



## PREPARING to Read

# The Cask of Amontillado

Short Story by EDGAR ALLAN POE

*“I must not only punish, but punish with impunity.”*

### Connect to Your Life

**Revenge!** In the first paragraph of this story, the narrator, Montresor (môn'trě-sór'), vows revenge. He not only wants to make known the wrongs he feels have been done to him, but he also wants to punish the wrongdoer. Think about a time when you felt wronged or unfairly treated. In the heat of the moment, did you feel like getting even? How did you eventually react? Discuss one or two such incidents with a partner.

## Build Background

**Carnival** This story takes place in a European country, perhaps Italy or France, during carnival. Mainly celebrated in Roman Catholic regions, carnival is a time of festival just before the 40-day period of fasting known as Lent. During carnival, people wear fanciful costumes, attend balls, and participate in feasts. Mardi Gras in New Orleans originated from this European celebration.

### WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

accost    impunity    termination  
destined    preclude    virtuoso  
fetter    repose  
implore    subside



**LaserLinks:**  
Background for Reading  
Visual Vocabulary

## Focus Your Reading

**LITERARY ANALYSIS MOOD** One element that adds an extra chill to Poe's tale is **mood**—the feeling or atmosphere the writer creates for the reader. For example, think about the following description:

*We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.*

What mood is created by the description of darkness and foul air? As you read, think about other descriptive details that contribute to the mood of the story.

**ACTIVE READING MAKING INFERENCES** You make an **inference** every time you figure something out on the basis of evidence. Usually you infer by combining clues in the text with what you already know from your experiences or other reading. Montresor, who tells this story, is also one of its two main characters. As you read, think about the narrator's actions, his thoughts, and his feelings. Look for insights into his motivation and state of mind. Here is an example of the kind of inference you might make about Montresor, based on clues presented in the story.

### READER'S NOTEBOOK

As you read, record any observations that provide clues about the narrator's state of mind in a chart like the one shown.

What the Narrator Says	What I Can Infer
The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge.	The narrator feels that he has been injured by Fortunato's insults.



THE CASK OF  
EDGAR ALLAN POE  
A MONTILLADO



The thousand injuries of Fortunato<sup>1</sup> I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however,

that I gave utterance to a threat. *At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but punish with impunity.

#### ACTIVE READING

**CLARIFY** What terms does Montresor set up for his revenge here?

A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such

to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood, that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good-will. 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.<sup>2</sup>

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be

respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship<sup>3</sup> in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity—to practice imposture<sup>4</sup> upon the British and Austrian *millionaires*. In painting and gemmary<sup>5</sup> Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack—but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially; I was skilful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley.<sup>6</sup> He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells.

1. **Fortunato** (fôr'chə-nă'tō).
2. **immolation** (ĩm'ə-lă'shən): death or destruction.
3. **connoisseurship** (kɔn'ə-sûr'shĩp): expertise or authority, especially in the fine arts or in matters of taste.
4. **imposture**: deception.
5. **gemmary** (jěm'ə-rě): knowledge of precious gems.
6. **motley**: the costume of a court jester or clown.

#### WORDS TO KNOW

**preclude** (prĩ-klōd') *v.* to make impossible, especially by taking action in advance; prevent  
**impunity** (ĩm-pyōō'nĩ-tě) *n.* freedom from punishment, penalty, or harm  
**virtuoso** (vũr'chōō-ō'sō) *adj.* characteristic of a person with masterly knowledge or skill  
**accost** (ə-kōst') *v.* to approach and speak to in an aggressive or hostile manner

I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him: "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking to-day! But I have received a pipe<sup>7</sup> of what passes for Amontillado,<sup>8</sup> and I have my doubts."

"How?" said he. "Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi.<sup>9</sup> If anyone has a critical turn, it is he. He will tell me—"

"Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

"And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

"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 niter."<sup>10</sup>

"Let us go, nevertheless.

The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado!

You have been imposed upon. And as for

Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk, and drawing a *roquelaure*<sup>11</sup> closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.<sup>12</sup>

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 the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux,<sup>13</sup> and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

"The pipe?" said he.

"It is farther on," said I; "but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls."

He turned toward me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.<sup>14</sup>

7. pipe: a wine barrel with a capacity of 126 gallons.

8. Amontillado (ə-mŏn'tl-ä'dŏ): a pale dry sherry.

9. Luchesi (lŏŏ-kä'sē).

10. niter: a white, gray, or colorless mineral, consisting of potassium nitrate.

11. *roquelaure* (rŏk-lŏr') *French*: a man's knee-length cloak, popular during the 18th century.

12. palazzo (pə-lät'sŏ): a palace or mansion.

13. from . . . flambeaux (fläm'bŏz'): from their wall brackets two lighted torches.

14. filmy . . . intoxication: eyes clouded and watery from drunkenness.

## ACTIVE READING

**INFER** Based on this exchange between Montresor and Fortunato, what can you infer about each of their characters?

“Niter?” he asked, at length.

“Niter,” I replied. “How long have you had that cough?”

“Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!”

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

“It is nothing,” he said, at last.

“Come,” I said, with decision, “we will go back; 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. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi—”

“Enough,” he said; “the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough.”

“True—true,” I replied; “and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily; but you should use all proper caution. A draft of this Medoc<sup>15</sup> will defend us from the damp.”

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle that I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mold.

“Drink,” I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

“I drink,” he said, “to the buried that repose around us.”

“And I to your long life.”

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

“These vaults,” he said, “are extensive.”

“The Montresors,” I replied, “were a great and numerous family.”

“I forget your arms.”<sup>16</sup>

“A huge human foot d’or,<sup>17</sup> in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel.”

“And the motto?”

“*Nemo me impune lacessit.*”<sup>18</sup>

“Good!” he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons<sup>19</sup> intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize



Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

“The niter!” 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—”

“It is nothing,” he said; “let us go on. But first, another draft of the Medoc.”

I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grâve.<sup>20</sup> He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upward with a gesticulation<sup>21</sup> I did not understand.

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.”<sup>22</sup>

15. *Medoc* (mā-dôk’): a red Bordeaux wine.

16. *arms*: coat of arms—a design that represents one’s ancestry and family heritage. (In the following paragraph, Montresor describes his family’s coat of arms.)

17. *d’or* (dôr) *French*: gold colored.

18. *Nemo me impune lacessit* (nā’mō mā ĩm-pōō’ně lă-kěs’ĭt) *Latin*: Nobody provokes me with impunity.

19. *casks and puncheons*: large containers for storing wine.

20. *De Grâve* (də gräv’): a red Bordeaux wine.

21. *gesticulation* (jə-stĭk’yə-lă’shən): a vigorous motion or gesture.

22. *of the masons*: a Freemason, a member of a social organization with secret rituals and signs.

“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 *roquelaure*.

“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 search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt,<sup>23</sup> in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been

#### ACTIVE READING

**PREDICT** What do you think Montresor plans to do to Fortunato?

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 the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously<sup>24</sup> 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 recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial 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.

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.

“Proceed,” I said; “herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi—”

“He is an ignoramus,” interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

“Pass your hand,” I said, “over the wall; you cannot help feeling the niter. Indeed it is *very* damp. Once more let me *implore* you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power.”

“The Amontillado!” ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

“True,” I replied; “the Amontillado.”

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

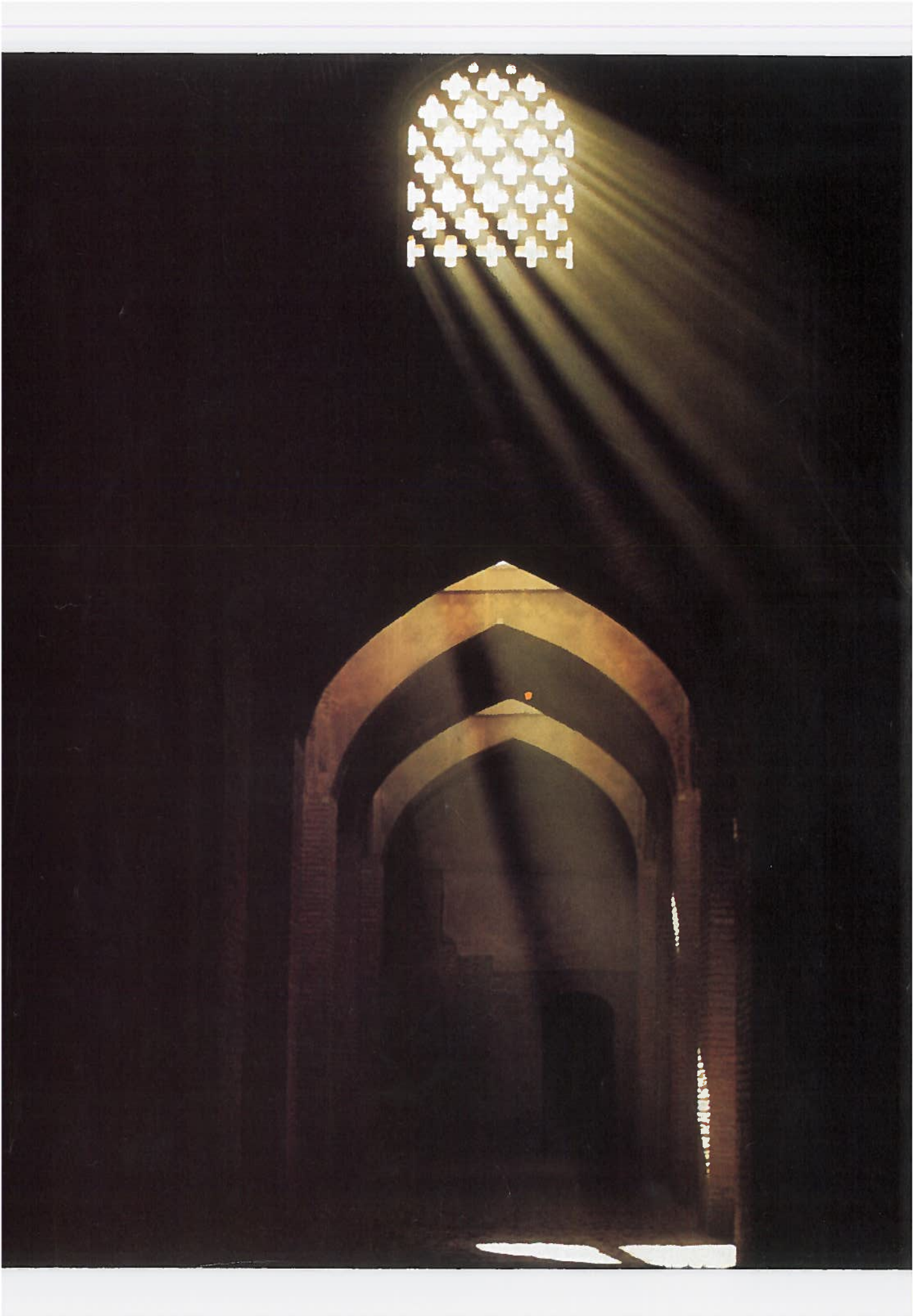
I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry<sup>25</sup> when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The

23. **crypt**: an underground chamber serving as a burial place.

24. **promiscuously** (prə-mĭs'kyōō-əs-lē): randomly.

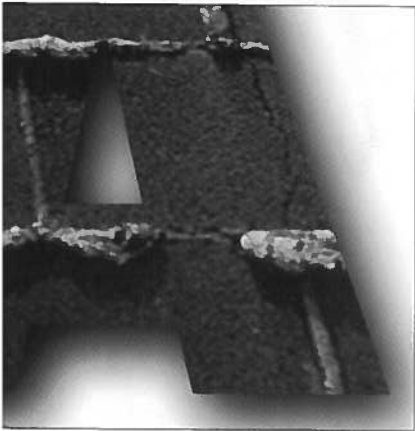
25. **masonry**: stonework.

WORDS **termination** (tūr'mə-nā'shən) *n.* the end of something; limit or edge  
TO **fetter** (fĕt'ər) *v.* to restrain with chains or shackles  
KNOW **implore** (ĭm-plŏr') *v.* to beg; earnestly ask for



earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was 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 labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained



form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated—I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier,<sup>26</sup> I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured

me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I re-echoed—I aided—I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamorer grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single

stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said—

“Ha! ha! ha!—he! he!—a very good joke indeed—an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!”

“The Amontillado!” I said.

“He! he! he!—he! he! he!—yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone.”

“Yes,” I said, “let us be gone.”

“For the love of God, Montresor!”

“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God!”

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud, “Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again, “Fortunato!”

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture<sup>27</sup> and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labor. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart<sup>28</sup> of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*<sup>29</sup> ❖

26. **rapier** (rā'pē-ər): a long, slender sword.

27. **aperture** (ăp'ər-çhər): an opening, such as a hole or a gap.

28. **rampart**: fortification; protective barrier.

29. *In pace requiescat* (ĭn pā'kě rě-kwē-ēs'kāt) *Latin*: May he rest in peace.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**subside** (səb-sīd') *v.* to become less agitated or active; lessen  
**destined** (dēs'tīnd) *adj.* determined beforehand; fated **destine** *v.*



## THE STORY BEHIND “THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO”

Edward Rowe Snow

While at Fort Independence, Poe [who was a private there in 1827] became fascinated with the inscriptions on a gravestone on a small monument outside the walls of the fort. . . .

*Beneath this stone are deposited the remains of Lieut. ROBERT F. MASSIE, of the U. S. Regt. of Light Artillery. . . .*

During the summer of 1817, Poe learned, twenty-year-old Lieutenant Robert F. Massie of Virginia had arrived at Fort Independence as a newly appointed officer. Most of the men at the post came to enjoy Massie’s friendship, but one officer, Captain Green, took a violent dislike to him. Green was known at the fort as a bully and a dangerous swordsman.

When Christmas vacations were allotted, few of the officers were allowed to leave the fort, and Christmas Eve found them up in the old barracks hall, playing cards. Just before midnight, at the height of the card game, Captain Green sprang to his feet, reached across the table and slapped Lieutenant Massie squarely in the face. “You’re a cheat,” he roared, “and I demand immediate satisfaction!” . . .

The duel began. Captain Green, an expert swordsman, soon had Massie at a disadvantage and ran him through. Fatally wounded, the young Virginian was carried back to the fort, where he died that afternoon. His many friends mourned the passing of a gallant officer. . . .

Feeling against Captain Green ran high for many weeks, and then suddenly he completely vanished. Years went by without a sign of him, and Green was written

off the army records as a deserter.

According to the story which Poe finally gathered together, Captain Green had been so detested by his fellow officers at the fort that they decided to take a terrible revenge on him for Massie’s death. . . .

Visiting Captain Green one moonless night, they pretended to be friendly and plied him with wine until he was helplessly intoxicated. Then, carrying the captain down to one of the ancient dungeons, the officers forced his body through a tiny opening which led into the subterranean casemate.<sup>1</sup> . . .

By this time Green had awakened from his drunken stupor and demanded to know what was taking place. Without answering, his captors began to shackle him to the floor, using the heavy iron handcuffs and footcuffs fastened into the stone. Then they all left the dungeon and proceeded to seal the captain up alive inside the windowless casemate, using bricks and mortar. . . .

Captain Green shrieked in terror and begged for mercy, but his cries fell on deaf ears. The last brick was finally inserted, mortar applied, and the room sealed up, the officers believed, forever. Captain Green undoubtedly died a horrible death within a few days. . . .

[In 1905, workmen repairing the fort found the dungeon. To their amazement, they found a skeleton inside, shackled to the floor, with a few fragments of an old army uniform clinging to the bones.]

1. **subterranean casemate** (sŭb'tə-rā'nē-ən kās'māt'): a fortified underground or partly underground room with small windows for firing weapons from.

## Connect to the Literature


### 1. What Do You Think?

Why does Montresor end his story with the Latin phrase meaning “May he rest in peace”?

### Comprehension Check

- Why does Montresor want revenge?
- What weakness of Fortunato’s does Montresor take advantage of in order to carry out his plan?
- What happens to Fortunato?

## Think Critically

2. **ACTIVE READING MAKING INFERENCES** Briefly refer to the notes in your  **READER’S NOTEBOOK** about the narrator’s state of mind. What is your evaluation of Montresor? Is he sane or insane, reliable or unreliable? Are his actions justified, or is he evil and malicious? Support your response with evidence from the text.
3. Do you think Montresor achieves the kind of revenge he says he wants in the first paragraph? Defend your answer.
4. Look back at “The Story Behind ‘The Cask of Amontillado’” on page 215. Why might the incident described have captured Poe’s imagination? Explain.

## Extend Interpretations

5. **Critic’s Corner** It has been said that “The Cask of Amontillado” is more powerful because Poe does not include more specific information about Fortunato’s insult. Do you agree? Explain why or why not.
6. **Different Perspectives** Some readers feel that Montresor suffers for his crimes, feeling haunted by guilt. Others see him as a criminal for seeming to gloat about his evil act. What do you think will happen to Montresor?
- THINK ABOUT**
- his deliberate actions
  - his reaction to Fortunato’s moans and groans
  - his state of mind at the end of the story
7. **Comparing Texts** Poe is as well-known for his poetry as for his short stories. Now that you’ve read examples of each, which form of his writing do you prefer? Discuss your choice with someone who prefers the other form.
8. **Connect to Life** Recall your own experiences with feelings of revenge. Do you think revenge is ever justified on a personal level, or is it better to forgive and forget? Explain.

## Literary Analysis

**MOOD** The overall feeling or atmosphere the writer creates for the reader is called **mood**. Descriptive words, the setting, and figurative language contribute to the mood of a work, as do the sound and rhythm of the language used. Think about the use of repeated sounds in the following example, and notice the effect they create:

*I must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser.*

What mood is created by the repetition? How does the sound of the language affect you? Say this passage aloud, and note what words and sounds are being emphasized.

**Activity** Find two or three other examples that help create the mood of the story. Identify what kind of mood is being created, and explain how the mood is developed.

**POINT OF VIEW** The **point of view** is the perspective from which events in a short story or novel are related. A story told in the **first-person point of view** has a narrator who is a character in the story and tells everything in his or her own words. “The Cask of Amontillado” is told from the first-person point of view. You know what Montresor is thinking and feeling, but what can you infer about Fortunato’s thoughts and feelings from Montresor’s description in this passage?

*But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato.*



# THE AUTHOR'S STYLE

## Poe's Sinister Stylings

**Style** is the particular way in which something is written. Word choice, sentence length, imagery, and tone all contribute to a writer's style. Part of Poe's genius comes from the slightly different style he creates for each one of his tales, depending on who's telling the story and what effect or impact Poe wants the story to have.

### Key Aspects of Poe's Style

- short sentences or sentences with dashes and other interruptions
- repeated or italicized words that draw attention to the narrator or to a concept
- frequent use of first-person point of view
- rhythm that conveys the intensity of the narrator's thoughts

## Analysis of Style

At the right are excerpts from the openings of three famous Poe tales. Study the chart above, and then read each opening carefully. Complete the following activities:

- Find several examples of each stylistic device in the passages. Decide what effect Poe was trying to create in each case.
- Find at least two or three additional stylistic devices that you see at work in any of the three examples.
- Look again at the two poems, the story, and the letter. Choose one, and discuss with other readers the stylistic devices you see being used.

## Applications

**1. Changing Style** Working with a partner, rewrite one of the opening passages, expressing the same ideas but in simpler language. Then read your version and the original aloud, and compare them. What's missing in the changed version? Share your observations with your classmates.

**2. Imitation of Style** Choose one of the three openings, and write a continuation of the story in the style that Poe has established. Then entertain your classmates with a reading of the piece.

**3. Speaking and Listening** Alone or with a group, give each opening a dramatic reading to reveal the different characters and moods expressed through Poe's style. Have the class discuss the differences they hear in each of these oral interpretations.

from "The Tell-Tale Heart"

True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

from "The Black Cat"

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul.

from "The Fall of the House of Usher"

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit.

## Writing Options

**1. Program Introduction** Using language that is appropriate to a formal setting, create a TV host's introduction for "The Cask of Amontillado."

**2. Fortunato's Version** Retell your favorite part of the story as though Fortunato were the narrator. Be sure to include your impressions of your "friend" and his actions. Put your version of the story in your **Working Portfolio**. 📁

### Writing Handbook

See page 1153: Narrative Writing.

## Activities & Explorations

**1. Sinister Readings** Select passages from the story that characterize Montresor as either sincere or insincere. Do an oral interpretation of these passages for classmates. ~ **SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

**2. Flow Chart** How does someone commit a "perfect" crime? What steps does Montresor take? Make a flow chart that graphically represents each step of Montresor's plan. ~ **VIEWING AND REPRESENTING**

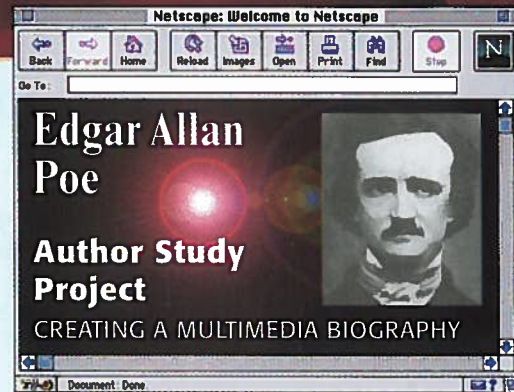
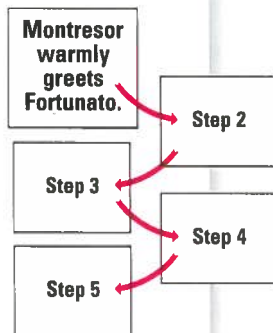
**3. Video Adaptation** As you view the film of "The Cask of Amontillado," compare the mood created in the film with that evoked in the story. Which did you find more powerful, the story or the film? Discuss your responses with your classmates. ~ **VIEWING AND REPRESENTING**



**Literature in Performance**

## Inquiry & Research

**Science and Medicine** Find out how long Fortunato could last in the walled-up niche. What would happen to him after being deprived of fresh air, water, and food? From these gruesome facts, draw some conclusions about how the human body reacts under certain conditions.



Working with a small group, with a partner, or alone, create a multimedia biography of Poe. You may wish to focus on one facet of his life that especially intrigues you: his career, his personal life, or his influence on later writers. Your biography might take the form of a video, a web page, a slide show, a performance, or some combination of products like these. Following is a list of sources and suggestions that can help you complete your research:

**Books and Periodicals** Look in these resources for images not only of Poe, but also of other writers of his day, including Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Possible causes of Poe's death are still debated today, so don't overlook recent newspapers or magazines.

**Films and Readings** Look for biographies of Poe or performances of his work on videotape or audiotape. Several actors have even taken on the role of Poe himself in one-man performances. Edit excerpts from these performances into a "Best of Poe" presentation.

**Computers** Try to find as many nonprint materials as possible for your presentation. Use CD-ROMs and the Internet as resources. Try contacting Poe appreciation societies or museums. Look for images of Poe and samples of his handwriting as well as for photographs of his many rented residences.



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