

Logic and Religion in Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and Symbolism.

Thomas Atkinson - 06256029

MA by Research

## Contents

Chapter 1: Previously on Poe.....	3
Chapter 2: Allegory, Embedded Meaning and Construction in Usher.....	6
Chapter 3: The Entropic Course of <i>Usher</i> .....	17
Chapter 4: Mystery, Darkness and Silence and the Death Drive.....	21
Chapter 5: Doubles, Repetitions and The House.....	34
Chapter 6: Deconstruction and the Use of Language Ambiguity in <i>Usher</i> .....	45
Chapter 7: Organ Symbolism and Religious Motifs.....	56
Chapter 8: Interpreting <i>Usher</i> .....	67
References.....	76

## Chapter 1: Previously on Poe

When it comes to the analysis of Poe, be it the man or his works there is little that has not already been done. Critics, both biased and fair, have looked at every aspect of Edgar Allan Poe: his personal life, his short fiction, his poems, his essays and any meaning which might lie within them. The obvious question is then “why conduct another study in so full a field?” The answer is that of improvement. This study will offer a more rounded and complete analysis of a single tale. It will not be limited to what so often happens in Poe study, that a single aspect is combed to show or prove a point. Examples of this include the grouping of tales by theme such as in the work of Levine and Hoffman, or the need to present a single theme such as Jules Zanger does with forbidden knowledge. This singular way of viewing Poe extends to the application of theory. It is instantly obvious to even a first-time reader of Poe that there is a psychological aspect to his work, to deny it would be to fly in the face of reason. Due to this aspect of Poe’s work, there is a wealth of psychoanalytic studies available. Psychoanalysis of Poe’s work aside there are also deconstructive readings.

In order effectively to analyse the work of Poe, several facts must be considered. Poe used personal and biographical references in his work to an extent that makes ignoring them in the analysis of his tales impossible. As such they must be incorporated without being fixated upon. His parents’ background in acting appears in his work with the way Poe sets a scene and explicitly refers to this scenic construction. The death of women in his novels parallels the loss of women in his life and, as many critics have pointed out, the relationship between Poe and his cousin seems to provide the inspiration for Roderick and Madeline in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The aspects of Poe’s allegory are intertwined and may not be examined separately, but must be analysed relative to what they represent and their relation to the other

parts of the tale. In his essay on reinterpreting "*The Fall of the House of Usher*",<sup>1</sup> Leo Spitzer falls into the trap of isolating the atmosphere and the use of darkness and light in the tale without ever showing their significance or relating the two. It is because of this that the essay merely highlights Poe's descriptive prowess and does not show the true importance of what is being described. This interrelation of aspects of a tale mean Poe's writing is highly complex. It is therefore not enough to apply a single literary theory, nor is it enough to pick a single theme for analysis. Poe used a totality of writing style, and as such the entire tale must be analysed as every aspect is relevant. This is the reason why articles such as W.O. Clough's 'The Use of Colour Words' by Edgar Allen Poe or J. O. Bailey's 'What Happens in "The Fall of the House of Usher"?' fall short. By picking up on a single aspect of Poe's tales, such as the Narrator as a symbol of rational thought by Bailey or Poe's use of white and black by Clough, who accurately observes that there is a psychological element behind the choosing of such colour schemes yet leaves it at that without questioning the motive behind such choices. This form of analysis is incomplete in that it only highlights aspects of a tale and doesn't ascribe any meaning as to why they are there. To fully comprehend the tales of Poe, the surface narrative must be penetrated and the undercurrent of meaning exposed. If this is not achieved then critics of the work of Poe will forever fall into two camps, those who admire the aesthetic brilliance of the author and those who admire the technical and clinical construction of a tale. The irony being these are the two things Poe wished to perfectly combine.

By considering these two facts, this study offers a dual application of theory. It will provide both psychoanalysis and deconstruction of *The Fall of the House of Usher*. It recognises that Poe the author is not a separate entity to his work, whilst maintaining a line

---

<sup>1</sup> Referred to from this point on as *Usher* to indicate the full text, rather than a specific character.

between analysing the text and the author. It will also analyse the entire tale and interpret multiple themes and references in the work due to the totality style of writing. If this study has to have an origin, a first stepping stone, then that would be the Bruce Olson essay 'Poe's Strategy in "The Fall of The House of Usher"'. In this essay Olson identifies that "Poe seems to be seeking the aesthetic counterpart of a critical argument[...]" and that Poe is struggling to reconcile a relationship between intellect and what Olson calls "[...]the process of creating Beauty" (Olson, 556). The essay also glances over the organic relationship between the House and Roderick, and it is by using these from Olson, coupled with original study, that this work will improve existing understanding of Poe's tale.

## Chapter 2: Allegory, Embedded Meaning and Construction

Evidence from previous studies on both Edgar Allan Poe and his work has been used as the basis for this hypothesis: that there is strong evidence for the tale *Usher* to be interpreted as a complexly constructed allegory. The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘allegory’ as “a story, poem or picture which contains a hidden meaning” and that the theme of this allegory is a philosophical thought process concerning the relationship between logical and Christian religious thought and behaviour. In order to show this within Poe’s tale, two forms of critical analysis are being applied: psychoanalysis and deconstruction. The reason for using two forms of analysis is to provide a more comprehensive reading of the tale. In applying separate literary theories, the aim is that each analysis will highlight different themes within the text. This is part of the new approach this work uses in order to provide more comprehensive analysis of *Usher*. This work follows a structure therefore; the Freudian psychoanalysis and interpretation will occur first, followed by the Deconstructive close reading. The findings of these two theories will then be combined to provide an overall interpretation of the work.

The first part of the analysis will take a psychoanalytic approach to the tale, focussing on the Freudian concept of The Uncanny within the text. Psychoanalysis is a theory often applied to Poe’s texts as “surely no other writer other than Freud himself has so engaged the psychoanalytic literary community” (Benfey in Silverman 27). In this work, the use of psychoanalysis will show how themes and motifs that occur within the text expose the hidden undercurrent of meaning. Psychoanalysis was chosen as it is a highly useful tool for exposing the psychological nature of the text, and its application to the fiction of Poe is nothing new as “other studies, long and short, French and American have used psychoanalysis to some extent in the search for Poe’s hidden secrets” (Stovall 418). The Uncanny as a concept in particular is well suited to *Usher* due to the tale’s content and has been associated with Poe’s work in other studies (Kaplan 48, Vidler 17-18, Royle 145). When using psychoanalysis, care has

been taken to apply it to Poe's work alone and not Poe himself. However it is necessary that this work does take into account some biographical information regarding Poe to provide a more relevant interpretation of *Usher*. In order to accomplish this, a line between the text and author is maintained in order to provide a more rounded analysis of the work, free from any possible subjective influence. Due to previous application of these theories to the work of Poe, psychoanalysis and The Uncanny were deemed justifiable as a relevant method of analysis.

The second part of the work will offer a post-structural analysis of *Usher*. This deconstructive reading emulates the method Roland Barthes uses in *The Semiotic Challenge* which covers the introduction to Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar". The text will be broken down into lexias. The term lexia is used to denote a unit of reading as described in Roland Barthes *The Semiotic Challenge* as "[...] obviously a textual signifier" (Barthes, 263). Each lexia is then given a semiotic analysis. This part of the analysis will involve a close-reading and aim to highlight how the allegorical aspects and themes shown by the psychoanalysis appear in the text. It will also cover the ambiguous nature of the text, the organic nature of the tale and the religious theme of the tale as well as how these are interpreted. It is also noted that due to the very nature of deconstructive theory, what Poe intended in *Usher* cannot truly be uncovered, as Derrida states "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 158). Even if it were possible directly to consult Poe on his work, it would still be impossible to reconstruct his intended meaning. In that regard this analysis also employs a sensible level of deconstruction and logical interpretation as its second form of analysis. This deconstruction will focus more on looking at the use of words, their order and meaning, and phrasing within the tale. If "the writer first deliberately conceives the single effect to be wrought" then the use of deconstruction is an attempt to uncover that single effect (Stovall, 420). When these two theories have been applied to the text the conclusions drawn from them

will be combined in a final chapter which will review the original hypothesis posed in this introduction and how the two analyses have found evidence for this.

Ye who read are still among the living; but I who write shall have long since gone my way into the region of shadows. For indeed strange things shall happen, and secret things be known, [...] And, when seen, there will be some to disbelieve, and some to doubt, and yet a few who will find much to ponder upon in the characters here graven with a stylus of iron.

So opens the Poe work *Shadow – A Parable* and it is strangely clairvoyant in regard to the future analysis of Poe's work in that even an author who was "a direct and major influence on Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine and Rimbaud" should suffer his personal life being seen as the reason for the dark nature and subject matter of his tales and poetry (Galloway, 2003). However, as previously noted, when analysing *Usher* it is impossible not to mention the author, as information about Poe's writing style and nature (by which is implied his penchant for embedding meaning within his fiction) is key to the hypothesis that the text of *Usher* is allegorical in nature. It should be stressed that this study is an analysis of the tale not the author, though it can be argued that Poe does in fact draw on his own life for thematic content in his Tales. As mentioned, there is a danger of the focus of analysis (particularly psychoanalysis) shifting from the text to Poe himself. An essay by Floyd Stovall highlights this by noting that "[Poe's Writing] merits detailed study without reference to its possible auto-biographical significance" (Stovall, 418). Floyd Stovall goes on to highlight the levels of meaning in Poe's work and the need to maintain a strict line between author and text analysis, "I believe the critic should look within the poem or tale for its meaning, [...] To affirm that a work of imagination is only a report of the unconscious is to degrade the creative artist to the level of an amanuensis." (Stovall, 418) As the article highlights, Poe also wrote essays on the



method behind his composition. This is important as Poe's tales are highly constructed with Poe often both explicitly referencing the construction or placing other pieces of work such as the poem *The Conqueror Worm* in *Ligeia* or *The Haunted Palace* in *Usher*. This is repeated behaviour and therefore must be deliberate and worth noting.

As mentioned, it is impossible not to examine the life of Poe when analysing his work, particularly as analysis of his texts has shown that he often used references and material from his own life within them. This work however will keep this biographical analysis brief and related to the themes of the *Usher*. Poe's mother and father were both actors. Poe would have seen them both perform and as such be acquainted first hand with the notion of scenery and the construction of a tale; this is seen in *Usher* explicitly as references are made to the scene and scenery. In May 1836, Poe married his cousin Virginia Clemm; this may be related to an autobiographical reference in *Usher* as Roderick and Madeline are noted to be part of an incestuous family line. Madeline (like Virginia Clemm in reality) also suffers from an illness which causes her to suffer the symptoms of tuberculosis, notably slow breathing and a flush of the cheeks; these are seen in Madeline shortly before her interment by Roderick. While these references may take their inspiration from Poe's actual life they are a small part of what can actually be interpreted from *Usher* and as such have been dealt with here briefly. When it comes to Poe's stance on religion he evinced "the Southern gentleman's respect for moderate religion" and "His religious heritage fitted Poe, who neither attended church very often nor evaded the religious impulses of his own nature" (Buranelli 30 and 42). This shows a very balanced view and is congruent with the dual nature of the man. Poe was rarely overtly religious in his work and in his combination of views on nature, religion and science shows a more pantheistic nature. This did not mean that Poe did not ask questions of religion, he saw potential flaws and questioned their nature, as Jacobs writes "if the primary attribute of God as evidenced by his creation were his artistry, why did the creation exhibit

deformity, pain and death, those flaws in artistic design? Poe did not ask this question in his book reviews during this period, but he did ask it in his philosophical tales” (Jacobs, 405). This philosophical questioning was extremely important to Poe. He saw a relationship between religion, nature and science and even in his work as a critic “He wanted his modes of validation not only to be empirically sound but also to be in accord with a metaphysical system” (Jacobs, 402). It was this relationship between these points that drove Poe to use philosophical arguments and exercise his thoughts in his tales in order to further increase his own understanding. Poe’s fiction was just one part of his desire to know. This desire to know was part of Poe’s obsession with reason which has been described as “the dominant force in his life” (Yewdale, 689). The philosophical thoughts and extending of arguments in fiction was an echo of Poe’s life as “through his entire life he was investigating, analyzing and comparing, being driven always by that irresistible force – Reason” (Yewdale, 690). This echoing of Poe’s obsessions in his work was also seen in his choice not just of problem, but also in his construction of his tale as he “often drew upon his memory for his settings” (Buranelli, 28). Likewise, “Poe wrote some of his tales in immediate response to jolting personal events. “The Masque of the Red Death,” for example, is a story drenched in blood, which appeared soon after his young wife’s first hemorrhages” (Silverman, 18). When analysing the work of Poe it is important to remember therefore that he placed self-reference within his tales, and used personal experience or questions as a basis for his work, but that they were not in any way seriously autobiographical. The experience that Poe uses merely formed a starting point for what he was constructing, the theme or question around which the tale would be built.

The tale of Usher is considered one of Poe’s best stories and is often used as an example of the author’s extreme use of “constructiveness” in his work. It is one of a number of tales published between 1838 and 1840 that have a psychological theme. The tales

published by Poe during this period contain shared themes and motifs, for example the description of a building having the qualities of a head appears in *William Wilson* which was published in the same year (1839) as *Usher* in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, which Poe had just become the editor of (Hayes ed. Xvii). The destructive conclusion of a race is seen in *Usher*, but also on a larger scale in *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion* published the same year.

To say that Poe deliberately concealed or embedded meaning within his tales is nothing new, even Poe's own theory "states that prose fiction, like poetry, like any art, may hold latent meanings that can be deciphered only if the symbols provided by the writer are interpreted rightly by the reader" (Buranelli, 69). Indeed, "Initiated readers of Poe relish [...] having to pore diligently over his texts to detect the embedded secrets" (Kaplan in Silverman, 46). Poe's pastimes, as well as his fiction, show that he was fond of cryptography and ratiocination. Whilst working as an editor he delighted in solving the ciphers he was sent (Wimsatt, 754) and it is clear to see from Poe's work that he had an affinity for mystery and concealment. The often cited examples of this are Poe's short detective stories collectively known as the Dupin Tales, and this was not by accident as "Poe believed that [...] literature locates its deepest meaning in an *undercurrent*. The surfaces of his tales are always deceptions" (Kaplan, 46 in Silverman). Poe's tales were carefully designed and it cannot be forgotten that Poe was writing to make money. Because of this, the fiction he produced had to have entertainment value and hook the reader, one way of doing so was the deliberate presence of mystery in his tales as "Poe aimed to puzzle his readers. Tale after tale begins or ends with an invitation to decode or decipher a peculiar sequence of events" (Benfey in Silverman, 27). Poe's tales are not just thought exercises in which revelations are sought; this very seeking is hidden by the metaphor of the tale. Analysis of Poe's tales must therefore consist of first deciphering his metaphor, then interpreting the results of what is posed by the

“undercurrent [...] of meaning” (Zanger, 533). There is no doubt that Poe has placed an implicit meaning within *Usher*. An essay by Bruce Olson highlights the use of Poe’s strategy and puts forward the notion that Poe is in fact illustrating an argument he develops in his essay *The Poetic Principle*. In the essay it is stated that “the story becomes the means for an argument” (Olson, 557) and this argument is related to the many themes within the tale. The difficulty arises in the analyses itself, as *Usher* is also a perfect example of Poe’s use of totality in his work; everything is relevant and “Poe’s conscious artistic purpose is evident in the effective functioning of many details of symbolism and setting” (Gargano, 179). It is this presence of a multitude of details and totality of writing style that warrant a dual application of theory in order to provide a more complete analysis.

Whether it was a form of entertainment, a personal pleasure or for more cerebral reasons it has been shown that Poe placed meaning in his tales below that of the surface narrative. Poe wanted his tales to be analysed and placed under scrutiny as this was one of the very purposes he constructed them for. These analyses of Poe’s texts have also shown the allegorical nature of his work, often in regard to his apparent need to resolve problems faced in reality (and unfortunately often linked to his life and the tragedies he experienced) as “An allegory was a means whereby his creative imagination undertook to solve certain problems of its own mind and art; they were ways of reducing reality to determinate and logical outlines” (Davidson, 182). What this tells us is that Poe’s use of metaphor is a deliberate and conscious decision in his writing. The notion that Poe’s tales contain metaphor is not a new one, indeed there appear to be recurring themes within his Tales to the extent that his stories have been grouped together in themes such as “The Death of the Beautiful Woman” (Levine, 62) and “Metempsychosis” (Quinn, 198). This thematic content of Poe’s tales is seen more simplistically by Davidson who states “Poe’s allegorical narratives might conveniently be examined under two major themes, one religious the other social and political” (Davidson,

182). This is not to say that Poe's tales are simple fables designed to show a theme, they are in fact complex endeavours by Poe to answer questions and by doing so gain greater understanding, "In a typical story [...] through symbolic setting [...] Poe organizes a series of episodes to suggest his main theoretical concerns and to establish unconventional states of mind in which [...] discoveries can occur" (Shulman, 250). What Shulman highlights is what makes Poe's tales different from a simple allegory or fable; Poe uses his literary creations as exercises in thought. He poses questions or isolates real world problems and then creates a literary universe in which the characters and settings are symbolic and react and interact with each other until the problem reaches some form of resolution at the conclusion of the tale. It is this notion of *Usher* as a thought exercise and its interpretation which forms the focus of this work.

That Poe could explore a religious theme is indicative of the time, religion was still important but when speaking of Poe and his contemporaries "One mark which characterized all these writers is that they came at a time when a once-powerful religion was in decline" (Davidson, 183). This decline gave Poe more freedom to expand on his own religious themes in his tales. One such grouping of tales that relates to the religious theme in Poe's work is those that contain the theme of forbidden knowledge. In an essay on the subject, Jules Zanger covers the more religious aspect of this theme; however he also highlights the search for knowledge occurring in the Tales, "we recognize that Poe's protagonists are, at best, very reluctant seekers after revelation" (Zanger, 535). In the cross-section of tales used in that study this is true, yet even showing this reluctance, they are still seeking the revelation of knowledge that was once hidden. This perceived reluctance, or as he describes of Poe's protagonists, "essentially passive rather than active" may have something to do with the fact that they are literary tools employed by Poe (Zanger, 535). The characters in many of Poe's tales are incomplete, in that they represent a certain viewpoint or are symbolic of a way of

thinking with little room for expansion. This character will then encounter an opposing view, or an event will occur that will test the protagonist's way of thinking. The essay also highlights the curiosity of the protagonists, and this is exactly what Poe often is, curious. This curiosity reflects the need to know something, or a state of what Freud refers to in his essay *The Uncanny* as "intellectual uncertainty" (Freud, 125).

Returning to the notion that *Usher* is a tale which has been meticulously put together "critics have long noted, "The Fall of the House of Usher" is carefully constructed" (Peeples, 179 in Hayes ed.). It is this construction that Poe was proud of and discussed in his essays such as "The Philosophy of Composition" and "How to Write a Blackwood Article". This constructive nature of Poe's writing makes it certain that he would have placed different levels of meaning and understanding in his narrative as a matter of course. *Usher* even reflects on its own construction; in her essay on reading *Usher* Harriet Hustis states that "analysis of Poe's writing, his "production of textuality," needs to be accompanied by analysis of this "metanarrative of reading" (Hustis, 4). This construction of a metanarrative by Poe in his tales was particularly prevalent at the time of writing *Usher* as "Poe's fondness for metafictional self-reference seems to have peaked around this time" (Peeples, 178 in Hayes ed.). This is seen in both the biographical details Poe slips into *Usher*, such as the description of Roderick that critics feel is a textual portrait of Poe, but also of his use of the *mise en abyme*, *The Haunted Palace* in the tale. This use of self-reference is the reason that Poe the author must be considered in the analysis of his work. In placing his own pre-published work within the tale, Poe is both indulging in self-reference as well as emphasising the constructed nature of the tale. Hustis' essay also highlights the nature of the House as representative of the story itself in her argument that the House itself, like the text is a construction with the words being the individual stones. In *Usher* Roderick believes that the House has sentience, and this is seen in the "collocation of the stones", the grammar and

syntax in Hustis' reading. On their own the words are essentially dead stones, but once assembled they have life and are constructed into the tale itself. This repeated reference to its own construction is just one way in which the doubling motif occurs in the tale, (and this is considered in greater depth later on) but it is obvious with such care to emphasise and repeat that in *Usher* "Poe is interested in creating more than just a bizarre story or incisive parody" (Hustis, 4).

This totality and its need for analysis are mentioned in Gargano's essay *The Question of Poe's Narrators*. In it he states that Poe "so often designs his tales" and that he "intends his readers to keep their powers of analysis and judgement ever alert" (Gargano, 178). This means any analysis of Poe's work must scrutinise every aspect in order to provide a worthwhile interpretation. This is another reason why this study used two separate methods of analysis in order to better study the tale of *Usher*.

In summary there is validity in the application of the Freudian concept of the Uncanny through psychoanalysis and a deconstructive close reading to the text of *Usher* to provide evidence congruent to the hypothesis of this work. Poe carefully constructed his texts from both his own personal experience, as well as to aid the extension of philosophic arguments that he wished to explore. This construction was part of Poe's totality writing style and was necessary as Poe (as a critic himself) meant for his work to be held up to scrutiny and wanted it to be appreciated and interpreted for the embedded meaning it concealed. This embedded meaning has been seen in the form of allegory in Poe's tales by previous studies (such as Benton's study of *Eleonora*) and this allegory was often relevant to something personal in the author's life. This previously identified allegorical content in Poe's work made it logical to assume that it would be present in other work due to the thematic groupings made of his fictive texts. Poe's self-reference and use of personal experience was only a basis for a tale though, and Poe never let his writing become a truly self-analytical process which means that

any theory applied to his texts should not apply to Poe himself, or assume that a single character is representative of Poe. It is also clear that Poe had a moderate view on religion and applied his logical and analytic thought process to it in his personal search for understanding. Poe's search "for a unifying principle" (Buranelli, 55) of art, science, logic and religion took place during his fiction was eventually addressed directly in his essays. That is not to say that *Usher* deals directly with the notion of God, or is an argument against religion. Poe was not anti-religious; he merely sought to understand a personal theory that unified reason, logic, nature and religion. It is the aim of this work to interpret and explain how Poe approaches an aspect of his unifying theory in *The Fall of the House of Usher*.



### Chapter 3: The Entropic Course of *Usher*.

The tale of *Usher* moves towards a single event, the implosion of the House. This unwavering route to destruction creates a sense of entropy. This is enhanced throughout the story with descriptions of rot and decay, as well as events such as the death of Madeline and the slow mental decline of Roderick. The geographical movement of the narrative also becomes more claustrophobic as the tale progresses. We journey with the Narrator from unknown origins, to a tract of country, to the Usher estate and finally into a tomb. This constant decrease in the size of the environment is brought to a conclusion when the entire house implodes and is swallowed by the tarn. It is in the entropic nature of the story that the Freudian notion of the Death Drive occurs. It is Roderick who provides a specific reference to this and the fatalistic nature of the tale as he exclaims “I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results.” (*Usher*, 95). The concept of the Death Drive is not named explicitly in *The Uncanny*, yet it does have its roots in that essay and in what Freud recognised as a “compulsion to repeat” (*The Uncanny*, 356). The repetition in this case is the return of something. Repetition and return occur frequently in *Usher*, an example of which is the return of Roderick’s presence in the life of the Narrator. The Death Drive is ultimately fatalistic in nature, as is the tale of *Usher*. Drawing from the point that the tale moves ever inward in focus, this keeps the reader subtly (like the characters) moving ever onward to the climax of the tale. There is at no point a return to any other setting (with the small exception of the return from the crypt to the house), and even the rooms of the house are visited just once. The fate of the characters is also felt by Roderick. The ultimate demise of the siblings is predicted as a result of his extensive reading of literature on chiromancy and fortune telling. Roderick even paints a portrait resembling the crypt in which Madeline is eventually entombed. The beginning of the novel also sets up the eventual death of the Ushers, with its

description of them as the last remaining two. With the starting detail that no other branch of the Usher line has managed to expand these facts, it provides a poor forecast for the future of the Ushers and subtly lets the reader know that a tragedy is likely to occur. The House is also part of the Usher family and as their property it is also a double in several respects. In this way it is linked to them and as such shares the same fate as the twins. The House that contains the story is in the same state of disrepair as the Ushers who inhabit it. Its description of being dark, rotten and projecting a sense of foreboding gives the entropic side of the tale an aesthetic quality. The settings of the tale are dying and eventually, just as the Ushers perish the house is destroyed becomes their tomb as it sinks into the tarn.

Studies after Freud have noted that the Death Drive can be linked to the figure of woman. Elisabeth Bronfen states that “woman functions as privileged trope for the uncanniness of unity and loss, of independent identity and self-dissolution” (Bronfen, 56). This and Freud’s statement that “the aim of all life is death” is implicit in *Usher (Pleasure Principle, 38)*. Madeline and Roderick are twins, doubles of each other and in this way they show unity, yet they are still isolated from each other. They are also the last two members of the Usher line, a family that has “put forth, at no period, any enduring branch” (*Usher, 92*). The Ushers represent the difficulty in Poe’s attempt to resolve his philosophical conflict between his views on religion and science. The conflict Bronfen mentions is played out perfectly in the siblings; Madeline literally dies, representing the death of the Usher line, but her position as Roderick’s twin and the ending of his patriarchal line also robs him of his identity as a pure-bred Usher. Roderick is destined to perish as he cannot live with Madeline, and yet the Usher line cannot survive without her. This destruction of identity does not have to be interpreted as having completely negative connotations. When considering the two elements that this work proposes are being symbolised, those of logic and religion, they have very distinct ways of practice and thinking. The conflict the Ushers represent is Poe’s

struggle to reconcile his logical and religious sides. The two aspects of his all-encompassing aesthetic theory that cannot live together in harmony, just as the Ushers can't live with or without one another. This relationship between logic and religion is being questioned and tested by Poe who was always searching for a way in which the two could be unified.

Through this interaction and blending of the two they would lose the separate identity they had as they become the all-encompassing theory that Poe wished to understand. Returning to the notion of the death drive and the tale's obsession with death and dying it is easy to highlight the entropic and fatalistic tone of *Usher*. This concept is seen most explicitly in Roderick's speech and behaviour but it is also present in the tone of the tale. This negative tone has been seen as a theme in other work, as "All movement in the story is toward destruction [...] it must, we feel, have significance for more than the plot" (Robinson, 79). This move towards destruction shows that something must end, whether it is the way of thinking that the Ushers represent, or an enlightenment following the repressive darkness that the House represents. While this may seem entirely negative at first it must be remembered that not everything is destroyed, and the destruction of the House followed directly by the new day and new silence represents not complete destruction but merely a change and sense of peace.

When all these entropic elements are drawn together they can be interpreted as two separate ways of thinking being lost in favour of a new single belief. The story is saying that the old must change or be destroyed to make way for the new. The characters of Roderick and Madeline represent the loss of identity that must take place for progress to be achieved. If the House is indeed the mind, or container of these thoughts, then its destruction is inevitable, a fact the story plays on through its entropic nature. With the introduction of the logical Narrator to the House, we see Poe questioning the existing way of thinking and cracks (such as the fissure in the House) beginning to appear. This follows its course until the full

destruction of the House and its occupants, an event signifying that the two aspects of Poe's theory cannot be separate; they must lose their singular identities. Unfortunately this is where the story ends and as such the new all-encompassing theory is never identified. This does not mean that the end of *Usher* is negative however; as the bright light of the moon shows enlightenment has taken place. The end of the tale is merely the end of the old way of thinking, the moonlight a precursor to the literal and allegorical dawning of a new day.

#### Chapter 4: Mystery, Darkness and Silence and The Death Drive.

When the tale of *Usher* is read for entertainment it appears to be a stereotypical work of Gothic Horror Fiction. It features common aspects of such a work, which have been described as “Gothic Trappings”: a desolate setting, a mysterious house, a mentally unstable owner, crypts, darkness and a premature burial (Hume, 282). *Usher*, like the Gothic Novel “is more than a collection of ghost-story devices” and below the narrative there is strong evidence for a deeper meaning (Hume, 282). The Freudian concept of The Uncanny and psychoanalysis based around this concept can be readily applied to Poe’s tales, designed as they are to thrill and frighten; as Freud himself wrote in his essay on the Uncanny, “There is no doubt that this belongs to the realm of the frightening,” (Freud, 123). It has been shown in the introductory chapter that there is a strong evidence that *Usher* is likely to contain deeper meaning and this is where The Uncanny (as a psychoanalytic tool) is particularly useful as it is concerned with themes and motifs such as the ones found in Gothic literature. Freud’s essay begins with an attempt to define the Uncanny using dictionary definitions of the word in several languages. This process revealed other words related to the Gothic Horror genre: sinister, eerie, haunted etc. However as this list of definitions continues it focuses more on the mystery associated with the term. It is this definition that concerns the hidden, encrypted or repressed and this is where the term becomes particularly relevant to my argument as I consider what is concealed within by the symbolism of *Usher*.

At the end of Section I of the essay Freud writes “The term ‘uncanny’ (*unheimlich*) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open.” (Freud, 132). It is from this section also that the most basic definition of the term (relating to the qualities of feeling) is found; that the Uncanny is the familiar, now seeming unfamiliar and vice versa. Interestingly, in relation to the character of Roderick, the Scottish definition of the Uncanny as beyond knowledge (where the Chambers Dictionary defines it as

“weird, supernatural; (eg of skill) much greater than one would expect from an ordinary human being;”) can be seen as Roderick’s artistic talent is described as capable of painting an idea. This sense of the Uncanny is in the unknown, and with this “intellectual uncertainty” comes the need to satisfy it, the need to bring to light the unknown or repressed (Freud, 125). In his book *The Uncanny*, -Nicholas Royle states “It has to do with the return of something repressed, something no longer familiar” (Royle, 84). This statement fits *Usher* perfectly. Roderick is uncanny to the Narrator as he is no longer familiar, Madeline is repressed by her illness and premature burial, yet she returns with unfamiliar, uncanny strength. The text itself returns to several key themes; darkness, repression, doubles/repetition and death. These themes being highlighted by Nicholas Royle in his book *The Uncanny*. All these themes help to emphasise the allegorical nature of the tale in some way. The undercurrent of meaning is itself repressed in the space below the narrative.

In *Usher* mystery is used as a way of creating a sense of tension and a feeling of the Uncanny for the reader, but it is also a subtle indication of the deeper meaning within the tale. Poe creates this sense of mystery primarily through what he does not tell us. This absence of information has a two-fold effect. During a first more passive reading, it allows the story to show the reader only what Poe wants the narrative to show for the purpose of entertainment. This can be thought of as the surface of the tale. During a second interpretive reading, however, these gaps of information in the text become clues and pointers that cause the reader actively to search for more and question why such omissions might be present. This is a deliberate act as “Poe intends his readers to keep their powers of analysis and judgement ever alert” when considering his tales (Gargano, 178). When the introduction to the tale is analysed these gaps of information become more apparent; for example *Usher* is a re-telling of past events by the Narrator who remains anonymous and non-descript due to an absence of any physical description. The only real inference that can possibly be made from the text is

that the Narrator tends to prefer logical thought processes, yet even these begin to desert him as the tale continues as he is unable to sleep and begins to shake with an irrational fear (*Usher*, 102). The geographical area, “a singularly dreary tract of country,” also remains nameless, and despite the story being a supposed re-telling of events, the area from which it is being narrated also remains undisclosed (*Usher*, 90). It is also difficult to place the story temporally, as the passage of time is only alluded to vaguely. Poe even deliberately confuses through mixed descriptions of the day/night cycle in the first line where the day is described as “dull, dark, and soundless” yet the climactic scene which takes place at night is lit with supernatural light (*Usher*, 90 and 105). This disorientation of the reader occurs subtly from the beginning of the tale and continues throughout the text via a textual muffling of the senses. This lack of descriptive information is related to the themes of darkness and silence. The day the Narrator arrives is seen as soundless, and the Narrator is silent when it comes to providing any further description. This lack of physical and temporal description and the surreal blend of day and night give the tale a tone that is “essentially like dreams” (Rein, 367). This has also been noted as giving the tale a psychological nature in previous interpretations and helps give credit to the tale’s interpretation as a psychological journey, or a representation of the conscience (Hoffman, 297; Davidson, 196; Shulman ,245). This work interprets this psychological feel of the narrative in this way, as the characters and events are seen as symbolic of separate entities (logic and religion) and the progression of the tale shows how they interact as Poe continues his search for understanding their relationship.

In keeping with this tone of muffled obscurity, darkness is a very important theme in *Usher*, and is also closely linked to the theme of silence. Most of *Usher* takes place in darkness; there is constant allusion to this, even during daylight hours. This is seen explicitly as the Narrator describes “the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber” when commenting on trying to look around the rooms of the House (*Usher*,

94). Imagery of darkness like this is seen in psychoanalysis (particularly in the Uncanny) as representing what Ernst Jentsch called “intellectual uncertainty” (Freud, 125). Darkness is Uncanny because we do not know what lies within it. It has the ability to change how we perceive; even a familiar room may seem foreboding when in darkness. Like the House of Usher, this darkness must be explored if the feeling of the Uncanny is to be removed. This process has to occur even if it is not to find answers, but simply to reassure that there is nothing in the darkness. Darkness also has a suppressive role; it hides things which have been repressed. As mentioned earlier, Madeline is repressed within a tomb which is “entirely without means of admission for light” (Usher, 102). During the tale, the Narrator is constantly in darkness, both literal and metaphorical. He is trying to make sense of the situation he is in through analysing each event as it happens, essentially looking for meaning and logical conclusions to the events he has witnessed. This alludes to Poe’s use of concealment of meaning within his work; the Narrator is the reader’s link to the story and as the Narrator must search, and so must the reader.

Closely related to darkness is silence, as both have a suppressive effect on the senses. Silence in *Usher* is more complex and gradually gives way to noise, as by the climax of the tale it has become the crescendo of the House’s collapse. This literal build up of noise adds to the inevitability and tension of the tale, however more interesting is the silence of the text. This silence is what is unsaid within the tale, the omissions made by Poe which increase the need to look beyond the text for its true meaning. Poe never explicitly tells the reader that there is something suppressed in his tales, however his silences and omissions act as an invitation to analyse and explore. Poe essentially creates an invitation to read between the lines of his tale by proving these teasing omissions. The subtle building of noise towards the climax of the tale is also symbolic of a change occurring. As the Narrator and Roderick continue to interact, the noise continues to grow until the House falls into the tarn. This



continuous process represents a continuous change. When the Narrator is reading the fictitious work *The Mad Tryst* to Roderick, each noise the Narrator describes is interpreted by Roderick as the sound of his sister escaping her tomb (*Usher*, 105-107). This is a way of Poe showing that sound is significant in his tale, as if the sound of one story can have a different interpretation, it is logical to assume that the sound in the main narrative will have significance also. The first, composite motif that was highlighted was that of darkness and silence. These aspects of the Uncanny have a dual function. Firstly they are symbolic of repression; that something that was once visible or explicit has now been concealed or hidden in some way. By having something hidden there is the instant implication that it must be found. This connects the motif of darkness and silence with the answers that *Usher* (as a philosophical device) is searching for. A more literal embodiment of this is seen in the text; the tale starts in darkness and finishes in supernatural light. If the darkness is symbolic of concealed answers, then the climactic enlightenment is needed in order to see them. Continuing the notion that darkness and silence are also signs of repression, then it would make sense that what is being repressed is a sensitive subject as something that could be discussed openly would have been addressed explicitly within a text. This could be something that has long been accepted, or that behaviour at the time meant that to question could cause social alienation or other trouble. The Usher race and House are both described as long-lasting in the text, and thus arguably represent a long established way of thinking or an institution. As one example of the religious theme, the House as symbolic of a church can be applied here, as the Christian church is an established institution which in the example of *Usher* contains the characters and the ways of thinking that they represent. If Poe is looking philosophically at religion, or even questioning his own faith it would have been a sensible move not to do so explicitly, instead using his tale as a way to do so allegorically.

While there are multiple mentions of darkness or gloom in the text, silence is not mentioned as much and has a more complex presence in the tale. In fact silence is only mentioned at the beginning as it opens on a “dull, dark and soundless day” (*Usher*, 90). While the beginning of the tale is silent, as the narrative progresses there is a greater abundance of sound, culminating in the storm and eventually the collapsing of the House. This increase of sound can be interpreted in different ways. The first is related to the notion put forward by Anthony Vidler who notes of the Uncanny that “Its favourite motif was precisely the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence” (Vidler, 3). This notion of a secure place being invaded is seen in the text when the Narrator arrives on a “soundless” day and is led into the house by a valet “of stealthy step” (*Usher*, 93). There is essentially no noise before the presence of the Narrator at the House and it can be said that as a result of this new presence that noise invades the House, like the presence of light invading the darkness. This in turn can be interpreted as another way of *Usher* showing the presence of a new method of thinking.

When considering my argument, that *Usher* is an allegory for the integration of logic and religion, then the silence which rests on the Usher House as the text opens can be interpreted as what is normal or established. The presence or invasion of the Usher estate by the Narrator brings sound with it. Throughout the tale the level of noise increases with the final crescendo being the complete destruction of both the House and the Usher siblings. This leaves only the Narrator left alive as dawn begins to break. In this analysis the House and the Ushers represent the established way of thinking: religious thought. When the Narrator arrives this traditional, established thought is challenged, in this case by logic and science which the Narrator symbolises. When the religious thought is challenged by logic, cracks begin to appear, a textual example being the fissure in the House which is visible only to the “eye of a scrutinising observer” (*Usher*, 93) who can only be the Narrator. Eventually this

process destroys what is established; in this case the House is literally destroyed. This does not mean, however, that Poe or the tale are anti-religious. The bright full moon at the end of the tale shows that there is merely a new way of thinking or an idea that has been established. The light that occurs is also symbolic of this as the darkness that filled the Usher House is now gone and literal and figurative enlightenment has taken place. Essentially everything has changed from the beginning of the tale, there is now light, noise, and the House of Usher has been destroyed.

The darkness and silence of the text form a composite binary opposite to light and sound, and as such the presence of these in the text must also be considered. Whenever light does occur, it is never natural in the sense that it has an undiluted or unpolluted source such as pure sunlight; it is in constant conflict with its surroundings. The “encrimsoned” light the Narrator sees when encountering Roderick is not enough completely to drive away the darkness of the room, and can only allow the nearer objects to be seen, causing the Narrator to have to look further and deeper within the darkness (*Usher*, 94). Notably, since this is the recollection of the Narrator, with whom the reader has an implicit connection, the reader too must look further into the dark. The picture of the tomb, drawn by Roderick and described by the Narrator, shows that there should be no natural light, yet it is lit somehow, and when the storm occurs near the climax of the tale, there is again a source of unnatural light from somewhere illuminating the surroundings, despite the cloud-cover obscuring the moon. While this presence of light in the darkness again points to a theme of conflict within the tale, it is also inferring that due to its unnatural source, the light is itself symbolic. If darkness is repression, then this light may symbolise enlightenment and the light of knowledge. As the tale is being interpreted so far as dealing with a psychological theme, then this may be a literal shedding of light on a subject, of textually representing a new method of thinking about something. This notion of the function of light combined with “fierce breath of the

whirlwind” can be seen as possibly symbolic of the winds of change the *ushering* out of the old, and in with the new (*Usher*, 109).

The darkness is also described at times as having shades, and colour is mentioned several times in the few descriptive passages given, such as the “feeble gleams of encrimsoned light” and the air of “deep, and irredeemable gloom” (*Usher*, 94). This use of shades gives the impression that there are several different tones that can arise from or be found in one colour, in the way that there are several different meanings found within the narrative. This explicit mention of shades points to “inner textures of the story” (Spitzer, 357) and gives evidence to the theory that *Usher* is a complex work with more meaning than is visible by simply taking it at face value.

The Death Drive and destruction also give the tale its more moral dimension. The Ushers are seen as inherently immoral due to the lineage of their family, and as Roderick slowly becomes more unstable and chaotic his behaviour also becomes questionable. The destruction of the Usher siblings shows that immorality is punished in the end, with disorder and chaos being a means to that destruction. This is a highly religious way of thinking and is particularly representative of Christian thought in the tale as the Ushers are dragged down into the tarn. This damnation or destruction with a downward movement is symbolic of the notion of Hell being below or beneath, compared to Heaven being above. It is the presence of the Death Drive that also gives the tale its sense of direction. This can be interpreted as the fatalistic nature of the tale. The characters never seem to be completely in control of their own actions, as each one follows a distinctly destructive and seemingly controlled path through the tale. The Narrator is a good example of this; he does not visit Roderick of his own free-will, despite them being boyhood companions. He states this overtly in speaking of the letter, when he notes that he “had admitted of no other than a personal reply [...] with no hesitation” (*Usher*, 91). On his first sight of the House, the usually logical Narrator cannot

even describe why he feels the sense of unease that he does, he can only verbalise that some intangible quality of the landscape evokes that emotion in him as he thinks “what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher” (*Usher*, 90). Upon entering the House the Narrator is then guided by a valet, literally led through the House to Roderick; he is not permitted to choose his own path. This enthrallment continues until the spell is broken by the collapse of the House.

The destructive paths of these characters are firstly a nod to the title of the tale. The tale describes the fall of the House and the House itself is “of Usher” it is a place where people are led or ‘ushered’. The integration of the Narrator into the House is also a sign that this is a philosophical process. The tale is a classic case of Poe following an idea through to its logical conclusion. In this case it is the controlled application of logic and religion. The characters have to follow a certain path through the narrative as this is representative of the steps of thought that Poe is taking. Returning to the earlier example of the Narrator’s arrival embodying the introduction of logic into the established religious geography, his first interaction with the landscape is unease. He knows something is wrong but nothing specific. This is logic finding trouble with simply accepting the way things are, the established order of the Usher estate. The final part of this description ends with the Narrator discovering the fissure in the House, after careful scrutiny a distinct problem has been found, and then the Narrator moves into the House to begin closer inspection.

While the Death Drive is essentially the notion that all life leads to death, it is not as fatalistic as this in *Usher*. Instead it represents the fact that there must be a solution to the questions that it is trying to answer, that a conclusion must be reached. This then results in the end or “death” of certain aspects of the tale, such as the Ushers and the House. When the characters have finished their interactions this means that all the steps of the thought process

have been taken and it is logical to assume that an answer will have been found and the process will finish.

One of the final motifs of the Uncanny evident in *Usher* is animism, or when a seemingly inanimate or lifeless object appears to have the qualities of life. Madeline's (presumed) lifeless body has 'a faint blush upon the bosom and face' and this gives it the suspicion of life (*Usher*, 103). It is also worth noting that Madeline must possess an almost superhuman or uncanny strength, as she not only escapes a sealed coffin, but in total darkness also manages to unlock and open a "door, of massive iron" and "immense weight" (*Usher*, 102). The ability of Madeline, a woman on the verge of death, to do this is easy to overlook as just a device to give the story a shocking conclusion, yet if she is a symbol of will or strength (Freud's Life Drive), then is Roderick her opposite in his preoccupation with his malady and weakness (Freud's Death Drive). This is related to living things seeming to be automatons. An example of this is Roderick as he is described explicitly as cadaverous and pale, which has connotations not only to death, but also of undead creatures such as zombies or vampires. His psychological traits also appear to show madness (a factor of the Uncanny) as he is prone to "an excessive nervous agitation" (*Usher*, 95). His mood changes suddenly, as does the intonation of his voice and the Narrator makes reference to him being seemingly possessed or behaving as if under the influence of drink or drugs with his comment on Roderick's tone being "observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium" (*Usher*, 95). This gives Roderick the appearance of a corpse, somehow imbued with life. His sister is no different as we see Lady Madeline "pass and disappear" much like a ghost (*Usher*, 96). We also see that her appearance fills the Narrator with a sense of dread. At this stage in the story we do not yet know that Roderick and Madeline are twins and double each other; however as has been mentioned the doppelgänger is often as sign or portent of destruction for the one whom it doubles. This representation of the two also creates a sense of conflict in the

story which is seen in the conflicting nature of the tale's philosophical argument. Roderick is described almost as a walking corpse, and he appears to represent the death drive, while Madeline is his opposite, a woman who overcomes death (supposedly) and represents the life drive. This opposition sets a tone of conflict through the tale, and this is seen in explicitly through Roderick's responsibility for the burial of Madeline, and Madeline's eventual revenge on her brother. Like logic and religion, the two siblings have a relationship, yet are constantly in conflict with one another which leads to their eventual destruction. Through *Usher* Poe is using the characters and setting to try and better understand the relationship between these two entities.

When looking at *Usher*, several key themes and motifs become apparent in the story. As mentioned, the most basic definition of the Uncanny as a Freudian concept is when something familiar to us suddenly seems unfamiliar, or something unfamiliar in fact seems familiar to us. Poe uses this strange feeling to great effect in *Usher*. As a short story it can be read quietly for entertainment; however on closer inspection we see what is so uncanny about it. What Poe does is almost systematically to remove any description that allows the reader to orientate themselves or accurately place aspects of the text such as location, time or even facial or physical descriptions (with the exception of Roderick). This is encapsulated by Jentsch, who "attributed the feeling of uncanniness to a fundamental insecurity brought about by a 'lack of orientation,'" and though he was not entirely happy with the definition even Freud concluded that "The Uncanny would always be an area in which a person was unsure of his way around" (Uncanny 125). This lack of a definite time, place or signs such as this mean that the text is much more open to interpretation, not only in the way we adapt the story (such as an interpretation by Bailey which sees both the Ushers and the House take on a vampire-like nature) but also in the allegorical nature of the story and the search for meanings that Poe has concealed within the text. The use of the Uncanny to not only conceal meaning

but also highlight this concealment through word play is highlighted by the subject of confinement and encryption within the Uncanny. The theme of containment is seen from the opening of the story, where the landscape is quickly diminished to the interior of the House, confining both the reader and the characters. During the climax of the novel we see that an important event (which begins the final part of the narrative) is the premature burial of Madeline. These repetitive references to confinement are also seen in the weather as the clouds never seem to be anything other than “oppressively low” and this almost seems to be a hint to look within the story, as Poe has not only removed references that prompt us to search for meaning and description but also placed these repetitive suggestions that something was concealed within the text (*Usher*, 90). In relation to the Death Drive, there is a strong sense in *Usher* that events and situations lie outside the control of the characters, and while the logical Narrator tends to dismiss this, the more sensitive Roderick sees the coincidences and situations as signs of fate. Roderick also embodies the Death Drive with his outburst in the text “I shall perish, said he, I *must* perish in this deplorable folly” (*Usher*, 95). There is also the seemingly random, but actually quite revealing description of Roderick’s books which contain three on the subject of Chiromancy (palmistry) and reading the future through this method (*Usher*, 101). There is also the repetition of death and burial imagery as well as the use of pathetic fallacy (when the weather is described) that gives events a pre-determined and fatalistic nature.

Throughout the tale the reader is confronted with ambiguity and allusions. They are left to draw certain conclusions when it comes to aspects of the tale such as Roderick’s illness, the Narrator and Madeline’s physical description and even the year and country that the tale takes place in. The tale is full of unknown aspects in this regard, the tale creates a lot of the dramatic tension this way by use of the Uncanny as the reader is unsure of what they do not know. Using this level of ambiguity is also a plot device; it causes the reader to



continue in order to discover answers at the conclusion of the tale. The reader is an unwitting analyst caught in the mystery of the text. This mystery however is a continuation of the theme of the repressed and the need to bring to the surface (or out of the darkness in *Usher*) what is puzzling. It is yet another method employed to subtly make the reader aware that there is a question being posed in the text and that by processing the text, even at the level of simply reading the tale, that a level of resolution will be reached. This combined with the other motifs in *Usher* again infer that there is something below the text that warrants further examination.

## Chapter 5: Doubles and Repetitions and The House.

An aspect of the Uncanny that occurs throughout *Usher* is that of doubles and repetitions. This is also related to the Death Drive in the sense that repetition is involved, but the subject of the double as a motif throughout *Usher* should be considered separately. Many doubles in *Usher* are not true duplicates, but are fractured or incomplete reflections. The first double is that of Roderick and the Narrator. These two characters represent extremes of personality, shown in the way they think and act. While an individual has a mixture of traits, the Narrator and Roderick display what can be described as half personalities. The Narrator represents logic, order and being of sound mind. He eschews superstitious thinking and tries to ascertain why events affect him so; “What was it – I paused to think – what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?” (*Usher*, 90). The Narrator attempts to remain calm and collected throughout the tale, even during the violent climactic storm when he attempts to pacify the frantic Roderick. He is observant and methodical, which is shown in his attempts to explore the darkness of the House. Roderick is his opposite, given to artistic pastimes and interests in chiromancy as well as his questionable mental health. Roderick mentions a mental disorder in his letter to the Narrator, and becomes more fragile as the tale progresses. The opposition of the characters is seen explicitly at the end where Roderick screams at the Narrator that he (the Narrator) is in fact the madman for the way he remains calm in such a situation: “MADMAN! I TELL YOU THAT SHE NOW STANDS WITHOUT THE DOOR!” (*Usher*, 108).

Another significant doubling in the story is that of Roderick and Madeline. They are both Ushers, and more than that, they are twins. They also share other traits in common; both are ill, and both show signs on the Uncanny. Roderick exhibits madness and unusual behaviour, while Madeline is ghostly, silent and returns from the grave. While the Narrator and Roderick are facets of one personality (the logical and artistic extremes,) the relationship

between the Ushers is different. As mentioned, they are bound up in a relationship that can only end negatively. Nicholas Royle highlights a relationship between doubles found in another of Poe's tales, *William Wilson*, however it is relevant for the Ushers also: "Indeed Poe's story suggests feelings at once of strange 'animosity' and 'affectionateness' for one's double" (Royle, 190). Roderick is obviously distraught by the slow decline of his sister; however it is he who also prematurely entombs her. Like Wilson, Roderick senses his loss of identity at the hands of his double, but knows that he cannot truly hate his sister Madeline. If Madeline is Roderick's double then this also correlates with what Freud states: that the double is "the uncanny harbinger of death" (Uncanny, 142). It is also relevant to the Narrator, as it is when he arrives that Roderick begins to deteriorate, and Madeline and Roderick are ultimately the death of each other.

We also see a double in the noted association between the House of Usher and the family line. While obviously separate, they are still seen to be one and the same by the surrounding peasantry (*Usher*, 92). The House is also full of darkness and dark spaces such as the crypt. One of the themes of *Usher* is that of containment. All doubles in Poe contain one another in some way. The Ushers contain aspects of each other in their appearance, The House contains the Ushers it is linked to, and the Tarn, which shows a mirror image of the House, eventually contains the House as the structure sinks below the surface. This repeated imagery of containment in the narrative seems a strong indication that there will be something contained in the text as well. This theme of containment is seen from the opening of the story where the landscape is quickly diminished to the interior of the House, confining both the reader and the characters. Once within the House, we proceed to see this explored further, with Roderick's habits being confined by his illness, his perceived containment within the House and the literal confinement of Madeline to the crypt. During the climax of the novel we see that this event is highly significant. When considering The Uncanny and the

hidden, the premature burial of Madeline, or to put it another way, her *encryption* is important. Not only does Poe encrypt his characters (and suppress them in darkness) he also encrypts meaning within his tales. Like the unfamiliar effect of what was once repressed returning or repeating, Madeline returns from her suppression. These repetitive references to confinement are also seen in the weather as the clouds never seem to be anything other than “oppressively low” (*Usher*, 90). This can be interpreted as encouragement to look within the story, as Poe has not only given little textual description (the act of which prompts us to search for meaning) but also placed these repetitive suggestions that something is hidden within.

The House of Usher is an incredibly important (though mute) character in *Usher*. As a tale “first and foremost, it is about a house, and in no other Poe tale is the house itself so central to both a story’s plot and its network of symbolism” (Peeples in Hayes, 178). It combines all the aforementioned aspects of the Uncanny; it is silent, has its own doubles and reflections, it is dark and it contains and confines the human characters. The house has a “role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion of alien spirits” (Vidler, 17). The House of Usher is not haunted, yet it still affects the Narrator with feelings of the uncanny. It is given some anthropomorphic quality; “The vacant, eye-like windows” (*Usher*, 90) (uncanny in itself as a vacant stare in a human is an unsettling thing) and later Roderick describes the oppressive personality and physique of the building. The way in which the House and the family line of Usher are confused also adds to its personification. The House has a dark interior and is strongly associated with death. The woodwork and masonry are rotting and in disrepair and the House itself also houses a crypt below it. The House reflects the Ushers themselves. It ‘lives’ as long as the Usher family does. Like them, it contains the fate of their family line and, like them, it reflects their internal pain and illness. Vidler states that “The house is a metaphor, [...] whose structure

coincides with the mood of the story and proposes thereby a method for its interpretation,” (Vidler 32). Almost the entire story of *Usher* occurs within the House. It is the setting of the House which upsets the mood of the Narrator and provides the majority of the uncanny feeling, this effect by a House has been mentioned previously in this study, and with the Narrator’s entry we can “cross over the threshold of an edifice whose structure coincides with the mood of the story and proposes thereby a method for its interpretation” (Vidler 32). This makes analysis of the House integral to understanding the story, and indeed all facets of the House have a relevance to interpreting *Usher*. The House sets the mood of and contains the story, its structure emphasises both the psychological nature and constructed totality of the tale. It controls and contains Roderick and it is the noises of the House which build the final climactic tension. It should not be forgotten that the full title of the story is *The Fall of the House of Usher* and more time is given to the House’s description than anything else in the story. If any aspect of *Usher* is going to provide a method of interpretation (or indeed if Poe is giving us a clue as to where the meaning is concealed) then it is almost certainly going to be the House itself. In that regard the House must be considered as more than it seems. Despite the fact that it still stands, the House is described as being full or rot, decay and a strange fungus that is interwoven into the masonry. This fungus, however, is still a form of life, and it can be said that this in turn gives the House life. Roderick even states a belief in “the sentience of all vegetable things” (Usher 100). It is essentially an organic space, both in the tale and as the place where Poe can set the events of his allegory. Moving further than this sense of the physical uncanny space is one “no longer entirely dependent on the temporal dislocations of suppression and return, or the invisible slippages between a sense of the homely or unhomely, but displayed in the abyssal repetitions of the imaginary void” (Vidler, 37). This is a move away from the basic suppression and return, and into much freer territory, where uncanny is produced by an “endless drive to repeat” to carry on, through the

imagination and to be self-reflective until a final endpoint is reached. This is relevant to Poe's work; the House (and the space it represents) is a construct of Poe's imagination and a method of self-reflection, of how to resolve the problems that torment him in reality. The house is a mind, a consciousness or psyche, however rather than attribute this to a specific character such as the Narrator (Peeples in Hayes 180) this work considers that the House is symbolic of a place for thought, and as such is more impersonal.

The concept of the double, reflections and repetition is an important and explicit theme in *Usher*. The doubles used in this tale though are not like the more traditional doppelgangers seen in some of Poe's other tales (William Wilson, Ligeia, Morella etc.) but are in fact what can be considered two separate facets of a whole which share a common relationship. This highlights "Poe's theme of split consciousness" (Gargano, 179). To illustrate this point the characteristics of the Narrator and Roderick, and Roderick and Madeline are good examples. Taking first the Narrator and Roderick, they represent two parts of a single personality, logic and art. They are completely split by this with the Narrator failing to comprehend Roderick's paintings and music, and Roderick's frustration with the Narrator's refusal to accept anything beyond what he can ascribe a logical reason for. With Roderick and Madeline the double is more obvious as the two are twins; however they differ in gender (an obvious difference) and also in what they represent. Roderick is obsessed with death and the mortality of his lineage, his obsession becomes so great that he eventually ends up living out a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this way Roderick is representative of the Death Drive and fate in the tale. Madeline is different in that despite her actually having an illness, she battles against it. During the course of the tale she is sent to bed by her doctors, again an example of a lack of free-will, but even overcomes a premature burial. Whether Madeline actually comes back from the dead is not a particularly important point, either way she represents the life drive, and in doing so both doubles and opposes Roderick. These character

doubles represent the conflict which is taking place in the tale. Each character is symbolic of a separate way of thinking and each has its own conflict with the other. The Narrator is constantly alluded to as the logical way of thinking; he is slow and methodical and tends to discount things he cannot explain within his parameters of thought. This is in direct conflict with Roderick, who has a love of the arts and is seen as a hypersensitive individual who embraces unconventional thought such as the study of reading the future. Through this obsession with the future we see Roderick as a symbol of the death drive and this in turn puts him in conflict with the character of Madeline. While she is not often seen and has no speech within the tale, her actions speak for her as she struggles from within her tomb and breaks free from a dungeon in order to find her brother.

The next form of doubling is that of reflections. There are a few significant reflections that occur in the tale and all of these are also related to the theme of containment. The first reflection is that of the House within the tarn. This is an explicit reference to the inverted nature of the characters. Mentioned previously was the way in which the characters are incomplete or inverted duplicates of each other and this is seen in the character of the House which has its reflected duplicate in the tarn. The tarn eventually contains the House, and as such is the ultimate form of containment within the story as it eventually consumes all other doubles. The story itself is split in two directly by the presence of the poem which the Narrator recites. This is actually a separate work by Poe and it functions as a *mise en abyme* within the story. Not only does it split the story in two, it reflects the story itself telling a similar tale of a palace that at first is a scene of education and light, but eventually becomes dark and sombre. This poem has been interpreted as almost a prologue to the story, detailing the happy beginnings of the Usher household up to the arrival of the Narrator in its present state. Again this double is a form of containment as the poem contains aspects of the story, while the story itself contains the poem. Finally there is the reflection of the House. The

fissure which marks the front of the House runs down the centre for a reason. In bisecting the House it reflects one half with the other and this gives the House the characteristics of a brain. The House is where the story takes place and as such is where the thought process takes place. Multiple studies have shown that the House is symbolic of the mind (Shulman, Robinson, Peeples) and as this story is a philosophical questioning it is fitting that it takes place within this mind-like setting. This also makes the House a container; it contains all the characters and major events of the story. These textual reflections show that there is conflict within the story, every important aspect of the tale has two sides or parts to it which represents the two sides to the debate the story is representing. Each double is also a form of containment. This is a hint to the nature of the story and its own containment of this undercurrent of meaning. The House is a mind which contains the aspects of the problem being processed; the story is an allegory which contains a poetic version of itself.

The final form of repetition in the tale is that of textual repetition, this is mainly used as a way to emphasise aspects of the tale that Poe wishes the reader to focus on. This is dealt with in greater detail in the chapters providing a deconstructive analysis but it is worth mentioning here as it is a form of doubling.

The next major entity highlighted by the psychoanalysis of the tale is that of the House itself. Aside from its presence as a character in the tale, it can be argued that the House is the most significant aspect of the text. It is the setting of almost the entirety of the narrative with the small exception of the description of the Narrator's journey. It features in the title and is referred to on numerous occasions by the characters. The House has already been seen as a space, a container. It is where the characters interact and develop. Like the manuscript in *The Purloined Letter*, the House has a highly significant function in that it is a "pivot around which a pattern of human relationships rotates," (Muller & Richardson 59). These



relationships are the separate points of view coming together to provide an answer to Poe's philosophical musing.

There are two main ways of analysing the House when considering it as a space; that of a physical, tangible House, and figuratively, such as a mental space. If the House is to be taken as a literal space, then it has certain connotations with the home and interiors, as the House is a container, both of the Usher family, and the events of the story. The home is traditionally a place of security and safety. This House is where one feels secure, however this is no ordinary House, and it is described by Roderick as having sentience, that it is influencing him, specifically his spirit (*Usher*, 97). This is related to the notion that the House is both personified and sentient and that it is containing both Roderick and his ability to think which strongly suggests that there is a psychological element to what the House represents. It also has an atmosphere described as an "air of irredeemable gloom" and this is designed to emphasise the negative feel of the text, the sense that something bad is going to occur (*Usher*, 94).

Just as the House can be seen as split by the fissure which bisects it and as it is symbolic of the mind, represents a split in thought and two conflicting methods of thinking, so too can the Narrator and Roderick be read as opposites, representing the two halves of a single personality in their extreme logic and art. It is in having these doubles interact and present symbolic meaning that "Poe suggests to his readers ideas never entertained by the Narrators" (Gargano, 178). This is because the readers of the text are 'complete personalities' unlike the extreme characters of the tale who represent a single way of thinking.

It can also be interpreted that the House is symbolic of another type of security, such as a method of thinking or a point of view. In the text the Narrator describes "the narrow limits to which he [Roderick] thus confined himself" (*Usher*, 98). This is not just an explicit mention of confinement, but is also symbolic of narrow-mindedness and of an inability to

consider or take meaning from whatever may fall outside of those limits. This shows the extreme nature of the symbolism of the characters, they are both single-minded in their own right. Roderick is shown as unwilling to accept the Narrator's application of logic to his superstitions, and the Narrator attempts to explain away and ignore any untoward or illogical feeling he experiences. He is "stubbornly rationalistic [...] is indeed obtuse" and "he explains away every phenomenon that he considers unnatural or does not understand" (Bailey, 447). This security of thought is seen to be affected by the Uncanny as the Narrator's thought process is gradually undermined, or invaded by superstitions. The House is also described like a church with its gothic arches, vaults and burial ground (which is related to a religious theme in the text and analysed further in the following chapters). If the House is in fact symbolic of a church and therefore religion, it can be surmised that it is the nature of religion that is being questioned here in *Usher*.

The House is also constantly personified and given anthropomorphic qualities, it is capitalised which effectively makes The House a proper noun and gives it the human quality of a name. It is given physical characteristics such as organs and its walls are described as having a physique. It is also given eye-like windows and its corridors are described as passages, reminiscent of the physical passages of the body (*Usher*, 93). Due to these qualities it is undoubtedly being described as representing a human head and as such is closely related to the brain as the area of thought. As the characters search the darkness of the House for answers, they are essentially pawns partaking in the philosophical process of the tale, their interactions forming the events that lead the argument to what Poe saw as its logical conclusion. The events of the narrative therefore become the thought processes related to the themes of the tale, and it becomes probable to interpret the underlying theme of *Usher* as psychological or related to ways of thinking about a topic.

When these motifs are combined, the psychoanalysis of *Usher* shows that the tale does indeed have layers of meaning below the surface of the text and that this deeper meaning is itself a search for knowledge through the analysis of a symbolic subject. It uses the notion of the double to show that there are multiple methods of thinking in place, as well as using the split and oppositions within those doubles to show that there is also conflict between these methods of thinking present within the tale. The allusions to the House as a mind show that the meaning behind *Usher* is psychological in nature, and this supports the need to consider and apply logic to the text. It also suggests, through the themes of darkness and repression as well as in-text description, that the subject of this undercurrent of meaning is an established institution. Finally, animism and anthropomorphism are also seen several times throughout the story, the most obvious example of this being related to the previous theme of containment, and is the actual House of Usher, within which the characters reside. From the beginning of the story the House is given human attributes, a notable example of which being the ‘vacant’ eye-like windows and the living fungi which cover the interior stonework. What makes the House more Uncanny is its apparent animism, seen in the way the apparently dilapidated stonework is somehow still held together by an unseen force and the way that the life of the House follows the lives of the Ushers. All of these elements are interrelated and in true uncanny style they repeat throughout the tale and while they are present to some degree in all Gothic Horror, they are significant in Poe’s tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque as they indicate the first clues as to where to look for the deeper meaning in Poe’s tales.

In *Usher* there is the constant mention of looking and gazing. The three characters of the House, Roderick and the Narrator are all searching constantly throughout the tale. The Narrator is “in view of the House” (Usher 90) suggesting that the House is watching the Narrator’s progression, the Narrator mentions that “the eye [...] struggled in vain” alluding to

his own surveying of the House and finally Roderick is found “gazing upon vacancy for hours” (Usher 103). This is related to the searching for answers seen in the tale, and also a textual hint that the reader must also search within the text. Like the clue in the use of the word scene, and the mention that the rearrangement of the aspects of the scene will cause different feelings, the reader is encouraged also to look within the tale in order to see the undercurrent of meaning within. It is noted also that like the reader interpreting the text, the characters also are seeking answers, when describing Roderick we see that “he seeks knowledge” and “has found some explanation in quasi-scientific theory” (Bailey, 447). Like Roderick the reader is given hints to look for answers, and apply theory of their own to the text. The Narrator states that, “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” (Usher 93). This essentially defines the notion of The Uncanny as the familiar is seemingly unfamiliar. It is also a motif of re-examination with the tale. It has already been noted that the story can be interpreted as a questioning of an established institution, and this institution is the familiar. It is in re-examining through *Usher* that it becomes unfamiliar, as aspects which have been accepted are challenged. This is also related to the repression seen in the darkness motif

## Chapter 6: Deconstruction and the Use of Language Ambiguity in *Usher*.

The Fall of the House of Usher has “long been recognized as one of his best stories – but “Usher” is a particularly apt story for examining Poe’s “constructiveness” for other reasons as well” (Peeples in Hayes). This constructiveness is related to the totality of Poe’s writing style. Everything in the tale has significance to the finished work, even down to the specific words Poe chooses to use. The ambiguous nature of the sentences and their ability to invite numerous interpretations is a deliberate act by Poe to place the undercurrent of meaning in his work. This in turn means that analysis can be difficult, so in order to provide a thorough analysis of the text, a template from a chapter on this style of analysis (which is also a break down of a Poe text) from Roland Barthes *The Semiotic Challenge* was used to separate the text into lexias. These lexias were then analysed individually, before being grouped together into the motifs they represented. Due to the totality of Poe’s work, the themes are often inextricably linked and intertwined (a reference to the Arabesque nature of his tales), and this has been noted in this chapter when necessary in order to cut down on possible repetition.

The title of the tale itself deserves consideration as it can be interpreted in different ways, it describes both the literal destruction of the House seen in the climax of the tale, and as the House of Usher refers to the family line, also the destruction of the family in that sense. The title also describes the family as it changes from social and moral order into madness and

perverseness, which is seen to a degree in all characters including the House itself. The way the title is ambiguous is typical of the work of Poe and in particular this tale which has several levels of meaning itself. This fall is evidence of a change, in the tale it is the destruction of a family line, however this can be interpreted as the end of a significant or well established idea. After the title comes the epigram, which was taken from De Béranger's *Le Rufus* and has been changed slightly (Mon Coeur to Son Coeur): "Son Coeur est un luth suspend; Sitôt qu'on le touché il résonne." (*Usher*, 90). When it is translated for this study from French to English it reads "His heart is a suspended lute; Whenever one touches it, it resounds." Since this has been personalised by the change from *my* heart to *his* heart, it seems to be a dedication and since the description is male it can be logically assigned to either Roderick Usher or the Narrator. The link to Roderick seems logical as the description of the lute and heart has emotional and artistic connotations which Roderick is seen as having in the text. The use of the term suspended is interesting as it suggests something that is not just hanging but stopped or is silent, yet has not ceased to exist. The heart/lute can be read as a synecdoche for Roderick (or what Roderick symbolises) as something recollected, as the second line portrays the notion that it can still be reached or touched, and resounds or resounds, when it is.

The ambiguous nature of the text is also seen in the characters themselves. During the course of the tale, we see a quite detailed description of Roderick and, while the same physical description does not occur for Madeline (possibly as she is Roderick's twin sister), it is worth analysing both Usher siblings as it illustrates the ambiguity of the tale well. Starting with the names, Roderick is Germanic meaning famous ruler, yet Usher is an Anglo-French name which means a servant with control over who is admitted to the presence of nobility<sup>2</sup>. In his name alone we see opposition in Roderick Usher, and this is reflected in his actions, he

---

<sup>2</sup> All definitions of these names used in this study are taken from [www.meaning-of-names.com](http://www.meaning-of-names.com)

is both the nobility and head of the Usher household and also the character that ushers the Narrator into visiting by writing the summoning letter, as well as being the Narrator's usher about the House. His corrupt nature is alluded to in the "want of moral energy" (Usher 94) of his features. He is described as having an "exaggeration of the prevailing character of these [facial] features" (Usher, 94), which can be interpreted that the man himself is an exaggerated character, or one designed to show an extreme idea. In his description is also mentioned the Arabesque, which is capitalised in order to be emphasised inferring that Roderick himself can be described as so. *Usher* was published in the second (1845) edition of *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* which are both forms of art, Arabesque being "derived from Arabian and Moorish art and refers to an elaborate design in which highly stylized human and animal figures are embedded among intertwined branches, foliage, and fanciful scrollwork" (Kaplan in Silverman 48). This infers that Roderick is like the art, and therefore of a more artistic temperament in contrast to the logical Narrator. The Narrator later speaks of Roderick thus: "I was at once struck with an incoherence – an inconsistency" and this shows again that the Narrator and Roderick are opposites, but also that Roderick has conflict and opposition within himself and mirrors the inconsistencies of the House in this way (Usher 95). This opposition within Roderick is seen in the way he also changes rapidly in mood, being "alternately vivacious and sullen" and his voice also varies rapidly (*Usher*, 95). The Narrator notes that when Roderick is possessed by the "animal spirits" that he has "hollow sounding enunciation [...] and perfectly moderated guttural utterance" this may be a reference to speaking in tongues and as such reinforces the religious motif of the tale (Usher 95).

Similar patterns of meaning can be seen in Madeline. Her name is Greek and means a high tower, this gives the impression of something inaccessible or locked away and is related to the containment theme. Madeline also seems to be more revered than Roderick by the Narrator, as he never fails to give her the title 'lady' when mentioning her. Madeline is

also a corrupted double of Roderick, she is his twin, but a different gender, and while Roderick is preoccupied with thoughts of death and gradually becoming weaker, Madeline is described as fighting her illness, being ordered to bed and most notably returning from her grave. If Roderick represents a death obsession, Madeline appears to represent a will to live. As a character she is Roderick's twin sister and is the last remaining female Usher. In this role and as a woman she is responsible for the continuation of the Usher family line, based as it is on incestuous behaviour. This is a significant fact as she represents the very identity of Roderick, both as his twin and without her the Ushers lose their pure-bred identity as a family. This is the terrible fact that Roderick cannot reconcile within himself. To continue the Usher line would be sinful, yet inaction would mean the destruction of the family line. Roderick is in a no-win situation attempting to reconcile two options, just as Poe is attempting his own reconciliation of religion and logic. This causes distress to Roderick as Madeline is increasingly ill and he sees his sense of identity destroyed. In the tale it has been noted that Madeline is symbolic of the Life Drive (see chapters 2 and 3). She represents a will to live that is seen in her "resurrection" but also in her role as a woman and a giver of life. Splitting her name gives Made Line, and this is exactly what she has inherited, a synthetic incestuous family identity. She is the opposite of the biblical Eve figure and is the last of her race. This is relevant to the religious theme of the text, but also shows that something is coming to an end and is part of Poe's philosophical questioning of religion. This is summed up in a comment made by Robert Jacobs who wrote "if the primary attribute of God as evidenced by his creation were his artistry, why did the creation exhibit deformity, pain and death, those flaws in artistic design? Poe did not ask this question in his book reviews during this period, but he did ask it in his philosophical tales." (Jacobs, 405). Ambiguity is also seen in the descriptions presented by the Narrator and the repeated language he uses, for example "a singularly dreary tract of country" (*Usher*, 90) is the first use of the term 'singularly'



(which occurs a further five times throughout the tale on pages 91,92,96,101 and 104) and has two quite distinct meanings, the first in this case referring to a single person or thing having good or great qualities. The second meaning portrays something having strange or eccentric qualities. This is a deliberate attempt to set a mood in the text using dualities, even the coupling of dreary with singular produces another opposition within the tale, as the dreary tract is also then seen as good or great. It is not just in the speech of the Narrator that ambiguity is found, but also in the actual words found in the narrative as well.

The equivocal nature of the text (and the religious or spiritual motif) is seen in the use of the word 'tract'. While this word can indicate the large, anonymous area of land, a tract is also a pamphlet of political or religious writing. Staying with the analysis of definitions, a tract is also a passage within the body, again a deliberate reference to both the organic nature of the text as well as maintaining the image of passing through a portal or gateway. The ambiguous use of language continues as the Narrator states "and at length found myself", which poses the question 'who has the Narrator found and this is related to the searching motif, particularly the interpretation by critics that this is a psychological journey such as Shulman and Stovall?' (Usher, 90). The statement "and at length found myself" suggests both the physical location of the Narrator, but also a search (Usher, 90). It is interesting to note that the Narrator has found Roderick Usher, his incomplete doppelganger, when the Narrator states he "found himself" this can be read as a subtle way of identifying Roderick with the Narrator. The Narrator also states "I was passing alone" (Usher, 90). This relates to the death motif as the Narrator is "passing" but also he is passing through the country tract, not along it. The use of passing suggests a gateway or portal as well as highlighting the fact the Narrator is on a journey this is seen again as the Narrator rides over the causeway which gives the notion of passing or crossing of a boundary. This is linked to the notion of the portal

or gateway and this is more apparent as the Narrator explicitly enters the “Gothic archway of the hall” (Usher 93).

Religious and spiritual motifs are seen all the way through *Usher*. They are present in the ambiguous nature of the words and in the religious connotations they provide, and are seen more explicitly in the mentions of the spirit and the theme of the divine plan and afterlife that are seen within the text. The House is given features of Gothic architecture and with its subterranean crypts is easily comparable with a church or cathedral. This repetition of religious motifs is another device that Poe uses to set the tone of the tale, and in doing so provide textual hints as to the theme of the undercurrent of meaning. *Usher* is never an explicitly or overtly religious tale, but by following the clues that Poe leaves in his text it can be interpreted and read as such.

The greatest hint that the tale gives to its own construction and totality is found in Roderick’s belief in the sentience of the House. This belief is even preceded by the Narrator stating that he is talking about a belief at which “I have previously hinted” (Usher 100). This is the belief by Roderick in “The method of collocation of these stones – in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many minute fungi that overspread them” (Usher 101). The use of collocation is again an interesting textual reference as according to the *OED* it means “a word or group of words that occur together frequently”, which is particularly relevant in *Usher* as it is how the tale emphasises its key themes and the feel of the tale. Collocation is also the juxtaposition of words (like the oppositions found in *Usher*) with a frequency greater than chance, this seems to be an implicit hint that there is deliberately more meaning in *Usher* than one might discern on first reading. This and the use of the phrase “the order of their arrangement” is another implicit hint that the way the story is worded is a deliberate act, the words used, the syntax and deliberately ambiguous language, form a link to Poe’s use of totality (Usher 101). These words are covered or concealed by fungi, however;

they are obscured by the face value of the tale and must be uncovered for different levels of meaning to be exposed.

As mentioned there is repetitive use of the term scene, but also “the details of the picture” gives the idea that we are in a fictional realm, and that maybe a “different arrangement of the particulars” would yield a different response (Usher 91). This is compounded in the next line as there is another reference to scene and picture as the Narrator is ‘acting’ on an idea. The text also seems to have its fictitious nature highlighted with the use of descriptions such as when the Narrator mentions the contents of the room and how they “failed to give any vitality to the scene” which is one of the other repeated terms in use of “scene” (Usher 94). It should not be forgotten that Poe’s birth parents were both actors, and this constant use of scene indicates a space or an idea that has been constructed to suit a purpose, such as illustrating a logic problem seen in the introduction to this analysis.

This ambiguity of language leads on to the second motif I wish to highlight, that of the text using ambiguous terms to hint at its own fictive nature and the need to look beyond the text. *Usher* appears to highlight its own fictive nature on several occasions; this is seen in the terms used in the tale, an example of which is ‘phantasmagoric’ (*Usher*, 98). This describes a mixture of the real and dreamlike, a blend and blurring of the boundaries between the real and the fictive. The use of terms like this that make the text appear to be aware of its textuality. The need to interpret the text (along with evidence of other motifs) and hints at its nature are also seen in descriptions such as “minute fungi overspread the whole exterior” (*Usher*, 93), This is another opposition, as the fungi is a symbol of decay and death, yet it is still life, and being interwoven with the House, gives the House an organic feel like the text. This is part of a lengthy description of the House that shows another opposition, as the whole building is perfectly intact, yet the individual stones are crumbling. This may be symbolic of something that appears sound (such as a theory or way of thinking) yet is not in fact as secure

as it appears. The metaphor for this involves “the specious totality of old wood-work” and mentions vaults and rot, this implies the motif of death, but also repression as the vault is a room where death is locked away (Usher 93).

It has been noted that this tale is an excellent example of Poe’s totality of writing and it is through this self awareness of the text and obvious theme of construction that Poe is showing the reader that everything within the tale has meaning, even down to the careful wording and syntax of the sentences. This tale is not just a simple story, it is a well-constructed argument. A running theme through Poe’s work was the juxtaposition of art and science, and he often considered problems of a philosophical and religious nature. In *Usher* this is realised and as such Poe has taken pleasure in providing obvious hints that this tale is a construction, it is an allegory and it has to be interpreted for its full relevance to be revealed.

There are many deliberate ambiguities and oppositions in *Usher*. These serve as a device to highlight the strange events of the tale, but they are also a recurring motif and therefore deserve closer inspection. Even in the very first line there are examples of these contradictions in the tale as the Narrator describes a whole day. While this would be expected to contain light and noise, it is described as the opposite “dull, dark and soundless” (Usher 90). Even this day has its opposite as the night of the climax of the tale is described as “glowing in unnatural light” (Usher 105). This is also related to the previous addressed notion of the Uncanny within the tale as darkness and silence is symbolic of repression. Apparent in the first line, these contradictions are often related to other themes and motifs found within the story such as madness, order and disorder, and light and darkness. Simple contradictions are seen throughout the text such as the way that the tarn is described as black, yet “lurid” meaning unpleasantly bright or vivid in colour, and the way the climactic night as there is a duality in its description as “terror and beauty” (Usher 104). These oppositions are also seen in examples of equivocal phrases such as “the simple landscape of the domain” (*Usher*, 90).

Here, simple means, non-complex as well as implying a low level of intelligence, while domain is an area belonging to a lord, (who is implied to be Roderick as Madeline is always described as “Lady Madeline” or “the Lady”) but also an area of activity or knowledge, which references the sentience of the landscape and House, but also the search for knowledge. This mention of sentience also further personifies the House and is integral to the tale being interpreted as a psychological process. The House itself is seen as a human head, similar to the school in *William Wilson* (Peeples in Hayes 179). So what occurs within this metaphorical head is the philosophic process of the tale, any further reference to sentience is designed to emphasise and set the tone of the tale. The term ‘equivocal’ (meaning a word or phrase that can be interpreted in different ways) is used explicitly in the text (*Usher*, 92). It serves as an obvious clue that, if the events and the speech of the characters are open to interpretation, then without doubt the tale itself is open to interpretation. This gives strength to the argument that there are multiple meanings found within the text. This ambiguity has an extremely important role in the text; it provides allusions to the conflict of opinion which this tale symbolises, and also shows that the tale itself has more than one way of being interpreted. It also provides many of the oppositions that occur within the tale, and this is a way of emphasising the polar opposites that occur. Everything, whether it is a word, sentence or theme seems to have at least two ways of being read, and this is important in setting the tone of the tale as one of conflicting opinion that requires resolution.

The tale of *Usher* itself has an ambiguity which shows something that can be interpreted in numerous ways and that has several meanings, this is an obvious hint that there is more to be found within the story as it is subtly repeated, encouraging the reader to look further beyond the simple narrative. This totality and ambiguity of language is used here to highlight other potential motifs, which will then be analysed in greater detail as the chapter progresses. The first motif of *Usher* is that of the ambiguous and often equivocal nature of

the language it uses. This sets up several of the other motifs of the tale such as oppositions, and the religious motif.

This notion of the need to look beyond the text for embedded meaning is seen in both the references the text makes to itself and also the ambiguous nature of its description, both of these points can be seen in the nature of time in *Usher*. While the time period is not explicitly described, the season is mentioned, “the autumn of the year”, which is a textual reference to “fall”, the American name for autumn. It also has connections to coming to an end and death. This is quickly followed by “the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens” (Usher 90). The use of pathetic fallacy creates a mood in the text, and a hanging object is essentially suspended like the heart/lute of the motto, this is also the first mention of oppression, a word that is repeated throughout the text. In trying to alleviate uncomfortable feelings, the term “the mere house” is used by the Narrator (Usher 90). This gives a deliberately ambiguous meaning. The House itself lies on a tarn or lake, and as a ‘mere’ is a lake, the Narrator is essentially describing a lake house, however it is ironically implied that mere also means nothing more, that the house is just a building. It is also interesting to note that the Latin *merus* means (like the Usher family line) pure and undiluted, another reference to the House. “It [the effect of the House] was a mystery all insoluble” (Usher 90). Loaded words such as ‘mystery’ again imply something hidden, secrecy and also the need to solve a mystery, to search for a solution. This is linked to the searching motif, however a mystery is also a secret religious ceremony, and the term insoluble relates to both the inability to solve, but also has an ironic meaning as the it relates to the House which is unable to dissolve, which in fact it does in the climax of the tale. This creates the need to search for a meaning, both in the Narrator and also in the reader. The letter from Roderick to the Narrator is another example of this as it “has lately reached [the Narrator] in a distant part of the country” which is a further example of the lack of specific details (Usher 91). It is also chronologically the

first event to occur despite appearing out of sequence in the narration, and thus can be seen as the mystery which needs to be solved and leads to the events of the tale. It is described as having a “wildly importunate nature” which shows that in the Narrator’s opinion the mystery is a persistent one, and requires personal attention in order to resolve (Usher 91). Once again the need to solve a mystery is a form of the searching motif and therefore the need to find some kind of answer or meaning.

This need to interpret is seen when Roderick is describing his problems and the Narrator notes “the terms, and the general manner of the narration had their weight” (Usher 95). This little sentence shows that the way something is interpreted can be influenced by the way it is narrated. The Narrator is the reader’s source of information for these events, yet by the end of the text he doubts his own thoughts; this is a subtle hint to look at how the text is interpreted. The House is also linked to the Ushers and this need to interpret as the Narrator states is “the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people”.(Usher 92). A description such as this both personifies the House as it gives it character, but it also insinuates that the House is a double of the Ushers, and in fact reflects the twins., as it decays or sickens, so do they The Narrator considers this effect explicitly and this reinforces the relationship between the three. This is seen again in the loaded phrase “the quaint and equivocal appellation of the House of Usher” (Usher 92), as quaint relates to what is attractive yet unusual, equivocal can be understood in several ways and read as a clue that the House and the Ushers themselves are equivocal, that they have other symbolic meanings, not just the characters described in the text and all must be considered in order to fully unravel the meaning in *Usher*.

After close analysis of the text it is evident from the very beginning that there is an undercurrent of meaning in *Usher*. The dualities and oppositions are a clear sign that there is a conflict within the tale. This conflict is the philosophical debate that the tale symbolises.

Poe is attempting to explore what happens when logic is applied to religion. The tale also provides evidence that it is a well-constructed allegory through its use of terms such as scene, and the notion of construction and collocation. Its ambiguous language is also a device to allow for separate interpretation and the constant allusions to looking and searching are an obvious clue that the reader must search the tale for its meaning, that there is something hidden within, but also that a resolution is being sought after. It also clearly shows that the characters are symbols; this is part of Poe's totality; if everything within the story matters (which this analysis has shown to be true) then the characters themselves are going to represent the most important parts of what Poe is trying to say.



## Chapter 7: Organ Symbolism and Religious Motifs

This chapter will deal with the organic motif and the religious aspects of the tale. In the context of this work the term organic requires some explanation. In this study organic means relating to physical organs and life. The organic motif in the text is important for two reasons. The first is that it shows the use of three organs, the brain, eyes and heart. The second is that it shows the conflict within the tale.

As organs of sight, the eyes are often symbolic of looking and searching. The first organs to be mentioned in the text are the eyes, these are described by the Narrator who notes that the House has “vacant eye-like” windows (Usher, 90). A vacant eye is one that arguably cannot look or see, and this may be a reference to the darkness and obscurity within the tale. Continuing the description of the House the Narrator says “perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered”. This is a first sign of the Narrator’s methodical nature, and is linked to the searching motif (Usher 93). Due to the connection the reader has with the Narrator, this phrase subtly directs the reader to consider and analyse the House for what else might be discovered, what is found within the House and what it symbolises. The interior of the House also shows the searching motif in relation to the presence of darkness, as the Narrator describes Roderick’s room as lit by “Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around; the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber,” (Usher 94). When breaking down this description, evidence of the searching motif is seen as the room is still dark despite the “feeble gleams on encrimsoned light”, forcing the observer to exert effort – to search – in order to see. This light does, however, allow the viewing of the “more prominent objects around” (Usher 94). The searching of the Narrator is apparent in the attempt to look into the darkness of the room, but this attempt to look into the darkness can also be read as a partial enlightenment of the Narrator, whose "eye, however,

struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber” (Usher 94). Here the searching motif is obvious, but also the notion of darkness as hiding or encrypting something. The Narrator is not ‘enlightened’ enough to see what lies within the darkness and must continue searching in order to find what is hidden within the House. When the sight motif is combined with the presence of darkness in the tale, it is implied that a search for knowledge or answers is taking place. In order to see, the characters require light, yet the House is almost always described as being in darkness. In order for the characters to see clearly, they thus require enlightenment. This search for answers – on both a literal/physical and on a metaphorical level -- is relevant to my argument that the tale of *Usher* is a philosophical thought process. The tale is an allegory for the integration of logic and religion as part of Poe’s all-encompassing theory and as such is a device for Poe to explore this. The evidence for this search for answers being a psychological process is seen in the presence of the next organ motif, that of the brain.

The organ of the brain and its association with thought is expressed in *Usher* through the description of the House. The House of Usher is symbolic of a head. When the Narrator first encounters the House it is described thus “I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.” (*Usher*, 90) The Narrator is within view of the House, but this small phrase gives the impression that, whilst the Narrator can now see the House, the House can also see him (Usher 90). This idea of the House viewing the Narrator is continued in the Narrator’s preliminary description of the House and grounds where he says “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” (Usher 90). These vacant eyes of the House mark the first anthropomorphism of the House and give it head-like qualities; to make sure that the reader picks up on this quality

of the building, the term is repeated at the end of the paragraph for emphasis (Usher 90). Further on in the story there is again anthropomorphism of the House as the Narrator states “But the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapour, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion” (Usher 105). This supernatural fog is described as an exhalation and the way it enshrouds the mansion gives the impression that the House is in fact breathing out the vapour in the same way human breath mists in cold weather

The House is not only live on a basic, physical level, it is also described on two occasions as having sentience. The first is when the Narrator is relating the nature of Roderick’s beliefs:

“an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit – an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence.” (Usher 96).

This not only describes the House exerting some kind of hold over Roderick, but again gives the House physical qualities through the use of the term ‘physique’. The sentience of the House is described in greater detail later in the text when the Narrator is relating Roderick’s view on “The sentience of all vegetable things” and states of the House that “The conditions of the sentience here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones – in the order of their arrangement” (Usher 100). This gives the impression that the House itself is in fact sentient. If the House is a sentient head, then what it contains is the organ of the brain. The interior of the House is described as having rooms which are lit by “Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light” and the Narrator on entering the House is led “through

many dark and intricate passages” the use of the term passage relates to the body, and this and the red colouration of the rooms gives the interior of the House the feeling of an organ (Usher 93-4). With the exterior of the House having the qualities of a head, and the interior described in terms reminiscent of an organ, it is logical to assume that the organ in question is that of the brain. If the House is a head/brain then the events of the narrative that occur within it can be thought of as thoughts in that they happen within a brain. This is relevant to my argument that the events of *Usher* are in fact a thought process. The narrative details the integration of logic in the form of the Narrator and established religious thought in the form of the Usher family. The interaction of these characters takes place within the House and therefore can be described as the thought process of which *Usher* is an allegory.

The heart motif is first seen in the epigram which states “His heart is a suspended lute, whenever one touches it resounds” (Usher 90). Chapter four dealt with the double of Roderick and the Narrator and this motif is a continuation of that. The heart is a symbol of the passion and artistic expression which is primarily seen in the character of Roderick. Roderick is an artist in every sense of the word, the Narrator describes Roderick’s talent for painting as “By the utter simplicity, by the nakedness of his designs, he arrested and overawed attention. If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher.” (Usher 98). Roderick’s skill as a musician is also noted by the Narrator; “They must have been, and were, in the notes, as well as in the words of his wild fantasias (for he not unfrequently accompanied himself with rhymed verbal improvisations), the result of that intense mental collectedness” (Usher 98). Roderick is thus a man who can both paint an idea as well as improvise a tune and lyrics on the spot. This artistic, hypersensitive Roderick is the heart in the tale of *Usher*. Everything that the logical Narrator sees as pseudoscience or superstition, Roderick believes in; the Narrator is explicitly dismissive of Roderick’s beliefs when he states “Such opinions needed no comment, and I shall make none” (Usher 101). Roderick

feels and believes in the sentience of vegetable life, and that even the inanimate can exert a force on the animate and it is Roderick's beliefs that are used as a device to further emphasise the opposition between the logical Narrator and the artistic Roderick.

Returning to Roderick's beliefs, it is in these that the religious notions of the *Usher* are first revealed, namely in his obsession with the afterlife. "Thus, thus and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results," states Roderick (Usher 95). He is not afraid of dying, but fears what will happen after this, in particular to his and Madeline's souls. The evidence of Roderick being religious is also seen in his phrasing, when Madeline dies she succumbs not to her illness, but as Roderick states "to the prostrating power of the destroyer" (Usher 97). Roderick's collection of books<sup>3</sup> is also highly revealing, with several books having religious topics. "Ververt et Chartreuse" concerns a convent parrot named Vert-Vert who talks about religion, "Belphegor" is a tale about a demon from hell, "Heaven and Hell" has obvious religious connotations. "The City of the Sun" concerns a people who live in a utopian paradise within the sun and has highly spiritual overtones and the "*Directorium Inquisitorium*" contains instructions for priests examining heretics and finally the only fictional volume of the selection, the "*Vigiliae Mortuorum secundum Chorum Ecclesiae Maguntinae*" is an "exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic – the manual of a forgotten church" and therefore is an obviously religious text (Usher 101).

The religious overtones of the text are not just seen in Roderick, but are also subtly emphasised throughout the text of *Usher*. At the very beginning of the tale, in the Narrator's first description of his journey, "the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens" (Usher 90). This adds a religious element to the nature of the weather: traditionally when a deity is angered they respond with destructive weather as punishment (the most well known being

---

<sup>3</sup> For a greater description of the content of the books in Roderick's collection see Thomas Ollive Mabbot's essay "The Books in the House of Usher". *Books at Iowa* 19 (November 1973).

flood myths in several religions). This is seen near the end of the tale when the Narrator describes how the storm tears apart the house: “While I gazed this fissure rapidly widened – there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind [...] my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder” (Usher 109). In this regard the immoral nature of the Ushers can be seen as being punished by a divine hand, or as an inversion of the Genesis story, where the last two humans of the race are destroyed. This inverted genesis theme is also seen in the description of the grounds of the House, “a few rank sedges [...] a few white trunks of decayed trees” portrays an anti-Edenic setting in that it contains no life, only decay and rot (Usher 90). The religious nature of this inverse Eden is reinforced with the Narrator’s description of the feeling it evokes in him: “an utter depression of the soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation” (Usher 90). The religious notion is seen in the term “soul” and in the fact that the grounds of the Usher estate give the impression of things not of this earth To say that the Narrator’s soul is affected and that the feelings being evoked are unearthly implies a religious meaning. As the Narrator attempts to shrug off these thoughts the religious theme is seen again as the Narrator describes the feeling as “the bitter lapse into everyday life” where the word lapse has the double meaning of a decline (or Fall) into something, but also to stop following religious rules (Usher 90). When the Narrator begins describing the House and grounds he uses the term “an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven” which is essentially saying that the air of the House is evil or irreligious, and that it has no association with Heaven (Usher 92). The Narrator continues of this perceived atmosphere “which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn” (Usher 92). This description as the area is exclusively one of death, decay and because of this seems to represent evil. Linked to this the Narrator’s description also states “a pestilent and mystic vapour”. Pestilent is deadly, a reference to death and also the fatalistic nature of the tale, the term mystic and not *mystical* is used, the importance being that mystic has to do with thought

and the search for knowledge in order to become closer to God, and to reach truths and conclusions beyond human understanding (Usher 92). This term combines both the religious overtones such as Pestilence being one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the Revelation part of the Bible, and the searching motif.

The next line under scrutiny is “an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime” (Usher 90). To use the term “unredeemed” implies the religious notion of redemption and salvation. Fatalistically (and potentially connected to the Death Drive) is the implied notion of the inability to be saved as it is the term unredeemed being used, there is no redeeming or redemption for the soul. Taking the term sublime in its literary sense provides another example of ambiguity, as in the Romantic sense it can be the power of nature or art to inspire emotion through its beauty, however Edmund Burke defined it as “whatever is in any sort terrible [...] or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (Burke 1). In his essay *On Imagination* Poe mentions the difference between the two and separates beauty and sublimity. This reference to goading of the imagination is integral to the essay as Poe states “Even out of deformities it [the imagination] fabricates that *Beauty*” (Imagination in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* 445). This indicates Poe is well aware of the ambiguity of the terms he uses. The Narrator also states “The analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth” Again this is an allusion to the philosophising of *On Imagination*, and also the logical thought of the Narrator, but it is also implying a (possibly religious) notion that the power is beyond human comprehension (Usher 91). After this the Narrator then attempts to come to his senses by “shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream” (Usher 92). This is a reference to the spirit and therefore the religious theme, as well as dream highlighting the difference between the unreal (a dream, the textual world) and reality. This is seen again as the Narrator “scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building” (Usher 92). The

Narrator is now looking more logically at the *real* aspect, as well as further signs of the seeing/searching motif.

The Usher family is described as having “put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent” (Usher, 92). In this we see that the Usher family is essentially incestuous, and that Roderick and Madeline are the last two of their race. The notion of the last remaining two Ushers shows the inverted-Genesis theme. A little later the Narrator states that “the consequent undeviating transmission from sire to son,” and talks of “the patrimony” which again can be read as a religious reference as God is *our father* (or Adam as the apparent father of all life) and the use of sire not only has the connotations with breeding, but also is a way of addressing a king or ruler (Usher 94).

It is not just God or heaven that are alluded to in the tale; there are also the notions of evil or a demonic undertone with short asides such as “the wild ritual of this work”, which has a connotation with deviant or distorted religious ceremony (Usher, 101). The Narrator mentions that an “incubus of utterly causeless alarm” sat upon his heart (Usher, 103). This is a demon but notably a male demon, this could be symbolic of the male church, or to do with Roderick as a male.

Having talked of a family evil, deplorable folly and the notion of being lost, it may be that Roderick fears for his soul as he senses divine punishment for an immoral life. The Narrator also picks up on the religious notion of Roderick’s speech as he describes “In the under or mystic current of its meaning, I fancied I perceived a full consciousness on the part of Usher” (Usher 98). First is the reference to undercurrent of meaning and also the repeated use of mystic and its religious nature. Next is the note that the Narrator ‘fancied I perceived’ and as such is drawing his own conclusions like an analyst (Usher, 98). This is continued as the Narrator looks “into the recesses of his [Roderick’s] spirit” (Usher, 97). The Narrator is essentially exploring Roderick’s spirit. This conjures images of the religious notion of



darkness or a dark/evil spirit. It also may be where anything repressed is stored. This is followed by reference to darkness of the mind, with further links to morality as it is seen that Roderick implants or views “all objects of the moral and physical universe” with this darkness (Usher, 97). There is also the description that Madeline “was no more” (Usher 101) again this seems to denote not just death, but a lack of existence. There is a possibly religious reference to Hell, as the tomb is “lying, at great depth” and was used for the “worst purposes of a donjon keep” (Usher 102) – presumably torture, it is finally described as “this region of horror”. This region of horror might relate to Hell like the terms “disordered fancy” and “kingdom of inorganization” (Usher, 100). Firstly these are connected to a lack of order and organization – or chaos. The term kingdom suggests a realm or area. The most obvious realm of chaos would appear to be Hell.

There is also the use of repetition throughout the text such as the use of the word “belief” to strengthen and emphasise the religious theme. The use of binary opposites is also a way of showing the spiritual side of the text as the use of the term mortal implies its opposite immortal. There is the notion of “painting an idea” like the Romantics tried to do in some respects. This too is linked to deconstruction and the need to look within the text as the artist is incapable of reconstruction which gives Roderick a supernatural quality.

This analysis has shown that the use of organ symbolism is highly significant to the text and is important in emphasising the nature of the tale itself. The heart symbolises passion as exhibited in the character of Roderick, who is symbolic of artistic temperament. This is in direct conflict with the theme of the mind. Here the representative character is not the Narrator, who symbolises the application of logic, but the House. This use of a building to symbolise a head has been seen before in Poe’s work (such as *William Wilson*), and here it is a container for thought. The House is the space in which the process Poe is illustrating with his tale takes place. This is the mind as a container of thought. While the story unfolds, the

characters interact and move ever onward towards a conclusion. This all goes on within the mind until the conclusion of the tale. This focus on the House/Mind is also evidence for the psychological nature of the tale. *Usher* is a thought exercise; it is an allegory that allowed Poe to explore the various conflicting opinions he had until he reached a suitable conclusion and what better place to set this exploration than in a space which symbolises thought.

The organic motif also emphasises the theme of searching itself. There are numerous references to eyes throughout the tale, particularly at the start in the description of the House, where Poe deliberately is setting it up to be viewed as similar to a human head. These eyes have the dual function of both personifying the House, thus giving it the status of a character in its own right, but also by implying that what goes on inside is the key to understanding the tale. The eyes also show that there is something to be seen or explored. Like the theme of darkness, which by its very nature implies that something must be enlightened, the explicit description of eyes throughout the tale implies that there is something to be seen or sought after. Other small references to the organic nature of the tale merely serve to keep the tone of this theme in the tale, the passages and tracts of the House representing those of the body; while the mould and inexplicable life force or sentience of the House again shows that there is an organic theme throughout. This organic theme is also used to focus the story, like the narrative that draws inward to the House; the House itself is also a focus. As a motif of sentience and life it draws attention to itself from its surrounding grounds which are noted as lifeless and dead.

The analysis has also highlighted the distinctly religious tone of the tale. Poe was never afraid to speak on the subject of religion when it was necessary (such as in his essays) but was sometimes misunderstood or misconstrued. The relationship between art, nature, religion and science fascinated him, though, and as such he used his tales to answer questions on the subject, without detracting from their potential ability to generate income by being too

explicitly religious. As such the religious theme of his tale is much more implicit and appears through clever word usage and implication. Throughout the text Poe has placed words which have meaning related to religious topics. Seemingly innocuous words such as tract and mysteries, have religious meaning, and the ambiguous nature of characters' speech can all be interpreted with a religious slant. There are also allusions to religion in the various settings the tale occurs in; the church-like House and the anti-Edenic Usher estate provide a tangible religious backdrop to the tale, but there is also the implied notion of the "Kingdom of Inorganisation" and mention of destruction and damnation, while repetition of the term belief helps to emphasise the motif through the story (Usher 100). There is also the pre-occupation with death, and what happens afterward. The two speeches Roderick has within the text are full of ambiguous language which does not take too close a reading to expose the religious theme beneath. The religion being dealt with is never explicitly named as Christianity, though there is strong evidence for this fact. Poe's adoptive parents and family followed various forms of the Christian faith, and when Poe writes in his essays it is of a distinctly Christian God. The characters in the tale are likely to represent Poe's own thoughts and as such the religion in *Usher* is logically likely to be that of Christianity, thus *Usher* is Poe's way of attempting to satisfy his hunger for greater understanding while still making money from his writing.

## Chapter 8: Interpreting *Usher*

The aim of this work has been to show that *The Fall of the House of Usher* is not simply a work of Gothic Horror fiction, but is in fact a well-constructed allegory for a philosophical thought process concerned with the reconciliation of logic and religion. In the previous chapters, two methods of analysis have been used in order to highlight and provide an explanation for the presence of key themes and motifs within *Usher*. In this chapter, the conclusions drawn from these analyses will be combined in order to form a more complete interpretation of the story. As can be seen from the introduction to this study, Poe often used his tales as allegories and as a means to express real-world problems in his writing. It must be stressed again that the purpose of this work is not to analyse the author, but it would be remiss merely to gloss over Poe's style and penchant for mystery and undercurrent in his work. This use of his work as a way of solving problems, means that *Usher* is no different and that it too is a means to resolve something Poe considered important enough to write about.

As chapter two of this work shows, Poe concealed meaning within his works of fiction. This is seen in *Usher* as there are clues all the way through which point to the tale having meaning beyond merely the face value of the narrative. Numerous studies have shown that Poe often concealed meaning on his work, and even took pleasure in doing so. It has also been shown that Poe's tales were often allegorical in nature, with the meaning embedded in his narratives being symbolised by characters, settings and events within his work. In his essays Poe explains his theories on the construction of a tale or poem, and even expanded on the philosophical questions he asked himself. This was seen as "throughout his literary career, Edgar Allan Poe pursued a unitary theory of metaphysics, nature, art, and the human mind" this often appears in Poe's tales as a search or exploration symbolic of a search for answers (Moldenhauer, 284). In *Usher* this is particularly explicit as throughout the tale there

is the theme of looking and searching. This occurs both in the characters – as the Narrator looks around the House and observes Roderick – and in Roderick as he attempts to look into the future. Throughout the story are descriptions of eyes, or eyes are used as similes in other description. The whole purpose of an eye is to see and search and to repeat this through the text is Poe’s way of emphasising this searching motif. The use of darkness is also relevant to the theme of searching. Darkness conceals what is being sought after and often the Narrator finds himself struggling to see around darkened rooms. This is eased by increasing light or enlightenment, and this itself is a way of showing that the search is one of knowledge.

The close-reading and deconstructive section of this analysis has also highlighted the high level of construction in the tale of *Usher*. This has been seen both through evidence from Poe’s view of narrative construction in his essays and other work, but also from evidence found in *Usher* itself. This construction is also related to the totality of Poe’s writing style. An example of this is the repeated use of the term “scene” this gives the impression that the tale is highlighting its own deliberate construction, akin to an actor breaking the fourth wall. There is also explicit mention of “particulars of the scene” and the “collocation of the stones”, this infers the fact that these aspects of the tale (and thus the tale itself) can be rearranged or examined to give a different meaning (*Usher*, 101). The text itself also includes three fictitious works by Poe (*The Haunted Palace*, “The Mad Tryst” and the “Vigiliæ...Maguntiaë”). This shows that Poe has hidden, to a greater or lesser degree, his own work within the story and alludes to its awareness of its own fictive nature. In the case of *The Haunted Palace* the text is presenting us with a meta-narrative as the poem reflects the events of the story. This placing of different levels of narrative within the text make it sensible to assume that there are also different levels of meaning. There is also the language which the tale uses. The speech of the characters as well as the text itself often uses contradicting phrases or deliberately ambiguous words and descriptions. Such contradictions again point to

the nature of conflict within the story; how can the tarn be both black and lurid and the House be both rotten but in good repair are good examples of this. The text of *Usher* also uses repetition as a form of emphasis and one of the terms it repeats is that of “singular” and its synonyms. Repetition of a term like this is ironic in its use as there is nothing singular about the tale; it is full of doubles, repetition and reflections. This irony applies to both the description of the text, but also infers that the meaning of *Usher* is also not a singular subject, that there is in fact something deeper to be found within the text if the reader examines closely enough. This section of the analysis also shown the organic nature of the tale. It pointed out the reference to the heart and the mind, the artistic and logical extremes that they represent. These two oppositions are an important part of the thought process that Poe was representing in *Usher*; the way they interacted around the subject of religion, and the potential relationship between them that would lead to Poe having a greater understanding of the concepts in his unifying theory.

This method of thinking is highlighted by the motif of oppositions within the tale. Throughout the story there are numerous binary opposites, notably the use of light and dark. There is also opposition within description such as the tarn, which is described as both “black”, yet “lurid” (*Usher*, 91). This indicates that there is a conflict within the text. This means that *Usher* may be an exercise in resolving a symbolic or personal conflict relevant to the time. This opposition can be seen further in the notion of the double, brought to light by applying the Freudian notion of the Uncanny to *Usher*. The main characters in the tale are essentially opposites of each other. The Narrator is constantly described as surveying his surroundings, being methodical in his approach and is not superstitious in the extreme. The Narrator also struggles to describe abstract feelings, or Roderick’s works of art in any great detail. This means that the Narrator is described both as logical, but it is also inferred he is not of an artistic temperament either. This is in direct contrast to Roderick Usher, who is seen

to be highly superstitious and has a well described book collection which comprises of several texts related to chiromancy and attempting to predict the future. Roderick is also described as being musically and artistically talented as he both paints and improvises music and songs. This suggests that Roderick is more artistic and passionate than the Narrator. Viewing both of the characters like this, it appears that the Narrator represents the mind or is symbolic of a scientific, logical frame of mind. Roderick, however, appears to be symbolic of the heart and of a more artistic nature. This notion of the double also subtly raises the notion of conflict and this is seen firsthand in Poe's tale *William Wilson* through the escalating battle between Wilson and his namesake antagonist. Since the Narrator and Roderick are such extreme points of view it can be interpreted that they are related under a common theme, yet are symbolic of opposite beliefs or ways of thinking on that theme.

The House itself is capitalised within the text, giving it the appearance of a character in its own right. The House serves three main roles in *Usher*. The first is as a container. It is within the House that the majority of the narrative takes place, and the House also contains both Madeline and Roderick at the climax of the tale. In this respect it is a microcosm representing and containing the aspect of the problem the tale is attempting to solve. As a container it is also linked to the religious theme in that it appears vaguely church-like in the description of its Gothic archways, high vaulted windows and presence of crypts and vaults. The second role of the House is as a symbol of the mind; it is described as being split by a crack that divides the building in two and this is reminiscent of the two halves of the brain. The split is also symbolic of the conflict within the tale; if the House is indeed the mind, then it can be assumed that the characters represent different ways of thinking and therefore the conflict can be interpreted as a psychological one. The third role of the House is that of an antagonistic and dark presence. The House is constantly referred to as dark and while not in disrepair, still subject to rot and decay. Along with the landscape it also seems to have a

detrimental effect on all the characters within, most notably Roderick who seems to be connected to the House as more than just the owner. If Roderick represents a chaotic or different way of thinking, then this could be the reason for the conflict between the House as the mind and what he symbolises. The darkness of the House in turn symbolises the problem the tale is trying to solve and shows the need for 'enlightenment' in the form of answers.

Roderick and Madeline also seem to be corrupted or incomplete doubles of one another, Roderick is a man obsessed with the death and destruction of the Ushers, whilst Madeline is seen as the opposite as a woman fighting to remain living and overcome her illness. It is through Roderick and Madeline that the religious theme of the tale is seen. They are the last two of the incestuous Usher race, living together in a slowly decaying landscape devoid of life. This mirrors the Genesis story where the first two humans live in a lush and verdant Eden. There is also repeated mention of the spirit, and Roderick seems afraid of what will happen to both his and Madeline's soul after they die in the speech he makes to the Narrator, "I dread the events of the future," as he seems to know he is going to die shortly, but he continues "not in themselves, but in their results" (Usher 95). This is related to the immoral life of the Ushers, and the expected punishment of damnation can be interpreted from the title as this is *The Fall of the House of Usher* (my emphasis). There is also the mention of several descents, for example the characters into the vault and the House into the tarn; this can be interpreted as the religious view of descending to hell. The tale explicitly mentions "the moral and physical universe", which implies that there are other potentially intangible realms, as well as the "kingdom of inorganization" (Usher 100). Roderick knows that the death of either him or Madeline will result in the end of the Usher race (a term used in the book and also suggests that the Ushers are symbolic of a race of people) and fears this. This notion of destruction both of the Usher race and their spiritual destruction is another motif of the tale. This strong presence of a religious theme means that the problem being



considered by the text is likely to be a religious one. Poe was a white western male with an Episcopalian foster mother and Christianity being the dominant religion. This and the references in the text being of spirits, and concepts of destruction, hell and an afterlife it is reasonable to assume that the religion in question is most likely Christianity. There is often dispute as to whether or not Poe was religious, he “knew his bible well, at least as literature” (EA Poe Society of Baltimore). It is also understandable that, stemming from the events in his lifetime, such as poverty and the death of loved ones in his life, he may have questioned his faith. The prose-poem *Eureka* similarly questions matter and the universe as well as discussing the soul. In light of this, it may well be that Poe is using *Usher* to question religion. This is not to say that Poe was an atheist or that he wished to prove or disprove the relevance of religion, but rather that he chose to pose questions on the topic. Poe has discussed religion in other works, (*Eureka*, *Marginalia*) and his statements have been seen as both conventional and blasphemous; in a letter to Charles Hoffman Poe claims these blasphemous statements are “misrepresentations” (Ostrom, 382). This mixed view on religion shows that Poe had an open mind and was likely to question his faith from a view to understanding it further.

The destruction motif is seen in the whole story. Roderick is the character most obsessed with the destruction of the Usher race and appears to be symbolic of the Death Drive in this respect. The tale itself is also given a repeated negative tone with repetition of terms such as gloom and decay. The poem halfway through the tale also predicts a destructive climax and as such. The whole tale is designed to promote a feeling of inevitable death. Returning to Roderick, his book collection also contains works on predicting the future, as he wishes to avoid his fate which he cannot. This inability to do anything to change future events also adds a feeling of futility and inevitability. It also shows that ultimately the

problem that *Usher* hopes to solve is left without an answer. The narration is destroyed with the destruction of the House.

Looking at a combination of the themes in *Usher*, it can be extrapolated that the text is an analysis of the conflicting methods of viewing religion. The characters represent the different points of view, both logical and artistic. The logical side is essentially looking at elements of religion such as beliefs (the superstitions and theories of Roderick), while the artistic view is that of the Romantic, that art and nature themselves appear to be proof of a divine power. The focus of the problem is one of morality. The Usher siblings are a twisted version of the first man and woman, living in an equally corrupt anti-Eden. As a race, they are symbolic of the first race, and as such appear to have to interbreed in order to maintain their survival. This is in direct contravention with both biblical and physical law, and in doing so the Ushers are damning themselves. This is the problem that *Usher* seems to be addressing; in order for the story of genesis to work, contradictions to God's law must occur. It is due to this contradiction that the futility and inevitability of Roderick's research occurs, as a symbol of religion in his role as Adam he is literally driven insane as he realises the situation he is in. This eventually climaxes in his inability to change and the destruction of the entire House of Usher (both the building and family). The Narrator is saved from this destruction because he flees the building; this can be interpreted to mean that he is distinct from this problem and thus does not share the Usher's fate.

When considering the evidence both in the tale and from other sources, *Usher* is without doubt a well-constructed work, and one which obviously has an allegorical nature. When the work of Poe is considered as a whole, a preoccupation with philosophy and a search for knowledge becomes apparent. This need to understand also becomes an obvious theme as Poe's tales are analysed and seen as asking of questions. They are Poe's way of "making a fractured and dismembered world obtain some form" (Davidson 182) and in doing

so gain a better understanding. Like the tale of *Usher*, Poe himself had a dual nature; he was constantly conflicted in his thoughts and beliefs, described as “the most complex personality in the entire gallery of American authors” (Buranelli 19). This meant that Poe was constantly looking to resolve problems by application of logic. He was neither pro- nor anti-religious, merely curious as to how logic and reason could be applied to any problem. Despite this his work concerning religion has been misinterpreted. In effect, *Usher* is a tale questioning not the validity of religion or its place in society, but the relationship of logic and religion.

Poe was often concerned with morality, and this shows in some form through most of his texts, especially those such as *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *Hop-Frog* and *The Black Cat*, where the wrong-doer is always met with justice at the climax of the tale. The tale of *Usher* also highlights that, when considering religion, it is impossible to apply a view of single-minded logic or absolute artistic thinking to it. It shows that religion is contradictory, and that to follow it verbatim only leads to disorder while writing it off as illogical also prevents a full understanding. This is seen in the Narrator’s inability to conceive the full meaning of Roderick’s art, in the way he also struggles to comprehend the Romantic notion of divinity in the landscape, instead seeing a “singularly dreary tract of country” (Usher, 90). *Usher* can be interpreted as an illustration of this need to balance the mind and the heart and what they are symbolic of. It is a text that promotes a balance of thought and feeling, but also a moral message; the Ushers are punished for their immoral lifestyle, the ambiguity is also careful in that it does not explicitly name the cause of their punishment. The logical interpretation shows that Roderick and Madeline’s guilt at the immorality of their family line leads to physical and mental breakdown, while the artistic interpretation shows a form of divine justice -- the Ushers have sinned and are punished by being cast down into the oblivion of the Tarn. This balance is also seen in the use of double motif; there are always two in this tale: two sides to the House, two ways of thinking, the Ushers are twins and the House is

doubled in the tarn. This notion of two separate yet related entities is seen in *Eureka*, which deals with the nature of matter, and the nature of the soul and “is a strong indication of his belief that we each have a soul which exists apart from the physical body” (Poe Society of Baltimore). Poe was constantly striving for a greater understanding of the relationship between a few core concepts. It is fitting that these concepts are as conflicted as Poe himself was. As a Romantic artist, “Poe, while addressing himself to the total autonomy of art and art’s disconnection from daily life, was yet all the while disturbed by this wide separation,” (Davidson, 243). It is this separation that Poe was hoping to bridge with his theory connecting art and logic. Finally he addressed this “aesthetic counterpoint of a critical argument [, which] he later developed in “The Poetic Principle”” (Olson, 556). In his other essays as well as *Eureka*, Poe had attempted these constructed thought processes as a means to better this understanding he craved. This took time but before long a period of writing occurred from about 1839 onward, where these highly constructed and process tales were produced by Poe and are arguably some of his best work. Poe was never attempting to explain away or criticise religion, of which he had been accused. Nor was he biased against a logical or more rational point of view. Poe was instead trying to fathom a much grander and more unified philosophy which tried to incorporate and explain a shared, not conflicted relationship between the two seemingly opposed views. The beauty of nature and creation was obvious to him as a writer of the Romantic period, but equally as obvious were the patterns and logic behind human nature and life and this is what *The Fall of the House of Usher* seems to illustrate; the only problem being that just as the old ways of thinking collapse and the enlightenment of the moon occurs, the story ends. It seems that Poe has left the reader one vital mystery: does the collapse herald the breakthrough of the encompassing theory, or the knowledge that it is an impossibility?

## References

- Bailey, J.O. "What Happens in "The Fall of the House of Usher"?" *American Literature* 35.4 (1964): 445-66. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Jan 2011.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Semiotic Challenge*. Trans. Richard Howard. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. Print.
- Benfey, Christopher. "Poe and the Unreadable: "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart"." *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*. ed. Kenneth Silverman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 27-44. Print
- Bronfen, Elisabeth. "The Death Drive (Freud)". *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* ed. Elizabeth Wright (Cambridge Mass., and Oxford: Blackwell, 1992),
- Buranelli, Vincent. *Edgar Allen Poe*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1977. Print.
- Burke, Edmund. *On the Sublime and Beautiful*. Vol. XXIV, Part 2. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14; Bartleby.com, 9 Oct 2011.
- Clough, Wilson. O. "The Use of Colour Words by Edgar Allen Poe" *PMLA* 45.2 (1930): 598-613. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Davidson, Edward. H. *Poe A Critical Study*. Harvard University Press, 1980. Print.
- Dayan, Joan. "Poe, Persons, and Property" *American Literary History* 11.3 (1999): 405-25. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Eakin, Paul, John. "Poe's Sense of an Ending" *American Literature* 45.1 (1973): 1-22. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Evans, Oliver. "Infernal Illumination in Poe" *Modern Language Notes* 75.4 (1960): 295-297. *JSTOR* 13 Sep 2011.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock. UK: Penguin, 2003. Print.
- Gargano, James, W. "The Question of Poe's Narrators" *College English* 25.3 (1963): 177-81. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Hayes, Kevin, J, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.
- Hoffman, Daniel. *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe*. Wiltshire: Redwood Press Limited, 1973. Print.
- Hume, Robert, D. "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel" *PMLA* 84.2 (1969): 282-290. *JSTOR*, 8 Sep 2011.
- Jacobs, Robert, D. *Poe Journalist & Critic*. USA: Louisiana State UP, 1969. Print.

- Jacobs, Robert, D. "Poe's Earthly Paradise" *American Quarterly* 12.3 (1960): 404-13. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Kaplan, Louise J. "The Perverse Strategy in "The Fall of the House of Usher"." *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*. ed. Kenneth Silverman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 45-64. Print
- Marchand, Ernest. "Poe as Social Critic" *American Literature* 6.1 (1934): 28-43. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Moldenhauer, Joseph, J. "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision" *PMLA* 83.2 (1968): 284-97. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Muller, John P., William J. Richardson, eds. *The Purloined Poe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1988. Print.
- Olson, Bruce. "Poe's Strategy in "The Fall of the House of Usher" *Modern Language Notes* 75.7 (1960): 556-9. *JSTOR*. 10 Jan 2011.
- Peeples, Scott. "Poe's "constructiveness" and "The Fall of the House of Usher"." *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. ed Kevin J Hayes. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 178-190. Print
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Fall of the House of Usher". *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*. Ed. David Galloway. London: Penguin, 2003. 90-109. Print
- Pounds, Wayne. "Paul Bowels and Edgar Allan Poe: The Disintegration of the Personality" *Twentieth Century Literature* 32.3/4 (1986): 424-39. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Quinn, Patrick, F. "The Profundities of Edgar Poe" *Yale French Studies* 6 (1950): 3-13. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Rein, David, M. "Poe's Dreams" *American Quarterly* 10.3 (1958): 367-371. *JSTOR*, 13 Sep 2011.
- Riddel, Joseph, N. "The "Crypt" of Edgar Poe" *boundary 2* 7.3 (1979): 117-44. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Robinson, Arthur. E. "Order and Sentience in "The Fall of the House of Usher"" *PMLA* 76.1 (1961): 68-81. *JSTOR*. 10 Jan 2011.
- Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003. Print.
- Shulman, Robert. "Poe and the Powers of the Mind" *ELH* 37.2 (1970): 245-62. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Silverman, Kenneth, ed. *New Essays on Poe's Major Tales*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. Print.

- Spitzer, Leo. "A Reinterpretation of "The Fall of the House of Usher"" *Comparative Literature* 4.4 (1952): 351-63. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Jan 2011.
- Stovall, Floyd. "The Conscious Art of Edgar Allan Poe" *College English* 24.6 (1963): 417-21. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992. Print.
- Wimsatt Jr. W.K. "What Poe Knew about Cryptography" *PMLA* 58.3 (1943): 754-79. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.
- Yewdale, Merton, S. "Edgar Allan Poe, Pathologically" *The North American Review* 212.780 (1920): 686-696. *JSTOR* 13 Sep 2011.
- Zanger, Jules. "Poe and the Theme of Forbidden Knowledge" *American Literature* 49.4 (1978): 533-43. *JSTOR*. 3 Jan 2011.