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Poe
The Fall of the House of Usher
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Just like in Hawthorne's novel, Poe's story revolves around a house with "vacant eye-like windows" (529). The decaying house symbolizes the fall of the Usher family whose last two decedents die at the end of the story. It also symbolizes the preservation of evil that corrupted the Usher family in the past, and it affects everyone who enters it:

What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? ... I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. (529)

As the main character finds out pretty soon, Roderick and Madeline Usher, the only survivors of this family, have already been affected by the house. Their madness is probably enhanced by the intermarriage practiced by the Usher Family. As a result they both suffer from strange illnesses. Roderick invited the main character to visit, because they used to be good friends, with the hope that "the cheerfulness of [his] society [will bring] some alleviation of his malady" (529).

The setting of the story contributes to the mystery and horror that surrounds the characters involved. Not only the house itself is surrounded by a strange landscape, but its description seems to transport the readers straight into Dracula's castle, with somber corridors and rooms. Poe's writing immerses

the readers in the strangeness of the house, which captures their imagination even better than in the movie, where it appears to be less threatening:

I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into everyday life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. (529)

Corman's 1960 movie version does a better job at developing the plot in a more interesting manner, by introducing the love element between Madeline and the visitor. Also, Roderick and the main character are not friends, like in the book, and their hostile interaction improves the plot and adds credibility to the story, which seems a little bit more rigid in the written version. Both in the book and the movie, Lady Madeline is buried alive and succeeds to escape. In the night that she escapes, the elements of nature—strong wind, thunder, lightning and even a blood-red moon—seem to be at union with her madness—angry and hungry for revenge. In the movie, Roderick appears to be more possessive, and the readers sense their unhealthy relationship better than in the book where Poe hardly mentions it in the beginning of the story.

The main character fortunately escapes the Usher house barely alive. His judgment was affected by the power of evil that dominated the house, and this is part of Poe's main idea: the human mind is fragile, and sometimes people can't control a situation or their reactions to a situation. "Beyond

doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth” (529).

In this story, Poe uses a number of his recurring motifs and symbols. The eye of the house—which, just like in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, is all-knowing, all-seeing—symbolizes the presence of evil that took over the house. The dream-like state is also a recurring motif in Poe’s work. This allows Poe’s characters to connect with the “phantasmagoric conceptions” of the unknown (533). The whirlwind motif represents the connecting portal between the real and unreal that allows Poe’s characters to return to and reconnect with the real world: “While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sounds like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the “House of Usher” (540). In order to confer a macabre feeling to his story, Poe also uses the premature burial motif. His characters are transported to the realm of death by suffocation, and their death is painful and terrible.

There’s a definite plus when reading the story and then viewing the movie. In the movie, the music enhances the readers’ emotional response, and the visualization of the characters supports the readers’ imagination by helping them to materialize it. Poe’s story explores the strangeness of the human mind, with all its wonderful and terrifying facets. He also tries to warn the readers about the dangers of suppressing reality, just like Roderick tried to suppress Madeline’s presence. In the end, this leads to the extinction of the Ushers, as Madeline returns to claim and reunite with her twin nature.

Works Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan . “The Fall of the House of Usher.” *Literature: An Introduction to Writing*. Roberts, Edgar V. and Jacobs, Henry E. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001. 529-540.