The Representation of Women in the Works of Edgar Allan Poe

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe is a 19th-century writer who is most well-known for his theory that “the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (“The Philosophy of Composition” 165). Consequently, his tales where women seem to be attractive, but passive victims who are murdered at the start or during the tale are most widely read and are thus the most popular ones. However, Poe’s oeuvre offers more variation on the representation of women than “the beautiful, dead woman”. Unfortunately, these variations where women are in fact smart and play an active role go mostly unnoticed. Therefore, it is worth to have a look at the variety of women that Poe really presents to us, especially in his prose works. Moreover, it is also interesting to investigate the representation of this beautiful, dead woman, seeing that she might not be so passive and victimized as she may seem at first sight.

Various researchers have investigated how women are represented in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, but it is noteworthy that little of them have paid attention to the lesser-known tales, of which “Three Sundays in a Week” is an example. Most critical attention has gone to the tales of the Dark Ladies; “Berenice”, “Ligeia”, “Morella” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”. Yet we should not leave out the other stories, especially seeing that they can offer a new insight on Poe’s representation of women. Various researchers (Stovall and others) have proposed categories in which we can classify Poe’s fictional women, yet they mostly continue by analyzing only the popular tales. In this paper, we will therefore focus on the lesser-known tales as well. To start, in this first chapter, we will have a closer look at those different classifications, preceded by a graph which will illustrate how often women appear in Poe’s poetry and prose. In continuation, we will have a closer look at the women’s classification by the BBC documentary Edgar Allan Poe: Love, Death and Women, followed by the classification as discussed by Floyd Stovall. Both have a very different approach and therefore it is interesting to observe how each suggests diverse methods to place these equally diverse women into categories. In addition, we will present the categories of classification that are used in this paper.
1. The number of women in Poe's poems and prose

Before discussing how women are represented and categorized in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, we should have a closer look at how often they in fact appear in his oeuvre. We will do this by means of two graphs. The first graph illustrates the number of women in Poe’s poetry, the second in Poe’s prose. As a starting point, we will use the classification into “Poetry” on the one hand and “Fiction” on the other hand, as exercised in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (the 2006 edition by Barnes & Noble). We will not include the Scenes from “Politics”, nor the prose poem Eureka or The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, seeing that these do not result to be interesting for our analysis. The main focus of this paper will be on Poe’s short stories but we will have a brief look on his poetry as well, since Poe was a renowned poet and his vast number of poems can therefore not be ignored. The list of the classification of stories and poems used to compose these graphs can be found in the appendices.

The Appearance of Women in Poe's Poetry

From this graph, we can deduce that of the 63 poems mentioned in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe, 29 poems or 46% do not deal with women at all. Two poems, or 3% of the total number of poems, make small mentions of women but are not truly about them. Only one poem, “Bridal Ballad”, has in fact a female poetic voice. All other poems have – or at least appear to have – a male poetic voice. Even though the
larger percentage, around 54%, deals in some way with women, however small a mention it may be, a significant 46% does not deal with women at all. For a poet who claims that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic in the world, that 46% of poems that completely ignores women is quite remarkable.

Regarding Poe's prose, the numbers are a bit more varied. In this graph I have included the 70 short stories mentioned under the title “Fiction” in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. Of these 70 stories, 27% - or 19 stories – do not have any female character, nor is there any mention of a woman in general. The other 73% of the tales do contain women in smaller or larger roles. Even though it might seem contradictory to Poe's famous statement mentioned in the previous paragraph, his prose actually contains more women than his poetry. However, nearly a quarter of the tales only enclose small mentions of women. In these tales, no woman plays a considerable role. In 46% of the stories, so nearly half of the total number, women actually do play a considerable part. And in two stories, or 3% of the total, we even come across a female narrator. Yet there is some discussion about this topic, seeing that one of these two stories mentioned, “Mellonta Tauta”, is mediated by two men and can therefore not completely be considered a tale with a female narrator – but we will discuss this later on.
2. The categorization of Poe’s women

As we have already stated, various researchers have proposed categories in which we can classify Poe’s fictional and real-life women. To offer a short look into what categorizations are available, I will present two case studies. The first case study is a documentary by the BBC, called *Edgar Allan Poe: Love, Death and Women*. In this documentary directed by Louise Lockwood, we receive an account of Poe’s life and how the topics of love, death and women played an important role in it. Regarding the subject of women, they mainly refer to the real women in Poe’s life and not the fictional ones. However, I believe that the categories mentioned apply to his fictional women as well and therefore I will use the three groups of women discussed as a starting point for an overview of the women in Poe’s œuvre. To be clear: when I refer to the categories and the examples of Poe’s real life, this stems from the BBC documentary; when I refer to his fictional women, this is my interpretation of which women could belong to the categories proposed by the BBC. The second case study is an article by Floyd Stovall, written in 1925 and ever since often referred to by other academics. His classification is more detailed and varied but on some points it is open to discussion, as we will see in the second part of this section.

2.1 The classification of Poe’s real women – BBC’s Edgar Allan Poe: Love, Death and Women

The three main categories discussed in the documentary are the mother figure, the virginal maiden and the unobtainable icon. The first category, the mother figure, is represented in Poe’s life by his aunt and mother-in-law Maria Clemm, Virginia’s mother. His real mother, Eliza Poe, died while he was very young and therefore Poe found a replacement first in his stepmother, Frances Allan, followed by his mother-in-law (Weekes 149). In Poe’s works, we can find the mother figure for example in the poem “For Annie”: “She covered me warm, / And she prayed to the angels / To keep me from harm / … / To shield me from harm” (Poe 87). Another example of the mother figure

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2 Regarding poetry, I will not refer to the lines in the poem but to the page numbers, so as not to cause any confusion with the short stories discussed in the following chapters.
can be found in Poe’s fiction, namely in “Ligeia”, a story which we will discuss later on. In this tale, the narrator is referred to with child-like terms, thus placing Ligeia in the role of mother. The next category is the virginal maiden. In Poe’s life, this role is performed by Virginia Clemm, his first cousin and wife. The virginal maiden is without a doubt the category that appears most often in Poe’s works, both in his poetry and his prose. In his poetry, we encounter the virginal maiden in what is probably one of Poe’s better known poems: “Annabel Lee”. According to some researchers, Annabel Lee is based on a real-life character, namely Virginia Clemm (Sova 12). Nevertheless, I agree with Elizabeth Phillips that we should not link the poet to his poems in such a biographical manner (103). Undeniably, “[r]eal disservice is done to Poe’s work by the assumption, perennial and predictable as spring peepers, that his works are simple keys to his biography” (Phillips 103). Another example of the virginal maiden in his poetry is “Lenore”, who is described as “the dear child that should have been thy bride” (Poe 55). In Poe’s prose, we find the virginal maiden in the figure of Mademoiselle L’Espanaye in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, who lives with her mother and is not described as having a relationship with a male of any kind. Berenice, of the tale with the same name, is placed into this category as well. She is engaged to the narrator, also her cousin, but is not yet married. Therefore, she can still be called a maiden. In addition, the narrator tells us that “feelings with me, had never been of the heart, and my passions always were of the mind” (Poe 230). Relating this reference to a non-physical relationship with the spirit of that time, in which a woman was supposed to remain a virgin until marriage, we can safely assume that Berenice belongs in the category of the virginal maiden. The last category mentioned in the documentary is the unobtainable icon. According to the documentary, Frances Sargent Osgood, a poetess in Poe’s time, represents this category most strongly. She is known for her literary relationship with Poe as well and many claim that they had a romantic relationship, but this is not completely certain (De Jong 27). However, it is certain that Poe wrote several poems in her honour, for example “To F--s S. O--d” (which easily fills in as “To Frances Sargent Osgood”). Regarding Poe’s other works, Lenore from “The Raven” can be placed into this category since she is now unobtainable for the narrator and he converts her into an icon by his nostalgia and repeated ponderings and cries for the “lost Lenore” (Poe 68-71). Ligeia, from the eponymous prose work “Ligeia”, is an example of this category as well since Ligeia does become a “partner” in the narrator’s studies but the narrator is not able to put his theory into practice the way
Ligeia does (Poe 256). On many levels, Ligeia rises above the narrator and therefore she can be seen as an unobtainable icon as well.

2.2 The classification of Poe’s fictional women – Floyd Stovall’s “The Women of Poe’s Poems and Tales”

Floyd Stovall’s classification of Poe’s women does not refer much to the actual women in Poe’s life but rather to his fictional women; the women in his prose and poetry. In his article, “The Women of Poe’s Poems and Tales”, Stovall suggests that there are five general types of women in Poe’s works (198). Stovall’s categories are as follows:

First there are a number of pieces that describe spiritual beings in feminine form. Then there are both poems and tales that have to do with the death of women, Poe’s favorite theme. A third group introduce ideal and preternatural women; and a fourth group should be made to include all other types of fictional women. Finally, there are the living women of Poe’s acquaintance. (Stovall 198)

As is clear, most attention goes to Poe’s fictional women. Where Webb observes that there are a lot of similarities among the Dark Ladies (215), Stovall earlier noted that “[m]ost of Poe’s women, too, are very much alike in appearance and in character” (197). Yet it is still possible to place them into categories, based on their role in the poems and tales. Stovall’s categorization depends a lot on the importance of the role the women play in the stories and poetry, thus his classification is very interesting for this paper.

His first category, the spiritual beings in feminine form, is accompanied by the examples of Nesace in “Al Araaf” and the angels in “The Conqueror Worm”. The next category, namely that of the beautiful, dead or dying woman, is of more interest to us. Stovall refers to the poems “The Sleeper”, “Lenore” and “The Raven”, but also “To One in Paradise” and of course, “Annabel Lee”. This category appears most often in Poe’s poetry, but there are definitely examples in his prose as well. The Dark Ladies are generally described as beautiful and all of them die or seem to die at some point. Therefore, I believe they fit in this category as well. However, Stovall places some of them in another category, namely that of the women who have ideal or preternatural
qualities (or both). Ligeia (the prose version) is placed into this category by Stovall and whereas I agree with this classification, I also believe that we cannot ignore her role in the “death of a beautiful woman” category. The same holds for Berenice and Morella, who are also placed into this “ideal or preternatural” category by Stovall. According to Stovall, these three categories mentioned are the most interesting ones. This is also obvious by his designation of the last category regarding the fictional women, which is called quite simply “Poe’s other fictional women”. This last category is again separated into four groups: “those of the minor poems, those of the stories who are not clearly individualized, the grotesque women, and the women who are mere mechanisms of the plot” (Stovall 204). Indeed, this last category seems to be a random collection of less important or interesting women. Conversely, I believe that these women are exactly more interesting to investigate because they offer a variation to the typical Poesque theme of the beautiful, dead woman. Not many people know Poe’s other stories and it is exactly because some of these stories have received only sparse critical attention that they deserve to be investigated. For the minor poems, Stovall refers us to “Tamerlane” and “Eulalie” as the most interesting ones of this category. Regarding the women who are not clearly individualized, he mentions Kate of “Three Sundays in a Week”, Madame Lalande of “The Spectacles” and Madeline Usher of “The Fall of the House of Usher”. Nevertheless, I do not agree that these women are not clearly individualized. Stovall claims that “Poe has attempted to create normal, everyday women, but has succeeded only in making them ordinary and dull” (204-205). As I will explain later on in this paper, I disagree with Stovall that these women are not interesting and especially that they are ordinary and dull. Exactly because they appear normal, everyday women, they offer variation in Poe’s works. Unfortunately they are lesser-known variations and do not belong to the popular tales, but I will demonstrate that these women are in fact important women in Poe’s oeuvre and most surely cannot be forgotten. The following category, that of the grotesque women, makes mention of “Hop-Frog” and “King Pest” but we will not investigate this category. The last category is named “women who are mere mechanisms of the plot” and as an example, Stovall points out the women that appear in Poe’s detective stories – often also named “the Dupin tales”. Seeing that these characters illustrate the popular view of Poe’s women as passive victims, we will discuss this stereotypical image before illustrating that there are other, more interesting women in Poe’s works as well.
3. An overview of my approach

As is clear, Poe’s women have been represented in many different ways, but I would like to propose a new view that does not leave out the lesser-known variations. However, first we must discuss the archetypal women of Poe’s poetry, followed by those of his prose, in order to be able to detect how the variations are in fact variations. Regarding his poetry, we will offer a short overview of his poems, accompanied by some critical attention that has been given to them. Regarding his prose, we will discuss the stereotypes by means of the Dupin tales, more specifically “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, but I will also refer to “The Purloined Letter”. In the first tale, the women are dead from the start. In the second tale, the female character does not appear herself but is only discussed indirectly and consequently represented as a poor, helpless maiden who needs the help of a man to solve her problems. In addition, we will also discuss the representation of the female narrator in Poe’s works. Seeing that a female narrator is very rare in Poe’s works, it is definitely worth investigating how this exception is represented. When we have discussed this clichéd image of the dependent Poesque woman – or rather girl – and the female narrator, we will move on to the lesser-known variations in Poe’s work. These lesser-known variations are the smart women, who outwit men and are represented in a strong, positive light. They have not received much critical attention and are often barely known among (beginning) Poe readers, so therefore it is undeniably worth examining these “exceptions”. Additionally, also the well-known tales of the Dark Ladies deserve to be mentioned. Even though these tales are already rather popular, they can be seen in a different light than usual as well. In fact, the women of these tales are not as powerless and unimportant as they might seem to be during a first reading. After having then discussed these Dark Ladies, we will draw some conclusions about how women thus are represented in Poe’s stories and moreover, how the image of the Poesque women is in fact more varied than most people believe it to be.
CHAPTER 2: THE POETICAL WOMAN

Even though we will mainly focus on Poe’s short stories in this paper, we cannot disregard Poe’s poems. As we have seen in the previous chapter, nearly half of the poems do not deal with women in any way. This is a lot more than in the short stories, where “only” a quarter of the stories do not deal with women at all. Following Poe’s theory about his perfect poetical topic, a lot of his poems should deal with the death of beautiful women. In this chapter, we will thus offer a short overview of how women are represented in Poe’s poems and investigate if Poe in fact follows his own theory or not.

“The Raven” and “Annabel Lee” are probably two of Poe’s most famous poems. And indeed, both deal with women who have passed away. Moreover, the poetic voice is that of the “bereaved lover”, “the lips best suited for such a topic” – as Poe claims in his “The Philosophy of Composition” (165), written to explain how he composed “The Raven”. In this poem, Lenore is characterised only as a “sainted maiden” (Poe 71), “the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore” (68) but who passed away, causing the poetic voice much sorrow. She clearly is the stereotype of Poe’s poetic woman: dead and beautiful. The same goes for Annabel Lee, who is described as “a maiden” (Poe 89), “a child” (89), “the beautiful Annabel Lee” (90), “my darling, my life and my bride” (90). Both women’s characters are not developed; the only thing we really know about them is that they were beautiful, but unfortunately have died and that this causes the poetic voice much grief. Indeed, these poems rather deal with the man’s grief than actually discuss what these women looked or were like. This follows Person’s statement about Lenore that she “exists hardly even as a memory in the involuted game the speaker plays with the raven” (“Poe’s Poetics of Desire” 2). Additionally, even though Annabel Lee’s poem is in fact named “Annabel Lee”, we do not learn much about this character either. Both women might have been “[n]ameless here for evermore” (Poe 68).

In Poe’s prose we encounter a female narrator (see chapter 4) and as we have seen in the first chapter, there is a female poetic voice in Poe’s poems as well. One poem, “Bridal Ballad” is told from a woman’s point of view. This makes it stand out from his other poems, in addition to the fact that it is now a woman who mourns a deceased man, the
“dead D’Elormie” (Poe 61). As we can see in the lines “And the voice seemed his who fell / In the battle down the dell” (Poe 61), she actually loves another man than the one she is about to marry. Yet this poem can still be compared to the previous ones in that, apart from the fact that she does not love her fiancé, we do not know much about this woman. There is no description of her appearance or of any specific character traits. She remains just a bride, lamenting her situation of not being able to marry her true love.

Another poem that might be worth discussing is one of Poe’s “To …” poems. These poems are supposedly written for women in his life, so they suggest another type of poem than the previous ones. As an example of one of these poems, we will discuss “To F—s S. O—d”. This poem is quite obviously written for Frances Sargent Osgood, as we have already discussed in the previous chapter. However, if the poem were not named using her initials, there would have hardly been a way to determine it is about her. The object of the poetic voice’s affection is barely characterized. Instead, as in most of his “To…” poems, it seems that we are rather dealing with a weak extract of an unidentified woman who can be replaced by any other person. I thus agree with Karen Weekes that these women “lack individual development” (150). Moreover, she also argues that Poe is often “writing […] about a female object and ignoring dimension of character that add depth or believability to these repeated stereotypes of the beautiful damsel” (Weekes 150). Yet Weekes claims that this quote corresponds to Poe’s fictional women as well. On this subject, I would like to disagree, but I will treat this matter in the following chapters. However, this statement does seem to be true for Poe’s poetical women, seeing that there often is no clear description of them, neither physically nor personality-wise. It is frequently only claimed that they are beautiful, but as Leland S. Person argues about Poe’s poetic characters, “a woman’s beauty serves as a narcissistic mirror for reflecting and heightening […] male desire” (“Poe’s Poetics of Desire” 2). In other words, even though the poems may have women’s names as titles and they may be directed at women using “To…” titles, it is actually always about the “I”, the male poetic voice.

One of the rare poems in which the beloved is not dead but is in fact an important, perhaps even superior woman, is “For Annie”. In this poem, Annie is represented as a mother figure who shields the poetic “I” from harm:
She covered me warm,
And she prayed to the angels
To keep me from harm –
To the queen of the angels
To shield me from harm. (Poe 87)

In addition, the “I” in this poem places himself on her breast, a typical position of the child when lying with the mother:

She tenderly kissed me,
She fondly caressed,
And then I fell gently
To sleep on her breast –
Deeply to sleep
From the heaven of her breast. (Poe 87)

Yet again, this woman is not physically described. She is identified as a mother figure only, protecting and loving the poetic “I”. In the other “mother poem”, “Sonnet – To My Mother” – written in honour of Maria Clemm, Virginia’s mother – the woman is again primarily characterised as a mother whose main function it is to love and care. She is identified as “mother to the one I loved so dearly” (Poe 89) and is said to be “dearer than the mother I knew” (89) but that is all we truly know about her.

Keeping in mind Poe’s famous theory about the perfect poetical subject, it is rather surprising that only 51% of his poems are in fact about or for women. A stunning 49% hardly deals with women – or even not at all. Yet it is interesting that Poe uses the subject of the beautiful, dead woman in his prose as well: think for example of the Dark Ladies or the Dupin tales. Regarding his poetry, this topic in fact does not arise all that often, so it seems that the term “poetic” does not apply to poetry alone. Moreover, most of his poems are recounted from a male point of view, discussing the male's feelings, thoughts and views. The woman is not characterized at all; it seems that the most important element about her is that she is beautiful. There is hardly any interest in the female’s character, thoughts or emotions in most of the poems about or for a woman.
Therefore, considering this surprising representation of women in Poe’s poetry, it seems appropriate to turn in more detail to his “Philosophy of Composition”, that deals with how a story or poem should be constructed. To explain this matter, Poe describes step-by-step how he has composed “The Raven”. However, even though the sentence about the death of a beautiful woman may be the most famous phrase in this essay, he writes about much more than this. Moreover, this one quote is not much expanded upon; more emphasis is placed upon the raven and the lover than on the importance of the female character. Yet from this small extract (nearly the only one that deals with the subject of woman), we can deduce that indeed, the female’s most important characteristic must be her beauty:

Now, never losing sight of the object *supremeness*, or perfection, at all points, I asked myself – “Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?” Death – was the obvious reply. “And when,” I said, “is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?” From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious – “When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world – and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.” (Poe “The Philosophy of Composition” 165).

The rest of the essay deals with Poe’s mode of constructing the story line, rhythm, the lover’s feelings and the “conversation” between the lover and the raven. We can thus infer that not much attention has been specifically devoted to women in this essay. Naturally, his best-known sentence is striking for its rather harsh treatment of women, but we should thus keep in mind that most of the essay deals with the tone, the rhythm, the lover and the raven, and not so much with the female character.

In addition, the fact that most of Poe’s poems do not even deal with women and that the poems that do include them often only describe them as being beautiful, seems to contradict some researchers’ theory that the women in Poe’s poems actually represent (a version of) Poe himself. This theory can be found in Baudelaire’s view on Poe’s poetic “phantom women”: “they are types for Poe himself” (qtd. in Dayan “Poe’s Women” 4). Since we often only learn that these women are beautiful, but learn nothing about their
intelligence or other character traits, it is rather hard to believe that these “empty” female stock characters stand for Poe himself.

Even though this is just a short overview of Poe’s poetical women, I believe it is clear that there just is not that much to say about them. Most of these women are not described by means of their physical appearance, yet their character traits are also ignored. They mainly occur “as a means to a male end”: “the woman must die in order to enlarge the experience of the narrator, her viewer” (Miquel-Baldellou 181). Indeed, the women lack an identity and development of their own and even though they may receive title roles, they often still remain an empty character in the poem itself. In this way, Poe’s poetry refers to a prototypical beautiful, dead woman perhaps a bit too often. Unfortunately, I thus have to agree with Karen Weekes and Leland S. Person that most of these women represent weak stereotypes that are repeatedly used for the poetic voice’s selfish purposes.
1. The helpless maiden

Discussing women in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, one cannot help but notice how often they are completely ignored, as we have demonstrated by means of graphs in the first chapter. Moreover, when women do appear in his stories, they are often placed in the role of helpless victims. In this third chapter, we will therefore analyze the image of the helpless maiden that has become the cliché of gothic literature and that is evidently present in Poe’s works as well. This image is the one that is best known among Poe readers and therefore constitutes the prototypical Poesque woman. Yet it is interesting to observe that exactly the tales where the female character is helpless and dependent of men are the most popular ones. The – admittedly rather scarce – tales where a woman is intelligent and independent go mostly unnoticed. In this chapter, however, we will first offer an overview of the stereotypical image of the helpless maiden in order to then refute in the following chapters the popular view that this is Poe’s most important portrayal of woman.
2. Case study: The Dupin tales

According to Stovall’s classification, as discussed in chapter 1, the women who merely serve as mechanisms of the plot – and thus receive no important role in the story whatsoever - can be found strikingly in the detective stories about C. Auguste Dupin (205). Indeed, these tales are among the most famous works of Edgar Allan Poe, especially considering that they are widely acknowledged to be the first detective tales (Thoms 133). When reading these tales, one cannot help but notice how the women are characterized in these tales – or better yet, how they lack any character of their own. Stovall recognized that they “are usually not described, and [...] exist for no other purpose than to satisfy the exigencies of the plot” (205). Exactly because for example “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” has become so popular, the women in these tales have helped in creating the image of the helpless and dead or dying maiden that is seen as stereotypical of Poe’s works. Indeed, the most important women in this tale, Madame L’Espanaye and her daughter Mademoiselle Camille L’Espanaye, are identified only by their helpless shrieks and deformed corpses.

2.1 “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”

As is clear in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, it is a man who is described as being clever and a remarkable analyst. In this respect, one cannot fail to notice how in the rather theoretical beginning of the tale the whole explanation of what an analyst is, is characterized by the personal pronoun “he”, not “she”. The two murdered ladies do not get speaking roles – given that shrieks hardly count as interesting additions to the conversations – and are not described physically, apart from the wounds inflicted on their bodies. Following Church, “Poe locates meaningful, rational discourse in the two men and limits the two women to ‘shrieks’ and ‘screams’” (411). The harshness of the violence towards these women has led researchers to various theories. Marie Bonaparte reduces the story to “a Freudian ‘primal scene’” (qtd. in Church 409) while Lemay sees the murders as “the deleterious consequence of modern humankind’s sexual repression” (qtd. in Church 409).

3 However, we should not make the mistake to connect Poe to the narrator or to claim that this tale represents Poe’s own misogynistic views.
In his article about misogyny in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, Church stresses how the “women's deaths [remain] strangely unpunished” (409). Indeed, every man remotely involved is set free without charges and even the orang-utan is not killed for his aggressive behaviour but is sent to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. Church even goes so far as to state that Dupin and the narrator show a “misogynistic satisfaction in the deaths of the mother and daughter” (409). His arguments consist of Dupin and the narrator living together in a secluded way – not needing women in their lives – and of Dupin wishing to establish “his mental superiority over other men” (410). Church thus deduces that Dupin

must see in the circumstances of these two women, and modern women generally, their possession of new powers – intellectual, material, and sexual – and therein must experience an excruciating affront to man’s, but above all, his own superiority (410).

It is indeed interesting to observe that both mother and daughter do not have any men in their lives. They take care of themselves, and the only other person who helps them with domestic chores is also a woman, Pauline Dubourg, the laundress. They are known to have money and Madame L’Espanaye is said to have rather mystical powers, telling fortunes. Naturally, such self-reliant women could pose a threat to some men who feared the women’s lack of need for a male person in their lives. According to Church, “the women apparently consider themselves superior to and satisfied without men” (411). This view of the women as considering themselves superior makes the murders all the more interesting. It seems that women who pose a threat to man’s superiority are being killed to eliminate this threat. Concluding, Church claims that “[t]he tale thus mocks and punishes the women for aspiring to be men when they should be sexually subservient” (413).

Even though the women in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” represent a rather ambiguous image with them supposedly being a threat to masculinity by living alone, not needing men and having a lot of money, I believe their helplessness and typical female role in stressful situations is emphasised more convincingly. They only utter shrieks and screams, in the moments before the murders they were in their night-robies, the mother was combing her hair, they did not perceive what was going on behind them,
and in the end the daughter faints at seeing so horrible an event. Throughout the tale the powerlessness of women is stressed in general as well, as we can perceive in quotes such as “[n]o woman could have inflicted the blows with any weapon” (Poe 379) and “the strength of Madame L'Espanaye would have been utterly unequal to the task of thrusting her daughter's corpse up the chimney as it was found” (383). It seems that they are such an easy, obvious target, just because they are women. This is indeed a rather misogynist view, yet it stresses how a lot of people perceive the women of Poe's tales.

2.2 “The Purloined Letter”

Another Dupin tale, “The Purloined Letter” illustrates this image of helpless maiden as well. The whole plot is about a woman who is powerless as a man steals a letter from her, even though she knows he is the one who steals it. The woman gets no direct role in the tale; we do not see her, nor does she speak. The only way she is typified in this tale is by means of the image of, again, a helpless maiden who does not know how to solve the situation without the help of a clever man. She is represented as not sufficiently clever to solve this crime; only Dupin is considered adequate to find the solution. Once more, the woman is seen as inferior to man. Apparently, she is not even worthy of receiving a decent role in the tale.
3. Conclusions regarding the archetypal Poesque woman – or the helpless maiden

After observing the overall passivity and speechlessness of the women in both “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter”, it remains clear that the image presented to us of the famous Poesque woman is a fairly negative one. These women hardly receive speaking roles – if shrieks even count as speaking roles – and have therefore no opinion of their own. Moreover, they are either murdered right at the start of the tale or are presented as desperately in need of an intelligent man who is able to solve their problems, because naturally a woman is not able to overcome her own difficulties. Even though these detective tales do not belong to the Gothic genre, the image of the female character that we are offered throughout does correspond to the stereotype of the helpless maiden of this popular 18\textsuperscript{th}-century literary genre. However, seeing that with these tales, the new genre of detective fiction is introduced, it is rather disappointing that we do not find a new position for the women. Instead, their position as powerless, naive and dependent girls is only reinforced. The women of the Gothic fiction did receive speaking roles but here they are only shown as dead or desperate and voiceless. Sadly, this new genre just builds on previous traditions regarding women – probably because of the popularity of these rather antifeminist tales.
1. Frequency and agreements

Following the stereotype of the helpless maiden, it seems appropriate to investigate the rare female narrator in Poe’s works. We will discuss her role subsequent to that of the helpless maiden, considering that her importance is rather disappointing as well. With a female narrator, we would expect a powerful woman who has her own voice – in contrast to the helpless maidens of the Dupin Tales who remain voiceless. However, as we will illustrate in this chapter, the representation of the female narrator in Poe’s tales is quite unsatisfactory as well.

While the stories where women receive a considerable role are scarce, the stories where we encounter a female narrator are even scarcer, as we have seen in the graph in the first chapter. Only 3% of his entire oeuvre of short stories contains a female narrator. Nevertheless, even this 3% is rather ambiguous. Most researchers agree that we only encounter a female narrator in “How to Write a Blackwood Article” and in the accompanying story “A Predicament” (Martin 200). These two stories are generally considered as one. This is the case in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, the book used for this paper, as well. We will therefore consider this story as one whole from here onwards and discuss it under the title of “How to Write a Blackwood Article”. Yet this story is not the only one with a female narrator. The short story “Mellonta Tauta” also contains a female narrative voice. Yet this narrator is heavily mediated by a supposed male translator and by a preface of Poe’s hand. Consequently, we will not discuss this story as having a female narrator since it is (albeit allegedly) mediated by two men and it would therefore be rather dubious to discuss it as having a true female narrator with a completely unique own voice. In short, only one story of Poe’s entire prose oeuvre can be considered to have a female narrator.

Even though we can thus state that there is only one short story containing a female narrator, Gita Rajan believes that there is one more story that might actually be written from a female point of view. In her compelling article “A Feminist Rereading of Poe’s
“The Tell-Tale Heart”, she discusses the tale as if the narrator were a woman. Seeing that this is a revolutionary point of view, we will discuss this reading as well. Yet first, we will research the image of the Signora Psyche Zenobia, the female narrator of “How to Write a Blackwood Article” and “A Predicament”.
2. Signora Psyche Zenobia in “How to Write a Blackwood Article” and “A Predicament”

“How to Write a Blackwood Article” is perhaps a bit lesser known than the Dupin tales of the previous chapter but the story still has received plentiful critical attention. By some critics it is even considered to be “one of Poe’s best comic writings” (Sova 110). It is generally acknowledged that this tale was written as a satire on the exaggerated articles that appeared in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (as stated by, for example, Levine and Levine 131). “How to Write a Blackwood Article” is connected to the other short story “A Predicament” and both have the Signora Psyche Zenobia as a narrator. Additionally, this is the only tale that contains an obviously present female narrator. This makes “How to Write a Blackwood Article” all the more interesting to investigate since this one woman consequently becomes the representative of Poe’s female narrator. According to Thomas H. McNeal, Signora Psyche Zenobia is modelled on a real live person, namely Margaret Fuller, a literary critic and scholar (205). In this section, however, we will not go into this comparison to a real live person, since this thesis has not been sufficiently proved, as Levine and Levine (131) note as well. Instead, we will look into the Signora Psyche Zenobia solely as a literary character.

Signora Psyche Zenobia is presented to us only through her own mediation. We do not get a physical description of her facial characteristics, but we do get a description of her clothing – one which emphasises her vanity. Regarding her character, a lot can be gathered from her speech, her behaviour and Mr. Blackwood’s comments towards her. As we can derive from the text, Zenobia seems to be easily distracted – “Where was I? Ah!” (Poe 269) – but also rather haughty and vain, as we learn from the first sentence of the story: “I presume everybody has heard of me” (Poe 269). Additionally, she is also rather naive. When Dr. Moneypenny claims about Zenobia’s society that “our [the members of the society’s] initials [P.R.E.T.T.Y.B.L.U.E.B.A.T.C.H.] give our true character”, Zenobia responds that “for my life I can’t see what he means” (Poe 270). Throughout the story, this image of the naive and not quite intellectual Zenobia is only reinforced, especially upon reading “A Predicament”. The quotes that Mr. Blackwood helpfully offered are suddenly transformed into a meaningless blabber, as is illustrated in the following example:
‘Van muerte tan escondida,
Que no te sienta venir,
Porque el plazer del morir
No me torne a dar la vida.’ (Poe 274)

is transformed into

‘Vanny Buren, tan escondida
Query no te senty venny
Pork and pleasure, delly morry
Nommy, torny, darry, widdy!’ (Poe 282).

Clearly, the character of Zenobia is mocked and she is represented as an unintelligent woman who adopts someone’s words without bothering to check the correctness of what she is copying. However, her lack of intellectuality is stressed in another way as well. Throughout “A Predicament”, we are presented with a great deal of contradictions in her speech. An example of this is found in the following sentences: “In my solitary walk through the city I had two humble but faithful companions” and “He was three feet in height (I like to be particular) and about seventy, or perhaps eighty, years of age” (Poe 277, my emphasis). It is obvious that every means is utilized to sketch a rather unflattering image of Miss Zenobia – something she is even guilty of doing herself, albeit not consciously.

Moreover, it seems that Psyche Zenobia is characterized as some sort of female stereotype. She is overly sentimental in her words, gossips whenever she has the chance and appears to be terribly vain. We can observe her sentimentality in descriptions like “while the tears stood in his eyes” (Poe 276) and “Dogs they danced. Danced! Could it then be possible? Danced! Alas, thought I, my dancing days are over!” (Poe 277). The last sentence is an example of what many researchers have claimed to be the mocking of Blackwood’s Magazine’s style, but it additionally mocks the character of Signora Zenobia. It is she who takes over the so-called heterogeneous style in a rather exaggerated manner and it is she who brainlessly follows the advice Mr. Blackwood gives her. Subsequently, her vanity is illustrated in her treatment of others. She gossips, believes Mr. Blackwood is “evidently struck with [her] majestic appearance” (Poe 270), and
shows no respect whatsoever towards her servant. Obviously, she considers herself to be better than everyone else. Combining the characteristics previously mentioned, it is rather disturbing that this is how the rare female narrator in Poe’s works is presented.

However, between all the comedy and satire, there is a link to be noted with the Dark Ladies tales of chapter 6. Terence Martin sees a link between Zenobia and “Ligeia”, as “[s]he is Ligeia in burlesque, a caricature of a caricature” (200). He adds that she is “in a way the most Poesque of all: Zenobia is the indestructible narrator, whose narrative has no relation to the ordinary conditions of human existence” (200). Zenobia does in fact seem rather indestructible as she keeps on narrating even though her head has been separated from her body. Nevertheless, claiming that she is the most Poesque of all is perhaps not completely suitable. To give an example, we do not know whether she was indeed beautiful – naturally, she claims to be, but we do not receive another opinion about the matter – and therefore she does not truly correspond to Poe’s theory about the most poetical topic. Moreover, a satire can hardly be called a poetic story. However, to return to Martin’s statement about the indestructibleness of Zenobia, Person adds an interesting perspective to the final moments of Zenobia. Whereas other women in Poe’s works are often objectified by the narrator, “[in] ‘How to Write a Blackwood Article’ […] Poe even employs a female narrator to describe her own dismemberment” (Person, Gender Constructions 137). This time it is not the narrator who objectifies the female character, it is the woman herself who submits in doing so. Zenobia has thus taken over a typical trait of the male characters in Poe’s works, but this compromises her role as example of the female narrator even more.

The complete comicality of this tale makes it difficult to sketch a serious image of Miss Psyche Zenobia. However, considering all the textual evidence, there is not much positive to say about the supposedly only female narrator in Poe’s prose. First and foremost, the female narrator appears in a satiric story and can therefore not be taken seriously to begin with. Moreover, the shallowness and naiveté of her character are all the more stressed throughout the tale and reach their climax in her own tale in the style of Blackwood’s Magazine, “A Predicament”. As the culmination of these negative arguments, she even takes part in her own fragmentation. The Signora Psyche Zenobia can thus be said to be a grotesque character, exaggerated and ludicrous. Concluding, it is
rather disconcerting and disappointing that this is how the rare female narrator of Poe’s prose is sketched. Even if you consider the narrator in “Mellonta Tauta” as a fully worthy female narrator, this image is not ameliorated. In this story, the narrator herself says that she means the reader “to suffer the infliction of a long gossiping letter” (Poe 751) and repeatedly refers to her “giddiness” (Poe 752). Moreover, Pundita, the female narrator, is characterized as unintelligently as Zenobia, seeing that she refers to the Greek Aristotle as “the Hindoo Aries Tottle” (Poe 752). Naturally, this is meant for comic effect, but unfortunately, the comedy turns into a tragedy as we realize that this is the way Poe chooses to represent his only female narrator(s).
3. Female narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart”?

“The Tell-Tale Heart” is one of Poe’s best-known tales. Many assume that the narrator is a man, but in fact there is no textual evidence that supports that this is truly the case. Gita Rajan was the first to notice this and she therefore discusses the possibility of a female narrator in her article “A Feminist Rereading of Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’” that has been published both in magazines as in books. Jenny Webb refers to the possibility of a female narrator as well, but does this 23 years later than Rajan. For this analysis, I will thus use Rajan’s article as a starting point for a further exploration of the possible presence of a female narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart”.

As Rajan indicates at the beginning of her study, “Poe himself never indicates that the narrator is male, in fact, his text offers no gender markings” (284). However, “[r]eaders have assumed that the narrator is male because a neutralized and unmarked term is generally granted to be male” (Rajan 284). In addition, the fact that the bulk of Poe’s tales assume a male narrator supports a reading of “The Tell-Tale Heart” from a male point of view. Nevertheless, rereading this story from a female narrator’s point of view places it in a whole new perspective. Especially in the light of feminism, it is interesting to investigate this angle on the tale. Rajan suggests supplementary readings in her extensive analysis as well, such as a Freudian reading, a Lacanian one or a reading following Cixous’s or Bonaparte’s theories. The Lacanian reading works with the notion that metaphor is male and metonymy female (Rajan 285-286). Rajan refers to this specific use of metaphor and metonymy for her interpretation of “The Tell-Tale Heart”, as we will note in the next paragraph.

To begin, we will investigate whether we can derive from the text itself some evidence for the presence of a female narrator. As is already established, there are no gender-marked personal pronouns, apart from two lonely utterances of “madmen” (Poe 498) but this need not be a term used solely for men. However, it is possible to derive evidence for a female narrator from the style of the tale. Deriving from the supposition that “the metonymic register [is] marked by the ‘heart’ in Poe’s tale” (Rajan 293) and seeing that metonymy is female (286), the textual references linked to the heart can be treated as female as well. Accordingly, we can find femininity in “the narrator’s confused
emotions, such that the narrator's passions and fears combine and clash” and “the narrator's hysterical utterances, extreme passion, obsessive desire, neurotic fears, and pathetic confession” (Rajan 293). At this point, it seems interesting to notice the similarity between the narrator's hysterical utterances and the hysterical utterances of the female narrator in “How to Write a Blackwood Article” and “A Predicament”. In fact, we can find some utterances of the same style of speech in “The Tell-Tale Heart”. Consider for example interjections such as “ha! ha!” (Poe 500), “oh, no!” (Poe 499) and the repetitive use of the interjection “oh” in general. In addition, we can notice the excessive use of exclamation and question marks in the final scene and the many dashes that are used to insert contradicting and fast-changing thoughts that mark the narrator's extreme passion. One can argue that these characteristics refer to the narrator's madness, but it should be noted that they are often ascribed to female speech as well. A lot of these characteristics can also be found in Signora Psyche Zenobia’s speech, as is discussed in the previous section. Both women assume a rather hysterical style of speech, although this is more modified in “The Tell-Tale Heart” than in “How to Write a Blackwood Article”. The hysteria is more obvious in the final scene of “The Tell-Tale Heart” and is even more emphasised by the recurring use of italics. Consequently, the style of speech in this tale might support the thesis that we are dealing with a female narrator, considering that it is a rather emotionally influenced language.

When we discuss the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” as female, we can place the taking care of the old man in a new light, seeing that “[t]he female narrator begins in the traditional feminine position of a nurturer” (Rajan 295). Consequently, she is represented as a daughter figure, now taking care of the older man who must then represent a father figure. However, her love is turned into hate and “her primary desire is to rid herself of the male gaze, or domination” (Rajan 295). As in some of the Dark Ladies tales, we are introduced to a woman who no longer wants to suffer from male domination. She wants to become an active force and no longer wants to be the object of the male gaze. In this respect, she is stronger than the Dark Ladies. She kills the old man but does not die in the act itself, in contrast to Madeline Usher who murdered her brother but perished as well. We see the female narrator as an active figure, assuming power and taking revenge on the male figures that appear to represent domination. However, whereas it seems that she has vindicated patriarchy, in the end she actually
returns to be the object of the male gaze. Now the male gaze is represented by the policemen, since they “search the premises” and make observations (Poe 501). Accordingly, “even though a feminist rereading grants the female narrator a temporary masculine, active, subject posture, it undercuts this interpretation by superimposing a judicial and patriarchal closure” (Rajan 297). Where she refuses to accept the gaze of the old man and effectively resists it by killing him, she is not able to resist the gaze of the more active and powerful policemen and “the sound of the man's beating heart” (Webb 218). Before his death, the influence of the old man was represented by his gaze, but now that his gaze is absent, his influence is present in the beating of his heart. She finally succumbs to this combination of the gaze and the still beating heart and realizes that she cannot defy the male oppression of patriarchy. It seems that she knows herself that “patriarchal morality condemns a woman for being aggressive, for desiring power, and ultimately punishes her for achieving this power even temporarily” and that this unconscious or conscious realization leads her to confess her crimes (Rajan 297).

Rajan, in her Lacanian feminist reading of the tale, suggests that “[i]nstead of a young man desiring the power symbolized by the Father, she is the daughter desiring her father” (294). She hereby advocates a certain reversed Oedipal myth, although it seems that the daughter not so much desires the father, but rather the power that is usually connected to the male figure. As “she deeply resents the scrutiny of his eye, feeling abused and objectified by his paternal surveillance” she acts like a male narrator would as well (295). However, their motives would be entirely different. As we have already argued, the motive of the female narrator would be “to rid herself of the male gaze, or domination” (295). Yet, if we read the tale from a male narrator's point of view, it seems that the murder would be a rather impulsive act without any motivation behind it. Clearly, the tale changes completely when it is regarded from a feminist point of view. Additionally, the ending of the tale is influenced as well. With a male narrator, we know that his confession will have consequences, but with a female narrator, these consequences will have a deeper psychological level as well. According to Rajan, “[s]he begins and ends in a stereotypically feminine posture, the nurturer who has returned to her quintessentially repressed object position” (296). Consequently, she is more gravely punished for her desire to become an active agent. Women are expected to be passive
and nurturing, so if they transgress their stereotypical role, this will have greater consequences for them as well.

In conclusion, assuming that we are confronted with a female narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” significantly influences our reading of the tale. Whereas with a male narrator, we can find an Oedipal reading, with a female narrator this Oedipal reading is reversed (Rajan 294). Additionally, the motive behind the narrator’s actions changes, as well as the consequences for the crime he or she commits. However, a feminist reading of this tale is not a very positive one. The woman tries to resist the objectification and passivity of females but it seems that patriarchy – here in the role of the policemen – will always suppress these attempts. In the end, the female narrator is back to where she started: repressed and objectified.
4. Conclusions regarding the female narrators

Although the tone of "How to Write a Blackwood Article" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" is completely different, it is possible to find some similarities between the speech of Signora Psyche Zenobia and the (supposed) female narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart". Both have a rather emotional way of speaking and both women's speech is marked by excessive exclamation marks and italics. Even though we can ascribe the slightly hysteric way of speaking of the "The Tell-Tale Heart"'s narrator to him or her supposedly being mad, we can make a strong case that it is because the narrator is a woman as well. Of course Zenobia's style is significantly more exaggerated than in "The Tell-Tale Heart" but this is influenced by the genre of the tale as well. Whereas Zenobia presents a caricature of the snobbish and overly emotional nineteenth-century woman, the female narrator in "Tell-Tale" – if we assume there is one – is markedly more subtle. When adding Pundita in "Mellonta Tauta" to the equation, however, we observe that we can classify her in the same category as Zenobia: an annoying gossip, as she even claims to be herself (Poe 751).

In relation to the male patriarchal values, there is a considerable difference between both Zenobia and the narrator in "Tell-Tale". Zenobia does not object to the condescending comments made by Mr. Blackwood. Moreover, she does not even notice them and consequently does not represent an image of a strong woman who stands up for her rights. She personifies a female stereotype and is reduced to being a simple caricature. Nevertheless, the female narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" endeavours to resist this reduction to a passive object. She desires to kill the old man, who here stands for all patriarchal values. Thereby, she attempts to gain an active role in the story, a "masculine role" even, according to Rajan (295). However, her attempt fails as she finally yields to the policemen and confesses her crime, knowing that this will bring her back to her passive, feminine condition from before.

In conclusion, both women stand for entirely different representations of the female character. However, the image they represent is rather bleak. It seems that they are either reduced to a grotesque caricature or, if they dare to stand up against patriarchy, are suppressed and pushed back into their submissive and objectified role. Evidently,
this is not a very positive conclusion for these tales that bring the attention to the femininity of their narrator.
In this chapter, we will discuss the lesser-known variations of Poe's female prose characters. They are part of the tales that are less popular and that most people would normally not relate to Edgar Allan Poe. They are the smart female characters; the women who actually play an important role in the story and may even be superior to the men in the tale. Moreover, the genre of both tales we will discuss is different than Poe's most popular tales. Even though Poe is most known for his darker tales, full of Gothicism, murder and suspense, he has written tales in other genres as well. What is more, he has written various comical tales, amongst which we can find “Three Sundays in a Week”, “The Spectacles”, “The Duc de L'Omelette”, “X-ing a Paragrab”, “Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences”, “How to Write a Blackwood Article” from the previous chapter, and many more.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is in some of these comical tales that we can find the exceptions or lesser-known variations to Poe's “rule” of the beautiful, dead woman. Of these lesser-known, intelligent variations, we will discuss Kate of “Three Sundays in a Week” and Madame Lalande of “The Spectacles”. Both appear in comical tales and offer a refreshing view on Poe's oeuvre, both as regards genre as the representation of the female characters. The women of these tales offer an alternative to the by now stereotyped helpless, dead maiden of his other works or the rather annoying, snobby narrator of “How to Write a Blackwood Article”. Kate and Madame Lalande are truly intelligent and play a considerable role in both stories. Therefore, it is definitely important to bring these women to the critical attention, seeing that they offer a welcome variation to the stereotypical portrayal of the Poesque woman and have not yet received the acclaim they actually do deserve.
1. Kate in “Three Sundays in a Week”

“Three Sundays in a Week” is a tale that is not very well-known among Poe readers. Most readers associate Poe with his Dark Ladies tales, but fail to notice that he wrote other stories, connected to other genres as well. “Three Sundays in a Week” is a rather comical story but is regarded by various researchers as one of Poe’s lesser works and consequently not worth investigating (Sova 238). As a consequence, not much has been written about this tale nor about its heroine, Kate. However, I do believe it is interesting to have a closer look at this story, exactly because it stands out in its apparent commonness and because Kate does not correspond to the stereotypical female role that people usually associate with Poe.

The first element that catches our attention when reading “Three Sundays in a Week” is the contrast between the name “Kate” and the names of the women we have seen in other tales. Stovall argues that Poe’s “names are usually unfamiliar and always beautiful, especially because of their musical quality” and adds that “[t]his quality he secured chiefly by the use of long vowels, liquids and nasals” (197-198). Berenice, Ligeia and Morella correspond to these qualities mentioned by Stovall and can indeed hardly be called everyday names. Kate’s name, however, is a name that seems extraordinarily common in comparison to the names of Berenice, Ligeia and Morella. It does not have a musical quality, it is short and does not contain liquids or nasals. The contrast is even more strongly emphasised when we read Kate’s name in comparison to the rather odd name of the narrator’s grand-uncle: Rumgudgeon. She clearly differs from many other women in Poe’s tales, even by such a simple element as the commonness of her name. The only connection she has to some of the other women is that she is the narrator’s cousin and betrothed at the same time. This is obviously a recurring theme in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, but one cannot ignore that Kate offers a welcome variation on the theme.

The next element that is of interest in this tale is of course Kate’s intelligence. She is the one who finds the solution to her father’s ultimatum by listening carefully to the seafarer’s narration. She is the most attentive character in this story and ultimately the others have to give in to her cleverness and wit. Levine and Levine imply that both the
narrator and Kate arrange the coming together of three Sundays in a week (136), but I believe it is in fact Kate herself who finds the solution in the seamen’s story. Regarding Kate’s intelligence, we naturally observe that she might resemble Ligeia and Morella, seeing that they were learned women as well. However, I believe that Kate’s cleverness is of a different kind than that of the two Dark Ladies. Morella and Ligeia were learned owing to books, but Kate’s intellect is of a more natural source. Her intelligence becomes all the more remarkable when we regard her age: “she was barely fifteen” (Poe 431). Even at this young age, she succeeds in outwitting her father to reach her goal: being able to marry her great love. Her father evidently still regards her as a little girl, calling her “you huzzey”, “you jade” (Poe 432). It is only after her “trick” that he calls her by her first name when addressing her. Apparently, he does seem to notice that his little girl has grown up and that he must admit his defeat and her superiority. Moreover, it is interesting to notice how he addresses Robert with the derivative “Bobby” and still continues to do so after the trick. Obviously, Kate has risen in his esteem while he still considers Robert or “Bobby” as a child or a “boy”, as we can derive from his conversations (Poe 434).

What is also apparent in this tale is that Kate’s future husband admires her and truly desires to marry her. It is clear that he respects her, as for example a little phrase such as “all that Kate and myself wish” proves (Poe 429). Not only does he value Kate’s opinion, he seems to value it more than his own, since he puts her name first in the sentence. This is a widespread sign of respect in society and demonstrates that he considers Kate and her opinion to be important, since otherwise he could have just exclaimed “I wish” – thereby denying the woman’s own will. The narrator, Bobby, describes Kate as “a firm friend”, “a good girl” and evidently dreads the long time he has to wait to marry her if no solution is found (Poe 431). It seems that Bobby and Kate can be considered to be equals, both loving and respecting each other equally.

In addition, the style of speech of both Bobby and Kate should be considered. Bobby is too obviously flattering his grand-uncle, which is even more emphasised by the italics used: “My dear uncle”, “you are always so very kind”, “how very pleasant you are at times”, “you know, uncle” and “such a wit” (Poe 429). The hidden meaning behind his words is always mentioned between square brackets but naturally, the rude comments
he actually wants to pronounce would not convince his grand-uncle to let him marry his daughter. Bobby does not dare to stand up against his grand-uncle and is plainly overdoing his flattery by means of excessive laughing and the incessant repetition of “dear uncle” or “dearest uncle” (Poe 429). Kate, however, is more direct in her way of speaking and arguing. Her first direct speech is preceded by the explanation “(Interrupting.)” (Poe 432). Indeed, Kate does not start her pleading with excessive flattery but uses the simple “papa” to address her father (Poe 432). In her next speaking lines, she continues interrupting. Her father clearly wishes to continue the conversation with the sailors, but Kate stops him from doing so. Just as in Bobby's speech, Kate’s speech is enriched with italics as well. However, they are used for an entirely different purpose. Whereas Bobby’s italics refer to his excessive flattery, the italics in Kate’s speech are used to build her argument. We go from “it is something strange”, over “Robert’s not quite so bad as that. To-day’s Sunday.” to her final proof that “thus three Sundays have come together in a week” (Poe 432-433). Indeed, the textual layout underlines Kate’s cleverness even more, especially in contrast to the layout in Robert’s speech.

Recapitulating the most important arguments in this section, it has been proved that Kate offers a refreshing change in the portrayal of Poe’s women. Although there is still a link with some of the Dark Ladies who were intelligent as well, one can observe that the source of their cleverness is different. Kate, at a very young age, is able to outwit the entire company present in the scene and does so by paying attention and by witty deducing. She is one of the only women who is represented as having a “normal” relationship with her fiancé, the narrator. To conclude, Kate seems to represent a common girl with a common name but it is fascinating to see that in this story, it is the girl who is the cleverest of all and who is able to find the solution to the problem represented, as opposed to the Dupin tales, where it is always a man who solves the mystery.
2. Madame Lalande in “The Spectacles”

“The Spectacles” is a tale that is better-known than “Three Sundays in a Week”. It belongs to Poe's more comical tales. However, it is still less researched than his more well-known Dark Ladies tales and is, like “Three Sundays in a Week”, by some considered to be one of his weaker works (Levine and Levine 138). The most important female character in “The Spectacles” is Madame Eugénie Lalande. Even though Stovall places Madame Lalande among the group of “not clearly individualized” women (204), I believe we do get an insight into her personality, even though she might not be a fully developed character. Stovall argues that in this tale, “Poe has attempted to create normal, everyday women, but has succeeded only in making them ordinary and dull” (204-205). However, I do not believe that a woman who plays such clever tricks on the people around her and even consents to a mock marriage can be called dull.

Regarding Madame Lalande's physical characteristics, a lot can be said, but naturally we have to take into account that the physical description in the first part of the tale is influenced by the narrator's weak eyesight. In this first part, Madame Lalande is described by the narrator as “the most exquisite [female] I had ever beheld”, as having a divine form of face, as “grace personified”, the “beau idéal of my wildest and most enthusiastic visions”, a “queenly apparition”, and the outline of her head is compared to “that of the Greek Psyche” (Poe 551-552). It is interesting to note the link here with Ligeia, who is also compared to history's finest. Salzberg even goes so far as to say that “The Spectacles” is “a comic variant on ‘Ligeia’” (21), as we will discuss later in this section. Regarding Madame Lalande's clothing, the richness of it is stressed on various occasions. From this description we can deduce that she appears to be a wealthy and elegant lady. When the narrator regards the miniature of Madame Lalande in more detail, he describes “[t]hose large luminous eyes! – that proud Grecian nose! – those dark luxuriant curls!” (Poe 564). It is interesting to note here that the narrator uses the demonstrative pronoun instead of the possessive. I believe its use is connected to the use of the definite article in “Ligeia”, where it is employed by means of awe, as opposed to the definite article usage in “Berenice” that refers to the narrator's horror at regarding her countenance. The numerous exclamation marks in the narrator's speech support this thesis. However, the use of the demonstrative pronoun distances the narrator from
Madame Lalande and again we are confronted with a description in fragments. As Person notes, “Simpson therefore falls in love not so much with the woman as with an image of her he has created” (*Aesthetic Headaches* 45).

When the narrator wears his spectacles and finally regards Madame Lalande with a clear view, his speech is altered. He stutters and does not seem to find his words. Every supposedly horrible feature is emphasised by means of italics. At this point in the story, we learn that Madame Lalande appears young and riveting from a distance “[b]y the aid of [...] pearl-powder, of rouge, of false hair, false teeth, and false *tournure*, as well as of the most skillful modistes of Paris” (Poe 567). As is clear, she tries to hide her decay as best she can but thereby violates “what Poe’s narrators have come to expect in their brides” (Weekes 154). But “[p]utting on the glasses suggests a clarification of vision, a willingness to encounter a woman *as she is*” (Person, *Aesthetic Headaches* 45). Clearly, the narrator only attaches importance to the physical appearance of his bride, seeing that when he perceives how she really looks, he is abhorred. Person also refers to the miniature as a reinforcement of this idea, saying that “the woman’s image is thereby disjoined from her self and objectified for the wish-fulfilling imagination of the male” (*Aesthetic Headaches* 45).

As Weekes interestingly notes, Madame Lalande

is the opposite of Poe’s feminine ideal: she is more than a match for the narrator in intelligence; she is active; she is not young nor delicately beautiful; and although she is his own great-great-grandmother she seems completely uninterested in nurturing him (154).

Indeed, it is obvious that Madame Lalande is not the typical passive Poesque woman in that she is not afraid to exploit her intelligence to trick the narrator. Person stresses the importance of the fact we are dealing with a clever *woman* in his statement that “Simpson, of course, has been tricked – and tricked by a *woman*” (*Aesthetic Headaches* 46, my emphasis). Person’s addition “by a woman” underlines how noteworthy it is that a woman can pull tricks on men. Clearly, Eugénie is an intelligent lady with humour – not the passive or subservient woman many people expect when reading Poe. Although
there is an element of “horror” in the tale, it is used for comic ends. The scene where she takes off her wig is illustrated by F.C. Tilney in the *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (1902) in a way that reflects the narrator’s horror upon looking at the woman who turns out to be his great-great-grandmother. Madame Lalande herself is presented as a horrible and grotesque creature, as we can see in the following image:

![Illustration by F.C. Tilney for “The Spectacles” in Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe (1902).](image)

The narrator is appalled, thrust back in his chair, while Madame Lalande adopts a triumphant posture with both arms victoriously thrown in the air. In fact, one could say that her posture is rather masculine instead of feminine. Without her wig, she seems to be bald, her face is wrinkled and hollow and her feet are placed wide apart. The narrator cannot bear to look at her and has his hands in front of his face. It is obvious that Madame Lalande’s powerful position in this story is even more enlarged in this illustration, also because her position is higher than that of the narrator. It would have been even more impressive if the windows were behind her, because then the narrator would literally stand in her shadow. Now, this only happens figuratively but still on many levels – especially intellectually.

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At this point, it is interesting to return to Salzberg’s statement that “‘The Spectacles’ is, in part, a comic variant on ‘Ligeia’” (21). Whereas this seems a rather far-fetched statement at first sight, there is indeed some truth to his claim. Think for example of the physical description of Ligeia in comparison to that of Madame Lalande. Both have “large dark eyes” (Poe 554), are described in comparison to Greek beauties and both are portrayed by means of the greatest superlatives. Madame Lalande, just like Ligeia, demonstrates her intelligence. Ligeia does this by means of theoretical studies, Madame Lalande by means of her clever tricks and wit. In this respect, she resembles Kate from “Three Sundays in a Week”, seeing that both characters have a more practical kind of intelligence. Returning to “Ligeia”, Salzberg sees a similarity in the narrators of both stories as well, considering that in “The Spectacles”, “Poe characterizes the protagonist as a ludicrous version of the transcendentally inclined husband” (21). In addition, “[s]imilar to Ligeia’s husband, the young man in “The Spectacles” worships the sublime as it is personified in woman”. Moreover, Madame Lalande’s sudden “transformation” in the eyes of the narrator can also be connected to the final scene in “Ligeia”. Whereas the young Madame Lalande whom the narrator first beholds suddenly changes into a “villainous old hag” (Poe 566), Rowena also suddenly transforms into another person. Although this is a bit more far-fetched, it is still a point of consideration. As can be deduced from the information in this paragraph, there is indeed some evidence to link both stories together, although I believe that the similarities end with what has been summed up.

To sum up, it is clear that Madame Lalande offers an alternative to the typical Poesque woman, while at the same time hinting at those well-known macabre stories. She is witty and intelligent but does not represent the beautiful dead woman and this is abhorrent to the narrator. We can thus apply Weekes’ statement that “[o]nce a woman steps out of the narrow boundaries of the stereotypical feminine role, she is reviled rather than revered” (154). Nevertheless, Person blames the narrator for the confusion in this tale as well, because “when they project such an ideal, male characters commit themselves to a creative process at once destructive and self-destructive” (Aesthetic Headaches 44). In conclusion, Person notes that “[t]he death of a beautiful woman may have been the most poetical topic in the world for Poe, but his tales suggest an equal
fascination with women who have life, if not lives, of their own” (Aesthetic Headaches 47).
3. Conclusions regarding the intelligent women

As is clear, Kate and Madame Lalande offer an entirely different representation of the female character in Poe's prose. They do not conform to Poe's thesis about the beautiful, dead woman. In addition, they offer a refreshing alternative to the snobby narrator of "How to Write a Blackwood Article". Kate and Madame Lalande are clever women, not identified by their appearance alone but moreover by their intelligence and wit. They do not die, nor are they dying, and their lovers do not attempt to murder them. Indeed, we see a rather contrasting image to that of the typical Dark Lady as well, in addition to the helpless maiden or disappointing female narrator. Naturally, the genre of these tales is different, but is interesting to observe that exactly the tales where the woman is represented in a positive light are lesser known by most people. However, this makes Kate and Madame Lalande all the more interesting. Exactly because they offer variation to the beautiful, dead woman and instead seem to represent the normal, everyday (but by no means dull) women in Poe's tales, they cannot be forgotten. Moreover, Poe seems to suggest a new image of the (literary) learned lady. His friend and contemporary Tucker talks about the “unmarriageable ‘learned ladies’” in his novel George Balcombe (Dayan “Amorous Bondage” 247) and therefore it is noteworthy that Poe represents these intelligent women as having been married or about to marry. Clearly, their intelligence does not pose a problem such as it does in other contemporary novels.
CHAPTER 6: THE DARK LADIES

1. Who are the Dark Ladies?

Poe’s so-called “Dark Ladies” are probably the most famous and most written about women of his entire oeuvre, as the sheer number of studies dedicated to them underlines (for example by Elisabeth Bronfen, Debra Johanyak, Joan Dayan, Jenny Webb and many more). They have been so frequently investigated that they often represent the epitomes of “Poe’s women”, completely eradicating the existing variety of types of women in his other works. An important influence of their popularity, following Carlson (“Tales of Psychal Conflict: ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella, ‘Ligeia’” 174) is that they can be connected with Poe’s theory of the death of a beautiful woman, to which we have already referred. It is for this reason that these tales are often read first when beginning to study Poe’s works. Consequently, the reader forms an image of the typical Poesque woman in relation to these Dark Ladies. The reader that is not very familiar with Poe might see these women as daunting creatures, returning from the dead to haunt their past lovers, but as we read deeper into these tales, we see that there is more to them than meets the eye.

The tales that are commonly (among others by Debra Johanyak and Leland S. Person) considered tales of the Dark Ladies are “Morella”, “Berenice”, “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher”. The Dark Ladies themselves thus are respectively Morella, Berenice, Ligeia and Madeline Usher. All four tales are (more or less) named after their principal ladies and are therefore often referred to with the more general term “Poe’s women’s tales” (as in Miquel-Baldellou’s “Demonising the Victorian Heroine’s Coming-of-Age in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s Lucretia and Edgar Allan Poe’s Women’s Tales”). In this chapter, we will investigate each woman and her story; we will summarize what has already been written while offering new perspectives as well. We will demonstrate that these women do not play the secondary role of a character that returns from the dead to haunt the narrator – the latter whom is often considered to be the protagonist, thereby placing the woman on a lower level of importance. We will prove that the image that is formed of these women during a first reading needs to be deepened and placed into
perspective relating to Poe’s other tales. In short, we will try to gain deeper insights into these memorable women and the importance of their role in Poe’s oeuvre. First, we will have a look at Berenice, followed by Morella, then Ligeia (accompanied by Rowena, the other woman in the tale), and we will end this chapter with Madeline Usher. Finally, we will conclude that these women in fact play a more powerful and independent role than appears at first sight and that they might even occupy the superior position in relation to the narrator.
2. “Berenice”

Berenice is the protagonist of the tale with the same name. In the beginning, she is described by the narrator – her cousin Egæus to whom she is also engaged – as “agile, graceful and overflowing with energy”, “roaming carelessly through life with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven-winged hours” (Poe 228). Physically, she is a “gorgeous yet fantastic beauty” and she is compared to a Naiad (a type of nymph that lives near water) or a sylph (an invisible being of air) – thus combining two elements of nature (Poe 228). Still using the nature imagery, the narrator recounts how Berenice falls ill, saying that the disease “fell like a simoon upon her frame” (Poe 228). The physical description of the ill Berenice is definitely worth noting since this type of description reappears in a very similar way in the other tales of the Dark Ladies. Indeed, as Jenny Webb already stated, the “[character] traits of the women show remarkable consistency” and “their common characteristics are evidenced on the level of physical minutiae as well: more than one woman is described as having black curling tresses, profound, wild eyes, high pale foreheads (sic) etched blue veins, thin, pale hands, and an emaciated frame” (215). Berenice’s description certainly fits the majority of these characteristics: she has a lofty, pale and placid forehead, her hair falls in ringlets and used to be dark. Nevertheless, her eyes seem pupil-less and lifeless, which creates an opposition to the wild eyes of Ligeia, whom we will discuss in another section of this paper.

From the third part of the tale on, the description of the ill Berenice progresses, zooming in on one particular aspect of her appearance: her teeth. This progression from looking at Berenice in her totality to meticulously analyzing her teeth is linked to the progression of the narrator's disease, a form of monomania or an “intensity of interest [...] in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe” which evolves to a “supernaturally exaggerated interest which was the prevailing feature of the disease” (Poe 229). This obsession with teeth of course immediately brings vampirism to mind. Indeed, the image of the ill Berenice very much resembles the stereotypical representation of a vampire: lifeless eyes that seem pupil-less, “thin and shrunken lips” and the teeth that are “long, narrow and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them” (Poe 231). Even though some researchers choose to see a vampire in the narrator (Twitchell, qtd. in Blythe and Sweet 23), I agree with Blythe and Sweet that it is
actually Berenice who most resembles a vampire figure. However, it is important to note that “it is his [the narrator’s] diseased imagination that sees the passive Berenice in the threatening patterns of the vampire and its spell” (Blythe and Sweet 23, my emphasis). They conclude that the vampirism in this story is used rather satirically by Poe, especially when we observe the ending, where we see “a man who thinks he can destroy a vampire not by the traditional methods of the stake ... but by pulling its teeth” (Blythe and Sweet 24).

Apart from the vampiric theory, there are also other aspects of the teeth that we need to consider. Interestingly, already at the end of the second part of the tale, the word “teeth” is written in italics and in the third part the focus on teeth is marked by a repetition: “The teeth! – the teeth!” (Poe 231). This repetition appears again when the narrator defines Berenice’s teeth as ideas: “Des idées! [...] Des idées!” (Poe 232). You could thus say that this progressive zooming in on one particular feature reduces Berenice to exactly that feature –given that the narrator regards the teeth as ideas, it seems that he reduces Berenice to just an idea. According to Jules Zanger (qtd. in Carlson “Tales of Psychal Conflict: ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella, ‘Ligeia’” 171) these ideas are linked to Plato’s Ideas, “the absolute True, Good, and Beautiful essences or forms beyond all change, time and sense perception”. Accordingly, by pulling her teeth in the end, the narrator perhaps wishes to preserve only the perfect, true idea of Berenice instead of the image of the sickened Berenice that appals him so. Although this might seem a romantic action, originating in love and the desire to preserve the “memories of a vague, platonic preexistence in which, if recovered, he might again be happy and whole” (David Halliburton, qtd. in Carlson “Tales of Psychal Conflict: ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella, ‘Ligeia’” 170), it is not an action of love at all, as most other researchers agree. According to Dayan, “[t]he pulling of her teeth is a total extraction of her identity and a mark of his derangement” (qtd. in Carlson “Tales of Psychal Conflict: ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella, ‘Ligeia’” 172). I choose to agree with Dayan, since we deal with an extreme case of objectification in this tale, as will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Another reading of the teeth is seen in various studies that show the teeth in a more sexual light. Miquel-Baldellou, for instance, believes that Berenice’s smile may be “a sign of sexual desire” (184), just as Weekes also notes that “[s]howing one’s teeth in a smile can indicate sexual interest” (156). Miquel-Baldellou adds that Berenice’s deterioration
in general reflects “a moral shift from innocence to sexuality” (184). When she becomes ill, her entire appearance is affected for the worse, but her teeth remain perfect, with “[n]ot a speck on their surface – not a shade on their enamel – not an indenture in their edges” (Poe 231). The contrast between the strong, healthy teeth and her diseased appearance is therefore very sharp. The narrator is drawn to this contrast and becomes obsessed with the teeth. But by pulling the teeth, he “desexualizes the corpse by removing this token of devouring carnality” (Weekes 156). In addition, for a sexual reading of this tale, it is necessary to observe how the teeth represent fetishist objects for the narrator. According to de Lauretis, a fetish is “a sign which both elides and remarks that separation in describing both the object and its absence” (qtd. in Kohno 40). Using this definition, it is clear that the teeth are fetishes for the narrator. They stand both for Berenice and her absence and by pulling the teeth, he seems to desire to “momentarily ‘reconstruct’ his recollections of joyful scenes” (Kohno 43).

Apart from the imagery of ideas already mentioned, we see Berenice also as “the Berenice of a dream – not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being” (Poe 230). Before her illness, she is described as fluttering through life but when the illness affects her gravely and she appears before the narrator’s eyes, there is a gloomy atmosphere surrounding her with the “uncertain twilight of the chamber” and the draperies “that caused in it so vacillating and indistinct an outline” (Poe 231). The description of the ill Berenice seems to be that of a ghost in a nightmare. She is “not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation” (Poe 230). Moreover, there occurs an “appalling distortion of her personal identity” (Poe 230), which later leads to the complete eradication of her identity, as discussed by Dayan (see above). Blythe and Sweet also refer to this scene where the ill Berenice occurs before the narrator, but they refer to it for another purpose. They use it to support their vampire theory, referring to the fact that Berenice “arrives at twilight” and that the misty atmosphere in which she appears “may allude to the vampire’s well-known ability to transform itself into a mist and back again” (Blythe and Sweet 24). Yet of course, we need to see both interpretations of this scene in the light of the narrator’s mediating vision on it.

In this tale, we do not get the woman’s point of view. Berenice is voiceless and passive, seemingly without a will of her own. In the beginning of the story, we get a short
description of her character and a hymn to her beauty but when she falls ill, we only find references to her appearance, never to her feelings or character. We do not see how the illness affects her inner self, only how her outer self is deteriorating and which effect this deterioration has on the narrator. Egæus cannot even bear to look at her; he is utterly appalled and has to objectify her – or parts of her – to make speaking of her bearable. As Jacqueline Doyle observes, he speaks of “the teeth”, “the eyes” and “the forehead” instead of “her teeth”, “her eyes” and “her forehead” (14). Berenice seems to just disappear into body parts, objectified, fragmented and with no personal identity or voice left because not even the “shrill and piercing shriek of a female voice” (Poe 232) at the end of the story is specifically assigned to Berenice. As Person states, “[f]rom the beginning he [Egæus] has abstracted her into the formal essence of woman” (“Amorous Bondage“ 245).

In comparison to the other Dark Ladies tales, Berenice seems to be the least powerful woman. We never see her as an active force since the narrative frame is drawn in such a way that she is bereft of power. Only in the end when her nails leave a mark in the narrator’s flesh do we find “physical evidence of a will to escape the grave and return to confront the living” (Webb 215). However, Johanyak does make an interesting point relating to “Berenice”. According to her, Madeline and Berenice “represent all the silenced, repressed, frustrated and domestically imprisoned women who were largely ignored or misused by fathers, husbands and brothers” (Johanyak 69). Indeed, Berenice does not seem to be a very powerful woman, but Johanyak insightfully adds that Berenice and Madeline both “appear at dramatic moments, confronting their lovers at reading-room or library door, as though threatening entrance into a traditionally male sphere of intellectual advancement” (69). As a result, the men start to objectify the women “who are then described as horrific ‘things’ rather than injured ‘women’” (Johanyak 69). So even though Berenice might not actually take revenge, we still feel the threat that she poses, both by penetrating that male atmosphere mentioned above and by struggling and imprinting her mark on the narrator. In addition, Person ascribes to Berenice’s teeth a certain powerful role as well since “[a]s ideas, or knowledge, the teeth objectify that aspect of Berenice which refuses to remain repressed” (Person Aesthetic Headaches 29). To sum up, even though Berenice may seem static and passive at first
sight, we can still find clues that underline her willpower and unconscious influence on the narrator by means of her teeth.
3. “Morella”

Morella and Ligeia (see next section) can be contrasted with Berenice in that they have power over the narrator due to their profound knowledge. They are learned women and the narrators are intimidated by their knowledge. Whereas Ligeia is extensively described in physical terms, Morella is rather defined by her character than by her appearance. She is described as intelligent; her “erudition was profound” and “her powers of mind were gigantic” (Poe 234). The narrator even identifies himself as “her pupil”, thereby defining her as the master in their relationship and him as the subordinate (Poe 234). This image of subordination often returns throughout the story, as Johanyak (65) sees as well: Morella places her hands on his (instead of the other way around), he lingers by her side and “dwell[s] upon the music of her voice” (Poe 234). However, he also tries to undermine Morella’s dominance by stating that she “attach[es] herself to me alone” (Poe 234). Still, it is obvious that Morella has the superior position in their relationship, especially on an intellectual level.

Whereas the narrator seems content with their arrangement in the beginning, he later feels that Morella undermines his masculinity. Morella seems to pose an “intellectual threat to the narrator’s masculine superiority and leadership” (Miquel-Baldellou 184). The narrator believes that she “challenge[s] his own learning and innocently usurp[s] his spiritual authority within the marriage” (Johanyak 65). Clearly, it is not “normal” for a woman to be extremely intelligent, since Weekes also notes that “[o]nce a woman steps out of the narrow boundaries of the stereotypical feminine role, she is reviled rather than revered” (154) – as we have seen already relating to Madame Lalande. Yet the narrator is never able to stand up to her or challenge her on any level. Even on her deathbed, she is the only one who speaks a considerable number of phrases; the narrator is only able to utter her name. Hence, Morella outwits the narrator every time, until her very last breath.

This distorted distribution of power continues when the child is born – the infant being “symbolic of Locke’s ‘tabula rasa’”, as said by Johanyak (65). As the father regards the child and her uncanny resemblance to Morella, both physically and intellectually, he tries to gain a certain power over her by leaving her unnamed and thus by “denying her individuality” (Johanyak 65). In this respect, there is a similarity between “Morella” and
“Berenice” in that Berenice is left without a personal identity as well. Yet in “Morella”, the denying of individuality and identity fails – just as the attempt to regain power – when the narrator succumbs and calls the child Morella. Even after her death she returns and dominates the narrator, like “a worm that would not die” (Poe 237). Interestingly, we can notice a link with the word “worm” here and the poem “The Conqueror Worm” in “Ligeia”. It seems that we can connect Morella to the worm in this poem, thus reinforcing Morella’s position as conqueror. According to Halliburton (qtd. in Carlson “Tales of Psychical Conflict: ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella, ‘Ligeia’” 174), “Morella has transcended the condition of womanhood; she is an incantation, a primal and timeless rhythm, a name”. In other words, she seems to be a supernatural being that cannot be defeated or dominated. Johanyak, in turn, claims that Morella “presents a woman of emotional intensity and determined will who threatens the narrator with complexities which he cannot understand, let alone reciprocate” (64).

Morella is seen as a powerful woman, not only in terms of her superior position in her relationship with the narrator, but also in her own right. On this subject, Webb notes that both Morella and Ligeia “evade their own imminent deaths through rather mystical and potentially horrifying means” (215). It is indeed interesting to see that both use another woman’s body to live on: Ligeia uses Rowena’s body for her own revivification and Morella lives on in the body of her daughter. As Webb states, this shows their “strength of will”. In this respect, they are similar to Berenice and Madeline, who also show a “will to escape the grave and confront the living” (215). In addition, her will to educate herself should be mentioned on this subject as well. In Victorian times, it was expected of women to stay home and look after the children. For this purpose, they did not need an education and therefore a large number of women remained uneducated. However, Morella completely resists the idea of the Victorian woman. Not only does she educate herself by reading “forbidden pages”, she is also not available when it comes to raising her child (Poe 234). It is the narrator who has to take over the female task of nurturing and raising children. Exactly because she is interested in education and forms a contrast to the typical Victorian woman, we can say that she represents a New Woman, just like Ligeia.

When discussing a learned woman like Morella, the subjects of her studies need to be analyzed as well. We learn that her favourite subjects are “those mystical writings which
are usually considered the mere dross of the early German literature” (Poe 234). More specifically, she occupies herself with “[t]he wild Pantheism of Fichte; the modified Παλιγγενεσια of the Pythagoreans; and, above all, the doctrines of Identity as urged by Shelling” (Poe 235). In other words, she is interested in the belief that there is not one God but that everything is divine (Fichte’s Pantheism); the idea of regeneration or rebirth (Pythagoras) and Shelling’s theory of Identity. It comes as no surprise then that Morella in the end embodies her own studies by regenerating herself in the body and mind of her own daughter, reclaiming her identity. Even though, according to Carlson, “the narrator stands for ‘the harsh mathematical reason’, abstract knowledge or thinking, and the technical arts (technology)” (“Tales of Psychal Conflict: ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella,’ ‘Ligeia’” 174), Morella’s learning triumphs since her spiritual studies overcome the rational studies of the narrator and she actually proves and embodies her theories about identity and regeneration. She is without a doubt the spiritual superior, even after her death.

Considering the supernatural elements in this tale, it is interesting to have a closer look at the terminology that is used to describe Morella. In fact, we never get a full physical description, only a description of her intellect and of some body parts that have a certain effect on the narrator. Once again the dark lady is objectified and discussed in parts. The narrator talks of the “imaginative Morella” (Poe 235), of her “low, singular words” and “the music of her voice” that turned into “too unearthly tones” (Poe 234). It is interesting to see how he uses abstract notions to describe her and puts so much emphasis on her voice and language. Later he continues describing her in fragmented terms, saying that he “could no longer bear the touch of her wan fingers, nor the low tone of her musical language, nor the luster of her melancholy eyes” (Poe 2010:235, my emphasis). As is clear, we do not obtain an image of Morella as a whole, but instead only perceive fragments of her. What is even more interesting is that the narrator identifies Morella first as the “most beautiful” or “Hinnon” but later as “the most hideous” or “Ge-Henna” (Poe 234), the latter seen as an equivalent for “hell” in the Bible5. As in “Berenice”, we are confronted with a spiritual terminology, but here the emphasis is rather on the religious aspect. This is remarkable if we compare it to Morella’s rather mystical studies,

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5 Source: [http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6558-gehenna](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6558-gehenna) [consulted on 10-02-2013]
which we have already discussed, since it illustrates the contrast between the narrator’s religious terminology and Morella’s mysticism.

Whereas Morella herself is not as extensively described in physical terms as for example Ligeia, her child is described in more specific terms as having a “high forehead”, “ringlets of silken hair”, eyes that “looked down into the depths of my soul” and that same sad musical voice as Morella had (Poe 237). In this description, we find the common characteristics of the Dark Ladies, as discussed by Jenny Webb (above). It is curious that the descriptions of the hair and forehead are almost exactly the same as those in “Berenice”, but the eyes then again are completely different. While Berenice’s eyes seem lifeless, Morella’s and the child’s eyes have an uncanny ability to completely see through the narrator. Seeing that this makes the narrator rather uncomfortable, it emphasises their spiritual strength and again refers to the submission of the narrator to a more powerful woman – even if she is just a child. Johanyak adds that the “second Morella becomes even more repulsive than the first, because she represents even more strongly the independent strengths and talents for which her mother dies”. Seeing that the second Morella thus represents a stronger independence than the first, Johanyak links this reinforcement to feminism, noting that “each succeeding generation reinforces more strongly and demonstrates more clearly the evolution of women’s individuality and rights” (66). Consequently, we can derive that both mother and daughter represent feminist generations, following each other and reinforcing one another.

In conclusion, we see that not only a first superficial reading, but also closer readings, offer us an image of Morella as a powerful woman. Clearly, the narrator occupies the inferior position in the relationship not only between him and Morella, but also in the relationship with his child. Even though he tries to control the child by leaving her unnamed and never speaking of her mother, he is still powerless. He sees this himself as well, as he claims that “it was impossible to speak”, rendering himself completely passive to the power of mother and daughter (Poe 237). As Leland S. Person concludes, “Poe abruptly reverses the flow of power [...] as his male characters are reduced to conditions of passivity [...] in the presence of women who refuse to be repressed” (Aesthetic Headaches 175).
4. “Ligeia”

Of the Dark Ladies, Ligeia is probably the one who has been researched most often (“Who’s/Whose Ligeia” by RC de Prospo, “Ligeia: A Triumph over Patriarchy” by Erin Leigh Helmey, etc.). Different theories and approaches have been applied to this story, ranging from racial theories (Joan Dayan), over gender (RC De Prospo), formalism (Brad Howard in Erin Leigh Helmey) and myth criticism (Daryl Jones in Erin Leigh Helmey) to feminism (Debra Johanyak) and many others. In this section we will investigate the general representation of Ligeia, as well as the more specific terminology used to describe her. In addition, we will discuss some interesting literary and cultural theories that have been applied to this story and the character of Ligeia specifically.

To begin with, in Ligeia’s portrayal, we see that the narrator refers to her “rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence of her low musical language” (Poe 256). We also learn that she is “tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated” (Poe 256). Regarding her learning and low musical voice, she very much resembles Morella, who is described with almost exactly the same words. Later, the physical description becomes much more detailed, more than in any of the other Dark Ladies stories. More than an entire page is dedicated to each minute detail of her face and facial expression, analyzing the “skin rivaling the purest ivory”, “the gentle prominence of the regions above the temples”, “the raven-black, the glossy, the luxurious, and naturally curling-tresses”, “the delicate outlines of the nose”, “the magnificent turn of the short upper lip – the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under” and “the formation of the chin” (Poe 257). But, as in Berenice, one specific feature receives special attention: her eyes. Whereas Berenice’s eyes are lifeless, Ligeia’s eyes are large, full and “the most brilliant of black” (Poe 257). The physical description of Ligeia leads Joan Dayan to believe that Ligeia might be a “mulatta” or “octoress mistress”, in other words, the offspring of a white man with a black woman (“Amorous Bondage” 260). According to Dayan, this would also explain why the narrator does not know her paternal name, since “light-colored women were prohibited from using the name of the father” (“Amorous Bondage” 271). However, whereas in Dayan’s opinion the “racialist terminology [...] generated its own gods and monsters” (“Amorous Bondage” 262), I believe that the terminology in “Ligeia” can play a rather different role, as I shall explain further on.
Even though the narrator of “Ligeia” again uses the definite article to refer to each facial feature, as does the narrator in “Berenice”, I believe it is used here in a different manner than in “Berenice”. In “Ligeia”, the narrator uses the definite article to express a certain awe, which is underlined by his use of extremely positive adjectives and references to the most beautiful facial features throughout history. It seems that he cannot fathom the beauty of this woman and thus can only describe her in generalized terms and body part for body part. We can see this as a positive form of objectification – opposed to the negative objectification in “Berenice”. However, an important comment must be made regarding this physical portrayal, as not all researchers agree on the motif behind it. According to De Prospo, “the narrator’s loving scrutiny of the ‘person’ of the live Ligeia yields the dissected parts of a dead body” (61), following his theory that “Ligeia is dead to the narrator from the outset, before she actually dies” (58). Indeed, several textual indications support this view, such as the sentence “I bring before mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more” (Poe 256, my emphasis). This leaves us with the idea that we are dealing with an idealized description of the deceased one, perhaps not quite truthful – also keeping in mind the substance abuse of the narrator.

Secondly we have to consider the power relations that exist between the narrator and Ligeia – later also adding Rowena to this triangular relationship – since Ligeia has been repeatedly referred to as a powerful and wilful woman (for example by Miquel-Baldellou and Webb). Just like Morella, Ligeia is an intelligent woman, her learning “was immense” (Poe 259). But as is stated earlier in the tale, she “became the partner” of the narrator’s studies (Poe 256), thereby indicating a relationship of equality, as opposed to Morella’s intellectual dominion over the narrator in the previously analyzed tale. Johanyak discusses the feminist aspects of the relationship between Ligeia and the narrator and notes that the narrator “chooses to dwell on Ligeia’s maternal characteristics” (66), as we indeed see in his choice of terminology: he describes himself as resigning himself to her guidance “with child-like confidence” (Poe 259), that he is “but as a child groping benighted” (Poe 259). Whereas Johanyak sees these images as “dismiss[ing] the significance and influence of her learning”, I believe it actually reinforces her intellectual maturity, since it is the role of the mother to pass on her learning to her children. Moreover, the narrator is thrown into an inferior position, helpless without Ligeia – or the mother. Kennedy recognizes “her domination of the marital relationship” as well (120). Several other images are poignant in this matter, as
they also illustrate the superior position of Ligeia. She “placed her marble hand upon [his] shoulder” (Poe 257), “bent over [him]” (Poe 259) in his study, a place that is generally considered to be the sphere of man’s intellect and power (Johanyak 69). Yet here it is Ligeia who enters this sacred male place and diminishes the narrator’s importance with a single powerful gesture. On her deathbed as well, she maintains her superior position, as she puts her words into the narrator’s mouth by making him recite a poem. Note also how he uses the telling phrase “I obeyed her” (Poe 260).

Yet a contrasting argument must be made regarding this power relationship. We encounter yet again that same spiritual, ethereal terminology in the description of Ligeia’s personality and appearance that is also used to describe both Berenice and Morella. The marriage between the narrator and Ligeia is described as “ill-omened” (Poe 256). Ligeia herself is described as having an “incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall” (Poe 256) and her beauty is “the radiance of an opium-dream – an airy and spirit-lifting vision”, “the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth” (Poe 257). According to Johanyak, this use of terminology “suggest[s] more a ghost than a woman” (67) and following Erin Leigh Helmey, “a ‘shadow’ is certainly not a description of a powerful woman”6. However, we should not conclude that this terminology is used to lessen Ligeia’s power in this story. After all, she is able to return from the dead, using another woman’s body to do so. I rather believe this terminology is influenced by the narrator’s opium abuse which clearly affects his mental capacities. Seeing that he “cannot […] remember how, when or even precisely where [he] first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia” (Poe 256) or does not even know the paternal name of his wife, it seems only normal that his other observations are infected with a dream-like, blurry quality as well.

Various researchers have offered a wide range of theories regarding the relationship between the narrator and Ligeia. D.H. Lawrence for example links vampirism to this story, claiming that “the narrator in ‘Ligeia’ [is] a vampire of the mind” (qtd. in Carlson “Tales of Psychal Conflict: ‘Berenice,’ ‘Morella, ‘Ligeia’”177). However, I take issue with Lawrence in that I believe it is actually Ligeia who can rather be considered a vampire of the mind, because it is she who still haunts the narrator’s mind after her death, just like Madeline in “The Fall of the House of Usher”. Moreover, Ligeia uses another person’s

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6 No page numbers available for Helmey’s article since it is an online source.
body to regain strength and revive – a quality often applied to vampires. Another theory is that Ligeia is the creative muse of the narrator, as is argued by Catherine Carter. According to Carter, Ligeia “represents the anima, the feminine or feminized alter ego of the masculine self” (4) and “her femininity is less important than, and potentially incidental to, her creative functions” (3). Moreover, Carter’s most remarkable statement is that Ligeia “is not a woman” (4). One of her arguments to support this assertion that Ligeia is more a muse than a woman is the narrator’s description of Ligeia – as extensively explained above – which presumably takes on an allegorical emphasis. Carter also notes the strong Oriental quality in the physical description and claims that “[t]raditional portrayals of muses are implicitly Orientalist” (10). Apart from her appearance, her learning is used as an argument as well, seeing that Ligeia “guides the narrator in his studies and writing, leading him toward, as he speculates, ‘a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden.’ (Works 2:311)” (11). Interestingly, Carter also analyzes the scene in the study but for different purposes than Johanyak (see above). Whereas Johanyak sees this scene as an image of Ligeia’s power over the narrator, Carter sees it as an opportunity to “meet with one’s muse” (11). In my opinion, both views are possible but I do not entirely agree with the way Carter treats the relationship between the narrator and Ligeia.

Whereas Carter (see above) claims that Ligeia’s most important role is not to be a woman but a muse, Johanyak argues for a feminist reading of “Ligeia”. The question whether we can develop feminist readings for Poe’s works has been discussed in various essays, such as “Poesian Feminism: Triumph or Tragedy” by Johanyak, “Poe’s Women: A Feminist Poe?” by Dayan and “A Feminist Rereading of Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’” by Rajan (which we have already discussed in chapter 4). The first two essays include some interesting arguments about “Ligeia”, which I will examine in this paragraph. Johanyak (63) demonstrates that “Poe’s dark heroines function as feminist prototypes” and indeed, we can find many arguments in the story that support this thesis. As already mentioned, Ligeia’s learning is impressive and in many ways she is the narrator’s superior. That is to say, “she is not connected to traditionally domestic occupations or pastimes” and this

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7 I only had access to this paper in a Word document, so the page numbers do not correspond to the original article as it appeared in Poe Studies / Dark Romanticism. The page numbers used refer to those in the Word document, as it is found here: [http://paws.wcu.edu/ccarter/cv/notawoman.doc](http://paws.wcu.edu/ccarter/cv/notawoman.doc)
posed threats to a male-dominated society, because ‘female independent selfhood was and still is defined by the traditional patriarchy as theologically evil, biologically unnatural, psychologically unhealthy, and socially in bad taste’ (Johanyak 63, quote within quote comes from Pearson and Pope 6).

Yet interestingly, the narrator does not rebel against this not so prototypical woman. In opposition to the other Dark Ladies tales’ narrators, he seems to be content with being in the subordinate position, considering himself a pupil. Since the narrator does not try to suppress his intelligent and more powerful wife, I do not believe that the narrator in this tale is an antifeminist (Johanyak 63) – as opposed to the narrators in “Morella” and “Berenice”.

The more interesting relationship in terms of feminism is therefore the relationship between Ligeia and Lady Rowena, Ligeia’s complete opposite. Rowena is “fair-haired and blue-eyed” (Poe 262) and in Joan Dayan’s opinion, “married off for money” (“Amorous Bondage” 259), not love, as we see in their statements: the narrator “loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man” and “she shunned [him] and loved [him] but little” (Poe 264). Rowena does not possess any great intellectual capacity (that we know of), she speaks only through the narrator’s indirect speech and dies as a powerless means to revivification for Ligeia. Even the description of the bridal chamber is more extensive than Rowena’s physical description, so we clearly understand that she plays no powerful role in the story whatsoever. Rowena is thus introduced mainly as a “bride” and a “wife” (Helmey), not a real woman with a personality of her own – or as Kennedy says, “Rowena remains a nonentity” (123). She is “a representative of the old, passive and submissive female”, while Ligeia is “a representative of the new, independent female” (Helmey). In other words, Ligeia, the intelligent and powerful woman, has conquered the powerless “bride” and therefore represents the “new woman” (Helmey), illustrating how “Ligeia” is a successful feminist tale.

To conclude, it is clear that various roles have been ascribed to the character of Ligeia. We see her as a mother, a teacher, a muse and a strong, powerful “new woman”. However, in all of these roles it is important to note the influence Ligeia has over the narrator. The narrator seems to have surrendered himself to Ligeia’s power and realizes
that she is actually his superior. In my opinion, “Ligeia” recounts how the modern woman vindicates and subdues the “old” woman and even the narrator in some ways.
5. Madeline Usher

“The Fall of the House of Usher” is perhaps the odd one out of the Dark Ladies stories. Madeline Usher is the only Dark Lady who does not have a tale named after her specifically. She has to share the title and the spotlight with her brother, Roderick Usher. Another difference with the previous Dark Ladies tales is that the narrator is not the husband nor the lover, but an outsider. Throughout the tale, it seems that Madeline only plays a secondary role. She herself is not seen or heard very often, it is only towards the end that her character gains importance. In the rest of the tale, the emphasis is rather on the narrator’s experiences in the house and with Roderick. But I agree with Spitzer that “[t]he fact that she is on stage only for a short time and has no lines to speak [...] should not lead us to underrate her importance, given her impact in the story and the interest which is aroused precisely by her mysterious appearances” (352).

Of Madeline, we do not get a direct full physical description, such as is the case with Berenice, Morella or Ligeia. However, Roderick, her brother, is described in full detail – a description that bears an uncanny resemblance to the physical portrayal of Ligeia, as D.H. Lawrence already recognized (qtd. in Jordan 9). We see some of the same features in the “eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison”, “a nose of a delicate Hebrew model”, a “finely molded chin” (Poe 302) etc. But given that Poe claims that there is a “striking similitude between the brother and sister” (Poe 309), we can assume that the same physical characteristics apply to her. Still, we are dealing with an indirect description – as opposed to the direct description in the other tales. The use of the impersonalized and reiterated “it” used by Roderick at the end of the story to describe his sister (as Joan Dayan notes as well in “Amorous Bondage”) also supports this indirectness. In addition, just as Berenice, Madeline is not given a voice in this tale. In other words, the textual evidence “troubles the woman’s existence as a fully separate character” (Keetley 8) and diminishes Madeline’s own personal identity – as we have seen happening in the other Dark Ladies tales as well.

In addition, a side note should be made regarding Madeline and Roderick being twins. Even though some researchers all too readily assume that Madeline and Roderick are identical twins - which Poe indeed makes us believe with various textual references, such as the “striking similitude” already quoted (Poe 309) – Poe does not explicitly
mention that they are indeed identical. In fact, identical (or the now preferred term “monozygotic”) twins are only in extremely rare cases of different sex and if they do happen to be a boy-girl twin, the girl most likely suffers from Turner syndrome (Machin 15). However, the symptoms of Turner syndrome do not correspond to Madeline’s symptoms, also because we do not know the true nature of her disease. The only symptom that might be argued to apply to Madeline is infertility, which could explain why they are the last descendants of the House of Usher. However, there is no reference at all to an attempt to conceive or to any sexual intercourse in general, so this is merely an assumption. Nevertheless, Poe presumably did not possess this medical knowledge and therefore did not shy away from making us believe that they are identical twins instead of fraternal (or the preferred term “dizygotic”) twins, which is the most probable scenario if we are dealing with boy-girl twins. Fraternal twins, however, do not necessarily look alike since they stem from two eggs and two sperm cells. They share around 50% of their DNA and therefore have as much or as few physical characteristics in common as any other “normal” brother and sister. To conclude this side note, Madeline and Roderick are most likely fraternal twins that coincidentally happen to look a lot alike.

To continue the analysis of Madeline’s role in “The Fall of the House of Usher”, it is important to note that even though we only find meagre references to the appearance and personality of Lady Madeline, there are a lot of things we can derive regarding the power relationship in this story. First of all, we learn that there was some sort of incestuous relationship or, more delicately put, “sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature” (Poe 309) between Madeline and Roderick – a tradition in the family, as “the entire family lay in the direct line of descent” (Poe 300). According to Carlson (“Tales of Psychal Conflict: ‘William Wilson’ and ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’” 191), D.H. Lawrence probably was one of the first to see this incestuous relationship and to speculate on the consequences it had on both Roderick and Madeline. This incest could explain the diseases that both siblings suffer from, but it also refers to the equality in that relationship. As Marsh notes, “she no less than he is a participant [in the incestuous relationship]” that is “hastening them down the road to mutual destruction” (8).

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9 Information about fraternal twins comes from [http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-fraternal-twins.htm](http://www.wisegeek.com/what-are-fraternal-twins.htm) [consulted on 08-03-2013]
although there is some disagreement on this equality among certain critics. And whereas Roderick may have entombed Madeline prematurely, she still haunts him in his mind and finally physically as well, again illustrating that they are well matched. However, in the end it is she who “bore him to the floor a corpse”, ending the mutual struggles (Poe 313). Although it is possible to argue whether we find an outcome to the power struggle since both of them end up dead, I would say it is Madeline who conquers. It is she who controls her brother’s thoughts while in the coffin, it is she who returns from being entombed and it is she who in the end falls upon her brother, pinning him to the floor and killing him, playing an active role. Thereby, she is also the only Dark Lady who actually avenges the other by taking his life. Spitzer additionally states that “Roderick is the representative of death-in-life and of the death wish, [while] Madeline becomes in the end the embodiment of life-in-death, of the will to live” (353). Following this line of thought, we can conclude that Madeline, even though not appearing very often in the story, in fact has the more active role. She opposes her passive brother and dominates him physically in the end, successfully counterfeiting his attempt to entomb her forever.

Apart from the aforementioned references to Madeline’s superior power, it is also possible to link the inset story from the Mad Trist to Madeline to find additional evidence towards her superiority. Since the events in this story – especially on an auditory level – sync up with Madeline’s actions, as Roderick himself also confirms (Poe 313), we cannot oversee the link between Madeline and Ethelred. Spitzer even calls Madeline the “female Ethelred” and “the true male and last hero of the House of Usher” (353). Whereas I agree that Madeline is indeed a female Ethelred, I find the statement that she is the “true male and last hero” (my emphasis) a bit inappropriate. In my opinion, the Mad Trist represents a typical chivalric romance where the male is the hero. But I do not agree that likening Madeline to Ethelred means turning into a male hero; I rather believe that it reinforces Madeline’s feminine power, inverting the typical gender roles of the chivalric romance by making the woman the heroine of the story, successfully killing the evil one, here Roderick. In the Mad Trist, Ethelred is continually referred to as “the good champion” or the “hero” (Poe 311), thus making Madeline good and a heroine as well. Ethelred, like Madeline, conquers all obstacles to get to the “maliceful hermit” (Poe 311), whom we can then similarly compare to Roderick, as Leland S. Person notes as well (Aesthetic Headaches 39). To conclude the link between the Usher story and the Mad Trist, it is also interesting to note the assonance between
Madeline (when it is pronounced as mad Lynn) and the Mad Trist. Since Poe uses assonance in various poems, for example “The Raven”, it might have been a conscious choice to connect Madeline to the Mad Trist by way of rhyming.

Another connection inside the story can be made with the inset poem “The Haunted Palace”. This poem has already been linked to the house of the Usher family (Spitzer, Robinson) and to Roderick Usher (Allison, Robinson), but to my knowledge never to Madeline Usher. Perhaps the link to the Usher House (both the genealogical and the estate meaning) is the most obvious and of course a strong case can be made to connect it to Roderick Usher, who would then be the king mentioned in the poem. However, it can also be interesting to connect this poem to Madeline Usher, especially when we consider the power relationship previously mentioned. Consider for example the “banners yellow, glorious, golden” that floated on the roof (Poe 306). According to Robinson, “the yellow banners on the roof correspond to Usher’s uncut ‘silken hair’” (72) but since Madeline looks strikingly like Roderick, I believe this statement applies to Madeline as well. The “two luminous windows” can refer to Madeline’s eyes, just as the “pearl and ruby” of the palace door then refer to her red lips and white teeth (Poe 306). Even though male terminology is used (king instead of queen, the male possessive article instead of the female etc.) and arguing that Madeline is the king is perhaps a bit dubious, I do think there is a place for her in this poem. The second stanza can refer to her disease that alters her appearance; the third stanza to the incestuous relationship between Roderick and Madeline, where Madeline’s spirits can be seen moving around Roderick’s throne; the fourth stanza then shows Madeline singing and praising her brother, the king, referring to a time when they were happy together. But most importantly, the fifth stanza then refers to Madeline in “robes of sorrow” who “assailed the monarch’s high estate” (Poe 306). And is that not exactly what Madeline does in the final scene? The “robes of sorrow” seem to resemble the white robes besmeared with blood that she is wearing in the final death scene (Poe 313). The choice of words is very remarkable here, since Madeline indeed assails Roderick in the end and thereby undermines his “high estate”.

One last theory that some researchers (Kendall Jr., Robinson and Lawrence (qtd. in Robinson)) apply to “The Fall of the House of Usher” is vampirism, even though they do not all agree as to who exactly is the vampire in the story. According to D.H. Lawrence
Roderick is the vampire, as he explains that “Madeline’s brother is ‘sucking her life like a vampire in his anguish of extreme love’ and she is ‘asking to be sucked’” (qtd. in Robinson 76). It seems that Lawrence does not dig deeper into the vampire motif but just uses it to illustrate his point about the incestuous relationship that is going on between Madeline and Roderick. Kendall Jr., conversely, sees Madeline as the vampire and vampirism as “the hereditary Usher curse” (450). According to Kendall Jr., we can find various textual references that support his thesis, such as the “sensation of stupor” that oppresses the narrator when he sees Madeline, which is “a characteristic reaction to the succubus” (451). Other evidence is found in her disease of cataleptic character, which supposedly means that “she has the common ability of witches to enter at will upon a trance-like, death-like state of suspended animation” (Kendall Jr. 451) and in the “heavy and horrible beating of her heart” (Poe 313) that is “traditionally characteristic of preternatural creatures” (Kendall Jr. 452). In my opinion, this vampire theory is a bit far-fetched, although it is fascinating to see that even this vampiric theory supports Madeline’s powerful role (at least in Kendall Jr.’s version, not D.H. Lawrence’s).

To conclude this part about Madeline Usher, I believe that although Madeline at first sight may not seem the main character in the story, her role is actually a lot more important than is initially generally believed. To me, she is the powerful one in the story and I believe that the various points of textual evidence that I have provided support my thesis.
6. Conclusions about the Dark Ladies

Although the women of the Dark Ladies tales may at first sight seem to be Poe’s typical beautiful, but dying women, it is now clear that there is more to them than meets the eye. In fact, they prove to be more powerful than one would have thought in a first reading of the tales. Even though there is a certain consistency in characteristics between the Dark Ladies, it is also important to see that each one is powerful and unique in her own way. As Miquel-Baldellou states, the women’s “ethereal appearance betrays a decidedly, and repulsive, strong will” (180). The narrator may try to silence them, as Jordan saw, by for example “the forcible removal of Berenice’s teeth by her professed ‘lover’; the premature shroud that ‘lay heavily about the mouth’ of Ligeia – and of Madeline Usher” (2), but in the end, it is usually the women who claim their power and vindicate by returning from the dead (Ligeia, Morella) or even by killing the lover (Madeline Usher).

When we draw in feminist theories, it is interesting to have a closer look at Johanyak’s conclusion. She claims that

the unspeaking, unmarried heroines merely simulate death, at least initially, while the two wives actually experience death and – in their husband’s minds if not in actuality – return in another female’s body, determined to persevere. Feminism evidently causes more problems for married women than single ladies (Johanyak 69).

An interesting argument to make is that Ligeia and Morella are indeed represented as New Women and consequently prove to be “better” representatives of feminism than Berenice and Madeline. The latter are not represented as intellectual women and do not even receive a speaking role in the story. Furthermore, since Ligeia and Morella both show an immense willpower to survive – not being afraid to use another woman’s body for this end – we can thus conclude that in relation to each other, Ligeia and Morella are seemingly the most powerful of the Dark Ladies. Whereas Berenice and Madeline manifest their power as well, Ligeia and Morella do this in a more noticeable and spectacular way and are therefore perhaps better representatives of Poe’s powerful woman.
CHAPTER 7: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

To claim that there are diverse opinions about Poe’s women is an understatement. Some see his fictional women as “excuses for this continued fascination with himself” (Dayan “Poe’s Women” 2), others then again link them to his biographical women (as Sova notes as well in her A to Z reference book) or only include the more popular and better-known women in the definition of “Poe’s women” (Kot, Miquel-Baldellou). Dayan additionally asks herself quite eloquently

But what are we to do with Poe’s bleeding, raped, decapitated, dead, and resurrected women, brutalized, buried, cemented in cellars, and stuffed up chimneys? (“Poe’s Women” 10).

Indeed, with this visual question in mind, it becomes rather hard to form a positive image of Poe’s women - especially when we also keep in mind that the women’s image that is offered throughout his poetry is a rather monotonous, too often repeated stereotype. However, throughout this paper, we have attempted to argue that there is no such thing as one Poesque woman. In fact, Poe offers us a variety of female characters throughout his short stories. The most famous are of course the Dark Ladies, terrifying creatures who return from the dead to haunt past lovers or to suppress the female rival. As Paula Kot and other critics argue, “Poe’s preoccupation with the death of a beautiful woman in his poems and tales concerning women actually reflects his interest in recovering women’s stories” (400). The male characters might seem to be the protagonists in these tales, seeing that they are the narrators and the view on the female characters is mediated through them. They might seem the more powerful ones, for the most part surviving while the female characters die or appear to die. Yet it is in fact the women in these tales who occupy the superior position. They deserve their title role, even though Madeline has to share the title with her brother. Ligeia is not only superior to the narrator in that the narrator places himself in the inferior position by referring to himself as a child, thereby placing Ligeia in the superior position of mother. She is also superior to the other woman in the tale, Lady Rowena Trevanian. Thereby, Ligeia places herself in the most powerful position of all the Dark Ladies. Exactly because of this
strong position, she is also the one who has been most researched of all Poe’s women. Morella, then again, is the narrator’s superior in that he appears to be her pupil. Morella is more successful in her studies than the narrator, who continuously has to walk in Morella’s footsteps. Moreover, the narrator even succumbs to the child by at length naming her after her mother, thus admitting the strong bond between both and the fact that he can never reach a higher position than both of them. Berenice and Madeline might seem the weaker women of the Dark Ladies, but they too must be acknowledged as powerful women. Madeline is important because even though we hardly see her in the story, she in the end falls upon her brother and thereby murders him. She therefore literally occupies the superior position. Berenice, on her part, shows marks of struggle when the narrator violated her still living body. In other words, whereas the majority of the narrators of the Dark Ladies tales try to objectify these women and represent them in fragmented terms to emphasize this objectification even more, each Dark Lady illustrates her strength and superiority in her own way. Even the two ladies who do not seem superior are in fact a lot more powerful and important than they might appear to be.

Whereas the Dark Ladies are here represented in a different light that underlines their superiority, the intelligent women of the fifth chapter have not often been placed in much light at all. Therefore, it is important to consider these women as well when discussing the representation of women in the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Even though the Dark Ladies are now placed in a more positive, powerful position throughout this paper, they were already known and popular before. This was not the case for Kate and Madame Lalande, the intelligent women. Hardly any research had been done on the subject of these tales; especially “Three Sundays in a Week” had not yet received critical attention for its positive representation of the female character. “The Spectacles” has received more critical attention over the years but it has not always been positive. Poe’s more comical tales are not always seen as very good ones but they still deserve to be analyzed for their positive image of women. Especially because these intelligent women seem to be rather rare in Poe’s works, we have to pay attention to them. They may be lesser known but they are definitely not less important.
Both the Dark Ladies and the intelligent women offer a positive alternative to the image of the helpless maiden that is typical for the genre of Gothic fiction and for Poe’s detective stories. Whereas the Dark Ladies may seem to belong to the Gothic genre, they do not correspond to the figure of the helpless maiden. In this respect, Poe offers variation where he does not offer variation on other levels. His rare female narrator is a true disappointment. She is likened to a stereotype of the gossiping, vain, naive and unintelligent nineteenth-century middle class woman. Even if we consider the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” to be female, we are still confronted with a failed attempt to obtain a more powerful position for women. Therefore, regarding the combination of the helpless maiden and the unintelligent female narrator, it is all the more important to place the intelligent women in the spotlight and to demonstrate that the Dark Ladies are imperative in terms of superiority as well. Poe’s women can no longer be reduced to that one stereotype of the beautiful, dead maiden. Instead, there is a whole variety of women and each of them deserves to be acknowledged – especially since this brings up a more positive image of the Poesque woman.
### 1. Prose

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<th>Women</th>
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<td>- Metzengerstein</td>
<td>- Loss of Breath</td>
<td>- How to Write a Blackwood Article (&amp; A Predicament)</td>
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<td>- A Tale of Jerusalem</td>
<td>- Four Beasts in One and the Giant's Dance</td>
<td>- The Assignation</td>
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<td>- Bon-Bon</td>
<td>- The Homo-Cameleopard</td>
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<td>- Ms. Found in a Bottle</td>
<td>- Adventure of One Hans Pfaall</td>
<td>- Berenice</td>
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<td>- Shadow – A Parable</td>
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<td>- Morella</td>
<td>- Mellonta Tauta</td>
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<td>- Silence – A Fable</td>
<td>- William Wilson</td>
<td>- King Pest</td>
<td>- The Tell-Tale Heart?</td>
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<td>- Mystification</td>
<td>- Never Bet the Devil</td>
<td>- Ligeia</td>
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<td>- Some Account of Stonehenge, the Giant’s Dance</td>
<td>- Your Head Morning on the Wissahiccon</td>
<td>- The Man that Was Used Up</td>
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<td>- Why the Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling</td>
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<td>- The Island of the Fay</td>
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<td>- The Facts in the Case of M.</td>
<td>- The Murders in the Rue Morgue</td>
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<td>Hop-Frog</td>
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2. **Poetry**

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<td>- To F--</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Eldorado</td>
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