

Representation of evil in poe and hawthorne's stories essay



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Since the discovery of philosophy by the Greek civilizations man has always tried to find the cause of many fundamental problems that are connected to the reality and existence of factors that contribute to these dilemmas but still remain unknown to humanity. One of the most controversial questions philosophy tries to answer is the origin of what we consider evil, who or what is connected to the main cause of the pain and suffering that goes on throughout the world.

“ Evil is when one purposefully causes pain, not pain caused by fault, knowing something is morally wrong, but still proceeds in doing so. Simply by the definition of evil, one can only have a grasp of what evil is, but only through experience one can understand evil fully since it is readily perceived differently among people of certain religions, races, ages, sexes, and mental prowess” (Origin of Evil 2, 1).

In “ The Tell Tale Heart”, Edgar Allan Poe expresses his perspective of evil through the planning of a murder while Nathaniel Hawthorne demonstrates his knowledge of the representation of an evil force just by using a piece of black cloth to cover the main character’s face in the story “ Minister’s Black Veil”. Although the presence of evil changes the atmosphere in both stories, there are several differences that modify the development of the plot. Firstly, the setting provided in each story helps the readers get a clearer view of how the surrounding atmosphere can affect the decisions taken by the characters.

On one hand, “ His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, “ for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers, and so I knew that

he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily" (Poe, 4), demonstrates that "The Tell-Tale Heart" is taking place in the bedroom of an old man in an unknown house during the night. Aside from the lack of details it can also be inferred that the story takes place in a high-crime urban zone.

On the other hand, Hawthorne's writing "The old people of the village came stooping along the street. Children, with bright faces, tripped merrily beside their parents, or mimicked a graver gait, in the conscious dignity of their Sunday clothes" (Hawthorne, 1) places the readers in a small village in the United States in the middle of the 1800's with an action that lasts for several days. Secondly, both Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne share a very similar tone through their writings that affects the perception of evil in their stories.

For example, "And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror"(Poe, 11) represents a nervous, yet saddening tone presented by Allan Poe taking in consideration the repetition of a statement made by the main character in "The Tell-Tale Heart". As well as Allan Poe, Hawthorne presents a mysterious gloomy tone where the minister's veil makes the readers question themselves about the main purpose for using the piece of crape.

An example of this gloomy and overwhelming mystery tone would be, "When Mr. Hooper came, the first thing that their eyes rested on was the same horrible black veil, which had added deeper gloom to the funeral, and

could portend nothing but evil to the wedding” (Hawthorne, 11) letting the readers know that all of the villagers gathered at the funeral disliked the veil, for it only brought more mystery and sadness. Thirdly, the behavior and decisions taken by the main characters also affect the representation of an evil force presented in both stories.

On The main character in “ The Tell-Tale Heart”, or the “ narrator”, is considered a wreck due to his paranoia along with his mental and physical illness. Thoroughly reading the story the narrator claims that he is able to hear the beating of the old man’s heart even when he’s already dead which leads the readers to assume that the narrator may suffers from Tinnitus, a medical condition that causes auditory hallucinations, major sensitiveness to sound and can sometimes cause amplified hearing.

Similarly, in the “ Minister’s Black Veil” Hawthorne introduces a lively clergyman, a man that is loved by everyone in the village where he preaches, but as the story progresses wears a black piece of cloth to give the character a gloomy aspect and pushes the readers to question if the minister is actually hiding something from everybody. With the use of a nervous tone, a psychopath character with mental and physical problems and a house during the night as a setting, Edgar Allan Poe represented evil as a negative impulse, something that cannot simply be controlled.

However, with the use of a small American village, a young clergyman and a black veil which is the key to the gloomy atmosphere in the “ Minister’s Black Veil”, Nathaniel Hawthorne represents evil as a secret sin that shall remain unrevealed for the rest of one’s life, thus concluding that the

differences between characters, settings and tone presented in their writings contributes to change the reader's idea of what evil really is.