



The Cask of Amontillado

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Furious because of unspecified insults by Fortunato, the nobleman Montresor seeks revenge. By appealing to his enemy's pride, Montresor lures Fortunato into his family vaults to sample some wine to determine if it is true Amontillado. Once there, Montresor bricks the drunken man into a niche in the wall to die. Montresor tells the story of his crime fifty years later to an unnamed someone who knows well the nature of his soul.

The clues to the basically ironic nature of the story can be seen in many separate details which suggest that the truth is just the opposite of the surface appearance. The central irony lies in Montresor's coat of arms--which depicts a large human foot crushing a serpent whose fangs are embedded in the heel--and his family motto: No one harms me with impunity. There is irony also in Montresor's criteria for a successful revenge: that a wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser or when the avenger does not make clear that he is acting out of revenge.

At the end of the story, although Montresor does indeed murder Fortunato, he never really makes clear to him why he is doing it. Moreover, the fact that fifty years later he confesses his crime, perhaps to a priest, might mean that he has been punished by guilt all this time. The question left in the reader's mind is: If Montresor is represented by the foot crushing out the life of the serpent Fortunato, then are the fangs of Fortunato still embedded in Montresor's heel? If so, it might be said that Fortunato fulfills Montresor's criteria for revenge more perfectly than Montresor himself does.

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