

The Cask of Amontillado

Short Story by Edgar Allan Poe

Is **REVENGE** ever justified?

Montresor, the narrator of “The Cask of Amontillado” wants revenge for a wrong done to him. Do acts of revenge ever resolve conflicts or do they just lead to more conflict?

PRESENT An act of revenge often causes a chain reaction. 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

Text Analysis: Mood

“The Cask of Amontillado” is a terrifying story about a man who plots a shocking act of revenge. From the beginning, the narrator’s talk of injuries, insults, and revenge sets up a sinister feeling. As you read pay attention to the following:

- Notice the details of the **setting**, the time and place in which the story is set, that reveal information about the characters’ lives and beliefs.
- Pay attention to Poe’s use of **imagery**—descriptive words and phrases that create sensory experiences for the reader.
- Setting and imagery create the **mood**, or atmosphere of the story. A story’s mood can affect the reader’s emotional reaction.

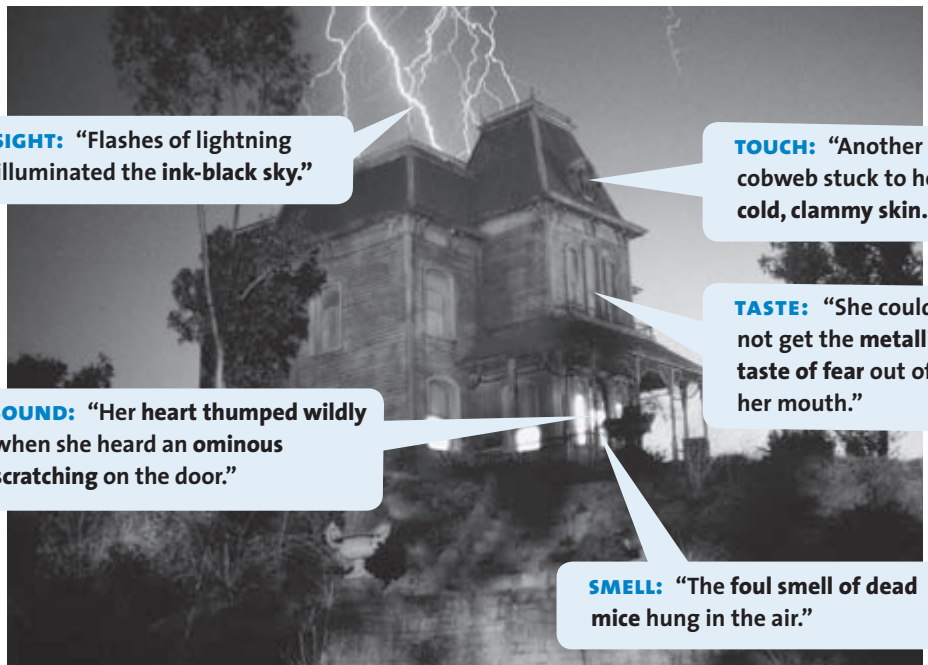
SIGHT: “Flashes of lightning illuminated the ink-black sky.”

TOUCH: “Another cobweb stuck to her cold, clammy skin.”

SOUND: “Her heart thumped wildly when she heard an ominous scratching on the door.”

TASTE: “She could not get the metallic taste of fear out of her mouth.”

SMELL: “The foul smell of dead mice hung in the air.”



Reading Skill: Paraphrase

Part of the challenge of reading Poe is getting through his long, complex sentences. To make sure you understand the events in this story, try **paraphrasing**—restating the information you’ve read in your own words. A paraphrase contains all the details of the original text but is written in simpler language. Here is an example:

Text	Paraphrase
“It must be understood, that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good-will.” (lines 11–12)	<i>You must understand that I said and did nothing to make Fortunato mistrust me.</i>

As you read this story, you will be prompted to paraphrase some difficult passages.

Vocabulary in Context

Note: Words are listed in the order in which they appear in the story.

preclude (prī-klōd’) v. to make impossible, especially by taking action in advance

*To preclude **pain**, she took an aspirin before her appointment.*

impunity (ĩm-pyōō’ńĩ-tē) n. freedom from penalty or harm

*He thinks he can do what he wants because he has **impunity**.*

immolation (ĩm’ə-lā’shən) n. death or destruction

*His thirst for revenge would only be satisfied by his enemy’s complete **immolation**.*

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

*She **absconded** with the evidence so as not to implicate herself in the crime.*

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

*Many buried bodies **repose** in the underground vaults.*

termination (tūr’mə-nā’shən) n. an end, limit, or edge

*We were coming to the **termination** of the tunnel.*

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

*I waited for the temperature to **subside** before I stepped into the bath.*

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

*The **aperture** was so small he could not fit his entire hand inside.*

**SET A PURPOSE
FOR READING**

Read this story to find out how a mysterious narrator seeks revenge on his worst enemy.

The Cask of Amontillado



Short Story by

EDGAR ALLAN POE

BACKGROUND Poe's story begins during carnival, which is celebrated before the start of Lent, the season in which Christians give up various pleasures. During carnival, people often wore costumes and dance in the streets. The story's setting soon shifts to the dark, cool burial vaults—called catacombs—under the narrator's palace. Centuries ago, Christians in Italy buried their dead in these underground cemeteries where bodies were placed in carved recesses along the walls of the burial chamber. The largest and most famous catacombs are those of the early Christians in Rome.

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
10 him who has done the wrong.

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

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

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**.

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
20 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 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
30 so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand. **A**

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.”

“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.”

40 “Amontillado!”

“I have my doubts.”

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

A MOOD

Circle the words in lines 25–31 that help set the mood, or atmosphere in the story.

1. **connoisseurship** (kŏn'ə-sūr'shĭp): 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.
5. **a pipe . . . Amontillado** (ə-mŏn'tl-ä'dŏ): a barrel of a wine that is supposed to be a type of pale, dry sherry, named for a town in southern Spain.

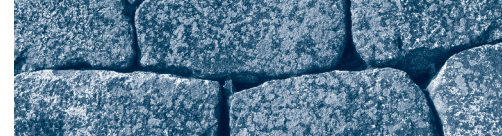
Reread lines 32–58. How does Poe build a suspenseful mood in this conversation between the narrator and Fortunato? What does the narrator want Fortunato to do?

[illegible]

Why is it convenient that the attendants have **absconded** to celebrate carnival?

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

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



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.

- 80 “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!”

PAUSE & REFLECT

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

“It is nothing,” he said, at last.

- 90 “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 will defend us from the damp.”

- 100 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.”

PAUSE & REFLECT

The narrator refers to Fortunato as “my poor friend.” What clues suggest that the narrator means the opposite of what he says?

C MOOD

Poe provides details in lines 82–101 to enhance the mood of the story. Where does the narrator lead Fortunato? Circle the words that show Fortunato’s condition. Why is his “gait . . . unsteady”?

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

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

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

D MOOD

Underline the sensory details and imagery in lines 117–125 that help you visualize the setting. What mood do they create?

“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
110 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.”

“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
120 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—” **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 Grève.¹⁶ He
emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light.
130 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.

“You do not comprehend?” he said.

“Not I,” I replied.

“Then you are not of the brotherhood.”

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

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

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

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



"How?"

"You are not of the masons."¹⁷

"Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

140 "You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said.

"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel¹⁸ from beneath the folds of my *roquelaure*. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

"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
150 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, 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 upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by
160 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. **E**

PAUSE & REFLECT

Why might Montresor be carrying a trowel, or shovel? What guess can you about his plans?

E MOOD

Circle the sensory details in lines 147–165 that add to the mood of the story. To which senses do they appeal? How would you describe the mood here?

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."

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

F PARAPHRASE

What has happened in lines 171–181? Complete the paraphrase started below.

*"He is an idiot," my friend said
as he walked forward. I was
right behind him. Suddenly he
was at the end of the hall,
stopped by a wall of rock and
looking stupid and confused.*

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
170 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
180 was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess. **F**

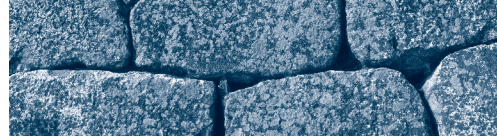
"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall; you cannot help feeling the niter. Indeed it is *very* damp. Once more let me *implore* you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power."

"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
190 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 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
200 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. **G**

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently
 210 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 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. **H**

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
 220 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
 230 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!” **I**

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

G MOOD

Reread lines 194–207. Circle the details that make the description especially horrifying.

H PARAPHRASE

Restate what happens in lines 208–216. How does the narrator feel at this point in the story?

I MOOD

Underline the **details** and **images** in lines 217–234 that create the mood of this scene. How would you describe the mood here?

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

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

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

“Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again,

“Fortunato!”

240 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

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

Text Analysis: Mood

Descriptive words, the setting, sensory images, as well as the sound and rhythm of the language the writer uses contribute to the mood, or atmosphere, of a work. On the chart below, list examples of passages that help create the mood of the story. Identify the kind of mood that is created and explain how the mood is developed.

Passage	Mood that is Created	How Mood is Developed
<i>"We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones." (lines 123–124)</i>	<i>gloomy, creepy, chilly, dark, and damp</i>	<i>descriptive words, setting</i>

What is the overall mood, or atmosphere, of this story? What do you think contributes most to the mood—the setting, the sound and rhythm of the language, or the descriptions of Montresor's thoughts and feelings? Explain.

Reading Skills: Paraphrase

Reread the following passage from the beginning of “The Cask of Amontillado” and then paraphrase it in the space below.

TEXT

“*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 redreser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.”



MY PARAPHRASE

Is **REVENGE** ever justified?

What do you think is the right way to address a wrong?

Vocabulary Practice

Circle the letter of the situation that most closely relates to each vocabulary word.

1. **aperture** (a) a crack in a building’s foundation (b) a large stack of lumber
2. **subside** (a) two cars racing (b) a heavy wind lessening in force
3. **impunity** (a) getting away with a crime (b) a tiny hole in a shirt
4. **termination** (a) someone starting a new job (b) someone getting fired
5. **repose** (a) lying on an empty beach (b) carrying a heavy load of books
6. **abscond** (a) making a public announcement (b) sneaking out of a meeting
7. **immolation** (a) deaths in a train accident (b) cartons of spoiled food
8. **preclude** (a) getting a flu shot (b) planting spring bulbs in autumn

Academic Vocabulary in Speaking

aspect

circumstance

contribute

distinct

perceive

An **aspect** is a part or feature of something. What **aspects** of Fortunato's character allow him to be fooled by Montresor? Identify two aspects and discuss how they affect the story's outcome. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your discussion. Definitions for these terms are listed on page 111.

Assessment Practice

DIRECTIONS Use "The Cask of Amontillado" to answer questions 1–6 below.

- 1 Montresor, the narrator, wants revenge because —
 - ☐ A Fortunato stole his amontillado
 - ☐ B Fortunato insulted him
 - ☐ C Fortunato insulted Luchesi
 - ☐ D Luchesi misjudged Fortunato
- 2 Which of the following does Montresor *not* do to ensure the success of his plan?
 - ☐ A He pretends to be Fortunato's friend.
 - ☐ B He gives Fortunato wine to drink.
 - ☐ C He carries out his plan when no attendants are at home.
 - ☐ D He pushes Fortunato down to the catacombs.
- 3 Which of these lines from the story is an example of imagery?
 - ☐ A "My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes."
 - ☐ B "We continued our route in search of the Amontillado."
 - ☐ C "The foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame."
 - ☐ D "He was much too astounded to resist."
- 4 Which of the following is the *best* paraphrase of the following quotation:
I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.
 - ☐ A I shook his hand for a very long time because I was so happy to see him.
 - ☐ B I did not want to shake his hand even though I was happy to see him.
 - ☐ C I was surprised to see that his hand would not stop shaking.
 - ☐ D I kept shaking his hand because he seemed excited to see me.
- 5 Which of the following is *not* a result of the carnival setting?
 - ☐ A Fortunato has a bad cold.
 - ☐ B Fortunato has been drinking.
 - ☐ C Montresor's servants are not at home.
 - ☐ D Montresor and Fortunato wear costumes.
- 6 Which of the following words does *not* describe the story's mood?
 - ☐ A sinister
 - ☐ B ominous
 - ☐ C upbeat
 - ☐ D gloomy