

Poe As A Romantic

A wise man once said "Artists are never before their time, they are the time and it is just the others who are behind." This defines the career of Edgar Allan Poe, one the greatest and yet one of the least recognized authors in American History. Poe lived and wrote at the beginning of the 19th century. His writing style was innovative, different from the styles of other writer of that time. He dealt with topics that though often written about, had never been incorporated into one story. Poe is seen as a romantic writer, living in a time before the romantic era. Evidence of this style is found throughout many of his stories, ranging from tales of horror to stories of love. Poe incorporated many of the Romantic ideals into his writings, utilizing many qualities that were never seen before. His works focus on four main motifs, Love, Beauty, Death, and Pride. These themes, when incorporated into one entire work, made up Romanticism, the thread Poe wove through every story.

One of the characteristics of romanticism is the admiration of beauty. Beauty was revered by Poe, he worshipped it in all its' manifests. Poe used beauty in almost all of his poems, often to describe a woman. In *Annabelle Lee*, *To Helen*, and *Ligeia*, Poe uses eloquent words to describe the objects of his affection. The beauty of the women in these poems was tremendous, not only physically but spiritually. Poe saw beauty in all things, and strove to incorporate it into all of his stories. Often, though, the object of great beauty dies. Poe does this on purpose, for to him, the death of a beautiful woman was the most romantic subject of all. If a beautiful woman died then that beauty was preserved for ever more. Beauty was very important to the romantic author, and indeed it was to Poe.

Love is another very meaningful element in a romantic story. Poe dealt with love in all of its aspects in many of his stories. Using many of his poems and stories, Poe traces the loss of love in his life. The first time Poe ever experienced love was the love he felt for Jane Stanard, the mother of his friend. The love he felt for Jane was childlike, innocent love. He wrote 'To Helen' for her, as an everlasting tribute to his love for her. In 'To My Mother' Poe writes of the love he felt for Aunt Maria Clem, a love that was familial in nature. Poe's Aunt Maria was his champion and they had a love unique in its kind. *Annabelle Lee* dealt with another type of love, the love Poe felt for his young wife Virginia. Poe and Virginia did not have a sexual love, but they were very attached emotionally. The love between them was more spiritual. Poe examines all types and all stages of love in his stories, from the child like love he felt in "To Helen" to the fragile love he felt for Virginia Clem. As with Beauty, the object of Poe's love seldom lives. This only makes his writings of love more romantic because the love that he feels and breathes into his characters is an everlasting love, one that disregards the boundaries of the material and spiritual world.

Death, and all of its aspects, is also a widely used romantic theme in Poe's works. Poe dealt with death in many different ways, using the fear of it to drive many of its' characters insane. In 'The Premature Burial,' the narrator is so afraid of being buried alive that he almost refuses to sleep. Poe uses the characters fear to build excitement in the story. In 'The Black Cat,' Pluto, the title character, is killed by his insane master. The cat returns from beyond the grave to haunt him, a subject often used by Poe. In 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' the guilt of murder drives the narrator to almost insanity. The death of Poe's love, the death of beauty, and even the death of evil is all found throughout Poe's stories. Death is a universal topic, and it is found in almost every one of Poe's works.

Pride, the last of Poe's themes, is often the flaw in many of his narrators. In 'The Tell-Tale Heart,' the narrator describes, in detail, exactly how he went about planning the murder, how stealthily he watched and waited, until just the right moment. He also describes, in detail, how intelligent he is, how no insane man could possibly be as meticulous as he. Though it is found in many of Poe's

works, perhaps the element of pride is best seen in 'The Cask of Amontillado.' In this story, it is the pride of Montresor, as well as that of Fortunato, that led to Fortunato's murder. Montresor was so resolved to seeking revenge on Fortunato; he could not possibly let Fortunato wrong him and survive. Fortunato, on the other hand, also played a big part in his own downfall. He was so determined to demonstrate his vast knowledge of wine and his superiority over Montresor, that he followed him blindly to his death. Pride often pushed Poe's characters to their death.

Poe's four motifs, his ideals found in every story, exemplify the elements found in a romantic work. Love, Beauty, Death, and Pride weave in and out of each of Poe's stories, subjects not often dealt with together. Poe showed his innovativeness in his writing, abandoning the ideals of former writers to deal with the more romantic aspects. Though the romantic era did not start until after Poe's death, he was truly writing before his time.