

The Cask of Amontillado

Short Story by Edgar Allan Poe

Is REVENGE *ever justified?*

KEY IDEA Montresor, the narrator of “The Cask of Amontillado,” feels that **revenge** is necessary to right a wrong. Some would argue that two wrongs never make a right and that revenge leads only to more wrongdoing. Do acts of revenge ever resolve conflicts?

PRESENT An act of revenge often causes a chain reaction, and the repercussions can go on for months or years. With a group, think of one act of revenge and chart out the possible chain of effects. Share your chain of events with the rest of the class.

Event

Girl makes fun of boy.



Act of Revenge

Boy spills ink on her uniform.



Effects

- *Uniform is ruined.*
- *Girl's parents have to buy a new one.*



LITERARY ANALYSIS: MOOD

In “The Cask of Amontillado,” Edgar Allan Poe creates an unforgettable **mood** of suspense and horror. From the beginning, the narrator’s talk of injuries borne, unforgivable insults, and threatened revenge conveys a sinister feeling. Poe develops this mood by means of

- the sensory details and imagery used to convey the setting
- the repetition of words and the rhythm of the language
- words describing thoughts, feelings, and actions

As you read, notice how Poe’s descriptions of the setting and his use of language combine to create a memorably dark tale.

READING STRATEGY: PARAPHRASE

Poe often uses long, complex sentences that are especially challenging to modern readers. To make sure that you understand the events in this story, try paraphrasing. To **paraphrase** is to restate information in one’s own words. A paraphrase is about the same length as the original text. It includes all the details of the original but is written in simpler language. As you read this story, take time to paraphrase difficult passages. Here is an example.

Text	Paraphrase
<p><i>“It must be understood, that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good-will.” (lines 9–10)</i></p>	<p><i>You must understand that I said and did nothing to make Fortunato mistrust me.</i></p>

Review: Make Inferences

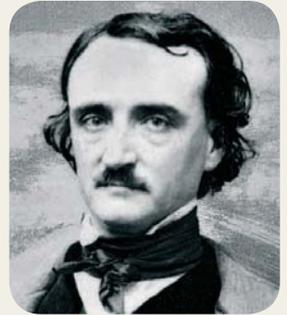
VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The boldfaced words help create a mood of horror. Use context clues to figure out the meaning of each word. Then use each word in a sentence. After reading the selection, check to see whether you used the words correctly.

1. to **preclude** pain
2. to lie with **impunity**
3. **immolation** of an enemy
4. **abscond** with money
5. everlasting **repose**
6. **termination** of a job
7. to help anger to **subside**
8. to close off an **aperture**

The Genius of Poe

Edgar Allan Poe started out as a poet but turned to writing short fiction to earn a living. His career in fiction officially began in 1833, with a \$50 prize for his story “MS. Found in a Bottle.” At the time he was living in poverty with his beloved aunt Maria



Edgar Allan Poe
1809–1849

Clemm and her daughter, Virginia. With the prize money came recognition and a job offer from a literary magazine. By 1838, Poe had married Virginia and moved the family to Philadelphia, where he worked for several leading literary magazines.

Master of the Macabre Poe may have started writing horror fiction because that’s what the reading public wanted. Gothic tales were popular at the time, and newspapers regularly printed sensational reports of bizarre murders. Poe adapted elements of Gothic fiction, took a few story ideas from news headlines, added his psychological insights into the mix, and soon became the undisputed master of the genre.



MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more on Edgar Allan Poe, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.

Background

A Different Burial Ground Although this story begins during a time of carnival festivities, the setting soon shifts to the dark, cool burial vaults under the narrator’s palace, where he also stores his wine. In such underground cemeteries, called catacombs, bodies were placed in carved recesses along the walls of burial chambers. The largest and most famous are those of Rome, in which early Christians were entombed.

The Cask of Amontillado

EDGAR ALLAN POE

The thousand injuries of Fortunato 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**. 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. **A**

It must be understood, that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato
10 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**.

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 connoisseurship¹ 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 upon the British and Austrian *millionaires*. In painting and gemmary² 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
20 was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival³ season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley.⁴ He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

1. **connoisseurship** (kɒn'ə-sûr'shîp): expertise or authority, especially in the fine arts or in matters of taste.

2. **gemmary** (jĕm'ə-rĕ): knowledge of precious gems.

3. **carnival**: a festival before the fasting period of Lent, characterized by fanciful costumes, masquerades, and feasts.

4. **motley**: the costume of a court jester.

ANALYZE VISUALS

Would you describe the mood of this photograph as festive or sinister? Explain.

preclude (prĭ-klōōd')
v. to make impossible, especially by taking action in advance

impunity
(ĭm-pyōō'nĭ-tĕ) *n.*
freedom from penalty or harm

A PARAPHRASE

Paraphrase the opening paragraph. Why does the narrator vow revenge? What does he consider a successful revenge?

immolation
(ĭm'ə-lā'shən) *n.* death or destruction



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 of what passes for Amontillado,⁵ and I have my doubts.”

30 “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!”

40 “As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi.⁶ 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.”

50 “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.⁷”

“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.” **B**

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk, and drawing a *roquelaure*⁸ closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.⁹

60 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.

B MOOD

Reread lines 27–55.

How does Poe build a mood of suspense in this conversation between the narrator and Fortunato?

abscond (ăb-skōnd')
v. to go away suddenly and secretly

5. a pipe . . . Amontillado (ə-mŏn'tl-ă'dō): a barrel of a wine that is supposed to be a type of pale, dry sherry, named for a town in southern Spain.

6. Luchesi (lŏō-kă'sĕ).

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

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

9. palazzo (pə-lăt'sō): a palace or mansion.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux,¹⁰ 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
70 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.¹¹

“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!”

80 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 Medoc¹²
90 will defend us from the damps.”

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

“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.”

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

“I forget your arms.”

“A huge human foot d’or,¹³ in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel.”

C MAKE INFERENCES

Reread lines 74–92.

What is **ironic** about this conversation?

repose (rĭ-pōz’) v.
to lie dead or at rest

10. **from their sconces two flambeaux** (flām’bōz’): from their wall brackets two lighted torches.

11. **filmy . . . intoxication**: eyes clouded and glazed over from drunkenness.

12. **Medoc** (mā-dōk’): a red wine from the Bordeaux region of France.

13. **d’or** (dōr) *French*: colored gold. (Montresor is describing his coat of arms, the distinctive emblem of his family.)

“And the motto?”

“*Nemo me impune lacessit.*”¹⁴

“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 puncheons¹⁵ intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I
110 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—” **D**

“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.¹⁶ He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upward with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

120 “You do not comprehend?” he said.

“Not I,” I replied.

“Then you are not of the brotherhood.”

“How?”

“You are not of the masons.”¹⁷

“Yes, yes,” I said; “yes, yes.”

“You? Impossible! A mason?”

“A mason,” I replied.

“A sign,” he said.

130 “It is this,” I answered, producing a trowel¹⁸ from beneath the folds of my *roquelautre*.

“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, 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 lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead,
140 in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior **E**

D MOOD

In lines 108–114, note the sensory details and imagery that help you visualize the setting. What mood do they create?

E GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Notice Poe’s use of **formal language**, including complex sentence structures.

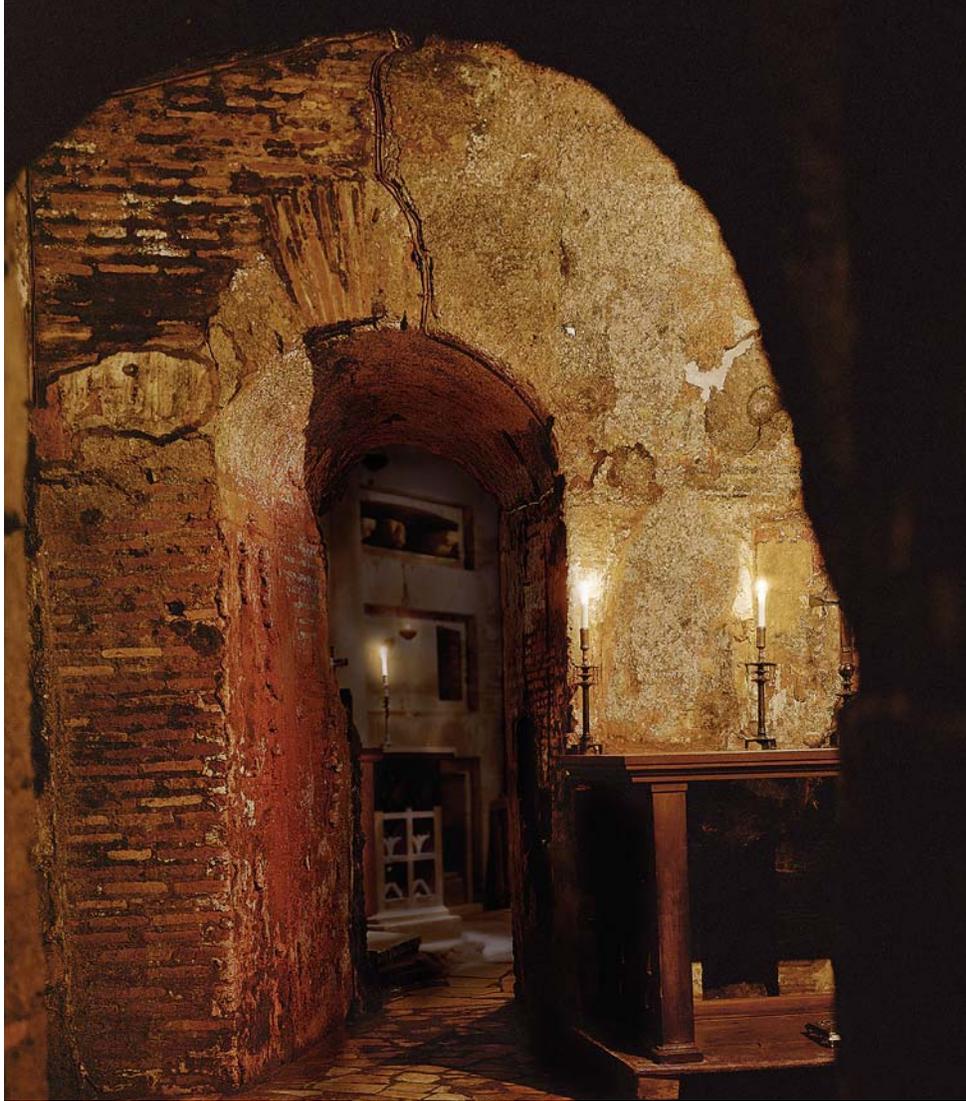
14. *Nemo me impune lacessit* (nā'mō mā ĭm-pōō'ně lä-kēs'ĭt) *Latin*: No one injures me with impunity.

15. **casks and puncheons**: large storage containers for wine.

16. **De Grâve** (də gräv'): a red wine from the Bordeaux region of France.

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

18. **producing a trowel**: Montresor is playing on another meaning of *mason*—“one who builds with stone or brick.”



ANALYZE VISUALS

What qualities of the catacomb are emphasized by the two arches? Explain.

crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth 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 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
150 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

termination

(tŭr'mə-nā'shən) *n.* an end, limit, or edge

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
160 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
170 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 when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The 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
180 my labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking **subsided**,

subside (səb-sīd') v. to decrease in amount or intensity; settle down



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. **F**

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,¹⁹ 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
190 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. **G**

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
200 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!” **H**

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called
210 aloud,

“Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again,

“Fortunato!”

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining **aperture** 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 of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*²⁰ 

F MOOD

Reread this paragraph. What **details** make this description especially horrifying?

G PARAPHRASE

Restate what happens in lines 185–191. What emotions does Montresor experience at this point in the story?

H MOOD

Reread lines 192–208. Point out **images** and other **details** that convey the mood of the scene.

aperture (ăp'ər-cher)
n. an opening, such as a hole or a gap

19. **rapier** (ră'pē-ər): a long, slender sword.

20. **In pace requiescat** (ĭn pă'kě rě-kwē-ēs'kăt) *Latin*: May he rest in peace.

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.¹ . . .

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. . . .

[In 1905, workmen repairing the fort 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'tĕ-rā'nĕ-ən kās'māt'): a fortified underground or partly underground room.