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Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe, a famous poet, was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 19, 1809. Poe was raised by his foster parents, John and Frances Allan. He grew up attending boarding school and then continued his education at the University of Virginia. Due to a lack of funds Poe was forced to leave the university before completing his first year. Soon after leaving college Poe enlisted in the army. Around this time Poe published his first poetry collection, Tamerlane. After returning from the Army, Poe attended the United States Military academy for a short period before having to leave, again because of his lack of financial support. Poe then moved in with his aunt in Baltimore, Maryland; and his writing began to flourish(*Biography.com*). He started selling short stories in Baltimore and then became the editor of the Southern Literacy Messenger when he moved to Richmond with his aunt and cousin. In 1836, Poe married his cousin, Virginia. In 1847 Poe’s wife past away. Due to the tremendous amount of loss and tragedy Poe experienced he dealt with many years of depression and alcoholism. This contributed to Poe’s dark, horror filled, short stories (Poets.org).

Throughout the poems and short stories published by Edgar Allan Poe common themes of darkness, pain, and depression are portrayed (“The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore”). He has changed the world of short stories with his dark details and strong story-telling skills. Throughout the stories The Raven, The Black Cat, and The Tell-Tale Heart Poe exemplifies characteristics of his life by the use of his themes, diction, and literary devices.

In the poem, The Raven; written in 1845 illuminates Poe’s personal feelings of loss, loneliness, and depression. Through Poe’s rhyming, detailed setting, and word choice the audience understands the suspense of the setting, the darkness of the story and the loss and loneliness the character is experiencing (“The Raven”). Poe uses his personal experiences of lose and loneliness to make the fictional story so realistic. As the story begins Poe sets the tone and the setting with lots of details.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I ponder weak and weary, Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore - While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly their came a tapping, As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. ’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door— Only this and nothing more.

Poe expresses the weariness and weakness of the character as he nods off to sleep to only be interrupted by an unexpected knocking (“The Raven”). He continues to grow the darkness and the suspense of the story as the character begins to hear and imagine more noises. “And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain Thrilled me – filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before; So that now, to still the beating of my heart,” In this quote, Poe expands on the creepiness of the room and the setting; the rustling of the curtains, the beating of his heart, and the terrors felt by the speaker are all felt by the reader. The reader learns of the loss of the speakers love, Lenore, and the sadness grows. Poe experienced so much lose and death in his life it became a common theme in his writing. It seems easiest for writers to write of incidents that resemble personal experience, therefore Poe wrote about what he experienced the most; death. Poe lost both of his parents at a young age, and his wife died from Tuberculosis (“The Raven”). As the short story continues Edgar Allan Poe continues to elaborate the themes of the story through the words and literary devices used by the speaker.

In Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Bells” he exemplifies similar literary devices and themes. Poe is commonly seen rhyming throughout his works. In this poem his rhyming allows the poem to be easy to follow and easier to understand. Poe begins this poem with a happy tone; discussing the rhythm and melody of bells.

Hear the sledges with the bells—Silver bells! What a world of merriment their melody foretells! How they twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, in the icy air of night! While the stars that oversprinkle. All the heavens, seem to twinkle with a crystalline delight; Keeping time, time, time, in a sort of Runic rhyme, to the tintinnabulation that so musically wells from the bells, bells, bells, bells, bells, bells, bells- From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

Throughout the first stanza of Poe’s poem “The Bells” there was a theme of happiness and peacefulness; a theme many of Poe’s works lacked. Instead he used his rhyming to annotate the bells in a positive way (Poe, Edgar Allan). But as the poem continues, Poe begins to talk about different bells; wedding bells, fire alarm bells, and iron bells, throughout each stanza there is a different theme and connotation of a bell. In the third stanza Poe describes the fire alarm. He expresses the sense of terror and panic associated with this specific sound of a bell. Poe uses a bell to describe how one version of something can be so beautiful and pure, the wedding bell, but another version can be so horrific and terrifying, the fire alarm. Even something so soothing and happy like a bell has a negative version of itself. The rhyming continues all through the poem to keep the reader engaged in the positive and the negative parts of the story (Poe, Edgar Allan). As well as rhyming, Poe uses repetition to keep the poem engaging and to exaggerate the important words within each stanza that highlight the themes. The first stanza repeats words like “twinkle” and “time”; while the third stanza repeats words like “shriek” and “fire”, these repeated words show the shift in theme in the poem. Words like “twinkle” and “time” portray a more positive tone, while “shriek” and “fire” portray a more negative meaning of the word “bell” (Poe, Edgar Allan). Poe is expressing how every good thing in his life has become bad; his wedding and marriage was so good and full of love but his wife was then diagnosed with Tuberculosis and passed away. Poe believed every good thing in his life had come to an end or turned out negatively and he expresses this through the different connotations behind a bell.

In both “The Raven” and “The Bells” Edgar Allen Poe expresses his themes with a similar uses of literary devices and tones. The most common used device used by Poe is rhyming. In most of Poe’s work he is found rhyming, although sometimes it is expressed through a positive tone and sometimes through a negative tone. The diction used by Poe makes his works so memorable and the themes feel so understood and expressed. Because of all the sadness and hard times Poe experienced he was able to make his work extremely dark and creepy. Each poem or short story that Poe wrote is expressed through a metaphor with the main element of the story. Like the bell represents so much more than just a bell it represents both sides to something, both the good and the bad. It expresses the different meanings behind one thing and how not every version of something is good. Through Poe’s dark diction, use of rhyming, and use of metaphors he is able to express the loss, sadness, and loneliness he experienced throughout his whole life.

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