

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

A Story by: **Edgar Allan Poe**

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Before you start reading

You are reading the **sample version** of this book. To get the full book, go to:

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Please note: The Table of Contents corresponds to the full book, not to the sample version.

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Foreword

The cask of Amontillado is a story of unexplained revenge. The narrator tells us about a murder he has prepared and cold-bloodedly executed, with little explanation as to his motivation apart from a vague mention of an insult.

The truth may be somewhat less poetic. After Poe's former friend and fellow writer Thomas Dunn English turned against him and began to criticize his work (but not before Poe himself ridiculed several of English's poems), their hostility escalated, and English wrote a novel in 1846 featuring a Poe-like character, portraying him as a drunk who grows insane and ends up in an asylum. Considering *The Cask of Amontillado* (published later in 1846) contains several undeniable references to this novel, it may be merely a portrayal of Poe's own "literary revenge".

Be it as it may, English's novel faded into oblivion, while Poe's short story became one of the best-known literary works of the English speaking world (and its title is perhaps the only reason why people know the word *Amontillado*, which is a type of Sherry wine).

Like most of Poe's works, *The Cask of Amontillado* is not exactly light reading for non-native speakers, but thanks to its high concentration of uncommon but still relevant words and idioms, it is a great tool to work with when you want to expand your vocabulary. I have selected over one hundred expressions in the story that may be hard to understand for an advanced English learner and tried to explain them in a manner comprehensible to a non-native speaker.

Vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and pronunciation are discussed in numbered annotations after each paragraph. I recommend to read the annotations carefully during the first reading

and then immediately reread the same paragraph once or several times again, until you can fully understand its meaning without looking at the annotations; repeatedly seeing new words in context will help you remember them.

Pronunciation is transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), in both American and British English. You can read a brief explanation of the IPA at the end of the book.

The Cask of Amontillado



The thousand injuries of Fortunato¹ I had borne² as I best could, but when he ventured³ upon insult⁴, I vowed⁵ revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance⁶ to a threat.

- 1 **Fortunato** /ˈfɔːrtʃʊˈnɑːtəʊ/ **US**, /ˈfɔːtʃʊˈnɑːtəʊ/ **UK**; a family name.
- 2 **borne** /bɔːrn/ **US**, /bɔːn/ **UK** is the past participle of the verb **bear** in all senses not related to giving birth (here in the sense of “tolerate”). In the sense of bearing a child (giving birth), the past participle is **born** (pronounced the same as “borne”).
- 3 **venture (up)on** /ˈventʃə/ **US**, /ˈventʃə/ **UK**; to go somewhere or do something even though it might be unpleasant or dangerous; to *dare* to do something.
- 4 the wording of the first sentence is a play on the English idiom **to add insult to injury**, which means “to make an already bad situation worse” or “to further mock someone who has already been hurt”.
- 5 **vow** /vaʊ/; make a formal promise (of).
- 6 **to give utterance** /ˈʌtərəns/ means “to speak about”.

*At length*¹ I would be avenged²; this was a point definitely settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, precluded³ the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but punish with impunity⁴. A wrong is unredressed⁵ when retribution⁶ overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

- 1 **at length**; after a long time; finally.
- 2 **avenge** /əˈvendʒ/; when you avenge something, you punish someone for causing it (e.g. “avenge your brother’s death”).

The difference between “avenging something” and “taking revenge” is that revenge is usually taken for personal satisfaction, whereas you avenge for rightful reasons. In other words, when you avenge something, it is an act of *justice*, and when you take revenge, it is an act of *passion*.

- 3 **preclude** /pri'klu:d/; to make something impossible to happen.
- 4 **impunity** /ɪm'pjʊ:nɪti/; if you do something *with impunity*, you do it in such a way that you cannot be punished for it.
- 5 **redress** /rɪ'dres/; to correct something that is unfair; **unredressed** is an uncommon word meaning “morally uncorrected”.
- 6 **retribution** /,rɛtri'bju:ʃn/; punishment or revenge for something very wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause¹ to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont², to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile *now* was at the thought of his immolation³.

- 1 **give cause** means “give reason”.
- 2 **wont** /wɔ:nt/ or /woʊnt/ **US**, /wəʊnt/ **UK**; an archaic word for a habit. It is pronounced the same as *won't* in British English but usually sounds the same as *want* in American English.
- 3 **immolation** /,ɪmə'leɪʃn/; burning to death.

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 imposture¹ upon the British and Austrian *mil-*

lionaires. In painting and gemmery², Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack³—but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially⁴: I was skillful in the Italian vintages⁵ myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

- 1 **imposture** /ɪmˈpɑːstʃə/ **US**, /ɪmˈpɒstʃə/ **UK**; pretending to be someone else. A person involved in such an act is called an **impostor**.
- 2 **gemmery** /ˈdʒɛməri/; now an obsolete word, referring to (the art of) making jewellery; a **gem** /dʒɛm/ is a precious stone.
- 3 **quack** /kwæk/; a charlatan; a person claiming to have skills they don't have, usually referring to medical knowledge.
- 4 **materially** /məˈtɪriəli/ **US**, /məˈtɪəriəli/ **UK**; substantially, largely, heavily.
- 5 **vintage** /ˈvɪntɪdʒ/; here a noun referring to a good year in which a certain sort of wine was produced. The word is also commonly used as an adjective meaning “having an old-time appeal”.

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This is the end of the sample. To get the full book, go to:

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