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| La Chute de la Maison Usher |
| The Fall of the House of Usher |
| *La Chute de la Maison Usher* [*The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1928] is an adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe’s eponymous story and the best-known film of French Impressionist director Jean Epstein. In the film, Roderick Usher spends his time painting his illness-stricken wife, Madeline, alone in their castle. When an unnamed friend of Usher visits, Madeline appears to die and is quickly buried, but she subsequently returns to life and destruction consumes the house. The film is heavily influenced by German expressionism, while also exemplifying some of Epstein’s most important formal contributions. Epstein was fascinated by cinematography’s proximity to human perception. In his theoretical writings on the concept of *photogénie*, he argued that film is uniquely capable of animating the material world by revealing sensibilities otherwise hidden. In one particularly atmospheric sequence in *Usher*, Epstein animates a funeral procession through double-exposure, slow motion, hand-held camerawork, and impressionist editing patterns. Epstein used these methods to endow objects with personalities, movement, and, in the film’s conclusion, a dangerous vitality. Surrealist Luis Buñuel worked on the film as an assistant to Epstein, but quit after a creative disagreement—setting the stage for Buñuel’s formal disavowal of Impressionist aesthetics with *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). |
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| Further reading:  (Aumont)  (Barreiro)  (Keller and Paul)  (Turvey) |