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Introduction:

Edgar Allen Poe was a great storyteller and one of the most important fiction horror story writers of his age. He was also credited with inventing the detective story when he came out with his Auguste Lupin character that was based in Paris and is rather a forerunner of Sherlock Holmes. In fact three of the classic Dupin cases; ' The Purloined Letter', ' Murders in the Rue Morgue'and ' The Mystery of Marie Roget depict three classic situations which continue to affirm the point that Poe was the father of the detective novel. However this makes us observe the clarity with which Poe comes up with solutions and is also a comparison with his own desired image which was the reasoning machine that is also so prominent in ' The Gold Bug'. However Poe's life was to be a considerable departure from that and was touched by tragedy and unhappiness leading to an early death.

Edgar Allen Poe was born in 1809 in Boston, Massachusetts to parents who were in the acting profession. He endured a poor and abusive childhood since his father abandoned the family while his mother died of tuberculosis when he was only two years old. Two kind souls who were John and Frances Allen adopted him and this took to the young Edgar taking the middle name Allen. After being educated at a number of institutions which also included one in Stoke, England, Poe enlisted and became a soldier where he was to rise to some success. The military precision of his stories may be due to this experience.

After enlisting in Boston in 1827, Poe rose to the rank of sergeant major and was also admitted to West Point for officer training. However this experience soon came to an end when he was thrown out due to his appalling

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behaviour. Poe ended up destitute but he had turned to his pen and was writing pretty much regularly although he derived no income from this new pursuit.

Luckily for Poe an aunt in Baltimore, Maryland offered him solace and refuge at her home and he continued to write profusely although he alternated between periods of considerable industry to those of terrible depression and drunken debauchery. This is an apt description of himself in an autobiographical sketch; ' My sensitive temperament could not stand an excitement which was an everyday matter to my companions'.

Poe then married his cousin Virginia who was just thirteen years old but he did not find comfort in his marriage since he endured six years of poverty and destitution with her until the poor girl died of tuberculosis aged just 19 years old. Poe never recovered from this great loss descending into a maelstrom of drunkenness and drugs although his writing became even more prolific.

Poe's painful life was mixed with an incredibly powerful imagination as well as a strong belief in the importance of art. He was also possessed with morbidity that had a romantic tinge to it and which linked beauty and death in an inextricable fashion (such as in *The Fall of the House of usher*).

Although he was an alcoholic and dabbled in drugs, he was a supremely gifted editor, a reviewer with an acerbic pen and a journalist of the highest order. His stories tapped into the public's imagination and left readers shocked and thrilled in almost equal measure. His style of fiction leaves several things unsaid and his characters have a sense of the mystique about them which can be also an autobiographical point where bouts of desolation

and terror are left purposely unexplained. Shifts in tone are also characteristic of his work especially in 'The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket' which has an incredible twist at the end which can never really be explained.

Poe's unfortunate childhood which left him orphaned when he was just three years old and cut off by his foster father left him in constant penury. However he was determined to make a success of himself as a writer although fame only came after his death. Poe also was deeply and singularly affected by his family's misfortunes where his sister was confined in a mental asylum while his brother died of drink. Poe was not actually an alcoholic although he drank too much and thus had problems in keeping jobs which made him a nomad, struggling to find work and moving from publisher to publisher whilst dreaming of creating a journal of national importance, something which he was never capable of doing.

The 'Cask of Amontillado' by is one of those truly classic Poe stories which reveals the depth of human revenge and depravation to right a wrong which is obviously something which rankles extremely deeply. It is loosely based upon the story of Romeo and Juliet with two rival families, involving Montresor and Fortunato, two supposed friends but in their heart of hearts, they are indeed sworn enemies. Fantasy and hallucinations are paramount which are probably part of Poe's own drunken deliriums. Montresor has vowed to destroy Fortunato once and for all for the various wrongs which he perceived were done to him over the years. Naturally enough, he chooses the carnival time to carry out his dastardly deed and one has to argue that the punishment meted out to Fortunato was far from

appropriate as being buried alive is definitely the worse kind of death ever. Even if Montresor felt wronged by Fortunato, the retribution of burying him alive was obviously not conducive with the crime. It is a case where the man was obsessed with the ruinous invectives that the other has imposed over him and the end result is a punishment which is not one with impunity but one full of horror and bestiality.

Even as Montresor works and lures Fortunato down to his wine cellars, one has a feeling of foreboding that something is going to happen and that this happening will be worse than terrifying. Here is a prelude to what will be about to happen:

" My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted . The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre. Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon; and as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

Here we can sort of feel that something dreadful is going to happen as Montresor lures Fortunato down into the dank depths of the wine cellar to perform his dastardly deed.

Yet again one comes closer to the actual punishment when Montresor begins musing on how he will eventually bury Fortunato alive although he is constantly attempting to lure Fortunato back to safety upstairs:

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above

the elbow.

" The nitre!" I said: see it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones.

Come, we will go back here it is too late. Your cough" -

Montresor's feigning of concern for Fortunato's cough is rather hypocritical although one can also sense that the situation is turning ominous and terrifying. Undoubtedly the punishment being meted out to Fortunato will be so diabolical, so horrifying that one cannot even contemplate it.

As we arrive close to the bitter end, the situation gets tensed up and the climax being reached is something almost out of this world:

" A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated -- I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs , and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I reechoed -- I aided -- I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still".

How Montresor can remain unmoved by the terrible deed he is carrying out is something which the human mortal cannot really comprehend. As the sounds of the chained Fortunato continue to rattle and the wall of bricks is slowly built up, the sense of tension is palpable and unbelievably gripping. Death and murder can never be a substitute punishment to what was meted out beforehand. In his actions, Montresor is doing Fortunato an incredible wrong, the ultimate wrong one can argue. The concluding lines of the story

are also highly gripping when he says, ' In Pace Requiescat' which gives a finite sense to everything as a conclusion to the story. On a personal note, one feels that Fortunato received the most terrible punishment for his sins and even if he atoned for them in another world, then he deserved a second chance in this one. As for Montresor, one wonders how he lived out his last years, wracked by the guilt of the terrible deed he did. That surely demonstrates that the punishment was definitely not the appropriate one. Edgar Allen Poe was also a master in creating tension and this is present in several of his stories among which one may count The Raven, The Black Cat and the Tell Tale Heart. Tension is an important part of Poe's strategy since we never seem to know what is coming next and this culminates in a frenetic sense of energy and momentum in the story. Poe relies on a number of techniques in these three stories and one may mention the foreshadowing where we are consistently led to believe that the narrator is about to meet his impending doom. The leitmotif of an object which is in most cases an animal which is black in colour also creates a sense of foreboding and high tension since doom is to be expected at one point or another.

The Black Cat uses a strategy to create tension with the narrator telling a story. The descent into violence and alcoholism is part of the story and there is also considerable tension in the part leading to the narrative when the cat begins to act strangely and the narrator gouges out the animal's eyes. The part which leads to the hanging of the cat is particularly powerful as here we are observing the inner savagery of man. The night is also an important part of the strategy of tension especially when the house catches fire and all is laid waste. The sense of impending doom and inevitability of the story works

upon our imagination and here we can observe the technique of repetition as well as the symbolism created by the animal.

Another strategy used by Poe is the use of visual imagery to create terror. This is an essential part of the story of the Black Cat. The replacing of the murdered cat with another also gives rise to terrible hallucinations and here we have incredible tension as the narrator is being made to face his impending doom. Here one can observe similarities to Poe's own drunken stupor when he had to face the bottle so the story could be said to have emanated from these types of hallucinations.

In the Lupin stories such as 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' we also glimpse some traits that were common to Poe such as the 'locked room mystery' where there is no way in or out with the windows and doors securely fastened and locked but a murder has occurred just the same. In fact this was copied by detective story writer Agatha Christie in her Poirot novel, 'Death in Mesopotamia'.

Conclusion:

The deaths of those women who were close to him in life also deeply affected and scarred him. He also had a crush on a friend's mother while he also endured the dominance of his aunt Maria when marrying his cousin Virginia. Poe was also attracted to women whom he couldn't get or those who were ill and dying of tuberculosis (again in parallel with 'The Fall of the House of Usher')

He then became a haunted figure created by his own morbid imagination living out his dreams in fits of stupor. Stories such as 'The Pit and the

Pendulum', 'The Tell Tale Heart' and 'The Fall of the House of Usher' date from this period and are in a sense autobiographical. Poe's poem, 'The Raven' achieved some success but nothing else was publicly acclaimed during his short life. He died barely aged 30 in a drunken delirium in Baltimore after having supposedly been travelling to New York. He was found in mysterious circumstances wearing someone else's clothes and without a penny on him giving rise to several theories that he had been mugged or beaten to death. After his death his talents have been recognized and he is one of the most popular horror story writers ever. The description by Baudelaire that he was 'a fallen angel who remembered heaven' is an apt epitaph.

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