

Analysis of "the fall of the house of usher"



In the short story, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, written by the poet Edgar Allen Poe during the romantic period, it sheds light into a time where there was much darkness, mental illness, and an overall negative psychological outlook and misunderstanding to certain societal and personal identifications. Poe is a known poet of revealing the inner evils and the dark and gloomy settings within his writings. He is a known writer of the personal fears and fictional mysteries that displayed a semi-accurate truth that was historically known as the gothic writing style during the romantic period.

This gothic style of writing that Poe is known for is precisely presented in, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, within Poe's extensive use of a darkened setting, the use of underlying physical and mental illnesses, surreal imagery, and symbolism that both represented the gothic writing style and the historical context of the mid-nineteenth century.

The short story written by Edgar Allen Poe begins with a descriptive yet negative setting that promotes the gothic literature style presented by the author.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. (Poe 629)

This descriptive beginning to the story portrays to the reader the gothic style of writing that Poe is known for. When looking at what makes literature apart of the gothic style we can review the comments made by Andrew Smith

when he describes the characteristics of gothic literature for the romantic period when stating that gothic styles contain representations of ruins [or] castles and that it contains, forms of monstrosity, and images of insanity, transgression, and the supernatural. When looking at the short story, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and what Smith identified as elements of a gothic writing, the readers can identify the correlation to the gothic literature based on the imagery used to describe the setting. The audience can use the imagery and diction used by Poe to solidify this statement with the use of words such as, Decaying, excessive antiquity, and even the description of the grey walls that darken the setting furthermore and help present the themes of gothic literature.

Using what Smith presented as characteristics of gothic literature the audience can create a connection of the gothic literature genre to the short story written by Poe, but we can also use contextual evidence in the story to get an idea of the theme and period and how it was presented in, *The Fall of the House of Usher*. A major theme of the short story is incest. Incest is subtly presented to the reader at first when the author mentions in the short story, Her decease, he said, with a bitterness which I can never forget, would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers (Poe 633). This is important to the theme and the period because it sheds light upon the reason of the mental illnesses faced by the Ushers. As Poe presented a like comparison between both remaining members of the Usher family when he describes their features, figures, and even the air around them all seemingly alike, even Identical (Poe 633). With this description of the Ushers Poe is giving even more insight on the

ancestral lineage of incest and its importance to the overall plot. When understanding the importance of the relation of incest to the plot the understanding of the side effects of incest is a required knowledge. Written in a scientific meta-analysis study there is a statement about incest and how it relates to the Usher's when stated, Biological incest offenders exhibited more psychopathology (e. g., mental health difficulties) (Toates). This is a key factor in the plot and identifications of the Ushers' mental illnesses and fears. This reported research of biological incest (which is what is believed to be a part of the Usher's lineage) ties together the themes of the story and gives certain understanding to why the Ushers' actions, appearances, and psychological states are presented the way they are in Poe's, The Fall of the House of Usher.

When looking at symbolism in the short story the audience can identify certain aspects that reference the gothic literature this specific story is a part of, but also the time period in which this work is written in. Symbolism is immediately found in the title of the piece, The Fall of the House of Usher. This in simple terms represents the crumbling of the House at the end of the story, but in a symbolic aspect it could mean the discontinued lineage of the Usher family with the death of Madeline and Roderick Usher. Diving deeper into the ancestral tree, this also means the discontinuation of the incest that was a part of the Usher family; the incest that caused their mental and psychological illnesses. The Usher's house complete demolition also means that the darkness and evils that surrounded the actions practiced by the Usher lineage are no longer. Poe, represented many different symbolic

elements within his short story that presented the audience with insight into the gothic literature style and the romantic period.

Poe's, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, gives the audience insight into the romantic time period and gothic literature style presented by the writer by using the symbolic elements, the descriptive diction with darkened settings, as well as the use of imagery and other analytical elements to portray his darkened story. It also gives us insight into the importance of the author and his effect on modern day gothic literature and society. As Lasley Dameron commented in his online article, Edgar Allen Poe is the south's most renowned literary artist of the 19th century, and recognizing his connection to the gothic elements and his artistic talent to articulately display the plot and theme of a short story while keeping the audience hypnotized within his writing and is one of the most influential gothic writers during the nineteenth century.