



“THE TELL-TALE HEART” AS THE SEQUEL OF “THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE”: A STUDY ON THE HYPOTHETICAL REVENGE CHRONOLOGY OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

Aman Pal 

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details: Independent Researcher, Writer and Former Student of English Literature, Kalyani University, Kalyani, Nadia, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:
Aman Pal

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Abstract

The paper is going to analyze the underlying sequence between the two stories of Edgar Allan Poe i.e. “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”. Some major observations are made from the perspective of feminism as the former story contains violence against women and the latter is the revenge of that violence. Poe’s stories often challenge patriarchy if it is seen closely beyond the layer of the pages. This study is also a result from the perspective that is an outcome of a close textual and historical research. Though there is no such formal connection between the stories but hypothetically one can consider this analytical sequence as literary research initiative on mastermind Poe.

Keywords: *Murder, Revenge, Old, Evolution, Madness, Patriarchy, Feminism*

One who reads Edgar Allan Poe is aware of his mastery over the deep-rooted sensation of grotesque. Except some, most of his writings are filled with gripping thrill and suspense. Poe is associated with building up violence while playing with psychological and mental order. This paper is going to analyze the stories “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) and “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) of Poe and tries to establish a sequence between them by discussing the underlying appeals of the stories.

First of all, if one comes to the epigraph of the “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, the line “what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women” (141) has a metaphorical connection with the story. According to Robert Graves in his *The Greek Myths*, Achilles was destined to either live a long but dishonorable life at home or conquer fame in Troy and die young. His mother Thetis knew that if he leaves for the voyage, he would never return. Thetis disguised Achilles as a girl and kept him in the court of Lycomedes, king of Scyros, under the aliases Cercysera, Aissa, or Pyrrha. Secondly the name Achilles comes from the Greek words ákhos, which means “pain” or “grief,” and láos, which means “people”. Together, these words might be translated as “pain or grief of the people”. So, the epigraph of the story, to some extent, hints that pain is there within women hidden in disguise. This actually occurs in the story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” as two Parisian women, Madame L’Espanaye and her daughter Mademoiselle Camille L’Espanaye, are brutally victimized in a grotesque way. In this way Poe metaphorically connects the epigraph with the story.

Poe didn’t take any human beings, who are one of the four genera of Ape, to perform the murder. Rather, if one comes to the climax of the story, Poe choses the murderer as an Orangutan, who is also one of the four genera of Ape. So, by not choosing the modern species, Poe decided to do his job by the older one. Older species here represents older customs, rituals and hypocrisy that patriarchy bears throughout the ages to suppress the women along with their voice and choices. In the story the Orangutan somehow escapes from its master by taking his shaving razor, the masculine murder weapon. While roaming around, the Orangutan saw the two women in a building and climbed up there. After reaching there, to seize their shriek, the Orangutan killed Camille and put her into the chimney. Then it cut the throat of L’Espanaye by the razor and thrown her outside the window. During this violent murder, neighbors heard some voice unknown to them. Some of the voices were by the women, which were suppressed by killing them, and some of the Orangutan’s whose voice seemed confusing enough to the neighbors as the voice of patriarchy is quite complicated. Poe intentionally chooses the primitive version of human being to show the violent, ferocious and savage sides of human and patriarchy. By murdering with razor, the Orangutan mimicked the human beings. In the place of human, by choosing a primitive animal as the victimizer, Poe wanted to portray the Orangutan as the representation of patriarchal ancestor of humans to point out the issues of women in the time of our forefathers.

“The Tell-Tale Heart” is another macabre of Poe where the narrator murders an old man for nothing but intolerable gaze. The setting and the name of the characters are unspecified. Though it seems like the narrator is male from the two following sentences- “Madmen know nothing” (Poe 228), “would a madman have been so wise as this?” (Poe 229), but the gender of the narrator is not explicitly mentioned or can not be deduced. In spite of being consider the narrator as male by various critics, Slater and Duke highlighted the absence of gendered pronouns in Poe’s story by illustrating a female narrator. Thus, the present research is also considering the narrator as female to establish the connection with the story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”. Here is also Poe obsessed with the concept of old by putting an old man in the position of victim. The concept of ‘madness’ in the story leads many critics to interpret the text as Poe’s obsession with paranoia and other mental disorders. But this paper attempts to deconstruct the point of view of the interpretations yet. As previously argued, the concept of old denotes something primitive, stereotype and hypocritical norms of patriarchy. In the story “The Tell-Tale Heart” the narrator attempts to murder the old man due to his ‘vulture’ and ‘evil eye’. Apart from that, one can easily understand that some unavoidable reasons trigger the narrator to kill the old man to fulfil some kind of revenge. After murdering the old man, the narrator gained unexplainable satisfaction, a kind of catharsis. If one considers the narrator as female then the murder can be represented as revenge of the victimization of women in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”. So here in the story “The Tell-Tale Heart”, on the one hand, the narrator works as a representation of the female world while on the other, the old man works as the representation of patriarchy. The narrator was disturbed by the gaze of the old man, so one can easily refer to the scenario of savage male gaze that often violates the chastity of women that alludes to various instances of commodification and dehumanization of female body in literature and in real life as well.

This is a revision of the stories from the perspective of Post Structuralist Feminism that loves to confuse patriarchy. In this way this paper attempts to relocate the interpretations hitherto made. So, if the study concludes itself by jotting down the arguments discussed earlier, it will be as follows. Both the Orangutan in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and the old man in “The Tell-Tale Heart” are the ambassadors of patriarchy that promotes its hypocrisy to the female world. On the other hand, the women in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” are the ambassadors of females. While taking revenge by murdering the old man, the narrator of the latter story works to some extent as the representation of third wave feminism by confusing patriarchy by not using any gendered pronouns in the story. Moreover, if one considers the two women of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” as homosexual then the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” may be represented as a homosexual as well who murders the old man (representation of patriarchal boundary as previously argued) to demolish the old customs and conventions by taking the revenge of the two women who were being murdered due to the social norms of patriarchy as homosexuality was a crime until mid-twentieth century in contemporary time.

Though hypothetical in nature but still there is a logical voice from the point of view of Post Structuralist Feminism in this current study. So, Poe’s narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” is debunking the gender performativity. By not giving any gender to the narrator, Poe has taken his exceptional writing skills beyond the modern epoch as David Greven once stated that our critical explorations of nineteenth-century theories and manifestations of gendered identity have found great resonance in Edgar Allan Poe’s construction of gender in his most complicated and controversial works. The politics which the narrator deals with is not about the body but about the language like what Judith Butler does in her *Gender Trouble*. Not only the narrator of this story but Poe is such an anomaly that in every writing he transcends the oceanic domain of human conception.

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