

The person telling a story—the narrator—may be a character who observes or participates in the action. Note how Poe uses *dramatic irony* in this story by having his narrator, Montresor, tell the reader directly what he sees, thinks, and feels. This story is a classic example of an unreliable narrator. By telling the story from Montresor's *point of view*, Poe intensifies the effect of moral shock and horror, forcing the reader to share the inner workings of a murderer's mind. What differences are there between what Montresor perceives and what you, the reader, perceive?

“The Cask Of Amontillado” by 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 definitely 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.

Why does Montresor seek revenge on Fortunato?

How will he seek revenge?

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 **connoisseurship** in wine. Few Italians have the true **virtuoso** spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity - to practise imposture upon the British and Austrian *millionaires*. In painting and **gemmary**, 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.

What is Fortunato's weak point?



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**. 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.

Why are Fortunato's clown or jester costume and Montresor's happiness at seeing Fortunato ironic?

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, and I have my doubts."

What is "a pipe of...Amontillado"?

"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 !"

As we read this section, label the dialogue "F" or "M" to show who is speaking.

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado !"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado !"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi. If any one 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 **nitre**."

"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."

Throughout this conversation, what effect does the mention of Luchesi's name have on Fortunato?

Where does Montresor want to take Fortunato?

Why is Montresor "concerned" about Fortunato?

Why does Fortunato want to still go with Montresor?

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

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**, 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 Montresor.

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 towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the **rheum** of intoxication.

What is wrong with Fortunato? Why is Montresor easily able to lead Fortunato into the catacombs?

"Nitre ?" he asked, at length.

"Nitre," 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.

Why is Montresor's statement, "your health is precious" ironic?

"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 --"

Montresor may be jealous of Fortunato when he says, "you are happy, as once I was."

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

Why is Fortunato's statement, the cough "will not kill me" ironic?

"True - true," I replied ; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily - but you should use all proper caution. A **draught** of this **Medoc** will defend us from the damp."

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

"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."

Knowing that Montresor wants to kill Fortunato, why does Montresor toast to Fortunato's "long life"? How will Montresor murder Fortunato?

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

"These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

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

SYMBOLISM: How is Montresor like a snake?

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."

"And the motto ?"

"*Nemo me impune lacessit.*"

"*Nemo me impune lacessit.*" Latin for "no one assails me with impunity."

In plain English: "no one can attack me without being punished."

"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** 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.

Why does Montresor alert Fortunato to the dangers of the catacombs?

"The nitre !" 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 draught of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grève. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upwards 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."

"How ?"

"You are not of the masons."

"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 *roquelaire*.

"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, 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 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 in 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.

IRONY: Montresor does not recognize the secret gesture that would identify himself as a mason. However, he says that he is a mason.

Once you know Montresor's plan for Fortunato's death, you will know why Montresor says that he is a mason.

What might the trowel be used for?

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depths 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.

What does Montresor do to Fortunato?

"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall ; you cannot help feeling the nitre. 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."

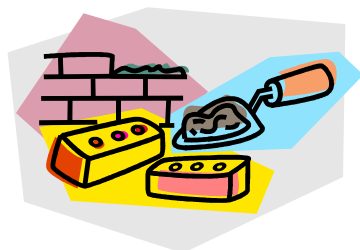
"The Amontillado !" ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"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.

How will Fortunato die?

I had scarcely laid the first tier of my 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 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, 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, Montressor !"

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

What does Fortunato mean when he says, "Let us be gone"?

What does Montresor mean when he says, "Yes, let us be gone"?

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 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!*

"In pace requiescat!"

Latin: "May he rest in peace."

How will both Montresor & Fortunato rest in peace?