Patriarchal Physicians and Dismembered Dames:
Edgar Allan Poe and Nineteenth-Century Representations of Gender

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April 2020
Acknowledgements

To my advisor, Professor Charlotte Sussman. Thank you for reading each and every draft of this thesis with immense diligence and care. You have guided me through each step of this process, honed my writing skills, and inspired confidence in my own capabilities.

To my mentor, Professor Michael D’Alessandro. Thank you for introducing me to the most horrifying nineteenth-century American texts. Without your English courses, I would not be able to tackle an author as daunting as Edgar Allan Poe.

To my family: Mom, Dad, and Lilly. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue an English degree even though we all expected me to be a Biology major. Mom—thank you for your edits from my fourth-grade papers until now that have shaped me as a writer. Dad and Lilly—thank you for allowing me to edit your writings to sharpen my skills.

To my families at Duke. Thank you for reminding me why I pursued this project and always exclaiming, “woah, that’s so cool!” when I explained my topic. To the person who listened to my pains and joys during the entire writing process, witnessed my late nights and early mornings typing away on my computer, and acted as my unyielding support system—Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To Poe, the inspiration for this thesis. Your writings have fueled my own fulfillment and showed me that “even in the grave, all is not lost.” There are no words to express my gratitude.
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I. Introduction

When I first read Mary Shelley’s science fiction novel, *Frankenstein*, I deepened my lifelong pursuit of studying the biological sciences. The creation of the fictional monster from disassembled dead bodies was driven by Victor Frankenstein’s curiosity in science. The novel pushed me to develop an understanding of neuroscience, biology, and psychology as I read about the monster’s “birth” and development. Unexpectedly, I also developed a yearning to continue reading and analyzing classic novels. Since that experience, my academic career has centered around weaving together the disciplines of the humanities and the sciences. As an English major on the pre-medical track, I frequently look through the lens of one subject to understand the other. This intersection of medicine and literature is a category within the field of medical humanities, which applies the strengths learned in humanities education to the practice of medicine. For example, meticulous attention to detail, synthesizing of information, and thorough assessment of the literature are directly transferable to medicine, where the narrative of the patient will likewise need to be interpreted. In this case, literature helps physicians understand their experiences with patients. The complement to this, which I will focus on for this thesis, is studying how medical models influence literature and other realms of life such as representations of men and women. Thus, my culminating project is fueled by my appreciation for the medical humanities, focusing on the patient-doctor dynamic in relation to nineteenth-century American literature.
My first experience with writer Edgar Allan Poe (born January 1809, Massachusetts—died October 1849, Maryland) begins as most others do: reading and deciphering his poem, “The Raven” with my middle school English teacher. I recall how in awe I was of his innovative—for my young age—rhyming abilities such as “Lenore” with “nevermore,” and how hauntingly he was able to imagine a black bird. Yet, these were simple and surface-level thoughts for works by one of the most influential nineteenth-century American writers. It was not until I enrolled in an English course entitled American Crime at Duke University, facilitated by Professor Michael D’Alessandro, that I was able to understand the significance of Poe’s macabre stories. The course required me to intensely analyze his works as well as consider supplemental readings from nineteenth-century social and political history. In reading primary texts against these materials, we considered the reality of the era, authors’ literary imagination, and how these works engaged with the historical and cultural context of their publication. With this background knowledge, the value of Poe’s works emerged.

In the same academic semester, I enrolled in a course titled Doctors’ Stories, taught by English Professor Charlotte Sussman, where I explored the nature of medical stories and the roles that doctors play in society and patient interactions. I reflected on personal experiences and textual examples of medicine to think more critically about a physician’s function. The most striking piece the class read that best connected our non-fictional and fictional course texts was Michel Foucault’s Birth of the Clinic. In it, Foucault aims to historicize the transition from treatment-based to prevention-based medicine that heavily employed the medical gaze, a complex term that will be dissected more in-depth throughout this thesis. Simply put, it is a type

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1 Birth of the Clinic is one of the few sources that was not published in the nineteenth century that will be discussed in this thesis; however, it will be utilized because it is an in-depth historical analysis of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century medicine and how it transitioned into the modern diagnostic medicine that was practiced during Poe’s era.
way of looking at a person’s body in parts in order to best differentiate certain ailments from others in a medical context. Foucault describes the eye as a depositary and source of clarity; it has the power to bring a truth to light that it receives only to the extent that it has brought it to light; as it opens, the eye first opens the truth: a flexion that marks the transition from the world of classical clarity—from the ‘enlightenment’—to the nineteenth century (Foucault xiii).

The gaze was a source of knowing and form of perceiving for physicians. I learned that this was the scientific and medical backdrop to Poe’s publications. Inevitably, in that one semester, I saw several elements of my Doctors’ Stories syllabus texts in the texts discussed in my American Crime class, and vice versa, inspiring my combination of the history of medicine and Edgar Allan Poe.

This thesis analyzes how Poe utilizes nineteenth-century medical discourse to characterize the relationship between men and women in several of his Gothic short stories, namely, “Berenice,” “Ligeia,” and his detective fiction stories—“Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” and “The Purloined Letter.” In the first chapter, I will analyze the medicalization of female bodies, particularly “Ligeia” and “Berenice,” in an intimate sphere. I will highlight parallels between the marriages in these two stories and the patient-doctor interaction to ultimately demonstrate that Poe is critiquing the social values that women were expected to uphold in the nineteenth century. My second chapter re-evaluates this claim in Poe’s detective fiction. I review the implications of the medical gaze in Poe’s work in the more physical realm of the crime scene as opposed to the more emotional realm of marriage. I thoroughly discuss the similarities between the physical space of the detective crime scene and the doctor’s medical arena. I argue that in this context both physician and detective exert the same type of masculinity that overpowers the women of Poe’s stories. In these detective stories, Poe is no longer critiquing but rather upholding the societal predispositions of women: the male
characters successfully control the dead females. In the conclusion, I explore these different and not-so-different types of masculinities further in the range of stories presented in the previous two chapters. Yet, this cannot be done without a thorough analysis of the historical moment of these publications. The remainder of this introduction will establish the scientific and social happenings of Poe’s era. This will set the context for the remainder of the discussion to establish key terms seen throughout this thesis such as the “cult of domesticity” and the “medical gaze.”

The Scientific and Social Historical Moment of Poe’s Time

Section I: Medical Context

Nineteenth-century medicine was defined by the professionalization of physicians and movement of medicine into the scientific field. Attention shifted from patient-centered therapeutic care to empirically-based scientific clinical practices. Scholars pushed for progress away from a theory-based, hands-off approach to medicine towards medical practices bolstered by tested predictions, experiments, and concrete observations (Degeling 129-130). According to Michael Sappol, the study of anatomy was at the forefront of this transition. New medical instruments, such as the stethoscope (1816) and ophthalmoscope (1847), were invented and new surgical techniques emerged to further the precise technique of studying the body (Wendland 34). Surgery was revered because through it, physicians harnessed the power of intimate familiarity with the body (Bloch 230). Dissection was critical to the craft and anatomy became knowledge unattainable to other classes (Sappol 3). The shift in focus to the examination of the body is connected to a social hierarchy where physicians dominated through their access to
specialized knowledge. Medicine became a way of hardening or further stratifying social structures; doctors were socially superior.

Distinct examples of the call for a scientific approach to medicine during the 1800s are presented in *The Lancet*, a general medical journal that published on a variety of topics such as new methods of treatment, cases of injury, or epidemics with a high fatality rate. Although the following contributors are European, their articles in *The Lancet* showcased the scientific shift in the nineteenth century and had far-reaching implications for the United States. For example, the treatment of cholera in the beginning of the 1800s focused on relieving symptoms of watery stools and vomiting with remedies based on “reasoning and reflection, founded on the general principles of science” (Howard-Jones 375). It is apparent that medicine was a theory put into practice rather than the result of concrete understanding. However, Irish physician Dr. O’Shaughnessy proposed “A New Method of Treating the Blue Epidemic Cholera” because he recognized the need to “inquire the remote causes, the pathology or physiology of this disease, any data could be discovered which might lead to the application of chemistry to its cure” (O’Shaughnessy 366). He intentionally explored the cause of the disease and its symptoms to more effectively treat and potentially prevent. His treatment centered around the “injection of highly-oxygenated salts into the venous system” rather than the former treatment of bloodletting by leeches; This demonstrates a deeper degree of anatomical knowledge and its function in clinical settings. Although this is not an effective method of treatment today, the theory behind O’Shaughnessy’s process is what we consider to be modern medicine. For example, the article scientifically advances progress towards treating cholera by explaining the health benefits of salts proven by chemistry, referring to previous research, and reporting statistics of preliminary experiments on animals. There is a desire for a fundamental understanding of the body in attempt
to avoid “cadaverization,” or the rapid health decline of cholera patients that closely resembled death (Anderson 15). In a similar vein, British surgeon Joseph Lister published “On a New Method of Treating Compound Fracture, Abscesses, etc: With Observations on the Conditions of Suppuration,” which serves as a guidebook for how to dress and heal wounds properly to avoid infection, factually explaining the accumulation of fluid and pus and the anatomy of the lower limbs (Lister 773). Since physician goals were long-term improved health outcomes, the body became an organ to be intensely scrutinized.

In order to understand the impact of these new medical ways of thinking, we need to understand views about gender more generally in this society. Although a broad topic, I will focus on some aspects of it that are important to my discussion, including social sphere separation and the inferiority that accompanied it, supported by thoughts of women’s biology contemporary to this time.

Section II: Medicine in the Social Context

Edgar Allan Poe’s stories emerged in the early 1800s, a time of great upheaval in the United States: a significant expansion of land; development of technology as seen with new medical techniques; and a shift in culture and values, specifically in regard to gender. Yet, as the boundaries of American land pushed westward, the role of women in society became more confined, centering our discussion around the changing social dynamics of the time. The cult of domesticity dominated the understanding of a female’s obligations to society, stationing them as comforting constants during the transitions of the time period that saw a variety of social identities (Welter 162). More recently, several critics have urged scholars to reconsider the term

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2 This argument mainly pertains to Western, white, middle-class females that Poe’s stories would have most likely been about. There are a multitude of factors such as race and religion that may have impacted gender roles that are not thoroughly explored in this essay. These factors explain some of the nuances associated with the issue of the too general and sometimes inapt term of “separate spheres.”
“separate spheres” because no experience could be solely attributed to a specific gender. Although women mostly occupied the domestic sphere as dutiful housekeepers, wives, and mothers, power dynamics were more nuanced (Davidson and Hatcher). It is too rigid to link physical separation with social subordination since it can be argued that women controlled and defined their own space. Yet, women’s attempts to take more active roles in society were met with resistance. Due to the limitations placed on most women, this thesis will focus on dominant social values, while acknowledging how critics have rethought these separate spheres. Barbara Welter, in her article “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” addresses these more widespread social practices that defined gender, proposing that women upheld four chief characteristics: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter 153). As women maintained the household, men dominated the contributions made to societal progress, particularly in the fields of science and medicine.

The concept of “separate but equal” spheres for men and women emerged in nineteenth-century America. Society did not deem the domestic and working spheres as inherently unequal. According to the “Treatise on Domestic Economy,” women took no concern in civil and political spheres but were of “superior influence” in moral and “benevolent enterprises” (Warder). By placing utmost importance in the nurturing of the family unit, proponents of these separate spheres glossed over the fact that women were denied higher education, participation in government, and financial independence. Although this subordination to men was a heavily socially constructed ideal, underlying biological aspects were utilized to reinforce this distinction (Kerber 13); Females’ primary contribution to society was reproduction. The ability to reproduce is unique to female anatomy. Therefore, women’s bodies were of foremost value.
The medicalization of the female body was deeply interwoven with a belief in women’s social and sexual inferiority. Female ailments were treated as “complaints,” inextricably linked to their sexual organs. For example, Dr. Dewees, professor of midwifery at the University of Pennsylvania, stated in his work on the diseases of women that the uterus exerted power over a women’s physical being, to the extent of being plagued by twice the sickness of that of man. Headaches, nervousness, and feebleness were attributed to irregularities of the womb (Wood 29). Women’s inferiority to the strength—physical, mental, and social—of men seemed to be rationally explained by their biology.

According to nineteenth-century physicians, female biology regulated their moral system as well. Their female-specific bodily functions dictated how they interacted with society. In Gaillard Thomas’s “A Practical Treatise on the Disease of Women” (1872), he discusses potential “female complaints” during the process of menstruation under a section entitled “Of the Diseases Peculiar to Women.” His writings are at first academic in nature, describing, in medical terms, the quantity of discharge expected in a normal menstrual cycle and the symptoms that may accompany it. Yet, his writings transition into a conjecture of why women experience menstruation. One opinion holds that it is for the benefit of the child when growing in the womb since women can bear children only after their first menstruation. He continues, “In the opinion of that able physiologist, Mr. Abernathy, [menstruation] relieves uterine irritation, and mitigates the extreme of sexual desire, thereby enabling a woman to conform to the laws of morality and the social compacts that are established between us” (Thomas 51). The first and the second clauses contrast greatly in terms of content: rational and subjective, respectively. The physiologist’s more subjective belief reveals nineteenth-century societal views of female sexuality and the expectation for women to curtail sexual desire. Their genitalia were responsible
for upholding this rigid “law-like” system of acceptable behavior. The belief is also not supported by evidence or additional examples which further suggests that it is an opinion influenced by the social concerns of the time.

Evidently, the structure of dominance and hierarchy became increasingly defined, and medicine was another avenue for men to exercise their influence. Men were the powerful figures in both of these spheres: acting as the head of the house and of the hospital. This differentiation of the social spaces allowed for the gendering of professional fields. This manifested concretely in the form of the “medical gaze.” As stated, Michel Foucault coined the term to describe the physician’s intense observation of their patient’s body to diagnose and treat. The (male) physician was the gazer while the (female) patient was the object of the gaze.  

Foucault presents arguments that describe a successful gaze as the abstraction of the person from their “pathological truth.” A patient brought “disturbances” to discovering and treating the disease itself, which was of primary importance, such as “his predispositions, his age, his way of life, and a whole series of events” (Foucault 8). This markedly medical separation of a patients’ identity or “disturbances” from their symptoms is a technique that Poe attributes to several of his male characters. I see this as a central dynamic in the stories I refer to: a separation of the symptoms from a more holistic understanding of a person. For example, in Poe’s detective fiction, symptoms are analogous to the clues the detective identifies which are separate from the victims themselves. Thus, terms such as “medical gaze” and “separation of symptoms from personhood” will be mentioned frequently throughout this thesis to describe this separation of the physical and emotional being and how the men perceive female bodies.

3 Medicine was a male-dominated profession with women mostly serving nursing and midwifery roles for a majority of American history. Women were denied admission into medical schools until 1847. By the end of the nineteenth century, women comprised a mere 5% of the physician workforce, at 7,000 physicians (“Women in Medicine” 2).
The medical gaze is not only rhetorical but is also visible in visual depictions of nineteenth-century medical content. For example, in an Italian medical textbook by J.P. Maygrier entitled *Nuove dimostrazioni di ostetricia*, studying doctors were taught how to properly give a gynecological exam to women. There are several illustrations of exams conducted by male physicians on female patients throughout the text, one of which will be discussed here, another that will be revisited in Chapter 2.

*Figure 1: Illustration of a man and his female patient in Nuove dimostrazioni di ostetricia, Demonstration of Obstetrics by Maygrier, J. P. (Jacques Pierre), 1831.*

In Figure 1, a woman lies in a position typical for a physical exam with her back reclining, knees flexed, and soles of her feet on the bed. The physician’s hand is hidden behind her garments, but it is assumed to be underneath her dress ready to administer the woman’s pelvic exam. The woman’s gaze is blank, and her body is almost lifeless, not carrying out an action like the doctor. Her face is barely visible underneath her rigid traditional bonnet, demonstrating that this patient is more her symptoms rather than a person. While the patient remains anonymous, the physician and his hands are the focal point of the image. His facial profile is well-seen, and he maintains a refined expression as he executes his specialized skills.
Yet, visual depictions did not need a male to be present to show the gaze at work. For example, a book published by the Peabody Medical Institute called *Sexual Physiology of Women and Her Diseases* (1869)—which will be referred to again in Chapter 2—depicts idealized representations of women. The first illustration lies opposite the title page, suggesting how heavily these medical practitioners weighed female beauty in relation to their physical health.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 2: Illustration of a woman and title page of Physiology of Woman and Her Disease or Woman, Treated of Physiologically, Pathologically, and Esthetically (1869) by Albert H. Hayes, MD.*

The woman appears posed, accentuating her body’s silhouette. Her hands lie on her head to display her breasts while her legs are crossed, barely obscuring her genitalia (Figure 2). The erotic gaze morphs into the medical gaze, an element seen in Poe’s “Ligeia” and “Berenice.” If the reader manages to digest the entirety of the title page despite the distraction, they will see the romanticized poem that begins with “Honored be women!” The short passage exalts certain qualities of women such as a “graceful” air, “fair” skin, “like a being of light/scatters around wherever she strays,” embedding obedience and beauty as domestic ideals (Hayes). Medical discourse is reinforcing socially cultivated structures, by connecting scientific and aesthetic content and language.
Section III: Edgar Allan Poe’s Short Stories

The cult of true womanhood and immense scientific progress were two dominant narratives during the nineteenth century. Women were prominent forces in the domestic sphere, often expected to maintain chastity until they gained their societally enforced life objective: marriage. They remained dutiful wives in exchange for their husband’s security. Yet, this exchange was not an equal one since women were consistently denied opportunities for advancement. Medicine was another way to reinforce women’s inferiority and physicians’, therefore male, superiority. The intense examination of the body was not strictly reserved to female bodies; however, in a male-dominated field, a power dynamic was inevitably created. The male physician was intimately familiar with the female patient’s body. Poe and his male characters, in the particular domains of marriage and the crime scene, mimic this intimacy. They successfully dissect dead and dying women with the medical gaze.

Edgar Allan Poe’s career flourished in this time and many of his stories explored gender dynamics; for example, his most famous work, “The Raven” (1845), gaining him international prestige, follows a distraught narrator as he mourns the death of his late lover. The themes of gender and death are a common thread throughout his works, which were first published in 1827. The stories I discuss in my upcoming chapter span the late 1830s to early 1840s; the last of these stories, “The Purloined Letter” was published in 1844, which is only a few years before his death in 1849. Many of the contemporary historical texts I use to describe Poe’s work will span his lifetime and slightly beyond, rarely exceeding the 1860s. Thus, Poe’s life is concurrent to the medical and social context I refer to in this introduction and throughout the remainder of the work. He wrote and published a majority of his works in New York, narrowing the use of additional sources to mainly American authors when possible.
Poe eagerly contributes to the narratives of medicine and domesticity, engaging with the aforementioned social and medical contexts throughout his Gothic short stories and detective fiction. With an understanding of the medical gaze and contemporaneous medical treatises, Poe both critiques and upholds nineteenth-century gender dynamics. In my literary analysis, I present close readings of the grotesque visual imagery of the body and clinical language in both Poe’s short stories and varying media with nineteenth-century medical content. I draw parallels between Poe’s writings and medicine that would have been practiced during this time to expose understandings of masculinity and femininity and differing representations of gender.
II. Chapter 1: Invading the Intimate: Poe’s “Ligeia” and “Berenice” in the Nineteenth Century

Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories are characteristically Gothic and grotesque creating a dark atmosphere that can be summarized by his opening lines of “Berenice:” “Misery is manifold. The wretchedness of earth is multiform” (Poe and Thompson 140). Poe transformed “the mundane into the macabre…[with themes of] youth and demise, female and the Ideal, and death and beauty” (Poe and Hayes xiii). Thus, Poe’s stories have garnered attention for their violence and graphic discussions of death. In particular, Poe imagines a dead or dying female throughout his core writings, where a woman is threatened by dominant men or by her situation. Poe produced horrifying and enigmatic works, which held especially true if they were beyond scientific understanding. However, I argue that Poe’s works function well within nineteenth-century scientific and medical theory.

Several critics have focused on the presence of medical discourse in Poe’s short stories, specifically, “Ligeia” and “Berenice,” the two stories discussed in this chapter. David Sloane methodically describes the types of medicine seen in Poe’s stories, going so far as to break down the medical content into four categories: phrenology, nosology, pathology, and mesmerism (Sloane 16). He explains what each phrenological term would have meant during this time, such as the implications of Ligeia’s “lofty forehead.” Cristina Pérez Arranz similarly attempts to identify each phenomena Poe alludes to in his texts; for example, she observes cataplexy in “Berenice” and tuberculosis and consumption in “Ligeia” (Arranz 64). Sloane and Arranz also speculate about potential sources of Poe’s medical information; for example, Arranz attributes Poe’s medical content to newfound access to professional medical publications while Sloane links some of Poe’s works to the arrival of a famous British phrenologist in New York (Arranz 63, Sloane 22). While these critics make valuable points about the nineteenth-century medical
context, I am more interested in the crucial structure of gender dynamics regardless of the particular disease.

My thesis is grounded in the idea of the medical gaze, which is a realm that researchers have yet to fully explore in “Ligeia” and “Berenice.” The critic that comes the closest to doing this is Aspasia Stephanou, who compares Ligeia’s and Berenice’s decomposing bodies to female vampires; she argues that Poe unites vampire mythology and medical discourse to uniquely comment on Poe’s female victims as materialized spirits. Although this particular subject is not within the scope of this thesis, she goes on to say that “medical knowledge and literature created a metaphorical feminine body, a cultural construct controlled by the authority and gaze of the medical practitioner and writer” (Stephanou 40). Stephanou only mentions this gaze twice more throughout her work, but this sentence is foundational for the remainder of my argument. It points out that the gaze, first exercised by the physician, is evoked in Poe’s works as a form of male control and dominance.

Edgar Allan Poe’s “Berenice” (1835) centers around the narrator, Egaeus, who has a tendency to obsessively fixate on one thing, dissociating from the world when he does. The object of his preoccupation is his fiancé and cousin, Berenice. She falls ill and dies, but Egaeus is engrossed by her, driving him to a state of insanity. “Ligeia” (1838) similarly follows its narrator—unnamed in this story—who is enraptured by his wife, Ligeia. Ligeia, like the beautiful Berenice, dies, greatly affecting the narrator’s mental state. These two stories will be discussed together in this chapter because they both engage the medical gaze and its effect on gender dynamics, enlightening our understanding of Poe’s works in the nineteenth century.

“Ligeia” and “Berenice” are narrated by men who describe their late lovers who, upon the conclusion of both stories, are resurrected from the dead. Both narrators are fascinated not by
the women but by their symptoms. This is a strong example of Foucault’s examination of the medical gaze discussed in my Introduction. The narrators illustrate Ligeia and Berenice in a style that has many commonalities with medical discourse. This language serves to reduce the women into metaphorical and ultimately, literal corpses in death; however, the women are resurrected as a symbol of their success over the medicalization of their body by these men. Thus, Poe utilizes these elements to comment on male-dominated values of the nineteenth century, particularly the professionalization of medicine and the cult of domesticity. The advancements of medicine provide Poe with a backdrop for his Dark Romanticism literature and an avenue to comment on patriarchal dominance. Poe critiques contemporary societal ideals through the narrators of “Ligeia” and “Berenice,” who study these women as scientific objects. The intensity of their gazes drives them to a point of madness, failing the men upon the conclusion of the story.

There are consistent parallels between the marriages in Poe’s “Ligeia” and “Berenice” and the doctor-patient interaction. The first is that Poe employs contemporaneous medical language to characterize the wives’ beauty in the stories. The primary features of this language include comments on patient’s symptomology, appearance, and behavior, specialty-specific language, and reflections on mortality. Moreover, there is a scientific vocabulary and style adhered to by both physicians and Poe’s narrators, making use of methodological verbs such as “analyzed” and medicalized descriptions of the body. Their medicalized reports consist of color, texture, and nineteenth-century specific anatomical vocabulary. Accounts from physicians during the early 1800s will be utilized throughout this section to further demonstrate these similarities.

The second and third parallels between Poe’s marriages and the physician visit is the vulnerability expected of the relationships and the nature of the men’s gaze upon the female body. Marriage is an emotional union of two people that requires a personal form of knowing
another person. It was a necessary social tradition during the nineteenth century. A doctor’s visit calls for a similar connection between them and the patient. Studying and diagnosing a person’s body to ultimately provide care requires a form of intimacy. Michel Foucault attributes this closeness to the doctor’s power of gazing upon the body:

Doctor and patient are caught up in an ever-greater proximity, bound together, the doctor by an ever-more attentive, more insistent, more penetrating gaze, the patient by all the silent, irreplaceable qualities that, in him, betray—that is, reveal and conceal—the clearly ordered forms of the disease (Foucault 15-16).

Foucault identifies the dynamic between the patient and doctor, assigning a role to both parties: the gazing doctor and the silent patient. To reiterate, the medical gaze separates the person’s identity from their body in a dehumanizing manner. Foucault argues that this “gaze” characterized early nineteenth-century physicians, a majority of whom were white and male. Although the romantic gaze is expected between a wedded couple, Ligeia, Berenice, and their husbands fill the roles dictated by Foucault because of the presence of the medical gaze and the medical language previously mentioned.

An examination of medical discourse at this time is best done by looking at primary medical sources and linking this to Poe’s stories. Nineteenth-century physicians, similar to Poe’s narrators, paid strict attention to the appearance of the female body. Although they are not physicians, the narrators of “Ligeia” and “Berenice” adopt several of their qualities; firstly, the doctor’s tendency to methodically examine the body. Both narrators are plagued by psychological conditions that cause them and the readers to also hyper-focus on the women and their bodies in Poe’s stories. The medical journal, dating from the 1830s, of M.M. Haworth, a North Carolinian physician, although containing appropriate thoughts for a physician, reveals this scrutiny.
As a gynecologist, Haworth describes the labor and delivery of a newborn child whose mother does not survive. There is a repetition of her symptomology as he monitors the patient’s progress. The patient presents with a “severe headache, face flushed, considerable pain in her back and extremities, [and] no fullness nor tenderness of the abdomen” (Haworth, Figure 3). The doctor physically probes in parallel to the visual probing of the women in Poe’s stories, as the narrators attentively describes their facial appearances. As Ligeia grows ill, the narrator observes that “the wild eyes blazed with a too — too glorious effulgence; the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave, and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the gentle emotion” (Poe and Thompson 164). Her unhealthy organs are communicating her sickly state to the examiner. Similarly, M.M. Haworth notes his patient’s diminishing condition as she experiences more pain, a “tongue brown and

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4 This passage is one of the only entries that refer to the female patient as a “Mrs. ____.” Throughout the journal, the female patients are named as being the wife of a certain man, whose complete name is stated. This method of patient keeping furthers the idea of the female body as an object of inquiry rather than a suffering patient.
dry,…trembling of the hand,…[and] slight twitches of the muscles of the face” (Haworth). Poe specifically incorporates the rhythms and language patterns of medical literature to describe female characters as if they were patients. Both men employ color, anatomical location, and abnormalities to observe these women’s declining health. The narrators are portrayed as body experts similar to a physician conducting an exam.

In addition to the physician-like accounts of the females, “Berenice” particularly engages with an understanding of nineteenth-century medicine. Egaeus describes Berenice’s eyes as “divine orbs” which can be interpreted in both a religious and astrological context; however, the term “orbs” is also an example of medical jargon that would have been familiar to physicians during this time. “Orbs,” as mentioned in the story, were the eye while orbits were the socket containing the eye. According to W.W. Owens’s University of Virginia anatomy lecture notes of the 1880s, vision depends heavily on the complicated structure of the eye appendages. When describing the Lachrymal Apparatus of the eye, he writes that it lies “in the depression sun on the orbital plate of the frontal bone.” Additionally, his notes explain that the “eye ball is situated in the front part of the orbit embedded in a mass of fat” (Owens). Thus, orbits are key to the underlying clinical significance of the eye and Poe provides a slight acknowledgment of this gross anatomy.

The narrators in “Ligeia” and “Berenice” enter into this nineteenth-century medical discourse through their discussions of their lovers’ bodies. Medical examiners inspected bodies to determine causes of death; yet, these narrators inspect the bodies of their lovers to determine the source of their infatuation. In “Ligeia,” the narrator takes care to paint a portrait of Ligeia’s physicality: “I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead — it was faultless… the skin rivaling the purest ivory…the gentle prominence of the regions above the temples… I looked at
the delicate outlines of the nose” (Poe and Thompson 161). The narrator utilizes language standard for medical diagnoses, such as “examined” and “scrutinized,” when delivering this bodily assessment to the reader. Similarly, Egaeus discerns that Berenice’s “forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid [with]… hollow temples.” He creates a landscape of the body, including features rarely regarded for their beauty such as the “forehead” and “temples.” As he continues to gaze upon her, he describes her eyes as “lifeless and lusterless” and notices her “thin and shrunken lips” (Poe and Thompson 145). Both narrators assume the position of body experts as they carefully sketch distinct facial features. This intense focus on the face, as demonstrated with the language or “orbs,” presents these women as objects of scrutiny. Admiration of these women is rooted in viewing her body rather than another aspect of her identity, as is typical with the medical gaze. In addition, the narrators’ descriptive, list-like formats of the women’s physical features is intended to celebrate their beauty but instead, demonstrates the men’s obsessive nature. Poe includes striking similarities between the husband’s and physician’s language to criticize these men for their compulsive gaze.

Egaeus exerts a male medical gaze on Berenice that suggests a relationship similar to that of a patient-doctor. This is fully realized in “Berenice” when Egaeus sees her “not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream—not as a being of the earth—earthly—but as the abstraction of such a being—not as a thing to admire, but to analyze—not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation” (Poe and Thompson 144). She is not one to love, typical of a domestic partnership, but even more demeaning, a ‘thing to analyze’ and to serve his gaze. The narrator analyzes Berenice when she is a physical body but even when she is not a physical body as seen in this dream-like state. For physicians, patients were also considered as mere objects, detached from any identity. For
example, in Dr. Benjamin Rush’s medical casebook, dated 1811, he quantitatively rather than qualitatively documents brief histories for his treatment of about seventy-five individuals.

![Image of a page from Benjamin Rush's medical casebook, 1811-1812]

Figure 4: Benjamin Rush medical casebook, 1811-1812

Most entries in Rush’s journal include the year, patient's name, presented medical issue, dates of treatment, prescriptions applied, pulses noted, and the progression or resolution of the complaint (Benjamin Rush). Many of the casebook pages resemble the layout seen in Figure 4. As illustrated, the entry contains little identification of the patient and the majority of his scribbles are an extensive list of numbers—16, 23, 30, 25—presumably pulses and prescriptions. The physician views and records these individuals as a series of data points, a ‘thing to analyze,’ like Poe’s narrator does Berenice.

The social and medical context are intensely intertwined and equally imposing on Poe’s female characters. Marriage, “the proper state for the exercise of the domestic virtues,” was considered most desirable for women in the nineteenth century (Welter 169). As seen in the introduction, during the nineteenth century, the cult of domesticity perpetuated the idea of women as secondary to men, and as beings who needed to remain sheltered. This model dictated
women’s submissive behavior, celebrating it as a virtue (Welter 153). Within this value system, women were separate from but mostly dependent on men; they were not fully functioning outside of the domestic sphere. Men exercised control over women, manifesting in the form of bodily control. As stated previously, marriage in Poe’s stories acts as the perfect parallel environment for the intimacy of the medical encounter described by Foucault. Thus, in this context, the gaze is unexpectedly powerful. The women become patients, or victims, within the emotional and mental space of their domestic partnership. For example, Berenice’s marriage serves as a site for Egaeus’ medicalization and dehumanization of Berenice. The patient and doctor, like Egaeus and Berenice, are bound through an infiltrating gaze by one party and the silence of the other. With the introduction of this gaze, the domestic space is not one of benign intimacy, but one that is dangerous and imposing.

Ligeia and Berenice, the narrators’ lovers, primarily occupy the role of wife throughout the stories. Although Ligeia is described as an educated woman, potentially indicating social mobility, the narrator fails to remember her last name, undermining her ability to escape the domestic sphere (Poe and Thompson 159). He simply remembers that before her death, she took his last name in marriage. The cult of domesticity is enforced upon these two women as they are not given a voice nor space to express their character. They have no identity and are instead at the mercy of the predominantly physical descriptions by their husbands. They are not necessarily participating in household chores, but they only occupy the domestic space. To an extreme extent of supporting the household, Ligeia has to not only take on the role of wife, but also mother; the narrator comments, “Without Ligeia I was but a child groping benighted” (163). Although he intends to emphasize Ligeia’s significance in his life, he further exploits her womanhood, forcing her into premature motherhood. An unusual relationship emerges between Berenice and Egaeus
as well. They were cousins who “grew up together in [his] paternal hall” (141) Their shared heredity was typical during this time period, but the term “paternal halls” connotes a father-like quality to their home and foregrounds their earlier experiences in a patriarchal environment. Thus, their marriage may be conceived as Egaeus pursuing and maintaining the “paternal halls” of their childhood. Once more, Poe is seemingly denouncing the men’s oppressive patriarchal pursuits. Moreover, domestic restraints extend to all females in Poe’s works.

In “Ligeia,” Lady Rowena Trevanion, the narrator’s second wife after Ligeia dies, represents literal physical confinement within the household, as the bridal chamber is explicitly described as her place of death. The architecture and decoration of the bridal chamber is sketched for the reader in great detail to highlight its grandiosity; yet, its brilliance is juxtaposed to Lady Rowena’s intense anguish. The illness throws her “upon a bed of suffering” and eventually a bed of death, located in the room in which the narrator claims they pass most of their time, drawing connections to a nuptial bed shared between the couple (Poe and Thompson 169). The women of the stories are ultimately contained within these marital bonds. Once bound to these particular men, they are the subjects of their medical gaze. Although marriage is not inherently threatening, the dynamic takes a dark turn because of these men. The bed, traditionally a symbol of sex and reproduction, is recast as a death bed.

Although seemingly a description of how the narrators are enraptured by their wives’ beauty, the stories are less romantic and more scientific. In doing this, the erotic gaze, an expression of lust and desire, is essentially medicalized. Furthermore, both narrators fixate on and fetishize a specific part of their lover’s body. This body part is referred to a “peculiarity” in both stories because of the inexplicable qualities that deeply affect these men. Egaeus has monomania, a disease defined as an obsessive preoccupation of with one thing in nineteenth-
century psychiatry. On Berenice’s body, it is her teeth that dominates this compulsion. With an
odonatological approach, he admires the sublimity of her teeth as there is “not a speck on their
surface—not a shade on their enamel—not an indenture in their edges.” His neuroses and
knowledge of specific dental features set the tone for a medical examination. He studies her
teeth, describing his methodical approach of doing so: He “[holds] them in every light. [He]
turn[s] them in every attitude. [He] survey[s] their characteristics.” He continues to ‘dwell,’
‘ponder,’ and ‘muse,’ establishing a physician-patient atmosphere (Poe and Thompson 145).
Evidently, both narrators treat Berenice or Ligeia similarly to a case study, analyzing her in great
detail over time. This is explicitly expressed when Ligeia’s eye “possess[es] [the narrator] with a
passion to discover” (Poe and Thompson 162). Like a physician, this patient sparks his curiosity.
As mentioned previously, he spends hours contemplating or rather researching these “divine
orbs,” their hue, formation, brilliance, and intangible expression. This fixation with the women’s
health proves detrimental to Egaeus and the narrator of “Ligeia,” respectively.

The increasing intensity of the narrators’ study of the body leads to the men’s self-
destruction, further proving Poe’s critiquing of men. It is no longer an appreciative admiration
but an obsession, as the fascination with the women’s ‘peculiarities’ begin to haunt them. For
Egaeus, Berenice’s teeth exacerbate his monomania, transforming his disease from “not even, as
might be first supposed, an extreme condition or exaggeration of such propensity” to an all-
consuming possession that he “struggle[s] in vain against its strange and irresistible influence”
(Poe and Thompson 145). Monomania creates an addictive behavior; thus, her teeth constantly
occupy the entirety of his mind for extended lengths of time. Her teeth are not only the last image
that remains with Egaeus after Berenice’s death but also the last image that remains with the
reader upon the conclusion of the story. Egaeus, in Gothic fiction form, removes “many white
“and glistening substances” from Berenice’s mouth in a frenzied and dissociated state. As he observes Berenice’s corpse after her death, he again becomes fixated on her teeth and is suddenly overtaken by an uncontrollable feeling: “I sprang convulsively from the bed, and, uttering no word, rushed forth a maniac from that apartment of triple horror, and mystery, and death” (146). His trance-like state drips with the grotesque with diction such as “convulse,” “maniac,” and “triple horror, and mystery, and death.” As he researches her body, Egæus is simply gathering data to further his understanding, rather than expressing affection for her as his beloved wife. Egæus deviates from traditional expressions of love and matrimony with his dark mania of Berenice. Poe dwells on this unhealthy behavior, criticizing the patriarchal relationship it creates.

Although the narrator of “Ligeia” does not have a similar preexisting condition like Egæus, he also experiences a psychotic break because of his fixation with his late lover’s eyes. After Ligeia’s death, he becomes a “bounden slave in the trammels of opium” to “wild visions,” shifting in and out of consciousness for the remainder of the story (Poe and Thompson 166). Substance abuse, a strategy to cope with his mourning, plagues him. In his hazy stupor, he marries Lady Rowena Trevanion, another form of coping. However, as the health of his second wife decays, the experience triggers the memory of his true love Ligeia’s death. Visions of Ligeia dominate his thoughts, and an impending doom permeates the mood. When Lady Rowena dies, he begins to imagine her as reinvigorated with life, throwing the narrator into a “bewildered dream,” “a mad disorder of [his] thoughts,” and “inexpressible madness” (Poe and Thompson 170). He hallucinates that the Lady Rowena is alive twice, describing her changing pulse, bodily hue, and temperature of the corpse, as a physician would describe an ill patient in his medical notes. The culmination of his psychosis is the final image of Ligeia. He sees a figure arise from the dead but when he sees her eyes, he is immediately aware that this is Ligeia rather than Lady.
Rowena; he shrieks, “these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the LADY Ligeia” (Poe and Thompson 173). Like Egaeus, the narrator is all-consumed by this lasting image of Ligeia’s corpse resurrecting from the dead, emphasizing the object of their bodily obsession. The narrators self-destruct due to their medicalized obsession.

Poe’s characters are in direct conversation with the nineteenth-century culture including gender roles and models of marriage, allowing him to comment on the values of this epoch. The narrators of “Ligeia” and “Berenice” enter into the medical mindset of the time that focused on the anatomy of their lovers. This further oppresses the women in their already restricted domestic sphere, until their demise. Simultaneously, this fixation on the body catalyzes the men’s descent into madness. Upon the conclusion of the stories, the destruction of the males gives space for the women to prevail in the conclusion and for Poe to comment on the juxtaposition of the growing role of predominantly male physicians and the increasing confinement of women.

The absurdity of the women resurrecting after certain death guides the topic away from science fiction to a satirizing of societal values. Poe is actively destroying the archetype of women being the source of comfort in the home and the inferior sex (Welter 153). Paradoxically, Poe affirms women’s power, leaving the men baffled, haunted, and distraught with by their rising. The corpses reject this male dominance, a stark contrast from the medical dehumanization of their body in the introductions of these stories. He chastises the scientific pursuits of these men that ultimately hinder the prosperity of women. Both Ligeia—as a frightening ghost—and Berenice—from her physical grave—resurrect as symbols of overcoming the male gaze and patriarchy that dominated this time period. In Aesthetic Headaches: Women and a Masculine Poetics in Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne, Leland Person supports this claim, arguing that the women resist death and their position as aesthetic objects (Person 22). Yet, this also extends to
the women rejecting their transformation into scientific objects. They are liberated as the objects of gaze and scientific inquiry.

In this section, the women harnessed power in their transition from life to death to life once again. We will now transition to Poe’s detective fiction; here, unfortunately, women do not have this same ability to transcend life since a majority of the female characters are dead before the stories begin. In addition, there will be a shift in focus from men’s dominance in an emotional or mental manner to a much more physical arena. The medical gaze in “Ligeia” and “Berenice” results in the destruction of the women’s identity while the gaze in Poe’s detective fiction is more devastating to women corporeally.
III. Chapter 2: Pervading the Physical: The Medicalization of Females in Poe’s Detective Fiction

In the previous section, I compared the medical gaze to the erotic gaze within “Berenice” and “Ligeia,” arguing that Poe’s work is grounded in the social and scientific context of his time. In *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, critics Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman note that “Poe’s most extravagant literary maneuvers were usually based in the specific cultural and political climate of antebellum America” (Rosenheim and Rachman x-xi). Other critics have drawn attention to dead women within the social context, sensationalism of crime with the rise of the Penny Press, and the characters’ psychopathology and general medical discourse in Poe’s short stories. However, they have rarely acknowledged the connection between Poe’s men and nineteenth-century physicians, as seen in their relationship to women. This section expands upon the penetration of the domestic sphere by controlling, masculine gazes. Previously, we saw the infiltration of mental or emotional space by the men’s medical gaze in these traditional marital bonds; however, it is the physical space that is dominated by men in Poe’s detective series featuring Detective Dupin. Rather than a manic obsession like the narrators of “Berenice” and “Ligeia,” there is a methodical poise to Dupin’s gaze. The object of his gaze are female victims who are often dead and mutilated, placing Poe’s works in an especially visual register. Thus, art, particularly medical art, will be referred to in this section as another archive of evidence illuminating the control of the detective and physician.

The birth of American detective fiction is attributed to Edgar Allan Poe and his brilliant detective, C. Auguste Dupin. Poe established the model for future sleuthing literature in his

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5 See the critics mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1. In addition, there is little to no mention of medical discourse found in Poe’s detective fiction, only his Gothic short stories.

6 James V. Werner in his critical essay entitled “The Detective Gaze: Edgar A. Poe, the Flaneur, and the Physiognomy of Crime,” coins the attentive quality of the detective’s work as the gaze. However, there is no connection made to the medical gaze.
Dupin series: “The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841),” “The Mystery of Marie Roget (1842),” and “The Purloined Letter (1844)” (Silverman 162). Within these stories, Dupin is the focal character, praised for his ability to solve seemingly unsolvable mysteries, often involving dead, dismembered dames. The position he holds is almost directly comparable to that of a physician in the nineteenth-century medical world—the physician is the healer of incurable ailments, praised and upheld for their immense access to knowledge. The detective and the doctor are distinctly masculine figures, manifesting their power in the form of intellect. Their presence dominates these stories, and that domination is emphasized by the subordination of Poe’s female characters. When the victim-detective dynamic is compared to the patient-doctor dynamic, similarities arise that continue to emphasize Poe’s conversation with the social and medical dialogue of the time. Observing the male and female dynamics in detective and medical domains exposes the vulnerability of female bodies and the power of the men who control them. This chapter argues that Poe upholds the nineteenth-century patriarchal system, revealing the detective gaze as productively male-centric in nature.

The detective’s crime scene and the physician’s medical arena are environments characterized by three unifying elements: the intelligent dominant male figure; the silent women who are used primarily as data; and the dismemberment of bodies. The detective story and medical practice of the nineteenth century both champion a male figure whose masculinity is defined by intellectual acuity and an extensive store of knowledge. They are required to investigate acute situations, collecting evidence for a logical conclusion; the result is apparently benevolent—a solved crime or the restoration of health to an individual. Yet, their process, as demonstrated by Poe and contemporaneous medical practice, involves exposing bodies to uncover the truth. As discussed in previous sections of this essay, within the social context of
domesticity, women were silenced by these dominant men. To benefit their work, Poe’s male detectives and nineteenth-century doctors transformed women into data and clues. The term “transformed” is key to understanding their practice as many of these bodies are dismembered, in both Poe’s detective genre and with the rise of surgical practice in the medical field. It is important to note that Poe’s stories are not explicitly medical. Yet, Poe’s Gothic stories were created against the historical backdrop of death’s increased medicalization. Thus, through the process of comparing the two, dominant males and submissive females, and the separation of women’s symptoms from their personhood—an idea introduced in the historical introduction of this thesis—are key to understanding their material similarities.

The only women present in the stories are dead women, reinforcing the tropes of the powerless female and the omnipotent male. This is evident in the descriptions of their violated bodies. “The Murders of the Rue Morgue” is the first story in the series of Poe’s detective fiction. In Detective Dupin’s tale, he encounters the graphic murders of two women found in their bedroom chamber. The L’Espanayes are found with their heads nearly detached from their “much bruised and excoriated” corpses, “throttled to death” (Poe and Thompson 247). The story describes the deceased women in language similar to that of a coroner or medical examiner, who performs post-mortem examinations of bodies: “Upon examining [the body], many excoriations were perceived…Upon the face were many severe scratches, and, upon the throat, dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails” (247). The story explains the nature, number, appearance, and potential cause of the injuries. Their deaths are harped upon for several more paragraphs—at one point, a physician by the name of Paul Dumas is called to view the bodies at the scene of the crime. With more specificity and “in the opinion of M. Dumas,”

The face was fearfully discolored, and the eye-balls protruded. The tongue had been partially bitten through…All the bones of the right leg and arm were more or less shattered.
The left tibia much splintered, as well as all the ribs of the left side. Whole body dreadfully bruised and discolored... The head of the deceased, when seen by witness, was entirely separated from the body, and was also greatly shattered (251).

Dr. Dumas expectedly utilizes anatomical vocabulary such as tibia and points to specific locations of the wounds. His language demonstrates that Poe is in conversation with the rise of forensics and sophisticated pathological anatomy. Evidence for this is seen by comparing Dumas’s words with an excerpt from an 1850 Laurens County, South Carolina coroner’s report: “he found Barbara Milam his wife lying in the house dead and in flames her body very much burned. Her person bloody with the appearance of many bruises & cuts as if with an axe” (The State vs. the Dead Body). The goriness of the crime is at the forefront of the description. Conjectures are made about the modes of death with a succinct description of the body’s several afflictions. These types of observations were specific to Poe’s era. Investigations in the nineteenth century required more detailed reports from medical examiners, leading to the use of technical medical language since physicians were employed on an increased basis (Visible Proofs).

Dr. Dumas’s words work their way down the deceased’s body, beginning with the eyes and stopping before her lower half, separating its different parts before he describes it holistically. There is no continued reference to the body being female, but Poe repeats “Mademoiselle” or “Madame” almost 70 times throughout, ingraining the gender of the deceased into the reader’s memory (Poe and Thompson 246-265). This attention to gender is more directly seen in the South Carolina coroner’s report: The victim’s pronouns are more prevalent in this description than in Dr. Dumas’s and her married status is considered a relevant detail (The State vs. the Dead Body). The victim is painted as a domestic housewife in a mere three-sentence transcription.
Poe deliberately constructs femininity and masculinity within “Murders of the Rue Morgue.” In Dr. Dumas’s opinion as he inspects the bludgeoned victims, “A heavy club of wood, or a broad bar of iron—a chair—any large, heavy, and obtuse weapon would have produced such results, if wielded by the hands of a very powerful man. No woman could have inflicted the blows with any weapon” (Poe and Thompson 251). Gender dynamics pervade in this sentence. Although it is an objective description of the deceased bodies, the physician manages to reinforce norms in his testimony: the criminal is characterized as male due to the murderous brute strength. Men are associated with violence, while conversely, women are the weak victims found in the home. It is yet another example of the interaction between medical dialogue and the social sphere that worked to depict women as the weaker sex, because these crime scene observations are corroborated by an intelligent doctor.

In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Poe also subtly genders how the L’Espanayes were murdered although the detective is actively absent. When he solves the crime, Dupin determines that the murders achieved by “the hands of the very powerful man” were instead the hairy paws of an Ourang-Outang. Here, masculinity is being extended to the nonhuman beings—the Ourang-Outang is only in possession of the razor because he is trying to mimic a characteristically male activity. His master finds the animal wielding a razor in front of the bathroom mirror, following the routine he had unknowingly implanted into the beast’s memory. Escaping from his master’s quarters, the animal finds himself in the bedroom of his victims, “flourishing the razor about [one of the women’s] face, in imitation of the motions of a barber” (Poe and Thompson 264). In trying to also occupy the masculine space, the ourang-outang encroaches on the feminine space: the domestic home of the L’Espanayes. Poe stresses their vulnerability as the house is only occupied by women and they are attacked in their private
bedroom chamber. The ourang-outang reveals the violence of man in an eruption of male strength.

The doctor assumes that the degree of strength exerted in the crime is distinctly masculine. There are two avenues of understanding this comment when in reality the attack was by an ourang-outang. The first makes a claim that men are so brutal that they are almost animalistic. The second claim is more complicated, giving human men an alibi by claiming that they could not be responsible for such brutal killings, that only an actual animal could be capable of such things. In this way, a hierarchy of masculinity is created: the acceptable form of masculinity represented by Dupin is seen as superior to the violence; and a disowned version of masculinity is represented by the animal. Dupin is allowed to disavow the violence through this lens. However, there is also a particular type of violence to Dupin’s masculinity. There is a sanctity of the feminine space that Dupin publicly breaches, receiving high praise for his work. His sanctioned form of studying and gazing at females is just as terrifying as the deadly ourang-outang physically entering the bedroom chamber, if not as deadly. Thus, the animal warps Dupin’s cognitive violence into an extreme physical manifestation.

I continue this argument about the particular violence of this sort of masculinity with the support of artwork, photographs, and other relevant depictions of medical practice. Art, similar to literature, preserves and reveals how people felt during a particular time period. These works provide insight into the aesthetic and historical significance of medicine to nineteenth-century society. As a form of education, medical art and photographs became more prevalent throughout the nineteenth century to record observations, document new techniques, and serve clinical reports. Thus, the two mediums are particularly connected and intertwined in this historical moment. When considered in tandem with Poe’s series from the same several years, patterns
emerge, confirming that Poe reflected societal beliefs about science. In particular, the medical art of this period focuses our attention on the physician’s gaze and control; the significance of this emerges in the context of Poe’s detective fiction. These images elevate an understanding of the detective whose method of investigation requires the structuring gaze. Dupin acts as the pinnacle example of this connection.

Dupin is a young man with a “peculiar analytical ability,” succeeding in his art of detection until “the name of Dupin [grew] into a household word” (Poe and Thompson 242; Poe 152, “The Mystery”). To review, while traditional masculinity is often correlated with superior physical abilities, in this context, Dupin’s intellectual prowess makes him the most masculine character. Dupin is the archetype of the detective whose mental superiority designates him as omnipotent and omniscient. The narrator acts as a sidekick to the heroic detective, who leaves the narrator and reader in suspense until the detective deliberately decides to reveal his deductions. Scholar Charles J. Rzepka, in his historical book Detective Fiction, asserts that the detective is “the defender of hegemonic norms and self-perpetuating cultural value systems” (Rzepka 22). The detective’s ability to methodically reason to uphold hegemony is in direct opposition to the transgressor’s disordered criminal impulses. The detective maintains complete control, as his abilities are almost imperceptible to others with fewer analytical capabilities. It is not surprising that, by this standard, the characters who do not possess this ingenuity, are inferior in comparison. By making it evident that he is more intellectually adept than everyone else, he demonstrates his control over all situations and characters, making him the most powerful as a result of his above-average masculinity in the form of extreme intellect.

Dupin’s authority thus directly resembles nineteenth-century depictions of medical doctors. Elite men were praised for their contributions to medicine, solving daily medical issues
similar to how Dupin solves seemingly insuperable crimes. For example, men such as Joseph Lister and Harvey Cushing were eventually titled pioneers and forefathers for their contributions to the medical field when they were widely adopted, including antiseptic techniques and local anesthesia. Their dominance pervaded society because of their immense knowledge base and the constant threat of illness. The most iconic example of an illustration of the physician’s control of the patient interaction is The Doctor, an 1891 painting by Luke Fildes, meant to illuminate an idyllic relationship between physician and patient (Figure 5).

![Image of The Doctor, 1891, Luke Fildes](image)

*Figure 5: The Doctor, 1891, Luke Fildes*

Despite the singular attentiveness this physician gives to his patient, the focal point of the work, certain elements distinguish the doctor from his surroundings to elevate his importance. The doctor sits pensively staring at the helpless and feeble girl, visibly struck by illness. He is a grand figure, occupying most of the left side of the image, dressed in a fitted black suit with groomed hair, starkly different from the rural setting. The bedroom is slightly disheveled with debris on the floor, a makeshift bed of two mismatched chairs, a ragged blanket, an oversized pillow, and one dilapidated lamp. The lamp is angled, shining its light directly upon the physician, so that he remains at the forefront of the painting despite his dark clothing that could potentially blend in
with the shadowy background. He rests his chin in his hand and physically leans over the girl, demonstrating his influence and importance. This is further highlighted by the man, assumed to be the patient’s father, emerging from the dark on the right side of the image. He is powerless in relation to this man of intellectual intensity. These sentiments of the intellectual superiority of the doctor were internalized by nineteenth-century Americans, especially because of the constant progress in the medical field.

Operating theaters, photo-documented as early as the 1840s, were another arena for physicians to display their excellence. These surgical spaces were inspired by the anatomical amphitheaters of the Renaissance, which hosted public dissections for religious and scientific purposes. In the nineteenth century, demonstrations of new medical techniques were showcased for both the public and the success of medical school students. The movement of the medical establishment towards anatomy-based science and surgical approaches required more specialized knowledge and training. Moreover, laypeople were thrilled to witness medical miracles; for example, general anesthesia was first presented to the public in a theater-like space. A patient lay in the center of the room, surrounded by physicians, scholars, and medical equipment (Figure 6).

![Figure 6: Re-enactment of the first public demonstration of general anesthesia by William T. G. Morton on October 16, 1846 in the Ether Dome at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston.](image)
Typically, rows of theaters were filled to watch surgeons work. As physicians stepped in front of their audience, they received rounds of applause, similar to an actor on a stage or the worship of a godlike figure. The audience members were reveling voyeurs of gore and drama. Before antiseptics and anesthesia, the screams of the patient on the operating table invoked terror and excitement. Horrifyingly, dissection was a form of entertainment.

In *The Gross Clinic*, American artist Thomas Eakins’ 1875 painting, famed Philadelphia surgeon Samuel Gross operates for his medical students seated in the amphitheater.

![Figure 7: The Gross Clinic or The Clinic of Dr. Gross is an 1875 painting by Thomas Eakins](image)

Dr. Gross seems distinguished in his black frock, a stern look, and a more elderly appearance with his frizzy white hair. He stands while the others remain seated and his face is illuminated similar to the patient’s body, denoting his dominance. His surgical companions are connected to the patient, resulting in at least five different limbs involved in the operation. They are slicing into what seems to be the patient’s leg with sharp and possibly painful medical instruments, creating a deep gash. Blood oozes from the wound onto the patient’s body and the operators’ hands. The most gruesome element of this image is the blood that remains on Dr. Gross’s hand
as he presents to and teaches his audience. It remains inches away from the women in black, potentially the patient’s mother, who hides her face in horror (Figure 7). The doctor’s gaze is foregrounded in the violence of the operating theater, similar to how the violence of Dupin’s masculinity, as discussed previously, is revealed through the orang-outang’s brutality in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” It is key to note that the primary characters of these works are male; they dominated the medical field just as the detective possesses control in Poe’s stories. Part of the centrality and power of both figures is their ability to remain whole bodies. For example, in the painting, Dr. Gross’s body is the only one almost fully seen while his surgical residents and patient are parts and pieces of a body. Likewise, Dupin’s body and mind are fully functional while the women of Rue Morgue’s heads are severed at the scene of the crime.

Detective Dupin’s control and ultra-masculinity extend not only to his superiority over the entire investigative task force but also over the women in Poe’s stories. The women in Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” and “The Purloined Letter” are all “silent,” whether they are dead or just briefly mentioned (Jordan 2). Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye, Marie Roget, and the royal woman in “The Purloined Letter” are never explicitly “heard” by the reader. Instead, Dupin views the women as no different than clues. In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” Dupin employs the details of their horrific deaths as nothing more than commonplace information that helps him apprehend the culprit; Yet, in looking at the women as additional pieces of the puzzle, he separates them from the living bodies they once were. Their role is to serve the men in their professions as evidence or clues, especially the detective of the story. They cannot consciously do this; they are only as useful through the exploitation of their dead bodies.
“The Purloined Letter” reveals that women are silenced despite the absence of body horror. Rather than “the physical destruction of the female victim, the threat…is entirely psychological” as her reputation is at risk due to the theft of a letter with important contents (Burke 47). The Prefect goes to Dupin on behalf of the woman, who is only described as an “illustrious personage” to protect her identity (Poe and Thompson 369). The woman does not present her case to the detective and is not given a name. She is powerless despite her complete vitality. Dupin is enlisted and agrees to save this unknown woman from losing her honor; however, his main goal is to assert his dominance over the Prefect as mentioned previously. Dupin’s masculinity and the male-colored views of the women in the stories are designed by Poe to overshadow the females’ presence and their femininity.

The deaths of the L’Espanayes in “The Murders of the Rue Morgue” are horrific because of the gory descriptions of their dismembered bodies. Yet, an additional layer of terror is added because women’s bodies, according to ideals of true womanhood at that time, are not supposed to exist in this way. Nineteenth-century femininity valued women who were chaste, well-mannered, and educated mainly in art and embroidery. Poe deviates from this model in his works, preying on the fear of the ruined women that prevailed during this time. Karen Halttunen comments on this panic in her study Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870. “Painted women,” or prostitutes were thought to negatively influence innocent men. As prostitution became more visible in America, the dichotomy between the true woman and the “painted” woman intensified. Women occupied both the urban streets and the domestic home. This speaks to the distinction between the woman who is whole—the true woman—and the women who is dismembered—the fallen woman. This
historical context deciphers why women are presented as opposite extremes in Poe’s works and the medical texts with which he engages.

The medical gaze reflects the social happenings of the nineteenth century. In this discussion, women are represented as either horribly mutilated or a beautiful model of purity. Poe disfigured the women in his texts, strikingly similar to how doctors dissected bodies as mentioned above. Yet, many idealized versions of female bodies existed within the pages of nineteenth-century medical textbooks, providing illustrations to which we can compare to the dismembered women in Poe’s stories. Upon closer inspection of the images in these medical textbooks, a link emerges. Poe’s “silent” women and the textbook’s posed women are two aspects of the same ideology. These pictured women are also not given a voice in pages written by knowledgeable male doctors. In the *Physiology of Woman and Her Diseases*, a book written by Dr. Albert H. Hayes to educate the population on how to treat females “psychologically, pathologically, and esthetically” (Hayes), female beauty was inherently linked to women’s health and well-being. Written in 1869, the book contains “eight elegant illustrative pictures” to eliminate confusion on how a female should look. For example, on a full book page with no writing, a nude woman lies gracefully with her eyes downcast in a demure manner. It is an unspoken and reluctant invitation to view her body (Figure 8).
Figure 8: Illustration of a woman in Physiology of Woman and Her Disease or Woman, Treated of Physiologically, Pathologically, and Esthetically (1869) by Albert H. Hayes, MD

Although her hand delicately and sensually cups her right breast, her eyes do not look directly at the reader, maintaining her chastity. Her legs are gently crossed, while her genitalia are further covered by her arm. There is a hint of makeup on her face and her hair is neatly done. Taking these aesthetic elements into account, it is clear that this is not a natural but an artificially crafted ideal of a healthy woman. This image is expected to be in a magazine rather than a textbook published by an established medical institute.

Poe invites the reader to gaze upon a characteristically ideal female in “The Mystery of Marie Roget.” Unlike the whole naked body pictured in Hayes’ textbook, Marie Roget’s body is clothed but dismembered. Lace, a feminine symbol, is “found so tightly wound around her neck as to be hidden from sight.” The reader traces the layout of the woman’s body as it is described in the story. Her outer garment was “torn upward…to the waist, but not torn off” and her dress “of fine muslin…had been torn entirely out—torn very evenly with great care” (Poe 158, “The Mystery”). The reader can imagine the woman’s exposed body with shreds of clothing falling off
of her, showing an eerie amount of attention in her murder. Her clothing is characteristically female, such as a dress and lace, and care has gone into the perfect description of her body. Although the woman illustrated in Hayes’ medical textbook is fully naked, Marie Roget’s clothes are ultimately invaded, and she is similarly left bare by Poe’s language. These descriptions are only communicated to and by men throughout the story, demonstrating that the males have complete power over the women.

These characterizations of attired, or rather unattired, women are reminiscent of an 1831 medical textbook that illustrated demonstrations of obstetrics, or the branch of surgery concerned with childbirth. The viewer is encouraged to imagine what is not presented—a male physician investigating a women’s genitalia with his hands.

![Figure 9: Illustration of a man and his patient in a medical textbook entitled Nuove dimostrazioni di ostetricia, Demonstration of Obstetrics by Maygrier, J. P. (Jacques Pierre), 1831](image)

There is an attempt at propriety as their eyes do not meet and they are fully covered. However, the physician’s hands disappear into the dress material as he lifts his patient’s clothing. Her face appears despondent as this man violates her protective barrier of clothing for the ultimate goal of obstetric health (Figure 9). A bodily examination by a male physician was typical for this period;
however, there is no educational purpose to this image, aside from instructing the doctor how to avoid embarrassment. This constant gender separation is essential to understand Poe’s detective fiction and the medical field. There is a penetration of the feminine, intimate space underneath her garments. This exam is a visual representation to what is occurring in the medical situation. There is an invasion of the microcosm of feminine space, her genitalia, similar for example, to the detective’s presence in the bedroom chamber of the L’Espanayes. It can also be assumed that this female patient is similarly silenced as there is no effort at dialogue and their heads are facing in almost opposite directions.

I argue that Poe is upholding the use of the masculine gaze and therefore, societal ideals regarding masculinity in his detective fiction. Unlike his Gothic stories, the main male figure maintains his dominance over the female characters. The preceding visual and literary analysis of Poe’s texts and medical materials conveys the dominance that characterized Detective Dupin. These “dominated women” remain dead and silent, subject to the medicalization of their bodies. Furthermore, Dupin solves the crime and is continuously commended for his deductive methodology which actively involves viewing women as clues. Thus, Poe upholds nineteenth-century masculine behavior in three ways. Firstly, Poe allows the detective to hold maximum control through the entirety of the stories. Secondly, Poe’s male figure preserves the female characters silence (in death) by dissociating symptoms from their personhood. Lastly, Poe ensures that only Detective Dupin solves each mystery, preventing other characters access to his intellectual domain.

This section has focused on some of Poe’s works, which are rarely linked to nineteenth-century medical discourse: his detective fiction. However, I argue that the two are deeply connected. When we do link medical discourse and Poe’s detective fiction, we see that both the
doctor and physician exert a great deal of control. The women they gaze upon remain silent and powerless. Although the detective and physician are detached from the females they probe, there is a potential for violence in these relationships. By looking at medical language, as done previously in the first chapter, as well as visual depictions of nineteenth-century medical content, we can fully understand how the body horror of Poe’s female victims and the dominance of Poe’s male detective are related to the clinical scenario. Although the men in the previous chapter, at first, achieved a similar control and violence over their brides, they did not manage to dominate throughout the entirety of the story or command the physical space as well as Detective Dupin. Poe critiqued the men and their use of the medical gaze; yet, in this chapter, the men are praised for their use of their gaze and thus, societal roles are endorsed and reinforced. This creates a tension in our understanding of how masculinity function in Poe’s works. In my conclusion, I will address the question of why this difference exists and how it can be attributed to the type of masculinity expressed by the different men throughout Poe’s Gothic and detective fiction.
IV. Conclusion

In the first chapter, I looked as Poe’s Gothic texts in direct comparison with nineteenth-century medical texts, noting overlaps in the husbands’ and doctors’ diction and vocabulary as well as their relationship to their object of interest: their wives or patients, respectively. I observed that the female characters overcome the masculine gaze they are forced to endure through resurrection. With the women’s resurrection, Poe ultimately critiques the men who employ the male medical gaze. In the second chapter, I considered the similarities of the detective’s and doctor’s environments through analyses of both nineteenth-century medical artwork and Poe’s detective fiction. The clinical setting and Poe’s crime scene are marked by an intellectually adept dominant male figure and silent, and often dead, dismembered, women who are used primarily as data. Both detective and physician exhibit excessive authority and control over the women through their gaze, a characteristic that Foucault attributes to nineteenth-century medicine. In these stories, the detective ultimately solves the crime and maintains his power over the dismembered female characters; I interpreted this, although opposite of my analysis of his Gothic stories, as Poe commending the masculine gaze. Herein lies a contradiction in Poe’s works.

It is unsatisfactory to simply accept that Poe can argue both for and against the masculinities he presents. The idea that both arguments can exist in Poe’s works is extremely difficult to grasp; however, I will attempt to hypothesize why he does this in the following paragraphs. Drawing from my arguments in Chapters 1 and 2, my conclusion posits why Poe creates a tension within his own works.
In this range of Poe short stories, the key difference we see is the different types of masculinities expressed. The detective demonstrates a masculinity characterized by emotional restraint as he focuses his gaze on the dead female characters. However, the husbands abandon all emotional restrain, allowing their emotional attachment to their wives to catalyze their mental disarray. These different masculinities lead the male characters to exercise the medical gaze in alternative ways. Thus, Poe presents readers with some male characters who successfully utilize the masculine gaze and others who are unsuccessful. Success is defined by the men’s ability to maintain control over 1) the female characters and 2) their mental and physical state upon the conclusion of the story. If the women were overpowered, remaining an object of the gaze, the male characters were successful, as seen in the detective fiction. Similarly, if the male characters remained sane and poised, they were also considered to successfully use the masculine, medical gaze.

In Poe’s Gothic stories, we see a failure of the masculine gaze. For example, in “Ligeia,” madness overwhelms the male narrator and he is at the mercy of a ghostly version of his late wife, Ligeia. The language Poe employs, such as “there was a mad disorder in [his] thoughts—a tumult unappeasable,” and how the narrator “shrieked aloud,” demonstrates a troubled man who can barely grasp reality (Poe and Thompson 170). Ligeia, herself, is the ultimate cause of this downfall, catalyzing his mental turmoil. As suggested in Chapter 2, she is able to avenge the effects of her husband’s gaze in her haunting resurrection. The woman overpowers the man in this scenario despite his attempt to exert dominance. A similar pattern unfolds in Poe’s “Berenice” as her image continues to occupy Egaeus’s mind after her death.

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7 Since this thesis focuses on works and history from the nineteenth century, historical views on gender and gender roles will be discussed. Critics have considered Poe in the context of progressive ideas of gender expression; see, for example, my sentence describing YonjaeJung’s “Poe the Feminist?” on page 48. However, my conclusion posits Poe in his particular epoch which was defined by stricter societal ideals regarding masculinity and femininity.
However, in comparison, Poe’s detective fiction showcases a male who maintains his sanity and his dominance, in the form of the gaze. His control over the females in the story does not waver like we see in his Gothic stories. If anything, Detective Dupin’s control only grows in intensity as he solves the crime. His knowledge base grows, using the females as data to further his objective. In a genre defined by power dynamics, between the detective and the criminal or the detective and the police, Dupin’s role of the detective is also characterized by power in his relationships. Dupin, as the crime solver, successfully exerts his dominance to his own benefit.

Another question to tackle is why the kind of masculinity presented in Chapter 1 differs from that in Chapter 2. Perhaps, it is how the male characters employ nineteenth-century medical discourse. In my thesis, I argue that medicine was an element of nineteenth-century culture and that culture significantly influences gendered behaviors. Poe engages with nineteenth-century medical discourse and social order throughout multiple of his works, shedding light onto his historical context through his male characters. Now that we have fully explored contemporaneous materials such as firsthand physician accounts, medical journals, instructional medical illustrations, and visual representations of the physician-patient encounter, it is abundantly clear that a knowledge and understanding of nineteenth-century medical ideals permeated Poe’s stories. Poe models his male characters after the physicians who practiced during this time.

Cross-textual comparisons and illustrations analyzed in my previous chapters enable us to discern these different masculinities. The narrators of “Ligeia” and “Berenice” use similar medical language and capitalize on the same intimacy seen in the medical encounter. Dupin likewise employs these medical techniques but manages to express an extreme version of this medical masculinity. He nearly embodies the medical doctor: both detective and doctor dominate
their professional environments, using females as evidence to investigate or symptoms to diagnose. In this way, the detective can further detach from the women they seek to manipulate as opposed to the husbands in the other stories. Medicine preserves the masculine dominance and emotional restraint, as previously mentioned, expected of the detective, reinforcing the gendering of roles within the genre. As a husband, their masculinity fails. When their masculinity is bolstered by controlling and male-dominated fields, they dominate women who may challenge gender norms.

Critics such as YonjaeJung in “Poe the Feminist?: The Return of the Rejected in Poe’s Dying Woman Stories,” and Johanyak in “Poesian Feminism: Triumph or Tragedy” have argued that Poe expresses a feminist point of view in stories like “Ligeia.” For example, they argue that because Poe’s resurrecting women do not succumb to their male oppressors, he demonstrates an early push for women’s rights. However, I speculate that Poe is presenting much darker ideas, not deviating from his horror genre to be a proponent for women. Instead, I suggest that Poe’s Gothic stories are a warning for men. Poe presents two striking examples of how masculinity within the domestic sphere leads to deterioration of the man himself. He does not want the men who read his stories to fall subject to a similar fate. Poe is not purposefully uplifting women but instead trying to maintain male power. He intentionally critiques the men who ineffectively use the medical gaze, not societal gender roles. Any feminist interpretation is only peripheral to Poe’s chief pursuit.

In disagreement with past critical essays, I suspect that Poe is not advocating for a kind of masculinity that respects women or one that considers women as equal, especially when his earlier Gothic stories are considered in direct comparison to his later detective works. In his detective fiction, Poe does not similarly warn men, but rather offers an alternative form of
masculinity for them to adopt. Dupin’s detection is a more subtle form of control that Poe deems as permissible and even praiseworthy. Historically male-dominated professions such as doctor and detective were a way to continue to fortify gender norms and exert patriarchal dominance in a successful manner.

Reading further into these stories, one could hypothesize that women are a threat to the patriarchy if they are living, as seen in Poe’s “Ligeia” and “Berenice.” However, if these female characters are dead, they cannot impede this socially-constructed male control as exhibited in “Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Thus, for gender norms to be maintained, the women must fully actualize the ideal of “symptoms separated from personhood.” Morbidly, the best way to be completely separate from personhood is to be dead. I am not asserting that Poe wanted women to be dead, but if you take the above argument to its extreme endpoint, this is its logical conclusion.

This thesis explores only five of about twenty Edgar Allan Poe short stories, warranting more exploration from future scholars on the representations of genders and the role of medical horror in his other works. Poe utilizes nineteenth-century medical discourse to reveal different masculinities and how the feminine characters in his stories respond to them. I suspect that other Poe stories will follow this pattern of male dominance influenced by medical discourse, continuing to show men how to and how not to exercise this control. Future considerations can expand upon my argument to think more critically about Poe’s sentiments towards nineteenth-century medicine and scientific progress or specifically characterize the range of masculinities that exist in Poe’s works. In addition, the use of medical discourse throughout Poe’s stories could redefine or more effectively define Poe’s Gothic and detective genres, informing future readings of his texts.
In analyzing Poe’s works, I am no stranger to the oddities that best define this beloved author. I identify most with the narrator from “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” who accompanies Detective Dupin as he solves crimes, fascinated by his method. He relates, “It was a freak of fancy in my friend…to be enamored of the Night for her own sake; and into this bizzarrerie, as into all his others, I quietly fell; giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect abandon” (Poe and Thompson 240). Similar to this narrator, I too have become an acute observer and participant in Poe’s eccentricities, fully dissecting the horror of his words, works, and worlds.
Works Cited


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