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The Fall of the House of Usher

The Fall of the House of Usher is acclaimed as one of Edgar Allan Poe's greatest works. Poe uses Symbolism and analogies in both characters and setting to tell this gothic tale of death and downfall. He often drew upon memory for the setting of his stories. He combines atmosphere and analogy to form the setting which provokes to the reader a sense of insufferable gloom. Too much of the horror has been attributed to its setting. But the setting does have a double importance, descriptive and symbolic. Poe introduces plot in its most rudimentary form, underscoring the miasmatic elements in the tale. The story connects plot and setting so that they seem one. From the first sentence to the last, the mood of desolation and impending doom never leaves. Poe used the principle of analogy very effectively in House of Usher. Finding an identical pattern in each the house and the family, he makes the events in the book being read correspond to those going on in the house. The entire opening scene is steeped in blackness and melancholy. (Neilson, 197, Buranelli, 62)

Another of Poe's writing techniques is anima. Anima is giving a character qualities of having an animal spirit. Madeline Usher is the anima figure in the story. Poe's use of symbolism in his gothic stories is a guiding thread to his literary art. That he is not persistently a symbolist is one of his strengths, for it means that he only turns to symbolism when it has a distinct role to play. His symbolism generally takes the form of allowing some object to stand for an abstraction or personal attribute. Five persons figure into this tale, but the interest centers exclusively in one—Roderick Usher. (Levine, 125, Buranelli 85)

Roderick, cadaverous eyes, large liquid and luminous beyond comparison. His lips are very thin and pale. Usher suffered from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most Ochs 2

insipid food was alone bearable; he could wear only garments of a certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even the faintest light. The characters also show gothic tendencies. Just as Usher simultaneously exploits and loathes his disease, he longs for death and at the same time fears it. at the same time fears it. Roderick is himself a symbol of isolation, and of a concentration of vitality so introverted that it utterly destroys itself. He is physically isolated. (Buranelli, 63)

Madeline Usher, Roderick's twin sister is given to trances and sleepwalking

and is completely unaware of the world surrounding her, even the visitor's presence in the family home. Madeline's cataleptic condition affects Roderick deeply. He sees her wandering about the house, her physical being, as well as her psychological being decaying daily, but he does nothing about it. It is Madeline, the anima figure, who has been Roderick's companion for many years, and He has kept alive this psychologically incestuous relationship. Madeline takes the initiative to bring an end to the negative and destructive union of souls. (Knapp, 139)

Clearly, the supernatural happenings in this story are unreal and so must be seen as symbolic. The gloomy appearance of the house gives it a supernatural atmosphere that gives the house life-like characteristics. The narrator describes the house as resembling the image of a face or a skull with eye-like windows, and hair of fungus. The reader knows that a house can't just split apart, therefore it must be seen as symbolic. A symbol of the death of both Roderick and Madeline Usher. (MacAndrew, 196, Neilson, 197)

The happenings which are not supernatural are Roderick's illogical and irrational behavior. The most interesting one of these events is the burial of his sister Madeline in the vault. "The tragedy is so far from being gratuitous or a matter of erratic desire that

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both the family and the family mansion are foredoomed to destruction." Madeline is not dead. He buries his sister alive in hope that she suffocates, then he will move her to the family grave yard. Elizabeth MacAndrew quotes, "It is an obvious rule of art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes." This is true, although Madeline is dead, she is not entirely gone. She comes from her interred casket to seek vengeance on her brother, who sought to rid himself of her, to entomb her prematurely. She haunted the soul of Roderick. Madeline and Roderick are almost two faculties of the same soul, of which the mansion is their body.

The Usher family and the Usher mansion are analogous-stained with time, used up, crumbling within, ready to collapse. The narrator describes the house as ready to crumble to the ground, therefore there must be something supernatural holding it up. "The symbolic analogies reinforce one another in a steely web of cause and effects." (MacAndrew, 197)

Madeline kills Roderick and the Usher Mansion splits in half, falls to ruins with the joining of its two last representatives. The final collapse of this gothic house is melodramatically spotlighted by the blood-red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely perceptible fissure. This ends both the suffering of the characters, as well as the house. The Fall

of the House of Usher is a mosaic of incidents, psychological attitudes, and symbols all cemented into place in a unified structure according to the prescription of an exacting and skillful art, that is Edgar Allan Poe. (Neilson, 100)

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