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EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER"  
- THE THEME OF THE PHYSICAL POWER OF WORDS

"The mathematics afford no more absolute demonstrations than the sentiment of his art yields the artist"<sup>1</sup>. According to Edgar Allan Poe's principles of composition, "constructing" a tale or a poem, with the ultimate object of producing "a certain unique or single effect"<sup>2</sup>, is a matter of reason and logic. It is precise and imaginative, which is "never otherwise than analytic"<sup>3</sup>, like the game of whist discussed in the opening paragraphs of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". The rules are invariably strict and the effect depends on the genius of observation (of the partner's or the reader's response to emotional stimuli) and the validity of inference. The analytical faculty of a mathematician, argues E.A. Poe in "The Power of Words", is the "faculty of referring at all epochs, all effects to all causes", "... the prerogative of the Deity alone", "but short of the absolute perfection ... exercised by the whole host of the Angelic intelligences"<sup>4</sup>, that is, poets.

We read in "The Poetic Principle":

<sup>1</sup> The Domain of Arnheim, [in:] Complete Stories and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, New York 1966, p. 575 (all quotations from Poe's tales come from: "Complete Stories..."; number of pages for "The Fall of the House of Usher" follows quotations in the text).

<sup>2</sup> E.A. Poe on N. Hawthorne's, "Twice-Told Tales", [in:] The Works of Edgar Allan Poe, vol. VII, New York 1971, pp. 38-39 (all quotations from Poe's literary criticism come from "The Works of Edgar Allan Poe", ..., vols. VI, VII, VIII).

<sup>3</sup> The Murders in the Rue Morgue, [in:] Complete Stories..., p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> The Power of Words, *ibid.*, p. 593.

I make Beauty, therefore - using the word as inclusive of the sublime - I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes; - no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least most readily attainable in the poem<sup>5</sup>.

Once the poet has mastered, however imperfectly, the faculty of retrogradation - of referring effects to their causes - he can deliberately and responsibly create, that is, perform the reverse act of converting causes (artistic medium) into effects (visions of Beauty and Sublimity), his skill in handling "the physical power of words" manifesting itself in the immediacy and intensity of the "pre-established" effect. As Poe mystically elaborates on his theory in "The Power of Words", word-impulses given the air will radiate in their multiform modifications, or, in other words, in their creation of the novel and the original, until, finally, the poet would find them "reflected - unimpressive at last - back from the throne of the Godhead"<sup>6</sup>. Through poetry and music, in "a wild effort to reach the Beauty above", we experience that "pleasurable elevation, or excitement of the soul", "brief and indeterminate glimpses" of "divine and rapturous joys ... beyond the grave"<sup>7</sup>. And though, or because, the poetic intellect is "the most exalted of all"<sup>8</sup>, it is never free of the acute awareness of its own limitations. The search for the absolute perfection of art is "the desire of the moth for the star"<sup>9</sup>. What the artist ultimately achieves is but "a glimpse of the spirits' outer world" and there he must stop, as the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" stops at the edge of the tarn, contemplating his inability of encompassing the whole significance of his vision. In contradiction to his "philosophy of composition" Poe has to admit

<sup>5</sup> The Poetic Principle, [in:] The Works..., vol. VI, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> The Power of Words, [in:] Complete Stories..., p. 593.

<sup>7</sup> The Poetic Principle, [in:] The Works..., vol. VI, pp. 12-15.

<sup>8</sup> The Colloquy of Monos and Una, [in:] Complete Stories..., p. 595.

<sup>9</sup> The Poetic Principle, [in:] The Works..., vol. VI, pp. 12-13.

that the final product of the most imaginative act of creation cannot be fully and rationally accounted for, even by the creator himself.

"A sense of the fullest satisfaction" in recognition of the beautiful, the original, the harmonious, can also be attained in a "tale of effect". Poe's insistence on the "unity of effect" and "totality" - the compactness of thought and expression, "deliberate care" in choosing images and arranging them in climactic order - places his conception of the tale proper in the nearest vicinity of what he conceives to be the purely poetic<sup>10</sup>.

Thus in both, a poem and a tale, it is through what we may call after Poe essentially "earthly" elements of medium and method - words with their more or less easily recognizable external equivalents and their artistic adaptation "with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem"<sup>11</sup> - that the reader arrives at the visionary, the spiritual and the ideal, belonging no more to the world of logic and deduction, escaping all analytical faculties and attempts at definition, and consequently the reader, like the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher", is "forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth" (p. 177).

Such seems to be the dilemma of Ellison, a landscape-gardener and "in the widest and noblest sense a poet":

In truth, while that virtue which consists in the mere avoidance of vice appeals directly to the understanding and can thus be circumscribed in rule, the loftier virtue, which flames in creation, can be apprehended in its results alone. [...] We may be instructed to build a "Cato", but we are in vain told how to conceive a Parthenon or an "Inferno"<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> However, "beauty can be better treated in the poem" and the writer "who aims at the purely beautiful in a prose tale is laboring at a great disadvantage" as he must reject these modes of expression ("the ratiocinative, for example, the sarcastic, or the humorous") which are "absolutely forbidden" by the quality of rhythm (ibid., vol. VII, p. 40).

<sup>11</sup> The Philosophy of Composition, ibid., vol. VI, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> The Domain of Arnheim, [in:] Complete Stories..., p. 573.

The realization of Ellison's visions of the "purely physical leveliness" is made possible not after he inherits "a fortune of four hundred and fifty millions of dollars" but after death - "It is, of course, needless to say where was the locality"<sup>13</sup> - and the narrator's voyage on Arnheim's Lethe in "an air of funereal gloom", shut out from "the light of day" to enter regions of "exquisite cleanness" and "crystal" streams which remind us of the ideal "crystal springs" of "The Poetic Principle", this voyage must stop at the "gigantic gate or rather door of burnished gold, elaborately carved and fretted"<sup>14</sup>, the gate to Elysium. When "the whole Paradise of Arnheim bursts upon the view", "here on earth" we can proceed no further and the tale ends. Both Poe's fascination with the theme of irrational powers overcoming man's will and drawing him into unfathomable precipices and possibly the most favourable climactic denouement it offers in the composition of a tale seem to account for the reappearance of similar type of endings in many of Poe's works. His narrators often resemble Herman Melville's "standers-of-mast-heads" who put to their post for the simple reason of watching and "singing out" indulge in unconscious reveries, lose their identities, "become diffused through time and space", and finally drawn into the vortices, "no more to rise for ever"<sup>15</sup>.

There is a close thematic and structural analogy between "The Domain of Arnheim" and "The Fall of the House of Usher". In both of these tales, the subject of which is artistic sensibility, the artist manages to put his utterly idealistic theory into practice, which ultimately ends in his death, and in both the narrator endeavours to maintain rationalistic view in order to tell us about experiences having the quality of a dream or cataleptic vision. The narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher", like Ishmael, is the one whose "identity comes back in horror", the one "Escaped Alone to Tell Thee". Both Ellison and Roderick Usher seek solitude in their art, yet Ellison's medium makes him happy

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 579.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 582.

<sup>15</sup> H. M e l v i l l e, *Moby-Dick, or the White Whale*, London 1969, p. 177.

("He admitted but four elementary principles, or more strictly, conditions of bliss. That which he considered chief was - strange to say! - the simple and purely physical one of free exercise in the open air"<sup>16</sup>), while the medium of Roderick separates him from the external and healthy and belongs solely to the imaginative world of the delirious mind.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is the expression of both Poe's theory and method of artistic creation. Constructed according to the rules of "The Philosophy of Composition", bearing strong structural affinity with "The Raven" and, if successful enough, evoking the pre-established effect of horror, the tale remains, above all, an ingenious illustration of Poe's idealistic conception of the ultimate limits of poetry, when poetry is conceived in the images of madness and death. Its dominant theme is that of "the physical power of words" and of art in general. As I have mentioned before, the primary paradox in Poe's theory of creation seems to consist in the poet's belief that art attains its ideal (Beauty and Sublimity) through essentially "physical" and "materialistic" means. Another paradox, with which Poe deals in "The Fall of the House of Usher", is that the state of the ideal can be recognized by its power of "materializing", evoking immediate physical effects, the objective experience or sensation, which, when art approaches its purest form, become destructive to the creator, as it then "appartains to eternity alone". In other words, the last stage in the spiritualization of the poetic medium is, according to Poe, the destructive realization of its ideal.

The solitary rider passing "through a singularly dreary tract of the country" appears in the opening sentence of the tale as the image of the poet, whom the winged horse of poetry leads through the haunted worlds of his imagination into regions of extremal sublimity of spirit, the highest sphere to which poetry can aspire, where causes and effects become magically one and belie rational and analytical powers - the "melancholy House of Usher"<sup>17</sup>. Critics have often observed that throughout the text

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<sup>16</sup> The Domain of Arnheim, [in:] Complete Stories..., p. 571.

<sup>17</sup> Loneliness is, according to Poe, the necessary condition for experiencing intense poetic moods. We read in "The Island of the Fay": "My wanderings amid such scenes have been many, and

there reappear allusions to the essential physical and spiritual identity of Poe and his protagonist. In the description of Roderick's lineaments they recognize most characteristic features of Poe's countenance from the famous daguerreotype of Mathew Brady. We read in another passage:

It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other - it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher" - an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion. (p. 178)

The "equivocal appellation" may be read as an allusion to the name of Poe and the most immediate association it has with the words "poet" and "poetry", of which he had always been aware. The House of Usher is Poetry, and Roderick, "in the direct line of descent" the last of "the ancient race of the Ushers"<sup>18</sup>, with their burial-ground "remote and exposed", is the last of the poets, as he attains the last, the ideal stage in the perfection of his art, which is at the same time the end of all art.

For the justification of the elements of scenery as well as of the whole situational context and the atmosphere in "The Fall of the House of Usher" we may, therefore, search in Poe's essay on the composition of what he believes to be "the poem written solely for the poem's sake", "the poem p e r s e". "Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones"<sup>19</sup> - the word "melancholy" is used in the first sentence of the tale as the attribute to the House of Usher and then obsessively reappears

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far-searching, and always solitary; and the interest with which I have strayed through many a dim, deep valley; or gazed into the reflected heaven of many a bright lake, has been an interest greatly deepened by the thought that I have strayed and gazed alone" (ibid., p. 565).

<sup>18</sup> In his essay on Longfellow's ballads Poe wrote: "Man being what he is, the time could never have been in which Poesy was not (The Works..., vol. VI, p. 153).

<sup>19</sup> The Philosophy of Composition, ibid., p. 43.

in a variety of images to become its "only legitimate" tone<sup>20</sup>;  
"Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the universe's  
a l understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?  
Death - was the obvious reply", and "[...] the death of a beautiful  
woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the  
world"<sup>21</sup> - in "The Fall of the House of Usher" it is the death of  
lady Madeline, Roderick's sister; when viewed as devoid of all the  
sexual, "earthly" passion, their relationship embodies the truly  
poetical, while passion, Poe claims, is antagonistic to Beauty<sup>22</sup>;  
"circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect  
of insulated incident"<sup>23</sup> - in the tale it becomes the predominant  
feature of the atmospheric conditions, of the interior of the  
house and, significantly, of those works of Roderick's imagination  
which he shows directly to the alarmed narrator; "the room  
(in "The Raven") is represented as richly furnished - this in  
mere pursuance of the ideas I have already explained on the  
subject of Beauty"<sup>24</sup> - in Roderick's room, books and musical  
instruments, "scattered about", are reminiscent of the heritage  
of his ancestors who "by multiform combinations among the things  
and thoughts of time" struggled to "[...] attain a portion of  
that Loveliness whose very element, perhaps, appertains to eter-  
nity alone"<sup>25</sup>.

Speculations on the nature of the novel and the original  
constitute a large portion of Poe's criticism, since it is  
originality, he believes, that the artist should always and  
unreservedly adhere to. The poetic medium affords but one possible  
way of its accomplishment - the poet must find new modes of com-

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<sup>20</sup> "And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted  
me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more  
bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering  
a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality,  
poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe,  
in one unceasing radiation of gloom". ("The Fall...., [in:] Com-  
plete Stories..., p. 182).

<sup>21</sup> The Philosophy of Composition, [in:] The Works..., vol. VI,  
p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> The Poetic Principle, *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> The Philosophy of Composition, *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> The Poetic Principle, *ibid.*, p. 13.

binning forms which have already existed as "previous combinations". The second element of Poetry, the first being "the thirst for supernal BEAUTY", is "the attempt to satisfy this thirst by novel combinations among those forms of beauty which already exist - or by novel combinations of those combinations which our predecessors, toiling in the chase of the same phantom, have already set in order"<sup>26</sup>. As Poe writes in his appreciation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's tales, the reader will recognize the novel with "[...] a calm astonishment that ideas so apparently obvious have never occurred or been presented to us before"<sup>27</sup>. The observations which the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" makes on his way to Roderick's room illustrate the same idea:

While the objects around me - while the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy - while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this - I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up.<sup>28</sup> (p. 179)

When the narrator gives a short presentation of Roderick's theory of the sentience of all inanimate nature, he actually defines poetry as the collocation of forms and specifies its intrinsic thematic and tonal characteristics.

The belief, however, was connected (as I have previously hinted) with the gray stones of the home of his forefathers. The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones - in the order of their arrangement, as well as that of the many fungi which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around - above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn. Its evidence - the evidence of the sentience - was to be seen, he said, (and I here started as he spoke), in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result was discoverable, he added, in that silent, yet impotent and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded

<sup>26</sup> Poe on Longfellow's ballads, *ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>27</sup> Poe on Hawthorne's tales, *ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> We read in another passage: "I looked upon the scene before me - upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain [...]" ("The Fall...", p. 177).

the destinies of his family, and which made him what I now saw him - what he was. Such opinion need no comment, and I will make none.

It is tempting to identify "the gray stones" of "forefathers" with the image of the medium of poetry - words, and "the method of collocation of these stones" - the method of the collocation of words into poetic combinations. The "crumbling condition of individual stones" as well as the zigzag fissure which the narrator sees on approaching the House of Usher are tokens of the growing spiritualization of the medium of poetry, which, in the "excited and highly distempered ideality" of its master, shakes loose of the natural, logical bonds of objective equivalents. The fungi, the decayed trees and, above all, the tarn become symbols of death<sup>29</sup>. The stones of the House of Usher are reduplicated in "the still waters of the tarn" like poetry brooding over its most melancholy, that is, its most intrinsic topic - death. The artist's sensitivity makes him creative but at the same time most receptive - open to the subtlest influences that his art would exert on his spirit.

[...] the poetic sentiment (even without reference to the poetic power) implies a peculiarly, perhaps, an abnormally keen appreciation of the beautiful, with a longing for its assimilation, or absorption, into the poetic identity. What the poet intensely admires becomes thus, in very fact, although only partially, a portion of his own intellect<sup>30</sup>.

And if the highest, the most sublime manifestation of art is conceived in the image of death, its influence must be "silent, yet importunate and terrible".

Music is, according to Poe, the prototype of all art. In music effects "spring as directly as possible" from their causes: it is that kind of impulses given the air which through their physical power lead to the most immediate, and escaping all analysis, identification of the stimulus and the experience (the elevation of the soul). It seems natural then that in its

<sup>29</sup> Gaston Bachelard argues in his essay "L'Eau et les Rêves" (Wyobrażenia poetyckie, Warszawa 1975) that stagnant waters become the dominant symbol of death in Poe's work.

<sup>30</sup> A Reply to "Outsiders" [in:] The Works..., vol. VI, pp. 243-244.

pursuance of the exalted and the perfect, poetry should seek assistance in purely musical techniques.

I was aware, however, that his very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity, as well as in a passionate devotion to the intricacies, perhaps even more than to the orthodox and easily recognizable beauties, of musical science. (p. 183)

Roderick's painting is again the realization of the ultimate aim of art as Poe understands it - "If ever mortal painted an idea, that mortal was Roderick Usher" (p. 183). Yet to the degree that the artist attains his goal, he dangerously loosens his contacts with objective reality and becomes insane. In fact, Roderick makes that one step further over the edge of the precipice; in a desperate effort of his art to reach the "spirits' outer world", he trespasses the limits of the natural and the healthy. Devoted no longer to the "orthodox and easily recognizable beauties", his music becomes "wild fantasies" ("to a discordant melody"), his paintings and poems<sup>31</sup> - obsessive visions of the emblems of death, "partaking rigidly of the spirit of abstraction".

When the narrator reached the House of Usher, "a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded (his) spirit":

I say insufferable - he comments - for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. (p. 177)

There is nothing natural in the House of Usher, as it is actually the product of Roderick's imagination in its "highest artificial excitement" - the product of Roderick's medium, and "[...] to view natural objects as they exist, and to behold them through the medium of words, are different things"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> "The Haunted Palace" has the form of a ballad and is recited by Roderick to the accompaniment of guitar. "Certain effects of stringed instruments" can most readily embody the palpitating state of his nervous system.

<sup>32</sup> Poe's review of Drake and Halleck, *ibid.*, vol. VIII, pp. 301-302.

Roderick is aware of unusual, unnatural creative power of his spirit. He fears its physical embodiment.

I dread the events of the future, not in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which might operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. (p. 181)

It is the fear of converting the ideal into its physical effect in the final, extreme, God-like act of poetic imagination. The ideal is Sublimity and Beauty, the goal of art, the effect is Death, the ultimate and the only possible satiation of man's thirst for the ideal. The realization of the most poetical is the realization of death<sup>33</sup>.

This explains the nature of the relationship between Roderick and his sister. "A settled apathy" and "frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character" (p. 182) make lady Madeline a mediator between the two worlds and, consequently, the agent in the fulfillment of Roderick's destiny. The kinship of the poetic and the spiritual accounts for the presentation of Roderick and Madeline as twins - "I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them" (p. 186). With the help of the narrator, who since that moment is no longer a detached observer but an active though still unconscious collaborator, Roderick buries his sister alive and thus, in accomplishing what Poe believed to be the most intense and horrifying of all human experiences ("The Premature Burial"), he makes the "ideal" vision of his abstract painting real. In agreement with my interpretation of "The Fall of the House of Usher", the name Madeline may also be read symbolically as consisting of two words: "mad" and "line", and meaning "insane verse" - the poem of insane imagination.

Roderick's mind remains in a state of nervous agitation. At the beginning of the tale, we read:

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33 As Charles Feidelson writes in "Symbolism and American Literature" (Chicago 1969, p. 42): "Just as Usher simultaneously exploits and loathes his disease, he longs for death and fears it - longs for the state of "real dream" to which he tends and fears the annihilation which that entails".

His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision - that abrupt, weighty, unhurried, and hollow-sounding enunciation - that leaden, self-balanced and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement. (pp. 180-181)

This intense excitement of "lost drunkards" or "eaters of opium" is the metaphor of poetic intellect in the act of creation, the metaphor which Poe's great admirer, Charles Baudelaire, develops into a whole theory of creative stimulants. After lady Madeline is put to her tomb in the vaults of the house, Roderick's "mental collectedness and concentration" become still more powerful:

There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was labouring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. (p. 187)

"The gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls", which at the climactic end of the story turns into "exceeding density", represents this agitation of Roderick's imagination "in extremis" and his inability to withstand its annihilating powers.

The night of Roderick's final "materialization" of his poetic vision is "a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, the one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty" (p. 188)<sup>34</sup>, glowing with "unnatural" light in which the reader recognizes unique traits of Usher's painting, the light which, like all art in its highest refinement, has no external sources and becomes self-contained and abstract - originates from the artist's imagination and exists for its own sake. The narrator reads passages from "Mad Trist" of Sir Lancelot Canning, a work of "uncouth and unimaginative prolixity", "the only book immediately at hand". Yet in the condensation of the spiritual and the poetic - in Roderick's presence ("a whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity"), the simple words of the mere romance acquire the power of converting themselves into immediate

<sup>34</sup> In Poe's review of Longfellow's ballads we read: "There are points of a tempest which afford the loftiest and truest poetical themes - points in which pure poetry is found, or better still, beauty heightened into the sublime by terror" ("The Works...", vol. VI, pp. 157-158).

physical effects. It is not surprising to find that in the climactic scene of the tale, the "key-note", "some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn"<sup>35</sup> is an elaborated version of an essentially musical effect of refrain - the images of the text are echoed by the sounds of Madeline's movements in the coffin. It may not be without significance that the motion of Roderick's body is easily associated with the regular pulsating beat of the metronome.

I saw that his lips trembled as if he were murmuring inaudibly. His head had dropped upon his breast - yet I knew that he was not asleep... The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea - for he rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. [...] I leaped to my feet; but the measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed. (pp. 189-190)

In the act of artistic creation, Roderick creates reality itself, "[...] as if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell [...]". The last of the poets is the poet of the extreme. The absolute and the perfect realization of his ideal is the "materialization" of death - art and spirit become one, "[...] with a low moaning cry (lady Madeline) fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother".

And thus the narrator's vision is accomplished. Roderick was his guide or his "usher" to the "precipitous brink" of the poet's ideal. He alone "survives the wreck" in coming back to the world of reason and logic, in which causes and effects can be considered separately and rationally accounted for - "I found myself crossing the old causeway" (the choice of the word "causeway" is evidently not accidental). The "blood-red moon" is the first natural source of light while "the deep and dank tarn [...] closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher"".

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<sup>35</sup> The Philosophy of Composition, *ibid.*, p. 43.