

Proof of unreliability in the cask of amontillado

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Proof of Unreliability in The Cask of Amontillado Edgar Allan Poe is an author known for his pieces of literature which capture the element of mystery.

Many times, scholars debate over the true meaning behind his texts as they are often written as narratives. This combination of an unclear meaning behind his work and the fact that his stories are narratives often leads to the question of, " To what extent can the narrator be relied upon? " The same issue arises in Poe's, " The Cask of Amontillado".

The story is a reflection of the past, involving a plot that evolves into a murder mystery involving two gentlemen, Montresor and Fortunato. The story is told from Montresor's point of view, recalling an event that occurred fifty years ago. Montresor secretly despises Fortunato due to past " insults" that are claimed to be unforgivable. Montresor demands revenge for these acts and plans Fortunato's murder and later tricks him into death. The story provokes questioning as to whether the narrator of the story can be relied upon to accurately display the events described.

In Edgar Allan Poe's, " The Cask of Amontillado", Montresor does not provide enough insight into the information that remains with hidden meaning. He fails to provide significant causes for action due to the lack of description and proof, and the argument of whether Montresor could be considered insane also arises. Montresor only further confuses the reader by pointing out all the obvious irony surrounding the two main characters Montresor and Fortunato. Therefore, the narrator's accounts cannot be considered reliable.

The lack of Montresor's ability to explain the past and why he feels such a hatred towards Fortunato is why his account of the story cannot be relied

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upon. "The Cask of Amontillado" begins with Montresor providing his own reason for wishing death upon Fortunato. The two first lines read, "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge"(218). Right from the start the reader is confused as to what this "insult" actually is, as it remains to go unexplained for the remainder of the story. In her article discussing "The Cask of Amontillado", Elena V. Baraban asks, "Why did he do it? (47) The intrigue of the story comes from attempting to answer this seemingly simple question. Many stories would provide a motive and reason for such horrendous acts; however, Montresor provides no such explanation for the murder he commits. It can be continually questioned as to what this "insult" was, as no rational person would avenge an insult with murder. The narrator's reliability is questioned even further considering Montresor withstood "thousand injuries" borne upon him by Fortunato. It seems as though Montresor was not remotely bothered by these injuries, which reiterates the question of: Why did he do it?

What exactly made Montresor take Fortunato's insult in such a disrespectful and hateful way that would make him wish death upon Fortunato? This confusion proves the narrator's unreliability. A second idea supporting the notion that Montresor is an unreliable narrator is the seemingly apparent insanity of Montresor. Restating the thought of Montresor murdering Fortunato over an insult supports the idea of Montresor being insane. An instance where Montresor could be viewed as insane would be where he is imprisoning the helpless Fortunato behind a brick wall that he has constructed. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and

felt satisfied. "(222) The gratification that comes of ease over Montresor as a result of his murder makes insanity a high possibility for a motif behind his actions. Montresor's fulfillment is also shown when he states, " My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so" (223). Even after fifty years, Montresor feels absolutely no remorse for his actions. Such a lack of sorrow and guilt, even after fifty years, could only be found with a psychopath. Montresor's insanity makes his description even more unreliable.

Another aspect of the story that makes Montresor unreliable is all the irony that he brings to our attention. We find that Fortunato is named ironically, as Fortunato, closely resembles the word " fortunate". This man resembling the word " fortunate" actually ends up having a very unfortunate death as he is manipulated by Montresor and gets buried alive. Additionally, Fortunato wears a jest costume complete with the cap and bells. This provides early signs that Fortunato is to become a fool. On the other hand, Montresor wears a silk black mask showing the readers that he is indeed the dark, manipulative figure in the story.

Another example of irony is how the setting of the story is initially the carnival, and quickly turns into that of the dark, damp, catacombs. All of these examples make the story sound too ironic in a sense, therefore, its credibility is hard to trust. This, along with other ironic events such as the Montresor family crest meaning, " No one insults me with impunity"(220), and Fortunato drinking a wine named De Grave (grave), proves this story's undependable plot. It can be clearly seen that the narrator provides a recollection of events that are obviously unreliable.

The fact that no reason for cause is shown by the narrator, as well as the likelihood of the character playing the narrator being unquestionably insane, proves that the story is unreliable. These factors, in addition to the confusion resulting of endless irony would make any logical reader question the validity of the narrators accounts. A story such as " The Cask of Amontillado" shows readers that narratives require some sense of background information and that the character narrating should be viewed as logical, in order to be considered reliable.

Also, the plot must not be twisted by some sort of other element, such as irony, which was seen in this story. A combination of such factors will allow readers to depict the narrators accounts as an accurate portrayal.

References: Baraban, Elena. " The Motive for Murder in 'The Cask of Amontillado. " Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature. 58. 2. (2004): 47-62. Print. Poe, Edger Allan. " The Cask of Amontillado. " Portable Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing, Eighth Edition. Ed. Michael Rosenberg. Boston: Wadsworth, 2012. 218-223. Print.