

PinkMonkey Literature Notes on . . .

Sample MonkeyNotes

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The Man Who Was Poe

by

Avi

1989



MonkeyNotes by Laurie Lahey

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

Providence, RI in 1848.

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Edmund Brimmer - Edmund Brimmer is an eleven-year-old boy who has been living with his aunt and twin sister in Providence, RI. Edmund's mother left their home in England the previous year to divorce her.....

August Dupin/ Edgar Allan Poe - Edgar Allan Poe comes to Providence shortly after Sis goes missing. He is battling an identity crisis and believes he is no longer the famous writer, Edgar Allan Poe. Instead,.....

Minor Characters

Sis - Sis is Edmund's twin sister who is kidnapped in the beginning of the novel. The plot revolves around Edmund's search for Sis, whom he always believes is alive. In the plot's conclusion, Edmund.....

Aunty Pru - Aunty Pru takes care of Edmund and Sis when their mother, Aunty Pru's twin sister, goes to America. When Aunty Pru receives a desperate message from her sister, she takes the

Captain Elias - Captain Elias is a dockworker who is called captain, although he is not really a.....

Mr. Throck - Mr. Throck is a night watchman who was working with Aunty Pru to find her sister. In the.....

Mr. Fortnoy - Mr. Fortnoy finds Aunty Pru's dead body. He is friends with Mr. Throck. For a.....

Mrs. Helen Whitman - Mrs. Helen Whitman is a poet as well as Poe's love interest. Her mother, Mrs. Powers, wants her to marry Mr. Arnold. Mrs. Hunt is concerned about.....

Mr. Rachett/ Mr. Arnold - Mr. Rachett marries Edmund's mother, then steals her money and abandons her. Mr. Rachett comes to America and changes his name to Mr. Arnold because Arnold is a.....

Mrs. Powers - Mrs. Powers is Mrs. Hunt's mother. She wants her to marry Mr. Arnold and conspires.....

Catherine - Catherine is the servant at Mrs. Hunt's house, although her loyalty rests with.....

Mr. Peterson - Mr. Peterson works at the bank, although he also works with Mr. Rachett in.....

Mrs. Rachett - Mrs. Rachett is the mother of Edmund and Sis. She comes to Providence to find her new husband, Mr. Rachett, who has stolen her money and abandoned her. In Providence, she is

CONFLICT

The conflict of a plot is the major problem experienced by the protagonist. In this plot Edmund, the protagonist, must find out what happened to his family. While this is the major conflict, other conflicts can also exist for other characters. For example, Dupin battles the inner-conflict of resolving his identity.

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force. In this novel Edmund fights.....

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the character that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. Plots may have multiple antagonists that work together to oppose the main character. In this novel, Mr. Rachett and Mr. Peterson join forces to steal.....

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. The climax of *The Man Who Was Poe* occurs when Edmund confronts Mr. Peterson at.....

Outcome - The outcome, resolution, or denouement occurs in the final chapter when Edmund reunites.....

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Because this novel is a mystery, much of the plot is revealed in an incoherent fashion and may be confusing. This synopsis will recount the major plot-events chronologically.

Edmund Brimmer's mother marries a man named Mr. Rachett, whom Edmund and his twin sister, Sis, never meet. Soon after the wedding Mr. Rachett steals Mrs. Rachett's money and leaves London for Providence, RI. When Mrs. Rachett learns where Mr. Rachett has gone, she leaves Edmund and Sis with her twin sister, Aunty Pru, and comes to Providence to divorce Mr. Rachett and reclaim her money.

In Providence, Mrs. Rachett is taken captive by Mr. Rachett. Mrs. Rachett is able to get an urgent message to a sailor, who delivers it to Aunty Pru. Aunty Pru, Edmund and Sis come to Providence to find Mrs. Rachett, who has been gone for a year.

Aunty Pru hires Mr. Throck to help her find Mrs. Rachett. When Aunty Pru comes to town, Mr. Rachett places an ad in the paper under his new name, Mr. Arnold, to see if she knows about his alias. While checking the paper to see his ad, he comes across an ad Mr. Peterson has placed. Mr. Peterson, who works at the bank and knows where Aunty Pru lives and about the reward she has there for the safe return of her sister, hatches a scheme with Mr. Rachett to kill Mrs. Rachett and rob the bank.

One day Aunty Pru leaves Edmund and Sis in their small, cold room and says she is meeting a man who will help find their mother. Aunty Pru does find her sister and when they learn that Mr. Peterson intends to murder her (because Mr. Rachett wants to marry another woman) Aunty Pru switches places with her. Aunty Pru is murdered instead. Mrs. Rachett escapes but does not know how to find Edmund or Sis.

When Aunty Pru does not return for two days, the children grow hungry. Edmund goes to get food, locking Sis in the room. On the way back to the room, Edmund is detained by a man, whom he thinks is.....

THEMES - see additional discussion in Overall Analyses section.

Major Theme

The malleable boundary between what is real and what is imagined - This novel illustrates how reality and fiction can be interrelated. Characters use fiction in their real lives and a writer bases his fiction.....

Minor Themes

Twins - Avi picks up on this theme from Poe's own writing. One of Poe's most famous twin stories is "The Fall of the House of Usher." For Poe twins were often two sides of the same person. In fact, in.....

Additional themes are listed in the complete MonkeyNotes summary.

MOOD

Suspenseful. Avi creates a feeling of suspense in this novel in three ways; he creates.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Avi Wortis was born December 23, 1937 in Manhattan, NY. He grew up in the New York City area, living in Brooklyn. He never uses his real name and has been called Avi since he was so named by his twin sister, Emily, when they were babies. He also has an older brother. His father, Joseph, was a psychiatrist; his mother, Helen, was a social worker. Avi has said that his family is very intellectual and that he was read to every night. His family took weekly trips to the library, and Avi loved reading even at an early age.

Even though Avi loved to read, school was difficult for him. While both his older brother and his sister were excellent students (his brother even attended college at age fifteen), Avi struggled, especially

LITERARY/HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Much of this novel is based on the biography of the real Edgar Allan Poe. Poe was an American writer who lived from 1809-1849. He is best known for creating the detective story and giving credence to the short story, for which he created the notion of preconceived totality of effect.

The character August Dupin is based on the main character in Poe stories such as

GENRE

Fiction, Mystery

CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES

Prologue

Summary

Edmund and his sister, whom he calls Sis, are alone in a cold room in Providence, Rhode Island. They are thin and pale and do not have enough clothes to keep them warm. The only heat in the room comes from a candle. Aunty Pru left two days ago and the children are hungry. Sis urges Edmund to get them some food with the little money they have. Edmund is reluctant to leave Sis, but agrees that they need food. Edmund locks the door when he leaves so that it is impossible for Sis to leave or anyone else to enter. Edmund buys a loaf of bread. On his way home, an old man asks Edmund to help him get to another part of town. Because Aunty Pru has taught Edmund to be kind to the elderly, Edmund assists the man. When Edmund returns to his room, Sis is gone.

Notes

In a novel, the prologue is a section that offers introductory information before the exposition. Unlike the exposition--which offers background information on the main characters and critical aspects of the plot-- this prologue works to grab the reader's attention.

Part I

CHAPTER 1

Summary

Edmund runs into a man who calls himself August Dupin. Dupin tells Edmund that he will help him find his family members if Edmund delivers a letter to Mrs. Helen Whitman. Dupin is very specific with his directions of how the letter should be delivered. Dupin asks Edmund if he can stay with him and Edmund agrees. Edmund is a bit hesitant about trusting this stranger because Dupin is so intense. However, Edmund realizes that he has no one else to help him.

Soon after Dupin and Edmund depart from Mrs. Whitman's house a servant girl steps out into the cold. She takes a note to the Hotel American House, which reads "Edgar Allan Poe has com."

Notes

This chapter begins the novel's exposition. The exposition is the section of a novel in which the main characters and main conflict are introduced. Any relevant background information is also given in this section. Because this story is a mystery, suspense is an essential element. To maintain suspense, Avi will keep some information from the reader. In not revealing all the information about the characters and plot, Avi forces the reader to help solve the crime, which heightens suspense.

Typically, in mystery novels the protagonist encounters unexplainable events and other characters whose motives are questionable. The protagonist is the main character who works to overcome some obstacle; in this novel the protagonist is Edmund. Edmund confronts the inexplicable disappearance of his mother, aunt, and sister. Dupin seems to want to help Edmund, but he is a suspicious character. Dupin's motives are unclear and he will frequently waver between kind stranger and belligerent drunkard. Moreover, the reader is informed that Dupin may not be who he seems when the servant delivers the note. Depending on the reader's familiarity with the Poe canon of literature, it may or may not be obvious that Dupin is really Poe. August Dupin is the main character in Poe stories such as "The Murder in the Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," and "The Murder of Mary Roget." "The Murder in the Rue Morgue" is considered the first detective story.

Readers familiar with Poe's writing will also notice themes present in *The Man Who Was Poe* which are central to Poe's own writing, such as death, twins, the supernatural, and premature burial. Other readers who are familiar with Poe biography will notice the representation of some of his real-life events in this novel. The real Edgar Allan Poe was in Providence, RI in 1848; he was really in love with a woman named Mrs. Helen Whitman; he really had a daguerreotype of himself made; he was known to be a heavy drinker. Mrs. Whitman was truly concerned with Poe's drinking, as she broke off their engagement because of his drinking.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

On the way to his room, Edmund tells Dupin that he and his sister spend a lot of time down by the docks collecting the names of the ships. When Dupin asks if Edmund has talked to Captain Elias (who works at the docks) about his sister, Edmund tells Dupin that he is not supposed to discuss family business. Dupin insists they go to the docks. When they arrive, Dupin meets two men, Mr. Fortnoy and Mr. Throck, who are looking at a dead body. The dead body is a woman who resembles Edmund. Mr. Fortnoy pulled her out of the water and Mr. Throck is the night watchman. Throck tells Dupin there will be an inquest in the morning; if no one claims the woman, she will be buried in the pauper's field. Edmund tells Dupin that the dead woman is his aunt but insists the dress she is wearing is not hers. Dupin and Edmund head back to Edmund's room.

Notes

In this section Dupin displays his kind, gentle side. He is reluctant to show Edmund his dead aunt and seems genuinely interested in helping Edmund solve the mystery of his family's disappearance. In this section we also learn of three new characters: Captain Elias, Mr. Fortnoy and Mr. Throck. A cast of characters is a necessary element of a mystery plot because it provides possible perpetrators. Because there are many possible suspects, the reader must actively engage the text-- thus heightening suspense.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Edmund Brimmer - Edmund Brimmer is the main character and protagonist of this novel. As the main character, Edmund must work to overcome the major conflict of the plot. The major conflict of *The Man Who Was Poe* is finding out what happened to Mrs. Rachett, Sis and Aunty Pru.

Edmund's character heightens the mystery and suspense of this novel. He is an.....

August Dupin / Edgar Allan Poe - Typically, the other main character in a novel is the antagonist. However, in *The Man Who Was Poe*, the antagonists are not well-developed, and thus provide little.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

This novel is a work of fiction that uses the real-life events and character attributes of writer, Edgar Allan Poe.

Exposition - The exposition of a plot is the place where the reader is introduced to the main characters and any important information to understand what is currently happening. The exposition of this novel occurs in.....

Rising Action - Rising action is the action that will lead to the climax (or the major turning point in the plot). In this novel the rising action is everything that

Climax - The climax is the point in the plot where something happens to change the course of action of the main character. It is a decisive moment that will determine the outcome of the plot. Here, the climax occurs when Edmund confronts.....

Outcome - The outcome of the plot is when resolution occurs. The outcome of this novel is the successful rescue.....

THEMES / THEME ANALYSIS

The malleable boundary between what is real and what is imagined - This novel illustrates how reality and fiction can be interrelated. Characters use fiction in their real lives and a writer bases his fiction on reality. Sis helps Edmund and Dupin solve the crime by leaving buttons

POINT OF VIEW

Third person, omniscient, past tense. The story is told by a.....

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS / QUOTES

Edition: Avon Flare, 1991. Originally Published: 1989

1. **“But Aunty Pru says you should always help the old ones.”** – Edmund, p. 22.

Edmund says this when explaining why he did not come directly home the night Sis was taken. When the old man asked Edmund to help him, Edmund did so against his instincts. Instead of trusting himself, Edmund thought of what Aunty Pru would say. The old man was actually keeping Edmund from going home so Sis could be taken. In this novel, Edmund must overcome his self-doubt and learn to trust his judgment.

2. **“I told you, I notice details...”** – Dupin, p. 56.

Dupin says this to Throck after he provides astute observations he has made of Throck. This quotation is important because it shows how observant Poe is, and how being observant makes him an excellent writer. In picking up on themes in Poe’s writing and integrating them into the story, Avi suggests that Poe took real-life experience and translated it into literature. Dupin’s accurate estimation of Throck implies that perhaps Poe’s writing is so effectively terrifying because it accurately portrays reality.....

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY

Edmund - For Poe, who suffers from an identity crisis, the name Edmund symbolizes another version of himself. Poe notes the close relationship between the names “Edmund” and “Edgar.” This similarity along with Edmund’s missing mother, wicked stepfather, and beloved Sis, makes Poe think.....

Other symbols / motifs / imagery are discussed in the full MonkeyNotes summary.

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *The Man Who Was Poe*

Author: Avi

Date Published: 1989

Setting: Providence, RI in 1848.

Genre: Fiction / Mystery

Tense: Past.

Meaning of the Title: The title of the novel, *The Man Who Was Poe*, refers to Edgar Allan Poe's.....

VOCABULARY LIST / HISTORICAL REFERENCE

Decrepit - worn out, broken down with age

Dismal - dreary and dull

Baleful - ominous, intending harm.....

STUDY QUESTIONS / QUIZ

Multiple Choice

- Why does Edmund leave Sis?
 - To find Aunty Pru
 - To get food
 - To deliver a letter to Mrs. Whitman
- Why did Aunty Pru leave?
 - To meet a man who was going to help her find Edmund's mother
 - To visit her sick mother in London
 - To have her portrait painted.....

Answer Key

1. b 2. a

ESSAY QUESTION TOPICS / BOOK REPORT IDEAS

- Write an essay describing the first encounter between Mrs. Whitman and Edmund from Mrs. Whitman's perspective. Make sure to include any emotions she might have about Poe. Does she love him? Does she think he can overcome his problem with alcohol?
- Why do you think Poe decides to call himself August Dupin? What qualities might Poe admire about Dupin? How is he finally able to reclaim his own identity?.....

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