

A Modern Reading of Edgar Allan Poe's The Fall of the House of Usher: From Madness in Gothic Fiction to Psychological Decline in the Digital Age

Rachida Belounis

University of Algiers 2 (Algeria), Faculty of Foreign Languages,
belounis.1@outlook.fr

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Abstract:

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) has always fascinated audiences for its gothic qualities. Yet, Poe's exploration of psychological issues such as madness, social anxiety and phobia makes his story as relevant in modern times as ever. Therefore, the present article proposes to study Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* in a modern context, highlighting the interplay between setting and mental condition. More accurately, it attempts to draw connections between madness in nineteenth century gothic fiction and psychological deterioration in the age of social media. It essentially aims to explore the effects of loneliness in the decayed house of Usher on Roderick's and Madeline's mental health and seeks to show how social media platforms contribute to a comparable sense of solitude. Moreover, it attempts to examine the drawbacks of loneliness on both Poe's fictional characters and social media users.

Findings showed that both in Poe's work of fiction and in reality, extreme forms of solitude deeply affect physical health and psychological wellbeing, causing behavioral change which may culminate in depression. Most importantly, loneliness may eventually distort self-perception, resulting in self-alienation and identity loss. Therefore, it can be said that this research study contributes to understanding how nineteenth century literature serves as a lens through which to explore contemporary issues and challenges, particularly in the age of social media, providing foundations for future research on digital culture.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, identity loss, loneliness, psychological decline, social media.

1. Introduction

Solitude is a recurrent theme in literature, often pictured as a deep psychological force that can have a significant impact on the characters' mental health. Writers, across different time periods, such as Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett and Edgar Allan Poe often explored characters struggling with extreme isolation, depression and despair. *The Fall of the House of Usher* is one of Edgar Allan Poe's most critically examined gothic stories which expose the consequences of loneliness on mental wellbeing. A survey of the critical evaluation of *The Fall of the House of Usher* reveals that the story has most been regarded as a reflection of the fragility of the human mind, exemplified by Roderick Usher's descent into madness.

In his critical analysis of the *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Eiss (2011) sheds light on the complexities of the human psyche. According to him, what is noteworthy about Poe's story is that it is less about a madman than it is about a seemingly normal person who experiences insanity. Zaini (2020) has offered a slightly different critique. In her article, Zaini focuses more on the narrator's psychological state than that of Roderick. She interprets the story as an allegory of the narrator's anxiety and fear. From her perspective, all the gothic elements in the story can be viewed as projections of the narrator's disturbed mind. Other critics have drawn connections between the story and the author's personal experiences. In his biography of Poe, Morgan (2023) views the story as a self-critical analysis. He posits that Roderick's mental instability echoes Poe's internal struggles and experiences of alienation and despair. It is worth pointing; however, that if the story has been approached through different critical lenses, most interpretations have carefully highlighted the impact of the environment on the characters' psychological conditions. Newell's (2020) examination of the story intertwines the characters' unstable state of mind and the environment, revealing how the decaying house and the surrounding landscape create experiences of alienation and inner turmoil. In the same context, Girgus (1979) argues that the deteriorating state of the

house can be seen as a physical representation of the psychological tension experienced by the narrator and Roderick Usher, suggesting that the setting exerts control over its inhabitants. Taken together, the various interpretations of *The Fall of the House of Usher* demonstrate how already in the mid-nineteenth century Poe examined the complexities of the human mind, though psychology, at that time, was not a fully developed field of thought.

Given the complexity of the characters' psychological condition, *The Fall of the House of Usher* can be reinterpreted in contemporary contexts. It could be said that Poe's narrative has given a framework through which current concerns about mental health can be examined. When environmental psychology grew into prominence in the 1960s, there has been an increased focus on the relationship between the external environment and behavior. Barker (1968, cited in Heft 2001), the founder of environmental psychology and a leading figure in the field, has found out that individual behavior and environment are related by cause and effect relationship. According to him, the environment surrounding people governs to a large degree their behavior. One of the main issues that environmental psychology addresses is the impact of loneliness or social isolation on mental wellbeing. Current research in psychology has demonstrated that loneliness is positively related to mental disorders, anxiety and premature death (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). As concerns about social isolation have escalated in the context of social media, it would be interesting to examine how *The Fall of the House of Usher* resonates with contemporary discussions regarding mental issues and digital landscapes.

In the present article, I will attempt to study the extent to which loneliness, mental decline and self-deception experienced by the fictional Usher family echo modern experiences of digital addiction, psychological turmoil and self-alienation. Considering the researchers' findings mentioned earlier, I can hypothesize that there is a deep connection between excessive social media usage and mental health decline, highlighting the eventual impact of the online environment. More precisely, I assume that the deterioration of the Ushers' psychological condition and the decaying surrounding landscape in *The Fall of the House of Usher* serve as reminders of the harmful effects of digital landscapes on the individual's mental

condition. In order to prove this hypothesis, there is a need to address the following questions. The first is to know whether the setting in Poe's short story has isolating effects which can be paralleled to those of social media platforms. The second is to try to find similarities between cognitive decline in the fictional story and modern experiences of psychological deterioration. The third is to find evidence that both in fiction and reality, entrapment and mental breakdown may lead to the distortion of one's personal identity.

2. The Ushers' House as a Symbol of Social Media Entrapment

Poe opens the narrative in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, with a detailed description of the Ushers' mansion and its surrounding atmosphere, revealing the significant role that the setting plays in the story. This is a significant detail to consider since in my study I will explore the impact of the environment on the characters. It seems that Roderick Usher and his sister Lady Madeline are both entrapped in their ancestral mansion for a long time. In fact, the desolate house and the decaying atmosphere clearly evoke a sense of utter isolation. Upon the first glimpse of the edifice, the narrator is careful to point out that his friend Roderick dwells in a lonely house in a remote place, which makes the former feel a sense of discomfort and uneasiness. The climax of the scene occurs when the narrator approaches the dwelling, and notices the presence of "a black and lurid tarn" separating the house from the external world (Poe, 1839/1994, p.77) The lake in this scene not only emphasizes the remoteness of the location, but it also serves to heighten the feeling that there is no escape from it, conveying a sense of utter confinement.

Entrapment evoked by the house location in Poe's story widely echoes social media isolation. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat can be compared to the Ushers' mansion in terms of their alienating power. Both stand as a potent symbol of physical isolation. That is, excessive use of social media may lead people to spend more time engaging in online interactions than in the real life; so much so, the virtual world can just feel as real as the physical world. Yet, physical access in the virtual space is not foreseeable, revealing how detached excessive users are from the external world. The sense of isolation is further stressed if we consider the fragility of social media networks. Owing to the slightest network connection issue, the virtual

world would crumble leaving its users in a state of deep loneliness. Interestingly, the fissure that runs through the Ushers' mansion foreshadows the instability of the building, paralleling the vulnerability of the virtual world. The argument seems to run if we consider the last scene when the crack in the walls widens and the dwelling collapses.

The physical isolation of the dwelling seems to mirror the characters' sense of loneliness, which backs up the argument that the environment might have isolating effects on people. To illustrate this argument, I would like to refer to the scene when the narrator finally ventures into the Ushers' mansion and meets his friend. To his great surprise, the narrator learns that Roderick has not left the house in many years, suggesting how socially isolated his friend is. Moreover, the narrator discovers that Roderick apparently lives with his sister Madeline, which may imply that he has a companion. Yet, the narrator catches a glimpse of the woman only once, in a state of utter depression: "Lady Madeline...passed through a remote portion of the apartment, and without having noticed [the narrator's] presence, disappeared." (p.82) In reference to this scene, the thought that Roderick has ever engaged in any form of effective communication with his sister becomes far less likely. Thus, it could be safely assumed that Madeline's presence in the story is physical rather than emotional, implying that the sister does not offer any psychological relief to her brother.

The idea that Roderick has a sister but still feels lonely is highly evocative of the paradox of social media platforms. Cornwell and Waite (2009) define social isolation not as lack of contact but rather as absence of meaningful interactions and supportive ties. This definition is interesting in the context of my study as it sheds light on how an individual can technically connect with others and still experience loneliness. This is exactly the type of connectedness that social media seems to provide for its users. Similar to Roderick's and Madeline's relationship, online interactions offer an illusion of communication, resulting in emotional detachment.

As the story continues, we learn that Madeline is not just Roderick's sister but she is also his twin. This detail may point to the deep connection between Roderick and Madeline. The twins are so similar that they become interdependent. However, considering the previous

argument in regard to Madeline's ghostly appearance, it can be inferred that what connects the twins is not interaction but rather solitude. Although it might seem paradoxical, being isolated from the external world, each of the twins needs to validate himself/herself through the other. Madeline, who remains silent throughout the story, can be viewed as a symbol of mutism which is an extreme form of loneliness. As such, Madeline is not only the physical expression of Roderick's isolation but she is also a manifestation of his existence as a lonesome man. That is, Roderick needs to validate Madeline's extreme solitude as a natural part of human experience in order to affirm his own existence, and so does his twin. Therefore, both rely on their "strong connection" as twins to maintain a seemingly normal life. Yet, if validation offers the twins an apparent sense of connection, it will limit their worldview and sink them into further solitude.

A parallel can be drawn between the twin's interdependent relationship in the story and interconnection in echo chambers on social media platforms. Ertuğrul and Elçi (2025) explain that echo-chambers create an environment where people are exposed to viewpoints which reinforce exiting perspectives, which may offer them an illusory sense of satisfaction and unity. Much like the twins, users in echo-chambers mirror and validate each others' beliefs and thus become interdependent and strongly connected to each other. However, the more people engage with perspectives that align with their own beliefs, the less willing they become to interact with people who do not share their viewpoints. Consequently, users become deeply isolated in those echo-chambers. Yet, similar to Roderick's and Madeline's interdependence, the users' interconnectedness makes loneliness feel more natural and bearable, which deepens their sense of alienation; so much so, they become entrapped in big virtual prison cells.

Feelings of imprisonment are further stressed by the descriptive details of the interior of the house. Upon his entrance, the narrator presents the reader with the image of the mansion as a huge prison. The black floor, the narrow windows and the darkness that envelops the rooms are literal and figurative manifestations of the emotional prison where Roderick and Madeline dwell (Poe, 1839/1994, p 79/80) The narrator makes another significant observation when he points to

the “dark draperies hang[ing] on the walls.” (p.80) The heavy curtains not only intensify the claustrophobic atmosphere but they also serve to create a sense of concealment, as if Roderick and his twin sister were hidden from the outside world. Throughout the story, it is hinted that their isolation could be related to a family curse which has caused them to withdraw from social interaction: “For many years, [Roderick] had never ventured forth- in regard to an influence whose suppositious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be re-stated.” (p.82) Yet, Poe does not offer any further details, leaving the nature of the curse open to interpretation.

The invisible and unnamed evil force behind the twin’s isolation can be metaphorically associated with the anonymity behind the screen which may cause emotional solitude. In the digital world, people often use false identities which may enhance cyber-bullying. Indeed, when interacting behind a screen, users may engage in harmful conversations which may create emotional detachment from both sides. The abused may feel unappreciated and unwelcome, which makes them emotionally withdraw from online interactions for fear of more rejection. On the other hand, the abusers keep their identities hidden for safety reasons, which results in superficial interactions. Therefore, both experiences of emotional disconnection sink social media users into deep loneliness (Sahin, 2012) As online cyber-bullying happens behind a screen, its isolating effects on people remain unseen and unspoken, deepening their sense of entrapment. Because bullied users cannot share their experiences with other people, they will often withdraw from social interaction.

Paradoxically, while people today embrace social media for socialization and interaction, much time spent on social platforms often fosters a deep sense of loneliness. As discussed so far, Poe, in the *Fall of the House of Usher*, provides many details about the exterior and interior of the house which can be metaphorically interpreted in ways that offer insight into the isolating effects of digital addiction on social media users. To take the connection between Poe’s story and social media addiction a step further, it has to be examined whether there is further evidence that entrapment experienced in the virtual world may result in psychological deterioration similar to Roderick’s and Madeline’s mental decline in the fictional story. In order to reach the said objective, a close study of

particular scenes in the story and examination of specific interactions between the characters are necessary.

3. The Impact of Digital Addiction on Mental Health: A Modern Parallel to the Ushers' Psychological Decline

In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, when the narrator first meets Roderick, he is shocked by how much his old friend has changed over the years. The narrator describes an image of a man in his worst physical state. Indeed, Roderick's pale complexion, his silken hair and pallid lips are all signs of physical deterioration. (Poe, 1839/1994, p.80) Similarly, prolonged exposure to social media content may lead to health issues that can be likened to Roderick's physical fatigue. On this point, research has shown that excessive social media use may weaken the users' immune system, resulting in an alteration of their physical state (Anshari et al., 2025) Equally significant to observe is Roderick's sensitivity to light (Poe, 1839/1994: 81) which evokes the harmful effects of digital addiction on eye health. In relation to this, studies have confirmed that excessive exposure to blue light emitted from the screen may cause eye strain (Moreno & Hoopes, 2020) Most interestingly, research has emphasized the interaction between biological health and cognitive functioning; revealing that physical weakness experienced by social media users is often the result of psychological strain. In other words, digital addiction causes cognitive fatigue which, over time, will manifest in physical health issues.

This idea is heavily echoed in Poe's story. In fact, it can be assumed that Roderick's physical alteration is a manifestation of his mental decline which has slowly weakened his body. The deep connection between physical fatigue and mental decline can be noticed in the narrator's detailed description of his friend. Indeed, when the narrator notes that Roderick has a cadaverous appearance, he hastens to add that his friend also suffers from intense agitation and insufferable fear (Poe, 1839/1994, p. 83), as if the physical and psychological states seem inseparable. To put it differently, Roderick's body seems to deteriorate along with his mental well being.

Equally important is the striking parallel between Roderick's mental decline and the literal decay of the house which underscores the impact of the environment on Roderick's psychological state. This argument is reinforced by the fact that Roderick admits to his friend

that there is a connection between the dwelling and his mental fatigue: “[Roderick] was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which...brought about upon the morale of his existence.” (p.82) Drawing from this argument, we can infer that Roderick’s overwhelming nervousness is the result of his entrapment in the decaying mansion. In the realm of social networks, Roderick’s agitation can be likened to social media anxiety.

Just as the crumbling house has triggered Roderick’s psychological fragility, the fragmented relationships in the digital world may have a similar impact on mental health. Recent studies in psychology have shown that one of the main reasons behind high levels of social anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation and social rejection (Reichenberger et al., 2019) In view of my study, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter may result in low levels of self esteem. Indeed, compulsive platform users who are entrapped in the virtual world are constantly comparing their lives to other people’s lives which they mistakenly perceive as perfect and authentic. Repeated comparison may cause users to feel anxious about how others perceive them (Sandua, 2024) The more anxiety people experience online, the more they avoid engaging in social situations.

In Poe’s story, it is clear that Roderick avoids social interaction, which explains why many years had elapsed before he decided to invite his only friend to visit him. Roderick’s avoidant attitude can be interpreted as a fear of social judgment; as if he was afraid that people would witness his physical alteration and psychological decline. This argument is further stressed by Roderick’s obsession with his family’s curse. The Usher family’s doomed fate is perceived by Roderick as a sign of weakness which makes him feel unworthy and causes him restlessness. A similar sense of doom can be experienced online. Seen in a metaphorical sense, the Usher family’s curse may stand for feelings of insecurity that screen addicts may experience when they fail to live up to the seemingly idealized version of life shared on platforms,. They may feel as if they were doomed to remain invaluable. Over time, the sense of doom turns into fear and social anxiety.

Various studies have provided evidence for the association between sleep disturbance and digital addiction (Kim et al., 2010 cited in

Bozoglan, 2018) In fact, high levels of stress, mainly the fear of social rejection, may lead to a constant cognitive process. The latter not only amplifies anxiety but it may also result in a range of sleep disorders. Interestingly, in Poe's story, Roderick seems to present signs of insomnia which worsens his psychological condition. While there is no explicit mention of sleep deprivation in the story, Roderick's irritability, his exhausted appearance and nocturnal awakening paint a picture of a man who might be experiencing insomnia. Roderick's restlessness reaches its peak in the last scene, during the stormy night, when the narrator depicts his friend in a state of intense agitation: "He roamed from chamber to chamber...There was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes-an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanor." (Poe, 1839/1994, p. 89/90) At this point in the story, even the narrator experiences a growing sense of unease which prevents him from falling asleep: "Sleep came not near my couch...An irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame, and at length sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm." This is an important detail to point out as it hints at the possibility that the narrator might have been affected by the claustrophobic environment. Confined in the Ushers' decaying mansion since his arrival, the narrator is gradually pulled into a state of emotional isolation and agitation comparable to that of his friend. The contagious effect of emotional imprisonment on the narrator can be interpreted to mean that Roderick's psychological condition is closely related to the desolate family mansion. Based on this, the experience of sleep disturbance shared between Roderick and his friend can be viewed as a metaphor for how platform enthusiasts may share their struggles with insomnia in the digital space. Paradoxically, though online shared experiences may create a sense of community, each user experiences sleeplessness and uneasiness alone. Similarly, Roderick and the narrator fail to comfort each other during the stormy night, which reflects their emotional isolation despite being in the same room.

Roderick's psychological deterioration culminates in a delusional state. During the stormy night, Roderick confides to his friend that, for days, he has been hearing strange noises which seem to come from the vault where Lady Madeline was sealed. As it is not clearly stated whether Madeline was buried dead or alive, if she ever even existed, we may wonder if it is not Roderick's disturbed mind that has caused

him hallucinations. More ambiguity is created when Madeline finally appears as a ghostly figure who has escaped from the coffin to seek revenge. If Madeline was entombed alive, then she might have escaped from her tomb. Yet, it is still confusing how the dying Madeline could break a door of massive iron (88) and free herself from the vault. In consideration of this, it is possible that the return of the twin sister might be just a product of Roderick's hallucinations. As Zaini (2020) argues in his article, Madeline could be the manifestation of the narrator's fears and solitude experienced in the gothic mansion.

Roderick's delusional state resonates with the illusory truth effect experienced on social media platforms. In this respect, Chapman (2024) elucidates that repeated exposure to manipulated images, videos and posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter may create confusion about what is authentic and what is not. The illusory truth effect is amplified by the echo-chambers which further isolate excessive users and often result in the acceptance of false narratives that align with the users' preexisting beliefs and assumptions, leading to a more distorted sense of reality. In the same context, it can be assumed that Roderick's preexisting belief that his family is doomed to perish plays a significant role in the development of his hallucinations about the inevitable return of his twin sister to take him. In other words, his overwhelming belief in the family's curse might have caused him to confuse imagination with reality.

Digital deception is further echoed through the narrator who, like Roderick, seems to be deluded about some of the mysterious events he witnesses in his friend's mansion. Gruesser (2004) argues that Poe depicts a narrator who is neither wholly reliable, nor totally untrustworthy, which casts doubts on some of his perceptions of the events surrounding him. In this regard, I would like to refer back to the first scene when the narrator arrives at his friend's dwelling and notices an upside-down reflection of the mansion in the tarn (Poe, 1839/1994, p.77) The inverted image of the house can be interpreted metaphorically, suggesting not only the Usher family's psychological disintegration but also foreshadowing the narrator's eventual mental alteration over the course of events. To illustrate this argument, I would like to compare the narrator's mental state at the beginning and the end of the story. On the first day of his arrival, the narrator seems to be struck by the decaying atmosphere surrounding the house,

Roderick's physical alteration as well as Madeline's ghostly appearance. However, towards the end, the narrator seems to become more emotionally involved in the events of the story. One example of this would be his acceptance to help his friend bury Madeline despite the possibility that the woman might still be alive, which makes him his accomplice. Most importantly, during the stormy night and right before the eventual resurrection of Lady Madeline, the narrator starts hearing mysterious noises which can be paralleled to the woman's movements in the vault. In the same scene, the narrator even admits that Roderick's deteriorating mental condition has affected him: "I felt creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions." (p.89) If the narrator has become delusional like his friend, then his assumptions about the revengeful lady Madeline are highly questionable. Just as the narrator's unreliability creates confusion, constant social media engagement may blur the line between true and manufactured experiences. In fact, made-up events in the digital world may seem true to the point of gaining the users' trust. And the more users become involved in the virtual world, the less likely they are to raise doubts about what is true and what is wrong, resulting in utter confusion.

As pointed out earlier in the second part of the present article, social media entrapment may indeed result in serious psychological issues such as insomnia, depression and hallucination. The latter are strongly reflected in Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* through the characters Roderick, Madeline as well as the narrator. Therefore, at this point in my analysis, there remains to supply evidence that both in the Poe's story and the virtual world, cognitive distress may culminate in identity loss. To shed light on this argument, I would particularly explore Roderick's and Madeline's collapse in the last scene and attempt to draw parallels between the characters' experiences of psychological decline and online engagement of social media users.

4. The Twins' Death as a Metaphor for Identity Collapse in a Hyper connected World

In *Poe's story*, it seems that Roderick is not the only character who suffers from physical and psychological distress. Just like her twin brother, Lady Madeline has also been affected by the Usher family's

curse. However, it is worth pointing out that the twin sister, in comparison with her brother, presents decline in its extreme form. As already observed in the previous parts of the present article, Madeline has a ghostly appearance which can be interpreted as an advanced stage of Roderick's physical deterioration. Although Madeline's physical condition which "baffled the skill of her physicians" remains ambiguous (p.83), the rigidity of her body and deathlike sleep strongly align with the symptoms of catalepsy, a state where a person experiences a sudden paralysis with loss of consciousness (Berrios, 1994) In view of this, the deathlike episodes can be seen as symbols of identity loss where the sick woman temporarily loses her sense of self. The more cataleptic states Madeline experiences, the more alienated she becomes from her authentic self. Madeline's cataleptic condition culminates in her premature entombment which further suggests identity loss, as if her true self were buried in the vault along with her actual body. What adds weight the image of self-burial is the existence of dark draperies placed on all the interior walls of the dwelling. This significant detail not only suggests entrapment as noted earlier, but it also vividly evokes identity disguise.

In the framework of my study, Madeline's disassociation from self strongly resonates with identity confusion experienced on social media platforms. As it pertains to this, Rodriguez (2021) explains that the construction of identity in social media requires recognition from the other which often manifests in the form of positive comments, shares and *likes*. That is, people tend to measure their self-worth based on the approval of the online community. Consequently, digital addicts may feel pressured to reshape their identities in a way that they can get validation and acceptance. In a similar way to Madeline, users become disconnected from their authentic selves each time they engage in digital interactions. Therefore, Madeline's cataleptic episodes in Poe's story might be symbolic of online interactions as users transiently lose their true selves in the digital space.

Self-distortion in Poe's story is further reflected through Roderick. Given that the twins share the same inescapable fate, it can be argued that Roderick might as well be experiencing an identity crisis. To the point, Roderick's gradual downfall throughout the story, both physically and mentally, parallels the fading of his identity. This may account for why the narrator hardly recognizes his friend when he first

arrives at the Ushers' mansion. More to the point, Roderick's inability to maintain a sense of self can be perceived during the stormy night when he desperately attempts to alleviate his inner turmoil through art (Poe, 1839/1994, p. 85) As an artist, Roderick's poetry and music should normally serve as means for self-expression. However, as the narrator observes, his friend's artworks have an unsettling quality, suggesting that his artistry mirrors his troubled mind rather than his individuality. It seems that the house of Usher and the ancestral curse have fixed the limits of Roderick's self-expression. (Garmon, 1972) Thus, Roderick must break all ties with the family as well as the dwelling. This is probably the reason why Roderick might have hastened to bury Madeline, the only remaining member of the Usher family. For the same reason, Roderick might have sent for the narrator in an attempt to help him escape from the cursed house and eventually find relief. Only in defeating the limiting forces of the house and the Usher family's curse can Roderick regain a sense of self.

The Usher family's inherited fate can be seen as a form of homogenization which highly evokes conformity in social media. Just as Roderick and Madeline cannot form a true sense of self outside the Usher family, obsessive users fail to construct a personal identity beyond the digital realm. If we approach it metaphorically, the Usher family's curse, which allows for multiple interpretations as already pointed in the present paper, may also stand for digital addiction. As a curse, screen addiction can be perceived as an overpowering force, tying the users together in a homogeneous virtual world. Users who engage excessively may inherit behaviors, standards and values that limit their self-expression. The more time spent on the screen, the harder it becomes for the users to escape the "digital curse," resulting in self confusion much like Roderick's and Madeline's bewilderment.

To take self-distortion a step further, I would like to explore Madeline's act of revenge in the last scene. As Madeline's death remains ambiguous, her eventual horrifying resurrection at the end of the story evokes mystery and confusion as to whether the buried woman has returned as a living person or a ghostly figure. If we consider Madeline's entombment as the longest cataleptic episode she might have gone through, then her reincarnation further suggests self alteration, as if her true self were reduced to a mere shadow. With regard to this, Madeline's final return can be interpreted as a last

attempt to reconnect with her authentic self. However, Madeline's efforts are futile as the agonizing woman finally falls on her brother and literally dies. (Poe, 1839/1994, p.95) Lady Madeline's death in the final scene is highly symbolic; revealing a complete loss of identity, where Madeline's real self is lost forever.

Madeline's agonizing moments appeal to the challenge of forming a personal identity in a hyper connected world. In fact, in the early stages on social media platforms, users might experience an inner conflict about their real selves and virtual selves. Eventually, they might experience multiple shifts between their offline and online selves, as suggested by Madeline's cataleptic states. Over time, users can become deeply absorbed into the offline world to the point of totally losing their authentic identities. This idea is highly evoked by Madeline's passage to death which parallels the social media users' complete withdrawal into the virtual world.

Madeline's revengeful act can only be fully explored when considering Roderick's final moments. In this respect, Poe ends the story with the twins falling to the ground in death. As already highlighted, Roderick might have sealed his sister in the vault in order to cut any remaining ties with his family. Building on this argument, it can be inferred that Madeline's revenge against her twin brother points out the difficulty to stand against the Usher family's doomed fate. In accordance with my study, Roderick's succumbing to his own fate alongside his twin sister further suggests conformity and loss of individuality in the digital world. The twins' interconnected fate is reinforced by the literal collapse of the Ushers' mansion. If we consider it in symbolic terms, the burial of the twins' bodies beneath the debris of the house parallels the repression of the users' genuine identity which seems to be shattering under the weight of digital addiction.

5. Conclusion

The fundamental concern of the present article was to provide a fresh reading of Edgar Allan Poe's nineteenth century gothic short story *The Fall of the House of Usher*. More precisely, this paper aimed to draw a parallel between madness in Poe's gothic story and psychological decline in the digital world, underscoring the significant impact of the environment on mental health and behavior. On that account, the

primary hypothesis arising from the chief interest of this article was to provide evidence that both in reality and fiction; experiences of extreme forms of loneliness may result in mental deterioration, culminating in identity loss self-detachment.

My study has revealed how the environment in narrative and in social media may result in profound solitude. In Poe's story, the remoteness of the Ushers' mansion, the claustrophobic atmosphere surrounding it and the darkness that envelopes the interior of the dwelling strongly evoke isolation. Indeed, it has been noted that Roderick and his twin sister Madeline are totally withdrawn from the exterior world and have not ventured outside or hosted any guests for years. Moreover, Roderick's avoidant attitude and Madeline's ghostly appearance widens the communication gap between the twins. Similarly, my analysis has demonstrated that social media, through echo-chambers, anonymity and cyber-bullying, entrap social media addicts in a huge virtual prison, resulting in shallow interaction and complete detachment from real life. Based on these findings, it has been inferred that absence of effective communication in Poe's story deeply resonates with the superficial connectedness that social media platforms offer for their users.

My research findings have equally shed light on the effect of extreme loneliness on physical health and mental wellbeing. In fact, the notable parallel between the actual decay of the house and Roderick's psychological deterioration has underscored the harmful consequences of deep solitude on mental condition. In this context, my examination has indicated that Roderick's mental decline manifests in agitation, insomnia and hallucinations which essentially stem from his feelings of insecurity caused by the Usher family's curse. Correspondingly, my investigation has disclosed that constant comparison on social media platforms may cause users to feel socially inadequate, leading to high levels of stress and sleep disturbances. In addition, Roderick's auditory and visual hallucinations are highly evocative of the illusory truth effect in social media which is further echoed in Poe's story through the unreliable narrator.

Most importantly, a contemporary reading of Poe's story has highlighted loss of personal identity in the digital space. Indeed, the Usher family's doomed fate strongly mirrors conformity in a hyper

connected world where digital addicts feel pressured to conform to the standards of the digital community and shape their identities accordingly. Moreover, Madeline's and Roderick's death in the last scene further alludes to identity collapse on social media platforms. Actually, the twins' burial beneath the Ushers' crumbled mansion serves as a strong reminder of self-withdrawal into the virtual world of appearances. While social media seems to provide freedom of self-expression away from societal standards in real life, it entraps its users and drives them to form identities that align with the values of the virtual space, leading to self-alienation.

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