

Writing, as Mysterious as a Cat: a Critical Evaluation of Poe's the fall of the House of Usher

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Abstract—Edger Allan Poe occupies a unique place in American Literature. A master of the horror tale and the patron saint of the detective story, Poe, in his supernatural fiction, usually deals with paranoia rooted in personal psychology, physical or mental enfeeblement, obsessions, the damnation of death, feverish fantasies and the cosmos as source of horror and inspiration, without bothering himself explicitly with such supernatural beings as ghosts, werewolves or vampires. The terror infused in his works is not fantastic or 'German' but it is realistic and based on true principles of human nature and conduct.

J.J. Ingram writes of Poe – "His readers are well aware how clearly Poe's idiosyncrasies, both in his prose and in his verse, show through the transparent mask behind which his heroes are supposed to be hidden and in the 'Narrative', it is rarely that the imaginary hero is thought of otherwise than as identical with Poe himself." Like his poems Poe's tales are notably unequal. The best of his narrative work is to be found in his analytical tales, in certain stories in which he combines his analytical gift with the imaginative sensibility as in *The Fall of the House of Ushers*. In all of his short stories, he displays a skill of concentration and of construction and shows himself as a master of English style and approaches the eloquence and splendor of De Quincy.

Keywords— Gothic fiction, American Gothic Genre, Poe, Modern Psychological Fiction, Freud, Doppelganger.

I. THE NOTION OF THE GOTHIC

George Saintsbury explained Supernatural as "...Of the terror and mystery novel (the 'novel of suspense', as some call it, adopting from Scott a label doubtfully intended as such) the chief writers – almost the only ones now known, except to special students – were Mrs. Radcliff and 'Monk' Lewis. But in the eighteenth century it enjoyed an enormous popularity, secretly registered and irremediably ridiculed in Miss Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. In Lewis's hands (as it had done in those of the

Germans) it admitted real diablerie and permitted great license of situation and action; in Mrs. Radcliffe's and in most, through not quite at all, of her minor followers, it was strictly 'proper', and employed a curious, ingenious, and at the time highly realised machinery, which has been accurately enough called the 'explained supernatural'. Both these methods of applying supernatural element were revived in the sensational novels of the third quarter of the nineteenth century and sporadically since."

The gothic fiction, which is considered as a subgenre of gothic-horror first originated in the hands of the british author Horace Walpole, through his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*. Gothic novels are also considered to contain the essence of romanticism and similar atmospheric substances, which were also flourishing at the time of its origin. To be mentioned, that several romanticist author, including P.B Shelley is reknown for penning Gothic novels. The gothic fiction gained immense popularity in the Victorian era, through the everlasting works of Edgar Alan Poe, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Gothic fiction's origin also lies with the Gothic architecture, which follows the patterns of pseudo-medieval buildings, and also which are recurring backdrop of Gothic fiction. Gothich novels also produced several more subgenre, such as German Schauerroman and the French Georgia.

When Horace Walpole first attempted to pen down *Castle of Otranto*, his primary aim was to create an intricate and experimental fusion of mediaeval romanticism and modern novel. This unexpectedly gave birth to the Gothic fiction. The novel contained many of the original gothic clichés, such as ancestral curse, labyrinthal passages, chilling plot and a weak hearted heroine.

Ann Radcliffe was one of the most prominent gothic authors of its early stages, along with being a significant Victorian female author. She was the first one to give birth to the much used literary device of the "Byronic Hero". She is also well known for using the method of explained supernatural, in which every supernatural occurrence can be traced back to a natural explanation.

Her work *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is considered an all-time best gothic novel.

Clara Reeve, another remarkable authoress of that time is well known for her work *The Old English Baron* (1778). She skillfully adapted Walpole's plot, and applied it according to the demands of the modern times, with added pinch of fantasy and realism.

Through the passageway created by authors such as François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil, Baculard d'Arnaud and Madame de Genlis, the gothic novel appeared in France as the Roman Noir or the Black novel. While in Germany it took the form of Schauerroman or shudder novel, debuting through the works like *The Ghost-Seer* (1789) by Friedrich Schiller, and like *Das Petermännchen* (1791/92) by Christian Heinrich Spiess.

Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* first provided with a continental perception of the proliferation of gothic fiction throughout Europe. The novel bleakly incorporated the elements of sadistic inquisitors, corrupted monks and spectral nuns.

Marquis de Sade can also be considered as a significant figure in the overall growth of Gothic fiction throughout Europe. He implied and incorporated, perhaps subconsciously and unintentionally some of the gothic infrastructure in his works like *The Misfortunes of Virtue* and *Eugenie de Franval*.

In Germany, Gothic fiction flourished as Schauerroman (shudder novel), quite interesting while evolving and getting popular throughout Germany, it frequently shared, interchanged and mutated its elements with other subgenres such as, *Gespensterroman* or *Geisterroman* (ghost novel), *Räuberroman* (robber novel), and *Ritterroman* (chivalry novel). Though the term Schauerroman is considered as the German Gothic fiction, however it can be evaluated as partially true, as there are some original and unique traits of Schauerroman, which differs it from a conventional English Gothic fiction. Some of the fundamental differing traits of Schauerroman are the existence of secret societies, practices of dark arts and necromancy, and a much gloomy and pessimistic plot. Some successfully early German gothic works are, Karl Grosse's *Horrid Mysteries* (1791–1794), Christian Heinrich Spiess' *Das Petermännchen* (1793), *Der alte Überall* and *Nirgends* (1792), *Die Löwenritter* (1794), Hans Heiling, *vierter und letzter Regent der Erd- Luft- Feuer- und Wasser-Geister* (1798), Friedrich von Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (1786–1789), Heinrich von Kleist's *Das Bettelweib von Locarno* (1797), Ludwig Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* (1797) and *Der Runenberg* (1804), Christian August Vulpius's *Rinaldo Rinaldini, the Robber Captain* (1797). While some of the prominent German female gothic writers'

works were, Sophie Albrecht's *Das höfliche Gespenst* (1797), *Graumännchen oder die Burg Rabenbühl: eine Geistergeschichte altteutschen Ursprungs* (1799).

In the later years, E. T. A. Hoffmann rose to fame with his novel *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815), which was richly influenced by *The Monk*, and at the same time plays with the device of doppelgänger. Few other considerably influential Gothic fiction authors of this era are, Jean Paul (Siebenkäs), Adelbert von Chamisso (*Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, 1814), Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff (*The Marble Statue*, 1819), Ludwig Achim von Arnim (*Die Majoratsherren*, 1819), Wilhelm Meinhold (*The Amber Witch*, 1838 and *Sidonia von Bork*, 1847), Jeremias Gotthelf (*Black Spider* 1842), Theodor Storm (*The Rider on the White Horse*, 1888).

Russia, another major country of overall literary evolution have also seen the influence of Gothic Fiction, however not until very recently was it gained the term 'gothic', instead it remained in latent form for a long time. The earliest works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky might be labelled as 'Gothic'. However most critics prefer to use terms such 'romanticism' or 'fantastique' instead of naming it Gothic. Nikolay Mikhailovich Karamzin could be the first Russian author to be considered the pioneer of Russian Gothic fiction. His novel which poses all the qualities of Gothicism, is *Ostrov Borngolm* (1793). The remarkable Russian author who practiced in this genre is, Nikolay Ivanovich Gnedich, with his novel *Don Corrado de Gerra*, (1803)

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol is perhaps the only important author during the transition who has explored the gothic vividly. His collection of gothic stories is titled *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1831–1832). Other contemporary authors include Count Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy, Yevgeny Baratynsky, Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoevsky, Mikhail Zagoskin and Józef Sękowski/Osip Senkovsky (*Antar*). Few remarkable later years authors include Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, Grigory Petrovich Danilevsky, Grigori Alexandrovich Machtet.

It is well known that many notable romantic poets, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote gothic fictions or experimented with it. However the greatest landmark of this genre might be Edgar Allan Poe. His works less played with the physical manifestation, instead it fixated onto the soul. In his own words, "the terror of the soul". His outstanding work, *The Fall of the House of Usher* explores this internal horror with the applications of classical gothic traits, such as, insanity, death and aristocratic degeneration.

However the portrayal of a complex Byronic hero is more evident in the works of the Brontë sisters, rather than of

Poe's. In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) the appearance of the demonic protagonist Heathcliff, along with surrealistic apparitions probes the psychological depth. At the same time it also explores the boundaries and rebel of feminism through its women characters. Elizabeth Gaskell is among other women author of the era who includes the traditional elements of ancestral curse and sin in her works like *The Doom of the Griffiths*, (1858) *Lois the Witch*, *The Grey Woman*.

The Gothic novel, then, is a specialised form of the historical romance, a form of fantasy about past history and alien cultures which has a meaning for its present audience through a variety of cultural and political reflexes. Its hallmark is a deliberate archaism. While gothic connote any of a wide range of overlapping senses: horrid, barbarous, superstitious, Tudor, Druid, English, German, and even Oriental. Its most obvious reading for a modern reader is perhaps 'anti-classical' or 'medieval', and this is how Bishop Hurd uses it in his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance of 1762*, in which he defends the taste for the labyrinthine form of 'Gothic' (i.e. Tudor) organisation in everything from landscape gardening to wandering narrative of Spenserian romance.

Gothic tales initially, had a predominant disposition to infuse their readers with an element of terror which however changed with the gradual onset of modernity and Freud's theory of psychoanalysis as the once gloomy castles with its meandering labyrinth of corridors of the Gothic novels gradually came to signify the darker region of the human psyche.

II. MODERN PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO GOTHIC NOVELS

While in the 19th century, Freud's essay *The Uncanny* (1919) heralds a new and essentially modern line of thought, which has had an enormous influence of critical approaches to the Gothic novel. Freud analyses Hoffman's famous story *The Sandman*, rejecting the idea that horror is connected to what he calls 'intellectual uncertainty'. Instead he introduces the notion that the whole structure and mood of horror fiction is a projection, in heavily codified form, of deeply instinctual drives in the unconscious mind. He accounts for the recurrent motifs of this kind of fiction by seeing them, not as a literary devices, but as a projection of what he calls 'repetitions and compulsions' – the primary activity of the pleasure principle which drives us compulsively to repeat experiences which we find pleasurable – acting here in repressed, inverted form. Thus the traditional idea of the 'explained supernatural', in Freud's argument becomes part of the mechanism of evasion and repression, by the conscious mind, of the instinctual drives of the unconscious. The whole shape of this kind of fiction for

author and reader alike becomes, in Freud's view, a distorted projection of desire for the womb, the ultimate target of the unconscious.

Apart from medieval exploration, and Freud's modern interpretations, the most interesting and important recent works on the Gothic has been feminist. The pioneer essay in the 1970s by the Ellen Moers, *Female Gothic* sparked off a new approach to the genre, and this is directly taken up in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's piece, *Horror's Twin* on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Here the literariness of the Gothic is given a new twist and development. The Freudian allegory of the 'family romance', the primal, oedipal reaction of the children against the father, is imported into the perception of literary tradition. The authors argue, after Harold Bloom in his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, That *Frankenstein* is an allegorical exorcism of Mary Shelley's literary patriarch, Milton. It is a fictionalized rendition of the meaning to women of the myth of *Paradise Lost*. The authors' theme is bibilogenesis – the book, they argue, is a displaced 'birth myth' in which the monster, by inversion, is Eve. The point to a reduplication in the language of the text of all the roles from the biblical story of *Genesis*, which Milton himself had rewritten. As Marquis de Sade remarks in *The Fruit of Revolutionary Tremors*, "...Man is subject to two weaknesses which cling to his existence, and give it its character. Universally he must pray, universally he must love; and in this lies the essence of all novels – they are either produced in order to depict those beings whom he has worshipped of to celebrate those whom he has loved. The former, motivated by terror or hope, ought to be somber, gigantic, full of lies and fictions, such as were composed by Esdras at the time of Babylon's thrall : the latter filled with delicacy and sentiment, such as those of Theagenes and Chariclea by Heliodorus. But since man has prayed and since he has loved , everywhere , at any given point on this habitable globe, it follows that there will be novels, that is works of fiction, which as often as they portray the mythical objects of his worship, celebrate those more real ones of his love..."

The juxtaposition of opposing elements are one of the basic foundational architecture provides the gothic its fundamental horror. This particular mechanism is known as 'The Notion of Double' or 'der Doppelgenger'. It has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank. He has gone into the connections the 'double' has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the astonishing evolution of this idea. For the 'double' was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death', as Rank says; and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first

'double' of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling multiplication of the general symbol; the same desire spurred on the ancient Egyptians to the art of making images of the dead in some lasting material. Such ideas, however have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind the double takes on a different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death.

The idea of the 'double' does not necessarily disappear with the passing of the primary narcissism, it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of development of the ego. On the development of monstrous ego, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar remarks with the reference of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, "...Shelley ended up telling, too, the central story of *Paradise Lost*, the tale of 'what misery the' inabstinence of Eve/Shall bring on men'... no ordinary nineteen year-old but one of England's most notable literary heiresses... and the the wife of a third,...wife of some of Milton's keenest critics...about the family romance of English literature is simply an accurate description of the reality of her life... *Frankenstein* 'is an instance of genius observed and admired but not shared...the terms of *Paradise Lost*, which (as she indicates even on the title page of her novel), she saw as preceding, paralleling and commenting upon the Greek cosmogony of the *Prometheus* play, her husband had just translated...is its author's use of an unusually evidentiary technique for conveying the stories of her monster and his maker... consists of three 'concentric circles' of narration...the novel's literary structure prepares us to confront Milton's patriarchal epic, both as a sort of research problem and as the framework for a complex system of allusions... 'I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of world never before visited'... 'Whence did I come?'... the monster reports wondering, describing endless speculations cast in Miltonic terms...*Frankenstein* answers such neo-Miltonic questions mainly through explicit or implicit allusions to Milton...Promethean over-reachers."

Frankenstein, the first edition was published in 1818. In this masterpiece by Mary Shelley she elaborates the significance of *Frankenstein's* self-absorption primarily in terms of his social relationships. Although liberating the monster allows *Frankenstein* to see that personal fulfillment results from self-denial rather than from self assertion.

III. THE GENRE OF AMERICAN GOTHIC ROMANCES

American and British gothic Romances, despite both being the subgenres of Gothic Fiction, share a few individual traits. As Allan Lloyd Smith remarks, "The inability of many Gothic characters to overcome perversity by rational thought is quintessential American Gothic." (Allan Lloyd Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* pp. 65–69).

While British Gothic romances follow a more physical exploration, often taking place in somber ancient castles, American Gothic romances provide more of a psychological approach, particularly in the hands of Edgar Allan Poe. The fundamental elements include cognitive conflicts, guilt, Puritanism, ab-humans, Das Unheimliche or alienation within the familiar as defined by Sigmund Freud, ghosts, monsters, and domestic abjection. Most of these concepts stemmed from xenophobia. Like Allan Lloyd Smith comments, "The emergence of the "ab-human" in American gothic fiction was closely coupled with Darwinism." Hence the backdrop of American Gothic novels are often transferred from medieval castles to labyrinthine caves. A good instance of which can be Edgar Huntly, or *Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* by Charles Brockden Brown. In the very beginning of the novel, Brown heralds his rebel against the conventional methods of Gothic structures. In the preface, Brown remarks that he will not put into use the same crafts as previous authors applied to create the Gothic feel. In his own words, he will not use "puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras."

However, the origin of American Gothic Fiction not just lies in following the European Literary trend, but also certain socio-historical events stimulated the mutation of Gothic Romanticism. Such as the Native-American conflicts and genocide, or the slave trade. Like Leslie Fiedler stated that the proper subject of American Gothic is slavery. It becomes more evident in Robert K. Martin's words, "...behind the gothic machinery of Poe's *The Black Cat* – with its graphic and "damnable atrocities," its "perverseness", its murdered corpse. "clotted with gore" – are resounding echoes of antebellum slavery discourses, allusions which allow the story to be read not only as an examination of the narrator's purported "peculiarity character" but also as an investigation into peculiar psychopolitics of the master/slave relationship, a bond whose sentimentalized image was at the heart of the South's proslavery rhetoric.

In early era of Gothic one can notice abuse or oppression on women or children, this particular misogynistic narrative have always remained a organic part of Poe's works. Gothic romanticism had always been a valiant

medium to echo the voices of the repressed "others". The reflection of all this notions can be found in Poe's *The Black Cat* if interpreted through its symbolic significances. Similar to the British Gothic Literature, the American Gothic Literature also illustrate the anxiety of the middle class from aristocratic oppression, the class fears and the socio-political tension as the unstable political regime of the infantile democracy transcends through metamorphosis. However the lack of solid foundation by the American authors was often faced with criticism. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in the preface of the *The Marble Faun* refers to the "poverty of materials in America by elaborating a catalogue of missing items like no shadow, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity." [Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, New American Library, 1961]

The thematic elements of Early American Gothic fictions were dealt with wilderness anxiety and the Puritanical society. A good instance of which could be *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Washington Irving. As Terrence Martin states, "Irving's depictions of regional culture and his themes of progress versus tradition, supernatural intervention in the commonplace, and the plight of the individual outsider in an homogeneous community permeate both stories and helped to develop a unique sense of American cultural and existential selfhood during the early nineteenth century." [Martin, Terence (1953). "Rip, Ichabod, and the American Imagination". *American Literature* .]

Apart from these authors, one of the most significant one who contributed to the growth of American Gothic Fiction, is H.P. Lovecraft. Stephen King called him as, "the twentieth century's greatest practitioner of the classic horror tale." [Wohleber, Curt (December 1995). "The Man Who Can Scare Stephen King". *American Heritage* . 46 (8). Retrieved September 10, 2013.] Died in 1937 bereft of money or any recognition, Lovecraft rose to fame posthumously. The sheer popularity and influence of his works manifested Lovecraftian Horror as a subgenre. His particular unique style roam around the insignificance of human existence, extraterrestrial interference and sub-humans or monsters. The themes and plot wrecks havoc on the supposed sanity of the protagonist. To shed more light upon this in Lovecraft's own words, "Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form—and the local human passions and conditions and standards—are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget

that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities. These must be handled with unsparing realism, (not catch-penny romanticism) but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown—the shadow-haunted Outside—we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold." [H. P. Lovecraft Letter to Farnsworth Wright (July 27, 1927), in *Selected Letters 1925–1929* (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1968), p.150]

Gothic and romantic intricately interrelated and at times consist of the similar nature and elements; Gothic as well as Romanticism are a consequential transition from neoclassical philosophy of rationality, to romantic belief in passion and imagination. Both centers around the human individual. American Gothic was born in the land of optimism, in the country streamed with eternal vision of future. As Eric Savoy observed, this trend had its root embedded in the past of America. At the same time it reflected the nightmare was veiled under the "American dream". In the American Gothic the spirit of the past never sleep and constantly haunt the present.

The Transcendentalists were assured of the fact that perfection was innate characteristics of mankind. However the Gothic Romantics believed something entirely contrasting to that. They held the belief that evil and good existed in equal proportion within human individuals, also they are prone to sin and ouroboral destruction, and not so imbued with sanctity. Hence they took it as a duty to remind the fact. American Gothic explored its premise with presenting horrible deeds of human beings, and inner dilemma of guilt, immortality and insanity.

In spite of the fact that Gothic Romantics and Romantics witnessed in seeing nature as profound spiritual entity, however for Gothic Romantics, the natural world was filled with gloom, decaying and haunted. Like mentioned before Transcendentalism observed everything under bright daylight while Gothicism did it under the misty darkness of forest gloom - Transcendentalist noticed the paradise but Gothic made us travel through the seven layers of Dante's *Inferno*. Eventually, Transcendentalism believed in human goodness will remain till the end. But Gothic Romanticism attempted to project the human flaws.

Romantic authors bestowed their faith upon some celestial order, Gothic writers instead of providing any clear or particular answer leaves the reader in a paradoxical maze, forcing him to confront the moral and emotional ambiguity. As G.R. Thompson states in *Introduction: Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition*;

"Fallen man's inability fully to comprehend haunting reminders of another, supernatural realm that yet seemed not to exist, the constant perplexity of inexplicable and vastly metaphysical phenomena, a propensity for seemingly perverse or evil moral choices that had no firm or fixed measure or rule, and a sense of nameless guilt combined with a suspicion the external world was a delusive projection of the mind--these were major elements in the vision of man the Dark Romantics opposed to the mainstream of Romantic thought."

IV. POE AS A WRITER OF GOTHIC ROMANCES

Edgar Allan Poe was already a flourishing prodigal poet at the tender age of thirteen. Poe published his first book while staying in Boston, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, (1827). Poe published his second books *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* in 1829. While living in Baltimore, struggling with poverty, he kept writing short stories. His only complete novel was published in 1938, titled *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Poe published *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in 1830, which contained some of his everlasting gothic-horror works, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher, William Wilson, Ligeia* etc. His suspense thriller *The Gold Bug* made him win the literary prize in 1843

Poe's stature as a major figure in world literature is based in large part on his ingenious short stories and critical theories, which established highly influential models for the short form in both fiction and poetry. Regarded by literary historians as architect of the modern short story, Poe is credited with the invention of several popular genres: the modern horror tale, science fiction tale, and the detective story. Twentieth century scholars have discerned in such well-known short stories as *The Fall of the House of Usher* a seminal contribution to the development of various modern literary themes, including the alienation of the self and the nature of the subconscious. The critic Allen Tate has even identified the tormented Roderick Usher as a prototype for the self-conscious hero in modern fiction. Although nineteenth century critics generally failed to recognize the full extent of Poe's contribution to the form, he is now acclaimed one of literature's most original and influential practitioners of short story.

However it could be stated that Edgar Allan Poe nurtured and matured American Gothic Fiction as a proper Victorian genre for his writings have a more prominent disposition towards a psychological approach rather than the fictional. Like D.H. Lawrence stated in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1924), "He was an adventurer into the vaults and cellars and horrible

underground passages of the human soul. He sounded the horror and the warning of his own doom."

The basic elements in all of his gothic works deal with death, decay, supernatural and insanity, while the obnoxious events take place somewhere far from civilization, in some surrealistic plane. All of these elements are vividly visible in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In which Poe never provides a direct hint, but educates readers with a passive psychoanalytical implication in a first person narrative, which enhances the observation of the readers and consequently make them aware of the crime and horror.

Poe follows the method of unknown suspense in his works. He creates a consequential chain of interrelated events, and amidst the labyrinth of narration the author had weaved, one finds the reader and the narrator in similar situation. Like Chunyan Sun states, "... half an understanding. The reader experienced these mysterious events through the narrator's feelings. "What's that?" was the common question to the reader when facing this kind of suspense. To the readers, the more they reason according to common sense, the more confused they get. Poe was particularly good at this. The vision-like suspense in his works is impressive. Unlike other writers, Poe never gave the readers a definite answer to his suspense. Most of the time, he didn't give us the answer, which gave his works a lot of space for explanation; so ideas on the understanding of Poe's works vary from person to person, which also made his works mysterious. And reading Poe's works is a great pleasure to most of the readers. Poe liked to design in his novels."

Poe's works, although pregnant with atheistic values, projects a world devoid of Christian teachings. He depicts a state where God has been transformed into something of materialistic value. Like Dorothy Z. Baker states "Poe's short fiction expresses his rejection of the theory of divine providence that enabled authors such as Cotton Mather to create history and story from events that occurred in colonial New England. In the absence of a belief in divine order and divine intervention, Poe is, correspondingly, unable to achieve the coherence of plot and the tight, definitive closure of the earlier providence tales". Poe was also quite aware of the nihilistic futility of life; hence his stories cast a sorrowful atmosphere; but it often has been considered that it was a reflection of his own life.

The grotesque psychoanalysis present in his works help high values in the hand of French symbolists. Lawrence applauded the psychological enigma of Poe's works. He remarked that Poe well dissected the modern psychological breakdowns, at the same time he staged a paradoxical yet well balanced love-hate relationship of

over-indulgence. The morbid symbolism of Poe was also well praised by Eliot.

**V. THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER
AS A MATERIALISATION OF
THE GENRE OF AMERICAN
GOTHIC FICTION**

The Fall of the House of Usher is known for its remarkable structure, in which major themes emerge through an elaborate network of repeated images. The prominent theme of duality is expressed primarily in several parallel structures, including the symbiotic bond between Roderick and his sister Madeline. The theme also appears in the opening image of mansion reflected in a dark tarn, as well as in the metaphor of a mind infected with madness, suggested by Roderick's poem *The Haunted Palace*. Also while Roderick's declining mental condition is echoed in the crumbling house, overgrown with parasitic plants and wrapped in a sort of unpleasant swamp gas. The fissure which finally destroys the Usher Mansion literally brings the theme of dualism to a crashing climax. Roderick's extreme sensitivity to Romantic literature and his inordinate desire to preserve Madeline's corpse hint at other important themes, those of decadence and decay. Thus, Poe presents Roderick as a tragic aesthetic, who, though completely alienated from mundane reality, succeeds on arousing pathos in the reader. As more than one critic has observed, the fall of the house of Usher describe the decline of an incestuous, decaying family, with all of its psychological implications, as well as an actual, if improbable, physical event.

It is useless to ask for a perpetual spring and summer. Poe had to lead on to that winter crisis when the soul is, as it were, deluded of itself, reduced back to the elemental state of a naked, arrested tree in midwinter. Man must be stripped of himself. And the process is slow and bitter and beautiful, too. But the beauty has its spark in anguish; it is the strange, expiring cry, the phosphorescence of decay. Poe is a man writhing in the mystery of his own undoing. He is a great dead soul, progressing terribly down the long process of postmortem activity in disintegration. This is how the dead bury their dead. This is how man must bury his own dead self: in pang after pang of vital, explosive self-education, back to the elements. This is how the seed must fall into the ground and perish before it can bring forth new life. For Poe the process was one of perishing in the old body, the old psyche, the old self. He leads us back, through pang after pang of disintegrative sensation, back towards the end of all things. Yet Poe is hardly an artist. He is rather a supreme scientist. Art displays the movements of pristine self, the

living conjunction or communion between the self and its context. Even in tragedy self meets self in supreme conjunction, a communion of passionate or creative death. The motto to *The Fall of the House of Usher* is a couple of lines from De Béranger.

Son coeur est un luth suspendu;
Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.

The brother and sister loved each other passionately and exclusively. They were twins, almost identical in looks. It was the same absorbing love between them, where human creatures are absorbed away from themselves, into a unification in death. So Madeline was gradually absorbed into her brother; the one life absorbed the other in a long anguish of love.

It is lurid and melodramatic, but it really is symbolic truth of what happens in the last stages of this inordinate love, which can recognize none of the sacred mystery of otherness, but must unite into the unspeakable identification, oneness in death. Brother and sister go down together, made one in the unspeakable mystery of death. It is the world long incest problem, arising inevitably when man, through instance of his will in one passion or aspiration, breaks the polarity of himself.

The best tales all have the same burden. Hate is as inordinate as love, and is slowly consuming, as secret, as underground, as subtle. All this underground vault business in Poe only symbolizes in which beneath consciousness. On top, all is fair-spoken. Beneath, there awful murderous extremity of burying alive. Fortunato, in *The Cask of Amontillado*, is buried alive out of perfect hatred, as the Lady Madeline of Usher is buried alive out of love. The lust of hate is the inordinate desire to consume and unspeakably possess the soul of hatred one, just as the love of is the desire to possess, or to be possessed by, beloved, utterly. But in either case the result is dissolution of both souls, each losing itself in transgressing its own bounds.

Roderick Usher is himself a symbol – of isolation, and of concentration of vitality so introverted that that it utterly destroys itself. He is physically isolated. The narrator reaches the House of Usher after a whole day's journey "through a singularly dreary tract of country" that is recognizably the same sort of domain-beyond-reality as that traversed by Childe Roland and his medieval prototype. Arrived at the mansion, he is conducted to Usher's studio "through many dark and intricate passages"

The Fall of the House of Usher is perhaps not Poe's best work, but it has significant features, which ought to illuminate some of the later, more mature work in the naturalist-symbolic technique of Flaubert, Joyce and James. Poe's insistence upon the unity of effect, from first word to last, in the famous review of Hawthorne's *Twice-*

Told Tales, anticipates from one point of view the high claims of James in his Essay The Art of Fiction

Roderick Usher is a "Gothic" character taken seriously; that is to say, Poe takes the Gothic setting, with all his machinery and décor, and the preposterous Gothic hero, and transforms them into the material of serious literary art. Usher becomes the prototype of Joycean and Jamsian hero who cannot function in the ordinary world. He has two characteristics traits of this later fictional hero of our own time. First he is afflicted with the split personality of the manic depressive.

Secondly, certain musical sounds (for some unmusical reason Poe selects the notes of the guitar) are alone tolerable to him: "He suffered from a morbid acuteness of the sense." He cannot live in the real world; he is constantly exacerbated. At the same time he "has a passionate devotion to intricacies... of musical science"; and his paintings are "pure abstractions" which have "an intensity of intolerable awe."

Usher's "want of moral energy," along with hypertrophy of sensibility and intellect in split personality, places him in the ancestry of Gabriel Conroy, Stephen Daedalus, John Marcher, J. Alfred Prufrock, Mrs. Dalloway – a forebear of whose somewhat showy accessories they might well be a little ashamed; or they might enjoy a degree of moral complacency in contemplating their own luck in having had greater literary artists than Poe presents them to us in a more credible imaginative reality. The powerful description of the façade of the House of Usher, as the narrator approaches it, sets up unity of tone, but the description is never woven into the action of the story: the "metaphysical" identity of scene and character reaches our consciousness through lyrical assertion. The fissure in the wall of the house remains an inert symbol of Usher's split personality.

The House of Usher, like many edifices in Poe, in a state of extreme decay. Such is the case also with the "time eaten towers that tremble not" in Poe's poem "The City in the Sea"; and likewise the magnificent architecture of "The Domain of Arheim" is said to sustain itself by a miracle in mid-air.

The Fall of the House of Usher is a journey into the depths of the self. The Fall of the House of Usher as a dream of the narrator's in which he leaves behind him the waking physical world and journeys inward toward his moi interieur, toward his inner spiritual self. The inner and spiritual self is Roderick Usher.

Roderick Usher, then, is a part of the narrator's self, which the narrator reaches by the way of reverie. We may think of Usher, if we like, as the narrator's imagination, or as his visionary soul.

The hypnagogic state, about which there is strangely little said in the literature of psychology, is a condition of semi-

consciousness in which the closed eye beholds a continuous procession of vivid and constantly changing forms. These forms sometimes have color, and are often abstract in character. Poe regarded the hypnagogic state as the visionary condition per excellence, and he considered its rapidly shifting abstract images to be – as he put it- "glimpses of the spirit's outer world."

Roderick Usher stands for the hypnagogic state, which as Poe said is a teetering condition of mind occurring "upon the very brink of sleep." Since Roderick is the embodiment of a state of mind which falling – falling asleep – is imminent, it is appropriate that the building which symbolizes his mind should promise at every moment to fall.

The dreaming soul, then has its own light- a light more spiritual, more divine, than that of the sun. And Poe's chamber of dream is autonomous in every other respect. No breath of air enters it from the outside world: either its atmosphere is dead, or its draperies are stirred by magical and intramural air-currents. No earthly sound invades the chamber: either it is deadly still, or echoes with source less and unearthly music. Nor does any odor of flower or field intrude: instead, as Poe tells in The Assigination, the sense of smell is "oppressed by mingled and conflicting perfumes, reeking up from strange convolute censor."

The point of all this is that the dreaming psyche separates itself wolly from the bodily senses - the "rudimental senses," as Poe called them. The bodily senses are dependent on objective stimuli - on the lights and sounds and odors of the physical world. But the sensuous life of dream is self-sufficient and immaterial, and consists in the imagination's Godlike enjoyment of its own creations.

The typical Poe story occurs within the mind of a poet; and its characters are not independent personalities, but allegorical figures representing the warring principles of the poet's divided nature.

The narrator of The Fall of the House of Usher has a "noticing" eye which, clearly in defiance of his conscious intention to enlighten and demystify, weaves a pattern of surrealistic detail that contradicts any common-sense view od reality. What he sees, without apparently being fully aware of it, is a barely definable similarity between the house and its master.

In Heart of Darkness (1898-99), Joseph Conrad's first narrator comments on the conception of the meaning of narrative held by Marlow, who is himself the narrator of the basic tale of his pursuit of psychological double Kurtz, and to whom Conrad's first narrator listens as one sitting in darkness waiting for light. The first narrator comments that Marlow, unlike other tale-spinning sailors, saw the significance of a narrative not as a core meaning of some kind but as a system of structures: "the yearns of seaman

have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. [But to Marlow] the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out haze, in the likeness of one of those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine." So it is with Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), a tale that bears a number of similarities in theme, imagery, and structure to *The Heart of Darkness*. Poe's tale is a structure of interpreting structures that shifts its aspect with slight shift of perspective by the reader. Given the initial focus of a reader, the primary answer to any question presented by the story varies, though the relationships among the various structures of the story do not.

The Fall of the House of Usher is a tale of the protagonist's journey into the darkest and most hidden regions of his own self and the fearful tableau therein enacted is a fable of his destiny fetched up from the region of his deepest and most archaic dreams.

The story begins by setting up at the thesaurus of Goth clichés – the lonely wanderer, the dreary landscape, the decaying castle, the reflecting tarn. Inside the House of Usher, the weird inmates – the demented genius of art and his sickly, spectral sister; the strange affinity between these spooks and their creepy house; the incestuous attachment. So strongly hinted between them; their premature burial; the ghostly congruence between his music, painting, poem and the snatch of a wild romance read by the narrator and the actions – the irrevocably doomed actions – which overtake the hapless personages in their haunted house establish a dazzling, garish and intricately consistent pattern of concentric meanings.

Poe adopts the impressionistic mode of writing in the story. Reality, regarding the Ushers siblings, is presented by a filtered impression of the narrator himself. The protagonist is held back from appearing in the text and in the meantime the narrator's hypothetical assumptions render ambiguities to Roderick's personality. The House of Usher is given a metaphorical dimension by the preponderant use of emotional attributes. The narrator records a series of emotional effect that the house exerts upon his mind – "a sense of insufferable gloom". "Shadowy fancies, sorrowful impression." -such excess of emotional repercussion destabilize the reader's position as to the truth value or validity of the details the narrator furnish with.

Much of the story works on a symbolic level. The House of Usher becomes more than a mere structure; it reflects the mental health of the neurotic Roderick Usher and Lady Madeline and takes on a profound and intricate metaphorical implication of the self. The crack on the

wall of the house which is discernible in the moonlight, signifies the psychological erosion in the relationship between the brother and the sister as well as an "irreconcilable fracture in the individual's personality".

The introductory scene introduces a solitary rider approaching the House of Usher. The climax of the scene is reached when the rider brings his horse at the brink of "a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by dwelling" and experience a shudder more thrilling than before" as he sees in the silent black waters "inverted images of the grey sedge and the ghastly tree stems and the vacant and eye like windows." Although the gloom of this scene undoubtedly prepares the reader for the melancholy happenings at the house, the black tarn is not simply part of an elaborate gothic décor – it is associated with imagery of desolation and decay.

Besides having a fascination for the weird and the spectral; for also interested in the concept of the double, the schizophrenic and the ironic. An investigation of these phenomena is carried out several stories including *William Wilson*. There is a special importance attached to the fact that Roderick Usher and Lady Madeline are twins. Poe creates in this story his conception of a special affinity between a brother and his twin sister. Roderick represents the mind or the intellect, while the portion of personality that is referred to as the sense – hearing, seeing, touching and smelling – is represented by Madeline. A reversal of roles is also suggestive in the concept of twins. It is Usher who seems to represent the weak, the over sensitive, the over delicate and the feminine. In contrast Lady Madeline possesses a super human will to live and is an embodiment of a masculine force who survives after buried alive and is able, by using almost supernatural strength, to force her way out and escape from her entombment in the results and then despite being drained of strength, as evidenced by the blood on the shroud, she is able to find her brother and fall upon him.

The twins may also be seen as two aspects of one personality. The final embrace, in this case, becomes the unifying of two divergent aspects into one whole being at birth; birth which is considered by Romantics as being a breaking away from supernatural beauty. Thus the narrative exploits to a great degree the use of symbols and through them conveys the open ended meaning to the readers. The psychological states are projected through the figures presentation of the external forces.

The unity of design and the unity of atmosphere lends the story its compact narrative structure. In terms of the plot, the setting is in the past. An urgent letter from Usher to his only childhood friend, the narrator, implores the latter to visit the House of Usher "post haste". The sense of the

double or the ironic reversal is set up when the House is reflected in the waters of the “black and lurid” tarn.

The language of the story almost erases the margin between poetic expression and the prosaic tongue. The use of metaphors and rhetoric devices such as personification lends poetic language. The author uses the device of estrangement to defamiliarise the familiar things and add strangeness to them. In doing this, Poe, anticipates his romantic sensibilities.

What is more surprising is what happens to the narrator after Madeline’s entombment. His earlier detached and rational attitude disappears and his mind begins to submit to the power of Roderick’s mad fantasies –

“I felt creeping upon me by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influence of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions.”

What happens to the narrator after his death is not altogether unprepared for earlier in the tale, for despite his façade of rationalism, he has shown signs of an imaginative and highly impressionable mind. On the night of the catastrophe, the narrator experiences that same depression and terror which had oppressed Roderick Usher throughout the tale and it becomes obvious that his mental balance is being disturbed by his environment and by Roderick. When he comes to his room, the narrator is in a state of extreme terror, which is an extension of Roderick’s own condition.

These facts about the narrator bring up scruples in our own mind regarding the authenticity of the narrator’s descriptions. In this, the story anticipates modernism. The analysis of the two neurotic victims or psychopaths by the employment of various symbols give the tale its modernist character.

An element of resonance has been subtly imbued in the tale. This is highlighted on the fatal night – a few moments before the actual fall of the House of Usher takes place. The narrator begins reading out from an antique volume entitled *Mad Trist* by Sir Lancelot Canning to a visibly shaken Roderick Usher. When he comes to the section where the hero forces his way into the hermits dwelling, the narrator recounts that it “appeared” to him “that from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came indistinctly to his ears, “what might have been in its exact similarity of character ... the very cracking and ripping sound”. The piercing shriek of the dying dragon is paralleled with the “low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted and most unusual screaming or grating sound. “The distant “hollow, metallic and clangorous, yet apparently muffled” sound is an exact counterpart of that described in the novel.

Madeline’s return from the tomb has been accepted as a literal fact by Poe’s critics, though most of them have avoided committing themselves on the problem of exactly

how Madeline achieves her resurrection. It is a tribute to Poe’s skill as a writer that he has created through the narratorial figure a situation which appears as real to most of his readers as it does to the narrator and Roderick Usher, but this does not mean that Poe intended Madeline’s reappearance to have any reality outside the deranged minds of the two protagonists in the tale. In a letter to James Russell Lowell, Poe said that he considered the *Fall of the House of Usher* to be his finest production and this being so, it is unlikely that he would have compromised. The purpose of the tale is to explore mental derangement rather than to present an elaborate Gothic horror story and the terror it contains is psychological, not ‘German’.

The Fall of the House of Usher is Poe’s aesthetic Gothic-Romantic achievement. He produces different kinds of beauties: the beauty of horror, the beauty of love, and the beauty of death and despair. This pursuit of Romanticism marks the novel as an apt adaptation of Goth-romanticism. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, elements such as atmospheric creation, character portrayal, symbolism etc provide the creation of Gothic horror which enlightens the readers with Romantic sublimity. Kevin J. Hayes, remarks, “the word ‘aesthetic’ and its cognates have clung to the name of Edgar Allan Poe.” This statement perhaps rightfully sums up the infrastructural composition of *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Aesthetical Romanticism reflecting beauty of horror is well manifested in Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

VI. THE GOTHIC ROMANCE AS A PRECURSOR TO THE MODERN PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

The Gothic and Modernism movement of English literature initiated within a short gap of time, however the latter had immense influence on the second one. Gothic as a sensual genre with profound psychoanalysis of human mind bore similarities with Modernism texts. The *fin de siècle* of the 18th century as well as the Victorian Era, can be marked as the transcendental movement and metamorphosis of Gothicism. The advent of the modern age can be considered as an essential catalyst to instigate the mutation of Gothicism with Modernism. Punter observes the most fascinating event of Gothicism in such a short period of time it produced ‘the most potent of modern literary myths’ (Punter 1996, 1), The Gothic approach of certain works which influenced the literary evolution through the century were, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, H. G. Wells’s *Island of Dr. Moreau* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. These works often

considered as consisting symbolic power similarly vibrant to the early Gothic, specially that of Poe, an ignition That fuelled the fusion of Gothic and Modernism. The rise of modernism instigated the symbolic form of literature, which had its foundation deep submerged in Freudian psychology. As the modernist believed that the world and reality can be interpreted through its symbolic interrelation with human psychology. Similar trends were reflected through Gothicism in earlier era, as the prime goal was to stimulate emotions of fear, sorrow, anxiety and nostalgia. Robert Young has argued and provided us with the Freudian interpretations of Dracula and others. To be mentioned, that Freud's depiction of fear and anxiety was originated from reading the Gothic novel *The Sandman*.

The similar aim of Gothic and Modernism were vented through a narrative self-consciousness and an interrelation between the paranormal and the met fiction. Playing with the vivid colours of horror and the unapproachable prospects of reality and subjectivity. Which becomes more evident through specific Gothic thematic methods and instruments, such as of haunting, the doppelgänger, a philosophical confliction between the good and evil, an atmosphere of suspense. A close analysis of these two genre provides similar symbolical aspects such as, darkness, disturbing backdrop and inhuman monstrous characters, and projection of the 'Others'. Like Carter puts it, "the 'subterranean areas behind everyday experience'.

The influence of Gothicism on Modernism lies deep under its tendency to explore self-consciousness. Often a multilayer of self-irony can be noticed along with an amount of meta-discourses which races against the mainstream society, conventional literature which often mislabeled as its representative. The meta-narratives tends to disturb the strong and biased records of Socio-cultural references and history by implying the distorted or alternate version and fantastic devices. Modernist author Samuel Beckett, often practiced the dissection of narrative method in his simplest prose which runs through subjectivity and consequential solipsism.

The Gothic element of haunting can also be traced in Woolf's works, which often dictates the fragility of modern human conscience. Wilt states that Woolf portrays a world of efflux and manifestations, in which the spirit dwells as a dominant and complex being, both single and multiple entity. While Jeff Wallace observes the Gothic Modernist texts of Joyce. In Gothic Modernism he states "Like contemporaries such as Woolf and Forster, Joyce evinces a fascination with those figures, typified by the clerk, whose life is an enigmatic struggle of survival, to 'keep body and soul together'. Andrew Smith in *Vampirism, Masculinity and*

Degeneracy: D. H. Lawrence's Modernist Gothic analyses Lawrence's work on the backdrop of 19th century degeneracy and decay. Lawrence generates such theories through a chain of Gothic imageries in his works. He thus projects the images of vampires in order to relate the issues of sexuality, class, femininity and decay. His works are a debate on the revelation of psycho-neurotic self.

VII. CONCLUSION

Maria Beville witnesses the obvious mutation of Gothicism and Modernism eventually produces the Gothic-postmodernism. As Beville argues in *Gothic-postmodernism Voicing the Terrors of Post modernity*, The term 'Gothic-postmodernism' is necessary for this analysis as it denotes a distinct generic mutation in literature. Through particular use of this term it will become clear that the Gothic, as the descriptive term of Gothic-postmodernism, functions to fulfill the expression of the darkness of post modernity, while postmodernist aspects operate to establish ontological and epistemological standpoints that query accepted ethical and moral 'realities', which have long been the focus of Gothic subversion. As a result, in a single term it is possible to communicate the extent to which the two literary ideologies, the Gothic and the postmodernist, have come to be intertwined into a controversial mode of writing that could be referred to as a literary monster. Its fascination with terror, the negative and the irrational, and its hostility toward accepted codes of reality, place it firmly in the realm of revolution. What is often terrifying is that this revolution is against humanity itself, a humanity that has become increasingly secular and that has become too familiar with overarching concepts of the transcendent. Through the terror of Gothic postmodernist texts, we can question our own unconscious fears, beliefs and prejudices, not only in terms of the desire that instigates them, but also in terms of the repercussions for society in general. This locates the genre as a literary blend of many theoretical approaches to subjectivity, in a pivotal role in contemporary literary development.

The Modern Gothic rises from the complex and identical themetical relationship between the Gothic and Modernism, as a hybrid of two different literary modes which maintain an intricate bond with unrepresentable and symbolic apparition of reality, it provides an enigmatic context of horror With deep analysis into issues like , epistemology, self-exploration, ontology and troubled conscience of modern everyman. As a literature of the 'other', it ponders on the passionate emotion while shedding light upon death and decay, and the paranormal through the manifestation of the 'other', which requires alternative narration in the conventional literature. For such and due to our need for fear and anxiety and the

exploring the power of the unrepresentable. Gothic and modernism, is a deconstructive genre. As Beville remarks, “a counter-narrative which amalgamates the metafictional and the supernatural and arrives at ‘a third space’, a fourth dimension in literature.”

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