

# QLH-S02E03M: The House of Usher

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

madeline, film, gothic horror, roderick, talk, usher, story, crumbling, low budget, dream sequence, movie, crimson peak, gothic romance, mansion, house, love, threatened, colorized, shock, gothic

## SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers

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**J** Jessi Chartier 00:04  
Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark.

**J** Jen Myers 00:17  
Before we get started as a reminder, when we talk about movies, we need to talk about everything in the movie, so there will be spoilers involved. If you haven't seen the movie or want to refresh your memory before you listen, you can stop now and do that before coming back.

**J** Jessi Chartier 00:32  
Welcome back to Quiet Little Horrors. Today we're going to do a mini episode where we're going to look at a film to either preview an upcoming episode, or where we look at something that's just fun for the heck of it.

**J** Jen Myers 00:45  
Let's talk about The House of Usher.

**J** Jessi Chartier 00:48  
The House of Usher follows a Bostonian who visits his love, who happens to be bedridden in a crumbling house. He's convinced she's being held captive by her delusional brother. And things go awry. Hey, Jen.

J Jen Myers 01:02  
Hey, how's it going?

J Jessi Chartier 01:05

It's going great. Now that we get to talk about Gothic Horror. Yeah, it was about time. It really was. I mean, I think some people refer to technically as gothic romance. But the tropes in the archetype, like the archetypes, there we go, tend to be kind of a same across both. One just happens to have a formidable love story. That's kind of being threatened by something supernatural. So let's Yeah, let's talk a little bit about what makes a movie Gothic Horror Story, Gothic Horror, Gothic romance. So for those of you who don't know, typically it takes place in Victorian Period. Love is often threatened by something, it's usually something supernatural. It doesn't necessarily. Even if it's a person, it's like, the madness of that person is what's threatening. Environment always plays a character in the movie. Sometimes it is a threat. But it definitely often represents things that are going on within the characters. So the environment could be a house, it could be a wolf on the Moors, it could be a monster in the lake, something in the attic. So there's usually this sense of environment that plays the character. The threat is often never seen until the very end, or it's never seen at all. But there's like lingering evidence of it creaking boards, moans in the middle of the night that just meet might might just be the winds on the moor, right? Like there's lots of that kind of stuff. And then of course, death is romanticized, or seen as inevitable, almost like people are waiting for it. So those are usually the tropes of a really good gothic horror. I mean, there's more to it. And you could probably argue that there's even more nuance, but just in broad strokes, those are those happen to be got the core, and we're talking about Gothic Horror, because our next podcast is going to be about Crimson Peak, which is a beautiful gothic romance from Guillermo del Toro. And we're talking about Gothic Horror, because in our next podcast, we're going to be talking about Crimson Peak, which is such a good movie, and Guillermo del Toro really loves Gothic Horror, Gothic romance. And he just brought it to life. So we're going to talk a little bit about a common, not common I should that makes it sound like it's bad. Classic gothic horror, the House of Usher. Mainly because it's probably the most well known, aside from like Dracula, or some of the other ones that we'll talk about later. But we really wanted to do House of Usher, because it's got Vincent Price, and I mean, like any excuse to watch him. It's just fun. So gent, talk a little bit about the House of Usher, you know, a little bit more about the backstory of how it got made and all that good jazz.


J Jen Myers 03:58

Yeah, well, the House of Usher I think is one of the most like you said, it's something that's really, really well known from this era. It was made in 1960. And it was directed by Roger Corman, the famous low budget auteur, if you will, who you know, really made his bones, I guess he always did. He never really graduated into making like real high budget films. He just kind of did his own independent thing for a long time and actually still does if I'm not mistaken. But yeah, so in the 60s, he made a series of movies that were based on Edgar Allan Poe stories. I think they all also starred Vincent Price. I think the House of Usher is I think, was one of the first and I think is probably one of the most successful not just commercially I think they were all pretty successful commercially, at least as part of you know, low budget, independent horror movies in the 60s go. But also like as a story, I think the House of Usher just it really works. And

even though you can tell it's you know, Low budget in some ways, especially to our modern eyes, the the lighting is kind of flat in places, especially for where it's supposed to be like a mysterious mansion. And you know, it is what it is. But I do think that it is a really successful story. And it's a really great example of the kind of Gothic horror that we've just been talking about. Even more so than the original post story that I came from it because, in fact, it follows the story pretty closely. There's the House of Usher, which is a crumbling family mansion of Roderick and Madeline Usher, who are the only two living ushers left and brother and sister. And then in the original post story, there's a narrator that is a friend of Roderick's, who comes to this mansion and sees Madeline and poor health and is basically kind of just this this pale wisp of a person. And Roderick is kind of, you know, weird, kind of later he kind of descends a little more fully into madness. And, like you said before, things go awry. And the film is very much the same, except that it's changed the narrator into a character who is actually Madeline's patrol. Apparently, Madeline was out and about at some point and met this dude. And they fell in love and then went back home and he hasn't been able to see her. And he's worried about her. So he comes to the mansion and finds that Roderick is kind of creepy and controlling and trying to get him to go away and not see Madeline. And yeah, so it's it the the big change from the original story. And what kind of maybe makes this movie almost more Gothic Horror than it was in the beginning is adding that love story between what's his name? Uh, Madeline and the new dude, I forget what his name is. And then it is Philip.

 Jessi Chartier 06:53

Mark, Mark Damon is the actor.

 Jen Myers 06:55

Yeah, I mean, he's not very interesting. He's just kind of the vehicle for the rest of the story.

 Jessi Chartier 07:00

It's true, but you know, he's he's definitely a handsome young man. So I think that you know, the casting director got it right there.

 Jen Myers 07:08

Yeah. And well, he brings kind of like the the emotional element to the story in the film, where he's more emotionally invested in saving Madeline and saving her from this. This crumbling, literally crumbling house and this possibly mad brother who's trying to control her life. And, and she's see even though she's supposed to be sick in the movie, she looks a lot healthier. We get the sense that this poor woman is kind of trapped in this and he's in her fiance's trying to pull her out of it. Spoiler alert, he does not do that. And everything crumbles around them. Um, yeah. So what what are you? What do you think about this film? Jessi? What are the things that pop up in your head first about it.

 Jessi Chartier 07:54

Jessi Chartier 07:15

So I watched the colorized version. So I gotta I gotta preface that. And I don't even know if it was originally colorized

J

Jen Myers 08:01

I think, I think it's originally colorized, if I'm not mistaken

J

Jessi Chartier 08:03

It was like, hyper colorized. So the colors were so amazing. The Victorian architecture and the costumes were just great. I think one of the things that I really like about this movie is that it holds true to the slow burn, like you don't really know what's going on. I mean, you do like the house is crumbling. There's this delusion that the house is connected to the people like you really are told it's told from Philip's point of view. So like, you really buy into that Roderick is just super crazy, that Madeline is being held against her will, and that Philip needs to get her out. But he is unable to do so for a myriad of reasons. But what I love about it is that the creep factor isn't really there. And maybe this is just a modern eye looking at it. It's not really there until Madeline escapes the coffin at the end. Right? Then the creep factor like gets cranked to like 11 with bloody fingernails and hands and maddening eyes and images of glimpses of women in white running that this woman in red and white just running around. And a really strange dream.

J

Jen Myers 09:27

Yeah, there's a weird dream sequence in it. Yeah.

J

Jessi Chartier 09:31


Like it just it goes from very not not necessarily non threatening, but very everyday like Okay, okay. Roderick's just crazy. We need to get Madeline out and then just suddenly it descends into like, What the heck is going on? And I love that about it. I love the fact that there was you had to wait for it. You had to wait for that and it was it made it that much better for me yet. No,

J

Jen Myers 09:56

I agree with you. And the funny thing is I'm not 100 I can't say this for sure. I was Not upset I don't know how it is, but knowing what I do know about like, Corman and these productions, like I said before, these were pretty low budget quickly done films. And so it's interesting to think that a lot of those elements might have been, you know, have arisen in the film, just because there is kind of a sensational aspect to what they were doing. And like this dream sequence is, it could very well have been like, okay, we're making a horror movie that we need to like shock people with. And also we've got some extra time here. So what can we do, let's do a wild dream sequence, you know, like, you know, those are the type. Those are the way those decisions are made for this film, right. And it's just this amazing. Not, I want to say stroke of


luck. It's not like there wasn't any sort of, you know, talent or skill in this. But it is interesting to see that these this film and films like it and you know, we can talk about this, how this connects to gothic horror in general. But it was popular entertainment, right? Like this was not supposed to be some sort of like, high art is like, this is something we want to do to like shock the kids and their parents sitting in the theater and tell everybody else to come to the theater to see this. This wild thing like that was the point of it is to kind of shock until late. And so the Yeah, I think it's great that they they threw this throw the stuff in with that scene that you mentioned, we couldn't even like skipped over the fact that Madeline is is buried, buried alive, essentially by Roderick. And well, he says she's dead. Phillips effects she's alive. This happens in the story as well, where she appears live but has actually died or something like that. But yeah, there's a scene in this film where she's clawing her way out of the coffin and you see her bloody hand come up, and then she's basically base at that point. She has also gone mad. She wasn't before but she is now because she's been very alive. And so yeah, she's running throughout the the mansion, and it's starting to really fall apart. And it's, it's, it's pretty wild. You're right. Like it gets cranked up real heavily there at the end and it works. It all it all works on the level that is supposed to work on.

 Jessi Chartier 12:12

Yeah, it's it's just a lovely, lovely piece and it hits all the themes and all of the stuff that goes in with a good Gothic Horror romance. So I'm, I'm excited to explore our next film *Crimson Peak*, because we can go man, we can go so deep in so many ways, because there's so many references to original Gothic stories. Oh, just like I can't wait to get into it because there's so much we can just sink our teeth into there.

 Jen Myers 12:43

So if you want to join us to get more into Gothic Horror, then stay tuned for our discussion of *Crimson Peak*.

 Jessi Chartier 12:51

Join us next time on our full episode with quiet little hoarse