

A Trio Of Poe

A Reader's Theatre

Adapted by Paul Caywood

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STORY OF THE PLAY

"The Masque of the Red Death" is a fantastic tale of a fatal disease that was sweeping Europe in the 1800's and before. In "Lionizing" Poe was satirizing authors who get recognition when they write nothing but trivia and nonsense in flowery and literary styles. Then, when the work is published, people who know nothing about writing purchase the books and pamphlets and think they've bought masterpieces. It is true satire and works well between two works of macabre horror. "The Cask of Amontillado" finds that if a man is the type who wants to get revenge on someone who has done him wrong, there are many ways to do it. Today, Poe is said to have been an American literary genius.' The Masque of the Red Death," "Lionizing," and "The Cask of Amontillado" demonstrate Poe's great talent as a writer. About 40 minutes.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849.) wrote many short stories, poems, and literary reviews, for which he received little recognition and even less money. Such stories as "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "The Gold Bug" are now regarded as great tales of mystery and horror. Today, Poe is said to have been an American literary genius. "The Masque of the Red Death," "Lionizing," and "The Cask of Amontillado" demonstrate Poe's great talent as a writer. In each of the stories, he creates something different: an unusual situation, strange characters, images of far-off locations, and new literary styles. But, above all, he devises compelling plots that drive a reader to the end of the story.

READERS' ASSIGNMENTS

(6 m, 4 w.)

- READER #1: *(Woman.)* Hostess, Duchess
READER #2: *(Man.)* Montessor, Guest at Almack's, Fum-Fudger, Royal Highness, Friend at Pall Mall
READER #3: *(Man.)* Narrator for "Lionizing"-real name Robert Jones
READER #4: *(Woman.)* Guest at Almack's, Fum-Fudger, Friend at Pall Mall
READER #5: *(Man.)* Father of Robert Jones, Grand Turk, Dignitary, Man at Almack's
READER #6: *(Woman.)* Guest at Almack's, Fum-Fudger
READER #7: *(Man.)* At Almack's, Fum-Fudger, Artist, Aestheticus Ehix, Prince Prospero
READER #8: *(Woman.)* Guest at Almack's, Dignitary, Friend at Pall Mall
READER #9: *(Man.)* Fortunato, Fum-Fudger, the Earl, Man at Almack's
READER #10: *(Man.)* Sir Paradox, Dignitary, Prince of Wales

*All of the readers help interpret the story of "The Masque of the Red Death."

SETTING

The diagrams below show the positions of the readers for the plays. For "The Masque of the Red Death," all of the readers are standing except Readers #4 and #7, who sit on high stools.

For "Lionizing" and "The Cask of Amontillado," the readers sit URC (*The first row on chairs or low stools and the second row on high stools.*). During the plays, the readers keep their positions unless otherwise directed. For "Lionizing" there is a high stool and music stand DLC. For "The Cask of Amontillado," there are two high stools and two music stands DLC.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION NOTES AT END OF SCRIPT

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A TRIO OF POE

(The READERS come onstage casually, entering from different directions. They take the positions assigned to them for "The Masque of the Red Death." When all are in place, Reader #1 takes a step forward and speaks to the audience.)

READER #1 *(Hostess.)* We're going to read three of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories for you. In his stories, Poe usually dealt with strange and eerie situations, but he could and did write stories of satire and humor. We'll give you a sample of three different kinds of stories. Poe was a literary genius who created striking and romantic poems, eerie stories, and laughable, satirical skits.

Our first story is entitled "The Masque of the Red Death." The tale is said to be fantastic because its aim is to create an impression in the reader's mind rather than to relate a plot or tell about an interesting character. A masque was a type of dramatic performance seen three or four hundred years ago. The Red Death was the plague that ravaged many of the countries of Europe during that time.

END OF SCENE

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

READER #10: The Red Death had long devastated the country. It was fatal and hideous. The disease caused sharp and painful bleeding from the pores. And death came quickly.

READER #3: Prince Prospero was a rich young nobleman who lived in northern Italy. He was a happy and shrewd man. When half the people of his country had died, he summoned a thousand hale and light-hearted knights and dames to his castle. His fort-like home was surrounded by a strong, high wall, and there were iron gates, which, when locked, permitted no one to come or go. The Prince laid in provisions of all kinds for his guests, and he provided for their entertainment with clowns, musicians, dancers, and plenty of wine.

READER #6: When five or six months had passed, the Prince announced,

READER #7: *(Prince.)* We shall have a masked ball. I tell you, it will be magnificent. All of the seven rooms of entertainment in the castle will be used.

READER #2: The first room was the Imperial Suite. It was long and narrow, and with the Prince's bizarre tastes, the Gothic stained-glass windows shut out most of the light. The dominant color of the room was blue.

READER #4: The second chamber was purple in its ornaments. Even the windows were purple.

READER #10: The third was green throughout, and so were the casements.

READER #8: The fourth was furnished and lighted in orange.

READER #3: The fifth with white.

READER #6: The sixth with violet.

READER #5: And the seventh was shrouded in black velvet tapestries, which covered the walls, the ceiling, and fell in folds to the carpet. But the windows were scarlet, a deep blood color.

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READER #1: The rooms were lit by braziers of fire that projected eerie rays through the tinted windows. The people became gaudy and had fantastic appearances. But in the seventh chamber, the effect of the firelight on the blood-tinted windows was ghastly. It produced such a wild and haunting look on the faces of the people that few of them dared to enter the room.

READER #6: It was in this room that a gigantic ebony clock stood against the farthest wall. Its pendulum swung to and fro in a dull heavy clang. When it struck the hour, the sound was so foreboding that everything, indeed every person, in the room halted. A hush fell over the people, the musicians stopped playing, and the lights flickered uncertainly.

READER #4: But when the doom-like chimes stopped, the clowns tumbled and laughed again, the musicians went on with their lilting tunes, the dancers waltzed, and dreamers went back to dreaming. The heart of life beat on feverishly.

(ALL of the group are laughing and talking. A couple of them have begun to waltz around the stage and among the readers. Recorded MUSIC of a waltz will help this sequence. The dancers should have handed their scripts to a nearby person, and he or she should have tucked it under his arm. If the dancers have lines at this time, they should be reassigned to other readers.)

READER #7: *(Prince.)* Enjoy yourselves!

READER #1: Tonight we revel!

READER #8: Be happy!

READER #6: Singsongs!

READER #3: Drink wine!

READER #6: We're safe!

READER #10: We're secure in the Prince's castle!

(The clock CHIMES, and the people fall silent. When Reader #5 finished his last speech, he went unnoticed to the prop table.)

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(Now, he returns to his place dressed in a black robe, with a hood covering his head, and a death mask over his face.)

READER #1: Before the echoes of the chimes had sunk into silence, many in the chamber noticed the presence of a masked figure in the room.

READER #4: I see something, over there.

READER #8: *(Almost a whisper.)* What is it?

READER #3: A masked figure.

READER #1: In only a moment, the rumor of a horrible presence filled the room, striking the revelers with surprise and anxiety, then with terror.

READER #8: *(Very frightened.)* What is it? I want to know.

READER #7: *(Prince. Trying to sound authoritative.)* What does this mean?

READER #2: Shrouded in such a robe.

READER #10: Wearing the mask of a corpse.

READER #8: *(Horried.)* Oh, God! The Red Death!

READER #2: Prince Prospero was furious that someone had interrupted his revelries.

READER #7: *(Prince. Very angry.)* Who dares to insult us with this mockery? Seize him and unmask him-so we know who we'll have to hang from the battlements at sunrise!

READER #10: At first, there was a slight movement of the revelers toward the intruder.

(READER #5 comes C.)

READER #10: But then, in awe, not one of the revelers put out a hand to seize him.

READER #8: The black-robed figure walked to the Prince.

(READER #5 comes to R of the PRINCE, and READER #6, in fear, moves close to READER #4.)

READER #9: It was then that Prince Prospero, maddened with rage and shame at his own cowardice, drew his dagger.

End of Freeview

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