

Comparison of the theme of greed in the celebrated jumping frog of calaveras coun...

[Literature](#)



Introduction

Although “ The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” by Mark Twain develops its theme of one does not have to be educated to be clever, through allusions, “ The Devil and Tom Walker” by Washington Irving better develops the theme of greed can lead to moral corruption, through allegory and symbolism.

The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

“ The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County’ begins in Angels Camp, a mining settlement in Calaveras County, California when a man from the east comes to visit. The narrator speaks with Simon Wheeler to ask after a man named Leonidas W. Smiley, at the request of a friend. Instead of giving the narrator the information that he requested, Wheeler goes on a tangent and launches a tall tale about a man named Jim Smiley. Jim Smiley would bet on anything. The major theme of this story is that one does not have to be educated to be clever. After Smiley had continued betting the dog, named Andrew Jackson, to the point of his death, Wheeler states, “ It was a good pup, was that Andrew Jackson, and would have made a name for himself if he’d lived, for the stuff was in him, and he had genius I know it, because he hadn’t had no opportunities to speak of, and it don’t stand to reason that a dog could make such a fight as he could under them circumstances, if he hadn’t no talent.” (Twain, 2). Through this quote, Twain develops the theme by explaining that the dog was not very smart, but he was extremely clever. The tactic he used won him a lot of dog fights until he was paired with a dog that had no hind legs, which was a fluke situation. But this dog, that most

everyone believed was not worth a dime, proved many wrong, not by being incredibly educated, but by his cleverness during his fights. Twain uses allusion by naming the dog after Andrew Jackson, the 7th president of the United States and a former general. Both the dog and Jackson were known for being tough and unstoppable in battle. Andrew Jackson was not known for his smarts, but his perseverance and scrappiness, especially during his presidency and several battles. After the stranger filled Smiley's frog with quail shot, Smiley had gathered a frog for the stranger to compete with, and they were lined up ready for the bet, Wheeler, talking about Smiley, says, "Then he says, 'One two three jump!' and him and the feller touched up the frogs from behind, and the new frog hopped off, but Dan'll give a heave, and hysted up his shoulders so like a Frenchman, but it wan's no use he couldn't budge; he was planted as solid as an anvil, and he couldn't no more stir than if he was anchored out. Smiley was a good deal surprised, and he was disgusted too, but he didn't have no idea what the matter was, of course" (Twain, 4). Through this quote, Twain develops the theme by showing how uneducated and oblivious Smiley was, especially to leave his frog, that he had been training for 3 months, with his competitor. The story says nothing about the stranger's education, but he was very clever. By putting the quail shot into Dan'l Webster, the stranger was able to win the bet. Smiley, thinking he was smart to train and bet the abilities of his frog with a stranger that was handling a frog that was picked from outside minutes before the competition, would instantly win the bet and obtain money, was completely fooled by the person he was trying to fool. Smiley was so oblivious that he didn't realize what had happened until his frog burped up some quail shot,

but at that point, the stranger was already gone with the money, and it was too late. Twain uses allusion by naming the frog “ Dan’l Webster” referring to the great American statesman, Daniel Webster. The fact that both the frog and the statesman were known for their brilliance leads to the reason why Twain chose to use this allusion. The intelligence and mastery of the frog, being able to learn and obtain skills quickly, could have easily won the bet against the stranger but ultimately lost due to Smiley’s ignorance and obliviousness.

The Devil and Tom Walker

“ The Devil and Tom Walker” begins the story with a short explanation about Kidd the Pirate who left gold buried on the banks of Boston. Since Kidd’s death, the devil, taking the form of many different people, guards its hiding place. Then Irving mentions Tom Walker, a miser. He never gives anything to anyone, including his wife. His wife, who is as miserable as he is, is verbally abusive and rumored around town to be physically abusive toward Tom as well. One day when walking home, Tom decides to take a shortcut through the swamp and sits on a log to rest. Soon, being confronted by a sick faced man who is identified as “ Old Scratch.” This man, who is the devil, offers Tom a large sum of money in exchange for “ certain conditions.” Tom goes home and discusses the offer with his wife. She believes he should take the offer. Tom, being miserly, is hesitant to take the offer since he doesn’t want to share any of the wealth with his wife. She becomes angry and decides to visit “ Old Scratch” herself. But after a couple of days, she doesn’t return. After Tom had been searching through the woods, all he finds is her heart and liver tied up in her apron and he knows that she is dead. Tom is happy

<https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-the-theme-of-greed-in-the-celebrated-jumping-frog-of-calaveras-county-and-the-devil-and-tom-walker/>

about his wife's death because this now leaves him to make his deal with "Old Scratch" and not have to share any of the wealth. After his conversation with the devil, Tom agrees to be a corrupt usurer. He leaves Boston living a life of wealth and corruption. Years later, Tom decides to go to church to seek salvation, fearing the potential punishments for the actions he has made. Carrying a Bible everywhere he goes, to try and ward off old scratch, Tom believes he is safe until Old Scratch shows up at his door with a black horse. Tom is thrown upon the horse and taken back to the old Indian fort, gone in a blaze of fire. The theme of the story is greed can lead to moral corruption. Irving reveals the theme through symbolism to create the allegory. The devil symbolizing temptation, Tom and his wife symbolizing greed, and later, Tom symbolizing hypocrisy after seeking salvation at the church, which Irving shows will be punished. The murky woods full of quagmires in which Tom meets the devil are symbolic of his conscience, which, clouded by his greed, falls easily to the devil's temptation. At the beginning of the story, it states, "He had a wife as miserly as himself; they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other"(Irving 1). Through this quote, Irving shows how greed can destroy valuable relationships. Tom Walker and his wife treated each other horribly and had horrible thoughts just because they were so greedy and miserly. Later, as Tom is being carried off to hell on the horse, these were his last words, "The devil take me if I have made a farthing!"(Irving 5). Through this quote, Irving develops the theme by showing that Tom has become just as bad as the devil himself; he's a liar, a cheat, a miser, and a man who has lost his moral

completely. At this point, there is no chance of redemption for Tom, as he calls for the devil to take him away.

Conclusion

“The Devil and Tom Walker” was more effective in developing its theme of greed can lead to moral corruption better than “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras Country” because “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” tried to incorporate its theme through two very different scenarios. When the narrator was talking about the dog’s persistence and strength, then ending the portion of the story by having the dog lose a battle and end up dying, brought the attention of the reader away from the theme of one does not have to be educated to be clever to the fact that the dog had died from a fluke situation. Although the dog was uneducated but clever, his death showed that even the most clever can be fooled by simple things. In “The Devil and Tom Walker,” Irving developed the theme using different literary devices and incorporating all of them to make the theme more straightforward and easier to understand for the reader. Though Tom Walker is presented as an individual who has always been morally corrupt, the action of “The Devil and Tom Walker” presents how moral corruption breeds more moral corruption, escalating to the greatest corruption of all, a pact with the devil. Selling his soul to the devil presents a crisis to Tom only when he pauses to consider the after-life. His conversion to religion, made specifically for the sake of his personal interest rather than his faith in God, is a further act of moral corruption. Nevertheless, Tom cannot escape his fate, and Irving makes it clear the consequences of such “ill-gotten wealth.”

Though the narrator refers to the tale as a “story,” he also states that the

<https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-the-theme-of-greed-in-the-celebrated-jumping-frog-of-calaveras-county-and-the-devil-and-tom-walker/>

truth of it, “ is not to be doubted.” Although Mark Twain’s “ The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras Country” does a beautiful job of illustrating the theme of one does not have to be educated to be clever through allusion, it is unparalleled by Washington Irving’s “ The Devil and Tom Walker”’ s development of its theme of greed can lead to moral corruption through allegory and symbolism.