

Poe's "the fall of the house of usher" essay



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The literary catalogue of Edgar Poe features bizarre, ghastly, and morbid works. Poe's short stories are synonymous with gloomy themes and dark storylines. "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Cask of Amontillado" are some of Poe's darkest stories.

Even when highlighting the bright aspects of life such as family and love, Poe does not abandon this dark-themed literary style. In "The Fall of the House of Usher", Poe tells the story of a man who is visiting an old friend. The story is about the remaining two members of the Usher family.

In "The Fall of the House of Usher", Poe portrays the Usher family as struggling to survive albeit in a gloomy manner that involves degradation, disease, and death.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is a story that investigates the situations that surround a bizarre family. The Usher family is isolated from the rest of the population and it does not exhibit any signs of normalcy. In addition, the family's existence has almost become a supernatural phenomenon.

Poe portrays the family as one that is surrounded by an eerie atmosphere that scares the narrator from the start. At the start of the story, the narrator is able to paint a vivid picture of the Usher's family setting.

The narrator notes that during "the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens... (he came) within view of the melancholy House of Usher" (Poe 2).

Poe's story tells about the bond between Roderick Usher and his sister Madeline Usher. The unidentified narrator who has been called by Roderick

to help diffuse the tension ends up being embroiled in the Ushers' family affairs. The narrator is only able to survive the fall of the Usher family by running away.

To gain insight into Poe's perspectives about family, one has to consider his family background. As a child, Poe witnessed several tragedies including losing both his parents before he was three years old. In addition to being orphaned at an early age, Poe's brother died when he was young.

Rosalie, Poe's younger sister suffered from a mental illness and subsequently became insane. Poe's familial misfortunes continued when he was formally adopted by John Allan's family. It is alleged that Poe was mistreated by his foster father when he was young.

As a young adult, Poe had to drop out from university due to his drinking and gambling. After his foster father managed to get Poe admitted to West Point University, Poe was consequently expelled. It is at this point when John Allan disowned Poe as his son. When Poe was 27, he married his first cousin who was thirteen years old at the time.

Roderick tells the narrator that he and his sister share a special kind of connection. Although this 'special connection' is not verified in the story, it alludes to some form of kinship. One assumption that can be made from Roderick's claims is that he and his sister are involved in an incestuous relationship.

According to the narrator, the Usher family has been locked out from the outside world for generations. Moreover, the family did not welcome any

outsiders to their house. Previously, Poe had been married to his first cousin and he was therefore privy to the dynamics of incestuous relationships.

However, instead of defending incestuous relationships the author is against these relationships. According to Poe, the doom that befalls the Usher family is closely tied to the destructive nature of incestuous relationships. When the members of the Usher family declined to allow outsiders into their house, they spelt their own doom.

The incestuous portrayal of the Usher family is Poe's way of condemning the place of incestuous relationships in the society. The narrator does not feel at ease whenever he is at the confines of the Usher family home. Moreover, he is not able to decipher the nature of the relationship between Roderick and Madeline.

The dilapidated condition of the Usher household echoes the conditions of both Roderick and Madeline, the two surviving members of the Usher family. The family's building exhibits visible cracks and fundamental weaknesses just like Roderick and Madeline.

In one instance, Roderick tells the narrator that the " mansion exhibits some sought of power over him" (Poe 2). The mansion symbolizes the integrity and legacy of the Usher family. Therefore, Roderick is claiming that the power of his family's legacy has a great impact on his life.

This can be interpreted to mean that Roderick's current state is as a result of factors that are beyond his control. The same logic can be used to

understand Madeline's state of health. At one point Roderick tells the narrator that even doctors cannot figure out Madeline's ailment.

The mystery of Madeline's disease prompts Roderick to bury her inside the house. By so doing, Roderick denies doctors the chance of investigating what killed her sister. However, it later emerges that Roderick's actions were in bad faith.

The only family in this story is the Usher family. Consequently, the only family bond in the story is that of Roderick and Madeline. In a characteristic manner, Poe leaves the nature of Madeline and Roderick's relationship as a mystery. Nevertheless, the actual nature of this relationship is the key to Poe's portrayal of family.

While some speculate that Roderick and Madeline are in an incestuous relationship, others claim that the two are one person split into two. This latter proposition is supported by the fact that Roderick's chances of survival wane after he buries her sister. Eventually, the two siblings' existence comes to an end at the same time.

The relationship between Roderick and his sister can also be interpreted to be supernatural. Poe portrays the Usher family as having a relationship that is hard to define and one that borders on the supernatural. This portrayal might be the key to Poe's core understanding of family. According to Poe, family is a complex unit that borders on the supernatural.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" is an eerie account of an isolated family. The house of Usher's account resonates with Poe's dark writing style. Poe

portrays a family that is isolated from the rest of the world at its own peril. Even the strong bonds between the family members of the Usher family are not enough to save the family from doom.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Fall of the House of Usher*, New York, NY: Langworthy & Swift, 1903. Print.