

The fall of the house of usher

Literature, American Literature



The Horror of "The Fall of the House of Usher" What is a horror? What does it mean to be terrified? The definition of a horror fiction is "fiction in any medium intended to scare, unsettle, or horrify the reader." Since the 1960s, any work of fiction with a morbid, gruesome, surreal, or exceptionally suspenseful or frightening theme has come to be called "horror" (Wikipedia). "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a great example of a story on the basic level of a gothic horror, in which the element of fear is evoked in its highest form. There are many different elements, such as setting, feelings, themes, and characters, that play an essential role in suggesting this. One of the greatest aspects of Poe's writings is that he makes the reader actually experience the feelings of his characters. As in many "scary stories" the characters start doubting themselves and those around them. Everyone has been in a situation where they know something is not quite right and immediately paranoia sets in. These feelings overcome many characters in horror fiction; Roderick Usher is one of these characters. His fear of the situation and his mental agitation soon engulfs him. His insufferable gloom drives him straight into madness. He fears his situation and anticipates his death. Curiosity overwhelms the reader as the secrets of the Usher house are unveiled. As one enters into the house with the narrator he or she quickly becomes curious about Lady Madeline, Roderick, and the history of the Usher family. All of these Mathews feelings can be found in any typical horror story. The setting of a story plays a critical role in creating the mood. Every detail of this story, from the opening description of the dark tarn and the dark rooms of the house to the unearthly storm which accompanies Madeline's return from the tomb, helps in conveying the terror

that is the mood (Womack) . In fact, the first five paragraphs of " The Fall of the House of Usher" are devoted to creating a gothic atmosphere. An ancient, decaying castle paints an eerie, moldy picture. The surrounding moat seems stagnant and sullen. The time period also ties into this mood. It's autumn and the weather is cool and dreary. How many horrors take place in the daytime? Not many, and this story is no different. It's dark, or at least semi-dark. Immediately Poe entraps the reader. There is a sense of being confined within the walls of the Usher house. Outside a storm is raging and inside there are mysterious rooms where windows suddenly whisk open, blowing out candles. Creaking and moaning sounds fill the air. The wind is whipping, and the landscape is barren. This is gothic writing and these are its trappings. The darkness of everything symbolizes death to come. Upon entering the gothic archway of the deteriorating mansion, the narrator is led " through many dark and intricate passages" filled with " somber tapestries" and " ebon blackness". Over everything, Poe drapes his atmosphere of sorrow and irredeemable gloom. He evokes his primary effect, the anticipation that some fearful event will soon transpire. Poe keeps the theme of fear and horror throughout, but he uses other Mathews themes to help suggest this fear. He uses the Doppelgänger theme, which is used when he describes the reflection of the house in the tarn and a striking resemblance between Roderick and Madeline Usher. A doppelgänger is the ghostly double of a living person or any double of a person. It's also referred to as an evil twin (Wikipedia) . The death and resurrection of a woman, Madeline, is also a main theme in " The Fall of the House of Usher" (Wikipedia) . The theme of mental illness is also explored in this work. Besides his own illness

and being depressed by Madeline's deteriorating condition, Roderick becomes " ...enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the house..." (Womack) . He quickly enters an unstable, mental state. This state is characterized by his anxiety, depression, and other symptoms. Besides Roger and Madeline, the narrator himself may suffer from mental instability, given his reaction to the depressing scene he describes in the opening paragraphs. Evil has been at work in the Usher house for generations. Roderick Usher's illness is " a constitutional and family evil...one for which he is despaired to find a remedy." Roderick and Madeline seal themselves inside their mansion, cutting themselves off from friends, ideas, and progress. They have isolated themselves, and have become musty and mildewed, sick unto their souls for lack of contact with the outside world. The narrator realized that he is entering a world of mystery when he crosses the tarn bridge. He said, " What is it--I paused to think--what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble." (Cumming) Mathews Poe describes the characters in a way such as to evoke a feeling of literally entering into a horror story when one enters the house. Roderick is described by his friend as having a " cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous lips...very pallid; a nose...with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a chin in want of moral energy; hair of a weblike softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up of altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten." Simply he was on the verge of madness. His body rocked gently from side to side in a constant and uniform sway. As the narrator placed his hand on Roderick's shoulder, " ...a strong

shudder came over Roderick's whole person; a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of his friends presence." (Womack) Madeline quietly becomes the main character in this story. She chooses the fate of her and her brother. The last night of Roderick Usher's life he knew she was coming for him. " ... and there did stand the enshrouded figure of Lady Madeline...There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame." She was a strong, independent woman who was on a mission. Female readers sympathize with this woman for the pain she has endured, but they also commend her for her power. She escaped from a coffin and her prison, and she was out for revenge. Roderick and Madeline were an peculiar couple. Physically they were two different people. They played two different roles in the story, but many people Mathews argue that they are actually the same person. They share sympathies and they are connected on his mental disintegration to her physical decline (Womack). In horror fictions, typically there is a weak character that the stronger character feeds off of. The suspense of whether she will actually destroy him holds strong until the last moment. " The Fall of the House of Usher" is definitely classified as a horror fiction. It hold all the effects and elements of a typical " scary story". There are many different elements that play an essential role in suggesting that this story is, in fact, a horror. From the feelings that Poe instills in each reader and in his characters to the theme and setting of the story it's all stereotypical of a horror. Each of the characters in this work are described with a spooky distinction. Did the " Fall of the House of Usher" leave the readers scared or with an unsettling

feeling? Did the gruesome setting leave the readers in suspense? " The Fall of the House of Usher" answers all of these questions, as would any horror.

Works Cited " The Fall of the House of Usher". Wikipedia. 16 October 2006.
[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Fall_Of_The_House_Of_Usher&oldid=81341740)
[The_Fall_Of_The_House_Of_Usher&oldid= 81341740](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Fall_Of_The_House_Of_Usher&oldid=81341740) Patterson, Arthur. " Setting the Stage". The Fall of the House of Usher. <http://watershedonline.cac.literature/Poe/pousher.html> Womack, Martha. " Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher'". The Poe Decoder. 17 October 2006. <http://www.poedecoder.com/essays/usher/#theme>. " The Fall of the House of Usher". Cumming's Study Guides. 16 October 2006. <http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides2/Usher.html#Top>