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An Approach to the Gothic Aesthetics in Edgar Allan Poe's Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This B.A. Thesis aims to explore the presence of Gothic elements in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe. Thus, I will begin with a definition of the concept of Gothic aesthetic as it was articulated by British authors of the late 18th century such as Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis. The introduction of the Gothic in the United States starts with Charles Brockden Brown, being E.A.Poe the leading representative of this aesthetics. In this project, tales such as “Ligeia,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Oval Portrait,” and “The Cask of Amontillado” will be analysed.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo pretende explorar la presencia de elementos góticos en los cuentos de Edgar Allan Poe. Para ello se parte de una definición del concepto de estética gótica tal como fue articulado por autores británicos de finales de siglo XVIII tales como Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe y Matthew Lewis. La llegada del gótico a Estados Unidos se produce con Charles Brockden Brown, siendo E.A.Poe el mejor exponente de esta estética. En este trabajo se analizarán cuentos tales como “Ligeia”, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, “The Oval Portrait” y “The Cask of Amontillado”.

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AN APPROACH TO THE GOTHIC AESTHETICS IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S STORYTELLING

Loredana Alexandra Andreea Cute

1. Introduction

Gothic literature is the reflection of the human subconscious. Feelings such as terror and fear are part of human nature and these come to light in our approach to a Gothic work. In a narrative that clusters around the darkest ideas and thoughts of our being, the purpose of the author is to capture the reader with him to a place far removed from the reality, to a fantastic and irrational universe. As Poe himself stated in his "Review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*", during the reading of the story the reader's soul belongs to the author. Therefore, in this dark world of vampires, ghosts, ruined abbeys and deserted castles, the writers place their characters and make them experience bizarre events where supernatural elements within a bleak atmosphere plunges the reader into the abyss of our souls.

The intention of this B.A. Thesis is to explore the presence of Gothic elements in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, the leading representative of this aesthetics in American literature. In the first place, I will look at a definition of the Gothic aesthetic. Then, I will proceed with an introduction to major British Gothic authors of the eighteenth century, particularly the pioneer of the Gothic literature, Horace Walpole with his novel *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. Thereafter, this genre entered the United States and Charles Brockden Brown became its leading representative after the publication of his novels *Wieland; or the Transformation* and *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*.

Then, I will delve into Edgar Allan Poe's life will be explained in order to comprehend his works. Therefore, I will analyse the Gothic elements of four of Poe's most best-known tales: "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Oval Portrait," and "The Cask of Amontillado." These stories are notably interesting because of the typical Gothic elements they present such as a gloomy atmosphere and disturbed characters.

Poe portrayed in his tales some significant events which affected him grievously. He lost his mother when he was only two years old; then he deeply felt the death of Jane Stanard, mother of one of his closest schoolmates, with whom Young Poe may have been

infatuated. Then, he also suffered the painful loss of Frances Allan, his adopted mother, who passed away while he was away, and finally his wife Virginia Clemm died because of consumption. As a consequence, in “Ligeia,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and “The Oval Portrait” Poe deals with an essential topic for him, this is, the death of a beautiful and young woman.

For my project I will fall back on the sources from notable critics of Gothic literature and others who have studied the life and production of E.A. Poe: Arthur Hobson Quinn, Robert Hume, Benjamin Fisher, Margarita Rigal Aragón, among others.

2. Gothic British authors of the eighteenth century

2.1. Definition of the Gothic

Gothic literature emerges in the eighteenth century in Britain as a literary genre precursor of the Romanticism. It opposes to the aesthetics and philosophical movements dominant in the period, namely, Neoclassicism, Rationalism, and the Enlightenment. In opposition to the exuberance of the Baroque period of the previous century, Europe preferred the harmony of the classical world and the good judgment of the rational. But, not after a long time, artists and thinkers adopted the unexplained, the supernatural over the limits of knowledge. So, released from the chains of the rational, many authors decided to fill their books with ghosts, demons, vampires and other supernatural beings, all these the incarnation of Evil. Hence, the scenery of the literature of this time was a “sinister” one. The Gothic as “primitive” is a symbol of everything that is far from civilization, of nature, but it is also the image of a lost and genuine culture, which must be recovered at some point (González-Rivas Fernández, 2011). Gothic’s purpose is to resume what has been forgotten for years, to recall to life a glorified past and to preserve continuity. So, past and present are closely connected. Kilgour claims “*While the term gothic thus be used to demonize the past as a dark age of feudal tyranny, it could also be used equally to idealise it as a golden age of innocent liberty*” (Kilgour, 1995:14).

Gothic literature caused a double effect on society. On the one hand, people were soon interested in the suspense and defamiliarization of reality recreated in these Gothic stories, which were read and written avidly; but, at the same time, the success of this genre increased the fear about the possible subversive consequences of this type of literature in society (Kilgour, 1995). Furthermore, the Gothic deals with the concern of

the unknown and transforms it into a central theme, essentially based on two primary manifestations in the reader: the terror and the horror. For Lovecraft, “supernatural” is considered to be equal to “horror” and a truly supernatural tale must contain

A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the demons of unplumbed space. (qtd. in Perry and Sederholm, 2009: 65)

So, Gothic novels are set in the past and in foreign countries—generally Southern European Catholic ones. Monasteries, ruined abbeys, medieval castles, torture chambers, with a plot which hinges on suspense and mystery, together with wicked tyrants, witches with demonic powers, all in the same story, creates the perfect Gothic atmosphere. They constitute in themselves a symbol of death, destruction and decadence, of what was and is no longer. In the end, these elements create a gloomy landscape, which is nothing else but the reflection of the characters’ soul and mind, especially those of the villains. This can be observed in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole (1717-1797), where the castle is a representation Manfred’s thoughts, the protagonist of the novel.

In the words of Longueil, the term “Gothic” can have three possible meanings, “*all closely allied, -barbarous, mediaeval, supernatural*” (Longueil, 1923: 454). The first one is related to brutality, crudeness, wickedness, characteristics connected to how the Renaissance was perceived during the Middle Ages. In the eighteenth century, “Gothic” desisted from having a derisive connotation as it happened before so now, it represents the transition from classic to the medieval. For the father of the Gothic, Horace Walpole, this term meant just “mediaeval” and nothing more. The third meaning, that of “supernatural,” is the outcome of the other two. For the reader, a predominant characteristic of the Gothic is the setting where the story happens. However, besides these “*lonely castles, haunted towers, subterranean passages*” (Longueil, 1923: 458), the supernatural episodes are even of more importance. According to Todorov, the supernatural phenomenon can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be either an illusion of the senses, a product of our imagination, and the laws of this world remain as they are, or the occurrence really happened, and it is a component part of the reality. So, then the reality is governed by rules unrevealed to us. The fantastic is precisely on the border between the strange and the wonderful, it corresponds to the moment when we doubt if the supernatural had truly entered the real world.

The “Gothic” can be classified with labels such as “black Gothic”, “satanic Gothic”, “fantastic Gothic”, “female Gothic” and “black Realism” (González-Rivas Fernández, 2011). The “black Gothic” is the “pure” one, that which follows the conventions of the first period of this literary genre, based on a typical Gothic atmosphere, medieval castles, ruined abbeys, defenceless maiden, etc. Authors such as Horace Walpole and Sophia Lee are followers of this Gothic trend. Other authors, such as Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), prefer the type of Gothic in which the supernatural phenomena have a rational explanation. Therefore, according to Todorov’s theories, this is defined as “strange”. In “satanic Gothic,” that of Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818) and Charles Maturin (1782-1824), the unfathomable elements are accepted as such, and, for Todorov, they become part of “the marvelous”. Among others, the “fantastic Gothic” and “black realism,” that of Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), is where the Gothic is in the own horrors of certain human behaviors (Todorov, 1995).

A basic characteristic of any Gothic novel is that it should provoke fear defined by a presentiment of it and the intensity the reader experiences due to some unexpected events. This fear is originated by an ambiance of sinister and dark elements and by the formidable preeminence of the evil over vulnerability and good (Keech, 1974). For Ellen Moers

the Gothic” is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear. In Gothic writings fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare. Not that is, to reach down into the depths of the soul and purge it with pity and terror (as we say tragedy does), but to get to the body itself, its glands, muscles, epidermis, and circulatory system, quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physiological reactions to fear. (qtd. in Levine, 1982:77)

Many authors claimed that the concepts of horror and terror have almost the same meaning, but Ann Radcliffe, one of the earliest Gothic authors, asserted in her book *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826) that “*Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them*” (McKillop, 1932: 357). So, the difference between them depends on the effect it causes on the reader.

Any Gothic novel has such an impact on the reader that it can be related with the concept of sublime is present in any Gothic novel. Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an eighteenth-century thinker, in his treatise on aesthetics *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), explores and defines the concept

of sublime. For him, some things present in our lives are beautiful, but others are sublime. These last ones move us more profoundly than the beautiful, these touch our souls in its depth while the beautiful has an impact just on the surface. On the one hand, beautiful things tend to be small, smooth, delicate and attractive, and they produce pleasurable sensations inside us. On the other hand, the sublime ones are vast, gloomy, dark and threatening; they overwhelm and terrify us. Burke thought that the reason why the sublime moves us so deeply is because it is tied to the possibility of pain. So, in the words of Edmund Burke “*Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling*” (Burke, 1965: 35).

The sublime had a powerful influence on Romanticism, which shares common aspects with the Gothic literature. This notion of the sublime has influenced and is influenced by the Gothic, those masterpieces imbued with mystery, darkness and the inexplicable. *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), by the Romantic author Mary Shelley (1797-1851) is the ideal *magnum opus* of the fusion between Romanticism and the Gothic. The Gothic invoked not only the sublime but also the “grotesque,” which soon started to be used in all arts. During the eighteenth century, compared to the harmony of the classical art, this denomination denoted something unreal, unnatural and in a certain way repulsive.

2.2. Horace Walpole and *The Castle of Otranto*

The Gothic novel flourished between 1764 and 1820, being Horace Walpole the earliest practitioner. He published *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764, a novel about an old castle and ghosts which awakened the enthusiasm of English readers. At that time, it was difficult to believe that this genre of literature would be a success because it was something which has not occurred before. The author himself was not very convinced of his “experiment” and this is shown in the first edition of the novel, which he published under a pseudonym. Walpole even pretended that his work was a translation of a sixteenth-century Italian manuscript. In fact, the literary critic was not flattering with the novel because even nowadays, it contains sections which are more laughable than terrific. Nevertheless, *The Castle of Otranto*, which had as subtitle “A Gothic Story,” is part of the history as being the founding work of the Gothic so it has an honorific place in

universal literature. It is from then on when the adjective “Gothic” begins to designate for the first time a type of horror literature with a medieval atmosphere and some recurrent motifs. Therefore, *The Castle of Otranto* “is a terror story, but it is also the beginning of a form. Walpole opened possibilities of which he was but dimly aware” (Hume, 1969: 290).

Horace Walpole was born on 24 September 1717 in London, the youngest son of the prime minister Sir Robert Walpole. He was grown in an intellectual environment and he had an education typical of the highest social class. He studied at Eton and then at King’s College. After his phase at the university, in 1739, Walpole embarked with his friend and poet Thomas Gray (1716-1771) on the Grand Tour, which gave him the opportunity to visit Italy, a place which he became fascinated with. This experience was decisive in his life because he was enchanted by this country more than he was already. Since his early childhood, he had a passion for Italy, with the collection of Renaissance paintings of his father and with the Latin classes from school. He even signed some of his letters as “Horatius Italicus.” When he came back again to England, in 1741, he entered Parliament, but he was not very distinguished as a writer in this period. Walpole died in 1797, unmarried and without children.

In 1747, Walpole acquired a small villa called Strawberry Hill at Twickenham. The following years, between 1749 and 1753, he transformed the house into a Gothic castle for himself, which was portrayed in *The Castle of Otranto*. The castle was in tune with the architecture of the moment, this is, the Gothic Revival. In the words of Crystal Lake, it is “characterized by its medieval malevolence: a giant, armored hand appears on a banister; an army arrives bearing a colossal, ancient sword; a figure walks out of an old, musty portrait; a skeletal monk speaks” (Lake, 2013: 489).

This author’s masterpiece tells the story of usurpation of the principality of Otranto. Manfred is the protagonist and he is the one who owns the castle. His son Conrad is to marry Isabella, but this cannot be possible because he is found dead in the courtyard crushed by a helmet. This is a supernatural incident with no rational explanation, and it seems to be an old prophecy. Manfred decides to marry himself Isabella, the one who was supposed to be his daughter-in-law but first he needs to finish his relationship with his wife Hippolyta.

Nevertheless, Isabella does not agree to marry Manfred, so she flees to a church where she could be hidden, being helped by a peasant named Theodore. There, priest

Jerome discovers that Theodore is his son. Theodore was about being murdered but, finally, Manfred decided to lock him up in a tower from which he was released by Matilda, Manfred's daughter. After some events, rescues and escapes, the novel finishes with the death of Matilda by hands of her own father. Manfred thought he was murdering Isabella, but he committed a terrible mistake by stabbing his daughter. The story is finished when Theodore marries Isabella and he turns out to be the legitimate prince of Otranto.

Similar to many other masterworks of the Gothic genre, the plot of the story was revealed to the author in a dream. Walpole described it to the Reverend William Cole in a letter on 9 March 1765:

I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hand, and I grew fond of it —add that I was very glad to think of anything rather than politics—. In short I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in less than two months... (qtd. in Groom, 2014: xxviii).

2.3. Some significant Gothic novels

After the apparition of *The Castle of Otranto*, soon appeared imitations of this novel. The decade of 1790 would be the most prolific one with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe and *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis. After these exceptional novels, a few years later, in 1818, Mary Shelley wrote a novel which took its author to the climax of horror literature, *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, later Mary Shelley, was born in 1797 in London, England. She was the daughter of the philosopher and political writer William Godwin (1756-1836) and the advocate for women's right Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). Her mother died not after a long time of giving birth to her daughter. Thus, Mary Shelley was left in care of her father. She did not have a formal education, but she was passionate about her father's well-stocked library. In 1814 she began a relationship with Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), a significant English Romantic poet. They travelled in different countries of Europe for a time, but they faced financial problems. In 1815, they had to confront the loss of their first baby. Later, her half-sister committed suicide and

another two children died. Another tragedy in her life was when, at the age of 24 she was widowed. In 1851, Mary Shelley died of brain cancer.

Frankenstein was published in 1818, anonymously, in Harding, Mavor and Jones editorial with a prologue of her husband. In 1831, the novel was published for the second time, with some changes and a prologue by Mary Shelley herself. The author explains in the introduction that the inspiration to write this monstrous story came from the reading of German ghost stories during a day of bad weather on the shores of a lake, with her husband and Lord Byron, another widely acclaimed Romantic author.

For Ellen Moers, Mary Shelley portrayed in her work different aspects of her life but the most significant one is the role of motherhood and birth. The personal experience of Shelley with her parents and her own relationship with her children influenced her to create one of the major compositions of Gothic work which a female author ever created.

With *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, Mary Shelley initiated a new modern genre, the transition from Gothic literature to science fiction. However, she would have never expected to reach with this story such a success, considering the time when the novel was published. In the mid-1800s, women were supposed to express themselves in an open way just when they were accompanied by men. They had neither the right to vote nor the right to have their own property. They were expected to be tender, transparent and pure. But female authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen with her *Northanger Abbey*, showed a rebellious figure of women because they wrote about themes they were not supposed to do so.

These masterpieces of the Gothic literature written by Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, George Lewis and Mary Shelley, were praised by distinct authors of the British literature such as Thomas Gray, Lord Byron, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. According to James Keech

Thomas Gray was made afraid of sleep at night by reading The Castle of Otranto; Byron called Vathek his Bible; Ann Radcliffe's novels established her to the age as a major novelist; Coleridge gave The Monk serious critical consideration in The Critical Review and thought it the "offspring of no common genius"; and genuine originality and serious literary skills were noted in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer. (Keech, 1974: 131)

3. An introduction to the American Gothic

In the nineteenth century, the United States was still a large area of fertile land half

conquered. After the independence from England, in 1776, the literature of the New Republic was almost non-existent. There was not an original American literature, but a colonist one so authors had the desire to create their own literary legacy. They had an understandable anxiety of independence from European roots, they wanted to be a new nation with a production full of features distinct from the ones of the European authors. For instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in “The American Scholar” (1837) wrote that “*Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this*” (qtd. in Scofield, 2006: 6). Therefore, every single American author, included Gothic writers such Edgar Allan Poe, had the ambition to create an independent tradition, they wanted to be recognized for their own achievements and not for imitating the British predecessors. Though, before being totally disconnected from Europe they needed a model in order to create something different from what the first Gothic writers produced. Hence, many authors turned their eyes to Europe searching for material that America lacked. European nature was an inspiration for their work, the same as the Romantic British authors.

Many writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century were expatriate and travelled around Europe in search of the romantic feeling of living abroad, the same sensation Romantic British authors experienced. American authors were captivated by John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*, and the poetry of William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Lord Byron (1788-1824), among others. Even if American authors were supposed to create a completely distinctive literary tradition, the compositions mentioned before had a colossal impact on the new literary creation of America. (Baym, 2012:6).

Besides the desire of being independent in terms of literature, many American leading figures of the time such as John Adams (1735-1826), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) or Noah Webster (1758-1843), declared the need for a national art and a national architecture. Americans have an immense feeling of nationalism, of individualism as David Punter claims when he says

The United States is, it would surely be fair to say, the home of individualism, whatever that might mean in terms of the subject; it is the home of that cast of mind which prefers to separate itself, given the chance, from the communitarian, and therefore from the pull or lure of the “historical.” The rhetoric of the nation relies upon “making it new,” on being free from the traditions and prejudices of the “old world order.” (Punter, 2014: 26)

After the American Revolution, patriotic writers were desperate for creating “American” works due to the immense feeling of nationalism that the country was traversing then. This was portrayed in the literature and culture of the new nation. The critic Solyman Brown claimed in his book *An Essay on American Poetry* (1818) that “*The proudest freedom to which a nation can aspire, not excepting political independence, is found in complete emancipation from literary thralldom*” (qtd in Baym, 2012:5).

The country lacked the long tradition and history which Europe had, and, therefore, the abbeys and Gothic ruins that populated the literature of horror were non-existent. Authors such as James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) complained about the lack of material and literary precursors, in comparison with Europe, in *Notions of the American* (1828) he contends that “*...There are no annals for the historian; no follies (beyond the most vulgar and commonplace) for the satirist; no manners for the dramatist; no obscure fictions for the writer of romance; no gross and hardy offences against decorum for the moralist; nor any of the rich artificial auxiliaries of poetry...*” (qtd. in Serafin and Bendixen, 2005:804). Notwithstanding, the authors of the Gothic novel soon learned how to overcome these difficulties. Historical events and national issues, such as those of the Salem witch trials, the Puritan consciousness but, above all, the fear to the Other (the Indian, the Black, the stranger...) provided terrifying outlines to the new American writers. The English Gothic tradition exerted its influence on the other side of the Atlantic, where the novels by Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818) or Charles Maturin (1782-1824), as well as some German Gothic works (Schiller, Kahlert, Hoffmann etc) expand. (Baym, 2012:5)

The wave of European Gothic novels that flooded the American market altered significantly the reading habits of the society. This phenomenon cannot only be appreciated in the impact of Charles Brockden Brown’s masterpieces, the first Gothic American writer, but also in the work of later authors such as Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) or Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). Before James Fenimore Cooper, Brown, declared from a nationalistic attitude in the preface of *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799) that he would employ “*incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness*” to demonstrate that America can provide “*themes to the moral painter*” which “*differ essentially from those which exist in Europe.*” (qtd. in Baym, 2012:5).

The American writer of the beginning of the century adjusted his literary instinct to

the demands of moral realism that fecundated the nascent project of the American cultural nationalism. Surpassing the rational limits was tantamount to incurring the aberrant extravagances of the fantasy, to derive dangerously into the supernatural world of superstition, magic, or disturbances of sensibility, while undermining the foundations on which national experience was based: the facts, the material reality, the social and political background of the country. These values were artistically intelligible in the same languages the writer could use and manipulate. (Martín, 1997:70)

Most writers explored the ‘American reality,’ and because they were sceptical of their imagination, thus recreating picturesquely landscapes and national episodes that rarely allow the apparition of irrational or supernatural elements. Therefore, it is difficult to notice in the genesis of the so-called American “romance” a sharp distinction between imagination and reality, fact and fiction, fantasy and experience, since the poetization of American history itself does not detach from the actions, scenes or places that defines it. Several authors such as Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), Washington Irving (1783-1859) and Nathaniel Hawthorne tried to find and imaginative territory suitable for “romance” but none of them reached such ideal and radical grade as those of Edgar Allan Poe. Washington Irving was gradually incorporating into his narrative work an American landscape drawn with mythological features. The conviction that the nature of the United States provided immense poetic reverberations leads him to develop a clearly “picturesque” narrative aesthetic, open even to the magical winds of goblins and elemental spirits that do not alter the nationalist equilibrium of his mind. Its dependence on the objective and real world is compatible with the pleasures of the imagination that create fantastic appearances, tolerate ghosts, enchantments and superstitions. Nathaniel Hawthorne combines in his narrative real and historical facts with purely imaginary adventures. For him America offers a sufficiently complex reality and historically dense in order to make possible the creation of a narrative literary genre clearly conciliatory of imaginary and real elements. (Martín, 1997:70-71).

3.1. Charles Brockden Brown

Charles Brockden Brown, the earliest Gothic author in America, was born on 17 January 1771, in Philadelphia, son of Quakers parents, Elijah and Mary Armitt Brown. Due to his high social status he was a member of the Southern District Monthly Meeting in Philadelphia. His three older brothers began their commercial careers whereas Brown was enlisted in the autumn of 1781 in the Friends’ Latin School. This was the first time

when he participated in the world of literary ideas. He attended it for four years, until 1784, where apart from studying the Bible, he studied Greek, Latin, English literature, geography and mathematics. At the age of sixteen he started his career as a lawyer because he was influenced by his parents. Therefore, he began his work at the law office of a non-Quaker, Alexander Wilcocks, in 1787. During this period at the office, he met Henrietta Chew, the daughter of the associate of Wilcocks, for whom he felt a certain attraction. Brown began his fiction with a series of letters dedicated to her. Approximately on the same date, in 1786, Brown joined the Belles Lettres Club, formed by a group of youthful men, most of them Quakers, who shared their imagination and writings with each other. The group frequently debated problems which later Brown would deal with in his fiction (Weinstock, 2011). As stated by Peter Kafer, the members of this group “*had in common...youth, moral earnestness, and professional ambition*” (Kafer, 2000: 546). Most of these affiliates were successful as lawyers, doctors or businessmen but this was not the case of Charles Brockden Brown. After a few years working at the Weinstock-Chew law office, Brown decided to put an end to his career as a lawyer and to devote himself to his imaginary fiction.

Brown moved continuously from 1793 to 1800 between Philadelphia and New York. There he became associated with other literary societies which allowed him to flourish his intellect and creativity. This inspired his writings and gave him the opportunity to publish (Moses, 1986:15). His first literary works, some sketches entitled “The Rhapsodist” based on the work of the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), were published in 1789, when the French Revolution started. Brown’s knowledge was also strongly influenced by other philosophers, writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and William Godwin (1756-1836) and even scientists of the time. In 1799 he became the editor of the *Monthly Magazine and American Review*, to which he contributed essays, criticism, and fiction (Weinstock, 2011).

In 1800, he met the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, Elizabeth Linn, with whom after some years of courtship, he got married in 1804, and they had four children. Because of this marriage, Philadelphia Quakers disowned Brown the same year of the wedding. From 1801 till 1810 when he died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-nine, he composed three considerable political papers, positioning himself to Federalist political ideas (Moses, 1986).

On September 5, 1777, when the author was six years old, his father Elijah Brown was arrested and deported to western Pennsylvania and later to Virginia. The incident due to political reasons which affected the Brown family and Philadelphia Quakers in general, “*was the charge of Toryism and treason against some twenty leading Quakers*” (Moses, 1986: 20). This is supposed to be the triggering circumstance of Brown imagination which later he would portray in his writings. Therefore, the unforgettable experience replead with moral and emotional factors would conceive his complex fiction.

According to Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Brown’s Gothic can be classified in Urban Gothic, Psychological Gothic, Frontier Gothic and Female Gothic (2011:6). His novels were published between the years 1798 and 1801, some being released concurrently both in Philadelphia and New York. The author created his novels in the same way British Gothic novels were written. He would subject his characters—Clara Wieland, Constance Dudley, Edgar Huntley or Arthur Mervyn—to threats and mental tortures, incarnated by antagonists bordering on madness and error, that which later, Poe would definitely release from his real chimeric surroundings. Brown does not conceal his fears to the imagination when he needs to legitimize psychologically the behaviour of his characters who move in Gothic settings, besieged by a physical more than mental terror. (Martín, 1997). So, in the words of Peter Kafer “*Behind Brown’s gothic fictions about insanity, about sleepwalkers and ventriloquists, scalping Indians and spontaneous combustions, looms the haunting experience of a childhood that, try as he might, he could not escape*” (Kafer, 1992:482).

Wieland; or the Transformation: An American Tale published in 1798 is Brockden Brown’s first concluded novel. Two years before the author would start his *opera prima*, a scandalous event happened in the city of New York. The author was inspired in the 1781 case of James Yates, who murdered his three children and his wife due to some voices he heard, arguing that it was God’s desire. Then, the story of *Wieland* is about a religious fanatic who slaughters his wife and children after hearing a supernatural voice that instigate him to commit this terrible action.

The story is set in what the author called “Mettingen”, a space located on the boundary of the fantastic and the real, characterised by seclusion and weirdness. *Wieland* is composed of several bizarre episodes which made the story appealing for the reader. Brown’s opening of the story depicts the sins committed by two generations of Clara and Theodore’s progenitors. Clara, the narrator of the story, recounts the happenings that

occur to herself, her brother Theodore, and their friends Henry Pleyel and his sister Catherine. Conforming to Carol Margaret Davison, the same as Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, Clara seems to be unable of understanding herself and, therefore, sometimes her narrative can be misconstrued (Davison, 2014:114).

From the very beginning, the story involves the reader in unfortunate circumstances, the death of Clara's father and then that of her mother. Involved in this sinister plot, the coming of a mysterious character, Francis Carwin, is a turning point in the story. This "bilquist" is a being endowed with a faculty akin to the ventriloquism that allows him to project his voice at distance, creating a bilocation effect. When Theodore hears voices his personality changes, he becomes gloomy and reticent, there is a "transformation" inside his person. He murders his wife and their children as a proof of his devotion to God. Later, he essays to kill his sister too, but he does not accomplish it. At the end of the story he commits suicide while Clara and Pleyel depart to Europe (Savoy, 2002).

The voices are not only heard in Theodore's mind but also in that of Clara. These voices threaten to rape and kill her when she hears them from her room. The next time when a strange event happens, the setting is in the woods. In the early American literature, the forest is the location of significant masterpieces such as *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854) by the transcendental author Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) or "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864). In this tale, the same as *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799), another novel by Charles Brockden Brown, the Indians are present, they are portrayed as the evil which inhabits the woods. According to Weinstock, the Indians of Brown's novel are "plot devices" rather than people- "nightmarish natural forces that are part of Brown's Gothicization of the American landscape" (Weinstock, 2014:45).

Wieland is not completely a fictitious story, the author portrayed in the novel the event which affected him for his whole life, this is, the imprisonment of his father due to, he disagreed with the Stamp Act of 1765 and because of his revolutionary ideas. In the words of Peter Kafer, *Wieland* "is Charles Brockden Brown's imaginative account of - and psychological return to- the experience and consequences of his childhood in the Pennsylvania Revolution" (Kafer, 1992: 491). In another novel, *Edgar Huntly*, through the character of the eponymous hero, Brown claims that "Most men are haunted by some species of terror or antipathy, which they are, for the most part, able to trace to some

incident which befell them in their early years” (qtd. in Davison, 2014:112). Therefore, the author let the reader know that any trauma a person experiences, sooner or later, would affect the person’s mind and soul.

Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* but also *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker*, in which he melded “*European Gothic with American setting and social anxieties*” (Sivils, 2014:84) were an enormous influence for posterior authors such as Washington Irving with *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon* (1819-1820) and James Fenimore Cooper with *Lionel Lincoln* (1825), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and *The Prairie* (1827). Hence, distinct writers adopted Brown’s elements so as to create the innovative literature they were yearning for (Sivils, 2014:84).

4. Edgar Allan Poe

4.1. Life of Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston on January 19, 1809, the second of three children of Elizabeth Arnold, a prominent actress, and David Poe Jr, son of an Irish-born Revolutionary War patriot. Poe’s father deserted the family a year after the author was born and in December 1811, Elizabeth Poe died at the age of twenty-four of tuberculosis. According to Quinn, the last time when she made a performance onstage was on October 11, 1811 (1998: 44-45). However, Levine claims that she died during a performance in Richmond, Virginia (2016 :604), which is not possible due to the fact that Elizabeth spend the last weeks of her life in bed. After losing his mother, according to Poe himself, in his Letter 47 of 1835, August 20 written to William Poe, his father died soon at the age of twenty-seven just few weeks after the death of his mother: “*My father David died when I was in the second year of my age, and when my sister Rosalie was an infant in arms*” affirmed Poe. “*Our mother died a few weeks before him. Thus we were left orphans at an age when the hand of a parent is so peculiarly requisite*” (Poe, 2008:99). Now an orphan, the little boy was sent to his foster parents, Frances Allan and her husband John Allan, a Richmond tobacco merchant, while his siblings William Henry and Rosalie were sent to different families. The Allans renamed the boy Edgar Allan and raised him as their son even if they never adopted him legally.

The Allans moved to Scotland and then to London. In 1818, Poe became a boarding student at the Manor House School in suburban London, but the collapse of the London

tobacco market affected the family's economy and they had to move back to Richmond in 1820. Edgar's schooling continued at private academies. The death of an uncle in 1825 left John Allan a rich man and he bought a house for himself. Poe became engaged to Elmira Royster even if both families disapproved the engagement.

In 1826, Poe entered the University of Virginia, where even though he was a good student and he dedicated himself to poetry, he resorted to gambling, so he ran into debt and began to drink. In 1827 he enlisted in the Army as "Edgar A. Perry". In the same year, he paid for the printing of *Tamerlane and Other Poems* which later, in December 1829, was published for the second time as *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*. His foster mother Frances Allan dies of consumption in February 1829 and the following years he lived in poverty among some relatives in Baltimore, including his aunt Maria Clemm and her little daughter Virginia. "Metzengerstein," Poe's first story, was published anonymously in 1832 in the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier*.

In March 1835, Poe began his career as editorial assistant of Thomas W. White, publisher of *Southern Literary Messenger*, gaining his reputation as the "Tomahawk Man." However, when Poe submerged himself in drinking, his relationship with White decayed. Then, he returned to Baltimore and he married his cousin Virginia Clemm in May 1836. The following year, he moved to New York where *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, his only completed novel is published. In 1839, Poe moved to Philadelphia, where he became assistant editor of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* and several of his stories such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "William Wilson" were published. His publications include *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), a collection of twenty-five stories, his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (1842), *The Raven and Other Poems* (1845) and "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), an essay about how he wrote his worldwide well-known poem "The Raven."

The death of his wife Virginia in 1847 caused by consumption affected Poe seriously, who was ill himself the same year. Nevertheless, he continued with his devotion to writing, publishing *Eureka* in 1848, a work about philosophy in which Poe showed God as the dominant force who controls the physical world. Soon after, the desolation of Virginia's loss inspired the author to write his poem "Ulalume". One of the most significant works of Poe, his poem "Annabel Lee", was published posthumously (Quinn and Thompson, 1984: 1455-1463). Edgar Allan Poe died in Baltimore on October 7, 1849. As stated by Natasha Gelling, on October 3, Joseph W. Walker, a composer for the

Baltimore Sun, found the author “*semi-conscious and unable to move*”, “*a man, delirious and dressed in shabby second-hand clothes*” (2014). Even nowadays, Poe’s death is shrouded in mystery but there are several speculations about the way in which he died. For Quinn and Thompson, he died “*of congestion of the brain*” (1984:1463) but for other critics, there are different theories: beating, cooping, alcohol, carbon monoxide poisoning, heavy metal poisoning, rabies, flu and, even, murder. Among all of these, the one that Poe died because of drinking was a popular theory expanded by Snodgrass, a magazine editor. However, this hypothesis was refuted by modern science, which discovered from samples of Poe’s hair low levels of lead in his body. The tests made to the author, revealed raised levels of mercury in Poe’s system which means that the theory of poisoning with carbon monoxide would be an appropriate one. As stated in Gelling, this would explain for Chris Semtner, curator of the Poe Museum in Richmond, Virginia, Poe’s state of hallucination before his death. Nevertheless, the levels of mercury which were found in Poe’s system are much below the levels which would have put in danger Poe’s life to the extreme of death. Despite all these speculations about the reasons which caused Poe’s death, for Semtner, none of these theories can clarify his inexplicable and mysterious death, Semtner has never been convinced of just one hypothesis, for him Poe died due to a combination of components.

Edgar Allan Poe was an intellectual and educated author for the time when he lived. He was not just interested in literature but also in the world and society which surrounded him. His contribution to American fiction was crucial at a time when he was openly suspicious of the role of imagination in novelistic creation. The author refused to accommodate his art to the opinions of the moral orthodoxy of American rationalism, as David Galloway claimed, “*Art was, for Poe, the only method by which one could penetrate the shapeless empirical world in the search for order*” (2003: xxii). In the words of Félix Martín, if the literary norm emanated from the facts, from the current events, and from the moral truth, the exception belonged to the imagination, and the narrative art that lived on it would seriously threaten the social, political, psychological, and moral order of the American society. To contemplate an aesthetic preference in such a characteristic way is not exaggerated in a case like that of Poe. His challenge to social norms or his image of a cursed and alienated writer orchestrate, along with other critical principles and attitudes, a persistent legitimation of imaginative literature amidst clearly adverse contexts (Martín, 1997: 69).

The study of Edgar Allan Poe's contribution to universal literature, implies an inherent difficulty due to its multifaceted narrative. In Poe, the terror is diversified, explores new dimensions, and the Gothic is recreated from modern keys which leads to the creation of new literary genres such as those of detective fiction and science fiction. As a result, Poe's work includes terrifying, analytical, philosophical, detective or satirical elements that overlap and coexist simultaneously, which makes extremely troublesome any endeavor of internal classification. Nevertheless, Julio Cortázar's 1970 distribution of Poe's storytelling is an accurate one. Therefore, tales such as "The Oval Portrait" (1842) and "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) are considered to be horror tales while "Ligeia" (1839) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) are part of Poe's supernatural or Gothic tales. Moreover, Poe's short fiction can be categorized in metaphysical tales, analytic tales, tales of anticipation and retrospection, landscape tales and grotesque tales. Not only Julio Cortázar made a classification of Poe's tales. Indeed, Margarita Rigal Aragón points out that Susan and Stuart Levine in 1976 put "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Oval Portrait" into the same category because these tales expound a common theme, the death of a beautiful woman, whereas "The Cask of Amontillado" is part of anti-aristocratic tales, together with other tales such as "Mystification" (1837) and "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842).

As a receptor of all the preceding Gothic tradition, Poe's tales reflect many of the topics of the genre: haunted houses, suffocating atmospheres, corpses... But the author goes further, and it gives a twist to all the common places of this already known scenario. His work represents a turning point in the evolution of Gothic literature, which according to González-Rivas, after Charles Maturin's *Melmoth, the Wanderer* begins to experience a significant transformation: the passage of the object to the subject, the fear originated in the outside world to a terror that arises from the same protagonist and the deepest of his psyche (González-Rivas, 2011: 413). In short, with this change of focus of which Poe is served, the Gothic account becomes much more mature, and adopts a greater psychological and narrative complexity that later will inherit authors like Oscar Wilde or Henry James. As a matter of fact, some scholars have considered Poe as the creator of science fiction, a title that is disputed with Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*. The fact is that science fiction is one of the many extensions that emerged from the Gothic narrative, and that were evolving literarily throughout the nineteenth century.

With Poe the reader is immersed in the deepest regions of terror, in the spectral world of shadows and ghosts, it may produce shakiness to observe how it remains at the edges of the abyss advocating a highly problematic aesthetic of fiction. The tales of Poe's narrative work respond to the aspiration for apprehending supernatural beauty through the words and language's effect. Only a few writers have been so stubbornly debated as Poe for translating mechanically and verbally those realities and ghosts that the imagination inhabits for the eternity, beyond the grave. His pronouncements on the supremacy of the imagination, his explicit condemnation of the moral intent in the work of art and of the moral allegory, both in poetry and narrative, as well as the rejection of all kinds of truth inherent to the facts of the narrative, all these were well known in Poe. According to Martín, there is no doubt that his challenge overvalued the scepticism of his contemporaries around the function of the imagination and moved a conflict of social and moral character to the mastery of aesthetics. By refusing the moralizing didacticism as the objective of the work of art, Poe liberates it from the external similarity criteria and unleashes those fantastic and formal elements that shape it aesthetically, configuration appreciably especially through the effects it produces on the reader (1997:73-74).

When Poe began composing tales, around 1830, he was aware of the influence of the European Gothic tradition in America and of some works by Charles Brockden Brown and Washington Irving, whom the author admired. Not only the well-known novels of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Gregory Lewis, but others such as *The Ghost-Seer* (1789) by Friedrich von Schiller, *Horrid Mysteries* (1796) by Karl Grosse and *Herman of Unna* (1796) by Christiane Naubert, influenced Poe's imagination and creation (Martín, 1997:75-76).. Outside the ambiguous rationalism of Radcliffeans and Germanic works, or from the fantastic sensationalism of Lewis and Walpole, terror was found to be legitimate, providential, or supernatural causes in an impregnable country apparently to the incursion of the ghosts of imagination.

The influence of these works produced in the American writer a cautious attitude, that which will obstruct the struggle between the powers of the imagination and that of the real world, or between romantic fiction and the orthodoxy of prevailing literary realism. The authors who were admired by Poe—William Godwin (1756-1836), Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), E.T.A. Hoffman (1776-1822), Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824)—introduced ingredients of supernatural or irrational character in their works, elements that our writer aesthetically assimilates. For instance, we can find resemblance between “The

Pit and the Pendulum” (1842) and “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846) with *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) of Charles Maturin or, according to Martín, there are similitudes between Scott’s *The Antiquary* (1816) and Poe’s “Berenice” (1835) and between E.T.A. Hoffman’s *The Majorat* (1817) and “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839). The socio-political motivations of some heroes of Maturin, the universe of elemental and magical spirits that animate the tales of Hoffman, the ideological protection that governs the romantic world of Scott or the spectacular appearance of supernatural agents of Godwin’s novels are aesthetically dissolving in an autonomous narrative artifice, suspended from the critical mental alteration of the narrators (Martín, 1997:76).

The reader should be placed in the voices and psychological attitudes of the narrator to examine how Poe aspires towards an ideal, romantic, didactic, sublime and terrifying aesthetic narrative. The cultural and literary context of his time as well as the appropriation of the Gothic tradition, close and orient his creative impulses towards an acceptance of terror as a natural and essential means to transcend reality. It entails this aspiration, both for Poe and for the narrators of his stories, a titanic and ambiguous struggle between the real and the imaginary world. Many of Poe’s narrators try to justify rationally the mental and psychological deterioration due to the excesses of the imagination. In the words of Martín, the author is not oblivious to the Burkean aesthetics of the sublime, nor renounces to mention physical objects that produce horror, source original of the sublimity, a mixture of fear and astonishment, that situate its narrators in the doors of the most sublime of the experiences, that of the infinity. An example of the presence of Edmund Burke in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe is “Berenice” (Martín, 1997:77-78).

The spiritual element is transferred by Poe from the supernatural regions to the composition itself, to the mind of the artist and the reader. The most imaginative work is the most spiritual one, the mystical search has its aesthetic embodiment in the form of technique and literary effects, the imaginative experience is a matter of taste, resources oriented to produce beauty. Poe creates in his works a “terror of the Soul,” a pseudo spiritual sublimity settled only in the words and in its effects (Martín, 1997:79). Therefore, the most sublime and beautiful work, is the one which transcends the reader’s senses thus causing uncertainty, terror, anguish; feelings which, with the development of the story, make the reader immerse himself or herself deeply in the supernatural world the author had created.

The horrors of the imagination are confined, not only in the rational and sensory prison which devised thinkers prior to Poe, but with that veiled and underground domain of linguistic effects which form the supernatural happenings of Poe's stories. The anguish of premature burials, the phenomena of reincarnation and vampirism of the tales of Poe form the substrate of a mystical and transcendent aspiration. The writer and the poet must aspire to the supernatural beauty, whose tendency is the elevation of the soul, but at the same time it cannot remove, as Martín claims, that passion which is the intoxication of the heart and which naturally tends to degrade the soul (Martín, 1997: 82).

4.2. Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic storytelling

4.2.1. "Ligeia"

For Poe "the death of a beautiful woman" is equivalent to the most poetic theme in the world. The author was obsessed with this topic because during his lifetime, he suffered the loss of several beautiful and young women. His mother Eliza Poe died when he was three years old, "*and this traumatic event caused him not only to seek desperately for replacement caregivers but to re-enact this bereavement in his poetry and prose*" (Weeks, 2004: 149). Later, he had to overcome the death of his foster mother, followed by the death of a close friend, and that of Virginia Clemm, his own wife. This subject is portrayed by Poe in poems such as "Lenore," "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven" and tales include "Ligeia", "Berenice", "The Oval Portrait" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Weeks, 2004: 148). If we contemplate the figures of beautiful and almost disembodied young ladies—Berenice, Ligeia, Morella, Eleonora or Madeline—who return from death as spectral and ultra-terrestrial shadows, reincarnated beings and avenging vampires, we feel that the way to the spiritual domain remains buried in the glow of the subliminal world, in the fantasies and hallucinations of the male narrators. Poe projects on these female characters its destructive impulses, sheltered in the language of the poetic sublimation (Martín, 1997:83).

Both the psychological condition of these and the mysterious connection between the spiritual world and the material one, an unveiled connection through death, allow the reader to get completely into the phantasmagorical world of two renowned and fascinating stories, "Ligeia" (1838) and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Both stories place us in the doorways of an enchanted and spiritual world in appearance, but horribly inhabited by female spectral figures, heroines and idealized vampires, characters

who embrace death and succumb to the most absolute destruction, or narrators who are tortured with hallucinatory visions and share annihilating experiences as protagonists. Poe can be considered a perverse writer, intoxicated by the passions of the heart and tortured by the powers and delusions of the mind. Therefore, there is no doubt that the self-destructive mortification of the narrators magnetically fascinates the reader and encloses him in their hallucinating mental worlds. Such impulses break the feeble rationality of some narrators and characters until leading them to madness (Martín, 1997:93).

The image of the dying woman, almost shrouded, had a great success in Romanticism, which found in this reason the beauty of the horror and the pleasure of the suffering. Poe was seduced by the dead beloved, and he developed extensively this topos in his narrations, based on a woman almost phantasmagorical and with certain features typical of vampires, which is key in many of his stories, in this case, “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher.” While it is true that in the Gothic literature love is a secondary theme, displaced by a greater attention to the supernatural and the unknown, in “Ligeia” love and passion merges with elements of the tomb.

Ligeia is a beautiful young woman with whom the narrator falls in love, he adores her in such a way up to the level of idolatry. The narrator is absolutely captivated by her beauty, whose features are described perfectly, down to the last detail

In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her...I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead...the skin rivalling the purest ivory...and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and naturally-curling tresses...I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly- the magnificent turn of the short upper lip-the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under- the dimples which sported...the teeth glancing back... (Poe, 2003:63-64)

After the marriage, Ligeia contracted a serious illness and despite her strong desire to cling to life, she died. The narrator experiences a period of devastation after losing the love of his life. Therefore, some months later, he decided to move to one of the furthest places of England, in an abbey he had purchased for himself, which is described as “*The gloomy and dreary grandeur of the building, the almost savage aspect of the domain*” (Poe, 2003:70). Even if he felt devastated by his loss, as the reader can perceive from the narration, he got married with “*the fair-haired and blue-eyed*” (2003: 70) Lady Rowena. However, the enchantment of Ligeia over the narrator is really powerful and only the fact of reminding her produces him a feeling of hatred towards his new wife. Lady Rowena

also falls ill and dies, probably because of a few drops allegedly spilled in her drink. The night of her death, the body is in the bridal chamber of the abbey, depicted by the narrator with specific details, creating a typical Gothic atmosphere. The architecture and the decoration of this room which “*lay in a high turret of the castellated abbey*” (Poe, 2003:71) help the narrator to stimulate the sensations the author aimed to create in the souls of the readers. This bridal chamber with “*phantasmagoric influences*” (Poe, 2003:72-73), where the constant threat of death is always present, is the recreation of gloomy romantic ambience,

Over the upper portion of this huge window, extended the trellice-work of an aged vine, which clambered up the massy walls of the turret. The ceiling, of gloomy-looking oak, was excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device. From out of the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting, depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metal... (Poe, 2003: 71).

In these circumstances, the narrator describes how in several occasions, he notices how the body seems to revive, to fall then inert and cold. Finally, after several recurrences, the beloved wakes up, miraculously in the figure of Ligeia, not Lady Rowena. The moments when the narrator realizes that Rowena may still be alive are described as

I had heard the noise, however faint, ad my soul was awakened within me...Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression, I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat. Yet a sense of duty finally operated to restore my self-possession. I could no longer doubt that we had been precipitate in our preparation-that Rowena still lived. (Poe, 2003:75).

In “Ligeia” it is difficult to depart the macabre of the ideal and directly attribute to the narrator the spiritual reanimation of Ligeia and her reincarnation after the death of Rowena. At first, the reader accepts the fact that Ligeia has died but as the narrative progresses, the author immerses us more and more in a state of uncertainty. It is true that this beautiful woman has risen or, the resuscitation by the soul of Ligeia is due to the will of the narrator, to its hallucinating state, to the influence of the opium or the same will of Ligeia? We cannot be certain whether Ligeia has truly returned to life or this occurrence is just in the narrator’s mind affected by the pain of losing her or because of the opium. As Paul Lewis claims “*If a narrator reports seeing a ghost, can we trust his perceptions?*” (Lewis, 1979: 207). However, according to Félix Martín, Ligeia, with her conscience, her eyes, her beauty and her infinite supremacy is the one who has power

over the narrator; she has an infinite yearning for life, who loves passionately and whose desire is to triumph over death (1997:87).

Then, Ligeia's return to life is a miracle for which we do not have an exact explanation, and this turns the story into a fascinating and unexplained mystery. The narrator realizes the strength of the love of Ligeia only after death and it is precisely the narrator that will engender the transformation of the corpse of Rowena, as a result of which miraculously appears restored and alive Ligeia. The narrator alternates the psychological states to which he is subjected with frightful relapses of the corpse in an irremediable death culminating in the appearance of a more shocking figure than he had ever been able to dream. In the words of Martín, the presence of this sort of vampire is reduced to an emblem of death, to the black and strange eyes of a lost love, possibly the most accurate emblem of what the supreme beauty meant for Poe (1997:87-88).

The opium is a significant factor in the development of this story. From the very beginning, the narrator warns the readers that what they are reading in these pages may be just a dream provoked by the effects of this substance, "*it was the radiance of an opium-dream*" (Poe, 2011: 63). In this way, Poe avails himself of the opium to catch his own character in an oneiric state and thus introduce the direct association between the opium addict and the creation of the story. When the narrator suffers the visions and torments of his narcotic hallucination, he believes he sees his beloved and he is terrified because of Ligeia's omnipotent presence after death. This is represented in the special light that dominates his surroundings. Ligeia harasses the narrator entering the room through the complex prism-cut of a censer and the game of light that produces the wind in combination with this exotic and decorative element on the walls of the chamber. (González del Pozo, 2008: 92)

The resemblance between Poe's Ligeia and Lady Rowena could be compared in some way with the likeness of Isabella and Matilda in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. In this novel, Manfred stubs his own daughter Matilda because he thought that she was Isabella. Even though both have completely different personalities and "*temperaments*", Matilda and Isabella "*are double or mirror images*" (Morris, 1985:305).

4.2.2. "The Fall of the House of Usher"

"Ligeia" is a prototypical version wrapped in the relationship of love and sublimity

of an almost adolescent narrator, the same as “The Fall of the House of Usher”, where Roderick Usher and his sister Madeline hide their relationship in a sexual repulsion. “The Fall of the House of Usher”, one of the most acclaimed tales of Edgar Allan Poe, was first published in 1839 in *Burton’s Gentleman Magazine*. In the words of Clive Bloom,

‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ is probably the most interpreted short story ever written, its ambiguities endlessly fascinating. Whatever might be said about the tale’s significance it is clear that Poe combined physical horror (entombment and reincarnation; a collapsing house surrounded by a moat) with horror more closely associated with the mind (Usher’s hypochondria and hysteria and Madeline’s catatonia): horror has as its sources both traditional gothic and medical conditions garnered from a contemporary popular encyclopaedia. (Bloom, 1998:3)

The tale begins with the arrival of the narrator at the house of Usher, called by his friend of youth Roderick Usher, who at that time is very ill, due to a strange nervous affliction. The house has a sinister and abandoned air that overtakes the narrator, who especially gives attention to a fissure that opens along one of the walls. Once inside, he realizes that the atmosphere is equally rarefied beginning with the “*Gothic archway of the hall*” (Poe, 2003:93) and the “*many dark and intricate passages*” (2003:93) until every single object of the house: “*While the objects around me- while the carvings of the ceiling, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies*” (2003:93), and even the room in which the narrator settled in, “*the windows were long, narrow, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor...dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered*” (2003: 93-94). The ambiance of the house was so gloomy and depressing that the narrator had the sensation he “*breathed an atmosphere of sorrow*” (2003:94).

The narrator is presented before Roderick, and he also meets his sister Madeline, victim of a cataleptic disease and who is already moribund. When Madeline dies her brother decides to keep her corpse in the basement of the house, at least for a while, to prevent someone from asking to unearth her with scientific intentions (given the rareness of her illness). It is at that moment when the narrator warns of the striking resemblance between Madeline and Roderick, when he realizes that they are twins. In the days following the burial of his sister, Roderick is more and more restless. One stormy night, the narrator tries to keep tranquil his friend reading to him some passages of the fictional medieval novel *The Mad Trist* of Sir Launcelot Canning. However, suddenly some noises seem to accompany the reading of the work. Then Roderick confesses to the narrator that

he believes he has buried his sister alive, and that the noises that are heard are because Madeline is trying to escape from the tomb. Suddenly, the doors of the hall are opened, and appears the figure of Madeline bloodied. With one last breath of life, it falls on Roderick. This one, terrified, dies also at that very moment. The House is the true protagonist of this story, a sinister and claustrophobic space that, with a supernatural influence, imprisons its inhabitants and buries them with its final destruction. Therefore, the house is the monster of this story, it is the one who has the power over the characters and the narrator. Only the narrator manages to escape the house, before the fissure of the walls is widened and the mansion collapses completely (González-Rivas, 2011: 495-496).

Leaving aside its formal perfection, appreciable both in its symbolic structure and in the gradation of emotional reactions that produces the development of the action, its strange and gloomy atmosphere or the depraved condition of the twins, Roderick and Madeline, this narrative is overlooking the abyss of the dying without aspiration of sublimity, because those elements that suggest aesthetically certain indefinite mystical elevation, come to stop fatefully to the death, to the world of the senses. According to Martín, Roderick's paintings, his artistic sensibility, his passion for music and poetry articulate symbolically all the aesthetic resonances of the work. Not even the music manages to liberate Roderick from his sensory prison (Martín, 1997:88-89). His "*dirges*" (Poe, 2003:97) resonate eternally in the lives of the narrator and the reader, and his revered readings are of a spectral nature, especially related to the ancient rites and vigils of the deceased. Every artistic sign is affected by the terror of the death, of a death that Roderick inevitably respects and to which he agonizingly opposes; he is completely terrified with the fact that sooner or later he will die, "*I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR*" (Poe, 2003: 96).

According to Fred Botting, "*Ghosts did not exist in reality but inhabited the distorted mind*" (2010:12). Therefore, in "The Fall of the House of Usher", besides the narrator and Roderick, there are mentioned other characters but just in the first pages of the story, the valet "*of a stealthy step*" (Poe, 2003: 93) who conducted the narrator "*through many dark and intricate passages*" (2003: 93) until the studio of Roderick, and the physician whose "*countenance...wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity*" (2003: 93). These characters are not real, they are phantasmagoric figures who are present merely in Roderick's mind due to his "*mental disorder which oppressed*

him” (Poe, 2003:91). Madeline is, on the one hand, a real character because she is Roderick’s sister, but on the other, she is also phantasmagoric figure because she appears and disappears in one second through the halls of this mysterious and sombre house, “*While he spoke, the lady Madeline (for so she called) passed through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread- and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings*” (Poe, 2003: 96).

In “The Fall of the House of Usher” there are many elements typical of the gothic novel that was conceived during the first period, up to 1820: the claustrophobic space of the house, the dark atmosphere and the medieval inspiration, present in the fictional novel *Mad Trist* of Sir Launcelot Canning (González-Rivas, 2011: 496). From the beginning of the tale, the reader embraces the gloomy atmosphere of the narration “*with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolated or terrible*” (Poe, 2003:90). The narrator even attributes to the house features of human beings such as “*the vacant eye-like windows*” (Poe, 2003:90).

A dissimilarity between Edgar Allan Poe’s Gothic storytelling and the novels of the Gothic British authors is that those wicked villains are not present in the creation and imagination of Poe. Nevertheless, even if the narrator does not follow this tradition, by reading “The Fall of the House of Usher” the readers can perceive that, the same as the first Gothic novels, the setting of this story is somewhere in Europe, maybe in Germany because Roderick, the name of the protagonist, could be a German name. Moreover, when the narrator is describing “*the arrangements for the temporary entombment*” (Poe: 2003:102) of Madeline, he utilizes the terms “*remote feudal times,*” “*donjon-keep*” and “*long archway*” (2003:102). Therefore, the only possibility for the setting of this story is in Europe due to America lacked all these elements. The setting of the novels of the Gothic British authors used to be South of Europe, in countries such as Italy or Spain because for them religion and Catholicism was an important topic at that time. Nevertheless, Poe has not been an author who gave a significant role to religion so his tales are not placed in these countries except from “The Pit and the Pendulum” (1961), which is set in Toledo and in which the author alluded to the Spanish Inquisition, and

“The Cask of Amontillado”, which, although placed in a city in Italy or France, it makes reference to a Spanish type of sherry.

Although Poe distanced himself from the British Gothic, there is a connection between Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, where the castle is a representation of Manfred’s mind, and “The Fall of the House of Usher”, where the deterioration and mental instability of Roderick is reflected on the fissure of the facade of the mansion. At the end of the story, just right after Roderick’s death, the house collapses. In the words of Walker, the fissure represents “*the imminent collapse of Roderick Usher’s ruined personality*” (Walker, 1966: 586). Therefore, it is shown that the House is deeply connected to the Usher family and once the last generation vanishes, so does the House. The collapse of the building is described by Poe as “*there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters- and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘HOUSE OF USHER’*” (Poe, 2003: 109). In *The Castle of Otranto*, the novel ends with the destruction of the castle and that of an illegitimate usurpation.

According to Ruth Perry, “*Old buildings, supernatural happenings, unravelling history shrouded in darkness and self-conscious about itself- these elements suggest the incest motif*” (Perry, 1998: 269). In the “Fall of the House of Usher” the reader can find all of these components, therefore, we could say that in this story, incest constitutes one of the key motifs of the narrative, and it seems to be very far back within the same Usher family “*I had learned, too...that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honoured as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, as laid*” (Poe, 2003: 92). This theme is intimately linked to another of the great topics of Gothic literature: the double or “Doppelgänger”, which is represented here in the close relationship of twins, Roderick and Madeline Usher. Furthermore, the idea of the double is presented from the beginning of the narrative in the same house, with the reflection in the gloomy tarn: “*I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down- but with a shudder even more thrilling than before- upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant eye-like windows*” (Poe, 2003:91). This notion of the double is also developed by Poe in other tales such as “William Wilson” (1839).

As it is claimed by Walker, Roderick is a horrified victim involved in the tenebrous atmosphere of the house and his distorted notion of perceiving the reality. He has not been killed by his sister Madeline but in his imagination, the fact that he buried his sister alive, has been the climax of his mental state's decomposition. It was already in a degradable state but after the entombment of his sister, Roderick's appearance in general, but especially, his countenance has been deteriorating since then: "*And now, some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend...The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue...and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance*" (Poe, 2003:103).

For the readers, the twins are considered to be the protagonists of this tale. Nevertheless, many authors have pointed out that the narrator is the character who has a decisive and fundamental role for the construction of the story. For instance, he is the one who uses the resource of a story within a story by reading the fictional novel *Mad Trist* in a crucial moment of "The Fall of the House of Usher", in the climax of this tale. This novel is a duplication of the tale because there is a parallelism between the incidents of the tale and the narration of the "Mad Trist". After Ethelred, the protagonist of novel, received a reward for killing the dragon, "*a distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled reverberation*" (Poe, 2003: 107) is heard. At this moment is when Roderick confesses that he "*has listened to the 'Mad Trist' as a duplication of his own inner reality*" (Herrmann and Kostis, 1980: 40). The poem "The Haunted Palace" which appears in the tale duplicates the House and this can be observed when the ruler of the palace—Porphyrogene—has disappeared, the same as the House itself at the end of "The Fall of the House of Usher".

A possible interpretation for this story of Roderick and Madeline is that of incest but besides, it could also be understood as Madeline being a vampire. "Red" in "Ethelred" could be related with the "blood-red moon" which appears at the end of the tale when the House collapses, and the fact that Madeline returns from the tomb as a vampire in order to kill her brother brings together the idea of 'blood', which is red. The symbolism of this colour is a significant one for the reader in the development of the story.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is one of Poe's remarkable achievement in the universal world of short story. In the words of Benjamin Fisher,

The tale offers an anxiety-ridden narrator- protagonist, a haunted mansion tenanted by haunted sibling- who eventually come to “haunt” the storyteller- a mysterious doctor, whose intents seem to be nefarious, plus a veritable gallery of Gothic properties...distorted thought and sense perceptions that disturb Usher and the narrator, live burial and the horrifying return of the interred. All these, and much more, are dramatized with model concession. (Fisher, 2004:88-89)

4.2.3. “The Oval Portrait”

Edgar Allan Poe has treated in a masterful way the theme of love and death, a subject in which, as has been seen, inspired many of his best-known tales, always giving them a Gothic twist where a feeling like love can become really sinister. This has been seen previously with “Ligeia,” but it is also the case of “The Oval Portrait,” which appeared in April 1842 in *Grahams Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine* with its original title “Life in Death.” Three years later, it was revised and published on April 26, 1845 in *The Broadway Journal* (Nielsen, 2014: 248).

The narrator of this story, wounded, travels through the Italian Apennines, and he arrives at an abandoned castle in the middle of nowhere, that reminds him of the scenery of Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novels. There is a close similarity between the “*huge, gloomy, and menacing Gothic castles*” (Lévy, 1972: 20) of “Ligeia,” “The Fall of The House of Usher,” and “The Oval Portrait,” with those medieval fortresses of the adventures of the characters of Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, and Charles Maturin. From the first lines of “The Oval Portrait”, Poe alludes to the narrative of Ann Radcliffe by placing the setting of this story in a chateau, “*one of those piles of commingled gloom and grandeur which have so long frowned among the Apennines, not less in fact than in the fancy of Mrs Radcliffe*” (Poe, 2003: 201). The atmosphere of this chateau is created by every single object and room which form it, which are surrounded by a sense of gloom and darkness. The apartment in which the narrator established himself is one of the smallest and extravagantly furnished of all the chambers of the castle, and every corner of it, the candelabums, the tapestry, the curtains, the trophies, etc. are ideally set so as to create a Gothic archetypical ambiance. This is room where the narrator found the oval portrait,

lay in a remote turret of the building. Its decorations were rich, yet tattered and antique. Its walls were hung with tapestry and bedecked with manifold and multiform armorial trophies, together with an unusually great number of very spirited modern paintings in frames of rich golden arabesque. In these paintings, which depended from the walls not only in their main surfaces, but in very many nooks which the bizarre architecture of the chateau rendered necessary...the tongues of a tall

candelabrum...and wide the fringed curtains of black velvet which enveloped the bed itself. (Poe, 2003: 201)

There, a portrait of a woman in a frame, from which an intense sense of life is emitted, appears in his chamber on the pillow of his bed. Then, the narrator discovers the description of this painting in the book, and he decides to read the story of a woman in love, who only had eyes for her husband. But her husband, a painter, shared the love of his wife with his other passion, art. Aware of this, the woman considers art as an imposing rival; and so, when her husband proposes to paint a portrait of herself, she seems to be disquiet by this idea. Her husband, absorbed in art, does not realize that his wife is losing vitality day after day, a detail which though is noticed by the rest of family and friends. The last few days he isolated himself in his workshop, getting more and more obsessed with the portrait, *“the painter had grown wild with the ardour of his work, and turned his eyes from the canvas rarely, even to regard the countenance of his wife. And he would not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sate beside him”* (Poe, 2003: 203-204). And when the last brushstroke is given and when he becomes conscious of all the life he has managed to reflect in his portrait, he observes his wife to discover that she is dead.

Regarding the two titles mentioned, “Life in Death” and “The Oval Portrait”, in relation with the story, the prevailing one is more accurate since the portrait is the fundamental element of this story. Nevertheless, if one tries to understand every single piece of the narration, at the end we realize that even if the young woman is dead, in some way she is still alive, her expression is of *“an absolute life-likeness”* (Poe, 2003: 203). Therefore, the image of this dead woman has been represented in the portrait, so in some way she lives for an eternity. Then, the title “Life in Death” could be also appropriate but the author considered that “The Oval Portrait” matches better for this story. According to Skov Nielsen, the relationship between these two titles is that “Life” and “Portrait” imply a relationship between reality and art, between life and portrait and *“they stage these relations not just within each of the tales but also in their interrelation. Beyond a couple of major changes in the beginning and ending, Poe makes countless small corrections, so that almost every single sentence is told in a different way- is in short twice told”* (Nielsen, 2014 :248-250).

The artist made this portrait while she was still alive but then she died, with the portrait, the artist guaranteed her beauty for eternity. Her aspect and her features seem to

be so real that the narrator, when is reading the description about how the portrait has been elaborated, has the sensation that she is in front of him in flesh and bones. However, despite he made her immortal, at the same time he is the one who killed her because as Twitchell claimed “*the artist is so obsessed with his art that he sacrifices his loved ones in the process of creating perfection*” (1977:387).

The image of the woman in this tale, in comparison with “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”, is depicted as a weak, devout and submissive figure whose life is absorbed by the painter. She is “*a maiden of rarest beauty...humble and obedient*” (Poe, 2003:203) ready to sacrifice her life for love while in the other two tales, are Ligeia and Madeline who have power over the narrator and over the male figures. Comparing the figure of the narrator in these three tales, in “The Oval Portrait”, he is a point of view, the same as in “The Fall of The House of Usher” (Gross, 1959: 17) while in “Ligeia” he is a direct participant in the story, he is the protagonist because he experiences the occurrences of the story, and at the same time, he narrates them. Once the narrator introduces to the reader the story of the painter and the young woman, his figure moves to a second place, so the reader is not focused on him anymore but on the mysterious story of how this oval portrait has been created. Then, in “The Oval Portrait”, the first-person narrator vanishes from the text and incorporates himself in the “*background of the whole*” (Nielsen, 2014: 252).

According to Sylvie Richards, the persecuted woman is a model in Radcliffe’s novels such as *Romance of the Forest* (1791), in which the heroine Adeline is persecuted in a sinister castle; and in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), in which another heroine, Emily, is shut up in the bleakcastle of Otranto by an evil character (1983:308). However, in Poe’s “The Oval Portrait,” the one who is running maybe because he feels threatened by someone is a male character, in this case, the narrator because he arrives at this chateau in his “*desperately wounded condition*” (Poe, 2003:201). The reader is ignorant of what happened to the narrator just before he introduces us in this sinister narration, we do not know how and what is the reason that led him to arrive at the Apennines.

Notwithstanding, as it is mentioned by Seymour Gross, at the beginning of the original version of this tale, in “Life in Death,” can be found a passage of around four hundred words which Poe decided to eliminate later from his final version. From this section, the reader can notice a neurotic instability of the narrator conceivably because his addiction to narcotics which provoked a psychic disturbance upon him. In this portion,

the narrator remembers that he has some opium in his tobacco case so after days without sleeping and debilitated for the loss of blood, he decides to consume a dose for relief. (Gross, 1959:17). Therefore, this tale, the same as many others of Poe's stories, could be merely a product of the narrator's imagination or even of that of the author. For instance, in "Ligeia," the narrator mentions that the beauty of this young woman was "*the radiance of an opium-dream*" (Poe, 2003: 63). Poe was addicted to this narcotic, so this addiction is transmitted to his narrators. The readers must accept that the "*absolute life-likeness*" of the oval portrait is just an illusion of a mind disturbed and the narrator's hallucinations because of the pain and opium (Gross, 1959:18). Poe, in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) asserted that "*the death...of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic topic in the world*" (qtd. in Richards, 1983:308). Therefore, following his aesthetic, according to Richards, in "The Oval Portrait," Poe gave the woman a beauty which is blemished with pain, corruption and death but even so, the representation of the painter's wife is even real than the reality itself (1983: 308-309).

At first impression it seems that there is only one portrait but in fact, there are two in this story: the oval portrait of the young woman and "The Oval Portrait" of the character narrator observing and reading the description about the oval portrait of the girl. The "Oval Portrait" inserts the story of this young woman and her picture and "The Oval Portrait" embeds the oval portrait. The characters, the narrator and the girl depicted in the portrait, share common features. There is a correspondence between the description of the room of the chateau and the chamber where the girl was painted and where she died. Therefore, this room is portrayed by the artist who painted the girl in his work of art. Then, as it is claimed by Skov Nielsen, both artists —the one who painted the girl, and the narrator, the one who is describing the story—share the same fate and when they finish their art works, both finish their stories and they disappear (2014 :251- 252).

In the words of Skov Nielsen "*The Oval Portrait' is constructed in such a way that the framed frames the frame and the embedded embeds the embedding in a sense that the embedded description in the book comes to embed the framing description of the character reading the book*" (2014 :252). Therefore, following this structure of a story within a story, after introducing the reader in the typical Gothic world of Ann Radcliffe, the narrator permeates the walls of the castle upon his arrival at the remote turret room. The presence of the narrator in the heavy-curtained bed, the portrait of the girl in arabesque frame and the story of the portrait in the volume are embedded one within the

other until creating the last piece of the story, the death of the young woman which gave life to the portrait. Then, there is no way out “*from this told story and its heavy frame nor from the bed, nor from the castle*” (Caws,1983:681).

While the narrator is in his room, the fact that the candelabrum moved by chance to directly illuminate a place which before was full of darkness, where the portrait of the young woman appeared, has no explanation. It is in this moment when the narrator gets more and more the attention of the reader. This game of lights with the candles and the candelabrum, serves to create a tenebrous atmosphere. The narrator in some way is playing with the reader at a key moment of the story. There is no one in the chateau except form the narrator and Pedro, his valet, who is probably a phantasmagoric figure, but the volume with the paintings appears on the pillow of his bed by chance. Here is when the narrator immerses the reader in a mysterious narration.

The transmigration of the souls, which in several of Poe’s tales such as “Ligeia”, “Morella” or “Eleonora” had been limited to human beings, is presented in this case in an inert object, the oval portrait kept in the castle. In this case, the author, by depicting the image of the woman in the portrait, her figure is being reincarnated. The portrait is one of the classical motifs of the Gothic literature since the very beginning, with *The Castle of Otranto* or the portrait in *Melmoth, the Wanderer*. As it is mentioned in González-Rivas, in Horace Walpole’s novel, the portrait of Alonso abandons the canvas before the astonished gaze of the prince; and the portrait of Melmoth appears in the first chapters of the novel, ominously anticipating the entrance of its protagonist (González-Rivas, 2011: 513-514). Therefore, with this motif, Poe continues with the Gothic tradition of his predecessors. Even if Poe is a disciple of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin, his tales are enclosed by more art than the most exceptional Gothic story, and “*the interior spaces that he explores are immeasurably more authentically those of the soul*” (Lévy, 1972:28).

Poe has not only used the motif of the portrait in “The Oval Portrait” but he made it the central theme in “Metzengerstein,” his first tale. Therefore, Poe shares this common characteristic with the first Gothic novels. The same motif will reappear in force at the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, with a significant role in works of other authors such as Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890).

The motif of the portrait can be related with another one which has already been referenced in other occasions: that of the Double or Doppelgänger, which has been mentioned previously with “The Fall of the House of Usher”. In “The Oval Portrait” the

artist continues his work by prolonging the life of his wife without paying attention to the pain he is causing to her. Therefore, as it is claimed by Lima, not only this “*perverse artist*” but also Roderick Usher are “*nothing more than Poe’s double, characters blessed and cursed by their genius*” (Lima, 2010:23). And also, according to Richards, at the end of “The Oval Portrait” is “*the Double that kills its model, the painting that now lives, having drawn out the life from the young woman*” (Richards, 1983: 309).

Following the theory of Lima, Poe’s process of creation has so much in common with the perverse plots that his narrators elaborate. There is an immense complicity between Poe’s villains and the narrator himself, they are beings condemned to self-destruction and they are victims of their violent impulses, “*being both the artist and the criminal*” they are controlled by the “*same demonic impulse that destroys personality*” (Lima, 2010:24). Taking this into account, even if in the real life, Poe’s wife died of consumption, there could be a possibility that Virginia’s love and her vitality, the same as this young woman in “The Oval Portrait,” had been absorbed in such a way by the author that she finally got sick of consumption and died.

4.2.4. “The Cask of Amontillado”

“The Cask of Amontillado” was first published in issue 33 of *Godey’s Magazine and Lady’s Book* in November 1846. As it is mentioned by David Reynolds, the motives that could lead to the creation of this story would relate to the War of the Literati, to some litigation that Poe had some time before with two of his most bitter literary enemies. Hiram Fuller, who worked at the *New York Mirror* where Poe was collaborating for a year, 1844-1845, made some remarks which displeased Poe, while Thomas Dunn English also launched attacks against the figure and the work of Poe. The three-band verbal struggle continued for a few months and possibly had some impact on the production of “The Cask of Amontillado”. In this story Poe, wanted to communicate certain concepts and arguments that, although based in complex and sometimes very personal mental schemes, had some impact on the daily thinking of the readers of the time as well as in the way of observing his incipient national literature. “The Cask of Amontillado” is a story that contains, therefore, doses of ironic humour that are interspersed with the terror produced by the events narrated in history. This is where it lies its main artistic and human quality.

As stated in Reynolds, Poe based this story in several works he had knowledge of. Joel Tyler Headley's "A Man Built in a Wall" is the specific work from which Poe inspired himself. It was published in the *Columbian Magazine* two years before the apparition of "The Cask of Amontillado". Headley narrates that in an Italian church he had visited once, he found a niche where were discovered the bones of a man who had been buried alive. If we pay attention to the way in which the bricks were laid, or how the revenge is fulfilled in this story, there can be found resemblance between Poe's work and this one where

The workman began at the feet, and with his mortar and trowel build up with the same carelessness he would exhibit in filling any broken wall...It was slow work fitting the pieces nicely, so as to close up the aperture with precision...With care and precision the last stone was fitted in the narrow space- the trowel passes smoothly over it- a stifled groan, as it from the centre of a rock, broke the stillness- one strong shiver, and all was over. The agony had passed- revenge was satisfied, and a secret locked up for the great revelation day. (qtd. in Reynolds, 1993: 94)

"The Cask of Amontillado" features two main characters, Montresor and Fortunato, and other such as Luchesi and Lady Fortunato are merely used for the development of the action between them. Montresor, a first-person narrator, has devised a perfect revenge against his colleague Fortunato due to some alleged offenses committed against him. Montresor explains this to the reader since the very beginning of the narration "*The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge*" (Poe, 2003: 310). Then, he expounds how he contemplates his premeditated revenge by making his enemy aware of his execution. It is at carnival time, in an unknown city of France or Italy. On the one hand, the characters have Italian names which would imply that the story is set in Italy. On the other, Montresor wears a *roquellerie*, which is a French term. Therefore, it is not clear about which of these two European countries is the one Poe has chosen for the setting of this story. Considering that it is carnival, this could be related with the carnival of Venice so, if the story is set in Italy, Poe continues with the tradition of the Gothic British authors by placing his tales in the South of Europe.

When Montresor finds Fortunato one evening on the street, Montresor can begin with his plan of revenge. He tells Fortunato that he has acquired a barrel of Amontillado, a rare and precious wine, in order to lead him to his palace to accomplish his vengeance. Once achieved his purpose, Montresor guides his victim through "*several suits of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults*" (Poe, 2003: 312), where the wine is supposedly

found. They continued their way *“in search of the Amontillado”*, they *“passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame”* (2003: 314). Montresor insists repeatedly on leaving that annoying visit by vaults full of humidity damaging to Fortunato’s cold, cunningly concealed his impatience to reach the end. Fortunato, because of the carnival, is stunned due to both a light cold and because of the drink, of which he seems to have abused before meeting Montresor. When Montresor says to Fortunato that they better go back from the catacombs to prevent Fortunato’s health to be deteriorated, Fortunato answers him that he will not die because of a cough. Montresor replies to this *“True-true”* (Poe, 2003: 312) because he knows, as well as the reader, that he will bury him alive, so a cough is not the responsible of Fortunato’s death but Montresor.

Already in the *“long walls of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons intermingling”* (Poe, 2003:313), they reached the *“dump ground”* (Poe, 2003:312) of the cold and humid catacombs of the Montresors, where *“drops of moisture trickle among the bones”* (2003: 313), the host offers wine in several occasions to Fortunato in order to increase his stun and helplessness to his homicidal intentions. First, Montresor offers him several draughts of the Medoc, but later Montresor gave him another wine, De Grâve *“I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grâve”* (2003: 313). This foreshadows the end of the story, it is a clear anticipation of Fortunato’s death, that he will end in a grave, entombed by Montresor. Thus, they finally arrive at the small niche where the precious barrel is located, and Montresor takes advantage of the state of weakness of Fortunato to hold him to the wall with some chains he had prepared in advance. After this, Montresor confines his enemy in the tiny corner that represents the niche of Amontillado. At the end, Montresor abandons his enemy in that gloomy and dark place and concludes that for fifty years no one has dared to violate the remains of the dead.

We have the impression that Poe would like to bring the readers together with Montresor and Fortunato to the darkest and lugubrious portion of our entire human soul. In order to achieve this purpose, he describes a perfectly Gothic environment to prepare the reader for the outcome of the story: feelings and sensation of moisture, darkness, mystery, fear, everything related with a sense of decaying. Poe describes in a Gothic style the interior of the crypt where the tiny niche is located with the Amontillado:

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing bones, we perceived a still interior crypt or recess, in depth about four feet...but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.(Poe, 2003: 314).

According to Llácer Llorca, the possible causes of the crime of Montresor go from revenge as a matter of honour to the envy of the change of social situation that have suffered both characters and that have placed Montresor in a position of inferiority with regard to Fortunato, going through the personal envy or in the matter of wine or of fortune and ending in the absence of any justification or logical or sufficient reason (Llácer Llorca, 1997:367). Among all these options, the most appropriate one would be that of revenge as a matter of honour. The readers do not know the exact reason of the insults and injuries of Fortunato towards Montresor's person. However, Montresor is determined to punish Fortunato "*with impunity*" (Poe,2003: 310) for his actions and words. Therefore, a reasonable explanation of why Montresor feels offended and decides to kill Fortunato is because the latter does not remember the motto of Montresor's estate, "*Nemo me impune lacessit*" (Poe,2003: 313). This is considered an act of dishonour and Montresor will not allow to be disrespected, thereupon he decides to punish Fortunato by following the motto of his coat of arms. The fact that Fortunato has not been able to recognize the motto, is a sample of the decaying of the prestige of Montresor, it is no longer as important as before and it may be forgotten.¹

In "The Cask of Amontillado", the same as in "The Oval Portrait," there can be found elements which allude to the first Gothic novels of the European British authors.

¹ There are critics, such as Elena Baraban, who consider that Montresor does not feel guilty for his actions and for them he murdered Fortunato without remorse because when he chained him he even stepped back to listen the noise produced by "*the furious vibrations of the chains*" (Poe, 2003: 315). Nevertheless, for other critics like G.R. Thompson, Montresor did not accomplish the perfect murder he was planning in detail and he indeed suffered due to the perpetrated the murder, "*Montresor, rather than having successfully taken his revenge 'with impunity'...has instead suffered a fifty-years' ravage of conscience*" (Thompson, 1973: 13-14). Moreover, other critics such as Joy Rea, believe that Montresor killed Fortunato because they were friends and because he loved him; for him, this act is thought to be a "*perversity*" (Rea, 1966:61). This idea of the perverse narrator, in this case, Montresor, can be related with the narrator of another tale of Poe, "The Black Cat". Both kill their victims, even though they had not serious reasons for doing so. In the development of "The Cask of Amontillado", there is neither a fragment nor a detail which indicates that Montresor is insane. On the contrary, for instance, in "The Black Cat", the narrator mentions in the first sentences that he is not a mad person, which could suggest to the reader that the narrator is, in fact, crazy.

In this tale, on the coat-of-arm of Montresor appears “*a huge human foot d’or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel*” (Poe, 2003: 313). In *The Castle of Otranto*, the body of the man whose life and title have been usurped, returns as a ghost to his personal castle, in a fragment form. In one of several apparitions, it embraces the aspect of a gigantic foot: “*it is a giant, I believe ...for I saw his foot and part of his leg; and she dwelled principally on the gigantic leg and foot which had been seen in the gallery chamber*” (qtd. in Cagliero, 2001:36).

The arms of Montresor, the same as the motto of his house, represent everything for the honour of Montresor. Then, by killing Fortunato, as James Gargano asserts, Montresor “*momentarily regains his birthright and reestablishes his family’s importance by giving dramatic substance to the meaning of his coat of arms and motto*” (Gargano, 1967: 123). These two elements could be an anticipation of the ending of the story. Montresor could be the foot of his arms which smashes the serpent, which would be the figure of Fortunato. The serpent also represents that, after half of a century, Montresor’s conscience still haunting him because of the atrocity of the act he has committed. Therefore, although Poe distances himself from the Gothic British novels where the readers can find the figures of the villains, in “The Cask of Amontillado”, we could say that Poe maintains this initial characteristic of the Gothic literature by placing Montresor as the villain and Fortunato as the victim.

In this story Poe mixes the Gothic with the grotesque, two aspects of significant importance for the author. The setting of this plot is on the one hand, the carnival, which is related with the grotesque, and on the other, in the second part of the development of the story, the catacombs of Montresor’s palazzo, which designate a Gothic ambience. The costume of buffoon with which is dressed Fortunato, as well as his “*cap and bells*” (Poe, 2003:311) are key in the understanding the story. According to Vottero, this last element represent the fear and the vain hope of the character while the costume symbolizes the drollery of the human condition. (Vottero, 2018: 101).

With “The Cask of Amontillado”, we have the impression that Poe wants to immerse the reader in the most profound portion of our souls, in the deepest abyss of our being, from which we cannot leave, just as Fortunato has not been able to remove the chains that Montresor has imposed on his being. As Joy Rea also claims, in this tale Poe wants “*to make us see the abyss, the infinity, the chaos inside ourselves into which we both dread and desire to fall*” (Rea, 1966:69).

5. Conclusions

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most significant authors of universal Gothic literature and the most translated American author ever. His supernatural imagination creates works that, with all their formal and aesthetic aspects, together with tormented characters and bleak atmospheres, conceives a narrative that traps the soul of the reader, who is completely immersed in his descriptions until the last detail. His production had been of great influence all over the world. Not only did it influence authors from the United States, such as Ambrose Bierce, but Poe's works crossed also the ocean back to Europe, from where the Gothic literature emerged. The author was extremely admired by French symbolists (Baudelaire, Valéry and Mallarmé) and his production also touched the imagination of authors such as Oscar Wilde in creating his novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. As it is mentioned by Ibáñez, Baudelaire's translations in French was the foundation for translators of different nationalities such us Italian, Russian and Romanian. Edgar Allan Poe's recognition reached also Asiatic languages. In Japan, Yone Noguchi, follower of Poe, imitated the author in a way that it is complicated to differentiate whether his creations are translations or adaptations of Poe's works (Ibáñez, 2016: 110-113).

Gothic novels of the British authors are set in foreign countries where ruined abbeys, medieval castles, torture chambers are the appropriate setting for these stories. If we blend this with the plots which hinge on suspense and mystery, together with wicked tyrants, witches with demonic powers and supernatural elements, all in the same story, then we do have the perfect elements which constitute the Gothic atmosphere. Poe does not maintain some of the characteristics of the Gothic British authors such us wicked tyrants or prophecies. Nevertheless, as a receptor of the preceding Gothic tradition, he reflects components of this genre in his tales, but his imagination takes him further. With Poe the Gothic account becomes much more mature and in several of his tales we can find a great psychological and narrative complexity. Poe aspires to create in his works a sublime and terrifying aesthetic narrative and this implies that the reader must accept terror as a mean to transcend the reality. This is the reason why it is said that Poe creates in his works a "terror of the Soul."

Although Poe distanced himself from the British Gothic, there is a parallelism between Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, where the castle is a representation of the protagonist thoughts, and Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," where the fissure of the House stands for the mental and physical degeneration of Roderick. In addition,

even if in Poe's tales we do not find those villains which are present in the novels of the Gothic British authors, in "The Cask of Amontillado", we could say that Montresor is a villain whereas Fortunato is his victim. Indeed, in this story, the purpose of Montresor is to punish Fortunato with impunity. He entombs him alive in a wall of the catacombs of his palazzo. Similarly, in "The Fall of the House of Usher" Roderick, with the help of his friend the narrator, decides to inter his sister alive within a casket which they place within the dungeon of the house. Therefore, we can observe that in these two tales Poe illustrates this common theme whereas in the other stories I have been analysing, the author develops another one, the death of a beautiful young woman. In "Ligeia" and "The Oval Portrait" and even if in "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe deals with the figure of a dead beautiful young lady. Since his early childhood, the author suffered the loss of some women very important for him, beginning with his mother, so these events he experienced in his life affected him to such an extreme that he portrayed this in his tales.

In "Ligeia" the narrator, after the death of his beloved, desolated and in desperation moved to an abbey in "*one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England*" (Poe, 2003: 70). Likewise, in "The Oval Portrait", the narrator arrives wounded at an abandoned chateau among the Apennines. In these two tales, except from the narrator, no one inhabits these buildings. This fact transmits the reader a sense of mystery and an atmosphere of mistrust, because what is the reason why these deserted castles appear in the middle of nowhere and no one occupy them? These castles, abbeys, monasteries could be solely in the mind and the imagination of the narrator, disturbed many times by the excessive use of opium or laudanum, which lead us to even contemplate the fact that that these stories could be simply a dream of the narrator.

Notwithstanding, in "The Fall of the House of Usher" we can meet several characters, not just the narrator: Roderick and Madeline Usher, the valet of the house and the physician. However, it is true that, except from Roderick, they are not real characters because the narrator just introduces them at the beginning of the story and as the stories progress, they vanish. Hence, they are phantasmagoric figures which address the human mind. As if intruders, they storm the fortress of our sense causing chaos and disorder by giving the narration an inexplicable and mysterious perception. In "The Oval Portrait" something similar occurs, in the first paragraphs of this tale, the narrator mentions the name of his valet Pedro but then he also disappears because he is not a real character.

In “The Fall of the House of Usher” the narrator describes the whole mansion while in “Ligeia” he just mentions the reforms he made to the abbey, but he focused the Gothic description to the bridal chamber, not to the entire abbey. In “The Oval Portrait”, the chamber of the castle of the Apennines has a rich decoration, although ancient and ruined; numerous tapestries hung on the walls, also adorned with profusion and diversity of heraldic trophies and with a wide set of paintings with frames of golden arabesques. The same description is maintained in the case of Roderick Usher’s room with “*the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies*” (Poe, 2003: 93).

There is a dissimilarity in the way the author portrays the image of the female character in “Ligeia” in comparison with “The Oval Portrait.” In “Ligeia,” the figure of the narrator is subjected to the power of his beloved because his love for her is so strong to the point of idolatry, which gives her the force to control him. On the contrary, in “The Oval Portrait,” the unnamed young lady depicted in the portrait is represented as a devout and submissive woman whose life has been taken away by the painter’s self-absorption in his art.

As I mentioned before, even though Poe separated himself in some aspects from his Gothic predecessors, in one of the tales I have been analysing, in “The Oval Portrait”, he preserves the motif of the portrait. This element can be found also in *The Castle of Otranto* and in Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth, the Wanderer*. Moreover, in “The Cask of Amontillado” Montresor’s coat-of-arms displays a human foot, the same as in *The Castle of Otranto*, where in one of the several apparitions of the man whose life and title have been usurped, he embraces the form of a gigantic foot.

Another characteristic which Poe’s tales have in common with the novels of the Gothic British authors is that Poe sets his stories somewhere in Europe. For instance, it could be interpreted that the setting of “The Fall of the House of Usher” is in Germany due to the names of the protagonists are supposed to be German. Moreover, the characters of “The Cask of Amontillado” bear Italian names and at some point of the story, Montresor refers to his castle as his *palazzo* which is an Italian word. However, Poe mentions some French terms such as De Grève wine and the *roquelaire* he wears that night, so it is not clear if the setting of this story is Italy or France. In “Ligeia,” after the death of this beautiful young woman, the narrator moved to “*an abbey, which I shall not name, in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England*” (Poe, 2003:70).

Therefore, either in one country or another, what we know for sure is that Poe placed his tales in Europe due to America lack the long tradition Europe had in terms of literature.

In his preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840), Poe claimed that even if his tales present ingredients that are supposed to be from Germany, “*terror is not of Germany, but of the soul*” (Poe, 2003: xxxi). The Gothic, with Edgar Allan Poe, captures the reader in a supernatural world, replete with terror, suspense and mystery. With “Ligeia” he illustrates us that love is stronger than death, it transcends the limits of the reality until the grave whereas in “The Oval Portrait”, the process of painting the young woman in order to make her immortal for the eternity, has taken her liveliness. In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Poe introduces us deranged characters and a bleak atmosphere whereas in “The Cask of Amontillado,” we have the sensation that together with Fortunato, the soul of the reader remains in the darkest and damp catacombs of Montresor’ palazzo.

In short, Edgar Allan Poe’s Gothic fiction has turned the author into a legend whose figure, with his macabre and complex stories, will endure for the eternity. Poe has been and will remain one of the most extraordinary authors of all time, creator of deranged characters and terrifying atmospheres. From “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” to “The Oval Portrait” and “The Cask of Amontillado,” the reader has been participant of the sublime way in which Poe traps our attention in his breathtaking narratives.

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