

Alfred hitchcock and edgar allan poe essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Fear, terror and suspense are the most vivid emotions created by Poe's stories and by Hitchcock's films. Several themes are common to both: the madness that exists in the world, the paranoia caused by isolation which guides people's actions, the conflict between appearance and reality along with the double aspect of the human nature, and the power of the dead over the living. Not only the themes are similar in both men's work but also the details through which a story is written or shown. The similar themes and narrative techniques can be seen clearly in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and in Psycho.

For both Poe and Hitchcock, madness exists in the world. 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and Psycho are two very similar studies in madness.

Roderick Usher and Norman Bates [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=705jPpxq1JQ>] are both insane. They have many common traits although they are also quite different. They are victims of their fears and their obsessions. Norman who seems agreeable and shy is, in reality, a homicidal maniac who has committed matricide. He suffers from schizophrenia — he acts as both himself and his dead mother. Roderick Usher appears strange from the beginning, almost ghost-like, with his 'cadaverousness of complexion' — however, he is not a murderer. He suffers from a mental disorder which makes him obsessed with fear: fear of the past, of the house, of the dead. He finally dies, 'victim to the terrors he had anticipated.'

The way in which madness is projected in both stories is quite similar as well. The short story and the movie both take place in a dark and gloomy house, a 'ghostly house' — 'a mansion of doom,' writes Poe. In both houses there is the presence of a mysterious woman. For Poe, the woman is Roderick

Usher's sister Madeline who suffers from an undefined illness, seems to die twice, and appears as Roderick's double. For Hitchcock, it is the mother who is at first seen as a murderer and tyrant, but who turns out to have been dead for years, and who lives only through her son's insanity. The death of both women is a source of mystery and horror. In both stories the woman is kept in the lower section of the house — Madeline in a coffin and Mrs. Bates as an embalmed corpse. Other narrative techniques tie the two tales: the dark and stormy night in which death takes place, the dead birds which Norman Bates stuffed — Poe's most famous poem is 'The Raven' — the pond in which the House of Usher disappears and the pond in which Norman Bates entombs the cars and bodies of his victims.

It is fear or paranoia which guides the actions of the two madmen. Roderick is a 'bounden slave' to 'an anomalous species of terror.' He does not understand himself what he fears, just as no one knows the nature of his sister's illness. It is this paranoia which made him insane and which causes him to die. He is unable to react against the events. His fear of insanity is the reason for his madness. There is also a sense of predestination or of something supernatural controlling him. He cannot escape his fate. Norman Bates is also a victim of his fears which he cannot avoid. 'I think we're all of us clamped in our private traps,' he says. He killed his mother and her lover, and then assumed her identity. His way of escaping his fears and his guilt is through violence. This paranoia and madness is caused by the characters' isolation. Roderick lives alone with his sister in a gloomy house. Norman is in complete seclusion in the house of his dead mother. They are separated from the world both physically and mentally.

Both artists are interested in the double aspect of human nature. Roderick and his sister are essentially two sides of the same person. They are twins and look identical. They die almost as one person. Poe shows this double aspect by his description of the two, the 'striking similitude.' Norman and his dead mother are an extreme case of double personality. The mother half of Norman acts as his evil side, while the other side seems completely normal. Norman is a seemingly shy and innocent man — however this is just a front hiding the beast within. Hitchcock expresses split personality through devices, such as mirrors.

The settings of the stories are very deceptive. A motel is generally considered a refuge or a safe-haven for travelers. It provides shelter and escape from the dreaded outdoors. Inside of this motel there are many pictures of birds. Birds, beautiful animals free to fly away, in this story – as in *The Birds* – are a symbol of evil and death. Poe is also very illusory. He carefully depicts the House of Usher stressing the fissure splitting the building — it seems on the verge of collapse. Despite its unstable appearance it remains firm until the very end when it suddenly sinks. These deceptions add to the effect of the stories, enhancing the intense fright and suspense.

The last theme which is found in both Hitchcock and Poe is the power of the dead over the living. In 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and in *Psycho* the dead triumph over the living. The short story indicates this as Madeline brings her terrified brother with her when she dies. In *Psycho*, guilt from the loss of his mother and her lover controls Norman's life. The mother side of Norman completely takes over in the end.

Hitchcock and Poe share a common trait beyond these themes and story-telling techniques — a love for solving mysteries. Poe is considered the first to write mystery stories and Hitchcock is seen as the master of mystery movies. The two artists develop a mystery throughout their two works, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and Psycho. The two masters of horror plan carefully every word. Hitchcock shot footage for one week to achieve the perfect balance of suspense and terror in the 'shower scene' of Psycho. They leave the viewer in suspense until the very end when the stories unfold. It is not until then that the audience understands fully the disturbed state of the main characters and the twisted plot of their stories.

There are many similarities between Edgar Allan Poe and Alfred Hitchcock, in their themes, their methods for reaching the reader or spectator, and their fascination with the human mind and its complexities — their view of the world. The semblance of two of the most well known masters of terror and suspense is striking — as seen in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and Hitchcock's Psycho. Both men are fascinated by mystery, by horror, by madness, by death.