



The Voice of Madness: Exploring Irrational Narrators in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*

Hayder M.Saadon M.Ridha AL-Hasani

Al-Mutafawqeen Secondary School, General Directorate of Education in Najaf,
Ministry of Education, Iraq.

haideralhassani1983@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0002-3814-2034>

Abstract

This study aims to show that Edgar Allan Poe's narrators in *The Black Cat* (1843) and *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843), are irrational and unstable despite their claims of being sane. E. Poe's psychological curiosity about insanity defences was displayed in these stories, it tells how narrators in both stories are suffering from mental insanity. The two main characters unwittingly reveal their dementia by revealing the obsessions that lead them to commit murder. These hallucinations and double standards are additional evidence of mental instability. Hopefully, the investigation highlights the deceptions and delusions in emphasizing the guilty demands of both insane storytellers, they were mad for different reasons, in both tales, storytellers are irritated by something and choose to murder someone. The two stories are captivated by deceptions and parodies, E.A. Poe proved a willful trickery narrator. Poe's stories were designed for part banter, and half sarcasm, in addition, his works were greatly influenced by developments in Victorian mental illness treatment and the insanity defence argument. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which was set up at the end of the 19th Century, predates his dedication to human psychological issues by decades. Both criminals were considered crazy and powerless of self-control. Throughout the first story, the narrator explains his killing of a flatmate once having studied him, secretly, for seven days. Despite his feelings for the elderly man, he had no regrets about killing him for the sake of his eye. In the second narrative, the narrator describes his murdered cat, which haunted him, and eventually, caused him to kill his wife because of a little animal as revenge. Both narrators seek to show their normality, but their obsession and hallucinations, unwittingly reveal their irrational and deranged men.

KEYWORDS: Psychology, Horror, Mental Insanity, Hallucination, Storytellers.

صوت الجنون: استكشاف الرواة غير العقلانيين في قصيدتي إدغار آلان بو " قصة القلب المودوع " و " القط الأسود "

حيدر محمد سعدان محمد رضا الحساني

وزارة التربية\ المديرية العامة للتربية في النجف الاشرف\ ثانوية المتفوقين الاولى

haideralhassani1983@gmail.com



<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0002-3814-2034>

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إظهار الرواة في قصيدتي إدغار آلان بو "القط الأسود" (1843) و"قصة القلب المروج" (1843)، غير انفعاليين وغير مستقرين على الرغم من ادعائهم بأنهم عاقلون. وقد ظهر الفضول النفسي لإدغار آلان بو حول دوافع الجنون في هذه القصص، وتروي كيف يعاني الرواة في كلتا القصتين من الجنون العقلي. يكشف الشخصيتان الرئيسيتان عن خرفهما عن غير قصد من خلال الكشف عن الهواجس التي تقودهما إلى ارتكاب جريمة قتل. هذه الهلوسة والمعايير المزدوجة هي دليل إضافي على عدم الاستقرار العقلي. يسلط التحقيق الضوء على الخداع والأوهام في التأكيد على الدوافع المذنبة لكلا الراويين المجانين، فقد كانا مجنونين لأسباب مختلفة، في كلتا الحكايتين، ينزعج الراويان من شيء ما ويختار قتل شخص ما. القصتان مفتونتان بالخداع والمحاكاة الساخرة. أثبت ادكر الن بو أنه راوي مخادع متعمد حيث صُممت قصص بو لجزء من المزاح ونصف السخرية، بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تأثرت أعماله بشكل كبير بالتطورات في علاج الأمراض العقلية في العصر الفيكتوري وحجة الدفاع عن الجنون. تسبق نظرية التحليل النفسي لسليغموند فرويد، التي تم إنشاؤها في نهاية القرن التاسع عشر، تفانيه في القضايا النفسية البشرية بعقود من الزمان. اعتُبر كلا المجرمين مجنونين وعاجزين عن ضبط النفس. في القصة الأولى، يشرح الراوي كيف قتل زميله في السكن ذات مرة بعد أن درسه سرًا لمدة سبعة أيام. وعلى الرغم من مشاعره تجاه الرجل المسن، إلا أنه لم يندم على قتله من أجل عينه. وفي القصة الثانية، يصف الراوي قطه المقتولة، التي كانت تطارده، وفي النهاية، تسببت في قتله لزوجته بسبب حيوان صغير انتقاماً. ويسعى كلا الراويين إلى إظهار طبيعتهما الطبيعية، لكن هوسهما وهلوساتهما تكشف عن غير قصد عن رجلين غير عقلانيين ومضطربين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علم النفس، الرعب، الجنون العقلي، الهلوسة، رواية القصص.

1. Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe's works are terrifying because of their peculiar style and inventive depictions of unreliable narrators, when it comes to the human condition, due to the Tales' effect and intricate plotlines. In *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843) and *The Black Cat* (1843), E. A. Poe illustrates the revelation of first-singular storytellers, he tries to avoid blaming and enforce their sanity by referring to outside strange powers, leading them to carry out the crimes. E. A. Poe's goal is not to investigate mystical events that are practised by the locals, but rather to expose the inconsistencies of the human mind via the actions of an insane murderer (Bynum, P. M. 1989, p.144). The study explores how the narrators' deceptions, and hallucinations together with their unreasonable conduct, drive them to fall into deception and are subsequently portrayed as unstable individuals around the period of both tales' production.

Edgar Allan Poe is considered the best horror story writer among his contemporaries at that time. His unique style has made him a hero among thriller authors. In this study, Poe's tales were analyzed using a *Stylistic Approach* to show how the author uses terror in a variety of ways. This analysis also evaluates the effects of stylistic variances on the overall feeling of terror (Dern, J. A. 200, p.55). Purposive sampling is used also, which is a descriptive qualitative examination. All horror sceneries were



bought utilizing literary investigation. E. A. Poe employs a similar approach to tell his stories, using first-person perspective and streams of thought, but each narrative has a distinct central topic. The style delivers varied feelings according to the concepts Poe picks. The speaker in *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Every evening, he goes to the old man's house and sees him, planning how to murder him since the man's eye annoys the narrator. The victim wakes up one night when he hears the narrator moving and his heart is beating so fast and so loudly, he chooses to murder the old man in cold blood. The cops arrive at the residence after he murders the victim and claims that a neighbour heard some sounds. The cops stay at the residence with the narrator and converse for a time. The narrator is so anxious that he hears his own heart pounding and mistakenly believes it is the heart of the guy he murdered. The noise became higher until he couldn't stand it any longer. He then informs the cops about the guy he murdered, claiming that he believed he heard the other person's heart, but it was his own. (Imran, A. R. 2016).

2.1 Insanity Defense as Controversy Issue

It's impossible to read these stories without thinking about the turmoil that surrounded criminal defiance in the early 19th Century, until the end of the eighteenth century, irrational offenders were punished and imprisoned in the same way as rational ones since they were not conscious of their conduct. After various changes, medical testing was applied at the Supreme Court to separate both sorts of criminals, thus unstable persons were attentively recognized. These stories were written and published about a potential resistance in criminal prosecutions: individuals may suffer from a condition that is neither medical nor rational but rather moral, thus they are unable to control themselves or conscious of their crimes. The term "moral insanity" refers to a person's mind that is unable to act inappropriate or reasonable manner. If you want to fully grasp the significance of my research, you'll need to know where these mysterious stories come from (Bynum, P. M. 1989, p.146).

The presence of obsessed characters is common in several of Edgar Allan Poe's writings, a handful of studies have focused on this theme in the author's work. In the short tale "Berenice," the central character is infatuated with his partner's teeth, which has inspired a lot of previous writing. That's why we're looking at Poe's tales since obsession is a major factor in both tales' plots, and that's why this research is being done. According to this interpretation of both stories and other stories in which obsession is a central element, tension, a sense of paranormal activity and an eerie effect may be seen (Ibid)

2.2 Poe's Narrators Symbolized the Monomania through Excuses



The narrators in both stories describe the motives behind their crimes ambiguously, revealing the causes of madness sequences: In *The Black Cat*, the narrator's mind is more excitable, less tranquil, and less rational than others, besides he claims to have mental stability. He professes to be tranquil and reasonable yet, motivated by violent desires, he gets the cat's eye to kill it later, and then he kills his wife unconsciously without any hesitation. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the storyteller defends his mental health in the same way. He confesses to the murder, owing to the simple feeling of heartbeats in his head. He shows careful attention, even if he professes to be worried. The discrepancies between what they say and what they do are thus countless. Although they portray serenity, showing scarcely any regret, guilt, or awareness, as the study shall afterwards investigate. The sanity mask they wear all the time is the clearest indication of their mental instability (Kresnanda, A. N. 2020)

Another sign of their moral madness is their penchant for making excuses again and over again, and their responsibilities are not taken seriously. The presenter's affection for animals in *The Black Cat* might appear to be an ordinary story attached to the case, but it functions as a soft depiction of himself. However, it forms a well-thought interest to sympathy, he looks to beg forgiveness of the readers and justify his wrongdoing. He then attributes his mental instability to alcohol consumption was not what led him to murder his wife. All the justifications set him stuck in an inner struggle. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the storyteller likewise excuses his psychological sickness to break his emotions of guilt (Saputri, I. D. 2020).

His major justification is his over-perceptiveness of the common sense of trial, one of the strongest expressions of his insanity. It may look paranormal, yet this over-perceptiveness is a fabrication of his psychological instability, both characters violate their selves by appealing to irrational criminals. These psychotic characters are unaware of what they perform and behave, and their calmness is important to set up the psychological disorder. The storyteller in *The Tell-Tale Heart* seems more delighted and startled by his activities, thus his actions irremediably shock him. Astonishment may be seen in his response to the sounds of heartbeats. He's afraid of being found out, and the sound he hears is his heart racing in response to that anxiety. However, he is unable to recognize it. Killing the cat in *The Black Cat* blinds the narrator from the seriousness of his act, and then it vanishes at this moment. These central storytellers condemn themselves, and by defending their rationality. Their delusional behaviour is worsened by their inability to recognize and accept responsibility for their actions, as well as their continued use of evasive excuses. (Bynum, P. M. 1989, p.148)

3.1 The Spirit of Perversion as Indicators of Insanity



The storytellers are misled by their obsessions, which leads them to kill without hesitation, so the narrators' ideas and solutions cannot be logically supported, they serve as more evidence of their insane state of mind. The basic disposition and character had undergone a major change for the worse, the criminal in *The Black Cat* blames his aggressive behaviour on his wife and the mysterious cat. The corrupted spirit, on the other hand, is introduced as an uncontrollable power, a more than devilish malice, gin-nurtured that utterly rules him (Kresnanda, A. N. 2020). A cat is seen standing over a hogshhead by the protagonist while he is drinking one of his favourite drinks. The cat has no owner and has never been seen before, so he at once offers to buy it but makes no statement about it, knowing nobody about the strange cat. It seems like the outcome of his absurd attitude. Here, he is fully driven by the desire to be pursued by perverseness. He may be able to exorcise the demon within himself if he kills the horrible cat.

When the narrator feels afraid of his obsession, he acts in an unclear manner, revealing his insufficiency. Perverseness, to readers, signifies the long-awaited justice that will finally strike at the core of the psychotic man's depravity (Ibid). The storyteller of *Tell-Tale Heart* couldn't avoid the lure of his preoccupations revealing his absurdity. Foreshadowing an impending preoccupation, killing the old man is motivated only by an obsession, there was no logical or emotional justification. There is no sense of urgency. He guesses it was eye! That was it, exactly! An eye becomes the source of the tragedy of an old man and the narrator as well. Matthey Bynum stresses the 19th-century view of a crazy man as a helpless person terrified to glimpse into people's eyes. The lunatic in *The Black Cat* likewise concentrates on eyes, specifically the missing eye, because of their preoccupation and fear, the eye is what draws them to committing the crimes.

3.2 The dilemma of the supernatural

The narrators are enclosed in a mysterious fizz, along with their fascinations, alters their profession and shows their lunacy. The label of The Black emphasizes the traditional notion of cats as magicians, which is later addressed by the storyteller, or no greater excuse than that it occurs, right now, to be recalled. Some readers would regard him as a victim of the supernatural, the author wants to draw the reader's attention to this strange point. Poe's emphasis on a universal force antagonizes personal aspirations and relegates people to fleeting life. He shows schizophrenic beings haunted by the mystical powers of the black kitten in the story while killing the soul in *The Tell-Tale Heart*. In the latter tale, the reporter appears to give up his uneasiness – skillfully conveyed by Poe's drafting of brief phrases and constant words – to propose a notion that sparks a glow on the uncanny, killing that had trailed the victim with his dark shadow as he approached and engulfed him. Terrors from



the unknown immobilize and alter the perspectives of both narrators. Hallucinations and madness have weakened their senses. Since they are terrified of the supernatural, their confessions are unreliable. Their recurring delusions only help to reinforce the impression that they are insane (Setyaningrum, E. S. 2015).

The storytellers are an example of unreliable narrators in Edgar Allan Poe's short tale. To hide their omissions, the narrators try to mislead the reader by going off-topic and digressing. Because the researcher evaluated the narrators' restricted information, their engagement in the incident, and the problematic value system, this was possible to find out. The research found that the narrators were untrustworthy because of the excessive repetition and ambiguous language (Setyaningrum, E. S. 2015). When the narrators describe themselves as "crazy," for example, they have grown a keen sense of hearing, which only serves to set up the opposite. According to new research, this is because the storytellers are untrustworthy owing to the accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and purposeful efforts to steer the reader's sympathies. Throughout the novel, they try to win the reader's sympathy. To escape accepting responsibility for his acts, notably the murdering, and probably most importantly, to prove their sanity. Also, the study of both stories' textual signals shows the narrators are untrustworthy due to the many contradictions between their statements and deeds.

The narrators' ideas, principles, and behaviours diverge dramatically from those of the presumed author, the viewers, and the works. The narrators and readers are separated by several textual cues in the discourse. To the untrained eye, they support a clear understanding of the narrators' intentions. This makes it difficult for the reader to empathize with them. The inferred author is communicating with the reader via these signals, which might be construed as such. Signals in this sense show the contrast in morality between the narrators and the inferred author 'the second self of Edgar Allan Poe,' The reader can tell the difference between the narrators and the inferred author based on these linguistic cues (Shen, D. 2008, p.122).

3.3 Double standards and hypocritical attitude

Despite being troubled minds, the storytellers in both narratives prove ecstatically self-certainty and fearlessness to be incorrect. Readers are put off by the narrator's hypocritical attitude and begin to doubt their reliability. Throughout *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the killer's annoyance of anguish about the aged man exposes inconsistent conduct. It results paradoxically since this delight turns in opposition to him when the policeman laughs at him, could take these false grins no more! He intentionally mocks the elderly man's anxiety, but he can't stand the cops' attitude, and his cynicism is on full show as a result (Bynum, P. M. 1989, p.147).



The Black Cat also has an unreasonable narrator who beats his pet against the wall in front of the police as his wife lay dying, on a section of brickwork behind which his wife's body had once stood. This mentality drives both narrators to their self-judgment and tells how one's self-satisfying duplicity might lead to killing someone unconsciously. The offenders' mental craziness is mostly determined by their hypocrisy, coupled with other symptoms like obsessions and hallucinations. In both tales, human characters are shown as irrational and brutish beasts, whereas animal characters are depicted as sentimental and kind beings (Walsbergerová, T. 2019).

One of the authors' fundamental beliefs is the difference between humans and animals, this parallel may have been miscalculated in various crucial studies on Poe's stories, but it needs to be investigated to affirm the storytellers' lunacy. The image of killing is more than just horrifying; it seems to be a figment of the imagination. Because of this, animals are portrayed as rational creatures in E. A. Poe's stories. Throughout *The Black Cat*, the storyteller asserts the disinterested affection of a savage touches his soul and has often been tested by Man's meagre friendship and weak loyalty. For the first time, Poe used this to prompt both the detectives and the readers to seek a brutal and uncontrolled killer, which is how the offender ends up being a chimp instead of a different animal. Poe uses the well-known "wild beast" test from the eighteenth century in these stories to further cement the idea that the speakers are mad. According to the results, mad people are only capable of acting like savage animals, and not like logical beings at all (Kresnanda, A. N. 2020).

4.1 Crazy Storytellers Powerful Emotions rather than Logic

Poe's chroniclers are motivated to kill for no real reason. They hold one quality in common, the overwhelming, motiveless urge to kill their victims. These irrational protagonists act on impulse and, demonstrate a callous disdain for the suffering of the victims, they encounter. Even if the killer of an elderly man planned his murder for seven nights, his anxiousness and senseless crime indicate his incapability to behave sensibly and cautiously. The killer of *The Black Cat* claims that impulsiveness is "one of the primordial instincts of the human heart," which matches well with the description of perversity provided above (Silva, N. P. D. 2017). All these responses not only discredit the demented narrators' claims of self-defence but also condemn them and reveal their unmistakable madness.

Instead of feeling sorry and contrite, both men act out separately without any sense of blame or morality. A further example of their deceitfulness is created through the murderer of "The Black Cat," the murderer then assumes his insensibility. They professed shame but another aspect of the complicated charade. Both narrators look like immoral guys, unconcerned with the targets' death. The "The Black Cat," the



madman boasts the narrator even laughs about his murder. Rather than feeling pity for animals and primates, Poe expresses mistrust and even misanthropy toward humans. This absence of morality and responsibility shows the narrator's instability even more clearly (Walsbergerová, T. 2019).

4.2 The Representation of Hysteria in Edgar Allan Poe's Narratives

E.A. Poe's narratives are among his most notable literary works. Hysteria is shown in both narratives in various ways, and the purpose of this essay is to examine how these many hysterical symbols work together to express the messages in both stories. The semiotic technique is used in this study. The *Black Cat* and *The Tell-Tale Heart* were applied to gather the data, which was then analyzed thoroughly. The data are evaluated using the descriptive approach to determine the symbols of hysteria that are featured in both tales. After examining both stories, the study reveals two sorts of symbols that are incorporated in the two short stories. The first sign is the emblem of fury, while the second symbol is the symbol of fear.

These two symbols profoundly impact one another, and both symbols are the major cause of Hysteria experienced by the two main protagonists in both short stories. The two main protagonists in the two short tales, which deal with curses and phrases that allude to things, animals, colours, and natural events, use these symbols to express themselves. It was also revealed that both the major characters in the two short tales exhibit the traits of a psychopath, who delights in torturing and killing their victims while remaining calm and collected throughout the process. Both tales communicate the idea that it is natural for a person to be terrified of the crime that he or she commits, especially if that act results in the death of another person (Walsbergerová, T. 2019).

4.3 Psychological illness importance in E. A. Poe's literary works

Literature is a mirror of human experience. Retelling the story of a person or a societal phenomenon is best done via this medium. Literature also gives a function in fixing a diverse event, dependent on humans' difficulty towards themselves and their environment. When it comes down to it, literature has a profound influence on how people think and act. Psychological research in the form of literature is required in this instance. Mental illness is one of the most widespread occurrences in our society that warrants attention when it comes to difficulties of the mind. Now, when people talk about being crazy or insane, they're referring to having a mental illness. Before the nineteenth century, clear descriptions of certain disorders, which may be labelled paranoid schizophrenia, were found to be quite infrequent. Edgar Allan Poe's writings include instances like this. E. A. Poe was best-known for writing horror stories, which have become some of the most enduring works of American



literature. The mental illness of the fictional character generally develops the primary components of horror stories. The characters are motivated to perform their heinous deeds by the mental disease with which they are afflicted (Wiratningsih, R. 2003).

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude this paper, comparable narrators try to set up their rationality in Poe's works *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*. However, their unreasonable behaviours and acts lead to their condemnation, then they reveal their insanity while committing their crimes. The essay has studied how both speakers show indications of controversial moral insanity via their skilful deception and indifference. Equally, psychopaths reveal their truth by killing the people they care about because of the narrators' mental hallucinations. It is Poe's insight into the minds of these people that shows them to be illogical and hypocritical characters, they are displayed to have dementia via their unrepentant impulsiveness and frailty. Instead of concluding that both narrators are normal people who tell lies or have strange experiences, further investigation supports Poe's point to show insane and vicious criminals who are unable to control their actions.

Anxiety is expressed in Poe's short tales via characters and situations, according to the research. As a result of their unstable psyches and unfathomable flaws in their personalities, the major protagonists in both books exhibit traits such as contempt for right and wrong, lying or deception to exploit others, and being cruel, cynical, and dismissive to others. Those conditions cause lethal action such primary character becomes the aggressor or assailant by assaulting an innocent victim. Poe shows the enigmatically blending signs of antisocial personality disorder in his short tales. The nameless narrator is the most essential and most complicated character in both tales. The storytellers proved several characteristics of anti-social personality disorder. Many clues point to the narrator's illness in these short pieces. Edgar Allan Poe is well-known for his short tales replete with obsessed people, but only a small number of studies have focused on this theme in his works. Obsession, in his short stories, is the focus of this research since it seems to play a significant role in the most important acts in the short fiction. Narratives are designed to have a certain impact on their readers. As a result, the primary goal of this research is to figure out how obsessions in these short tales contribute to the overall impact of Gothic fear in readers' minds and bodies. Obsession in the selected stories provides effects like tension, a sense of being haunted, and an eerie impact when regarded as the principal topic of both tales.



References

- Bynum, P. M. (1989). Observe How Healthily—How Calmly I Can Tell You the Whole Story”: Moral Insanity and Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart. In *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression* (pp. 141-152). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Dern, J. A. (2001). Poe's Public Speakers: Rhetorical Strategies in " The Tell-Tale Heart" and" The Cask of Amontillado". *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 53-70.
- IMRAN, A. R. (2016). *SYMBOLIZED HYSTERIA IN EDGAR ALLAN POE’S “THE BLACK CAT” AND THE “TELL-TALE HEART”* (Doctoral dissertation, UNIVERSITAS HASANUDDIN).
- Kresnanda, A. N. (2020). *Through The Eyes Of Madness: A Psychoanalytical Study Of The ‘Unreliable Narrator’Of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”, “The Black Cat” " and “The Cask Of Amontillado”* (Doctoral dissertation, UNIVERSITAS AIRLANGGA).
- Saputri, I. D. (2020). *PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER IN THE BLACK CAT, THE TELL-TALE HEART, AND THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER by EDGAR ALLAN POE* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Hasanuddin)
- Setyaningrum, E. S. (2015). *Paranoid Schizophrenia in Poe’s Works: The Tell-Tale Heart, The Black Cat, and The Fall of The House of Usher* (Doctoral dissertation, UNIVERSITAS NEGERI SEMARANG).
- Shen, D. (2008). Edgar Allan Poe's Aesthetic Theory, the Insanity Debate, and the Ethically Oriented Dynamics of “The Tell-Tale Heart”. *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 63(3), 321-345.
- Silva, N. P. D. (2017). Obsession in Edgar Allan Poe's" The Black Cat" and" The Tell-Tale Heart".
- Walsbergerová, T. (2019). " Making a Mockery of Horror": the double-crossing paranoia of EA Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart and The Black Cat.
- Wiratningsih, R. (2003). *Mystery as Seen in Edgar Allan Poe’s Short Stories The Fall of The House of Usher, The Tell-Tale Heart, and The Black Cat* (Doctoral dissertation, Master’s thesis, Universities Sebelas Maret. [http://www. amazon. com/exec/Obidos/redirect](http://www.amazon.com/exec/Obidos/redirect)).