

Gothic poe



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Comparisons of Edgar Allen Poe's two Gothic tales, "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher", reveal a volume of similarities and some notable differences. From characters, language, settings, literary approach, even plot devices, "Ligeia" and "Usher" have many striking connections that point to a common author. With the exception of themes and plots the differences between the stories can be fairly subtle. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" the narrator visits an old friend who may be going mad. Roderick Usher and the narrator entomb Usher's sister prematurely. In the end, when this misdeed is revealed, both siblings die. The narrator escapes in time to see the house collapse and slide into the lake. In "Ligeia", a man marries a mysterious woman who inspires him. Upon her death bed she makes avowals that death will not hinder her deep devotion to him. He is distraught by her death but marries another woman though there is a lack of affection between them. After some mysterious occurrences, the second wife falls ill and dies. After a night of reviving and faltering, the narrator finally reveals that the now re-animated corpse standing before him has the features of, and in fact is, his first wife, the deceased Lady Ligeia. Both stories are told in first person and are told as a past event. "Usher" is told by Roderick's visiting friend. "Ligeia" is also told in first person from the perspective of Ligeia's and Rowena's husband. Each story has three characters. "Usher" has Roderick, Lady Madeline, and the narrator. "Ligeia" has Ligeia, Rowena, and the husband who narrates the story. Poe's descriptions of some of the characters are very similar. Roderick Usher is described as having eyes that are "large, liquid, and luminous" (Poe 2500) with "a nose of a delicate Hebrew model" (2500). Ligeia's eyes are "large and luminous" (2489), her nose is like the "graceful medallions of the Hebrews" (2488). Both are also

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made to seem of some other "race". (2501)(2488). Poe uses his superb understanding of nuance and connotative power of words to set the tone. Many of the same words (or forms of them) occur in both stories: decay, desolate, emaciated, melancholy, sorrow, perverse, ancient, ghastly, corpse, and phantasm. Two phrases that occur in both stories yet are not necessarily Gothically inspired are leaden-hued and stringed instruments. In "Usher", leaden-hued describes the "vapor" (2499) of the lake. In "Ligeia" it describes the window glass of the bridal chamber. Roderick Usher favors "stringed instruments" and Ligeia's eyes inspire similar feelings as those of "stringed instruments" (2489). The settings bear remarkable similarities as well. The setting of the House of Usher is dreary from the "extraordinary dilapidation" (2499) and "extensive decay" (2499) of the building. Usher can be found in a room with "somber tapestries" (2499) and a "vaulted and fretted ceiling" (2500). The narrator of Ligeia meets her in a "old, decaying city near the Rhine" (2487) but after her death he moves to a "gloomy and dreary" (2492) abbey in the "wildest and least frequented portions of... England" (2492). The bridal room is described as having a "ceiling...lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted" (2493) with a "heavy and massive looking tapestry" (2493). Edgar Allen Poe uses extensive foreshadowing in "The Fall of the House of Usher": the title, the melancholia presented by the house, the ghastly, "remodeled and inverted images" (2498) of the "black and lurid tarn" (2498), the "barely perceptible fissure" (2499), the "faint blush" (2506) on the body of the dead Lady Madeline. This foreshadowing is fulfilled in the end when Lady Madeleine proves to not be dead (yet) and the "fissure rapidly widen[s]... and the deep and dank tarn" (2510) swallows the House of Usher. Foreshadowing in "Ligeia" comes from the last muttered words of <https://assignbuster.com/gothic-poe/>

Ligeia herself, “ Man doth not yield him to angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will” (2492) (2489) (2487). A line, purportedly by Joseph Glanville, that is repeated three times in the story. Ligeia does apparently overcome a feeble will to return to her beloved. Both stories contain Poe’s poetry, in comparable forms, presented as a creation of one of the characters. “ The Haunted Palace” (2504) is Roderick Usher’s poetic tale of a monarch and his decaying castle; an eerie reflection of the past and current state of the House of Usher. The poem is six octets with ababcdcd rhyme schemes. “ The Conqueror Worm” (2491) are Ligeia’s “ verses composed by herself not many days before” (2491) through which the death of man is a sad play for angels. “ The Conqueror Worm” is five octets (allowing that the third and fourth octets are combined) also with an ababcdcd rhyme scheme. Beyond the similarities in physical descriptions, “ eyes” and “ sight” play significant roles in both stories. In “ Usher”, eyes become the windows on the soul. The eyes trace the progress of Roderick Usher’s deteriorating mentality. After the entombment of Lady Madeline, “ the luminousness of his eye had gone out” (2506). On the last bizarre night at the House of Usher “ there was... mad hilarity in his eyes” (2507). As the sounds of the re-animated Madeline come ever nearer, he reacts with “ wide and rigid opening of the eye” (2509). Even the House itself has its “ vacant eye-like windows” through which the world may view the House of Usher. This view of the House is reflected in Roderick’s poem “ The Haunted Palace”. At one time, the world might “ through two luminous windows” (2504) see “ spirits moving musically” (2504). Now, “ through red-litten windows” they see “ forms that move...to discordant melody” (2504-2505). Also, there is a sense of blindness or inability to see throughout “ Usher”.

The fissure of the house requires “ the eye of the scrutinizing observer... The eye...struggled” (2500) to see the corners of Usher’s room. Roderick’s eyes are “ tortured by... faint light” (2501). Even the narrator is overcome by a “ stupor” when watching Madeline. The eyes play a different role in “ Ligeia”. Her husband sees divinity or mysticism in her eyes. He sees revelations of the mysteries of life and science in her eyes. When she falls ill, her “ eyes shone less and less” or “ blazed with a too—too glorious effulgence”. When she is gone he cannot understand any of his scholarly pursuits without the “ lustre of her eyes” (2490). With the loss of Ligeia’s guidance the narrator feels that his “ vision grew dim” but consoles himself with “ visions of Ligeia”. In the end, it is the “ the full... the black... the wild eyes of ...Ligeia” that the narrator uses to fully identify the re-animated corpse of Lady Rowena. Questionable sanity is a part of each story. Roderick Usher has “ an excessive nervous agitation”(2500). His sister, Lady Madeline, suffers “ a settled apathy” (2502). Lady Rowena is driven mad by a room that the narrator claims was capable doing just that. The narrator of Ligeia seems mentally unstable, caused by the loss of his beloved Ligeia, perhaps by his opium use, or perhaps by the grim setting. The madness serves to make dubious the insights of the characters. Despite these remarkable similarities “ Usher” and “ Ligeia” are different in theme, plot and other subtleties. Thematically “ Usher” deals with family or generational sin. “ Ligeia” touches more upon themes of obsession and overcoming death. Although the plots are different there are still some odd similarities. Both stories involve women meandering through the house only vaguely noticed. Ligeia “ came and departed as a shadow” (2487) while “ the lady Madeline... passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment, and... disappeared” (2501). A

woman dies and returns to life in both stories. The sense of hearing things and not really wanting to admit to the presence of such sounds builds suspense in both stories. It is important to note that variances occur within the similarities between the stories. The point of view is first person, but in “Usher” the narrator is not a member of the doomed and maybe mad Usher family. His observations seem reasonable and believable. In “Ligeia”, the narrator is the husband of both women and his words are biased. Opium is referred to in each story, but the level of importance varies. In “Usher” the narrator merely mentions that that Roderick had the nature of an “irreclaimable eater of opium” (2501). After Ligeia’s death, her husband, the narrator, becomes “a bounden slave ...of opium” (2493). He designs the horrific bridal chamber as inspired by “the excitement of...opium dreams” (2494). Because of his admitted addiction, the reality of the narrator’s tale is always in doubt. One major difference between the stories is the endings – primarily that “Usher” has an ending. There is nothing left to be said and done about the House of Usher. “Ligeia”, however, is an open-ended story. The narrator, speaks as if this occurrence happened in the past, so what became of Ligeia? Did she truly return from the dead? Was the narrator insane? Was it all an opium addict’s illusion? Poe ends the story at the shock of recognition. Ligeia has an opulent feel, with thick environmental descriptors and exotic references that are not as prevalent in “Usher”. Starting out on some unnamed city on the Rhine, there are many references to historic figures: “Cleomenes” (2488), Homer (2488), “Democritus” (2489), “Leda” (2489), ancient deities: “Ashtophet”(2487), “Azrael” (2490), and unusual locales “valley of Nourjahad”(2488), “Luxor”(2493), “India” (2494), and “Venice” (2493). The plot of “Ligeia” is more strongly based in

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the environment; the mysterious occurrences, the room that drives people insane, seem much more possible with the distinct atmosphere provided by abundant description and exotic references. The stories are different but in many ways they seem to be written from the same recipe. Many of the startling similarities between the characters, language, setting, foreshadowing, madness, and death can be attributed to Poe's staunch representation of the Gothic tale. Some of the exactitude of language does point to a single author. There are also certain aspects that are quintessentially "Poe". The reference to opium always invokes the name of Poe. The use of "eyes" as a significant role in the story, the references to music and instruments, are not common to every Gothic tale but are not unfamiliar in Poe's writings. Edgar Allen Poe enjoyed a reputation as a pioneer of Gothic tales. That he had a certain standard for his Gothic tales is obvious in the similarities of these two stories. The differences in Poe's stories reflect a master's vision for the details and an inspired method of weaving suspense and dark ambiance into his Gothic stories. Works Cited Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Fall of the House of Usher." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Lauter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. 2497-2510. Print. - - -. "Ligeia." *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Lauter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. 2487-97. Print.