

The Abyss of the Unknown in the Books “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” and “*A Rose for Emily*”

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Abstract

The stories “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” and “*A Rose for Emily*” have made an important contribution to literature. “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” presents a story of a family consisting of two siblings who lived together in an isolated house. Similarly, “*A Rose for Emily*” presents the story of a woman, Emily who lived a mysterious life. There are various themes that can be drawn from the stories. The aim of this paper is to explore the universal theme of the abyss of the unknown in the two stories. Thus, the paper critically delves into the elements of the stories that support the theme. Some of the supporting themes in “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” include the house, terror, illness and madness, the description of the family, and death. In “*A Rose for Emily*”, the presented themes are resistance to change, family, death, and alienation. The paper also analyzes the similarities and dissimilarities as presented in the stories with regard to the universal theme. The similarities include families and residences, incest, house, isolation, and the deaths of the characters. The dissimilarities in the stories were in the setting of the stories and suspense.

Keywords: Abyss of the unknown, theme, suspense, mystery.

1.0 Introduction

The books, “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” and “*A Rose for Emily*” present a plethora of themes that are important in understanding various phenomena in the society. According to Jockers and Mimno (2013), in literature, the historical and cultural environment of an author plays a significant role in influencing the choice of themes. Additionally, the more thoroughly the readers identify the themes, the better they understand the broader perspectives of a novel and the context in which it is published.

“*The Fall of the House of Usher*” is a story written by Edgar Allan Poe. Although the story gets various critical interpretations from many readers, it receives appraisal with regard to genre as a Gothic romance

(Timmerman, 2014). The story evinces the narrator's experience at the house of Usher. Conspicuously, the house of Usher, which is the residence of the narrator's childhood friend, is mysterious and scary. Accordingly, the house seems to have an evil atmosphere which is shown by the decaying trees, murky pods, small cracks on the walls, and the disintegration of some individual stones. In the story, it is evident that Usher's family has never flourished as one member of the family only survives from one generation to another.

Avoiding the dangerous ramifications of lonesomeness, Roderick invited his friend, the narrator, to come and give him company. As observed by the narrator, Roderick looked pale and less energetic as he was physically and emotionally ill. However, the narrator tried to cheer him up but his attempts were futile. Drastically, the narrator found that Roderick's sister, Madeline, was ill with a mysterious sickness that led to her death. Trying to help Roderick elude from the entangled inner conflict he was passing through, the narrator accepted to help Roderick to bury Madeline inside the house. Roderick dreaded burying her outside the house for fear that doctors might exhume her for a scientific examination. One night, Roderick was very uneasy when he saw a bright-looking gas surrounding the house. However, with the intention of consoling Roderick, the narrator explained that it was a natural phenomenon and started reading a romance to him. All of a sudden, the narrator heard some sounds that corresponded to those described in the story. With the aim of producing a catharsis of pity, Roderick revealed that he had been hearing these sounds by the time they buried Madeline alive. Actually, the sounds were being made by Madeline while trying to escape. Unexpectedly, they saw Madeline, who appeared as a ghost, coming closer to them. She intentionally attacked Roderick and killed him. At that moment, the narrator was compelled to escape the house which then crumbled down (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

On the other hand, "*A Rose for Emily*" is a short story that was written in 1930. The setting of the story was in Jefferson, a small town of in the South of USA (Eriksson, 2011). The story began at Miss Emily's funeral where everyone was excited to get into her old house which nobody had entered for the last ten years. For a long time, the town had had a special agreement with Miss Emily who was exempted from paying taxes since 1894. Although the new leadership of the town was not happy with the agreement, Miss Emily refused to pay the taxes. Emily's father died and left her the house in which she lived alone as she had failed to get a suitor due to her father's threats. Despite the fact that her father was very wild and abusive, Miss Emily really felt the loss. A few years after her father's death, Miss Emily started dating Homer Barron, a Northerner, who was working on a sidewalk-building project in the town. However, the townspeople were unhappy with the relationship between Miss Emily and Barron and even asked Miss Emily's cousins to stop

the affair. Barron later disappeared in a mysterious way. The story ended at the death of Miss Emily. At the funeral, Miss Emily's servant allowed the townswomen to go into the house. It was at that point where the townspeople broke into a room upstairs which had been closed for over forty years to find the relics of Homer's corpse in the bed (Faulkner, 2012).

2.0 Discussion and Analysis

2.1 The Abyss of the Unknown

In both stories, the theme of the unknown is presented in form of mystery and suspense. Three psychologists, Andrew Ortony, Gerald L. Clore, and Allan Collins develop the standard account theory of suspense which holds that suspense is made up of three main elements: fear, hope, and the cognitive state of uncertainty. The psychologists define fear as the feeling of displeasure while expecting an undesirable event. On the other hand, hope is the feeling of pleasure in the expectation of a desirable event. According to the theory, the feeling of suspense arises when individuals are in fear of a bad outcome or when they are hopeful of a good outcome. In both cases, suspense happens when a situation that is expected to occur is unknown. The degree of uncertainty of a particular outcome determines the level of suspense. As such, if there is no uncertainty, there is no suspense. With regard to the cognitive state of uncertainty, it is impossible for individuals to fear a situation that they are sure will turn out well (Smuts, 2008).

The difference between mystery and suspense lies in the two questions. The first, "what is about to happen?" is related to the future and it involves suspense. The second is associated with the past and answers the question, "what happened?" and it involves mystery. This basically means that it is possible to have mystery without suspense, while suspense must always be linked to mystery. Furthermore, mystery is associated with what is irrational, inexpressible, and incomprehensible (Dąbala, 2012).

This paper aims at discussing the theme of the abyss of the unknown as presented in the two stories. The paper begins by discussing the theme in the story "*The Fall of the House of Usher*" and then in "*A rose for Emily*". Also, the paper discusses the similarities and dissimilarities between the abysses of the unknown in the two stories. A conclusion is then drawn from the critical analysis of the two books.

2.2 The Abyss of the Unknown in "The Fall of the House of Usher"

The section focuses on exploring the abyss of the unknown in the tale "*The Fall of the House of Usher*". The unknown in the story is mainly aimed at arousing the interest of the readers in the plot. A number of events which the readers are unaware of create a feeling of mystery or suspense. This makes the readers to expect a mysterious occurrence. The abyss of the unknown is

demonstrated in the themes of the house, terror, illness and madness, family, and death.

2.2.1 The House

The house in the story is used symbolically to depict an unknown incident that may happen in the story. According to Fadaee (2010), a symbol is a communication element that represents the complexity of a person, object, idea or group. Psychological theorists perceive symbols to have a deeper ineffable meaning and mystical process (Morrell, 2011). Lei (2015) described a symbol as an object that represents a visual image, belief, material entity or action. At the beginning of the story, the narrator noticed that he was entering into a world of mystery after he crossed the tarn bridge. He explained that he did not know what it was that unnerved him when he contemplated the house of Usher (Yamina, 2013). Accordingly, he felt that the image of Roderick's house was horrifying. The house had cracks and was surrounded by dead trees. This implied that the house was an indicator of an unknown negative phenomenon (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

2.2.2 Terror

Terror is another theme that depicts unknown events in the story. Not only does it destroy the very differentiation between life and death in gothic novels, but it is used to evoke suspense and anticipation. It reveals potentially an unknown phenomenon and encourages the reader to read the story. Terror is discrete and apprehensive (Bloom, 2010). In the story, the narrator spoke about some horrifying and dreadful incidents that happened in the mysterious house where Roderick lived. The narrator and Roderick sometimes heard peculiar sounds from stringed instruments (Yamina, 2013). The appearance of Madeline after entombment was rather a surreal scene that caused terror to Roderick and the narrator. Besides, the atmosphere inside the house equally led to the feeling of suspense and mystery, for example the narrator confirmed that in the house the light which was never bright gave a ghastly and mysterious feeling. Generally, the gloomy atmosphere created in the story helped to demonstrate an unknown phenomenon that might occur later in the story (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

Ultimately, when Madeline appeared in the house, the narrator was sleepless because he was experiencing a feeling of terror that he could not understand. That feeling was an indication of fear or anxiety over something that he was not aware of. To get relieved, he read the book 'A Mad Tryst' by Sir Lancelot Cuning to Roderick Usher, but the events in the book were similar to the happenings in the house. At this point, the reader was unaware that the story was a depiction of Madeline's appearance from the tomb (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

2.2.3 Illness and Madness

The theme of illness and madness is used in literature to raise the critical consciousness of humanity. For example, in Latin America, women writers, from using madness as a tool for tackling the issue of female marginalization and to discussing the changes of women position in the society, have convincingly established a linkage between addressing women's social struggles in the society and accepting them as prominent figures. Moreover, madness in literature is described as a destabilizing and subversive condition; it's a representation of a counter-culture perspective. A destabilizing condition is one that challenges the social norms and power dynamics, while a subversive condition plays an important role in separating reason from unreason. Crucially, madness is determined by the understanding and neutralization of cultural practices (Sánchez-Blake&Kanost, 2015).

Madness and illness have been manipulated in the story to display the unknown. Roderick and Madeline suffered from mental illness. This was verified by depression and anxiety. In Roderick's case, this was demonstrated by the fact that he felt physically and emotionally ill and hence he invited the narrator to give him company. Yet, the illness from which Roderick was suffering is unknown. Also, there is evidence that Madeline was suffering from symptoms of an unknown illness that had for a long time baffled her physician. Obviously, these symptoms resembled those of epilepsy, schizophrenia, hysteria, alcoholism or a brain tumor. Nevertheless, her illness led to a settled apathy and frequent presentations of partially cataleptical character. Drastically, while the narrator and Roderick laid Madeline in a tomb at the bottom of the house, they were unaware that she was not dead but she could possibly be suffering from catalepsy (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

After the entombment of Madeline, the narrator explained that Roderick's health worsened. This verified that something had been wrong with Madeline's burial. After a while, Roderick heard weird sounds and felt certain occurrences in the house predicted for the unknown that was about to happen (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

In another scenario, Roderick entered into a period of immobility which he thought to be the nature of his ailment. He added that it was a constitutional and family evil for which he failed to find a remedy. He further described the ailment to be a mere nervous infection that would pass off. However, Roderick appeared uncertain of the nature of his condition which was seen by the incoherence and inconsistency in his character (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

2.2.4 Family

Families can be defined both in a psychological and transactional perspective: in a psychological perspective, intact families are those that

accomplish their respective psychological tasks while the transactional perspective views intact families as those that create a sense of interdependence and permanence in their relationships with one another. The most common psychological tasks accomplished in families include raising and socialization of children, parenting, and providing instrumental and emotional support for one another (Vangelisti, 2012). However, the family presented in the story provides support for the theme of the abyss of the unknown.

The Usher family was mysterious in that it was socially isolated and lived a supernatural and mystic life. The relationship between Roderick and his sister Madeline also seemed abnormal and incestuous. However, it wasn't clear what bound Roderick to Madeline and what made him feel extremely terrified of her (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). Roderick Usher and his sister cut themselves from friends and stayed by themselves in their mansion. They ended up being sick and insane as they lacked contact with the outside world (Yamina, 2013). Apparently, the two siblings hadn't any spouses and they lived together in the isolated house with each of them suffering and ailing in the family home. However, it was unknown what exactly the relationship between the two siblings was.

In the narrator's description of the Usher family, the narrator explained that the family had strange qualities such as a thin family tree that was characterized by a direct line of descent and never put forth any enduring branch. The root cause of this scenario was unclear. Nevertheless, it could be an implication of incest whereby the strange ailment that was consuming Roderick and Madeline was a result of inbreeding. However, the actual nature of the family was unclear to the narrator as it was isolated, strange, and mysterious (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

2.2.5 Death

Death is a secret and mysterious event. Zygmunt Bauman, a sociologist argued that death is the most trustworthy experience in the life of a human being. However, it still remains unknown and inexplicable. Literature provides humans with the ways of approaching death and imagining it in various views. As such, literature offers insight on mortality and death in various ways (Hakola, & Kivistö, 2014). Death is basically represented as mimicry or signification in language and has been widely used to describe various themes. This means that literature neutralizes the language of death, projects the reader into an atmosphere of immortality and presents theoretical principles and cultural illusions for controlling death. Generally, there is a relationship between literature and death. However, the representation of death in stories does not bring about the characters' courage of facing death or their indifference towards death. It is often presented as inevitable (Teodorescu,

2015). Apparently, death is used in literature to create emotional effects, suspense, mysteries, and plot twists (Hakola&Kivistö, 2014).

In the story, death presented the abyss of the unknown. Madeline, Usher's sister, died and rose from the tomb. Nonetheless, it was unknown if she really died. Roderick and the narrator put her in a tomb under the castle after she succumbed to a strange illness. When she appeared, Roderick shouted that they had put her living in the tomb. Unfortunately, the family had some supernatural characteristics, for example Roderick possessed some characteristics of a vampire such as lying on a sofa for long, avoiding daylight, food, and roaming. As such, it was unknown whether in real sense Madeline died or she was just present to demonstrate supernatural characteristics (Poe & Sylvester, 1975).

2.3 The Abyss of the Unknown in “A Rose for Emily”

This section discusses the theme of the abyss of the unknown in “*A Rose for Emily*”. The story of Miss Emily is characterized by a number of mysterious and suspenseful events that help to catch the attention of the reader in the entire story. The major theme is examined through various sub-themes which include resistance to change, family, death, and alienation.

2.3.1 Resistance to Change

The study of social psychology has significantly focused on the issue of resistance to change. Between 1857 and 1929, Thorstein Veblen, an American sociologist, noted that human beings privilege traditions and customs over social change. Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist who wrote his work between 1890 and 1947, viewed resistance to change to stem from the fact that human beings have more value for the groups in which they belong. Also, a change in attitudes and behavior is associated with abandoning the embrace of a social reality which is largely shared by family members and friends (Jost, 2015). These aspects of resistance to change have been deep-rooted in the “*A Rose for Emily*”.

In the entire story, Emily was depicted as a woman who was resistant to change. The cause of this resistance was unexplained in the entire story. Resistance to change was confirmed by the townspeople who despised Emily because she was an old fashioned lady. Moreover, those people kept gossiping about her and discussing how she conducted herself and her life (Gray, 2013). While the town of Jefferson had significantly progressed as depicted by the new gasoline pumps, cotton wagon, and garages, Miss Emily remained embedded on the past.

In another scenario, it was evident in the story that Miss Emily's family had an exceptional relationship with the town leadership and was, therefore, exempted from paying taxes. With the new management of the town, Miss

Emily was required to start paying the tax obligations which she rejected. Her refusal to adapt to the new changes was also not known (Faulkner, 2012).

2.3.2 Family

The story depicted Emily's father, Colonel Sartoris, as an overprotective, stubborn, and overbearing person. The mysterious relationship between Miss Emily and colonel did not seem as that of a daughter and father. Many times, Emily's father refused to let any man be near his daughter. After his death, Emily became confused and disoriented. She wouldn't believe that her father was dead and even went ahead to deny the townspeople's permission to bury him (Faulkner, 2012). This raised further questions on her relationship with her father (Gray, 2013).

2.3.3 Death

The circumstance surrounding the death of Homer Barron was mysterious and unknown. Miss Emily's suitor inexplicably disappeared and his relics were later found in a room upstairs after Emily's death (Melczarek, 2009). The story implied that Homer died of poisoning since Miss Emily was seen buying poison from a pharmacy. The townspeople even thought that she was going to poison herself (Faulkner, 2012). The causes of Emily's death and that of her father were also unknown.

2.3.4 Alienation

Alienation is one of the major themes of human condition that has been largely explored in many sociological, psychological, philosophical, and literary studies. Alienation is defined as being estranged from something or somebody (Saleem&Bani-ata, 2014). Not only is it a mental condition, but it is also defined as the state of feeling separated or estranged from one's work, products of work or self (Saleem&Bani-ata, 2014). Alienation can be referred to as social isolation or geographical separation that causes a number of challenges for families such as limited interaction with the expended family or friends and the lack of access to resources such as schools, physicians, and transportation. In some circumstances, family may choose or be forced to remain isolated from the surrounding community for various reasons such as fear of crime, suspiciousness, and violence (Nelson &Prilleltensky, 2010).

In the story, the townspeople remained skeptical of Emily. The narrator explained that while the town of Jefferson grew and progressed, Emily remained haunted by the past. She was even more complicated and difficult to understand since despite refusing to pay taxes, she didn't accept to hang up her mailbox (Gray, 2013). Emily's alienation led all the townspeople to make up stories.

In another scenario, an awful smell emanated from Miss Emily's house. This is present in the story when the board of Alderman went to Miss Emily's house to collect taxes and find the house smelling of dust and disuse which was described by a close dank smell. The cause of the smell was unknown. The city council was unable to confront Miss Emily regarding the strong smell. Instead, they sent men under the cover of darkness to sprinkle lime around the house. After this action, the smell dissipated (Faulkner, 2012).

3.0 Comparison between the Stories

3.1 Similarities

There are various similarities in both tales in relation to the theme of the unknown. These similarities are shown by various aspects in the stories such as families and residences and other themes such as incest, house, isolation, and the deaths of the characters in the stories. This section discusses the various similarities in the story with regard to the abyss of the unknown.

3.1.1 Family and Residences

The two stories take on precisely the presentational pursuits of two mysterious families. A lot is unknown about the families since they are alienated from the society and exhibit abnormal characteristics. In the tale "*The Fall of the House of Usher*", the Usher family was described as one with a thin direct family line with no branches (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). The main reason behind these questions was unknown. Nevertheless, it was presumed to have been caused by inbred genes. Similarly, the story "*A Rose for Emily*" illuminated mystery of unknown; Miss Emily's family had always been gossiped by the townspeople due to its weird nature. Also, the events that happened in Emily's house were mysterious and this was confirmed during Emily's burial when all the townspeople wanted to enter the house to find out what exactly was inside (Faulkner, 2012). This showed that the family lifestyle portrayed a world in irrationality disrupted the stable social order.

3.1.2 Incest

According to Tosenberger(2008), incest is in most cases associated with romantic and gothic literature. In the English speaking world, the love between siblings in the form of incest is a strange phenomenon that is sensational. In most cases, sibling incest results in a circular argument. The sexual relation between siblings in literature leads to the feeling of shame and confusion. This suggests that the behavior is wrong (Kokkola&Valovirta, 2017).

In both stories, there was an unknown relationship between family members which seemed to be incestuous. "*The Fall of the House of Usher*" presents the story of two siblings, Roderick and Madeline, who lived in

isolation in their family home. The two siblings did not have spouses and they seemed to have special bond. The narrator explained that they all seemed to be slowly consumed by strange illnesses within the confinement of the building in which they lived. Also, the thin family line and strange illnesses could have resulted from inbreeding (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). However, it was not clear on the exact nature of the relationship between the two siblings. In the story "*A Rose for Emily*", Miss Emily seemed to have an incestuous relationship with her father. This was in pursuit of the fact that the father was treating Emily as an object of possession and he did not allow her to marry. After his death, Miss Emily still believed that her father was alive and even refused to allow the townspeople to bury him. Miss Emily then married Homer, a contractor from the North, but she later poisoned him (Faulkner, 2012). Nevertheless, the relationship between Miss Emily and her father was not well understood.

3.1.3 The House

The narrators in the two stories painted a mysterious picture of the two houses. In "*The Fall of the House of Usher*", the house in which the Usher family lived was mysterious since it had cracks and was surrounded by dead trees (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). The house also portrayed darkness and horror. Moreover, the story evinced a surprisingly consistent evil atmosphere of the house which was exhibited by decaying trees and murky ponds, small cracks, and the disintegration of individual stones (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). Similarly, in the tale "*A rose for Emily*", the house was described as having a crack on the wall. It was also an old castle that created a horrifying perception (Faulkner, 2012). In both cases, the houses themselves are a depiction of a negative unknown phenomenon that is about to occur in the story.

3.1.4 Isolation

In most cases, the physical condition that symbolizes loneliness and isolation is darkness which is described in terms of visual isolation and monotony. However, loneliness which is a human condition is caused by pain of an individual living in illness or isolation, by sense of absence due to the death of a loved one, or by extreme joy as a result of triumph (Mijuskovic, 2012).

In both tales, isolation is a common theme which is used to depict the mysterious nature of the characters. In the tale "*The Fall of the House of Usher*", isolation was perceived in Roderick and Madeline's life as it was reflected in their relationship and alienation whereby the society did not even understand their behavior and what happened in their house. Also, the siblings suffered from an unknown condition which the physicians were unaware of (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). In the story "*A Rose for Emily*", isolation was

apparent in Miss Emily's lonely life. That posture of living was her ethical self-reflection of social separation. The separation which was shown in the story by the fact that whatever happened in her house was unknown (Faulkner, 2012).

3.1.5 Deaths of the Characters

Another similarity is entailed by death in the stories. According to Bloom and Hobby (2009), death arrives either gradually or abruptly and one cannot escape it as it is inevitable. Each of the stories is emblematic of occurrence of death in a mystifying way. In "*The Fall of the House of Usher*", the death of Madeline and Roderick occurred in a strange way. However, it was unknown whether or not Madeline was really dead or she was suffering from cataleptic symptoms since after her burial, she reappeared (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). In "*A Rose for Emily*", mysterious deaths also happened. The circumstance surrounding the death of Homer Barron, who was Emily's lover, was unknown and mysterious. Homer disappeared and was later found dead and decomposed in a room in Emily's house. It was assumed that Emily poisoned him but this had not been asserted in the story (Faulkner, 2012). The deaths of Emily and her father exhibited mystery.

3.2 Dissimilarities

There are several dissimilarities manifested in the stories "*A Rose for Emily*" and "*The Fall of the House of Usher*". While focusing on the universal theme, the abyss of the unknown, the differences can be manifested in various situations such as the setting of the stories and suspense. This section suggests that the abyss of the unknown must be discussed by drawing support from these situations.

3.2.1 Setting

Both stories have different plots that serve many purposes. In "*The Fall of the House of Usher*", the main characters, Roderick and Madeline were affected by unknown physical and emotional illnesses. The story revolves around their health conditions which were mysterious and strange (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). In "*A Rose for Emily*", Miss Emily was affected by change to which she was very resistant. She started by refusing that her father was actually dead and even confronted the townspeople and tried to challenge them. She then rejected to pay her tax obligations to the new town management. Also, Emily lived with only one servant who was the only one to be allowed in her house. Even though she killed her lover, she insisted that she stay with him all along. All these events were characterized by various mysterious events.

Alienation and isolation have for a long time served as themes in art (Simeon&Abugel, 2008). These themes were demonstrated by the two stories which are plotted in different settings. “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” by Edgar Allan Poe was set in a remote setting. The narrator explained that it was located in the middle of nowhere. It featured a sense of alienation or isolation from the society. The Usher family was naturally and geographically separated from the society. This portrayed an unknown phenomenon that may occur in the future (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). On the other hand, the setting in “*A Rose for Emily*” was situated in an urban one. Miss Emily’s home was located in a society that was interactive and functional. This was depicted in the relationship between Emily’s family and the city council. Also, the townspeople were occasionally interested in Emily’s family. This was confirmed by their willingness to bury her father, their concern for the awful smell coming out of the house, and their attendance during the Emily’s burial. At some point, they even disapproved of Miss Emily’s affair with Homer. However, Emily’s family alienated itself from the society for reasons that were unknown.

3.2.2 Suspense

The ending of both stories leaves the reader in suspense. In “*The Fall of the House of Usher*”, the story ended with the narrator rushing out of the house as it collapsed. The narrator explained that everything had happened so fast. The ending failed to clearly answer all the mysteries and questions that arose in the course of the story, and hence the readers were left to develop their own views and perceptions (Poe & Sylvester, 1975). On the other hand, “*A Rose for Emily*” ended surprisingly when the corpse of Homer Borron was found lying in a bed upstairs. Whatever eventually happened to the caste or Homer’s relics was unknown.

4.0 Conclusion

The paper presents the critical analysis of two books namely “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” and “*A Rose for Emily*”. The analysis involves comparing and contrasting the situations in the books that present the universal theme of the abyss of the unknown. Also, the stories contain themes that define the historical and cultural environment of the authors.

The tale of “*The Fall of the House of Usher*” by Edgar Allan Poe is a story of a strange family. The narrator was a friend to Roderick Usher who lived with his sister in a family house. The narrator explained his experiences in the house after he was invited by his friend to give him company since he was suffering from emotional distress. Various strange occurrences happened in the house and they formed the backbone of the story.

On the other hand, “*A Rose for Emily*” is a short story of a mysterious family that lived in a strange castle in the town of Jefferson. The story began at the burial of Miss Emily, who used to live a mysterious and alienated life. Miss Emily lived an isolated life with her father who refused to allow her to marry. After her father’s death, Emily had an affair with Homer Borron, a contractor from the North, who later disappeared. Miss Emily was resistant to change which was displayed by her refusal to accept that her father died and the refusal to pay her tax obligations following the changes in the town leadership. It was during her burial that the townspeople learnt that she had been living with the corpse of her lover in the house.

Various themes in the stories helped to show the universal theme of the abyss of the unknown. In the story of “*The Fall of the House of Usher*”, these themes were seen through the house which was horrifying, had cracks, and was surrounded by dead trees. It was also undertaken by various incidences of terror that occurred in the house, the nature of the Usher family, the illness of Roderick and his sister Madeline, and their deaths. In “*A Rose for Emily*”, the universal theme was presented in Emily’s resistance to change, the death of Miss Emily, her father and her lover, the nature of Emily’s family, and alienation.

The two stories have a number of similarities such as the mysterious nature of their families, the theme of incest presented in tales, the weird environment of their houses, the presentation of death in the stories, and the alienation in which the characters lived. The dissimilarities in the stories were also displayed in the themes of suspense and the setting of the stories.

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