

Usher House

Poe's inter-grown house and family of Usher are artworks of morbidity and malaise worthy of the spectacular climax he devised for them. He has preferred to make mood everything, saving almost all dialogue and explicit action for the closing scene. There is no moral, no tragic flaw, no explanation. Poe rather gives us the logic of the nightmare, and on this plane his logic is airtight.

Probably the safest course in dramatizing this gothic masterpiece would have been to save this masterpiece as intact as possible. In fact, I found myself taking liberties. To start, I have my Poe himself the narrator who lives to tell the tale. More radically, I have conceived him and the doomed siblings as types of an antebellum warmth and gallantry which hardly exist anywhere in the prose of the real Poe, and must be counter to his purposes here. I have added other gothic staples – forbidden knowledge, a Faustian pact, ghostly ancestors – and have shifted all into a tale of good and evil and redemption. Good means Poe and the siblings, evil means Primus and the ancestors, Madeline becomes the agent of redemption.

To fit this new design, I have played down Roderick's ailments, and played up his geniality and hospitality. I show no hint to his intolerance to light and noise, suggesting that the lumens and decibels that he meets are within his comfort zone, or, if not, he is too considerate a host to wish to seem a burden. Meanwhile I have done everything I can to make Madeline endearing, not threatening. Only the forces of evil fear her. This premise can make the close all the more horrific.

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