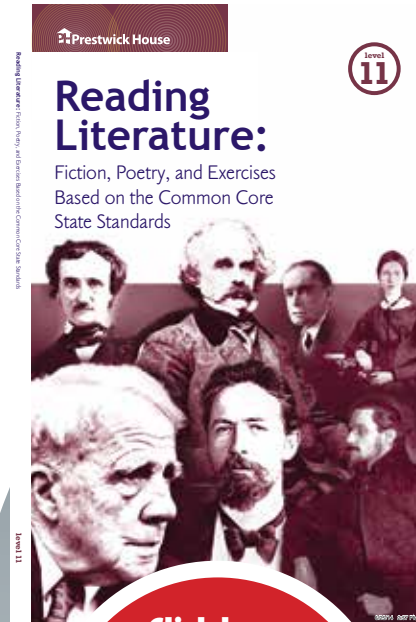




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INTRODUCTION

The Cask of Amontillado

This tale of revenge has often been called Poe's most perfect short story. It first appeared in November 1846 in *Godey's Lady's Book*, a Philadelphia magazine for which Poe was a regular contributor, mostly writing literary articles and reviews. "The Cask of Amontillado" was later included in the first volume of *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe* (1850-1856), edited by Rufus Wilmot Griswold, who was, ironically, an enemy of Poe and did a great deal to discredit him with a defamatory obituary and then an even more libelous "Memoir of the Author," which was included as a preface to Griswold's edition of Poe's works. Fortunately, Poe's reputation was later salvaged by John Henry Ingram, an Englishman who published a new, corrected "Memoir" in 1874 in his own edition of Poe's writings, then a full biography in 1880 (*Edgar Allan Poe: His Life, Letters, and Opinions*).

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe was almost always controversial, making his living as both an inventive, sometimes shocking writer and a brilliant, exacting critic of the work of other writers. There is no doubt that he singlehandedly reshaped American literature and world literature. For example, he invented the detective story with his tales featuring the iconic character C. Auguste Dupin, who was to be reincarnated with different names by other writers. Sherlock Holmes is Dupin's direct descendant, as Arthur Conan Doyle acknowledged. Poe also set down rules and definitions for the short story and the poem: The aim of both should be a single, carefully planned, emotional effect, and the short story should be able to be read in "one sitting," which for Poe was "half an hour to one or two hours." Poe's only longer work is *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), and it is more of a novella, with twelve "Episodes," each of which can be read in no more than Poe's allotted time.

Poe was born in Boston on January 19, 1809, to two actors, both of whom died before Poe turned three. A wealthy Richmond, Virginia, couple, John and Francis Allan, adopted Poe; he chose Allan as his middle name. Poe did not get along with his adoptive father and eventually left home. In 1827, at the age of 18, Poe paid a printer in Boston to publish his first book of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*. Hardly anyone noticed the book at the time; only 50 copies were printed. That same year, Poe, unemployed and unable to support himself, joined the army.

He rose to the rank of sergeant major, but death was to disrupt his life again. In 1829, he heard that his foster mother was sick and was asking to see him. By the time he could get to Richmond, however, she had died and been buried. Soon, Poe left the military and moved to Baltimore where he fell in love with his young cousin, Virginia Clemm; they were married in 1836. The year before, he had moved with her and

The Cask of Amontillado Edgar Allan Poe (1860)

I

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 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.

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.

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.

Precluded: prevented

Impunity: without punishment

Unredressed: unavenged

Retribution: revenge

Wont: a preference, habit

Immolation: destruction; killing

Connoisseurship: deep knowledge and appreciation

Virtuoso: an expert

Gemmary: jewels or precious gems

Accosted: confronted

Motley: multicolored, as in a jester's costume

Surmounted: topped

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.”

10 “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.”

“I forget your arms.”

15 “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.”

“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 long walls of piled skeletons, 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.

20 “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 Grave**. 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.

Medoc: French red wine

Repose: rest

Fortunato’s comment about arms implies that Montresor’s family is so important that it has a “coat of arms,” a unique design called a family crest. Each coat of arms is based on something knights wore in the Middle Ages to protect and identify the wearer.

Azure: blue

“Nemo me impune lacessit,” the motto of the Montresors, means “No one harms me without punishment,” which is the basis for the plot.

Puncheons: short wooden posts to support a ceiling

Flagon: a bottle to hold wine before serving it

De Grave: expensive French red wine

Gesticulation: a use of the arms and hands for emphasis



QUESTIONS

1. How does Montresor justify what he is about to do to Fortunato? What is left uncertain in his explanation?
2. Why does Poe choose to open the story with uncertainties?
3. How are the connotations of the setting, Fortunato's name, and his clothing ironic?
4. Because of Montresor's motive and point of view, we know that he often means the opposite of what he says, or he states something the reader understands as irony, while Fortunato takes the words at face value. What are three examples of such verbal and dramatic irony in part I?



INTRODUCTION

Eveline

This story of a young Irish woman's difficult choice between her family and her husband-to-be was originally published on September 10, 1904, in a journal called *The Irish Homestead*. James Joyce later revised it and included it in *Dubliners* (1914), a collection of 15 stories that were controversial because of their stark, naturalistic realism. In a letter to Grant Richards of London, who eventually accepted and published the book, Joyce said, "I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass." *Dubliners* was the first realistic literary treatment of Dublin and its citizens.

James Joyce

Joyce is considered by many to be the most influential writer of the twentieth century, and many scholars feel that his groundbreaking novel *Ulysses* is the greatest novel ever written in English. Most of Joyce's other works are also popular and critically acclaimed, yet his success was hard won and did not come quickly. In fall 1902, Joyce left Ireland for Paris, but the following spring, he returned to Dublin to help care for his seriously ill mother. While there, Joyce met his future wife, Nora Barnacle and soon moved with her to mainland Europe and returned to Ireland only for a few short visits.

Joyce was born in Dublin on February 2, 1882, one of fifteen children. He graduated from University College in Dublin in 1902. During his time there, he published a review of a Henrik Ibsen play, having become an ardent fan of the controversial Norwegian playwright. Joyce also generated some controversy of his own when his 1901 essay attacking the conservative Irish Literary Theatre was rejected by the university's magazine. Joyce published it himself, which gave him his first taste of notoriety and became the first of his many battles against censorship.

The traditional novel form that Joyce grew up reading was not sufficient to cover the way he wanted to convey his thoughts, and he, consequently, developed his own style. His most well-known book, *Ulysses*, was considered obscene, and no publisher would accept it. In 1922, however, Sylvia Beach, Joyce's friend, published the novel in France. After *Ulysses* had gained a considerable amount of fame and critical appreciation, it was published in the United States, but not until 1934. The first legal British edition came out two years later.

Soon after Joyce published his last novel, *Finnegans Wake*, World War II began in Europe, and in 1940, he and his family found asylum in Zurich, Switzerland. Having had nine operations throughout his adult life to correct eye problems and almost totally blind, Joyce faced another serious health problem, a bleeding ulcer, after moving to Zurich. He went into surgery, but never fully recovered and died in his hospital bed on January 13, 1941.

“Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!”

She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her.

She stood among the swaying crowd in the station at the North Wall. He held her hand and she knew that he was speaking to her, saying something about the passage over and over again. The station was full of soldiers with brown baggages. Through the wide doors of the sheds she caught a glimpse of the black mass of the boat, lying in beside the **quay** wall, with **illuminated** portholes. She answered nothing. She felt her cheek pale and cold and, out of a maze of distress, she prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty. The boat blew a long mournful whistle into the mist. If she went, to-morrow she would be on the sea with Frank, steaming towards Buenos Ayres. Their passage had been booked. Could she still draw back after all he had done for her? Her distress awoke a nausea in her body and she kept moving her lips in silent **fervent** prayer.

20 A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand:

“Come!”

All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.

“Come!”

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish.

25 “Eveline! Evvy!”

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.

Although there is no consensus, the most common translation of “Derevaun Seraun,” apparently an Anglicized version of a Gaelic phrase is, “The end of pleasure is pain.” That loose translation suits the end of the story and Eveline’s ultimate decision, but there is also no evidence that she or her mother understands what it means.

Quay: a dock or harbor

Illuminated: lit

Fervent: passionate, intense



QUESTIONS

1. In paragraph 1, what are the connotations of the word “invade”?
2. What can be inferred from the wording of paragraph 1?
3. What is a reason Joyce might have chosen to repeat the phrase “used to play” in paragraph 2?
4. The author’s use of words in paragraph 3 also involves repetition for emphasis. What is the significance of “dust” and “familiar objects,” both of which are repeated in the paragraph? How do they affect the meaning and tone?

Dulce et Decorum Est
Wilfred Owen (1920)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
 Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
 Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
 Of tired, outstretched Five-Nines that dropped behind.

5

“Five-Nines” were German 5.9-inch shells, often full of mustard gas.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
 And flound’ring like a man in fire or lime.—
 Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

10

The “helmets” refers to gas masks that soldiers wore to protect against the deadly gasses that the opposing armies used.

While “ecstasy” usually means a state of extreme happiness, it can also mean an irrational frenzy, as it does in this case.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

15

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
 His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin,
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

20

The image of “froth-corrupted lungs” refers to the lethal effects of mustard gas, which is a yellowish-green gas. It causes skin blistering and burns the respiratory system, including the nostrils and mouth, eventually forcing the lungs to stop working. It is especially dangerous after multiple exposures or in a highly concentrated form. Mustard and other gasses were used extensively in WWI. It was especially effective on soldiers who were fighting in trenches.

25

