A Feminist Rereading of Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”

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Some contemporary feminists and theorists argue that there is a difference between masculinist and feminist discourse in literary texts. French theorists like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous follow Jacques Lacan and psychoanalytic theory and trace the unconscious drives exhibited in the discourse of the text as repressed male/female desires. Even though these desires may be contradictory and conflicting, they reveal the position of the speaking subject (male or female) within the discourse of the text. The French scholars, in seeking the overlapping or androgynous places of discourse in the text, assert that males and females engage in differently gendered readings. Kristeva and Cixous argue that sexual identity (male or female) is a metaphysical construct outside the boundaries of the text, while gender identity is based upon cultural notions of maleness and femaleness evidenced in the text. Gender identity is more fluid than the former and makes room for the crucial concept of androgyny that is central to feminist readings in demolishing the rigid patriarchal notion of what is male/female. Androgyny deconstructs crippling binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity by allowing the speaking subject to occupy either or both positions.

While sexual identity, and, consequently, discrimination, feature prominently in masculinist readings, French theorists are radically shifting the very nature of the struggle of the sexes by focusing on gender-governed identity. Hence, a feminist reinterpretation of a narrative typically could argue that an unmarked narrator can be
seen as female. Such a reading would displace a whole series of masculinist assumptions. In accordance with this approach, I will focus on Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," especially its narrator, and argue that the narrator is indeed female. Poe himself never indicates that the narrator is male, in fact, his text offers no gender markings. Readers have assumed that the narrator is male because a neutralized and unmarked term is generally granted to be male. This is a trap that the language of the tale innocuously lays before the reader. By positing a female narrator, I propose to dislodge the earlier, patriarchal notion of a male narrator for the story. I argue, instead, that a gender-marked *rereading* of this tale reveals the narrator's exploration of her female situation in a particular feminist discourse. My feminist reading of "The Tell-Tale Heart" profiles the identity of the narrator as filtered through Freud's, Lacan's, and Cixous's theories of narrativity.

Psychoanalysis partially bridges the gap between conscious and unconscious thought and language through dream theory. Freud argues that instinctual forces—eros and thanatos—manifest themselves through dreams, and that these forces coexist and continually contradict each other, being intertwined in pairs like love/hate, life/death, and passivity/aggression. However, Freud maintains that people manage to lead ordered lives because they sublimate these forces as desires in dreams through at least two specific mechanisms, "condensation" and "displacement." Freud builds his psychoanalytic theory on human sexuality and desire, seeing the male as superior, in possession of the phallus, i.e., power. A female is inferior for Freud because of her lack of the sexual organ to signify the phallus and the power it symbolizes. In short, Freud's definition of the male and female, locked into this privative power equation, automatically privileges the male and marginalizes the female.

Lacan, in his revision of Freudian theory, fastens upon three principles: desire (the phallus as power), condensation/displacement (the dream as a system of signs), and hierarchy (the male as superior, or possessing power through the penis: the female as inferior, or lacking power). Relying on Roman Jakobson's

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structural linguistics, he combines these three principles to establish a relationship between language per se and conscious/unconscious thought. Jakobson uses language as a model of signs to explain human thought and consequent behavior. A sign, for Jakobson, is a representation through language of the relationship between signifier (the physical sound of speech or the written mark on the page) and the signified (the invisible concept that this sound or mark represents). Jakobson's linguistic formulations reveal the doubleness of the sign and the fragility of the signifier (word) and signified (concept) relationship. In effect, he sees meaning emerging in discourse not through the relationship between signifier and signified but through the interaction of one signifier with another.

Jakobson maintains that language is constructed along two axes—the vertical/metaphoric and the horizontal/metonymic. Lacan's matches Jakobson's theory of language with Freud's theory of dreams, positing that dreams are structured along metaphoric and metonymic lines. Lacan claims that the "rhetoric of the unconscious" is constructed on two main tropes—metaphor and metonymy. He equates condensation with metaphor because it is a process of selection, substituting one signifier/word for another. Displacement he sees as metonymy because it combines one signifier/word with another. For Lacan, unconscious desire, like language, is structured as a system of signs, articulated metaphorically and metonymically in dreamwork and considered as discourse. While in Freudian analysis the focus is on the excavation of the subject's behavior, in Lacan it shifts to language, tracing the path of desire as a sequential power transaction in the discourse of the text. Thus, Lacan reconstructs Freud's behavioral model into a seemingly less prejudiced linguistic one by emphasizing the arbitrariness and precariousness of language itself.

Further, according to Lacan, the metaphorical register represents the masculine through the "transcendental phalus," embodying the ultimate power of the signifier as a linguistic mark whose meaning is forever repressed (in the unconscious or the "text") and never attainable. Hence, every subject must engage in a constant

externally extended towards the desire of something else" (278)

metaphoric game of substitution in the attempt to grasp this final desire. In contrast, the metonymic is temporal and sequential, it propels the signifier forward in an attempt to recover the (unconscious) signified through narration. Significantly, Lacan claims that this reaching forward to achieve completeness is a mark of femininity, a feminine marker in discourse. Finally, Lacan concludes that even though language itself is symbolic, the symptom that prompts discourse is metonymic. Thus, the metonymic, feminine, "imaginary" register is the force that propels narrative.

It is at this point that Lacan differs radically from Freud. While Freud assumes that language can completely appropriate and express thought, granting closure in the text, Lacan posits an inherent gap in this relationship, arguing for never-ending narrativity. For Lacan, the sign can never be complete or made whole because a signifier can only point to another signifier, resulting in an unending chain of signifiers we forever attempt to bridge through language and thought. Lacan connects language to thought as expressions of patterns of desire, motivated and propelled towards possessing the ultimate sign of power—the "transcendental signified," or phallus. Thus, the transcendental signified belongs in the metaphoric register, and the desire to possess it creates narrativity, which belongs to the metonymic register. Lacan strategically argues that the desire to possess the "transcendental phallus" is universal, both in males and females, and appears to collapse sexual difference. But this apparent egalitarianism, I argue, does not in fact work.

A masculinist reading of Poe's tale using Lacan's theory still supports the Freudian notion of the Oedipal myth. However, the Lacanian approach emphasizes sexual difference less than the Freudian approach does. Robert Con Davis analyzes Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" using Lacanian principles in "Lacan, Poe and Narrative Repression." He focuses on the latent and repressed levels.

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of the text as a method of locating the nexus of power Davis argues 
the act of gazing, whether the old man’s or the narrator’s, is a 
metaphoric power transaction between the subject and the object of 
the gaze. Using Freud’s “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes,” with its 
traditional patriarchal dichotomies of “subject/object, active/ 
passive,” Davis matches Freud’s theme of the “gaze” with Lacan’s 
theory of voyeurism to interpret Poe’s tale. Davis highlights the 
“Evil Eye” as a predominant metaphor in Poe’s tale that functions 
primarily through its power of the Gaze. Building on the theme of 
the gaze and voyeurism, Davis validates his masculinist reading by 
arguing that the old man and the narrator are indeed doubles, 
always already connected by the gaze. He sees both characters as 
having similar, almost paranocially sensitive hearing and sight, in-
omnia, and a preoccupation with death. The “eye” of the old man 
represents the Symbolic Law of the Father, or Lacan’s version of 
Freud’s Oedipal complex. Davis argues that in an attempt to escape 
paternal subjugation, the narrator engages in his own vindictive 
game of voyeurism. Davis sees the murder of the old man as a 
cruelly symbolic act of Oedipal mastery “in choosing to heighten 
the old man’s fear of death and kill him, the narrator controls—just 
as a voyeur sadistically controls—a situation like his own, as if the 
subject and object could be merged in a mirror phase of complete 
identification” (255). Davis even argues for a third voyeur in the 
figure of Death: “Death had stalked with his black shadow 
and enveloped the victim.” This allows him to posit a typical La-
canian triangle, consisting of the old man, the narrator, and Death.

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Psychoanalytic Difference In Narrative Theory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984) Davis 
argues that, according to Freud, the act of gazing represents the gazer’s status as subject 
actively engaged in a pleasurable power game with the receiver of the gaze. In the object 
position, the receiver passively submits to the painful humiliation of the gazer’s oppressive 
surveillance. By incorporating Lacan into Freud’s theory, Davis shows that the “Gaze” is 
composed of three shifting positions of the subject’s desire for the Other. Beginning with 
the gazer in a voyeuristic subject position, scrutinizing an exhibitionist as object, we move to 
a second, mirror-like stage, where the subject/object of the gaze are replicas of each other. In 
the final moment, positions are reversed when the (former subject and current) object 
returns the gaze. Like the ever-shifting signifiers in language, the gaze is also a never-
ending game. Davis’s Lacanian interpretation sees the gaze as a mark of desire for the Other 
that is revealed in the text through intersubjectivity and reciprocal looking. Thus the looker, 
by looking, loses some of his power through the gaze itself.

5 Edgar Allan Poe, The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (New York: Modern 
Library, 1965) 303, cited hereafter in the text.
and create a constant shift in the power of the gaze through the triple itinerary of the signifier.

Because Davis places the narrator and the old man in the "double" positions connected by the gaze, he sees the gaps in the gaze between the subject and object and the gazer and voyeur as forces that produce the narrative, propel the tale forward, and alternately manifest and repress the text. Based on a primarily metaphoric interpretation—the eye as the Symbolic Gaze of the Father—Davis argues for a male narrator who acts as voyeur and exhibitionist alternately. Davis neatly sums up the final scene of Poe's tale as clearly metaphoric by saying: "His [the narrator's] resistance to being seen points to a desire to escape subjugation absolutely and to choose death rather than to become passive while alive" (254). Significantly, Lacan's suggestion that the metonymic dimension of the text is female is absent in Davis's reading. Thus, even though Lacanian readings seem to open the door to feminist perspectives, they ultimately only nudge the door ajar.

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Cixous's feminist approach to psychoanalytic interpretation and her notion of feminine writing provide a fruitful way of sabotaging the masculinist-based reading of texts. Hence a rereading of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" with Cixous's paradigm offers an alternate gender-marked interpretation. She systematically interrogates existing critical presuppositions, deconstructs them, and advocates a three-step reinscription procedure. 6 First, according to Cixous, one must recognize a latent masculinist prejudice in society, a hidden privileging of the male and marginalizing of the female. Next, one must consciously undo the basic slanting in favor of the male term over the female term at the very nodes of these seemingly logical oppositions, such as male/female, reason/feeling, culture/nature, etc. Patriarchy, by creating these oppositions, privileges the first term and lowers the status of the second, forcing the

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textual subject to occupy either of these positions and accept the power (or lack thereof) that goes along with it. This logic divides each term against itself and makes the whole system of binary (Western) thought rigidly prescriptive. The male, according to this system of thought, can have an identity and value only in juxtaposition to an inferior female signifier and vice versa. Also, in privileging one term over another, the first term sets the norm for the second. More important, oppositional thinking, which is characteristic of patriarchy, forbids a wholeness or a shared existence for any term, focusing on maleness or on femaleness instead of the androgyny that Cixous and other French feminists advocate.

Consequently, Cixous's final step is to combat this problem of division by embracing these oppositions and erasing their differences. This is the "pretext," or background, for the process of jouissance that Cixous advocates. The strategy behind jouissance is to discredit the notion of difference by going beyond the idea of constraining divisions, to explore instead the freedom of excess, a utopian vision that subverts the male definition of desire. Patriarchy is based on a system of libidinal economy—(a repression of desire both conscious and unconscious that creates meaning in a text)—Cixous's jouissance demands a libidinal excess—additions of unconscious meanings through consciously constructed texts. The practical method behind this political feminist position is to create a multiplicity of meanings. In linguistic terms, jouissance creates an excess of signifiers, the freplay of which will build several levels of meanings, all of which can be validated by the text. These meanings do not depend upon a series of repressed previous ones, they do not impoverish the meanings that come before them through a process of substitution but, instead, enhance each other through a process of addition. An example of this is the notion of androgyny which is central to some feminist readings. Instead of focusing on either male or female voice in the text, androgyny allows the same voice to be male and/or female in various parts of the text, allowing for numerous complementary interpretations.

Kristeva, in *Devise and Language*, and Cixous, in *La Juene Née*, argue that the concept of androgyny belongs to the realm of the "Imaginary," which, in Lacanian theory, is pre-Symbolic, or pre-Oedipal, and thus, is before the Law of the Father. While Cixous is explicit in calling this jouissance in the sense of the purely pleasurable state of excess, Kristeva connects jouissance to reproduc-
tion. However, they share this vision of utopia, with no boundaries or barriers of any kind, a vision that is based on unlimited joy.

The inherent danger in Kristeva's and Cixous's vision of utopia is their marked privileging of the imaginative/poetic over the analytical/theoretical in feminist writing. Because of their emphasis on emotions rather than reason as the feminine mode, some patriarchal theorists do not treat feminist discourse seriously. Sentimentality is precisely the club that patriarchy holds over the woman to control and deem her inferior. However, there is a definite value in adopting Cixous's position of abundance in an effort to invalidate the rigid male parameters and explore the text with an expectation of plentitude and multiple meanings. It is essential to point out that Cixous's notion of jouissance as a pleasure principle is different from Lacan's notion of free space with an abundance of signifiers (or even Barthes's version of the "pleasures of the text"). The latter suggests a chasm with an abundance of repressed, free-floating signifiers, while the former gathers up this abundance of signifiers to nourish and cherish separate multiple readings.

Cixous begins by questioning the validity of categories like male/female in both writing and reading texts. She sees these as gaps created by ideological differences propagated by a phallogocentric (phallus- and logos-oriented) interpretive community. Further, she argues that this kind of oppositional thinking is itself aggressive (very much like the male logic and body behind it), because one term in the couple comes into existence through the "death of the other." Cixous, in *La Jeune Née* asks, "Where is she?" (115) in a patriarchal binary thought system that creates divisions like "Activity/Passivity, Culture/Nature, Father/Mother, Head/Emotions, Logos/Pathos" (116) which is structured primarily on the male/female opposition. An effective way to allow both terms to exist is to ask for a gendered position that both males and females can occupy either jointly or individually within the texts, as speaking subjects. This is made possible through the notion of jouissance, which focuses on the speaking subject with a gendered (hence mobile) identity. Also, this deliberate exploration of multiple mean-

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ings would ceaselessly expose the hidden male agenda which is created to silence women.

I preface my rereading of Poe's tale with a Freudian analysis, much like that in Marie Bonaparte's *Life of Poe* 8 However, while Bonaparte's emphasizes the element of primal-scene voyeurism, mine sees the male narrator's retelling of his story/dream as a narration of a rite of passage "The Tell-Tale Heart" begins by describing the narrator's feelings about taking care of an old man. The old man's disturbing stare upsets the narrator, who decides on an impulse to kill him. The rest of the tale focuses on the narrator's elaborate plan to murder him, and ends with the narrator's confession of the crime. The story has Poe's typical macabre atmosphere and deliberately contradictory syntactical style. By killing the old man, the narrator symbolically castrates him, eliminating him from the text, and hopes to escape subjugation. This allows him to step into the old man's position of unchallenged power. The act of murder reveals the condensed expression of his desire to usurp the old man's place and authority. Similarly, his swing between neurotic and hysteric utterances, repeatedly assuring the reader of his sanity, is an effort to displace the sense of fear that is incumbent upon possessing such authority. At the beginning of the tale, the narrator shelters the old man (love), but ends up murdering him (hate). The narrator's contradictory actions, in an effort to possess ultimate power, are the result of the intertwining of eros and thanatos. The narrator's final confession to the policemen (the substitute father figures) is a combination and sublimation of his desire for power and fear of castration as a challenge to his new power.

The standard Oedipal interpretation is explicit in the climactic bedroom scene that graphically reveals the simultaneous condensed and displaced desires of the narrator. The bed serves to feed the contradictory instinctual urges of eros and thanatos, satisfying the young man's passion while smothering him to death, granting the young man power while nullifying it in the old man. The narrator's imbalanced emotional utterances about being "driven" by the old man's "eye" are symptoms of the condensed

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desire that make him conceive his elaborate plan of shutting the old man's "Evil eye forever" (303). It is his attempt to usurp that very authority of the old man's surveillance. And the narrator's own deafening "heartbeat" prods him on, leading him from one event to the next in the narrative, revealing his efforts to escape the displaced sense of fear in letting this desire get out of control. While the eye (condensation) represents the narrator's problem through a sense of abstract desire, the heartbeat (displacement) serves as the significant, concrete sense of fear in dealing with this problem. This enables the tale to maintain its ambivalence between myth and reality, dream and nightmare, due to a coexisting tension between metaphor/condensation and metonymy/displacement throughout the narration. In this traditional Freudian analysis, the identity of narrator remains fixedly male.

However, my rereading of the tale includes both a masculinist and feminist approach to the narrator. Using Lacanian principles, I profile the narrator as "speaking subject," presenting the narrator first as male, then as female. Unlike Davis's reading, my masculinist rereading focuses on both the metaphoric and metonymic aspects of the text, moving away from an exclusive "Gaze"-oriented interpretation of manifest and repressed levels of discourse. I treat the eye as a metaphor of patriarchal scrutiny and social control, and the heart as metonymic device to subvert such control. The narrator admits his obsession in saying, "when it [the eye] fell upon me, my blood ran cold, and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever" (305). The narrator explicitly reveals his anger at the old man's symbolic method of subjugation and expresses his consequent desire to annihilate the old man, thereby negating and usurping his power. Davis too, points this out by showing how the narrator first isolates the gaze, then inverts it, so that he can gaze at and subjugate the old man. The narrator retaliates against the "Evil Eye" by voyeuristically gazing at the sleeping man. Thus, the gaze moves from the old man to the narrator, symbolizing the shift of power between them. Lacan calls this mobility the "itinerary of the signifier" (171) to indicate the constant substitution maneuvers that the metaphoric register undertakes in its attempt to possess the ultimate object of desire—the transcendental signifier. Within Poe's tale, the "itinerary of the signifier" can be graphically traced.

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9 Lacan, "L'Instance" 171
along the "single thin ray" of light from the narrator's lantern that falls upon the "vulture eye directed as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot" (306) Gaining new power through his reversal of the gaze makes the narrator heady, and he cries exultantly that the old man "was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more" (306).

However, the "itinerary of the signifier," due to its constant process of substitution, does not allow power to rest with one gazer for a long period. The very nature of the gaze, as posited by both Freud and Lacan, is extremely volatile, temporary, and unpredictable. Consequently, in Poe's story the power of the gaze destabilizes the narrator, and it is for this reason that he breaks down and confesses to the mildly suspecting policemen. The police in Poe's tale are the literal representations of societal power, but they are also a metaphor for the Law of the Father in the unconscious. The policemen's gaze, thus, both literally and metaphorically represents the sanctioned authority that the narrator had just usurped from the old man. When they gaze at the narrator, they reverse the path of the gaze, once again throwing him back into the passive object position that is revealed by his hysterical and humiliating confession.

Equally crucial in a Lacanian analysis is the metonymic register, marked by the "heart" in Poe's tale. It exhibits a complicated displacement process working simultaneously on two manifest levels. At one level it represents the narrator's confused emotions, such that the narrator's passions and fears combine and clash, spurring the tale forward. The tale unfolds through the narrator's hysterical utterances, extreme passion (even though the narrator explicitly denies this at the beginning of his tale), obsessive desire, neurotic fears, and pathetic confession. At another level, it represents the physical pounding of the narrator's heart, giving him the energy to kill the old man. On the night of the assault, the narrator remarks "Never, before that night, had I felt the extent of my own powers" (306). Notably, it is the narrator's fear of the imagined sound of the old man's heart, that overwhelming roar, that ultimately betrays him into confessing to the policemen. These two aspects of displacement embodied metonymically in the heart are fused in a strange manner, alternating between hearing and feeling throughout the tale, such that they keep plummeting the narrative onwards. Thus, the sounds in the tale move rapidly from heartbeat to creaking doors, to muffled smothering sounds, to loud ticking watches,
and finally pounds as unbearable noise in the narrator’s head till he articulates his fear through the confused discourse of a hysterical confession.

There is also a third kind of displacement at the repressed level of the text. This is evidenced in the metonymic shift not only between one aspect of the heart to the other, but in a total shift from sound to sight at crucial points in the text. Thus, the metonymic register displaces the narrator’s feelings throughout the text in various ways. A good example is the elaborate precautions that the narrator takes to direct a single ray of light in a darkened room on the old man’s eye (sight). When the narrative has been raised to a fever pitch on the night of the murder, the narrator suddenly fumbles with the catch on the lantern and goes into a detailed description of sounds of “death watches,” and crickets in “chimneys,” effectively displacing reader attention. The displacement and metonymic tactics repressed in the narrative itself act as a marker for signaling the manifest displacement of the narrator’s fears regarding his uncontrolled and unsanctioned actions. It is here that Lacan’s notion of the “itinerary of signifiers” in the metonymic register serves him well. Metonymy, as both agent and trope, by constantly shifting, mediates between thought and language, showing both the instability of this relationship, and its inability to bridge the gap. At the textual level, it highlights the constant forward movement in an attempt to narrate through the rapid and confusing chain of events. It reveals the obsessively fragmented discourse of the narrator, in a painful effort to make meaning, and to make whole this relationship between thought and language. Thus, in my masculinist reading, by using the Lacanian paradigm of a male speaking subject, I reveal the problematic nature of language itself. When the narrator fails, one glimpses—with a strange pathos—the failure of language, too.

In contrast, my Lacanian feminist rereading of Poe’s tale, identifying a female narrator, yields an interpretation that is the reverse of the Oedipal myth. Instead of a young man desiring the power symbolized by the Father, she is the daughter desiring her father. I will show that Lacan’s innovativeness lies in the way he volatilizes the metaphoric and metonymic registers through his theory of the “itinerary of the signifier.” Lacan suggests that sex roles as represented by linguistic tropes can be made less rigid. Hence sexual difference can be erased by energizing and mobilizing these linguistic tropes. Metaphor as a trope represents a pattern of desiring
and desired where the object of desire is the transcendental signified, or phallus. Metonymy would be the act of seeking and transacting this power through narrative. Thus, Lacan’s strategy is to dislocate the fixity of sexual identity, or what he claims is gender identity, through the use of tropes as agents of desire. This would allow both men and women to possess the transcendental phallus, or its metaphoric power, but because of the temporary nature of this power, the very act of possession would be continually deferred and drawn out metonymically in narrative for both masculine and feminine subjects.

Within this framework, the narrator in Poe’s tale can be posited as a female rather than a male who desires power. She stalks the old man and father figure for “seven long nights” and kills him in an attempt to escape the surveillance of his Evil Eye. The female narrator begins in the traditional feminine position of a nurturer. She takes him into her house and even remarks with dark irony after terrifying him with her nightly ritualistic voyeurism: “I went boldly into his chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by his name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night” (306). But she deeply resents the scrutiny of his eye, feeling abused and objectified by his paternal surveillance. Angered and humiliated by his gaze, she goes through the same maneuver that the male narrator does in reversing the path of this gaze. Unlike the male narrator, her primary desire is to rid herself of the male gaze, or domination. However, in traveling through the gaze’s path, she substitutes the first desire for her need physically to possess the old man. In this context, the climactic scene in the bedroom, with its implied sexual overtones, supports a Lacanian feminist reading better than a Oedipal one. In that one moment of possession, she becomes the aggressor, she even assumes a male sexual posture, forcing the old man to receive her, almost raping him, so that “he shrieked once—once only” (305). The scene culminates with her smirk: “There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood spot whatsoever—A tub caught it all” (305). In this one act, the female narrator captures both the masculine gaze and masculine role. Thus, in appropriating the male posture, she even refers to herself in explicitly masculine terms, claiming repeatedly, that her actions are not those of a “madman.”

Yet, ironically, the very authority of her newfound power makes her more vulnerable, more of an object of desire by others. Metaphorically, she moves from the position of actively desiring that
Lacan allows to both the male and female to the position of being passively desired, one that is traditionally only the female's. It is here that the Lacanian "itinerary of the signifier" betrays her. The movement between male/female roles is ultimately restrictive to the female. Unlike the male narrator who confesses for fear of castration, the female narrator is denied this option. Acknowledging her femininity, she stands before the policemen, stripped of her power in her traditional posture as female, passive, subservient, and accountable to the male gaze—and exposed in the eyes of the Law through the return of the repressed (murdered) father. She begins and ends in a stereotypically feminine posture, the nurturer who has returned to her quintessentially repressed object position.

My feminist rereading with metonymy as focal point again reveals the confined position of the female narrator. The heart as an allegory of metonymy displaces the narrator's fears and desires, working on the two levels already examined, making her obey the dictates of her confused emotions. Further, Poe's text, if reread as narrated by a female speaking subject, indicates that this desire and fear is more frequently associated with a female "voice" than it is with the male's. The female narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" focuses on evocations of space and emptiness, which are typical expressions of female consciousness. The narrator claims her fear was engulfing, making her feel as if "enveloped in cotton" (305), just like her "terrors" which "welled" up in her bosom, "deepening, with its dreadful echo" (304). Interestingly, Lacan's theory of metonymy as the motor of language supports the psychoanalytic view that links the female phobia of emptiness (as a primal corollary to lacking the phallus) with gaps in narrativity that make this tale seem discontinuous and disjointed. Thus, the narrator's confused recounting of her tale is a method of compensating for this emptiness, from the initial display of desire in her heart to the culminating betrayal of that desire, resulting in her agonizing confession.

This feminist investigation into the speaking subject, both male and female, unMASKS the hidden male agenda, it also shows that a feminist rereading using only the Lacanian principles of psychoanalysis is problematic. As already shown, the female narrator's

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voluntary confession to the mildly suspecting policemen reveals her restricted position As woman, she reoccupies her traditional role as a submissive, victimized object, offering herself up to be scrutinized once more by the male gaze She can, finally, never aspire to usurp this power or be outside/above the Law of the Father Ironically, even though a feminist rereading grants the female narrator a temporary masculine, active, subject posture, it undercuts this interpretation in returning her to a traditionally female position by superimposing a judicial and patriarchal closure Such a feminist reading shows how clearly the female is boxed into a role, making both her sexual and gender identity rigid A feminist re-reading must go beyond the unmasking of such oppression, it must seek alternate positions for the female speaking subject

Although Lacanian psychoanalysis first creates a division between male/female and then erases it under the guise of gender equalization, it seems to suggest that certain codes of behavior and discourse are allowable only to a male Should a female dare to transgress, she will be punished by the Law of the Father Consequently, the female narrator is permitted to desire the “metaphoric” phallus as power, but she can never aspire to possess it And if she chooses to disobey this basic patriarchal dictum, not only will she fail but she must bear the moral consequences In a feminist rereading of the ending of the tale, the female narrator’s marginalization becomes explicit What was successfully interpreted as a dramatization of the Oedipal myth for the male narrator turns to the harsh reality of oppression for the female narrator

A feminist theorist must suspect that this development reveals Lacan’s bias in adapting Freud’s notion of manifest and repressed texts At the manifest level, Lacan explicitly advocates sexual egalitarianism, but at the repressed (more influential) level he implicitly subverts it My feminist rereading of the manifest text is as presented in the above analyses Yet if one were to reread the repressed text, the Lacanian prejudice against the female would become obvious. I submit that the unconscious, or repressed text, through the pressure it exerts on the conscious or manifest text, shows that patriarchal morality condemns a woman for being aggressive, for desiring power, and ultimately punishes her for achieving this power even temporarily. Both male and female readers of Poe’s story have tended to accept the Law of the Father, together with all its arbitrary presuppositions, and grant power only to the male
Thus, the status of the male narrator in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" has remained stable. But if one wishes to transcend this phallogocentric prejudice, one must look elsewhere than Freud and Lacan.

To experience what Cixous explains as jouissance within Poe's text, we must erase the rigidity of metaphor (eye) and metonymy (heart) as separate categories. Instead, a gendered reading of Poe's tale would make the "eye" and the "heart" serve as metaphors and metonymies simultaneously, intermingling and creating multiple meanings. Quite accurately, Cixous's use of tropes can be called gendered, as they have greater maneuverability than Lacan's sexual tropes, which are clearly marked as metaphor/symbolic/male, and metonymy/imaginary/female. This strategy is Cixous's way of combating Lacan's notion of gendered dissemination, which is actually based on a sexual paradigm. Lacan's position is invested with patriarchal biases such that the female term is violated and abused either at the conscious (manifest text) or unconscious (repressed text) level. The "eye" as metaphor has yielded meaning to Poe's text, but reading it metonymically enriches the tale further. The "eye" is the virtual symptom of the female narrator's desire to gain power in a male-dominated society. In this context, it energizes the sequence of events in the tale to climax in the narrator's confession. Since killing the old man does not grant her lasting power, she confesses to the policemen and, thus, recirculates her power. Paradoxically, in the confessional scene "she" adroitly forces the male gaze to expose the controlled violence of the patriarchy. Her aggression against the old man is an explicit assault on male domination. Her confession becomes her implicit critique of domination. For a feminist reader, this is gratifying, an expression of solidarity through her exposure of ideology. For a masculinist reader, it is one more reminder of rebellion against patriarchal oppression. Her confession reveals the latent fetters of bondage in a patriarchal ideology, and she re-reverses the gaze of the policemen by letting it bounce off her objectified body by using the eye as a metonymic instrument. Here the gaze is just one more part in her plan to expose the system. She exchanges the virtual prison bars of the Father's Law for the actual ones of the penal system. Henceforth, she will covertly make her point on discrimination against women through the underlying irony of her tale.
Writhing under the policemen's scrutiny, she protests "they were making a mockery of my horror! But any thing was better than this agony more tolerable than this derision" (306) This indicates that her first plan to usurp power from the old man had failed, and now she must adopt another, creating a new perspective for the final scene. Her confession, now read ironically and not as evidence of guilt, directs the gaze back into the metaphoric register. It activates her plan for the exposé. For a moment, between her first plan and the second one, the gaze falls on the metaphoric spectre of the Law. In this sense, the interweaving of metaphor and metonymy, as a slippage of tropes, allows for multiple readings that build on one another instead of repressing one meaning to manifest another. This is an example of the jouissance that Cixous advocates as a method of accretion.

Similarly, luxuriating in the jouissance of multiplicity, the "heart" can be moved from the metonymic to the metaphoric register. As a metaphor, it serves to foreground the tale as belonging to the romance genre, with all its associations of passion and fantasy. It also allows the tale to be read as wish fulfillment, a dream in which the narrator as melodramatic heroine becomes the cynosure in a male arena, the active speaking subject, instead of the fetishized object. She proudly declares "I foamed—I raved—I swore" (307), as a way of explaining her frantic attempts to remain on center stage. This is an enactment of the stereotypical feminine posture. By obeying the dictates of her heart in committing the passionate crime (exaggerated, no doubt), she dramatizes her exalted position as woman. Now the female narrator emerges as the martyr through her confession, also a typical position for the female.

But when examining the text under the light of jouissance, the first step in reading is to expose such a patriarchal stereotyping. Yet the interweaving of the metaphoric and metonymic registers gives diverse readings. According to the metonymic register (eye), the female narrator is an active speaking subject who assumes a male gendered identity, but the metaphoric register (heart) forces her back into the archetypical female position of martyr. This slip between the metaphoric and metonymic registers is crucial to feminist writing because it reveals the androgyny created by jouissance. Moreover, gendered identity sheds a different light on the
other characters in the tale, too. In the crucial, confessional scene, all the characters can be read androginously. The literal keepers of the Law of the Father, the policemen observe passively while the female narrator is explosively active. She is the speaking subject, frenetically pacing, vigorously thumping the furniture, and energetically talking. She is catapulted into her final ironic, yet male and active posture by “the beating of his heart!” (307, italics added) It is the old man’s heart, dramatized like a damsel in distress, that vocalizes the narrator’s confession. In the ironic conclusion of the tale, both the policemen and the old man remain static, while the female narrator adopts the dynamic and aggressive role, deliberately calling attention to the subservient status of all women. What needs to be emphasized here is the active androgynous narrator who can be contrasted to the passive males, her actions should not be mistaken for the actions for a stereotypical “hysterical” female. This erroneous stereotyping will, no doubt, create a neat niche for the female, but leave the male position in the discourse vacant. Thus, Cixous’s brand of androgyny and multiple readings cancel out stereotypical sexual markings of the text.

Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” can indeed be read as the female narrator’s own cry from “the soul when overcharged with awe” (304), a tale of escape, but escape into deliberate captivity so that she can articulate a female discourse. She experiments and functions in both the active and passive registers as a speaking subject and passive object. In this venture, her discourse becomes a painful tool of signifying and defining herself within the confines of patriarchy. Through jouissance, interweaving metaphors and metonymies, constantly slipping between the tropes, defying libidinal economy, and creating an excess of signifiers, she inscribes an “other” discourse. This rewriting becomes possible through the complex pattern of gendered tropes that are occupied by both male and female characters in the tale. It is this embracing, this gathering together, not only of the tropes, but also of the characters occupying these gendered tropes, that makes this tale a revelation of feminist rewriting as well as rereading.

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