

The Casket for Fortunato

"The Cask of Amontillado," a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, is not a story to be read passively and small details should not be overlooked. It is a complex story full of literary devices such as foreshadowing, symbolism and irony, and it is a dark revelation of human psychology.

Montresor, the villain, vigilantly planned every detail of Fortunato's demise. Foreshadowing was strongly employed when Fortunato was in a fit of coughs. Montresor insisted they return, but Fortunato said, "I shall not die of a cough." "True," says Montresor, implying Fortunato will die foolishly by his hand. As the pair continued down the vaults, Montresor reached out for a bottle. Its label, "De Grâve," hints at the outcome of Fortunato's mistake of blindly trusting Montresor. The label insinuates death.

The names Montresor and Fortunato are revealing. Montresor in French stands for "My Treasure." The story reveals that Montresor treasures his ego. Secondly, in romance languages, Montresor means "To show fate." This shows relevance because Montresor gives Fortunato clues about his fate and, eventually, Montresor brings Fortunato to his "fate," death. On the other hand, Fortunato's name in Italian means "lucky." However, Fortunato is very unlucky to have died in such a brutal manner, making his name ironic.

Furthermore, Poe dresses the two characters up in ironic costumes. Fortunato is dressed up as a jester: a fool, blind to his surroundings and fate. In contrast, Montresor wears a black silk mask, representing the grim reaper. Their costumes represent the events and places: the carnival and the catacombs. Moreover, the carnival is an animated event; it takes place above ground, symbolizing life. The catacombs are below ground, home of the dead. Montresor invites Fortunato down to the vaults; the scene portrays them walking into hell away from life.

The coat of arms has a special meaning, too. Montresor's coat of arms displays a foot of gold stepping on a serpent in an azure field. This also foreshadows Fortunato's death, for Montresor figuratively steps on and kills Fortunato. The serpent, with its fangs embedded in the gold foot's heel, represents Fortunato, who has bruised Montresor's ego. The coat of arms forewarns the reader about Montresor's vengeful nature.

The title of the story contains another punning clue. The word cask is part of the word casket, yet one contains wine and the other a corpse. No coincidentally, Fortunato's demise is precipitated by the temptation to drink wine, namely Amontillado.

Moreover, the story makes many references to nitre. Montresor frequently claimed the nitre looks like spider webs. This suggests that Montresor is like a spider luring Fortunato into his web.

However, Montresor is not as cold-blooded as a spider or any other predator. After trapping Fortunato and hearing Fortunato's last words, Montresor yearns for an answer from Fortunato: "[Montresor's] heart grew sick." Montresor had planned everything carefully, but he forgot about his conscience. He began to feel guilty. Although Montresor wanted to take revenge without any risk or consequences, his revenge brought him emotional anguish and strong remorse.

To conclude, "The Cask of Amontillado" teaches us to be vigilant around people, especially the upper class. Edgar Allan Poe shows the outcome of challenging the egoistical upper class and bruising their egos.