
Imagery In The Cask Of Amontillado

"The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe, is an engagingly gothic short story of a vindictive protagonist, Montresor. Insulted by Fortunato, he seeks to regain his dignity and pride by exacting revenge on his enemy underneath his home, in the catacombs of his relatives. Edgar Allan Poe's short story can be analyzed from different critical perspectives in relation to the overall theme, revenge.

Edgar Allan Poe's short story is unique and can be understood from a cultural perspective. From a Christian cultural perspective, specifically Catholicism, Catholic people would most likely disagree with the narrator and the actions of the protagonist, Montresor, but might agree with specific details of the character's relationship with the Catholic church. A Catholic individual would agree with the facts that he is and should be sharing details of his crime in confession. In the first line it's clear that the person he is speaking with is from the church and is providing a confession 50 years later after entombing Fortunato in the catacombs. "You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, that I gave utterance to a threat" (Poe). The line suggests that he confesses often to the priest. It is important that a confession within Catholicism, should be kept confidential between the confessor and the priest. According to Helen Costgane, "the seal may not be broken directly or even indirectly, by revealing information that might link the penitent to his or her sin". For this reason, Montresor trusts him by telling him of his crime, his retribution towards Fortunato. Despite giving specific details of the nature of his crime he's not concerned that the priest will disclose his secret. In terms of his confession, Catholics would agree with this aspect and that it should be done. Despite him killing Fortunato, one could argue that his actions weren't without purpose. At first glance it appears that he is killing out of pride, but further reading suggests that his reasoning is for his family. "The Thousand injuries I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge" (Poe). According to The Bible it is sinful to murder "thou shall not kill" (Exodus 20.13); but in some ways he is fulfilling other Christian duties. One of the ten commandments say, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20.12). He is honoring his family by following his family's motto on his coat of arms which says, "Nemo me impune lacessit" (Poe). The Latin phrase translates to "no one provokes me with impunity" which means that he shouldn't exempt people of punishment if provoked. In the sense that he is defending his family's name, a Catholic would most likely agree with these actions. Something that a Catholic would disagree with is the characters personalities. In the Bible there are sins such as pride (James 4.6), gluttony (Proverbs 23.20-21), and wrath (Proverbs 19.19), all of which the characters demonstrate in their persona. Fortunato on one side shows gluttony, the Bible suggests that one shouldn't overindulge in food or drink and he demonstrates this act multiple times. Before entering the Montresor's vault, he was intoxicated "looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication" (Poe). He then drank again later walking through the vaults, "I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grave. He emptied it at a breath" (Poe). The intoxication prior to entering the vaults and the emptying of the bottle, both indicate overdrinking (gluttony). Both characters are prideful, but Montresor takes it further by acting on his pride and as well as wrath which means that he has strong hate specifically for Fortunato and is immensely prideful to the point of revenge. A Catholic reading the content will also disagree on the masonic aspects of the short story. In the story both characters claim to be Masons and in Catholicism it is a crime against the church to be involved with secret organizations especially

those that are in opposition. This includes Masonry. "Then you are not of the brotherhood.' 'How?' 'You are not of the masons'" (Poe). Montresor then goes on to say that he is also of the brotherhood. According to Joel Schron "No fewer than eight popes, beginning with Clement XII in 1738, have condemned [Freemasonry]. Catholics who joined Masonic societies incurred automatic excommunication." It's not clear if Fortunato is a devout Catholic but Montresor is presumably of a Catholic faith to be confessing to a priest. In the eyes of the Catholic church it's a crime to be a part of masonry. The Code of Canon Law not only commends free masonry but also states:

Can. 1184 §1. Unless they gave some signs of repentance before death, the following must be deprived of ecclesiastical funerals:

1/ notorious apostates, heretics, and schismatics;

2/ those who chose the cremation of their bodies for reasons contrary to Christian faith;

3/ other manifest sinners who cannot be granted ecclesiastical funerals without public scandal of the faithful.

§2. If any doubt occurs, the local ordinary is to be consulted, and his judgment must be followed.

Can. 1185 Any funeral Mass must also be denied a person who is excluded from ecclesiastical funerals (Pope John Paul II).

The catacombs where Fortunato was entombed isn't specifically a church burial; therefore, there is uncertainty whether it was acceptable for him to rest there. Catholics would agree with specific religious facts within the text such as the confessions and his devotion to his family but would disagree with the actions of both characters, and their poor behavioral traits as well as masonic details.

This poem cannot only be understood from a cultural perspective but as well as Marxist. From a Marxist perspective, there are elements of class struggle within the poem. One of the characters is the bourgeoisie and the other is the proletariat. Both main characters are perceived to be from the same social class and it's clear that they are of distinguished stature. Both title and possessions imply wealth. Fortunato's wife holds the title of "Lady Fortunato" (Poe), and Montresor has maids, a vault with wine, and catacombs within his home. Montresor is the bourgeoisie attempting to maintain his role within the social class by exacting revenge on Fortunato, who is attempting to replace Montresor. In order to keep his place Montresor kills Fortunato. "The first paragraph of the story delineates the conflict between the characters as arising from their social roles," says Elena Baraban. Seeking retribution for Fortunato's insulting actions, Montresor entombs Fortunato in stone and mortar. The reasoning behind his actions is because Montresor feels disrespected, "when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge" (Poe). The protagonist vows to avenge his dignity and pride because of his social standing as a genuine bourgeoisie and his family's motto. "In seeking revenge, Montresor is acting out the motto of his people, as it appears on the family coat of arms, *Nemo me impune lacessit* ("No one wounds me with impunity")", says "The Cask of Amontillado". For this reason, Montresor feels justified in killing his enemy. According to Elena V. Baraban "Being a descendant of a powerful aristocratic family, Montresor could not possibly let Fortunato insult him with impunity,"

belonging to a powerful family Montresor feels the need to redeem his family's honor and continue to be a part of the social elites as his relatives despite his loss of wealth. "You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was" Montresor was once wealthy and apart of his revenge is to kill Fortunato to keep his position (Poe). She also says that despite Fortunato being wealthier, Montresor's family is nobler than Fortunato's and therefore Montresor holds a higher place in society as the bourgeoisie. Baraban also points out that lines "These vaults," he said, "are extensive." "The Montresor's," I replied, "were a great and numerous family," (Poe) suggests that Fortunato is impressed and recognizes Montresor's once-powerful family. As for Fortunato, he is the proletariat within the short story and to gain higher stature, he insults Montresor. Despite them appearing to be of the same social class, and despite Fortunato having more wealth, he holds a lower position as the proletariat. According to Richard Benton, the name Fortunato means fortunate or rich, which does go with his social status because he is a Lord. Benton also suggests that Fortunato's title as a lord isn't the same as Montresor's hence "his indifference to Montresor's coat of arms and his lack of manners peg him as a bourgeois Italian... whereas Montresor is a noblesse d'épée [nobility of sword], but a man of the country instead of the court". Because his title is purchased, this is one of the reasons why Montresor doesn't respect him and is insulted by him and therefore rather than requesting a duel to settle their disputes as one would at the time, instead he kills Fortunato. Benton states that in France's society there are honor codes that are exclusive amongst aristocratic classes, "An offense against one's honor called for justice and punishment in the 'duel to the death.' However, the honor of an aristocrat could not be satisfied in the performance of a duel unless the impugner was a social equal". Montresor never saw Fortunato as an equal and therefore had no issue in maintaining his place of power by killing his enemy. Within the short story, there are elements of class struggle, one character (the bourgeoisie) attempting to maintain his social role by killing off his rival and the other (the proletariat) attempting to take the other's place.

In a male dominated short story there are many stereotypes that enforce the patriarchy aspects of society. From a gender perspective Montresor and Fortunato display many stereotypes of a masculine dominated societies such as power struggle. One of the gender stereotypes especially for this time period is that they have title and property. Both main characters are seen to having fortune and this is common at the time especially for males. "There were no attendants at home", "bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults" (Poe). These quotes explain that not only does Montresor have land, but he has maids. As for Fortunato he is wealthier and even holds a title. In the short story as Fortunato is about to meet his death, he points out to Montresor that he should return because "Lady Fortunato" (Poe) is waiting for him and that Montresor should stop reveling in entombing him. Asides from their titles and wealth they must defend their honor or their coat of arms which represent their families. By murdering Fortunato rather than dueling him as one would he killed him, and this action displays cowardice. According to "The truth about Your Family Coat of Arms," "only male line descendants of the person to whom the coat of arms was granted would have any right to use it. Coat of arms are considered legal property which is passed down from father to son." Being that the main characters are males its common for them to be the ones to hold the coat of arms. As males they not only hold the coat of arms, but they must defend it. Montresor's coat of arms "Nemo me impune lacessit" translates to "no one insults me with impunity" (Poe). By following his coat of arms Montresor fits the stereotype of an aristocratic male. Masonry is another aspect of gender stereotype within the short story. At some point in the story when Montresor and Fortunato in the catacombs the discuss masonry. Oddly, despite Montresor not being a mason he entombs in the form of masonry. "You are not of the

masons.', 'Yes, yes,' I said; 'yes, yes' (Poe). Only males are masons and Fortunato is in fact a mason. The masonic aspects fit with the 19th century male who is wealthy and powerful. According to "Freemasonry," "admitted as members men of wealth or social status." Edgar Allan Poe's short story contains many examples of stereotypes that apply to gender critical perspective such as masonry, title, wealth, and the pride of having to defend their honor and coat of arms.

In the short story "The Cask of Amontillado" there are many possible perspectives that can be examined through reading, but the story can also be analyzed by looking at the author and his relationship with his parents. Oedipus complex suggest that a child may have feelings of desire for the opposite sex parent and bear jealousy or loath the same sex parent. After the passing of his mother and the disappearance of his father, John Allan took care of Poe but there were issues between the two. Observing Edgar Allan Poe's relationship with John Allan his guardian, it's apparent that their animosity towards each other alludes to the Oedipus complex. According to Thompson, "Poe as the orphaned child itinerant actors and reared in the home of a tyrannical and unloving foster father is said to have felt lack of roots and self-identity". John Allan took care of Poe but despite that there was resentment between them. Allan and Poe at one point even alienated each other. "Poe increasingly irritated John Allan, who wrote that the boy was 'quite miserable, sulky & ill-tempered to all the Family'(Kennedy). Like the Marxist critical perspective, class struggle, in the Oedipus complex on person is attempting to keep one down while the other is attempting to rise above the other. The father, John Allan, attempts to keep the son, Poe, down and from being able to rise above himself and Poe attempts to take Allan's place. Being a womanizer John Allan had an affair and this caused confliction himself, his wife and Poe. "Mrs. Allan also seems to have quarreled with Allan frequently, and Poe is said to have joined in on her side" (Thompson). This situation between the family is a perfect example of Oedipus complex. Poe took the side of his foster mother and opposed Allan. There were instances when John Allan was visibly attempting to keep his foster son down. "Allan refused to cover his debts, estimated at two thousand dollars, and when Poe returned to Richmond, he learned that Allan would no longer support his studies" (Kennedy). By refusing to assist Poe with his debts and his studies, Allan is creating an environment where he is able to maintain his place. Applying the Oedipus complex offers a new perspective into the story. Rather than focusing on the character and the content, Psychoanalytical perspective analysis the author himself and how his life reflects the content of his work particularly this one.

Analyzing the short story from different perspectives allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding. In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," the audience may observe critical perspectives such as cultural-religious perspective as well as Marxist criticism to better understand the main theme in the short story, which is revenge. The theme of revenge influences a significant part within the story of a vindictive protagonist who seeks redemption for his family's name and his own pride.