

English 1102 - Notes on The Cask of
Amontillado by Edgar Allan Poe and
The Lady and the Dog by Chekov



Professor Caroline S. Brooks

Narration and Point of View

- ❖ Perspective and focus influence the way we view the events in our lives and the way we tell stories.
- ❖ A story is told from a particular perspective, where the truth is either revealed or concealed.
- ❖ Narration distorts experience; it is important to learn how to read stories, how people tell stories, what is involved, how they make stories out of their own experiences, how through narrative they can make sense of their own lives.

Narration and Point of View

- ❖ Narration and point of view are less often the focus of student essays. Who is telling the story and from what perspective?
- ❖ How does point of view contribute to the meaning of a particular text?
- ❖ Narration and point of view affect reader's sympathy and knowledge of particular characters
- ❖ Narration shapes a text's overall meanings

Narration and Point of View

- ❖ Form can either support or complicate particular interpretations of text.
- ❖ What is lost or at least fundamentally changed by altering point of view?
- ❖ Keep a record of expectations and pay attention to the way in which point of view shifts and how point of view affect those expectations?

Character

- ❖ We judge fictional characters the same way we judge real characters in our lives.
- ❖ Our responses are based on what a character says, does and how they say it and do it, and what others say about them.
- ❖ In analyzing fiction, you must read characters carefully to try to understand who they really are.
- ❖ There is the influence of cultural stereotyping in fiction and in life.

Character

- ❖ Characters in the story are not reducible to their racial identity
- ❖ How close we get to a character in a story is a function of point of view.
- ❖ First person narration provides a close encounter, a kind of intimacy and proximity to one character's thoughts and experience which causes us to respond more sympathetically; we feel a greater sense of outrage or betrayal if the character lets us down.
- ❖ Third person narration is highly variable and omniscient; it tells the story from no perspective at all.

When Writing About Character

- ❖ Show how a particular character embodies a world view or value system and show why a character suffers a particular problem or dilemma.
- ❖ Note how and why a particular character develops or changes over the course of the narrative, and outline clearly the claim regarding each stage a character goes through.
- ❖ Show how a central conflict in the narrative is dramatized through a comparison of and / or opposition between multiple characters.
- ❖ Show how and why a minor character plays a crucial role in any given text.

When Writing About Character

- ❖ The key problem for students is to treat characters as individual people versus as embodiments of certain worldviews, values, attitudes and ways of being.
- ❖ Characters in fiction function both as individuals and as representatives of certain worldviews.
- ❖ Facts do not support any argument unless you infer something from them.

Setting

- ❖ Ask the following questions when studying the setting of the story:
 - ❖ When does the story take place?
 - ❖ Where does the story takes place?
 - ❖ What part does the setting play in the experience and meaning of the story?
 - ❖ Don't skip over descriptions of setting when reading!
 - ❖ How do portrayals work to evoke particular feelings, expectations or attitudes in viewers?

The Cask of Amontillado

by Edgar Allan Poe

- ❖ Poe's story is first-person narration with a partially unreliable narrator, who reveals at the end of the story that 50 years has passed.
- ❖ Suspense is founded on the reader's expectation that Montresor will gain revenge; the reader is both curious and anxious about the ending.
- ❖ Exposition includes the first three paragraphs
- ❖ When reading fiction, we take the high ground and damn imperfect characters.

The Cask of Amontillado

by Edgar Allan Poe

- ❖ The first-person narration makes us cheer for the protagonist; The story involves character types or stereotypes.
- ❖ Poe challenges the reader to try to guess what will happen next. Amontillado challenges Fortunato's pride; Fortunato is dressed as a fool.
- ❖ Poe's story is macabre, like a fable, with Montresor as the author and Fortunato as the unfortunate reader.
- ❖ Montresor announces that there is a plot (a good plot) where perpetrator doesn't get caught.

The Cask of Amontillado

by Edgar Allan Poe

- ❖ Montresor's charge is vague, yet we can count on him to carry out his plot.
- ❖ Stop at certain points and write down what you think might happen.
- ❖ What would be lost if the story were told from the 3rd person omniscient perspective?
- ❖ Montresor plays fair with Fortunato with ironic indications: he agrees Fortunato won't die of cough and he drinks to Fortunato's "long" life.

The Cask of Amontillado

by Edgar Allan Poe

- ❖ Reader's guesswork is based on cause-and-effect. There is a logic in the sequence of events and in the character's motivation.
- ❖ Plot and suspense seem to depend on logic. How can you guess what will happen next?

The Lady With the Dog by Anton Chekov

- ❖ Can the two main characters explain how or why they fell in love with the people they loved?
- ❖ Did the circumstances of their meeting these people have anything to do with why they fell in love?
- ❖ What are the circumstances of their everyday lives? Both are genuinely bored and both are alone in Yalta. Both are unhappily married.
- ❖ Meeting Anna opens Gurov's eyes to the beauty around him.

The Lady With the Dog by Anton Chekov

- ❖ The relationship between character and setting prompts the characters relationship and transform the relationship.
- ❖ For Gurov, the unreal becomes his reality. What causes this change in perception?
- ❖ Gurov begins a routine vacation affair and surprisingly falls in love. Human actions are often inexplicable. It shows the depths of ordinary experience suggesting something about the relationship between inner and outer reality.
- ❖ The way Gurov and Anna act and express their feelings toward each other suggests that life retains meaning, even in the face of what seems like an indifferent universe.

The Lady With the Dog by Anton Chekov

- ❖ Does their last meeting present a last chance to avoid the hell of a clandestine relationship, or are they offered no more than a choice between one circle of hell and another (the pain of separation versus the misery of an affair)?
- ❖ If Gurov and Anna are already imprisoned in one of the lower circles of hell, what kind of hell might it be? Dante consigned the lustful to the second circle of the Inferno, but Chekhov is writing in a different time and culture. His lovers forgive each other instead of seeking absolution from a priest.
- ❖ How does translation itself function as a kind of literary criticism or interpretation and what does it mean to analyze or interpret such translations / interpretations?