Hedonism in the Catacombs

Have you ever been wronged by someone? If so, would you take revenge if you had the chance? What would be your boundaries in doing so? Deep inside the catacombs, revenge will be taken, but is it a revenge based on anger or something else? In the story “The Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Allan Poe, the narrator seems unhinged and seeks a fatal revenge for a wrong that is never fully described. The narrator may not only be taking revenge because he feels anger toward his friend, but because of his hedonism, his “Devotion to pleasure as a way of life” (hedonism). Indeed, Poe’s character may only find pleasure by making others feel pain.

First of all, the narrator states that he prefers to store his wine, not in a cellar, but in the catacombs with the remains of dead people. “We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors” (327). While the catacombs offer a dark, cool area to store wine, no sane person would enjoy to store something they would drink in the same room where there are remains of dead or diseased people. There may be a stench, and the rodents that scurry around would make anyone with any sanity simply feel uneasy and disgusted. Why would the narrator store his wine, something meant to bring happiness, with the remains of dead people, a symbol for sadness? Practical purposes aside, Poe’s narrator finds as much joy in the decay of others and the remains of their life as he does in his wine.

Furthermore, wine is something that brings the both of them happiness and is a passion for them as well, it's the perfect excuse to take Fortunato into a remote place and drug him. “The
wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc” (328). When the narrator says his “fancy grew warm,” he may not be referring to the wine completely. He is making a small reference to the happiness which he feels as his enemy or “friend” takes one step closer to death as every drop hits his tongue. As his revenge gets closer to his fingertips, he becomes anxious; he cannot wait to feel the satisfaction as his own friend suffers. He feels pleasure in the drunkenness and destruction of his friend, Fortunato.

Next, the narrator displays a clear sign of his hedonism.

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 instance reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproched the wall; I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still. (329)

The narrator had a single moment of sanity, where his mind questioned if he should keep going. This was not a normal feeling for him. He had to touch the cold walls of the catacomb to remind himself what he was there to do. He felt satisfaction as he touched the walls because it made him remember his passion, and he perhaps thought of the other people he had killed there. It almost appeared as if he is lost in his own reality and at times tends to be unconscious of the real world. Remembering the catacomb and past deeds gave him a tremendous amount of pleasure. He
began to scream louder like a mad man; he yelled louder and stronger than the man in pain, and he enjoyed it.

Moreover, there's is another clear sign of his hedonism.

The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was not the cry of a drunken man. There was a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might harken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flamboux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within. (329)

Even though the narrator knew his enemy, or his friend as he likes to call him, was not drunk anymore and was well aware of what was going on, he kept walling Fortunato in. He did not stop, not even after hearing a man yell in pain, and not even after hearing the chain shake in such a brutal way; none of those things convinced him to stop. Actually, it brought to him a feeling of satisfaction, of happiness, and of joy. He rested for a while and sat down with the bones surrounding him; the bones did not gross him out or cause him to feel sorrow. The pain of his friend did not scare him but brought joy to his heart.
In conclusion, the narrator appears to be a psychopath. He keeps wine, his passion, inside the catacombs where there are remains of dead people. This is appropriate, as the death and pain of others brings him the same type of pleasure wine does. He also claims to care for his friend, but seems to find a tremendous amount of satisfaction as he hears him struggle and scream of pain. At times, he showed consciousness of the real world, but, as he touches the walls of the catacombs, he goes back to his own world. He goes to a world in which he can only find pleasure, happiness, and satisfaction by harming others; he cannot help this attitude, as he is mentally unstable and has no consciousness of a “normal” reality.
Works Cited
