



The Fall of the House of Usher (Annotated)

Edgar Allan Poe

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Roderick Usher is ill, but not due to any normal causes. When the narrator of the story arrives at the House of Usher, he finds that all is not well in the old ancestral home. The house itself appears to be almost alive, and the illness of Madeline, Roderick's sister, is not all it seems.

The Fall of the House of Usher by Edgar Allan Poe is a classic short story first in 1839, and was memorably adapted for film by Roger Corman in 1960.

This unique edition includes an original essay on the 'Curious Quirks in the Early Life of Edgar Allan Poe' by J. S. Williams.

The Fall of the House of Usher is in the opinion of many scholars Poe's most famous work of prose. This unsettling macabre work is viewed as a masterpiece of American Gothic literature. Indeed, as in many of his tales, Poe borrows much from the Gothic tradition. Still, as G. R. Thomson writes in his Introduction to Great Short Works of Edgar Allan Poe: "the tale has long been hailed as a masterpiece of Gothic horror; it is also a masterpiece of dramatic irony and structural symbolism."

The Fall of the House of Usher has also been criticized for being too formulaic. Poe was criticized for following his own patterns established in works like Morella and Ligeia using stock characters in stock scenes and situations. Repetitive themes like an unidentifiable disease, madness, and resurrection are also criticized. However, there is speculation that Poe used a real-life incident as the basis for his story: the entombment of two lovers at Usher House in Boston, whose bodies were discovered when the house was demolished in 1800.

Scholars speculate that Poe, who was an influence on Herman Melville, inspired the character of Ahab in Melville's novel Moby-Dick. John McAleer maintained that the idea for "objectifying Ahab's flawed character" came from the "evocative force" of Poe's The Fall of the House of Usher. In both Ahab and the house of Usher, the appearance of fundamental soundness is visibly flawed — by Ahab's livid scar, and by the fissure in the masonry of Usher.

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