

## A Stylistic Analysis of the Psychological Conflict in Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart'

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### Abstract

Portraying meaning is of more importance than using the right words only. This is what Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was very well aware of. Within the short story *The Tell-Tale Heart* that consists of about four pages, Poe used 489 punctuation marks, a very considerable number. This paper attempts to stylistically analyze the meaning behind such punctuations, and how they represent the psychological conflict of the main character, using thereby Freud's theories, along with a thorough evaluation on both the linguistic and literary dimension.

**Key words:** Mental disorder, psychology , obsessive compulsive disorder, punctuation marks, madness, Freud.

## Introduction

Mental illnesses, which include madness, have been oftentimes portrayed within literature, either as a dramatic tragedy, or a mystery, or even horror. Famous literary fictions with one or more characters that have a certain mental disorder, out of many, are for instance William Shakespeare's Hamlet, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird, and Oscar Wilde's Picture of Dorian Gray. Amongst the list, Edgar Allan Poe could certainly not be left forgotten, as he implemented characters who oftentimes suffer from a mental disorder of some sort, including his short story The Tell-Tale Heart.

If the written words are considered as the window through which the reader could have a look at the ideas of the writer, punctuation marks are the glass that make the view clear. Using punctuations appropriately, the writer would convey his/her message systematically. Such important and vital linguistic tool has gotten little attention concerning the stylistic analysis of literary texts.

Poe is best known by his gothic works in which he recurs the theme of death that made them part of dark romanticism. Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart

is by no means different. In it, he presented a portrait of the mental deterioration and paranoia, a story about an unnamed narrator who tries to show his hypersensitivity as evidence of his sanity. The behavior of this personality was highly contradicted and paradoxical which could be seen as an application of the Freudian psychology on mental disorder.

In this masterpiece, Poe used punctuation marks skillfully. His style required him to use many punctuations to bring the reader to the arena of the murder, and more importantly, the mental state of the narrator. Through such punctuations, the reader is enabled to see, by the eye of his/her mind, what the murderer acted and/or felt. Digging the text deeply by using this cohesive tool, several mysteries could be revealed. The present study is an attempt to investigate the psychological conflict behind the murder of the vulture eye.

## Freud's Psychoanalytic Approach

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was a professional scientist who spent his life studying mental illnesses from a biological point of view. He was born in 1856 in Moravia, which is what today is within Czech Republic (Muckenhaupt, 1997, p.11). His family was from the middle-class and followed the Jewish religion. From a young age he had high

aspirations, hoping one day to become a famous person through one of his discoveries. Later on, he became a physician specialized in neurology and he shifted his interest into treating people with mental illnesses, including those who suffer from fears, anxieties and obsessions. As this became his specialty, he soon developed the procedure called 'psychoanalysis', trying to delve into the lives of his patients through verbal interactions (Weiten, 2012, p.35).

Freud strongly related negative childhood-experiences with psychological problems that could occur later in life. The individual might have certain fears, desires, and motivations that shape his own attitude and reflections. Freud believed that unresolved guilt, fear, and sexual conflicts, might in fact be deeply buried into the unconscious mind, which in turn result into psychological problems. (Plotnik, 2014,p.9) In his book *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* Freud stated that "(n)ot alone is the meaning of the symptoms invariably hidden in the unconscious; but the very existence of the symptom is conditioned by its relation to this unconscious" (Freud, 2013, p.288). Then, again, he repeated this idea in the same book that "(a)s an unconscious thought it had the

power to create a symptom" (Freud, 2013, p.304).

In trying to understand human behavior as well as the way personality develops on the biological, cognitive, emotional, as well as motivational levels, Freud founded this approach delving thereby into all aggressive or sexual desires and behaviors, repetitive behaviors, thoughts on religion, tradition and politics, and anything that could influence a person consciously and unconsciously (Wolitzky, 2006, p. 65). Hereby, Freud developed various techniques that would treat all unconscious mental problems which may have originated from a young age and resulted into abnormal physical symptoms. Psychoanalysis developed later into the wider term psychodynamics, taken over by other psychodynamic theorists such as Jung, Adler and Klein (Hill, 2001,p. 72). This theory could be defined as "a view of mental life from the perspective of inner conflict, particularly conflicts outside of awareness." (Wolitzky, 2006, p. 65).

Thus, unaware of the impact certain experiences one could have had in the past, unconsciously they may have resulted into many mental and physical symptoms. Freud used thereby several methods including 'case study', which involves a deep interview with the client, 'free association', which is when

the individual freely expresses himself into anything that comes into his/her mind, and 'dream analysis' which attempts to interpret dreams in a very detailed manner (Hill, 2001, p.72).

Psychoanalytic psychology divided the mind into three different forms of consciousness. The first is known as the conscious mind which contains all visible and controllable thoughts and feelings. Then comes the preconscious mind, which also contains thoughts and feelings, only here it needs efforts from the individual before being aware of them. Lastly, there is the unconscious mind which is the part of the mind that one has no awareness of. Furthermore, there are three other mental structures that Freud came up with. The first one is the 'id', which involves one's deepest natural impulses and desires. It works on the pleasure principle which tries to satisfy these needs immediately. The second mental state is called 'superego' which is related to an individual's ethical sense, allowing him to choose that what is morally right based on the 'idealistic principle'. In between the id and the superego there is the 'ego' which uses the 'reality principle' in which one chooses independently, based on one's logic. The greatest part is the 'id' that lies in the unconsciousness, whereas the other two mental states take up all three forms of

consciousness (Friedenberg, 2006, p.73).

The psychoanalytic theory could be illustrated as an iceberg, as Freud himself proposed. That what is above the water is what is visible, representing the individual's consciousness. The part of the iceberg that is still visible, yet under the water, symbolizes the preconscious. However, the greatest part of the iceberg is below the water, which represents the inaccessible and suppressed unconsciousness (Berger, 2006, p.157).

Hemingway took over the Freudian iceberg theory and used it to depict that what lies hidden beneath the literary surface of a novel. Even though the unconscious element may not be visible, it is a deliberate choice by the author to leave out seven-eighths of the story beneath the surface (Stoltzfus, 1996, p.92). The iceberg theory, or also called the theory of omission, leaves out many details in order to reinforce the text (Donaldson, 1996, p.233). For this, he used mostly simple declarative sentences, giving away the action without describing all the details. (Donaldson, 1996, p.59) Thus, despite the fact many details have not been written, that what is hidden has its own weight and significance (Boon, 2008, p.89).

Interestingly, the writer Edgar Allan Poe used the iceberg theory before it came into existence as it was only in 1900 that Freud distinguished between the conscious and the unconscious mind in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. It was not Poe who used it at first though, as other writers and thinkers such as Plato and Nietzsche, presented ideas similar to this concept (Stamos, 2017, p.355). The phrase “double consciousness” was used in a letter written by Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchill dated January 16, 1815, and is regarded as “the first well-documented case of multiple personality disorder in the United States” (Stamos, 2017, p.357).

In psychoanalysis, obsessive compulsive disorder is a mental disease that has been long studied with different names such as “the demonic condition”, “perfectionism” and “obsessive doubting”. Later on, however, Freud called this disorder as an “obsessive neurosis”. He believed that a person suffering from such repetitive thoughts, could eventually be so engrossed into their thought process, that they feel forced to do some sort of action, even something as far as committing murder (Thomsen, 1999, p.13-14). Stories like *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe depict this mental disorder, in which the narrator is a monomaniac who cannot

stop thinking about a certain idea or thought. Sternberg stated that “(a) truly obsessive person...has an all-consuming thought that cannot be put out of mind, however one tries”, taking thereby the protagonist of *The Tell-Tale Heart* as an example (Sternberg, 1997, p.47). The story consists of repetitive patterns that are not only visible in the repetitive words used to emphasize the compulsive and undesired thoughts, but also in the “compulsive and insistent retellings” of the story. His inner consciousness beats him in the end into confessing (Elmer, 1995, p.130). Moreover, this repetition also intensifies the overall suspense in the tale, as when the narrator repeats the same words, it shows his obsession and the paranoid schizophrenia that he suffers from, reflecting the chaotic mindset that repeat the same thoughts over and over again. This then, subverts the narrator’s own statement at the beginning of the tale when he asks the reader to “observe how healthily --how calmly I can tell you the whole story”(Zimmerman, 2005, p.279)

### Punctuation marks

The spoken language differs in many ways from the written one. The absence of the facial expressions and gestures, as well as the phonetic and phonological aspects, such as pitch, stress, and intonation, are among these



differences. To fill this gap, a system of symbols is used to indicate such absent dimensions of language. These symbols are called punctuation marks. A writer is not only in need of drawing his ideas in well-constructed sentences within unified and coherent paragraphs; rather, s/he should do his/her best to punctuate correctly. It could be argued that the coherence, clarity, and effectiveness of the writing are highly dependent on good punctuation. As a result, the reader could understand the text well if s/he represents these punctuations in his/her mind (Pak-tao Ng, 2008, p.253).

Readers should notice that these punctuations are used by writers to guide them within the course of their reading. Punctuations are used to help the readers understand the meaning in a better way. Through them, the reader would imagine the tone of voice, gestures, pauses, and/or the stress of particular syllables or words. They help to make the process of communication between the writers and readers more accurate and clear (Fairbairn and Winch, 2011, p.83-84). They are just the traffic signals that guide the reader when to stop, pause, proceed, or slowdown. Thus, a text without adequate punctuation would be a chaos (Norstrom, 2011, p.166). When these punctuation marks are used correctly, the intended meaning would be shared

in an easy way so that the reader would grasp it. They also enable the readers to save much more time in understanding the text than the unpunctuated one. Therefore, they are considered as a basic tool for effective written communication (Dajang and Adewale, 2016, p.6).

Many definitions have been set by scholars to define punctuation marks. Some have defined them according to the origin of the word punctuation as being derived from the Latin word "Punctum", a point(.). This means that how to put the point in its appropriate position in the text to stop at (Dajang and Adewale, 2016, p.7). George Smallfield (1838) has seen punctuation as being "the art of dividing a written or printed composition into sentences, or into parts of sentences, by the use of points, or stops, for the purpose or marking the different pauses which the sense and an accurate pronunciation require." (p.7).

All the definitions and comments on this topic agree that punctuations play a vital part in both processes of writing and reading, so that the writers and readers would communicate more effectively. Their use is thus a necessity, rather than an esthetic process. Although there is some space for the writer to use the punctuations that s/he wants, for the process of

interpretation, the writer has no choice but to use the appropriate one. In his *Tell-Tale Heart*, Poe skillfully used the punctuation marks to show the

psychological conflict of the main character. The following table shows the types, as well as the percentages of the punctuations in the text:

No.	Punctuation	Symbol	The Total No.	Percentage
1	Comma	,	145	29.7%
2	Dash	-	134	27.3%
3	Full stop	.	118	24.1%
4	Exclamation	!	41	8.4%
5	Semicolon	;	16	3.2%
6	Question	?	10	2%
7	Apostrophe	'	8	1.6%
8	Colon	:	7	1.4%
9	Quotation	" "	5	1%
10	Parentheses	( )	3	0.6%
11	Hyphen	-	2	0,3%
Total			489	100%

**Table No.1 (the used punctuations and their percentages)**

In a very short text, Poe has used many punctuations to clarify the feelings and suffering of the hero. He described the pauses, the interruptions, and contradicted ideas that took place in the story. There are two types of punctuations: Terminal punctuations, which appear at the end of sentences, and internal punctuations, that are used within sentences (Norstorm, 2011, p.166). According to table No.1, the available terminals are the full stop, exclamation, and question mark. On the other hand, the internal punctuations are the comma, dash, semicolon, apostrophe, colon, parentheses, and hyphen. The total number of the used punctuations is (489).

Each one of the punctuations has a specific use and meaning with in the text. Here are the uses and meanings of the used punctuations:

1. Comma: This is used in a sentence when the writer wants to:

- Pause in the speech before proceeding
- Add a phrase with no subject
- Separate words or items on a list
- Include more than one adjective.

(Experts, 2005, p.187)

2. Dash: It is an egotist punctuation mark. i.e. it is used to :

- To interrupt the flow of his idea with another thought.

- To give a summary or definition of a list.
- To indicate incompleteness.
- To make drama.

(Woods, 2006, pp.82-83)

3. Full stop: Also called a *period*, which is considered as the longest pause of the punctuation marks. It is used at the end of the sentence to indicate that it has ended (Hillary, 2015).

4. Exclamation mark: It shows strong feelings, like fear, anger or passion. It also could be used to accentuate feeling of a written spoken word. (Experts, 2005, p.187)

5. Semicolon: It is a longer pause than a comma, but shorter than a full stop. In general, either of them can replace it. This punctuation is used to link two or more clauses that could function as independent sentences but the writer wishes to connect them together. It shows the reader that what is written before it, is not all what the writer wants to say within this sentence (Curtis, 2009).

6. Question mark: It is used with direct questions, series of questions, and/or uncertainty and doubt (Miller & Taylor, 2008, pp.57-58).

7. Apostrophe: It is used to show abbreviation or possession (Barrs, 1994, p.25-26).

8. Colon: It is used to indicate a break or pause within a sentence to add a

phrase or clause that adds more details or information about what has been mentioned. It is also used to indicate that something is to follow (Clark and Pointon, 2009, p.407).

9. Quotation: It is used to indicate that the writer is quoting someone else's words or speech. This punctuation draws the attention of the reader to a part of the text as being exactly what one stated (Finlay, 2011).

10. Parenthesis: It is used to include information that clarifies what is mentioned before, or as an aside (Stern et al., 2014, p.34).

11. Hyphen: it is used to make a compound word by linking them together. (Challenger and Friend, 2013, p.101)

## Data analysis

Style usually is not consistent. It could pass through different changes and manipulations within the course of the literary text." There is no absolute consistency of style with a given domain, and therefore, in measuring the overall statistical properties of texts, we may fail to capture significant variations of style." (Leech and Short, 2007, p.57) It would be impossible to say that certain linguistic phenomena are totally consistent and homogeneous all over the text. Rather, there would be some aspects, which are within the



subconscious of the writer (i.e. they would be partially out of his/her control). Thus, the present section is not claiming to give a perfect analysis of the linguistic value of the punctuation marks within Poe's story; rather, it aims at giving the most general meanings and conceptions behind using such punctuation. In addition, it is difficult to cover all mentioned punctuations in the text. Thus, some examples only are going to be examined in this section. Short (1982, P.56) has pointed out that, "(i)t is not all linguistic data must be relevant. Thus, linguistic detail is used only where it is relevant for the purpose of the argument."

Comma, the most frequent punctuation in the text, has a great value as it embraces several uses that will be elaborated on with a few excerpts taken from the text. This punctuation, which was used a hundred forty-five times, is usually used in complex and elaborately detailed sentences. Throughout the course of the story, some complex sentences were used by the narrator to describe his behavior during the night: "*And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head.*", and how he behaved during the day: "*And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber,*

*and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he has passed the night.*" Such complex and contradicted actions depict what goes on in the mind of the narrator. They reveal the two struggled sides of his identity (ego and superego).

Commas are also present in order to increase the tension and evoke emotion within the reader: "*It was a low, dull, quick sound...*" The short pauses, due to the commas here, almost replicate the beatings of a heart. It is the repeating sound that frightens the narrator, which keeps on being mentioned throughout the tale, just as he had described earlier in the tale: "*Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror*", after which he kept wondering what such sound could possibly be, to finally realize that "*(I)t was the beating of the old man's heart*" that "*grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant.*" Such an obsession haunted him day after day, night after night, until it became his soul purpose to stop that beating. This depicts an obsessive-compulsive disorder, due to the repeated thoughts and actions of the man every single night. When the narrator kills the old man, he states: "*Yes, he was stone, stone dead.*" This is a chilling statement to be said after having committed a murder, and this depicts the man's

madness. Twice has the word 'stone' been mentioned, separated by a comma, in order to emphasize the state of the murdered man. He is now lifeless as a stone.

More commonly, the comma was used to give much more details for what he felt, did, and saw. Several phrases, adjectives, and repeated words were included by adding this punctuation: "very, very dreadfully nervous ...a pale blue eye, with a film over it...[I want to kill] the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever." Such continuous detailed and repetitive language might reflect the suffering of the narrator. The suffering that made him shriek every night: "The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream", when his heart starts to beat and "(i)t grew louder, I say, louder every moment". Such compulsion is usually repeated at midnight, the time of the murder. "Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it [the groan] has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me". The unconscious impact certain past experiences could have, may have resulted into mental and physical symptoms.

The dash, the second most frequent punctuation, was used a hundred thirty five times in the story. In general, the

use of this punctuation is highly limited in the texts, since it is not, for example, as common as full stop and comma. In spite of that, it was used many times in Poe's story. As mentioned in the previous section, it is used to interrupt the flow of the idea with another thought. Interrupting his ideas a lot, the narrator gives a negative impression about his mental health. This punctuation is used in a dual form (i.e. two dashes follow each other directly) which could either emphasize certain words or phrases, or represent a long pause or hesitation in the spoken language.

By the end of the story, the sound of the beating heart is again heard by the narrator, despite the fact he already killed the old man, which increases the state of paranoia the narrator is going through. It is then that the punctuation mark of the dash is mostly used throughout the text. "*Yet the sound increased -- and what could I do?*" "*I gasped for breath – and yet the officers heard it not.*" In both of these examples, the action is described first, followed by the thoughts of the narrator. Thus, the sound increased, and this made him wonder on what to do to mute the sound. Also, his fears made him breathe in deeply, but the officers next to him remained oblivious of what he was going through. Still, the

narrator's insanity forces him to think that the officers knew exactly what happened: "*They heard! -- they suspected! -- they knew! -- they were making a mockery of my horror!*" He stated this believing that everyone must have heard the beating sound, unaware that his insanity is reaching its toll here. The sound he is hearing could perhaps be his own sinful heart, or it could be a sound that his unconsciousness has made up, as a result of his obsessive paranoia he has been displaying for all the past period, long before the man was killed, and that remained haunting him even after. Unable to handle it anymore, he shrieked: "*I admit the deed! --tear up the planks! here, here! - - It is the beating of his hideous heart!*" Clearly, the narrator cries out to the officers without much logic in his language. It seemed that being caught was much more tolerable for him than to live with the sound forever. His illogical reasoning is depicted via the many dashes in the entire paragraph, of which a few have been selected for clarification.

The first used punctuation in the story is the exclamation mark which came after one word only, "*TRUE!*", which indicates agreement and usually comes as an answer for a question. The word along with the exclamation, give the reader an impression that the

narrator was wondering about the appropriate word that describe what he feels. It seems that he was strongly struggling between feeling he was a mad person, and trying to prove otherwise, denying his mental state and defending himself by telling the story of his crime. Having forty-one exclamations in a very short text like this, the narrator described his misery and his restlessness with the sound that alarmed him every night "*hark! louder! louder! louder! ... It is the beating of his hideous heart!*"

It could be stated then, that the exclamation mark is used to display the hysteria within his mind, which could either represent the thought process of the narrator, or the statements he loudly says to the officers. "*Oh God! what could I do! I foamed -- I raved -- I swore! ... It grew louder -- louder -- louder!*" These exclamation marks portray the heightened fright of the man and are within the text not enclosed by quotation marks, as opposed to the speech directed to the officers: "*Villains! ...dissemble no more! I admit the deed!*" And yet, the most important reason behind the murder was his fear of the old man's eyes: "*I think it was his eye! yes, it was this!*" Marked at the end of these phrases by exclamation marks, this depicts his attempts to find any logic in that these eyes were the

reason behind his deed. The man was obsessed that he may be seen by others due to his feelings of guilt, which is here represented by the eyes of the old man. He himself stated that “(h)e had never wronged me. He had never given me insult.” Nevertheless, once he developed this idea in his mind, it haunted him ever since: “I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.” The use of the exclamation mark is mostly at the end of the story, at the point of highest tension where the climax of the tale lies. In only the last two paragraphs, twenty-five exclamation marks could be counted. This is when the man loses himself completely and is torn between his own delusion and reality.

Full stop, the most common punctuation mark in English, came as the third frequent one. It is used to end declarative sentences. Most of these sentences were long and complex. However, he mentioned successive simple and short sentences in which there was no other punctuation, when he tried to explain the motives behind his crime as not being evil and/or greedy: “Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire.” The same thing happened when he simply tried to defend himself that there

was a reasonable motive behind his aggressive behavior and that he is not mad: “Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me.” This might reflect that these ideas were said aloud with a sane mind, and thus, they need not to be elaborated nor complex. Moreover, short sentences also add to the tension in the story, since short sentences could build the feeling of haste and fear, just as Poe used in his *Tell-Tale Heart*: “The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease.” Again, short sentences follow one another and though the officers had not noticed anything, panic starts to take over, even though he fools himself into thinking at first that he was “singularly at ease”. Intense anxiety grabs hold of him.

The semicolon was used sixteen times. This punctuation is highly related with the connected speech, in which more than one sentence is mixed into a longer one. Using compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences, the narrator made it clear that the long pauses in his narration (that are reflected by the dual dashes) are not attributed to a problem with his speech organs, rather, they are related to the flow of his ideas which usually mix between what he did and what he felt. In addition, they might reflect the

continuity of his terror as he describes the way he sees the old man: *"I saw it with perfect distinctness --all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person"*. The narrator describes how the eyes make up the only part of the old man's face, nothing else. He states also that *"(w)henever it [the eye] fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees -- very gradually -- I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever."* He killed him because of his *"Evil Eye"*. The illogical reasoning of the man caused him to relate the eye of the man, to his motive behind wanting to kill him. His mental capabilities have made him unable to think clearly, depicted thereby with a semicolon between two discrete ideas. Also, this punctuation mark is an effective method for telling multiple incidents in one sentence: *"A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they had been deputed to search the premises."* It allows the writer to leave out the unimportant details, and merely focus on the prime events.

The question mark is used ten times within the story. The first time is

already in the first paragraph: *"-- nervous, -- very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?"* The way this sentence had been said already depicts his nervous demeanor, wondering though, why the reader might call him mad. This is again stated further in the story: *"And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the sense?"* This is his answer to what may be 'wrongly' perceived as madness, which is the *"over-acuteness of the sense"*. It could indeed be true that his OCD caused him to be over-obsessive on the sounds he hears (the beating of the heart) and the *"Evil Eye"* he saw on the old man. Both he were unable to deal with for a long period of time, until he finally decided to tie the knot and make an end to his extreme agony by committing the hideous murder. Further in the story, the man met the officers: *"I smiled, -- for what had I to fear?"* This seems to be more a self-encouragement rather than a question. Trying to come over as strong and ignorant of the murder of the old man, he decided to smile and pretend there was nothing to fear. Yet, while he was still next to the officers, *"the sound increased -- and what could I do?"* Asking himself what he could do to mute the sounds, in fear the others might hear it, he was unaware



that these sounds may only be present in his own mind, or may be even stemming from his own heart. It became so extreme that he started wondering “(w)hy would they not be gone?”, impatient to see them leave as he kept asking himself “(w)as it possible they heard not?”. His final outrageous statement clearly indicated that he believed they actually did hear the sounds, and that the only outcome was to give up and confess.

The colon is used seven times within the short story. The first time it is used is when the narrator stated: “Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain.” This sentence is preceded by a number of thoughts that went through the mind of the old man, who tried to convince himself that the sound he heard could be just the “wind in the chimney” or perhaps “only a mouse crossing the floor”, or “merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.” All these thoughts indicate that he was aware of something going on. The use of the colon depicts then the many attempts in trying to find a reason behind the sounds, followed by a colon, and then a contrasted result, which is that these attempts were all in vain. Although he sensed something, he was unable to save himself from the upcoming terror, as it was “(a)ll in vain;

because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim.” Another instance in which the colon is used is when he stated “I have told you that I am nervous: so I am.” This sentence refers to the very beginning of the tale, when the narrator indeed stated his nervousness, and again repeats it in this case. Rather than using a complex sentence, the writer chose to use a colon instead, followed by “so I am”, which shows that it is used as a device to make this sentence more powerful. Short phrases intensify the horror that could be sensed within the tale. An interesting phrase in the tale is when the colon is used three times within only one sentence: “The ringing became more distinct: --It continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness -- until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.” The narrator seems to have completely lost his touch with reality, living only with the sound that, in the end, he realizes it is not made up within his mind. After all, the sound is too loud to spring forth from his imagination. The panic stricken man is not only noticeable for the readers through his actions and his way of thinking, but is also clearly seen through the language that the writer used. Thus, language has



the function of both story-telling, as well as portraying the neurotic fears, and obsession with death that the man is both suffering from.

The quotation mark is used in total five times, and although very limited, through these, the thoughts of the narrator and the old man are spoken aloud, allowing the reader to delve into their minds. The first instance in which the quotation mark is used, is in fact said by the old man: "*Who's there?*" after the old man "*sprang up in bed, crying out*". This is the first time that the old man sensed something, and indeed, it was when the unknown man was stalking him, in an attempt to enter into his room silently. Although a very short phrase, it does portray the fear the old man was feeling at the time. Sometime later, two quotation marks indicate the speech stated by the old man, but it is only in the last paragraph that the narrator himself is speaking. This is at the utmost height of his panic attack, unable to control himself and handle the situation, he confesses by calling out the officers as "*(v)illians!*" followed by "*dissemble no more! I admit the deed! -- tear up the planks! here, here! -- It is the beating of his hideous heart!*" Using here quotation marks clarifies in a direct way the massive impact the crime has had onto the man, and although it seemed so easy

at first, the feelings of guilt and paranoia started to overwhelm him and finally took hold of him.

As to the parenthesis, this is used only three times within the tale, functioning as a clarification for what was mentioned previously. The first use is in the following sentence: "*And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously-oh, so cautiously -- cautiously (for the hinges creaked)...*" The word 'cautiously' has been repeated three times, one after another, immediately followed by the reason why he was so careful, which is that the hinges creaked. The narrator is directing his speech to the reader, which interestingly has occurred many times throughout the tale, as in the following excerpt: "*His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers)...*" The phrase in between the parenthesis could be seen as an irony, as after all, the old man was afraid of robbers, but he apparently never had in mind to take heed of a murderer. The last time a parenthesis is used, the man describes the scene right after the crime: "*A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the*

*premises.*” Rather than straightforward saying *and the officers*, ‘the officers’ in between the parenthesis seems to put the focus on who these people were. Thus, not only is it a clarification for the reader, but it is also an emphasis on their importance and their role in the short story, eventually leading to the dramatic confession.

Finally, the hyphen is used two times only within the story. The first time is in the title of the story itself "*The Tell-Tale Heart*" showing that telling the tale is going to be mostly inside the heart, the subconscious, in which the biggest part of the mountain, the events, is taking place within the self of the narrator. Having such compound word in the title might also indicate the psychological duality of the narrator that made him doing contradictory things or even ask and answer himself. The second instance in which the hyphen is used is "*blood-spot*", in which the narrator, after having committed the crime, proudly states that "*(t)here was nothing to wash out --no stain of any kind --no blood-spot whatever.*"

## Conclusion

In order to portray this mental disorder, Poe not only used words to bring over his story, but he strongly focused on the unique usage of

punctuation marks and their importance in transferring a message just as strong as words could be. Although they usually are used in order to pause and depict the relation between words and phrases, Poe managed to use these punctuation marks themselves as meaningful and significant devices, to narrate the story. Through them, the character’s hesitation, insistence, fear, anxiety, and madness, were all portrayed efficiently, which would never have been clear otherwise. Though, *The Tell-Tale Heart* may have been a short story, Poe’s use of language and punctuations could very well be the reason as to him being considered as one of the greatest American writers of the Victorian Era.

Since Poe’s tale does not in fact explain the narrator’s past experiences, the reader is left to wonder about what made him the way he is, as to Freud’s theory on psychological problems due to negative childhood experiences. Although having an obsessive-compulsive disorder usually does not pose any risk to one’s own safety and health, or someone else’s, the character is unable to deal with it, feeling the impending danger of his own thoughts, yet knows he is unstoppable at some point. Having to stand up every midnight in order to take a peek at the old man sleeping, seeing him again in

the morning to ask him about how he passed the night, contemplating over and over again on how to get rid of the "Evil Eye" and the beating sounds of the heart, his life seemed to be one dreadful routine.

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## المستخلص

ان تصوير المعنى بشكل واضح اهم بكثير من استخدام الكلمات الصحيحة فقط، وهذا ما كان ادغار الان بو (1809-1849) مدركاً له تماماً. في قصته القصيرة (القلب المليء بالقصص) والتي تتألف من أربعة صفحات فقط استخدم بو (489) علامة ترقيم وهو رقم كبير قياساً بحجم القصة. ان هذه الدراسة تحاول تحليل المعنى الكامن وراء استخدام هذه العلامات اسلوبياً، وكيفية عكسها للصراع النفسي الذي تعيشه الشخصية الرئيسية في القصة، اعتماداً على نظريات فرويد جنباً الى جنب مع التقييم لكلا من البعدين اللغوي والادبي.

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