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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

GOTHIC LITERATURE AND STEPHEN KING: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF *THE SHINING*

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Abstract

The bachelor thesis is concerned with the contrastive analysis of Stephen King's *The Shining* and the main features of the Horror and Gothic Genre. Moreover, it also addresses if Edgar Allan Poe's style of narrative had an important influence in the writing of this best-seller novel. In the theoretical part of the thesis, the biographies of Stephen King and Edgar Allan Poe are included together with an introduction to the Horror Genre. The main part of the thesis centers its attention on the contrastive analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's adaptation of Gothic elements and both *The Masque of the Red Death* by E. A. Poe and Stephen King's *The Shining*, providing a deeper analysis on the last best-seller writing.

Key-words: Stephen King, Edgar Allan Poe, horror genre, gothic elements, *The Shining*, American literature

Resumen

Este proyecto de fin de carrera se centra en el análisis comparativo de *El Resplandor* por Stephen King y las principales características del género de terror gótico. El estilo de escritura de Edgar Allan Poe supuso una gran influencia en King a la hora de redactar y crear esta novela de éxito internacional. En la parte teórica del proyecto se incluyen las biografías de ambos escritores junto a una introducción y características de los géneros gótico y de terror. Sin embargo, el análisis principal se centra en la comparación tanto de la adaptación personal de Poe sobre los elementos Góticos, el cuento *La Máscara de la Muerte Roja* de E. A. Poe y *El Resplandor* de Stephen King, dando más relevancia al análisis de esta última gran obra literaria.

Palabras clave: Stephen King, Edgar Allan Poe, género de terror, elementos góticos, *El Resplandor*, literatura americana

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1. Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe, together with Stephen King are two of the best-known horror writers in the world. The literary careers of both authors have been an important source of inspiration for many other horror writers. However, Edgar Allan Poe's works stand out because he inspired great authors such as H. P. Lovecraft and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and what is more important, he had influenced Stephen King's novels.

Both Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King have had similar life styles. From a curious point of view, both writers present similarities in their darkest habits, attitudes and moral standards. They were involved in the difficult worlds of alcohol and drugs, having serious problems in their darkest times. For instance, Edgar Allan Poe wrote several works such as *Eureka: A Prose Poem*, in which is evident that he was under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Unfortunately, his short life was always marked by depression, his tendency to melancholy and his love of alcohol and drugs that eventually destroyed his life.

Even though, they are considered two of the best writers of the Horror Genre and due to their greatest writing skills, they would probably continue having an influence in many future authors of bizarre and gothic novels.

This bachelor thesis is divided in two main parts. First, a theoretical approach to the biographies of Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King. In addition, it also includes an introduction to the Horror Genre as well as the main characteristics of the genre and Gothic literature. Furthermore, it is also included the style of writing of both authors, King and Poe. On the other hand, the thesis' main focus is based on the contrastive analysis of *The Shining* and the influence Stephen King may have had to write it, using as a source of inspiration Poe's tale *The Masque of the Red Death* and the typical and characteristic gothic elements.

To sum up, Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King are considered the masters of storytelling; to be more precise the masters of terror, suspense and mystery.

2. The Horror Genre

As previously mentioned, this analysis is going to be focused on the influence of Edgar Allan Poe and Gothic elements in Stephen King's *The Shining*. But first, it is important to have a look at Gothic Literature and the Horror Genre.

Horror started as a true genre in the end of the eighteenth century and it continues in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the Gothic narrative is a literary genre closely related to the horror and terror genre and consequently, it is difficult to establish a crystal-clear differentiation between them. The rebirth of the Gothic, as stated by Lucía Solaz, was the emotional, aesthetic and philosophical expression of the reaction against the dominant thought of the Enlightenment, according to which humanity could achieve – through proper reasoning – true knowledge and harmonious synthesis, thus obtaining perfect happiness and virtue.

The characteristics of this genre develops firstly through romantic settings; for instance, shady landscapes, dark forests, medieval ruins and castles, basements, crypts and passages full of ghosts, noises, skeletons, etc. Moreover, it also possesses fascinating and strange characters, great and different types of danger and often damsels in distress. Furthermore, the supernatural elements are present in this narrative appearing in a more direct or suggested form. In the context of this genre, most of the stories take place in medieval castles and monasteries. Strictly speaking, Gothic terror was a literary trend of Anglo-Saxon origin, as a reaction to Rationalism. The Gothic novel is, in its true essence, to narrate stories and not to recreate in the psychology of the characters, who are more subjects at the service of events than being authentic creators of the plot. However, it would be obvious that Stephen King explores in a profound sense the psychology of his characters, and so did Edgar Allan Poe.

Within the narrative subgenre known as novel, it is necessary to distinguish the novel from the fantastic folklore narrative and traditional tales or myths because it is

fundamentally developed from the end of the eighteenth century till the present times, and it possesses several characteristics associated with the aesthetic movement known as Romanticism. Even though, terror is commonly seen as a genre with its roots set in English lands; however, Edgar Allan Poe is considered one of the first developers of this genre, among others such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and H. P. Lovecraft, whose life mirrors Poe's.

According to Miriam López Santos, the Gothic novel is built as a continuous succession of enigmas to which the protagonists are forced to confront. The Gothic develops a universe in which every object and situation, even each character, seems to hide something such as a dark past, a perverse secret; in short, a hidden casualty. These series of enigmas come to reality thanks to the nocturnal forces that are the dreams, unforeseen incidental situations and a sequence of apparitions that the characters had to suffer and overcome.

Regarding the typical characteristics of the Gothic narrative, the most important and outstanding elements are the followings.

First, the intrigue normally unfolds in an old and remote castle, even in a monastery. The architectural elements possess importance since they serve to enrich the plot. Moreover, the atmosphere is full of mystery and suspense; the author creates a supernatural setting capable of arousing feelings of mystery and terror by itself. This supernatural setting obviously presents supernatural events that are difficult to explain. There are also ancestral prophecies, curses upon villages and their entire inhabitants. Uncontrollable emotions live inside the characters; they are subject to unbridled passions, panic attacks, excitement of the mind provoking depression, anguish, paranoia, jealousy, unhealthy love, etc.

Nevertheless, one of the main constituents of these novels and constantly present in the minds of the characters is fear. Most of the events that should or should not be explained by the protagonists deal with this fear. Around this sentiment, the double game and the dialectic between reason and unreason are settled. As H. P. Lovecraft has once said, it is fear, without a doubt, the oldest and most intense emotion of humanity.

Furthermore, the paradigm of the damsel in distress is very frequent; female characters face situations that cause them to faint, shout, and cry, even provoke in them serious nerve attacks. The compassion of the reader is searched in these situations presenting an oppressed heroine by terrors that are usually the main focus of the plot.

Another unavoidable paradigm is the tyrannical figure of men, usually as a father, king, husband or guardian; they require the damsel to act in an unworthy or inadmissible way, it might be forcing her to marriage, sacrifice her chastity or some sinister action.

The feeling of empathy towards the villain of the story also plays an important role. The reader shares the feelings and emotions of the evildoer as if they were their own. Besides, there is a critical moment during the story in which the monster that the villain represents is redeemed, or their real and considerate self is revealed. In that precise moment, the emotion of empathy flourishes in the readers. Murder and death are presented as a beautiful and necessary mean.

The presence of death in these stories does not always mean something absolutely tragic or negative; it truly represents a needed dreadful event. And finally, the pathetic fallacy; the emotions of the protagonists intervene in the appearance of things, or the other way around, the climate that surrounds a scene defines the mood of the characters.

Another significant event in horror writing took place in the second half of the twentieth century, when modern authors got inspiration from previously mentioned authors and besides from important global events such as wars – they are considered a source of fear and isolation which develops profound psychological traumas –, advances in technology and medicine.

To conclude, one of the main important elements present in fantastic and gothic stories is the presence of the doppelgänger. First, it is the twin or double of someone; however, it is the “evil twin”. A doppelgänger is defined as a creature which is neither replicate nor duplicate, but an entity that reflects the less civilized and the darkest aspects of our subconscious.

3. Contextual framework and style of writing

3.1. Edgar Allan Poe

The image of Edgar Allan Poe as a morbid cultivator of terror literature has sometimes dulled the appreciation of his literary transcendence. He certainly was the great master of the genre, and he also inaugurated the detective stories and the genre of science fiction. But, above all, he revitalized the tale both from his theoretical writings and his literary praxis, proving that his expressive potential had nothing to envy the novel and giving the short story the dignity and prestige it has nowadays. Despite he practiced several genres throughout his literary career, he constantly treats in an almost obsessive way themes such as death, burial in life or mourning. Furthermore, in his numerous dark romantic stories it is appreciated his unquestionable condition of poet.

In the view of Philip Van Doren – one of the most prestigious American critics of the twentieth century – Edgar Allan Poe achieved what a few American writers had even dared to try; he managed to study in depth and uncover the unconscious of the human mind, leaving free terrible images and dreadful dreams never before incarnated in the written word. Therefore, E. A. Poe became the master of storytelling, dark romantics, bizarre and gothic short stories.

E. A. Poe was born in 1809 in Boston. He became an orphan two years later of his birth. The two years old Edgar was educated by John Allan, a rich merchant living in Richmond who take him in. From 1815 to 1820 he lived with his foster parents in the United Kingdom, where he began his education. He attended grammar school in London and Stoke Newington. However, Poe's relations with his adoptive father were traumatic, and the early death of his adoptive mother became one of his recurring obsessions. In 1820, he returned to the United States and he continued his studies in private schools. Poe attended in the University of Virginia in 1826 with a specialization in poetry and Latin; nevertheless, his gambling and drinking inclinations got him expelled and as consequence,

he enlisted in the army under a nick name. Later, he travelled to Boston where he anonymously published his first book, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, 1827. In 1829, he published his second book of poems, *Al Aaraaf*, and he obtained a position in the Military Academy of West Point by influence of his adoptive father. Poe soon started to dismiss his duties and disobey the rules; acts which got him expelled again in 1831.

In 1832, after the publication of his third book (*Poems*), he moved to his relatives in Baltimore, where he got married with his own little cousin Virginia Clemm, who by then only had fourteen years old. By that time, he entered as editor in the newspaper Southern Baltimore Messenger, in which he published diverse poems and narrations of his own, and the newspaper become one of the most important of the south thanks to E. A. Poe. Later on, Poe and his wife moved and he collaborated in several magazines in Philadelphia and New York, city in which they both settled in 1837. A year later, in 1838, he published his only novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in Philadelphia. But Poe wrote theoretical essays and specialized articles on literary theory apart from writing poems and short stories.

In 1840, he published in Philadelphia *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. Three years later, he obtained an extraordinary success with *The Gold Bug* (1843), as emblematic of his writing as the book poem *The Raven and other poems* (1845); this last one brought to the summit his literary reputation. In addition, he was author of notable writings such as *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* (1841), *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* (1842-1843), and *The Purloined Letter* (1844), which are considered as the predecessors of the modern novels of mystery and detective stories. Among his outstanding short stories are *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842), *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1842), *The Ticking Heart* (1843) and *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846).

His wife illness turned their marriage into a bitter experience for E. A. Poe; her death in 1847 of tuberculosis brought Poe to deep depressions. Furthermore, his tendency to gambling, alcoholism and drugs was aggravated. However, this tragic event did not stop his writing and Poe even wanted to create his own magazine, *The Stylus*. After Virginia's

death, he started to travel from city to city and seeing different women at the same time; simultaneously he tried to write newspaper articles and more poems; nevertheless, he was obviously feeling depressed and having drinking problems again. These problems are reflected in his writings, where we can appreciate his feelings of isolation and psychic loneliness. These drugs and drinking addictions were in all probability the cause of his death, which occurred in 1849. He was found unconscious on a Baltimore street and taken immediately to a hospital, where he died a few days later, apparently from a brain hemorrhage. Nevertheless, the cause of his death and why he was found unconscious would remain forever a mystery.

Edgar Allan Poe's writing style.

According to Poe's style of writing, it should be highlighted that Edgar Allan Poe considered himself, above all, a poet; and therefore, he should be judged as such. However, his verse and poetry ends in the background due to his own wittiness as a narrator. As stated by Guido Carboni; initially, Poe's themes are connected with the ideality of dreams, the pastoral myth and nostalgia for the Garden of Eden. However, he establishes that later the poetry of Poe moves toward the contemplation of loss and pain that characterized *The Raven*.

In a way to present his tales, Poe mostly refers to his works with a mixture of *grotesque*, *arabesque* and *rationation*. Nevertheless, Poe wrote two types of short stories: tales of horror and tales of ratiocination. Within the first group, we can appreciate a haunted Poe who presents the irrational mind of the characters seen from the inside. What is more, Poe's intention in writing these short stories to curdling the blood of his readers. In these tales, there is an emphasis on the psychological element; together with violence and fear which are elements used for the psychological exploration of the characters. These tales of horror can be subdivided into murder stories, tales of love and marriage, and stories of death. In the second group of short stories can be appreciated the rational Poe. He presents characters with a rational mind which can decipher any secret code or mystery; besides Poe offers a magnificent analysis of the brilliantly analytical mind. As consequence, Edgar

Allan Poe creates the formula to the detective stories; nevertheless, he only wrote three stories with that kind of formula.

Carboni states that an important aspect of Poe's art is that it is at the threshold of this merging of *novel* and *romance* into the modern psychological novel. He continues saying that it uses, and often exploits, magic, horror and superstition, but at its best it uses that "unreal" setting to explore human psychology under extreme conditions.

Therefore, Edgar Allan Poe's writings – mostly the tales of horror – present a series of typical gothic characteristics. However, Poe managed to adapt these characteristics and transform them into his own style of writing horror short stories. Some of these peculiar characteristics are the followings.

First of all, as Carboni had mentioned, death is a recurrent theme in Poe's fiction; it is also the most compelling image for the dissolution of the boundaries of identity – Carboni continues – the ultimate step into an uncontrollable dark abyss. E. A. Poe transforms the death of his characters as something gratifying and beautiful; besides if this death includes some violence, it makes it look even more pleasurable in the eyes of the reader. Carboni ends up saying that Poe transforms the most irrational and unexplainable event with a violent death, into a necessary "logical" result of chain of causes and effects. He finds its source and motivations, and in the end, it all seems clear, the death is almost acceptable.

Moreover, the setting of most of his short stories takes place in isolated and remote regions. For instance, Edgar Allan Poe writes in *The Masque of the Red Death* that the events are settled in "the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys".¹ Usually in these locations death is right around the corner and tragic events happened in the past of these places. Therefore, death is a critical element in Poe's stories.

Furthermore, in Gothic stories there is an emphasis on the psychological element. Violence and fear are emotions used for psychological exploration of the characters. In this kind of stories, Edgar Allan Poe presents the irrational mind seen from the inside. There is

¹ Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Masque of the Red Death", *Tales of Mystery & Imagination*, Harper Press, 2011, pp. 173

no sane individual in his horror tales; there is always a highlight on mental illness and madness in the characters. Also, Poe wants to induce in the reader extreme emotions such as anxiety, isolation, fear, anger, obsession, etc.; he uses these emotions to play with the reactions of the readers. Apart from this, the presence of ghosts and supernatural elements in the narrations is another key element in E. A. Poe's tales.

3.2 Stephen King

Prestigious and current American writer, Stephen King won the favor of the critics with his first novel *Carrie* (1974), which would be followed by *The Shining* (1977) – novel which earned him great international prestige – *It* (1986), *Misery* (1987) and *Insomnia* (1994), just to mention some of his greatest successes. His effective and direct style, together with his great ability to highlight the most disturbing aspects of daily life, made him the master and specialist of the current horror literature; even though he also made incursions into the fantasy genre and science fiction. Stephen King is also author of scripts for television; moreover, most of his novels have been adapted to the cinema.

Stephen King was born on 21 September 1947 in Maine; he is the second son of Donald and Nelie Ruth Pillsbury King. He was not expected to be born because her mother was told she could not have children and that is why his parents adopted his older brother. After the separation of his parents, he was raised along with his brother in the maternal custody. His family had to travel across the state searching for help from his relatives whilst his mother was looking for any jobs she could find. Stephen King spent part of his childhood in Fort Wayne (Indiana) with his paternal grandparents, and in Stratford (Connecticut). At the age of eleven he moved with his mother to Durham (Maine), where she worked as a cook in a mental health institution.

Since he was a child he was attracted for literature, specially science-fiction and horror stories. In 1966, he graduated from Lisbon Falls High School; while he was in high school he started to write short stories and articles for the school newspaper. Finally, he

finished his studies in the University of Maine of Orono thanks to a scholarship. He specialized in English with focus on contemporary pedagogy and literature. Furthermore, during his university years he actively participated in the student political life, becoming a member of the Students Senate and getting involved in the anti-military movement of the Orono Campus against the War of Vietnam. In the university is where he truly began his literary activity publishing several stories in the university magazine, *The Maine Campus*. However, during these university years, he started to experiment with drugs and he also drank heavily. But nothing was excessive because he managed to overcome this dark stage of his life.

After graduating in 1970, he married the novelist Tabitha Spruce in 1971, whom he had met while he was a fellow working in the university library. Both had two children within less than three years. In the first years of their marriage, Stephen had to work in public laundries and he also obtained occasional economic benefits from short stories he managed to publish in a men's magazine. Some of these stories would be later collected in a book called *Night Shift* (1978); moreover, a few of them would be object of cinematographic versions, such as the short story *Children of the Corn* (1978).

In 1971, he began his career as a high school teacher and he also taught English at the Hampden Academy, while he continued his writing activity at night. By doing this he could write his first novel *Carrie*, published two years later, which would be adapted a few years later to the cinema obtaining a clamorous success. Thanks to the earnings he made with it, Stephen King could quick as a teacher and become a full-time writer. In this first novel, which tells the story of a girl with telekinetic powers, it is already possible to notice what style of writing would present Stephen King: a skillful combination of elements of classic terror with parapsychological fantasies or science fiction present in the everyday life.

In 1973, he moved with his family to the southern Maine in order to take care of his ill mother. However, King managed in finishing his second and great successful novel, *Salem's Lot* (1975). Unfortunately, during this great period his mother died of cancer.

Since this date, Stephen King began an accelerated career of publications and adaptations to cinema and television. His prolific literary production constitutes one of the most representative works inside the genre of mystery and terror in the modern American Literature. He gives in his prose high priority to the intrigue of the plot and the shocking scenes. In his stories, he treats with devilish assassins, vampires, phantasmagoric appearances and beings with parapsychological and extra-sensorial abilities. The psychological perversion of his characters, as well as the suffocating atmospheres in which they unfold, have turned many of his novels into authentic bestsellers that very often, have been adapted to cinema and television; increasing, even more, Stephen King's international fame.

Among some of his novels that have been object of cinematographic adaptations and gave Stephen King international fame, outstand the followings: *The Dead Zone* (1979), *Christine* (1983), *Firestarter* (1980), *Misery* (1989), *Pet Sematary* (1981), for which he wrote the screenplay and participated as an actor interpreting a secondary role. Nevertheless, one of his most outstanding novels is *The Shining* (1977), a novel of horror and parapsychological events which was taken to the big screen by Stanley Kubrick in 1980, pontificating the fantasy and terror cinema, in large part, thanks to the magnificent interpretation of Jack Torrance by Jack Nicholson.

As well as Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen King also wrote under the effect of alcohol and drugs. However, it seems the quality of his writings was not affected. Some characters such as Jack Torrance from *The Shining*, an alcoholic with aggressive tendencies, reflect King's addictions. Furthermore, Annie Wilson from *Misery* is also a character who stood both for drinking alcohol and cocaine.

As Kopečná had established,

“So far, Stephen King has written 36 novels, 8 books of *The Dark Tower* series, 8 books under the Richard Bachman pseudonym, 9 collections of short stories, 5 non-fiction books and 7 screenplays based on his works. On top of that, King is now 65 (70) years old and despite his drug history and minor problems with health he does not seem to intend to stop writing.”²

Stephen King’s writing style.

Dealing with Stephen King’s style of writing, his novels do not present the difficulty of other contemporary literary works when classifying them according to gender. It needs to be added that critics all over the world refer to the author as the master of terror. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that although all his works are characterized by the inclusion of extraordinary situations or characters, King employs with authentic mastery resources from police narrative that are necessary to maintain the devouring passion of his readers, turning his works into true action, suspense and terror thrillers.

Unquestionably, one of the factors that have mostly contributed to the success of Stephen King’s narrative is the thematic selection. In general, he selects simple and ordinary topics known by mostly everybody, particularly by American society. The author’s ability lies precisely in drawing fantastic and frightening stories from boring and common daily routines. King deals with daily life themes that are interesting enough for him to push himself to write one or several novels about it. Several examples of these themes could be the impossibility of closing the Pandora’s box once it is open such as in *Tommyknockers*, *The Stand* and *Firestarter*; the universal question of “Why?”, in other words, if there is a God, why horrible events occur in the world; for instance, in *The Green Mile*, *Desperation* and *The Stand*. Moreover, King also deals with the thin dividing line between reality and fantasy, such as in *The Dark Half*, *Bag of Bones* and *The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three*. Furthermore, among his thematic violence is also present, for example in *The Shining* and *The Dark Half*. As well as the fundamental differences

² Kopečná, Kateřina. "Comparison of Lives And Works Of E. A. Poe And Stephen King / What Can Make People Write Horror Stories?". Charles University in Prague, 2012.

between children and adults, which are pretty represented in *It* and *Bag of Bones*; and finally, King also includes in his narrative the healing power of the imagination.

King himself warns that from the writer's point of view, the analysis of a novel's thematic should not be addressed until writing the first draft of the novel. He said that "beginning with thematic issues and concerns is the formula to achieve a bad narrative; however, the good one always starts with the story's argument". From the perspective of the argument, few readers would be tempted by *Carrie* – King's first literary success – which against all odds, sold millions of copies all over the world. No reader would find hard to feel empathy towards the main character, and it is that precise moment where the writer uses his magic and turns a common argument into a bloody and fascinating story. King takes things far enough to escape out of control, and adds extraordinary telekinetic powers to the victim to achieve her brutal revenge. Considering that King's themes belong to the universal interest, it is possible to assume that the real secret which captives millions of readers resides on his incredible arguments.

To sum up, the thematic clichés in King's novels relate to matters known to all and that is why the readers, perhaps from a secondary plane while reading, identify themselves with the story. The themes are not terrifying, but their fantastic arguments, together with their plausible characters are the truly terrifying elements.

Whatever, the characters of Stephen King are the ones who transform his novels into plausible and real stories. Stephen King's novels have usually as protagonist middle-class characters, children or like most of the times, a writer. The characters develop in their daily life; however, they experiment supernatural encounters and strange circumstances that would probably change the course of their adventures.

King's ability to grant life to his characters seems magic; still he – perhaps driven by the pedagogical desire to contribute to a better popular narrative – has decided to show his own tricks. It is as simple as paying attention to what people do and then, tell the truth. One resource frequently used by King is being descriptive using the stream of consciousness, frequently with the intention of referring to the characters' mood. He avoids using

omniscient descriptions; instead King recreates dark environments allowing the reader to deduce by himself the mental state of the characters.

In conclusion, King's narrative is characterized by being easy to understand, enjoyable and sometimes, even amusing. Critics agree that over the years the quality of King's prose has improved in a noticeable way. He often refers to important works from other authors, using quotes and excerpts from their works in his own books; mostly his protagonists, particularly the writer-protagonists, read a lot. Certainly, works that King has read himself. Stephen King knows how to fascinate his readers through his meticulous prose and fantastic, macabre or terrifying arguments.

King's books deal with everyday topics; stories where the strangest things happen to ordinary people and sometimes, it does not have a good end. As it happens in real life, there are no happy endings guaranteed.

6. Analysis of *The Masque of the Red Death*

The Masque of the Red Death is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe. Its first publication was in 1892. This short story belongs to the Dark Romantics and it is characteristic because of its brief extension and characters. Furthermore, it is considered as a fictional story; however, it is often asserted that it can have its basis in real facts. In the view of Stephen Peithman, *The Masque of the Red Death* is an undisputed masterpiece in the genre of short-story writing. He continues by stating that it is noticeable the complete absence of that Poe trademarks the first-person narrator, and the use of allegory – which Peithman says – Poe disliked in general and attacked in the works of others. Besides, the tale is more dreamlike and purely descriptive than any of Poe's other stories, giving the whole the quality of a poem.

First of all, an analysis of the characters is presented as follows. The Prince Prospero, in words of the narrator of the story, he is described as a person who is “happy and dauntless and sagacious”.³ After that, the dames and knights of his court are loyal subjects, always prepared to serve the Prince. And finally, the masked figure – with spectral appearance – who arrives at the masquerade causing astonishment among the masked crowd. Besides, the vesture of the figure was “dabbled in *blood* – and his broad brow, with all the feature of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror”.

This brings up to the presence of the narrator making clear its importance throughout the developing of the main events. The narration is presented in third person singular. Initially, an omniscient narrator appears to be directing the course of the events without involving himself in the story. One instance could be the very beginning of the short story:

“The ‘Red Death’ had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal – the redness and horror of blood”.⁴

^{3,4} Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Masque of the Red Death” *Tales of Mystery & Imagination*, Harper Press, 2011, pp. 173-74

Nevertheless, as the events progress, the narrator directs the story towards a specific target group. It appears to be that the narrator knows all the facts that would happen next in the developing of the story. One such example is the change of verbal tense in the narration, it switches from past to present tense. For instance, “But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held”. This procedure is common in some narrative structures and it is often claimed that the procedure gives a certain nature of verisimilitude to the story; because this method places the narrator almost at the same level as the characters since it presents detailed information about spaces and attitudes of the characters. Hence, the style of narrating is indirect.

Added to that, it is said that the narrated world of *The Masque of the Red Death* belongs to the 1942-44 Holland and in that time, the country was under the Nazi Germany. Regarding the temporal order, the story follows a chronological order since the beginning of the Red Death until the famous masquerade that takes place five or six months after the seclusion of the Prince with his court in one of his abbeys.

The events of the story take place in the castellated abbey of Prince Prospero. Moreover, within this abbey stand out the seven rooms where the masquerade was held. In words of Stephen Peithman, seven is the number of the universe and it represents a completeness or totality. In Christian thoughts, he continues, there are seven sacraments, Major Prophets, virtues, deadly sins, etc. Therefore, the use of the seven to represent the rooms gives the castellated abbey a divine appearance. In addition, each chamber possesses a characteristic color; being described in order in the tale as blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet and the last one was black velvet. And it is quite evident that each color possesses a different meaning; for instance, in general terms blue represents truth and intellect, purple means power and justice, green is growth, hope, youth and fertility. However, orange stands for ambition, luxury and pride; and white is a representation of all colors in one, but it also means life, death and purity. The violet color is darker than purple having a close relation to death and mourning. And finally, black is characteristic of darkness and destruction, the emptiness.

Nevertheless, there is an emphasis in the description of the last room due to it is fairly different from the rest. The narrator states that “in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations”. Besides, he adds that “the panes here were scarlet – a deep blood color”. And this scarlet color gives to the room a sinister aspect which is pretty characteristic in the narrative of Edgar Allan Poe.

This seventh room is also characterized by the presence of the “gigantic clock of ebony”. In its description and through the developing of the events it is highlighted the pendulum and the “monotonous clang” of the clock besides the “musical striking of the hours, which emanates from the most sinister room in the castellated abbey”.⁵

Bearing this in mind, time makes itself an important element in the development of the circumstances. The whole theme of time is represented by the ebony clock of the seventh room. Its tick-tock was such “clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical”⁶ that provokes the musicians of the orchestra to stop playing and the gay company to pause, momentarily, each lapse of an hour to let the ebony clock rang. And right after the clock is finished; all the masquerade and activities are restored. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on midnight because that is the time when the masked and mysterious figure is firstly seen in the party.

In his analysis of time in *The Masque of the Red Death*, Jean-Paul Weber states that the murder of Prospero “reflects Poe’s unconscious jealousy – which makes ‘The Masque of the red Death’ the most Oedipal of the tales of Poe”.

What is more, the tale is full of symbols. Some of these are the Red Death, more than a plague it can refer to the abuse of the monarchy that, when finishing with its country, moves away to enjoy and take advantage of that stolen from the people. Another symbol is the red color; it represents violence, greed and violent death. Looking back at the seven rooms, this number alludes to perfection due to God created his perfect world in seven

⁵ Regan, Robert, and Edgar Allan Poe. *Poe. A Collection of Critical Essays. Edited by Robert Regan. [By Various Authors.]*. 1st ed., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1967, pp. 85

⁶ Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Masque of the Red Death.” *Tales of Mystery & Imagination*, Harper Press, 2011, pp. 175

days. Thus, Prince Prospero's isolated kingdom was intended as a perfect and safe space. On the other hand, the color of the seventh chamber – black velvet – is contrasted with scarlet, which is a color that represents blood and death. In addition, the Red Death triumphed over all the inhabitants and over Prince Prospero in that precise room.

As a general conclusion of this short story, it is a tale that shows the horrific attitude of a Prince who faces bad times with the Red Death. The Prince Prospero believes that locking himself in his castle makes him invulnerable to the plague. He goes through moments of joy and tranquility to despair and anguish. And finally, he realizes that no one can escape death and when he does, it is already too late. Edgar Allan Poe wants to cause a psychological terror in the readers with this story.

7. The Shining

In this section, it is going to be presented a comparative analysis of Stephen King's *The Shining* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, together with the archetypical Gothic elements.

Both Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft are worldwide known for their incalculable contribution to the Gothic and Horror novel. Both are authors of some of the most terrifying and disturbing stories ever heard. However, although Poe and Lovecraft are considered the founding fathers of Terror, throughout the twentieth and early twenty first centuries, nowadays the undisputed master of this genre and one who has exploited it to unsuspected limits is undoubtedly, Stephen King.

7.1. Background of the novel

After writing *Carrie* and *Salem's Lot*, which are settled in small towns in the state of Maine, Stephen King was looking for a change of background for his next book. So, randomly, he chose the state of Colorado, to be more precise, the city of Boulder. Therefore, in the early 1974 he spent some time with his wife and sons in the state of Colorado. Later, he and his wife decided to spend a few days in a hotel nearby the Rocky Mountains National Park, this hotel was the Stanley. And on October 30, 1974, Stephen and Tabitha finally register in room 217 at the Stanley Hotel. They almost did not make it because the hotel was closing for low season. The couple were the only guests in the hotel that night, they also had dinner in the Dining Room all by themselves, everything was so isolated, so lonely. After dinner, King decided to wander the empty hallways of the hotel ending up in the bar being served by a waiter named Grady.

That night, King had a nightmare about his three-year-old son being chased in the corridors by a fire hose. In fact, that nightmare becomes real to the 5-year-old Danny Torrance; it is included in chapter nineteen:

“He came down on the other side of the hose and ran, and suddenly he heard it behind him, coming for him, the soft dry whicker of that brass snake’s head as it slithered rapidly along the carpet after him like a rattlesnake moving swiftly through a dry field of grass. It was coming for him, and suddenly the stairs seemed very far away.”⁷

King himself confessed that he “got up the bed, light up a cigarette, sat in a chair staring at the Rocky Mountains, and by the time the cigarette was already consumed, I had the argument of the book firmly set up in my mind”.

7.2. Contrastive analysis of the novel

It is evident that Stephen King set up the basis of *The Shining* making constant references to Edgar Allan Poe’s tale *The Masque of the Red Death*. First, when the novel is not even commenced, King introduces a fragment of the tale. To be more precise, this fragment belongs to the description of the magnificent ebony clock in Prospero’s castellated abbey. It is reasonable to think that Stephen King establishes a parallelism between this ebony clock and the clock in the ballroom of the Overlook.

Time takes an important position in the development of both the tale and the novel; moreover, a special emphasis is set up on ‘midnight’. While in *The Masque of the Red Death* midnight represents the exact time when “the ebony clock went out”, provoking “the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all”⁸. Nevertheless, in *The Shining* midnight represents the precise moment of Jack Torrance’s death together with the death of the Hotel due to the Overlook’s boiler explosion.

The Masque of the Red Death develops its plot in the middle of a party, to be more precise a masquerade. All Prince Prospero’s subjects and he himself wear masks, even the Red Death. Besides, there is a masquerade in the Overlook. However, in the novel this

⁷ King, Stephen. *The Shining*. 1st ed., New York, Anchor Books, 2012, pp. 255.

From now on, quotes from *The Shining* will appear. As consequence and to avoid repetition, only the page will be provided in the correspondent quotation.

⁸ Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Masque of the Red Death.” *Tales of Mystery & Imagination*, Harper Press, 2011, pp. 180

party had happen in 1925. This masquerade is presented as a supernatural event in chapter thirty-six. It appears to be a short circuit of the elevator, due to it woke up the Torrances with its noise. Therefore, they went to investigate discovering that the elevator's car was going up and down all the time; the curious thing was that the car was empty, no one was there. Nevertheless, Wendy and Danny heard and saw something:

“*Mommy!*” Danny screamed. Then she was up, her check flushed, her forehead as pale and shining as a spirit lamp. “What about this Jack?” She threw something and suddenly the hall was full of drifting confetti, red and white and blue and yellow. “Is *this?*” A green party streamer, faded to a pale pastel color with age. “And *this?*” She tossed it out and it came to rest on the blue-black jungle carpet, a black silk cat’s-eye mask, dusted with sequins at the temples.” (443)

And that mask was the real proof that something beyond nature was materializing in the Overlook.

The first Gothic element previously mentioned is that the development of the plot takes place in castles or fortress, nevertheless the most important aspect is that those locations are usually isolated from the outside world, creating this way an atmosphere of mystery, horror and suspense. At the beginning of *The Shining*, Jack Torrance is introduced from the perspective of a job interview because he had a job offer of being the caretaker of the Overlook Hotel during winter. So, Jack is talking to Stuart Ullman, the director and supervisor of the hotel. The intrigue of the novel develops inside the isolated hotel which is located at the top of Colorado Mountains, approximately 65 kilometers from the nearest town, Sidewinder. On top of that, the Overlook Hotel becomes more isolated because of the snow during winter, since it is a time of huge blizzards and snowing. Usually, this setting presents any supernatural elements and as the plot unfolds, the Overlook is full of paranormal activity.

Two paradigms have been previously mention, these are the damsel in distress and the tyranny of men. In *The Shining*, both elements are present. First, the female figure often struggles with extreme and difficult situations provoking anxiety attacks, nervousness, shouts and extreme sentiments and feelings such as fear, depression or anguish. All these elements fit perfectly with the figure of Winnifred “Wendy” Torrance, Jack’s wife. At the

beginning of the story, their marriage seems to be perfect, both husband and wife live happily, Jack had a great job as a teacher in the university and they did not have monetary problems. They are the perfect marriage. However, after the birth of their son, Danny Torrance, some problems started to arouse. Jack starts to have serious problems with alcohol. When Jack is going through this pretty devastating phase, Wendy is always by his side. She really is a very strong woman, who stood by her husband's side, even when he reveals his dark personality and has done terrible things to other people and his own son. Wendy is forced to fight and face Jack's temper due to save her son.

Jack Torrance suffers a great development in the novel. At the very beginning, he is presented as a writer and a renewed person because once in his past, he was an alcoholic. He had lost his previous job as a teacher in the Stovington faculty for beating a student and what is more, Jack broke his own son's arm when Danny was only three years old. On the other hand, Jack's drinking problems started while he was a teacher. Some partners from the Stovington faculty were heavy drinkers and drove Jack Torrance and his friend Al Shockley into alcohol. Furthermore, there is a time when Jack himself says that "he was *still* an alcoholic, always would be, perhaps had been since Sophomore Class Night in high school when he had taken his first drink" (155). As consequence of all this, Wendy wanted to divorce from Jack, but they never reach that point in any conversation they had; therefore, they are still married despite their marital issues. From a psychological and chronological point of view, Jack Torrance evolves from a normal teacher to an alcoholic, then to a renewed person, and ending up in a terrifying and completely insane creature. This psychological transformation begins when the Torrance family moves to the Overlook Hotel to spend the winter.

Edgar Allan Poe includes in his horror narrative a special emphasis on the psychological elements of the characters; and so does Stephen King in the novel. He achieves in this novel a perfect blend of madness and the element of the supernatural. Since Jack Torrance is a man who is mentally unstable because of his alcoholism, King knows how to perfectly narrate the oppressive effect of the building's environment and the terrifying events that occur in the inside. This oppressive effect is reflected in Jack

Torrance's guilty mind because of the feeling of failure – both professional and family related –, his abstinence and anxiety caused by the internal fight against the urge of drinking again. Jack Torrance fall into madness is as disturbing as predictable.

The Overlook Hotel means a fresh start to the whole Torrance family: Jack would use this opportunity to prove to his family that he truly had changed, besides to end up writing his unfinished theatre play. Wendy really needs to believe that Jack is no longer the person he was before, and she hopes the six months they would spend together prove it. And for the young Danny, he just wants to spend time with his family. There is something absolutely important about Danny, and that is he has a gift, a very special one. According to Dick Hallorann, the Overlook Hotel's chef, Danny can *shine on*. Dick also possesses this *shinin on* but not in the same level as Danny does. This *shinin* gives them the ability to read people's minds, perceive some events from the future, telepathic communication, and feeling the presence of supernatural entities. With this gift they had, Stephen King adds another Gothic element into the novel.

What is characteristic about Danny's *shining* is that he can see the past and perceive some future events because he has a guide. This person is Tony. At first, Tony is presented as Danny's imaginary friend, in the view of his parents. However, during the development of the novel, Tony is revealed to be the person who guides Danny through his visions of the past and future events, he is the one who warns Danny that the Overlook is a dangerous place where horrible incidents had happened, and where tragic circumstances would happen. Moreover, there is a word which presence echoes during the beginning till the end of the novel; this term is *redrum*. Tony is the one who shows Danny this word during his visions; however, Danny does not realize the significance of the term until it is almost too late. *Redrum* is just *murder* spelt backwards. Nevertheless, this term coined by Stephen King also can refer to violence, bloodshed, destruction, warfare, etc. Apart from this, it is later revealed that Tony's name came from Anthony which is Danny's middle name. With this revelation, it is confirmed that Tony is not Danny's imaginary friend but himself, his own *shine*. And Tony once told Danny this truth, that he is in a place deep down in his own mind. The place where Tony is. He is a part of Danny" (618).

In the novel, it is perfectly evident how in the character of Jack Torrance flourishes his state of progressive derangement. As he arrives at the Overlook in a state of certain contained despair, hoping to redeem his frustrations in a place seemingly adequate, but instead he finds free field to unleash a personal conflict that finally transforms him into a completely psychopath. However, the real reason for his madness is the Overlook Hotel. His constantly growing mental crisis is provoked by external agents. Jack cannot control his inner rage and he is driven by a series of factors such as the claustrophobia that provokes the empty and disturbing rooms of the hotel, with an oppressive and almost suffocating atmosphere and strange appearances. His wife Wendy and little Danny are his companions, while also sufferers from the hallucinations which they do not question if they are real, but clearly from a fantastic nature that generates extreme anxiety. As previously mentioned, in Gothic narrative there is a moment when the reader feels empathy towards the villain of the story, in *The Shining*, Jack Torrance is that villain. Stephen King represents that moment when Jack Torrance's body and mind are completely in control of the evil spirit of the Overlook. He is hunting his son, Danny, with just the purpose of murdering him; however, Danny manages to see a glimpse of his dad under that mask of madness. At the same time, he is Jack, but still he is not Jack.

"You're not my daddy," Danny told it again. "And if there's a little bit of my daddy left inside you, he knows they lie in here. [...] You're it, not my daddy. You're the hotel." (631)

Nevertheless, the precise moment previously mentioned when the reader feels empathy towards the villain is the following one:

"The face in front of him changed. It was hard to say how; there was no melting or merging of the features. The body trembled slightly, and then the bloody hands opened like broken claws. The mallet fell from them and thumped to the rug. That was all. But suddenly his daddy *was* there, looking at him in moral agony, and a sorrow so great that Danny's heart flamed within his chest. The mouth drew down in a quivering bow.

"Doc," Jack Torrance said. "Run away. Quick. And remember how much I love you."

"Oh Danny, for God's sake – "

"No," Danny said. He took one of his father's bloody hands and kissed it. "It's almost over." (632)

In addition, as the hotel is full of paranormal activity, most of it affects in a direct way the little Danny. Some of the most important events happen in room 217 and in the children's area of the hotel. Dick Hallorann specifically told Danny not to enter in that concrete room under any circumstance. Nevertheless, driven by curiosity, Danny manages to get the master key and he enters the room 217. A tragic murder took place in that room and as a consequence, Danny met the ghost of a woman's corpse inside the bathtub. This dead old woman tries to suffocate him; consequently, she leaves some pretty bad marks on Danny's neck. When he manages to escape, and run towards the protection of his parents, Wendy suspects and wonders if Jack was the cause of such a brutal mark on Danny's neck. Therefore, she doubts her husband's word about staying sober and being able of controlling his bad temper. Aside from Danny's incident in the past, Jack continually cleans his lips – just in the same way he used to do when he was an alcoholic – feeding Wendy's bad thoughts about him.

Other paranormal events occur in the playground where Danny decided to play one afternoon because it “seemed much nicer in the deep snow than it ever had during the autumn. It looked like a fairyland sculpture” (420). Then, he saw a ring of cement and began to dig in order to make alive his imaginary game. But “he was suddenly aware that he felt closed in and extremely nervous in this tight ring of cement” (421). He could hear his own breathing and he wanted to be out more than anything else. So, he turned around in the inside of the ring and unfortunately, when he was about to achieve his goal, the snow fall closing the opening he made before, enshrouding him into darkness. He was not capable of rational thinking, he was just afraid, and by the time he assumed he was in the dark and closed in he realized that “something was in here with”¹² him. Something that the Overlook has have prepared for an occasion just like that. Then he was out, he run from that ring of cement and look to the Overlook and without any warning he heard a sound, the clear sound of snow falling. The following events have also a relation with the paranormal world. These ones keep a close relation with some hedges with animal form, for instance among them there were a rabbit, a dog and a lion. These hedges seemed to have life of their own because they pursued Jack in one occasion, and moreover Danny saw them moving

right after the incident he had inside the cement ring. The hedges also attacked Dick Hallorann when he comes to rescue Danny and Wendy.

Furthermore, an important fact is show did Dick Hallorann know that Danny was in such a tremendous danger. At the beginning of the novel King reveals that Hallorann travels to Florida for a vacation season, that is he is pretty far away from the Overlook Hotel and Danny. As mentioned before, both of them possess a special gift, so when Danny feels he is no longer safe he telepathically sends a distress message to Dick. Hence, he takes the first flight he can to Colorado with the only thought of being able to arrive in time and save Danny and his family.

To conclude, one important characteristic of Edgar Allan Poe's writings is that he manages to transform death into something beautiful and necessary. That is when a character dies; his or her death is not seen as a tragic event but as something gratifying for the reader. Stephen King incorporates this element in *The Shining*. In the final chapters of the novel it is described how the boiler of the Overlook explodes, destroying the evil soul of the Hotel, the hedges, the playground and killing Jack Torrance in the process. The real villain of the story is not Jack but the Hotel; the Overlook is the one who drove Jack madness, the one which controlled the paranormal events, and the one which was trying to murder the Torrance family. Bearing this in mind, when the boiler of the hotel finally does its job, the reader feels a great satisfaction because Danny, Wendy and Dick Hallorann are safe and sound, whilst the Overlook is burning in flames, killing Jack Torrance in the process.

8. Conclusion

It is crystal clear that Jack Torrance is a doppelgänger and it is certain that he reflects Stephen King's darkest personality. Jack represents Stephen, who in the time he was writing the novel also has children and he is married, such as the protagonist of his novel. It is not a coincidence that Jack Torrance is also a writer. King felt the need of drinking heavily and consuming drugs to get inspired and being able to write, same as Jack. Alcohol provided by the Overlook Hotel, and the snow constantly present in its surroundings isolate Jack, making him more vulnerable to his corrupt habits and revealing his hidden self. In addition, the snow is a symbol for cocaine, reflecting in that sense Stephen King's own obsessions.

As previously analyzed, it is evident that Stephen King follows the characteristic of the Gothic literature to build up his literary world and create his characters. In addition, his great achievement with this novel is the ability to make the reader enter the minds of the protagonists and make them part of the character's sentiments of joy and anguish, even their dreams, and obviously, to see through their perspective the horrors that surrounds the Overlook.

As mentioned before, the narrative of Stephen King is characterized by including some quotes or fragments from other works he had read. But the characteristic is that he mentions these works through his characters, mainly his writer-characters are influenced by those works King has read. For instance, in *The Shining* it is clear the influence Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* had. The first-time Stephen King makes a reference about this short story is the following one:

“And later, at midnight, Derwent himself crying: “Unmask! Unmask! The masks coming off and...
(*The Red Death held sway over all!*)

He frowned. What left field had that come out of? That was Poe, the Great American Hack. And surely the Overlook – this shining, glowing Overlook on the invitation he held in his hands – was the furthest cry from E. A. Poe imaginable.” (227)

Bearing this in mind, that is not the only time when King makes a clear reference to Poe's tale. During the development of the plot, the same phrases are constantly repeated in critical moments of the story. King makes an abundant use of the following expressions:

“(And the Red Death held sway over all!)

Unmask, unmask, unmask.”

Furthermore, as *The Masque of the Red Death* is settled in a masquerade, in *The Shining* there are constant references to another ‘mask party’ held in the Overlook, confirming this way the deep influence of this tale in the development of crucial events in the novel.

In the view of Lucía Solaz, American gothic works would erect their own versions of the enchanted and isolated castle in their images of an insecure civilization. She states that the main themes would be self-terror, psychic and social disorder, disintegration of families, ontological contradictions and conflicts, and a lively sense of loneliness and homelessness. Solaz continues saying that all variety of American Gothic share a common feature and that is the inclination to explore and expose the dark side of experience and its terrible moral ironies. This view of hers coincides with the narrative technique used by Stephen King in *The Shining*, because of self-terror and social disorder is present in Jack Torrance; besides the feeling of families’ disintegration due to the Torrances are no longer a close family since they have several issues; and loneliness is also characterized in Jack and Wendy.

To conclude, *The Shining* is a descent into darkness and mental illness in the inside of a hotel that appears to have a life of its own, and between whose walls lay terrible suffering and horrors.

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