

# The Fall of the House of Usher | Quotes

## 1.

*Son coeur est un luth suspendu;/Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne. De Béranger.*

Narrator

These lines in French, used as the story's epigraph, come from the poet Pierre Jean de Beranger. Beranger was a contemporary of Poe, living 1780–1857. The lines translate as "His heart is a hanging lute; whenever someone touches it, it resounds."

This description fits Roderick Usher. As the story progresses, he becomes ever more tightly wound, like a string on an instrument that's too tense, and any sound sets him off. The quotation from the outside author sounds artistic and, like this sensitivity, is a good thing, but Poe shows just how dark and painful this sensitivity could be.

## 2.

*I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit.*

Narrator

Though the narrator later expresses doubt about Roderick's suggestion that the literal house of Usher has its own intelligence, this line from early in the story shows it has power. Like a haunted house, it shapes the mood of those in it, or even those who see it. This line also shows how the house works even on those beyond the family.

## 3.

*What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?*

Narrator

The narrator demonstrates his intelligence and high level of education throughout the story through his vocabulary, the concepts he considers, and the books he refers to. Despite all this, he cannot identify what it is about the House of Usher that upsets him so much. This line opens the suggestion, continued through the story, that whatever is happening at the House of Usher lies beyond the powers of reason.

#### 4.

*Although, as boys, we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend.*

Narrator

This line from early in the story indicates several things about the main characters in this story. First is the simple fact that they used to be friends, even intimate. Second, the narrator doesn't know Roderick well. Roderick's character is reserved, but his reserve is also a kind of paradox. It suggests something in Roderick is hard to know. This may align with the narrator's sense that he can't understand what's going on with the House of Usher. Something in both is beyond his ability to know.

#### 5.

*In the manner of my friend I was at once struck with an incoherence—an inconsistency; and I soon found this to arise from a series of feeble and futile struggles to overcome an habitual trepidancy—an excessive nervous agitation.*

Narrator

The narrator is perceptive enough to notice his friend Roderick acts inconsistently, an important insight since the narrator has already said he doesn't know Roderick well. Roderick's odd behavior is so pronounced that even someone not very familiar with him can see it. The narrator also diagnoses Roderick's manner as coming not just from fear and anticipation, but from repeatedly trying to overcome these fears and failing.

#### 6.

*To an anomalous species of terror I found him a bounden slave.*

Narrator

This observation builds on the narrator's earlier observation about Roderick's behavior. It extends the diagnosis, making it more specific. Earlier, Roderick had a nervous manner because he'd been fighting his fears and losing. Now he's completely lost, and terror rules him.

## 7.

*The disease of the lady Madeline had long baffled the skill of her physicians. A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character were the unusual diagnosis.*

Narrator

Here the narrator provides at least one clear reason why Madeline might be concerned about physicians wanting to look at her body: they don't understand her condition. There's also a reason why someone might bury Madeline alive, or mistake her for being dead. A person suffering from catalepsy doesn't respond to external stimuli, and the limbs rigidly stay in whatever position they'd been in. The person might be mistaken for a corpse in the stage of rigor mortis—and unable to speak up to tell others he or she is still alive.

This second-hand diagnosis also serves several other functions for the story. First, it further indicates that whatever is going on in the House of Usher is beyond rational understanding. This statement from Madeline's doctors describes what's going on with her, but it isn't a diagnosis. There's no statement of what causes either the "wasting away" or the catalepsy. Second, it shows how Madeline and Roderick are linked. She becomes insensible to any external stimuli, so she can't see or hear anything. He becomes so sensitive to sound that he can't listen to some music.

## 8.

*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.*

Narrator

This passage communicates several key points. First, the factual point: Roderick and Madeline are twins, and therefore much more closely linked than most siblings. Second, there had been an especially close bond between the twins. Various myths and folk beliefs speak of an especially close tie between twins. In some cases they are thought to communicate in uncommon ways (without words), or to share powers and even a single life. This establishes a possible foreshadowing: they were together in birth, and so may be together in death.

The final point may be the oddest of all: the narrator hadn't noticed the close similarity between Roderick and Madeline until just now, when Madeline is dead. This further establishes the narrator as atypical, even odd.

## 9.

*'And you have not seen it?' he said abruptly, after having stared about him for some moments in silence—you have not then seen it?—but, stay! you shall.' Thus speaking, and having carefully shaded his lamp, he hurried to one of the casements, and threw it freely open to the storm.*

### [Roderick Usher](#)

This passage from Roderick is a classic example of using misdirection and language to build suspense and connect themes. Roderick asks if the narrator has seen "it." This indefinite pronoun leaves readers wondering what exactly Roderick has seen. Their imaginations fill in the gaps. When he opens the window to reveal the storm, the story changes course. Instead of revealing some supernatural monster at that point, Roderick is essentially revealing his emotional upset, symbolized by the storm.

## 10.

*Not hear it?—yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long—long—long—many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it—yet I dared not—oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am!—I dared not—I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb! Said I not that my senses were acute?*

### [Roderick Usher](#)

This passage from Roderick continues the process of measuring out information, sharing it a piece at a time and using dashes to delay the reader. This creates anticipation, a kind of forward motion in which readers lean forward to hear what Roderick will finally say. The interjections of "pity me" and "I dare not" also work to delay the final revelation, and also keep readers' attention on Roderick: what's important here is not only what he heard, but also how it made him feel.

When he gets to the final claim that they buried Madeline alive, tension jumps to a new level, and the story changes direction again. Since Madeline was afraid of this specific fate, it adds a powerful element of dramatic irony to the story, if Roderick is right. At this point, readers don't know if he's speaking accurately, or if he has become even more unhinged. If he's crazy, then he is making up a story to fit his symptoms, like his overly

acute senses. If he's right, then this makes sense of everything the narrator has been hearing in the house. The narrator's ability to judge the situation becomes most murky just as the story reaches its peak.

## 11.

*'Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? Madman!'—here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul—'Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!'*

### [Roderick Usher](#)

Roderick labels the narrator a "madman," essentially saying he's the one living in reality while his old friend (the narrator) is crazy. This suggestion nudges readers to reevaluate the entire story to this point, looking for signs the narrator is the disturbed one instead.

## 12.

*While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher.'*

Narrator

This is the final line of "The Fall of the House of Usher." As the narrator watches, a crack in the house widens, and the house literally breaks into pieces. The pieces then fall into the lake, which completely swallows them up.

As a realistic description, this line fails. Too much happens too completely and too quickly. A crumbling house takes a long time to collapse, and would almost certainly not disappear completely beneath the waters of the lake. Some pieces would end up on the shore, some would float, and so on. However, as a dreamlike and symbolic image, the final line is fitting.