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THE KNOTS IN “THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER”:
A PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERS

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THE KNOTS IN “THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER”:
A PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERS

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"In me didst thou exist -- and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself."

Edgar Allan Poe, *William Wilson*

RESUMO

O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar “A Queda da Casa de Usher”, um conto publicado pela primeira vez por Edgar Allan Poe em 1829, no ápice de sua carreira. Tendo uma vida problemática, Poe utilizou muitos temas relacionados a ela, tais como melancolia, alcoolismo, loucura e raiva na maioria de suas histórias. Em "A Queda da Casa de Usher", o escritor aborda a decadência gradual da casa de Usher, nos dois sentidos da palavra "casa": a propriedade da família e a linhagem familiar. Os dois membros remanescentes da família são um casal de gêmeos, Madeline e Roderick, conectados por uma relação mórbida em uma história que evoca sensações claustrofóbicas e imagens de catalepsia que remetem a sentimentos incestuosos e doenças mentais. A narrativa nessa história – diferentemente das técnicas geralmente utilizadas por Poe – se desenvolve em primeira pessoa, apresentada por um narrador/personagem cujo nome não é revelado. Sendo uma narrativa sugestiva, muito do que é contado pelo narrador deixa espaço para dedução, principalmente quando se trata da relação estranhamente simbiótica dos irmãos Usher, sua casa e sua família. O trabalho inicia com uma breve contextualização, que apresenta os temas centrais em Poe que são relevantes para o estudo do conto escolhido. A seguir, há a análise dos personagens, que é feita levando em consideração a ideia do duplo, tal qual apresentada por Sigmund Freud no ensaio "O Estranho" e por Otto Rank em *O Duplo: Um Estudo Psicanalítico*.

Palavras-chave: O estranho; O duplo; Edgar Allan Poe; Psicanálise; Narrador.

ABSTRACT

This work aims at analyzing “The Fall of the House of Usher”, a short story first published by Edgar Allan Poe in 1839, at the top of his writing career. Having himself a troubled life, Poe uses several correlated themes such as melancholy, alcoholism, insanity and anger in his stories. In “The Fall of the House of Usher” the writer deals on the gradual decay of the house of Usher, in the two senses of the word “house”: the family property and the family lineage. The two remaining descendants are a pair of twin siblings, Roderick and Madeline, connected in a morbid relation in a story that evokes claustrophobic sensations, catalepsy, beckoning at incestuous feelings and mental illnesses. The narrative in this story – differently from the technique usually used by Poe – unfolds in first person by a narrator/character whose name is not disclosed. Being a suggestive narrative, much of what is told by this narrator leaves room for deduction, mainly when it comes to the strangely symbiotic relationship of the Usher siblings, their house, and their family. The work starts with some contextualization aiming to present the central themes in Poe that are relevant to the study of the chosen short story. Then we have the analysis of the characters, which is performed taking into consideration the idea of the double, as presented by Sigmund Freud in the essay “The Uncanny”, and by Otto Rank, in *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*.

Keywords: The Uncanny; The Double; Edgar Allan Poe, Psychoanalysis; Narrator.

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1 INTRODUCTION

What is there in Poe's works that hits the reader's attention so deeply? Why do the grotesque and the mystery, although so unreal to our logically-based minds, keep haunting us? Notwithstanding rarely opening to conclusive interpretations – or maybe exactly because of that –, Poe's tales and poems keep suiting our souls finest curiosity.

Because Poe's stories are filled with fantastic elements, they contain blurred zones to which the readers respond with their personal emotional experience. In this sense, besides containing their own internal fictional doubles – like Roderick and Madeline – Poe's texts also work as a mirror to the readers' inner secret life. I believe that if these stories, so strange to rationality, keep catching our attention, the reason is that the tales trigger a response related to our basic human fears. When we read, we not only receive what the author wrote, but we also project in the text elements that regard human nature: our fears, traumas, expectations and all sorts of inquietude. Along with the reader's projections, there is also the author on the other side of the construction. And when the author is Edgar Allan Poe – whose life is as interesting as the lives of the characters he creates – the critical discussion can be enhanced when some autobiographical elements are retrieved, and also when some of Poe's critical opinions about the act of writing are connected with the texts he creates.

Poe's fiction has the quality of reaching what is unreachable and putting that into words. The Dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp refers to this capacity, in his work *Creative act*

In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfaction, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the aesthetic plane. The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of. (DUCHAMP: 1957, p. 1)

Ultimately, the struggle to find out how much is rational and how much is not rational in the process of artistic creation is irrelevant. And obviously the author works on materials according to his own perception of things. Therefore, the combination of an

artist's works and the facts we know about the author's personal life can offer keys to the interpretation the reader makes of the work. That is why we will sometimes bring some elements of Edgar Allan Poe's life experience into our discussion of his text.

Among the several lines that could be followed to undertake this discussion of "The Fall of the House of Usher", the one chosen to give support to the present work is the Psychoanalytical Approach. Freud's essay on the Uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919) seems particularly suited to the analysis of the horror that takes place inside one ancestral house. It seems as if both Poe and Freud address the same phenomenon, the first through a literary representation, the other through rational analysis. Both refer to elements that are common to all people, in any space or time. Maybe because of his troubled life, Poe was capable of impressing universal fears, neuroses and complexes in his works.

"The Fall of The House of Usher" is then undertaken in the light of the psychoanalytical approach, focusing on the concept of the Double, as presented by Freud in the essay "The Uncanny" and later developed by Freud's disciple Otto Rank in *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Instead of having a specific section to introduce Freud's and Rank's ideas, they will be presented along the flow of the discussion, because that is the way in which they prove more useful.

In the original version of "The Uncanny" (1919), written in German, the word that is the title to Freud's work is "*Das Unheimliche*", meaning "the unfamiliar." As the root of the word we have the particle "*heim*", that means "home". Therefore, the concept refers to the experience of a kind of fear that comes from the least expected place, from within what is familiar, and therefore should be safe. The horror that comes from a source we trust is the worst kind of horror imaginable. This applies to the home of the twin siblings, Madeline and Roderick, and to the way they relate to each other and to the house where they belong. Therefore, this work by Freud could not be more in tune with the subject presented as the chosen topic of this work, because Freud's "The Uncanny" is about the deeper layers of the psyche where one meaning and its opposite can coexist. The term "*heimlich*", can refer either to what belongs to one's family and home – or to what is strange and hidden – especially the things about ourselves that we do not allow ourselves to know. These concepts are so connected to the story that we seem to be participating in a game of hide

and seek, just like in the play with meaning of the word "*heimlich*" itself. This play is reinforced by the external frame to the work provided by the mysterious narrator in the first person. This structure that brings a story within a story is frequent in Gothic narratives, such as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. The external frame is provided by a narrator that should be reliable, and whose behavior seem plausible and sensible in contrast with the behaviour of the less reasonable characters we meet in the story told by the narrator. On second thoughts, though, his presence in the story is quite questionable. Whatever is told in this story, we get to know it through the eyes and the judgement of a narrator who does not give us his name, and who is ultimately responsible for concealing all that is concealed from us.

Speaking of concealing, the central subject where all monsters live in "The Fall of The House of Usher" is the relationship between the Usher siblings. It does not matter how one chooses to analyze this short story, their interdependence seems always to be at the root of all problems. The motive of incestuous connections involving siblings is not uncommon in Poe's fiction, happening again, for instance, in "The Masque of the Red Death". As a taboo theme, such topic fits perfectly the previously mentioned "hide and seek" aspect of this story. The image of catalepsy, associated to Madeline's disease, provides a suitable metaphor for a topic which is unmentionable. Being only a subject to be inferred by the reader, but never mentioned by the characters, the incest theme, however hidden, floats as a central topic in the story. Madeline, in her feminine condition, never leaves the ancestral home. Roderick, as a man, should go into the world and do things. But a strange uncatalogued disease – represented as an intense heightening of all senses – makes him very feeble and causes him to return to his home. In other words, Roderick cannot lead a normal and healthy life when he is away from home, and from Madeline. This aspect gets even more significant when we take into account that they are not only brother and sister, but twins. The presence of two similar persons in Literature is a classic theme. Among other interpretations, it may be analyzed according to the concept of the double. Such subject is well explored by Otto Rank in his book *The Double: a Psychoanalytic Study*, where Rank analyzes the personal lives of some authors, the possible reasons for their preference for the theme of the double and the literary productions regarding the topic. An aspect pointed by the psychoanalyst is that the characters who have doubles – or

Doppelgängers – have their emotional lives troubled by them. If that is to be assumed and applied to the context of our story, it is interesting to point that the Usher family has no heirs but Roderick and Madeline, who represent the last lineage of the family. The bond that connects them is so strong that prevents them from connecting with anyone else, therefore the family is bound to end. In this light, what could the fact that Roderick invites an "outsider" to his house mean? Once more Poe seems to be playing a game in which, step by step, the plot of the story gets more and more intricate. Given this question, the intention of this work is to trace some considerations about "The Fall of the House of Usher", focusing on the dualisms it contains, aiming at investigating the role of the narrator, and the characters, having as a support Freud's "The Uncanny" and Rank's *The Double: a Psychoanalytic Study*.

2 POE'S LIFE AND ITS RELATION WITH HIS PRODUCTIONS

The crossings between the life of the person and the fiction created by the writer indicate that not only the traumas of the person have furnished the materials for the creation of the artistic work, but also may have contributed to the healing of some wounds. In addition, considering that this monograph has one of its bases in the book *The Double: a Psychoanalytic Study* by Otto Rank, it is interesting to mention that Rank treats this connection involving authors and their works as a symbol for the image of the double in Literature.

As a writer, Poe wrote only one novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, being his career consolidated on short stories of the horror and detective fiction. Poe is considered a pioneer of the short story as a genre, having influenced many other authors that came after him. In the line of suspense, his famous detective Auguste Dupin was a reference to Arthur Conan Doyle when he created Sherlock Holmes. Doyle made statements about the importance of Poe to Literature in general, as well as to the detective genre, affirming that "each [story] is a root from which a whole literature has developed" and that before Poe "breathed the breath of life into it" there was no sign of detective stories. (DOYLE apud FRANK and MAGISTRALE: 1997 p. 103) Poe not only was the first writer to produce short stories as we know them today, but also – as he was a literary critic as well – wrote essays giving directions on how to write them, transforming the short story genre into an art form.

In what concerns Edgar Allan Poe's life, it is difficult to separate fact from gossip, because the first memoir about his life, which served as a basis to all subsequent sources, was written by Rufus Wilmot Griswold, a person with whom Poe had disagreements. Griswold provides a negative image of Poe, as an alcoholic and reckless man. This exaggerated article influenced people's opinion for a long time until more detailed biographies started being published. Despite not being exactly the horrible person depicted in Griswold's article, Poe had, in fact, quite a troubled life. He was born in Boston in 1809 and lost his parents when he was two-years-old, due to tuberculosis. He was adopted by

Frances Allan and her husband John Allan. Their financial condition was good, for John Allan was a wealthy merchant. Poe had an excellent relation with his stepmother, but a troubled one with his stepfather. When in puberty, melancholy started haunting him. In the year of 1826, he started studying at the University of Virginia. Poe's taste for alcohol and gambling combined with his adoptive father's disinterest in helping him financially contributed to a troubled university life. The fact that John Allan did not give him enough money to afford his expenses in the University ended up pushing the already potential gambler Poe into the vice, as a way to get further money to pay his debts. The vice for betting along with the need for money put him in a complicated situation and Poe was forced to leave the university. Frances Allan died of tuberculosis and when – at the age of 27 – Poe married his cousin, Virginia Clemm, who was 13 and who would also die of tuberculosis some years later. Poe got engaged for a second time after the death of his first wife, but the marriage was never consummated. About his drinking habits, Baudelaire said: "he did not drink like an ordinary toper, but like a savage, with an altogether American energy and fear of wasting a minute, as though he was accomplishing an act of murder, as though there was something inside him he had to kill." (BAUDELAIRE, 1852 apud MEYERS: 2000, p. 25) As a consequence of his alcohol abuse disorder, Poe started suffering from delirium tremens, a condition that causes mental confusion, tremors, diaphoresis, tachycardia, and anxiety. Having such a troubled life, his depressive symptoms – besides leading him into alcoholism – also pushed him into opium abuse in the last years of his life. .

Poe's personal life seems in a certain way well aligned with the kind of literature he writes. Otto Rank sees this kind of troubled author as more prone to write a kind of fiction where the theme of the double is more clearly identified (cf. RANK, 1971). To Rank, authors who use the theme of the double in their works seem to have egocentrism as a marked characteristic of their personalities. Their psychology can be summarized in a simple formula:

The pathological disposition toward psychological disturbances is conditioned to a large degree by the splitting of the personality, with special emphasis upon the ego-complex, to which corresponds an

abnormally strong interest in one's own person, his psychic states, and his destinies. (RANK: 1971, p.48)

Poe suits this profile. In the words of his biographer Probst, "His whole mind revolves only around his ego". (RANK, 1972, p.37) This aspect of Poe's personality can also be attested in a letter sent to his father Allan when he tried to excuse his gambling debts and accused Allan of not loving him in a self-pity tone: "(...) But in a moment of caprice - you have blasted my hope because forsooth I disagreed with you in opinion... I have heard you say...that you had no affection for me." (POE apud MEYERS: 2000, p.30)

Maybe the most classic example of the use of the double in Poe is the short story *William Wilson*, where the main character is haunted during all of his life by a *Doppelgänger*. Some authors point the semblance as a reflection of Poe's life, in the sense that Wilson, such as Poe, starts his life in a good condition, but wastes it on alcohol and gambling. One of the facts brought by Rank is that besides being an alcoholic, Poe had some phobias such as fear of being buried alive, a common feature in some of his short stories, such as "The Cask of Amontillado", "Berenice", "The Black Cat", "The Premature Burial" and "The Fall of the House of Usher". Rank brings several examples in his book of writers that show mental diseases reflected in their productions. Such reflections are not necessarily written on purpose. On the contrary, Rank says that the writers are often unaware of that fact. (RANK: 1971, p. 48). Obviously, Poe's works are not necessarily conditioned by his personal life and his predicaments. If it were so, there would not be any healthy successful writer, which is not true. Still, when we read his stories, we cannot help asking ourselves whether – had Poe lead an utterly common life – he would be capable of writing the psychologically twister narratives he excels in writing. There seems to be a close connection between the writer and the man. And this connection finds its way into a similar mechanism present in each reader. We all know that what happens in fantastic stories is not true, but we feel, nevertheless, that they contain a sort of psychological truth that is universal. We can accept that, interpret and feel disturbed by that: "In the writer, as in his reader, a superindividual factor seems to be unconsciously vibrating here, lending to these motifs a mysterious psychic resonance." (RANK: 1971, p. 48)

Considering the reasoning presented above, it is possible to affirm that, given his unfavorable family conditions, Poe's works are influenced by his trajectory. In the specific case of "The Fall of the House of Usher", the possible relations with Poe's life lie in the fact that this short-story relates to a troubled family. Although the nature of their problems differ, neither Roderick Ushers nor Edgar Allan Poe continue their lineage. If we take into account what Freud has to say in his essay "The Uncanny", we can find similarities in the elements retrieved from the facts in the life of Edgar Allan Poe, in the character of Roderick Hudson and also in the character analysed by Freud in "The Uncanny", i.e. the protagonist Nathanael in the story *The Sandman*, by E. T. A Hoffmann. Among the things the three have in common we have a difficulty to relate both to the paternal and the maternal figures. It is from his study of Nathanael that Freud develops his concept about fear of castration, represented in the difficulty to see things as they are in fact. Their perception is distorted because of the anxiety derived from their difficulty to deal with deeply-rooted repressed feelings. In the case of *The Sandman*, what frightens the protagonist the most fear of castration associated with his eyes. Freud suggests that this topic is common to everyone, for having to deal with castration is part of the Oedipus complex and, therefore, part of human condition. If Hoffman's story works so well, it is because anyone can relate to it in an unconscious level. Considering this explanation, the bond between the writer and the reader is explained as well, for they share the same taboos.

Now that the relations involving Poe, his works and the reader have been presented, in the next sections we will proceed to the analysis of "The Fall of the House of Usher".

3 THE HOUSE AS PRESENTED BY THE NARRATOR

3.1 The House of Usher

When figure the image of the double in “The Fall of the House of Usher” we immediately think of the two siblings. Nevertheless, there are several other double references in the story. We have the house as a double to the family that inhabits it; the image of the which is doubled in the reflex cast upon the lake that surrounds it; and even in the poem within the story, that represents the house as a human face, the face of any member of the Usher clan. Therefore, we might start by tracing some considerations about what a house represents to us, and the importance of a house in our culture. Firstly, the house is our home, the place of our development. It is the point from which we perceive the world, where we are from. It is the space where most of our childhood memories are settled. It is the place where our family is sheltered and, as a consequence, we rarely think of one without remembering the other. That is the place where people feel that they belong, and to which they are emotionally rooted. However dearly connected our home might be with our feeling of belonging, and of safety, there comes a time in which we must depart from home, abandon the state of childhood and plunge into adulthood. The rupture with the original family is a necessary psychological step for one to form a new family. Some people – and some literary characters as well – have more difficulty in crossing that bridge than others. This process is elaborated by Freud when he describes the Oedipal process in the text “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy” (1909). In the Oedipal phase, a boy's desire is directed to his mother and then, as the child grows, this attachment is gradually worked out until he comes to the point of psychologically returning the mother figure to the father figure and leaving home in search for his own partner. In other words, it is necessary to break this mother-son bond so that he can move into another stage of development. If we transpose that to what we have in “The Fall of the House of Usher”, it is clear that the rupture process does not occur in the story, and its negative consequences culminate in the literal implosion of the Usher House. We seem to meet one of those cases where the family clan, for some unknown reason, has closed into itself, possibly for several generations, getting into a process of emotional and physical decay that culminates in the state of the

affair the narrator presents to us. According to what we are told, Roderick has not been able to leave the house for several years.

The narrator approaches the House of Usher in a dark autumn day. In the following paragraphs it is revealed that it is his intention to spend some weeks there, as he has been invited by his old boyhood friend. From the first paragraphs, the reader meets a number of dualisms, which will only increase during the development of the story. The description of the house is indispensable for us to understand the story:

I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. (POE: 1839, p. 231)

Clearly, the narrator attributes to the house some characteristics that are proper to human beings, such as the "eye-like windows", which lead us to think of the house as a human head. Other words used to describe Usher's home provoke an uncomfortable feeling, that can be in part attributed to the richness of details that evoke a state of melancholy – words such as "torture", "vacant eye-like", "dreariness", to name but a few. Poe's text is prodigal in detailed descriptions that serve as an accurate representation of Freud's idea of the *Unheimlich*, the frightening contrast between what should be perceived as familiar – the house of the narrator's friend – and the discomfort caused by its decay. In our culture, home is the place where we feel comfortable and safe, it is the place we are familiar with. However, it is also the place we are bound to depart from. According to psychoanalyst Andrea Masagão,

A casa carrega as marcas do lugar de origem ao qual tivemos que renunciar ao sair de casa e, nesse sentido, ela é um lugar paradoxal onde se revela o contato com a origem, mas também a perda da origem, o desejo mas também o luto, o mesmo mas também o heterogêneo. Assim, a casa

remete ao mesmo tempo ao que nos é familiar: ao espaço do reconhecimento e pertencimento que fixa o eu na relação de espelhamento com os objetos do mundo; e ao espaço da perda que marca a relação de exclusão interna do sujeito a seu objeto e que implica a errância do sujeito e seu desfalecimento. (MASAGÃO: 2010, p. 2)

This dialectic movement meets the narrator's first impression, for although the house belongs to his old childhood friend, they haven't seen each other for a long time. In this sense, the image that the narrator kept on his mind is quite different from the one he is seeing now, for the house has changed from an imposing home to a decaying place:

While the objects around me - while the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy - while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this - I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. (POE: 1839, p. 233)

The narrator has also mentioned that, despite the fact that they had been close friends, he has never known much about Roderick Usher, who had a very reserved personality. This might seem strange, because close friends are expected to share their feelings. Nevertheless, Usher is described as having an "excessive and habitual reserve" (POE: 1839, p.232).

The story works somewhat like a magnet, using factors that in a certain way oppose to one another: a long-term friend, but with a secretive personality; a rich family, but segregated from the community and gradually decaying; an ancient big mansion, but a ruining structure. And we have a narrator who seems both attracted and repelled to the house, finding it enervating, but pushed into it as if the house and the circumstances were dragging him inside. And the narrator himself seems in a certain way to agree,

Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it may have been for this reason only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there

grew in my mind a strange fancy (...). I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves. (POE: 1839, p. 232 - 233)

The narrator brings us not only the description of the house, but the house's reflection in the pool, and an image reflected is nothing less than the establishment of the duplicity. As a matter of fact, mirrors are folkloric elements to many civilizations, being part of their superstitious traditions and legends. Coincidentally to the theme of this story, these legends are mostly connected to the idea of death and misfortune. To many of these peoples, the mirror appears as an object that reveals what is occult. Moreover, the image of the house is not reflected on a mirror, but on water, one of the four natural elements. The reflection of the house is presented upside down, and that may represent the problematic state of the house nos. The inverted double image contributes to the impression of the fall, as the narrator *sees* the house *through* the inverted imaged of its reflection. So it is, that horror took over him after uplifting his eyes from it,

I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy—a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity—an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued. (POE: 1839, p. 232-233)

As shown above, the narrator attributes to the house the atmosphere that as involved him since his arrival, as if the house is a personification of an evil force. He not only admits the strangeness of his attraction to the house, despite its horrible appearance, but he also attributes to the house the morbid atmosphere that surrounds it. Once again we think of “The Uncanny”, for the disturbing feelings are provoked by a meeting with what is, or should be, well-known. In this sense, the house of Usher is the central element responsible for awakening repressed feelings. According to what the character/narrator says, it seems

that the house is somehow a "living" object. If we keep in mind that house represents the family, the house can be taken as the ghost of all the ancestors in Madeline and Roderick's lineage:

I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other—it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher"—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion. (POE: 1839, p. 232)

This correlation of the House of Usher and the Usher family is certainly deeply impressed in the siblings sense of identity, as well as in the minds of the people who live nearby, to a point that the two instances are represented by the same expression. In the quotation presented, the narrator brings further information about the family, about the symbiotic relationship of its members, possibly the cause for the decay of the house, as now one part of this double entity is vanishing and the other is decaying.

Finally, there is the fissure that goes from the roof "until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn". (POE: 1839, p.) This is a barely perceptible feature that, as the narrator says, requires a "scrutinizing observer" to be seen. The fissure is forgotten until the end of the story, when it plays its role: the house falls, it crumbles within itself, and the possible rational explanation is the fissure on the wall. Here we reach another important element, usually present in stories involving doubles. Such stories usually open to two lines of interpretation. Readers who insist of clinging to the boundaries of rationality can extract one plausible explanation, in this case the falling of the house caused by its architectural deteriorated condition. Readers who are more open to the decoding of the symbolic implications of the story can absorb its fantastic elements. Tzvetan Todorov affirms that the fantastic genre is subdivided into two different subcategories: the uncanny-fantastic and the marvelous-fantastic (TODOROV: 1975, p. 25). According to him, the word "uncanny"

is used when the analyzed instance is simultaneously open to the two interpretations, the rational reading and the reading that accepts the possibilities of the fantastic:

Nas obras pertencentes a esse gênero, relatam-se acontecimentos que podem explicar-se perfeitamente pelas leis da razão, mas que são, de uma ou outra maneira, incríveis, extraordinários, chocantes, singulares, inquietantes, insólitos e que, por esta razão, provocam no personagem e o leitor uma reação semelhante a que os textos fantásticos nos voltou familiar.(TODOROV: 1975, p. 26)

To reinforce his statement of the rationality of the uncanny, Todorov uses the fissure on the wall and the resurrection of Madeline in “The Fall of The House of Usher” as an example. According to him, the apparently supernatural aspects presented in the story are perfectly explained by the rational details inserted into the narrative, so the events could be logically clarified. The fall of the house happens due to its fissure, and Madeline's resurrection is a return from her cataleptic slumber. Still, the rational relief does not invalidate the psychological charge of the events.

3.2 The Narrator

The way a story is narrated is intrinsically connected with its purposes, effects and structure. In this sense, the elliptical plot in “The Fall of the House of Usher” is woven through a first-person narrative, where the narrator tells the readers about a traumatic experience he has suffered, and refers to two other characters, but he does not know what the other characters think. It is up to the reader to decide to what extent the narrator is reliable, or to what extent he is so related with the events that he cannot see things that clearly. Readers must consider what is given them, and also what is omitted. As a consequence, this sort of narrative demands an attentive reader, otherwise he/she may end up being tricked. Considering this, it is important to examine the narrative scheme of this short story, and the first topic to be explored is the way the narrator introduces the events that he has witnessed in the visit he made to the House of Usher. On the one hand, readers

are always offered a glimpse of rationality in the plausible reasons for the events presented; on the other hand, the narrator himself seems not to believe the reasonable explanations he offers. The narrative is kept in the thin line that separates rationality from superstition, as if the aim of the narrator was to discredit himself:

What was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. (POE: 1839, p. 231)

The word choice in this paragraph is used not to convince who reads it, but to *try* to convince the narrator himself. As the narrator says, he is *forced* believe, but he actually doesn't. In the sense of analyzing his narrative structurally, the descriptive sentences he uses are often very long, complex and full of adjectives. Despite of the effort he puts in describing anything perfectly, he ironically seems to lack words when it comes to getting to the real core of his thoughts: "Yet I should fail in any attempt to convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all."(POE: 1839, p 11).It is, then, ironic that the reader is presented with a story narrated by a first person narrator who seems sometimes incapable of expressing himself at its fullest, for he should be the one to express the best considering his central role in the narrative, leaving room for a discussion about the reliability of this narrator.

Many of Poe's stories are narrated in the first person; notwithstanding, this one is different, because the narrator is not the protagonist, a person of action inside the story, although he is an essential piece for the mechanism of the narrative. Given the differences from most of Poe's narrators, this one is curious because the narrator does not offer the readers his name, although the opportunity is given during the story, for there are dialogues with other characters. The narrator focuses more in Usher and in the events that happen in

the house than in himself; so, although he is the one in control of the narrative, the reader does not get to know much about him.

In addition, the fact that there is only one point of view open to tell the story limits the scope of the reader. The narrator could be questioned about his reasons to go to Usher's house and actually stay there. The story starts when the narrator is getting closer to the house, and he experiences every sort of dark emotions that emanate from the circumstances. He claims feelings of sadness, stupor and astonishment, but never considers leaving the house. On the contrary, he seems more and more attracted to the events. This reaction evokes the story told by Freud in "The Uncanny", when the psychoanalyst gets to the same place for three times "without purpose". Why would the narrator attend so promptly to a friend whom he hasn't seen for years? It seems that the reasons for the narrator to go back to Usher's house exceed what is shown explicitly in the story.

Gothic stories built out of a "story within a story" structure, such as this one, usually represent a plunge into the self, and have a core which is difficult for the reader to deal with. The narrator is usually a character in the external frame story, who works as a mediator who pushes us into the horror and removes us from it when tension becomes too high. The strange circumstances presented are very attractive to the reader. When "The Fall of The House of Usher" is analyzed, everything that surrounds the story is both attractive and repulsive. Under the light of Psychoanalysis, this sensation becomes clear: "(...) I will say at once that both courses lead to the same result: the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar." (FREUD: 1919, p. 1). So, as shown in the text *Uncanny*, what terrifies a person is strictly connected to something well-known. This can be attributed, in part, to the fact that, when they were children, both the narrator and Usher used to be very close and the house was the place for their meetings and for plays. The house represented both family and familiarity, it was a "home". In this sense, the movement the narrator performs is one of "returning home". Notwithstanding, we know that a first-person narrator is never utterly reliable; therefore, it is not absurd to affirm that the narrator and the Usher family may be more acquainted than what we are allowed to see. A closer look at the main character, Roderick Usher, and at the plot of the story may enlighten us about that.

4 THE PLOT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

When the narrator finally enters the house, he finds his friend Usher lying on the couch, but the image he sees does not correspond anymore to the person he used to know:

Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the man being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. (...) And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke. (POE: 1839, p. 234)

Once more, we are confronted with opposition, being the narrator in front of his well-known friend who seems, however, totally changed. On the contrary of what could be expected, Usher's disease will not be clarified – at least, not out of the scope of the inference. The circumstances around him and his sister will only grow darker as the narrative unfolds. The health problem that has reached Roderick is not a common one. Besides looking physically ill, Usher's mental health seems also affected. He not only acts mentally ill but also displays unusual symptoms, such as an aversion to music – except for some specific instruments. This symptom is quite interesting to the story. When approaching the house, the narrator informs us that the Usher family was well recognized for a fine taste for arts. Then, it is symptomatic that Usher now suffers from a disease that parts him from his origins. It seems as if Usher personifies the lineage decay, weakened along the time, that will be finally concluded with the fall of the very house.

As the story goes on, the reader is faced with images and facts that appear symbiotically connected to each other. The characters and the situations portrayed appear in the narrative like a mirror, reflecting one another, being inwardly connected but still somehow opposing. As pointed by the narrator, Usher lets him know, little by little, traces of a superstitious personality, which is shown when he tells the narrator that he attributes to

the House part of his sickness. This connection makes sense if we go back to the description of the house, which looks like a human head, besides the fact that the house received the family's name, both building and its owner direct themselves together to an end, succumbing at the very same time. The references to the house and its head-like nature appear as well when Roderick reads a poem entitled *The Haunted Palace*:

In the greenest of our valleys,
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace --
Radiant palace -- reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion(...) (POE: 1839, p. 238)

Besides the poem's connection between the palace and a head, the monarch introduced is called "Thought", a reference to Usher's mind. But, if it is assumed that both Roderick and the building are one thing, what could the narrator be doing inside someone else's head? This question ends up with no answer if we don't assume that Roderick, the house and the narrator are part of the same thing: a disturbed mind. Many are the clues that lead to this conclusion. As stated before, the feelings that overtake the narrator are of an *uncanny* nature, in the sense described by Freud in his essay. What the narrator does as he visits his friend may represent his own return home. We are led to think that this uncanny feeling comes exclusively from the shock between the imposing house from his memories and the decaying house before him, but isn't this a weak argument for such feelings and such insistence in staying in the house despite of the strange situations he witnesses? What the narrator seems to be doing is to trick us into thinking that the relationship between him and Roderick is not as close as it really is.

Going further in the narrative, after the unusual conclusion of Usher's part of attributing his sickness to the house, there is also the fact that his loved sister Madeline, his only companion for long years, is also dying. Strangely, this so called loved sister barely appears in the story. Actually, the only scene where she appears alive is a bare apparition, making her seem like nothing more than a ghost. In addition to that, almost nothing is said about her, leaving the reader without sufficient information. If Madeline was so important

to Usher, why does not she appear more consistently in the story? Why, during Roderick's conversations, she is barely mentioned? And why would a brother and a sister be confined in a house all alone without any other kind of human relation? It has already been assumed in this work that the house is sort of an extension of Roderick and the narrator's mind, but this closure awakes strange ideas regarding Roderick-narrator's relation with Madeline, the female presence in the story, whose mark seems to be present in her absence. Going back to the poem *Haunted Palace* some more interesting suggestions are shown:

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)
And, round about his home, the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed. (POE: 1839, p.238)

Since this poem is introduced in a story that suggests an unnatural relationship between a brother and a sister, it is impossible to read about the "monarch's high estate assail" without recalling the *Oedipus King* story and, consequently, the previously mentioned Oedipus complex. Apparently, the poem refers not only about incestuous feelings but also brings the family's decay as well – such as it is shown in the short story. The Usher family once was rich and well-recognized, but as time passes it started to decay, which can be in part attributed to the fact that the family was not successful in its succession. The decay of the Ushers, then, is not only caused by the lack of heirs, but also because its end culminates in an incestuous relation of Roderick and Madeline, regardless if on the physical or on the psychological level. Still in the field of Roderick's artistic production, he also paints a picture described by the narrator as:

(...) the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the Earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch, or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet, a flood of intense rays rolled

throughout, and barthed the whole in gastly and inappropriate splendor.
(POE: 1839, p. 237)

Like the poem created by him, this picture seems to represent the situation Roderick is in: a place with no exit. In this sense, the tunnel appears as a representation of the lack of options Usher has – except for the tunnel itself. It is a one-way road without any get away.

Also, the names of the characters in this short-story have interesting meanings. "Madeline" is a variation of "Magdalene", the controversial Biblical character. And there is the word "mad" contained in the name. As Madeline is the only woman in this ancestral house, she may work as a representation of all the limitations attributed to women in a patriarchal system: the impossibility of inheriting property; the silence that drives to immobility and to madness; the claustrophobia. As to "Roderick", the name has a Germanic origin, it is the same name as the last Visigoth king's. In "The Fall of the House of Usher", Roderick is the last living representative of his lineage, just like the Visigoth king was of his. Also, their last name "Usher" is a word in English and it was used as a verb by the narrator to say that he was conducted by a valet to the interior of the house (POE: 1839, p.7). Considering that the narrator seems to be dragged into the circumstances and the place, the choice of this specific verb may be a confirmation of it.

Regardless of how briefly Madeline physically appears in the story, it is the presence of her absence that determines the increasing pitch of the tension and the climax of the narrative. Roderick had been reading *VigiliæMortuorumSecundumChorumEcclesiæMaguntinæ*, a manual that gives directions for bearing the death. Influenced by it, he decided to preserve the sister's corpse for fifteen days. When her body is being prepared to the funeral, precisely when the narrator is considering the resemblance between Usher and Madeline, Roderick tells him they are twins. The idea of mirror strikes again, turning the relationship between all of the characters even closer. This fact adds to the endless presence of dualisms in the story. It may seem strange, at first, to think that the Usher siblings are *Doplelgängers*, for they, in fact, do not represent the classic model. Otto Rank points that usually the double appears in Literature as two characters of the same sex, where one of them – usually the protagonist – is

persecuted by the other.(cf. RANK, 1971). In such stories, the central character has his life troubled or ruined because of his double. Classically they are split characters, where one is the hero and the other is the villain. Rank affirms that this is comprehensible, because the double stands for a scission of the mind, where the person projects in another self the bad aspects of his/her personality. Even though sex-differenced cases are not the most common or classical ones, Otto Rank states that twin siblings do represent so. To explain the existence of the double, he goes through a profound study that looks for evidence of the double in ancient societies: from myths about shadows, stories related to water reflection, German and Hindi legends, and, finally, Greek – to which he sticks to. In Greek mythology, there are stories involving the presence of the mirror. Sometimes it appears as an element of eroticism and sometimes as a dangerous object that leads to tragic endings. In the myth of Narcissus, Rank says that this duplicity is combined and both elements are present. In the classic version of the myth of Narcissus, he falls absorbed in himself after seeing his own image reflected in the water. A later version, by the geographer Pausanias, however, says that Narcissus had a sister who died, very similar to him in appearance. Due to it, Narcissus gets devastated and then he remains entrapped in his own image, as a way to ease the pain of losing his beloved companion. This version has similarities with the relation between Usher and Madeline. Just like Narcissus in Pausanias' version, Roderick cannot stand his sister's disease and her consequent death, so both succumb together.

Another point established by Rank is that the occurrence of the double is always connected to an inability to love. The author brings many examples of characters that had their love lives troubled because of their Doppelgänger. In the extent of narcissism, this point makes sense, for it is not possible to love anyone else if you are in love with yourself. Freud also, in the “The Uncanny”, when he analyses the character Nathanael in Hoffmann’s *The Sandman*, reaches the conclusion that – because the character has a distorted image of the masculine and of the feminine because of his fear of castration – he develops a narcissistic behaviour. Therefore, narcissism – or egotism, or selfishness – may be a symptom that betrays one’s inability to get emotionally connected with others. And this reminds us of what Rank has to say about authors – like Poe – who use doubles in their fiction and who are said to be self-centered persons.

In the extent of the inability to love others, the connection is clear: the only person Roderick is able to love is his sister, who so intensely resembles himself. However, the concretization of this connection is a moral interdict. Because of his desire, both the family lineage and his mental health implode. In the final section of the story, both narrator and Usher take Madeline's body to the family vault, into the depths of the house. Madeline's funeral can be read as the repression of the incestuous feelings of her brother's. If the house represents Usher's mind, then the grave where Madeline body's lays represents the place where his deepest desires are hidden in him.

It is after Madeline is buried that we have the climax of the story, in a scene where possibly the first person narrator is the one who less understands what is happening; because Roderick and the readers are fully aware of what is happening to Madeline and of how she reacts to that. The mirror to Madeline's progress is the growing horror displayed in Roderick's face. The narrator says that, in several times, Usher seems to be paying close attention to something, "as if listening to some imaginary sound" (POE: 1839, p. 18), despite of "gazing upon vacancy". Finally, in a stormy night, the narrator starts walking in circles inside his room, when Roderick nervously enters. Noticing that Usher is feeling more nervous than the usual, the narrator starts to read *Mad Trist* by Sir Launcelot Canning (apparently another of Poe's imaginary fictional authors). What the narrator reads in *Mad Trist* aligns perfectly to what is happening during the scene between him and Usher. The growing tension in this part of the narrative is extreme, and it is even more emphasized by the reading. In *Mad Trist* the hero Ethelred is also facing a stormy night and wants to break into a palace and, for that, he needs to use force. As Ethelred breaks the door with his mace, Usher and the narrator hear a similar noise coming from somewhere in the house. The reading continues and in the story Ethelred was expecting to find an eremite inside the house, but he found a dragon instead and a sign with the sayings "Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin; Whoslayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win;" (POE: 1839, p. 22). Up to this part of the narrative, Usher had turned his chair in order to face the door of the room they were in. The hero Ethelred kills the dragon and, since the story is finished, the narrative starts focusing again only in Usher, the narrator and the house. Roderick seems to have reached complete madness for he is terrified while mumbling words as if he was waiting for someone to appear at the door. In a quick sequence of events, Madeline appears

at the door and falls on Usher, who dies instantly. Terrified, the narrator runs away from the house and after a while, he looks back and the house finally succumbs.

Given the last sequence of events of the narrative, a pause to analyze *Trist* is necessary. The reading of it is, in the first place, important to create a much tenser atmosphere in this part of the story, so the climax is extreme. Still, it is also interesting to analyze it considering its implications to the story it is inserted in, for the crossings between them are clear and it is hard to believe that Poe used such a detailed narrative for effect purposes only. This theory becomes more plausible if we analyze it according to what Poe says about his own way of writing in his *Philosophy of Composition*:

I select 'The Raven,' as most generally known. It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referrible either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded, step by step, to completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem. (POE: 1846, p. 2)

Considering this statement, it is likely that Poe used *Mad Trist* for more purposes than tension. The first thought that a reader may have about the relation between *Mad Trist* and the Usher siblings is that Roderick is the dragon killed by Ethelred represented, in turn, by Madeline. This comparison is clear, for Madeline is the element of action in this scene, while the dragon (Roderick) is locked inside a palace. Nevertheless, should Usher and his sister be necessarily - and exclusively - interpreted as the dragon and Ethelred respectively? In such an intrinsic relationship, the conclusions will hardly have biunique correspondences, and this is the most interesting aspect about the use of *Mad Trist* within the narrative. The characters in both stories are possible to be perceived at the same time as the dragon and Ethelred. Because of the parallels between what is happening to Usher and the narrator, the first conclusion the reader gets is the one where Roderick is the dragon and Madeline is Ethelred. But, considering the whole story of “The Fall of the House of Usher” and the stated theory that the house is an extension of Usher's mind, it is also possible to affirm that he may be analyzed as well as being Ethelred himself, while the buried Madeline may be interpreted as the locked dragon. There is an ambivalence in

relation to the crossings of the story in Mad Trist with what happens between Madeline and Roderick. At the same time that during its reading, Madeline is the character that represents action in the scene – represented then by Ethelred – she is the one who was confined and buried alive in her tomb. It is established, then, another mirroring game among the Usher siblings. This, in fact, comes in handy to the whole plot of the story, reinforcing its dualist aspect of revelation and concealment, approximation and distancing.

Some may think that Madeline was actually alive when she entered the room - as it was mentioned in the second chapter of this monograph, Todorov, for instance, affirms so - however, if we go back in the narrative, we will see that the description of the place where she was buried leaves no room for this interpretation:

The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; (...) It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep, and, in later days, as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp, grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges. (POE: 1839, p. 240)

Even if Madeline was buried alive, her apparition in the room could not be a living one, for the description of the chamber she was buried reinforces that she could not get out of it alive. It must be admitted that along this short-story Poe provided his readers with many details that could lead to rational explanations for the events that take place in this story - according to Todorov, in the case of Madeline, her cataleptical condition would be the explanation for her resurrection. However, as it was shown in the excerpt presented, in the specific case of Madeline's apparition, these details are not applicable, for she could never remain alive in the place where she was buried, and even if she did, she would never be able to leave it. Despite agreeing with Todorov to the extent that “The Fall of the House of Usher” belongs to the uncanny fantastic, it is still a short story of the *fantastic* genre and

the explanations will not always follow the course of the reason. It is important to comment on that precisely to reinforce the fantastic aspect of this story as well as the analog character it. Short stories usually bear more than one message besides the one narrated in the first frame. The story we read represents only the first layer of it, while the possible interpretations lie "beneath" it. As it was said before, this work aims to state that "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a representation of Roderick's mind, so the "resurrection" of Madeline within this interpretation is not only a fantastic element in the story. Besides being a closure for it, the return of Madeline also represents the complete madness of Roderick and the ultimate end of the Usher family. In this sense, however Usher tried to get rid of his incestuous feelings putting his sister in the deepest place of the house, she returned, just like in classic psychoanalysis cases when a repressed desire comes out. The fact that both die in each other's arms is quite symbolic too, considering the incestuous aspect of the text. Their deathly encounter is quite representative of the incest suggested in the story, mainly when considered that Madeline came out of her tomb as an expression of the attempt to repress this feeling. Also, taking into account what was said before about the double aspect present in their relationship, Otto Rank affirms that most of times the characters try to kill their doppelgängers and this culminates not only in the death of their double, but also in the death of themselves, and that is exactly what happens to the Usher siblings. Their relationship assumed such a symbiotic character that the death of one had necessarily to imply in the death of the other. In the extent of Madeline's burial, however, it is not possible to affirm that she was dead. Taking into account that Madeline is the object of Usher's desires, she needed to be eliminated. A hint on it is when Usher and the narrator are preparing her body for the burial and he says that "the disease had left a faint blush upon the bosom of the face", that happens to maladies of a strictly cataleptical character". Regarding this cataleptical aspect, it was not mentioned for the first time during her burial, but previously in the beginning of the story, when the narrator met her. What happens is that Usher, consumed by his guilt, took advantage of his sister's disease and buried her alive, so he could get rid of her as well. The place where Madeline was buried, then, has a triple meaning: first, it makes sure - for Usher - that even being buried alive, she dies due to the conditions of her tomb. Secondly, thanks to it, the horror character in the last scene of the Usher siblings is enabled. Third, it represents Roderick's efforts to repress his desires.

Another important topic to the final conclusions of this monograph is the nature of the description of the feelings that overtake the narrator the night Madeline returns. It was already assumed that considering Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* it is very unlikely that the elements presented in his works are a mere result of coincidence. In this special part the narrator describes the oppressive emotions he feels saying that sat upon his heart an "incubus of causeless alarm". The choice of the word "incubus" is very interesting. Mythology describes an incubus as a male demon that approaches women while they are asleep in order to engage in sexual activity with them. When the narrator described his feelings with the use of this word he was in his bedroom, a fact that meets quite perfectly the meaning of "incubus", for this room is the part of the house where people retire to sleep. In addition, being the bedroom the room for privacy, there is a common association between it and sexual intercourse, so much so that not a long time ago - and still nowadays among some families - it was vetoed for unmarried couples to meet in each other's bedroom. The fact that the three characters of the story meet in the narrator's bedroom after this very specific description of his feelings reinforces the symbiotic aspect that hangs above the three of them, as well as it contributes to the theory that Roderick and the narrator are the same person. The whole story revolves around the strangely close relationship that the Usher siblings have and, in this sense, there would be no room for the narrator in this plot unless we admit that his existence is conditioned to Roderick's. In the scope of analyzing the intentionality of the choice for the incubus, it is worth to say that back on the narrative the narrator used the name Fuseli to describe the character of Roderick's painting. Fuseli was famous for his pictures full of supernatural influences. In his piece entitled "The Nightmare", the painter depicts an incubus sitting on a languid woman. Fuseli and Poe shared an interest regarding the subconscious aspect of human mind. It is common to find in Poe's works references to madness, hypnosis and the subconscious - just like the ones presented in "The Fall of the house of Usher" for instance. Similar subjects are common in Fuseli's paintings too, for he was very fond of the supernatural theme - just like Poe.

Finally, as a last topic of analysis, although evidences for it were given, explanations about how could possibly Roderick and Usher be the same person have not been explored so far. Considering what was said about the symbolism of the incubus, the

proper reasons can be finally presented. Analyzing the narrative, the reader easily finds passages where the narrator uses words that reassemble sleep. At least three times the narrator used the word "dream" in different situations. First, he compares the feeling that reached him when he looked at the house to the "after-dream of the reveller upon opium". Still in the beginning of the narrative, while describing the house, he says "shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building". And, finally, in a third situation, when Roderick and him were spending time together: "we painted and read together, or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar." Finally, the last reference lies upon the use of the word incubus. Why are we presented with so many references of the oneiric? Why is this narrator a nameless one and so different from others by Poe? How could Roderick and him be the same person? Considering these questions and the aspects presented before, it is possible to answer to them if it is assumed that what happens to the narrator is a dream resulting from real feelings. Roderick, then, is the person the narrator projects his own feelings. The house, in turn, with all of its head-like descriptions, its depths and its ruin is the representation of the narrators mind and his subconscious. Incest is not a feeling welcomed in our society. The sexual intercourse between members of the same family would trouble the functioning of the society, for the society is based on the family. In this sense, incest has become a tabu and stopped being acceptable and because of its unacceptance incest is repressed. In the dream sphere, however, the repressed feelings everyone has are able to emerge. The rules that apply to our society are not present during sleep. Then, the unconscious part of mind is able to show what is repressed in the shape of a dream, regardless of what is permitted or prohibited in civilization.

5 CONCLUSION

Argentinian author Ricardo Piglia, in the book *Formas Breves*, says that a short story invariably tells two different stories (cf. PIGLIA, 2000). This is the case with “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Respecting the Incest theme, on the surface level we have the considerations about the incest theme in the case of Madeline and Roderick, and we wonder at the possible reasons why the character of the narrator has been invited to spend some time with them. The circumstances that surround the siblings lead to the impression that their relationship goes beyond what is socially accepted between brother and sister, leaving room to the question whether they share an incestuous physical relation. That is an interpretation left in the open in the story, and probably some of the readers consider that possibility. Other readers, though, possibly do not rationalize about that probability, simply let themselves be carried by the flow of the narrative. On the second level of the story – the one referred to by Piglia – that issue does not matter at all. That is why Freud is used as one of the supporting accesses to our reading of Poe’s story. When Freud uses terms as “incest”, or “castration”, he refers to the psychological dimension of those ideas, not (necessarily) to their actual concretization. One way or the other, the fact is that – emotionally – neither Madeline nor Roderick are able to survive outside the walls of their haunted place. If we consider the state of decrepitude of the Usher mansion, it is clear that the siblings do not represent the first stage in that – probably long – process of degradation. Families that close themselves to the interaction with other groups are bound to end in themselves, as happens in this story. In this sense, the fact that Roderick invites his friend to stay with them may represent a last attempt to revert the course of action in the story. But that is not enough to loosen the grip of his commitment with Madeline. In addition to what has been said about the meanings contained in the name of the ancestral family, Filipe RógerVuaden, in his study of Poe, calls attention to how inextricably Roderick is entwined with his sister in the very formation of the word “Usher”, which contains the words “us”, “she” and “her” in its formation (cf. VUADEN, 2016).

Assuming the incest in the narrative – whether on a concrete or on a psychological level – the fact that Roderick introduces the presence of a third person may indicate that his

bond to Madeline represents such a transgression, such a disruption to his moral code, that he could not allow himself to be fully aware of that pulsion. And we, as readers, might also vicariously enjoy the forbidden experience, which might explain why texts by Edgar Allan Poe never lose their grip on us. This sense, the external – but not that external – third element, the narrator, the “normal” character in the story, may protect the reader from reaching a level of the narrative that might prove too strong to be aesthetically enjoyed.

The use of Otto Rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* helped us make the transition from Freud's field of Psychoanalysis into the realms of Literature and, especially, granted the possibility of crossing the bridge that separates Poe's life as an author and his personal life. The first chapter of this monograph is dedicated to elements of Poe's biography, because it is from the materials met in their personal experience that artists mold their production. During the research about Poe's life, it was found that his "enemy" Rufus Wilmot Griswold wrote an obituary about him, in which Poe's bad habits were exaggerated perhaps in order to try to ruin Poe's memory once for all. This obituary helped build a stereotyped image of Poe, which along with the themes of his works may remain perpetuated until nowadays. To this day it is difficult to establish in what stage of the scale Poe lies, between the extremes of a saint and the denigrated image presented by Griswold. According to Rank, it is common to all writers who used the double in their literary productions to have an egomaniac personality (cf. RANK, 1971) – and this shows the letter written by the author to his stepfather. Poe did drink and gamble, indeed, but what separates the version of Poe portrayed by Griswold from the person are the motivations for this behavior. What happens when a person tries to ruin someone else's career – like Griswold did – is that the personal backgrounds must be hidden in order to polarize opinions. There is no room for midterms when one aims at damaging someone's reputation. It cannot be ignored that Poe lost his parents very early, that he was adopted by a man with whom he never had a good relationship, and that all the women he loved died untimely. If these facts were the trigger to all the failures Poe has had in his life, might they not be considered, also, the cause for him to have become the great author he is? In the process of accommodating a turmoil of emotions, the negative experiences in Poe's life ended up forging the creation of "The Fall of the House of Usher" and the rest of his production. The factors brought by Poe in "The Fall of the House of Usher" present close relations to the

idea of the double. The elements in the story mirror some psychological aspects of the author's life. The siblings die entwined in a mortal embrace. The house crumbles down and is swallowed by the lake that held its reflection.

The greatest expression of the double in the narrative are the characters of Madeline and Roderick. Since they are sex-differenced, we have here a relation of complementarity. He is the one meant to go out into the world and do things; she is expected to remain at home and provide for the welfare of the inmates. Even their illnesses seem complementary. Her catalepsy makes it impossible for her to be recognized as being alive by anyone other than Roderick; his strange psychological circumstance of having each sense heightened into a painful pitch make it impossible for him to live, move and interact as other people do. The fact that Roderick does not hasten to rescue Madeline as soon as he realizes she has been buried alive may be taken as an indication of his resolve that – if he cannot live as other people do – he would rather not live at all. Following the criteria presented by Rank in *The Double: a Psychoanalytic Study*, like in other classic literary examples, the Usher siblings are similar in appearance, and they are so intrinsically connected that one cannot live if the other dies. Proof of this is the fact that both get sick at the same time and, in the end, they die in each other's arms. Also according to Rank, in all occurrences of the double, the characters have their emotional lives troubled by their double. In the case of Roderick and Madeline, this aspect is taken to the extreme, for their lives are not only ruined by each other, but *limited* to each other, and this culminates in the end of the family lineage. Another important duplicity in the text is the way the house is described. Its head-like shape and its capacity of bringing up bad sensations along with Roderick's disease – which is as well described as being intrinsically related to the house – lead to think of the owner and the building as a single thing. The house, then, has an important role in the narrative, being a representation of Usher's mind, to the point that its fall represents the decay and the end of the Usher family.

The old manor house once had an important role in society as a representation of the Usher family. For the inhabitants of the surroundings, there is no difference between the Usher family and their house. In the poem, the house is presented as a head, the head of the Usher family. Following this logic, it is natural to wonder what the narrator would be doing

inside Roderick's family's head. The narrator follows the events in a way that shows both horror and attraction, he has his emotions disturbed by the strange circumstances around him. This, however, does not stop him from staying, fascinated, in the house. Taking into account Freud's theory, presented in "The Uncanny", that the unfamiliar is contained inside the familiar, we may conclude that doubles generate other doubles, and that the narrator sees himself in Roderick. When we read "The Fall of the House of Usher", even the smallest detail seems to match the plot perfectly without leaving any loose ends. By interpreting the narrator as being the same as Roderick Usher, the attraction felt by the narrator for the house is explained, for he is returning to something that is actually known – his own mind. And as the narrator is the mediator between the internal facts in fiction and the readers, the narrator propitiates the readers' connection with a set of primitive drives that are interdicted to reason, but not to aesthetic fruition. This fact beckons to the idea of a dreamy mind narrating a nightmare motivated by incestuous feelings. The split between Roderick and the Narrator is corroborated by the fact that the story is like a dream, where Roderick is the representation of the Narrator in whom the shameful feelings are projected. Also, the fact that the reader is presented with a first person narrator is essential to the intricacies of the plot. Because the narrator is a character as well, he is not entirely aware of what happens between Madeline and Usher, as well as the circumstances that culminate in the end of the family. Since we read this story through the report of this narrator, we are not able to get to know the other perspectives. In this regard, it is important to take into account the reliability of this narrator too, for the criteria of what to tell and what to conceal is in his hands. The fact that his name is never disclosed opens to two different interpretations: on the one hand, the name may be omitted because the narrator is not to be trusted; on the other hand, the narrator may be so well known to the reader – because he is also a double to the reader – that any introduction would be utterly unnecessary.

The initial question that set the will for writing this monograph respects the possible reasons why Poe's fantastic stories invariably catch our attention. The reading of Freud's "The Uncanny", helps answering this question, by connecting both reader and writer through their fears in common. However, maybe even more impressive than the fact that Poe's short-stories are always appealing to us, modern readers, is the fact that even after years of extensive analysis and critical essays written about his works, there are still things

to be said about them. I hope this monograph may contribute to the discussion of this short story, and be useful to other academic researchers, as well as encourage other students to keep studying and analyzing Poe. Despite of the uncountable amount of works written about “The Fall of the House of Usher”, it has been a pleasure to present here my own personal review, to revisit the famous haunted place on my own.

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