The Transcendence Of Frogs And Ourangatangs Essay, Research Paper

The Transcendence Of Frogs and Ourang-Outangs

“Hop-Frog!, I will make a man of you.”

In Edgar Allen Poe’s short story “Hop Frog,” the title character Hop-Frog is able to transcend the limitations of his physical body, in ways the King and his seven ministers are unable. “Hop-Frog” has multiple examples of the transcendence of man, and the inability of man to transcend. The most prominent of these points are:

1. By overcoming the limitations of his, Hop-Frog’s, physical bodyhe is able to transcend into a greater existence than his biology would allow.

2. By the King and his ministers discounting of Hop-Frog due to his disfigurement and their inability to acknowledge his transcendence, they are fated to never have the chance to transcend.

3. By the use of symbolism in “Hop-Frog,” Poe reinforces the actions of the characters and strengthens the representations of their transcendence, or lack there of.

Each of these of these three points coalesce to bring the significance of the transcendence of man, or the lack there of, into a focused view.

Hop-Frog, the title character in Edgar Allen Poe’s “Hop-Frog,” is able to transcend the limitations of his physical body. Biologically Hop-Frog is nothing more than a freak of nature. Hop-Frog is a dwarf. His means of locomotion was that of an “interjectional gait—- something between a leap and a wiggle,”(482) and this motion was only afforded to him through “great pain and difficulty.” Hop-frog’s teeth are “large, powerful, and repulsive.”(484) His arms, not in balance with his body, have a “prodigious power.”(482) His arms so over compensated for his body he “resembled a squirrel, or a small monkey, more than a frog.”(482) His ability to tolerate wine is nonexistent. The story states that Hop-Frog is from “some barbarous region.”(482) For the King, Hop-Frog is a “triplicate treasure”(482) for the king to laugh at. If a man is no greater than his biological make up, then Hop-Frog is a freak, and limited to his body. Hop-Frog proves this is not true. By using his arms Hop-Frog is able to do astounding acrobatic feats. Hop-Frog is able to overcome the effect that drink had on him and is able to remain calm and formulate a plan of revenge when Trippetta is struck and wine is thrown in her face. Hop-Frog even breaks the stereotypical mold of a beautiful hero. Hop-Frog is able to find a love with Trippetta, a love that transcends his physical makeup. Hop-Frog saves the girl, has his revenge, escapes unharmed to his homeland, and in an ironic twist of fate is able to have the last laugh at the King’s expense. Hop-Frog is an example of a transcendent male, one who is able to go beyond his biological makeup and becomes something greater.

The King and his seven ministers are all healthy, albeit fat, strong men with little or no disabilities the reader is informed of. Their only weakness according to the author was that for “jest.”(481) It the King’s and his minister’s predisposition to joking, and their inability to see in others any measure of transcendence are doomed to failure. The fact that the King and his ministers call him “Hop-Frog” and not his given name, thereby not acknowledging his existence, further reinforces the fact that they see him as nothing more than an object to laugh at. The fact that the King continually forces Hop-Frog to drink wine even though the King knows the effect it has on him. The King, unable able to recognize Hop-Frog’s transcendence, has no idea as Hop-Frog lays the ground work for the King and his ministers death through a “carefully planned and enacted setup.”(1089) The King is only Able to see that Hop-Frog is laughing, and since the King’s weakness is a “good Jest”(481), he is unable to see the motives behind the actions. When the King allows for no weapons at the gathering, and entrusts the keys to the locked doors to Hop-Frog, the King and his ministers are again unable conceive of any transcendence in Hop-Frog. The King and his ministers are, up until the moment of their inevitable death, still not cognoscente of their fate, they “were convulsed with laughter,”(486) and ignorant to the events that were to succeed. It is the King’s and his minister’s predisposition to jokes, and their inability to acknowledge Hop-Frog’s transcendence from the limitations of his body, the fact that he is more than just the sum total of his parts, that dooms them to their fate. “Hop-Frog!, I will make a man of you,”(484) is the King’s ultimate admission of his inability to acknowledge Hop-Frog’s transcendence, by not acknowledging that Hop-Frog is biologically a man, the King is blind to the fact that Hop-Frog can be more than a man biologically.

In “Hop-Frog,” Poe makes use of extensive symbolism to enhance the transcendence of Hop-Frog and the inability of the King to recognize the fact. The opening description of the king is that he would have “preferred Rabelias’ ‘Gargantua’,” a giant king with a great capacity for food and drink, indicating a great lack of control and animal desires. When the mythical king is hungry or thirsty he eats or drinks, and when the King in the story wants a jest he has one. Both kings react without consequence, and both kings constrained by their animal urges and desires, are nothing more than the biological limits of their bodies. Another strong symbol, is that of Hop-Frogs choice of costume for the King and His Ministers. By choosing ourang-outangs Hop-Frog represents the King and his ministers as “basal beasts,”(331) with no conscience. He, Hop-Frog, shows them to be animals that have a thought, lust or desire and act upon it accordingly without care to the repercussions that it might have on others. The chains that Hop-Frog ties around their bodies is a representation of the fact that the King and his ministers, will never be able to transcend the “bestial bodies”(331) they inhabit. Hop-Frog’s final words as he is about to leave, “… this is my last jest,”(487) is a vocalization by Hop-Frog that he has now transcended the limitations of his body and indicates that he is going to go forward from there. The most profound use of symbolism is when Hop-Frog escapes through the “roof of the saloon.”(487) The act itself represents Hop-Frogs ability to transcend his body. The saloon represents his body, and the escape a symbolic representation that Hop-Frog has surpassed his biological limitations.

Edgar Allen Poe’s Hop-Frog contains many examples of the transcendence of man and the inability of others to acknowledge. The main character, Hop-Frog, is able to overcome the effect that drink has on him, finds love, and manages to be more than his biological makeup. Hop-Frog is able to transcend the limitations of his physical body, and is able to become something greater than biological makeup. The King and his seven ministers are unable or are unwilling to acknowledge Hop-Frog’s transcendence and in so doing they doom themselves to an inevitable fate. Also, through the use of symbolism, Poe is able to “strengthen his imagery”(1091) of Hop-Frog’s transcendence and the King and his seven ministers inability to transcend and recognize transcendence in others.

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