

Mood of obsession in
berenice by edgar
allan poe



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Use of literary devices to enhance the mood of “Berenice” Famous author and poet Edgar Allan Poe is well known for his writing of ill-minded scenarios and grotesque circumstances. Poe, one of America’s most ailing writers, made use of many different literary devices to develop his popular, eerie, and suspenseful mood. In “Berenice” (1835), Edgar Allan Poe creates a perturbed mood to uniquely describe love, life, and death through his use of terror inflicting diction, gloomy description, and obtuse syntax.

“Berenice” is a short horror story about a man who is going to marry his cousin, Berenice, and when she contracts a disease, she begins to deteriorate. As she slowly falls apart, the only things that remain healthy looking are her teeth which Egaeus, the main character, begins to obsess over. Later, Egaeus is falsely notified that Berenice has died and her grave has been disturbed. Next to him lays a box of all thirty-two white teeth and the reader is left to assume the rest. Poe utilizes irregular diction in his story to illustrate a mood of pure delirium.

Poe ends the first paragraph of the story by saying, “How is it that from beauty I have derived a type of unloveliness? —from the covenant of peace a simile of sorrow? But as, in ethics, evil is a consequence of good, so, in fact, out of joy is sorrow born” (1). The use of terms such as “unloveliness,” “sorrow,” and “evil” provokes feelings of sadness and depression, which aids the reader in understanding the story’s plot. Poe presents the words “ardent,” “startled,” and “wild” to accentuate the mood of nervousness that the narrator explains and feels.

These words all help stress the narrator's feelings of anxiety and confusion. Toward the end of the story, Poe uses the words "hideous" and "vain" which also adds to the mood of doom. Generally, the diction Poe utilizes helps to assort the story's mood of hopelessness. Description is another literary device that Poe takes advantage of, but especially in "Berenice." The mood of the story is dismal and gets more and more nerve-racking as the story goes on. The gloomy way he describes himself and the beautiful way he describes Berenice adds to the mood of perplexity.

For example, Poe writes of Egaeus and Berenice: "I ill of health and buried in gloom-She, agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy" (1). This description makes the reader believe that Egaeus may not be attracted to Berenice, adding to the mood of confusion and opposition. Poe later describes his disease, saying "This Monomania, if I must so term it, consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the attentive" (2).

This very specific and worrisome description tells the reader that not only is our main character intelligent and witty, but he is also reaching the brink of insanity which creates a very frightening mood. The teeth, which have been slowly driving Egaeus mad and making him continuously attentive, are described as "Not a speck on their surface-not a shade on their enamel-not an indenture in their edges-but what that period of her smile had sufficed to brand in upon my memory" (2).

Poe's well-known use of specific and bleak description is used greatly in "Berenice," working in combination with other literary devices to create a

mood of panic and despair. Apart from diction and description, Poe also creatively uses syntax as one of his main literary devices. The mood of “Berenice” is dark and eerie, and the syntax proves this as the story progresses. Throughout the entire story, Poe uses em-dashes to intensify the detail of each sentence and to help the reader comprehend the repetitiveness and irregularity of his thoughts.

For example, in paragraph four, Poe says, “Berenice and I were cousins, and we grew up together in my paternal halls— Yet differently we grew” (1-2). The fact that Poe points out that Berenice and Egaeus grew up differently despite their shared home shows that the differences between the two characters are not only important but necessary in the understanding of the mood. This sentence structure continues to make appearances through the entire story. Poe later says, “In the meantime my own disease—for I have been told that I should call it by no other appellation—my own disease...” (2).

The emphasis on “for I have been told that I should call it by no other appellation” through the use of em-dashes, demonstrates the mood of loneliness and hopelessness that not only Egaeus feels but the reader as well. Towards the end of the story, Poe writes, “Through the gray of the early morning - among the trellised shadows of the forest at noon-day - and in the silence of my library at night, she had flitted by my eyes...” (3). Again, Poe is specifically calling out the feeling all around the home as Berenice makes an appearance which creates a mood of vividness and anxiety.

Poe's odd syntax in the short story gives succor in building the mood of fear, bewilderment, and panic. Edgar Allan Poe's compilations almost always exhibit moods of despair or sadness, but "Berenice" is one of his works that totally embodies this type of mood. Poe's story of a delirious, unhealthy, and depressed man has remained a masterpiece over the years and his terror-inflicting diction, gloomy description, and obtuse syntax could easily be the reasons why. "Berenice" will always be one of Poe's greatest short stories and will forever be praised in American literature due to its memorable mood of hopelessness and insanity.