The House of Usher as Phantasmagoria

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Abstract
The poems and stories of Edgar Allan Poe have inspired a varied abundance of adaptations and emulations. These acts of homage range from prose narratives, poems, and graphic novels, to dramatic and operatic performances, to animation comedy and visual artworks. Yet at the gravitational centre of Poe adaptation is the feature film. Throughout the history of cinema filmmakers and directors have found Poe’s texts irresistible, and none more than ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ (1839). This short prose text has generated dozens of filmic adaptations of striking aesthetic and formal variety. The combination of Gothic literary conventions, an emotionally suggestive narrator, and contemporary themes of moral and physical degeneracy provide ample stimulus for creative re-imaging of the fate of the house’s inhabitants. This text provokes an unrivalled cinematic experimentalism when compared with almost any other frequently adapted pre-cinematic text, such as the novels of Jane Austen. Does something inhere in the story or its mode of narration to inspire this experimental challenge to aspirant directors? This essay will attempt to show by way of close reading that Poe’s text is a literary phantasmagoria, a lantern show that invites a specifically cinematic speculation as to the nature of events, the mode of their narration, and the qualities of perception enlisted within the narrative frame that convey scene and action to the reader. The House of Usher—a reticulated system of story, building and family line—projects its oblique images, inciting its viewers to take on the powers of suggestion and to reanimate its bloody chamber in evermore suggestible moving images.

Full Text:

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The House of Usher—that reticulated system of story, building and family line—projects its oblique images, inciting its viewers to take on the powers of suggestion and to reanimate its bloody chamber in suggestible moving images. Poe’s Usher as the Threshold of Allegory Poe’s manner of composition, characterisation and thematic treatment in the Gothic mode makes ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ particularly conducive to radically experimental adaptation. (France, 1928). Sydney Studies The House of Usher as Phantasmagoria means for plot advancement and as symbolic evidence of Roderick’s mania as it develops within the Gothic house. One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly, in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch, or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet a flo