

## UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGE OF PRINCE PROSPERO IN “THE MASK OF THE RED DEATH”

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### ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the study of the Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Mask of the Red Death”. It mainly focuses on the analysis of positive and negative features of ideal and negligent ruler in the given literary piece. The story serves as an allegory for the inevitability and inescapability of the death, emphasizing that no amount of wealth or power can protect against its reach. These concepts are fully explained with the help of extracts taken from the literary work.

**Key words:** negligent, incompetent, authoritarian, corrupt, tyrannical, macabre.

### INTRODUCTION

“The Mask of the Red Death” by Edgar Allan Poe is a captivating literary piece that delves into the theme of power and the image of a ruler. Through vivid descriptions and intricate symbolism, Poe presents a haunting portrayal of the ruling class and their response to a deadly plague known as the Red Death.

Nowadays the world is filled with negligent, incompetent, authoritarian, corrupt and tyrannical rulers whose governing lead to long-lasting negative consequences, impeding progress, undermining democratic values, and causing suffering to the people they are meant to serve. While we are pleased with the rise of the advanced technology, the narcissism of leaders saddens us. The number of unsuccessful and selfish governors is growing for the course of their unawareness. They get used to thinking only inside of the frame, and they do not care about outside of the frame. But the heads need to think and consider every aspect of their country. We must get rid of egoistic habits, by showing them harmful effects of self-centeredness. From this point of view, Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Mask of the Red Death” undoubtedly is a good sample for revealing negative points of rulers along with encouraging the audience to read bestsellers.

**Main body:** “The Mask of the Red Death” is a haunting short story written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1842. [1. 23] This American writer is known for his poems and short stories particularly in the genres of horror, mystery and macabre. He is considered one of the most significant figures in American literature and credited with influencing the development of the modern detective story and science-fiction. He is known for several literary masterpieces. Among which “The Mask of the Red Death” has a deep impact on readers who are true fans of this genre. At the heart of the story lies the character of Prince Prospero, who embodies the image of a ruler. Prospero is depicted as a wealthy and influential nobleman who isolates himself and his followers in his opulent abbey, desperately seeking refuge from the Red Death.

**“The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisators, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine.”** [4.100]

This vivid description emphasizes the opulence and extravagance associated with the image of a ruler in the story as well as this image of a ruler is characterized by extravagance, decadence, and an overwhelming sense of entitlement.

Poe employs the symbolism of the seven colored rooms in Prospero’s abbey to underscore the detachment of the ruling class from the suffering of the common people. Each room represents a different facet of the ruling elite’s lifestyle, ranging from wealth and pleasure to debauchery and indulgence. The revelers within these rooms remain oblivious to the suffering that persists outside their luxurious walls, thereby reflecting the callous indifference of rulers towards the plight of their subjects. For instance: the quote which is given below highlights the sense of detachment and indifference displayed by the ruling class towards the suffering caused by the Red Death.

**“The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime, it was folly to grieve, or to think.”** [3.15]

Moreover, the masked figure of the Red Death itself serves as a potent symbol of the inescapable mortality that rulers cannot evade. Despite Prospero’s earnest attempts to shield himself from the disease, the Red Death infiltrates his palace, serving as a stark reminder to both him and the readers of the ultimate futility of power and wealth in the face of death. This serves as a scathing critique of rulers who prioritize their personal comfort and security over the well-being of their people. [2.34]

However, whether Prospero is an ideal ruler or not, matter of interpretation. On one hand, Prospero can be seen as an ideal prince because of his ability to gather resources required to create a secure and extravagant refuge for himself and his allies. He demonstrates his power and authority by carefully selecting his guest, providing them with luxurious environment and organizing a masquerade ball to distract them

from the horrors outside. Prospero appears to be in control of his domain and its inhabitants taking measures to safeguard their well-being. On the other hand, Prospero actions and attitudes towards his subject can be seen as problematic. Rather than assisting those suffering from the Red Death, he isolates himself and elite in his castle abandoning majority of his people to their fates. This lack of empathy and concern for the welfare of his subjects raises question about Prospero's moral leadership. Additionally, Prospero's belief that he can escape death and inevitable consequences of the Red Death exhibits a sense of arrogance and hubris. Rather than taking an action to prevent or alleviate the suffering caused by the plague, Prospero chooses to revel in his opulence and wealth, seemingly insulated from the harsh realities of his kingdom. In my point of view, an ideal governor or prince someone who possesses qualities and skills that to effectively govern and lead their people. But unfortunately, we cannot see the features of an ideal ruler in the image of Prospero. Because he has not got ability to make a wise decision and prioritize the welfare of his nation and citizen. He made a decision but not proper for all of his citizens. Because he called all of his friends and relatives in his masquerade ball, but he did not call all ordinary people. An ideal ruler should consider every part of citizen's life and treat all citizens equally. And also, an ideal ruler has to understand complex issues.

### CONCLUSION

While Prospero possesses qualities that align with an ideal ruler in terms of his power control and resources, his lack of compassion for his subject and his refusal to face realities of the Red Death detract from his suitability as a truly ideal ruler. Furthermore, "The Masque of the Red Death" offers a chilling and symbolic depiction of the ruler's image, highlighting themes of mortality, authority, social responsibility, and the consequences of hubris. It serves as a powerful reminder of the limits of human control and the need for compassionate and responsible leadership. Besides, "The Mask of the Red Death" by Edgar Allan Poe presents a compelling and symbolic image of the ruler, highlighting the stark contrast between the power of wealth and authority and the inevitable presence of the death. Through the character of Prince Prospero, Poe depicts a ruler consumed by arrogance and a false sense of control. Despite his attempts to insulate himself from the horrors outside, Prince Prospero's efforts prove futile in the face of the relentless Red Death. This portrayal serves as a cautionary tale, reminding readers that no amount of wealth, privilege, or status can shield one from the harsh realities of mortality. Ultimately, Poe's story emphasizes the humbling truth that even the most powerful rulers are subject to the same inevitable fate as their subjects, as death eventually claims us all, regardless of our position or wealth in society. As one of the richest people of our era once Steve Jobs said: "Death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it..."

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