

Phoebe Brand  
Reflective Essay

During the creation of this essay, the first and most obvious issue writing it was the utter freedom I had within it. Being a freshman in college, I was just branching out of the strict systems my high school had been teaching us for years: five paragraphs, introduction, three body paragraphs, and conclusion, each with a singular thesis-quote-analysis order in the bodies. I never strayed from this, so when I was told the essay's length needed to be eight or more pages, I was immediately scared. I had no idea how to lengthen three paragraphs to eight pages, nor what 'argument' I was defending or making in the essay.

When I talked to my professor about this, I was more than excited to learn that I could just...write something akin to a flow of thoughts. Of course, it still had to have some structure, but I had more freedom than I ever imagined. I was told to follow the flow of the plot, expound on my thoughts as I went, and see how they could add even more color to the bigger picture. Seeing how my focus was to analyze Poe's writing style, it was intriguing to discover that the more I wrote down my thoughts, my words reflected back more than I was originally thinking.

I'm unsure how to feel about the finished project. More than proud in a way only a mad scientist could feel? I was still in the craze that is Finals Week, and at some points during the writing process, I'm sure witnesses like my roommate could only describe me as some muttering hermit in the corner of my dorm talking about my ideas like I just made some scientific breakthrough. Looking back on it, especially during the revision process, I see the madman scrawling of some of my word choices or claims. To be honest, I don't even see some of my points anymore, and it took a couple rereads to understand them as I once did. Having someone edit my writing helped; you are your own worst critic. I could hate on my work all day, but knowing someone else understood what I was trying to say was fulfilling and gave me an insane rush of confidence I needed as a person who's not had anyone read their work before!

The publishing process was surreal for me. I knew editing was an integral part of publishing, but I didn't expect it to be as in-depth as it was. I thought it would be more of an overview or independent project. I hadn't expected to receive a fully annotated PDF of edits, not that it was as much of a mess as it felt like, but rather there were a lot of minor tweaks that needed to be done. It felt professional, and I appreciated that.

"The Cask of Amontillado" will always be my favorite piece of Poe's, and I hope this essay conveyed that. It's one of the most interesting uses of unreliable narration I've read, and I believe it should continue to be referenced as one of the greatest examples of said narration when it comes to creative writing. I love unreliable narrators, from Nick Carraway in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* to the female narrator lost in her own isolation in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Such narrators add a level of humanity to a piece of literature that I don't think is achievable without one. It can go as far as to make someone like "The Cask's..." Montessor—a man with a murderous debt to settle—into a villain you might be unconsciously cheering for. I hope by exploring more concepts like this and getting a start in publication, I can continue to incorporate these narrators into more of my creative and critical works.