

The short story writer which I have chosen to research is Edgar Allen Poe. After reading one of his works in class, I realized that his mysterious style of writing greatly appealed to me. Although many critics have different views on Poe's writing style, I think that Harold Bloom summed it up best when he said, "Poe has an uncanny talent for exposing our common nightmares and hysteria lurking beneath our carefully structured lives." (7) For me, this is done through his use of setting and narrative style.

In many of Poe's works, setting is used to paint a dark and gloomy picture in our minds. I think that this was done deliberately by Poe so that the reader can make a connection between darkness and death. For example, in the "Pit and the Pendulum", the setting is originally pitch black. As the story unfolds, we see how the setting begins to play an important role in how the narrator discovers the many ways he may die. Although he must rely on his senses alone to feel his surroundings, he knows that somewhere in this dark, gloomy room, that death awaits him. Richard Wilbur tells us how fitting the chamber in "The Pit and the Pendulum" actually was. "Though he lives on the brink of the pit, on the very verge of the plunge into unconsciousness, he is still unable to disengage himself from the physical and temporal world. The physical oppresses him in the shape of lurid graveyard visions; the temporal oppresses him in the shape of an enormous and deadly pendulum. It is altogether appropriate, then, that this chamber should be constricting and cruelly angular" (63).

Setting is also an important characteristic is Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher". The images he gives us such as how both the Usher family and the Usher mansion are crumbling from inside waiting to collapse, help us to connect the background with the story. Vincent Buranelli says that "Poe is able to synthesize an atmosphere which is dark and dull. This is one of the tricks which he largely derived from the tradition of the Gothic tale" (79). The whole setting in the story provides us with a feeling of melancholy. The Usher mansion appears vacant and barren. The same is true for the narrator. As we picture in our minds the extreme decay and decomposition, we can feel as though the life around it is also crumbling.

Narration is also an element in Poe's short story style that appears to link all of the stories together. He has a type of creativity which lets the reader see into the mind of the narrator or the main character of the story. Many of the characters in Poe's stories seem to be insane. The narrator often seems to have some type of psychological problems. For example, in Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," the story opens with a first person narrator (Montresor) speaking about the planning of Fortunato's death. By the anger and remorse that Montresor has for Fortunato, one might think that this was a recent incident. It is not until the very end of the story that we realize, that the entire event occurred fifty years ago. David Herbert Lawrence says, "To the characters in Poe's story, hate is as inordinate as love. The lust of hate is the inordinate desire to consume and unspeakably possess the soul of the hated one, just as the lust of love is the desire to possess or be possessed by the beloved, utterly." (33). Poe's stories often have narrators that feel extreme hate or extreme love for another character in the story.

Another example of Poe's narrative style is seen in his story entitled, "The Black Cat", where the narrator seems to have an obsession with pets. He has one "special" pet which is a black cat. Although their original relationship with

each other is one of respect and love, the situation soon changes. The narrator becomes somewhat possessed with the hate for the cat. He turns against his wife and stabs his cat in the eye. By the end of the story, he killed his wife in an attempt to kill the cat. Afterwards, the narrator does not even feel remorse for the wrongful death of his wife. Instead, he is just happy that the cat disappeared. This is just another instance in which the reader wonders what is the driving force begins the narrator's insanity. Buranelli, "In both Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" and his "The Black Cat", the narrators act without conscience. There are no doubts, hesitations or second thought to impede the narrative. Both narrators just sought revenge" (77).

Even though there are many more elements to Edgar Allan Poe's short stories than just his creative use of narration and setting, these are characteristics which has attracted the most attention. Poe has a way of writing in which he does not have to reveal too much, or paint a pretty picture for the reader in order to attract his attention. In D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, the author states, "Poe's narrowness is like that of a sword, not that of a bottleneck: it is effective rather than constricting. Nothing adventitious is in his great stories, only the essentials, the minimum of characterization, plot, and atmosphere. By ridding himself of everything except what is precisely to the point, he achieves unity of effect." (66).

There is also a prominent distinction between right and wrong in Poe's stories. Viscous characters tend to come to a bad end. This lets the reader accept these endings as a triumph of good over evil. As stated by Buranelli: "He has created a universe, given it psychological laws without denying the existence of the moral law, and peopled it with characters appropriate to such a universe. Putting overt mortality out of bounds helps to give him uniqueness" (74).

After researching Edgar Allan Poe more in depth, I now have a much greater respect for him and a slightly different perspective of his stories. While it is still evident to me that narrative style and setting have a great deal to do with the development of Poe's short stories, I also realise now that we can't overlap and intertwine with other aspects of the story, making them equally as important. I will end with a quote found in Vincent Buranelli's *Edgar Allan Poe*: "Even though Poe is often looked upon as a gifted psychopath who is describing with consummate artistry his personal instabilities and abnormalities the fact remains that his superiority is more than a matter of art. There is a violent realism in his macabre writings unequalled by the Americans who worked in the same genre."

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