

The Fall of the House of Usher | Symbols

Eyes

In Western culture, the eyes are the most symbolic sense organ, and sight the most symbolic sense. An old saying claims the eyes are the window to the soul, and in many ways, contemporary psychology confirms this. The eyes communicate a person's emotional state, and changes in perceived illumination relate to changes in mood, as in the idea of being bright-eyed. When the light goes out of someone's eyes, they become sad, depressed, or, in the end, they die.

In this story, the first times the narrator mentions eyes, it is the [House of Usher's](#) "eye-like windows." These two mentions in the first page personify the house: before Roderick suggests the house has an intelligence, the narrator has already done so using images. The narrator notes these eyes are "vacant," which suggests this intelligence is disturbed in some way.

The narrator comments explicitly and repeatedly on Roderick's eyes. When he first arrives at the house, the narrator finds Roderick's eyes particularly luminous, indicating a strong or special spirit. However, once Madeline dies, the light goes out of Roderick's eyes. At the very least this symbolizes a blow to his spirit, and may be a kind of spiritual death foreshadowing his actual bodily death.

House of Usher

The narrator explicitly tells readers that the peasants who live around the House of Usher have fused the physical house, the single line of inheritance, and the family into a unified whole. The living Ushers are the house of Usher, and the House of Usher is the house of Usher. They are one and the same.

Descriptions of the physical house, which start in the first paragraph, are also descriptions of the House of Usher: like their house, the family is isolated and melancholy and may exist beyond the reach of reason.

Writing on archetypal symbolism in this story, or the inclusion of universal characters, symbols, themes, or settings such as the hero or good versus evil, for example, psychology professor Colin Martindale also suggests a second symbolic meaning for the house (and notes that [Poe](#) makes this one explicit in the story as well, through his use of "The Haunted Palace"): the house stands for Roderick's mind or personality. In this reading, the narrator is trying to help Roderick come to peace with the content of his mind, which includes his twin sister, who is an example of the anima, or the unconscious. The decay and eventual collapse of the house then become the decay and eventual collapse of Roderick's mind.

Weather

From the start of this story to the end, weather plays a major role. The narrator mentions the weather in the opening line, commenting on how low and oppressive the clouds are. They limit vision, and so limit his understanding of the house and situation. When the narrator wakes up in the night after Madeline's death, Roderick opens the window to reveal a strange storm that is almost physically impossible. At the same time, there is a whirlwind blowing intensely and clouds so low they touch the house's towers. Poe here taps into the longstanding symbolic association between the sky and the spiritual realm: the term "heaven" or "heavens" is used for both. The weather seems to reflect the spiritual turmoil of the characters.

Throughout the story, but especially once Madeline dies and Roderick enters an agitated state, the weather outside the house mirrors rising chaos inside the house. The distinction between the two fades, and the external weather becomes interwoven with the emotional reality within the house. When the narrator wakes in the night, he listens for sounds during pauses in the storm. When Madeline finally returns from the vault, the house breaks apart and the weather enters (and destroys) the house. These powerful emotions are no longer at bay: they completely overwhelm Roderick, until he collapses and only the storm is left.