The Cask of Amontillado, by Edgar Allan Poe

In A Nutshell
Edgar Allan Poe, an American short-story writer, essayist, and poet, published “The Cask of Amontillado” in 1846. It was his last, and some say greatest, short story. It’s a tale of revenge, murder, torture, and addiction set in a vast underground Italian catacomb (underground cemetery). It’s also a journey into the dark and mysterious recesses of the human psyche.

Poe was born on January 19, 1809 to actors David and Eliza Poe. He and his brother and sister were orphaned shortly before Poe’s second birthday, and were each taken in by different families. Maybe this helps explain why he was attracted to the dark themes.

His biography is fascinating, and the subject of much debate, gossip, and speculation. For example, he’s rumored to have died from the bite of a rabid dog, but he probably passed away as a result of drug- and alcohol-related complications. He was a heavy drinker, and also addicted to the drug laudanum. This information helps us decipher a difficult symbol in the story, which you can read about in “Symbols, Imagery, Allegory.”

If you are interested in getting to know Poe better, we’ve provided you with lots of handy links in “Did You Know?” The most important thing you need to know about Poe is that he was a truly brilliant, visionary, and influential writer. He basically invented the genre of mystery or detective fiction as well as science fiction, and he had very precise ideas about what stories are supposed to do and be, as is reflected in his essays.
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**Big Picture Study Questions**

1. What if Montresor is a woman? Most people assume Montresor is a man. Why? Would it change the way you think about the story if Montresor is a woman?

2. What kind of clown is Fortunato? We see lots of scary clowns in the movies and in books. Is Fortunato a scary clown? If so, what is scary about him? If not, why?

3. How do you feel when you read "The Cask"? Claustrophobic? Tired? Something else? What about the story makes you feel this way?

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