The Devil’s Library Episode 19 – “The Fall of the House of Usher” & “What Moves The Dead”

[Intro Music]

Ligeia
Hello and welcome to our new episode of Devil's Library. I am Ligeia. Hail Satan. And I am here today with my beautiful, gorgeous friends, Pike.

Pike
Hail Satan.

Ligeia
Lithos.

Lithos
Hail Satan.

Ligeia
And Leraje.

Leraje
Hail Satan.

Ligeia
Today we are entering the decaying world of Edgar Allan Poe. And his The Fall of the House of Usher, which is a Gothic masterpiece of madness, isolation, and the terrifying relationship between the human mind and the surroundings. And then, 183 years later—yes, I needed help to count this—T. Kingfisher invites us back into the same house in her book or short novella What Moves the Dead.

Only this time, something rather unpleasant is growing beneath the floorboards. And we are going to explore two very different approaches to Gothic horror. One where the greatest terror is what we cannot explain, and the other where the explanation might be even worse. Or is it? So guys, we are finally doing it! Edgar Allan Poe!

Leraje
You're happy we're doing a Poe, are you?

Ligeia
Yes! My dream. I pushed you a little bit.

Pike
I said I hadn't read anything of Poe, and then I started looking through the book and I was like, "Oh, I've read that one. Oh, I've read that one." So actually not coming in that fresh, but I hadn't read "House of Usher."

Ligeia
Okay. So it was your first read of this story, at least?

Pike
Yes.

Ligeia
Good, good, good. I think the three of us, Lithos, Leraje, and me, we have read this before, I think.

Lithos

I have I realised that I hadn't actually read any Poe uh when I started reading this. Um I was completely familiar with all his tales because they have become so enmeshed in culture and they've been adapted, they've been rewritten, they've they've been they've had film versions and audio versions, but I hadn't actually read any until now.

Pike
Does that mean you You hadn't gone to school.

Lithos
I didn't. I they didn't do poet school in Luxembourg.

Pike
Oh, okay.

Lithos
Unsurprisingly.

Leraje
They didn't do poe in school in England either, funnily enough.

Pike
Really? I had I had a few people tell me they had it as their high school curriculum.

Ligeia
Oh, I see.

Pike
Part of their high school.

Leraje
Yeah.

Pike
Not the whole of their high school curriculum. That would be weird.

Leraje
Just Poe. Nothing but Poe.

Ligeia
I would go there. I would go there. So it's not weird to me. But anyway, I'm really happy because we have mentioned him many times, and so I thought this is a good uh example of really old story, one of the first acknowledged horror stories, right? And something that was inspired by it, and it's not that old, so.

And how that could look. So, what did you think, guys? Or do we start with the plot, or?

Pike
Do we want to start with a joke? I've got a joke about-

Ligeia
Yes, please.

Pike
So, ask me if I liked The Fall of the House of Usher.

Leraje
Did you enjoy The House of Usher?

Pike
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Are you not familiar with pop culture?

Lithos
Obviously not. What?

Pike
It's a song by Usher.

Leraje
I don't even know who Usher is.

Ligeia
Oh my God.

Lithos
Even I know who Usher is.

Ligeia
Okay.

Pike
Okay, moving on, moving on.

Ligeia
I'm so sorry. Is that spelled the same way, by the way? I don't know.

Lithos
Yeah.

Ligeia
Is it?

Pike
The same way.

Ligeia
Oh, sure. Okay. Oops. Anyway, yeah, that was good.

Pike
Oh, thank you.

Ligeia
It's not your fault that I'm not into pop music. It's not your fault.

Leraje
No, it's not. I mean, literally, unless it's screaming and talking about Satan, then I don't really listen to it usually.

Pike
That's fine. That's fine. We will not attempt humour again on this podcast.

Ligeia
We can. We can. This is gonna be fun. Don't worry. It's a fun horror.

Pike
Now there sits upon my heart an incubus of causeless alarm.

Ligeia
Very good.

Leraje
I think you and I, Elijah, were quite hurt by Amanda- Fuck. Miranda's- Miranda.

Ligeia
Miranda.

Leraje
Miranda's anti-Poe attitude in White is for Witching.

Ligeia
Yes.

Leraje
Is that is that really what drove your choice to-

Ligeia
That was the last straw. Because-

Leraje
That was the last straw.

Ligeia
I mean, because we have been mentioning Po here and there. And I'm like, yeah, we will do some Poe. We will do- but like, I'm sorry, Miranda, first of all, is mentioning uh Poe in a bad way and she wants to kill Ligeia.

Leraje
Yeah, it's out of order.

Ligeia
I couldn't- I'm like, this is the sign that I need it. So there we go.

Pike
For the benefit of the listener, we are referring to a character from another book we read called White is for Witching.

Leraje
Yes.

Ligeia
Yes. So thank you. Thank you, Pike.

Lithos
She's not gonna be the only one who upsets you, I'm afraid.

Leraje
Oh. Okay.

Ligeia
Should I get my tissues? Am I gonna cry?

Pike
Should we gag him, Ligeia? Yes, yes, yes.

Lithos
Just my personal opinion. I've already told you I'm quite lowbrow.

Leraje
Quite lowbrow. So, um. Should we talk about Fall of the House of Usher first? The poster?

Ligeia
Of course. Yeah. I can do the plot summary, but uh it will take for an hour. Is anybody here able to like say it in a short way? Or you don't mind? Oh yeah, you're ready. Good.

Lithos
I didn't think there was much of a plot. Bloke turns up. Okay.

Ligeia
It's not you, Lithos. I'm gonna say it.

Pike
No, no, let let him do it. A bloke turns up at the house.

Lithos
Of his friend who's unwell. And then um his friend's sister is unwell, but she hardly appears in it. And the house is decrepit. And then they spend some time talking about stuff. And then the girl dies. And then they talk some more about stuff. And then she suddenly appears, throws herself on his friend.

Kills him, guy runs out the house, the house collapses into the lake. That's the end of the story. That's- sorry, that's all I got from it.

Pike
That sounds like quite a lot is happening. Yeah,

Ligeia
in 10 pages.

Pike
Lifetime.

Ligeia
Quite a story. Well, you were not wrong. So that's the plot. That's what we have. Do you guys want to add anything to that or-

Leraje
I mean, plot-wise, that's not inaccurate.

Ligeia
It's not inaccurate, yeah.

Leraje
I think, um, the the uh I don't want to say the point of Poe, but one of the points of Poe, and we talk about this, like, when we do the Ligotti episodes, it's more about the mood that's evoked than the actual events. The Gothic sense of, um, something that there's a there's an occult secret, and by occult I mean the kind of like traditional uh use of the word, a hidden secret, And uh how that secret comes into the the lives of the participants of the story and ruins everything when it's revealed.

Uh and and and it's the evocation of a mood, which I think Poe is particularly strong at, rather than linear storytelling.

Ligeia
Is that fair to say? Absolutely true.

Leraje
Yeah.

Pike
That sounds right. Yeah.

Ligeia
Yeah. He is more of the, you know, if it works for you, it works for you. If you don't like this sort of you know, description-heavy atmospheric writing.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia

Maybe then I understand that it's not for you. Well, I don't understand how it's not for any- anyway.

Lithos
I can explain.

Ligeia
Okay,

Leraje
go on.

Lithos
I I don't mind sort of like exposition and uh that kind of background stuff, but I found his prose, to be quite honest, insufferably turgid. And and there were sentences that spanned a whole paragraph with so many fucking sub-clauses. I I spent literally way too long on the first few pages going through a paragraph, getting halfway down, going, I can't remember what this started about.

And and sub-clause after sub-clause. And by the end of the paragraph, I'm like, could you use full stops maybe? Um I just found His prose is so turgid and, to be honest, leaden, that it did nothing for me. It literally- I was like, is something gonna happen? And then the bit that gets exciting towards the end, that's like 3 pages when suddenly something happens, but there's not enough detail in that.

So I was really just- because I was really looking forward to reading some Poe because I'd heard so much. I knew the stories were good. I knew they were great ideas, but his prose did absolutely nothing for me.

Ligeia
I get it.

Lithos
I found it really difficult.

Ligeia
It's fair enough, I think.

Pike
I agree. And I think this was heavily- I mean, the description was heavy, even for- for um, not even the description, but the- whatchamacallit, syntax, the the way it- It was heavy going even for Poe. Like other stuff that I read of his was a lot easier.

Lithos
It did get it did get better towards the end of the story, um and it made more sense. But there was an awful lot of sort of like descriptions at the start, which, like I say, I do like descriptive stuff. I I I don't want it all to be about action, but I need to be able to read a paragraph and not lose track halfway through because it's sort of like sub-clause and and then hyphen comma comma comma hyphen hyphen and just interjections and it's like, what the fuck?

It's it just struck me as at times kind of like stream of consciousness almost and it's like-

Leraje
Well, that's that's not a bad comparison really, that stream of consciousness.

Ligeia
That's why it works for me.

Leraje
Probably.

Ligeia
I mean, for me, I can read anything by him. I love it. I love the way he writes, but I guess I I absolutely understand it's not for everybody.

Leraje
I think if you take two stories by Poe, uh so if we take The House of Usher and then compare it to another one that we talked about recently, which was uh Masque of the Red Death. The Masque of the Red Death is a more direct, succinct story, I think.

Ligeia
It is. And

Leraje
it's more event-driven.

Ligeia
Yeah. I mean, he wrote stories that are maybe easier to read. Uh, but this one, I think, is one of the most mentioned, one of the most famous ones. And it inspired so many things, so many small movies or other, you know, pieces of literature or poetry or whatever.

Lithos
There was a- was it Mike Flanagan? Excuse me, the Michael Flanagan adaptation. Um, someone turned it into a series and then-

Leraje
Oh yes. Yeah. The House of Usher. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was good, actually. I enjoyed that.

Pike
I wanted to ask you, so both of you have read quite a lot of Poe. Would uh House of Usher- would you rank it as one of your favourites?

Leraje
I would. Yeah.

Pike
Yeah.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
But it's you shouldn't ask me because-

Leraje
They're all Ligeia’s favourites.

Ligeia
I mean, I have like 5 books and it's like up and down.

Leraje
I do, I just enjoy that. I know people, some people struggle with that style of writing and I get it.

Ligeia
Yes, me too.

Leraje
But I just love it. It's um it's kind of rich and there's a depth and a and a kind of like the way he summons an atmosphere, the way he conjures the the kind of like uh the the the kind of like decaying grandeur of the house and the kind

of the richness of of of that same decay and how it plays into the uh the relationship between Roderick and Madeline and to a lesser extent between Roderick and the narrator.

It kind of like they they they it feeds they they feed each other and I really enjoyed that. And I think the reason for me that it's one of my favourites is because it's an An example, or one of the very earliest examples of something that is truly gothic in that sense of the word.

Pike
Right.

Ligeia
It is truly gothic, but I think his whole work is very gothic.

Leraje
Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Ligeia
And I mean, obviously this takes so many aspects of, or ticks uh so many aspects that we call gothic horror. It's all there. It's this decaying, desolate house that is- I mean, one of the- for me, one of the things that speak to me in this story the most is how, for me, he made the house itself sound like there is something sentient in it.

Leraje
Hmm.

Ligeia
And he never explains, he never overexplains. He leaves the stories almost ambivalent. Open, and this one as well, like you can't really tell if it's Roderick and his mental health or is this actually something happening in the house or is it just the belief in the family that something is wrong and the belief is so deep in them, or at least in in Roderick and probably in Madeline, uh that they actually can't escape it, which is the terror and the horror of the story.

So there are many ways of how you can look at this story. And I have read it many times and I I never have been able to settle with one explanation because some days this works for me, some days that works for me. And I love that about Poe. He gives me the space to come up with a reasoning.

And

Leraje
yeah,

Ligeia
I think that was on purpose.

Leraje
No, I agree. And I think the whole kind of like the Madeline. So There's this the secret, which is, you know, the Gothic secret, which is a traditional element of the Gothic story. Madeline, the secret is explained in the fact that it's Madeline, but the reason for why Madeline is back from the dead is never explained, and that's that's hidden.

Uh, and that's it's sort of like what you were saying earlier about how is this supernatural? It is supernatural, but how? And Poe never explains that, and that's reflected in the in the way that Madeline's reanimation from the dead, apparent reanimation from the dead, is also never explained.

Ligeia

It's not. There is the question: is this madness, or does the the environment, the surroundings, have like genuinely an influence on these people? Which would make it supernatural, of course, but he doesn't make it too supernatural for me to think uh This is just- it can be explained in other ways. So I always enjoy that sort of writing where I do have that choice.

Yeah.

Pike
Yeah.

Ligeia
So what did you think about Roderick and Madeline and them being twins? And this is a very Gothic element as well. The doubling.

Leraje
Yeah.

Lithos
I mean, I thought Madeline was, to be quite honest, was a side character. I mean, she hardly appears.

Leraje
She was.

Lithos
Yeah. She she floats by the door and then she's gone and then she's dead and then she suddenly appears at the end and it like it was like what? I just I I I'm still flummoxed by why it's a classic. I'm I'm like I can see why it's been adapted because there's so many loose ends and open threads left there.

But it was like I it made absolutely Zero sense in terms of a coherent narrative to me. It was like, what's she in there for?

Ligeia
So I think Roderick, they are like two opposing parts of the same, of like human existence, right? So Roderick is the mind, the intellectual part. Well, did you think the same?

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Okay, let me have my 5 seconds of thinking. But you can you can absolutely, if you think the same, you can talk. Um, no. So it's the mind, the intellectual, the imagination, you know, the music, the nervous illness that he's suffering with, the obsessive fear. And then Madeline is the representation of the body and the decaying, the illness, the disease.

And I think the horror of the story can be also seen like the body, the body is taking revenge, sort of. upon the mind because the mind was trying to deny the body. So this is how I saw why these two people needed to be there.

Leraje
A big thing in Gothic literature is this concept of doubling, so which is the most obvious representation of that in this story is the fact that Madeline and Roderick are twins. But there's also uh doubling throughout the story. So you've got the house and then the reflection of the house in the tarn,

Ligeia
Mm-hmm.

Leraje

Which is not the house, but an image of the house. There's also the fact that this story is called "The Fall of the House of Usher," which could be talking about- so there's a doubling of meaning there: the fall of the actual house, and then there's the fall of the family line of Usher.

So there's that that doubling there as well.

Ligeia
Mm-hmm.

Leraje
And then it could be uh a doubling of or or a comparison between the conscious and the unconscious. Roderick is a conscious mind actively concealing a dark secret. Madeline is the unconscious, who is hardly seen during the story, as Lithos said. Uh, but the second time she appears, she's literally buried or repressed uh in an unconscious state.

So there's all this doubling throughout the story, which I think is something that uh Poe did deliberately. And I think to answer your question, Lithos, about why people think this is a classic, I my own opinion is because it's so It has every single element of what become became the gothic tradition of of writing.

And it's it's almost like a textbook for how to write a gothic short story or or a piece of gothic fiction, I think.

Pike
Is it is it 19th century?

Ligeia
1839.

Lithos
Yeah.

Pike
Yeah, I was gonna say all that uh doubling uh of ideas, that's That's very 19th century. They love that stuff.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Yeah. I'm probably in the wrong century, so possibly it speaks to me. I'm an-

Pike
Oh, like, yeah, I thought you were 500 years old.

Ligeia
Oh, yeah. Well.

Lithos
I mean, I'm not denying the fact that he was massively influential and sort of one of the forefathers of what became sort of horror. Um, then that there is a reason that his stories have been- have figured in in every branch of horror, music, film, whatever. So many times they they are good ideas.

And the fact that there are so many open threads in this and like there was like, why is that happening? Is a great thing if you want to take this and pad it out. Which is what has happened with the other book we're discussing, which we might we might need to come on to because we're spending an awful lot of time on Poe here.

Pike

Actually, whilst we're still on Poe, I wanted to ask you, you know, his library is described in quite a lot of detail. Uh, it's got all this occult stuff. Have you read anything from there or been tempted to?

Leraje
From his library.

Pike
Yeah.

Leraje
Uh, no, actually, that's that's that's a good point.

Ligeia
I am tempted to.

Leraje
Yeah.

Pike
It's I looked into it and it's weird shit. He's got a book by Machiavelli, that Machiavelli. Um, in that book, a fallen archangel comes to earth to investigate the complaints of souls that their wives are to blame for their damnation. This is uh. a quote. Um, and then there's another one about sentient trees, like a place where the trees are walking and speaking.

It's and-

Lithos
I have actually read some Machiavelli. I've read The Prince.

Pike
I've got it. I haven't read it.

Lithos
It's it's not that long, and it's actually what what I would say it formed the basis of modern geopolitics. You know, it's kind of like people go Machiavellian plotting, and it's like when you read it, you kind of go, well, this is just what people have been doing through the centuries. Just laying it out straight, going, well, if you want to invade somewhere, be careful.

Don't do this, do this.

Pike
Did it change you?

Lithos
No, it just surprised me because I'd thought, you know, because people use the phrase Machiavellian, It would be like really, really sort of grim and nasty. And it was just like, well, no, actually, you're just talking about political machinations here.

Ligeia
So coming back to Poe, I was just- before we move on to the other book, I was just going to say that I also liked the psychology of fear, how it was nicely done uh with Roderick. Because I think uh he turns Poe turns the perception of fear of no perception itself into like the instrument of horror in this story.

What's that?

Leraje
Fireworks. Fireworks.

Ligeia

Oh, okay. Sorry. Somebody fell.

Lithos
Either that, yeah, either that or it's the fall of one of our houses, Madeline's.

Ligeia
Yeah. Is Madeline coming back? Yeah. So I just wanted to point that out. Like, I really enjoyed how, you know, the bodily sensations, they became frightening. Fear, it intensifies with those sensations that he has. Uh, his hypersensitivity, you know, he like, his world was slowly becoming unbearable to him. Everything was just too much.

He was overstimulated with everything. As the days progressed, it was absolutely horrible to imagine his world. Uh, light, sound, texture, you know. So I thought that was well done. And people who suffer sort of, you know, with overwhelming like sensations and sensitivities can find themselves in this story. Hello, Lygia. I did. Because I don't know, it spoke to me.

Obviously this was too- the progress of that was too fast, but I think it was well done for, for, I don't know, it spoke to me. I did like that.

Pike
So The Fall of the House of Usher, you liked the descriptive prose. And also you said you liked the- that there is a secret to it, right? That things are not told straight up and then explained. And What Moves the Dead is the opposite of that. How did you feel about that book?

Lithos
I thought, yes, this is what someone should have done with the story in the first place. To be quite honest, I read it and I was like, now, Poe, if you'd written that, just like put more detail in, just yes. This is what the idea needed. That was my my opinion.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
You, Pike?

Pike
No, no, I asked the question, so I want to hear the answers.

Ligeia
For me, it's obviously there is a there is the original story that will always be for me the master mould. And then you have a story that came after that as as a beautiful child, a completely individual story, which I love what she did. It's individual. She is not hiding that it's inspired by him.

It's not uh stupid. It's not just like trying to squeeze the fame out of Poe. It's well done. I love the book. I love her writing. This is not my first book by her that I read. I love her humour, and I love how brave she is in how she approaches the stuff.

It's it's a fresh approach. I really like it. This is why I brought it to you, because I thought it's it's a really nice thing to compare these two. One is really just dreary and atmospheric and dark, and there is no escaping it. There is no hope. And then you have this book, and I'm not saying there is hope or anything.

Uh, we haven't spoken about the plot or how it ends, but it's sort of like a light read. It's such a comforting book in a way to me. Which if if there are people who are not into horror, what are you doing here, first of all? And um.

Pike
You've been told.

Ligeia
You might be like, it's such a good book.

Leraje
I also enjoyed it. It's not the first thing I've read by her either. Like, I recommended- what was it?

Ligeia
The Hollow Places.

Leraje
Yeah, Hollow Places. So I read that and enjoyed that. So I thought I would probably enjoy this. And the fact it's based on the House of Usher- sorry, go on.

Ligeia
Just to tell Lithos, you were saying something about the sentient trees. So you can find that in The Hollow Places. It's really interesting. There are these sentient trees. I will not say more. It's also a tiny book. I think it's right here somewhere. So, if you like her writing, that's a good book as well.

Lithos
I really did. I thoroughly enjoyed it. There's, we should say that there's the only thing that this has in common with The House of Usher, apart from the sort of basic plotline of Madeline are gradually getting worse and worse. The only characters that are the same are Madeline and Roderick Usher. Um, the narrator is completely different.

There are extra characters. The house is there, the tarn kind of lake is there, and and Madeline and Roderick, I think the author was quite true to their characters in the original book. Um, what changed was the The narrator was a completely different, a completely different perspective.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Pike
I think also all of you probably liked that- here come spoilers, there will be spoilers, we spoil every single book.

Leraje
Yes!

Pike
So listener beware. Um, I think also all of you liked that Sulphur saved the day. Yes. When I read that, I was like, ah. I know, I know this will please everybody.

Leraje
Yeah, definitely.

Lithos
And there's there's just so many little clever details I liked in the book. Um, the the the the clever use of pronouns from the- now, what was the country that the narrator was from?

Leraje
Galatia.

Lithos

Galatia. Yes, that's it. Which makes more sense towards the end when They use a child pronoun to refer to the fungus that is trying to take over everyone and everything around it. It was kind of like also reminiscent of some episodes of Star Trek TNG. It's sort of like in the kind of story arc of a consciousness trying to take something over, but not malevolently.

Ligeia
I really liked when you when you mentioned the pronouns, that it was unthinkable in that country to use or she or he for children at all. I absolutely loved it. Like, are you are you a weirdo? This is a child. There is no he, she, whatever. I really like that tiny detail. It made my heart sing.

Like, please, can we do this?

Lithos
I think the pronoun thing was also, there is no he or she. There are words to denote men, women, male, female, but the pronouns all relate to your standing in society kind of thing.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
So child pronoun, and there's even a pronoun for God and a pronoun for rocks. And it was kind of like, there's obviously some humour in that. But yeah, yeah, it was, because at first I thought, why are you throwing these pronouns in? And then it kind of made more sense in the end because you're kind of like, That's a clever way of showing that the entity is regarded by the people who who are being taken over by the the entity, the fungus, is is being regarded as a child type um being, as in something in its infancy.

Leraje
Yeah, and and also I thought it was a nice way of setting up- I mean, to me the the kind of like the the one of this the the horror elements of What Moves the Dead is the idea that Individual identity can be subsumed into a collective uh without autonomy or consent. And so by giving Alix Easton a set of pronouns that are so specific, not just to gender but also a role in life, a role in society, what they do, they define her car as um very specifically-

Ligeia
What was-

Leraje
I was so I couldn't remember where I put the fucking notes and it's over here. I

Ligeia
googled down. Okay,

Pike
Leraje is not respecting the pronouns of a fictional character.

Lithos
No, car is a pronoun as in K-A, car and can, K-A-N, not as in C-A-R, the thing you drive around in.

Ligeia
Oh yeah, car.

Leraje
So, so the final confrontation in this story is between Alex Easton and Var, or the the the the mycological entity, whatever we want to call it. And I think that was the central horror. It set up and illustrated the central horror of this story, which is, to me, in my opinion, was the loss of- or the potential loss of Alex Easton's individual autonomy and identity into this collective.

Because the the the the the mycological entity is can be everything and everyone because it's not it's not one thing, it has nodes, you know, it can there's this whole underground network. So I felt that was possibly a good way, this this kind of like emphasis on Easton's individual identity versus this uh collective identity.

Pike
I didn't read so deeply into it, but I like this explanation.

Leraje
Yeah.

Pike
Okay. So how is Madeline alive? I would read and I'd be like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So the, you know, the fungus is controlling. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But how is she alive? And then in the end, in the end, I just remembered, I don't know if any of you watched Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

No. There is a character called Krang, which is basically a brain in a bodysuit. It's got a little window there and it's got the controls and it's controlling the the bodysuit. And I thought by the end, that's that's basically what Madeline is, right? It's just fueling the fungus, it's just fueling the brain.

Is that right?

Leraje
I think so. Um, it's still Madeline even towards the end, but Madeline's time is short. The the brain is still a chemical process or a, you know, an electrical chemical process, but it's also a bit of meat. And so the the the the fungi can, I don't know, press the right keys and activate Madeline's personality.

So it's it is still Madeline, uh but won't be for much longer, and and it'll just be Var as Madeline.

Lithos
Yeah, there was in the end there were kind of the fungus is feeding off Madeline and would have kept Madeline alive much longer had she not been already ill when she fell, drowned in the lake and got the fungus.

Leraje
Mhm.

Lithos
And the fungus kept her alive, although she should have she should have drowned and been dead. Fungus kept her alive, and then she was interacting with the fungus and teaching the fungus things like speech and sight. And and it was kind of symbiotic, but more on the sort of like the fungus is in control kind of thing.

That's the impression I got.

Ligeia
Until the neck thing happened and

Pike
When her head gets- is it twisted off or her neck is broken?

Lithos
Her neck's broken, basically. So it's kind of hanging like

Pike
that.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Pike
At that point, I don't I don't know. I've it felt a bit of a stretch, you know. Uh the fungus succeeding where, I don't know, Pavlov failed. It's one thing sending those you know electric impulses and getting I don't know a person to move their limbs or open their mouth or something. But to consciousness is a whole different kettle of fish.

Lithos
I think there's a whole suspend your disbelief thing about horror where you're kind of like going, don't try and look for a scientific explanation.

Pike
But they weren't so scientific from the beginning, right? They're like, oh, we're gonna explain you all about this.

Lithos
Oh yeah, yeah.

Pike
Mycelium and networks and how it works. And

Lithos
but they they were Victorian scientists, so. Their knowledge was limited.

Pike
But their environment was magical.

Lithos
Yes.

Ligeia
Magical mushrooms. Yeah.

Lithos
I mean, it was quite clever because the thing is, and the author says it in in the notes at the end where, and and this is this really resonated with me. She said she'd read the story and then thought, yeah, that's too short. That ended too soon. And I I had thought exactly the same thing.

And then she also said, it spends an awful lot of time and more time talking about fungi than about Madeline. And again, I agree. You know, Madeline was a side character. It was a two blokes, whereas in this novel it's three strong women, but two strong women and one very ill woman. But her her her person appears a lot more in the novel.

And then the presence of the fungi. in the original is also kind of explained in a way, if that makes sense.

Pike
Yep.

Leraje
I read that note too, and I did- I don't really- so the the the fungus, the fungi, the mushrooms, whatever, the decay in the the Poe story, I don't really remember it taking such a prominent role.

Ligeia
It's not central to the story. It's mentioned on the side, As like present.

Lithos

I think what she said was Poe spent more time on the fungi than he did on Madeline.

Ligeia
But it's not true. If you ask-

Lithos
That's how that's how I that's how I read it.

Ligeia
I know she said it. I know she said it. I'm not sure if I'm mis- misunderstanding her, but-

Leraje
Well, if you are, I am too, because I didn't understand that comment.

Ligeia
It wasn't central to his story.

Pike
Someone will have to go back and count the words.

Ligeia
I have read it like 15 times already. And I I still think like it was it came from history. It is in the story.

Leraje
Definitely.

Ligeia
It wasn't her idea or whatever, but I wouldn't say it was like massively important. It was one of the you could go that way. It was one of the paths that you could take like what she did, but it could also be similarly. He was, he was, sorry, what Po was mentioning, how the Usher family used to believe that even the way the house was built, how the stones were put together, there is a sort of like a way to it.

It's a key to something that they don't understand anymore, or they never understood, and it's keeping them in the house and they can't really leave, but they don't know why, if you remember that. So that was It was the same amount of importance as when he was talking about the fungus, fungus, fungi, help me.

Pike
Mushrooms.

Ligeia
Mushrooms. Ah, yeah. So, if she didn't say that, I I understand that this is this is based on his story, but I just don't agree with that, that he spent so much time talking about that. He spent a lot of time talking about the house and how the the the you know how they met when um he's coming there after I don't know 6 years they haven't seen each other and how Roderick has changed and his hair and that was there also.

I did not feel I will never feel that it's too much time spent on. I understand that the ending Might be a little bit frustrating for people if like could be maybe longer. It's even hard for me to say that because I just I think he was genius. So I I think he did what he wanted to do and this is what it is.

But I would understand that. I just don't feel like the fucking mushrooms were like mentioned too much. I don't know.

Lithos
I didn't like I say I I didn't read it that way. I read it as saying he he's He spent more time describing the mushrooms than he did Madeline.

Ligeia
Maybe it was just to show-

Lithos
I did not like the fact that Madeline just sort of appeared in the first story and then in the end she she murdered her her twin brother and then suddenly the the house collapses and I was like, right, okay, that's you've really made Madeline a side character here.

Ligeia
Well, because she was the unconscious You know, I think that was on purpose, that she was actually- that's why she was silent, because she was unconscious part of the being.

Leraje
She was a representation of that, of the secret, of the unspoken secret.

Ligeia
That's how I read it.

Leraje
Yeah, me too. But I I I do understand the idea that it's- she wasn't really given- the character of Madeline in Poe's story had no agency, whereas Madeline in Kingfisher's Absolutely.

Ligeia
Reimagining. Yeah.

Leraje
Certainly had agency.

Ligeia
Or did she? Yeah.

Pike
Did she?

Ligeia
She had a little bit of fungi.

Pike
The worms.

Ligeia
Sorry.

Leraje
Wrong story.

Ligeia
No, no, there were worms in the story. Roderick could hear the worms.

Leraje
That's true. Yes. Yeah, that's true.

Lithos
Agency might not be the right word.

Ligeia
No, no, no. But they were worms in the story.

Pike
Quite legit.

Ligeia
Quite important because that was also one of the moments where he was like, "I can hear the worms." And then that was the question, like, is are these mushrooms, are these fungi like threatening everything that is alive? Even the worms were leaving. There were no uh mice or rats or anything in the house, which was weird because it was uh old and dirty and, you know, I don't know.

He could hear that. Which was also awesome in a way. Horrible, but awesome. Can you imagine? Like he could hear the worms eating her body.

Pike
Lovely.

Ligeia
I mean, that's an experience. Sorry.

Leraje
Not a good one. Continue. Okay. Yeah, maybe agency is the wrong word, but she had, let's say more personality. She was more of a character.

Ligeia
She was more present. I mean, yeah, the the character of Madeline was present. Yeah, so

Lithos
I thought all the characters were good. It was a good characterization.

Leraje
Yeah,

Lithos
you know, even the side characters, you know, there was some thought put into it. Um, you know, and and there was, which I always like about horror, if if there's some humour in the background, I kind of like that as well.

Leraje
Oh, it definitely made me laugh out loud 2 or 3 times.

Ligeia
Do you have any quotes?

Lithos
No, unfortunately, I I I I lost the ones I made about the um the second novel. There was just one in the first one. But that was just about the most turgid bit of prose in in the original book, which I was like- it was it happened right at the start and I was like, oh my God, no, please don't tell me I'm not gonna like Poe.

I'm really gonna upset some people if I fucking don't like Poe. This is completely okay. I'm gonna fuck off every goth in the universe. Oh my God, and my dear, the Raj are gonna be really upset because they're such fanatics. And I'm like, I'm just- but I was glad when I got onto the second book because I thought, oh yeah, this is good.

Ligeia
You were glad when you finished with Poe. Okay, that's done. Um, so I just had one more thing that I wanted to say about Kingfisher's interpretation or her story. I thought how she approached the body as like uh the body as an occupied house, right? I have I have my notes here, so I will read that because I will fuck it up, of course.

So I think in Poe, the mansion, the house, and the people that are in the house in the story are so closely connected. interconnected that they actually formed

this one uh almost like organism, and everybody is sort of sick or ill or they they just can't escape this enclosed thing. And what she did, she reversed that, what I think happened.

So the human body becomes a kind of a house. It's a structure that can be entered, occupied, and controlled by something else. And the mushroom, the the fungus, becomes like the new inhabitant. Maybe that's also what you were asking, Pike. And so Madeline's body is another House of Usher, sort of.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
It's a physical structure-

Pike
Nice.

Ligeia
—whose original identity is being destroyed by an invading presence. And the Gothic haunted house has been transformed into the haunted human body. And this is absolutely amazing what she did, I think.

Lithos
Yeah, that's very good. Yeah,

Leraje
yeah.

Ligeia
Because she could have just created a story with a haunted house, but what she did about the body itself, it was amazing.

Lithos
Yeah, because in the poem, it's, it's definitely the house that is the malignant force.

Ligeia
Yes.

Lithos
Um, that, that is the thing that, that, that is, that, that sends out the terror vibes. It's Something's wrong with the house.

Ligeia
With the house.

Lithos
Now, in this one, there's nothing wrong with with the house other than it's kind of fallen into disrepair. But, you know, it's the fungus that is the the malignant force in inverted commas.

Ligeia
Oh, and I like that that detail with the hairs.

Lithos
Hmm.

Ligeia
I mean, hair, the body hair that like

Leraje
Oh

Ligeia
yeah.

Lithos
I can assure you these aren't

Leraje
my serious-

Pike
Oh no.

Leraje
For

Lithos
the benefit of the listener, I have I have pretty white hair.

Pike
For the benefit of the listener, it's not hair, it is hyphae of a of a fungus that lives inside Leif's and operates in it.

Ligeia
Yeah, that's why you don't like Poe, maybe.

Leraje
Yes.

Lithos
I am fungus boy.

Pike
It does not understand the culture.

Lithos
No, no. Or poetry or the finer things in life or sentences with more than 20 words in them.

Ligeia
Leifas, you are such a fungi, really.

Leraje
Oh

Ligeia
God. I have to, sorry, sorry, sorry. Love you, sorry. I will never say that again. Jesus Christ.

Pike
Are we done piling up on Lithos? That's

Lithos
okay. I'll take it because, you know, it's like I've I've done the same for Po.

Ligeia
Yes, true. You have to pay.

Leraje
All right, let's do Pitchforks then. Pike? For uh

Pike
for

Leraje

both?

Pike
For each?

Leraje
Yeah, for for each.

Pike
Because they are different.

Leraje
Yes, they are.

Pike
I'll say for House of Usher, I'll give 7 pitchforks. Um, I didn't love it. I complained about things. But I did get I did get stuff from it. You know, I'm I'm glad I read it. I would read other other uh writing by Poe. Um and to for What Moves the Dead, I would give 6 pitchforks.

I'd say it's probably not for me. It's not bad. I just maybe think young adult novels appeal to me where they portray um coming of age and sort of young adult novels that have an entirely sort of adult story, they don't really do very much for me. I don't know what to take from it.

Leraje
Fair enough. Uh, Lithos?

Lithos
I- you might want to close your ears, Ligeia and Leraje, for mine. I'm gonna give it 4. Sorry.

Ligeia
It's okay.

Pike
We'll just cut you out.

Lithos
I- I am going to give What Moves the Dead 9.5. I thought it was nearly a perfect horror story. Damn Nearly. Um, I know I didn't think it was a young adult. I did not read it. I know she writes young adult fiction under her own actual name, but I just thought it was a great, a great reimagining, really well written, very captivating, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

But it was-

Leraje
Would you say it was the story that you wished the Poe one had been?

Lithos
Yes.

Ligeia
Well, so for Edgar Allan Poe, my beloved. So for his uh beautiful, symbolic, um psychological, and completely profoundly ambiguous writing, 10. And for Kingfisher, for how brave that was and the-

Pike
Oh, I thought you said 4.

Ligeia
No, no, no, no.

Lithos
So did I. I was like- Just because I gave Poe that, you don't have to. No, no, no.

Ligeia
It was, listen, it was both my suggestions. So I'm happy you liked one of them. It's still good. So I think I will give her a 6. When I compare it to Poe. Okay. So that's why.

Leraje
Um, okay. I'll give Poe a 9. Um, and I'm only not giving it 10 because it's not my favourite Poe story. My favourite is, um, Masque of the Red Death. And I will give, uh, What Moves the Dead an 8 because I really enjoyed it. And I really- I think more than the actual horror, I enjoyed the extra characters.

And I also did not know it was young adult. I had no idea.

Pike
I don't necessarily- I didn't check what it's classified as. It reads as young adult to me, as in it's very kind of, I guess, it's thin on- it doesn't go very deeply.

Lithos
What I read about it was this was considered one of her adult fiction books rather than young adult, but it's, I mean, this is all personal opinion. However it takes you, it takes you.

Leraje
Absolutely.

Pike
Yeah, yeah, totally.

Leraje
Okay, so that's our take on two Usher stories. What Moves the Dead by T. Kingfisher and The Fall of the House of Usher by Edgar Allan Poe. Next up is Pike's choice, I think.

Pike
Yes, we are reading The Demolished Man by Alfred Bester. Um, I haven't read it. Um, it's a science fiction story and it's a sort of backwards detective story. Uh, it's about a rich guy who wants to murder his rival. But it's a future society that has telepaths that can um detect crimes before they happen just by reading people's minds.

Um, which might, if you've seen Minority Report, that might remind you of that. This does not have Tom Cruise and it was written before Minority Report.

Leraje
Cool. Uh until next time, I've been Leraje. Hail Satan. Ligeia?

Ligeia
Hail Satan.

Leraje
Pike?

Pike
Hail Satan.

Leraje
Lithos?

Lithos
Hail Alex. Hail Alex.

Pike
That's Lieutenant Easton to you.

[Outro music]