

James's. The most famous of the dungeon's occupants, the narrator of Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon," shared his imprisonment first with his brothers and later with a bird that had found its way in through a crevice. Byron's prisoner laments having to witness the sufferings of his youngest brother — "to see such bird in such a nest" — and he surmises that the actual bird which later appeared "broke its cage to perch on mine."<sup>10</sup> Hemingway's story not only unfolds against the backdrop of James's tale and Byron's poem, but it also allows us to see the earlier story in a new light. "You look as if you were taking me to . . . a funeral"<sup>11</sup>: the reflection back from Hemingway's story seems to emphasize the proleptic irony in Daisy's words to Winterbourne.

In short, Hemingway's extended allusion to "Daisy Miller" gives his "A Canary for One" a structural force and a pathos that many readers have missed, perhaps because they have underestimated the subtlety of Hemingway's art or had some difficulty in seeing his work as being, in more than one sense, in the tradition of James's.

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10. George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Prisoner of Chillon and Other Poems* (1816; rpt. Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), pp. 7, 16.

11. *Daisy Miller*, p. 41.

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## THE ACCOMPLICE IN "THE TELL-TALE HEART"

"Poe's narrator tells a plain and simple story, which leaves no doubt that he is mad," T. O. Mabbott says in his preface to "The Tell-Tale Heart."<sup>1</sup> Most readers would agree, not only because the murder of an old man seems motiveless, but also because the narrator's confession comes across as calculated and heartless. Whereas "The Cask of Amontillado" offers witty dialogue and a romantic setting, inviting us into the story and thus eliciting our sympathy for the narrator in spite of our antipathy to the murder, "The Tell-Tale Heart" entombs us with the narrator's stark obsessions to which we react by shrouding ourselves with moral indignation and psychic detachment.

The story's plainness and simplicity, in fact, seem the means by which the narrator's madness is rendered transparent. Undistracted by context or extenuating circumstances, we focus our attention on his protestations of sanity, which of course fall apart with every "reason" he gives the listener, the "you" of the story who hears the confession. "Why *will* you say that I am mad?" the narrator asks (p. 792), explaining that his senses were

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1. Thomas Olive Mabbott (ed.), *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Belknap Press, 1978), III, 789. All following quotations from this work will be indicated in the body of the text.

not dulled but heightened during the horror; mania can't be madness, he argues unconvincingly. "Observe how healthily — how calmly I can tell you the whole story," he says, proceeding to undercut both calmness and wholeness by his agitated and incomplete rendition. And his emphasis on murder as a rational process only underscores the barbarity of the act itself. Faced with these attractive ironies, Poe critics have institutionalized the narrator's madness and gone on to concentrate on either the dynamics of that mental state (how the narrator becomes both murderer and victim)<sup>2</sup> or Poe's use of it to illustrate such ideas as passage to original Unity, or the frustrating of demon Time.<sup>3</sup>

This verdict of madness, however, comes less from the story itself than from our commonly held assumptions that all obsessive murderers are mad and that their madness is easily recognizable. If, on the other hand, we begin by assuming that anyone canny enough to carry out such a crime might be canny enough to disguise his own motives, and if we further assume that the narrator knows his listener's moral and rational position and thus makes his claims of mental health so absurd that they must fail to convince his audience, then we have a different story, though one quite faithful to Poe's other works where characters show no end to their duplicity, and where the lines between sanity and insanity blur in a nightmare atmosphere. To activate this reading, our attention must shift from the red herring of madness to the more subtle designs of the confession and the language by which the reader is induced, like one of M. Dupin's dupes, to select "odd" when he should have selected "even."

Pretending to share with the listener a universal concern for reason, the narrator seduces the listener by getting him to participate vicariously in the crime, an accomplice after the fact. He accomplishes this quickly and subtly in the third paragraph through the sense of sight: "You should have seen *me*," the narrator says and immediately repeats it: "You should have seen how wisely I proceeded — and with what caution — with what foresight — with what dissimulation I went to work!" (p. 792). Later in that same paragraph, he takes further advantage of the listener by assuming his sympathetic reaction to the scene where the murderer pokes his head into the old man's room: "Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in!" (p. 793). By these suggestive nudges, the auditor is transformed into an active voyeur. The narrator concludes that long third paragraph with another subtlety: "So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept" (p. 793). In this sentence, "see" takes on the sense of understanding, though it does so without entirely relinquishing its primary meaning which is returned to by the narrator's claim to have

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2. See for example Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Belknap Press, 1966), pp. 189-190, and David Halliburton, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 333-338.

3. See for example Joseph J. Moldenhauer, "Murder as a Fine Art: Basic Connections Between Poe's Aesthetics, Psychology, and Moral Vision," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 83 (May 1968), 292-293, and E. Arthur Robinson, "Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart.'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 19 (March, 1965), 369-378.

“looked in.” Meanwhile, the listener has been maneuvered from thoughts of missed opportunity (“You should have seen”) to the thoughts that he and the narrator presumably share (“So you see”).

After the third paragraph, the listener, now assumed to be a silent accomplice, comes across as being somewhat timid but anxious for the deed to be done: “Now you may think that I drew back — but no” (p. 793). He is put in the position not only of encouraging the narrator’s story but also of egging on the murderer. The listener is also chided for his deficiency in imagination while the narrator exhibits his own powers of metaphor: “So I opened it [the lantern] — you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily — until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye.” (p. 794). This technique of attempting to limit the listener’s access to the story and then tantalizing him with its details resembles in its psychological awareness and ultimate effect the game Montresor plays with Fortunato, enticing him to go more deeply into the wine cellar by telling him he should leave.

Final references to the listener return to the innocuousness of the opening remarks: “Have I not told you?” and “Do you mark me well? I have told you.” (p. 795). The narrator may be chiding the “you” for his inattentiveness. But by this stage of the story his intent seems more gloating than goading, a kind of “I told you so,” for we suspect that the listener is deeply and emotionally involved in the tale. The narrator has in fact assumed this involvement, for the “you” references disappear after paragraph thirteen (though the listener resurfaces at the end, as we shall see). The “you” of “The Cask of Amontillado” appears only once, in the first paragraph, perhaps to show that the narrator is speaking to a close friend. But Poe’s narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” needs a continuing listener, somewhat less than a character but somewhat more than a device, to prove his point that if anyone can be seduced by narrative, then it becomes difficult to separate those who take pleasure in committing and confessing crime from those who take pleasure in hearing about it.

The motif of the listener becoming an accomplice comes directly from late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Gothic literature. The confession of a villain often blasts the innocent listener out of composure and security, as in Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*. Borrowed effectively for American literature by Brockden Brown and Hawthorne, this technique features a diabolical contract in which the two figures become collaborators moving away from the extremes of their original positions.

Poe himself uses demonic collaboration variously in earlier stories. The narrator’s outfitting of a pentagonal room appropriate for Ligeia’s return, and his attempt to invoke her by calling her name at Rowena’s deathbed indicate that he may be in league with the occultish Ligeia who herself “used” him earlier to read the poem which seems to have precipitated her death. And the narrator in “The Fall of the House of Usher” reads to Roderick the very story most calculated to excite him to the imagination (or reality) of the bizarre ending. The influential opinion of Jungian critics that Ligeia dramatizes the narrator’s anima and Roderick the narrator’s shadow, in fact supports this collaboration theory, all being one in the psyche. But by making the listener in “The Tell-Tale Heart” a voiceless yet

clear presence, Poe effects some last minute twists which are not typical of Gothic literature, and which point instead toward a much more sophisticated esthetic.

Toward the end of the story the police arrive and the narrator gives himself away to them while sitting over the dismembered body of his victim. Conscience wins out, or the "narrator's compulsion to unmask and destroy himself by finally admitting the crime," as Edward H. Davidson puts it.<sup>4</sup> In this mainstream interpretation, the police may be thought of as the murderer's super-ego, and the entire inner story a psychodrama of compulsions and counter compulsions.

Although the narrator may not have been in conscious control of the actual events, however, he seems to know exactly what he is doing in retelling them to the listener. By ignoring the listener toward the story's end, he encourages the listener to become more actively involved in the ending and thus to identify with the police officers who listened to the murderer's original confession. This reaction seems reasonable for the listener because after becoming involved symbolically as accomplice, he must feel the need to shuck off guilt by identifying with the accusers rather than the accused. He can imagine himself sitting with the officers around the murderer, awaiting the final outburst with considerable pleasure since he is already familiar with the details. He has been allowed a margin of safety, to eat his cake and then have it returned to him whole.

Here of course the narrator springs another trap, telling the listener that at the climax of his confession to the police, he cried out, calling them "Villains!" (p. 797). Though this counterattack is anticipated a few lines earlier by his reference to the "hypocritical smiles" of the officers, its intensity (the narrator's accusation of the police is the only part of the story rendered in quotation marks) must come as a shock to the listener who has put himself in their shoes. What may well have been simple projection in the inner story now becomes a more calculated and loaded indictment of the listener, as he is made to feel the full guilt of his vicarious fantasies. He's a villain for wanting to listen to the recreation of a tale of horror, and he's a naive hypocrite for imagining that he can do so with impunity.

The cry of "Villains!" remains also to haunt the perceptive reader who has also presumably played the game of accomplice and accuser, whose desire for a good story has kept him reading and whose conscience has brought him up short — provided of course he is capable of this kind of response. Poe's contemporaries may not have been, we assume from our experience with reflexive literature and our cultivated self-consciousness as readers. In Alain Robbe-Grillet's "The Secret Room," for example, an implied narrator views a painting of the aftermath of a vicious murder and then, apparently by his curiosity, causes the scene to run backward as if it were movie film so that the murder itself is reenacted. Thus the reader, who shares this desire to know what has happened, becomes accomplice to both the viewer and the murderer. But Poe too envisioned this kind of reader response. In his 1847 review of Hawthorne's tales for *Godey's Lady's Book*, Poe speaks of the reader's engagement as co-creator: "He feels and in-

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4. Davidson, p. 190.

tensely enjoys the seeming novelty of the thought, enjoys it as really novel, as absolutely original with the writer — *and himself*. They two, he fancies, have, alone of all men, thought thus. They two have, together, created this thing.”<sup>5</sup>

Poe did not share Hawthorne’s overly scrupulous concerns for the artist as one who observes life from a self-indulgent distance. But Poe certainly understood the demands audiences make on art: how the poet may be forced to write short stories in order to make a living, and how the gothic interests of readers often force writers to perversions of their craft. The relationship between murderer and victim is a two-way pull, as is the relationship between writer and reader. We are all accomplices, though some, by virtue of experience, are more aware of it.

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5. James T. Harrison (ed.), *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), XIII, 146.

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## JESUS, O’CONNOR’S ARTIFICIAL NIGGER

Most critics of Flannery O’Connor’s “The Artificial Nigger” seem uncomfortable with Mr. Head’s final assessment of the statue: “They ain’t got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one.”<sup>1</sup> Coming at the climax of the story and labeled as an explanation “once and for all of the mystery of existence” (p. 269), the comment jars some readers, seeming merely the punch line of a tasteless racial joke, a confirmation of Mr. Head’s unregenerate bigotry, and thus inconsistent with the narrator’s later assertion of Mr. Head’s salvation through mercy. The tone of the passage is difficult to discern, however, only for readers who do not trust the narrator. And many do not. For some reason — probably oversensitivity to the story’s racial overtones — they seem to suspect irony or an artistic lapse.<sup>2</sup> I think, though, that Mr. Head’s statement is neither irony nor lapse. Rather it embodies the theological heart of the story, which the

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1. Flannery O’Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p. 269. Subsequent references are to this edition.

2. Turner F. Byrd, for example, calls it a “ludicrous pronouncement” (“Ironic Dimension in Flannery O’Connor’s ‘The Artificial Nigger,’” *Mississippi Quarterly*, 21 [1968], p. 267). Peter Hayes calls it an “absurdity” (“Dante, Tobit, and ‘The Artificial Nigger,’” *Studies in Short Fiction*, 5 [1968], p. 267). Some other critics simply omit the statement from their discussions of the story, such as Preston Browning, *Flannery O’Connor* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), pp. 260-69.

Still others acknowledge its serious role in the story but disagree about its significance. Frederick Asals, for example, comments that the statement “brings [Mr. Head] to full self-awareness,” but he does not explain how the statement does this bringing (*Flannery O’Connor: The Imagination of Extremity* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982], p. 85). Kathleen Feeley explains the comment like this: “In some distorted way, this statement attributes value to the Negro race, which, through the day, Mr. Head has been demeaning to Nelson” (*Flannery*

