

Masque of the red death

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Edgar Allen Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* you are engaged into a story of intrigue and metaphorical suspense. From the beginning of the parable Poe engages the reader to the confusing array of details. The series of rooms, which may at first, seem to be meaningless have an intrigue place within the story. As a matter of fact, Poe never includes any detail without thought. From the color scheme to the guests of the ball, all of which compiled together gather the evidence as to relevance of life and sickness within the tale.

The strategic placement of the rooms from east to west are one of the initial clues as to Poe's moral lesson to the story. As the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, each new beginning and new day is began in the east and ended in the west. In Poe's mentioning of the strategic placement of the rooms automatically brings the reader's attention to that precise thought out detail. The placement and color Poe gave to each room symbolizes the stages of life.

As Poe elaborates in saying, " The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. " (208) Each room with its own color, its own stage must be entered and observed individually, one at a time. As life as taught us and although we may attempt to rush it, our life is a gradual process, one of which must be lived as the stages we progress. The colors used in each individual room also represent the gradual stages of life, ultimately resulting in the color of black which can be easily related to death.

These gradual stages can also be interpreted as the gradual and painful stages of sickness. Each stage of an illness must be painfully endured until the sometimes viewed pleasant release of death. It is in the black room, the last room that a “gigantic clock of ebony” was placed. As if the clock symbolized the common illustration of the “elephant in the room.” It was the object that nobody wished to acknowledge but could not overlook.

Even if the guests wished to ignore it, Poe describes the clock’s “brazen lungs... [came a] sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to the hearken to the sound; and a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation.” (209) The even simple mention of the “more aged and sedate” gives an additional clue as to Poe’s idea and reference towards age. This clock signified and made a clear point every hour of the time passing by. Time which ultimately signifies youth and health, as individuals begin to age and lose their youth their health soon follows.

The ending to one’s life is always the unavoidable toll of which the price is death; a heavy price which we all must pay at one point in time. In Poe’s parable he insightfully chooses the cause of death for all of those in the abbey to be one of a plague, of a sickness. The man disguised as the “Red Death” gradually entered the ball and passed through the rooms from east

to west, as they were intended to be passed, as any human would pass through the stages of life from beginning to end.

This theory can be also viewed as the gradual stages of an illness. A person may begin their journey through an illness with great hopefulness and denial with death being their gradual but, ultimate destination. This was the same sense of denial that adorned the guests of the abbey which was the location for the joyful masquerade ball. The guests wearing the masks were not only disguising their appearance but their emotions and fears as well, their true fears of death.