The Masque Of The Red Death, He Minister’s Black Veil, The Devil And Tom Walker: Comparative Analysis

1. How are the masque in The Masque of the Red Death and the veil in The Minister’s Black Veil similar?

The masque and the veil are both similar in both stories due to the fact that they have a similar symbol, they symbolize misfortune and miserability. As seen in The Masque of the Red Death for instance, as people become aware of the masked stranger’s presence, “And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise --then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust” (Poe). Very clearly, the presence of the stranger causes a strong discomfort in the crowd at Prince’s Prospero’s party, and what makes the stranger's presence noticeable is his terrible mask, which proves that the mask is indeed a symbol of sadness, horror, which always is connected to misfortune. Furthermore, when the minister is at the wedding, he sees himself in the reflection of the glass, “At that instant, catching a glimpse of his figure in the looking-glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shuddered, his lips grew white, he spilt the untasted wine upon the carpet, and rushed forth into the darkness” (Hawthorne). As shown by this short passage, as the minister raises his glass of wine at the marriage, he sees his own veiled face in the reflection of the glass and gets immediately terrorized by himself, which clearly suggest the veil as a symbol of terror and misfortune, just like the masque of the red death.

2. How is Tom Walker’s fate similar to that of the Minister’s in The Minister’s Black Veil?

Tom Walker’s fate is similar to that of the Minister in the way that Tom Walker both finish their lives in sadness and pain. For instance, as Tom Walker is taken away by the Devil, “A countryman, who lived on the border of the swamp, reported that in the height of the thunder-gust he had heard a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and running to the window caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills, and down into the black hemlock swamp toward the old Indian fort, and that shortly after a thunder-bolt falling in that direction seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze” (Irving). As shown by the quote, Tom Walker’s fate was one of pain and death, because he made a deal with the Devil and, by selling his soul to him, he accepted to go to Hell at the end of his life. Similarly, in The Minister’s Black Veil, as Hooper pronounces his last words on his deathbed, “What, but the mystery which it obscurely typifies, has made this piece of crape so awful?” (Hawthorne). This demonstrates that Hooper was very frustrated with the way people treated him simply because of his appearance and the black veil, and he also expresses his disappointment at seeing the way society behaved with him, the way pain was inflicted upon him by others, just like Tom Walker’s pain inflicted on him by the Devil.

3. How are the different wives in The Devil and Tom Walker and The Minister’s Black Veil similar/different?

Tom Walker’s wife is different from Hooper’s wife because, as opposed to Tom Walker’s wife, Elizabeth Hooper questioned her husband about the veil, but she did it out of pure goodness and concern for her husband’s well-being, as he was wearing this black veil constantly without any explanation. Tom Walker’s wife is different because she seems concerned for her husband, but she is not in reality. “All her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man's terms, and secure what would make them wealthy for life” (Irving). The narrator demonstrates that Tom Walker’s wife motivation is pure greed for the potential money her husband could acquire, not actual concern for her husband’s happiness, as opposed to Elizabeth Hooper. Therefore, because of her greed, Walker’s wife is very different from Elizabeth Hooper.

4. Clearly, in The Devil and Tom Walker, Tom Walker commits a sin and sells his soul to the Devil. Can someone as generous and as miserable as Tom Walker be forgiven for his sin, and does it apply to anyone in life in general?

I would say that, personally, I think that a person can be forgiven for their sin or sins as long as they do not cause long term negative consequences to others. However, in the story, it is mentioned that when the Devil and Tom Walker make a deal, the Devil convinces Tom Walker to open a broker’s shop and states, ''You are the usurer for my money!’ said black-legs with delight” (Irving). The Devil employs precisely the term usurer, which is a pejorative term, in order to clearly show that Tom Walker will not loan money to people in order to help them, but rather to plunge them into ruin for the rest of their lives. So, although Tom Walker was miserable himself before becoming an usurer, I do not think that he can be forgiven for his sin because he has had a negative effect on the lives of numerous other families in Boston by becoming an usurer there. It is simply not fair for one person to get out of the lower class while bringing down hundreds from higher classes to lower classes.

5. How did the event of Tom Walker’s wife’s death change the course of the story and changed Walker himself and his social interactions?

The fact that Tom Walker’s wife died in the middle of the story changed the course of the story radically and actually made it continue. To be fair, I believe this was the action that pushed Tom Walker to make a deal with the Devil, as he felt sympathy for him and trusted him. For example, as the narrator describes the relationship between Walker and his wife, he mentions “Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words” (Irving). This sentence implies that Tom Walker was often a victim of domestic violence from his wife when arguments were powerful. Therefore, it is only logical that Tom Walker Does not feel love towards her wife, but rather hatred. So, by taking away her life, the Devil has done a favor to Walker, which he is grateful for and incites him to make a deal with him, to return the favor he has done to Walker.

6. What do you think the Minister is laughing to/about while he is smiling? What is he thinking about exactly?

I think that the Minister is thinking about the attitude of others towards him and, although he expected others of being rather surprised by his unusual apparel, I do not think he expected others to be so intolerant with this simple and inoffensive veil, the minister's smile shows how the minister's surprise of how cynical he became because of these reactions. For instance, he says, "When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil!" (Hawthorne). The quote clearly supports the point above, Hooper is baffled by the intolerable behavior of everyone towards an individual in difficulty who has committed a sin, and his smiles were, without doubt, a realization of what the human nature is and how disgusting it is.

7. What is the masque for the Red Death precisely a symbol of? What exactly is Poe's message by giving a masque to a disease?

The masque for the red death in Poe's story symbolizes the animosity of disease in general. For example, as many decide to attacked the masked stranger, it is said: "Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave-cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form" (Poe). This shows that, clearly, before that people started to attack this stranger and find out that it was in fact an entity and disease, it was believed that it was a person and that it could have been stopped if this person was attacked, or even killed. Poe's message by doing so is to show that no-one can simply run away from disease and death, as it can come through various forms while being completely undetected, it can even come through contagion of a person already carrying the disease, which is exactly what the masked stranger in the story represented.

8. How does the time period in The Devil and Tom Walker foreshadow, in a way, the ending of the story?

As mentioned by the narrator, "About the year 1727, just at the time that earthquakes were prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, there lived near this place a meagre, miserly fellow, of the name of Tom Walker" (Irving). It has to be remembered that, during that the 17th and 18th century, in the United States, strong puritan beliefs prospered in villages. These beliefs, throughout history, have always sparked up disputes between citizens, which resulted in the death or someone or more people. So, very clearly, because of the setting of the story, we could have already known that certain characters were unfortunately going to die in the story, and these were Tom Walker and his wife.

9. What is Hawthorne's message in the death of Hooper in The Minister's Black Veil?

The message that Hawthorne is trying to convey to his readers through the death of the main character minister Hooper is a very cynical one, that being forgiven for a sin is never possible, because the people will always focus on the fact that you committed a sin, and not that you

regret it. For instance, as stated by the Minister on his deathbed, “When the friend shows his inmost heart to his friend; the lover to his best beloved; when man does not vainly shrink from the eye of his Creator, loathsomely treasuring up the secret of his sin; then deem me a monster, for the symbol beneath which I have lived, and die! I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a Black Veil” (Hawthorne). Hooper is expressing, just like the question before, his frustration that people focused on his veil precisely and were terrified by it, as opposed to trusting the minister for revealing his darkest secret. Therefore, because the story depicts it, it is surely Hawthorne's message that people who are cynical are right, human nature is unforgiving.

10. What does the attitude of the guests in Poe’s The Masque of the Red Death suggest about people’s opinion about disease?

The guests at Prince Prospero’s party are decontracted, naive, and almost foolish as they only think about the party, but not the dangers around it. For example, as mentioned by the narrator as he describes the guests in the castle, “There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust” (Poe). As demonstrated by the quote, it is clear that most of the guests are quite foolish and intelligent since they are dressed in a childish manner. Thus, since they are so immature, this implies that the people are very unaware and ignore completely the risks of disease in their environment, which will later result in their death.

11. Why is it that Tom Walker did not accept the Devil’s deal before his wife got killed, even though he could have ran away with his wealth without his wife.

I believe that Tom Walker did not accept the Devil’s Deal beforehand because he had a strong sense of ethics and he knew that it would be considered as wrong to make a deal with such a person. For instance, when Tom Walker does make a deal with the Devil, “This, however, Tom resolutely refused; he was bad enough in all conscience, but the devil himself could not tempt him to turn slave-trader” (Irving). The fact that Walker refuses to become a slave trader shows that he is a person that attaches a great importance to ethics and is unable to do certain things because they are “wrong”. It can therefore be concluded that Tom Walker did not initially make a deal with the Devil because he knew he would harm people in the process, and he simply thought it was wrong.

12. How are the outside characters in The Devil and Tom Walker and in The Minister’s Black Veil similar?

They are similar in the way that they all ultimately feel pity, at one point or another, for the main character of the story. For example, in The Devil and Tom Walker, “Tom's wife was a tall termagant, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words. No one ventured, however, to interfere between them” (Irving). This shows that, clearly, the people are feeling pity for Tom Walker since he was beaten by his wife, even though they never intervened. Furthermore, in The Minister’s Black Veil, one individual

tells the minister, "'Dark old man!' exclaimed the affrighted minister, 'with what horrible crime upon your soul are you now passing to the judgment?'" (Hawthorne). By saying this phrase in such a tone, it demonstrates that this individual, just like the outside characters in Irving's story, feels pity for Hooper as he still does not want to reveal his sin, even though he is about to pass away. He feels pity over the fact that Hooper's sin is eating him alive so much that he does not dare to say it.

13. In The Masque of the Red Death, how come the guests in the party are so terrified of the masked stranger but Prince Prospero's is not, as he even attempts to murder him?

I believe that the reason why Prince Prospero is not, as some might think, because he is unaware of the significance of the stranger's presence, but rather because he underestimates the power disease can have onto a person and thinks he can overcome it easily as shown by the quote: "who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him --that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise, from the battlements!' (Poe). This underestimation of the power of the disease might be due to the fact that the Prince has been isolated from the outside world so much that he might have not seen the extensive damages of the disease, whereas the other guests who come from the outside have and are terrified by it.

14. What exactly does the glass in The Minister's Black Veil symbolize?

It is clear that the glass in Hawthorne's story, the glass during the marriage has a deeper meaning than what it seems it does. When Hooper raises his glass, he sees a reflection of himself and reacts the following way, "At that instant, catching a glimpse of his figure in the looking-glass, the black veil involved his own spirit in the horror with which it overwhelmed all others. His frame shuddered, his lips grew white, he spilt the untasted wine upon the carpet, and rushed forth into the darkness. For the Earth, too, had on her Black Veil" (Hawthorne). Since Hooper himself was afraid when seeing his own veiled face through the reflection of the glass, we can assume he gets scared because he realizes what a terrible sin he has committed. It is strongly implied in the epilogue that the sin Hooper has committed was killing a beloved friend, so, the glass was perhaps a symbol of his friend looking down at him and blaming Hooper for conducting a normal life as if nothing happened. It is probable that the fact might just be the spirit of his friend who is infuriated with what Hooper has done to him, which would explain why Hooper is so afraid at his own reflection.

15. How does Irving criticize religion in The Devil and Tom Walker?

It is clear that, at one point, Irving does criticize the importance of religion in the story. At first, it is mentioned that Tom Walker is not necessarily a very religious person, and he does not follow every rule as any good Christian would. However, towards the end of the story, as the Devil is closer to taking his soul, "He became, therefore, all of a sudden, a violent church-goer. He prayed loudly and strenuously, as if heaven were to be taken by force of lungs" (Irving). This shows that suddenly, Walker becomes much more religious although he never was before. It is implied that not only does Walker become religious, he becomes a radical and important member of the church. Obviously, Walker goes to Church in order to repulse the Devil and

extend the time he has before he takes his soul. His only goal by becoming more religious is not to learn how to become generous, but rather to save his own life because of the sins he has committed in the past. This is clearly hypocritical from Walker do perform this action. Irving is criticizing society by mentioning that many people in religion seem to go to Church out of pure goodness, but in fact only do so for their personal interests, just like Tom Walker. This is an additional message from Irving that he is trying to communicate through his story.