. In this way James surpasses Poe in realizing the potentials of "terror fantasy".

6. Faulkner's artistic method as embodied in his short story "A Rose for Emily" and his gothic novel "Sanctuary" is also indebted to Poe's horrible grotesquerie and curious fusion of comic qualities with the sinister. The Poesque combination of Gothic and ironic elements in "A Rose for Emily" creates "grotesque" as a sensibility accommodating the complexity of vision – the grotesque image as historical commentary.

Like Poe, Faulkner really does not wish to provide a Gothic experience in which more or less purely evil monsters are temporarily loosed in the world. Terror becomes a primary means by which Faulkner creates a meaningful fictional work about characters that are extreme victims of a culture that has lost faith in any spiritual reality. Both Poe and Faulkner are realizing full well that the psychological fear is of more importance than the physical danger.

On the one hand, Faulkner draws on a rich Gothic tradition as well as on the central literary tradition and Poe in the first place when he discovers the value of terrifying the implied reader to reduce distance between reader and morally equivocal characters. On the other, Poe's tales "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Tell-Tale heart" taken as paradigmatic, "Sanctuary" approaches tragedy. Most of Poe's "Gothic" tales and "Sanctuary" violate Gothic conventions and point away from the tale of terror toward classic literature.

7. The relations between Poe and Howard Phillips Lovecraft are not merely those of genre and influence but of similar temperaments exploring the same psychological and philosophical terrain. Their shared doubleness implies aesthetic schizophrenia, professing classicism and practicing romanticism, worshipping natural law by day and breaking (through the vehicle of dream) its coordinates of

time and space by night. The reason for this splitting is the very rigidity and defensiveness of the two writers' conscious minds that made the unconscious appear overpoweringly alien and terrifying. Even granting this, however, Poe and Lovecraft are more than victims of their own psyches; each is his most perceptive analyst, though Poe is a more gifted scribe; more than that, Poe is incomparably superior to all the writers who follow in his wake.

8. Richard Wright owes much to Poe's technique of describing the setting in order to suggest an eerie, dreary atmosphere. More interesting is Wright's use of Poe's habit of blending the uncanny and the natural by postulating hidden but rational laws governing the action, as is particularly apparent in "The Fall of the House of Usher". In his novel "Native Son" Wright makes use of a too obvious Gothic imagery which immediately recalls Poesque metaphors and scenes. Still more striking is the use of Poe's tale "The Black Cat" in the novel. The situations and the symbolical use of the cat are unmistakably Poesque. But the central episode of the novel – once the reader can step back from the psychological suspense and the social protest – is one long, melodramatic murder story.

9. "Usher II" by Ray Bradbury reflects the Bradburian affection for fantasy and horror literature combined. The attack on censorship which it embodies is justified by reference to fairy tales and other sentimental children's favorites; but the works being defended most passionately are the horror tales of Edgar Allan Poe. Many works by Poe are referred to in this story ("The Fall of the House of Usher"; "The Black Cat"; "The Mask of the Red Death"; "The Cask of Amontillado"). It castigates the postwar American society for its consumer-oriented mentality, increasingly homogenized character and total ignorance of Poe's world, the latter being a generalized symbol of "all the beautiful literary lies and flights of fancy". By defending Poe's works Bradbury warns the postwar America, becalmed in a sea of conformity and eager to wallow in the consumer culture, against the menacing influence of consumerism and standardized values encouraging uniformity and the cult of stark/bleak realism.

10. Poe's appeal to such American postmodernists as T. Pynchon and J. Barth derives not only from his projections of violence or insanity but also from his articulations of estrangement and doubt. Estrangement figures importantly in Poe's narrative scheme as well as American postmodernist fiction. This tendency of Poe's writings reflects contemporary cultural and socioeconomic changes. More than a century earlier than postmodernists Poe sarcastically portrayed the alienating consequences of the market revolution. His tale "The Man of the Crowd" conveys

a prescient awareness of metropolitan alienation, describes the city as a desolate, dehumanized place.

Poe prefigured the skepticism and uncertainty that spread from the 19th century into our own era. In the works of Pynchon we have grown accustomed to the black void that seems to define the condition of modern being. We may speak of a postmodern cult of death that reveals in fantasies of sadism, masochism, and annihilation; in place of a loving God, it reveres a hypostatized figure of universal destruction, similar to the one evoked in the closing sentence of "The masque of the Red Death."

Writing at the advent of the so-called post-Christian epoch, Poe gave memorable literary form to the conflicted imaginary of the modern consciousness. As instanced by his powerful hold on such celebrated postmodern authors as John Barth and Pynchon, Poe remains an inescapable presence in contemporary culture. And although academic disagreements about his achievements persists, his place in the pantheon of enduring American authors is secure.

CONTENT OF THE THESIS AND THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS ARE REFLECTED IN THE FOLLOWING SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS:

1. E. A. Poe and Gothic Tradition. Proceedings of the Faculty of European Languages and Literature, v. V, Kutaisi: Kutaisi Akaki Tsereteli State University Press 2004.

2. E. A. Poe and R. Bradbury's "Usher II": Artistic Imagination and Reality. Proceedings of the Faculty of Arts v. VII (II). Kutaisi: Kutaisi Akaki Tsereteli State University Press, 2005

3. E. A. Poe and R.Wright: Literary Kinship. Proceedings of the Faculty of Arts v.VII (II). Kutaisi: Kutaisi Akaki Tsereteli State University Press, 2005.

4. T. S. Eliot on Poe. Proceedings of the Kutaisi Institute of Pedagogy and Arts. Kutaisi: 'Khandzta', 2006.

5. Edgar Poe and Henry James: Narrative Techniques and Gothic Convention. Proceedings of the Faculty of Arts, v. VIII (II). Kutaisi: Akaki Tsereteli State University Press, 2006.

6. American Literary Criticism on E. A. Poe. In: V. Amaglobeli (ed.), American Literature and Georgian-American Relations. Proceedings of the 3rd International Scientific Conference on American Studies. Kutaisi: Akaki Tsereteli State University Press, 2006.

7. 'Closed' and 'Open' Symbols in E. A. Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death." In: Journal of American Studies IV. Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. Center of American Studies, Tbilisi: Publishing House "Klio", 2006

8. Disintegrating the 'Gothic' Tradition: Edgar Poe and William Faulkner In: N. Kakauridze (ed.), The 20th Century Western European and American Novel: The Questions of the Poetics. Kutaisi: Akaki Tsereteli State University Press, 2006

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11. Edgar Poe and American Postmodernism. In: Journal of American Studies V. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 2008

12. The Genesis of American Short Story and E. Poe's Definition of Short Story as a Genre. In: Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on American Studies. Kutaisi: Akaki Tsereteli State University Press, 2008