Your Name

Instructor Name

Course Number

Date

Title: The Cask of Amontillado

 Edgar Allan Poe was a renowned American novelist, editor, and literary critic. He is known for his stories of mystery and the macabre, and for employing the techniques generally used by the authors of the modern era. He is credited with exploring the darker thoughts and themes in the Romantic Period. Poe is also credited for defining the modern short story and he was an early adopter of the genre of Science Fiction. He wrote seafaring adventures that inspired Melville and Verne, he wrote horror stories which inspired Lovecraft (who inspired King) and Bradbury. He wrote satire, science fiction, and mysteries, the latter which inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, he even wrote a few silly stories. The Cask of Amontillado is a narrative penned by Poe that spins around Montresor seeking revenge from his friend who he believes has insulted him.

It is a story of revenge, injuries and insults are all it says but mainly insult. There is a costume party, a guy tells a convoluted story about a barrel of wine, tricks another guy into the basement to taste the wine, and then (in classic Poe fashion) walls him up for future generations to find. This story reflects on the behaviour of the man who desires to exact revenge and on whom revenge will be exacted. Fortunato is lured into a wine cellar with the promise of a very nice “pipe” of Amontillado which presumably doesn’t exist and get his fool self-bricked up behind a wall. In the very first lines of the story, the narrator (Montressor) states that Fortunato had insulted him a thousand times. Although he had not actually done him wrong that many times, he exaggerated so he can be justified in his acts of revenge. The narrator is manipulative and unreliable while Fortunato is prideful and insensitive as reflected by their behaviour.

Symbols play an imperative role in adding meaning to the theme of revenge in the story. “Nemo me impune lacessit” takes to the idea of revenge. The setting of the story, a carnival season points out to the madness of the narrator’s mind. Fortunato’s outfit is a symbolic illustration of what he is, ““The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress”(Poe). In the title, the work cask means a barrel or a container and from the title, one meaning that can be interpreted from the title is “The casket of piles of bones”. Alcohol also plays a role in directing the story as the narrator offers wine to Fortunato which he being alcoholic could not resist.

Back in Poe’s time, being a man entitled having to defend your honour and living up to a man’s name. It's meant ironed early and briefly during the opening lines that Montressor has had his honour defamed by Fortunato. This will not stand, so, he murders him. Aside from being insulted, Fortunato is an antagonist because of his pride; he's too prideful to say no to go down to the vaults because he is half-drunk, full of himself and unaware he has done harm. He’s not murdered directly per se but being buried alive where you won't be found ever again falls along those lines. From Poe's perspective, the fear of enclosure was one of his most prevalent themes. (He was buried with a bell on his toe because he was terrified he might be buried alive.) 'wall' or 'enclosure' symbolism in his various short stories: "The Tell-Tale Heart" (the old man's heart beating beneath the floorboards), "The Black Cat" (the feline is trapped behind a wall), "The Fall Of The House Of Usher"(whose walls come tumbling down at the end, and under which Lady Madeline lies buried), "The Premature Burial" and of course "The Cask Of Amontillado" (in which Fortunato is walled up and left to die.). The style of the narrator is also important to note in this regard.

The style of the narrator is also very cold, merciless, and he has a convincing style of telling the purpose of killing. From his style, it can also be interpreted that he is confessing may be to a priest. He doesn’t mind sharing the story about his agony and assassination of Fortunato; indeed, he thinks what he did was the just and the correct way to deal with the situation. This is the ultimate theme on which the story is based. Thus, the key theme, the one that jumps outright, is revenge. Though the readers are never told the way, Fortunato insulted the narrator at some time previous to the story. This insult was apparently unforgivable and that is why the narrator walled Fortunato up in his wine cellar. The main clue was the narrator’s motto: NEMO ME IMPUNE LACESSIT. Latin for: No one may attack me without penalty that reflects the main theme (Stott).

Besides, other meanings that can be The Unreliability of Perception and The Danger of Pride. The drive behind the murder of Fortunato was not only revenge of the narrator but also his own pride. In addition, the Montresor’s perspective of the story tells why he was convinced about killing someone and the way he felt when he was harmed. The narrator also manipulates the details and it is interesting to know about the mind of the murderer. He gives excuses and reasons for what he does throughout the story. He uses words to make the reader understand the pain and agony he is going through.

**Works Cited**

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

Stott, St Graham John. “Poe’s the Cask of Amontillado.” *The Explicator*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2004, pp. 85–88.