

Comparing and contrasting good and evil research paper



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The essay is a critical examination of how evil and good are portrayed in two literatures; Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*. *The Tempest* is thought to have been written between 1610 and 1611. The story revolves around a remote area in which Prospero the main character is trying to ensure that together with his daughter they get back what is rightfully theirs.

Ideally the play lets the reader know that Miranda and her father were kicked out of their rightful position by Antonio, Prospero jealous brother. This leaves them stranded for 12 years and Miranda's father is working day and night to reclaim their deserved position. Through such efforts, it is evident for the reader to clearly see through Shakespeare glasses the manner with which good and evil as themes are clearly depicted (Shakespeare par. 5).

The second literature that will be used is *The Fall of the House of Usher* written by Poe. It is a short story of Gothic horror narrated in first person. The work was published back in 1893. In this gothic story, readers are told of the family of Usher; Roderick and his twin sister Madeline.

The two suffer from a disease which is unknown and cannot be cured. Their transgression which includes mental illness and incest are clearly brought to light by the author. To successfully accomplish this task, it would be rational to provide an understanding of the terms evil and good. In this context good will refer to that which is morally right. This means that good is that which helps and does less harm to others in the society.

On the other hand, evil is that which is not morally acceptable. It is an act of not being concerned about others as well as knowingly and intentionally

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seeking to harm the interest as well as welfare of other human beings. It is worth to acknowledge that there is a controversy between good and evil and as suggested by other scholars hence difficult to determine whether one is evil or good (Herman 234). However, for the purposes of this paper every act will be analyzed independently.

In the play *The Tempest*, Shakespeare has managed to clearly depict evil and good through characterization. It is through such characters as Prospero, Miranda, Ferdinand, Alonso, Ariel, as well as Antonio among others that the audience can see good and evil as intended by the author (Cantor 106).

In the beginning of the play readers are made to clearly understand that Prospero's jealous brothers with the assistance of Alonso who was the King of Naples was toppled and set adrift with his daughter who was only 3 years old. This is an evil and inhuman act done to him and his daughter. The main reason that drove Antonio to do this was because of his selfish interest in gaining power to rule the people of Milan. This is shown in the following line

[Wow, is it exposition time already? Okay, kiddo, listen up: I used to be the duke of Milan, but then my asshole brother and the King of Naples put you and me on a boat and we ended up here]

On the other hand, through secretly supplying the boat used by Prospero with adequate food, water, clothing as well as books from his study room, Shakespeare manages to make readers understand that this was a good act. This was done by Gonzalo who was counselor to the King. Another act of evil is depicted when Ariel was trapped in a tree. This was the work of Sycorax who was a witch who trapped the later for his own selfish gain.

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Despite his help to Ariel and teaching Caliban religion and other important things such as language, it was evil for Prospero to enslave Caliban and Ariel and later took power and controlled the people living in the island. This is exemplified in the words said by Caliban, " You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you, For learning me your language" (Cantor 71).

Similarly another act of evil is portrayed through an attempted rape where Caliban attempted to rape Miranda. Shakespeare wanted the audience to know how some evil acts are directed to certain gender. It is worth noting also that evil can be done by a group of people. The author makes the readers understand that the rebellion planned by Caliban, Stephano and Triculo failed (Graff & Phelan 49).

It is indeed difficult to establish whether it was good or evil for Prospero to raise tempest through his magic making the ship carrying his brother Antonio, Alonso, Gonzalo and two of Alonso's brother sons to capsize. However since he did this to revenge, it was an evil act as portrayed by the author.

Shakespeare has tried to make readers hold the view that the acts of the various characters resulting to a good or evil activity is largely motivated by how every person perceives his position relative to those of other characters. Interestingly, the concept of evil and good has been successfully portrayed through the various themes in the poem. For instance, it is due to power that the readers are able to establish the motives behind the actions of Prospero and his brother Antonio (Grant 89).

In this story, the author manages to bring the concept of good and evil in a completely different way when compared to the first article written by Shakespeare. Nonetheless there are instances where there seems to be some similarities. It is worth noting that Poe managed to use imagery to bring about the concept of evil (Kennedy 47).

For instance, it has been widely accepted that darkness is associated with evil things. In the beginning of the story the narrator while visiting his friend describes the surrounding and he uses the following words, “ During the whole of a dull and soundless day..... When the clouds hung oppressively” (Krutch 62) this clearly depicts that there was an act previously committed that was morally wrong.

Additionally the narrator describes how the house of his childhood friend looked like; he said “ I know not how it was - but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit” (Kennedy 74) It is no doubt that Usher residence was one place that a lot of evil had taken place that even a new visitor will be met with a sad environment.

Additionally Poe manages to portray evil by making the narrator fully describe how the house of the Ushers looked like. This not only depicted the nature of evil but also its consequences; it fully destroys a family. The decaying and crumbling building symbolizes the effects of evil (Auberlen 207).

[I looked upon the scene before me - upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain - upon the bleak walls - upon the vacant eye-like windows - upon a few rank sedges - and upon a few white trunks of
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decayed trees - with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium - the bitter lapse into everyday life - the hideous dropping off of the veil.

There was iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart - an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime] (Poe par. 6).

Through the narrator and Usher Roderick the readers are made aware of incest in Usher's family. Upon arrival of his friend, Usher makes his childhood friend understand that the illness he is suffering from is a 'family evil' (Walter 98).

The narrator since was a long-time family friend to the Ushers, clearly knows that the family did not allow any member to be married by other members of the society and for that reason they engaged in inbreeding. This led to a very weak blood-line of the family since the family became one and the same genetically. As a result majority of the family members died due to complications related to inbreeding leaving only Usher and his twin sister who are also suffering from a deadly disease (Corben 153).

Through Madeline, the nature and effect of evil is depicted. She also suffers from serious disease that is unknown and incurable. Madeline and Usher engaged in an intimate relationship despite the fact that they were siblings. Similarly the cries heard while the narrator was loudly reading a story to comfort Usher as well as the crumbling and submerging of Usher's house is a symbol of evil (Poe, par. 12). This is supported by the following.

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[...my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder - there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters - and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the " House of Usher] (Poe par. 40)

This is the ultimate punishment for engaging in morally unacceptable activities. It is also worth noting that through Usher, his act of prematurely burying his twin sister was morally unacceptable. Interestingly, through paintings and music, the author manages to use these tools to bring out the concept of evil and good.

Concerning morally acceptable deeds, the narrator has taken the duty of heeding his friends call. He pays Usher a visit since they were childhood friend. It is through the narrator that we see that he takes the responsibility of staying; talking and comforting Usher who was very sick. Additionally the narrator helped Usher lay the body of his sister in a tomb within the family house. From the short story it is apparent that the issue of evil outweighed good (Poe par. 3).

From the review of the two stories, *The Tempest* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, it is evident that the theme of evil and good are clearly depicted. However the authors used different mechanisms to accomplish this. Shakespeare managed to use characters to portray good and evil.

For instance it is through the main protagonist Prospero that other characters are developed conveying the same themes. On the other hand, Poe used imagery and symbolization, painting, music and first person narration through an unnamed narrator to portray good and evil. For <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-and-contrasting-good-and-evil-research-paper/>

instance Poe uses terms such as ' mansion of gloom', ' a ghastly pallor of the skin', and ' darkness' among others. This makes readers understand all these are linked to evil activities.

The common ground to both the authors is with regards to theme development, where the evil and good are manifested through characters. Although the authors used different mechanisms to portray the theme of evil and good, readers are able to appreciate these classical works. From these two classical works, it is apparent that evil is bad and leads to serious consequences.

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