

The Significance of Poe's Title, "The Fall of the House of Usher" ©

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Edgar Allan Poe chose a suitable title to his short story, "The Fall of the House of Usher." This title is symbolic as it suggests both the last of the Ushers, Roderick and Madeline, and the decaying mansion where they live. Throughout the story, evidence of the "The Fall" is abundant as the narrator sets the dark tone and the metaphor between the Ushers and the mansion.

In the beginning, the narrator speaks oppressively about his visit to the House of Usher where his boyhood companions resides. "I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit." His description of a dreary autumn landscape agrees with Poe's title. What a better season than fall – a time when nature is dying and entering dormancy – to illustrate the story. The narrator mentions the house has "vacant and eye-like windows," which gives the house a life-like presence, and sadly, the two occupants within it are as vacuous as the windows. Roderick's boyhood companion continues with his observation of "a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn." This tiny crack prepares the reader for the gradual fall of the house, Madeline's deteriorating body, and Roderick's mental illness.

The Usher family mansion and the remaining members seem to intertwine. Poe includes metaphors in his story such as Roderick's thoughts that the house has control over and subsequently the fate of the Usher family. We soon discover that Roderick and

Madeline are twins – Madeline is waning physically while Roderick is decaying mentally. The two represent the physical and the mental parts of being human, almost like they are one. “A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them.” After Madeline’s body is entombed, Roderick’s failing mental health escalates.

In closing, Poe’s title captures the theme of his story as simple as possible. The “barely perceptible fissure” widens which creates the house to crumble while the “zigzag direction” of the fissure symbolizes an unstable Roderick, who finally meets his fear of madness in the end and reunites with his sister. The infectious horrors of the house nearly undertake the narrator who narrowly escapes the fallen house and the madness within.