



The Man of the Crowd

Edgar Allan Poe , Ralph Cosham (Narrator)

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About The Man of the Crowd by Edgar Allan Poe

"The Man of the Crowd" is a story by American writer Edgar Allan Poe about a nameless narrator following a man through a crowded London. Plot Summary: The story is introduced with the epigraph "Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul" — a quote taken from The Characters of Man by Jean de La Bruyère. It translates to This great misfortune, of not being able to be alone. This same quote is used in Poe's earliest tale, "Metzengerstein". After an unnamed illness, the unnamed narrator sits in an unnamed coffee shop in London. Fascinated by the crowd outside the window, he considers how isolated people think they are, despite "the very denseness of the company around". He takes time to categorize the different types of people he sees. As evening falls, the narrator focuses on "a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age", whose face has a peculiar idiosyncrasy, and whose body "was short in stature, very thin, and apparently very feeble" wearing filthy, ragged clothes of a "beautiful texture". The narrator dashes out of the coffee shop to follow the man from afar. The man leads the narrator through bazaars and shops, buying nothing, and into a poorer part of the city, then back into "the heart of the mighty London". This chase lasts through the evening and into the next day. Finally, exhausted, the narrator stands in front of the man, who still does not notice him. The narrator concludes the man is "the type and genius of deep crime" due to his inscrutability and inability to leave the crowds of London.

The Man of the Crowd Details

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From Reader Review The Man of the Crowd for online ebook

Mark says

Very mysterious and intriguing story. It is best to read this short story in the evening after the sun has just gone down. You can really pick up on the atmosphere the character is in, as the story has an air to it that seems (in my opinion) to suit this time of day. You can just envision yourself among the "crowd" full of cliques and faceless people, following that distinct man in his day...there is something oddly mysterious about that kind of pursuit.

Jason Koivu says

I read this in 2010, gave it three stars, and I have no idea why, because I can't remember a damn thing about it.

Let's see if Wiki can cast some light on it...

"The Man of the Crowd" is...about a nameless narrator following a man through a crowded London...

After an unnamed illness, the unnamed narrator sits in an unnamed coffee shop...he considers how isolated people think they are, despite "the very denseness of the company around". He takes time to categorize the different types of people he sees...the narrator focuses on "a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age", whose face has a peculiar idiosyncrasy...

Wow, no wonder I'm having trouble remembering the specifics of this one, everything and everyone is nameless! It's easy to forget people and things when your brain doesn't categorize them with some kind of title, name, or at least a brief-yet-memorable definition.

The Man of the Crowd reminds me of something a college professor once told me: 99 out of 100 people you'll meet will be interesting in some way, while that 100th person will be interesting because he/she will be so unnaturally boring as to make him/her interesting.

So, our unnamed narrator spots the world's least interesting man and is so drawn to him as to spend the entire evening and night following the man around to discover what he's about. The plot thickens the more nothing happens. The very fact that this man wanders without purpose, seems to have no home or place to go, this limbo state is enough to condemn the man in the eyes of his pursuer. Clearly, thinks the narrator, this man is guilty of something!

I have a vivid imagination, so this sort of scenario actually makes sense to me. Poe had a pretty dang vivid imagination, too...in fact his probably ranks up there on the top "most vivid" list. I think that kind of mind, the curious one that can make up crazy shit where others see normality, is prevalent in writers especially while they industriously work away at their craft. So while this might sound nuts I'm going to say it anyway, *The Man of the Crowd* is the kind of story that could only be written by a writer.

Yani says

¿Se puede experimentar la vorágine de una ciudad como Londres a través de los ojos de alguien que simplemente está sentado en un café? ¿Contemplar a los diferentes transeúntes, los empujones cotidianos, la marcha incesante, la sensación de estar en un grupo pero sin perder la individualidad? O mejor aún: ¿qué se sentiría al divisar un rostro demoníaco que se vuelve tan sospechoso que induce al protagonista/ narrador a salir del café e iniciar una persecución?

Poe logra su objetivo. Este cuento es un paseo por el corazón y los bordes de una ciudad. La narración parece un laberinto sin salida que traza líneas (que parecen que no van a ninguna parte) y hasta yo terminé exhausta en ese recorrido. Pero valió la pena cada página, incluso aunque a uno le impresione o decepcione el final. Uno de mis relatos favoritos de Poe, por lo menos hasta el momento.

Mya says

I enjoyed the ending. What a classic?

Knigoqdec says

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J.M. Brister says

"The Man of the Crowd" is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe. Although it is not among some of his more well-known, it is still quite enjoyable.

An unnamed man in an unnamed cafe in London sits and watches people pass by. As they do, the unnamed man begins to put them all in categories. When he stumbles upon an old man he can't quite classify, he follows him throughout the market, trying to decide what "box" to categorize the man.

The unnamed man is not as fascinating as the old man he follows. I guess that is the purpose of the story, and why I love Poe so much.

Although not Poe's usual dark, gothic style, the story is richly written. This is nothing crazy or scary about this particular story, but that's why makes Poe so awesome. Although the names and places are very vague, the descriptions of the setting are amazing. If you enjoy Poe, you will not be disappointed.

I highly recommend this story for the American lit fan, Poe fan, or someone looking to read something a little different.

Siobhan says

I'm slowly working my way through Edgar Allan Poe's work, something which will take me quite some time, and of those I have read thus far The Man of the Crowd is my least favourite.

I know many people enjoy this one, approach it as having a much deeper meaning that wows them. Whilst I can see that deeper meaning within the story, I wasn't invested enough to care. I kept expecting something more to happen, something chilling to occur, only to finish this one feeling as though nothing happened.

It could have simply been a reflection of my mood at the time of reading, though.

Adam Sprague says

How many people are simply just "men of the crowd"? Too many.

Marija Andreeva says

I loved it.

It is a short story and it is totally Edgar Allan Poe. I loved it. I was always expecting something to happen and th?n... there was the end. Great message.

Israa says

I just like the last two or three lines "The old man," I said at length, "is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds."

Sean Barrs the Bookdragon says

Have you ever stopped, for just a moment, and observed the crowd you are part of but not fully a member of? We're all isolated from each other when in a mass crowd of people; there's not really any connectedness with other people. By observation this idea is felt more strongly; thus, the narrator of this tale carries with him a depth of separation and loneliness. Well, until he finds an unusual face amongst the crowd of supposed pretenders and hypocrites.

So, he follows the face and, you guessed it, observes some more. The man of the crowd exhibits some unusual behaviour but none other than the narrator seems to notice him. He is lost in the busy city of London and his identity is forever obscured; he is just another irrelevant person in a tide of faces. No one knows him, no one cares about him. His oddness is as unnoticeable as everyone else's. In this, he has the perfect cover for he is a thief that can steal and vanish into the crowd with complete ease. He becomes incognito with no

trace of his identity left. Well, except for our perceptive narrator's observation of him and the other secrets of the crowd.

"There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes — die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not suffer themselves to be revealed."

This is an interesting idea. I think this story is really relevant in today's ever rising population and increasing modernisation. For me, this story questions individuality. If a person can be lost in a sea of people, then are we all the same? Are we all a member of Poe's metaphorical crowd? I think it's also suggestive of what horrors may lurk within the crowd, and how easily it can become hidden. Through this story I think Poe's is suggesting that amongst the depths of people can come easily disguisable, and unnoticeable, evil. It's a great story.

Glenn Russell says

Published in 1845, *The Man of the Crowd* by Edgar Allan Poe is a fascinating tale exploring, among other topics, the various ways we can be present in the world and experience the people and life around us.

For such nineteenth century thinkers as Arthur Schopenhauer aesthetic experience is a way to lift us above our everyday concerns, material desires and emotional sufferings to a realm of intellectual contemplation that is most pleasant and freeing. This is, in fact, the narrator's mindset for the first half of the story when he sits in a coffeehouse in a happy mood, free of boredom, with clear-headedness and a sense of exhilaration so that "Merely to breathe was enjoyable." He has been feeling calm and keenly interested in his cigar, his paper and the people in the coffeehouse for some time when he turns his attention to the coffeehouse window and the mass of humanity pounding the pavement outside.

Listening to his account, it's as if he is a spectator sitting in his box at the theater, watching the play of everyday urban life where the actors are men and women from London's social classes and cultural strata, top to bottom. The narrator categorizes and describes in colorful detail the appearance of decent business-types, haggard clerks, pick-pockets, gamblers, dandies, military men, peddlers, beggars, invalids, young girls, the elderly, drunkards, porters, coal-heavers, organ-grinders, laborers and monkey-exhibitors.

Then, when night descends and the gas-lights turn on, as if in answer to the shifting light, the narrator shifts his focus from overall physical appearances and clothing to an examination of individual faces. We read, "Although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years."

Perhaps his "peculiar mental state" is heightened intuition from his prolonged aesthetic experience, but, whatever it is, as he looks out the coffeehouse window, the narrator thinks he can read an individual's life history by momentarily viewing his or her face.

Then, something unexpected happens: the narrator sees an old man between sixty-five and seventy, an old man whose face is so arresting and absorbing and idiosyncratic, the narrator feels compelled to leave his seat at the window and follow him down the street. Will he learn more about this old man with a face that prompts ideas of such things as vast mental power, of triumph, of blood-thirstiness, of excessive terror?

The narrator is certainly willing to sacrifice his calm, happy mood and enjoyable breathing to find out. We read, "I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated. Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view – to know more of him. Hurriedly putting on an overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, I made my way into the street." So, it's bye, bye happy, relaxed contemplation; hello, craving desire and psychological fascination.

And here we follow the narrator as he experiences an entirely different way of being in the world, a totally different way to experience life and observe people. The mindset he adopts is intriguing, mainly the attitude of a private detective trailing a suspect with a tincture of flâneur, that is, an explorer and connoisseur of the street.

The narrator's excitement and inquisitiveness is heightened; he is willing to race through London streets for hours, even the dangerous and dilapidated East End and even in the rain. Poe writes, "The rain fell fast; the air grew cold. Down this, some quarter of a mile long, he rushed with an activity I could not have dreamed of seeing in one so aged, and which put me to much trouble in pursuit."

The narrator relays his many observations and judgments about the old man of the crowd as he follows his path for hours and hours, until the rising of the sun the next day. Now, that's headstrong fascination! Ultimately, the narrator doesn't like what he discovers and concludes for such as the old man of the crowd, he can learn no more.

What I personally find fascinating is Poe's penetrating insight that our intention and focus and mindset radically alters our perception; how, when we shift from calm philosophical to aroused and desirous, we are, in a very real sense, encountering a different world. What an altered experience the narrator of this tale would have had if, after putting on his hat and coat and running from the coffeehouse, he couldn't locate the old man. What a dissimilar world he would have seen if he reverted to his calm, aesthetic contemplation, randomly and casually strolling London's streets.

Emilia says

A Man of the Crowd is the first short story in which the concept of the flâneur was used. It first appeared in a poem by Charles Baudelaire and if translated from French is described as a stroller, idler, walker. In this short story we have two flâneurs. The first one is the narrator who watches through the window of a hotel. He treats the people who pass for his own pleasure. He divides the crowd into people who have their characteristics. He is a voyeur; taking extreme pleasure in reading people from their clothes, way of walking, posture. The narrator is actively gazing from his hotel D* situated in London and then becomes a part of the crowd experiencing it. He follows, as he says himself, Satan – an extremely intelligent yet gruesome person who is 65-75 years old. People in the crowd are secluded by a thick mist and gas lamps which is typical of the 19th century Victorian London similar to Arthur Conan Doyle's one. But after following him for hours he realizes that the man has no direct goal. He leads him through London showing him its duality. The rich, secure, clean West side and the East side which is in decrepitude and decay, crowded by corrupted people. The narrator finally learns that the man will be forever a part of the crowd and never apart from it. Even if he had followed him for days he would never have read anything from his face. He is anonymous, and unknown

face among a stream of individuals. This short story was extremely interesting to me.

Ebster Davis says

This is kind of an unconventional detective story. I really don't feel like it had any resolutions. (I think the point is that sometimes you don't get to see the resolutions.) I still think the concept was a really cool one.

*Spoilers to follow

I feel like the narrator could have been Poirot or Dupin, or perhaps Holmes in a quiet moment, sitting around London people-watching.

There's a lot of detail going into describing all the people in the crowd of people going about their normal lives. Then he notices "the man". The man blends in to the crowd and probably the narrator is the only one who notices that he is suspicious.

I'd be tempted to think the narrator/detective is just paranoid, except the man of the crowd does act really suspicious.

I don't think "The man of the crowd" never figured out he's being followed, you follow someone around for like a straight 48 hours, he should have some idea he's being followed. To me its more likely that he's just not afraid of being caught. His method is perfect and he knows it.

Alejandro Saint-Barthélemy says

To read in tandem with Baudelaire's prose poems and the movie "Following", by Cristopher Nolan.
