

Review of the masque of the red death, by edgar allan poe



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The world is wrapped in a thick, black veil that hangs anonymously above, coating the world in darkness. In Edgar Allan Poe's short story, *The Masque of the Red Death*, published in 1842, Poe writes another gripping Gothic horror story describing this ever looming darkness. In this short story, Prince Prospero and thousands of his friends, lock themselves away in Prospero's castle to escape a deadly pestilence. There is an extravagant party to forget the disease, and while the guests swirl about the ballroom, an unexpected visitor appears. This visitor embodies the sickness that Prospero tries to escape. Through symbolism, Poe contributes to a macabre mood filled with darkness and the stench of the ever approaching death. The symbols include; the rooms, the clock, and the uninvited guest.

The world in the *Masque of the Red Death* is infested with a sickness that threatens those who encounters it and Poe's metaphors reflect this mood. Prince Prospero locks himself away to avoid such a tragic death. He puts on grand show in and even grander castle. Inside, it is a winding labyrinth with seven rooms of seven different colors. The first room is decorated entirely in blue. As partygoers wander room from room, the colors and decorations of each room also change. In the final room, an exception to all the rest is a black room where no light enters. In "this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet—a deep blood color" (2). The rooms begin with blue decorations, the color of birth, and end in black and blood red, the universal symbol for death. The rooms represent the path from birth to death. No light comes through any of the windows, because you cannot see what will happen in life. You travel along life in darkness until you reach the end. On the wing opposite of

the winding halls from life to death, there lies a pendulum; a swinging clock counting down the days of life.

The very symbol of death can be found in a clock that is ticking, counting the days, the minutes, the seconds until lives are taken. In Prospero's castle there is a massive clock swinging a huge pendulum. Every hour the guests pause their celebration to listen to the chiming of this clock. When the sounds become silent, the people continue their foolish escapade. As the sound of the midnight hour becomes silent, "individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before" (3). The midnight hour marks the end of a day. It is the symbolic witching hour where ghastly creatures crawl from their hidden crevices. At the end, people see the mysterious man standing uninvited in their festivities. The time stops and the cloth over their eyes reveals the death that sits patiently by, waiting until there is no more time left and it can drag you down to its domain.

Death is an unavoidable force that looms over all in many different forms and throughout all the years in existence. Prospero attempts to shield himself from the death and horror that dwells outside his pristine castle. Death cracks his bony fingers and climbs into the world of the living to take the lives of Prospero and his friends. For these people, death took on a form of person infected with the disease they feared the most; the Red Death. When he makes his appearance in the ballroom, "his vesture was dabbled in blood—and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror" (3). The figure first appears in the blue room, the room of birth. Even at the beginning of a life, death is present. Prospero
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follows death through each room, going through all the many stages of life. The figure stops at the black room, and Prospero falls dead. There is no escape to death. It is a constant presence that joins your life at birth and only makes a star appearance when it's time to steal that life away.

Edgar Allan Poe uses items and people as a metaphor to contribute to horrifying and gruesome atmosphere. The corridors of Prospero's mansion weave a complex maze that leads to darkness at the end. As time ticks away, the clock chimes until the very last hour when death will arrive to take its prize. Death is an intangible thing that is always present until it takes on a moral form and creeps up from the shadows to steals the very thing that kept death away. As the dark veil thickens with the inevitable truth of death, a light shines, but all lights are put out by the darkness that death carries on a black steed.