Revenge is a Dish Best Served Cold:

Analysis of Revenge in “One of These Days” and “The Cask of Amontillado”

Revenge, sweet revenge! Some people are just born with a sense of revenge in their hearts whereas others might lapse into revenge when they are pushed hard enough. Many people can feel revengeful, but only a handful will carry out the deed. Two authors, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Edgar Allan Poe, write stories that have dealt with the notion of revenge. In Marquez’s story, “One of These Days,” a dentist gets revenge on the town mayor for some supposed political deaths of people in the town. On the other hand, Poe’s story “The Cask of Amontillado,” illustrates a revenge fulfilled based on a mystery insult done by Fortunato to the main character, Montressor. The two stories, “One of These Days” by Marquez, and “The Cask of Amontillado” by Poe, illustrate the differences in how revenge can be taken.

The first difference in the revenge that Aurelio Escovar, the dentist in “One of These Days,” and Montressor, the main character in “The Cask of Amontillado,” take is the amount of planning that has gone on for each act. Escovar is, by happenstance, presented an opportunity to take revenge on the mayor when the mayor comes to see him about an abcessed tooth. There is no way for Escovar to know that the mayor would be visiting him for such a problem. It is only after Escovar looks at the mayor’s tooth that he decides “it has to be [taken out] without anesthesia” (Marquez 676). This decision is made quickly and on hand without prior planning. One critic illustrates the quick gleam of revengeful thought in Escovar: “the reader suspects vengeance when the dentist states that the tooth must be removed without anesthesia” (Chase). Escovar sees his chance and quickly takes it. Oppositely, Montressor has time to carefully and fully plan the revenge he takes on Fortunato. He first insures that his household help will be good alibis. Montressor recounts, “I had told them that I should not return
until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders...insure[ed] their immediate disappearance” (Poe 728). Montressor plans for them to be able to say they were there all night and saw no one at the house, lest they lose their jobs from disobeying orders. He further shows his preplanning by showing the audience the tools with which he will bury Fortunato in the catacombs. When Montressor gets to the burial spot, he pulls out his pre-placed materials: “I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar” (Poe 730). This shows Montressor has had plenty of time to place what he wanted down in the recesses of his castle. Looking at the difference in the planning between these two acts of revenge illustrates the ideas of circumstance and premeditation.

A second difference in the acts of revenge taken by Escovar and Montressor is the pain each one inflicts upon his victim. Escovar inflicts immediate, grueling physical pain upon the mayor as he crunches the tooth out of the mayor’s mouth without any anesthesia. As Escovar takes out his revenge, Marquez narrates, “The Mayor felt the crunch of bones in his jaw, and his eyes filled with tears” (676). The lack of anesthesia while the dentist physically rips a tooth out of the mayor’s mouth shows a harsh physical punishment. However, Montressor exacts both physical and mental torture on his victim. Not only does Montressor murder Fortunato by bricking him up in the wall, but he psychologically manipulates him. As Fortunato is yelling for help, Montressor copies him and shows him that no one can hear him. Montressor says, “I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I reechoed-I aided-I surpassed them in volume and in strength” (Poe 730). This is mentally anguishing to Fortunato who is now aware of his fate; these yells only show him that he is going nowhere. To add to the mental harshness of the revenge Montressor creates, he also physically tortures Fortunato. Fortunato has been chained to the wall in the recess, and as Fortunato was screaming, Montressor began slashing at him with a small knife through the hole of the bricking (Poe 730). Readers do not know what physical damage this has caused, but after Montressor “thrust[s] a torch through the remaining aperture,” and bricks up the last part of the hole, readers know that the fire and smoke, along with being left to starve, is a physically devastating act (Poe 731). Both of these acts of revenge cause pain, but it is Montressor that creates a dual punch with both mental and physical torture.
Finally, the outcomes of the acts of revenge differ between the stories “One of These Days” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” Even though Escovar has momentary power over the mayor, his revenge is short lived. Escovar has caused the mayor pain, yes, but in the long run after the initial pain, the mayor is not hurt in any way. He shows Escovar that he has not been hurt when Escovar asks where to send the bill: to the mayor or to the town. The mayor pipes up and says, “it’s the same damn thing” (Marquez 676). This statement from the mayor shows Escovar that he has not had that much of an impact with his revengeful act. On the other hand, Montressor’s revenge is final. Montressor makes sure Fortunato will never bother him again. After Montressor throws the torch in the crevice, he bricks Fortunato up forever: “I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones” (Poe 731). From this, readers know Fortunato has no way of getting out. Poe further illustrates the finality of Montressor’s act by showing how long Fortunato has been undiscovered. Poe narrates, “for the half of a century no mortal has disturbed [Fortunato’s remains]” (731). Fifty years later, no one has been able to prove or uncover the revengeful act of Montressor. One can even see the pride with which Montressor recounts his tale: “Montressor confesses with an ambivalent mixture of elation and obsession” (Platizky). He is certainly happy with the outcome of his vicious plan and has thought about Fortunato’s death for half a century. Overall, even though both characters cause pain to their enemies, it is Montressor that makes the lasting impression with his deed.

Characters taking revenge upon one another has been a theme in many literary pieces over the years; the revenge played out in “One of These Days” and “The Cask of Amontillado” certainly exhibit this theme through the characters of Aurelio Escovar and Montressor. The quick reaction of the dentist versus the premeditation of the murder of Fortunato shows the length of planning that each one used. The severity of the inflicted revenge also differs between the two stories because one is instant pain that goes away with time whereas the other is death – a final end. Finally, the difference in the two characters’ revengeful acts is the outcome of each. One man loses the battle of revenge where the other man succeeds overall: the mayor makes sure Escovar knows he has not won and that the mayor will do whatever he wants while Montressor brags that he has had the last laugh.
Some say revenge is a dish best served cold, and this is just how both characters from “One of These Days” and “The Cask of Amontillado” dish it out: the cold-blood runs deep in their thoughts and actions.

Works Cited


