Litera: Dil, Edebiyat ve Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi
Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies

İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Litera 2022; 32(1): 229-248
DOI: 10.26650/LITERA2021-937582

Research Article

The Burial of Ambivalence in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*

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Submitted: 15.05.2021
Revision Requested: 21.10.2021
Last Revision Received: 01.11.2021
Accepted: 03.02.2022

Citation: Gunday, M., & Birlik, N. (2022). The Burial of Ambivalence in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*. *Litera, 32*(1), 229-248. https://doi.org/10.26650/LITERA2021-937582

ABSTRACT

In Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Cask of Amontillado*, Fortunato's captivity by Montresor in the middle of a carnival with no explanation amazes readers and leaves many unanswered questions in readers' minds, thereby leading to reductionist interpretations of the story. Each of these readings leaves some elements in the story in ambiguity, failing to integrate them into a totalizing interpretation of the story. The reading of the story in relation to the Freudian concept of the uncanny, however, helps us to understand the motive behind the murder, by revealing the unconscious mechanisms at work. In light of this, this study argues that as a murder story involving the cruel death of a helpless victim on the surface level, *The Cask of Amontillado* is based on what is left unsaid in the narrative. It arouses the sense of the uncanny, as what Montresor says on the conscious level in the guise of the *heimlich* turns out to be, on the unconscious level, actually a phantasy of acting out the repressed wishes that he had pushed back to the darkest recesses of his psyche because of their disturbing threat to his egotistical unity.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, *The Cask of Amontillado*, Sigmund Freud, the uncanny, psychoanalytical criticism

Introduction

Told from the perspective of an intradiegetic narrator, Montresor, Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846) goes back to the soul-shattering memory of a brutal murder committed 50 years ago in a carnival season.[1] Ending simply with Montresor's heartfelt(!) blessing of "In pace requiescat!" (Poe, 2011, p. 188) for Fortunato, whom he had mercilessly murdered below his palazzo, the story presents a menacing atmosphere mixed with tension, suspicion and fear. Adding to the story's unexplained complication, Montresor never clarifies the motive behind the murder, apart from stating that "[t]he thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge" (Poe, 2011, p. 181). Another possible reason for his attempt is vaguely hinted at between the lines. The narrator regards himself as an expert in wine tasting, and the only genuine rival to him is Fortunato. Another element that hints at a possible rivalry is, as his name implies, his lucky standing in life. Fortunato represents the best in every sense of the term, as Montresor says to him, "Your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed" (Poe, 2011, p. 184). In such a context, Fortunato appears as a rival who leads the narrator to narcissistic aggression due to his inability to feel narcissistic omnipotence in Fortunato's presence. In other words, Fortunato represents the glorified mirror image that makes Montresor feel inferior to him. Because of his hatred for Fortunato due to an offense that he never makes explicit, Montresor wants to take revenge on him and asks him to come with him to sample a cask of Amontillado. Then, they descend a long staircase and find themselves among Montresor's family catacombs in the wine cellar, after passing through damp tunnels beneath the palazzo. Having arrived at the catacombs, Montresor chains Fortunato to a wall and kills him by burying him alive. Montresor literally builds a hall in the

1 The story is narrated by Montresor who, as an intradiegetic narrator, tells down to the last detail how he murdered Fortunato. Being unable to stand Fortunato's insult after the thousand injuries that he had borne as best as he could, Montresor decides to take revenge on him. Choosing the time of the carnival for the punishment of his victim so that he can benefit from his drunken and clownish state, Montresor lures Fortunato into his palazzo with the promise of a taste of Amontillado that he has just purchased. After coming to the palazzo, which he has emptied by sending his attendants to the carnival, they take two torches and pass through labyrinthine rooms in search of the wine. Then, they descend a long staircase into the damp ground of Montresor's family catacombs. In the underground chamber, surrounded by dust and bones, Fortunato finds it difficult to breathe and he begins coughing. However, Fortunato still goes on insulting Montresor because he does not remember his family arms and is amazed at the thought of his being a member of the brotherhood. After this, they continue their search for Amontillado. When they arrive at the deepest crypt, Montresor chains Fortunato to a wall and buries him alive by building a new wall around him. Stating that no one has disturbed Fortunato's bones for fifty years, Montresor ends the story with an ironic blessing of peace.

deeper recesses of his cellar to imprison him. With its many narrative gaps, the story is regarded as a riddle that leaves many questions unanswered and its interpretation does not go beyond the story of a murder committed for no reason at all. A close reading of the story in relation to the Freudian concept of the uncanny, however, goes beyond such a reductionist interpretation as it sheds light on the motives behind the murderous act and decodes its mystery by directly penetrating the intricacies of Montresor's unconscious. In light of this, this study argues that by offering insight into narrative gaps, the Freudian idea of the uncanny helps us both to weave the narrative elements into a coherent pattern and to get glimpses of Montresor's unconscious mechanisms.

The way Montresor tells the story of how he murdered Fortunato triggers a sense of the uncanny because what he says on the conscious level offers an insight into his dark psychic recesses and testifies to the return of the repressed *heimlich* in the form of the *unheimlich*. Fortunato speaks to Montresor's unconscious in his threatening role. That is, he triggers some unconscious reactions in Montresor. Several times in the story, Montresor expresses his admiration for Fortunato for his being not only an expert in wine but also for being a man of wealth, respect and happiness. Montresor's appreciation of Fortunato reflects that he sees him as his narcissistic rival, as his idealized image. Also, Fortunato's murder reveals what a huge threat he poses to Montresor's egotistical unity and self-esteem because of his perfection. One focus of the article will be how Fortunato, as Montresor's narcissistic rival, metamorphoses into an uncanny element and how this element leads Montresor to a womb phantasy. Reflecting the *unheimlich* in the guise of the *heimlich*, Montresor's palazzo, with its damp vaults and catacombs below, takes on the role of his unconscious. The cellar of the palazzo acts as the displaced form of a uterus, as it is accessed by long stairs. As Freud (2001) states, while "all elongated objects, such as sticks, tree-trunks and umbrellas (the opening of these last being comparable to an erection) may stand for the male organ,""boxes,""cases,""chests,""cupboards,""ovens,""hollow objects,""ships" and "vessels of all kind" assume the role of "the uterus" (*Standard Ed.*, *Vol. 5*, p. 354). Descending the stairs, Montresor treats his palazzo as a womblike environment where he can feel secure and his choice to bury Fortunato here proves to be not a random act, given the pleasure he feels. Montresor's burying Fortunato alive evokes another uncanny effect in the story. This unfamiliar way of killing triggers the uncanny as it acts both as a displaced fear of premature burial and of the death instinct. It can also be interpreted as a pervert transgressive act, given that it reflects the undervaluation of the reality

principle by the pleasure principle or a literalization of a metaphorical process. Montresor literally buries the glorified image, which bothers him, rather than repressing the sense of inferiority inspired by Fortunato.

The Burial of Ambivalence in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*

Giving insight into the return of the personal *heimlich*, the uncanny feeling is evoked firstly by Fortunato's complexity of character and the ambivalence embodied in it. Montresor's account of how he killed Fortunato reveals his unconscious mechanisms, which can explain his real motives. Looking at the connotations of his name might shed further light on Fortunato's implications for Montresor. Meaning "fortunate, wealthy, happy, or more generally, because of its derivation from the verb *fortunare*, blessed by the goddess Fortuna or random fate" (Scott, 2004, p. 87), Fortunato presents a model of perfection for Montresor. Montresor perceives their interaction in binary terms and locates himself on the opposite leg of this binarism. The name also symbolizes "Montresor's low estate, his agonizing remembrance of power and his present spiritual impotence" (Sova, 2007, p. 44). Moved by the wealth and prominence Fortunato has attained by "chance" rather than by "personal virtue" (Baraban, 2004, p. 51), Montresor adopts a changing attitude towards Fortunato. He not only expresses admiration for Fortunato and feels an irresistible urge to kill him for his insulting perfection but also hints at his hollowness. For instance, He says: "he had a weak point, this Fortunato, although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared" (Poe, 2011, p. 181). Then, he implies that he is shaped by pretense and deception: "few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian *millionaires*" (Poe, 2011, p. 181). Likewise, he adds, "in the painting and gemmary, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere" (Poe, 2011, p. 181). The way he depicts not only the strengths of Fortunato but also his weaknesses at such points as painting and gemmary seems to create confusion concerning the role of Fortunato as the ideal model for him. However, the intensity of his hatred and jealousy implies that he feels the need to insert such negative expressions about Fortunato so that he can escape confronting his captivation by Fortunato's enchanting perfection on an unconscious level. In this way, the negative statement "He had a weak point" (Poe, 2011, p. 181) preceding his complimentary expressions about Fortunato acts as a defense mechanism to resist his threatening feelings of envy through negation.

As Freud (2001) states, "the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*" (*Standard Ed*., *Vol. 19*, p. 235). Furthermore, he cannot help comparing himself to Fortunato after boosting him. Having stated that Fortunato was skillful in the matter of old wines, he adds, "[i]n this respect I did not differ from him materially; — I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could" (Poe, 2011, pp. 181-182). Comparing himself to Fortunato in terms of his financial status and skill in Italian wines, he reveals his narcissistic yearning through the mechanism of negation. This is exactly what Freud (2001) means when he defines a way of "taking cognizance of what is repressed" and "a lifting of the repression," "though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed" (*Standard Ed*., *Vol. 19*, p. 236). Thus, this negation becomes a formula of his painful inferiority in the face of Fortunato's perfection.

Repressing his painful state of mind, Montresor addresses Fortunato with such sincere terms as "My dear Fortunato" and seems to feel happy for encountering him: "You are luckily met" (Poe, 2011, p. 182). In this way, he covers his malice towards his narcissistic rival. Regarding the concept of narcissistic rival, Freud (2003) argues that "a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self thus may be duplicated, divided and interchanged" (p. 142). This motif, called "the double" in Rank's terms, attains an uncanny quality, deriving from the fact that though being "a creation that belongs to a primitive phase in our mental development, a phase that we have surmounted, in which it admittedly had a more benign significance,""the double has become an object of terror, just as the gods become demons after the collapse of their cult" (Freud, 2003, p. 143). By his simultaneous evocation of the feelings of sympathy and terror, Fortunato stands as Montresor's narcissistic rival. After persuading Fortunato to sample Amontillado, Montresor's self-control dissolves and he aims to annihilate his narcissistic rival, who surpasses him and who damages his narcissistic omnipotence. On entering the palazzo and descending the long stairs opening into the damp ground of the catacombs below, Montresor's reality principle dissolves and he is overruled by his unconscious drives. Thus, he reveals how worthless he feels when compared to his narcissistic rival, Fortunato: "Your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter" (Poe, 2011, p. 184). In his words, we smell the nostalgic yearning for his long-lost omnipotence, which is represented by Fortunato, and also the immensity of the threat posed by Fortunato to his present self. He tells Fortunato later, "you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible"

(Poe, 2011, p. 184). So Montresor cannot stand up against the pressure of his unconscious forcing him to annihilate his narcissistic rival, which arouses in him a feeling of inferiority. This feeling of inferiority does not leave Montresor in peace, thereby clarifying also "the thousand injuries" and "the insult" he complains about in the opening sentence. In their relationship, on the one hand, he seems to be considerate about Fortunato's health. On the other hand, he triggers the jealousy Fortunato feels for Luchesi, whom Fortunato calls an "ignoramus" (Poe, 2011, p. 186). This small detail shows that there is a similar rivalry between Fortunato and Luchesi, and Montresor is well aware of it and deliberately refers to it.

Fortunato offends Montresor not only by being greater than him in every aspect but also by deliberately humiliating him with face-threatening speech acts. He begins his verbal attacks by asking Montresor about his family coat of arms, which shows his "feudal family's fall as concomitant with the rise of capitalism" (White, 1989, p. 553). When Fortunato shows his ignorance of Montresor through his simple but sharp statement, "I forget your arms," Montresor's reply is, "A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are embedded in the heel" (Poe, 2011, p. 184). Montresor's answer reflects the traumatizing intensity of Fortunato's humiliating attitude towards him and also foreshadows the forthcoming violence to which he will expose Fortunato, given that he likens him to a serpent which is to be killed. Fortunato also despises Montresor when he forgets his motto: after asking about his coat of arms, he asks him "And the motto?" and Montresor answers, "Nemo me impune lacessit" ("No one injures me with impunity") (Poe, 2011, p. 184). Moreover, upon Montresor's answer, he pedantically adds "Good!" (Poe, 2011, p. 184). What is worse, Fortunato harms Montresor's self-esteem regarding his social reputation when he, with a cynical tone of voice, implies that he cannot be a member of the brotherhood:

> '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, 'a sign'.

> 'It is this,' I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my *roquelaure* a trowel.
> 'You jest,' he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. 'But let us proceed to the Amontillado'. (Poe, 2011, p. 185)

As in the above lines, no matter how hard Montresor tries, he cannot persuade Fortunato about his membership in the brotherhood. Although he also displays a trowel, "a legitimate tool of Masonry itself," discerning that "authentic recognition is key to brotherhood" (Foy and Lambo, 2015, pp. 254-255), he fails in his attempt because Fortunato remains insistent on not taking him at his word. The irony of situation here is that Montresor has a feeling that he can grasp only the literal meaning of masonry rather than the network of power which is charged with masculine or phallic energy. As Baraban (2004) points out, Fortunato's refusal to remember neither the coat of arms nor the motto of the Montresors reveals that their conflict is rooted in an earlier time:

> The display of family insignia was an indispensable part in the life of a socially prominent nobleman. Since a rich and a powerful man cannot remember the Montresors' insignia, it is logical to assume that Montresor was not an active participant in the life of social aristocracy. Montresor's inability to recognize a secret sign of the freemasons made by Fortunato and the latter's remarks 'Then you are not one of the brotherhood', also imply that Montresor is probably a bit of a recluse. Fortunato is definitely more powerful than Montresor. (p. 51)

As Baraban underlines, Montresor's inability to become an active member of the life of social aristocracy speaks of his marginal status in the social world and his problematic relation with the markers of patriarchal culture. In this battle of power between the two socially contrasting antagonists, "the nobleman Montresor" and "the nouveau riche, bourgeoisie Fortunato" (Benton, 1991, p. 184), Montresor's insistence on being one of the brotherhood shows how much he suffers from his marginal status and it paves the way for him to counter this humiliating gaze. As Fortunato has a very low opinion of him, Montresor feels traumatized. However, he never reveals his plan of murder, in the same manner as he tries to look considerably silent or unconcerned when Fortunato does not believe his claim that he is a member of the brotherhood. Though wearing the mask of a smiling face to hide his burning hatred for Fortunato, his smile shifts from the familiar to the menacing, as he states, "I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face,

and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation" (Poe, 2011, p. 181). He hides beneath the mask of this smile a sense of pleasure derived from the forthcoming idea of Fortunato's death. The peak of this sense of pleasure is when Montresor makes Fortunato beg of him "For the love of God, Montresor!" (Poe, 2011, p. 188). As Kishel (1982) claims, "stripped of its direct address, the plea 'For the love of God' becomes a beggar's traditional cry for alms, commonly heard in the street" and "Montresor, of course, would have enjoyed hearing his successful friend reduced to the beggary that must have haunted his own declining fortunes" (p. 30). Reducing Fortunato to the state of a beggar and "systematically denying every impulse represented by 'the noble Fortunato,'" Montresor "restores the perfect, lucid order that prevailed when the Montresors 'were a great and numerous family'" (Poe, 2011, pp. 188-184) and he tries to attain "a mental equilibrium" (Stepp, 1976, p. 451), though ending in failure.

A sense of the uncanny is evoked secondly through the womb phantasy concretized in the form of travel into the deeper layers of Montresor's palazzo. Montresor's womb phantasy is reflected initially by the physical description of the place that he chooses for Fortunato's destruction. Here, one cannot help referring to Freud (2001), who in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* claims that many "dreams, often accompanied by anxiety and having as their content such subjects as passing through narrow spaces or being in water, are based upon phantasies of intra-uterine life, of existence in the womb and of the act of birth" (*Standard Ed*., *Vol. 5*, p. 399). Similarly, the palazzo to which Montresor takes Fortunato stands as a womblike environment with its dark grounds descended by a long winding staircase and opening to several interwoven corridors lying in unplumbed darkness. For instance, to enter into the labyrinthine passages of the palazzo's murky ground, they need light, and Montresor says, "I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults" (Poe, 2011, p. 183). Even though they take flaming torches with them so that they can see what lies ahead, they never have clear vision because the heavy and smothering state of the deep crypt with its "foulness of the air" causes their flambeaux "rather to glow than flame:" "It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see" (Poe, 2011, pp. 185-186). In addition to this misty and stuffy atmosphere, which is also reflected by Fortunato's coughing ("Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!-ugh! ugh! ugh!-ugh! ugh! ugh!-ugh! ugh! ugh!-ugh! ugh! ugh!" (Poe, 2011, p. 183)), the unknown depths of the cellar, to which there is no easy access, become another sign of the womb phantasy:

> At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior crypt or recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no special use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite. (Poe, 2011, pp. 185-186)

As shown by Montresor's account above, even when they arrive at the most remote end of the crypt, they confront another interior recess and they can never be sure about the final border of the ground because of its convoluted state. Echoing the psychological depth of the story, the deep-reaching position of the labyrinthine ground, which allows no easy entrance, takes on the role of a womb where the ovum waits to be fertilized in the deeper layers of the uterus, covered in darkness and moisture. In addition to the physical description of the wine cellar, which arouses the sense of the uncanny with its womblike darkness, moisture and depth, the motive behind Montresor's going into that remote vault objectifies his womb phantasy as it unveils the feeling of insecurity and fear of Fortunato lying deep in his heart. As Freud (2001) states, in order to escape the menace, the ego resorts to "a temporal regression to infancy" and "in extreme cases, to a time when the subject was in his mother's womb and protected against the dangers that threaten him in the present" (*The Standard Ed., Vol. 20*, p. 127). Similarly, in the face of Fortunato, who outmatches him in all aspects as a threat to his ego boundaries, Montresor resorts to an intra-uterine regression so that he can be stripped of the dangers of the external reality. The analysis of how he kills Fortunato uncovers his womb phantasy further, although he verbalizes it as an ordinary murder committed in the darkness of a cellar. He prefers to put an end to Fortunato's existence not in front of everybody, in the open space of the carnival, but rather in the wine cellar surrounded by his family catacombs—in other words, not in the domain of the father, which is represented by culture, but in the domain of the mother, the repressed member of the family, which is represented by the cellar. By taking him away from the huge crowds of people who gathered for

the carnival celebration and making him pass along the narrow corridors of his palazzo, he solidifies his process of regression into his intra-uterine existence. The fact that it is the carnival time contributes to the sense of the uncanny, as it is the time for the unleashing of repressed desires on a communal level. Luring him into the vaults on the damp ground, he wants to relieve his unconscious from the tension of the disturbing psychic material and thereby to return to the sterilized state of an embryo in his mother's womb. His phantasy is implied also by how he persuades Fortunato to come with him. He convinces Fortunato to descend the stairs opening to the damp ground of the wine cellar by asking him to sample a cask of Amontillado, and at the very moment they arrive at the desired wine cellar, Fortunato finds himself surrounded by walls all around. In this way, while Montresor turns into an embryo in the cask that represents the womb, Amontillado takes on the role of amniotic fluid because he is forced to be reborn by the force of wine. Wine, a liquid of intoxication, contributes to the unleashing of desires. As such, with the cask of Amontillado, which symbolically represents not only intra-uterine regression but also the dominance of the pleasure principle over the reality principle (given the wine's silencing influence on the ego), Montresor wants to get rid of the difficulty of confronting himself. His repressed anxiety comes to the surface with the difficulty he has in facing himself and the expectations of the wider world, and also with his attempt to get away from the presence of others by taking shelter in the womb, the cellar. His emptying of the palazzo before descending into the vault implies, for instance, that he wants to pull away from those around him by hiding in a protected place where he will not feel the need to assert who he is or what "a great and numerous family" the Montresors were (Poe, 2011, p. 184)—that is, where he will be protecting himself from the threat of external forces to his egotistical unity:

> There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time. I had told them that I should not return until morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I knew well, to ensure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned. (Poe, 2011, p. 183)

As reflected in the lines given above, Montresor encourages the attendants in an ironic way to go away so that he can get rid of the menace of their gaze, acting as the superegoized self. This prepares the perfect setting to act out his womb phantasy and to escape the danger of punishment that might be given by the wider world.

Through his phantasy to return to the embryonic state and to be reborn by pushing Fortunato into the womblike environment of his wine cellar, Montresor also indirectly fulfills his phantasy of having an incestuous affair with his mother, as Freud (2001) states: "the phantasy of re-birth" is "in all probability regularly a softened substitute (a euphemism, one might say) for the phantasy of incestuous intercourse with the mother" (*Standard Ed., Vol. 17*, pp. 101-102). Thus, "there is a wish to be back in a situation in which one was in the mother's genitals" where "the man is identifying himself with his own penis and is using it to represent himself" (*Standard Ed. Vol. 17*, 2001, p. 102). Montresor's taking Fortunato to his labyrinth-like wine cellar implies that he wants to inject more energy to the field of the pleasure principle through his regression. As stated above, driving the servants away, he wants to evade the gaze of the external world. At this point, Fortunato's statement "Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone" becomes important as it signals the beginning of Montresor's rebirth with Fortunato, given that Fortunato uses not a singular but a plural pronoun in "Let us be gone" (Poe, 2011, p. 188). Apart from signaling their rebirth, the mention of Lady Fortunato gives clue about the reason why Montresor feels the need to be in his mother's womb, thereby reflecting one more motive behind the murder. While Fortunato has his Lady Fortunato, whom he thinks would be worried about his absence, Montresor has no such female figure in whom he can see the image of his mother and feel the security of a newborn baby. Disgusted at the thought of having no imago who could give him the image of an omnipotent man in the conscious world, he decides to return to the womb of his mother and, in the psychic space of the cellar, regain the lost feeling of wholeness that comes from union with the mother. As Freud (2001) argues, "for a man who is impotent (that is who is inhabited by the threat of castration), the substitute for copulation is a phantasy of returning into his mother's womb" (*The Standard Ed., Vol. 20*, p. 139). Similarly, by his incestuous phantasy, Montresor acts out his wish to attain a competent image of himself and to replace the role of the father.

Though giving him the chance to return to the security of his mother's womb and fulfill his Oedipal wishes, the perverse transgressive act of having union with the mother, however, does not prevent him from re-experiencing the same traumatic effect at birth. As the indicator of Montresor's going through an intra-uterine regression, his experience of rebirth is shown both through the anxiety that grips him on the verge of entering the cellar (the womb), and through the excitement that leaves him almost paralyzed with hope at the thought of a new birth—a new identity which is implied by the

atmosphere of the carnival mixed with tension and elation. "The act of birth" stands as the "first experience of anxiety, and thus the source and prototype of the affect of anxiety" (*Standard Ed. Vol. 5*, 2001, pp. 400-401). Likewise, even the very first idea of entering into the cellar triggers a sense of distress in Montresor. Though cunningly tempting Fortunato to come with him, he procrastinates regarding going underground with such excuses as the dampness of the vaults below, the coldness of the air and the probability that Fortunato might have an engagement with Luchesi:

> 'Come, let us go.'
> 'Whither?'
> 'To your vaults.'
> 'My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi—'
> 'I have no engagement; —come.'
> 'My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre.
> 'Let us go nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. […]'. (Poe, 2011, pp. 182-183)

While it is Montresor who offers the suggestion that they descend into his wine cellar to sample a cask of Amontillado, this offer seems to have been made by Fortunato, given that persuasive expressions such as "'Come, let us go,'" "'Let us go nevertheless'" and "'The cold is merely nothing'" (Poe, 2011, pp. 182-183) are used by Fortunato. By his timidity in carrying out his plan of descending into the damp ground of the palazzo, Montresor seems to be avoiding the anxiety of the birth trauma. Behind his timidity might lie the feeling of uneasiness from which he suffers due to the pain of the rebirth by intra-uterine regression. His feeling of anxiety about rebirth is also implied when he says "'We will go back'" (Poe, 2011, p. 184) and repeats the same excuse about the dampness and the increasing nitre lying below to dissuade Fortunato from proceeding on their way underground: "'The nitre!' I said; 'see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough—'" (Poe, 2011, p. 185). In addition, voicing the painful reminiscences of his traumatic birth experience, he depicts himself as if he had been dragged into the cellar by the force of Fortunato, as he says, "Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm; and putting on a mask of black silk

and drawing a roquelaure closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo" (Poe, 2011, p. 183). Baraban (2004) claims that Montresor uses the verbs "to possess" and "to suffer" not accidentally and he relates his choice of these verbs to his having a "better aristocratic lineage" than Fortunato, though being not as "wealthy" and "powerful" as him: "he 'suffered' when his offender virtually led him to his palazzo because etiquette does not allow minor aristocracy the liberty of touching someone of more noble origin" (p. 51). However, Montresor's deliberate choice of these two verbs reflects more than his discontent with their undeserved current social standing or his hatred for his being traumatized by his narcissistic rival. Expressing on the conscious level his dissatisfaction with Fortunato's hurrying him to his palazzo, Montresor, in fact, objectifies his unconscious anxiety about being so suddenly taken to his mother's womb to experience the traumatic effect of rebirth. In addition to anxiety, however, he also experiences some sort of excitement, though mixed with stress, due to the idea of this rebirth. No matter how much he suffers from the anxiety of rebirth, he does not give up the idea of going back to the mother's womb to be reborn. He motivates himself by pausing and holding Fortunato firmly: "I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by the arm above an elbow" (Poe, 2011, p. 184). His perseverance in continuing his travel into the cellar, despite the anxiety capturing him, is coupled with the happiness he feels with the thought that he will reverse his role with Fortunato through the experience of rebirth.

Montresor's excitement about the prospective idea of changing roles through rebirth is presented within the context of the carnival season, which gives insight into how much he wants to annihilate his present self and to re-create himself in the image of a person having a superior social standing to him. For Baraban (2004), given the fact that "a new class of nouveaux riches, of whom Fortunato was probably one, became socially prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," it is implied that the story is set in the eighteen or nineteenth century, and the relationship between Montresor and Fortunato, accordingly, sheds light on the "social tensions of the capitalist society" (p. 52). Looked at from this perspective, Montresor's choice of the carnival season as the time to take Fortunato to his cellar is shown to be, on the unconscious level, actually a wish-fulfilment to be reborn as how he wants to be, instead of remaining as how society perceives him to be. The fulfilment of his wish to be reborn into a new self is reflected overtly by his attempt to reverse his and Fortunato's current social standing through the exploitation of their appearance. As Bakhtin (1984) states, "in the world of carnival, all hierarchies are canceled" and "all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic

and political organization" are suspended (pp. 251-255). Likewise, while Montresor wears "a mask of black silk" and "a roquelaure," he describes Fortunato like a clown: "The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical caps and bells" (Poe, 2011, pp. 183-182). Through this incongruity between their clothes and current social standing, their roles are reversed. Although Fortunato is forced to "degenerate into the role of a drunken fool, both in costume and behavior" despite his "obsession with his self-importance" (Sova, 2007, p. 44), Montresor is allowed to act out his phantasy of renewal, shrouded behind his phantasy of elevation in social rank. So it becomes apparent that through enjoying his "roquelaure" that conceals his current inferior social standing and mocking the clownish look of Fortunato by paying him the ironic compliment, "How remarkably well you are looking today" (Poe, 2011, pp. 183-182), Montresor not only expresses the simple satisfaction of having the chance to undermine his enemy but also experiences some sort of *jouissance* by transgressing his stabilized social identity, recreating himself through the carnivalesque rebirth and putting an end to living neurotically with his repressed feeling of inferiority. As a man who is "almost beaten by what he views to be the loss of his birthright, the theft of ancestral claims and the disgrace of his glorious name" (Sova, 2007, p. 44), Montresor benefits from the unsettling atmosphere of the carnival world to become "the master of the man who has mastered him and humiliated him" (Gargano, 1967, p. 124). Moreover, he renews himself, though at the cost of undergoing the traumatic experience of rebirth marked by both pain and pleasure.

The sense of the uncanny is evoked thirdly by the premature burial of Fortunato. When interpreted on the conscious level, this live burial seems to conflict with the intensity of the hatred that Montresor feels for Fortunato, as it would extend the time needed for the death of his victim. In other words, due to his disturbance by Fortunato's menacing existence, Montresor is expected not to hesitate for a second to kill him as soon as possible; however, he delays this by giving him some time inside the wall. This premature burial of a hated victim that does not sound reasonable on the conscious level attains a reasonable explanation when analyzed with reference to the concept of the Freudian uncanny: behind it lies Montresor's repressed unconscious fear of being buried alive.

The historical background of the premature death provides a better insight into the return of Montresor's fear of premature burial in his capturing Fortunato within a wall. As Dülmen (1990) states, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, "the traditional

rituals of execution were burning, drowning and burying alive" and those violating the religious and moral order were killed not by "the executioner's hands, but without bloodshed by forces of nature, through fire, water or earth, to which especially purifying and destructive powers were attributed" (p. 121). Among these three rituals of death, live burial was the cruelest:

> Being buried alive was deemed a particularly horrific and severe punishment for a variety of sexual offences such as adultery, murder of one's spouse and infanticide, but it also punished cases of grand larceny. It was used mainly as a punishment for women, as a counterpart to breaking on the wheel for men. The delinquent was generally undressed and laid on her back in a pit beneath the gallows, bound, covered with thorns and buried from the feet upwards. This was often combined with impalement- that is, a pale was driven from above through the heart, navel or chest. This might be carried out before or after burial. The symbolism is not completely clear; obviously a return was to be rendered impossible and at the same time impalement prevented slow suffocation. (Dülmen, 1990, p. 121)

Born in the following age in which "attempts were made both to protect individuals from premature burial and society from judicial acts of public torture that were formerly sanctioned as rites of purification" (Platizky,1999, p. 208), Poe discloses, through the character of Montresor, an unresolved conflict whose roots go back to his repressed fear of being punished with a premature burial. Interestingly enough, Bennett (2011) claims that embedded in Fortunato's burial scene might be "a (homoerotic) bondage fantasy gone too far" and he further notes that even if not implying homoeroticism, "what Montresor does to Fortunato dramatizes the greatest fear of every submissive bondage enthusiast—namely, to be restrained and then abandoned" (p. 49). In contrast to Bennett, we argue that it is his unconscious fear of being buried alive that motivates Montresor to bury Fortunato alive. Thus, motivated by his fear of being buried alive, Montresor leads Fortunato to the "extremity of the niche," and "finding his progress arrested by the rock," he chains him to the granite with the help of "two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet horizontally" (Poe, 2011, p. 186). Moreover, chaining him on the waist in a few seconds, he withdraws the key and walls him up with a "trowel" and "a quantity of building stone and mortar" that he finds by throwing aside the pile of his family bones (Poe, 2011, p. 187). Analyzed from a Freudian perspective, Montresor's precautions to secure the captivity of his victim (chaining or walling in

with stone) reveal the degree of his repressed anxiety about being chained and walled up in the entrance of a niche, with no chance of survival. They also reflect his yearning for attaining male potency, given that the trowel and the mortar he uses are packed with implications of the phallus. As Freud (2001) states, "all weapons and tools are used as symbols for the male organ: e.g. ploughs, hammers, rifles, revolvers, daggers, sabres, etc." (*Standard Ed., Vol 5*, p. 356). Thus, as Bradley (2008) also underlines, in burying Fortunato alive, Montresor emasculates him and acts out his phantasy of gaining dominion over him: Fortunato's "continued existence is what empowers Montresor" (p. 60). By doing so, Montresor objectifies his repressed unconscious fears. Engel (1983) draws attention to the release of his "neurosis," stating that "the enclosures and the crypt" in which he buries Fortunato stand as "metaphors" for his "obsessive mind and the complex relationship between the reality of his disturbed inner self and his controlled, rational outer appearance" (p. 29).

Montresor's neurotic anxiety about being enclosed helplessly within a wall also explains the reason why he feels the need to describe Fortunato as having jingling bells on his clown hat. He mentions Fortunato with "bells" on his head (Poe, 2011, p. 182) to act out his own unconscious wish for being rescued in case of a premature burial. As Crichton states, "in an attempt to keep living entombments from occurring, coffins and vaults—especially for the wealthier classes—were equipped with special springs and sounding devices to give the person mistakenly buried alive a chance to be rescued" (ctd. in Platizky, 1999, p. 206). Similarly, acting out his phantasy of escaping premature burial and avoiding the darkness in the wall in which he unconsciously fears being enclosed and left to die, Montresor throws his torch into Fortunato's crypt before putting the last tier on him: "I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within" (Poe, 2011, p. 188). Also, no matter how much he resembles an executioner by burying Fortunato alive, his fear of premature death in the guise of his aggression reveals his being no different from a prisoner. Despite the difference in their roles, he still identifies with Fortunato. This is revealed by that he experiences a sense of jouissance while listening to Fortunato's vibrations inside:

> There was then 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 hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours 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 flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within. (Poe, 2011, p. 187)

Listening to Fortunato's vibrations of the chain and holding the flambeaux over the wall, Montresor relieves himself of the fear of being unable to be rescued from premature burial. In this context, while the ongoing vibration of Fortunato's chain comes to mean the continuation of his life in the case of being punished with a premature burial, Montresor's throwing a few rays, though feeble, over the wall implies his desire to have someone who could notice his enclosure and rescue him from death. By walling in Fortunato and hearing his fading but ongoing sound, he creates the image of a pervert. Montresor uncannily tries "to isolate, and enclose, a part of himself and a neurosis he hates—symbolized by Fortunato" (Engel, 1983, p. 28) and he feels pleased with acting out his unconscious mind and relieving himself, though only for a time, of his unconscious fear. Montresor's unconscious fear of premature burial in turn reflects his unconscious wish for immortality. As Freud (2001) states, phantasies about life in the mother's womb "afford the deepest unconscious basis for the belief in survival after death, which merely represents a projection into the future of this uncanny life before birth" (*Standard Ed., Vol. 4*, p. 193). Similarly, burying Fortunato alive, Montresor acts out his phantasy of attaining immortality. This is closely linked with his phantasy of survival, as shown through his ascertaining the rescue of his victim by placing jingling bells on his head, throwing a torch into his crypt or listening to the ongoing vibration of the chains inside.

Conclusion

To conclude, reflecting that "for Poe, it is not supernatural beings that people should fear" as "the real horror lies in what human beings themselves are capable of" (Sova, 2007, p. 42), Montresor's depiction of how he murdered Fortunato triggers the uncanny because what it presents on the conscious level as a cold-case murder story turns out to be actually an attempt to deal with the return of the disturbing psychic material that he had pushed back because of its destabilizing effect on the equilibrium of his psyche. The sense of the uncanny dominating the story by involving a blurry distinction between the known and the unknown stems from the fact that Fortunato incarnates Montresor's narcissistic rival by traumatizing him with his perfection and representing "all that Montresor and his family have lost" (Sova, 2007, p. 44); the damp vault of the palazzo to

which Montresor takes Fortunato by making him descend through vagina-shaped long stairs takes on the role of an encompassing and protective uterus where Montresor acts out his womb phantasy by regressing into an embryonic state; and the premature burial of Fortunato reflects Montresor's attempt to deal with his repressed fear of being buried alive. Penetrating into the deeper layers of Montresor's unconscious, these uncanny elements converge in his wish to go through a phantasmal renewal through coping with his repressed feelings of envy, low self-esteem, sense of incompleteness and fear of premature burial. Suitably, he murders Fortunato during the carnival, which "celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world" (Bakhtin,1984, p. 410). However, the question of whether or not he can really attain a psychic rebirth by stripping himself of the reminiscences of his repressed feelings remains unanswered, given the ending of the story. His explaining the murder in a detailed manner fifty years later implies the inevitability of the return of the repressed psychic material which he had tried to get rid of and reflects that "even though the long dead Fortunato may be buried," he is "still obsessed with the details of the crime and can recite them complete and intact after half a century" (Engel,1983, p. 28). More importantly, Fortunato's insistence on posing a threat to Montresor's egotistical unity is reflected in Montresor's final remark, "In pace requiescat!" (Poe, 2011, p. 188), as "the reader is left to question if he wishes peace upon Fortunato or for himself" (Sova, 2007, p. 43) with this blessing for peace.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.
Author Contributions: Conception/Design of Study- M.G., N.B.; Data Acquisition- M.G., N.B.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- M.G., N.B.; Drafting Manuscript- M.G., N.B.; Critical Revision of Manuscript M.G., N.B.; Final Approval and Accountability- M.G., N.B.
Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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