

There is quite a difference between reading and reading *critically*. When you read a text critically, you read and reread with a questioning mind, continually asking yourself, "Why this?" and "Why that?" Reading critically requires you to pay attention not only to *what* a writer is saying but also to *how* he or she is conveying meaning. By reading a text critically, you can identify and understand the complexities and interrelated elements in a text that casual readers may never notice. Great works of literature reveal their greatness to readers who approach them critically.

The following pages present Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado" on the left side of the screen. On the right side are comments intended to help you understand the story and questions that a critical reader might ask when reading this text. Many other questions could be asked of the text, and you might think of some of your own as you are reading the story.

The Story	Questions and Comments
<p>The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge<sup><u>1.1</u></sup>. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat <sup><u>1.2</u></sup>. <i>At length</i> 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 <sup><u>1.3</u></sup>.</p> <p>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 <i>now</i> was at the thought of his immolation. <sup><u>1.4</u></sup></p> <p>He had a weak point--this Fortunato--although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided</p>	<p><sup><u>1.1</u></sup> What does the name "Fortunato" suggest? What do you think of a character who will not tolerate insult without seeking revenge?</p> <p><sup><u>1.2</u></sup> Is the narrator addressing a specific character that remains silent? Who might "so well know the nature of [the narrator's] soul"?</p> <p><sup><u>1.3</u></sup> The narrator offers some advice on seeking revenge. What is his advice?</p> <p><sup><u>1.4</u></sup> How does the narrator behave around his "friend" Fortunato?</p>

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. **1.5**

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend **1.6**. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much **1.7**. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells **1.8**. I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand **1.9**.

I said to him--"My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met **1.10**. How remarkably well you are looking to-day! But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts" **1.11**.

"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." **1.12**

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts." **1.13**

**1.5** What does this paragraph tell you about the narrator, about his social class, his attitude toward himself and others, his understanding of others?

**1.6** Why do you think Poe chose "dusk" and the carnival season as part of the setting for this story?

**1.7** For what other reason might Fortunato greet the narrator with "excessive warmth"?

**1.8** Fortunato is wearing a costume similar to that of a jester.

**1.9** Apparently, the narrator also greets Fortunato with "excessive warmth," but why?

**1.10** Do you think this will be a "lucky" meeting for Fortunato?

**1.11** Amontillado is a fine sherry. Remember what the narrator identifies as Fortunato's "weak point"?

**1.12** Psychologically, what effect might the narrator's words have on Fortunato in this paragraph?

**1.13** Why would the narrator repeat that he "has his doubts" about the Amontillado he purchased? Earlier, the narrator states that

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi **1.14**. 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. **1.15**

"Come, let us go."

"Whither?"

"To your vaults." **1.16**

he, like Fortunato, is a wine expert.

**1.14** Luchesi is another wine expert.

**1.15** The narrator continues his psychological manipulation of Fortunato. How is the narrator manipulating Fortunato here?

**1.16** Notice it is Fortunato, and not the narrator, who insists on going to the narrator's vaults.

"My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi--" **2.1**

"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." **2.2**

"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 *roquelaire* closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my

**2.1** We soon find that the narrator very much wants Fortunato to go to the narrator's vaults, so why does the narrator say that he does not want Fortunato to go?

**2.2** If the narrator perceives that Fortunato is afflicted with a "severe cold," why does the narrator tell Fortunato that he looks "remarkably well" when the characters first meet?

**2.3** It is carnival time, so the narrator is wearing a mask and a *roquelaire* (a cloak), but why else might he be dressed this way?

palazzo. 2.3

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. 2.4

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 2.5. 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. 2.6

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode. 2.7

"The pipe," he said.

"It is farther on," said I; "but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls." 2.8

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

"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

2.4 What instructions did the narrator give his servants earlier in the evening? Why did he give these instructions? What does this tell us about the narrator?

2.5 "Flambeaux" are torches.

2.6 The narrator finally reveals his last name, Montresor. "Catacombs" are underground tunnels lined with the remains of the dead.

2.7 Why might Fortunato walk in an "unsteady" way?

2.8 This is the "nitre" mentioned earlier. Nitre is "a mineral of potassium nitrate" that apparently can be bad for one's health.

2.9 If the narrator hates Fortunato, why would he refer to Fortunato as his "poor friend"?

2.10 What do the following words suggest

for many minutes. **2.9**

"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. **2.10** 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--" **2.11**

"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 draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damp. **2.12**

about the narrator: "you are happy, as once I was"? Likewise, what do the adjectives the narrator uses to describe Fortunato tell us about him, especially in relation to the narrator?

**2.11** Why is the narrator so concerned about Fortunato's health? Note also that the narrator says he cannot be responsible for making Fortunato more ill.

**2.12** In a few places on this page, Poe uses "foreshadowing," hints about things that will occur later in the story. Can you identify some of this foreshadowing?

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. **3.1** He raised it to his lips with a leer **3.2**. 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." **3.3**

"I forget your arms." **3.4**

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel." **3.5**

"And the motto?"

"Nemo me impune lacessit." **3.6**

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells

**3.1 Why would the narrator want Fortunato to drink some of his wine?**

**3.2 Why might Fortunato look at the narrator "with a leer"?**

**3.3 What does this comment tell us about the narrator?**

**3.4 Fortunato is referring to the narrator's coat of arms, a symbolic depiction of ancestry and family distinctions.**

**3.5 How does this coat of arms relate to other aspects of the story?**

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 **3.7**. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"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--" **3.8**

"It is nothing," he said; "let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flacon of De Grâve. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light **3.9**. 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." **3.10**

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

"You? Impossible! A mason?" **3.11**

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said.

"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my roquelaire.

**3.12**

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us proceed to the Amontillado." **3.13**

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak, and again offering him my arm.

He leaned upon it heavily **3.14**. 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. **3.15**

**3.6 "No one can injure me with impunity" (Latin)**

**3.7 "Puncheons" are heavy timbers. Notice the setting: the "inmost recesses" of the "extensive" catacombs.**

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**3.8 The narrator nearly insists that Fortunato leave the catacombs. Why?**

**3.9 What does this description tell us about Fortunato?**

**3.10 Masons are members of a fraternal organization with secret rites and signs.**

**3.11 Fortunato finds it "impossible" to believe that the narrator is a mason. What does this fact tell us both about Fortunato and the narrator? Also, if Fortunato finds it impossible to believe that the narrator is a mason, why would Fortunato give the narrator a secret sign that only another mason would understand?**

**3.12 A trowel is a tool used to spread cement or mortar. (A "mason" is also**

someone who works with stone or brick.)  
**3.13 Why does Fortunato "recoil" when the narrator produces the trowel? Why do you think Fortunato does not ask, and apparently does not wonder, why the narrator is carrying a trowel beneath his cloak?**  
**3.14 What does Fortunato's leaning "heavily" suggest?**  
**3.15 Literally, the scene is getting darker. What might this detail suggest on a symbolic level?**

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious **4.1**. 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 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. **4.2**

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--" **4.3**

"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

**4.1 Notice where the narrator and Fortunato are now: at "the most remote end of the crypt" in the "inmost recesses" of the "extensive" catacombs. Why this setting?**

**4.2 Why do you think the narrator goes into such detail as he describes this scene? Why, for instance, does the narrator give the measurements of the "interior recess"?**

**4.3 Why does the narrator mention Luchesi at this point?**

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 nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. **4.4** 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." **4.5** 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. **4.6**

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 **4.7**. 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 **4.8**. 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

**4.4 Why does the narrator remind Fortunato of the nitre and again "implore" him to leave the catacombs?**

**4.5 "True" seems an odd response to Fortunato's "The Amontillado!" Why do you think the narrator responds in this way?**

**4.6 Obviously, the narrator has carefully prepared this scene, but why do you think the narrator kept his trowel with him and did not bury it under the bones with the other materials?**

**4.7 Why might the narrator describe Fortunato's silence as "obstinate" (stubborn)?**

**4.8 What is your reaction to this comment by the narrator?**

**4.9 Why do you think the narrator describes in such detail his building of the wall to encase Fortunato?**



mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within. 4.9

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 5.1. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess: but the thought of an instant reassured me 5.2. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied 5.3. 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 clamor grew still. 5.4

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close 5.5. 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 5.6. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognising as that of the noble Fortunato 5.7. 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!" 5.8

"The Amontillado!" I said. 5.9

"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." 5.10

"Yes," I said, "let us be gone." 5.11

5.1 Why does the narrator "hesitate" and "tremble"? And why does he indicate that he reacted in this way only for "a brief moment"?

5.2 The narrator reveals a fact that he has held back until this point: that he is carrying a rapier. Why might the narrator have a rapier with him?

5.3 How does the narrator "satisfy" and "reassure" himself?

5.4 Why does the narrator "re-echo" and even "surpass" Fortunato's yelling? What effect might the narrator's actions have on Fortunato?

5.5 Why do you think Poe chose "midnight" as the time when the narrator is finishing his task?

5.6 Why does the narrator react this way?

5.7 What effect does the narrator create by referring to Fortunato as "noble" at this point?

5.8 How would you explain Fortunato's behavior and comments?

5.9 How would you explain this comment from the narrator?

5.10 What might Fortunato be trying to do by mentioning his wife, "the Lady Fortunato," and how she and others will be waiting for them?

5.11 The narrator knows that "they" (Fortunato and he) will not be going, so why does he

"For the love of God, Montresor!"

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!" **5.12**

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

"Fortunato!"

No answer. I called again--

"Fortunato!" **5.13**

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 **5.14**. My heart grew sick--on account of the dampness of the catacombs **5.15**. 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 **5.16**. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them **5.17**. *In pace requiescat!* **5.18**

The End

respond in this way?

**5.12** What might the narrator mean by this echoing of Fortunato's words?

**5.13** Why is the narrator becoming "impatient"?

**5.14** What effect is created by the "jingling of the bells" at this moment?

**5.15** Why does the narrator specify that "the dampness of the catacombs" is what made his heart grow sick? How would you describe the narrator's tone in this sentence?

**5.16** Why does the narrator now work quickly to finish his task?

**5.17** This is a surprising fact: it has been 50 years since the narrator buried Fortunato alive. Why might the narrator be telling his story now?

**5.18** "Rest in Peace" (Latin). Why do you think the narrator ends his story with this phrase?