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THE MIRROR IN THE MIRROR IN THE MIRROR**

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SUMMARY

This is an analysis of the *mise en abyme* effect in E.A. Poe's "The fall of the house of Usher." The paper starts with the identification of the Nietzschean concepts of the Apollinian and Dionysian facets of art, relates them to Gnostic forces of attraction and repulsion, and then compares them to elements of Poe's philosophy of composition. The paper goes on to point out a pre-Formalist notion of arrangement in Poe, and eventually focuses on the mirroring effect which is central to the tale. André Gide's comments on *mise en abyme*, and Lucien Dällenbach's study of Gide's concept, are submitted to close scrutiny. This examination shows that both the French writer and the systematizer of his ideas were wrong when they dismissed "The fall of the house of Usher" as an imperfect example of *mise en abyme*.

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RESUMO

Esta é uma análise do efeito de *mise en abyme* no conto "The fall of the house of Usher," de E.A. Poe. O artigo começa com a identificação dos conceitos Nietzscheanos das facetas apolínea e dionisíaca da arte, relaciona-as às forças gnósticas de atração e repulsão, e então compara-as a elementos da filosofia de composição de Poe. O artigo releva uma noção de arranjo pré-formalista em Poe, e termina por focalizar o efeito de espelho que é central no conto. Os comentários de André Gide sobre *mise en abyme* e o estudo de Lucien Dällenbach sobre o conceito de Gide são submetidos a um exame cuidadoso. Tal exame mostra que ambos o escritor francês e o sistematizador de suas idéias estavam errados ao rejeitarem "The fall of the house of Usher" como um exemplo imperfeito de *mise en abyme*.

The mirror in the mirror in the mirror

By looking at the images in the tarn, the Narrator in "The fall of the house of Usher" seems to repeat Narcissus' myth[1]. But while Narcissus was enamored with his own appearance, he has decided to know his true nature as it is a result of his interaction with reality. The Narrator's gaze is an infraction of the natural order of the lake/mirror which sets off a mirroring structured narrative. His trip towards the origin of the reflections is the probation the hero must undergo before ascending to Heaven; it is the painful quest for the Self.

The mirror

The first reflection is represented by the exterior of the anthropomorphic house with its *"vacant eye like windows,"* whose contemplation the Narrator *"can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium - the bitter lapse into every-day life - the hideous dropping off of the veil* "(231). It is the veil of māyā, the illusion, that hid the Narrator's condition of prisoner of the dullness of everydayness and that now he tears to pieces.

In *The birth of tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche claims that when the veil of illusion is torn, the primordial unity of the universe and the I is revealed. The concept of māyā is applied to *"the sense-world of manifold phenomena held in Vedanta to conceal the unity of the absolute being "* (*Webster's New*

Collegiate Dictionary, 1979). Developed probably between 1500 B.C. and 500 B.C., Vedanta is *"an orthodox system of Hindu philosophy developing esp. in a quantified monism the speculations of the Upanishads on ultimate reality and the liberation of the soul"* (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1979).

Nietzsche equates māyā with the Apollinian aspect of art - *"the dream world,"* where, according to Lucretius, the glorious divine figures first appeared to the souls of men:

> *The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is the prerequisite of all plastic art (...). In our dreams we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous. But even when this dream reality is most intense, we still have, glimmering through it, the sensation that it is mere appearance (...).*[2]

Apollo, the deity of light, is also ruler over the illusion of the inner world of fantasy, and image of the *principium individuationis*.

In opposition to the Apollinian, Nietzsche identified the Dionysian side of art as an intoxication, which is a mixture of the terror that seizes man as he is *"dumfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena"* and the ecstasy that wells from the *principium individuationis*.

Although he ascribed the Apollinian and the Dionysian mainly to the Attic tragedy, Nietzsche claims that they are

> *artistic energies which burst forth from nature herself, without the mediation of the human artist - (...) first in the intellectual attitude or the artistic culture of any single being; and then as intoxicated reality, which*

> *likewise does not heed the single unity, but even seeks to destroy the individual and redeem him by a mystic feeling of oneness.*[3]

In Nietzschean terms, from the dialectical shock between the Apollinian illusion and the Dionysian intoxication, truth is generated and the individual is reborn, and is at once nauseated with the intromission of everyday reality. This nausea is the effect of knowledge, for knowledge inhibits action, as the individual understands that his actions cannot alter the eternal order of the universe. The Nietzschean concept of the tragic presupposes the annihilation on the ego so that the individual can return to nature and the primordial Oneness. In a similar way, to the Narrator is left only the role of spectator of the *theatrum mundi* and it is through his eyes that the reader learns about the Ushers and their destruction.

The monistic aspect of Vedanta *"seeks to trace phenomena of many different kinds to a single source or principle"* (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1979), similarly to what the Gnostics preach and Poe defends in his theoretical works. Gnosticism, and Poe's metaphysics, state that the *"single source or principle,"* or the Godhead, suffered a split and the resulting parts are subject to centripetal and centrifugal forces until entropy prevails, when the opposites are paradoxically reunited, annihilation is achieved, and a new beginning is then possible. Likewise, Nietzsche sees the Apollinian and Dionysian in a dialectical relation, at moments seemingly balanced, but always fighting to overwhelm each other. The synthesis of this dynamic opposition is art, which is not meant to improve or educate man, who, in turn, is not the true

author of this art world. *"On the contrary,"* warns Nietzsche,

> *we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art - for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified...*[4]

It may be difficult to assert Poe's influence on Nietzsche, if there ever was any, but it can be suggested easily that Poe was a Nietzschean *avant la lettre*, for the concept of the world being justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon not only recurs in his works but is his guiding motto.

This concept forecasts the rise of existentialism a hundred years later, with its pessimism towards existence and *la nausée* as a result of awareness. In fact, part of what Sartre and Camus developed as a philosophical and literary current could be found as early as Poe and Nietzsche. Poe differs from the existentialists in that, like the Gnostics, he believes that essence prededes existence, that Logos precedes creation. But the disgusting sensation that the *"dropping off of the veil"* generated in the Narrator is altogether the same that befalls the existentialist when faced with his condition in the world. On the other hand, if for existentialism there is no salvation, only commitment and *bonne foi*, for Poe there is a way out - through cognition and the awakening of the Self.

By housing Dionysian content in Apollinian form, Poe triggers a dialectical confrontation whose synthesis is the text itself. If Nietzsche is right, then,with the synthesis comes truth, that is to say, the text equals truth; indeed, Poe claims as much when he says that *"Truth is often, and in very*

great degree, the aim of the tale "(Poe, 1842).

A similar confrontation of opposing drives can be seen in the clash of the Gnostic forces of attraction and repulsion that cancel each other out into unity, if only to reappear as the newly formed unity which is split once again. In Gnosticism, this unity means knowledge, which is not immutable and eternal but ought to be always contested so that higher levels of truth be attained. It is this perpetual movement from *stasis* to *dynamis* which propels the Narrator in his search for knowledge and individuation.

From textual to discourse level

As could be expected from a hermetic tale like "The fall of the house of Usher," knowledge and truth are not presented readily. On the contrary, they have to be decoded deciphered, and discovered within the undercurrents of meaning of the discourse. This was experienced by the Narrator as he gazed at the house and pondered about what it was that so unnerved him. He

> *was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among consideration beyond our depth. It was possible, he reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression...* (231)

This nearly mathematical notion of arrangement and combinations is Poe's theory of formal construction explicited on textual level. In "The philosophy of composition," he explains that

> *Keeping originality always in view - for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable source of interest - I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone - whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone - afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combination of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.*[5]

This principle, which is one of the basic notions of Formalism, was taken up by several Russian Formalists. Boris Eichenbaum, as he examined the literary discourse, theorised that *"art's uniqueness consists not in the 'parts' which enter into it but in their original use."*[6] Likewise, Victor Shklovsky pointed out that *"poets are much more concerned with arranging images than with creating them."*[7] This is Horatio's *dispositio* - the two-thousand year-old notion that the arrangement of images in speech should be emphasised. Such arrangement, according to Shklovsky, does not aim to facilitate recognition, but rather,

> *to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.*[8]

Poe is a master of making things familiar unfamiliar, or to use a better phrase, of creating the uncanny so as *"to increase the difficulty and length of perception."*

This works on a double level: like the Narrator who has to employ his intellectual faculties strenuously to understand the effect of the simple and common elements upon him, so does the reader, who finds himself lost in a maze of false signs and indexes that hinder his sorting out one possible meaning. Such difficulty seems intentional in "The fall of the house of Usher," for, as a Gnostic text, it ought to be hermetic; that is, it should be understood only by the initiates. Its cryptic form, realised in terms of vocabulary, symbols and allusions, and their arrangement, is supposed to be a barrier against the profane, uninitiated man.

To increase such cryptographic effect, Poe places one character feeling one emotion in front of a mirror. This single character is the Narrator, who looks at the tarn and finds his first impression - *"the hideous dropping off of the veil"* - enhanced. The *"consciousness of the rapid increase"* of his sorrowful feelings *"served mainly to accelerate the increase itself,"* such being the *"paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis* " (232). As the Narrator stares at the mirror, and is unable to perceive that what he can see is his own reflection, his fear expands and overwhelms him.

These three elements, one character, one emotion and a mirror, are the narrative elements Poe used to achieve his final goal: the effect of unity. His use of the mirror creates the illusion of a text filled with characters, and many a critic has been fooled by Poe's terrifying fun-house.

Mise en abyme

When the Narrator comments on the reflection of the mansion he is introducing the effect of mirroring, which will attain a climax in Roderick's reading of "The haunted palace." André Gide named such effect *mise en abyme*. *"J'aime assez qu'en une oeuvre d'art,"* wrote Gide in 1893,

> *on retrouve ainsi transposé, à l'échelle des personnages, le sujet même de cette oeuvre. Rien ne l'éclaire mieux et n'établi plus sûrement toutes les proportions de l'ensemble. Ainsi, dans tels tableaux de Memling ou de Quantin Metzys, un petit miroir convexe et sombre reflète, à son tour, l'intérieur de la pièce où se joue la scène peinte. Ainsi, dans le tableaux des Ménines de Velasquez (mais un peu différement). Enfin, en littérature, dans Hamlet, la scène de la comédie; et ailleurs dans bien d'autres pièces. Dans Wilhelm Meister, les scènes de marionettes ou de fête au château. Dans la Chute de la maison Usher, la lecture que l'on fait à Roderick, etc. Aucun de ces exemples n'est absolument juste. Ce qui le serait beaucoup plus, ce que dirait mieux ce que j'ai voulu dans mes Cahiers, dans mon Narcisse et dans la Tentative, c'est la comparaison avec ce procédé du blason qui consiste, dans le premier, à en mettre un second "en abyme".*[9]

Lucien Dällenbach tried to define the concept of *mise en abyme* and concluded that, as means of a return of the work towards itself, it appears as a modality of *réflexion*; that its essential property is to put forth the intelligibility and the formal structure of the work; that it is the appanage neither of the literary narrative (*récit littéraire*) nor of literature alone and that its name comes from a heraldic procedure,which Gide found out in 1891.(DÄLLENBACH,n.d.). *Abyme*,then is a technical term that refers to the heart of a shield: *"C'est le coeur de l'écu. On dit qu'une figure est en abyme quand elle est avec d'autres*

figures au milieu de l'écu, mais sans toucher aucune de ses figures."[10] What attracted Gide's attention was the image of a shield housing, in its centre, a miniaturised replica of itself, suggests Dällenbach, who then states that *"est mise en abyme toute enclave entretenant une rélation de similitude avec l'oeuvre qui la contient."*[11]

In literature, the most famous and most revered example of *mise en abyme* is that of the *"play within a play"* in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* , where the prince of Denmark represents, on stage, the murder of his father so as to show the assassin that he knew all about it. Hamlet uses theatre, whose function he defines as *"to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature ,"* to reveal events both past and future, this establishing the use of *mise en abyme* not only as a means of recollection, but also of prediction.[12] Rather incomprehensibly, Gide disregards *Hamlet,* together with "The fall of the house of Usher," as not quite exemplifying what he meant by an episode *en abyme*. Dällenbach is intrigued by this fact because the reading of "Mad Trist"produces an undeniable effect of reduplication in the tale:

> *C'est une double fonction qu'y exerce le roman gothique: fonction emblématique dans la mesure où, associé de force au protagoniste, il blasonne, par son titre, ce personnage au tempérament lugubre et morbidement exalté; fonction préfiguratrice puisqu'en une manière de contrepoint il relate, à mots couverts, l'histoire même de l'hallucinante Madeline [sic] .*[13]

Dällenbach believes to have found the answer to his puzzlement in one of Gide's letter, where he comments on his *La tentative amoureuse*: what Gide had tried to write on was

> *l'influence du livre sur celui qui l'écrit, et pendant cette écriture même. (...) Le sujet agissant, c'est soi; la chose rétroagissante, c'est un sujet qu'on imagine. C'est donc une méthode d'action sur soi-même, indirecte (...)*[14]

From what Gide wrote, one may conclude that Poe tried to know himself by writing "The fall of the house of Usher." This may apply and may be supported by the Gnostic elements in the tale, which, in a final analysis, can be shown to be a work of cognition. Poe's intentions, however, were known only to him and an attempt to find what they were is to fall into the intentional fallacy, which shall be avoided here.

Gide tried, in his *La tentative amoureuse*, to evidence the mutual construction of the writer and of the text, that is,

> *un couplage ou un jumelage d'activités portant sur un object similaire ou, si l'on préfère, comme un rapport des rapports, la relation du narrateur N à son récit R étant homologique de celle du personnage narrateur n à son récit r.*[15]

To Gide, then, the subject of the work is relational, determined by the relationship between the text and the one who writes it; that is, it is duplicated from the very beginning of the composition process. From what Dällenbach suggests, here lies the reason for his dismissing "The fall of the house of Usher" as a perfect example of *mise en abyme*. Gide claims that Poe's tale is the narration of a story, not the reciprocal construction of a story and a narrator. The tale establishes a doubling which, according to Gide produces only two terms of the four he requires for a *mise en abyme*. In other words, "The fall of the house of Usher" presents only *n* and *r* , and not *N*, *R*, *n*,and *r*

in a relation of reciprocity. Consequently, the tale falls short of satisfying Gide, *"un écrivain qui avait choisi, pour sujet problématique, la problématique du sujet."*[16]

There is something wrong with Dällenbach's reasoning: first, the episode of the "Mad Trist" is not the main *mise en abyme* in "The fall of the house of Usher." Although it may have suggested the label of the narrative procedure to Gide, due to the presence of a shield in the tale within the tale, it is just an index that points to the heart of the question - "The haunted palace," the poem Roderick composed and the Narrator repeats. If the next is a shield that houses a smaller replica of itself in its center, then it is Roderick's poem, which Gide overlooked, that is the main *mise en abyme*. The story of the "Mad Trist", as will be seen below, is more what Jean Bellemin--Noël calls *effet de citation*: it places *en abyme* another fantastic text as a warrant of the veracity of the tale. It is a kind of fantastic intertextuality supposed to make credible the larger text, which, due to a number of references, is granted the status of referent.[17]

Supposing that Gide had not overlooked the poem, then the second wrong point in Dällenbach's reasoning would be the reasoning itself. Initially, it is necessary to compare "The haunted palace" to Dällenbach's thesis and see if it deserves the label of *mise en abyme*. His first definition of it requires an "enclave" that holds a relation of similitude with the work which contains it.[18] "The haunted palace" repeats not only the plot of "The fall of the house of Usher" but also the anthropomorphic description of the mansion. Dällenbach's proposition is that N:R::n:r, also fulfilled by "The haunted

palace." Here the Narrator (N) bears a relation with "The fall of the house of Usher" (R) homologue to that borne between Roderick (n) and "The haunted palace" (r). It is fair to believe that this is enough to prove that Dällenbach's requirements are met, and, therefore Roderick's poem is the very heart of the tale.

A conclusion may be reached that both Gide and Dällenbach failed to see the principal *mise en abyme* in Poe's "The fall of the house of Usher." Gide's slip cannot be easily accounted for, for he is the one who introduced the term into literature. On the other hand, Dällenbach's can be explained by the fact that he was trying to justify Gide, not to verify if he was correct in disregarding the embedded poem.

In fact, Roderick's writing activity mirrors that of the Narrator, which mirrors that of Poe. Such *mise en miroir* of writing is what Bellemin-Noël calls *l'effet d'écriture*, which is a personal mode, existential and stylistically marked, of the writer enjoying his own image of *auctor*.[19] This is strikingly similar to what can be inferred from Gide's comments on the process of mirroring, which made Dällenbach write that

> *la spécularisation scripturale se soutient de la spécularisation imaginaire qui permet au sujet de l'écriture de jouir obsessionnellement de l'image le figurant tel qu'il veut se voir: écrivain.*[20]

Back to discourse level

Whether or not Poe was enamoured of his image as a writer is out of the scope of this paper, but it can be said that he

put mirrors everywhere in "The fall of the house of Usher." The most important of them, the lake in front of the House, introduces the idea of abyss in the very beginning, with its *"precipitous brink"* (231). But, together with the function of placing everything *en abyme*, the mirrors cast infinite reflections within and without the house of Usher. Such mirroring will pervade the whole story with such an intensity that the story becomes but a reflection of the Narrator. From a spectator, he transforms himself into the author of the *theatrum mundi*. In fact, the story comes into existence at the moment when the Narrator turns his eyes upon the lake/mirror, and finishes when he turns them away.

The effect of unity is explicited by *"the House of Usher - an appelation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion"* (232). Externally, the building seemed to have suffered little, in spite of its *"excessive antiquity,"* and yet *"there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones* "(233). This foreshadowing of a split between external appearance and structural condition is more clearly announced by the reference to the *"barely perceptible fissure, which extending from the roof of the building (...) made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn* " (233).

The house isolates its dwellers and the Narrator from the outside, providing one of the most important elements Poe demands of a good work of art, in his*"Philosophy of composition"* - circumscription of space. He claims that it

> *is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident: - it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with the mere unity of place.*[21]

The family mansion is so appropriate to Poe's own requirements that it is felt to be a tomb where the Ushers are buried alive. It is the corresponding image, in macabre terms, of the notion of "narrowness of consciousness," which the Self must break through so as to become one with the universe and attain the primordial unity.

The twins Roderick and Madeline were once a single being, but as they were born they separated, repeating the Gnostic version of Creation. Now, after the Fall, the two parts will attract and repulse each other until their eventual destruction. Roderick is hyperesthetic while Madeline, his symmetrical half, is cataleptic, which makes each complement the other. It is worth mentioning that their link with the House is so strong that it even bears their characteristics. It has one half which is sentient, like Roderick, and another half which is non-sentient, like Madeline; it repeats their split in its structure and will follow them in their annihilation.

The unnatural attraction that exists between brother and sister may be considered incestuous and therefore taboo, which fulfills one of Punter's parameters of Gothic fiction. But on the other hand it is the Gnostic concept of attraction of the opposites, which is the natural way of things in the cosmos after the Fall. For Poe, it is the endless power of centripetal forces that pull every atom towards centers of aggregation.

The second reflection

Roderick's personality, like the house, is also split, which he shows metaphorically through the poem "The haunted palace." As the house reflects the Narrator, so does the haunted palace Roderick; it is his mirror, the whole situation mirroring that of the Narrator and the house. The palace and King Thought explain what is happening to Roderick: in a once merry kingdom there was a civil war and the king was overthrown. Where spirits moved musically *"To a lute's well-tuned law,"* vast forms now move fantastically *"To a discordant melody;"* where Thought reigned, now sorrow rules.

Here the mirroring effect, or *mise en abyme*, reaches its climax. The first character is Roderick, the first mirror is his poem, and his emotion is fear. The second character is the Narrator, his mirror is the House, and fear his emotion. It has been commented already that the story is a reflection of the Narrator and that it exists only when he tells it - he is the creator and the creature. In much the same way, the text only comes into "existence" as the reader opens the book and starts reading. By analogy, the text becomes a mirror for him, who thus equals the Narrator. And then again, there is only one character - the reader; everything else is a mirrored mirror, or yet, *"a dream within a dream."*

The third reflection: meta-narration

"Abissus abissum vocat," an abyss calls for another abyss, teaches the Bible, and so it is in "house of Usher" (Ps. 42:8).

To the adventures of the "Mad Trist" which acts as an indicator of the central *mise en abyme*, there must be added the chain mirroring of Roderick and his poem, of the Narrator and his text, of Roderick and the Narrator and of the Narrator and the Reader, which makes "The fall of the house of Usher" a paragon of repetition of reflections. Such reflections are but an enunciate ("The haunted palace") that refers to the bigger enunciate ("The fall of the house of Usher") to the enunciation (the Narrator's story) and to the code of the narrative, at the same time, which is made possible by the support the enunciate provides the reflexivity*. This support opperates on two levels, that of the narrative, which means that "The haunted palace" as an enunciate will keep its signification like any other enunciate, and that of the reflection, in which "The haunted palace" intervenes as an element of meta-signification that allows the narrative to take itself as theme.

But, as Dällenbach points out, *"un énoncé ne devient réflexif que par la revelation de dédoublement qu'il avoue avec l'un ou l'autre aspect du récit."* For this relation to emerge, it is necessary, on the one hand, that the totality of the text be gradually apprehended and, on the other hand, that the reader as decodifier be able to move from one field of meaning to the other. In "House of Usher," the reader will find his task alleviated by the Narrator constantly bringing forth the

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* Enunciate, enunciation and narrative are the English for énoncé, énonciation and récit, respectively. Enunciate, which is a neologism for utterance and/or discourse, will be preferred due to its closeness to both French and Portuguese terms. They were taken from GREIMAS and COURTÉS (n.d.).

analogies - "... which I can compare to...," "... eye-like windows...," "... as if in a dream...," "... as if of..." etc , which, discrete at first, turn more explicit in the retelling of the adventures of Ethelred:

> *for it appeared to me (...) - it appeared to me that, from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came, indistinctly to my ears, what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (...) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. It was, beyond doubt, the coincidence alone which had arrested my attention (...).* (243)

And also,

> *I did actually hear (...) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound - the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek as described by the romancer.* (244)

Then, Roderick undertakes the task and renders a word-by-word explanation of the sounds they had heard and the story told:

> *And now - to-night - Ethelred - ha! ha! - the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the shield - say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault!* (245)

Both "The haunted palace" and "Mad Trist" can be considered meta-narratives, that is, they are textual segments supported by an internal narrator to whom the Narrator temporarily gives place, dislocating, thus, his responsibility for conducting the

narrative. More than that, they are reflexive meta-narratives, in that they reflect the narrative, cut it, interrupt the diegesis and introduce a factor of diversification in the discourse.[23] The diversification is introduced by the fact that both internal texts are written pieces and impersonalise, for a period of time, the narrative which had been told from an "I" point of view - that of the Narrator.

A point can be made that the repetition of the effect of *mise en abyme* would result in a shattering of the unity of the narrative. But this is not so. The single *mise en abyme* splits and denies a unified narrative; contrariwise, the multiple reflections, in a narrative doomed to shattering, as the fantastic one is, represent a factor of unification as the *"morceaux métaphoriquement aimentés se rassamblent et compensent au niveau thématique la dispersion métonimique."*[24] "The fall of the house of Usher," then, by its multiplicity of reflections acquires an effect of unity that confirms and fulfills Poe's requirement of singleness in a tale. Here, the *mise en abyme* provides the narrative with a *leitmotiv*, that of the mirror. In Poe's mirrors, the Author, the characters and the Reader are reflected and repeated, thus producing an abysmal text that seems to be viewed from the wrong side of a telescope.
(...)

As the Narrator looks at the lake, he triggers all the events. With a conjuror's gesture, he puts a whole world to revolve; he is the magician that operates the theatre of shadows, its creator and its audience. Like Narcissus, he is entrapped by his own reflection; unlike Narcissus, he frees himself and goes on redeemed. And he leaves with something more than when he

arrived: the notion of a Fall that followed a split of the primordial unity. Through fear, this mythos will be engraved in his memory and he will be able to attain salvation by spreading the knowledge. Such is the way of Gnosticism.

Poe puts his texts to work as convertional propaganda of his beliefs. By proposing another way of understanding the world he advocates an ideology that should encompass both reason and observation, the concept and the object, the Dionysian and the Appolinian, the yin and the yang. He is not submitting a new ideology instead: he is offering a way out for man, a fallen and divided creature always prone to commit "a bitter lapse into everyday life." And the exit is via total knowledge: not a one-sided apprehension of reality, but a total approach to the universe.

Such amplification of awareness is characteristic of the fantastic. The Narrator has altered his view of the world, as being a predictable *locus*, where nature follows rigid, preordained rules. He had a lesson on how to see the Other, as one who is in himself as he is the Other. Once his referential marks in reality underwent a change, the Narrator was forced to modify his ego accordingly. Such is the way of the fantastic.

Notes

[1] POE, 1938.

[2] NIETZSCHE, 1938. p. 34.

[3] NIETZSCHE, 1938. p. 38.

[4] NIETZSCHE, 1938. p. 52.

[5] POE, 1846. p. 87.

[6] EICHENBAUM, s.d. p. 112.

[7] SHKLOVSKY, s.d. p. 12.

[8] SHKLOVSKY, s.d. p. 6.

[9] GIDE, 1893. p. 41.

[10] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 17.

[11] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 17-8.

[12] SHAKESPEARE, circa 1600. III. ii. 21-2.

[13] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 42.

[14] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 25.

[15] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 30.

[16] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 30.

[17] BELLEMIN-NOËL, 1972. p. 16.

[18] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 18.

[19] BELLEMIN-NOËL, 1972. p. 10.

[20] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 27.

[21] POE, 1846. p. 104.

[22] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 63.

[23] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 71.

[24] DALLENBACH, s.d. p. 94.

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