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**The Motif of Madness in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and
*The Fall of the House of Usher***

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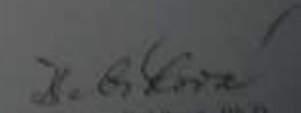
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ABSTRACT

This bachelor paper deals with the motif of madness in *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. This work is divided into three chapters. The first part analyses *The Yellow Wall Paper* in terms of feminism; motif of madness and mental health; Gothic literature and racism. The second section is dedicated to *The Fall of the House of Usher* and its motif of madness, Gothic literature and the meaning of the symbol in the context of this story. The last part compares both short stories in terms of the aspects of mental state and the motif of madness, as well as elements of Gothic literature. Also a review is included at the end of this written work.

KEYWORDS

The Yellow Wall Paper, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the motif of madness, feminism, racism, Gothic literature

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá motivem šílenství (duchovní nemoci) v dílech *Žlutá tapeta* a *Pád domu Usherů*. Práce je rozdělena do tří celků. První celek rozebírá dílo *Žlutá tapeta* z hlediska feminismu, otázky šílenství a duševní nemoci, gotické literatury a z hlediska rasismu. Druhý celek se věnuje povídce *Pád domu Usherů*, který se člení na další tři podkapitoly: duševní nemoc, gotická literatura a význam symbolu domu v této povídce. Poslední celek porovnává oba literární texty.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Žlutá tapeta, *Pád domu Usherů*, motiv šílenství, feminismus, rasismus, gotická literatura

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1. INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Edgar Allan Poe were two American authors living in the same country but at different times. Both of them were writers that specialized in different literary genres. This paper will analyse in detail the motif and interaction of madness and the related issues concerning this topic.

The first part of this paper is dedicated to *The Yellow Wall Paper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This area is divided into four different topics. The first one is related to feminism, which is introduced with the support of other extracts from this book, and also by the background of the position of women in the society at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The second topic of this part concerning Gilman's fiction focuses on the mental state and madness, which was most probably provoked by the narrator's obsession of watching the yellow wallpaper in her room where she was kept. This part is supported by the original letter of Gilman's physician, who recommended Gilman to stay isolated from society. Another part is dedicated to the elements of Gothic literature. The Gothic literature is described with its features and they are applied to the Gilman's text. In the fourth part of this analysis of *The Yellow Wall Paper*, the opinion of a possible context of racism is expressed. This theory is supported by the text from Susan S. Lanser and her ideas about the racism of *The Yellow Wall Paper*.

The second part of this paper will be dedicated to the analysis of *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe. This chapter is divided into three subchapters. The first one analyses the problems of madness and mental health from the main characters of *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The second subchapter touches the issue of Gothic literature, which is in turn the common background topic for both stories in this paper. Finally, the third part describes the meaning of the symbol that represents the house in the general context of this story.

The last chapter is focused on the comparison of the various common features from *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. As these common features are chosen, the motif of madness and the disease of the main characters in both stories are thoroughly described. As for the second part of the third chapter, the elements of Gothic literature are illustrated in detail, with the support of short passages from both books.

2. Analysis of *The Yellow Wall Paper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

2.1 Feminism

The Yellow Wall Paper touches the issues of feminism, health, mental state, madness, diary, Gothic literature, unsolved problems and, in certain cases, even racism. In this chapter I would like to analyse the idea of feminism, with its theory applied to the text of *The Yellow Wall Paper*, which is one of the biggest issues in the story. According to Kathy J. Whitson, it is not easy to define feminism, as she argues below:

“Even within the field of feminist studies and within the larger community of feminists, there is much variation in the understanding of the term. The American feminist movement has, from its beginning, been sometimes guilty of foregrounding the concerns of one class, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation over the concerns of others. There have been calls for separatism as well as calls for inclusion, but the common denominator in most of the manifestations of feminism is the call for the social, political, and economic equality of women.”
(Whitson, 2004, introduction)

However, Whitson’s view of feminism does not give the reader a clear clue of what the feminist movement exactly was, but it shows the common aim of women in society in the period between the end of the 19th century and the following one. It was the call for their equality in terms of social, political and economic sameness. *The Yellow Wall Paper* is considered to be one of the literary

texts about feminism. This short story is an example of men's superiority above women. According to Wang, the narrator's detailed use of a daily journal had an even deeper meaning:

“On the one hand, the narrator is put into a cell-like room with thousands of eyes gazing at her all the time. On the other hand, she is also an infant-like feminist who consciously rather than unconsciously rebels against the social Panopticon. She tries her best to use “pen” which symbolizes “penis” to challenge the men-named authority.” (Wang, 2007, p. 54)

With the help of writing the narrator's inner feelings, she could record it and afterwards revise what had happened to her in the past. Holding a pen could symbolize for the main character the fact that she managed to win over her own husband. She might feel better when she knows that sometimes she can hold him in her hands, as usually her husband is the one who has complete power over her life. However, some of feminism's prevalent issues are indisputably present in Gilman's work. Gilman also wrote other works related to feminism and the feminist movement. For example: *In This Our World, Women and Economics*, and also by contributing with many novels to the monthly journal called *The Forerunner*. (<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/gilman.htm>) Although *The Yellow Wall Paper* was published in 1892 for the first time, the idea to interpret this work as a feminist text finally came in 1973. When this short story was published, it was simply considered as a ghost story only. (Gilman, Dock, 1998, p.18) When reading *The Yellow Wall Paper* the reader can see the superiority of the narrator's husband John. In the text the narrator repeatedly uses “he” when referring to John. The love is apparent, but maybe it could be confused either with her fear or by an attitude of subordination. Let me illustrate this with the following example: “He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 167) or “He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.” (Gilman, 1999, 173) but the loving attitude changed as the story continued: “He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind. As I couldn't see through him!” (Gilman, 1999, p. 180) The tone is ironic at first and then even reveals a feeling of deceit. I would say that this change in her manner can appear

as a consequence of tiredness in her life at this house, which is nice on the one hand, but on the other she really has to deal with her own loneliness. In the final part of the story the narrator claimed:

“Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!”
(Gilman, 1999, p. 182)

In general, this piece of text is a certain victory for her over her own husband, her loneliness and her lack of freedom. It could be just a symbol for a victory, but also a message for other women to believe that there is a possibility for them to win. Even if their husbands treat them not as good as they would deserve, men should not underestimate women at all, as it reflects by this thought from Gilman’s quotation:

“There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex.
Might as well speak of a female liver.”
(http://thinkexist.com/quotation/there_is_no_female_mind-the_brain_is_not_an_organ/201016.html)

The narrator and the main character are the same woman in this story. The general perfect picture of a woman at the beginning of the 20th century was a pretty and neat lady with longer hair and a nice figure, which would correspond with her age. In this book the narrator is quite unknown. There was no description of her physical appearance, but from the content the reader could imagine her as a woman who is not confident enough and this reality corresponds with the way she holds her body. She does not stand straight. Her body could be in a good shape in spite of the fact that she gave birth to her child in recent times. The reader imagines her face to be very serious and sad, as a consequence of her health problems and struggles with her personal life. Her unstable attitudes towards John in their relationship, as I have mentioned previously, are the causes that her face and body are continuously changing throughout the story. At the end, she might be seen like a woman with a strange smile on her face and with her body standing proud. As for the narrator’s name, this might be strange; but

the woman telling this story does not have a name. One reason for that could be connected with the position of women in society at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. (<http://www.wic.org/misc/history.htm>) In those times, women were not treated like they are nowadays. They started to fight for their rights to stop being tied to their homes and children, in order to gain their freedom to decide what they want to do with their lives. Furthermore, so they could face themselves to take part in other issues they wanted to decide on their own. Their position was changing very slowly, as it can be understood by the old truth that women should just cook, take care of their children and husbands, as well as to protect their domestic environments; a reality that it is still present up to these times. The reason that the narrator is unnamed would be to show the unimportance of the woman's role and the fulfilling of her dreams. In this short story the main character does not have a name, while at the same time the other characters' names are indeed mentioned. According to this, her husband is called John, his sister is Jennie and Mary is the one who takes care of the narrator's baby. This reality represents the oppression of the main character. It seems that nobody takes care of her feelings or opinions concerning her own mental health. John claimed himself as the narrator's doctor, whose duty is to help his wife to cure her illness. The author of this book was considered to be very brave to publish this text in those times. One of the reasons she did such action, was to show to other women that they are not only the property of their husbands, and that their life objective is not just to serve them, but also to enjoy their own lives in order to do whatever they wish.

2.2 Health issue, mental state, motif of madness

Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote a letter to her physician Silas Weir Mitchell to explain him in what state she was. It was him who did not take her words seriously and told her how she should treat herself in order to get cured. In 1877 Gilman came to him to solve her health problems which she had in past years. As she said in *Why I wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper"?*, she suffered from a severe and continuous breakdown that led to melancholia. After three years of having these difficulties, she decided to visit a specialist in nervous disease, who

at that time was one of the best in the country. The advice he gave her was to “live as domestic a life as far as possible,” to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day, ” and “never to touch pen, brush or pencil again as long as I lived.” According to him, Gilman tried to obey him for next three months. After that she “cast the noted specialist’s advice and to the winds and went to work again – work, the normal life of every human being”. Later she wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper* to Mitchell, but as she declared in *Why I wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”?*, he never responded to her. Even Gilman sent him a letter by which she might help him to understand her problems better he decided to ignore it. (Thraillkill, 2002, p. 526) In *The Yellow Wall Paper*, the wallpaper and the room where the narrator was kept could be compared to the isolation, in which the real neurologist recommended Gilman to stay. In the book it was narrator’s husband who thought that the best approach for his ill wife would be to rest in her separate room. The narrator did not like the room and the wallpaper at all. “I’m really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 169) But after some time she got interested by that:

“But in the places where it isn’t faded and where the sun is just so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly conspicuous front design.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 171)

She could spend hours by watching it:

“I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. ... I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 172)

As time goes on, the narrator is becoming more obsessed by the wallpaper and it turns that the paper on the wall was becoming her new reality instead of the real life. She knows that there is a baby that she should take care of, but on the other hand, she likes being on her own and keeping the diary. Moreover, she also dedicated to studying the paper, which became even clearer to her with the figures that were appearing more obvious. She noticed other features that the wallpaper

had, for example that it changes colours by daylight and then by moonlight. As the narrator was observing the wallpaper for so long, she got possessive about it and she did not appreciate when she caught someone watching it. For example:

“I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I’ve caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 176)

In my point of view, I would say that the narrator is possessive because she feels that she can only rely on herself, her own diary and this wallpaper; which she considers she knows the most and that is the reason why it belongs to her. As she discovers new things about the wallpaper, she wants to keep all the secret things about it only to herself. It is obvious that the narrator feels uncomfortable when someone is watching it because she might think that other people want to steal the secret from her. Perhaps the mental disease she suffered did not allow her to think normally, in the sense that there was no one that would actually want to observe some kind of old, ugly and shabby wallpaper. Even if it is not written in the book, the reader feels that her obsession with the wallpaper has a hidden meaning due to her missing her own child; of whom she does not feel strong enough to take care of. Furthermore, her disappointment that she is not the perfect mother as the values of society at the time would have determined, could be another reason for her to get withdrawn. Keeping the secret diary enabled her to escape from the real world in which she was not satisfied and where she did not feel healthy and free. By studying the wallpaper, she concentrated on something and she kept working with it in her mind. It is not only with the visual effect at the end of the story, but also it affects her smell too:

“Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like. It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor ever met.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 178)

The narrator decided to peel off the wallpaper at the last night when they

were supposed to stay in the house. As she discovered other figures of women in the wallpaper, she also thought that one particular woman from the paper was helping her to strip it from the wall: “I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 180) The narrator became even more possessive later: “But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me, *–not alive!*” (Gilman, 1999, p. 180) When she was expressing herself like this, the reader might think that she could be able to actually kill someone just to protect her wallpaper. The paper could be considered not only a regular cover for the wall but something even more important. It could symbolize perhaps her own life, her child or her imagination, of even how free she would be when she would not have to be closed inside the house. She lived isolated from other people and it made her even more distant. Keeping the diary was one of the tools she had to cure herself, even though her husband or any other people would not agree with that. At the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century people with some kind of mental difficulties were considered mad and a threat to society:

“By the end of the nineteenth century, the asylums had failed as a cure for madness. There was no recognized medical cure for madness; confinement had only removed the mad as a threat to social order ("out of sight, out of mind")." (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401802605.html>)

A new concept that was introduced by Sigmund Freud to the public:

“Freud's innovation was the development of a systematic psychology of the mind and techniques to access the unconscious. Introduced to the American medical community during the first decade of the twentieth century, psychoanalytic techniques fundamentally altered treatment of the mentally ill.“ (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401802605.html>)

The treatment of individuals with those kinds of problems was different at the time when *The Yellow Wall Paper* was published. It was not a long time after that, when specialists started to cure mental disorders with other approaches than

those used in the 19th century. They tried to apply the psychoanalysis to diagnose the patient and according to that, they would follow certain kind of procedures in order to heal him or her:

“Mental illness in America was transformed during the twentieth century. The single therapeutic tool of the nineteenth century, the asylum, virtually disappeared.”
(<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401802605.html>)

The main character in *The Yellow Wall Paper* was the prototype of how to cure the patient with a mental disorder in the 19th century. There is a link between the narrator and Gilman, who also suffered from the mental disease. As was mentioned above, her own doctor told her to stay at home without any kind of disruption. She tried to remain like that, but after a couple of months, she gave up and started to fight against her illness according to her own way. As a result of these circumstances she wrote *The Yellow Wall Paper*. The main character's life corresponds to that of Gilman. And as Gilman knew that the asylum is not the right way to help people, she described her suggestion in the form of keeping a secret diary. But nowadays and on the contrary, psycho analytics suggest that patients should not be isolated from the real life. The current approach dictates that they should get involved in the activities of real life, and even more to find some new activities; which occupy their brains so that they are concentrated on some tasks and they do not feel that they are either useless, or a burden for the people around them. At the end of this story, the main character ended up in a very negative mental condition; she got mad. According to Wang, the reason for the narrator's mental state was due to the following factor:

“Lacking experience and understanding and courage, the early stage feminist is driven to madness and thus destroyed by the contradictory forces of patriarchal society and her early rebellious consciousness.”
(Wang, 2007, p. 57)

This was the cause for the disease of the main female character and the final mental breakdown at the end of the story was unavoidable, adds Wang. The circumstances for the ending of the main character were the climax that the reader

could expect when reading *The Yellow Wall Paper*. The mental state and the obsession by the wallpaper were becoming more and more passionate for the main character, so it became clear that this situation would result into something dramatic, which will add the final value to the fiction. The entire description of the last part is considered to be remarkable and it does not contain any extra information that could be considered redundant. The climax is expressed in a very rapid manner and that is the reason that generates a greater appearance of the narrator becoming mad.

2.3 Gothic literature

Another important issue concerning this short fiction is the ghost elements and the Gothic literature that share the following features of the Gothic literature:

“haunted castles, ruined buildings, dungeons, underground passages, crypts, and catacombs which, in modern houses, become spooky basements or attics, dark corridors, shadows, extreme landscapes and weather, magic, supernatural manifestations, or the suggestion of the supernatural, a curious heroine with a tendency to faint and a need to be rescued—frequently and horrifying (or terrifying) events or the threat of such happenings. The Gothic creates feelings of gloom, mystery, and suspense.”
(<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/gothic/gothic.html>)

Since the beginning, *The Yellow Wall Paper* was proclaimed as a piece of the ghost or horror story because its grim and depressive feelings were able to rise inside the reader. This trend was characterized in the media with this description:

““The Yellow Wallpaper” has been lauded as a preeminent piece of Gothic fiction because of its incorporation of such Gothic literary elements as horror, suspense, and the supernatural.”
(<http://www.answers.com/topic/the-yellow-wallpaper-story-7>)

The gothic elements in this story are not that clear at first. As mentioned above, you need certain circumstances to happen in order for a ghost story to be

regarded as one. The important thing with this text was not to describe terrible monsters in the haunted castle, which is so far away from the dwellings of other people, but to show other perspectives of fear or threats. As written in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" and the History of its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook*:

“Manley and Lewis likewise classify the tale as a “psychological horror story”. They claim that Gilman “needed no walking ghosts, no monster, no werewolf”; rather she relied on the knowledge that those dark sides of our minds give us our own ghosts, our own fears.” (Gilman, Dock, 1998, p.18)

In *The Yellow Wall paper*, ghosts might be represented by the figures in the wallpaper. But most probably there were no figures in it and it was only the narrator’s imagination. To illustrate that point:

“Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 178)

The women that she saw in the paper might have been only some curves in its patterns, but it helps the reader to think that maybe there really was some silhouette, which might appear like a person. Later, the narrator thinks that even the woman from the wallpaper gets out and she creeps in the daytime. She even gets out of the bedroom and moves to the garden, where she stays:

“I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines. I don’t blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught by creeping by daylight!” (Gilman, 1999, p. 179)

In this extract, we obviously can see the features of the Gothic literature. It is not normal that there would be some woman under the tree who is spying on other people. Especially, when the woman came from the wallpaper and went to the garden. This entire situation was just a part of the narrator’s own thoughts. It

is also an evidence of what Gilman said that we do not need and kinds of monsters, but sometimes our mind can create something unusual. The narrator had a mental illness which was probably the cause of those imaginative thoughts. The story of the woman who is coming from the wallpaper develops during the whole narration. At first, there was just a paper with some strange ornaments and colours, but at the end we could see the progress of the figures, which were getting the shapes of real women that were trying to get out. Even more, the narrator thought that she became one of them when she added at the end of the story: "I've got out at last in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman, 1999, p. 182) When reading *The Yellow Wall Paper* the reader might get the feeling that the atmosphere of the house is depressing and even the room of the narrator is without any colours or comfort. Those elements are also considered as a part of the ghost story.

2.4 Racism

A very interesting point of view is found in the *Feminist criticism*, "*The Yellow Wallpaper*," and *the Politics of Color in America* by Susan S. Lanser, where there is an opinion that there might be a hidden meaning of racism throughout the text of *The Yellow Wall Paper*. The entire background would be connected with the places where Gilman was born, where she lived and where she was at the time that she wrote *The Yellow Wall Paper*. (Lanser, 1989, p. 425) According to Susan S. Lanser, Gilman's was influenced by all these places. At the turn of century, Anglo-America was preoccupied with the superiority of the Aryan race and there were applied laws against anyone who could possibly destroy this idea. This thought was held by whites, Christians and American-born intellectuals. They even had different names for immigrants. They could call them "human garbage", "oxlike men", etc. and they were afraid that immigrants were "ready to "pollute" America with "non-Aryan elements"." (Lanser, 1989, p. 426) A connection between racism and *The Yellow Wall Paper* might even be found in the name of this story. In the *Feminist criticism*, "*The Yellow Wallpaper*," and *The Politics of Color in America* is showed that the colour "yellow" was used as a negative with an implied bad meaning. Yellow could have a connotation of

strangeness, disease, cowardice, ugliness and backwardness (Lanser, 1989, p. 427) In the 19th century there was a distinction with the three races: black, white and yellow. All of them were referred to the particular continent except yellow. “Yellow” were not only Chinese, Japanese and light-skinned African-Americans but also to Jews, Poles, Hungarians, Italians and even the Irish. (Lanser, 1989, p. 426) Lanser described that the wallpaper and later the woman who is in that paper could be yellow and by the peeling of the wallpaper from the wall, the author could suggest that she would like to peel the yellow colour of it and erase the racial difference. This is Lanser’s opinion how Gilman could see the racial matter under the condition, that she really was thinking about such racial issue while writing *The Yellow Wall Paper*. In my opinion, I could support her theory because the interpretation of the yellow race was really widespread, and even people from certain parts of Europe were considered to be members of the yellow race. As Lanser’s summarized Gilman, she was an activist in many movements and also was fighting in different fields to support the rights of women or lesbians. On the other hand, Gilman’s attitude towards Jewish people was not corresponding with her ideas about racial harmony as portrayed by her. In this respect she described:

“...that Jews have not yet “passed the tribal stage” of human development, that they practice an “unethical” and “morally degrading” religion of “race egotism” and “concentrated pride,” which has unfortunately found its way through the Bible into Western literature, and that refusing to intermarry they “artificially maintain characteristics which the whole world dislikes, and then complain of race prejudice.” ” (Lanser, 1989, p. 430)

In the relation with the colour “yellow” between Jews and the short story where the paper is introduced, Gilman was trying to express her views about the Jewish race. She saw them as a part of the yellow race and the woman who was hidden in the wallpaper could be Gilman’s figure. As was mentioned above, the wallpaper was not just for the visual effect, but also affected the smell, and was described as: “It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 178) Later in the book the smell was called “a yellow smell”. Can it be questioned that because Gilman had a feeling that Jewish people smelled like that, or they would have some kind of different

odour compared to other non-Jewish people from the Aryan race? It would be very interesting to know from where Gilman reached this conclusion. We do not know whether she actually met a Jewish person with whom she could experienced some negative incident. But what is quite obvious is that we see that this possible moment could have influenced her that much, that she even hid the secret “yellow” person in her work. Gilman also gave that person some kind of vision, which was very similar to her idea that there could be a threat from those people. “The immigrant “invasion” thus becomes a direct threat to Gilman’s program for feminist reform.” (Lanser, 1989, p. 434)

3. Analysis of *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe

3.1 Motif of madness

The second part of this bachelor paper will introduce the concept of Poe’s short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* in terms of madness and Gothic literature, as well as the house as a symbol used in this fiction. Carl Mowery wrote in his essay about *The Fall of the House of Usher*:

“The Fall of the House of Usher” is a cerebral story with little physical action and emphasizes the many interpretations the story inspires.” (<http://www.answers.com/topic/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher-story-8>)

Many critical opinions and studies were written about the features of madness in this short story. When reading *The Fall of the House of Usher* the reader might get the feeling of sadness, madness or mental disease. The atmosphere of the house could be described as gloomy, scary, frightening and even without life and light. Its overall condition was not good, and even though there were no visible scars on the house that could affect the comfortable living inside; at the end, they were living in an abandoned dwelling in the middle of nowhere. All of these features contributed to the fact that the narrator perceives Roderick Usher to be eventually unstable and affected by certain mental disorder. The

unnamed narrator described his host as follows:

“Usher arose from sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with vivacious warmth which had much in it.... While he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe.” (Poe, 2005, p. 84)

The narrator then continues to describe Usher’s physical appearance in the following manner:

“A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surprisingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence...” (Poe, 2005, p. 84)

The pallid colour could be the natural one from Usher’s lips, but also it could be seen as a symptom of some kind of disease because it could mean that he was not doing well inside of his body; therefore resulting in the paleness on the outside of his body. Other element that would indicate that Roderick Usher was not in a perfect mental condition could be that his senses were sharper than those of other people:

”...the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds; and these stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror.” (Poe, 2005, p. 85)

From the previous thought it is apparent that Roderick was not in a stable mental health. This reality demonstrates that Roderick Usher preferred to live without any other people around him, and he spent most of the time in his studio surrounded by his books. There is also a theory that Usher suffered from hypochondriasis and his fear was part of this situation. In *Usher’s Hypochondriasis: Mental Alienation and Romantic Idealism in Poe’s Gothic Tales*, different arguments are used to support the idea of Usher’s suffering from

the hypochondriasis:

“When Usher elaborates upon his fear it becomes apparent that, like his illness, it has much in common with the romantic and transcendental belief in the interrelationship of mind and matter.” (Butler, 1976, p. 8)

This fact can be illustrated with an extract from the text: “I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR.” (Poe, 2005, p. 85) As it can be seen, Roderick Usher had some kind of problem with himself. His own fear might be the reason for feeling very depressed, and even possibly thinking that he might die soon. The only company Usher had, was his sister lady Madeline. Therefore he called his friend from childhood to spend some time with him. The narrator could understand since the beginning that there was something strange with his host. He also noticed a few changes in Usher’s behaviour over time when they were reading or painting together. The mental state of Roderick Usher was not that visible at first. Even when he thought his sister died, he did not overreact, but he acted in a reasonable manner to this unpleasant situation. In the text was written the following description:

“I could not help thinking of the wild ritual of this work, and of its probable influence upon the hypochondriac, when, one evening having informed me abruptly that the lady Madeline was no more...” (Poe, 2005, p. 89)

Surprisingly, this situation was not a reason for any outbreak. But the mental problem could be founded in lady Madeline’s death. As can be seen when reading the final part, she did not die but was buried alive. And she even managed to get out of the tomb, although Roderick and the narrator tried to close her very firmly underground. The madness was getting stronger as Usher had to deal with his conscience. Because of his acute senses, he probably heard very well that his twin sister was trying hard to get out of the casquet. For more than a week he was hiding this fact and probably it did not help him to feel in a good condition. In the final part he was really getting insane. While the narrator was reading, Roderick

Usher knew that his sister would come soon. Perhaps he was so scared about what his friend might think of the situation that they buried a person alive, or maybe he was terrified of the possibility of what lady Madeline could do as revenge. When she was coming to their room, Usher's mental state got increasingly worse:

“...I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long–long–long–many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it–yet I dared not–oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am!–I dared not–I *dared* not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb!*” (Poe, 2005, p. 93)

The narrative ends when both twins fell on the floor dead. Maybe Usher could have died due to a heart attack when his sister entered the room. Another possibility of his death could have been caused by a shock. Perhaps his whole organism was in such a tense state for the last few years that it could not take it anymore and simply collapsed. Not only Usher was a victim of madness but there is also evidence that the narrator could actually have been also unbalanced at the end:

“In these last scenes some of Roderick's madness is transferred to the narrator. In the beginning the narrator thinks that what he sees is a dream, yet for the first several days he is at the house, he seems sane and in control of his senses. But after Madeline is entombed, the narrator becomes more agitated, just as Roderick does, and on the evening of the “seventh or eighth day” he is so uneasy that he cannot sleep.” (<http://www.answers.com/topic/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher-story-8>)

The reason for that circumstance might be influenced by the time that the narrator spent with Roderick Usher. He came to see him and he stayed a longer period because in those times when people were travelling, they usually lived with their hosts for a longer period. For example in the whole winter because travelling in that season was very difficult since they used horse drawn wagons. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/the-fall-of-the-house-of-usher-story-8>) For that matter, it could be deducted that the narrator transformed to the same mood as Roderick. The narrator could get tired of listening to Usher and of entertaining his host. It is possible that before he came to the House of Usher he used to live a calm

life without anyone. The narrator could do whatever he desired, but not at this place where he was called by his friend Roderick to join him in his lonely house. The perception of madness in this place could also be felt by the strange behaviour of lady Madeline, but maybe she was not strange or mad at all, but just a silent person who did not need to talk to others at all times throughout the day.

3.2 Gothic literature

Because my analysis will discuss *The Fall of the House of Usher* as an example of Gothic literature, it is important to define what this term actually means:

“Beginning with the classic Gothic novels of the eighteenth century, Gothic literature continues to build in popularity. Edmund Burke is attributed with defining the essence of Gothic fiction as literature evoking a sense of “delightful horror.” Without question, the umbrella of Gothic studies covers a continuum of “the horrible,” “the terrible,” and at times, “the diabolical,” all of which can be found in the literatures of romanticism, naturalism, fantasy, and of course, the supernatural.” (Bomarito, 2006)

In Poe’s short story we could find elements that clearly classify the narrative as Gothic – these include: the abandoned mansion, the twins acting in a strange and incomprehensible way, the gloomy description of the house and even the overall appearance of the interior of the house. The gloomy atmosphere is introduced at the beginning and persists through the whole story:

“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?” (Poe, 2005, p. 82)

As seen above, even the narrator was aware of something strange and he sensed the feeling of an unusual nature. The dull emotion could be a consequence

of the effect that the house had on people when they saw it. Also the tone of the entire story is narrated in a mysterious way. As the narrator came closer to the house he noticed other details, which caused other sensations that could generate scary feelings in the reader:

“...an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.” (Poe, 2005, p. 83)

According to this extract, the reader might see the whole atmosphere as something so strange that it could not even exist. A hyperbole was used for a more intensive effect. In relation to this fact, it would contribute that the narrator sometimes exaggerated what he saw: “The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves.” (Poe, 2005, p. 83) The movement of some green fungi is apparent. As the narrator continued with his steps into the house, he met a strange person on the stairs. He was informed that it was a family doctor. Why he came to the house? It is not obvious here whether he visited Usher or his twin sister. The fact that they met on the stairs where they just passed each other, is also scary. Usually when people meet in this place, they do not have time to see each other properly, especially in this case where lights were not the most important thing; and they might start thinking and even create their own fantasies of such encounter on the stairs. The scary atmosphere increased when the narrator entered the room where Roderick Usher was expecting him:

“Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow.” (Poe, 2005, p. 84)

Exactly “an atmosphere of sorrow” is another description of the mysterious House of Usher. Emotions like sorrow, fear or pity might perceive the reader when he is drawing a picture in his mind about this place. The “dark draperies” and “comfortless furniture” are other Gothic elements concerning this particular room.

Knowing that anywhere you sit, move or go; it creates a certain feeling that even the walls are watching you and will not allow you to do anything without their agreement. Almost a spiritual air were breathing Usher and the narrator when they were standing in the room and looking at each other after so many years. In a brief moment they were busy talking and Usher was very serious, while he was describing his strange illness:

“He entered, at some length, into what he conceived to be the nature of his malady. It was, he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy—a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass.” (Poe, 2005, p. 85)

As we can see from the text, Usher did not specifically mention the name of his disease. Therefore there was a space for the reader’s imagination to connect Usher’s situation with many other different kinds of disease. A mysterious illness with strange symptoms might also be Usher’s case.

“He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth—in regard to an influence whose supposititious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be re-stated—an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit—an effect which 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.” (Poe, 2005, p. 85)

It is strange that Roderick Usher did not leave his mansion for the last years. A creepy feeling would the reader get when staying in one room or a house for so many years. Roderick’s sister Madeline probably did also not go anywhere and her nature, her behaviour and even her physical appearance became unusual as well. Her state was described as: “A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character” (Poe, 2005, p. 85, 86) But the scary atmosphere with all those Gothic elements, the reader would not only perceive them due to the strange behaviour of

the main characters, or from the entire interior of the house; but also from the process when was Madeline being entombed. The whole story is filled with the narrator's comments on all these circumstances and that causes the creepy feeling throughout the whole story.

3.3 Symbol of the house

In the third part concerning Edgar Allan Poe and his *The Fall of the House of Usher* it will be dedicated to the symbol of the house that was used in this mysterious short story. This fiction is connected with the mansion, which can have a hidden meaning that will be developed as the main idea of this section. It would be wrong not to mention the biggest symbol, which is even hidden in the name of the story. This object allows the story to have a place where it could happen. The house is a place where the brother and the sister lived together. There were no parents, so that the house would become some kind of substitute of their mother. "...the house that shelters brother and sister is identical with the Mother." (Del Castillo, 1981, p.50) As mentioned before, Roderick Usher and lady Madeline probably did not leave their house for a long time. This would confirm the suspicion that they might be scared of the world around them, which became the reason for not going outside their mansion. The house provided them with shelter, a place to eat and entertain themselves, and a location to survive all these years. Because we do not know the background of Usher's family, we might wonder how two siblings decided to live so distant of the outside world. Did any serious tragedy happen in this family? Did their parents died in a serious accident? Nothing is known about this, but what can be clear is that *The Fall of the House of Usher* is a piece of Gothic literature and it is precisely because of this that all of this information might be missing. Since the twins are used to live together for so long, they might have had developed a strong relationship, and not just on the basis of brother and sister. One theory mentioning about the possibility of incest was:

"The theme of incest is also related to this constellation; love for the mother or the sister is the expression of a rejection of everything that lies "outside" the world of the child and its mother." (Del Castillo, 1981, p.50)

Although there is no direct proof that this situation happened, the not so obvious clues are here: living of Usher only with her sister for so long in the house even though they are not married, they did not even have partners to spend time with, also the way how lady Madeline took care of Usher before she got sick. Her health got worse at the end of the story and her brother was trying to help her as well. When we get back to the house, there is also a theory that it also served as an island:

“The island in this story, however, displays the same qualities as the Usher mansion: isolation and decay. The mansion, as we might recall, had an “insular” quality about it, since it was totally surrounded by water.” (Del Castillo, 1981, p.53)

The mansion of Usher reminds the notion of an island in more aspects. One of them could be loneliness, which is presented during the whole story. The other aspect is the surrounding of water which was described when the narrator came to the house:

“...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 re-modelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.” (Poe, 2005, p. 82)

The abandoned mansion has a lack of any features which might give its inhabitants any positive emotions. There are no vivid colours on the walls, there are no souvenirs reminding their owners previous times that they spent on holidays, and also some family pictures are missing. What other things could make their house a home? Flowers can be added as well as colourful decorations. From the description of the house, it is obvious that it was painted a long time ago and the walls were fading. Also the house from the outside would need at least small corrections; however, it was described that the house from the outside was not in such deplorable conditions:

“Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.” (Poe, 2005, p. 83)

As the reader might have noticed, the house was one of the most important factors in this story. It was so delicate that even over time, it became not just only a house, but it emerged with the whole family and its name. In the text it was written:

“...of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher"—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.” (Poe, 2005, p. 83)

From this description we would consider the House of Usher to be known for its independence in terms of surviving and keeping the distance from other people. Because there was also no other branches of the family, only direct ancestors were always parts of this clan. It might sound strange that this family decided to live far from other people, but maybe it was not always like this. Only when their parents died, became Usher and his sister the last members who left and decided to keep away from society in order to protect what remained. That is probably the cause that the house became not only a house, but it also functioned as their own world in which the twins had to care. In that sense, they were able to fulfil their idea. As twins, Madeline and Roderick were not only very close to each other but studies show that they were part of a certain pattern of mirror images:

“On the basis of his cosmological and aesthetic theories, Poe thereby constructs his architecture of mirrors to prop the movement of the story. Several studies have probed the pattern of mirror images, usually relating them to the rationality/irrationality of Usher or the physical/psychological tension between him and Madeline.” (Timmerman, 2003, p. 13)

As several studies proved that Poe constructed a tale where the pattern of mirror images was used, the reader is allowed to follow it without any further warning. Another example of the mirror is the link between the house and Roderick as a person. The physical appearance of the house corresponds with the look of Usher. Both of them seem to be fading and not enjoying their life's objective, which is to be satisfied. In the story lady Madeline died first, although later we found out that she was still alive, but when she managed to get out of the tomb and she appeared in Usher's room, there she did die, as well as her brother died in the same day; not only for them but also it was the end for the whole mansion, as people were calling it The House of Usher:

“...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.” (Poe, 2005, p. 93)

4. The comparison of *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*

4.1 Health problems

In the third chapter I would like to compare *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In previous parts of this paper, I analysed some of the similarities found in both stories and their main characters. As both of them share some kind of illness; people around them know about this fact and try to help them as much as possible. The bond that directly connects the unnamed narrator of *The Yellow Wall Paper* with the main character of *The Fall of the House of Usher* is definitely their mental state, which is not in a stable level. The female narrator from the first short story experiences some strange moods and feelings, which influence not only her life but also the life of her closest family members. Although her mental state condition is not directly her fault, it could be attributed to her husband's fault; since he always tried to take exceptional and dedicated care of her so she started to accept his arguments:

“I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always make me feel bad.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 167)

The narrator was aware of her struggles and she also knew what tool to use in order to confront them. The particular cure she was using was her daily journal, so she could record her feelings and ideas. She confessed that she was under the pressure of her husband who made her stay in the small room under the roof, but she was also strong to write her thoughts in the personal notebook, which she hid from her family. Through the writing of these papers, she could let her problems out to be shared with the outside world; which at the end had the effect of making her feel better. In the second short story, there might be certain similarities as well. Roderick Usher invited his old friend to join him at the time when he was missing the company from someone. Roderick might get the feeling that such company from his old friend would make him feel better. He knew that there was something wrong with him, and he might be aware of the fact that his loneliness could induce him to a worse mental state. Therefore, his life affected him deeply and he had to make that effort to feel a change around him. That is the reason why he warned his old friend the following:

“In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence—an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy—an excessive nervous agitation. For something of this nature I had indeed been prepared, no less by his letter, than by reminiscences of certain boyish traits, and by conclusions deduced from his peculiar physical conformation and temperament.” (Poe, 2005, p. 84)

On the other parallel story, the narrator of *The Yellow Wall Paper* also knew that sometimes she was not in the best mental condition, making her feelings and doubts about her health to be reflected in the story: “I’m sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.” (Gilman, 1999, p. 167) This short passage shows that the narrator knew about her healthy problems, but sometimes the reader might see that she was really influenced by

the comments that her husband made her believe. As I mentioned above, the narrator accepted the ideas of her husband John. He was trying to push her in the role of a sick person, whose objective should only be to stay at home to cure herself in the room. This practice was applied in the new house where they lived. Their new home was described by the narrator as “the most beautiful place” with “a delicious garden”. The isolation that the narrator suffered was overwhelming, but without any defiance she reconciled herself with her current reality. In *Doctoring The Yellow Wallpaper* is a direct evidence that in the whole society when *The Yellow Wall Paper* was written, neither the husbands or the doctors were respecting their female patients with what they are saying.

““The Yellow Wallpaper” has since become case of study of the physical consequences of the masculine refusal to listen to a woman’s words, a refusal that critics link to the more general proscription of female self-expression—literary and otherwise—within a patriarchal culture.” (Thraikill, 2002, p. 526)

Comparing the other fiction of *The Fall of the House of Usher* through the character of Roderick Usher, it becomes clear that he was influenced by the people around him, as it also would happen with the narrator of *The Yellow Wall Paper*. Roderick came from a family of twins and that is the reason why he was influenced so strongly by his sister.

“Confirming evidence that the twin motif controls the development of suspense is found in Poe’s elucidation of Roderick’s inexplicable reactions to Madeline’s death and subsequent burial in the underground vault...” (Stein, 1960)

According to this abstract, Usher’s sister played a very important role in his life. The reader may suggest that between those siblings there was a very tight link, which was even tighter due to the fact that their parents were no longer alive. During the whole story, Roderick’s affection might seem to be so deep, that it was Madeline’s fault too that Usher suffered with his mental problems and his state got increasingly worse. It might be clear that both twins shared a part of the same disease, but it occurred differently in each of them. The reader gets

different clues about Usher's health conditions as he continues reading the story. Roderick was mistreated by "an incoherence" in terms of his changing moods with "an excessive nervous agitation", which could be supported by the fact that his own senses were sharper than those of the other people. In the final part, it is proved that their bond was so close that Roderick died in a short period after his twin sister.

4.2 Gothic literature

In the last part of this paper, it will be dedicated to the Gothic literature in order to find common features between *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

In *The Fall of the House of Usher* the overall gothic tone is supported by the gloomy atmosphere of the house and its abandoned surroundings, with no people living around. All these circumstances can evoke overall feelings of fear, which would make visitors experience it when entering the house. Even the narrator was a victim of those feelings:

"A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master. Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken."
(Poe, 2005, p. 83)

As the narrator expresses this feeling, he was quite unsure of what he could expect inside the studio, where his friend Roderick was expecting him for a visit. The description of the interior of the building was scary and frightening. The narrator could even feel a certain fear of the subjects he passed on his way to the studio. The fear did not just evoke what he saw, but it could persuade his brain to think scary ideas and stories which could happen in this place. The emotions of fear are an example of gothic literature, as can be perceived in *A Reinterpretation of "The Fall of the House of Usher!"*: "From the beginning Poe has made it clear that he will deal in our story with the psychological consequences of fear."

(Spitzer, 1952, p. 354) and Spitzer continues:

“The psychological law formulated here by Poe (fear increased by consciousness of fear) is valid especially for the monomaniac Roderick, who, throughout the story, is conscious of his “folly.” (Spitzer, 1952, p. 354)

Not only the narrator might get scared, but also Roderick suffered from feelings of fear as it was precisely described in the book. Roderick was scared of different issues. He might feel depressed because of his own disease, which was not exactly defined. He was also extremely concerned about his ill sister. Finally the fact that Usher lived a lonely life without meeting any other people could add to his desperate situation. Compared to the other fiction *The Yellow Wall Paper*, it also contains elements of fear and despair. Each of the main characters had different methods of how to overcome their own fears. The main female character of *The Yellow Wall Paper* was forced to spend her life in isolation from other people because her husband thought it would be the best cure for her. To rise above that reality she was keeping the secret journal where she wrote her inner feelings, which could also be the one of fear. The narrator recorded her observation of the paper as she was analyzing it in her free time. Although it was not literally mentioned in the short story that the narrator was frightened, keeping her personal journal could evoke in the reader a certain sensation of mystery. The narrator did not precisely describe what exactly she was writing inside her diary. What was even more terrifying, were the details that the narrator provided when she was describing the wallpaper and its features, how it changed over time and what objects she could observe. This obsession with the wallpaper could be called a mania. The mental states she was suffering when watching the paper make the reader think whether the narrator was insane or not. From an initial and unimportant perspective, it led the narrator to observe the wallpaper more deeply. Description of the objects in the paper turned out to be very mysterious and intimidating for the reader:

“Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. And as she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through

that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.”
(Gilman, 1999, p. 178)

The difference between the frightening elements of the characters of Usher and the one from *The Yellow Wall Paper* is that in the first fiction, the overall impact on the reader starts from the beginning and the reader feels it until the end. The second fiction does not present itself as clearly frightening from the beginning, even though there is also an abandoned house, as in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The ghostly tone in *The Yellow Wall Paper* is mentioned only in relation to the narrator staying in her room at the top of the house and also when she was observing the wallpaper. Because of this circumstance, the overall ghost feeling is not followed in the whole story but only in those parts concerning the narrator’s diary. When comparing the climax in terms of gothic features in both stories, the ending in *The Fall of the House of Usher* is more intensive:

“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.” (Poe, 2005, p. 93)

On the other side, the final part of *The Yellow Wall Paper* was not that scary but rather surprising, as the narrator thought that she became a real part of the wallpaper. In this respect, she thought that she became one of the women who were creeping:

““I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane! And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!” Now why should that man faint? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!” (Gilman, 1999, p. 182)

As seen in previous endings, it becomes evident that the intensity of the manner in which the readers are influenced in terms of scary feelings is different

in both books. *The Yellow Wall Paper* might look surprising at the end because the narrator became fanatical and even her husband fainted when he realised what had happened. No murder took place here, in contrast with *The Fall of the House of Usher*, where the narrator ran away because both his host as well as his sister died at the same time. The death here also symbolized the total collapse of the entire mansion of Usher.

4.3 Review

In the final part of this paper, different reviews concerning *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* will be presented. The first fiction to be reviewed is *The Yellow Wall Paper* according to Henry Blackwell for *The Woman's Journal* in 1899: "This is most striking and impressive study of morbid psychology, in the shape of a story." (Golden, 2004, p. 83) Another review by an anonymous author for *Boston Daily Advertiser* on 1899 describes the story of *The Yellow Wall Paper*:

"The book is bound in what one may suppose is a sample of the abhorred paper, and its grotesque design will easily arouse sympathy for the poor lady. The story, far from being ridiculous, has touch of ghastliness." (Golden, 2004, p. 83)

Next anonymous author wrote for the *Time and Hour* in 1899:

"With wonderful word-selection drawing curves and blobs and goggling eyes, with none of the real of facts of her story told, but all left to interference, with no plot at all, but the simple "un-narration" of the horrors of the beginnings of puerperal insanity, Charlotte Perkins Gilman Stetson has done work in "The Yellow Wall-Paper"..." (Golden, 2004, p. 84)

All of those opinions mentioned above described *The Yellow Wall Paper* in a positive light. The work of Gilman was considered to be a new perspective on watching at women and their not so happy life. Thanks to this literary text and the unnamed narrator, women could feel that they are not the only ones who are not satisfied with their lifestyle and moreover, they have the chance and power to

make the change. *The Fall of the House of Usher* was also reviewed by many authors and John H. Timmerman said:

““The Fall of the House of Usher” is among those few stories that seem to elicit nearly as many critical interpretations as it has readers. More recent critical appraisals of the story have largely followed two directions: a reappraisal of the genre of the story as a Gothic romance¹ and a close attention to Madeline Usher as a type of Poe's other female characters. But the tale presents the reader a multiplicity of problems that set it aside from Poe's other stories.” (Timmerman, 2003, p. 1)

“While critics disagree on how seriously such a “mechanical” method of writing short stories should be taken and to what extent Poe himself adhered to his ideal theory in practise, they all agree that “The Fall of the House of Usher” is one of Poe’s best stories – some critics point out that “Usher” is Poe’s “finest experiment in the technique of fluid form”. (Ketterer 193)” (Liu, 2005, p. 103)

The Fall of the House of Usher is considered to be a very successful short story by the critics, which does correspond with my own opinion. The motif of madness and all the elements of horror and Gothic literature make the story very interesting and breath-taking. The reader is able to enjoy the atmosphere of fear and can also experience moments of sadness and madness. My personal impression to this book was very positive due to the fact that it allows for the understanding of the oppression sometimes felt by women inside the institution of marriage. For female readers this book allows them to empathize and perceive the feelings of dissatisfaction of the narrator.

5. CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to analyse the two short stories of *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, in relation to the motif of madness and the other related issues concerning those two narratives. As it is determined with exactitude in the first chapter; the motif of madness directly relates to both the problematic of mental health, and the instability of a psychological condition. All of those issues mentioned above were analysed at

first in *The Yellow Wall Paper* and subsequently in the second chapter in *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

The Yellow Wall Paper was divided into four separate themes. The themes in the first book were the following: feminism; health issues, mental state and madness; Gothic literature and racism. The feminist issue was defined and the link was shown between the narrator of the story and the background of the position of women in society, at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. The superiority of the narrator's husband over her was illustrated by certain concrete passages from the fiction. The theme of madness and health state were connected between the narrator of *The Yellow Wall Paper* and its author Charlotte Perkins Gilman because it was by no coincidence that Gilman suffered from the same difficulties as the narrator. As in Gilman's real life, she was recommended by her physician Silas Weir Mitchell to "live as domestic a life as far as possible", while also the main character followed that same destiny. In reality, Gilman gave up this approach after three months and returned to her daily routine but in *The Yellow Wall Paper*, the reader can observe the outcome where this treatment can lead; since the narrator got insane instead of being cured properly. In relation to Gothic literature, its features were applied to the text of Gilman. She confirmed that we do not need "walking monsters" but our own fears can create a lasting damage in our life. The fourth topic in the first part about *The Yellow Wall Paper* dealt with racism and was supported with strong arguments from Susan S. Lanser, in which she explained what the yellow colour meant in the time of publishing *The Yellow Wall Paper*. She indicated what the yellow colour and the notion of race stood for in the turn of the 20th century. In this respect, the final conclusion was that the objective of the main character needed to peel off the yellow wallpaper, which symbolized the skin colour.

The Fall of the House of Usher from the author Edgar Allan Poe was analysed among three different themes: madness; Gothic literature and the symbol of the house in this story. The issue of madness was illustrated also with the symptoms of the main character Roderick Usher and his twin sister, lady Madeline. The narrator of *The Fall of the House of Usher* was observing both of them throughout the story and was providing the examples about their strange

behaviour. These feelings were also presented in the analysis in the second part. As for the Gothic literature, the proofs were provided concerning the study of the house and the overall tone of the book. In the last part of the second chapter, the house as a symbol was described in depth.

The third chapter was a comparative analysis of *The Yellow Wall Paper* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. It was separated into two themes: mental state and Gothic literature. Furthermore, different reviews were included in order to give weight to the importance of the arguments presented throughout this work. As mentioned in the title of this paper, the motif of madness was the main issue in both literary texts. It is in this analytic process, where it was decided to focus on the themes related to the feminist issue and the reality of mental disease. All of these topics were very significant to analyse in order to compare its similar features, which were not perceived so clearly at first. In both literary works, the main characters suffered from some kind of mental disorder that influenced their life and also that of their relatives. In both stories the unforgiving reality of their disease overwhelmed them. The principal figure of *The Yellow Wall Paper* was led to a destiny of insanity, while the main character of *The Fall of the House of Usher* passed away in despair.

6. RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem motivu šílenství v dílech *Žlutá tapeta* a *Pád domu Usherů*. Práce je rozdělena na tři celky, které se dále člení na následující části. První celek se věnuje povídce *Žlutá tapeta* a její analýze zpracování motivu šílenství a dalších témat, které se vážou k této problematice. Je zde rozebrán motiv feminismu, duševního zdraví, prvky gotické literatury a otázka rasismu. Druhý celek analyzuje *Pád domu Usherů* též v otázce šílenství, duševního zdraví, prvky gotické literatury a význam domu jako nositele symbolu. Poslední celek se věnuje srovnání obou prací, jejich společných prvků v otázce motivu šílenství, který je přítomný v průběhu obou děl, dále pak společné prvky

gotické literatury, jež jsou ilustrovány ukázkami z textů a následně rozebrány autorkou práce.

První kapitola v povídce *Žlutá tapeta*, od známé americké autorky Charlotte Perkins Gilman, se člení na čtyři menší podkapitoly: feminismus, otázka duševního stylu a motivu šílenství, gotická literatura a rasismus.

Otázka feminismu, která byla aktuální již na přelomu 19. a 20. století, znamenala volání žen po společenské, politické a finanční rovnosti. Zbraní, jakou používala Gilman, bylo psaní děl s tematikou feminismu. *Žlutá tapeta* byla právě jednou z těchto prací. Hlavní hrdinkou, a zároveň vypravěčkou, této povídky je bezejmenná mladá žena, která trpí depresemi a melancholickými náladami. Její manžel John rozhodl, že nejlepší léčbou bude odstěhování se od společnosti a strávení nějakého času v izolaci, daleko od ostatních lidí. Tímto krokem John získal absolutní převahu nad životem hlavní hrdinky. Způsob, jakým se hrdinka tomuto brání, bylo psaní jejího deníku. Podle sekundární literatury je pero symbolem penisu, kterým se hlavní postava brání své mužské autoritě. Dále pak psaní do svého osobního zápisníku je nástrojem, který využívá, aby snížila moc svého manžela. Avšak nadřazenost jejího muže je více než zřejmá. Toto se projevuje neustálým odkazováním na něj, vypravěčka opakovaně používá zájmeno „on“. V průběhu děje také hlavní hrdinka přejímá názory Johna a tím ustupuje do pozadí její vlastní osobnost, pocity a názory. Jak již bylo zmíněno, autorka nemá jméno na rozdíl od ostatních postav. Vystupuje zde John, jeho sestra Jennie a dále pak Mary, která se stará o nedávno narozené dítě hlavní postavy. Nepojmenování autorky je také považováno za prvek feminismu, kdy je ukázána nedůležitost této osoby. Cílem vydání povídky *Žlutá tapeta* také bylo ukázat ostatním ženám, že pokud nejsou se svým životem spokojené, jsou dostatečně silné na to, aby se postavily svým manželům a žily spokojeně.

Co se týká druhé podkapitoly, v té je rozebrána otázka duševního stavu hlavní postavy. Jak již bylo řečeno, hlavní postava trpěla duševními poruchami, které vedly k melancholii. Manžel, povoláním lékař, rozhodl, že nejlepší bude odstěhovat rodinu na klidné místo a nechat svou manželku žít v ústraní. Tento postup byl aplikován v tehdejší době na takto postižené pacienty. Ve skutečnosti právě i autorka Gilman trpěla touto nemocí, po třech letech se rozhodla navštívit specialistu, který jí doporučil vzdát se společenského života a nedotknout se pera

ani štětce tak dlouho, dokud bude živá. Tímto doporučením se autorka rozhodla řídit následující tři měsíce, po této době se s nevalným zlepšením své nemoci vrátila k původnímu způsobu života a svému doktorovi poslala dopis, na který on již nikdy neodpověděl. Hlavní postava *Žluté tapety* byla nucena pobývat v pokoji, který byl vymalován právě žlutou tapetou. Její místnost se jí vůbec nelíbila. V knize je podrobně rozepsán průběh s jakým větším a větším zaujetím se hlavní hrdinka věnovala sledováním oné tapety. Postupem času v ní začala objevovat tvary a siluety, ze kterých se později stávaly jasné figury žen. Vrcholem bylo, že si hlavní postava připadala jednou z nich. Což bylo důvodem jejího výbuchu emocí na konci příběhu.

Třetí podkapitola první části se věnuje prvkům gotické literatury v tomto díle. Za znaky gotické literatury jsou považovány: opuštěné známky, zničené budovy, vězení, zvědavý hlavní hrdina, strašidelné události a další. Na první pohled se *Žlutá tapeta* nemusí jevit jako zástupce této literatury, neboť se zde žádní duchové neobjevují. Podle díla *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The yellow wall-paper" and the History of its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook* Gilman nepotřebovala chodící monstra, ale zaměřila se na hlubší stránky mysli, které ovlivnily myšlení a duševní stav hlavní postavy.

Poslední podkapitola rozebírá myšlenku rasismu, která se objevuje již v názvu díla *Žlutá tapeta*. Podle autorky Susan S. Lanser Gilman byla ovlivněna místy, na kterých pobývala. Žlutá barva, podle Lanser, signalizuje barvu se záporným významem, která navíc znamená nemoc, zbabělost a ošklivost.

Druhá kapitola této práce, která rozebírá dílo Edgara Allana Poea *Pád domu Usherů*, je následně rozdělena na tři menší podkapitoly: problémy duševního zdraví a motiv šílenství, gotická literatura a význam symbolu domu, který představuje důležitý prvek v této povídce.

Otázkou duševního zdraví se zabývalo již mnoho autorů. Příčiny nestabilního duševního stavu se mohou různit. V případě Rodericka Ushera, hlavní postavy v tomto literárním textu, šlo nejspíše o součet okolností, které přispěly k narušení jeho psychické rovnováhy. Opuštěný dům s pochmurnou atmosférou a tmavým interiérem, nenaplněný společenský život a sdílení jedné domácnosti s vlastní sestrou Madeline, to vše byly elementy, které ovlivnily Usherův život. Navenek se pak projevovaly nezdravou barvou v jeho obličejí a

také velkou přecitlivělostí jeho smyslů. On sám si uvědomoval, že je s ním něco v nepořádku a proto se obrátil s prosbou návštěvy na svého přítele z dětství, aby s ním strávil společné chvíle. Po příjezdu jeho letitého kamaráda, a také vypravěče celého příběhu, by se mohlo zdát, že se Roderickův zdravotní stav zlepšil, nebo lépe řečeno, již se nezhoršoval. Oba přátelé si krátili čas četbou různých knih nebo malováním. Během pobytu Usherova kamaráda došlo k významné události. Sestra Rodericka zemřela, oba mužští hrdinové se rozhodli pohřbít ji nedaleko domu. Již za krátkou dobu bylo však Roderickovi jasné, že jeho sestra nezemřela, nýbrž je jen otázkou času, kdy přijde a pomstí se za nespravedlivé uvěznění do hrobu. Díky Usherovým bystrým smyslům čtenář přesně ví, jak její příchod probíhá. Je důležité si také všimnout, jak se Roderick chová, tyto okolnosti přispívají k velmi intenzivnímu strachu hlavního hrdiny a ke stupňující se nervozitě. Tato chvíle nastala, Madeline se najednou objeví živá a přichází k Roderickovi. V závěru povídky oba sourozenci padnou mrtví k zemi. Vypravěč příběhu se rozhodne opustit a zapomenout vše, co prožil v posledních dnech a odjíždí z tohoto domu. Konec domu Usherů je znázorněn zároveň i pádem domu.

Druhá podkapitola rozebírá prvky gotické literatury. Narozdíl od povídky Gilmanové, příběh Poea představují více typické a napohled zřejmé znaky pro gotickou literaturu. Opuštěný a tmavý dům na samotě, pochmurný a tmavý interiér, hlavní hrdinové se zvláštním chováním a nejmenovanou nemocí a také způsob pohřbení lady Madeline jsou typickými příklady. Komentáře, které vypravěč podává, zesilují celkový dojem záhadného příběhu. Čtenáři jsou poskytnuty podrobné detaily o nemoci a zvláštním chování Rodericka i jeho sestry, o vzhledu domu, a navíc je mu ale ponechán prostor pro vlastní fantazii. Kombinace těchto aspektů přispívá k faktu, že *Pád domu Usherů* je typickým příkladem gotické literatury.

Poslední podkapitola je věnována významu symbolu domu, kde se celé vyprávění odehrává. Dům rodiny Usherů byl důležitým prvkem sourozenců, kteří v něm bydleli. Dvojčata Roderick a Madeline neměli rodiče, proto jim toto obydlí nahrazovalo matku a otce. Zároveň bylo jejich útočištěm, které ani jeden z nich po dlouhá léta neopouštěl. Bydlení zde jim poskytovalo místo, kde se bavili, jedli, cítili se bezpečně. Jedna z teorií také tvrdí, že jejich domov byl jakýmsi ostrovem, kde se oba mohli skrýt před zbytkem světa. Co se týká fyzických vlastností domu, bylo popsáno, že se nenacházel v tom nejlepším stavu, ale v dobrém stavu na to,

aby svým nájemníkům poskytl dostatečný pocit jistoty a bezpečí, který oba potřebovali. Právě v den smrti Madeline a Rodericka symbolicky zemře i samotný dům.

Třetí a závěrečná kapitola popisuje společné znaky povídek *Žlutá tapeta* i *Pád domu Usherů*: nemoc, kterou sdílí Roderick, Madeline i hlavní ženská hrdinka v díle Gilmanové a prvky gotické literatury, které byly již podrobněji rozebrány výše.

Fakt, že hlavní postavy obou povídek trpěly duševní poruchou, je více než zřejmý. Ženská vypravěčka v prvním příběhu i Roderick Usher si jasně uvědomovali, že svým chováním ovlivňují i lidi ve svém blízkém okolí. Bezejmenná hlavní postava ve *Žluté tapetě* přemýšlela nad tím, jak by si místo izolace ve svém pokoji raději měla hrát se svým nedávno narozeným dítětem, spíše než zabývat se sebou a svou nemocí. Zůstalo však jen u myšlenek, protože posedlost hlavní hrdinky žlutou tapetou se vystupňovala až k úplnému šílenství v závěru knihy. I Roderick Usher o svém zdravotním problému věděl. Snahu řešit tuto situaci podpořil pozváním svého přítele na návštěvu do rodinného panství. Přítel z dětství poznal již po příjezdu, že s jeho hostitelem není něco v pořádku. Společně pak trávili čas různými aktivitami pro rozptýlení nemocného Rodericka.

Prvky gotické literatury jsou tématem druhé podkapitoly třetího celku. Analýza společných znaků u obou prací utvrzuje čtenáře ve faktu, že v obou případech se jedná o ukázky gotických povídek.

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