

## Lecture 3: Edgar Allan Poe “The Fall of the House of Usher”

### Gothic Literature:

Gothic refers to the pseudo-medieval buildings and lifestyle.

It embodies the Romanticists’ lust for the **exotic** and the **supernatural**, as well as **extreme experiences**.

The first gothic novel is Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Ortanto* (1764), being written in the age of reason, it was dubbed by the advocates of the novel of the age of reason as unacceptable because it was **superstitious** and lacked didactical intention. (as opposed to the novel of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, rational and realistic)

There is **horror and terror** in the gothic novel. It speaks of ghosts, ghoulish brides, grotesque images of beasts and monsters and images related to **death**. S. T. Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* for example introduces daemonic images in poetry.

The gothic introduces the weird in formal literature.

### From “THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER” (1840)

By Edgar Allan Poe

*Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length, and greeted me with a vivacious warmth which had much in it, I at first thought, of an overdone cordiality — of the constrained effort of the ennuyé man of the world. A glance, however, at his countenance, convinced me of his perfect sincerity. We sat down; and for some moments, while he spoke not, I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! It was with difficulty that I could bring myself to admit the identity of the wan being before me with the companion of my early boyhood. Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. 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. And now in the mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of these features, and of the expression they were wont to convey, lay so much of change that I doubted to whom I spoke. The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the [page 69:] face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity.*

## ANALYSIS

The text in hand discusses the arrival of the unnamed narrator to the Usher family residency (which is actually a dark mansion). In the beginning he thinks that his friend's hospitality was overdone then he realizes how desperate for company Roderick actually was. He describes his countenance as unrecognizable and far from anything human, which denotes the element of the disgust and mystery for how a person could change so much in such a short time. The text also includes some humour and some irony which shows that Poe not only uses elements of the grotesque and the disgust in his Gothicism but he keeps the reader connected by his mastery of irony. One of the things that characterize this story the most is the depth of characterization and the levels of the self that are well reflected in the narration. The plot is equally intriguing and the main themes are related to the Darkness, disgust, horror, which are also the normal themes of a usual gothic text.

Edgar Allan Poe: (Born in 1809, died in 1849)an American writer, poet, critic and editor best known for evocative short stories and poems that captured the imagination and interest of readers around the world. His imaginative storytelling and tales of mystery and horror gave birth to the modern detective story.

Many of Poe's works, including “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” became literary classics. Some aspects of Poe's life, like his literature, is

shrouded in mystery, and the lines between fact and fiction have been blurred substantially since his death. His most famous poem is the Raven, a ironic gothic poem in which a raven mocks the speaker who spends an entire night seeing ghosts around him.

**Suggestions for Further Reading:**

*Supernatural Horror in Literature 1927,1933- 1938* by H. P. Lovecraft

<http://members.upc.ie/innsmouth/Bibliography/EBOOK%20H.P.LOVECRAFT%20-SUPERNATURAL%20HORROR%20IN%20LITERATURE.PDF>