

# Allegory as a significant device in the masque of the red death novel

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## **The allegory within the Masque of the Red Death**

Edgar Allen Poe was quite the gothic writer in the late 1800s and his work is still quite popular today amongst many. The short passage, "Masque of the Red Death" is an utmost example of a gothic fiction most commonly used by Poe. Poe's "Masque of the Red Death" was published, in part as a tribute to a deadly plague which was deteriorating the country at the time but also in part as a story of how death affects each and every one of us from a very young age and that Death is the inevitable end to everyone. The story is as though Prince Prospero takes members of his kingdom and hides them away so as to not be affected by the plague that is terrorizing his kingdom but condemns them all the same. Symbolism is one of the most common ways to reveal an allegory in a work of literature. Throughout the story, the allegory is enforced by major personnel, in this instance, Prince Prospero, the abbey, including all seven rooms, the chiming clock and the masked figure all support the allegory by symbolizing certain instances in which the moral is supported.

Prince Prospero is a symbol as well as a contradiction within himself. He is described as prosperous and sagacious but he is in fact killed by the red Death and is not very intelligent because he attempted to take on the Red Death single handedly. The belief is also that Prospero could represent the idea that we become aware of death at a very young age. For instance, when he sees the masked figure to begin with, symbolizing death he is in a blue room, blue symbolizing his youth. In addition to that suggestion, Prospero can also symbolize the superiority that man sometimes thinks he/she has

and the distinguishment between social classes. Prince Prospero thought that by separating himself and his guests from the rest of the kingdom, that he could somehow cheat death. Only people of the higher social class were thought worthy enough to escape the pestilence and the ball, which represents how Prospero viewed this class as being more important than any other. Prospero can also symbolize how out of touch the upper class was with the lower classes in society.

The abbey, is another excellent example of enforcing the allegory. According to H. H. Bell Jr. who believes Prospero is insane, " Assuming that death, even the one that Prospero is trying to escape, is the wage of sin, there would be little allegorical objection to having Prospero seek refuge in in an abbey- a monastery." (253) This meaning that having Prospero seek refuge in an abbey, symbolizes he is running from sin. Also, the detail that the abbey is secluded with only a way in and no way out suggests it's a place of confinement and gives it a more threatening atmosphere which is a crucial piece of gothic literature. Within the abbey, each room is a different color and that symbolizes a different stage of life and way of living. The room they start off in, and in which they recognize Death is the blue room. Blue being a symbol for the youth of your life and suggesting that we recognize death at a young age. The second room is purple which is used to symbolize the higher society and class which it is distinguished that Prospero cares deeply for. The third room is green and it suggests prosperity and growth, which is ironic since he chases death throughout it. The fourth room is orange which symbolizes the prime of someone's life, the autumn, where someone can be

considered past his prime but not entirely old. The fifth room is white which symbolizes the past prime or elderly age of life. The sixth room is violet, a color that throughout most of literature symbolizes gravity and chastity and the soberness of extreme old age. It is said that the final room is black which symbolizes death." (Bell 254) All of this symbolism poured into these rooms suggests that Prospero is chasing death throughout his life and yet is still bested by him.

The clock, within the story for some symbolizes the passing of time and how aware each person is of their own time continuously moving. When the clock chimes in the story, all of the guests fall silent as if startled or frightened that another hour has come to a close, but only within that chiming are they aware of the time that has passed. the clock is also used to symbolize the inevitability of death. Wheat talks about how death can not be contained or avoided, " as transitory as parts of a play", so it is useless to try to hide from it or contain it. (252) In the story, the guest could not stop the clock from running or the pendulum from continuing its swinging back and forth with the chimes that continued to disrupt their party. As the chimes disrupt the party, it is as though every person is brought from a fairytale to face the reality of death looming about, just for a moment before being thrown back into the joyous thralls of the party once more.

Finally, the masked figure that abruptly interrupts the ball. The stranger behind the mask is Death itself. The entire muse of a masked figure is allegorically symbolizing the disease infiltrating the solidarity of the abbey and the ball. Poe describes the figure as " tall, and gaunt" which suggests

the stranger is in fact an actual physical representation of a person affected by the disease. The stranger symbolizes death embodied and yet when they remove his mask there is a great nothingness. Its as if to say, death has no defined form or shape to himself. The stranger also seems to be the common interpretation that it frightens the guests so much to be around him because they fear him and he reminds them of what and who they have forsaken just to preserve themselves for the sake of their class.

The masque of the red death contains imagery that upholds the story's intended allegorical meaning, as well as imagery that is open to other personal interpretations. The allegory in Edgar Allen Poe's ' Masque of the Red Death' is that no matter how lavish and thought out the attempts to escape Death are, once you recognize death at such that young age, it will be inevitable to do anything but chase him throughout the rest of your life. This allegory is proven throughout the vital ideas and characters in the story. Prince prospero, the abbey including all seven rooms, the chiming clock, and the masked figure each support the allegory present in the story through symbolism which is one of the most easily identifiable pieces of figurative language when creating an allegory within a story.