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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

THE SELECTED WRITINGS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS
CRITICISM

Selected and Edited by
G. R. Thompson

PURDUE UNIVERSITY



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awaken M. Valdemar would be merely to insure his instant, or at least his speedy dissolution.

From this period until the close of last week—an interval of nearly seven months—we continued to make daily calls at Mr. Valdemar's house, accompanied, now and then, by medical and other friends. All this time the sleep-waker remained exactly as I have last described him. The nurses' attentions were continual.

It was on Friday last that we finally resolved to make the experiment of awakening, or attempting to awaken him; and it is the (perhaps) unfortunate result of this latter experiment which has given rise to so much discussion in private circles—to so much of what I cannot help thinking unwarranted popular feeling.

For the purpose of relieving M. Valdemar from the mesmeric trance, I made use of the customary passes. These, for a time, were unsuccessful. The first indication of revival was afforded by a partial descent of the iris. It was observed, as especially remarkable, that this lowering of the pupil was accompanied by the profuse out-flowing of a yellowish ichor² (from beneath the lids) of a pungent and highly offensive odor.

It now was suggested that I should attempt to influence the patient's arm, as heretofore. I made the attempt and failed. Dr. F. then intimated a desire to have me put a question. I did so as follows:

"M. Valdemar, can you explain to us what are your feelings or wishes now?"

There was an instant return of the hectic circles on the cheeks; the tongue quivered, or rather rolled violently in the mouth (although the jaws and lips remained rigid as before); and at length the same hideous voice which I have already described, broke forth:

"For God's sake!—quick!—quick!—put me to sleep—or, quick!—waken me!—quick!—*I say to you that I am dead!*"

I was thoroughly unnerved, and for an instant remained undecided what to do. At first I made an endeavor to re-compose the patient; but, failing in this through total abeyance of the will, I retraced my steps and as earnestly struggled to awaken him. In this attempt I soon saw that I should be successful—or at least I soon fancied that my success would be complete—and I am sure that all in the room were prepared to see the patient awaken.

For what really occurred, however, it is quite impossible that any human being could have been prepared.

As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes amid ejaculations of "dead! dead!" absolutely bursting from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute, or even less, shrunk—crumbled—absolutely rotted away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putrescence.

2. Here a thin, sour-smelling fluid discharge, as from a wound or ulcer.

The Cask of Amontillado

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.² 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.³ 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 upon 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 practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmary, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack,⁴ 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 carnival⁵ season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with

1. The text reprinted here is that of the first publication in *Godey's Lady's Book* (November 1846). The subject of living inurement, like premature burial, was popular in Poe's day; see Mabbott, III, 1252–56.
2. Most readers have taken this address to be an apostrophe in the "Dear Reader" style of so many 18th- and 19th-century stories. But since the reader does not yet know the nature of the narrator's soul, it suggests that the story is being told to an implied listener.
3. These words and the rest of this paragraph anticipate the narrator's family motto (quoted in the middle of the tale). "Impunity": from *punito*, *punitor*, "to punish or correct." A *punitor* is an avenger. Impunity means "without punishment" (i.e., to get away with it), one of two conditions the narrator is about to specify for successful revenge. To "impugn" someone also means to slander them, to call into question their honor. Some readers have found the indefiniteness of Fortunato's "insult" to the narrator both chilling and problematic; but there are clues to more than one possible insult.
4. Quack: a fake, an incompetent posing as an expert. Mabbott observes that in Poe's day Italy was a center for foisting off bogus artworks on foreign visitors. The phrase the narrator uses to describe Fortunato ("like his countrymen") puts immediate distance between them, suggesting among other things that the narrator is not of Italian ancestry.
5. Spring festival of the fleshly appetites (Latin: *carne*, "flesh"), celebrated for centuries in Europe. It originated out of folk celebrations of the mysteries of Dionysus in Greece (god of fertility and regeneration) and Osiris in Egypt (god of fertility and vegetation, associated with the renewal of life brought by the yearly flooding of the Nile). Carnival is traditionally characterized by parades, pageants, masquerades, singing, dancing, and general revelry, much of it drunken and bawdy. The Roman carnivals of Bacchanalia, Saturnalia, and Lupercalia evolved into Christian feasts in the Middle Ages; notably the Feast of the Ass, which continued the old pagan bawdiness, and the Feast of the Fools, which featured blasphemous impersonations of the clergy and a mock Mass. In the 14th through the 16th centuries, the Roman Catholic Church took steps to associate Carnival more closely with the spiritual aspects of Christian holy days, connecting it with Lent (the forty days of penance before Easter, symbolic of the forty days of Jesus's fasting in the desert). Americans know the rites of Carnival from Mardi Gras as celebrated in New Orleans, Louisiana. *Mardi gras* means something like "fat Tuesday"; the people are allowed a day to indulge fleshly appetites

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.⁶ I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

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,⁷ and I have my doubts."

"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!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchresi. If any one has a critical turn it is he. He will tell me—"

"Luchresi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."⁸

"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. Luchresi—"

"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."⁹

"Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchresi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm; and putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a *roquelaire*¹⁰ closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

and let off steam against authority. Some critics see the action of Poe's tale as playing out these symbolic ceremonies in a perverse way: the linguistic repetitions are both darkly comic and ritualistic, suggesting that the narrator is conducting a mock Mass for the dead as part of a satanic crucifixion and burial. Followed by Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent), Mardi Gras is also called Shrove Tuesday; the last day before confessing to a priest, doing penance, and seeking forgiveness for one's sins (being "shriven").

6. Fortunato is wearing the traditional clown's or jester's costume of the Feast of Fools.

7. A light, semisweet sherry from the south of Spain, prized by connoisseurs. "Pipe": a large cask. Some critics have suggested that in this scene Poe erred regarding the origin and genre of Amontillado, mistaking it for an Italian vintage rather than a Spanish one. But the situation is being manipulated by the narrator; his intent is to trick Fortunato by appealing to his pride, his sense of superior connoisseurship.

8. Fortunato (rather than Poe) here reveals his ignorance; as the narrator says, in the connoisseurship of wines Fortunato was, like the narrator, "sincere" (not necessarily expert).

9. Potassium nitrate, a gray-white mineral deposit used in making gunpowder; also called saltpeter (salt rock).

10. A cape or small cloak. In contrast to Fortunato's fool's costume, Montresor's mask and a cape suggest the costume of a stage villain (a "masked avenger").

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honour 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,² 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 upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.³

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.

"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.

"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 Luchresi—"

"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 Medoc⁵ 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.

2. A "sconce" is a decorative bracket for candles or torches ("flambeaux"), usually recessed in the wall; from the Latin *abscondere*, past participle of *abscondere*, "to hide away." Sconce is also an informal usage for "skull." A rough German equivalent, *Schanze*, is an earthen-work concavity, a fortification, paralleling the Italian *scanso*, "a defense."

3. "Catacombs": underground burial crypts, connected by labyrinthine passageways, descending down to sixty feet or more underground. The catacombs outside Rome (from the 1st century C.E.) are full of niches and cubicles designed as a Christian sanctuary for the dead, i.e., to protect the bodies from desecration. Living Christians also used them as a place of refuge from religious persecution, paralleling the Italian *scanso*, "a defense." The name Montresor (some critics are in the habit of spelling it Montessor) heightens the multileveled word play. It suggests the narrator's French, rather than Italian, ancestry. In French, *mon tresor* means "my treasure." The name Fortunato in Italian suggests "fortune" (he is wealthy) and "fortunate" (obviously not) along with "fated." The name of the other Italian connoisseur, Luchresi, suggests *lucre* (Latin: money). Griswold's edition changes it to Luchesi (the name of a contemporary writer) for reasons that are not entirely clear.

4. Montresor's irony provides another hint of the nature of the insult.

5. Wine believed to have medicinal properties.

"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."

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."

"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 fancy⁶ grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through long wells of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons⁷ 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.

"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 flacon 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!"

6. The Montresors were once great and numerous, now no longer; unforgivably, Fortunato has "forgotten" the nobleman's family coat of arms. As the present Montresor explains, the coat of arms portrays a foot of gold ("d'or") against a blue background ("field azure") in the act of crushing a serpent; the serpent, risen up to strike ("rampant"), has embedded its fangs in the heel of the foot. It is left unclear whether the Montresors are the avenging foot or the avenging serpent. (But see Genesis 3:15.)

7. No one is allowed to impugn me (Latin); or paraphrased as "no one offends me with impunity." It is the well-known motto of the Scottish Royal Coat of Arms, and some scholars surmise that there is thus a coded reference to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in the tale. This interpretation focuses on John Wilson (1785-1854), known as "Christopher North," who was a professor of philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and an early contributing editor of *Blackwood's*. He was noted for acerbity, and William Hazlitt (1778-1830) is supposed to have explained the "thistle" in Wilson's family crest by reference to the motto. Although there may well be some kind of payback in terms of the literary warfare of the day, this reading tends to push the story rather far toward a *roman à clef* (story with a "key").

8. Imagination; from the Greek root for fantasy (*phantasein*).

9. Casks that each hold approximately eighty-four gallons.

1. Wine from the Bordeaux region of France. Montresor's pun is obvious; "Flacon": a stoppered bottle.

"You are not of the masons?"

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

"You? Impossible! A mason!"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said; "a sign."

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

"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.³ Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side 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 crypt or 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.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavoured 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 Luchresi—"

"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.

2. Those who build or work with stone or brick; Fortunato means to indicate the Brotherhood of the Masons, a late-medieval trade guild originating in Scotland and England. Over the centuries, the Masons became an international secret society; Protestant or Deist in religious orientation and strongly opposed by the Catholic Church. By the end of the 18th century, all the major countries of Europe had Masonic societies. Fortunato's gesture is a secret sign unrecognized by Montresor, who produces a trowel (see below) as an ironic portent of his real intentions.

3. Like the earlier and more famous Christian catacombs of Rome, these are underground burial crypts and passages; the reference to the Parisian "fashion" of piling corpses to the ceiling tends to confirm Montresor's French origins.

"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 will 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 those 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.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in 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 vibration of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours 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 clamoured. I re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer 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! 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

4. Possibly a reference to the "wine" of revenge.

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, Montresor!"

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

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; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so.⁵ I hastened to make an end of my labour. 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!*⁷

Hop-Frog; or, The Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs¹

I never knew any one so keenly alive to a joke as the king was. He seemed to live only for joking. To tell a good story of the joke kind; and to tell it well; was the surest road to his favor. This it happened that his seven ministers were all noted for their accomplishments as jokers. They all took after the king, too, in being large, corpulent, oily men; as well as inimitable jokers. Whether people grow fat by joking, or whether there is something in fat itself which predisposes to a joke, I have never been quite able to determine; but certain it is that a lean joker is *arara avis in terris*.²

5. Some critics have seen the repetition of this phrase as especially significant, arguing that a Protestant-Catholic conflict lies at the heart of the insult.

6. In the Griswold version, these words are rendered: "on account of the dampness of the catacombs." The dash was used perhaps to suggest more strongly a hurried afterthought, a disingenuous denial that the narrator has been moved by the horror of his deed: By Catholic doctrine, if Montresor is *not* penitent, he cannot receive absolution, and his soul will go to Hell; on the other hand, if he is remorseful, then one of the two stated conditions for successful revenge in the first paragraph has not been fulfilled.

7. The last two sentences hint at Montresor's present age and would seem to have special relevance to his problematic spiritual and psychological state. The Latin is the final burial prayer: "Rest in peace." It is unclear whether the reference is to Fortunato or to himself—or if in fact it is Montresor's utterance at all.

1. The text reprinted here follows that of the first publication in the *Flag of Our Union* (March 17, 1849). This tale was the last to be published during Poe's lifetime; it may have been inspired by the story of the accidental burning death of several aristocrats in the court of Charles VI of France at a masquerade party in 1385, as told by Jean Froissart (1337?-1410?) in chapter 138 of his *Chronicles of the Hundred Years War* (written over a thirty-year period from 1369 to about 1400). This incident was summarized in an article published in the *Broadway Journal* for February 1, 1845. In "Barbarities of the Theatre," Evert A. Duyckinck, an editor of the influential *New York Literary World*, likened the recent death of a young dancer in London, whose costume caught fire from the gas lights illuminating the stage, to Froissart's account.

2. A rare bird on earth (Latin), a famous phrase of Juvenal (Decimus Junius Juvenalis, 1st-2nd century C.E.), Roman satirist.