



Environment Influences on the Emotion of Usher's Friend in *the Fall of the House of Usher*

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Abstract

Nature is deeply powerful that it can give either bad or good influence toward human's life. In this paper, the influence of nature toward the emotion of Usher's friend as one of the characters in the story 'The Fall of The House of Usher' by Edgar Allan Poe is discussed. The main aim of this paper is to disclose how nature around the house or the environment is represented in the story and how its presence affect human's emotion in the lens of ecocriticism. As for the methodology used in this research is qualitative-descriptive method in which the researcher read the story and some related references to gain deeper comprehension, after that critically analyze the story based on the theory of ecocriticism. From this analysis, the writer finds out the ecological imbalance in the environment of Usher's house which is marked by the dead trees, dead lake, and poor quality of air. While the inner side of his house is just as bad. It is deeply dark and unkempt, making a lot of germs live in. Such thing indeed spreads bad influence to the emotion of Usher's friend as the visitor in the house.

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INTRODUCTION

Nature is something that human being cannot survive without, for all their life necessities are provided by nature. A survey done by Nazaruk (2016), nonetheless, indicates that in each year, nature continues to suffer damage caused by human culture such as industrialization. For over a hundred years of nature exploitation as well, human has shown their dominances by using science, power, and their intelligence which leads to the disruption of the symbiotic alignment among human and nature. Responding to this situation, ecocriticism then appears as the movement aiming to remind people about the significance of nature to human life. Its main concern is to study the relationship between

literature and the physical environment, such as how nature is represented in the story or how nature elements affect the characters in the story. Found by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, ecocriticism takes its bearing from American Transcendentalism and British Romanticism (Barry, 2002).

In this paper, the writer attempts to use ecocriticism to analyze the story entitled *The Fall of The House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe which was first published in 1839. This story generally tells about an unnamed man (the narrator) who visits his boyhood friend, Roderick Usher. Shortly after arriving, the feeling of fear ambushes him as Usher's house looks very terrible. That big house is only inhabited by Usher, his servants, and his sister named Madeleine who suffers from strange disease. Usher himself suffers from psychological disorder that makes him unable to bear any contact with natural world. One night, Madeleine dies and is buried by Usher and the narrator in the crypt of the house. Several days later, Madeleine surprisingly appears from the tomb and murders her brother. The narrator then runs away as the house of Usher starts to collapse.

This story has been widely analyzed using psychoanalysis perspective with Usher's psychology as the main focus. For instance, the analysis done by Gumus (2016: 6) implies that "His predicament both mentally and morally may be derived from his ancestral history of sickness which makes him a probable hypochondriac". The analysis with ecocriticism perspective, however, is only done once by Peter Barry (2002: 167) who states that "Usher, then, radiates not energy, but entropy like an imploded star rushing towards its own disintegration". To gain different result with Barry's analysis, in this opportunity, the writer will focus more on the environmental influences toward the soul of the narrator or Usher's friend. The analysis will be based on these problem formulations:

- 1) How is the environment depicted in the story 'The Fall of The House of Usher'?
- 2) How does the nature in the story influence the emotion of Usher's friend?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Due to the increase of natural issues on the earth, ecocriticism becomes the new trending in literature field nowadays. It mainly aims to enhance people's awareness toward the importance of preserving nature and to make people realize how great the influence of nature toward humans is. This critical approach was first discussed in the essay entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in*

Literary Ecology (University of Georgia Press, 1996), written by Cheryll Glotfelty and her co-editor, Harold Fromm. Shortly after that, it becomes a hot topic talked in various seminars and meetings. Glotfelty (1996: 14) asserts that

Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theory, 'the world' is synonymous with society – the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" to include the entire ecosphere.

Indeed, ecocriticism has extended the concept of "the world" within literary analysis, so that now it does not just focus on cultural, social, and linguistic background. Rather, it talks about something that the readers often forget; which is the nature or the ecosphere depicted in the literary works.

Ecocriticism movement basically occurs both in United States and United Kingdom. Nevertheless, there are some differences underlying US and UK version of ecocriticism. As it is explained by Barry (2002: 161), US version of ecocriticism "takes its literary bearings from three major nineteenth-century American writers whose work celebrates nature, the life force, and the wilderness as manifested in America". The works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) were highly highlighted at that time as the references to develop the notion of ecocriticism. Besides, US version of ecocriticism tend to be remarkably dramatic compared to the UK version. It vividly shows the admiration towards nature using beautiful words. On the other hand, UK version of ecocriticism takes its bearings from the British romanticism of the 1790s. Jonathan Bate as the author of *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* and Raymond William with his book entitled *The Country and The City* are two authors who are famous at that time. Another difference among US and UK version of ecocriticism relies on its development. If in US, there is an association for the study of Literature and environment, in UK there is neither journals nor agency related to ecocriticism. Further, the tone in British eco-writing tend to be more 'minatory' or "seeks to warn us of environmental threats emanating from government, industrial, commercial, and neocolonial forces" (Barry, 2002: 162). That is why British eco-writings often deal with other issues which seem to endanger or damage nature.

Given that eco-critics focus on environment, the discussion in reading process will be talking about 'the outside things' such as the house and its environment rather than the characters and their psychology (Barthens, 2008).

They raise the notion of energy, "entropy (which is a kind of negative energy within systems which tends towards breakdown and disorganization) and symbiosis ('symbiosis', literally 'living together', denoting mutually sustaining, co-existing systems)" (Barry, 2002: 167). This 'science-like' analysis is done because ecocritic believes that nature does exist in the real world, it does not just a concept, word, nor text. It is something offering symbiotic relation toward human that can be either mutualism or parasitism. If we as a human mistreat the nature, then the relation it gives will be parasitism. It will influence our lives severely by bringing natural disasters. Contrarily, if we can treat it well, it will bring us many advantages or in other words, the relation among us and the nature will be symbiotic mutualism.

A brief recognition of Edgar Allan Poe and his writings are substantial here. Born at Boston on January 19th, 1809, Poe was an American author, poet, editor, and literary critic. His field of writing centered on mystery, thriller, and gothic, making him set as the discoverer of detective fiction genre. Poe had always been regarded as one of the most enigmatic and mysterious writers whose works were adored by many readers. One of his famous poems was *The Raven* (1845) which was much talked and analyzed that era due to its uniqueness. When other writers of his generation were busy conveying moral messages, through the poem of *The Raven* Poe appears with 'new colors' that were full of terror and mystery instead. His another notable works is *The Black Cat* (1843), a story that told a man who are kind, mild, and loving animals. He and his wife had a pet which is a cat named Pluto. All was well until one day, the man got drunk and unconsciously killed Pluto. Since that day forward, he was always hunted by the murdered cat. Some other frightening stories are *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher* that will be analyzed in this paper. History noted that the reason why Poe liked to write 'dark' stories was closely related to his mental state. Poe was mentioned to suffer from depression, bipolar depression, and dipsomania, which made him surrounded by sadness and gloom (Siwek, 2016).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given that this is a library research, the data were collected using book and internet. There are three steps done by the writer which are first, the writer read the

story of 'The Fall of The House of Usher' to get the clear depiction of what the story is actually about. After that the writer read some journals and books regarding ecocriticism which is used to analyze this story written by Edgar Allan Poe. This theory is chosen because Poe's novel inserts nature as one of its substantial elements and hence it is in line with the principles that ecocriticism offers. Lastly, the writer does critical analysis to find out which part of the story showing the influence of nature toward the emotion of Usher's friend. As this research aims to explain how nature affects human mind, the analysis is shown in a descriptive way.

DISCUSSION

In this section, there will be two discussions concerning the representation of environment in the story as well as the environmental influences toward Usher's friends. The discussions will be divided into two sub chapters as follow:

The Dreary Atmosphere Around the House of Usher

Since this story includes as a gothic horror story, setting becomes its great deal to convince the readers about the supernaturalism inside the story. Poe depicts the environment here as something which is very unkempt, making it looks gripping and uninteresting. This can be seen from the moment when Usher's friend arrives. He says, "I looked at the scene before me — at the house itself — at the ground around it— at the cold stone walls of the building — at its empty eye-like windows — and at a few dead trees." (Poe, 1988: 22)

Further, Usher's friend also mentions that there is a quiet lake with a dark water beside the house which raise the eeriness of the atmosphere. This 'few dead trees' and the 'dark lake' somehow implies the ecological imbalance around Usher's house in which there is no good relation between biotic and abiotic parts. According to Agudo (2016: 1), "ecosystem should have a process of "the cyclic flow of materials from abiotic environment to the biosphere and then back to the abiotic environment" in order to be balance." If the trees around Usher's house are not even alive, then the soil as abiotic part here is proven incapable to flow the materials to the biotic parts around it. The soil may have been dry up, lacking of organic matter, minerals, and nutrient that the trees can soak up.

The same case also happens with the lake of which the dark water reflects the growth of iron and sulfur bacteria inside it. These bacteria usually produce a harmful hydrogen sulfide gas that can screw up the living system under the lake

and disturb the biosphere around it (Schneider, 2005). This is probably the reason why the lake does not emit life and looks horrible. It destroys the lake ecosystem, including the fish, plankton, or any living creatures that once lives in it. Besides the soil and the water, another abiotic part that feels bad from around Usher's house is the air, as told by Usher's friend, "The air itself was different. It was not the air of heaven. It rose from the dead, decaying trees, from the gray walls, and the quiet lake. It was a sickly, unhealthy air that I could see, slow-moving, heavy, and gray" (Poe, 1988: 23).

The writer assumes that the poor quality of air in Usher's house maybe caused by the bad ecosystem around it, given that there is a proportional relationship among ecosystem services and the air quality. If the ecosystem were well preserved, there would be much oxygen which is good for health rather than carbon dioxide surrounding the house (Kiss, 2015). The air in Usher's house, hence, feels unhealthy as the ecological imbalance around it is unable to produce much oxygen.

Moving inside the house, Usher's friend seems telling that the inner side of the house is not less terrible with the outer side, as he says: "None of the walls had fallen, yet the stones appeared to be in a condition of advanced decay. Perhaps the careful eye would have discovered the beginning of a break in the front of the building" (Poe, 1988: 23). He also explains how the house is deeply dark and unkempt: "The windows were high, and pointed at the top, and so far above the black floor that they were quite out of reach" (Poe, 1988: 24); "Dark coverings hung upon the walls. The many chairs and tables had been used for a long, long time. Books lay around the room, but could give it no sense of life" (Poe, 1988: 24).

From those expressions above, it is clearly reflected how neglected Usher's house is that the stone as the foundation of the house begins to rot. Unused items such as chairs and tables are not moved, obsolete books are not cleaned as well. Such condition is undoubtedly dangerous because germs, dust mites, and other free-floating debris can trigger many illnesses. In addition, many rooms in the house are left in the dark, lacking of light because the windows itself are far above the door and hard to reach. The house then refuses the natural light and all its kindness. It rejects the vitamins, healing power, and positive energy offered by the sunlight. The never opened door and windows also indicates its loss of function as the entrance of air and sunlight. Instead, it now has turned into a barrier of entropy

inside the house so as not to exit. This is to say, the house keeps the negative energy inside which seems ready to give bad influence to whomever stay in it. All of these things definitely create a dreary atmosphere around the house of Usher.

The House Environment and The Emotion Disruption of Usher's Friend

Ever since the first sight of Usher's house and the circumstances around it, there are so many negative feelings surrounding Usher's friend heart as mentioned here: "When I arrived I felt something strange and fearful about the great old stone house, about the lake in front of it" (Poe, 1988: 26); "I do not know how it was—but, with my first sight of the building, a sense of heavy sadness filled my spirit" (Poe, 1988: 22); and "looked at this scene, I say, with a complete sadness of soul which was no healthy, earthly feeling. There was a coldness, a sickening of the heart, in which I could discover nothing to lighten the weight I felt. What was it, I asked myself, what was it that was so fearful, so frightening in my view of the House of Usher?" (Poe, 1988: 22).

By reading the statements above, it can be noticed that Usher's house, its environment, as well as the lake beside it have made Usher's friend feels sad and really concerned. This is indeed very reasonable because the atmosphere around the environment is proven to powerfully affect human's emotion. As it is said by Spasova (2011), the emotional changes of human being are strongly influenced by the humidity, the weather, the amount of sunlight and the number of temperature in that place. This statement is strengthened by Anna (2015: 1) who mentions that "human barometers get impacted by atmospheric conditions."

In regard to this, the writer finds several reasons on why sadness covers the heart of Usher's friend when he first arrives the house of Usher. The first reason is because the weather around is not good at all as depicted here: "It was a dark and soundless day near the end of the year, and clouds were hanging low in the heaven" (Poe, 1988: 22).

The position of the clouds certainly determines the humidity level of a place. If the clouds were hanging low like those around Usher's house, the humidity became high, causing on the low temperature. This low temperature can trigger the sadness or other negative feelings such as fear because it spreads the cold. The cold weather alone can interfere the production of serotonin as the brain hormones associated with mood elevation (Mercola, 2016). As the result, Usher's friend here suffers from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) that makes him obtain

deep feeling of sadness and fear caused by the cold.

The second reason of his sadness is because of the absence of verdant vegetation around the house. Several researches have shown the correlation between good environment and human emotion in which plants are evidently able to reduce negative feelings, decrease stress, and boost energy. Green environment can also put human in relaxed and happy mood (Kaplan, 2009; Bender, 2013; More, 2016). However, if the environment is arid and dark like in the Usher's house, the positivity will surely not come to human mind. It must be impossible to acquire positive feelings and energy from the land where no colorful plants grow, the trees are even dead, and the lake is lifeless. Rather, Usher's friend absorbs negativity and feel the mourn as the impact of this unsustainable ecology.

The third reason why Usher's friend feels uncomfortable with the house is mostly because the house is so dark that it does not allow the sunlight to go through. In fact, inadequate exposure to sunlight can influence the brain chemistry which then leads into the bad emotion. People are indeed sensitive to the darkness because "levels of the soothing brain chemical serotonin are at their lowest on the dark" (Loffredi, 2011: 1). Besides, lacking of sunlight exposure causes someone to lack of vitamin D as the emotion controller and hormone regulation. It is not surprising hence that the feeling of fear and sad wrap Usher's friend at the moment he comes, as he is not much exposed to sunlight.

The last negative thing from the house that affects the emotion of Usher's friend is its bad air circulation. As the windows and door are barely opened, the positive energy that wants to cover the house is restricted outside. Meanwhile, the energy inside the house mixes with germs, dust, making it unhealthy and dangerous. This unpleasant energy is definitely disastrous given that it influences undesirable emotions such as sadness, unhappiness and fear to come.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In analyzing the story, the writer uses ecocriticism to answer two problems formulation concerning the representation of nature around Usher's house and its influences toward the emotion of Usher's friend. It is found that there is an ecological imbalance around the house which is indicated by the soil incapability to live the trees, the dark water of the lake, and the poor quality of the air. Furthermore, the inner side of Usher's house is very unkempt as the foundation of

the house begins to ruin, dusty, and dreary. It is also less exposed to the sunlight which makes it is surrounded by darkness. All these negativities then bring bad impacts to Usher's friend who has just come to visit Usher. Somehow he feels a great sadness and fear whenever he stares at the house and its surrounding. Those emotions may be due to several things such as the cold and gloomy weather around the house, the arid environment, the darkness which covers the house, and the poor air circulation that is proven to greatly influence human's emotions.

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