

THE CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF POE'S THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

I Gst Ag Indra Trisnawan

Program Non Reguler
Sastra Inggris Fakultas Sastra
Universitas Udayana

ABSTRAK

Umumnya, sastra dapat didefinisikan sebagai ekspresi individu manusia yang berasal dari pengalaman, perasaan pikiran, ide, semangat, dan keyakinan dalam bentuk deskripsi konkrit yang diekspresikan dengan menggunakan bahasa. Sebuah karya sastra mengembangkan unsur menghibur yang memberikan kesenangan bagi setiap orang yang membacanya, dan itu dianggap menarik karena menyajikan banyak hal tentang kehidupan nyata.

Forster dalam *Aspek of Novel* menyatakan kita bisa mengetahui keadaan seseorang dengan tepat. Dalam hal ini fiksi lebih benar dibandingkan sejarah, karena fiksi diceritakan berdasarkan kejadian-kejadian (1974: 70). Dan ini didukung oleh teori Kenney dalam bukunya *How to Analyse Fiction*. Dia menjelaskan bahwa paling sedikit, kita mengartikan bahwa sebuah karya fiksi memuat peristiwa-peristiwa yang terjadi yang diceritakan satu demi satu secara berurutan. Ini juga didukung oleh teori Wellek dan Warren dalam *Theory of Literature* (1973:39) yang menyatakan bahwa karya sastra itu sendiri membenarkan semua kepentingan kita dalam kehidupan seorang penulis, dalam lingkungan sosial dan seluruh proses sastra yang dibuat berdasarkan imajinasi penulis dan umumnya mencerminkan kondisi sosial, yang menggunakan lingkungan sosial di sekitarnya sebagai dasar.

Dalam studi ini, cerita berjudul *The Fall of the House of Usher* dipilih untuk dianalisis. Si pembawa cerita diundang oleh teman masa kecilnya Roderick Usher untuk mengunjungi purinya ketika ia dalam kondisi tekanan emosional. Ia menemukan bahwa Roderick juga memiliki saudara kembar yang bernama Madeline yang juga dalam keadaan sakit. Karena sakit Madeline bertambah memburuk tak lama kemudian ia meninggal, dan Roderick dengan meminta bantuan si pembawa cerita mengubur Madeline di sebuah makam di dalam puri tersebut. Mereka kemudian merasa ngeri karena menemukan, bahwa mereka telah memakamkan Madeline dalam keadaan masih hidup. Madeline dengan cakarnya berusaha keluar dari kuburnya, lalu mendatangi Roderick untuk membunuhnya. Akhirnya Roderick meninggal dalam ketakutan.

Cerita ini secara psikologi bercampur kepercayaan tahyul menyoroti tokoh dalam sudut doppelganger, atau karakter ganda atau ghost double yaitu mitra hantu orang hidup.

Kata kunci: narrator, spooky, doppelganger.

1. Background of the Study

A literary work is created based on the imagination of the writer and it generally reflects the social condition, which uses the social surrounding as the foundation. Wellek and Warren (1973:39) state that the works of literature themselves justify all our interests in the life of an author, in this social environment and the whole process of literature.

To analyse a literary work is to identify the separate parts that make it up, to determine the relationship among the parts, and to discover the relation of the parts to the whole (Kenney, 1966:5). Novel is one example of fictional prose that describes character and introduces more than one impressions, effects or emotion described as a long story to write in a book. Character is one of important aspects, it carries the author's message that can bring various values in human life such as morality, education and many others.

It is to be noted that literary work cannot be separated from human life. The expression of literary form is language. Literature is an act of language, it is inseparable from life because it presents and describes the events that can happen in real life in society. Through literary work, which usually reflects our life, we can experience through our imagination also we also learn about human being.

In this study, a fiction entitled *The Fall of the House of Usher* by a popular American writer Edgar Allan Poe was analysed. The story's narrator is summoned by his boyhood friend Roderick Usher to visit him during a period of emotional distress. The narrator discovers that Roderick's twin sister, Madeline, is also sick. She takes a turn for the worse shortly after the narrator's arrival, and the men bury Madeline in a tomb within the house. They later discover, to their horror, that they have entombed her alive. Madeline claws her way out, collapsing eventually on Roderick, who dies in fear.

2. Problem of the Study

Based on the background mentioned above, the focus of this study is limited to the study of character. The problems then appear in this story are:

1. How does Poe make Roderick Usher inter related with his twin sister Madeline Usher.
2. What message does the writer want to show to the readers?

3. Aims of the Study

This study is intended to fulfil three aims: the general, specific, and academic aims.

The general aim of this writing is to apply the theories related to short story in order to get better understanding of Edgar Allan Poe's work entitled *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

Meanwhiles the specific aim of this writing is to find out what message the writer actually wants to say.

The last is an academic aim that is to apply the theory of literature studied in the English Department to write a scientific work which gives contribution to this department, so this writing can be used as a reference in literary analysis.

4. Research Method

There are three aspects of the research of the study; they are source, data collection and data analysis.

4.1. Data Source

The data were collected from the story entitled *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe (cited in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Page 127 - 138. *Adventures in American Literature*. 1968. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc).

4.2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data

The data were collected through reading the story intensively and make of note all the information relevant to the narrator and his father as the focus of being discussed and then the data were identified in accordance with their types then descriptively presented. They are several types of collecting data:

1. Reading the story carefully, selecting and taking note the selected items based on the related topic.
2. Finding out how Poe makes Roderick Usher inter-related with his twin sister Madeline Usher and what message the writer wants to show to the readers?

4.3. Method and Technique of Analysing Data

The analysis correlates to the problems that are formulated. The method used for analysing the data was descriptive. The data were collected from the data source and through the data collection, and were analysed using the theory of William Kenney. 1978. *How to Analyze Fiction*, theory of Warren and Wellek. 1962. *Theory of Literature*, and other supporting theories of Knicbocker and Reninger. 1963. *Interpreting Literature*.

5. Analysis

The Fall of the House of Usher is a story of a haunted house, dreary landscape, mysterious sickness, and doubled personality, however, part of the terror of this story is its vagueness. It cannot be said for sure where in the world or exactly when the story takes place. Instead of standard narrative markers of place and time, Poe uses elements of inclement weather and a barren landscape. Although he is Roderick's most intimate boyhood friend, the narrator apparently does not know much about him—like the basic fact that Roderick has a twin sister.

Poe, at the beginning, establishes the identity of the physical house with the Usher family, and this is developed throughout the story. As the narrator rides

up to the house he notices “the vacant eye-like windows” (p. 127) that will parallel Roderick’s own vacant and mad eyes. The gloomy house makes even the rational narrator depressed and gloomy, and its effect upon Roderick and Madeleine is to make them paralyzed and sick with fear. The narrator explains that since there are no Ushers who live outside the house, the “House of Usher” means “both the family and the family mansion” (p. 128).

The room of the house in which the narrator first sees Roderick who breathes “an atmosphere of sorrow” (p. 129) like its master who is “so terribly altered” that the narrator pities him. Roderick looks like a “cadaver” with “a want of moral energy” (p. 129). He explains to the narrator that it is the fault of the structure of the house: “the physique of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the morale of his existence” (p. 130).

Before the narrator, Roderick sings called “The Haunted Palace” in which he makes explicit the correlation between the body and the dwelling place. This palace once “reared its head” with celestial thoughts (p. 132). The large windows are like eyes through which one sees the ruler of the house in his “wit and wisdom” surrounded by divine spirits (p. 132). Roderick sings symbolically of himself in a sane and happy state of mind. Eventually, though, “evil things in robes of sorrow” (p. 132) assail the palace and possess the owner within until now travelers only see in the red-lit windows a “ghastly” and “hideous” throng of demonic forms (p. 132). The red-lit windows echo the red light the narrator sees in Roderick’s room and symbolizes a sort of frenzy and madness that can be seen in his eyes.

After he sings this song Roderick tells his theory of “the sentience of all vegetable things” (p. 133) that explains his fear of the House of Usher. The very “gray stones of the home of his forefathers” and their fungi “in the order of their arrangement” had given birth to a “certain condensation of an atmosphere,” giving off a “terrible influence” on the inhabitants of the house (p. 134). This living and evil breath of the house brings all the Ushers to a tragic end. In other words, as in the ballad, the house itself is mad. The House is the Usher family.

Madeline soon dies, and Roderick decides to bury her temporarily in the tombs below the house. He wants to keep her in the house because he fears that the doctors might dig up her body for scientific examination, since her disease was so strange to them. The narrator helps Roderick put the body in the tomb, and he notes that Madeline has rosy cheeks, as some do after death. The narrator also realizes suddenly that Roderick and Madeline were twins. Over the next few days, Roderick becomes even more uneasy. One night, the narrator cannot sleep either. Roderick knocks on his door, apparently hysterical. He leads the narrator to the window, from which they see a bright-looking gas surrounding the house. The narrator tells Roderick that the gas is a natural phenomenon, not altogether uncommon.

To discuss psychological approach with the supernatural belief, Madeline Usher, at least the Madeline who returns from the dead, is the physical manifestation of Roderick's worst fears. In fact, when Roderick is foreshadowing his death, he says "...the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR."

Does FEAR refer to Madeline? The way of Roderick's creation to entomb Madeline when she is alive makes the story spooky. Notice that Madeline does not appear at the door until Roderick claims that she is standing there. That is an evidence for this interpretation.

Talking about Roderick's twin sister, Madeline Usher, it can be interpreted that she does not fully exist from the start, but is some sort of supernatural shade, a spiritual doppelganger half of Roderick or ghostly double. This is why the narrator rarely sees her and why she doesn't acknowledge or interact with him during those times. It's why she can come back from the dead – because she wasn't fully human in the first place.

Another analysis involves psychologically that it is possible that Roderick knew Madeline was alive when he asked the narrator for help in entombing her. This could be the reason which raises some questions "Was he trying to end the Usher line once and forever? Was Roderick tormented with guilt over the incest they may have committed together? Did he try to kill himself by killing his

doppelganger other half? In this story, Madeline comes back from the dead to get even with her brother for burying her alive.

The story highlights the feature of the doppelganger, or character double nor a ghostly counterpart of a living person.

The narrator seems convinced by Roderick's reasons for doing such a terrible and irrational act, but then, he has been in the house for many weeks and is obviously affected. In the last scene, he is almost in as much fear as Roderick is. He is aware that his friend is mad by now: "there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes—an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanour" (p. 135). Even then, the narrator calls on science to explain the weird light in the tarn, but as Madeleine rends her tomb and kills her brother with fear, the narrator beats a hasty retreat just in time for the mansion to fall.

6. Conclusion

After discussing the story the final embrace, in this case, becomes the unifying of two divergent aspects into one whole being at birth. Certainly many people consider birth itself to be a breaking away from supernatural beauty, and they believe that death is a reuniting of oneself with that original spirituality. Madeline Usher can then be seen as the incarnation of "otherworldliness," the pure spirit purged of all earthly cares. She, it can be noted, at one point in the story, seems to float through the apartment in a trancelike state. If Usher embodies the incertitude of life — a condition somewhere between waking and sleeping.

Finally, it can be said that through *The Fall of the House of Usher* the writer wants to convey that when Madeline Usher embraces her twin brother, this embrace symbolizes the union of a divided soul, indicating a final restoration and purification of that soul in a life to come. They will now live in pure spirituality and everything that is material in the world is symbolized by the collapse of the House of Usher — the dematerialization of all that was earthly in exchange for the pure spirituality of Roderick Usher and the Lady Madeline.

7. Bibliography

Adventures in American Literature. 1968. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc

Forster, E. M. 1974. *Aspects of the Novel*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

Kenney, William. 1966. *How to Analyze Fiction*. New York: Monarch Press.

Knickerbocker, K.L. 1963. *Interpreting Literature*. USA: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc.

Scannell, Vernon. 1984. *How to Enjoy Novels*. London: Judy Piatkus, Ltd.

Stanford, Judith. A. 2003. *Responding to Literature; Stories, Poems, Plays, and Essays. Fourth Edition*. New York: The McGraw Hill Companies, Inc.

Tarigan, Henry Guntur. 1984. *Prinsip-prinsip Dasar Sastra*. Bandung: Angkasa.

Webster, Roger. 1990. *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Edward Arnold

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. 1963. *Theory of Literature*. London: Cox and Wyman Ltd.

Wiyatmi. 2006. *Pengantar Kajian Sastra*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka