

An analysis of the masque of the red death



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But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. (2) And so begins Edgar Allan Poe's story The Masque of the Red Death, an eerie story that details a prince and his people who happily ignore a occurrence (plague) that will be upon them and relentlessly kill the prince.

He uses symbolism, imagery, and allegory to fabricate a narrative which depicts themes of foolishness and folly. Symbols are the foundation of this story. The most influencing and important symbol is the clock. The clock boldly symbolizes how obnoxious time is to us, as said in the story "the time that flies" (5). Its eerie and depressing chiming on the hour is a reminder to the party-goers that their lives are drifting away with the time, and that death is approaching them far more quickly than they please. The effect the clock has on them is even more enhanced by the way the clock stops the dancing and music in short, all the life- of the party and makes everyone extremely frightful, as described in the story it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused revelry or meditation (3).(shmoop)

Another symbol is the seven colored rooms. Each room has a different color which corresponds to a different stage' of human life. Every room is arranged from east to west, east is usually the direction associated with beginning', and birth because the sun rises in the east, west (the direction the sun sets) is associated with endings, and death. From this knowledge the blue room is the furthest from the east and represent birth and suggest the unknown

from which a human being comes into the world. The next room is purple, a combination of both blue (birth) and red (life and intensity). Green, the next color of the room, suggest the spring of life or youth, orange the summer/fall of life, both of these rooms can be associated with people that are 20's-40's. Then the white room, signifies age (60's and up), then violet (a combination of purple and blue) a very shadowy color that represents death or illness. Black, the very last room, is obviously death. Yet there is no red room, which could be replaced with orange (summer/fall) room. Poe saved this color for the symbolization of blood, fear, and death. Both red and the black room go together just as the Red Death and the darkness go together at the end of the story.

Imagery is also a prominent feature in this story. The masquerade is a very big part of the imagery in the story, which could be compared to a dream or dream like. Everything is very wild, very intense and too grotesque to be true. From the blaring, over-the-top colors of the suite and the alignment of the rooms. Also the masqueraders themselves, dressed up in all kind of odd costumes, creating a bizarre collage of images. Poe uses dream language when he describes them: There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these -the dreams -writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. (7)

The last literary device used in this story is allegory. The castellated abbey is a place of confinement. It's hidden away where no one can find it. Beyond that, its doors are welded shut from the inside, which can conclude that everyone is trapped & no one can get in or out. The sense of confinement is crucial to giving the story its threatening atmosphere. The abbey is also a symbol of worldly power, stantly above the peasants who are being ravaged by the Red Death. As a castle and an abbey, it could present both state and church, who are trying to hide from this apocalypse called the red death. (shmoop)

All these literacy devices make up the theme of foolishness and folly. Prince Prospero, lives mainly for pleasures and so do his friends. Instead of them grieving they just enjoy life and keep on laughing. They refuse to even give death the time of day, so when a merciless plague strikes the kingdom all of them retreat to a palace. In the palace they partied with buffoons and alcohol galore. Poe structures his freighting tale around a contrast between the wading presence of death and the happy-go-luck folly of Prospero's court, who foolishly believe they can ignore it. (shmoop)