PARALLEL DEATHS: LOGIC AND STRUCTURE IN THE HOUSE OF POE

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ABSTRACT
Throughout this article a thorough reading of the short-story titled "The Fall of The House of Usher" by Edgar Allan Poe is proposed, with the purpose of exposing it as a fully intentional construction. The sort of intentionality here mentioned focuses on the structural framework, the narrative: its literary design. This analysis draws the reader's attention specifically to the layout, frame and scenery of the tale in order to reveal parallel structures expressed in a symmetry between ground and figure. The work addresses as well the author's intrusion within the text, the problem entailed by a referential language and the purposeful transformations resulting from textual appropriation.

RESUMEN
A través de este artículo se propone una lectura minuciosa del relato corto "The Fall of the House of Usher" de Edgar Allan Poe, con el objeto de exponerlo como una construcción completamente intencional. La intencionalidad aquí mencionada se centra en el marco estructural, en la narrativa: su diseño literario. Este análisis dirige la atención del lector específicamente al diseño, estructura y entorno del cuento con el propósito de revelar estructuras paralelas: una simetría entre la forma y el fondo; considerando, así mismo, la intrusión del autor en el texto, el problema que supone un lenguaje referencial, así como las transformaciones intencionadas resultantes de la apropiación textual.

It has been nearly half a century since the author was proclaimed to be dead in Barthes' famous essay "The Death of the Author" (1977), an idea that though toned down by other authors

like Foucault, still remains as the paradigmatic approach to literary criticism. Indeed, the author's presence is not always revealed within any given narrative, since the text provides even more than what the author originally planned. As Umberto Eco suggests in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (2002), the intention of the author is often "very difficult to find out and frequently irrelevant for the interpretation of a text" (26). Notwithstanding the stress on reading according to what the text itself offers and, likewise, on safeguarding its spotless quality from outside constituents –i.e. the author's experience and/or volition– it is undeniable that purpose can be taken into account. After all, intentionality stems from the mere act of writing.

One may find authors who aim to shed some light on the text before them without abiding by their pre-conceived notions about the author's intent in order to find out clues that may lead to the text's full understanding, among them Umberto Eco, Richard Rorty, or E. D. Hirsch. In the latter's *Validity in Interpretation* (1967)*,* the reader realizes that the author's defense becomes, rather, the text's defense, posing the question of how to approach the text. This issue brings together two apparently contradictory literary theories: the traditional approach to literature, in which bibliographical facts and the author's intention are taken into account, and the understanding of the text as the only valid object of analysis, defended by formalists and structuralists. In "The House of Poe" (1967), Richard Wilbur mentions several theoretical approaches to Poe's works, ranging from those that ignore allegorical meaning to those which are based solely on metaphorical interpretations. Accordingly, it can be surmised that there are, at least, two ways of dealing with the reading: by taking into account the suggestions that point out how to unravel a double literary framework and, therefore, to find out the author's obscure purpose; or by reading the text in an attempt to highlight the clues that lead to other significant patterns, regardless of the author's intentionality. However, it is impossible not to think that certain keys are intentionally dropped as a result of methodological repetitions that, in addition, provide acceptable means of interpretation. This stance does not imply any significant encroachment by the author on the text; intention is not to be understood as agenda or propaganda.[1]

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1 Such interpretations are neither profitable to literary theory, nor do they make an honest use of a text's interpretative elements. Furthermore, they are not appealing to

It is clear that influence is not to be ignored but the sort of intention here mentioned focuses on the structural framework, the narrative: its literary design. Irwin's "The Quincuncial Network in Poe's Pym" (1992) focuses on a particular scene within Poe's novel (the one which describes the organization of fowls' nests in Desolation Island). Irwin's theory suggests that there must be a reason, beyond mere narrative compulsion, for such a scene to be so long and so minutely detailed and narrated. The scene in itself is unrelated to the present essay, but Irwin's astonishing revelation thoroughly justifies the methodological approach to it, since it proves that beneath the naturalist scene lies an intricate and logical entanglement, not being exclusively the product of inspiration, chance, or personal experiences.

Taking into account such stance, Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" will be analyzed with the purpose of defending the intentionality of its design. It will be read as a composition that is based on parallel structures formed by a series of analogous elements present in the tale's plot, scenery, characters and motifs, as well as in the intertextuality within the story. In addition, and after a brief commentary on Poe's own thoughts on authorial intentionality, the first fragments of "The Fall of the House of Usher" will be studied, highlighting one of the story's principal elements: the narrator's impossibility to describe reality through language. The closing section will attempt to shed some light on the appropriation of texts from other authors and the transformation of their form and meaning to suit the author's design, which in the case of the story is deeply related to Poe's "Ligeia."

I. THE FRAMEWORK

"The Philosophy of Composition" (Poe 480-492) exposes the process of framing a literary work: "In his essay Poe attempts to explain how he creates poetry for public consumption or to affect universal appeal" (Rizzo 155). In "The Poetic Principle" (Poe 499-513), Poe states that there cannot be such thing as a long poem. If we were to argue as counter-examples poems such as "Iliad" or "Paradise Lost," Poe would contend that the reader would find that they are narrations composed by a series of short poems where the intensity

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the reader's imagination. In many ways, an interpretation that relies on the author's experiences has to be limited to the reader's knowledge of the author's context.

of emotions escalates and wanes according to the time spent reading the text: "But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length" ("Poetic" 266).

If this were accepted as a true statement, then a similar phenomenon would be appreciated in any short tale. The main issue that the reader faces in a poem that needs two or more reading sessions is that everyday reality would interfere with the continuity of the poem. The short tale, as the poem, has to preserve the mood towards an expected and predetermined climax, which would be lost in a very long composition. In "A Review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales,*" Poe's opinion on the matter is clearly stated (102-104).

Once established that the short story must develop in a single reading session, so as not to lose the grip on the reader, Poe discards composition as fruit of a certain inspiration, which, seizing the writer, allows him to write the text. Poe stresses the importance of intention and work in every valuable text. It must be admitted, however, that in some cases certain elements are in fact accidental, since a work of art is indeed able to rise above the author's expectations or design. Nevertheless, it could be argued that even behind the apparent adventitiousness and coincidental character of some elements, a certain degree of design can be found. Taking such stance into account, "The Fall of the House of Usher" will be approached very attentively, trying to examine every environment, situation, emotion and development in order to find a clear structure in the construction of the tale.

II. THE LAYOUT: DESCRIPTION AND LANGUAGE

In the first five paragraphs of "The Fall of the House of Usher" the writer has already sketched out the plan that he is going to follow throughout the narration. The interest in these paragraphs, in which the narrator has not even entered the mansion, lies in the fact that the complete plot has already been suggested; and, being faithful to the outlined theory, it should be enough in order to determine the intentionality that will lead the narration. According to Wood Krutch, "The creations of his imagination satisfy perfectly his critical theories because the theories were made to fit the works" (22). Therefore, we could regard Poe's short stories and theories as heading towards the

same initial intention:

> I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect.* [...] I say to myself, in the first place, 'of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?' Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone. (Poe, "Philosophy" 194)

Right from the story's title the reader realizes that Poe is making no effort to conceal the outcome: the house is bound to fall. According to Hammond´s *Companion* (1981): "Usher indeed inhabits a ruined palace of art and the reader has the sense, with his death, the building itself must come to an end" (72). Immediately after, the epigraph is presented.

> Son cœur est un luth suspendu;
> Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.
> De Béranger (Poe, "Fall" 397)

Taking into account the admission of purpose, it is impossible to skim over the many exogenous patterns that the epigraph offers. These will be mentioned further on in the essay. By now, suffice it to underline the most evident clues that herald the development of the narrative. Likewise, it is also enough to understand that, according to the closest association**,** "Israfel" (Poe 171-179), it foretells a particular emotional sensibility in some of the characters. "'Israfel' reminds us that in this imperfect world the poet can approach truth only through the veil of beautiful forms" (Stovall 175).

The first paragraph focuses on the mansion's environment with a description that sets the mood for the whole story. The narrator depicts it as a sublime image, overwhelming and terrible, but at the same time beautiful. The sadness that the location inspires is undeniable and the gloom and spectral feelings are prepared to flood the narration "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" (Poe, "Fall" 397).

The narrator is confronted with a problem that will relentlessly pursue him throughout the narration: the problem of language. Faced with the unspeakable, he does not even know how to start describing it to himself. Therefore, a breach opens up

between what can be felt and what can be understood:

> What was it — I paused to think — 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, "Fall" 397-398)

This perception is not unusual since, in fact, it is recurrent in the gothic fiction of different nations and periods. Take, for instance, the narrator´s attempt to define what unsettles those who meet Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1994), which so clearly evokes Poe's tale. The intuition that something is "wrong" prevails over the inability to specify precisely what is wrong and, likewise, feeling overcomes reason. However, being purely rational, the mechanism of communication fails, which is why narrators are forced to spin around the issue without being able to provide any satisfactory answer:

> He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives the strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point. He's an extraordinary looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way. [...] I can't describe him. And it's not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment. [...]
> Mr Hyde [...] gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile [...] -all these were points against him; but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr Utterson regarded him. "There must be something else," said the perplexed gentleman. "There is something more, if I can find a name for it." (Stevenson 15-23)

Communicating a reality that cannot be grasped rationally by means of using an imperfect and logical tool, along with the linguistic crisis that the narrator suffers, provokes the impossibility of verbalizing the ineffable. This attitude adds to the unreliability because, according to Thomas Weiskel:

> To the eye of the present, everything in the past looks like a compromise between the still further back and the yet to be or the new. That is not how the past felt or was lived, but it is, perhaps inevitably, the way its significance is structured. A metaphor is a compromise struck between the old and the new, between the overwhelming authority of language and the irrepressible anarchy of wit, or whatever principle of unprincipled association makes wit possible. (4)

As in some of Poe's other stories, such as "The Facts in the Case of M Valdemar" or "Some Words with a Mummy," the narrator struggles against his need to describe the supernatural, however impossible it is to do so. Although of a different nature, such difficulty is a trial similar to the one Dante faces when describing some parts of his journey and the visions he beholds here. [2] Particularly, this is the case of his rendition of the final revelation, God, in Canto XXXIII of *Paradise* (Dante 497, 499), in which he is aware and acknowledges the impossibility to transmute it to human language:

> From that moment what I saw was greater
> Than our language, which fails at such a prospect (v. 55-56)
> [...]
> O how my speech falls short, how faint it is
> For my conception! (v. 121-122)

III. PARALELL STRUCTURES

Returning to the narrator's description of the mansion's environment, he continues by addressing the purpose of his visit. In addition, he also reveals that the inhabitant of the house suffers from the most unusual malady, which, combined with the ghastly surroundings, creates a tension or fear that anticipates tragedy. There is both relief and sorrow in the fact that the story is being told in the first person, because it allows the reader to believe that the narrator overcame the terrible instances that he is about to witness. The distress comes when the reader thinks that the narration is an

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[2] The relation between Poe's tale and Dante is not unexplored, as can be seen in Allen Tate´s "Our Cousin Poe" (46).

account of true facts. In "Disfiguring the Perfect Plot: Doubling and Self-Betrayal in Poe" (1989), there is a remark about narrating on the first person: "Poe's narrators retain only the semblance of personality, these insubstantial figures complicate the way we are accustomed to reading the first-person fiction" (Auerbach 21). It is worth noting that, beyond the complications that Auerbach puts forward, the narrator is a mere excuse to be able to tell the facts: he is not essential for the story in itself, as he is just an appearance of personality, but he is necessary so as to satisfy the narrative urge. "The Question of Poe's Narrators" may offer an explanation that justifies such vacuity. It refers to the language with which these narrators attempt to describe what they behold.

> The language of men reaching futilely toward the ineffable always runs the risk of appearing more flatulent than inspired. Indeed in the very breakdown of their visions into lurid and purple rhetoric, Poe's characters enforce the message of failure that permeates their aspirations and actions. (Gargano 23)

Although this assertion may seem more appropriate to the final part of the narrative, it can be said to hold true at this early stage, even in the previous moments to the definite breach of language, since it is important to bear in mind that the narration of facts is subsequent to said rupture. In other words, the narrator is relating a series of events after he has already experienced them. Therefore, both the narrator's memory and consciousness are already polluted by the supernatural events that he has witnessed.

At this point, one is usually confronted with the urge to establish a clear difference between the parallel figures of author and narrator. The present work has stressed the presence of intentionality in the story, but at this stage, it appears that Poe leaves the narrator to his own devices.[3] Had this story been told in the third person, it would be easy to understand the way the reader learns things that the narrator ignores; however, this is not the case, as "Poe suggests to his readers ideas never entertained by the narrators" (Gargano 23). Auerbach agrees, and adds Bell's complaint, when he states:

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[3] Once again, it can be related to the link between Dante and his traveler: occasionally Dante is the surrogate, but during periods of metaphysical doubts, whenever actions or considerations might lead to his doom, Dante learns to split himself apart from his character in order not to be accused and judged by such attitudes.

> The associated failure of his fictional surrogates to understand the tales they tell about themselves [...] the exasperating obtuseness of Poe's narrators is frequently a crux in the secondary criticism. Why do these first persons so often and so blindly resist acknowledging what remains obvious to the reader? [...] Michael Bell [...] complains that Poe's narrators "refuse the implications of their own suggestive symbols." Bell points out [...] that the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" fails to make the obvious allegorical connection between Roderick's head and the mansion even as he belabors the analogy with numerous descriptive details. (25)

In addition to the parallel structure of author and narrator, the third paragraph reveals the existence of another analogy: the House of Usher is not only the building but also the family itself. Accordingly, Poe, through the narrator, leaves nothing either to chance or to the reader's interpretation. He does not take the risk that some off-guard reader does not link the family name with the house, a link that even "the minds of the peasantry" are able to establish (Poe, "Fall" 399). Notwithstanding, it is not so evident that the separation between Poe and his narrator is as radical –at least at this point– as Auerbach or Bell argue. In fact, the narrator declares not only that there is a connection between family and building, but also that even the least capable reader has reached the same conclusion.

The intentional construction begins to appear clear when considering the title, the environment, a madman, a relationship of ambiguity between the house and its inhabitants and the fact that the fall might not refer, at this point, merely to the building but also to the family.

Moreover, a further parallel structure is presented in the fourth paragraph: a double reflection. The first one, intellectual, and perhaps the more evident, constitutes the narrator's attempt to justify the events which he is about to tell, calling his impressions paradoxical, strange fancies surrounded by mystic vapors: mere superstitions. The narrator seems to forewarn of the extremely unnatural events that will follow in the narration. He needs to express what he saw, but he is aware of the reader's skepticism when he does it, in a very similar way to the narrator in "The Black Cat," whose first lines proclaim:

> FOR the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to

> pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to
> expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence.
> Yet, mad am I not — and very surely do I not dream. (Poe, "Black"
> 849)

The asseveration that the events, however unreal they might appear,
were revealed to his senses is not unusual in Poe's narrators and
also introduces a degree of authenticity in the story; it foretells the
horror by confessing that he himself found it hard to make sense of
what he saw there.

> These protagonists [...] speak their own thoughts and are the dupes
> of their own passions. [...] Poe understands them far better than they
> can possibly understand themselves. Indeed, he often so designs his
> tales as to show his narrators' limited comprehension of their own
> problems and states of mind. (Gargano 22-23)

The narrators of the stories that are here quoted agree on how
distressing it is to attempt to explain the unspeakable and it is there,
precisely, where Poe sets himself apart from them. He understands
them, and lets them express their madness freely. However, he does
not share it, at least not in the narrative function: "Part of the
widespread critical condescension toward Edgar Allan Poe's short
stories undoubtedly stems from the impatience with what is taken to
be his 'cheap' or embarrassing Gothic style" (Gargano 22). It is not
Poe's prose that suffers from incoherence, but his narrators' voices.
Since narrator and writer are not one and the same, neither the
shouts nor the complaints of the former belong to the latter: "The
structure of Poe's stories compels realization than they are more
than the effusions of their narrators' often disordered mentalities"
(Gargano 23).

The second reflection, a physical one, is that which
announces how the structure of the tale is going to work. The
narrator makes an intellectual contemplation but he also sees the
reflection of the castle in the water evincing an internal rhyme
between the real building and the mirrored one. As the reader
advances through the tale he will see that the unfolding of fatal
events operates in the same way. There is always a parallel structure
throughout the story; the parallel vision of the reflected castle
insinuates an analogy that has already started to work with the
ambiguity of the mansion's name and the family's name.

The description of the construction before the narrator enters the house definitively unifies the building and the family. Of the edifice, the narrator remarks: "No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones" (Poe, "Fall" 400). Once again, the problem of language becomes evident, in this case as either the impossibility to fully describe that mentioned "wild inconsistency" or an unwillingness to do so. One may suppose that such a quandary results from the uncertainty that shrouds the very events perceived.

Taking into account that the narrator had already introduced the ambiguity of the name referring either to the house or to the family (Beebe 123), and then established a parallel structure, one realizes that the wrongs of the building are also those of the family; by cause or by effect, or even simultaneously, in accordance to the nature of the story. The paragraph ends with the observance of a crack that goes from the mansion's roof to the water, and it is predictable, at this point, that a similar rupture occurs in the family. Perhaps it is Usher's malady itself (Beebe 125).

The narrator's entrance to the house marks the point where the host is introduced and his ailment explained. The narrative also establishes "a [...] relationship between a genius and his less discerning narrator-companion; in the emphasis on mystery and disclosure" (Kennedy 117-118). The sickness consists in an extremely keen perception of the world. That is, his senses have become over-perceptive and distinguish the slightest smell or taste and, as shown later, the slightest sound. Here a parallelism between the characteristic of the malady and the epigraph of the story is seen.

> Son cœur est un luth suspendu;
> Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.
> De Béranger (Poe, "Fall" 397)

The quotation is taken from the poem "Le Refus," which deals with political satire and social demonstration. Possibly, the quotation acts as a clue for the reader to address the political poem and attempt to find different elements in it that might help to decipher the story. As will be presently disclosed, the use of intertextual references to other works constitutes another dimension where the structure is also based on parallels. In the case of the epigraph, by taking into account the textual elements' purpose, the image of the

lute may also refer initially to Poe's "Israfel," published in 1831 –
eight years prior to the publication of the story– in which the angel is
described as a most wonderful being, whose heart is the sweetest
lute. Through the connection to this poem, it is hard not to
understand the epigraph as a reference to Coleridge's "The Aeolian
Harp," given the analogous relationship of some elements of these
two works. In Coleridge's poem the poet is compared with an
instrument so delicate and sensitive that the wind alone is able to
create melodies out of it without predisposition or intention. In both
cases, the force of nature or powerful feelings, move the poet to a
state of ecstasy; in Usher's case he is moved excessively. Somehow,
he becomes the personification of Coleridge's dreamt harp, which is
why, later on, the narrator insists in drawing Roderick Usher away
from any place where he could assist to nature's sublime display; a
pivotal moment in the narrative, staged along with the storm. Both
characters begin a relationship based on the sharing of artistic
experiences; reading quite often and sometimes, while the narrator
listens, the host will play endless melodies in a string instrument
that is the only one that his sensibility tolerates.

Another example of the parallel design of intertextual
references can be perceived in the painting of a tunnel that the
narrator beholds in a subsequent episode. This painting can be
understood as a reference to the works of John Henry Fuseli. Two
parallelisms can be found with the introduction of the painting. The
first one is the image: a tunnel with light that seems to come from
nowhere and leads nowhere. It might be a metaphor of Usher's
condition, which in spite of being illuminated, leads nowhere but to
his own suffocation. The second one is the crossed reference to
Fuseli's work, which would gain sense later on: a specific painting
called "Nightmare," in which an incubus sits on a maiden's chest
while she uncomfortably sleeps.[4]

The next parallelism can be found in the couplets that Usher
sings when he is playing the string instrument. These couplets are a
poem and refer to a palace that has been haunted, whose master
lives in wealth and in radiant splendor, sitting in glory while people
dance to the music of a *lute*. Then an evil overcomes and destroys
the happiness of the realm, and the music becomes discordant. The
poem seems to reflect (as the water did with the mansion) the reality

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4 Such a conclusion is merely an opinion based on the title's suggestion; otherwise,
the onlooker can only assume that she is dead.

of what is happening in Usher's life. It is a poem that anticipates the fall of the house, portraying the correspondence between the texts and their reality.

Afterwards, both reader and narrator learn about a second dimension of Usher's disturbed condition: his fear concerning the possibility of his only existing relative vanishing; the anxiety resulting from his sister's imminent death. Once again, one surmises about double meaning. Beyond fear, which is both symptom and cause of the disease, there is the hint that their fates are linked, suggesting that his life depends on her, and vice versa. After depicting the possible effects of Lady Usher's decline on Roderick's psychosomatic condition, the reader encounters the following paragraph, which describes Lady Usher's illness and finishes with a sentence of strange significance; a statement that insinuates Poe's intention towards the conclusion of the text.

> The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character, were the unusual diagnosis. Hitherto she had steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady, and had not betaken herself finally to bed; but, on the closing in of the evening of my arrival at the house, she succumbed […] to the prostrating power of the destroyer; and I learned that the glimpse I had obtained of her person would thus probably be the last I should obtain — that the lady, at least while living, would be seen by me no more. (Poe, "Fall" 404)

This passage is an anticipation of tremendous horror. The statement would not even be odd, pronounced by a guest in a house of a dying host. However, apparently trivial "at least while living," impregnates the sentence with meaning. It could mean that when Lady Usher dies he would see her corpse before being buried; but it also opens an interpretive alternative for the final events.

During the mentioned artistic encounters, it is told that the family has been always very zealous of their inheritance, that the name has been passed from sire to son without ever being drawn outside the family grounds. This fact strongly suggests an incestuous past down the family lineage (Thompson 143). Usher and his sister being the last members of the family, some ground for speculation is opened and incest can be imagined between the siblings who, being barren in their illnesses, were unable to preserve the name. Or, that

in order to avoid such infamy, they doomed the family's name to its disappearance. Any of these cases responds to the frustration and terror in Usher's words: "I *must* perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost" (Poe "Fall" 403).

When the death of Madeline Usher is announced, Roderick Usher expresses his desire to keep her in a vault inside the mansion for a few days before she is properly buried. Essays like Walker's "The 'Legitimate' Sources of Terror" (1971) or Hill's "The Dual Hallucination" (1971) state that even though the first reaction of the common reader is to accept that Madeline is alive, and that her escape is possible, reality contradicts that fact. Walker describes the impossibility of such a feat. Hill defends the idea that Lady Usher's return is a figment of Roderick's imagination, shared by the narrator.

Knowing his sister to be cataleptic, to lock her up in a crypt, instead of leaving her to rest in her chambers is odd. The narrator helps to grant him this request, and it is possible to think that this event was what he meant when he said that he would never see Lady Usher alive again. If Usher had thought that she was definitely dead, he would have buried her immediately. There seems to be only a plausible explanation for his demeanor, inasmuch as Usher's insight is accepted and not only the insanity that led to this proceeding: a third possibility exists.

IV. DISSOLUTION OF DUALITY

A few days later a tremendous storm unleashes, the sublime in its whole strength. That night the narrator wakes up startled because he feels an incubus sitting on his chest, the image of Fuseli's crossed reference. Usher comes into the room and opens the window. Aiming to calm the overexcited senses of his host, the narrator begins reading "Mad Trist" written by Sir Launcelot Canning.

Hitherto, the narrator has established relationships in varying degrees of subtlety that have been leading the reader to the certainty that a parallel structure exists between the house and Usher, between Usher and his illness, between Usher's illness and his sister's, and finally, between the house and the lineage. On a different level, artistic parallelisms can be found: four-line verses, paintings, instruments. Suddenly, Poe drives the narrative from intertextuality to self-reflexivity: narrative is not only a matter of metaphorically reflecting Usher's situation by means of writings,

songs or paintings. It seems that the narrative occurs in reality, as if the reader was dealing with an example of the Holy Scriptures, since it seems that, for a moment, the consequences of the narrative are effective, creative, primeval, divine. Furthermore both reader and narrator are set on the same dimension since they both assist to the metanarrative manifestation, as a corollary, of the three successive parallelisms.

On a first impression, the narrator attempted to deal with the unspeakable by means of words. Language was not enough to describe reality since he lacked the linguistic patterns that would help him to refer extra-lingual contents. The problem appears in a reversed situation: language causes reality's boundaries to overflow.

> Poe theorized that words possessed a "physical power," since the creation of the cosmos was itself an effect of speaking. But the substantializing power by which words create something out of nothing also endows them with the capacity to injure (Kennedy 115-116)

While the narrator is reading a passage of the book in which the hero is trying to get into a hermit's house, so violently that he cracks and tears the door, he thinks he hears –or, in fact, hears– in a remote part of the mansion, a noise similar to the one he just read. As he continues his reading, the hero of the book kills a dragon that dies with a terrible shriek. This time the narrator is certain that he has heard something, a similar screak in the corridors of the mansion. Finally, the hero gets to where a brass shield is hung, and as he approaches, the shield falls to his feet making an extremely loud sound. A great noise, as of a brass shield hitting the floor, gets the narrator to his feet. After such self-reflexive circumstance shocks the reader, the revelation of something even more frightful is presented. Both reader and narrator return to their corresponding conditions and the foretold dénouement unfolds. In "Revenge of Silence, The foreclosure of Language," J. Gerald Kennedy states that the tale "Mystification" "deploys writing as a weapon, a means of vanquishing an enemy through interpretive confusion" (116-117). A cognate metaphor, though reversed, can be presented: the act of reading out loud summons the enemy; it creates it, or as in this case, awakens and lures it.

The noises are made by Lady Usher as she escaped from her improvised entombment; the structure of her flight is parallel to that

of the champion getting his prize in the book read by the narrator. After this frightening moment, the horror comes in the form of Lady Usher as she enters the room. It is never cleared if she was cataleptic and woke up, or if she was dead and came from beyond. There is evidence to support either of the two. To argue in favor of the first case it is necessary to take into account the antecedent of the illness, and the fact that Usher said that for days he had been hearing her moving in the dungeon. To defend the latter assumption it is necessary to remember that the narrator had said he would never see Lady Usher alive again, so it is possible to assume that she is an undead. It is unclear how she survived without nourishment or how, being sick, had the strength to escape from her imprisonment, considering the iron door. This uncertainty is not a mistake. Far from that, it is an intended effect that Poe seeks in his tale in order to allow the reader to print his own sense of horror into the story. This offers a wider range of reality or credibility. He keeps the situation in the realms of the possible, yet extraordinary, facts for the skeptic, or in the grounds of the unnatural, for the mystic. It was known, since the title, that the house of Usher would fall, the reader just did not know how. "And such is the symmetry of the story that this is not revealed until the very last line" (Hammond 72).

Kennedy argues that, as a forerunner of Dupin's stories, "Mystification" considers the imposition of silence as a means of revenge,

> Based ultimately upon the inherit capacity of words to inflict mortal wounds, to impose silence. That is, language holds the key to intellectual rivalry which, is finally a contest for survival. (118)

On the contrary, in the case of "The Fall of the House of Usher" silence is the better regarded value. Silence keeps Roderick calm, while events unfold in the midst of noise. The importance of silence was initially provided by elements such as the storm and the gloomy manor's description. Confusion creeps in by means of language, altering what has been read in reality, in addition to the blare and rumblings of Madeline's progress and, finally, the fall of the house of Usher.

V. EPILOGUE: ON WILL AND TEXTUAL SALVAGING

The readers who are prone to accept the supernatural

explanation are assisted by the precedent of Poe's different stories as Lady Usher seems to be sharing Lady Ligeia's virtue: an iron will that does not entirely yield to death.

> And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.
>
> Joseph Glanvill (Poe, "Ligeia" 310)

It is worth noting that these were possibly not Glanvill's exact words, since the precise quotation is now quite impossible to track down. Despite that fact, it responds to the general feeling of the author and its meaning matches his work. The quotation's importance does not rely on its authorship but, rather, on its signification. Albeit not identical to the use of the epigraph from De Béranger's "Le Refus," Glanvill's epigraph follows a similar design: to endow new meaning to an existing text, altering its original signification to suit the content and implications of Poe's different literary texts. As already pointed out, the result is the creation of further parallel figures between the main work and the different texts referred to, both at the textual and intertextual level. As a result, Poe has been repeatedly accused of plagiarizing other authors' works (Galván 11; Rachman 51). Nevertheless, the reader who chooses to advocate Poe might reach the conclusion that there is no trace of misappropriation, in a subjective way. Glanvill's quote is not plagiarism, but quite the opposite. In fact, Poe confers him some words that he did not write; he plagiarizes the authorship of a convenient epilogue. Objectively analyzed, the situation would not even link Poe's plagiarism charges and Glanvill's quotation. Subjectively, however, they are one and the same thing.

Poe is a master of deceit, this understood as an illusionist's trick. Conflicting points of view have conducted thorough research on this matter. A remarkable article defending the author's illusionist outlook is Martín Gutiérrez's "Edgar Allan Poe: misery and mystery in 'The Man of the Crowd'" (2000), whereby the illusionist effect is to be termed *delusion,* which is "a deception." The article's author turns this feature into an attribute.

It should be considered that the approach hereby taken is a

subjective one. The significance of such illusions, plagiarisms and tricks does not rely as much on intellectual property theft, as on handling certain ideas so that they imply a richer potential than the one intended originally. It is subjective inasmuch as meaning has been manipulated by the author and, even more significant, transfigured by the reader who, due to the author's various tricks, is able to render new values and interpretations to the original text. Therefore, the latter becomes a new one, even though words remain identical: subjectively, the words are Poe's. Concerning De Béranger's quotation (Poe, "Fall" 397), it is a clear reference of the argument stated hereby. Likewise, Coleridge has been accused of plagiarism and, seemingly, he proceeds in the same way. On the other hand, Borges, having acted in a similar way, has not experienced any harsh criticism. In fact, such a characteristic has been praised as a fundamental part of his fiction.

Considering Glanvill's quotation again, authorship appears as a scarcely relevant matter. Instead, content prevails. The quotation heads "Ligeia," since the namesake character seems to embody the notion of will depicted by Glanvill. Similarly, Madeline Usher also impersonates such a spirit, but in a slightly devious way. In fact, Lady Usher has returned from beyond, or else, she did not completely surrender to death. She must have had a purpose to come back. An early interpretation might reveal that her return was enabled, as Lady Ligeia's case, by the wish to resist death. However, there is a second reading: it is reasonable to assert that her return was not the consequence of an urgent need to hold on to life, as her goal; this purpose was not end but means to achieve a final objective.

In the final paragraphs a particular mood is created, an anxiety that prepares the scene for the dénouement, as Kennedy proposes, though in reference to silence in Poe's work, is more than adequate for the present situation: "Anxiety projects itself as aggression to create a climate of potential violence" (119). As previously mentioned, in this case it is noise and not silence that generates this degree of anxiety. The 'awakening' of Lady Usher, being interrupted in the tale by the out loud reading, progressively acquires power, and reality, as the reading approaches its own climax. Roderick confesses to have heard Lady Usher while she was imprisoned, thinking that he has buried her alive. Regardless of her being agonizing or resurrected, she does not appear to have 'returned' to stay. She has come back for his brother so that she could die by his side; either in an embrace of love or in an embrace of

hatred.

> The process is what we call consideration and decision. It is thus that we are wise and unwise. It is thus that the withered leaf in an autumn breeze shows grater or less intelligence than its fellows, falling upon the land or upon the lake. The secret of human action is an open one -something contracts our muscles. Does it matter if we give to the preparatory molecular changes the name of will? (Bierce 84)

Roderick and Madeleine's death puts an end to the name, to the lineage and to the house. "What if Madeleine is dead, and like Poe's other heroines cannot stay away from the life she has lost?" (Wood 25). Madeline did not surrender wholly to death, not even partially, she defeated it long enough to take her brother with her. She had a stronger will. She did not to yield to it entirely, or defeat it, as Ligeia. She had the power to access death voluntarily. She delayed death to her convenience, to her whim, to her willpower.

> That is not dead which can eternal lie
> And with strange aeons even death may die.
> (Lovecraft, "The Nameless City")

VI. CONCLUSION

Through the course of this essay different aspects of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" have been studied in the attempt to propose a fully intentional reading of the work. If Poe's own remarks about the significance of work and design in literary composition do not suffice to defend the intentional writing of his tales, then the aspects foregrounded in this article may convince the reader of such a scheme. The tale's initial paragraphs address the impossibility of language to communicate the ineffable, an issue also present in works like Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and other tales from Poe, in addition to laying the foundations for the structure, based on parallels, over which the rest of the story and its principal elements are built. The fact that we can trace these series of analogies in the descriptions of characters and settings may already reinforce the appreciation of the story's intentional creation. Yet such parallelisms have been shown to exist not merely bound to the text itself, but they constitute an

intertextual network in which Poe appropriates and relocates the works from other authors, transforming their meaning in the process. The result of such use of artistic references results in the transition of the narrative from intertextuality to self-reflexivity, which may bring the reader into the reality of the events narrated. This, plus the parallel design of the structure, constitutes a device through which Poe is able to overcome the rational dismissal of the facts of the story by any skeptical reader and to ensure the intended effect of the tale, as initially envisioned by the author in its composition.

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