

# The fall of the house of usher



.. he " rank sedges," and the " black and lurid tarn," in which he sees the reflection of the house. He later says, " when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew a strange fancy.."(665). Although the narrator tries to view everything he sees in a rational manner, upon seeing the house and its surroundings, he has a heightened sense of superstition. He goes on to say that, " about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity" (666). This statement indicates that perhaps the house does indeed have supernatural characteristic.

The narrator observes the details of the house once more and finds that the house has fungi growing all over it and the masonry of the building is decaying. He says, " there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the utterly porous, and evidently decayed condition of the individual stones"(666). This observation suggests that perhaps something supernatural is holding the house intact, otherwise it would have fallen to the ground long ago. Upon entering the house, the narrator sees the inside of the house as well as the odd behavior and personality of its inhabitants and is increasingly convinced that the house has some supernatural effect on those who live there. For example, while walking through the passages he is confused as to why familiar objects such as the tapestries on the wall or the trophies fill him with a feeling of increased superstition and he even describes the armorial trophies as " phantasmagoric" (666).

Upon meeting Usher, the narrator remarks, ".. the physique of the gray walls and the turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had at

length, brought about upon the morale of his existence" (668). The narrator is remarking on Ushers strange behavior in the house. He later describes his own superstition late one night before going to bed, " I endeavored to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the phantasmagoric influence of the gloomy furniture of the room.." (673). He also describes feelings of alarm which he has as causeless, perhaps indicating that the house may in fact be having some effect on him. Throughout the story, Poes imagery of the house and the inanimate objects almost life-like characteristics, he is giving the house a supernatural quality.

Fear is a basic element of human emotion that is caused by the expectation or realization of danger. The existence of fear is essential for establishing our beliefs and the actions we take throughout our lives. " The Fall of the House of Usher: revolves around this realm of fear, and reveals the importance of facing and overcoming our fears. Poe suggests in the story that the denial of our fears can lead to madness and insanity. This message is especially clear as we follow the deterioration of Roderick Ushers mind and the resulting impact on the narrator of the story.

Upon entering the house, the narrator discovered the true source of Rodericks illness. " I feel that I must inevitably abandon life and reason together in my struggles with some fatal demon of fear" (668). Roderick is overwhelmed by the fear he is experiencing and it affects every aspect of his life. It is the constant presence of fear that has caused his illness. Roderick does not know how, or is unwilling to try to overcome his fears. One of Rodericks fears is death.

He is from a prestigious family. Roderick and his sister are the last of the long line of Usher descendants. " Her decease would leave him the last of the ancient race of the Ushers"(668). Roderick seems not only to fear death but also the uncertainty the future holds. The narrator of the story states that Rodericks fear may be linked directly to the house.

" He is enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and from which for many years, he had never ventured forth"(668). The narrator is implying that Rodericks mental condition may be relieved by him leaving the house and facing his fears. Because of Rodericks fear, however, he is restrained from leaving and does not make the attempt to defeat this enduring power that holds him captive. After Madeline is placed into the vault, Rodericks fear increases and his insanity becomes more evident. " He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step.

The pallor of his countenance has assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue"(673). The narrator closely studied Roderick and tried to understand his fears, while at the same time he was ignoring the inception of his own fears. Inevitably, the dramatic and intense fear was passed on to the narrator. " It was no wonder that his condition terrified-that is agitated me"(573). This statement indicates the character that has maintained his rationality has, at this point, also succumbed to fear. The narrator does not recognize that his feeling are derived from the fear within him. When Madeline returns from her supposed death both characters become paralyzed by fear. Roderick is ultimately destroyed by his biggest fear, that is, fear itself.

He brings about his own illness and death by refusing to face and conquer his fears. The narrator escaped from the house and its eventual collapse, but there is no indication that this escape frees him from his fears. This seems to suggest that fear is continuous and that no salvation exists. The recurring concept of fear in the story shows its power and impact on humanity. Poe shows us that ultimately we must recognize our fears to be able to overcome them.

The narrator of the story, an old friend of Roderick Usher, is shocked by the ghastly appearance and odd behavior of his long-time acquaintance and it is from this impression and several odd occurrences that he becomes increasingly uneasy. For example, upon seeing Roderick, the narrator remarks, "cadaverous of complexion; an eye large, liquid and luminous beyond comparison; lips pallid hair of web-like softness" (Poe, 667). Although Roderick is very much alive, his appearance would indicate death and his behavior shows signs of deteriorating sanity. "The fissure in the house seen earlier by the narrator symbolizes Roderick's deteriorating mental condition, as well" (Burduck, 72). Upon the narrator's entrance into the room, Roderick remarks on "the solace he expected to afford him" (Poe, 668).

Perhaps Roderick knows of some evil to come and he occupies his time with reading, music and the company of his old friend so that he will not go crazy. In addition, superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenants" (Poe, 668). This indicates that perhaps Roderick is aware of some supernatural element belonging to the house. In addition to Roderick's appearance and behavior, the narrator is shocked to see the similarity in Madeline and Roderick's appearance. The fact that the two remaining

members of the House of Usher appear so deathly, may be a sign of the final end to the House of Usher. Later, upon putting Madeline's supposedly dead body in a crypt, the narrator notices the unusually healthy complexion of the deceased Madeline, he tries to rationalize what he sees by concluding that it must have been caused by her particular illness. The fact that the color in her face is even mentioned may be a sign that perhaps she is not really dead and that Madeline may appear in the story later.

The narrator remarks, " There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with an oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage"(Poe, 673). The narrator also comments on how Roderick seems to stare at nothing and appears to be " listening to some imaginary sound"(Poe, 673). Again, this may be another hint of some evil occurrence yet to happen and Roderick does in fact lose his sanity as well as his life when Madeline reappears before Roderick and the narrator at the end of the story. In conclusion Poe's excellent use of characterization and imagery to depict fear and darkness, truly make *The Fall of the House of Usher* a story of the battles that we must face our fears in order to free our mind.