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**The Fall of the House of Poe: Gothic
Elements in Netflix's Adaptation of the Usher
family**

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ABSTRACT

Gothic literature emerged in the eighteenth century, with the latter half of that century seeing its emergence on the American continent. While initially rejected due to American practicality, writers quickly adapted Gothic literary aspects to fit their cultural traits. Edgar Allan Poe, a well-known American Gothic writer of the twentieth century, exemplifies this trend in his work “The Fall of the House of Usher”. In 2023, Mike Flanagan created a contemporary adaptation of the work as a Netflix series, which is based on the original work, but also references both other works by Poe and his own life. The aim of this essay is to explore how the American Gothic has been modified in a twenty-first century TV series, while showing how one short story by Poe is used as framework for his whole life and works.

‘Keywords’: Gothic, Edgar Allan Poe, Postmodernism, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, TV Series

RESUMEN

La literatura gótica surgió en el siglo XVIII, siendo la segunda mitad de ese siglo testigo de su aparición en el continente americano. Aunque en un principio fue rechazada debido a la practicidad americana, los escritores no tardaron en adaptar los aspectos literarios góticos a sus rasgos culturales. E. A. Poe, conocido escritor gótico estadounidense del siglo XX, ejemplifica esta tendencia en su obra “La caída de la casa Usher”. En 2023, Mike Flanagan creó una adaptación contemporánea de la obra como serie de Netflix, basada en la obra original, pero también referencia a otras obras de Poe y a su propia vida. El objetivo de este ensayo es explorar cómo se ha modificado el gótico americano en una serie de televisión del siglo XXI, mostrando a su vez cómo un relato corto de Poe se utiliza como marco para toda su vida y obra.

‘Palabras clave’: Gótico, Edgar Allan Poe, Posmodernismo, "La Caída de la Casa de Usher", Series de televisión

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INTRODUCTION

On October 12, 2023, Netflix released the adaptation of “The Fall of the House of Usher”, an American gothic horror series directed by Mike Flanagan. This director had previously stood out for other adaptations such as "The Haunting of Hill House", but this one goes a step further. This gothic adaptation gained incredible fame due to how well the Gothic genre is represented in the series, exploring different themes such as madness, terror, death, and revenge. Moreover, this series consists of eight episodes, which revolve around the protagonists Roderick and Madeline Usher, who are present in each of the episodes, as "The Raven" or "Annabel Lee". However, what is important to explore in this adaptation is the fact of knowing what aspects of the Gothic have been modified, as the current Gothic series can continue with the elements of the traditional Gothic, or adapt them in a more innovative way.

Therefore, this undergraduate dissertation will investigate how the original story "The Fall of the House of Usher" has been transformed into a twenty-first century television series. To do this, two different approaches will be followed. First, I will describe how traditional American Gothic became postmodern American Gothic. Therefore, the history of this classical Gothic with its different characteristics until its subsequent evolution towards postmodernist Gothic will be shown, seeing its similarities and differences in terms of its main characteristics. In addition, we will also be able to explore how traditional Gothic evolves into what is known as TV Gothic, which is the genre of this adaptation, with the introduction of innovative elements and techniques for this adaptation. In this way, we will analyze the different advances in the presentation of this adaptation on the screen. Secondly, I will discuss how a short story by Poe serves as a framework for Poe's entire life and work. For this reason, Poe's relationship with "The Fall of the House of Usher" will be presented, as well as a previous summary of it, in order to enter into context. Next, this adaptation will be analyzed considering the original work, and also showing the relationship between the titles of the episodes, the names of the characters and the plot with the life and work of Poe.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. THE POSTMODERN GOTHIC

1.1.1. ORIGINS

American Gothic is considered to be an evolution of the British Gothic adapted to the American continent. However, Postmodern Gothic has its roots in the traditional Gothic, which developed in the eighteenth century. Romanticism is a fundamental aspect in the beginnings of this genre, as it had a drastic influence on the American Gothic, since the first works of this genre were based on the British Gothic. From these works were extracted the supernatural and mysterious, which was the aspect the American authors were interested in (Spooner 25). In addition, not only did they borrow the most important themes from the British Gothic, but the way of writing was also relevant to American writers, who adapted their way of writing works to include those feelings of darkness in the environment (Punter 165).

In short, American Gothic was based on Romanticism. In this way, this genre facilitated the discovery of the anxieties and complexities of the society, making it a key movement in the American Gothic history. The great success of the Gothic genre meant the transfer of Gothic fiction to the screens, giving rise to Gothic television. Thus, it is an advance in the history of the Gothic by including these elements in series and films.

1.1.2. ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS

In this section it is my intention to examine how some of the most important elements of the American Gothic have been kept, transformed and developed in the twenty-first century. In this way, the evolution of the Gothic can be clearly seen both in literature and on the small screen. To accomplish this I will focus on the following elements: the setting, the aristocracy, the doppelganger or double, the horror and terror

and the supernatural. The reason for the selection of these elements is the importance of each of them reflected in the Gothic works.

1.1.2.1. SETTING

Setting is a crucial aspect in American Gothic works, as writers managed to convey terror through them. However, these settings changed drastically in the American works, because writers had to adapt to the different cultural environment. That is to say, British Gothic works presented old buildings, such as ruins and churches, as Punter (93) pointed out that “deteriorating castles, abbeys and manor houses in foreign, usually Roman Catholic, countries, abound alongside medieval and Reformation settings in the literature of the classic Gothic era”.

However, there were no castles in America, so American Gothic works depicted ancient settings under some sort of spell, such as haunted houses. In addition, these works established "wilderness" as the American landscape, which is a crucial factor for American Gothic writers to create a sense of terror in their works. Therefore, settings with dark forests were presented in American Gothic works as the setting (Punter 28). As for darkness, it was of great importance in these scenarios, as it enriched the scenery (Lloyd Smith 7). In addition, it went hand in hand with the shadows, as they combined. An example of these settings in American Gothic is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", where the main setting is the house of Roderick Usher. In this way, there is a clear transition towards a more realistic landscape imitating nature, instead of the presentation of previously used scenarios.

On the other hand, postmodern Gothic focused more on the presentation of scenarios in urban areas, so they left aside the wild terrain landscapes of American Gothic to create greater realism, giving more visibility to the experience of the characters in urban areas (Lloyd Smith 9). Thus, the way in which these urban settings are depicted as a mirror of the isolated population of America at the time.

1.1.2.2. THE SUPERNATURAL AND THE UNCANNY

The presence of the supernatural and the uncanny is another relevant aspect in American Gothic. The supernatural is crucial in the works of American writers, so they included scary characters that provoked fear and terror, such as the presence of “ghosts” in these works (Lloyd Smith 138). However, in postmodern Gothic there is an evolution through the presence of the visions that the characters suffer throughout the plot.

As for the uncanny, Allison showed through his review of Freud's *The Uncanny* that “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Allison 277). In this way, the uncanny creates uneasiness, which in many cases leads to an atmosphere of terror and horror¹. However, that is not their only definition, but Punter and Byron also established that the uncanny is “the emergence of what ought to have remained secret and hidden” (Lloyd Smith 76). Therefore, it should be mentioned that the uncanny is connected to what takes us back to a past memory, thus being the object of our own mind, which opens the way to our past memories. Thus, it is related to the supernatural, which is key for the presentation of American Gothic works. In postmodern Gothic the uncanny is also important, as it transforms the familiar into something strange and chilling. In this way, different reappearances of previous usual imaginations can be presented, going from familiar to disturbing (Alisson 286). Therefore, the uncanny is also a crucial aspect in postmodernist Gothic, as it contributes to the alteration of the ordinary.

¹ For more on horror and terror see Ann Radcliffe's definition (Raškauskienė 21).

1.1.2.3. PRESENCE OF ARISTOCRACY AND FAMILIES

Nineteenth-century American Gothic authors were keen to include aristocratic families as protagonists in their works. This became increasingly prevalent during this period and eventually became an important part of nineteenth-century American Gothic.

The fact that the aristocracy is at the center of these works was therefore particularly common in the American Gothic period. These families did not have a good image, as they were usually portrayed in a negative way. That is to say, they were portrayed in stories that dealt with aspects that placed them in a disadvantageous position, such as the aspect of aristocratic corruption or the depiction of the decadence of these families (Lloyd Smith 7).

1.1.2.4. THE DOUBLE

The concept of the double is a feature of the American Gothic present in nineteenth-century American works. It is defined as “the duplication and splitting of the self, in which there is an incorporation of the sense of otherness, strangeness and potential danger within the familiar” (Punter & Byron 76). However, Lloyd Smith established that the double is defined as the process of “division and fragmentation within the self”, giving rise to an *alter ego* (Lloyd Smith 138). Thus, when the concept of the double is given in the Gothic works of this period, an evil twin is shown, who tries to imitate the "self".

Additionally, Botting (114) argues that “horror is produced at the recognition of seeing oneself from an external position, in the realization that a tragic figure that the subject has been observing is actually that of his own”. In this way, the figure of the double “forms a doubly self-conscious” (Ibid), thus making the characters to perceive themselves as if they were someone else instead of considering themselves as themselves.

The figure of the double is seen most clearly in the works of well-known authors such as Edgar Allan Poe. In his work "William Wilson", this character is shown as the protagonist, who would be the "self", while the other Wilson would be his *alter ego*, or rather his "double", thus being the voice of his own conscience (Lloyd Smith 77).

1.1.2.5. EXPLORATION OF TECHNOLOGY

It should be pointed out that in the traditional American Gothic there were already writings about the dangers of technology and science. A clear example of this is Nathaniel Hawthorne, from whom are known the Hawthorne Experiments, a series of investigations in the field of social sciences, stand out (Hart 150). However, despite previous research on this, it is now that this topic becomes very relevant.

Moreover, it is also important to note that technology depicts the American society, as well as its problems and anxieties. In this way, the introduction of technology tries to examine the "loss of identity, isolation, and the fragmentation of the body and the self", which will be described more in depth (Spooner 76).

Regarding isolation, it is important to mention that more and more Gothic writers are showing characters who do not find their space within society, feeling that they do not fit into it, and losing the notion of who they really are. An example of it is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where the protagonist lives locked up in Dracula's castle, thus showing his state of isolation both physically and psychologically. In the same way, contemporary Gothic works also show this type of characters in their plots, experiencing states of isolation, showing that they do not fit into the society that surrounds them (99). Spooner proposed that characters in contemporary Gothic works are depicted in such a way that they tend to suffer with their "demons which isolate them from their peers" (104).

As for the identity, the characters depend so much on technology that they are completely marginated, leading them to live surrounded by technological elements, such as televisions or computers. For this reason, the progress of technology is increasingly shown to be connected with the notion of identity, as they present characters who are no

longer know themselves, and even this technology can dominate them, losing track of who they really are. Thus, Spooner stated that "humans are aligned with all that can be made and remade by a more than human technology" (Spooner 70). Moreover, Botting (361) established that technology can dominate human beings in such a way that:

It is the monster, and not his creator, with whom twentieth- and twenty-first-century subjects align themselves, in a world in which the workings of science and technology seem increasingly opaque to ordinary individuals (Botting 361).

Thus, the exploration of technology in Gothic works shows that technology is not only shown as a positive aspect, but also has a negative part. That is, the characters immerse themselves in a fictional world on numerous occasions, being gradually absorbed by the different technological devices. Edwards and Monnet (69) also discussed the realities and identities of characters through technology, stating that "simulated identity is facilitated by technology, as internet websites and social networking sites encourage the proliferative consumption of fantasy and virtual identities".

2. POE AND "THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER"

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was known as an expert in horror literature. Despite the fact that the Gothic genre began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) in England, it was thanks to Poe that the genre reached its maximum splendor in America (Meyers 37). His reputation also goes hand in hand with names such as Nathaniel Hawthorne or Herman Melville, both of whom were some of the leaders of the reform of Gothic literature.

Poe was a writer who based his life on the publication of short stories, poems, essays and novels. He was a man who wrote horror short stories and poems, with different works that continue to be recognized worldwide, such as the poem *The Raven*. However, from a young age he was enthusiastic about horror and apparition stories, which showed the path that Poe followed as he began to acquire literary wisdom. In this way, he ended up publishing in 1827 his first work called "Tamerlane", which despite not giving him a

great reputation, gave way to an extensive list of later works that launched him into the hall of fame of Gothic literature (Meyers 43).

Among his famous works is *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1839), which included certain works such as “Ligeia” or even “The Fall of the House of Usher”, the latter being one of the best known and most reputable almost two centuries after his death (Symons 227). However, Poe deviated from the style he followed in the previous works for the creation of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, whose style fits more with what is known as the detective novel, in which he also had to participate since it was the first detective novel in history. In addition, it was during this time that he also wrote famous works such as “Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Pit and the Pendulum”, and “The Black Cat”. However, his legacy did not stop there, but as his works were published, his reputation was constantly increasing, being even better known with “The Gold Bug”, and the poem of “The Raven“ (Gill 146). However, one of his best-known works that is also remembered is “The Cask of Amontillado”, published in 1846.

His writings were completely influenced by the addictions he suffered from throughout his life. Once Poe entered college, he became involved in gambling to pay for his studies, which led to him becoming embroiled in debt. However, not only did he end up addicted to gambling, but he also began to get used to drinking alcohol, which caused him to fall into states of euphoria (Gill 40). However, the continuous consumption of alcohol was due to the anxiety he suffered, which made him calm down so that he could write comfortably. In addition, it is also important to note that Poe not only resorted to drinking in order to mitigate his anxieties, but he also used drugs as a method of calming himself. In this way, Poe became completely addicted to both opium and alcohol, but also as a way to forget his beloved Virginia, who had died in 1847 (Meyers 207). This feeling of anguish and anxiety over the memory of his deceased wife is seen in well-known works such as “Ligeia” or” Lenore”, as well as the main theme of the poem “Anabel Lee”.

Nevertheless, Poe was never able to recover from the death of his beloved, turning his life upside down in a sudden change of behavior; he had relationships with different women, but they did not like him because of his addiction to alcohol. In 1849 he was

found dead at the age of forty-nine, with a legacy that will keep him in the hall of fame forever.

As for Poe's writing style, it is worth mentioning that he was noted for the creation of a unique literary style. In this way, this style stands out for the introduction of strange characters and specifically chosen buildings, where mysterious events take place in each of his works. In addition, he was also an expert at choosing words at specific times. That is, Poe was able to make use of several different vocabularies, being able to easily distinguish between the vocabulary of a work such as "Ligeia" or "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Zimmerman 261). For this reason, Zimmerman stated that:

[...] three different vocabularies can be found in Poe canon: his mechanically stereotyped vocabulary, his vocabulary of momentary inspiration, and his vocabulary based on literary and classical allusion and analogy (Ibid).

Another unique aspect of his literary style of writing is the creation of suspense. That is, most writers create a suspense known as "known suspense", in which both the narrator and the reader have the power to build the plot of the characters. In this way, while the narrator creates it, the reader gets to know it, feeling an attraction for it and for the characters to see how they are going to end up (Sun 97). However, Poe's style is based on the creation of an "unknown suspense". Unlike the other type of suspense, when reading Poe the reader is not at all aware of a series of events specifically created by him. However, instead of reading his works, we are more curious to read them because we want to know the unknown (Sun 97). In this way, what differentiates Poe from the rest of the writers is the way in which he never gave the reader a single response to the creation of said suspense, but rather gave rise to the reader's own reflection. That is why his works are known to be mysterious.

The narrator is also central to Poe's works. Writers before him often featured a third-person narrator, showing the plot of a series of characters from an external perspective. However, Poe always chose the first person for his works. In this way, he could tell what was happening to the characters from his own point of view, so the narrator could notice the narrator's emotions (Cox 70).

In short, Edgar Allan Poe is considered a master of Gothic literature and the short story. In addition, he is also one of the pioneers of the horror tale along with Nathaniel Hawthorne. Therefore, he left a legacy with a unique writing style that two centuries after his death is still famous, highlighting its narrative strategy and his word-choice ability.

2.1. “THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER”: ORIGINAL STORY

“The Fall of the House of Usher” is a short story written in 1839 by Edgar Allan Poe, in which a narrator, whose name is unknown, is introduced describing the route to the house of his friend, Roderick Usher. However, as he gets closer, he notices that the house has a dark and frightening look, just as the surroundings of the house also have a mysterious aspect. Shortly afterwards we are shown that the narrator had gone to Roderick's house because Roderick had begged him in a letter for some company, as Roderick was not in exceptionally good condition. As for the house, it has a large crack that covers the entire house, from the ceiling to the floor of the house. Moreover, the interior of the house was as gloomy as the exterior, showing the darkness and wear and tear of the house as he approached the place in the house where Roderick stood. When he arrived at Roderick, he was especially surprised by how pale his friend looked. However, it is shown that not only was the narrator scared and uncomfortable in that house, but Roderick also seems to show that he is not happy with his life in the house. In addition, not only did Roderick live in that house, but he also lived with his twin sister, Madeline. She had a disease which was so strange that the doctors could not find a cure, as she lost control of her body from one moment to the next.

As the days go by, it is shown how the narrator seems to try to improve the mood of his friend Roderick, listening to his stories and even listening to him sing, but with no effect. Shortly afterwards comes Roderick's confession, where he says that the house harms his health, being a reflection of his condition. Also, Madeline seems to have passed away, so Roderick leaves her buried in the basement of the house. As the narration advances, the narrator sees how Roderick is more upset, so he begins to read him short stories. However, while he was reading to him, he heard different sounds coming from the basement of the house, but that matched the plot of the short story he was reading to

Roderick. That is why at first he does not give them any importance, but he did when these sounds increased and became more strident. Moreover, he realizes that something strange was going on, as despite that, Roderick was lying on the ground, talking to himself, saying that he hears those sounds day after day. In this way, Roderick confesses to the narrator that he believes his sister is not really dead, and that she has been buried alive.

It is here that the climax takes place, as suddenly Madeline appears covered in blood, attacking her brother Roderick, so they die together. After witnessing this, the narrator runs away from the house, seeing how as he escapes, the house cracks completely. Hence, by the time the Usher twins' lives ended, the house completely collapsed, becoming a mirror of the Usher family.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. ADAPTING THE HOUSE OF USHER TO THE HOUSE OF POE

As for the adaptation *The Fall of the House of Usher*, it is noteworthy that Mike Flanagan has been inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's original short story. He has also recreated the entire plot of Poe's work through a postmodernist series, dividing it into eight episodes. That is, Poe's original work had approximately fifteen pages, this being the basis of the adaptation of *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In addition, this series is influenced by much of Poe's legacy of works, as can be seen in the different episodes: "A Midnight Dreary", "The Masque of the Red Death", "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Black Cat", "The Tell-Tale Heart", "Gold-Bug", "The Pit and the Pendulum", and "The Raven". In addition, each of the eight episodes has a meaning that goes beyond Poe's original work, but each episode references a different work by Poe. In addition, not only do the titles refer to his works, but the way in which each of them is developed reflects the same plot. However, each episode unfolds Roderick Usher's children displaying their deaths by following the plot of the original short story that gives the name

to the episode. In this way, we can see that *The Fall of the House of Usher* is full of characters and stories that are based on both his private life and his literary life.

3.1.1. EPISODES

Episode one, titled “A Midnight Dreary”, uses the first line of the famous poem “The Raven” as its title. There, a crow mocks the speaker while he cries for the sample of his beloved Lenore, telling said raven to go away, as it was a symbol of the evil. This poem began:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary, over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore, while I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, as of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door (Harris 868).

Furthermore, the last episode is titled “The Raven”, which is connected to the first episode, closing in this way the full series. In this last episode Roderick is shown on stage reciting that poem, just at the moment in which the deal they had agreed with Verna had been fulfilled with the death of all his lineage, which is another similarity to the original short story. In this way, this adaptation makes very frequent use of crows, showing them on stage as an evil being. A clear example of this can be seen when Roderick shouts "It is time", thus referring to what the raven in Poe's poem said over and over again.

In addition, it is in this last chapter that we see another clear reference to the original work “The Fall of the House of Usher”. At the end of the episode, Madeline suddenly emerges from the basement, escaping from her tomb. Thus, she attacks Roderick, and they die together as the house completely collapses. However, at the beginning of episode one Roderick Usher is shown at a funeral for the death of three of Usher's relatives, as they had died within a span of a week. It is there where another reference to Poe's literary life is present, as the priest proceeded to read excerpts from different works by Poe, among which we can distinguish “The Spirits of the Dead” and “For Annie”.

In episode two, entitled “The Masque of the Red Death”, Prospero Usher is depicted preparing a masquerade party at the Usher family factory. However, this party did not go as expected from the moment the party was illegal. It is here where the reference to Poe's work is remarkable, since the party ended with the death of the participants due to the release of chemicals (sulfuric acid) that is thrown on them, burning them completely. However, even though the adaptation *The Fall of the House of Usher* presents the same plot as in Poe's work, the way in which the participants die has been modified; the plague was replaced by sulphuric acid. Furthermore, the protagonist of this episode is named Prospero, referring to Prince Prospero, who is the character who organizes the party in Poe's “The Masque of the Red Death”, but who is also pursued by Death under a red mask.

Regarding episode three, we find a parallel with Poe's original work in a similar way to what happens in episode two. This episode is titled “The Murders of the Rue Morgue”, where Camille Usher, the Usher family's public relations officer in charge of preventing the company's downfall, dies at the hands of a chimpanzee, leaving her body in pieces. Compared to Poe's “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, we can see that the title is the same. Also, the main character of both the series episode and Poe's work is the same, as she is named Camille. However, the difference that Mike Flanagan introduced in the adaptation is that a chimpanzee executed the crime, while in Poe's work it is carried out by an orangutan.

In relation to episode four “The Black Cat”, we can find an adaptation similar to Poe's “The Black Cat” (1843). This episode revolves around Napoleon Usher, who suffers moments of madness, leading him to accidentally kill his boyfriend Julius' black cat (Pluto). As a result, he ended up replacing that cat with a similar one. However, the cat began to torture him psychologically, so that it hid in all parts of the house, but only Napoleon could see him, since his boyfriend Julius could not find him. Because of these appearances of the cat in his cause, the member of the Ushers' result in suffering all kinds of injuries on his body from said cat. In this way, he ends up going completely insane, starting to chase the cat around every corner of the house, which leads him to destroy the house in order to find it. Thus, we can see that there are certain similarities in terms of the way in which he kills the cat and replaces it. However, in the original work there is no

wife who ends up dead, despite the fact that the protagonist in both that work and the adaptation we see that he continues to suffer the consequences of alcohol and drug addiction. In addition, the axe that the protagonist of Poe's original work is also replaced in this postmodernist series through the inclusion of Thor's hammer, with which the protagonist crashed the walls of the house to check if the cat is still inside them. In addition, the adaptation continues with the madness of its protagonist Napoleon, since when he saw that the cat was on the railing of the balcony of his house, he pounced on it. Therefore, he fell into the void, dying on the spot.

With regards to episode five, "Tell-Tale Heart", we can see that the series has an identical title to Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" (1843). The protagonist is also called Victorine, who shows that she hears the heartbeat of her beloved. Therefore, the heartbeat in her head becomes so noticeable that it leads her to go completely insane. However, the adaptation has some quite notable differences, as Poe's original work shows us Victorine's madness for the sound of the heartbeat. Nevertheless, the adaptation goes a step further, by introducing a heart implant into Victorine's girlfriend. This implant is an innovation of the company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals, thus trying to advance in the heart market. Though, Victorine wanted to try the implant with his girlfriend, driving her into a state of madness due to the fact that she heard the sound of the heart implant constantly. As a result, Victorine ended up going to the point of maximum madness, killing her beloved so that the heart implant would stop beating. All this was seen by Roderick, who also witnessed how his daughter Victorine commits suicide by stabbing herself with a scalpel. Therefore, Mike Flanagan inspired this episode in "Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), following a similar plot, but with certain differences such as the introduction of the heart implant.

In episode six we can find the most differences in terms of the adaptation over the original work. The episode is titled "Goldbug" starring Tamerlane Usher. She liked to have everything under control to feel calm, in this case both with the presentation of her new company called Goldbug, and with the relationship with her husband. As the episode unfolds, Tamerlane ends up having everything under control at all times, until her brothers start dying one by one, which puts the launch of the Goldbug company in a second place. In addition, it is also presented that this leads her to have insomnia problems, so that she sometimes had hallucinations about an infidelity of her husband

with Verna (the woman with whom the Usher twins signed the agreement for their glorious life, in exchange for the death of the entire Usher lineage). These hallucinations increase as the episode progresses, reaching the climax when Tamerlane suffers a hallucination of Verna during the presentation of her company. In this way, Tamerlane saw her death when she nailed the mirrors in her room. Even though this episode shows how greed and wanting to have everything under control can take the protagonist's life, this episode seems extremely far from the plot of Poe's "Goldbug". That is, in Poe's original work, the plot revolves around a man rather than a woman. He is treated as if he is insane for pointing out that the image of a beetle was a skull, while following a series of clues in a pirate's treasure hunt. In this way, it is clear that this episode has not only been inspired by Poe's "Goldbug" but by "Tamerlane" (1827), who also suffered the cost of ambition and wanted to control everything, leading her to die.

Focusing on episode seven, "The Pit and the Pendulum", it is titled in the same way as Poe's original work. Hence, it follows the plot very faithfully, but with certain quite notable differences. There, we see Frederick Usher as the person around whom the plot of the entire episode unfolds. Frederick was the first son of Roderick Usher, who was obsessed with living up to the expectations his father had always placed on him. However, his obsessions also come from episode one, as he discovered that his wife, Morelle, had attended the mask party that Prospero had organized at the factory in episode two, which caused her to have burns all over her body. Therefore, Frederick cannot stop thinking about how his wife could have ended up in the factory, because his jealousy ends up increasing as the episode progresses. In this way, he agrees to take her out of the hospital, following the rest of the treatment at home so that no one approaches her. His state of madness and jealousy becomes more noticeable, as he comes to take revenge on her by knocking out several of her teeth with pliers.

Nevertheless, the punishments against his wife continue to increase, constantly drugging her so that the treatment would not progress. However, Verna (the symbol of the devil) drugged him with the same medicine with which he drugged his wife. In this way, when he arrived at the factory to see how Morelle could have gotten there, he was immobilized on the ground. However, the factory was going to be demolished, so the moment the roof is damaged, a pendulum shape is created that cuts through his body,

ending his life. Therefore, this episode has been inspired by “The Pit and the Pendulum”, as the plot is similar to Poe's original work. Nonetheless, Mike Flanagan introduced certain differences in the adaptation of that work. That is, in Poe's “The Pit and the Pendulum” (1842), the protagonist is not locked up in a factory, but is condemned to death and wakes up imprisoned in a kind of pit. In addition, the protagonist had a drink, which made him drowsy, being related to the drugs that Verna ingested to the protagonist of the episode of the series, Frederick. Poe presented him tied to a wooden structure face up, while the adaptation is similar, as he was not tied up but was immobilized on the ground because of the previously mentioned drugs. Finally, the original short story presents the pendulum slowly approaching him, but only while he was conscious, leading to two quite different endings; in the short story the protagonist is saved, but in the adaptation he dies.

3.1.2. CHARACTER REFERENCES

In the adaptation *The Fall of the House of Usher* not only can we find references to Poe's different works through the titles of the episodes and their plots, but the characters are also clear references to both his characters and his life.

The first of the most relevant names is Verna's name. This name is more mysterious than it seems, since Verna is actually the raven that always appears on the scene above Roderick Usher's head. Thus, this name is an anagram of the word “raven”; that is, a word formed by the rearrangement of the same letters. In this way, this name refers to Poe's poem “The Raven”.

As for the context of this character, it is shown from the first episode that twins Madeline and Roderick Usher made a deal with Verna, so that they would be wealthy in exchange for the death of their entire lineage before their own death. However, Verna is not human, nor a ghost or anything like that, as she reveals to Madeline early on that she is "not a woman". Hence, she is a shapeshifter who has the ability to transform into anything, whether she is a chimpanzee, a cat, a security guard, and even a sex worker. In Poe's original work, the raven is a clear symbol and at the same time a memory that

follows the protagonist throughout the plot. However, the adaptation gives a different role to the crow, showing it as a symbol of karma, and even as an omen of death.

As for Auguste Dupin's name, this is the name of the detective in the adaptation. This detective was in charge of investigating the Usher family regarding their crime and their problems with the Fortunato company. However, this is another allusion to Poe, as the name Auguste Dupin is based on the detective that Poe frequently used in his works. There are three works in which Auguste Dupin is a detective, such as “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1814), “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1843), and “The Purloined Letter” (1844).

One character who does not get much prominence is Eliza Usher. She is the mother of twins Madeline and Roderick Usher, but she does not appear much on the scene because she only has relevance in the first chapter, to show the Usher family's past. However, despite being a supporting character in the plot of this adaptation, Eliza Usher is a very clear reference to Poe's life. That is, Eliza Poe is the same name as Edgar Allan Poe's biological mother, showing that this adaptation makes references to Poe even in the characters that are less important in the development of the plot. On the other hand, the name of the Usher brothers' biological father in the adaptation is also linked to Poe's life. His name is Mr. Longfellow, who is actually his mother's boss within the Fortunato company. However, this name alludes to the real name of the poet Henry Longfellow, who went on to accuse Poe of plagiarism in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, he is not the only poet Mike Flanagan references in his adaptation. That is, there is a series of flashbacks introduced by Roderick Usher as the episodes progress, in which he worked for a man named Rufus Griswald, Fortunato's boss at the beginning of the series. The name Rufus Griswald was inspired by the name of the poet who also criticized Poe, publishing some of his works during the mid-nineteenth century as well.

Concerning the character of Napoleon Usher, this name is also a reference to another of Poe's works. In this case, the name Napoleon comes from “The Spectacles”, whose work shows the protagonist Napoleon, who ends up marrying an old lady. In this way, he realizes on the wedding night that she was his great-grandmother, once wearing the glasses that he always refused to use.

In relation to the drug that several members of the Ushers resort to as the plot unfolds, it should be noted that Mike Flanagan was also inspired by a work by Poe, which included a similar drug. The adaptation *The Fall of the House of Usher* based the introduction of lygodon into the plot on Poe's play "Ligeia". In this work, a man who was addicted to opium was presented, which was the source of inspiration to show Roderick Usher with the same drug addiction as that character, being a parallel with Poe.

Regarding the jester who appears on the scene numerous times throughout the plot, this is the head of the company Fortunato, whom the Usher brothers walled up, burying him alive. However, because of this crime, Roderick suffers different visions with this jester, appearing to him when he is confessing to the detective Auguste Dupin. In fact, the costume worn by the jester in this adaptation was inspired by Poe's tale "Hop Frog" (1849). Nevertheless, if we focus only on the crime that Roderick and Madeline Usher carried out, the walling up of their boss, it is also a reference to a different work by Poe. This crime is inspired by "The Cask of Amontillado", in which the protagonist lures his victim to a kind of winery, where after promising him a wine, he walls him alive. In this way, the crime that the Usher twins carry out with their boss Rufus Griswald in this adaptation is very faithful to Poe's work.

The bar where Verna is the waitress is a setting in which, despite the fact that she only has the spotlight for a single episode, the plot revolves around the moment in which the Usher brothers meet Verna there. However, the important thing is that the director of the series Mike Flanagan has also taken advantage of the introduction of the bar to fill it with references to Poe. If we look at the walls of this bar, we can see a black cat ("The Black Cat"), but also a boat inside a bottle, which is also an allusion to "Manuscript Found in a Bottle". In addition, if analyzed closely, a horse is also shown which may refer to Poe's "Metzgerstein", where the protagonist becomes obsessed with a horse. Finally, there is a direct reference to the great American writer, since behind the bar counter there is a photo of Poe, showing that the bar has an entire theme about both him and his works.

3.2. GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN THE TV ADAPTATION

3.2.1. SETTING

The Fall of the House of Usher's adaptation presents a house in an empty, dark contemporary neighborhood as the setting where Roderick Usher spends much of the plot. From the outside, this house is worn out by the passing of the years. However, from the inside it is already seen from episode one that it is not quite different from how it was presented from the outside; a completely dark building, with fallen walls.

In addition, when this house has been portrayed in a postmodernist Gothic series, there are similarities in the way Edgar Allan Poe described the Usher family home, but it manages to create a deeper fear. That is, Mike Flanagan shows a building that is not at all welcoming, just like the way Poe introduced the Usher house. Both show a house that has fallen apart over the years, but the way in which the postmodernist series presents it provokes a sense of more fear in the viewers. In addition, the way in which the scene of the description of the house is approached also helps to create this feeling of fear and unease, since the fact of seeing a completely empty, dark neighborhood, and that has a building that crumbles due to the passage of generations, is a clear incentive for the creation of horror in the viewer.

Nevertheless, the entire plot does not just take place in that house, but every member of the Usher family lives in their big houses. The houses of each of the Ushers are modern, which are presented in urban neighborhoods and affluent areas. In this way we can see a great change by capturing this type of settings in a postmodernist series. Hence, Napoleon Usher's house is a clear example of what a modern house is, as is Roderick Usher's mansion, which was large enough to raise all his children. In addition, the fact that this setting is located in a wealthy area and is so modern is connected to the fact that the Usher family is depicted as an aristocratic family.

Furthermore, other settings are also shown throughout the plot, such as the Usher family factory and the basement of the factory. Both settings are of great importance, as both are the site of crucial events.

As for the description of the factory, it is shown for the first time in episode two, “The Masque of the Red Death”, in which the factory is focused on different occasions because Roderick Usher and lawyer Arthur Pynn intended to demolish it. It is at this point that the factory is shown from a distant perspective. In this way, this setting was a very dark building, just like the house of the Usher family, also giving the viewer a sense of unease, due to the fact that this building was located in an area where there was no other building in its surroundings, being depicted in a way that it was thought to be abandoned as well. Settings such as the factory are set in urban areas, making reference to what Spooner established as “spaces of absence”. That is to say, in both scenes where the factory is shown in episodes two (“The Masque of the Red Death”) and seven (“The Pit and the Pendulum”), it has an appearance of abandonment and isolation.

Regarding the basements of the Ushers' childhood home and the factory, they have a certain relationship in terms of what happens in each of them. As for the basement of the Usher house, Detective Dupin is shown arriving at the house to hear Roderick Usher's confession about the death of each of his children. It is important to appreciate the fact that so far there is some similarity with the way in which Poe's short story unfolds, since Roderick is also shown telling his story in the house where he grew up with his sister Madeline. However, Dupin hears banging sounds coming from the basement of the house, caused by Madeline Usher, Roderick's twin sister. This is because one day Roderick called his sister Madeline at the house, poisoning her with the drink. Therefore, Roderick proceeded to mummify her, putting sapphire eyes on her while telling her that “they were the eyes of a pharaoh”. This postmodernist presentation of what happened in the basement has some relation to Poe's original work, since while Roderick was telling stories to his friend, it is thought from the beginning that Madeline is dead, so much of the plot takes place in the vault of the house, located in the basement. In addition, while Roderick in Poe's short story tells such stories, the narrator also hears sounds coming from the basement, as does Detective Auguste Dupin in the series. But what is most closely related is the moment in which Madeline suddenly appears from the basement, since in the series she appears mummified, without eyes and bloodied, while in Poe's original work Madeline is shown wrapped up. Therefore, they are two similar presentations of the final part of both works, in which the setting of the basement of the Ushers' childhood home takes on great importance.

Concerning the basement of the factory, there is no mummification there, but a walling takes place. That is, on New Year's Eve when Roderick was still young (1979), he confessed to detective Auguste Dupin that he had been seeking an important position at Fortunato Pharmaceuticals for some time. Therefore, on that Eve, twin siblings Roderick and Madeline conducted the plan they had been holding for a long time; they drugged the CEO of Fortunato, Roderick's boss, at the New Year's Eve party. In this way, Madeline seduced him to take him to the basement of the factory, where both brothers buried him alive inside the basement wall. Hence, they took over Fortunato Pharmaceuticals entirely.

3.2.2. THE SUPERNATURAL

When the topic of the supernatural is mentioned while analyzing *The Fall of the House of Usher* series, it is inevitable not to think of Verna's character. That is, Verna is the supernatural element that predominates throughout the plot, as she is a personification of the devil. It is at this point that curses and prophecies take on great importance in this postmodernist series, because the Usher brothers ended up making a pact with Verna, that is, with the devil. However, the pact was signed because of a tragic plan conducted by the Usher twins.

It all goes back to New Year's Eve 1979 (episode one). After the Usher brothers had been lying about the business that the company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals was doing for some time in order to get a good position within the company, Roderick and Madeline decided to completely end the plan they had been working on for a long time. This plan consisted of drugging Roderick's CEO and boss during the party, so that Madeline was able to seduce him by luring him to the basement of the factory. Once there, the Usher twins' plan was finalized once they walled him up, burying him alive. Thus, his plan would be successfully fulfilled, with the aim of taking over the company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals.

However, not everything went as they thought. As they went to the bar where Verna was the server so that people could see them and not incriminate them, she told them that she was aware of the crime they had committed. That is, Verna was not present there but knew what they did at all times. However, she offered to make a deal so that she would not reveal the crime about the CEO of Fortunato Pharmaceuticals.

It is here that the pact with the devil comes into play. This agreement was that apart from Verna protecting them judicially and they would not be convicted of such a crime, they would also have a glorious future, controlling the millionaire company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals. However, Verna assured that Roderick Usher would see his entire lineage die before his death came. Also, the two twins should die at the same time, just like they are accepting such a deal together. These types of pacts with the devil are also known as Faustian pacts. These pacts consist of offering your own soul, as a result of a life full of wealth or power. In this case, the Usher brothers are not putting their soul on the line, but are offering their entire lineage in exchange for a life of riches and power, through complete control of the company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals.

In this way, over time the prophecy is fulfilled, as both brothers take control of one of the most prestigious companies in the area. For this reason, they have a life full of luxuries of all kinds, seeing themselves in the mansion they have for the Usher family, apart from having a great reputation in the country, being followed by the press. In addition, once the alleged murder of the CEO of the company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals by the Usher twins began to become known, the development of the episodes shows that the prophecy was still running its course, protecting them judicially. Hence, they could not be convicted of any crime, being brought by the prestigious lawyer Arthur Pynn.

However, the prophecy is not only fulfilled in a positive way for them, but as the episodes progress, we can see how the offering that the Usher twins put into play was also going to be fulfilled. That is to say, Roderick Usher, apart from leading a glorious life in terms of his prestigious company, also had a long Usher lineage of six children, all of whom came from a different mother. In addition, Roderick also had a granddaughter named Lenore, Frederick's daughter. However, since episode two, we can see how their lineage decreases as they died, specifically one per episode. This happens because of the

pact that both Usher twins had signed with Verna, so the prophecy of the agreement with the devil was gradually taking away the lineage of these brothers. In this way, it was Verna who in one way or another ended the lives of each of Roderick Usher's relatives as the plot unfolded.

In addition, it is also relevant to illustrate that hallucinations and visions are two aspects that have a lot to do with the supernatural. The fact that the prophecy ran its course and took Roderick Usher's children one by one, led him to suffer different types of visions since episode one (*A Midnight Dreary*). There, we can see that at the moment when Roderick is at a wake for the death of one of his sons in the church, he suffers a vision of the corpses of his six children at the altar. In this way, it is clear that the visions that Roderick Usher suffers about his children are caused by the prophecy of the agreement they signed with Verna, so he had to see how his entire lineage lost their lives before their own life ended.

Nevertheless, this is not the only vision he had about his children, but while he is confessing to Detective Dupin about the death of each of his children, he has different views of the way in which they died. An example of this is Roderick Usher's vision of Camille Usher in episode three ("Murder in the Rue Morgue"). There, while he is telling the story of how his daughter has passed away, a sudden presence of Camille's corpse is shown on screen, so that Roderick feels his daughter's body right behind him, clutching his shoulders. Such a sight is completely terrifying, as Camille's corpse was shown on stage in the same way she had died, with the hands of an ape, as she died at the hands of one (minute 24:30).

Another aspect which is also worth mentioning is the constant presence of hallucinations caused by the synthetic drugs throughout the episodes of *The Fall of the House of Usher*. These types of drugs are shown in numerous scenes by the consumption of them through different members of the Usher family. Frederick Usher is one of the characters who most resorts to the consumption of synthetic drugs, so he uses them as a way to escape from problems. This is present during almost the entire plot that unfolds in episode seven ("The Pit and the Pendulum") where he resorts to the consumption of these drugs to escape from reality and the problems he had both with his wife, Morelle, and

with the problems of being in charge of the company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals. However, the recurrent consumption of them led him to suffer different psychological problems throughout the episodes of the series, which caused the consequent mistreatment of his wife. It is worth mentioning that Frederick began to escape from reality due to what happened in episode one (“A Midnight Dreary”), since his wife was invited to Prospero's party, and Roderick thought that she was being unfaithful to him, which led him to use these drugs.

3.2.3. NEW ADDITIONS IN THE POSTMODERN TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

As soon we enter the postmodern world, it is inevitable to talk about technology and the rapid progress it is making. Moreover, such is its progress that more postmodern Gothic works are showing the introduction of technology in their plots. However, this technology is incorporated in many different ways. That is to say, in the evolution of different contemporary Gothic works, the technological elements are not always the same, nor do they evoke the same feeling in the viewer. However, when we talk about the technological elements of these works, reference is made to the introduction of synthetic drugs, and the creation of heart implants.

If we transpose the use of drugs in *The Fall of the House of Usher* to today's society in the United States, we realize that the reality portrayed in the series is close to the reality of today's American society. That is to say, this society is not really satisfied with its current way of life and therefore repeatedly turns to synthetic drugs to escape reality. This brings us to a population where drug addiction is quite common and who live like simple zombies in order to be satisfied with themselves. This situation is similar to that of Frederick Usher throughout the series; a man who is at the head of the prestigious Usher family business but is really an unhappy person, both in his personal and professional life, which leads him to take drugs in order not to suffer.

Moreover, we must keep in mind that the issue of drugs is serious, because not only the members of the Usher family used them in the series, but also the rest of the country's

population. For this reason, the company Fortunato Pharmaceuticals had the great reputation it had for selling a drug called lygodon. This type of drug is shown on stage from the moment Roderick Usher introduces this drug to his boss. It is portrayed as a drug that miraculously cures you without any symptoms or side effects in those who take it. However, as the episodes progress, people consume this "medicine" more frequently, revealing that lygodon is not as miraculous and transparent as Roderick had originally claimed that lygodon was a drug that made those who consumed it for the first time to be completely addicted to it. Hence, Roderick secured the future of Fortunato Pharmaceuticals by putting the drug lygodon on the market, as it was so addictive that it would ensure him fixed profits for the rest of his life. However, this drug also kills thousands and millions of people, which is also a negative point for his company.

Furthermore, lygodon drug appears in the series *The Fall of the House of Usher*, although the name lygodon is a fictional one. However, the drug does have some similarities to a drug called Oxycodone, which was also sold by a very reputable drug manufacturer called Purdue Pharma. Furthermore, the way this pharmaceutical company marketed it is really the same as that of lygodon; it was found that this new drug was much less addictive than the other drugs, apart from the fact that it could cure anything. However, it turned out that Oxycodone was the same form as lygodon, a drug that was mistakenly released to the public, prompting society to try it. However, once they resorted to it, they fell into addiction, so people who took it over for a long period of time became completely dependent on it. It can therefore be said that the series *The Fall of the House of Usher* realistically depicts the phase in which synthetic drugs were introduced to the pharmaceutical market.

Nevertheless, through the fictional drug lygodon, the series reflects the process by which prestigious pharmaceutical companies have launched different types of drugs to the market that are harmful to our health, through a series of frauds. These opioids include not only the aforementioned oxycodone, but fentanyl is also very commonly used. Hence, a large part of the current American population is hooked on these types of drugs, which reduce the perception of pain. However, such addiction has led to millions of deaths, as can be seen in the latest episode of the adaptation. There, Roderick looks out the window,

observing how the millions of people who have resorted to the use of lygodon have taken their lives, being portrayed falling from the sky.

On the other hand, technology has not only made progress in the production of synthetic drugs, but has also been involved in the field of heart implants. These types of implants can be seen in the adaptation *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In episode five ("Tell-Tale Heart"), Victorine is shown on stage so obsessed with her heart implant project that she decides to put it into action with her girlfriend. In this way, we can see that technology is shown in a postmodernist series with all its advances. This reflects the fact that technology can be incorporated into all aspects of human life, as it is even introduced into our bodies in the form of implants.

However, fraudulent use of technology is made in cases like Victorine's one. In other words, she intended to introduce these implants to the market, but bypassing all kinds of controls, and testing them on humans directly. In this way, Victorine does not make legal use of technology through heart implants, since the health protocol must be followed, following the necessary controls. Nevertheless, she noticed that heart implant testing caused problems in animals, but decided to test it for herself with her girlfriend's heart.

4. CONCLUSION

After the detailed examination of both Poe's original work and the Netflix adaptation, it has been shown how this short story of traditional Gothic has been transformed into a postmodernist series of the twenty-first century. Different elements have been transformed when it comes to capturing this work in a series, such as the presentation of the setting, the way in which the supernatural was reflected, and even the introduction of synthetic drugs. These are the elements that have had the most importance and have shown the greatest impact in terms of their transformation, so that this series has captured the plot in urban settings, being a great progress from the wild forests. In addition, the special effects to reflect the supernatural is a huge change from the

traditional gothic, while the synthetic drugs are a sample of the present day, this being the one that has had the greatest transformation and impact in the series.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that although the series is called *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the series is actually a compendium of Poe's work, so only the short story has been used as a framework to introduce the rest of the fictional and real-life elements in the series. Thus, in this undergraduate dissertation I had shown that the adaptation has made use of different characters, names of short stories and complete developments of Poe's plots to create such a series. For this reason, some of the characters that have the most connection with Poe's works have been analyzed, as well as the characters that have the most differences in terms of the original works. In addition, the relationship of the different episodes with the original plots of his works has also been presented, in such a way as to show that one short story by Poe has been used as the framework for his whole life and works through a postmodernist adaptation.

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