

"the fall of the house
of usher" by edgar
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"The Fall of the House of Usher" is one of those novels whose grip on the readers will never get any lighter. It has stood the time test, proving that even a century later, a Gothic novel can stay just as fresh, stylish and breathtaking as it was when the book first came out. In addition, the novel seems to have become a "thing in itself," which reveals even more to those who often revisit it. Although "The Fall of the House of Usher" is traditionally believed to be a timeless horror story and a representation of the deepest human fears, it can also be viewed both as a product of its time, i. e., the "gruesome engine" of the then jurisdiction (Spitzer 363), and an observation of a gradual descent into madness that "started first in the person of their author" (Robinson 80).

On the surface, it might seem that the famous "The Fall of the House of Usher" is nothing more than just another horror story to entertain the readers and make them feel the chills crawling down their spines. Indeed, the novel is written in Poe's traditional manner, which was obviously growing popular at the time, and doubtlessly served its purpose, thrilling the readers into getting engaged with the plotline and sympathizing with the leading characters.

Though the plot could hardly be related to an average reader, the blurred border between the traditional Englishness and the nonsensical mystery creates an unusual effect, which makes the novel work. Because of the contrast between the realistic setting and the implications behind the plot, the novel makes one experience a rather weird sensation, which must be similar to observing something out of the ordinary in the broad daylight.

Indeed, though rather gloomy, the castle with its dwellers looks as if it was

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carved out of the XIX century reality; likewise, the discovery that Roderick's sister was buried alive was tragic, yet not surreal. The atmosphere that "The Fall of the House of Usher" is shot through with is, however, very mysterious, starting with the overall gloominess to Sir Roderick's strange sensation.

It seems evident that Poe tried to create the world of thriller, thus, making the readers project their own fears onto the leading character. The first and the most evident, the picture of a "haunted house" (Spitzer, 1952, 353) must be mentioned. A common idea for a thriller, a haunted house is a generalized representation of fear; thus, Poe helps the audience relate to the leading character easier. To make the image even closer to his average reader, Poe places a secret inside the house.

From a certain angle, the fact that Sir Roderick keeps his sister's corpse in the house can be interpreted as an attempt to hide a skeleton in a cupboard, which is typical for most people. Thus, the connection between the readers and the characters is made. The last, but definitely not the least, the scene in which the leading characters discover about the horrible death of Sir Roderick's sister must be mentioned.

With the help of several words - not even sentences - Poe manages to make the audience feel the shock and horror of Sir Roderick, who makes the dreadful discovery: "Say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles with the coppered archway of the vault!" (Poe, 1839). With the help of this scene, Poe evokes every person's nightmare, i. e., being buried alive. Thus, the "horror for its own sake" (Spitzer, 1952, 351) takes its toll on the audience. Portraying his

deepest fears, Poe managed to make the readers stand in the leading character's shoes and, thus, shared his fears with the audience. Hence, it can be considered that "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a psychological drama that "started first in the person of their author" (Robinson, 1961, 80).

However, the story can also be considered as a child of its era. Paying closer attention to some of the details of the story, one can easily see that Poe tried to cast the light on the "dark times" of the English judicial system, as well as on its deplorable state in general. Stressing that the gloomy settings are supposed to represent the "gruesome engine" of the XIX century jurisdiction (Spitzer, 1952, 363), Spitzer makes it clear that the specific atmosphere in the novel is supposed to represent "milieu and ambiance which were being formulated at his time" (Spitzer, 1952, 359).

However, depression and the problem of rotting moral values are not the only issues of the era touched upon in Poe's work; the novelist also considered the problem of "sociological-deterministic ideas which were in the air in 1839" (Spitzer, 1952, 360). The idea of determinism can be traced in the novel rather easily, starting from the above-mentioned horrible death, i. e., being doomed to death in pain, to the fact that everything in the story, from the general atmosphere to the gothic look of the castle, indicated that the trouble is ahead.

That said, one must admit that "The Fall of the House of Usher" incorporated both the epitome of people's personal fears and the XIX-century reality as the writer saw it. Making the fear of isolation in his audience go through the roof, Poe combined the dark, gloomy atmosphere of

the epoch, making a witty comment about its moral corruption and decay, with the natural fears that haunt every single living being. Though people have learned to control these fears, Poe, with all his talent, makes these fears come into the open once again and go " far below meaningless horror or the simple dangers of isolation" (Robinson, 1961, 69).

Therefore, it can be considered that " The Fall of the House of Usher" is both Poe's attempt to help the readers view the world with its ugliness through his own lens and at the same time reveal the readers his own psychological drama. Hence the thrilling duality of the " The Fall of the House of Usher" comes. On the one hand, it seems a satire of the political or, rather, judicial system of the time; on the other hand, Poe introduces the audience to the darkest corners of the narrator's psychics, which bears a frightening resemblance with the fears of the readers.

With the help of the two new ways to view Poe's " The Fall of the House of Usher," one can discover a new layer of implied meanings in Poe's novel. Still mysterious and uncharted fifteen decades after it was first published, " The Fall of the House of Usher" entralls the readers, giving them an opportunity to escape into Poe's world of triumphant madness.

Robinson, Arthur. " Order and Sentience in ' The Fall of the House of Usher' ." PMLA 56. 1 (1961): 68-81. Web.

Spitzer, Leo. A Reinterpretation of " The Fall of the House of Usher." Comparative Literature 4. 4 (1952): 351-363. Web.