

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



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Short Stories + Terror = Poe American Romanticism brought a new era to America and American literature. Within literature of the Romanticism era came the development of the gothic novel. Edger Allen Poe is one of the well-known gothic authors which arose from this era. Throughout Poe's career he wrote many short stories following one theory which he created – that every aspect of a short story should lead to one single effect. For Poe many of his stories have the single effect of terror. In Poe's story " The Fall of the House of Usher" he creates the single effect of terror through his description of the house, the entombment of Madeline, and Madeline's appearance at the end of the story. At the beginning of the story, the narrator comes upon " the melancholy House of Usher"(Edgar Allen Poe 264). Immediately Poe's description of the house sets the atmosphere for the story and begins building on Poe's single effect of terror. " With the first glimpse of the building a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit" at the mere presence of the house the narrator is overcome with sadness(264). As the narrator goes into a deeper description of the house, the reader can begin to visualize the dark and scary house with rotting trees surrounding it and old molding bricks creating its structure. " Dark draperies hung upon the wall," shows the house's visual appearance and atmosphere do not get any clearer within. The interior of the house compliments the house's dark and decaying outwardly appearance. The narrator describes the house as having " many darken intricate passages" with very large sad tapestries and ebon black floors(267). The description of the house is just one of many characteristics which create the story's atmosphere of terror. Madeline's entombment is another aspect in the story which creates an atmosphere of terror. Her death sets the stage for the story's horrifying

climax (David A. Carpenter 752). Many persons at one point in their lives may think about death, but being buried alive is for many a horrifying nightmare. Madeline's catalepsy causes her to take an appearance of death. Instead of burying her in the family cemetery far away from the house Roderick, Madeline's brother decides to bury her beneath the house(752). As the narrator describes, Madeline is placed in a vault which is " small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light"(Poe 272). After Madeline is placed in the vault the lid of her coffin is " replaced and screwed down" and the iron door to the vault is secured. Madeline is now screwed alive into a coffin and locked into a dark vault. The mere thought of Madeline's entombment should evoke terror into any reader. Finally Madeline's appearance at the end of the story is the last and most crucial part in creating the story's terror. Roderick and the narrator along with the reader have now assumed that Madeline is dead. While the narrator is reading to Roderick, he begins to hear noises that coincidentally coincide with the actions in the story he is reading. The story is about to reach its climax when the narrator finds Roderick sitting in front of the room door mumbling. Before the narrator can figure out what Roderick is saying the bedroom door abruptly opens and Madeline appears in her white robes bloodied by her struggle, falling upon her brother to bring both of them to their deaths(Carpenter 753). In retrospect Poe creates a masterful terror in " The Fall of the House of Usher" through his description of the house, Madeline's entombment and the crucial appearance of Madeline at the end of the story. These three aspects played huge roles in creating an atmosphere of terror. Because of Poe's strong belief in his theory, he chooses every character, scene, and setting to lead to his single effect of

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terror. It is this theory that forever makes him such a renown gothic novelist and short story writer.