Becoming “so terribly altered”:
Reading transformations of the self in “The Fall of the House of Usher”

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Contents

Abstract

In this thesis, I try to situate the effects of the text, specifically on the reader, by looking at ideas of transformation. My primary investigation is to determine the extent of the effect on the reader and the reader's reality, and if it is possible to alter the reader by inducing a transformation. I argue that transformation is possible as a "becoming". Transformation depends on the text's reflection and verisimilitude to reality, which aids introspection and the consequent transitioning toward a new identity.

I confront these concerns via close analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher". Whereas critics have read Poe while considering authorial intent and biography, and while limiting effect to emotion, I argue that the reader determines meaning and effect which can impose on identity. This inquiry deals directly with the interaction between the text and the reader, while acknowledging language as the common ground and means of communicating meaning and effect between them. Arnold van Gennep's theory of liminality provides a framework for transition, which I apply to character and reader becoming. And, it explains the interstitial space between the textual realm and the reader's reality.

My close analysis of Poe's characters elucidates these tasks as I engage the text as a reflection of the reader's development, and as the narrator's interactions with the Usher siblings mimics the reader's relation to the text. Mikhail Bakhtin's polyphonic theory depicts the text as life-like and appropriate for this exchange. I consider metafiction for its ability to dissemble illusory distinctions between the text and reality, and as it induces consciousness in the reader. I have also placed Poe in conversation with Julia Kristeva for her insights into the psychoanalytic process of abjection, and as she illustrates the revision of identity.

Much of this project deals with finding unity and reconciling the inherently contradictory elements of human existence. Ultimately, I consider how the process of textual interaction contributes to potential reader "becoming". And, I argue that becoming and identity are intimately dependent on self-consciousness of the vastness of human potential, as well as the dissolution of the very borders designed to limit and make sense of that vastness.

Introduction

In his essay "Kafka and his Precursors", Jorge Luis Borges speaks of new texts so exceptional that they alter the meaning of older texts via their fresh perspective. [1] Borges considers Kafka's works to have this effect, where they inspire new dialogue of older texts and ideas given their own unanticipated meaning.[2] According to Borges, Kafka's writing effectively disrupts time and linearity, where older texts bend and transform in relevance and meaning according to his ideas.

While Borges reads Kafka's writing as unprecedented and exceptional in this regard, I consider the possibility of re-reading Poe in view of contemporary theory with the expectation of finding potentially unexplored meaning in his work. Applying Borges' idea loosely, to re-read Poe is to inevitably read the old with new perspective given the limitless intersections of new and recycled meaning that intertextuality makes possible. In this sense, Borges' notion is always applicable, since the original perspective of a contemporary moment accompanies every interpretation of a text. I aim to read Poe anew outside of the limitations of authorial intent, yet still acknowledging the influence of the vast corpus of criticism dedicated to him.

In this thesis, I have set out to explore the effects a text produces by looking at Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher". As Gothic texts expressly undertake to stimulate effect in their characters and readers, Poe's work suits my inquiry.[3] Given my interests in this paper for effect – especially as it manifests between frames of reality – I emphasise Eric Savoy's account of Poe's work in his paper "The Rise of the American Gothic". Savoy homes in on the Gothic genre's production of effect and suggests that Poe's work typically induces, as its effect, a heightened sense of claustrophobia.[4]

Poe's "The Premature Burial" clearly relates an obsession with anticipating the stifling atmosphere of the grave, and "The Pit and the Pendulum" deliberates the descending razor-edged pendulum and constricting walls of an Inquisitorial torture chamber.[5] Both depict claustrophobia induced by physical spaces, and address the effects of the constricting, obsessive and fear-riddled mind.

"The Tell-Tale Heart" maintains this trend as its narrator fumbles to prove his own sanity, while divulging the details of the groundless murder of his elderly neighbour. His own stifling consciousness haunts him and forces him to confess his crime.[6] "The Oval Portrait" then depicts an artist retreating to a secluded tower to work on the portrait of his young bride. Neglected throughout the sitting, the painting to which the artist has relinquished the bride's life eventually subsumes her; trapping her between some form of

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[1] Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and his Precursors", in *Selected Non-Fictions,* ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne J. Levine and Eliot Weinberger (New York, Viking: 1999), 365.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Eric Savoy, "The Rise of American Gothic", in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 181.
[4] Savoy, "American Gothic", 181.
[5] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Premature Burial", in *Selected Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).
Edgar Allan Poe, "The Pit and the Pendulum", in *Selected Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).
[6] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart", in *Selected Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

existence and non-existence.[7] This entrapment also signifies the oppression of loneliness and powerlessness, by consequence of the artist refusing to acknowledge her existence as he fails to differentiate between the real and the imagined.

Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" also epitomises this effect. The narrator journeys to the cloistered and decaying Usher mansion to console Roderick, his childhood friend, of a mental affliction exacerbated by the steady decline of his sister Madeline.[8] And so, her inevitable passing leaves Roderick with a swelling psychosis. After Madeline is prematurely buried, she makes a haunting return that reifies Roderick's guilt and fears. The tale reaches its denouement as Madeline drags Roderick down in a deathly embrace, and as the fleeing narrator watches the Usher mansion crumble into the lake before it.

Evidently, these characters suffer the claustrophobia of being buried alive, of confinement to the ancestral home and of their stifling thoughts, not forgetting their inflamed anxiety at losing control of themselves and their surroundings. However, I argue that Savoy's interpretation limits the effects of the text to the production of emotion; of fear. Instead, I aim to prove that effect can extend further into the selfhood of the reader.

To this end, I consider what connects the text and the reader. Angela Carter, in her essay "Through a Text Backwards", provides commentary in relation to Poe's work when she suggests that despite his paper-thin writing his readers are still affected:

> His theatricality ensures we know all the time that the scenery is cardboard, the blade of the axe is silver paint on papier maché, the men and women in the stories unreal, two-dimensional stock characters, yet still we shiver.[9]

Carter emphasises the polarity of the real and the imagined, as she iterates the text's ability to affect the reader's reality despite its imagined contents. This effect occurs, according to Savoy, when the reader becomes immersed in the textual world and increases proximity to its imagined contents. [10] The loss of distance and objectivity makes the textual world seem that much more real to the reader, stimulating a response. As such, the very real emotions readers experience and their sense of what is *real* depends on what they believe to be real; as opposed to the textual world being *real* or signifying reality in any significant way.[11]

This sense of *real*, and reality, is linked to meaning and effect via language, since language communicates across realms of reality. I argue that meaning leads to effect, and that interaction with reality via language produces both. Humanity communicates meaning and interacts with reality via language. In his essay "On

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[7] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Oval Portrait", in *Selected Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).
[8] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher", in *Selected Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).
All subsequent references to "The Fall of the House of Usher" will be signalled parenthetically in-text.
[9] Angela Carter, "Through a Text Backwards" in *Shaking A Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings,* ed. Jennifer Uglow, vol. 3 (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 482.
[10] Savoy appropriates this idea from Slavoj Žižek, who considers this interaction with the Real in relation to art and portraiture.
Savoy, "American Gothic", 181.
[11] Ibid.

Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense", Friedrich Nietzsche contends that language is a tool used to define and categorise interactions with reality but is not connected to reality itself and does not refer directly to reality.[12]

Nietzsche elaborates that the meaning attributed has no connection to "pure truth" or the "thing itself" but is instead images or "metaphors" that are attribute to interactions with reality.[13] Language is the endless possibility of these metaphors that "designates the relations of things to men". [14] The original metaphor of an experience inspires infinite derivative metaphors, until the origin is forgotten.[15] Nietzsche confirms language is the metaphor that trails behind reality, and that words encompass innumerable concepts including yet surpassing the "unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin".[16]

Intertextuality offers a framework that makes sense of language – as the culmination of metaphors and meaning – which demonstrates the necessity of influence and interdependence in the creation of meaning. Looking at the historical progression of the theory, intertextuality pinpoints the location of meaning.[17] After having undergone periods of determined adherence to either the diachronic or synchronic character of language, presently it is accepted that meaning lies liminally between the diachronic, being informed by past utilization and overall evolution, and the synchronic where language is defined by its availability in a contemporary moment and context.[18] Meaning also depends on the combination of signs, the proximity of a sign to another in association, and the references of a reader based in personal experience and knowledge.[19] These variables determine that texts hold no stable meaning, but instead have endless potential meaning.[20]

The meaning that arises is fleeting, residing only in the moment of utterance or activation; utterance occurs in context of enunciation. Julia Kristeva posits that while enunciation is found within the quality of the word and belonging to the word as a characteristic, utterance reigns supreme in the production of meaning for its relation to the speaker who it abandons almost immediately.[21] I draw on the concept to show that utterance is valued for its relation to the speaker without enduring allegiance to the speaker, which iterates that meaning is independent and transitory.

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[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense", in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), 55.
[13] Nietzsche, "Truth and Lie", 55.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Graham Allen, "Dialogism to Intertextuality", in *Intertextuality*, 2nd ed., The New Critical Idiom (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 36.
[18] Graham Allen, "The Relational Word: Saussure", in *Intertextuality*, 2nd ed., The New Critical Idiom (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 9, 18.
[19] Allen, "Relational Word", 9-10.
[20] Allen, Dialogism to Intertextuality", 36.
[21] I have not applied Bakhtin's usage of utterance directly and have instead used Kristeva's derivative concepts of utterance and enunciation.
Ibid, 39.

Poe's narrator illustrates this distinction between the terms in his description of Roderick's speech as having a "hollow-sounding enunciation" yet a "self-balanced and perfectly modulated guttural utterance" (81). The narrator detects that Roderick's enunciation seems empty and lifeless; he merely regurgitates unengaged language. Yet, Roderick's utterance is "self-balanced", and meaningful and emphatic in its "guttural" quality, because his association and the narrator's interpretation is activating.

A repository or matrix of intertextual references accommodates all meaning, unattached to any single being but available to all interpreters of language.[22] Even though the interpreter does not possess meaning it does stem from interpretation. And, to further show that meaning stems from interpretation and that intent does not limit effect, I argue that authorial intent is not predominant.[23]

The demise of the priority of authorial intent has been prevailing opinion since Roland Barthes' 1967 essay *The Death of the Author*, in which he diverted from the long-standing tradition attributing all meaning to the intentions and biographies of authors.[24] Barthes argues that language houses meaning, specifically in active interaction and interpretation.[25] He confirms this when he says, "there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now."[26] The moment of enunciation is the instance in which language is activated for interpretation in the eternally unfolding moments of the present, regardless of original intention that lies deactivated in the past.[27] The meaning that erupts is ephemeral since "writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it," and so is constantly in a state of transformation.[28]

Using Barthes' argument for the decline of authorial intent, I show that the reader is responsible for activating meaning. Additionally, I suggest that the psychology of the author similarly has little impact on the activation of language and meaning. Contributing to discourse on the topic, Marie Bonaparte interprets Poe's work as an expression of his subconscious desires and fears, and further diagnoses him with a longing for his deceased mother, stepmother and young wife.[29] Angela Carter's parodies Bonaparte's ideas, in her short story "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe", while Maggie Tonkin elaborates on the implications of this parody in her article "The 'Poe-etics' of Decomposition". Tonkin argues that the parody exposes Bonaparte's desperate attempt to pin a psychobiographical reading on Poe, via his

[22] Allen, Dialogism to Intertextuality", 39.
[23] My mention of authorial intent throughout refers to the influence of intended meaning, determined by the author or whoever frames language before it is interpreted. In the example of the "Fall of the House of Usher", the narrator also demonstrates this concept as the one who frames the portrayal of the Ushers according to his own interpretation and as he wants it interpreted. I argue that ultimately meaning and effect is determined by the interpreter, despite authorial intent.
[24] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977).
[25] Barthes, "Death of the Author", 143-145.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 147.
[29] Maggie Tonkin, "The 'Poe-etics' of Decomposition: Angela Carter's 'The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe' and the Reading-Effect", *Women's Studies* 33, no. 1 (2004): 2, 4-6.

seemingly obvious necrophilial complex and obsession with the macabre, despite there being more probable explanations.[30]

As such, Bonaparte fails to read his work as an unexceptional product of its cultural moment, in which "the beautiful dead woman was part of the décor."[31] Similarly, Rebecca Munford emphasises that a predominantly male narrative upstaged the historical moment. [32] She argues that Poe, as author, abuses the image of the decomposing female muse as a means onto whom to enact his fantasies and simultaneously confront the late nineteenth-century fear of menacing, uncontrollable and sexually deviant femininity.[33] Although authorial intent, psychobiography and historical context might influence meaning, they do not predetermine or limit all possible meaning, which is ultimately decided by the reader and her interpretation.

The author is, instead, credited with linguistic arrangement. Poe's words convey the narrator's encounter with the Usher home as "an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil."(76) Even though Poe is responsible for the linguistic arrangement it is the reader that determines meaning, so that the "utter depression" is felt as the dashes weigh down heavily on either side of the "—the bitter lapse into every-day life—", emphasising the sinking into the depressive and stagnant mundane. The "hideous dropping off of the veil" teeters off the edge of the sentence, iterating the liberating yet horrifying realisation.

Carter goes on to problematise Poe's verbose and overdetermined style by suggesting that in order to make sense of his writing and find substantial meaning, it is necessary to purposefully read his texts backwards. [34] Meaning and effect both depend on the reader's reception and interpretation of language; where effect manifests from meaning. Interestingly, Poe's texts are still overwhelmed by his repute, since it is easy to complacently read his writing with prevailing interpretation and intended meaning in mind. Despite this, passive interaction still corroborates the reader's sway in dictating meaning albeit to reinforce predetermined opinion.

Savoy's exploration of a claustrophobia depicts effect limited by emotion, where Bonaparte considered psychobiography and Carter, Tonkin and Munford argued for historical and social context. However, having shown that reader interpretation dictates meaning production, I argue that there are no limits on meaning and effect which can further produce change in the reader. Reading Poe's characters' interactions within the text as they resemble the reader's interactions with the text itself – the text as pastiche of reality – I consider Poe's inclusion of introspective and self-conscious content and anticipate a similar introspective effect and becoming for the reader.

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[30] Tonkin, "The 'Poe-etics' of Decomposition", 3.
[31] Ibid, 10.
[32] Rebecca Munford, "Poe, Baudelaire and the Decomposing Muse", in *Decadent Daughters and Monstrous Mothers: Angela Carter and European Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 86-87.
[33] Munford, "Poe, Baudelaire and the Decomposing Muse", 86-87.
[34] I later unpack Poe's role as a literary critic. His insistence that a tale should be written with the denouement in mind also confirms Carter's claims here.
Carter, "Through a Text Backwards", 482.

Poe is influential to the self-consciousness of the Gothic genre, with Jerrold Hogle claiming Poe contributed a Freudian "sense of the unconscious as a deep repository of very old, infantile, and repressed memories or impulses, the archaic underworld of the self."[35] In this paper, I am interested in examining whether Poe's characters' confrontation with their inner-selves is at all related to the reader's own potential toward introspection and self-knowledge. Whilst premising this undertaking on the text's reflection and simulation of reality, and while unpacking the relationship between the text's concerns and its effects, I claim that the reader experiences effect. And, amongst these effects, I anticipate the redefining of reader identity.

Liminal theory outlines the milestones via which this transition is possible, where existing identity gives way to the stimulation of a newer revised identity. Liminality also refers more simply to interstitial space, or a border, which I use to elucidate the space between the imagined text and the reader's reality. Arnold van Gennep's anthropological study, *Les Rites de Passage*, informs my utilisation of the notion.[36] Van Gennep shows that the liminal creates borders of and for the self as it gives definition to that space between old and new identity. Chaos and confusion characterise this space which is not fully the new or old identification.

Savoy relates this interstitial space to Poe's characters directly, "Obsessive melancholics all, Poe's people surrender their defences in the conventional symbolic order and slice inexorably toward the chaotic and abjected Real."[37] Poe's characters forsake the monotony of the mundane for the unwieldy in-between, a rejected space that allows them to access similarly rejected aspects of the self. Whereas van Gennep offers a characterisation of the in-between, Julia Kristeva's take on abjection, in "Approaching Abjection", details the sequential operation in which identity unfolds within that transitional moment.[38] In abjection, it is the process of demarcating the boundaries of the self, by determining its preferences and aversions, which underwrites the creation of identity. [39] I apply abjection to both Poe's characters and the reader, to highlight similarities and to determine what disrupts identity and what triggers the creation of new identity.

The Gothic genre elementally confronts the abject which haunts characters psychologically or physically.[40] It is in abjection, and in this position that characters and readers are forced to confront the psychologically repressed parts of self or society, their unconscious or controversial desires.[41] Characters are often caught between a bureaucratically flawed past and by a present that both rejects and is possessed by the past. [42] The suffocating Usher bloodline, the weight of conformity to tradition, and an

[35] Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture", in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.
[36] Arnold van Gennep, "Classification of Rites", in *The Rites of Passage*, eds. Gabrielle L. Caffee and Monika B. Vizedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
[37] Savoy, "American Gothic", 181.
[38] Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", in *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver, rev. ed., European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
[39] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 230.
[40] Hogle, "Introduction", 2.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid, 3.

imposing hierarchical and classist past weighs on Madeline and Roderick, the sole surviving Usher heirs. These typically Gothic themes force characters to abject what has consistently contributed to identity, and to define identity anew. It is in relation to the characters' transitioning, that I later argue that the reader undergoes a similar becoming and redefining of identity.

"the *physique* of the gray walls": Chapter outline

Poe's text portrays character reflection as the "rank miasma of the tarn" permeates beyond the text so that its waters become a mirror for the reader, inducing a similar introspection:

> I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge (76, 91)

The narrator reads the tarn thereby giving language and meaning to his experience. Pondering the tarn's reflections physically affects him and causes him to "shudder", just as attributed meaning affects the reader of Poe's tale. The interest of this paper is the effect of the text on the reader, as the reader determines the meaning derived. And so, I argue that there are no restrictions on effect, and that there is consequently the potential for an effect on the reader's selfhood.

Chapter 1 sets out my theoretical concerns, laying out the foundational ideas and literature I use and interpret. In it, I unpack the foundational theories that support my arguments in the following chapters. After reminding my reader of the ways Poe attempts to enforce restrictions on the meaning of his works, I turn to Bakhtin who emphasises the life-likeness of the text and characters.[43] The realism of polyphony and dialogism frames the text as a parallel reality that the reader becomes immersed in, and the characters as fully-fledged human beings to interact with.[44]

Van Gennep's liminal theory then provides a framework for the interstitial, which connects the imagined realm of the text and the reader's reality. It also explains the procedures of transition and becoming, which I later relate to character and reader identity.

Chapter 2 begins the close analysis wherein I consider the locus of effect; which connects the reflections in the tarn with the "thrilling" "shudder" the narrator experiences. Effect liminally traverses the imagined text and the reader's reality, as a result of the reader's interpretation. I consider metafiction as a case study in the production of effect and self-consciousness, as it draws attention to frames of reality and

[43] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel and its Treatment in Critical Literature", in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, vol. 8, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 40.

[44] Fully-fledged characters are suggested in opposition to static object-like characters of the monologic text, who exist as simplistic representations of the author's intent.
Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 7.

insists on consideration of reader relation to the immersive text. It shows how frames delineate reality, and how the rupturing of frames forces a consciousness on the reader.

Chapter 3 homes in on identity. I read the Usher siblings as a single being forced to confront itself as I consider what disrupts identity and allows the creation of new identity. Kristeva's theory of abjection details a revolt of being stimulated by a confrontation with the horrific and abjected parts of identity. The haunting "remodelled and inverted images" (77) in the tarn portrays this uncanny encounter with the concurrently familiar and unfamiliar self. I read the characters as undergoing abjection, as the reader undergoes similar abjection via her interactions with the text.

D. H. Lawrence maintains that the liminal becoming is an essentially human task, that Poe himself underwent. He says that Poe was "Doomed to seethe down his soul in a great, continuous convulsion of disintegration, and doomed to register the process… For the human soul must suffer its own disintegration, *consciously*, if ever it is to survive."[45] I extend this burden and necessity to Poe's characters, considering their humanity fully, as a possible source of insight into reader identity, transitioning, potential consciousness and the "under or mystic current of [their] meaning" (85).

This thesis seeks to explore the extent of effect on the reader and the reader's reality. I argue that these effects exceed the mere emotional manipulation implied by critics, and that the text can trespass the reader's selfhood. The text's faithfulness to reality and the characters' life-like quality blurs the borders between the imagined text and the reader's reality, making immersion and self-consciousness possible. And, much as critics have argued that authorial intent and biography contribute essential meaning, I show that the reader ultimately determines the meaning and effect of a text. With this responsibility in mind, I aim to show that self-consciousness, induced by the text, can incite transitioning in the reader toward the redefinition of identity.

[45] David Herbert Lawrence, "Edgar Allan Poe", in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen, Studies in Classic American Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66.
Emphasis in the original.

Chapter 1
"I at length drank in the hideous import of his words": Language and interpretation

"with the *dénouement* constantly in view": Poe in perspective

As Edgar Allan Poe's pensive narrator trudges through the isolated expanse leading to the Usher family château, he contemplates the intolerable weight of the horror and melancholy that the scene has induced and which has begun to devour him:

> I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit… I looked upon the scene before me… upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. (76)[46]

In attempting to make sense of the source of his anxiety, the narrator is taken aback by the eerie influence of the environment over his state of mind. He attributes an "insufferable gloom", "an utter depression of soul", "an unredeemed dreariness of thought" and "shadowy fancies that crowded upon [him]" to the environment of the Usher home. What I hope to do in this chapter, is set out the theoretical framework and concepts that will contribute toward my arguments regarding the effects of the text and the defining of identity in the following chapters. I consider the decline of authorial intent, and the consequent dominance of reader interpretation in determining meaning and effect. And, I look to polyphony as it frames the text as reflective of modes of being and life outside the text, and to liminal theory as a means of organising the otherwise illusive moment of transformation.

[46] Emphasis in the original.

I begin by looking to Poe for his insistence on the influence of authorial intent, which I argue against throughout the thesis. In his 1846 paper "The Philosophy of Composition", Poe shares a compilation of what he considers to be the features of well-produced and effective poetry, while offering an almost scientific description of the measures taken toward his own "The Raven".[47] In his paper, he analyses the intentionality behind literary production and insists on the construction of the desired effect. According to Poe "It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation".[48] Poe corroborates with reports from Charles Dickens that "Godwin wrote his 'Caleb Williams' backwards", so as to emphasise that the effect and authority of Godwin's narrative resulted from his intentionality.[49] Poe insists on predetermining every detail, preventing written work from being bereft of plot development and purpose.

Poe is relevant for his awareness of effect and for his dual role as author and critic. To emphasise my argument against the predominance of authorial intent, I demonstrate that reading a text with Poe's intent in mind limits potential meaning and effect. And, that contrary to his intentions, the structures he uses to imbue his work with meaning delimits it.

He departs from any traditional characterisation of author for his atypical, combined identity as both author and literary theorist, which serves to instil his perspective and work with an awareness of structure and effect. From this viewpoint, Poe's work seems conscious of a potential readership's intertextual knowledge. Much of his work depends on direct reference to authors synonymous with the Gothic genre, words that carry the weight of the Gothic mood and mention of typical subject matter foundational to the Gothic setting. Angela Carter suggests that Poe set his tales in grand homes and châteaux that were clearly paper-thin but which still evoke the mood of the genre to his reader.[50]

In Poe's "The Oval Portrait", the château is described as having been rendered in "the fancy of Mrs. Radcliffe".[51] This pays homage to Ann Radcliffe, whose name is synonymous with the horror and Gothic genres, and who designed the "architecture of anxiety" alongside Horace Walpole, predating Poe's conjuring of his own subgenre.[52] The reference brings with it the air of mystery and romance typical of her writing, and makes relevant her novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which is considered an archetype of Gothic fiction.

Here Poe's intertextual name-dropping works to substantiate his tales with the mood and weight of every Gothic tale written before his, specifically those in an assumed reader's repository, lessening Poe's burden and allowing him to prioritise other aspects such as the psychological horror that he later became known for.

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[47] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition", in *Edgar Allan Poe,* ed. Philip Van Doren Stern, The Viking Portable Library (New York: The Viking Press, 1945).
[48] Poe, "Philosophy of Composition", 550.
Emphasis in the original.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Carter, "Through a Text Backwards", 482.
[51] Poe, "The Oval Portrait", 188.
[52] Carter, "Through a Text Backwards", 484.

These references aid his verbose style, as he relies on intertextuality for substance where his writing would otherwise seem excessive and empty. His cardboard setting and unrealistic characters still affect his reader because the words he purposefully uses to conjure them act as archetypes, parasitising the meaning of all previous and significant instances of that subject. His confidence in his reader's recognition of his intentions is due to his own awareness of Radcliffe's renown, and his assumption that Radcliffe and her work are essential to the intertextual references of the Gothic genre's readership.

Poe makes constant reference to other literary and artistic works and their authors as well. In "The Fall of the House of Usher", he compares Roderick's artwork to Henry Fuseli's, which brings with it foreboding, a surrealist air and its own Gothic Romanticism. Specifically, Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781) bears themes inherent in "The Fall of the House of Usher" of dreams and the imagination, of voyeurism, as well as of the horror, fear and passion that accompanies eroticism. The narrator further shares an extensive list of Roderick's preferred literary works. In Thomas O. Mabbott's paper "The Books in the House of Usher", he contemplates the significance of the texts mentioned and locates a reference Poe was previously believed to have fabricated.[53] Mabbott suggests that Niccolò Machiavelli's *Belphegor* (1515) appealed to Roderick due to the demoniac elements, with its protagonist lending his name, Roderigo, to him. Being the Spanish version of the name brings with its reference to Roderigo the last king of the Visigoths, whose fate presages Roderick Usher as the last of his own lineage.[54]

Even though Poe's use of intertextuality seems to broaden the scope of potential meaning, it also creates a definite limit. By incessantly emphasising the genre and its tropes, Poe restricts his reader to a specific interaction with his text. Writing solely in the Gothic tradition ensures that Poe's works are primarily interpreted in relation to his difference and distance to other texts of the genre. The direct references in the "The Oval Portrait" force the narrative into the bounds of the Gothic novel and limits it to a related trajectory.

Gothic tropes persevere by consequence of intertextuality that repeatedly makes them available to readers who may not have any lived experience of them. To illustrate, despite depicting castles in the heart of the Apennines, it is possible that neither Poe nor Radcliffe had ever visited the location themselves.[55] This demonstrates the limitation of intertextual reference which forces Poe, Radcliffe and their readers to write and read within the genre's recycled framework. In this way typical tropes of the decrepit bloodline oppressed by memories of its previous splendour and of the haunted castle, as well as considerations of insanity, isolation and imagination persist. The limits of intertextuality are its familiarity, as second-hand or indirect experience, and its foreign nature given there is no first-hand experience of it; language as a metaphor for experience extends to intertextuality. This connection between first-hand experience and the metaphor, the meaning attributed, is foundational to my concerns since I seek to explore the interstitial space between them and how that gap produces an effect on the reader.

[53] Thomas Ollive Mabbott, "The Books in the House of Usher", *Books at Iowa* 19 (1973): 3-7, doi: 10.17077/0006-7474.1059.
[54] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Roderick", https://www.britannica.com/biography/Roderick.
[55] Carter, "Through a Text Backwards", 483-484.

While I argue in this paper that intertextuality is the structure from which unlimited potential meaning derives, I contend here that reading intertextual references within the bounds of authorial intent is restrictive. The reader instead endows the text with meaning and determines how to interact with the text. I turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's polyphonic theory which frames the text as life-like and interactive, and which initiates my argument for textual immersion.

"different voices singing variously on a single theme": Bakhtin

Bakhtin's theories support my argument that immersion allows for the imagined text to affect the reader's reality, and that the reader can interact with the life-like characters toward introspection and self-definition.

In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin argues that certain forms of literature represent human experience better than others, referring specifically to the novel which represents development.[56] He sees it as "the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding."[57]

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* he then argues extensively for the unparalleled qualities of the polyphonic novel specifically, which he values above other genres for its inherent ability to mimic and translate into text the multiperspective quality, inherent contradictions and simultaneity of human existence.[58]The polyphonic text allows for independent characters to voice individual perspectives simultaneously, expressing the variety and contradiction of human interaction, despite their author.[59] It is then possible to read the characters of the "The Fall of the House of Usher", Madeline, Roderick and the narrator, as complete and developed individuals, persisting as voices independent of each other and of Poe. Of the characteristic polyphonic features, its inclusion of the dialogic is essential to this task.

The dialogic refers to the function of language to stimulate dialogue around potential meaning, as opposed to the monologic which merely conveys the static meaning of language.[60] According to Bakhtin, the dialogic manifests when "dialogue penetrates within, into every word of the novel, making it double-voiced, into every gesture, every mimic movement on the hero's face, making it convulsive and anguished".[61] The dialogic opens up the text so that anxiety, sorrow and defiance are read concurrently in Roderick's "overdone cordiality – of the constrained effort of the *ennuyé* man of the world."(80)[62] The dialogic is the manifestation of the human ability to communicate within the self and with others, expressing the complexity of human life and the processes that contribute to human becoming. The

[56] Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel", in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 7.
[57] Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel", 7.
[58] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 6-7, 23-24.
[59] Ibid, 6.
[60] Ibid, 7.
[61] Ibid, 40.
[62] Emphasis in the original.

multiplicity of voices within and outside of the text emphasises the variety of possible meaning to derive from a text, as well as the interactive quality of the polyphonic character. I later base my argument for reader transformation in introspection, which is made possible by this faithfulness to reality.

Overlooking Bakhtin's political concerns and his singular interest in Dostoevsky's texts, I apply his notion of the dialogic to the short story format that I deal with contrary to his own efforts. He explains that the polyphonic genre stands independently but descends from a long line of other genres including serio-comical epics such as Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and as a breakaway from contrastingly monological texts that allow only limited and authorially dictated perspective.[63] I argue that the short story is similarly independent but derivative, hosting polyphonic qualities as evidence of its origins in the novel. The term 'short story' indicates its contingency, that its existence rests on it being abbreviated in comparison to preceding formats. It retains elements of polyphony as evidence of its own becoming and transformation. The short story thus appropriately represents the fragmentary and ephemeral character of human nature and liminality, beyond the characteristics of the polyphonic text.

This thesis consequently contends that there is a possible universality to the unique qualities of polyphony – making no direct claims to official polyphonic status of either Poe's writing or the short story genre that he proffers. I am specifically concerned with Bakhtin's conception of character discourse as an additional voice and perspective concealed within texts, alongside that of author and reader and given the endless possibilities arising from the intertextual matrix. [64] Character discourse is the embodiment of the dialogic, as characters voice their perspectives outside of what the author imposes. Even though Bakhtin does not deem authorial intent irrelevant, his notion of character discourse implies a decline in it and opens inquiry as to where meaning rests in contrast to Poe's claims. Bakhtin shares his interpretation of the concept:

> Dostoevsky… creates not voiceless slaves… but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him. *A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels.* What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world,* combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.[65]

Bakhtin clarifies that part of the dialogicality of Dostoevsky's writing rests in his ability to conjure characters that exist beyond his command over them and which are capable of acting expressly against

[63] Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel", 36.
[64] I use the intertextual matrix repeatedly to refer to all the meaning that can be attributed to language without limitation. The matrix is as elemental as human DNA, configuring language as it is shared, altered and continuously reinterpreted through inescapable genetic collisions both distant and incestuously close. This matrix of intertextual potential also encompasses the synchronic and diachronic, which are structuralist terms that attempt to make sense of the arbitrariness of the signs that bear meaning. Language in its design as a system is synchronic in its instant and contemporaneous availability and is diachronic as it develops over time. The intertextual matrix is essentially dialogic in its constant vacillation between the synchronic and diachronic. I explore this further momentarily.
[65] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 6.
Emphasis in the original.

him. Bakhtin is not hinting at the oncoming decline of authorial intent, he overtly claims throughout that the effect lies within Dostoevsky's efforts. It is merely an unavoidable consequence of reader interpretation and his notion of character discourse that the author is no longer credited with omnipotent authority.

Bakhtin speaks about character discourse as the expression of individual ideology and opinion, and not necessarily about peculiarities of mannerisms or personality. Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's independent characters, "The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalising artistic vision."[66] Character discourse is an enhanced character perspective, and an independent and assertive interpretation of the textual world. In the following chapter I unpack Roderick and the narrator's debate regarding the sentience of their surroundings. Roderick is convinced of the sentience of his surroundings, as the narrator struggles between accepting this sentience and denying the extent of the power of natural energies. Their opposing perspectives drives much of their interaction and contributes to their design as fully-fledged beings.

The question still stands as to where exactly this independent character voice is located? While the meaning an author intends is historically and contextually located, the meaning derived by the reader is in a perpetual state of generation and becoming. Contemporary reader interpretation and creation of meaning account for this "constant renewing of the work" that Bakhtin speaks of, which depends on the synchronic and diachronic qualities of language.[67] Meaning is diachronic in its dependence on how a sign has developed over time, and synchronic in its contemporary usage and its relation to other words in its present arrangement. As I have shown, meaning rests more heavily in reader interpretation. This is especially true since the text lies dormant, as signs and symbols not yet inhabited by meaning, until activated by the reader.

Independent character discourse finds its locus in the synchronic and diachronic functions of language and within reader interpretation. I deviate from Bakhtin since this implies there is no single, overbearing character discourse but rather the opportunity for multiple independent discourses for each character, which textual activation makes possible. I read Poe's characters with these polyphonic and dialogic qualities, to further my argument that the reader can engage Poe's characters as if they are living others or internal voices against whom the reader can interact with introspectively.

Bakhtin also shows that the text is fundamentally fashioned according to reader reality, making it even more engaging and immersive. Bakhtin asserts that:

> The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of creation, as well as part of its subsequent

[66] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 5.
[67] Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 254.

> life, in a constant renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers.[68]

Bakhtin shows that the physical "real world", the human reality outside of the text, informs the textual realm, the world as it exists within the text. So, it follows that the author and reader's conceptions of the characters, and the characters' own conception of themselves, are all contained by the limit that the reality of the "real world" delineates.[69] Character discourses are necessarily based on human types, and so are limited by living *genres* of people which offer blueprints of being and of interacting. Character discourse is also more generally informed by basic human needs and functions as well as social structures which prescribe formulas of human activity in the public and private spheres. People and characters define themselves according to their adherence or disregard for these structures and genres. Since informed by the "real world" and its inhabitants, predictability in human behaviour limits character discourses that fall into these *genres* unoriginally.

"so terribly altered": Van Gennep

Having established the immersive and life-like qualities of the text, I outline my usage of liminal theory as it provides a structure to the undefinable in-between of transition. Finding its origins in Arnold van Gennep's anthropological research in his 1909 study *Les Rites de Passage*, liminal theory was primarily concerned with the processes of human rites of passage. Van Gennep envisioned a classificatory system for rites and rituals, in accordance with his own rigid vision of human processes. Under the impression that even nature has a compulsion toward pattern and structure, van Gennep's categorisation attempts to mimic this in its capacity to pass an individual "from one defined position to another which is equally well defined".[70] He interpreted this in the way societies organise themselves hierarchically so that individuals are made to cross imagined boundaries; such as between social or professional groups, or between milestones of age.[71] Essentially he envisioned human existence as a "succession of stages" positioned to overcome boundaries of hierarchy, which ceremonies and special acts commemorate. [72]

Van Gennep's system rests deep in human processes of becoming, as he says liminality's concern is "the very nature and meaningfulness of *life*".[73]The process of becoming is inexorably linked to moments of change in which life is "taken apart, recomposed and regenerated."[74] By destroying ties with the old in

[68] Bakhtin, "Time and the Chronotope", 254.
[69] I use 'limit' to denote boundaries, and as an extension of the idea that structures make sense of unlimited potential.
[70] Van Gennep, "Classification of Rites", 3.
[71] Ibid, 1-2.
[72] Ibid, 3.
[73] Bjørn Thomassen, "Into Liminality", in *Liminality and the Modern* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 3. Emphasis in the original.
[74] Bjørn Thomassen, "Arnold van Gennep: Fragments of a Life-Work at the Thresholds", in *Liminality and the Modern* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 38.

pursuit of the new, limits and borders are constantly being set and which are etched in the society or individual they alter.[75]

It is the aim of this thesis to inspect the in-between, the exact liminal moment of transition. Van Gennep's classificatory system sees rites of passage occur in three substages, which includes "preliminal rites", "liminal rites" and "postliminal rites".[76] These stages refer to the moment of separation from the previous state, the actual moment of transition between the two and the moment of incorporation into the new state, respectively.[77] Although the application of liminal theory has advanced beyond van Gennep's classificatory system, his insistence on the very necessary and inevitable nature of the liminal moment persists.

Taken from liminal rites, liminal theory is thus concerned with the moment of transition between states of identification; van Gennep refers to identifications that pertain to status such as age or occupation.[78] The liminal is both transition and the moment in which transition occurs, it is "the hideous dropping off of the veil" (76) that Poe's narrator speaks of, and the border between the antecedent and subsequent identifications of the mundane or the "bitter lapse into every-day life" (76).[79]

I look to liminal theory for characteristics of the interstitial, and I apply them to Poe's texts to confirm his characters' transitions. In the following chapters, I consider the liminality between the imagined text and the reader's reality as it explains their exchange and relate the characteristics of the liminal moment to the reader's interactions with the text to argue for reader becoming.

Bjørn Thomassen defines the characteristics of the liminal in its broadly applied contemporary manifestation, deriving from its anthropological and sociological applications. Theoretically, and for the purpose of this thesis, the liminal transcends the bounds of cultural and societal rites of passage. He likens the liminal process to the emotional experience of leaving the parental home:

> That mixture of joy and anxiety, that strange combination of freedom and homelessness; that pleasant but unsettling sensation of infinity and openness of possibilities which – at some moment, sooner or later – will start searching for a new frame to settle within. And if it does not, the void will perpetuate, and anxiety with it.[80]

I deduce from Thomassen's illustration that the liminal moment is an unsympathetic break from the rigidly structured norm that came before (the antecedent), but with the intention of reaching the new norm that follows (the subsequent). The liminal erupts between the two and so is simultaneously destruction and creation.[81] Severance from the predictable mundane characterises the liminal with

[75] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 4.
[76] Van Gennep, "Classification of Rites", 11.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Bjørn Thomassen, "The Uses and Meanings of Liminality", *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2009), 6.
[79] Ibid, 18.
[80] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 4.
[81] Thomassen, "Uses and Meanings", 23.

inverse qualities, as the unusual and unpredictable. While the antecedent and subsequent norms are complacent calm, identifiable and organised, the liminal is anxiety, fluidity, indefinite and unstructured.

Thomassen shows that fear and anxiety arise from the rupturing of the mundane, and from anticipating the unknown of the new mundane. As soon as the narrator enters the frame of the text, the anxiety of having left the security of his home and the fear of the melancholy and menacing Usher home causes him to panic. Similarly, Roderick's illness and symptoms bear a crucial sign of the liminal, as "some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR."(82)[82] Fear and anxiety are also concurrently riddled with the intense relief and excitement that comes with breaking from bland repetition, which, given the regular societal need for transition, attests to an innate attraction toward change, challenge and chaos. This explains the narrator's macabre reminiscing of the events of the fall of the house of Usher, including his insistence on tending to Roderick as he undergoes the ravages of transition and as he aids him in Madeline's burial.

This contradiction reveals underlying friction in the liminal, which Thomassen attributes to the realisation that "very basically… human life is organised as a precarious balance between the limit and the limitless."[83] The liminal gives human existence its forward trajectory, as it simultaneously threatens the eternal repetition of darkness, fear and the unknown.

The liminal disregards the antecedent and subsequent by imposing its confusing and disruptive presence on them. [84] Thomassen adds that the liminal imposes amnesia on the antecedent that it divorces from, despite retaining semblance.[85] This is evident in the Gothic genre which has characters that inhabit castles representative of a grand past, but who fail to reproduce the values and norms of the bygone era. While passing the "carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls… and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies" in the Usher home, the narrator vocalises his disdain for their deterioration: "The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered."(80) Similarly, Madeline and Roderick's eventual demise speaks to their inability to uphold the family lineage.

Moreover, the liminal permeates the characters' experiences with uncertainty, confusion and fear, resulting from the disturbance of what was normal. Madeline, who undergoes a very liminal premature burial, is a source of confusion via the psychosomatic symptoms of her illness, "A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character were the unusual diagnosis."(83) Her illness and burial are persistent sources of novelty and confusion, which recalls Thomassen's earlier foreboding that without locating the liminal "the void will perpetuate, and anxiety with it." [86]

Language and intertextuality determine the effect derived from the text, and the meaning given to the character's experiences. I argue that intertextuality is itself liminal in its unpredictable communication across realms of reality. When applying liminal characteristics to intertextuality, the amnesia of the antecedent manifests as the disregard for intended meaning, whilst the uncertainty of the subsequent

[82] Emphasis in the original.
[83] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 11.
[84] Ibid, 20.
[85] Thomassen, "Uses and Meanings", 5, 20.
[86] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 4.

equates to the unlimited potential for interpreted meaning. Consequently, I argue that intertextuality as a liminal process insists that the reader determines meaning. The liminal quality of the intertextual matrix is what allows meaning and effect to travel via language, between the imagined realm of the text and the reader's reality.

My exploration of Poe's philosophies on composition, and of the limitations of intended meaning on intertextual meaning production, serves to iterate my argument against the influence of authorial intent. The reader's ability to determine meaning and immersion in the text, which the liminal and polyphonic theories have iterated, suggests the text affects the reader via her interaction with the text and her interpretation. In Chapter 2, I look closer at effects produced, anticipating consciousness as a greater effect than stimulated emotions. And, in Chapter 3 I begin to unpack the transitions the reader and characters undergo, toward redefining reader identity.

This passage shows the activity of language, persistent throughout the text. Since the linguistic symbols that comprise written language are inactive and contain no meaning in themselves, its ability to indicate and incite a sense of energy is curious.

> *'Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!'*
>
> As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell, the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust — but then without those doors there *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold — then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated. (95)[87]

Mention of the "superhuman energy of [Roderick's] utterance" and the doors which "threw slowly back" by force of the "the rushing gust", as well as Madeline's "trembling and reeling to and fro" and her "violent and now final death-agonies" all exemplify vitality and activity. The energetic activity surprisingly emanates, contrary to expectation, from everything but the characters; energy occupies the inanimate, whereas passivity defines portrayal of the characters. Roderick's words, specifically "his utterance", stimulates the creation of this "superhuman energy", while Roderick is a mere intermediary. The "huge antique panels" of the door "threw" themselves open of their own accord, despite their heft and decay, perhaps with the help of the "rushing gust" but certainly not by Madeline's hand as she stands "emaciated". She strives for activity by exerting energy but fails miserably, so that her "struggle" implies effort without success. The effect is that her "trembling and reeling" translates as uncontrollable and her "violent and now final death-agonies" seem involuntary.

The narrator's observations demonstrate the relationship between the animate and inanimate components of Poe's textual world. This relationship mimics the relationship between the imagined text and the reader's reality. For this reason, in this chapter, I demonstrate that the ideals of the Romantic Imagination provide a reconciliatory framework for the inanimate natural world and animate mental function. I read Roderick and the narrator's character discourses as opinions held on whether the interpretation of events has the power to produce meaning and effect, as an example of the character consciousness towards which I argue. I utilise metafiction for its delineation frames, and which also

[87] Emphasis in the original.

stimulates consciousness as its effect. I use these claims to consciousness in the following chapter, when arguing for the redefining of identity.

"something in this nature": The Romantic Imagination and unity

The inanimate surroundings are what stimulates activity in the narrator's retelling. When he suggests that "Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure" (79) running down the façade of chateau, the eye acts autonomously without regard for its human host. Or, as Roderick laments the conditions of his illness, he foresees a time in which he will find himself "in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR" (82)[88], and in doing so describes fear with elusive and menacing independence. Moreover, he considers the imagination responsible for changing his perspective when he describes "an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime." (76) I use the ideals of the Romantic Imagination, which maintains a reverent dependence on nature and consideration for the Imagination as the unifying and all-encompassing authority of mental function.[89]

According to Bate, the Romantic Imagination is deeply rooted in attempts to invoke nature and to unite feeling, or perception of the energised, natural world, with abstract reason. [90] The Romantics sought "to bring out the rationality of the passions and the passionate nature of reason as part of a unified and balanced interpretation of human life."[91] Bronowski says that "Innocence returns to itself, greater, by way

[88] Emphasis in the original.

[89] I use 'Imagination' in reference to the Romantic idea encompassing unity in all aspects of the mind, as I have understood and explained it above, and as opposed to 'imagination' as creativity in thought and of the realm of the imagined. This definition, which I continue to build on throughout, acknowledges the challenges posed by attempting to define any singular Romantic philosophy. This is since, as Gorodeisky clearly asserts, very little is definitive of the Romantic movement apart from it comprising an epoch in which artists held a commitment "to the idea that the character of art and beauty and of our engagement with them should shape all aspects of human life". The idea of the Romantic Imagination specifically, also avoids any bold definition. Bate addresses this incoherent, spectral quality as a scarcity even in the work of individual artists. He says that Coleridge's direct claims to the Imagination is "so fragmentary, they have the attraction of allowing us to turn them into anything we want, if we take them up in isolation. That is a legitimate use of his insights." But, Bate cautions against attributing any defined theory to any single Romantic thinker. As such, I have undertaken to use Bate on Coleridge, Bronowski on Blake and Blake directly, to construct an appropriate definition of the Imagination for the purposes of this paper.
Walter Jackson Bate, "Coleridge as a Critic; the Function of Literature; the Imagination", in *Coleridge* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 158.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, "Wordsworth's Preface of 1800", in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Harold Littledale, (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), 247.
Keren Gorodeisky, "19th Century Romantic Aesthetics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed.* Edward N. Zalta, *last modified June 23, 2016,* https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/aesthetics-19th-romantic/

[90] Bate, "Coleridge as Critic", 159, 166.
Gorodeisky, "Romantic Aesthetics".

[91] Gorodeisky, "Romantic Aesthetics".

of experience", which elaborates on this unity as the interdependence between reason and feeling.[92] I argue that reason is interdependent of natural energy which also manifests as feeling. And, keeping with Romantic claims, I argue that their unity results in a greater and complete mental functioning, and ultimately consciousness.

Unity results from reason establishing the bounds of unlimited energy and feeling. In Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the dissenting Devil justifies Romantic thought as he claims, "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy. Energy is Eternal Delight."[93] Energy is essential and unlimited, whereas reason limits since it is limited to what could be explained, rationalised and proven. Energy exists without and despite explanation, while reason limits what is known for certain about reality and the energy that informs it. I interpret this sense of energy as the substance of existence, and experience of reality before interpretation. By trying to "torture" the imagination toward the "sublime", the narrator tries to make sense of his own irrational imaginings which the unrestrained "energy" informs. This is evident as he turns to the tarn, "It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression" (76-77). The narrator's attempts to make sense of the effects the imagination encompasses, reveals his struggle to define limitless, passionate energy (input) with reason.

Reading the narrator's engagement with his surroundings, I argue that he sees energy and feeling as having overtaken reason. He portrays Romantic energy as environmental and as a "sentience of all vegetable things" which has overcome reason (76). And, he claims that certain "natural objects" are endowed with a "power of thus affecting us", with an "influence whose supposititious force" and "power lies among considerations beyond our depth." (76) "Supposititious" iterates the enigmatic quality of this energy. Energised nature incites fear despite its degeneration, so that he reviles "a few white trunks of decayed trees" as "ghastly" and finds "clouds [which] hung oppressively low in the heavens" overpowering (76).

The narrator equates the energy of the environment with the denial of human agency. Despite being central to the narrative, the characters are framed as passive so that they express feelings of insignificance and powerlessness in effecting change. They appear apathetic to the trajectory of their narratives, which appears to be enforced by the fact that their illnesses deny them full control over themselves; Madeline's catalepsy and general wasting away, and Roderick's loss of mental acuity confirm this. The imagined textual realm continues independently of its characters, forcing their participation; the narrative continues after the Usher siblings' deaths, being endlessly reactivated by new readers and interpretations. The narrator is responsible for this since he chooses to depict himself as a victim and bystander, despite being in an authoritative position to alter the course of events.

[92] Julius Bronowski, "The Man Without a Mask", in *William Blake and the Age of Revolution* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 183.
[93] William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", in *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1946), 182.

Even though the narrator is the sole survivor and offers his undisputed inclusion and exclusion of details, he selects to emphasise his own passivity. He plays the role of the victim and seemingly deprives himself of affecting his reality or thoughts, in doing so deferring blame and responsibility despite the inherent power and bias in his narratorial role. Applying Romantic notions to the text, the permeating sense of passivity betrays the narrator's anxieties regarding the repercussions of acknowledging this power and energy in nature. These repercussions include the narrator having to confront his capacity and responsibility in determining his life trajectory.

He portrays himself as passive when he says:

> I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. (76)

He depicts himself as having been "forced to fall back upon" this opinion, refusing accountability, and showing resistance to what he deems the "unsatisfactory" Romantic conviction in the influential and unlimited energy of external stimuli. He radiates discomfort as he gazes into the tarn "but with a shudder even more thrilling than before" (77) and implores, "What was it that so unnerved me" (76). He seems sceptical of the power attributed to nature, which betrays a preference for the reason-oriented thought-process of an Enlightenment mindset. Yet, despite purposefully depicting himself passively, and showing his disapproval of unrestrained energy, the narrator cautiously engages the Romantic Imagination without denying it.

He contrasts his views by mentioning Roderick's claim that energy is discoverable in "that silent yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and which made *him* what I now saw him—what he was." (87)[94] Roderick's purported perspective of this Romantic energy – based in the narrator's biased portrayal – suggests an inability to alter or contain the effects of energy; energy has control over his family completely, despite their capacity for reason.

This is evident in the narrator's descriptions of the Ushers, especially pronounced in Madeline when she eventually succumbs to death. Her actions are exceptionally acquiescent as she "fell heavily inward" (95) upon her brother, necessitating his equally submissive demise as she "bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim" (95). However, much as the narrator is also taken aback by Roderick's prophecy materializing in Madeline's resurrection, he attributes it to the "energy in his utterance" and not Roderick himself.

This recalls Kristeva's definition of utterance as the application of a sign, specifically in its personalised usage.[95] An individual's interpretation of meaning in a sign is what differentiates it from enunciation (the mere linguistic characteristics and constituents of a word).[96] Utterance makes the intertextual matrix of meaning and effect relevant, whereas enunciation is the technical quality of the word as a vessel for meaning. And, even though the human connection activates utterance, Kristeva specifies that it

[94] Emphasis in the original.
[95] Allen, "Dialogism to Intertextuality", 39.
[96] Ibid.

simultaneously disregards the one who speaks.[97] The narrator indicates his awareness of this when he refers to Roderick as "the speaker" (95). This reduces Roderick to his essential quality as communicator, iterating the narrator's awareness that Roderick's speech only stimulates the potential for meaning, that it does not create meaning, and that meaning is independent.

These descriptions reveal the Ushers' inactivity, and the narrator's authority to cause their inactivity. The narrator's interpretation of events shows the limits of intent – how the Ushers want to be perceived – since his narration relates a purely subjective experience and interpretation. When the narrator first encounters Madeline, he claims that "a door, at length, closed upon her," (83). This signifies the subsequent exclusion of Madeline's physical presence. She is only mentioned again as the object of the premature burial and as the manifestation of Roderick's predictions, mirrored by the commas and words which similarly engulf the symbols used to express her, surrounding "her," and restricting her autonomy. My reading of the narrator similarly disregards his portrayal of events for my own interpretation; iterating my claim to the decline of authorial intent.

Whilst "The Fall of the House of Usher" relates the narrator's subjective chronicling of events, his intentional spinning of the tale exposes the evidently illusory passivity he ascribes to himself. This foregrounds interpretation again, since the narrator's interpretation of events determines the limited meaning and effect made available via his retelling.

Consequently, his interpretation, based on creative reason, works as linguistic restrictions on the characters' energy and feeling. This reconciliation between reason and feeling suggests he engages the full capacity of the Imagination via his interpretation. The act of narration betrays his use of the Imagination, overshadowing his earlier scepticism. Interpretation causes meaning and effect and places the interpreter, and reader, in the determining position.

I extend this analysis to Poe's reader. The reader uses reason to determine a limit on meaning and effect made available by the intertextual matrix, which results in the reader's specific interpretation. I posit, for the purposes of this paper, that the full application of the Romantic Imagination is equivalent to interpretation. This is since interpretation is the reader's use of reason to limit the intertextual matrix's energy – its infinite meaning and effect – by preference for the effect the reader dictates. The purposefulness of interpretation highlights the reader's potential, and especially in determining the limits of the effects of textual engagement.

Moreover, I argue that interpretation is a liminal activity, given that it involves deliberation and is fundamentally a process much like the liminal. To illustrate, I refer to the traces the liminal leaves behind to signal its occurrence. This residue is a result of the friction that inevitably follows the union of opposing forces, including that of reason and energy. According to my earlier interpretation of Thomassen's portrayal of the liminal, these traces include amnesia of the antecedent, confusion, contradiction, fear and anxiety.[98] The narrator's insistence on passivity opposes the activity of his retelling, just as his use of reason opposes the fluid energy of meaning that he tries to contain via interpretation. His confusion is

[97] Allen, "Dialogism to Intertextuality", 39.
[98] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 4.

evident as he struggles "to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over [him]." (89-90) And, he notices the growing discord around him, including in Roderick's symptoms as an "unceasingly agitated mind" and a "hurried, unequal, and objectless step." (89) This reminiscent of Thomassen's ominous prognosis, that without the liminal being resolved "the void will perpetuate, and anxiety with it."[99]

Evidence of liminal residue shows that interpretation is, in fact, a liminal process that the interpreter undergoes and engages in. This places the narrator and Poe's reader in a moment of change, since a liminal position anticipates an inevitable transition. As a liminal instance, interpretation shows signs of liminality's fundamental activity and its quality of being in progress. Interpretation is a process that takes the reader from an antecedent identification to a subsequent identification, via a series of changes; it is a state of becoming. Very simply, interpretation transforms the reader from interacting with reality as input to having an understanding and opinion of that input.

As if to confirm these deductions, Bate offers Coleridge's Romantic conception of the Imagination as:

> a *process* of realization by which the products and insights of two distinct aspects of mind become transmuted… On the one hand it is turned to the images and objects of the concrete world, which since they are rendered by the senses and the understanding, appear 'fixed and dead.' But by sensing the dynamic potentiality inherent in these particulars and behind the static 'masks' they seem to have, it volatizes the impressions of them and the conceptions to which they give rise;[100]

I have shown that interpretation is an example of this Romantic conception of Imagination that Bate relates. He mentions "realization" as a crucial attribute of the interpretation of "dynamic potential" in otherwise meaningless input. Much as this consciousness is important to the interpretation process, I argue momentarily in my discussions of metafiction and its frames that the power of a possible self-consciousness might be greater.

Significantly, Bate deems the Romantic union of opposing forces and interpretation as a "*process*". While I agree with Bate, I have argued that this process is specifically liminal, and that its consciousness is fundamental to liminality. These ideas are apparent in the text, where the narrator interprets a dynamism in the lifeless "decayed trees" (76) and the motionless "bleak walls" (76), so that he experiences an "insufferable gloom" (76) and an "utter depression of soul" (76). Roderick similarly interprets the inanimate structures of his family home, but with such "dynamic potential" that he attributes sentience to them. Poe's reader echoes this interaction in her interpretation of the otherwise inanimate text – essentially empty linguistic signs and symbols etched onto paper – as she attributes meaning from the intertextual matrix by reconciling reason and perceived energy.

In another example, the narrator describes "an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart" (76) as he contemplates the effect of his initial encounter with the Usher property. Poe's words use a combination of literary devices including assonance, consonance, alliteration and onomatopoeia. Much like the premise of onomatopoeia, I read these devices as similarly in alignment with a potential reader's reality.

[99] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 4.
[100] Bate, "Coleridge as Critic", 159.

While “iciness” conveys the sharpness of his haunting realization, the increased pace produced by the alliteration of the “sinking” and “sickening” induces a mimetic queasiness and vertigo. Despite these linguistic signs and symbols being entirely lifeless, there is potential for the reader to perceive energy in them and perceive meaning in the alignment of the metaphor of reality (language) with reality itself.

This uncanny alignment deepens the reader’s immersion in the text just as it intensifies the narrator’s immersion in his experiences with the Ushers’ and their home. This is evident when the narrator’s reading of the “Mad Trist” aligns with the sounds heard reverberating through the mansion, and as Roderick’s prophetic ravings align with Madeline’s rising from the burial chamber, and since both instances overpower the characters with fear. The use of language to date has surpassed memory of its origins in metaphor.[101] And, so I argue that the re-alignment of a metaphor with its reality is both immersive and uncanny. The characters are unsurprisingly disturbed by this, especially since the use of language and its illusory metaphors are equivalent to self-deception. The conscious process of interpretation confronts the reader with the realization that language is a metaphor for reality, that the emanating energy and sense of realism are illusory, and that the sense of realism is merely attributed meaning that the reader has allowed to deceive her.

In this section, I have aimed to show and remind that the energy and meaning of a text depend on the reader’s interpretation. Using the ideals of the Romantic Imagination I have argued that interpretation epitomises its reconciliation of opposing forces, of the animate and inanimate and of reason and energy, in the reader’s delimiting of the unlimited intertextual matrix to determine meaning. This interpretation is a liminal process, that necessitates both consciousness and transition. Moreover, in interpretation there is the possibility that the reader is confronted with the uncanny alignment of language and the reality that supports its metaphor. This confrontation forces the reader to admit that the use of language as a metaphor is self-deception and that language has no inherent meaning, energy or sense of realism.

I use these conclusions in the following sections, as I further explore the repercussions of consciousness and self-consciousness and the discovery of the self’s deceptions. They contribute toward my argument that the effects of the text are only limited by the reader’s interpretation and that the effects could extend into the redefinition of the reader’s selfhood.

“An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame”

In this section, I open the inquiry into metafiction and its application of frames, which act as borders and create a distinction within the vastness of experience. Patricia Waugh defines frames as the very “organization of experience”[102], and in the textual realm specifically, as part of the “analysis of the formal

[101] Nietzsche, “Truth and Lie”, 55.
[102] Patricia Waugh, “The Analysis of Frames: Metafiction and Frame-Breaking”, in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction,* (London: Methuen, 1984), 30.

conventional organization of novels."[103] It is a means of making sense of experience and of the interconnectivity of various layers of reality, perception, and states of mind.

Frames are constructions, man-made markers and borders intended to offer a sense of calm in the chaos of existence, but which are numerous and located ambiguously. Engagement with the text foregrounds frames of experience and mental function, as the distinction between the reader's reality and the imagined realm of the text. Since "The Fall of the House of Usher" relates a series of past events, Poe's text is also framed temporally. The narrator exists in both his present frame, from which he narrates the tale, and alongside the Ushers in a preceding frame that constitutes the subject of his narration.

Whilst frames create boundaries, essentially separating the reader's reality and the text, they also problematise these distinctions to different effects.[104] The reader of Poe's text is lead through frames of reality, absorbing her attention, until her own reality becomes peripheral and the text becomes immersive. The narrator frames himself from the onset as passive and pensive, leading the reader to trust in his narration. His opening dialogue includes, "I had been passing alone, on horseback" (76), as if journeying in from another life. His words create continuity with life outside of the encapsulated Usher estate, easing himself and his reader into the narrative frame. Cooperatively, the spatial frame maps the Usher home as concentric circles marked by distance. The deeper into the narrative the reader explores and the further into the Usher home the narrator advances, the more intense the textual immersion becomes.

The blurring of frames causes confusion and the imagined realm acquiescing into reality. The narrator suffers this from his first encounter with the Usher home, attributing his uncertainty to "shadowy fancies" (76) taking over his mind as he confuses the animate and inanimate. He attributes human qualities to the chateau, referring to it as the "melancholy House of Usher" (76) and repeatedly mentioning its "eye-like windows" (77). And, he denies the Ushers' their humanity by reducing them to objects via his claims that the inhabitants have long since been synonymous with the name and object of the building, with "the 'House of Usher'" (78). He describes Madeline and Roderick as having a "cadaverousness" (80), as if losing their human quality, causing Madeline's misdiagnosed death and premature burial.

For Waugh, this blurring of frames extends to states of mind, "Sometimes overt frames involve a confusion of ontological levels through the incorporation of visions, dreams, hallucinatory states and pictorial representations which are finally indistinct from the apparently 'real'".[105] This is apparent in the text, as the narrator repeatedly draws attention to his wavering mental state and the Ushers'. He speaks of his own "superstition" (78), hinting at irrational thought and his excited imagination. In his narration, his words, "Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream" (78), reveal his uncertainty regarding his mental state and his distrust of a reality that has already been tainted by memory.[106]

Moreover, he illustrates the distortion of sanity and delusion when he insists Roderick has a "mental disorder" (77), "an evidently restrained *hysteria*" (90) and that his peculiar ways are the "inexplicable

[103] Waugh, "Analysis of Frames", 30.
[104] Ibid, 31.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Emphasis in the original.

vagaries of madness" (89).[107] But, he also admits "that [Roderick's] condition terrified—that it infected [him]" (89). Consequently, when Roderick refers to the narrator directly, several times, as "Madman!" (95), he casts the narrator's sanity into question.

Similarly, the narrator's disregard for Roderick's opinion – that the sentience of their surroundings has been causing the decay of the Usher name and bloodline –draws attention to his own claims that simply looking at the home affects him. He inadvertently calls into question his own mental clarity and compromises the veracity of his narration. And, since Roderick's predictions are later realised, the reader is left uncertain as to the location of the text's parameters on reality.

Whilst the blurring of frames results in the characters' confusion and immersion in the Usher home, and a deeper textual immersion for the reader, these frames also signal the additional metafictional effect for the reader. Metafiction, or self-conscious fiction, disrupts the continuity of the textual realm by breaking through frames of reality and perception so as to self-consciously expose its own fictionality, to comment on the dynamic between the real and the imagined and to make an observation about the possible fictionality of the real. [108] The absorbing illusion of reality and continuity within the text is brought to attention, disrupted and undone. Considering the concentric spatial frames of the text this metafictional disruption results from Madeline's premature burial, resurrection and eventual demise, all of which unfold in the deepest recesses and epicentre of the Usher home, namely the family crypt and the narrator's bedroom located directly above (88).

And, for the reader who immerses herself in the textual realm and marginalises her own reality, this disruption appears as a jarring reminder that she is interacting with the imagined realm. Waugh identifies the significance of this idea when she shares that, "Contemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames, and that it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins." [109] The blurring of frames and the later cleaving of their overlap, works to exaggerate the difference between the frames and to show that there is in fact no true distinction between them.

I will return to the use of frames and metafictional techniques in the following sections, to explore the self-consciousness this jarring effect can produce and which further contributes to my argument toward a greater textual effect resulting from reader interpretation.

Interestingly, there is also a brief mention of a "peasantry" (78) and their perceptions of the Usher family as being synonymous with the name of their home. This, I suggest, insists on a social and economic hierarchy that, in conjunction with the decaying opulence of the Usher chateau, depicts its inhabitants as both part of a distinctive social class and as estranged from society; both already implying distinct frames of mind. This contributes to framing the narrator as part of a larger community (the public sphere), alluding to a world outside of the Usher home, whereas the Ushers are contrastingly framed by their encapsulated environment (the private sphere). These frames mimic and simultaneously establish the

[107] Emphasis in the original.
[108] Patricia Waugh, "What is Metafiction?", in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction,* (London: Methuen, 1984), 2.
[109] Waugh, "Analysis of Frames", 30.

distance between the reader and the text, suggesting that the Ushers' world is fictional in comparison to the narrator's.

"an instinctive spirit prompted me": The weight of community

In this section, I divert to consider the role of community and the public and private realms as frames, as they contribute to the creation of identity. It is an individual's determined adherence to either frame, public or private, that she locates herself. The narrator's existence in community provides others against whom he can verify his experiences and his identity, and which helps him to fulfil the fundamental human function of co-existence. The structures of society are determined and enforced in community and the public sphere, determining what is appropriate and necessary for peaceful cohabitation. Whereas, the Ushers' isolation in their private sphere denies them self-affirmation to the detriment of their being. For my purposes, the private sphere denotes a space outside the reach of societal influence, where identity is constructed in isolation.

As a result of narration, the reader is the text's community that dictates the restrictions on meaning that is derived. The narrator represents community in his interactions with the isolated Ushers, and similarly finds himself interpreting their ways of being in comparison to his own ways of being. The narrator is the mouthpiece of community, that guides the reader through the private Usher sphere. So, when he asks his community of readers indirectly, "What was it – I paused to think – what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?" (76), he epitomises this notion and the fact that language is fundamentally an interaction between an addresser and addressee.

Moreover, according to Graham Allen, "Each and every word expresses 'one' in relation to the 'other'. I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong."[110] Community is thus essential to a sense of self since it is in similarity and dissimilarity from other individuals and groups that an individual defines her identity.[111]

Upon the narrator's entrance, the Usher siblings' conditions begin to rapidly deteriorate. His presence makes them aware of the complicated nature of their intimate bond and the disparity between their way of life and the ways of community. He carries with him the judgement of society against reclusion, deterioration and the implied sexual undertone of the sibling relationship, and they show signs of being affected by his opinion.

Whilst the narrator's presence affects the Ushers, his portrayal of the public sphere and its values are also evident in the way he presents them to the reader. His perspective of the Ushers informs the reader of a very specific profiling of the "time-honoured" (77) "Usher race" (77). He describes Roderick specifically as having an "excessive and habitual" (77) reserve. Sections of the text are dedicated to documenting the

[110] Allen, "Relational Word", 19.
[111] This is made clear via Julia Kristeva's conception of abjection which will be explored further in the following chapter.

narrator's reverence at his passionate interests in art and music. There is an extract of Roderick's poetry, a citation list of his preferred literary interests and a full paragraph detailing his physical state, "A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison" (80). These observations show the narrator imposing the standards of the public sphere, as if policing the scene of the Usher home and its inhabitants to verify their conformity to the laws of community.

The narrator is the embodiment and enforcement of societal law and norms, so that his approval and disapproval of their actions portray their adherence or transgression against society. Upon returning to the Usher home after many years away, where Madeline and Roderick were isolated as the last remaining members of the Usher family, the private Usher sphere proves to have very few values in line with the narrator.

If it is via community and social engagement that "I give myself shape"[112], then it follows that the lack of community results in a certain deformation. The Usher siblings, having been confined to their own company for so long, can only fashion themselves against each other which results in them appearing as incomplete and inversions of each other. While Madeline's affliction is her physical depletion, her brother shows signs of psychological deterioration. They are so far from convention that their conditions go undiagnosed, to the end that Madeline is falsely declared deceased by a medical professional and Roderick's illness is only pacified by the most bizarre criteria, "the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture… and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror." (81)

Similarly, the narrator's emphasis on the isolation of the Usher home makes clear this departure from community and its restrictions. Their reduced visibility leads to reduced accountability, and amnesia regarding the rules that exist beyond the threshold of their property and bloodline. The Usher home bears the scars of this abandonment of societal ways in the decaying grandeur of its crumbling interior, and as the fissure across the façade hints at this irreparable chasmic split from society. According to Fred Botting, these details echo 18th century Gothic "anxieties and fears concerning the crises and changes in the present as with any terrors of the past."[113] Their split from society is mimetic of a split from and problematization of old values and a past identity.

Moreover, the further into the home the narrator voyages, the more detached he insists events are from societal norms. The narrator's bedroom, which is set in the heart of the home and directly above the tomb where Madeline is prematurely buried, is where the penultimate scene and eventual demise of the Usher siblings take place. To deepen obscurity, the placement of her corpse is supposedly only "temporary" (88), in the family tomb which was reportedly used "in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a dunjon-keep" (88) and later to store "powder, or some other highly combustible substance" (88), recalling a darker, chaotic past. This echoes my earlier exploration of metafictional frames. Here the narrative's spatial frames accentuate the frames dealing with the public and private.

[112] Allen, "Relational Word", 19.
[113] Fred Botting, "In Gothic Darkly: Heterotopia, History, Culture", in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 3.

Not only does his journey inward into the chateau reflect the Ushers' distance from societal norms, but it also represents the narrator's growing distance and separation from the very norms he came bearing. His advancement inwards emphasises and deepens his growing amnesia for societal ways, so that the more involved he becomes the less offended he is by the Ushers' peculiarities. The narrator increasingly becomes complacent and less vocal about his disagreements with them. When Roderick insists that the "sentience of all vegetable things" (86) has afforded the brick and mortar of his family home longevity and that it has affected the destiny of the bloodline, the narrator overlooks the implications of the statement despite having already shared his own opinion on the matter when he says, "Such opinions need no comment, and I will make none." (87) And later, responding to Roderick's request to temporarily entomb his sister in their home, the narrator plainly asserts, "I did not feel at liberty to dispute." (88)

It is apparent that the tragedy of the tale unfolds upon the narrator's arrival, since he brings with him the weight and judgement of society with its imposing laws and standards. Likewise, the reader, whom the narrator invites along with him into the Usher home, imposes her own societal standards and judgements on the characters as she interprets them.

As a guest, the narrator represents an external, populated community, while the Ushers epitomise the private sphere. The threshold between the two identifications is the space in which the one becomes and the other ends. If the public and private realms are primarily concerned with the shaping of discourse and identity, then the transition between is necessarily a mediation between identifications. The threshold between the public and private components of identity necessitates friction and adjustment, as the site of liminal spontaneity and creation.

Madeline and Roderick undergo a liminal transformation and re-defining of identity, triggered by the pressures of their relationship with society. Their dissociation from community, as the last remaining members of the Usher family residing in the isolated mansion, and the narrator's reintroduction of that sense of community problematises the Usher siblings' sense of self. Their physical and mental deterioration signals a rupturing from a past identification, the antecedent. Whereas their amnesia of societal ways is evidence of the liminal residue, as is Roderick's "incoherence—an[d] inconsistency" (81).

This section has worked to show the significance of framing the public and private spheres. The distinction is akin to that between the self and the other, and it is in proximity and distance to the other that identity is fashioned. This conclusion anticipates Chapter 3 in which I look closer at the formation of identity in relation to the other, particularly the internal other.

"a full consciousness"

Here, I apply the conclusions I have previously come to, toward the argument of consciousness and self-consciousness induced by metafiction as well as the liminal interpretation and re-definition of identity. I turn to the reader's engagement of Poe's text as a parallel to the narrator reading the "Mad Trist".

Poe's text culminates when the narrator begins reading an extract from Sir Launcelot Canning's tale, the "Mad Trist", to distract Roderick's fanciful thoughts. The narrator notices a parallel between the text he reads and the reality of his environment. It seems to him that the sounds written about, to describe the hero Ethelred's advancements toward his trophy shield, can be heard in the depths of the Usher home.

After reading that Ethelred had forced his way into a hermit's lair, the narrator literally hears the "echo" of "the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described." (92) Moments later, as Ethelred slays a dragon whose "shriek [was] so horrid and hash, and withal so piercing", a similar "unusual screaming or grating sound" emanates from within the Usher home (93). Finally, after reading that "a mighty great and terrible ringing sound.'" (94) resounded as Ethelred's trophy collided with the ground, the narrator hears a similarly "distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangourous, yet apparently muffled, reverberation." (94)

The constant weaving between the narrator's reality and his reading of the fictional text, interrupts his distinct framing of reality and the imaginary. His earlier confusion regarding the parameters of these frames, when he has trouble separating his "shadowy fancies" from reality, anticipates this magnified blurring. This is evidence of the alignment of reality and language, as the metaphor for reality, which I have shown causes a deeper immersion in the imaginary frame. The narrator's utterance affects him, as though the events he reads are truly unfolding.

However, the blurred frames are quickly restored to their distinction when Roderick correctly anticipates that Madeline has risen from her grave. Roderick's seemingly imagined and impossible suggestion is proven true, challenging the narrator with the realization that there was no blurring between the imagined and real frames and that Roderick distinctly engages the frame of reality all along. Drawing attention to the distinction of frames, the narrator emerges from the belief that the frames had converged. No longer absorbed by his own opinion, the narrator's distance from the imaginary frame he was absorbed in equips him with objectivity. So, he is made conscious of his previous state of mind and to the ultimate artifice of frames and the truth that there are no definite distinctions.

This objectivity makes the narrator conscious of his momentary immersion in the text. He realises that he interpreted a connection between his reality and the imagined text, that he simultaneously believed that the imagined text had infiltrated his reality, had caused his reality and that the text was unfolding in his reality.

His interpretation illustrates the Romantic Imagination as the full utilisation of the mind, as I have explored it. Objectivity makes him aware of how he interpreted, using creative reasoning to isolate meaning from the vast intertextual matrix, the coincidence of the parallel sounds only to come to an irrational conclusion. Evidently, the frames between the real and the imagined are indistinct and are reducible to the interpretation and organisation of experience. Moreover, reason and the fluid intertextual matrix of meaning are similarly as indistinct, since the factors that contribute to reason, such as the senses, are not in themselves indubitable nor is reason definitive of fact or truth.[114]

[114] I am alluding approximately to René Descartes' contemplation of what can be known indubitably about the self, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

Objectivity toward the now obviously lifeless text betrays his responsibility in determining the effect the text has on him. Consequently, he is responsible for his interpretation of the coincidence of events and for misleading his own thoughts. He is responsible for immersing himself in the textual world, and so is responsible for his own self-deception.

The narrator suffers these realisations throughout the text. In his initial encounter with the Usher home he deliberates the effects of the tarn on his mental state, causing him to contemplate the blurring of frames of mind. Consequently, at the denouement, when the home crumbles into its mirrored image in the dark waters, the narrator is again reminded that there are no borders and that finally the real and the imagined reconciling seamlessly and indistinctly. This iterates Waugh's claim that metafiction manifests as frames "explicitly laid bare" to expose their fluidity and innate interdependence.[115] Not even a ripple in the water is visible as "the deep and dank tarn at [his] feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the '*House of Usher*.'" (95)[116]

The metafictional disruption of frames similarly affects Poe's reader, since the narrator's interactions with the "uncouth and unimaginative prolixity" (91) of the "Mad Trist" are akin to the reader's interactions with what Carter regards as Poe's paper-thin, "cardboard" narrative. [117] Mere mention of the "Mad Trist" is self-referential to the reader's engagement with "The Fall of the House of Usher", drawing the reader's attention out of the immersive text and reminding her of its fictionality. This necessitates objectivity and consciousness in the reader, which draws her attention to her momentary absorption in the text which is cause for contemplation. A double awareness results if the reader interprets the narrator's experience with the "Mad Trist" as I have here, where his introspection and contemplation of frames reminds the reader to evaluate her own experience of frames that organise her reality.

The reader observes, as the narrator does, that frames of reality and the imagined are subjective and a means of interpreting and organising reality, that interpretation determines the meaning and effect of a text, and that she consequently is responsible for her own self-deception. When reading Madeline's premature burial, the weight of interpretation is consequently equivalent to the weight of the body as it falls "heavily inward upon the person" (95).

In this chapter, I have developed on the argument that reader interpretation determines much of the meaning and effect derived from a text. And, that interpretation is liminal since it is a process that transitions the reader toward an understanding, and so necessitates a consciousness. I have also looked at the immersiveness of the text as an effect which is produced when language aligns with the reality it refers to, and as a result of the metafictional blurring of frames. The disruption of this immersion, when the reader realises the frames are really a construction used to organise reality, amounts to a greater self-consciousness in the reader.

My conclusion for this chapter is consequently this self-consciousness of the reader. The reader is made aware of her role as interpreter of the text and of her own reality. The reader's realisation that she has been determining the meaning the text has for her and the effect it has on her, draws attention to the

[115] Waugh, "Analysis of Frames", 30.
[116] Emphasis in the original.
[117] Carter, "Through a Text Backwards", 482.

possibility that she could more consciously determine the meaning and effect she derives from the text. The effect of the text on the reader does not have to be limited to emotion and is instead only limited by the reader's potential interpretation. The reader is posed with the possibility that she could generate a greater effect on herself.

Moreover, I examined the frames distinguishing between public and private as akin to the framing of the self and other, which are necessary to defining the identity of the self. Considering the life-like characters, and the immersive world of the text that is designed within the limits of reader reality, I argue that the reader's engagement with the text could mimic the relationship between the self and other. In the following chapter, I explore the polyphonic text and its dialogic characters as fully-fledged beings with whom to interact and against whom the reader could define herself, as an example of a greater effect of the text.

Chapter 3
"a gentle violence":
Becoming the self

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the reader's interpretation determines the meaning and effect the text has on her, and that her consciousness of this role causes a deeper self-consciousness which could induce a greater effect from the text; above mere emotional impact. I have shown that the reader's proximity and conformity to others are what defines the self and that the text provides life-like others to engage with in this regard. As a result, in this chapter, I anticipate the defining of identity, as a liminal process, and in relation to the life-like characters of the text. I utilise Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, as it details the defining of the self against the internal other. I begin by setting out the principles of the dialogic as it allows me to argue that the Usher siblings' intimate relationship is akin to incest, and to frame them as the fragments of a single being engaging its internal other dialogically as it transitions.

At Madeline Usher's premature burial, the narrator homes in on her physical appearance as he details the uncanny experience:

> The disease which had thus entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspicious lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death. (89)

Her smile, "so terrible in death", is noteworthy for its uncanny contradictoriness. It draws attention to the frames of life and death and so is a cause for dialogue, sparking intrigue in these frames, their distinction and their repercussions on Madeline's state. It complicates meaning and hails the dialogic with its unlimited possibility. I consider Bakhtin's dialogic here for its capacity to contain within two-dimensional words the possibility of expressing numerous ideas and perspectives.[118]

Considering language's origins in the experience of reality, by way of Nietzschean metaphor as I have outlined it, language is the most appropriate means of expressing human complexity and for allowing a deeper understanding of human reality.[119] The dialogic is the expansion of language as it accommodates all potential meaning.[120] I am using it here as a catalyst for an exploration into the limits of possible meaning, which begins with a reading of incest between the Usher siblings. The dialogic makes this reading possible and apparent by permeating every word with multiplicity. [121] As Bakhtin puts it, the dialogic infiltrates "every mimic movement on the hero's face, making it convulsive and anguished".[122] And, it communicates the variety of meaning within the intertextual matrix, in a moment of communication.[123]

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[118] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 40.
[119] Nietzsche, "Truth and Lie", 55.
[120] I suggest that whereas the intertextual matrix abstractly encompasses the fluid movement and possibility of endless meaning, the dialogic additionally refers to the evolving debate for possible meaning.
[121] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 40.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

Betraying signs hint at this alternative interpretation, of the incestuous relationship between the Usher siblings. The constant mention of the Usher family lineage and the overwhelming intimacy associated with it makes this clear. The narrator's words appear to be approaching realisation and awareness of this unaccountable truth, evident when he says, "the Usher race, all time-honoured as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct-line of descent, and had always." (77-78)

The "direct-line of descent" implies that a very limited and intrafamilial gene pool informs the bloodline, which continues to turn inward to sustain itself. Their quarantine from society exaggerates this, as does the remoteness of the ancestral home that the desolate and decaying forest encompasses. The narrator encounters Roderick in a cavernous room where "gleams of encrimsoned light" (80) flood through tall and apparently stained-glass windows. The house's close association with the family name makes the blood-red glow appear sinister and claustrophobic as it bathes all the characters in the blood of the Usher line.

Reading incest between the Usher siblings is a well-established point of inquiry; one of many possible and existing analyses. Maurice Beebe argues that Roderick pursues his sister out of the blind desire for an heir, whereas John Marsh claims that Roderick goes so far as to violate his sister's corpse in the tomb and that his mannerisms show signs of sexual guilt.[124] In his thoughts on composition, Poe specifies that, in his opinion, the most poetic of subjects is the dying woman, and it is the lips of her grieving lover that best expresses a longing for her.[125] Since Roderick is the one who grieves Madeline, by Poe's formulation I deduce their incestuous bond. Renata Wasserman insists that this argument is mostly insinuated.[126] However, it is due to the dialogic that insinuated claims persist alongside literal interpretations and that texts can hold greater meaning and effect than enunciation allows.

My reading of incest between the Ushers is possible due to Bakhtin's conception of the dialogic, which sees individual words converse amongst themselves about potential meaning.[127] Roderick is described as passionate, but also portrayed as introverted with an excessive "reserve" (77). Reserve dialogically multiplies in meaning, at first glance referring to his preference for solitude, as a personality trait, suggesting he shares only aspects of himself and his character. He reserves himself in the isolated mansion, for himself and his sister. The unfolding dialogicality allows for contemplation regarding exactly which parts of the self he reserves; whether it be his mental, emotional or physical self. Reservation implies concealment of something significant or private, and so further stimulates the possibility of an incestuous reality.

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[124] Maurice Beebe, "The Universe of Roderick Usher", in *Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Regan (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967).
John L. Marsh, "The Psycho-Sexual Reading of 'The Fall of the House of Usher'" *Poe Studies*, 5, no. 1 (June 1972): 8-9, https://www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/p1972102.htm
[125] Poe, "Philosophy of Composition", 557.
[126] Renata R. Mautner Wasserman, "The Self, the Mirror, the Other: 'The Fall of the House of Usher'", *Poe Studies,* 10, no. 2 (December 1977): 33-35. https://www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/p1977201.htm.
[127] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 40.

The dialogic continues to unfold and stoke suspicion, so that the product of Madeline and Roderick's final embrace is similarly multiplied. The narrator describes Madeline as having "bore him to the floor a corpse" which places blame on her (95). Yet, connotations of support and aid complicate "bore" and absolve her of guilt. The word also resonates with her bearing a child. This could be the child of their incestuous union, or that Madeline "bore him", Roderick, as her own child insinuating father-daughter incest; the consanguineous Usher bloodline equally reinforces the latter. There is clear evidence of Madeline bearing the child of their incestuous union, as she stands before them with "blood upon her white robes" (95), and with the signs of "some bitter struggle upon… her emaciated frame" reminiscent of the intense physical demands of childbirth (95).

The dialogic makes reading Madeline as guilty and not guilty of Roderick's murder, and as the mother of Roderick's child and his mother all viable simultaneously. It expresses the inherent contradiction, uncertainty and multiplicity of human experience and of the intertextual matrix that allows for various interpretations of a single instance.[128] This is possible due to its "double-voiced" [129] quality, that opens the meaning of a word for debate and creates dialogue. Bakhtin reveres textual polyphony and the dialogic for this ability to reflect human reality, since it finds its meaning in the interpretation of the experience of that reality.[130] I argue that this life-like quality and precise representation of reality contributes to the immersion of the text and its continuity for the reader with reality outside of the text.

The coexistence of many, very distinct, consciousnesses and voices are characteristic of the polyphonic text, the dialogic and character discourse, since they capture essential human volatility and inconsistency.[131] This contradiction and variety in meaning are what makes the polyphonic of interest both to Bakhtin and to my exploration of the interplay between human existence and its textual representations.

To this end I argue that the notion of character discourse allows for a unique look at the internal workings of characters as they undertake the journey of becoming. Bakhtin's character discourse refers to "a *plurality of consciousnesses",* where their consciousness emphasises the holistic human quality that he envisions, and refers to their duality, contradictions and their ability to transform. [132]

Evidently, character discourse credits characters with complex emotions as mimetic of reality outside of the textual realm. And, it is this life-like quality and the text's general verisimilitude to the reader's reality that creates continuity between the frames of reality, and which makes the text immersive for the reader. Much as the multiplicity of the dialogic makes the possibility for various meanings and interpretations greater, it also stimulates dialogue with the characters so that the reader can engage them as she would a living being. And, it is in this dynamic interaction with another being, that I anticipate the reader's transitioning and becoming. Having situated the characters as valid beings with whom the reader can

[128] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 40.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Bakhtin, "Time and the Chronotope", 254.
[131] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 22.
[132] Ibid, 6.
Emphasis in the original.

engage, I turn to their interactions amongst each other as an illustration of the abjection process and which I can later relate to the reader's transition.

Falling "heavily inward upon the person"

I'm particularly interested in the "*coexistence* and *interaction*" [133] of characters between and within themselves because it exposes the internal conflicts and fractures of self. Bakhtin envisioned separate characters to represent parts of a single being, as if dramatically "forcing a character to converse with his own double, with the devil, with his alter ego, with his own caricature".[134] Not only does this allow for many perspectives of a single event, but it shows multiplicity and contradiction in inner dialogue as it unfolds; as the language that constitutes these characters is dialogically split and fractured in meaning.

I argue that the theme of twinhood as embodied by Madeline and Roderick Usher, is the incarnation of this confrontation with the self. Despite the near biological impossibility, the narrator's observation of a "striking similitude between the brother and sister" suggests they are identical monozygotic twins, produced from a single fertilised egg that has split into two separate beings (88).[135] The Ushers would then approach something like a single being split and placed alongside itself for coexistence and interaction.

Similarities in their physical descriptions emphasise their previous unity. While Roderick is described as having a "cadaverousness of complexion" (80) and as being "cadaverously wan" (90), Madeline's "gradual wasting away" (83) leads to her being falsely identified as a corpse, and as having a "partially cataleptical character" as she also approaches a cadaverous state (83). The illnesses that portray them as halves of a whole exaggerates this. Where Madeline suffers from a physical degeneration, her brother is mentally afflicted.

Moreover, Bakhtin is especially relevant for his interest in a single moment of character portrayal as opposed to prolonged temporal development. He attributes this quality to Dostoevsky's work when he says, "For him, to get one's bearings on the world meant to conceive all its contents as simultaneous, and

[133] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 28.
Emphasis in the original.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Although exceptionally rare, it is biologically possible for monozygotic twins to be of opposite sex. Due to the loss of the Y sex chromosome (which determines maleness), with the X chromosome inevitably remaining, the resulting female infant is likely born with Turner syndrome. Considering my argument, it is tenable to read related symptoms such as the late onset or complete absence of pubescence in connection to descriptions of Madeline as only being "in the maturity of youth" at her premature burial, despite the narrator speaking of their childhood as having occurred in the distant past.
"Multifetal Pregnancy", in *Williams Obstetrics, 25e*, ed. F. Gary Cunningham, et al. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2018), 3, http://accessmedicine.mhmedical.com/content.aspx?bookid=1918&sectionid=185086308
"Turner Syndrome", *NHS*, last modified May 14, 2018, https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/turner-syndrome/

to *guess at their interrelationships in the cross-section of a single moment*."[136] Bakhtin considered this to be a unique quality of Dostoevsky's writing, however, I apply it here as it breaks through conventions of the novel and because it makes possible a detailed inspection and interaction with the exact moment of liminal transition in a character.

These concepts of twinhood, simultaneity and the bisection of a single being make relevant Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection, as she explores it in "Approaching Abjection", which deals with the construction of identity.[137] Bakhtin's characters' engagements with each other are akin to introspection, which anticipates Kristeva's theory that allows for a closer psychoanalytic exploration of an individual's internal relationship with the self. Abjection is especially of interest since it delineates the process through which an individual attempts to expel a part of the self, and to define their identity while undergoing a liminal transformation and becoming.

Abjection is a reactionary "revolt of being", which causes the body to spasm because the abject that lies on the border of itself is frustratingly both attractive and repulsive. [138] Continuing with my dialogic interpretation, incest represents this border between the Ushers. Allen Tate expresses this idea, referring to Madeline and Roderick when he says that, "Two persons of the least dissimilarity offer the least physical resistance to mutual participation in the *fire* of a common being."[139] Familiarity makes incest attractive, as a narcissistic and comforting bond with an individual almost genetically identical, and made repulsive by societal taboo and the fear perhaps of deformity in offspring as consequence of the act. Incest between twins has the extra attraction of curiosity and heightened similarity, yet is repulsive and frightening as the unknown and for connotations of duplicity.

Incest causes the revolt of being because it places a fraction of the Usher self, abrasively both attractive and repulsive, at its own border as the abject.[140] If implicitly reading Madeline and Roderick's twinhood as monozygotic, then the splitting of the zygote at the onset of pregnancy separated the Usher being from itself. Their continued parallel existence always designates that a genetic fracture of the self resides physically apart from it. And, incest between monozygotic twins would consequently be the closest possible reunion of genetic material. Roderick and Madeline are at the border of the other during the process of abjection, as they are at the moment of their incestuous union and at the moment of their simultaneous demise.

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[136] The Ushers' extreme isolation and exclusion from society emphasises this timelessness; their isolation brings stagnation. Their environment reverberates this as their once grand family home now features outdated and decaying hallmarks of a bygone era.
Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 28.
Emphasis in the original.
[137] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection".
[138] Ibid, 229.
[139] Allen Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe", in *Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Regan (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), 43.
Emphasis in the original.
[140] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 230.

Yet, Kristeva adds that "abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory."[141] This explains why Roderick is able to bury his sister alive, despite claiming to have an intimate bond with her. Abjection is the rejection of a fracture of the self, due to an inability to recognise it as a part of oneself.[142] Roderick buries his sister after mistaking her catalepsy for death, despite it being the consequence of her long-held illness which he is aware of.

Roderick's realisation that he has discarded an aspect of himself causes his convulsive panic and blinding confusion, and as he notices a familiar being at his border that is both alluring and repulsive. He disrupts his sense of self when he realises that he has placed his sister at the very limit of the border, and that he nearly terminated a part of his own self by failing to recognise her.

Their dialogic character discourses physically manifest their inner turmoil, which surfaces as Madeline's "suspiciously lingering smile" (89) at her premature burial or as a "sickly smile quivered" (94) across Roderick's face whilst anticipating his sister's resurrection. This uncanny mirroring echoes throughout the text, alerting the reader to an underlying significance. The Ushers' body language conveys their character discourse of simultaneous discomfort and attraction and their consequent confusion.[143] The physical body subtly hints at an internal realisation and dilemma.

This raises interest in the body's ability to psychosomatically reveal the mind's subconscious workings. As such, Madeline's catalepsy seems to indicate much more than a mere bodily ailment or excessive fatigue. Instead, I read her comatose state as a means of shutting out contact with others, as if mimicking her subconscious avoidance of having to deal with the complexity of their incest or of the rejection of self. Similarly, Roderick's preoccupation with art, music and his affinity for very specific sensory experiences suggest a bodily opposition to psychological activities.[144]

The nausea and bodily convulsions experienced by the Ushers are also psychosomatically telling of an inconsistency; something of a warning sign, hinting at the liminal transition they are undergoing. Inconsistency stimulates uncertainty, evident as the Ushers oscillate rhythmically at the brink of a realisation or transition. While Madeline "remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold" (95) moments before her demise, the "measured rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed" (94) as he "rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway." (93)[145]

And, as when one shakes a volatile solution, an eruption results. This fluctuation leads to nausea and the eventual purge, a feeling described in depth by Kristeva: "I experience a gagging sensation and, still

[141] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 233.
[142] Ibid, 232.
[143] Although character discourse is comparable to independent voice, it is not independent of reader interpretation since the reader's interpretation determines the meaning of a text and the profiling of its characters.
[144] Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe", 44.
[145] The presence of the liminal is clear in the residue it leaves behind on the surroundings, as nature similarly trembles with confusion; "there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind" (91) and the clouds "flew careering from all points against each other" (91).

farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire"[146]

The subconscious self uses the body to communicate something internal to the conscious self. The nausea brings with it a hideous panic, a fear of the inability to breathe as the purge ensues and as the conscious self tries to comprehend. The narrator observes "a species of mad hilarity in [Roderick's] eyes—an evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole demeanour." (90)[147] Something internal is disrupted and unaccounted for. [148] The Usher being is undergoing abjection and is confused by the experience and realisations, because abjection "places the one haunted by it literally beside himself".[149]

I argue that the entire process of abjection, which includes the initial rejection of self, the realisation, the gagging and nausea, and the transformation of identity, all occur simultaneously and conflictingly. The simultaneity follows on from Bakhtin's polyphonic formula, which allows characters to express themselves and interact with each other "*in the cross-section of a single moment*."[150] For the purposes of this inquiry, I consider the events relating to the fall of the house of Usher and its inhabitants as the fragments of a single moment, to unpack the very moment of abjection and transition. This simultaneity reverberates throughout becoming, so that the part of self that is "jettisoned" is both inside and outside, manifesting the realisation that the process is both a past and ongoing self-harm. [151]

Moreover, for Kristeva, the motions and sensations of the gagging is a physical manifestation of rejection and distancing from the other.[152] This distancing is akin to my earlier mention of community as a frame, where the individual defines herself in distance and proximity to the conventions of society. In interacting with what is on the border the individual realises that what she has "jettisoned", to define herself, is in fact part of herself.[153] She has enacted self-harm, by shunning a part of the self to the border of being, in the hopes of defining the self.[154] Both the interaction and the realisation are enough to induce the purging action.

Kristeva specifies of abjection that "I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other."[155] Again, this draws on the fact that identity is constructed in relation to others; and is reminiscent of the narrator's role as the community that imposes and affects Roderick's sense of self. The narrator, and the

[146] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 231.
[147] Emphasis in the original.
[148] This reminds that the liminal permeates and infects its surroundings. The narrator claims, "An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame; and, at length, there sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm." (90) This is reminiscent of the *Nightmare* (1782) by Henry Fuseli (Poe cites Fuseli directly when likening Roderick's artworks to his) which seemingly deals with fear and desire being physically embodied, depicting an idea being osmotically transferred between different modes of consciousness and reality.
[149] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 229.
[150] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 28.
Emphasis in the original.
[151] Kristeva's terminology referring to the one, or part of self, who is rejected.
Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 230.
[152] Ibid, 231.
[153] Ibid, 230.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.

reader community he brings with him, represents the imposition of social norms and judgements on the defining of identity. As a result of the influence of the external other, the individual rejects a part of herself to appease the other and to construct identity in accordance with the rules of society.

In the case of the Usher being, their incest represents that fragment of the self that does not assimilate with societal conventions. Despite societal norms informing and imposing the taboo status on their incest, their transition remains an act of self-sabotage since it depends on their interpretation of what the other (society) wants; the Usher being is responsible for undergoing abjection or transformation because the intent or imposition of society stems from perception.

The laws of society and of the other are themselves constructs, and so are inconsistent, unstable and incohesive. The individual self can only guess at the desires of society or the other and determines this by way of selecting one out of many possible interpretations. The desires of the other contribute to defining identity because they function as constructed limits, much like frames, which make sense of unlimited input and delineates potential identity. As such, the individual defines herself by placing a limit on her identity, a limit to what she can know about the vast potential of her self. Considering Madeline and Roderick as a single being split, the other is concurrently part of the self and the part of the self that is rejected via abjection.

Consequently, the other is available due to the fracturing of the internal self. I argue, following Bakhtin's specifications, that involvement with the other extends further into the self than Kristeva clarifies. Bakhtin sees the internal polemic resulting from the dialogic rupturing of the self as far-reaching, extending to the point that there is a rupturing of the mind and its attention as well.[156] The dialogue of the other is always in proximity and insisting on being engaged, which denies characters full internal concentration on the self.[157] The Ushers exemplify this since their isolation from society confines them to each other's company, they are genetically the most alike, and their twinhood imposes on their identity as individuals.

D H Lawrence, in his thoughts on Poe and his works, makes the supplementary argument that human beings consume the vibrations of their surroundings and from others via interaction to sustain themselves, "He takes into him the life of his fellow men, with whom he comes into contact, and he gives back life to them."[158] In my analysis, interpretation and the defining of identity are two instances that insist on this osmotic transferral between individuals, or within an individual, which sees the self devouring the other to sustain itself.

When determining identity, the border between the self and the other is clear. Lawrence suggests that to take from the other implies crossing that border. In Kristeva's terms, this crossing is the site of disintegration. She says that abjection "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses."[159] Frames and borders make sense of reality and are examples of the meaning given to reality that is otherwise expansive and incomprehensible. Meaning collapses when the border between the self and other, as a construct, is trespassed. In abjection, the border between the self and other is both alluring and

[156] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 32.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Lawrence, "Edgar Allan Poe", 67.
[159] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 230.

repulsive, since it is where the self trespasses the other for the sake of her identity. Metafiction epitomises this effect, as it draws attention to the frame only to expose the frame as a mere construct.

I consider the self and the other as frames and so the essential fluidity and constructed nature of their shared border is evident upon inspection, as is the case with metafictional frames. The lack of true border between them iterates the fact that the other is always in proximity to the self and in conversation with the self, even if the other is internal. Bakhtin conveys this notion with regards to Dostoevsky's polyphonic work:

> In Dostoevsky, consciousness never gravitates toward itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness. Every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, or is on the contrary open to inspiration from outside itself-but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways glance at another person. [160]

The dialogic iterates the need for community and for others with whom to engage and against whom it is possible to define the self. The dialogic and the intertextual matrix both make endless meaning possible and available for interpretation, and so occupy the self with endless interactions with its internal and external others. I previously considered the way in which the narrator and readers, as representative of an external other and community, brought judgement and the norms of society to bear on the Usher siblings. Here I consider the internal other, and the way the self becomes its own judge and tormentor during transition.

Having set up the principles of abjection, I explore the example of the Ushers transitioning and defining identity in the following section. I also consider the significance of there being semblance of a border, the repercussions of trespassing the border of the other, and the role of interpretation in defining identity.

Beyond "the precipitous brink"

In this section, I consider the example of the Usher siblings, as a single being undergoing abjection within the limits of the textual frame. Their eventual demise anticipates tragic abjection, and it is the corpse, as Kristeva envisions it, which causes their transitioning.

As an element of death in the realm of the living, the corpse mocks and disregards the demarcation of the border (the frames of self), exposing its fragility, and initiates a transition. [161] Kristeva corroborates, explaining that what causes abjection is:

> what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite… Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility

[160] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 32.
[161] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 231.

> of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. [162]

Madeline, representative of the physical corpse of the Usher being, portrays the disturbing intentionality of the abject in "that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death." (89) The corpse is the embodiment of the abject in its disregard for borders, frames and limits – as death in the realm of the living – and is uncanny and disturbing as a lifeform devoid of life.[163]

Kristeva explains that the corpse results because through the process of abjection the subject rejected so much of her self that there is very little left, and so she has fallen into a state of cadaverousness.[164] As a result, the corpse is especially disruptive of identity and order as a crime committed against the self, as an act of self-harm. Madeline is what remains of the Usher being after the purge, as the physical manifestation of the almost lifeless being. The corpse represents simultaneously the abject (what is rejected) which is vile and disturbing and that part of self that rejects so much that it falls beyond the limit of what it is to be human.

Having fallen beyond the limit into the corpse state, the very sight of the self as corpse stimulates further rejection. The presence of the corpse – and what its presence entails for the subject, namely recognition of its own self-harm – excites such an intense horror that the subject berates itself and rejects, even more, knowing its own heinous potential. I consider this a prospective outcome, which the Usher being confirms when Roderick is similarly reduced to a lifeless state as he beholds his sister's corpse. And, when they finally confront each other, the rejected and the rejector, they both fall beyond the limits of life and into death completely. The being first rejects part of her self due to external pressures from society and the other, whereas the second rejection occurs after acknowledging the violence she has acted against her self.

Whilst the corpse is a physical entity, it also represents the neglect or abandonment of the body. I suggest that this entails a preoccupation with the mind and its processes. The condition of being a corpse is the neglect of physicality. Despite an emphasis on the physical condition of the Ushers via their corpselike states, their deterioration, their twinhood and similarity, their overall physicality is largely deemed insignificant via this overemphasis.

Poe's characters abandon the body for an obsession with the mind, and the internal aspects of the other. Allen Tate says of Poe's lovers, including Madeline and Roderick, that they,

> never do anything but contemplate each other, or pore upon the rigmarole of preposterously erudite, ancient books, most of which never existed. They are living in each other's insides, in the hollows of which burns the fire of will and intellect.[165]

Poe's characters are entirely concerned with the internal that they neglect the external and physical elements of being. Lawrence credits Poe's characters with an obsessive desire for complete knowledge of

[162] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 232.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid, 231.
[165] Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe", 43.

the beloved other and the other's consciousness; a pursuit that is intoxicating as the "heightening, the flow, the ecstasy."[166] Tate similarly observes this mania in Poe's "Ligeia", offering the husband's perspective when he says, "What he wants to do with Ligeia is to analyse her, till he knows all her component parts, till he has got her all in his consciousness."[167] In my application, this desire to know is mutual since both Madeline and Roderick – the fragments of the Usher being – want to reunite with the other half of the split zygote and with the abjected part of the self. The reunion of internal aspects of self anticipates full knowledge of the other and to be a complete self; to reconstruct a full identity.

However, their pursuit of unity is problematic in that it inevitably depletes the other, again causing a cadaverousness. Lawrence argues that to know fully is problematic in its impossibility and because it extends into death, since "You have to kill a thing to know it satisfactorily."[168] Consequently, for the Usher being, to know the other is to devour the self from all sides. Tate corroborates that since "Their very birth had violated their unity of being. They must achieve spiritual identity in mutual destruction."[169] Spiritual unity – the (re)union of the Usher consciousness – results in their mutual destruction since both entities are depleting the other into death.

Abjection is reminiscent of the dissolution of metafictional frames which is the dissolution of limits and structures – which keep order – and which reveals ignorance of the consequences of going beyond the frame or the border of the other. The self, or lover, has no restraint and no sense of proportion when getting to know the other, the beloved. And so, the self goes beyond the physical to consume the other's consciousness. Abjection or the metafictional heightening of the fragility of frames, and the consequent conclusion that there are in fact no true frames, impresses upon the self that she is bereft of borders and frames and so she sees no distinction between herself and the other.

Moreover, attempting to fully know "each other's insides" alone, is also problematic because the physical self is not acknowledged. And, as I have argued using the Romantic envisioning of Imagination, the unity or full utilisation of the mind is only possible via the union of both the physical and mental, energy and reason.

Instead, the self treats the consciousness of the other as if it were an object that can be fully known, explored and possessed. Again, Tate confirms this when he says, "The lover, circumventing the body into the secret being of the beloved, tries to convert the spiritual object into an object of sensation."[170] Both Madeline and Roderick, as fractures of the single being, desire to know the other fully, and both act as a self who is obsessing over the internal workings of the other. They are each a fracture of the self, and the other to the opposing fracture. Since the objectified other rejects all advances, both fractures of the Usher being experience rejection. Even though rejecting the other is a means of defining the self, in

[166] Lawrence, "Edgar Allan Poe", 68.
[167] Ibid, 70.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe", 45.
[170] Ibid, 44.

Kristeva's terms of abjection, the Usher being is rejected from all angles and by all parts of itself and so has no substance left for it to define identity with.[171]

Evidently, their mutual obsession with the other as object has resulted in their mutual depletion. They have both failed to acknowledge the other as part of the self, have failed to acknowledge both physical and mental components of being, and have not treated the other as fully human or as a valid composite of the self.

Madeline suffers in this regard, as she undergoes a "gradual wasting away of the person" (83) to the effect that Roderick and the narrator refer to her objectively as "our mournful burden" (88), "the face of the tenant" (88), "the deceased" (89) and "the body having been encoffined" (88). Language accommodates Roderick to the extent that it imposes the constraints of commas and parentheses around the mention of Madeline, interrupting her with borders and barriers and pinning her down whilst he is in pursuit of her consciousness, "While he spoke, the lady (for so was she called) passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and, without having noticed my presence, disappeared." (82) The language of the text insists on treating her as less than human, and as her brother devours all knowledge of her.

Tate adds that in Poe's textual universe, "the hyperaesthetic egoist has put all other men into his void: he is alone in the world and thus dead to it."[172] I argue that the desire to know and consume the external world is inextricably tied to the self's preoccupation with defining identity in relation to the external world by way of abjecting what it dislikes. However, this ambition becomes problematic when the self goes so far as to consume the entirety of its surroundings, the other included. Having consumed everything in attempts to know it completely, the self has also consumed the other which is, in fact, part of its self. [173] Consequently, there is nothing left inside or outside of the self, and nobody against whom to define the self.

Poe's characters are evidently Kristeva's dejects, having discarded too much of themselves they now include themselves amongst what they abject.[174] Despite the self being intent on defining identity she is unable to concentrate since her ever-changing surroundings preoccupy her as Kristeva predicts, "Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being,' he does so concerning his place: '*Where* am I?' instead of '*Who* am I?'"[175] The deject discards her border along with everything else, and so cannot come to know where her surroundings begin. [176] And, preoccupied with her surroundings, the deject fails to define the new border and the new limits of identity. [177]

Roderick occupies the space of the deject most apparently in his obsession with the sentience of his surroundings, "He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he

[171] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 232.
[172] Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe", 46.
[173] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 235.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
Emphasis in the original.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.

tenanted" (82). Focusing on the "long undisturbed endurance" of the family mansion reveals a fear of change – which has evidently overtaken the decayed mansion – much as his contemplation of the mansion's reflection in the tarn shares concerns for his own locus deceiving him (87).

These fears and impulses fester because the abject taunts him from the border, "A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a nonobject, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh."[178] Madeline haunts Roderick from amongst everything else he rejected, to constantly remind him that he has no solid identity and to preoccupy his attention and deny him the opportunity to define identity again. After burying Madeline alive, Roderick is consumed by the realisation of what he has done – of abjecting her – and gives up all semblance of normalcy for erratic and obsessive behaviour.

The abject denounces frames and borders because it is both part of and exiled from the self. The abject ruptures borders and taunts the self about not having identity, despite knowing that borders and frames constitute identity and that the process of abjection is itself a means of self-definition by way of differentiating the self from others. As is the case with metafictional frames, their dissolution draws attention to the locus of the frame, that frames are in fact constructs and that there is no true distinction between the self and the (internal) other. There is similarly no distinction between the deject and the abject, which leads to the conscious realisation that what was other, abject or external is rather part of the self and internal.

In response to being trespassed and to being treated as object, the other revolts. Enraged, Madeline retaliates with her "violent" (95) death agonies and targets Roderick as her "victim" (95). Tate says of Poe's female characters, who are usually positioned as the others being interrogated, that "the lovers have not subdued them through the body to the biological level, at which sanity alone is possible, and they retaliate by devouring their men."[179] Again, without engaging the self in its entirety, as both a mental and physical entity, there is inevitably no unified sense of identity.

In abjection, it seems that the self's interaction with the abject, her interaction with and as the corpse, and her awareness of the dissolution of borders and frames can likely lead to disillusionment with identity. This all occurs as she trespasses another being to the death, and as she falls beyond the limits of life due to excessive self beratement upon reflection. I propose that this is merely one possible progression. Alternatively, I argue that abjection can reach beyond the limits and (apparently non-existent) frames and affect the reader's sense of becoming as well.

"a mere different arrangement of the particulars": Redefining the reader

[178] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 235.
Emphasis in the original.
[179] Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe", 43.

Having shown the possible trajectory of Poe's characters' abjection and attempts at defining identity, I consider possible trajectories for reader transitioning when interacting with the textual frame and its dialogic characters.

I return to my earlier claims that the textual frame creates an immersive realm for the reader, which the polyphonic and dialogic life-likeness of the text and its characters intensifies. The reader engages the characters interactively, initially unconscious to the frames separating the text from her reality. It is part of the reader's reach, as the one who determines meaning and effect, to engage the characters as complete and competent beings and as reflections and fractures of her own self.

The metafictional disruption of frames that draws attention to their non-existence and, endows the reader with a consciousness regarding her relationship to the text and a self-consciousness of her ability to determine the effect the text has on her. Whilst the presence of the corpse disrupts the characters' frames of life and death, as death in the realm of the living, alongside Madeline's premature burial and uncanny resurrection it reminds the reader of the frames between the text and her reality. They remind the reader of the imaginary nature of the text's contents, and that the ultimate irrelevance of frames entails that the reader can self-consciously engage the text as though it were real and determine her preferred effect.

The reader engages the characters fully whilst operating as the community that imposes on them, reading them in adherence or divergence from her preferences, and framing them and limiting their identity via her interpretation. The reader treats the characters as extensions of her own engagements with identity and the influences of external pressures. Consequently, the reader extends her internal processes to the textual realm, positioning the characters as the internal other.

This reading situates the Ushers as the abjected parts of self that do not conform to convention, and the narrator as the deject who obsesses over complete knowledge of the internal other. His narration depicts the Ushers in full as if he devours all knowledge of them in his recollection. Evidenced as he details Roderick's physical appearance at length, "A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations" (80).

After abjecting the Ushers, for their incest and disregard for convention, the narrator becomes the deject, who has rejected so much of himself that he can no longer identify or locate himself. [180] He exposes his pitiful position as he grapples with trying to describe the space around him. He clearly obsesses over the details of the room in which he meets Roderick:

> The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within... Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. (79-80)

[180] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 235.

The changing landscape threatens the narrator in the same way it does Roderick, since both deal with the decaying Usher grounds and the debated sentience of their surroundings. The narratorial position also conveys the fluidity of surroundings, since he narrates from a future moment and alternative location. And, textually, the linguistic environment that describes the narrator is fluid. As part of the matrix, the signs and symbols that signify his presence are empty vessels that are occupied by ever-changing meaning derived from the intertextual matrix.

His obsession with locus results in him neglecting all interest in defining the self, much as the parts of self he rejects constantly reminds him about his volatile state.[181] As part of the same entity, the reader bears the same guilt for the Ushers' transgressions. Identifying amongst the abjected parts of self, the reader acts as the abjected does and repeatedly calls the narrator's solidity as deject into doubt; drawing his attention to the fact that he has rejected so much of himself that very little remains.

Even though the self abjects fractures of its being and devours all knowledge of the other in attempts to define identity, the self only achieves identity upon realising that the abjected and deject all still constitute the self. [182] It is in the reader's conscious engagement with the narrator and the Ushers that she objectively sees them as the abjected and the deject parts of herself, which further establishes a self-consciousness in relation to the text. This self-consciousness is the result of the transitioning, and, I argue, its most liminal moment.

The self-consciousness, which results from the reader's objective engagements with parts of the self, is also necessary when deciding the new normal that follows the liminal transition and the new identity that the self settles into. Taking cues from Thomassen's theorisation the new normal necessarily follows the liminal moment and its conditions, which are only temporary. [183] Once the new normal is attained, and identity is defined, the characteristic amnesia sets in and the self-consciousness passes. The reader's disengagement from the internal realm and interactions with her external reality depend on the self-conscious realisations that manifested from her interactions with her textual fractures of self. However, as is the case with liminality, her redefined sense of self is independent and forgetful of the processes that resulted in those realisations.

Alternatively, in another reading, the characters assume the role of the other, as opposed to the internal other, and as the embodiment of everything apart from what the reader perceives as self. The reader abjects the characters as those parts of self that she projects onto the text and considers external or innate to the text – but which stem from her reading since the interpretation of the text is dependent on her.

The reader's textual immersion resonates with the Usher being's obsession with getting to know itself to the death. This is since the reader becomes absorbed by the characters to the extent that she mimics

[181] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 235.
[182] Kristeva specifies that the abject is what is rejected by the deject and that they are the only parts of the self. However, I consider both the abject and deject as parts of the self, alongside the reader; showing a plurality of fractures of the self.
Ibid, 232.
[183] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 4.

Poe's characters' desire to know the abjected other fully. In this interaction, the text assumes the position of the corpse, as a lifeless body drained of meaning by the reader's interactions. The corpse reminds the reader of what she has rejected to define herself and draws attention to her self-harm, for which she further berates herself.

Despite Bakhtin envisioning characters as having the capacity to be fully-fledged human beings, they are at risk of being treated as objects by the reader who trespasses the limits of the characters to fully know them and consume them into her own identity. When the reader treats the abjected other as object, since the abject is a fracture of herself, she treats herself as object. Concurrently, the reader's immersion in the textual realm, and amnesia regarding her own reality outside the text, is the neglect of the physical for an obsession with the mental in a failure to engage herself fully. Treating the abject as object is the reader's attempt to engage the self on a physical level, and an attempt to engage herself fully.

Whether the reader interacts with the other or internal other, it is in abjection, as an instance of liminal transitioning, that the reader realises that reality is devoid of frames, mere constructs used to delineate a structure and meaning, and that her interactions across frames are rather interactions with manifestations and fractures of herself. The conscious and self-conscious realisation of the processes of liminality and abjection is that identity is a construct, a frame created to delineate that vastness of the self, and it is only after realising the constructed nature of the self that the reader can reconstruct identity.

In a more general sense, the reader is not a static or single being. Various individuals fill the position of reader across time and simultaneously. As the reader changes, the meaning derived from the text is similarly always unfolding. This eternal reader participates in the functioning of the text, alongside Poe who embodies authorial intent. The reader, whose function is interpretation, takes the position of the abject; the reader is that part of the functioning text which is constantly being rejected from the textual realm and replaced by other readers.

The abject threatens the stability of the deject, of Poe and his authorial intent. Even though it is the impulse of the deject to get to know the abject that taunts him, Poe as the author can never know the ever-evolving readership. Instead all parties involved in the functioning of the text are eternally left to convulse to the creation of new meaning and perpetually purging old meaning via a gagging action. No solid identity or resolution is ever reached, confirming that meaning that derives from the intertextual matrix is fluid and is independent of any speaker or interpreter.

The inevitable disruption of the textual frame and the reader's immersion in it, induces a consciousness and self-consciousness in the reader. The reader's self-consciousness of her ability to determine the meaning and effect of the text makes introspection possible, given the characters' realistic and mimetic functioning. These frames of mind lead to the realisation that frames and borders are constructs, and that identity is a means of framing the self and so is similarly a construct. Ultimately, the reader's comprehension of the borderless fluidity of experience, interpretation and communication is what allows her to reconstruct identity.

Conclusion

My ambition has been to determine the extent of effect on the reader, whilst exploring a reader's potential transitioning in relation to Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher". I have used Savoy to show emotion as a proposed limit on the effect of a text. And, I have shown that whilst Marie Bonaparte claims that meaning resides in the author's psychobiography, Angela Carter, Maggie Tonkin and Rebecca Munford have disagreed and argued that socio-historical setting instead determines meaning. I have also argued against authorial intent by showing that reader interpretation is the final determinant of meaning and effect, and that reading authorial intent, psychobiography or the socio-historical moment all depend on the reader and her interpretation of the text.

I have shown that much as the reader's interpretation determines the meaning and effect of texts, it is language's capacity to convey a sense of reality that limits it. Language underlies this interpretation of texts, and so interpretation depends on what language can communicate about the experience of reality, and which is further limited by the possibilities of reality. Reality also limits the text as an instance of language. Language and reality determine the fundamental structure in which meaning and effect must exist, but do not determine the meaning and effect the reader interprets. I have explored these ideas in relation to Poe's short story, and so argue that it is true for "The Fall of the House of Usher" with the potential to apply to other texts in varying degrees.

In my search for the conditions that induce a more significant effect from the text, I have shown that adherence to reality creates an engaging text. I argue that the closer the text and language function to fulfil their primary purpose, to convey a sense of reality, the greater the effect on the reader. The text's verisimilitude to reality conditions the reader toward textual immersion.

The polyphonic text and the dialogic iterate this dedication to a close representation of experience of reality. The dialogic conveys human multiplicity by making various interpretations of meaning possible simultaneously, whereas polyphonic character discourse offers life-like characters for the reader to engage with. Bakhtin's theories prioritise and premise this sense of realism as they exude the volatility, simultaneity and contradiction of human experience, and as they echo the principles of language that aim to closely convey reality back to the interpreter. Despite Poe's paper-thin characters his readers are still easily immersed in his text, which confirms that meaning and effect are determined by the reader.

Having framed the faithful representation of reality as the condition for my inquiry, I demonstrated the effects it has on the reader. A convincing portrayal of reality makes the text immersive for the reader, so much so that the reader loses sight of the border and frame between reality and the text. This contributes toward the metafictional effect that reminds the reader of the textual frame she engages.

However, despite the dialogic, the life-like characters and the immersive quality, the text is always only like reality and not reality itself; much like language is merely a metaphor for reality. The metafictional disruption of frames reminds the reader of this, and by drawing attention to the frame between the text and reality, it is evident that the frame is a construction.

My interests lie with the resulting consciousness, where the reader becomes aware of her distance and perceived proximity to the text. The effect is a consciousness of the frames involved in interpretation, and a consciousness of the general constructed nature of the frames that organise reality and define identity. Consciousness affords objectivity which allows the reader to observe her immersion in the text and her role in determining the meaning and effect of the text. The resulting self-consciousness allows the reader to control the effect the text has on her.

Consciousness and self-consciousness are evidence of greater potential in textual effect. Specifically, I have shown that self-consciousness makes endless effect possible, including the defining of identity, which is also only limited by the interpretation of the reader. Abjection is a necessary process of human development, which I have shown in the Usher siblings, and which the reader inevitably undergoes. But I argue here that this is also possible in relation to the text, as I have shown in my final chapter. Engagement with the text is comparable to introspection and engagement with the other or internal other; premised in the immersiveness of the text and the life-like quality of its characters.

The reader's consciousness of the constructed frames, which make sense of experience and delineate identity, induces realisations about the self. The reader becomes aware that there are frames separating her from the textual world and its characters, and that frames extend beyond the text to help her identify different parts of herself and determine who she is in relation to others. This coexistence of fragmented parts of an identity and the confrontation with the other and internal other is evident in polyphony. Bakhtin says that this simultaneity places the character in "convers[ation] with his own double, with the devil, with his alter ego, with his own caricature".[184] I have used Madeline and Roderick Usher's twinhood to illustrate this confrontation with the self.

This internal splitting also recalls Bakhtin's portrayal of the ironic rift within the serio-comic character in the early novel; he cites the 16th century authors Cervantes and Rabelais as archetypes of the serio-comic genre and its moment in the history of the novel. [185] The comedic makes possible an introspective dialogue as it scrutinises the traditionally serious role and plot for their unrealistically straightforward designs.[186] Irony complicates self and duty so that any singular and consequently obsessive destiny seems absurd, and so that for the serio-comic hero there is "no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash over the brim."[187] Bakhtin suggests that this inability to fulfil extends to death and is evident in Madeline's premature burial, and in the constant renewal of the text resulting from new interpretations, in new epochs, so that the characters never expire.[188]

The duality inherent in this lack of moderation toward the completion of a destiny elucidates that there is no single or straightforward trajectory for any character. Much like the polyphonic character who integrates a multiplicity of voices within itself, each with their own priority and opinion, the serio serio-

[184] Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", 28.
[185] Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel", 36.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid, 37.
[188] Ibid, 36.

comic hero translates essential human qualities into the text. In relation to Poe's reader, the multiplicity of voices each with their own direction, solidifies the simultaneity of various interpretations and the manifestation of many different effects.

Kristeva's theory of abjection, as I've explored it in Chapter 2, has helped elucidate this fracturing of the self, showing that there is always internal conflict even as the self undergoes a transitioning. According to Kristeva, an individual abjects a part of herself to define her identity only to realise that the abject remains a part of her identity. [189] The voices of the abject and the deject complicates any straightforward trajectory; where the abject taunts the deject so that she fails to redefine her identity anew.

It is in abjection that the reader engages the many fractures and voices of herself. However, it is the self-consciousness resulting from the metafictional disruption of frames that alerts her to her repeated construction of frames, which includes the framing of parts of self. Self-consciousness of the immateriality of frames highlights that she created the distinction between the fractures of self and between herself and community. And, it causes her to admit that she is responsible for attributing meaning to the voice of community that she claims imposes on her.

The reader interprets the desire of the other and community, which is to say that all information regarding the other and society is internal and that the other's assumed desire for the definition of the reader's self is rather the reader's own desire. And, without a border between society and the reader the exchange between them is mutual, where the reader influences community as much as community imposes on the reader's self. This iterates that the other is both internal and external simultaneously. The reader is then constantly engaging herself and her abjected fractures. In her interpretations of the other and society, she places limits on them and in doing so defines them and their identity.

I have interpreted metafiction in Poe's text as the narrator's reading of the "Mad Trist" and in its timeous echoing of his reality. I have shown that the resulting disruption of frames induces the reader's consciousness, and consequent objectivity and self-consciousness, and that these cognitive states are necessary for the liminal process of abjection toward the definition of identity. However, Thomassen describes the liminal specifically as the moment "during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction and destruction."[190] This reminds that the destruction of frames extends to the usual parameters used to make sense of cognitive processes, resulting in the disintegration of distinction between the conscious and unconscious frames of mind.

Moreover, in abjection, Kristeva explains that the abjected horrors, which are typically repressed in the unconscious, are excluded but liminally so.[191] Despite being rejected, the abject remains attractive and in conversation with the self as it taunts her about her lack of identity.[192] Kristeva thus argues that in abjection there is a distinction between self and other, where the other is proven to be a fracture of the self that resides at her border, and that it is "As if such an opposition subsumed the one between

[189] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 235.
[190] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 1.
[191] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 234.
[192] Ibid, 235.

Conscious and Unconscious".[193] This suggests that abjection, much like liminal becoming, places the self and the reader on the border of consciousness and unconsciousness.

I interpret this liminal position between the conscious and unconscious as advantageous for the additional potential that it releases since, as Thomassen says, it opens "the way to novelty and imagination, construction and destruction."[194] The consciousness dictated by the metafictional disruption of frames is distinct from the known conscious and unconscious frames of mind, and instead refers to the liminal space of potential between them.

Whilst I have argued that the reader's interpretation determines effect, here I add that in interpretation – as I have depicted it – the reader is in a liminal cognitive frame between the conscious and unconscious frames of mind and therefore has access to greater meaning and effect. When the reader engages the text in her liminal transition, she accesses an unbound variety of cognition. This iterates that interpretation allows the reader to derive endless potential meaning and effect from a text.

Poe's short story epitomises this potentiality of texts and provides the reader with a mimetic example from which to discern this potential. At the denouement, the narrator finally says:

> my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "*House of Usher*." (95)[195]

The dialogic expands the possibilities of "reeled" to encompass my interpretation of his becoming, and the idiosyncrasies of the liminal and abjection. The word connotes that distinctively liminal "state of disorder" and disorientation, as well as that "violent manner" of the abject that induces an "intoxication" and "faintness".[196] This feeling of faintness is reminiscent of Kristeva's words, that upon being confronted by the abject that disrupts all distinction of self and other, "*I fall in a faint.*"[197] The narrator experiences these feelings at his confrontation with the abject when the Usher château dissolves into its image in the tarn, doing away with the illusion of distinction between the object and its image; between reality and its metaphor.

In this thesis, I have argued that the effect of the text is not limited to emotion, or to authorial intent, a psychobiographical or a socio-historical reading of the text. Instead, reader interpretation, limited only by experience of reality, determines the meaning and effect derived from the text. In my inquiry into the limits of effect on the reader, I have shown that the text's immersiveness is what contributes to the production of a greater effect. And, that the metafictional disruption of frames causes objectivity and consciousness in the reader. The reader experiences this when the narrator engages the "Mad Trist" in a parallel reading, and as the narration concludes mimetically with the fall of the house of Usher.

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[193] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 234.
[194] Thomassen, "Into Liminality", 1.
[195] Emphasis in the original.
[196] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Reel, v.", https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/view/Entry/160644?rskey=ApBKXi&result=1#eid
[197] Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection", 231.

It is, consequently, the reader's consciousness that lingers liminally between the conscious and unconscious frames of mind, which induces an objectivity and self-consciousness that allows the reader a potential transitioning and defining of identity. It is the reader's interpretation of the text as life-like that makes this possible, as she engages the text outside of its constructed frame and instead as a viable other against whom to define identity. And, it is in each instance of the reconstruction of identity and the construction of new frames that the reader determines the limits of the effect of the text.

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