

Psychoanalysis of *The Fall of the House of Usher* from the Perspective of Freud's Personality Structure Theory

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Abstract: *The Fall of the House of Usher* is one of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous horror stories. Although there are many external circumstances and other causes that lead to the death of the novel's protagonist Roderick Usher, the character's own psychological breakdown is the greatest causative factor. Therefore, this paper uses Freud's personality structure theory to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the psychopathic psychology of Roderick Usher, and to explore the root causes of his mental breakdown. Then this paper reveals his inevitable eventual death, and finally discusses its warning implications for society.

Keywords: Sigmund Freud; Personality Structure Theory; Allan Poe; The Fall of the House of Usher.

1. Introduction

Allan Poe was "excellent at writing about the variations of human feelings such as remorse and terror," according to Zhou Zuoren. (Yang and Li 160). He depicts the characters' entire journey from psychopathy to mental collapse by examining the unconscious and subconscious mental operations in the most secret area of the human brain. He created a distinct Poe-style character and was the first author in the annals of American literature to view the mentally ill as the novel's protagonist.

A typical example is Roderick Usher, the protagonist of Allan Poe's most well-known Gothic horror novel *The Fall of Usher House*. This novel portrays the tragic fate of Roderick Usher and Madeline, the twin brother and sister of the fallen aristocrat who are cut off from the outside world. The story is set in a desolate, gloomy, and terrifying ancient estate. As the final survivor, Roderick Usher is weak-willed, morbidly minded, and has displayed these traits when faced with terror. Moreover, his sister Madeline endured a protracted period of acute sickness and tonic syncope. In order to deal with his mental illness, Roderick invited his friend to accompany him in the house. But it made no difference to his distorted psychology. He decided to bury Madeline alive instead. In the middle of a stormy night, his sister, dressed in robes with blood, attempted to escape from the vault's coffin and fell hard inward upon him. Then both brother and sister fell to the ground and died. The ancient House of Usher fell in the storm as well.

The novel has attracted a large number of discussions. In addition to the analysis of the novel's style and narrative aesthetics, most of the comments focus on the three protagonists of the novel, including Roderick Usher, Lady Madeline and the narrator "I", to explore the motivations of these characters and the ideologies that underlie them. For example, Marita Nadal, drawing on the trauma theory and Freud's concept of "uncanny", believed that Roderick was entangled by distant and repressed historical memories, which could not be recovered through rational efforts, but secretly impacted his present (Nadal 178). Another example is that from the perspective of feminism, some researchers thought that Lady Madeline's resurrection from the dead in the coffin is the exclusion and negation of the patriarchy represented by her brother Roderick and the narrator "I" (Ge 73). For another

example, Ronald Bieganowski argued that the purpose of the first-person narrator "I" in *The Fall of the House of Usher* is not to reveal the truth, but to try to tell those unreasonable things in vain, hence "I" belongs to the "self-consuming" narrator (Bieganowski 175).

Moreover, his unconventional psychology has attracted the attention of many scholars. From start to finish, the book is filled with a terrifying atmosphere. This atmosphere is conveyed by the mood of the characters as well as through the place itself. Roderick's spirit will likewise fall apart with the ultimate demise of the House of Usher. In order to explore the origin of Usher's abnormality and give a more thorough and in-depth knowledge of the hero's mental collapse, this study applies Sigmund Freud's Personality Structure theory.

2. Freud's Theory of Personality Structure

Freud's psychoanalytic personality structure, which is a science of understanding human motivation, personality, and spiritual activities, focuses on and extensively explores the unconscious field of human spiritual activities and has had a significant influence on many areas of contemporary western society (Cheng 7).

Freud thought that the id, ego, and super-ego made up the entire personality structure. The instinctual self, the most fundamental and basic aspect of personality, is the id among them. It symbolizes the most fundamental desires of people and is the foundation of the soul. It is made up of animal impulses, particularly those related to sexuality. Every human activity is actually driven by or internally motivated by sexual instinct, which is a powerful psychological force that shapes human behavior. (Ma 343). Freud pointed out that Id did not know what is value, what is good and evil, and what is morality (Freud 129). As can be observed, the id merely needs to abide by the Pleasure Principle in order to satisfy the wants and is not need to take outside circumstances into account.

The ego needs to follow the Reality principle at the intermediate level. It serves as a bridge between the id and the outside world, enabling people to experience constraints and limitations when seeking enjoyment in the outside world. The ego gives rise to the super-ego. It is the moralized self and it upholds the Moral Principle. The super-ego, according to Freud, is the embodiment of all moral restrictions (Huang 76).

The super-ego is governed by moral principles that can control human conduct and force it to follow social norms because it is a conscious component of the human body structure. These three work together to create an united whole. Through their good cooperation, people can maintain a healthy spirit, satisfy their basic needs and objectives, and encourage themselves to achieve their own goals. On the contrary, it will put people in an aberrant state, which will affect their psychology and personalities.

In actuality, the three psychic apparatuses are distinct entities with some overlap. A person's overall personality and way of life might be influenced through dynamic interactions with them. The biologically based id, psychologically based ego, and socially based super-ego are all parts of the personality structure. Freud compared the id, ego, and super-ego to three horses pulling a cart that can only be moved by the three horses working together as a team. These three psychological devices are linked and engage in dynamic interactions with one another. Conflicts between the id and the super-ego that are influenced by the ego are what make up the personality. In order for the personality to advance, the imbalance between these three psychic apparatuses is brought into new harmony by the ego defense.

According to Freud, the human body is a sophisticated energy system, and the energy that governs how the personality structure functions is known as mental energy. There is a specific amount of energy that the personality obtains; if the super-ego controls the most of the energy, the person will act morally; if the ego controls the majority of the energy, the person will act practically; The person's behaviors will be impulsive if the majority of their energy is still in their id. Instinct provides the psychological ability to influence the makeup of the personality. Instinctual drives provide the mental force that shapes the personality's structural makeup. Unconscious instincts drive human behavior, and the disposition and flow of instincts in each of the three components of personality determine what a person does psychologically. The dynamic system of personality is formed by the dispersion and transmission of instincts. The ego's role in the dynamic system of personality is to maintain equilibrium between innate inclinations and reality while appeasing the id and super-ego. According to Freud, "the poor super-ego serves three severe masters and dose what it can bring their claims and demands into harmony with one another... Its three tyrannical masters are the external world, the super-ego, and the id."

Roderick Usher was placed in an extreme environment by Allan Poe. His deplorable and isolating living conditions, along with the imbalanced ego, id, and super-ego personality structures, caused psychological abnormality, personality distortion, and death as his unavoidable and final freedom.

3. Psychoanalysis of Roderick Usher

In the novel *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the unhealthy development of the personality structure is precisely what leads to Roderick Usher's spirit collapsing from inside. Since they were young children, Roderick Usher and his twin sister Madeline had resided in a remote old mansion. They were accompanied only by attendants and no other relatives. At the beginning of the novel, it describes the bleak environment around the ancient building, such as "the bleak walls", "the vacuum eye-like windows", "a few white trunks of decayed trees". Roderick persuaded his friend to come along so he could get his sickness under control. He described his illness

and psychological concern in the letter. Via the friend's first-person narration, the entire story depicts the tragedy of Roderick and Madeline. Living in a deserted old mansion without the company of relatives has planted seeds for his mental disorder. His tripartite personality structure is unbalanced, which is a significant factor in his personality split.

3.1. The Id of Roderick Usher

Usher was defenseless due to his imprisonment and repulsive living environment. Just the old house and the "prostrating power" could accompany him throughout the day. In addition, Usher has sunk into a swamp of madness due to a lack of love. Environment-related potential mental variety causes have an impact on Usher's heart, which represents the imbalance among the ego, id, and super-ego. Sexual instincts in particular cannot be satiated, and as a result, the urgency of these desires to be satisfied increases rather than weakens or disappears.

The id, which is a symbol for unbridled desire, has no concept of morality and good and evil. The instinctual impulse must be let out, and that is the sole content. Usher's id pursues immediate bodily pleasure in accordance with the Pleasure Principle. Its power currently outweighs that of the ego and super-ego by a wide margin. It cannot be suppressed by the super-ego, which stands for restriction and prohibition, and the ego, which represents wisdom and caution. The id of desire is in charge. In order to accomplish its objective, it must overcome all challenges and impediments. Usher and his sister became involved in incest as a result of the id's overindulgence. Although Usher's demands were satisfied in terms of his sexual urges, it was only temporary. He craved fleeting joy in order to experience temporary pleasure, but afterward he was forced to experience greater levels of fear, worry, and guilt than the previous "prostrating power" in the old house. Because he will brutally punish himself and make himself miserable via self-indulgence and super-ego.

3.2. The Ego of Roderick Usher

The id is what propels the ego. The ego is tempted and compelled to comply with the instinctual id's desires. Usher needs to momentarily satiate his sexual inclinations. Due to the id's fleeting power, the ego is temporarily subjugated by it throughout the process of reconciliation. And this is shown in his behavior toward his sister, which is indicative of incest.

In addition, if one is able to interact with the outside world, one must take into account the exterior reality and represent the opinions of the outside world. The frightening and solitary living environment described above is Usher's outward world. His sister is the only person he can fully express his sentiments to. Usher may have a mental illness, so even though his ego must be aware of these facts, it is challenging for him to make an accurate assessment of the outside world in order to mediate effectively and sensibly. In addition to having incest with his sister, he also disregarded his duties as a brother by failing to take care of her needs and burying her alive instead. Usher's moral judgment has deteriorated and become extremely disorganized. The owner of the outer world, ego, is aware of its requirements yet unable to successfully apply them.

3.3. The Super-ego of Roderick Usher

The super-ego forces the ego to behave morally or under the weight of conscience. And it creates the ingrained

behavioral pattern and supervises, controls, and intimidates the ego. It will severely blame and punish the ego if it deviates from the expected pattern. There can only be kinship between brothers and sisters, according to the typical pattern of super-ego emotional conduct. But this norm was disregarded by Usher's ego, which jumped from the realm of kinship to the field of love. The super-ego's ethics and moral standards were gravely violated by behavior involving incest, which was also a disrespect to the super-ego's lofty ideals. The ego did not work well for the super-ego, who became dissatisfied. So Usher was surrounded by terror and guilt while being condemned by conscience and morality. When he noticed his sister Madeline moving far across the room, "he had buried his face in his hands, and I could only perceive that a far more than ordinary wanness had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears."

Usher is constantly reminded by Madeline of the serious sin he has done. She ceases to be his sister and instead serves as a reminder of his immorality. Usher is unable to hold back his tears of sorrow and remorse. His underlying mental disorder is becoming more obvious as well. "His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision." He is limited to eating the insipid foods. He exclusively dresses in certain textures. He feels choked by the floral scent, and his eyes can't stand the light. Only by hearing the sound of string music can he stop feeling scared. He was totally immersed in the abnormal horror as the guilt-related sense of fear and anxiety increased. "I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident, which may operate upon this intolerable agitation of soul. I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect - in terror."

Usher's fantasy painting makes the narrator "I" tremble at the sight of it, shudder the more thrillingly.....knowing not why", and feel "an intensity of intolerable awe". Without outlets, torches, or other artificial light sources, the painting's vast extent is buried deep down, but it nonetheless possesses "a ghastly and inappropriate splendor." Also, he turned the passionate waltzes into bizarre works. He was tortured to death by his guilt, worry, and anxiety. The ego tries to alter and eradicate the cause of this evil because it can no longer stand the existing quo. He buried Madeline alive in order to get away from the abime. Nevertheless, the super-ego was equally irritated by this action, so it inflicted a terrible punishment on himself: Usher was killed by his sister after she escaped from the coffin.

4. Conclusion

The French poet Baudelaire called Allan Poe a psychotic writer (Chang 152). Poe's decision to make the mentally sick the book's protagonist is neither random or done just to amuse readers. The ideal works must be the pinnacle of real life in every period. He paid particular attention to, painstakingly investigated, and in-depth evaluated the deviant inner world of persons in the social life of the United States at the time in order to inform readers and forewarn future generations. Then, using his own words, he recreated this in the form of short stories.

Usher's personality is a highly condensed representation of the many psychopaths that exist in society, and his living environment is a microcosm of everyday life. To analyze and

record the inner changes occurring in the survivors during this time, Poe drastically pushed the characters and setting to their limits. But although reality is not as terrible as fiction, many people have become or are on the verge of becoming Usher. Everyone experiences some type of mental illness, even though the symptoms vary slightly, since equilibrium is difficult to obtain because the three forces of the ego, id, and super-ego in the personality structure are constantly at opposition with one another and are not coordinated. Because of Poe's incredibly frightening objective environment, readers fully and truly comprehend that a decent environment, such as the home environment, the educational environment, and the general social environment, must be helpful to the healthy development of personality and psychology.

Only by developing an environment where moral ethics may act as a guide and a warning, and where morality can decrease the blocking and distorting effects of unfavorable surroundings on the development of psychology and personality can a tragedy like Usher be avoided. Additionally, morality can play a role in promoting the development of favorable environments. A person still has to grow up healthy if the unfavorable environment cannot be changed, which places additional demands on his or her capacity to coordinate and operate psychologically. It is important for the ego to coordinate the interaction between the id and the super-ego, and to have the ability to make morally sound decisions about how to behave in light of the external world. The super-ego's role in providing guidance and warnings should also be highlighted in order to better manage the ego. Only by fostering a healthy environment, striving to achieve as much balance in the tripartite personality structure, and accounting for both internal and external factors can the person's mental health and personality integrity be reached.

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