Referat:

Short Stories of Edgar Allan Poe
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1 Poe

- First work of prose: Metzengerstein (1836)
- „Schauergeschichten“
  - Tales of Terror (Pit and the Pendulum)
  - Tales of Death (Masque of the red death)
  - Tales of Revenge and Murder (TTH, Black Cat, Cask of Amontillado)
- Tales of Mystery and Ratiocination

- Individual is faced with Society, different from others, experiences sorrow and pain
- Because of the pain the individual has doubts about the moral standards of society. He lives a lonely life, exposed to abnormal instincts and forces.

Poe's theory of short story:
1. Author chooses „a certain unique or single effect“
2. Author invents a development that leads to the plot

- Theory deals with the act of creation and stylistic devices. Not with the work of art itself
- Importance of the first sentence
- No turning point no surprise ending
- Characters fail because of their illness or destiny

2 Narrator/ View/ Character

2.1 Point of view

1st person narrator

- Limited perspective: we only get to know what the character does, thinks or observes
- Reader is involved directly in the action
- Reader feels like a witness
- Narrator is one of the characters of the story, often the main character
- Subjective point of view, limited knowledge
• Present or retrospect

*Advantages:*
  - Credibility
  - Intimacy
  - Reader is addressed directly from the heart

*Disadvantages:*
  - Narrators prejudices, limitations

**Omniscient narrator**
• Narrator has a certain distance

*Advantages:*
  - Unlimited scope

*Disadvantages:*
  - Loss of vividness, involvement, intimacy

### 2.2 Friedman’s Categories
• Key idea: **telling-showing distinction**
  Set of categories describes several variants of „point of view“
  The most telling → the most scenic

**Telling** (Summary narrative):
General account or report of a „series of events covering some extended period and a variety of locale“.
The „normal untutored mode of storytelling“

**Showing** (Scene):
Description of concrete detail within a specific time-place frame.
Details of time, place, action, character and dialogue

• Modes rarely occur in their pure form
• They establish the two extremes
• Most categories are mixed forms
1. **Editorial omniscience**
   - Completely unlimited point of view
   - „Authorial narration“
   - Author informs about and judges ideas and emotions of the characters, can change viewpoint
   → Direct authorial intrusions

2. **Neutral omniscience**
   - Absence of direct authorial intrusions
   - Nevertheless author can bring his own attitudes (indirectly through the characters)

3. **„I“ as a witness**
   - limited point of view (wandering periphery), disguised narrator
   - more information through conversations, letters, diaries etc.
   - guess about others feelings and opinions

4. **„I“ as protagonist**
   - directly involved in the story (fixed center)
   - less mobility and sources of information
   - limited to his thoughts, feelings and perceptions

5. **Selective/ multiple selective omniscience**

   **Selective omniscience**
   - Limited to one character
   - Scenic presentation
   - Limited to internal and external action
   - No narrator
   - Mind of someone present
   - Author chooses a person to be omniscient

   **Multiple selective omniscience**
   - Several characters
6. **Dramatic mode**
   - No mental states or perceptions
   - Information limited to what the characters do and say

7. **Camera**
   - No apparent arrangement and selection
   - „slice of life“ as it passes before the recording medium

### 2.3 Modes of presentation

1. Scenic presentation: personal narration → showing (thoughts, dialogues)
2. Panoramic presentation: authorial narration or retrospection → telling (no emotions, past imperfect indirect speech)
3. Monoperspective
4. Multiperspective: changing points of view

### 2.4 Character

- Used to tell a story, to exemplify a belief, to facilitate a particular plot development
- Acting and experiencing characters
- Flat characters (unchangeable) – round characters (changeable) [Edwin Muir]
- Creating characters by *telling* and *showing* [Percy Lubbock]
- Methods of characterization:
  - By description or report
  - By action
  - Through a thought or conversation
  - By symbols or images
- Ways to describe characters:
  a) by giving names (e.g. Hamlet)
  b) allegories / symbols
- Character roles [Propp 1928]:
  - Villain
  - Doner
  - Helper
  - The sought for person
  - Clispatcher
- Hero
- False hero

3 **Short Story**

3.1 **Origins**
- Developed in the first half of the 19th century
- Reason: Newspapers and Magazines were published
- No time for longer reading

3.2 **Characteristics**
- Rapid, fluent action
- Often a main character and his actions
- Deals with a strange incident and its consequences or starting point
- Reactions and thoughts of the characters are of major importance
- Abrupt beginning: No introduction or conclusion
- No introduction of characters

3.3 **Methods of interpretation**
1. Text
2. Summary
3. Analysis of the stylistic devices
4. Central meaning considering the stylistic devices

4 **Stories**
✓ Imaginary reality causes isolation and destruction
✓ Romantic poet deals with the of problems of modern society
✓ murder without conscience (Gewissen)
✓ Poe *doppelgänger*
4.1 *The Tell-Tale-Heart (1843)*

**Perspective/ Point of view**
- First person narrator, first person protagonist (vergl. Zeile 1)
- Perspective is limited to one person (limited point of view)
- Scenic mode of presentation (showing)
- Reader sees the events through the eyes of the murderer
- Reader has immediate impression of what the murderer thinks, feels, sees etc.
- Madman characterizes himself by what he reports and how he reports it
- No long explanations by a third person necessary
- Stream of consciousness

**Narrator**
- Lives together with the old man
- Must be insane, had a disease, believes that other people think he is mad
- Wants to demonstrate that he is normal
- Wants to appear sane, rational and clever (disease has sharpened his senses)
- Overacuteness of senses, especially of hearing (stressed in the 1st paragraph)

**Why and to whom does the narrator tell the story?**
- No specific audience, but narrator is speaking to a listener
- Second person is addressed („True!“- reaction, „you“ „Hearken!“) as if s.o. had asked him to tell the story
- Tells the story after his deed and self-betrayal
- Tells the story in order to prove that he is not insane
- We can convince that he is either in prison or lunatic asylum

**Motive for the murder**
- Loves the old man
- But: eye is the motive he wants to believe in
- Real motive is pleasure and satisfaction in killing as a display of his powers and intelligence
- Moral standards have no value
Evidence for insanity

- Overacuteness of senses
- Lack of moral standards
- Description of mortal terror and concealment of the body
- Insane laugh at the end: ha! ha!
- Motive and deed are unreasonable
- He mistakes cleverness for normality
- Perceptions are mixed with imaginations

Plot and Stylistic devices

1. Abrupt opening
2. Self-persuasion that the eye was motive for the murder
3. Seven nights of waiting (murder cannot be carried out, because the eye is closed)
4. Murder (1st climax)
5. Concealment of the body
6. Police-officers visit
7. Self-betrayel

- Comparision to a vulture: ugly
- Nights of waiting: tension rises (reader knows that the old man is going to die)
- Atmosphere is created: room is black as a pitch
- Symbol of life (heartbeat) at the moment of death
- Dismembering of the body: madman is now vulture (vulture eye=vulture I)
- Illusion: beating of the dead heart (Angstpsychose)

Central Meaning

- Psychological study of a madman’s mind
- Psychology of a murderer
- Refusal to recognize his insanity
- Projection of his inner evil onto the outside world
- Pleasure and satisfaction in killing
- Self-betrayel: world of illusions has become reality

- Contrast: statement (proof that he is not mad) ↔ counter-evidence
4.2 *The Black Cat (1843)*

- 1st person narration
  - Evil is not the consequence of madness or insanity
  - Delight in being evil (perverseness)
  - Diabolic compulsion of self-betrayal
  - Reader knows that character will die (death penalty): attention and tension is produced
  - Special trait of character: loves pets
  - Contrast Human being - Pet: unstable behavior - permanence
  - Aim of the narrator: Listing of facts, reader is about to judge
  - Alcohol triggers off violence (is not reason)
  - Again: symbolism of the eye
  - Narrator judges the deed as „damnable atrocity“ in retrospect
  - Mystic elements
  - Second Cat gets no name: remains diabolic, indefinite force
  - Secret becomes a burden

**Character:**
- Murderer, madman
- Gives reasons why he committed the crime
- Wants to „unburthen his soul“, others are about to judge
- Friend of animals
- Changing process: round character
- Direct characterization (through himself): vivid picture

**Narrator/Point of view:**
- Report (reportorial narration), personal record
- I as protagonist (fixed center)
- Limited knowledge, subjective point of view
- Disguised narrator
**Plot and story:**
- Chronological order: linear
- Plot (central idea): murder
- Action and development are based on the plot
- Story = the way the plot is realized
- Lämmert: crises story (leads to catastrophe)
- Narrated time longer than the narrating time (time is condensed)
- Retrospective: temporal, spatial and physical distance (simple past)
- Several successive stages of conflict, turning point
- Series of smaller climaxes lead to a great climax (plot)

**Comparision to Tell-Tale-Heart:**
- „although“ of Tell-Tale-Heart becomes „because“: he kills, because he loves (is aware of the sin)
- first-person narrator who committed murder
- very fragile state of mind
- both remember their crimes made in the past
- BC: diary form, direct speech only in statements
  TTH: direct speech

**4.3 The Masque of the Red Death (1842)**

**Introductory part**
- Narrator gives background information
- The first two sentences are typical for reportorial mode (condensation of material in time)
- Past tense

**Descriptive part**
- Present tense
- Feelings & thoughts of the characters
- Narrator appeals directly to the reader, refers to himself as I
- Subtle evaluation, no direct judgements
- Narrator is outside the world of characters, not harmed by the Red Death
**Characters:**

a) the prince:
- is more lifelike
- described by showing and telling through the action
- more direct, clear character
- reader does not have to guess about him

b) the red death:
- personification of a disease
- not lifelike
- described only indirectly
- untouchable, abstract, superior

- Symbol of death: Pestilence
- Symbol: Masquerade
- Symbolic meaning of colours: black = death, red = extreme horror
- No farsightedness (rooms) also figurative meaning
- Colours of the Rainbow = salvation, black room is different
- Clock: empirical world (outside) in contrast to imagination
- Personifikation of the clock: minute-hand, face, brazen lungs
- Clock reminds of the outside world
- Reality cannot be evaded
- Sight of the stranger = destiny is inevitable = death
✓ We cannot escape from destiny
✓ Typical device for Poe: atmosphere: feelings (of the characters) have optical equivalents (colours)

4.4 **The Murders in the Rue Morgue**

**Introduction:**
- „passion of the intellect“: analytic competence can only be judged by the performance and its results
- Analyst enjoys to present his ability
- Apparent Intuition is nothing but pure combination
- Game of chess: Concentration is more important than analytical abilities
• Narrator is not the hero of the story
• Narrator shares the life of the hero, but does not have the competence to solve the mystery by himself.
• Reader identifies himself with the narrator (not with the hero) and is surprised in the end
• Triumph of Ratio: terror and death are weakened
• Reality is more than a constellation of facts
• To enlighten this complexity imagination is more important than intellect

✓ Problems cannot be solved by simple observation

4.5 **The Cask of Amontillado**

• 1st person
• murder without conscience (Gewissen)
• Montresor (evil) – Fortunato
• Montresor flashes clues (emblem) > menacing irony
• Fortunato = heir of fortune: Montresor demonstrates the illegitimacy of this heir
• Emblem: Foot triumphing over the serpent > giant has blindly stepped on a snake
• Ironic bond: death embrace
• Like the original fall from grace: Fortunato thinks he knows enough to sample the apple the snake tempts him with
• Montresor = snake: Large, powerful, clumsy
• Symmetry of opposition between Montresor and Fortunato
• Fortunato represents the Poe doppelgänger

**Theory of the short story**

Poe (Plot-a definition):

“Pen should never touch paper, until at least a well digested general purpose be established”
• The effect should be definitely considered and arranged, before writing the first word
• Most stories are valueless, because the authors have no fixed design and wait for inspiration
• Original conception
• The great variety of melodious expression which is given out from the keys of a piano, might be made, in proper hands, the basis of an excellent fairy-tale. (Poe: Music & Poetry)

• The short story (From a review of Hawthorne’s *Twice Told Tales*)
• Essay: The philosophy of composition (how Poe wrote *The Raven*)
• A good story must be written “backwards” (e.g. detective story)
• A short story should attempt to convey only a single impression
• In order to be successful a work of art must be short enough to be grasped at a single sitting
• The “creation” of a story: Has Poe reconstructed the event as it actually took place or did he construct an entirely different affair?

• Two stages of composition:
  a) invention (effect is chosen): Author chooses „a certain unique or single effect“
  b) act of processing (development): Author invents a development that leads to the plot

• The first sentence must aim at the effect/plot
• Leaving out a single word or sentence would destroy the piece of art (> Aristoteles)
• Unity of effects
• Poe demands:
  - Focus
  - Atmosphere
  - Key Role of the first sentence
    No Turning-point and surprise-ending
• Symbolism
• Characters fail because of their illness or destiny