[Name of the Writer]

[Name of Instructor]

[Subject]

[Date]

“The Cask of Amontillado”

**Introduction**

“The Cask of Amontillado” (sometimes called “The Casque of Amontillado”) is a short story penned down by Edgar Allan Poe in the middle of 19th century (Poe). It was first published in the issue of Godey’s Lady’s Book in November 1846. Edgar Allan Poe is primarily famous for his works in poetry and short stories, but he mostly got his fame from the area of short stories. He is one of the early practitioners of the country’s short stories and is considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre. He holds the credit to earn a living through writing alone, which resulted in a crisis in his life both in financial and career terms.

The story narrates about the revenge of a man that he takes on his friend who had tortured him mentally and most probably physically also. The main lead of the story, Montresor, thinks that his friend, Fortunato had insulted him multiple times on various occasions and he had been hurt from his side from a long time. Like many of his other works, and keeping in mind the fascination regarding the revenge trends of the 19th century, Poe narrates the story around the live burial of a person, in this case, by immurement. Similar to his other works, like in “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-tale Heart," the author narrates the story from a murderer's perspective. In Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado,” the symbolism presented throughout the text, the overall setting, and the actions of the narrator sets up the sinister principle of revenge as the theme of this short story.

**Discussion**

Edgar Allan Poe’s piece of writing “The Cask of Amontillado” is considered a masterpiece in the area of detective fiction writing. He is viewed as the pioneer of the genre and has given many short stories to English Literature on the said topic. The central theme running through the whole story is of revenge.

Plot Summary

The story takes place in an unnamed city of Italy, during the carnival time. The year of the occurrence of the story has also not been specified. The narrator of the story and the main lead, Montresor, is a fine young man who seems to have good taste in wines. His antagonist, Fortunato, who also happens to be his very good friend, has also got a good taste in wines and is very fond of drinking.

The story starts with the main character, Montresor, thinking bitterly about the times when Fortunato had insulted him multiple times. The starting line of the story portrays the amount of remorse that the lead of the story feels towards Fortunato "Fortunato had hurt me a thousand times, and I had suffered quietly." Montresor is hurt even over the fact that Fortunato makes fun of his name. Filled with boiling rage, he decides the murder of his friend, Fortunato, and plans to execute it on the eve of the Carnival.

On the planned day, Montresor finds Fortunato in a very shabby state. He is heavily drunk and not able to think straight. Montresor recognizes this instantly that today, again, Fortunato has gone out of limits of drinking and the devil inside him awakens. He finds it a perfect chance to fulfill his desire of taking revenge of all the insult that he had faced in the hands of Fortunato and ultimately kill him. Montresor lures him into a trap that he has got the finest collection of wines with him at his place, as he knew that drinks, especially old and quality wines are a weakness of Fortunato. He tells Fortunato that he has just got one of the finest and the oldest type of wine, Amontillado, and wanted the latter to try it. Fortunato, too drunk to think straight, fell into the trap and went with him to his palace. Montresor told him that he keeps all the collections in the catacomb, just below his mansion as it had the perfect environment and temperature for the storage of wines. Fortunato once again fails to understand the evil plan of Montresor and follows him blindly down the vault. The catacomb, which in the form of a long and narrow passage, served as a burial place for the family members of the Montresors, that is why it was filled with bones and decompositions of the human bodies.

The vaults keep going on and on, and both the men keep following each other until they reach a narrow niche. Montresor tells Fortunato to enter inside first as the Amontillado is right inside. Fortunato still does not understand the plan and in his greed for the wine, heads inside to get it first. Montresor, grasping the opportunity, quickly pulls the chains and confines him inside the niche. Fortunato, surprised by this unexpected action, tries to free himself but fails. Montresor on the other hand, reveals a brick and mortar which he had hidden beneath the bones nearby and starts building up a wall in front of the niche. When Fortunato finds out Montresor’s intentions, begs him to free him, pretending like he is subject of a joke, but Montresor never listens and keeps working quickly. When he just to put the last stone to the wall, Fortunato pleads to him to release him “For the love of God," to which Montresor pays no heed and throws a torch inside before sealing it forever.

Analysis

"The Cask of Amontillado" is an excellent piece of writing, which includes only two characters and a short span of time to narrate a long range of events and a horrifying murder. The raw emotions, the vivid descriptions, the elaborated situations, and the vengeance, are all enough to pass the chills down a reader’s spine. A bibliophile can easily feel the emotions that the author has intended to present and can relate to each and every step of the story.

In the story "The Cask of Amontillado," Edgar Allan Poe has made use of many symbols and imagery to create a perfect setting for the story and portrays the real emotions and rage going through the nerves. Every single detail presented in the text seems to be something else and point towards a flashing and encoded message that is equally gruesome and horrifying. The writer has used the symbols and left the rest upon the reader to decipher.

The first and foremost symbol that sets the stage perfectly for the story is the underground vault or the catacomb. The underground catacomb serves as the theater of the tale, where it takes place. It serves as a perfect place for a story that talks about revenge and murder in cold blood. Nothing could be better than the usage of a graveyard or a vault to create a horrifying and gothic feel for such a piece of writing.

The making of the catacomb also sets a perfect setting for the story as it has been portrayed as a dark, enclosed space with damp walls and bones all around. As Montresor and Fortunato keep going further, the cellar or the catacomb keeps getting smaller and smaller and fouler and fouler. The walls also keep becoming damper and damper. Although the dampness of walls is due to the fact that the catacomb is just beneath the river bed, the author has used it to create a perfect setting for revenge. The darkness of the crypt depicts the darkness of the intentions in Montessori’s heart.

Moreover, Poe has used the symbol of coldness various times in the text. The symbol or the “temperature” of the objects has been intentionally mentioned as cold to depict the coldness and cruelty of the emotions. The symbol cold used at multiple places represents the cold blood that was running through the veins of Montresor throughout the story. For instance, when Montresor and Fortunato enter the crypt, the former feels that "the floor was cold and hard." On another occasion, Montresor feels that the atmosphere of the catacomb as "here in the cool, dark, still air under the ground."

One positive thing about the story is that it shows no use of violence. Although it includes a murder, in the end, it consists of no blood, no guts, and no gore. The writer only triggers the readers emotionally and plays with their psyche. “The Cask” presents a strange psychological study of two creepy men, following each other in the middle of the night. Both the men on a quest, Fortunato wants the wine whereas Montresor wants Fortunato to feel his revenge, the heat of the insult that he had faced for years in his hands. And where there is revenge, there is tragedy; somebody usually gets killed in the end.

**Conclusion**

Shortly, it can be summarized that “The Cask of Amontillado” is a brilliant work of fiction, which introduces the reader to a wider range of cold and murderous emotions in an elaborated yet simple manner. It goes without saying that “The Cask” is an excellent work of Goth and horror that progresses along with its plot without any use of violence or blood.

Works Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The cask of Amontillado*. The Creative Company, 2008.

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