

Symbolism in the Masque of the Red Death: A Study of Edgar Allen Poe's Work

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Abstract

The Masque of Red Death short story written by Edger Allen Poe. It is a story of king Prospero and his efforts to save himself from a disease known as Red Death can be called another type of plague. King Prospero locks himself and his courtiers in his abbey in order to cheat death. He held a masquerade ball party in his abbey with almost all worldly pleasure and all equipment of safety were in it. Nobody can enter in that abbey without king's permission. King was so proud on his power ,he thinks that death can do no harm to him. But nobody can defeat death it is universal truth, and finally In the end of story death makes his own way to kill king and his courtiers nobody was left in the abbey.

Keywords: symbolism, Ebony clock, Prospero, masquerade ball.

Introduction

symbolism when we use one word, object, color to represent something different from its actual sense. Concept of different- different colors have been used in literary books, as Symbols for making a better understanding to readers about the situations, events, ideas, characters and places. Symbols have the power to convey an idea without saying it directly to the readers or audience. Effect of colors on human psychology is based on situation which they have been experiencing over time in their lives. Symbols have their specific roll in literary writings. Here are some colors with their symbolic representation used in literature specially:

Colors	common symbols
Red	anger, evil, desire.
Green	peace, envious, comfort, prosperity
Yellow	hope, energy, happiness
Blue	calmness, relaxation, depression, grief
Pink	love, romance, femininity
White	innocence, purity, youth
Purple	royalty, wisdom
Black	despair, mourning, death

These color symbols almost have covered the entire aspect/ field related to human life.

In *The Masque of The Red Death*, a short story written by Edgar Allen Poe, different - different colors have been used not merely to give an aesthetic look to the short story but also to present lively situations caused by plague in front of the audience and readers. This story gives a beautiful description of events due to the red death that occurred in King Prospero's Kingdom with the help of lively symbols. In the beginning of the story seven rooms in the fort of Prospero have been presented, beautifully decorated in different colors. King Prospero himself created seven chambers from East to West, from blue to black color. Which represents seven stages of life. All these seven rooms were situated in a specific order starting with the blue color as the day starts with the rising of sun in the East. And ending with the black color as ending of the day in the west with sunset.

Actually king Prospero tries to defeat or cheat death with the help of all these arrangements in his fort. Plot setting of this story also tries to describe that death follows everybody from the time of his/her birth and also that death is inevitable. Symbolism in masque of read death is as: Seven colors, Ebony clock, tripod and flames, music, the masked visitor, king Prospero himself.

Seven colors signifies:

color	symbols
Blue	rising of the day, birth,
Purple	childhood, energy
Green	adulthood/spring and development
Orange	power, summer and day tim
Violet	dusk, evening of life
Red	blood, danger
Black	death.

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Objectives

1. To see the importance and effects of symbols on human minds.
2. To find out how symbols have the power to create imagine
3. To find out how symbols represent ordinary objects of life in an extraordinary way.

Symbolism**Seven colors with seven rooms**

seven rooms were established in the fort of king Prospero with seven colors. Rooms were directed from East to West symbolizing the rise of sun in the east and setting down in the West. These rooms also represent seven stages of life. We can compare these stages with the seven stages of life represented by Shakespeare in his play *As You Like It*, and these stages are: infancy, schoolboy, teenager, young man, middle age, old age, death. These seven ages have been described by Shakespeare to show the circle of life. This circle of life has also been introduced by Edgar Allan Poe in *Masque of The Red Death*. Seven room cycle also shows the cycle of life from morning /birth to evening / death. Each room with a specific color had a specific meaning related to the life cycle.

Setting of room number seven was in the West which symbolized the setting down of sun which also shows the end of one's life in the dark. Room number first to six were in single colors but room number seven was colored in two colors red/ black which give it a very horrifying look. Everybody was terrified with its reflections; nobody, even the king himself, wanted to visit that room because of the "effects of the firelight... But ghostly in the extremes". The shadow and color that it casts upon the faces of those who might go there presents such a fearful and wild appearance that people are reluctant to enter because of fear of death. Red windows were shown happy about their flawless escape of death because they were alone and nobody visits that room, that's why they do not have the fear of any disease infection. It also symbolizes those people who have isolated themselves from others just because of the fear of death and happy to think that because they were alone and death will not harm them. Having all those precautions they also have fear of death inwardly which symbolizes all masquerades who were pretending that they have no Fear about death and enjoying their life in the castle. In fact they have a terror of death in their mind and heart.

Red color

If we compare red clear presented in poem "A Red Red Rose" by Robert Burns with the red clear presented by Edgar Allan Poe in *Masque of Red Death*, we will be able to understand the symbolic importance of color red which shows love, youth, romance at one side and on the other side it shows blood, red plague or danger also. It also symbolizes terror horror and an ending of life.

Black color

Black color shows destruction and death itself. It symbolizes the dark night which covers all the charm of the beautiful day and signifies the end of the day. This color combination also shows that special powers have been given to the seventh room though all the other rooms have only one color. It is only the seventh room that was colored or decorated with red or black color. This room ironically symbolizes those people of society who have been privileged with special powers mainly bourgeoisie of Country. As Prospero offered only upper class people to join his masquerade party. He even forgot about common people of his country who were dying with plague. As they were of the opinion that death cannot affect them just because they are much more powerful than others.

Another representation of colors can be considered as a symbol of king's indulgence in seven deadly sin**Envy**

It is not clearly depicted in the short story to whom the king wants to inspire but with the decoration and description of rooms, management of materialistic aspects in the fort, it can be clearly noticed that he is trying to impress someone who can save him from plague.

Pride

The king has excessive belief in his own abilities. A beautiful description of pride and vivacity can be seen in Prospero's words:
 "Who dares- he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near to him- Who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery size him and

unmask him that we may know whom we have to hang, at sunrise, from the betterments.”

It shows the king's pride for his power and wealth and his belief that nobody can harm him because he is a king and has enough strength to defeat even death.

Gluttony

It means having more material than one is needed for survival, instead of protecting his common people, with all the facilities which he has in his fort tries to lavishes his visitors with the appliances of pleasure.

Lust

Lust is associated with sex demanding for extreme pleasure of the body.

Anger

The king lost his temper when he noticed that there is an uninvited guest at the party.

Greed

He distributed his wealth only with upper class people and huge relatives, he does not even think about the common people's miseries who were dying with plague.

Sloth

It means absence of work the king worked only for the physical realm not for the spiritual.

Music

Music symbolized vivacity of life in *The Masque of the Red Death* through music and party Prospero and his courtiers try to show that they do not have any fear of death; they have locked themselves in Fort and nobody can enter there not even death. music also symbolizes beauty of life which is not permanently ticking off clock during music when musicians have to pause shows that all these worldly pleasures are for a short time they will be vanished by death at the end of the day. All materialistic pleasures are in vain because they cannot stop the time with it passing on with every second and indicating that death is following us even with all those pleasures fear of death remains in our mind.

Ebony clock

at every hour, for the purpose to remind us that death is coming. Each stroke of pendulum is countdown of death. It also aware us of the fact that we cannot control time and death both it represents time which is passing away with every second and inevitability of death. it shows that from our birth, death is continuously following us. Death is the ultimate truth. in this short story clock strikes are out of men's control. It stops ticking whenever somebody dies. it is situated in the center of fortress only to represent that everything revolves around death and the ultimate goal of life is to mingle up with the central point which is death itself. It stops at midnight which represents that time is over and now everybody is going to be killed by red death. Clock symbolizes life and also tries to show that life is temporary only death is permanent and inevitable. Clock is covered with velvet fabric of black color which shows a dead body in a coffin or also symbolizes funeral.

King Prospero

Prospero's name itself is ironic. In this story we can compare king Prospero with the magician Prospero in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. They both are equally powerful and strong enough to defeat everybody. Magician Prospero even have the power to call spirits from everywhere in the world he also can control oceans. On the other side king Prospero also represented with power and strength when plague separates in the city he locks himself in his abbey with his nearby and courtiers but he leaves common people without any care. He is aware of the fact that the disease is spreading quickly in the country, but he does not care about them. Instead of helping them he hides himself in his Fort to make himself safe.

Prospero symbolizes those people specially upper class people who pretend to show that they have no fear of death and disease outwardly but inwardly in their heart and mind they are terrified with the death. They tried to stop death through their materialistic things but in vain. He also represents humankind and its useless efforts to defeat the realities of death. Death is inevitable. instead of all these arrangements red death make his own way to kill the king Prospero.

Conclusion

Masque of the Red Death is a beautiful short story which shows with the help of different symbols the reality of life and death. Seven phases of life through the zigzag pattern of seven colors rooms give it aesthetic beauty set remove king Prospero also represented feudalistic Society of country in a fabulous way. but instead of all these things death red death plays an important role in this short story. King Prospero makes his all efforts to cheat the death through special artist qualities of its abbey. So that death could not come/ enter into his abbey. But perhaps he forgot that death has her own way to defeat life and finally, the death enters into the abbey and kills everybody. Even king Prospero was also killed by red death. This story shows inability of men to defeat death no matter how prosperous he is but when death calls someone he have to go. All these events have been presented in a very beautiful symbolic manner.

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