

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.

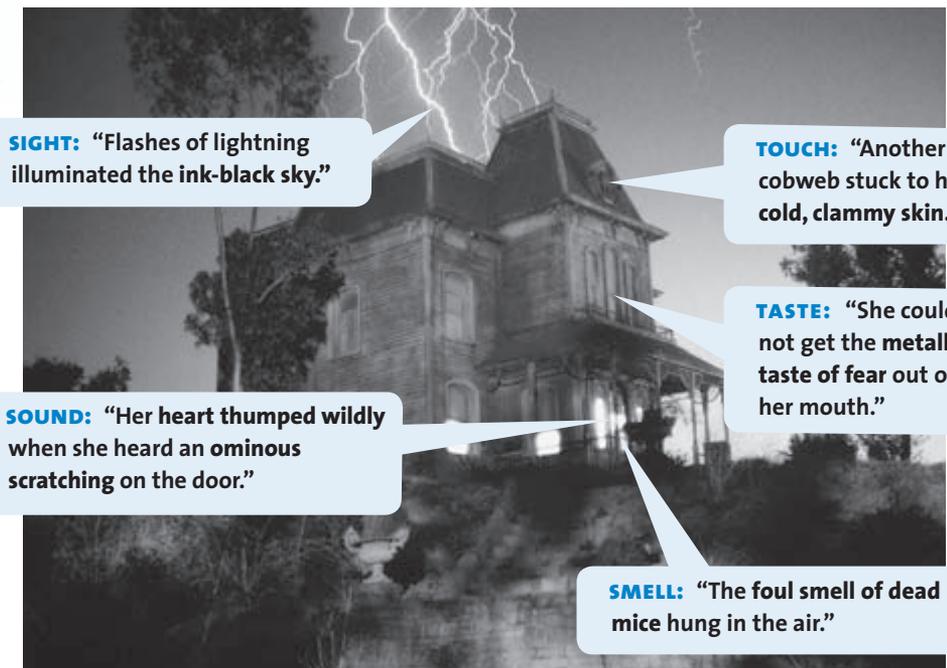


Effects

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.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

repose (rĭ-pōōz') 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-sĭd') 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-klōōd') *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.”

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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.

immolation (ĭm'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.



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. ©

“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?

Horizontal lines for writing.

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”?

Horizontal lines for writing.

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 ĩm-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.

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
<p><i>"We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones." (lines 123-124)</i></p>	<p><i>gloomy, creepy, chilly, dark, and damp</i></p>	<p><i>descriptive words, setting</i></p>

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 redresser. 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.

- Montresor, the narrator, wants revenge because —
 - Fortunato stole his amontillado
 - Fortunato insulted him
 - Fortunato insulted Luchesi
 - Luchesi misjudged Fortunato
- Which of the following does Montresor *not* do to ensure the success of his plan?
 - He pretends to be Fortunato's friend.
 - He gives Fortunato wine to drink.
 - He carries out his plan when no attendants are at home.
 - He pushes Fortunato down to the catacombs.
- Which of these lines from the story is an example of imagery?
 - "My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes."
 - "We continued our route in search of the Amontillado."
 - "The foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame."
 - "He was much too astounded to resist."
- 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.
 - I shook his hand for a very long time because I was so happy to see him.
 - I did not want to shake his hand even though I was happy to see him.
 - I was surprised to see that his hand would not stop shaking.
 - I kept shaking his hand because he seemed excited to see me.
- Which of the following is *not* a result of the carnival setting?
 - Fortunato has a bad cold.
 - Fortunato has been drinking.
 - Montresor's servants are not at home.
 - Montresor and Fortunato wear costumes.
- Which of the following words does *not* describe the story's mood?
 - sinister
 - ominous
 - upbeat
 - gloomy