

How colour conveys mortality in the literature

Literature



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Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and Poe's "Masque of the Red Death" have similar focus upon the imperfections of human nature and the effect of mortality upon it. This is observed through a shared focus on art and colour to explore these ideas. However, it is the use of colour imagery to convey the definite nature of mortality which delineates the two. Wilde directly links colour to character, first with the dichotomy of the painting and Dorian, and secondly, with the metaphorical symbolism of colour to represent the "inner" conscience of other characters. Poe's use of colour on the other hand is static with colour being an intrinsic part of the setting rather than changing with characters (like Dorian's Painting).

Poe divides colour amongst each room of Prospero's castle and various objects in the background and by focusing on single colours, Poe connects colour to the emotions of Prospero and his court whilst making colour representative of various aspects of mortality. Ultimately both the grand ball rooms of Prospero as well as Dorian's "inner" and painting deteriorate as both protagonists progress through the story, showing a use of colour to represent the characters inescapable, imminent mortality despite their countless and aggressive attempts to prolong their lives.

The function of mortality within the novels is also portrayed differently. In Poe's it is a barrier against the natural order until Prospero's death. Wilde's on the other hand illustrates an apathetic tone towards life due to Dorian's redemption in death.

Poe was a romantic writer whilst Wilde was an aesthetist. However, Poe's fatherhood of 'gothic' literature provided an inspiration upon which Wilde

would base his only novel. The ideas which both authors convey, serve as cautionary tales to the reader on limited vitality and the consequences of attempting to escape death.

The purpose of this essay is to examine and analyse how colour is used in literature to convey ideas, particularly on the nature of mortality. As such this essay will first examine, Wilde's use of colour to represent and explore the effects of immortality on Dorian and how he is unable to cope with it which causes him to 'detach' from his soul and abandon his morals. Then the essay will discuss how Poe's use of colour is more representative of human nature's fallibilities by showing the changing emotions of people through different colour 'lenses'. This will involve a detailed focus upon Wilde's use of immortality and the consequences of prolonged life and egotistic, totalitarian thinking within Dorian in conjunction with Poe's emotive and cyclical dissection of Prospero's character and how his greed for life penultimately causes him to lose it.