

The Image of Disease in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death”

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Abstract: This article describes the image of imaginary diseases in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and the reasons for writing about diseases. The allegory and symbolism by depicting the Red Death.

Keywords: mystery, fictional disease, Red Death, imaginary death, blood-bedewed, illness

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809 who was an American writer, poet, editor and literary critic. Poe is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre. Poe was one of the country’s earliest practitioners of the short story, and considered to be the detective fiction genre, as well as a significant contributor to the emerging genre of science fiction. Poe was the first well-known American writer to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career.

“The Masque of the Red Death” was written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1842. This story is Gothic novel. All the details in “The Masque of the Red Death “are written in an imaginary way. Poe writes about imaginary death in many of his works, because his life was full of hardships. He also died of an illness at the age of 40. The American writer Edgar Allan Poe is a genius in world literature. His works are one of the most brilliant examples of 20th century literature. Poe lived in the golden age of America, but he was not inspired by the beauty of life, he had a pessimistic outlook on life. That is why death and illness play an important role in his works. He used a more terrifying Gothic style.

Poe’s most famous works are macabre tales of terror, madness, decay, and death. The author’s life has been the subject of numerous medical and psychiatric analyses, and the effects of alcoholism and seizure disorder on his creativity have been studied. Review of The Fall of the House of Usher has implicated porphyries for the psychopathology of Roderick Usher and his sister Madeline.

The tone of "The Masquerade of the Red Death" is solemn, dark, and foreboding. The tone even becomes crazy at times. The brief narrative begins on a horribly serious note. The story is ominous because there is no way to escape the oncoming threat. In addition, the somber tone of the dark setting is present. The story's first lines, for example, are as follows:

The “Red Death” had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal –the redness and the horror of blood.

Prince Prospero, the story's central character, and his friends also live mostly for pleasure. They just believe in living in the moment and do not consider or lament the plight of those who are dying from the disease. They don't give you time to think about dying. When the epidemic strikes, they shut themselves in their palaces and begin drinking and partying with buffoons. Poe crafts his terrifying story by juxtaposing the Prospero's happy-go-lucky court, which believes they can easily evade death, with death's lurking presence. He hosts a masquerade ball in seven different rooms,

along with many other aristocrats. A strange figure disguised as a Red Death victim enters the party in the middle of the festivities and visits each of the rooms. Prosper and the visitors both perish after confronting the stranger. These tales are frequently interpreted as an allegory depicting death's inevitability. Critics and readers have offered a variety of interpretations on the story. The readers try to figure out what the disease's true nature is.

Poe also depicts the peasantry's hierarchical connection with Prospero. He demonstrates how inequitable the feudal system is. He also draws attention to the aristocracy's opulent lifestyle and the poor's plight. The usage of feudal images by Poe in the story is historically correct. The feudal society was at its pinnacle when the genuine Bubonic plague swept Europe in the 14 century. The sickness known as the Red Death exemplifies radical egalitarianism by attacking equally the rich and the poor. Blood, like the color red, has a dual symbolic meaning. It is a symbol of both life and death. The veiled figure emphasizes this symbol. Although the masked man does not expressly proclaim that he is the Red Death, he is the only partygoer dressed in the Red Death's attire. The Mask figure first appears in the easternmost room, which is then painted in a blue color, which is frequently connected with birth.

The Red Death is a fictitious disease. The disease has been described as “sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores” that leads to death within half an hour.

At the time the story “The Masquerade of the Death Red” was written, Poe’s wife Virginia was suffering from the disease of tuberculosis. This disease could have been a source for the Red Death in the story. Just like Prince Prosper, Poe ignored the true nature of the disease. Poe’s brother William, his mother Eliza, and his foster mother Frances, died because of tuberculosis.

Furthermore, the red Death could be a symbol for Cholera. In 1831, a cholera pandemic breaks out in Baltimore, Maryland. Poe was present during the outbreak. Some readers and critics, however, believe the disease is a reference to the bubonic plague that swept Europe in the fourteenth century. The idea of bubonic plague is accentuated when Red Death appears in the black room at the end of the story.

A scholar also provides an explanation by portraying the Red Death as a weak man that is shared by all of humanity, rather than a disease.

Thus concluding the end of the story:

„ And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night and one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all”. The author was implying that no one could avoid death and that diseases emerged out of nowhere in the human body. As a result, everyone should strive for beauty in every moment of life, obtain happiness, and enjoy it.

The disease represents the common features of human existence and death, making the story a metaphor of man's futile quest to avoid death. There are numerous disagreements over how the short story should be interpreted. Some believe that interpreting the story as an allegory would make it didactic. Poe despises morals, and if the narrative contains any moral lessons, they are not conveyed overtly. Furthermore, the Red Death may not be a disease or illness at all, but rather a human frailty. Edgar Allan Poe was a master at obfuscation in his writing. The seven chambers represented in the play have various connotations as well. The “Masque of Red Death” was full of symbolism.

The poet depicts seven rooms with his own skill so that the reader who reads this work imagines each room in his mind.

“There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor, which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. The first chamber was blue, the second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries were purple. The third was green throughout and so were the casement. The fourth was furnished and Latten with orange – the fifth with whites – the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries. The panes here were scarlet a deep blood color. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers”.

In addition, the poet depicts different periods of life in harmony with the colors of the rooms. They represent are birth(blue), youth(purple), adolescence(green), adulthood(orange), old age (white), imminent death (violet) and death itself(black).In the story, the Red Death passes through the houses one by one and approaches Prince Prospero .He begins to enter from blue room and the last room, black room, Prince Prospero dies. Poe makes it a point to arrange the rooms running from east to west. It symbolizes the human journey from birth to death. Poe crafts the last black room as the ominous endpoint, the room guests fear just as they fear death. Black is a symbol of death. The clock that presides over that room also reminds the guest of death’s final judgment. The hourly ringing of the bells is minder of the passing of time, inexorable and ultimately personal.

CONCLUSION. ”The Masque of the Red Death” is an allegory. It features asset of recognizable symbols whose meanings combine to convey a message. The Red Death thus represent, both literally and allegorically death. No matter how beautiful the castle, how luxuriant the clothing, or how rich the food, no mortal, not even a prince, can escape death. In another sense, though the story also means to punish Prospero’s arrogance combines with a grievous insensitivity to the plight of his less fortunate countrymen. Although he possesses the wealth into a mode of self-defense and decadent self-indulgence. His decadence in throwing the masquerade ball, however, unwittingly positions him as a caged animal, with no possible escape.”

Through the heroes of his dreadful works, Poe attempted to reveal the true reality. He gave them a wide selection of imaginations to choose from. Poe was instrumental in reawakening people's consciousness. He did not depict any religious beliefs in his paintings. He did not employ religion to pacify the human spirit in his works. His tales remain among the most horrific and strange. In his works, he demonstrated that death is unavoidable and that no one can avoid it. Because he wrote many of these incidents from his own life, Poe's works are written in a sorrowful tone. Poe himself was a victim of adversity throughout his life. He was afflicted with illnesses. Many of Poe's relatives died as a result of his illness. His works are the most popular and widely read. Poe tried to enter the human psyche and succeeded. He created his own unusual way. One of the reasons Edgar Allan Poe made him famous was that he listened to his heart.

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