

The Cask of Amontillado

Edgar Allan Poe, his words and stories have enchanted people for years. His frequent telling's of horrors surely came from somewhere right? After all, writers often write what they know or from experiences. They do all have over active imaginations but a seed has to be planted in order for the plant to take root and grow. I believe one of Poe's tales came from a rivalry with another writer.

In the short story *The Cask of Amontillado*, Poe tells the story of Montressor's revenge against Fortunato for insulting him. Bricking up the drunk man in the vaults of his home. Montressor never reveals what he has done until half a century has gone by. It is my belief that in this short story, Poe has penned himself as Montressor. While Fortunato is his rival Rufus Griswold.

Rufus Wilmot Griswold was an American writer, poet, editor, and critic. He and Poe met while both were working for the *Daily Standard* in 1841. Their relationship started out cordial. Griswold added a few of Poe's poems into his anthology. Poe even wrote a good review that was published about the anthology. From there things quickly went sour. Griswold expected more praise. Telling Griswold that he liked the anthology, Poe privately told others he was not impressed by the book. "A most outrageous humbug" he told a friend.

Their already tense relationship was stressed even more when Griswold was hired into Poe's old editor job at *Graham's Magazine*. Making more money than Poe did previously. Poe was furious. In a lectures he began openly attacked Griswold, continuing to do so throughout several lectures.

They fought over the affection of a fellow lady poet, Frances Osgood. Poe first won her affection causing rumors to stir. Especially since they were both married at the time. After all of the

rumors it seems that Griswold won this battle. Osgood dedicated some of her poetry to Griswold. Poe didn't take well to this news.

It's easy to see why they would dislike one another enough to write about each other. Later in Poe's life he became bitter and steadily more of a bar fly. He was seen in bars and drunk more and more. Often walking around aimlessly uttering words like a mad man.

Many of his last years it was said that he was constantly drunk and seemingly lost in his own mind. 1846, *Cask of Amontillado* is published three years before his death. After years of constant public loathing towards Griswold. Poe watched as Griswold was doing better than himself. I believe his loathing only grew. He had his old job, money, and now the girl they both lusted after.

The Cask of Amontillado begins with obvious anger and contempt. I believe dissecting Poe's story you get a good look at what he was thinking and his mental state:

“Fortunato had hurt me a thousand times and I had suffered quietly. But then I learned that he had laughed at my proud name, Montresor, the name of an old and honored family. I promised myself that I would make him pay for this — that I would have revenge.”

Here it seems that Poe is talking about Griswold. Poe feels wounded by his words. The words “old and honored family.” I believe come from the fact that Poe saw Griswold as inferior to himself. Poe saw Griswold as having no grammatical talent. He was nothing but a poor Southerner with unimpressive education. He shows this only a few lines down when Montresor is talking about Fortunato:

“Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack”

Continuing on in the story Montessor states that, although Fortunato has so deeply wounded him, he continues to be kind to his face, he must in order to keep his trust.

“I gave Fortunato no cause to doubt me. I continued to smile in his face, and he did not understand that I was now smiling at the thought of what I planned for him, at the thought of my revenge.”

Poe here is laying out the frame work of how Montessor gets his foe to never suspect him of any ill wish.

It is noted that Poe tried to reconcile his relationship with Griswold but neither party completely cared to do so. In a letter to Poe, Griswold stated that he didn't care for Poe's work but couldn't leave him out of his latest anthology. Poe sent back a few poems, and a reply saying he almost wished they could end their differences but thought better of it. Poe even tried to sweeten his half apology by telling Griswold he would stop attacking him in his lectures.

How Poe apologized to Griswold is similar to Montessor staying friendly with Fortunato. He needed a way to get Griswold to drop his guard. I believe Poe had some kind of hidden agenda. I don't see two grown stubborn men dropping years of dislike and public attacking for almost no reason. Poe had to have some unsaid reason for almost trying to patch things up with Griswold. Part of it may have been Poe needed to stay civil enough to be included in other anthologies Griswold may write in the future.

Should you change the amountillado with writing and poetry, then change the names of the characters to Poe and Griswold you would almost have their rivalry wrapped up. Both men are of similar social status, they share the same likes, they don't publicly loathe each other but do so privately.

Was Poe hoping to actually act out a similar plan to get rid of Griswold? And then thought better of it? Could that possibly be why he stopped speaking of Griswold in lectures? He thought he might still one day get rid of Griswold. I believe it is very possible. I think Poe wanted to get rid of his rival.

Though, if he had a plan why not go through with it? While battling with mental illness Poe seemed to have breaks in his madness. Even showing some sort of remorse for having such thoughts. I believe that answer is in Poe's writing *The Cask of Amontillado*.

“Remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight.”

Montressor struggles to fully wall up Fortunato, its short lived as he continues to torment the man who has come to realize his ultimate, damp fate.

“My heart grew sick”

Montressor has the last pang of guilt when he realizes that Fortunato has given up so easily. I think he was hoping for a bigger fight and more anger from him. He quickly hides his shame, blaming his feelings on the dampness of the catacombs.

Writing can be healing. You write out what you want to happen or what you wish would have happened etc. Its then there down on paper. Freeing your brain to focus on other things. When I write it gives me a sense of closure on the subject.

Other than thinking of ways Griswold could parish at the hands of Poe, I believe *The Cask of Amontillado* could have been Poe's way of accepting his relationship and rivalry with

Griswold. Accepting that he has what he never will. Maybe this story is him 'walling up' his distaste for the fellow writer.

When it all came to an end and Edgar Allan Poe died of who knows what. Maybe a mixture of it all. Griswold made sure to let his absolute feelings be known by writing Poe's obituary.

Griswold got in the last 'punch' on October 9th, 1849 Griswold published Poe's obituary. *The New York Tribune* stated that few would be upset over his death. He then goes on to quote his own book. Griswold writes of Poe as a man who was lost in madness, easily irritable, and he "regarded society as composed of villains."

Griswold makes Poe look like a drunken man who made almost nothing of himself. Talking mainly about the torments he went through and all of the other bad he knew of. He closes the obituary with: "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well." Making it prevalent that Griswold thought of Poe as a crazy man who only came to peace in death.

It wasn't until later that Griswold admitted to a friend: "I was not his friend, nor was he mine."

Their dislike for one another is the exact hate you can taste in Montressor's catacombs as they walk to the tomb in-between the walls. Dark, damp, cold, and seemingly for no reason.

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