The Ways In Which ‘The Fall Of The House Of Usher’ By Edgar Allan Poe And ‘The Bath’ By Janet Frame Vividly Portrays The Theme Of Loss

‘The Bath’ by ‘Janet Frame’ is about a frail and lonely elderly lady who struggles to complete simple tasks such as taking a bath. She visits her husband’s grave every year, without fail, on the anniversary of his death, as it is revealed that this is the only place in which she feels safe and peace. We witness her before she goes, attempting to complete simple everyday chores before finally she manages to force herself to make the strenuous journey to her husband’s grave. She struggles to accomplish daily tasks and has evidently lost her will to live as throughout she longs to escape the struggles of life and makes several references to death as well as the afterlife. This short story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator, as the reader reads the story they will become familiar with the theme of loss as the narrator explores and focuses on it throughout.

In ‘The Bath’ the theme of loss is portrayed as the story is focused on an elderly lady who has lost her dignity, independence and her ability to complete simple daily activities. The author emphasises how alone she is in her life after her husband passed away. This becomes more evident to the readers as while she was in the bath she thought helplessly to herself during her internal monologue “if I shout for help…no one will hear me. No one in the world will hear me. No one will know I’m in the bath and cant get out.” The repetition of the indefinite pronouns “no one” reveals her agony and fear that she will be trapped forever, as well emphasising the loneliness of the elderly. She feels imprisoned and alone, this becomes evident as now her determination has turned into despair. This evokes vast amounts of sympathy on the reader, therefore draws the reader in. Furthermore her troubles and burdens are described as “the slow progression of difficulties was a kind of torture.” This metaphor reiterates the cruel reality of growing old, it illustrates that slowly you will lose your independence and life will become more operose as it goes on. The adjective ‘slow’ has negative connotations as it may suggest that her troubles and ‘difficulties’ are passing by in a delayed manner, they do not come all at once but slowly leaving the elderly lady to feel as though she is being oppressed. This may make her feel as though if she had not lost her husband she may not feel this way as she would be able share her experiences and torments with him. This adjective is followed by the noun ‘progression’ which implies that her situation and exertion will only ‘progress’ and worsen. The noun ‘torture’ has connotations of excruciating pain that she evidently feels throughout. This phrase could reflect how the lady felt as she feels as though every year her life as well as this specific day becomes more strenuous and arduous as she feels the loss of her husband becomes more apparent to her. One of the “slow progression of difficulties” that the author described vividly was the elder lady attempting to take a bath, which is revealed to the readers, she did not do very often for apparent reasons. Taking a bath for her is irksome, she is afraid to perform the task as she has so much difficulty in doing so. She fears falling or injuring herself, as there is no-one to help her. When she decides to attempt to get into the bath, we find her first “pausing to get her breathe” and then we find her clinging tightly to the edge of the rim that to her seems as though it is “like the edge of a cliff with a deep drop below the sea.” The smilie “like the edge” evokes an image of suicide, suggesting to the audience she has lost her will to live. This striking image highlights the profundity of her distress and panic as well as loss of

hope and ability.

Furthermore in ‘The Bath’ the theme of loss is depicted as the elderly lady’s “loneliness welled in her.” This metaphor suggests that the loneliness is like rising water and will continue to become worse. The verb ‘welled’ suggests that her ‘loneliness’ is going to metaphorically overflow and become too much for her to handle. Perhaps that is why she spoke telling herself “I look after my husbands grave after seventeen years…I look after my husbands grave.” The repetition of “I look after my husbands grave” proposes that her husband is still with her in her heart and she may feel that she has not completely lost him, that maybeperhaps he is still there with her. She utters this in a tone of pride in the free direct speech as well as in the present tense, implying that she has a sense of purpose as well as feelings satisfied and proud. This may suggest that she has lot herself, but perhaps not completely as she still finds herself at rest and peace when she is around her husbands grave. This quickly turns for the worse as when she places the “first bunch of dark blue primroses with yellow centres, a clump of autumn lilies, and the shoots, six inches high, of daffodils” on her husband’s grave she is again alone. The author drags out the list of flowers, as this is what the elderly lady still has and can do for her husband that passed away. Perhaps looking at the lively colourful flowers will give her a sense of being alive again instead or mourning and thinking about loss. “I looked at my husbands grave for seventeen years” also displays that her heart is still with her husband and in a way shows her wishes either for him, or for her to join him in death.

In ‘The Bath’ by Janet Frame the theme of loss is vividly portrayed through the authors techniques such as repetition. The elderly lady is the main focus of all the loss; her husband, her independence and so on. ‘The Bath[s]’ main storyline is loss whether it is something physical or mental.

‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ by ‘Edgar Allan Poe’ is a story based around an unnamed narrator who visits his ‘companion in boyhood’ Roderick Usher, after receiving a letter from him explaining that he is suffering from a hereditary illness causing him to see, hear and imagine things that we not there. This ultimately leads him to insanity. Even as the narrator rides up to the old menacing house, he emphasises that overall the persona of the house is ghostly and appears to have supernatural qualities. During his stay at the minatory ‘House of Usher’ the narrator witnesses the death of Roderick Usher’s last living relative - Madeline Usher. She appears to die of her hereditary incurable illness. Usher is reluctant to any of the donors checking or experimenting onher therefore him and the narrator entomb her in a vault. They do this oblivious to the fact that she is still alive. Throughout thestory due to the supernatural along with many other unexpected events, sanity as well as Madeline and the entire Usher family are lost.

In ‘The Fall of the House of Usher the theme of loss is depicted through the loss of sanity as well as the overall health deteriorating in both the narrator and Roderick Usher. As the narrator first greets Roderick face to face he observes his “now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye…The silken hair, too had suffered to grow all unneeded.” The adjective ‘ghastly’ connotes paleness which suggests he or his face is lifeless, it also has connotations of ghosts which links to the supernatural elements of the ‘Usher House’ as well as the Usher family. The verb ‘suffers’ may foreshadow what is to come as in the near future Roderick is going to immensely suffer a loss of sanity. “His ordinary manner had vanished… he roamed from chamber to chamber” the adjective ‘ordinary’ stresses that Roderick used to have sanity however he lost that now leading him to have insanity now. Therefore he is now

“roam[ing]” around unsystematically and aimlessly, he does to know what he is doing. He has lost his mind. As the story goes on and we become informed that Madeline is not dead Roderick becomes deranged and his actions become irrational as he screams “Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating go her heart? MADMAN!” This can be contradicted as earlier on in the story “there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes - an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanour.” The metaphor ‘there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes’ suggest that he is demented. This is further implied as the adverb ‘mad’ and the noun ‘hilarity’ connote something very amusing is happening when in reality it is not.

Roderick Usher is slowly but surely loosing his mind and sanity. The phrase ‘restrained hysteria’ suggests that he has not completely lost his mind yet as he is still attempting top control himself and restrain himself from being irrational and causing a scene. Nonetheless, it is not only Roderick who is mentally disintegrating, it is the narrator too. As the narrator first approached the ‘melancholy House of Usher’ he described there being an “iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart.” The adjective ‘sickening’ implies that there is something wrong and something in the atmosphere feels unruly. Yet, as the story continues we witness a different side to the narrator, he is in a “pitiable condition into which I [the narrator] had fallen, by pacing rapidly to and fro through the apartment.” The narrator is beginning to replicate Roderick’s behaviour, leading the readers to wonder is thenarrator becoming sick and loosing his mind too? The adjective ‘pitiable’ may suggest that the narrator is feeling misfortunate and perhaps this has resulted in ill fortune. The narrator is beginning to loose his rationality as “at the request of Usher, I [the narrator], personally aided him in the arrangements for the temporary entombment.” Through his use of the noun ‘request’ the narrator appears to think it is orderly to assist Roderick in entombing his sister, this makes it apparent to the readers that Roderick is loosing his rationality.

Additionally in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher the theme of loss is illustrated through the “family evil.” This metaphor along with the noun “evil’ suggests that there is a family illness and is perhaps hinting at incest. The narrator hints at inbreeding or possibly close intermarriage in the family a he claims “that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent…it was this deficiency.” The noun ‘deficiency’ suggests that there was or still is something missing even though the narrator does not state what it is he speaks about it oil the context of “direct line of descent.” This would explain why if Madeline deceased it “‘would leave him [Roderick] (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers.’” Roderick admitted, “however, although with hesitation…and a long-continued illness - indeed to the evidently approaching dissolution - of a tenderly beloved sister” he then described her as his “sole companion for years.” roderick believes his illness is due to his extreme sympathy for his sister as it appears they have some sort of connection and duality. Roderick is convinced that Madeline will die soon as he claims “[she] would be seen no more.”

Perhaps Roderick thinks that when he looses his sister he will also loose the illness that he has because of her as in reality her presence does have a physical effect on him as he “buried his face in his hands…far more than ordinary…had overspread the emaciated fingers through which trickled many passionate tears.” The adjective buried has connotations of death and coffins, this foreshadows later in the story when Roderick and the narrator ‘burry’ Madeline. The adjective ‘passionate’ is used to describe his tears, this means that his tears were intense and ardent, this came from the bottom of his heart. He has lost all his faith and evidently he has lost his masculinity. However this does not happen and it only gets worse as when she dies she comes back and kills Roderick, leading all his fears and paranoia to come true.

In ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ by Edgar Allan Poe the theme of loss is actively portrayed as the theme of the supernatural runs throughout the story causing a lot of chaos and mystery. This then leads there to many unexplained losses, such as at the unexpected end to the Usher race as Madeline kills Roderick.