

SHORT STORY

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

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Analysis

“The Fall of the House of Usher” possesses the quintessential -features of the Gothic tale: a haunted house, dreary landscape, mysterious sickness, and doubled personality. For all its easily identifiable Gothic elements, however, part of the terror of this story is its vagueness. We cannot say for sure where in the world or exactly when the story takes place. Instead of standard narrative markers of place and time, Poe uses traditional Gothic elements such as inclement weather and a barren landscape. We are alone with the narrator in this haunted space, and neither we nor the -narrator know why. Although he is Roderick’s most intimate boyhood friend, the narrator apparently does not know much about him—like the basic fact that Roderick has a twin sister. Poe asks us to question the reasons both for Roderick’s decision to contact the narrator in this time of need and the bizarre tenacity of narrator’s response. While Poe provides the recognizable building blocks of the Gothic tale, he contrasts this standard form with a plot that is inexplicable, sudden, and full of unexpected disruptions. The story begins without complete explanation of the narrator’s motives for arriving at the house of Usher, and this ambiguity sets the tone for a plot that continually blurs the real and the fantastic.

Poe creates a sensation of claustrophobia in this story. The narrator is mysteriously trapped by the lure of Roderick’s attraction, and he cannot escape until the house of Usher collapses completely. Characters cannot move and act freely in the house because of its structure, so it assumes a monstrous character of its own—the Gothic mastermind that controls the fate of its inhabitants. Poe, creates confusion between the living things and inanimate objects by doubling the physical house of Usher with the genetic family line of the Usher family, which he refers to as the house of Usher. Poe employs the word “house” metaphorically, but he also describes a real house. Not only does the narrator get trapped inside the mansion, but we learn also that this confinement describes the biological fate of the Usher family. The family has no enduring branches, so all genetic transmission has occurred incestuously within the domain of the house. The peasantry confuses the mansion with the family because the physical structure has effectively dictated the genetic patterns of the family.

In its style and aims, no less than in its characterization, Dangling Man has pointed toward Bellow’s future work. Tersely reported evocations of grim urban landscapes relieved by sporadic metaphysical flights, all filtered through a troubled central consciousness, established a narrative mode that Bellow has never abandoned. Later protagonists, older and more sophisticated than Joseph, act on a wider stage and philosophize more abstrusely. Yet their struggles, essentially similar, are expressed by similar means. At the outset of his career, Bellow found, in Joseph’s dangling, a metaphor for the human condition. All of his future protagonists would dangle, sifting alternatives, searching for the proper means of carrying on their lives. Beginning with Joseph, these free agents, morally aware and hungry for values,

have done battle against the forces of nihilism and unreason. For Bellow's is finally a fiction that is dedicated to the celebration of human potentialities.

It is not uncommon for Poe to use first-person narration in his stories. In fact, the majority of Poe's short stories use this type of narration. The narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher," however, is unique in that he is unidentified aside from his gender. The story contains no descriptions of his physical features, his age, or where he is traveling from. Apart from his boyhood friendship with Roderick, his history is unknown. This is all intentional: Poe designed the character as a surrogate, or stand-in, for the reader. The absence of a specific description of his character allows the reader to easily identify with the narrator. In effect, the reader assumes the role of the narrator and experiences the fall of the house of Usher as both an observer and a participant—just as Poe intended. Poe sought to inspire powerful emotional responses to his stories. "The Fall of the House of Usher" is carefully crafted to elicit feelings of dread, stress, and, above all, what it calls "the grim phantasm, FEAR."

In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the setting, diction, and imagery combine to create an overall atmosphere of gloom. Death and decay are evoked at the outset. The story opens on a "dull, dark, and soundless day" in a "singularly dreary tract of country." As the narrator notes, it is autumn, the time of year when life begins to give way to old age and death. The house is as melancholy as its environment. A mere glimpse of the Usher mansion inspires in the narrator "an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart." Upon entering the house, the reader as the narrator navigates through a series of dark passages lined with carvings, tapestries, and armorial trophies. Poe draws heavily on Gothic conventions, using omens and portents, heavy storms, hidden passageways, and shadows to set the reader on edge. The overwhelming sensation is one of entrapment.

Whether the reader is trapped by the house or by its inhabitants is unclear. Poe uses the term house to describe both the physical structure and the family. On the one hand, the house itself appears to be actually sentient, just as Roderick claims. Its windows are described as "eye-like," and its interior is compared to a living body. Roderick suspects that the house controls its inhabitants. On the other hand, there are plenty of strange things about the Usher family. For one, "the entire family lay in the direct line of descent," meaning that only one son from each generation survived and reproduced. Poe implies incestuous relations sustained the genetic line and that Roderick and Madeline are the products of extensive intermarriage within the Usher family.

In the end, both houses "die" at the same time: Madeline falls on her brother, and the mansion collapses.

Interpretations

When "The Fall of the House of Usher" was first published in 1839, many people assumed that it was about Poe himself. They observed that the narrator's description of Roderick also applied to the author:

A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate

Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than web-like softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten.

Contemporary readers and critics interpreted the story as a somewhat sensationalized account of Poe's supposed madness. (As a recluse, Poe often invited such accusations.) Later scholarship pursued alternative interpretations. Some scholars speculated that Poe may have attached special importance to the fact that Roderick and Madeline are twins, noting that Poe previously investigated the phenomenon of the double in "Morella" (1835) and "William Wilson" (1839). Other scholars pointed to the work as an embodiment of Poe's doctrine of l'art pour l'art ("art for art's sake"), which held that art needs no moral, political, or didactic justification.

AFTER TWENTY YEARS

O. HENRY

In After Twenty Years by O. Henry we have the theme of friendship, change, guilt and dedication or loyalty. Taken from his Selected Stories collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that Henry may be exploring the theme of friendship. The story "After twenty years" is very impressive story. It teaches us that we should remain faithful and clean heart with our profession, either the conditions are against of us. The main theme is that duty versus relation, friendship, in this story "AFTER TWENTY YEARS" which has been written by O Henry. The moral lesson is that we should perform our duty with full honesty and sincerely. Those nations do not their work with full honesty, they become destroy very soon. The theme of this story is that we should remain sincere with our friends as well as duty. We should not adopt subjective approach at any case with anyone. We should help our friend in every moment of the life but when duty demands loyalty we should perform duty at first.

In this short story, they believe on each other, they make promise that they will meet after twenty years at this same place. After twenty year Bob comes in same place and waits for his friend. A police man walks on the street of New York. He meets with Bob. Bob says that he is here only for his friend. He loves his friend. Jimmy is the friend of Bob. When he sees to Bob he remembers that he is wanted to Chicago police. His relationship forces him to let him go but duty bonds him to catch up his friend. Bob has good point of view about Jimmy. Jimmy waits for other policeman that he comes and arrests him. A policeman comes in civil clothes. He catches to Bob and takes with him.

This story reveals that Jimmy loves his friend but he does his duty with full honesty. He can inform his friend so that he may save his life. But he perform his duty with full attention and other police man arrests Bob. He keeps

respect of his friendship. This story teaches a lesson that we should not take advantage in our duty and keep respect in our friendship.

The end of the story is also interesting as Henry appears to be not only further exploring the theme of dedication but he may also be exploring the theme of guilt. Rather than arresting Bob himself Jimmy sends another policeman to arrest Bob. It is possible that Jimmy still feels a strong bond towards Bob and may have felt guilty should he have been the one who was to arrest an old friend. It is also noticeable that the friendship that exists or existed between Bob and Jimmy does not take precedence over Jimmy's job as a policeman. Just as he was dedicated to his friendship with Bob when they were younger likewise he is now dedicated to his job as a policeman. Upholding the law is more important to Jimmy than any friendship he may have had with Bob. Which may be important as it suggests that rather than Bob being the one who has changed it is Jimmy who has changed. He views his past as just that his past without getting emotionally attached to it. Unlike Bob who has spent the evening reminiscing and hoping that Jimmy will show up so that they can rekindle their friendship. By the end of the story the reader realises that Jimmy's job is more important to him than having a friendship with an individual (Bob) who lives his life contrary to how Jimmy lives his.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

In *After Twenty Years*, there are only three characters that are found within the entire story. These characters, although each characterised significantly different, all play a vital role within the reading of the text. The characters also develop and change as the story progresses, which gives strong representations of each character and their identities.

The main character and protagonist is Bob, as the story is centred around him waiting for his old friend to meet him at their chosen time and place. Although he is represented briefly by his appearance, it is the small descriptions described that are of importance in his characterisation, in addition to his personality that is expressed throughout the story. We learn of Bob's loyalty to his friends and that he is wealthy, supposedly from hard work. In this way, Bob is a round character, as he is complex and immediately capable of change. As the story progresses, Bob's identity is exposed even more when the climax of the story is revealed. It is immediately presumed that Bob is a successful career driven man when he tells the police officer "I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile." However, in the turn of events, Bob's character is identified as actually being a wanted criminal in Chicago by the name of 'Silky' Bob.

The second character, the policeman, who also turns out to be Jimmy Wells, is in this sense seen as a protagonist, as the story is centred around Bob and his best friend Jimmy. Throughout the story, it is led to believe that the police officer is nothing more than an antagonist within the story, as he walks off to leave Bob waiting for his friend. The character's identity in the story is shown when it is seen that he is in fact, represented as two different people, as he is the friend Jimmy who also happens to be a policeman. The character of the policeman is represented briefly in his appearance, and although he does not express much personality, we learn of this side of him from Bob as his dear friend Jimmy.

"But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, stanchest old chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this

door to-night, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up.... He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was."

Jimmy's character is expressed through the dialogue of Bob, and it is the convergence of both characters in the end that also show him to be a round character. This turn of events also outlines Jimmy's dedication to the police force, which he regards as more important than his loyalty to his friend. Although his old friend had traveled far to meet him twenty years later, he had to do what was right and arrest him for the criminal he was.

The third and final character in the story is an antagonist, and is only described as 'a tall man in a long overcoat.' This brief representation describes this character not in personality but only in appearance by his height and attire. Although the tall man is a flat character and has very little depth, he still plays a vital role in the story and the climax of the plot. He therefore is just as vital for this fictional story as the other two rounded protagonists.