

#1224

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

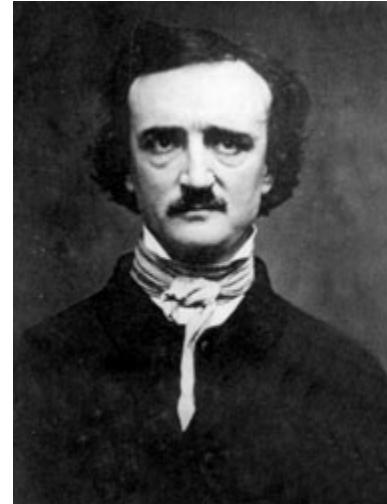
ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA EDUCATIONAL CORPORATION, 1975

LEVEL: ADVANCED

SUBJECT AREA: LITERATURE

COLOR

30 MINUTES



SYNOPSIS

This is one of Edgar Allan Poe's finest short stories. First published in 1839, it is a classic tale of horror and the supernatural, and is thought to represent many of the obsessions of Poe's personality. The story recounts the final days of the sole surviving members of the House (Family) of Usher. Despite the efforts of a friend, the Ushers appear doomed to die.

PURPOSE

General Objectives

1. To introduce the literature of Edgar Allan Poe.
2. To stimulate the imagination.
3. To introduce some elements of human psychology.
4. To demonstrate the visual and technical effects used in filmmaking of the supernatural and horror genre.

Behavioral Objectives

1. After viewing the media, the student will:
 - a. Answer the following "True or False" questions:
 - (1) (T) The House (family) of Usher was 700 years old.
 - (2) (F) Roderick and Madeline Usher were husband and wife.
 - (3) (F) Roderick's friend came to buy the house.
 - (4) (F) Roderick's friend wanted to marry Madeline.
 - (5) (T) Madeline suffered from catalepsy.
 - (7) (F) The doctor and servant tried to kill the Ushers so they could have the mansion.
 - (8) (T) The mansion was destroyed.
 - (9) (F) The Ushers were saved.
 - (10) (F) Roderick's friend was trapped in the mansion.

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2. Match the following words and definitions.

malady	a. Sadness or gloom.
melancholy	b. Something in the imagination.
fantasy	c. Sickness.
physician	d. No medicine to cure a disease.
incurable	e. doctor
3. List examples of visual and technical effects used in this media to convey horror and the supernatural.
 - a. Camera angles.
 - b. Sound effects.
 - c. Large, empty house.
 - d. Very little lighting.
 - e. Facial expressions.
 - f. Body language.
 - g. Shifting visually from one character or scene to another.
 - h. Varying camera shots from zoom in, zoom out, and freeze.
 - i. Makeup.

Discussion Objectives

1. Was Lady Madeline really buried alive?
2. What sicknesses do you think Roderick and Madeline had?
3. Many of the themes of Poe's writing and obsessions of his personality can be found in the House of Usher story. What are they?
 - a. Death.
 - b. Disease.
 - c. Decay.
 - d. Being buried alive.
 - e. Death of a beautiful woman.
 - f. Psychological problems such as guilt, madness, terror, and obsession.
 - g. Symbolism.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

1. Read the story "The Fall of the House of Usher" and other works by Poe.
2. View other visual media and read other printed resources dealing with the supernatural, horror, or the occult.
3. Discuss why the horror story or novel is a classic form of literature.
4. Compare the writing of Poe with a contemporary writer of horror, such as Stephen King.
5. Read a biography of Poe, and note similarities between his life and writing.

Captioned Media Program

6. Discuss how authors convey mood, such as horror, in their writing.
Contrast this with what tools are available to the filmmaker.
7. Do you prefer to read the story or see the movie version?

RESOURCE MATERIALS

- [The Monkey's Paw #1261](#)
- [The Tell Tale Heart #3186](#)
- [That Strange Mr. Poe #8921](#)
- [The Gold Bug #1376](#)
- [The Oval Portrait #8853](#)

SCRIPT

(Underlining indicates important words or concepts which may need to be introduced before showing the media.)

(Friend) (Thinking) During a dull and soundless day, I passed alone through the country. At length I viewed the melancholy House of Usher. I don't know how, but at first glimpse, insufferable gloom pervaded my soul. There was iciness, a sinking of the heart, a dreary sickness that nearly overwhelmed me. What was it that so unnerved me in contemplation of the home of my boyhood friend?

(Sound Effect) Knocking.

(Friend) A strange fancy possessed me. It seemed that around the whole domain, there hung an atmosphere removed from clean air, a pestilent and mystic vapor, poisonous to body and spirit.

(Doctor) Stay where you are. Excuse me. No wish to be abrupt. You've come to stay with the master.

(Friend) I have.

(Doctor) So very kind. Excellent.

(Friend) The lady?

(Doctor) Oh, the Lady Madeline.

(Friend) His wife?

(Doctor) He has none. Nor will he ever. She's his twin sister.

(Friend) I'd no idea.

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(Doctor) Few people have. She's led a retired life. She hasn't seen human faces in years. When she saw yours, the shock, you know?

(Friend) I, too, was a bit...

(Doctor) It's quite natural. I'm physician to the House of Usher.

(Friend) House?

(Doctor) The house, family, for centuries one has been identified with the other. No family, no house. The line's descended unbroken for 700 years. The master has no wife, no children. I mustn't keep you. Your host awaits you.

(Roderick) So, you really are here. I was afraid you wouldn't come.

(Friend) How could I refuse? Your letter was so urgent.

(Roderick) But after these many years. You've hardly changed. You're just the same. But I, you can see.

(Friend) But your letter? You've been ill for some time?

(Roderick) Forever, ever since birth. An exaggeration. Come sit down. Care for wine?

(Friend) Thank you.

(Roderick) This is a very old Sercial. My grandfather and father never drank it. You're the first to taste it.

(Friend) Superb. But aren't you going...

(Roderick) No, no. I dare not, only the lightest wine and seldom.

(Friend) But your guests?

(Roderick) Guests? We have none.

(Friend) None?

(Roderick) Until today, not since my father died. Since that day, I've never crossed the causeway. I've never left, not once.

(Friend) The reason?

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(Roderick) It became, it became intolerable, which is why I wrote you, the only friend I've ever had. I remembered your view of life. I longed for your cheerfulness.

(Friend) It is yours. Why've you never left the house?

(Roderick) Didn't I tell you? This isn't a malady to be cured by doctors. This is hereditary, a constitutional evil deep in the soul, rotting the mind, destroying the will to live, a nervous affliction. In your company, it'll pass off.

(Friend) I hope so. When it does, will you cross the causeway?

(Roderick) No. No, I don't think so. My difficulty, I might call it, is suffering acuteness of the senses, all five senses. Each one has become unendurably sensitive. Wine, it's not the strength I object to, it's the flavor. I can't eat anything but insipid foods, no spice, salt, pepper. I wear gloves. The slightest friction gives pain. Silk is all I can wear. The thought of handling leather or horsehair appalls me. The odor of flowers oppresses me. The once sweet smell of roses brings me suffocation. But of all the senses, hearing is the worst. Through these walls, I heard your coming. I listened to your horse's hoof beats, jingling bit, and creaking saddle. And I almost believe I heard you catch your breath when you sighted my house.

(Friend) Can that be possible? If so, I understand why you feel afflicted.

(Roderick) And why I can never leave.

(Friend) No, not that. But if it's nerves, you can be cured.

(Roderick) Yes, that's what I hoped when I wrote. Strange, but your voice I find tolerable.

(Friend) And music, too?

(Roderick) Not as you'd think. Stringed instruments, if lightly touched, barely coerced to sound.

(Friend) We can read and make music. You still paint?

(Roderick) Yes.

(Friend) That's enough. We'll pass the time merrily. Who knows, in time...

(Roderick) Time? I fear it most. I dread events of the future. I shudder at thoughts of any, the most trivial incident. I must abandon life and reason together. I'm overwhelmed by fear. Who's that? Who's there?

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

(Sound Effect) Knocking.

(Servant) Excuse me.

(Roderick) Why do you knock? I've told you, never knock.

(Servant) Lady Madeline wishes to see you. Good night.

(Roderick) Madeline is . . .

(Friend) Your sister, I've seen her.

(Roderick) How?

(Friend) As I came along the gallery . . .

(Roderick) How did she seem?

(Friend) Very beautiful, but strangely agitated, yet like someone in a trance or sleepwalking. We were three feet apart. I felt invisible.

Roderick) You were. It's a form of catalepsy. No doctor's found its cause. It's become ever more frequent. She grows weaker, wasting away. My beloved sister, companion all these years, is dying. She'll be gone. I'll be alone, last of my family and race. Are you surprised terror grips me?

(Friend) (Thinking) I later learned she had steadily borne up against her malady and had not betaken to bed. But the evening o f my arrival, she succumbed to its prostrating power. The glimpse I'd obtained of her would probably be the last I'd obtain. The lady, while living, would be seen by me no more.

(Roderick) Madeline!

(Friends) (Thinking) For days, her name was unmentioned by Usher or myself. During this period, I earnestly endeavored to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. As the closer and closer intimacy admitted me into the recesses of his spirit, the more I perceived the futility of attempts at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if a positive quality poured forth upon all objects o f the universe.

(Roderick) They say there's nothing smaller than the ultimate atom. I say they're wrong. There are worlds inside it, endless space, with a sun and planets revolving forever at enormous speed, alive, vital, indestructible. I tell you, there's no such thing as death. I'm finished with music and with painting.

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

(Friend) This is remarkable.

(Roderick) You saw it yesterday.

(Friend) When did you finish it?

(Roderick) Last night. I couldn't sleep. When I slept, I dreamt of many things, guilt. So, I didn't sleep. I went to my sister. She was cold. No breath in the mirror, no pulse. The doctor pronounced her dead.

(Friend) You expected it.

(Roderick) Yes. Now. You must help me if you will.

(Friend) What can I do?

(Roderick) Nobody shall touch her. There's a casket, a vault within the walls. We'll place here there and wait.

(Friend) Wait?

(Roderick) Until I'm sure. I'll not have her buried yet. They say she's dead. Indeed she seems to be. You know what I believe.

(Friend) I'll do what you wish. (Thinking) The reason for this proceeding, and no desire to oppose what I regarded as a harmless and by no means unnatural precaution.

(Roderick) Here, she must lie.

(Friend) And we must wait?

(Roderick) Did you know we were twins?

(Friend) I did.

(Roderick) We loved and cherished each other more, I think, than any two people ever did. Finish it. In God's name, finish it!

(Friend) (Thinking) For days he took no rest. His ordinary occupations were forgotten or neglected. He hurried without purpose. Servants were sent away. We lived alone in gloomy squalor. He seemed to listen to some imaginary sound. No wonder his condition alarmed and infected me. I felt creeping upon me, terrors caused by his inexplicable fantasies. Shouldn't you go to bed? You've not slept.

(Roderick) No, time enough later.

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

(Friend) Very well. Good night.

(Sound Effect) Footsteps.

(Friend) Someone there? Roderick? Is it you? Roderick? Come in.

(Roderick) You haven't seen it? No. But you shall. You shall! You see! You see! Clouds everywhere! No moon or stars to be seen! Where does that light come from?

(Friend) You mustn't behold this! These appearances bewildering you are but electrical phenomena, not uncommon.

(Roderick) What is this thing?

(Friend) I've a book for you, a favorite. I will read. We'll pass this night together.

(Roderick) No! No, listen. Do you hear that?

(Friend) A tree smashing.

(Roderick) Downstairs? In the vaults? I've heard it many hours, days and nights. I dared not speak. She was alive when locked in the vault. She was alive. We have put her living, in the tomb. From the first, I heard her movements inside the hollow coffin. And now, tonight, you heard it. Even your dull ears heard it beating on the lid, breaking of the coffin, screech of the door hinges, clang of the ironbound door. Now she's here. Her footsteps are on the stair. I feel the pounding of her heart. She is there, there. Now...she stands outside the door.

(Sound Effect) Thunder.

(Sound Effect) Rumbling sounds.

(Friend) From that chamber and mansion, I fled aghast. The storm was in its wrath. I crossed the old causeway. My brain reeled as I saw the walls rushing asunder. Sullenly and silently lay the fragments of the House of Usher.