

A comparison of the cask of amontillado and hop-frog



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Edgar Allan Poe's stories were set within 19th century Europe. He used witty depictions of various rumored tales and stories that vaguely resembled occurrences during his eventful life, "The setting is European, set in some indeterminate past, so as not to get too close to depicting Poe's own enemies." (Murphy) Poe wrote 'The Cask of Amontillado' in 1846 and set the story in Italy. An insane narrator enveloped in revenge, tells with pride how he cleverly lured his victim to a grotesque death, being buried alive.

Three years later, Poe composed 'Hop-Frog' or 'The Eight Chained Orang-utans'. This tale arose from a fiery death of a mean, gluttonous king and seven members of his cabinet council. The victims, who were chained up, are drenched in thick tar and flax by an enslaved, crippled dwarf named Hop-Frog and possibly his wife Tripetta. Revenge ravaged this couple, causing them to choose to perform a vengeful and vicious act after many painful years of humiliation and foolish acts. Hop-Frog and Tripetta sought freedom and pride.

Many similarities become obvious between these two pieces of literature by Edgar Allan Poe. Revenge is a very significant theme these two tales share. A person of 'higher status' commits great dishonor towards a person of somewhat a 'lower status', a higher or lower status accredited by society.

Humiliating the victim is a key ingredient of the revenge, stemming from the humiliation that was inflicted upon the villain in past circumstances and years. "THE thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. (Poe 3) This quotation taken from "The Cask of Amontillado" shows the revenge of the insane villain planned to take because of the unknown insults the victim had inflicted upon

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him, causing large amounts of humiliation. In comparison to the following quotes that explain the revenge taken and reasons for it due to the humiliation that had been forced upon poor Hop-Frog by the king – Edgar Allan Poe (1850) “ He knew that Hop-Frog was not fond of wine, for it excited the poor cripple almost to madness; and madness is no comfortable feeling.

But the king loved his practical jokes, and took pleasure in forcing Hop-Frog to drink and (as the king called it) ‘ to be merry. ”... “ His mode of equipping the party as ourang-outangs was very simple, but effective enough for his purposes. ”... “ Owing to the high combustibility of both the flax and the tar to which it adhered, the dwarf had scarcely made an end of his brief speech before the work of vengeance was complete. ”(Poe 2)

In both tales the villains being Montresor and Hop-Frog used wine as a method of trickery and distortion of reality, for the victim, “ True -true,” I replied; “ and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily –but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damp. ”... “ The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through long walls of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs.

I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow. ”(Poe 3) The usage of wine had been a great method in the king’s madness to drain Hop-Frog of any dignity he may have had left, thus building Hop-Frog’s inner anger towards the king and increasing his desire for vengeance. The trickery sits within the plot that the king and his seven

cabinet councilors had also been indulging in the wine and their distortion of what will be a good joke to play upon others. It instead becomes a joke upon them because they believe the nonsense that they created.

Being up for any prank, the intoxication of the wine and the chance to cause a big hoax outweighed any thoughts on reality and the trickery sits in place waiting for its prey. “ When the two little friends obeyed the summons of the king they found him sitting at his wine with the seven members of his cabinet council; but the monarch appeared to be in a very ill humor. ”... “ Come, drink! The wine will brighten your wits. ”(Poe 2) The imprisonment of the victim plays a key role in the strategy at hand by the villain. Montresor lured his victim down the winding damp passage, pushing him on and on with the enticing Amontillado in his possible grasp.

Leading the victim into a small empty crypt and still being overwhelmed by his intoxication, he didn't fight the clasp of chains around his body until the reality of the newly formed wall stood in the entrance of the crypt which hit him with the realization that he was an “ instrument of his own doom so as to reveal the cleverness as well as the full horror. ”(Poe 3) Hop-Frog cleverly explained the full vision of the Orang-utans in chains and the reaction they will receive from the masquerade guests and how the chains would increase the chaotic reaction the King so desperately desires.

Hop-Frog's masterful description manipulates the king, increasing the king's need to proceed with the prank. Being chained together made their entrance rather difficult and their final imprisonment certain. “ No sooner had the clock ceased striking, however, than they rushed, or rather rolled in, all

together—for the impediments of their chains caused most of the party to fall, and all to stumble as they entered. ” “...when the chain flew violently up for about thirty feet—dragging with it the dismayed and struggling ourang-outangs, and leaving them suspended in mid-air between the sky-light and the floor. “...amid the shrieks of the multitude who gazed at them from below, horror-stricken, and without the power to render them the slightest assistance. ” (Poe 3) Both murderers believed that the victims were the reason for their violent fatal endings (Murphy). A feeling of goodwill and ease had been portrayed across to the victims in both tales by the villains, as to gain their trust in some or other form either by the usage of wine and intoxication or by merely building up their self-esteem to the point that the victim believed that he was leading the villain. “ My friend, no.

It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre. ” “ Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. ” (Poe 3) Hop-Frog used a method of gaining the king’s trust and congregation by building up his excitement. He also played on the crude fondness the king has for Hop-Frog, using that to set the plan in full motion. “ The beauty of the game,” continued Hop-Frog, “ lies in the fright it occasions among the women. ” “ Oh, this is exquisite! exclaimed the king. “ Hop-Frog! I will make a man of you. ” “ His value was trebled in the eyes of the king” “...he possessed a triplicate treasure in one person. ” (Poe 2) Edgar Allan Poe dressed Fortunato the victim in ‘ The Cask of Amontillado’ in motley a colourful jester costume that he wore to the Carnival. Although the victim had worn motley in one tale and the villain had been dressed in

motley in the second tale, the connection between the two is clear. Hop-Frog being a joker, had been classed in such a social category and there to act foolishly without thought of mind.

Fortunato however, not being a jester in social standards, had been intoxicated by the wine and had played a fool wobbling down the damp passage without thought of mind or realization of his fatal engagement. Ultimately, it is clear that Poe hoped to show that people, regardless of social standing, react poorly to humiliation and it can cause many to seek revenge. When those seeking revenge are clever and their victims are drinking, revenge is that much easier in the worlds of Edgar Allen Poe.