

Brief literary analysis edgar allen poe



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15 November 2012 Edgar Allan Poe Literary Analysis Edgar Allan Poe is often regarded as the most skilled American poet and short story writer, and it is no wonder because every literary work created by Poe is written with such proficiency, that even readers today are awe-struck. In Poe's short stories and poems, one will find the same few themes in his works, such as women, the color red and a variety of horror themes, however one theme that is very repetitive is his employment of death. This theme is used in many novels today, and is also a popular theme in books, television shows and videogames.

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In fact, since the 1800s, people have become increasingly appealed by death. Death was one of Poe's favorite themes, and is a big reason why Poe's literary works are still read today. In Poe's short story "The Masque of the Red Death", the theme of death often brought up, such as when the fatal "red death" sickness was described: when contracted, its host would feel "sharp pains, and sudden dizziness" (1), and its host would have "profuse bleeding of the pores" (1). The red death was a widespread disease, but Prince Prospero's castle was safe from the red death because the disease couldn't get past the abbey gates.

In his happy mood, the Prince organized a ball, this ball was not an ordinary ball, but it was a masquerade, in which the guests would wear masks and costumes. This story ends in an extremely violent manner, in which every masquerader succumbs to the red death. The theme of this masquerade was gruesome; many masqueraders wore very graphic outfits, which foreshadow the horrible end of this story. Another one of Poe's works, "Annabel Lee",
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was actually based on his wife, Virginia Eliza Clemm Poe, and in the poem, Annabel is killed by the angels above that were jealous of the love between Annabel and Poe.

So one night, at the peak of their jealousy, the sent out a cloud “ Chilling and killing” (4. 6) Poe’s Annabel Lee. The theme of death is very obvious in that Annabel Lee dies in the poem, and the main character is filled with an infinite sadness, that he even sleeps by the grave. What’s ironic about this poem is the fact that Annabel dies from a chilly wind, and Virginia, in her last stage of consumption, dies cold, and Poe, so poor, was unable to afford a blanket for her, a simple luxury that would have brightened her mood just a bit. The Fall of the House of Usher” is a unique short story in that it was one of the first “ haunted house” stories of it’s time. This story was about a man who was invited by his friend, Roderick Usher, to cheer Usher up. The main character soon arrives at the Usher manor, which once was beautiful, now is an old run-down mansion. The only two Usherfamilymembers that are still alive are the twins, Roderick and Madeline, and both of them suffer from peculiar diseases, Roderick suffers from a “ morbid acuteness of the senses” (3) and Madeline seemingly suffers form a type of immunodeficiency, in which she gets deathly ill often.

The first appearance of the theme of death is when Roderick states Madeline as “ dead” and subsequently buries Madeline prematurely. Roderick is aware of this, and near the end of the story, Madeline breaks out of her coffin and “ with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother,” (10) killing Roderick, another appearance of death. At the very end, the manor disappears, symbolizing the death of the Usher bloodline. The theme

of death is apparent in this short story, so this theme is not only a coincidence. Many of Poe's stories include death, and "The Black Cat" is no exception.

This story is one of his more brutal stories in that the main character first hung his favorite cat, Pluto, and then "buried the axe" (4) in his wife's head. The final death is that of the main character, when he is sentenced to hang for his atrocious deed of murder. This theme of death is proved as a common theme now, as it is in at least four of Poe's literary works, and these stories aren't the only ones that include the theme of death. Death is not a happy event. A funeral is usually a time of sadness, and there is depressing atmosphere that is fueled by this sadness.

Poe recreates this atmosphere in many of his works in the mood of the story or poem. For example, in "The Fall of the House of Usher" this depressing mood is heightened when the reader becomes aware that the only remaining Ushers alive are Roderick and Madeline. Another instance of heightened mood is in "The Black Cat" when Pluto is brutally executed by the main character. This mood is even evident in "Annabel Lee" when Poe writes "A wind came out of the cloud by night, Chilling and killing my beautiful Annabel Lee" (4. 25-26). Poe is a master at creating this theme, as he effectively depresses the reader with the depressing mood of death.

Poe is also proficient at symbolizing death. The symbolism of death takes many different forms in Poe's works ranging from very simple symbols to rather complex ones. An example is the clock in "The Masque of the Red Death" in which the clock chimed every hour with a "dull, heavy, monotonous clang" (2). A clock is a symbol of death because it constantly

reminds the limited life p of a human being. A rather blunt symbol of death is a coffin, like the one Madeline Usher broke out of in “ The Fall of the House of Usher. ” The reason a coffin is a symbol of death is because a corpse is put in a coffin prior to the burial of the body.

The color black is also a symbol of death, which is the color of the velvet tapestries, hung in the seventh room in “ The Masque of the Red Death” which is the room Prince Prospero and his fellow masqueraders are killed. In many of Poe’s works, the story takes place in an old house, or castle, the reason behind this is that an older house usually means it has survived several generations, which can also be related to death, because a generation is defined as a group of people born at approximately the same time, and since a human being has a defined life p, the end of a generation is when the group of people die.

The old Usher manor has survived several generations of the Usher family, and it is also the place where several of the Usher family members are buried. At the end, it is the resting place of Madeline and Roderick. Ultimately, the house mysteriously disappears when Madeline and Roderick die. Another old building is Prince Prospero’s castle in “ The Masque of the Red Death”, and that also has seen many generations of mankind, but it also sees the death of Prospero and his friends when the Red Death sneaks into the masquerade and swiftly kills them all.

A very large amount of Poe’s works take place at night, rarely does one of Poe’s works take place in the daytime. The night has always held superstition for mankind because it is first of all, a time when humans sleep, and aren’t very active, and second of all, the human eye cannot see in the

dark well. As stated before, rarely does one of Poe's works take place in the day, in fact, the four works referenced all take place at night. One may wonder why many of Poe's works were violent, gloomy, and why many of his stories included a lot of death.

The explanation is because Poe had a very depressing life. His father was an alcoholic that left after Poe was a year old and eventually died of alcoholism. His mother cared for Poe until she died of consumption. After Poe's mom had died, Francis Allan adopted Poe and Francis sent him to a peculiar school in England. What made this school peculiar was how the taught math and physicaleducation. Math was taught using dates on tombstones, while physical education was taught by digging graves. This school could be a possible influence on Poe's works, because he got to do graveyard work.

Later, when he grew older, Poe had taken a romantic interest in his friend's (his friend's name was Richard) mother. Sadly, Richard's mother developed a tumor, and died. Soon after Poe had finished college, Francis Allan died of consumption, and she was the only reason John Allan hadn't evicted Poe yet, so once Francis died, Poe was evicted. After this event, Poe found a new romantic interest, in his adopted sister, Virginia Eliza Clemm Poe. Poe married her when he was twenty-six years old. Unfortunately, Virginia also died from consumption. Now it can be seen why Poe wrote so much about death, because he was surrounded by it.

Poe's life was a short-lived and very unfortunate one. Many of his loved ones died from either consumption or other causes, and Poe was always poor. Poe became an alcoholic, just like his father, and he died at age forty. There was no rest for Poe, so most of his feelings went into hispoetryand short stories,

and that was what made him a successful writer. In the time Poe lived, there was common a terrible disease called consumption, or more commonly known today as Tuberculosis. This disease would attack the victim's lungs, and slowly kill the victim.

The common symptom of consumption is coughing up blood, but there are other symptoms such as a fever, chest pains, a cough with increasing mucus and a nightly sweat. This disease is could have been a big influence on Poe's writing, because this disease killed many of Poe's beloved and in a rather violent manner. Another thing people of Poe's time were scared of was being buried alive, so much that devices that rung bells were attached to coffins so in the event someone was buried alive, person in the coffin could ring the bell and be rescued from their earthly prison.

This fear was so great, that Poe had the idea to put it into one of his stories “The Fall of the House of Usher” in which Madeline Usher was buried before she was dead, by Roderick Usher. This fear had an apparent influence on Poe's literature, and people loved the thrill of reading Poe's “tales of terror.” In “The Masque of the Red Death” Poe accomplishes several points, that death is unavoidable; Prince Prospero could not escape the inevitable Red Death disease by simply hiding in his Abbey until it went away. Poe also states that death is an eternal law. If there is a beginning, there is an end, and life is no exception.

Even time dies alongside the masqueraders, for time, one of humanity's fears, will cease to exist as well. These points are surprisingly true, for each thing that has a beginning comes to an end, no exceptions. Poe blends morals and lessons into a brutal story of a man who tried to evade death, but

he was foolish, for no mortal can escape death. Science states that everything was created, and everything will be destroyed, in due time, so this eternal law of death that Poe creates is so incredibly accurate to science, that Poe was a genius to secretly incorporate this law into a short story.

Edgar Allan Poe is perhaps one of the greatest American writers of all time. His short stories and poems are still read by the world, and for good reason, what makes his stories so good are his well-written story plots, and his themes of death, blood and gore which still ones that even people today can enjoy and be thrilled by. Poe had a depressing life, and it is unfortunate that he lived only forty years, who knows what else could have been produced.