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PARODY AND LANGUAGE IN «THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO» BY E.A. POE

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> The centre of reality is wherever
> one happens to be, and its circumference
> is whatever one's imagination can make of it.
>
> Northrop Frye

The majority of critics [1] who have discussed Poe's «The Cask of Amontillado», praise it highly and agree that it has a peculiar narrative construction but fail to extend their discussion to explain how the many aspects of the story cohere. An explicitly detailed study of its elements would unveil, not only its intricate unity but also the story's richest ironic meanings. The present paper tries to prove that the demonic parody [2] is the most cohesive and solid foundation upon which the subtle and insidious diversity of possible readings rest. Furthermore, the paper implicitly suggests how all of the critics, who noted the well constructed nature of the narrative, though without explicitly stating so, were right to presume its enigmatic [3] linguistic contrivance.

[1] Many of the critical insights in this paper have been seminally anticipated in published criticism on «The Cask of Amontillado»; they can be particularly found in a number of issues of *Poe Studies,* Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press. The journal's issue of June 1984 contains an index which refers to those insightful articles and the articles themselves cite most of the other major criticism on «The Cask of Amontillado».

[2] Two works have been very helpful in establishing the theoretical foundation about the concept of parody; first Northrop Frye's dicussion of demonic parody in *Anatomy of Criticism,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 147-151, 233-235, and 321-324, and secondly, Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art-Forms,* New York: Methuen, 1985, sp. pp. 30-45.

[3] Frank Kermode's ««Hoti's Business: Why are Narratives Obscure» and «Necessities of Upsringing» in *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 23-47 and 75-99 respectively have pushed closer towards clarity the present paper discussion.

The main plot-line deals with the rather obscure motivations behind an intricate vengeance on the part of its protagonist, Montresor, against his supposed offender and collegue, Fortunato. Whatever the motives that prompt Montresor to carry out the sacrificial retribution, he never does enumerate the purported «thousand injuries» [4] he claims to have received nor does he give convincing reasons in relation to his insistant appeal for a vengeance «with impunity» and «definitiveness» [5].

All we are told is supplied or omitted by Montresor, the first person participant [6] narrator; only through the limitations and intricacies of his telling will we be aware of the implications between narration, motive and event. For instance, Montresor tells us, fifty years after the immolation of his collegue Fortunato, that he felt fear and «sick at heart» [7]; we will deduce from this, among other things, that the immolation has not been all that impune and definitive as he tries to convince us to acknowledge. The *story,* still indelible on his mind, ends with the words *"In pace requiescat"* [8], that could easily be meant for his victim as well as for himself just before dying.

Since throughout his narration, neither his motives are ever explicit nor his telling sufficiently reliable, deceitful ambiguity is going to be the only constant and present reality through which we must wriggle wittily if we are to savour the story's richest and only Amontillado.

Because of the narrator's ambiguity and unreliability [9], the reader is best advised not to take anything for granted, but, on the contrary, to be wary about the assumptions behind the narrator's telling. Otherwise, he could complacently turn into what would be yet another symbolic victim of verbal delusions. The ambiguity, however, is the protective shield against an overwhelming rationale and helps the reader come out with a new vision, different from the unifocal one the narrator tries, so remorselessly, to cling to. The reader who is able to maintain an appropiate engagement/detachment [10] with and against the goddess of vengeance worshipped by Montresor, not only will realize how well the telling has been contrived, but what is more important, the Machiavellian precision with which all the elements cohere in a very different unified whole. The less reliable the help

[4] Edgar Allan Poe, «The Cask of Amontillado» in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe,* New York: Vintage Books, 1975, p. 274. All the subsequent quotation of the story in this paper are from this edition.

[5] Poe, op. cit., p. 274.

[6] As for the idea of «the narrator as participant» I'm in debt to *The Practical Imagination,* ed. by N. Frye, Sh. Baker and G. Perkins, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1980, p. 48; and in connexion with the idea of «the reader as participant» see Gay Clifford, *The Transformation of Allegory,* London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1974.

[7] Poe, op. cit., p. 279.

[8] Idem.

[9] On the concept of narrator's unreliability see Wayne Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction,* 2nd. ed., University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 158-59, 274, 295-296 and bibliography on pp. 482-494.

[10] I take the concept from Deanne Bogdan who is presently investigating the reader's response through engagement/detachment theory. Prof. Bogdan teaches at O.I.S.E., University of Toronto, Canada.

from the narrator, then, the more the reader's fascination will be with the challenge of deciphering the maliciously contrived verbal truth, which will put his perceptive powers to the sternest test. To be involved with the exquisite rationale and perverse complicity of the narrator, and not emerging with a new vision, would be to pay tribute to the same verbal *nemesis*. Only this highly creative capacity on the part of the reader would deliver him from the tyrannical imperatives of the verbal and «secret communion» [11] so earnestly desired by the avenger.

The logocentric [12] identity to which the narrator wishes to surrender the reader is the most important ambiguity one will have to strive with. Montresor starts to tell the story of his vengeance to a supposed «you» which according to him «so well know the nature of my soul» [13]. We don't yet know for sure who that hypothetical «you» can be. However, the complexity of this ambiguity will become much clearer if we postpone it until other kinds of simpler ambiguities are dealt with. When the protagonist, for instance, meets Fortunato in the street the very same day he will lead him to secret immolation, Montresor tells him what a happy encounter it is, and how well he looks; in fact, the encounter couldn't be less fortunate, and besides, if he's got a very bad cough, as we suppose, it would not make him look that well either. The name of Fortunato also partakes of that ambiguous double perspective: on the one hand, it truly refers to the *nouveau riche* status into which he has ascended, but, on the other hand, it is because of this socially privileged position, that Montresor is driven to be so envious of Fortunato and wills him into the unfortunate deed.

Montresor tries to present his vengeance to us as a simple matter of *lex talionis* [14]. He wants the «you» to recognize this as a correct retribute justice, in accordance with his traditional family attributes; the family motto in the coat of arms proclaims «nemo me impune lacessit» [15] that is, no one attacks me with impunity. The escutcheon represents a human foot striking a serpent's head at the same time the reptile strikes back at the heel, which gives expression not only to the retributive vengeance he apparently is determined to carry out, but also mirrors an inherent ambiguity: the same *lex talionis* with which Montresor carried out his retribution, seems to be inexorably at work now in his telling confession fifty years later. He has not forgotten Fortunato and less so at this very last moment of his life in which the narration of his deed to that «you» referred to above, takes place. Thus, a deeper irony and parallelism, regarding the emblematic implications which worked fatally for the victim, works for the aggressor and it may work for the implied «you», who may very well be Montresor's purported listening reader.

[11] Wayne C. Booth defines the rhetorical relation between narrator and reader in Poe's «The Cask of Amontillado» as «secret communion» in *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* op. cit., pp. 300-309.

[12] On the concept of 'logocentrisme' see Mikel Dufrenne, *Le Poétique,* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973.

[13] Poe, op. cit., p. 274.

[14] On the relation between *nemesis* and *lex talionis* see Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature,* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, Publishers, 1982, pp. 118-121.

[15] Poe, op. cit., p. 276.

Montresor's vengeance signified by the family escutcheon recalls the universal theme of antagonism between man and evil, a moral dualism to which Genesis 3:15, as we may recall, alludes in similar terms:

> I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your brood and hers. They shall strike at your head, and you shall strike at their heel [16].

No matter how universal this theme of confrontation between good and evil in the literature of all times may be, it doesn't justify nor doest it explain fully the obsessive determination on the part of Montresor to rise as a righteous *nemesis*. Therefore, we have no other alternative but to confirm, by our creative powers, the suspicion that Montresor's vengeance originates from an antagonism neither so wholly universal, nor so justifiable as he himself pretends it to be. Our suspicions come true when we start to think about social nuances. We realize, then, that Montresor occupied in the not so distant past, a privileged social status and that, with ill-disguised envious resentment, tries to convince that «you», to whom he is supposed to be addressing, of the inappropriateness of that position to someone like Fortunato. Confirmation of this hidden attitude is given during the long underground pilgrimage on their way to the assumed Amontillado. While they cross the ample spaces of the mansion, Montresor at one point confesses to Fortunato, that the Montresors were «a great and numerous family» [17]; the acknowledgement of the loss of an upper social ranking on the part of Montresor contrasts with the rise of a *nouveau riche* class to which Fortunato belongs and which according to the cynical envy of Montresor is one to «suit the time and opportunity» [18] much better. The inverted social direction of both family trajectories becomes much more obvious during the toasting. Fortunato toasts «to the buried that repose around us» [19] and Montressor, in an ironic and cynical address to Fortunato makes a toast with the words, «I to your long life» [20]— not for real, of course, since it is not going to be long before he immolates him.

As significant as the toasting, are the locuacious interchanges throughout the pilgrimatic descent. During one of the conversational flights, Fortunato, not remembering Montresor's coat of arms, demands from him the description which we have just referred to above. Without losing sight of the fact that it is Montresor who relates the story, Fortunato's inquiring reveals to us, among other things, that Montresor's social position does not have any longer the popularity, interest, and respect of which he could have boasted in the past and that now is dispensed to his rival.

Montresor's latent social antagonism towards his rival becomes surreptitiously apparent as the narrative unfolds. The later events will reveal much more clearly the deeper roots from which his antagonism derives. For instance, when Fortunato

16 From the *New English Bible*.

17 Poe, op. cit., p. 276.

18 Ibid., p. 274.

19 Ibid., p. 276.

20 Ibid., p. 276.

makes a special gesticulation while toasting, Montresor supposedly does not understand, and this is what goes on:

> I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.
> «You do not comprehend?» he said.
> «Not I», I replied.
> «Then you are not of the brotherhood».
> «How?»
> «You are not of the masons».
> «Yes, yes», I said; «yes, yes».
> «You? Impossible! A mason?»
> «A mason», I replied.
> «A sign», he said.
> «It is this», I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my *roquelaire.*
> «You jest», he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. «But let us proceed to the Amontillado».
> «Be it so», I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak, and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in research of the Amontillado [21].

Whether this event is a mere and fortuitous coincidence or, on the other hand, this visual joke has a deeper meaning in a premeditated design on Montresor's part regarding the victim as well as the listener, we do not yet know for sure. But we will soon realize that the contrived event has a concurrent counterpart in the ever deeper intricate design of the story. This design will reveal that the unnoted verbal authority of the story lies precisely in the integrity of the story's verbal structure which ultimately coincides not only with the contrived event but with the egocentric perception of the narrator as well, whose mind contains and continues to live in the unrevived morgue of its telling.

Apart from the undeniable contrivance of the joke as well as the telling, the truth is that the consolidation of Fortunato's economic and social rise is intimately and historically linked with Freemasonry, and that the trowell produced by Montresor and with which he will soon carry out Fortunato's walling off, corroborates the existence of a deeper antagonism on Montresor's part. Furthermore, the fact that Fortunato learns from the equivocal sign of the trowel that Montresor is a mason, when he is sure that he is a Catholic, and that the Roman Church had prohibited its followers to be members of the Brotherhood at the time the story takes place, leads us to think a step further and to see that his antagonism has its most significant roots in a religious context rather than in an exclusively socioeconomic one, though they both go together. (It would be convenient to recall, in this respect, that the Roman Church's prohibition of its members to join Freemasonry dates from the beginning of XVIII century and was stated in various papal bulls [22]. The origin of this prohibition, and the social circunstances sur-

[21] Ibid., p. 277.

[22] Freemasonry is condemned in the bull *In Eminenty* by Clement XII IN 1738 and it is reiterated such condemnation in *Human Genus* (1884) and *Annum Ingressi* (1902) by Leon XIII.

rounding the rise of Freemasonry in different countries, are obscure and still under research. Neverthless, the differences between Church and Freemasonry as institutions were rather clear: one was hierarchical, autocratic and orthodox, while the other was democratic, ecumenic, secret and fraternal [23]).

Whether we consider relevant or not the previous historical reference, what is true is that the story is full of other important religious allusions as well, which leads us to deduce that the conflict between the two main characters provides us sufficient ground for a religious interpretation. How coud we, otherwise, explain the fact that Montresor echoes Fortunato's *"For the Love of God"* [24] with a «Yes, for the love of God» while continuing implacably to immure him, tier after tier, till the eleventh tier which according to the kabalistic mysteries is the number of the infernal martyrdom? [25] Fortunato's religious appeal, pleading in the name of his aggressor's divinity, though he could not very well believe in it (Poe underlines Fortunato's words), manifests, among other things, his recognition of Montresor's superiority. At the same time the latter regains symbolically a superior position by denying recognition of this appeal, thus putting one of them in an unfortunate position while the other, in a righteous/divine role, plays the worst intransigence of intolerance, religious intolerance, and reenacts the immemorial and ritual persecution of which the catacombs' martyrs'bones are a symbolic proof:

> I forced the last stone into its position. I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I reerected the old rampart of bones [26].

Significantly enough, the «piles of bones» [27] of Montresor's mansion, besides being the remnants of his family pantheon, are identified with the Paris catacombs, giving the story a universal dimension:

> At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. [Sic] Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris [28].

We are coming, thus, to confirm our suspicions that deeper than the social antagonism is an ever more apparent religious intransigence. Although not yet fully documented, it is precisely to a discussion of this religious intolerence what I intend to devote the rest of the paper and by doing so to show that is what makes the story cohesive and gives integrity and meaning to all its elements with consistency and forcefullness: its religious intolerance design responds in a shaping parodic way to the sacrificial immolation officiated by its protagonist; that

[23] See R. F. Gould, *History of Freemasonry,* 4 vols., London, and A.G. MacKey, *Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry,* 3 vols., Chicago, 1950.

[24] Poe, op. cit., p. 279.

[25] Se Juan E. Cirlot, *Diccionario de Símbolos,* 3rd ed., Barcelona: Labor, 1979, p. 331.

[26] Poe, op. cit., p. 279.

[27] Ibid., p. 278.

[28] Ibid., p. 27.

is; from this perspective, the action reveals itself as an enactment which does not bring any renewal to individual or communal life; on the contrary, it is the demonic counterpart of the ideal sacrifice, that is the inversion of the biblical or ideal imagery of the Christian Passion.

This sacrificial parody is established from the very first moment when Montresor deceives Fortunato who is never aware of his being sacrified; besides, he has been taken in because of his inveterate inclination for spirits; being a connoisseur and enticed by the idea of tasting the special Amontillado, Montresor has little difficulty in drawing him into the supposed wine. He flatters him as the ideal person to try the special qualities of the vintage, and makes him drink so much on the way to the ever reached Amontillado that Fortunato is in a state of drunken delirium at the very moment of his immolation.

Furthermore the story takes place during carnival time, in which festivities, the King would usually take the place of the fool or buffoon for a day, something appropriate for which Fortunato, given his social status in relation to Montresor, seems to be a counterpart figure [29]. Saturn is the divinity to whom tribute is paid during these festivities, which have to do with *carnem levare* or carnival, and which received the name of saturnalias, and symbolized the slow and implacable passing of a time in which the flesh is taken away, or in which time eats his offspring, as in Goya's picture of Saturn devouring his sons. Saturn is like Dracula in this sense since both base their existence on the flesh and blood of their respective victims; they draw their life from dissolving other beings' identities, something very similar to what Montresor does to Fortunato's life. He walls him off in a crypt; crypt like sarcophagus etymologically means flesh-eating stone. The piles of bones that proliferate in Montresor's family pantheon are the social image of a gone-by body. Of course, this is a reminder of the demonic version of St. Paul's vision of a Christian body holy incarnated, and because of the story's biblical inversion [30], it follows that it is most appropiate for the action to take place in the catacombs just before Easter and during carnival time.

Furthermore, Montresor wears an ominous *"roquelaire"* [31] or cloak beneath which he hides the trowel. The cloak, in traditional symbology [32], isolates the person who wears it from the forces of the outside world at the same time as it expresses self-possession; it is an attribute of Dracula, dignataries and the clergy, as well as of bullfighters in a more stylised form. The cloak can be associated with positive or negative psychic contents according to the tonality in which they come to be revealed. The cloak Montresor wears is not the purple of divine authority according to its manifestation: it neither protects nor sublimates the instinctual drives of his psyche. He carries the fateful trowel hidden beneath the cloak with

[29] See Sir James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough,* London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1980, pp. 562-577 and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* Ardis, 1973, p. 101.

[30] As for the biblical symbolic imagery of «blood», «wine», «communion» *et al.* see Alan Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (1954), London: Thames and Hudson, 1983.

[31] Poe, op. cit., p. 275, 277.

[32] Cirlot, op. cit., p. 118.

which he will give free rein to the instinctual contents of his retributive and vengeful psyche. Apart from the «*roquelaire* closely drawn about» [33] by Montresor at the moment at which the pilgrimage begins, he also puts on a «mask of black silk» [34] by which we understand that the initiation rite of sacrifice has started.

Fortunato's clothing is no less symbolic than Montresor's The narrator informs us,

> The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting partly-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells [35].

Fortunato's garb is obviously of a buffoon, reminding us of the king figure substitute during carnival festivities. The motley colors without order and without harmony remind the viewer of the multiple and chaotic influences that he is under [36]. The cap, or hood, if one thinks of Little Red Riding girl who through psychic inmaturity does not recognize the wolf she has just been talking to in her grandmother's bed, carries not the sublime dignity of a crown but a meaning similar that of the girl's hood in the children's story.

The bells attached to the cap have also an inverted symbolism from the jingle bells of Xmas or the sounding bells rung in the elevation of the Holy Host at mass, which, in their turn, are a stylised reminder of the sound of the church bell to which the religious community assembles [37]; that is, the bells of the buffoon's cap — contrary to the sound of the church bell which is the mediating symbol between the earthly working community at the fields and the celestial order at the hour of the Angelus. The sounding bells of Fortunato's cap will recur many times throughout the entire pilgrimage to his immolation, as a reminder of mortal and contrapuntal parodic accompaniment.

A further inversion is the invisibility of the sacrificial rite. Instead of taking place after the ascent of a Mount Calvary from which the sacrifice may be visible to all, the pilgrimage follows a tortuous downward route. The pilgrims wander through laberinthine streets, archways, vaults, down winding-staircases towards the final blind recess of «the most remote end of the crypt» [38], all images of lost direction, and symbols of infernal descent towards an illusory centre [39] called Amontillado. While in their subterranean passage, Fortunato persistently asks Montresor for ««the pipe» [40] of the precious spirit; Montresor dismisses his inquiry and, instead, urges him to «observe the web-work which gleams from these cavern walls» [41], to which Fortunato pays no attention, since the narrator informs

[33] Poe, op. cit., p. 275.
[34] Ibid., p. 275.
[35] Ibid., p. 274.
[36] Cirlot, op. cit., pp. 135-141.
[37] Ibid., p. 117.
[38] Poe, op. cit., p. 275, 277, 278.
[39] See David Haliburton, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 250.
[40] Poe, op. cit., p. 275.
[41] Ibid., p. 275.

us that inmediately after his request «he turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication» [42] and Fortunato, absentmindedly utters, «Niter?» [43]. We cannot help associating the absent spider from the web with its surrogate, Montresor, whose hidden tortuous machinations are entrapping the unconscious, wine delirious, intoxicated Fortunato. This intricate underworld of Montresor to which Fortunato is led, has only a centre in which he will lose carnal identity be it individual, social or religious. The centre he is about to enter is the counter-image to an ideal body represented by a Holy Sanctuary or Sacred Heart in biblical symbology [44]. Montresor's telling that his «heart grew sick» [45] is, from this new perspective, a centre of liquidation or dissolution around which the whole story pours forth.

No wonder the dissolute atmosphere surrounding the entire pilgrimatic passage is constantly present. The walls leak out humidity and are covered with niter; both elements are indispensable for man's life on earth but in which man cannot possible live. Montresor explains to Fortunato who wonders about the dampness of the place that the humidity is due to the fact they «are below the river's bed» [46], thus the image of liquidation together with the irreversibility of passing of time joined inextricably for ever in hell; while the positive imagery would open an ascending road to sacred and immortal life, its negative aspect manifested here, is a sign of hell —hell being a metaphor for the complete loss of human, identity.

During the descending pilgrimage, Montresor and Fortunato significantly stop three times. First while they are toasting; second, when they interchange information about the coat of arms, and, third when Montresor shows Fortunato the trowel. This numerical reference presents a black version of the Calvary. There are other parodic parallelisms as well. Fortunato not only wears the buffoon's garb as king for a day, carries a cap with bells as an inversion of the thorny crown, and takes the fatal situation very lightly, but relentlessly demands that the 'chalice' not be taken away from him and that he be let to the Amontillado. What seems to be a final *tour de force* engineered by Montresor, is that Fortunato dies, not from lack of wine but from a lack of air behind a wall in the deepest recesses of any social breath, which makes his immolation all the more invisible to the world, deprived of any social recognition, as if it only owed its existence to the obscure intricacies of the narrator's mind.

The demonic parody or the inversion of biblical imagery of the Passion which the narrator's account presents, reflects the cohesiveness of all the story's elements and manifests the internal logic of a fervent, fanatical, mercenary and above all intolerant mind. The present demonic parody perspective can put «The Cask of Amontillado» to a final test of coherence if we ask why Montresor feels com-

[42] Idem.

[43] Idem.

[44] Watts, op. cit., pp. 194-196.

[45] Poe, op. cit., p. 279.

[46] Ibid., p. 276.

pelled to tell his story, and to whom he is supposedly addressing it, or why he tries so unyieldingly to drive his listener into participating in a secret sort of verbal communion.

There is no definite answer to all the previous questions. The words mean what they say. All we get, we get from the narrator's closed-in verbal structure; the rationalizing of its message would be to fall into a similar trap to that in which Montresor is caught as a consequence of his use of language [47]. He tries at every instance to bend his discourse, his words to the imperatives of his justifiable impunity. His discourse demands an accomplice, a secret sharer, but the communion he proposes only requires a victim similar to Fortunato's attitude of unconsciousness. There is not free creativity in the verbal communion sought by Montresor's discourse or Fortunato's spirits, both are inversions of a biblical sense of Spirit or Word; their communions are the inversion of the evangelic agape of the biblical sacrificial vision [48].

In sacrifice, the sacrificial victim is identified at the moment of his death with the divinity to which he is sacrificed to. Thus, sacrifice defines the nature of the believer: if the victim sacrifices himself to the Word, the effect is obviously one of divine origin, and becomes sacramental; but if his sacrifice is directed to the goddess of vengeance or the inversion of the Word as manifested in the demonic verbal structure, the effect is of a very different kind, usually excremental, i.e., out of the body, or without incarnation [49].

In the story narrated and acted out by Montresor, the sacrifice reveals the nature of officiating a demonic parody; it is owing to the internal *logos* of his mind then, that he seeks the complicity of a listener: a «you». But from the moment the reader becomes aware of a broader perspective than the one his discourse wants the reader to surrender to, he is no longer imprisoned in the mental limitations of the narrator, but partaking in the Word, which is not the narrator's voice. That is, from the moment the reader realizes he is in Montresor's rhetorical trap, he is no longer there.

The implications of Montresor's actions and narration are, then, that his social vision is based not in social integration but on egocentrically repressed perception which recognizes no broader social vision to his. Besides, the strict applicability of the law is not enough. By the end, Montresor's motive, act and narration makes him the officiating priest of a most horrible tyranny: to commit himself in act, motive and word to a demonic parody. His confession reflects for the

[47] This sort of ego-centric rhetoric used by the narrator is based on power and will-to-power, symbolised in the aggressiveness of facts and arguments; much modern philosophic thought, political writing and literary criticism uses language in this way and a good many pitfalls follow from it; the title of a recent critical study, *The Prison-House of Language* (by Frederic Jameson, 1972) carries a warning of some of these in its title.

[48] Watts, op. cit., pp. 128ff.

[49] In the nature of sacrifice either as meaningless destruction or meaningful offering I find invaluable Martin Foss' *Death, Sacrifice, and Tragedy,* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966, sp. pp. 44-51 and *Northrop Frye: The Bible and Literature,* Viceo Series, Programme # 13, Toronto: Media Centre, University of Toronto, 1983.

last time, if he is in his death bed whispering it to himself, the impossibility of integrating, or of making his ego disappear in a community of love through a wider social vision. He denies himself that social identity which is man's very own. To wit, Montresor qualifies Fortunato's understanding of «painting and gemmary [...] a quack» [50]; the ultimate irony is that the word Montresor means 'my treasure' in French, a precious gem, his name, his identity, which he seems to have valued rather little after all. The story of Adam and Eve, the first two biblical inhabitants who lost their paradisal treasure as well, is significantly linked to Montresor's coat of arms and ascendancy. All three were right to presume to be within the orbit of divine power. But they all took it to be something external to themselves. In the case of the biblical inhabitants their feeling of personal loss afterwards is overwhelming; the value of their personal treasure must have been enormous, judging by the vast common action and social vision they are consequently made to achieve in the future in order to get back to their Rightful Kingdom. This is not Montresor's feeling at all; he does not seem to have any awareness of any important vital loss to wit by the vision projected by his linguistic account.

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[50] Poe, op. cit., p. 274.