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In Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* incest is explored in a subtle manner. The love the siblings share for one another glints lightly throughout the story like small particles of dust that can only be noticed in the right light. During the story, the reader witnesses how society has shunned the Usher family, leaving their home and those within it rotting and secluded. Incest in the novel is not a result of Roderick Usher's personal desires but of his ancient family's influence. Throughout the story, the affects of a family's choice is revealed. Edgar Allan Poe uses links between the siblings and parallels between house and family to show how the practice of incest causes isolation and decay of the body and spirit.

Poe establishes that the "long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement" (58) was not of the sibling's choosing but of the family's influence. Roderick did not initiate a relationship with his "tenderly beloved sister" (54) because of his personal "shadowy fancies" (49). Roderick was manipulated by his parents, he was just another member of the family to experience the "influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, [had] exercised upon the other" (50). Even Roderick's parents cannot be entirely blamed because the Usher family has been practicing incest for many generations; "the stem, of the Usher race ... had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; ... the entire family lay in direct line of descent" (50). Both Madeline and Roderick are aware of the evil nature of their family's deeds. They are ensnared within the isolation that this behavior has caused and, therefore, share "sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature" (60). The seclusion the siblings experience is only broken by Roderick's childhood friend, the narrator. Roderick's friend reveals that he spent "many solemn hours ... alone with the master of the House of Usher" (55) since it seems that other members of society will not visit him.

Poe uses Madeline and Roderick as examples of the terrors that afflicts those who exercise the unholy act of incest. He insinuates that incest has caused mental and physical harm to the descendants

of the Usher family. Both siblings suffer from illness. Isolated in their home, the twins undergo “a gradual wasting away of the person” (55). The twins seem to split their afflictions. The separation of their illnesses is reflected in the exterior of the house. A “perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction” (51), symbolizes the splitting of the mental and physical conditions of brother and sister. While Roderick’s physical form is deteriorating Madeline’s remains strong; yet her mental health is fading and Roderick’s is more sensitive. Though Roderick has a “ghastly pallor of the skin, and [...] miraculous luster of the eye” he is experiencing an “acuteness of the senses” (53). Madeline’s fading mental health appears to have made Roderick’s stronger. The narrator believes that “the centuries had moulded the destinies of his family, and [...] made him what [he] now saw him” (58). Due to the inbreeding in their family, Roderick and Madeline are suffering from illnesses that could have been prevented had the blood line not remained isolated. The twin’s conditions are not the first in the family’s history. The incest in his family has caused all those who were born under the name Usher to be afflicted by “a peculiar sensibility of temperament [which displayed] itself, through long ages” (50) due to “a family evil” (53).

Poe communicates the horrendous affects of incest by using descriptions of the house of Usher, linking the mansion to its inhabitance. The narrator of the story gives the reader a subjective look at the dreary surroundings around the Usher house. As he approaches the house he notices that “there was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart” (49). The house inflicts upon him uncomfortable which repels him. No one ventures near the mansion, leaving its hosts isolated and alone. The condition of the house seems to have induced the current state of those who reside within it. Roderick is connected to the house, it has “brought upon the morale of his existence” (54). The Usher family has practiced incest for many generations. The act goes against the dogma of society and as a result has created “an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity which [has] no affinity with the air of heaven” (51). The state of the mansion reflects the Usher twins that reside inside it; both are decaying.

Roderick and Madeline are deteriorating physically and mentally, respectively.

Due to their illness, Madeline has “betaken herself ... to bed” (55) and Roderick’s sensitive senses has made it so he cannot even tolerate “the most insipid food ... [or] ... a faint light” (53). Since it is established that the twins rarely leave the house, Poe uses the mansion as a public display of the affects of incest. Using the narrator’s eyes, Poe shows the reader what a person outside the Usher family would encounter. Many people wonder “what was it that so [unnerves them] about the contemplation of the House of Usher” (49). The mansion is described as having human-like features. Poe paints a disturbing human-like picture of the House of Usher. The house has “vacant eye-like windows” (49) and “fungi [overspreads] the whole exterior” (50) as if the roof is covered with hair. The house mirrors Roderick’s condition the most. The mansion’s state reflects his physical state. The narrator observes both Roderick (55) and the House of Usher (49) to be “melancholy.” Roderick’s hair, which has a “wild gossamer texture, [and floats] rather than [falls] about [his] face” (53), is paralleled on the exterior of the house where the fungi is suspended “in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves” (51). The house serves as a physical monument to the affects of incest. Even if the narrator changes his angle or tries to associate the mansion with poetic integrity he fails to find any beauty or comfort in its exterior (49). The house repels the public like the topic of incest.

Poe uses the fading health of the Usher family and the deplorable state of the Usher mansion to demonstrate the negative affects of incest. Though Roderick was influence into the act, he has failed to produce any children. This is for the best since the other ancestors of the Usher family all suffered from illnesses due to inbreeding. Roderick and Madeline are victims of an isolated blood line that leads to the destruction of the family and its estate. Poe’s descriptions of the house and the isolation of its tenants in *The Fall of the House of Usher* is used to convey incest as an unholy and horrible act. In the end, it is the cause of the family’s isolation, physical decay and ultimate destruction.