

Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"

In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," the main character Montresor says, "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge" (1612). Montresor tricks the drunken Fortunato into going into the catacombs where he then proceeds to bind Fortunato and wall up the room. Montresor says, "I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain" (1615-6). At first glance the poem seems to be a great piece of gothic literature by Poe, but with missing key elements of gothic literature a reader is able to debate complex ideas. However, unintentional this may be on Poe's behalf, his intentions may have backfired in this work. Word Count: 129

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Edgar Allan Poe's intents, as well as any author's intent in writing gothic literature, are to explore the heights and depths of human emotions. In "The Cask of Amontillado" Poe does not add a supernatural element to the story in his attempts to show that humans can be horrific themselves without the aid of some fantastical force. A reader's response to this piece of work would be shock at what humans are capable of. It is hard to determine if Poe wants us to sympathize with Montresor for having to suffer from Fortunato or if Poe wants the reader to see Montresor as the villain. Typically in gothic literature "narratives follow innocent/pure characters who are flung into dangerous situations with terrifying supernatural elements or beings who torture them, often through strange and fantastical rituals" (class handout). In the first line of the story Fortunato is defined as the villain and Montresor is supposed to be the victim; Montresor is also the narrator so the reader should tend to sympathize more with him even though a clear explanation for why he is killing Fortunato is never given. However, a closer examination of the story shows that Montresor is the real villain.

Although it is stated that Fortunato has wronged Montresor, the reasoning for the events that took place that evening of the story were not directly explained. The general way of reading the scene where the characters meet is determined by several factors. Fortunato is drunk and wearing a "motley" which is defined in the footnotes as "A multicolored costume worn by clowns, jesters, and fools" (1612). However, Fortunato is partaking in merry-making activities like many other people of the time and Montresor takes advantage of his attempts to celebrate the evening. Therefore, when Montresor first approached Fortunato, Fortunato was an

“innocent/pure” character. He was not intentionally trying to harm anyone with his consumption of alcohol. In fact, Montresor admits, “He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much” (1612). Even though Fortunato was under the influence of alcohol he was still be courteous and not the villain type Montresor is trying to justify his murder as being.

Another element of the victim in gothic stories is that the innocent one is tortured. Although one may claim that Fortunato was torturing Montresor by causing him emotional stress, the fact remains that Montresor was causing the pain to Fortunato. Montresor prematurely buried Fortunato. Montresor first ties up Fortunato and he says, “Throwing the links around his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess” (1615). Fortunato is too drunk to defend himself. Montresor tricks him into the catacombs and then ties Fortunato up before Fortunato has a chance to defend himself. This shows that Montresor is the aggressor in the incident and therefore must also be the villain.

Montresor premeditates Fortunato’s death. Montresor has every intention to victimize Fortunato that night even though a rational justification is never given. Furthermore, Poe makes it difficult to empathize with either character because the surrounding factors that preceded this incident are unknown. A reader assumes that Fortunato victimized Montresor because Montresor is the narrator and claims that Fortunato has driven him to these drastic actions. However, the reader can explore their emotions as gothic fiction is intended to do, and he or she may see that the shock comes from Montresor’s personality. How can Montresor really leave another human being walled up in a catacomb to die? The reader’s emotions are being triggered by the heartlessness of the villain Montresor.

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Reading Response III-Works Cited

Works Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Cask of Amontillado." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Seventh Edition: Volume B 1820-1865*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 1612-6.