

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846)

A Radical Introduction

Many teachers seem to like Poe's morbid, psychological thrillers and miss the fact that "The Cask of Amontillado" contains an element of social satire of our classist world. Montresor represents the wealthy class which exists to serve and promote death – or the "death economy," to quote John Perkins. Thus, Montresor not only feels quite at home in the catacombs committing premeditated murder of a man who did him no harm – nothing other than an accidental insult, Montresor is also unmarried and childless. He is, one might say, divorced from Nature and biology.

As for Fortunato, he represents the lower or middle-class man. His name reinforces his position as a powerless man, for it is a pagan name, and paganism was long ago buried by Christian imperialists. Poe uses Fortunato to highlight the stupidity, gullibility and even willingness of the lower classes to believe and obey the ruling class – even unto death.

Today, the lower classes are waking up to the fact that we, too, are being led to our destruction and are destroying ourselves – not only with alcohol but with a vast assortment of intoxicants, toxic substances, greenhouse gasses, nuclear radiation and many other means by which we destroy our health and biosphere.

1. Explain whether or not Montresor has written a confession years after his crime because he felt guilty. Find evidence or lack of evidence of his having a conscience. Who is the "you" addressed in paragraph 1?
2. Consider the symbolism of the Carnival setting and the jester's costume worn by Fortunato.
3. How does Montresor manipulate Fortunato? Which of Fortunato's weaknesses does he exploit?
4. Explain that Fortunato had a death wish and ignored all the evidence and hints that he should not have followed Montresor.

5. Consider the symbolic implications of the descent into the wine cellar.
6. Explain why you think or don't think the story is humorous.
7. Has Montresor's crime been entirely successful? Explain in what ways he failed and succeeded. Remember to address the fact that Montresor might actually be mostly angry, not at Fortunato, but at the decline of his family's fortunes.

“Cask of Amontillado”: Character Analysis Paper

Write a five paragraph character analysis paper. Choose which character you want to analyze: Montresor or Fortunato. Once you have chosen a character, decide what three characteristics you want to focus on. Then write a paper. Each paragraph should focus on each of the three characteristics. Each body paragraph should have a topic sentence with a topic and a limiting idea. The rest of the paragraph should support the topic sentences using quotes from the story and analysis of the quotes. Avoid summary of the story at all costs in the body paragraphs. When writing about literature you should try to keep the paper in present tense.

Paragraph 1 (Introduction):

When writing an introduction, follow **ANT**.

Attention getter – get the reader's attention.

- rhetorical question
- relevant quote from an outside source
- relevant quote from the story
- fact or statistic
- description of initial response to the work
- shocking or amusing generalization.

Whichever method you decide to use, make sure the attention-getter is relevant to the topic of your paper.

The attention-getter should relate to the topic of your paper.

Necessary information:

- author’s full name – Edgar Allan Poe
- Title of story – “Cask of Amontillado”
- Brief plot summary – in two to five sentences briefly remind your readers what happened in the story. Highlight the major action of the story, especially those parts that are relevant to your analysis. Make sure to include the two character’s names. If your focus is Montresor, then the summary should concentrate on Montresor. He should be the subject of most of your sentences.

Thesis:

Your thesis should consist of a topic and limiting ideas. It should never be a question. It should be the last sentence of the introduction paragraph. The thesis should make it clear what characteristics you are concentrating on and what these characteristics add to the story.

Example:

1. Fortunato makes himself an easy target because of _____, _____, and _____.

Or

2. Montresor accomplishes _____ because of he is _____, _____, and _____.

Paragraph 2 – body

Body paragraphs should follow **TIQA**:

- **Topic sentence:** a topic sentence has a topic and a limiting idea, or a focus. Your topic is the character you have chosen. And your limiting idea is a character trait.
- **Introduce quote:** Before you supply the quote that supports your topic sentence, you need to

introduce it. What this means is that you give some context to the quote. If someone is speaking the quote, you should tell your reader who is talking.

o **Example 1:** When Montresor walks Fortunato through his Palazzo, he tells the reader, “. . .” (211).

- **Quote:** Provide a quote that supports the topic sentence.
- **Analysis:** After the quote, spend about 2 to 3 sentences discussing how this quote proves that the character has this trait.
- **Transition:** Use a sentence or half a sentence to transition into a second quote for support.

o **Example 2:** Another time the reader sees Montresor’s intelligence is when he . . .

- **Introduce quote.**
- **Quote**
- **Analysis**

Paragraphs 3 & 4:

Body paragraphs should follow **TIQA** (See above and class notes).

Conclusion:

- **Reword** your thesis. (You may want to start the rewording of your thesis with a signal word: e.g., *thus, therefore, in short, as one can see, it is obvious then, and then.*)
- Tie all your points together. Then in 1 – 3 sentences, tell your reader the **significance** or **importance** of the ideas you have been analyzing. You might want to tell your reader what they should learn from the ideas you analyzed in the body paragraphs. (Warning: do not use *you*.)
- **Clincher:** try to end your paper with a short sentence that reinforces your argument. This last

sentence should do one of two things. It should either include some words from your attention-getter or it should include most words from your title. This gives a sense of closure to your paper.