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Analyzing Criminal Discourse in Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell Tale Heart through Fairclough's 3D Model



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Abstract

This study investigated the psychological aspect of fear in the lines of Edgar Allan Poe's fictional work, the mystique of people, wrath, and restraint; for which, Fairclough's 3D model has been applied to capture critical, criminal discourse analysis that pays attention to the lingual expressions for deciphering gothic aspects in the text. Crime fiction is the focal area of this research mainly because of the concepts of fear and mystery connected with psychological and lingual human features. The aim of this research is to reveal and analyze crime fiction aspects in the texts of a short story, *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe. This research involves all the gothic features that are used by Edgar Allan Poe in order to unveil human mind and features that have to do with crime features such as suspense, curiosity, the environment, horrific context and those dimensions of grief that the protagonist is bound with die where language bears a tremendous role in designing features of crime.

Keywords: Mysterious, psychological, criminal discourse, Fairclough's 3D Model

Introduction

This qualitative study aims at analyzing the selected texts keeping in mind the elements of crime and fear in *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe through Fairclough's 3 D Model. Edgar Allan Poe was a poet, critic, and writer of short stories from the United States. He was well-known for his mystifying and unsettling works, which featured many puzzling problems that kept coming up in his dreams and daily life. His fictional tale "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) established the form of modern detective fiction, and his horror stories have the most atmospheric writing in American literature. His poem "The Raven" (1845) is one of the most well-known in the country's cultural history (Poe, 2018).

Language plays a very momentous role in interpreting criminal and supernatural activities within a text, and the language used in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe is rich in determining the aspects of crime and the incidents itself is mysterious enough to let the readers ponder on it (Abeng, et al., 2023). In the article, *The Myth of Patriarchy: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment* by Kainat Naseer (2022), it is said that language and literature are

interlinked with each other (Guercio, 2025). Literature shapes society and culture, and language helps it in doing so. There are three main features of language which help to depict the culture. First and foremost, this is a vehicle for communicating the new culture to the next generation, then it establishes a bond and allowing individuals to construct an identity (Ahmad, 2022).

Fairclough's 3d Model

The current study used three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 2013) for analyzing the connection between language, power and ideology in social and political contexts. There are three basic dimensions:

a. Texts (Textual Dimension) in Description

Texts can be regarded as any communicative production capable of being studied: speeches, advertisements, news, blogs, or tweets. Textual analysis entails the study of features which are linguistic in nature to establish the truthfulness of the text. It focuses on meaning building, its communication and use of language as an aid towards processes of reproduction in power arrangements for different mind-sets.

b. Discursive Practice (Discursive Dimension)

This dimension deals with interpretation of discursive practice that entails the analysis of language use within certain social and cultural settings. This covers the crafting and manufacture of texts. It comprises evaluation of the choices of the writers, editors or media producers in making contents and choice of language. In it, we can study how language creates and enforces power relations and how and what kind of ideologies are taken for granted in a society. It further focuses on the way that power dynamics and the methods of distribution, patterns of distribution mirror that of ideological assumptions of the texts. This helps in identifying the use of language for exploiting power relations and the ideologies in a society.

c. Social Practice (Social Dimension)

The third level in Fairclough's model is social practice which includes studying the general social framework of the texts analyzed. Social factors that influence language and put into consideration aspects such as economical political and past experiences. Social practice also involves examination of how issue of power and subject knowledge relations within ideological assumption of the society are constructed and manifested in social institutions and how discursive practice is formed through the

interactions with such structures and institutions?

Psychoanalytical Theory

It deals with the human mind, particularly the personality aspects which have been presented (Freud, 2017) and taken forward by other theorists. Key concepts in psychoanalysis include:

- **The Unconscious:** An aspect of the person's psyche that holds both urges and past experiences that may not be easily recognized by the person but directs the actions of the individual.
- **Defense Mechanisms:** Defense mechanisms that are employed in fashioning a psychological apparatus for dealing with facts and perceptions, in a bid to protect the ego, these include:
- **Dream Analysis and Free Association:** Methods applied to reveal prejudicial attitudes and perquisites causing behavioral patterns in an individual.

Literature Review

Edgar Allan Poe is known to be among the most creative authors of the early nineteenth century in America by many scholars. His short stories are in gothic genre and elaborating unseen narrator experiences a progressive mental degeneration and is plagued by devilish events (Castro, 2021). He can be described as a classic case of an author whose writing was shaped by both the year in which he lived and the century that preceded him (Fisher, 2010). Most of his works depict the theme of the fear of sociopolitical changes that occurred in American society and gothic tradition originated from Europe but in America, it took form of macabre and supernatural in Poe's telling (Mcgill, 2001). It can also be safe to assume that the terrible experiences which Poe himself went through throughout his wayward life were reflected in his stories.

Mysterious

There are two psychological narratives that serve to draw *The tell-tale heart* within the field of crime fiction. The writing style brings into human use of the first-person point of view making the reader feel the narrator's mind. This choice of perspective enables Poe to show how the mental state of a person driven to the threshold of insanity by guilt and paranoia works. The use of symbols and symbolism is among the main characteristic of storytelling in tales of Poe. As the victim that transforms into an

avenger of vengeance, *The Black Cat* is a powerful symbol for the speaker's guilt. The incorporation of symbols by Poe allows the supply of psychological and moralistic intent of the yarn for reader to decipher. Unlike Roderick Usher in *The Fall of the House of Usher* who admits to feeling mentally unwell, the narrator of *The Tell-Tale Heart* believes his hypersensitivity proves his sanity rather than being a sign of madness. Another element that can be linked with characteristics specific to the crime fiction tradition is the way Poe builds suspense and tension in the story (Poe, 2022).

The progressive unveiling of the narrator's character's degeneration together the gloomiest return of *The Black Cat* also helps to maintain suspense's presence for almost the entirety of the plot. *The Tell-Tale Heart* reveals the psychological contradictions that lead to a murderous profile and serve as a study in paranoia. For instance, the narrator acknowledges in the opening sentence that he is quite apprehensive, but he cannot see why this makes him appear insane. He describes his use of enhanced sensory capacity as self-defense against insanity (Guerrero, 2022).

Looking at the criminal language use in *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe. It is a sinister story based on the transportation of the main character from innocence to crime. The loss of the main character's moral compass is evident in his soliloquies, where the focus is on predominantly negative aspects of human nature supported by the specific choice of the words, and in their choice, there is premises of death, guilt, and pre-pathologic anticipation. It is expected that in a text that speaks of crime, the use of words such as "murder," "violence" "sinister" help to present a narrative that is based on an immoral deed. In this case, the use of first-person narrative point of view makes the discourses quite subjective since readers are provided with direct access to the main character's head. This choice determines the attitude towards the character and shows the reader the criminality of his actions (Pavel Girard, 2022).

Psychological

Dostoevsky employs the juxtaposition narrative method coupled with the revelation of the main character Rodion Raskolnikov's thoughts and belief systems. Why this linguistic feature: This helps in painting an internal struggle and moral ambiguity which he has before, during, and after the crime. The novel is very intensive in terms of the dialogues and the monologues which raise the elements of philosophic and

psychological planes of the characters. This element is evident in how Raskolnikov interacts with society and is specifically seen when he tries to justify his kill, feels guilty about it, and battles between the criminal part of him and the reasonable part. This is to mean that when engaging with Dostoevsky, and especially his novels, one anticipates discussions of symbolism (Aday, 2024). For instance, a dream of the 'yellow room' can be analyzed as the stress or the choking feeling existing in the main character Raskolnikov (Olivira, 2022). This is why the idea and functional application of language and a symbol as a mean give the work a psychological twist (Schaller, 2014).

The psychosomatic disorder of the criminal in both Dostoevsky and Poe's work is similarly portrayed using stream of consciousness, symbolism or tone shift, first person narrative and foreshadowing all of which collectively elaborate on the internal conflict of the murderer and the heavy consequence of his or her crime on the society (Oliveira, 2022). The works are not related in the scenes, yet they engage with similar questions concerning the psychological and moral consequences of criminality. Just like in the case of *Frankenstein*, *The Black Cat* is also a first-person narrative, which helps the reader identify with the main character quickly. The use of this narrative choice enhances the effect of the moral issue, and consequences presented in both works because it puts the reader in the position of seeing the hero's action (Trotsuk, et al., 2023). The use of symbols is very important to the creation of the themes of the story, just like in the work of Shelley as read by Poe. In *The Tell-Tale Heart* also the first-person narrators are made into heroes in the tales of criminal insanity by emphasizing their conflicts with the law and insanity.

In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Poe's sharp language and economical style so add to the story's meaning, and maybe this connection between form and content is what dread is all about. Like a beating heart, Poe is also a part of the scheme to catch the narrator in his evil scheme. Poe omits unnecessary details from the narrative to emphasize the murderer's fixation on three distinct, unadorned objects: the old man's eye, his own heartbeat, and his own sense of sensibility (Amir, 2020).

Stevenson and Poe also show concern in the duality of man; The story *The Black Cat* exhibits internecine conflict; illustrated in the struggle of the man and his evil selves. In a similar manner, the two characters of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are in

one way or another the two faces of the same man This connects the two works in terms of the analysis of this particular theme. That is why it is important to accentuate that both works' primary orientation is to reveal the characters' psychological states. There are major prospects of stylistic analysis for identifying the personalities mechanisms of the main characters that lead to their degradation and turning into evil people (Colley, 2017).

Criminality

Literary works written by Dostoevsky such as the "Brothers Karamazov", "Notes from Underground" also addresses issue on the psychological and moral outlook on criminal justice. They are issues like why people commit a crime, and the consequences of regret to the spiritual aspect of a person. The authors represent the true motivation and psychological assessment of the criminals through the events, while Capote gets to depict the planning and mental health of the criminals and the effect of the story socially (Woldetsadik, 2024).

It will be useful to continue the work by connecting other fields of knowledge to expand the perspective through reflecting criminals' attitudes and values. Adopting Fairclough's 3D model can provide a telescope as well as a microscope to analyze the linguistic phenomena related to crime in literature and understand how language subsumes within other social and cultural formations, with its possible challenges to continually examine approaches for improving the analysis and expanding the connections of fields (Santoso, 2018).

Research Methodology

Based on the language and text in the above-mentioned stories, the theoretical framework of this work is: Critical Discourse Analysis, and in CDA, the research uses 3-D model of Norman Fairclough, which offers a holistic approach to comprehend discourse by examining three interconnected dimensions: This framework suits well the analysis of literary discourse as it offers multiple perspectives on the criminal discourse in the selected crime fictions. This model is complemented with psycho-analytical model of Sigmund Freud to determine the uncanny effect of horror.

Data Analysis

The following sections have explored the selected texts of Edgar Allen Poe from the perspective of CDA and Psychoanalytical frameworks in *The Tell Tale Heart*. There

are a few textual examples:

Analyzing the given text according to the performed linguistic analysis, it is possible to state that the word **“haunted”** points out to obsessive-compulsive disorder in the protagonist of the story from the extracted quote of the text, **“It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night.** (Poe, 2002, p. 1)” In reinforcing the periodicity of ‘**day and night**,’ the speaker demonstrates that he cannot stop thinking about the murder, painting the picture of a man possessed. In addition, when it comes to the discursive analysis of the work, Poe’s (1841) ability to examine the way characters think or portrayal of the characters’ insanity and obsession, this is in tune with the normal coping mode that entails denial and minimization of criminal actions by most of the offenders.

Thus, through the concept of authoring, the narrator constructs himself as a character that is precarious and malevolent, thanks to which an eerie tone is set for the entire narrative. His acknowledgment of the fact that he is pursued by an idea also hints at the possibility of the supernatural or the irrational, which ties back to the narrative’s underlying mood or theme. Besides, in social aspect, the focus on an idea by the protagonist, the inability of the protagonist to explain the source of this idea, and the concept of social fear linked with the idea of mental illness or the concept of madness as the social idea of crime is shown. This characterization poses a challenge to the reader’s ability to define what is considered sane or moral and makes them question the two concepts.

In the next example, **“I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell.”** (Poe, p. 95) Thus, analyzing the language used in the passage, the usage of the phrase **“in hell”** to portray the state of spirit where the moral has been degraded to an extent of damnation depicts that the narrator has been punished for his sin thereby indicating that he suffered. This is because while using the source of the voices in the story, the author does not adequately clarify it or even justify it; the only motivation is to merely increase the eerie and relatively more thrill into the story. Further, Hell, which is given voices by the narrator, is made to control him and make him do what he does, and therefore, he tries to justify his actions as being compelled by evil forces. From this study, the reader will be made to absolve the narrator from individual blame, and more blame attributed to the supernatural or

society.

Moreover, from social perspective the above passage represents the psychological and existential aspect of the criminal speech, portraying the hero as a victim of his own personality and societal circumstances. It challenges the reader to think about the interconnection between the state of mind, culture, and legal responsibility of a person when committing a crime. This framing of action by the protagonist makes the readers think about the morality of extreme measures taken in defense of one's life.

In another extracted textual lines, **“True! -nervous -very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?”** (Poe, p. 3) linguistically, the use of the word **‘nervous’** to show the high level of anxiety the narrator is experiencing, the use of **‘very, very dreadfully’** to emphasize the level of anxiety the narrator is going through, are done in a rhythmic manner. The story poses the question of the narrator's sanity to the listener, making the audience rethink. In the discursive level, the narrator's assertion of rationality is a power assertion over the author, and a cover up of real intentions. This discourse is used to ensure that the normalcy is preserved, which is an indication of the social prejudice that was present during the 19th century regarding mental health.

Therefore, socially, fear and obsession of the narrator, which is progressively developed to consider every possibility as unreal and try to leave no doubt about being sane, is the reflection of the theme of the tale – the frailty of one's mind and the exigency of compliance with the norms and expectations of society. The second layer of understanding about the text in terms of meaning and significance derived from Freud's (1919) outline of the concept of uncanny, reveals that the constant booth assertion of sanity is a function of the heteroclinic loop coupled with strange behavior that has the effect of giving the audiences the creeps. This implies that the energy represented by the sexual drive and other aggressive drives are not well resolved. Lévi-Strauss and Lacan may describe the demand to reason with one's opponent as the ‘mirror stage’ and a sign of the narrator's subservience (Sarup, 1993).

The following line from *The Tell-Tale Heart* is an instance of psychological layering of criminal speech: **“True! —nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?”** (Poe, p. 7). The telling contradiction from the protagonist is his absurd denial of insanity despite obvious

signs of nervousness to support his claim are classic signs of a criminal mind. Repetition and the intensifiers contribute to the expression of the narrator's emotional state that could mean that the man is agitated or unstable.

It is crucial because the analysis of the excerpt "**Object there was none. Passion there was none** (Poe, p. 6). In the linguistic level, repetitive use of "none" strengthens the meaning of nothingness, which focuses on the lack of both object and passion. The simple, assertive language gives a conclusive and desolate feel, implying that life has no passion or meaning. At discursive level, the statement defies the very ideas of continuity and depth prevalent in most narrative forms. The absence of object and the absence of passion is something that is not necessarily present in other works of this genre, and the resulting confusion reflects that the narrator is experiencing it.

In a social respect, the excerpt triggers sensibilities of social isolation and a sense of hopelessness. The absence of object and passion represents the void and loneliness in the narrator's life and his detachment from society demonstrating his worthlessness in society's viewpoint. Turning to Freud's (1919) concept for a more advanced understanding, one can state that passionate denial may conceal unconscious impulses or past abuse. Following Freud, the first reason for finding the idea of the death of subject as a worker horrifying is its seeming lack of relation to any meaningful human values or emotions. This approach disinhibits language from its most familiar contexts and so we experience a measure of dissociation (Barthes, 2004).

Thus, analyzing the language, discourse and social significance of Poe's (1841) *The Tell-Tale Heart* – **You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing.**" with reference to famous critics, understanding deepens. Semantically, the combination of "**fancy**" and "**know**" creates an opposition between reason and unreason that play with the listener's judgment of madness and sanity. The employment of imperative tone confirms the narrator on the matter promising the conviction of their words.

In the discursive sense, the statement is the narrator's way of defending oneself against accusations, effectively claiming the role of the mad person. This brings out a struggle for power in deciding who holds the right to tell the story and defies social expectations of mental illnesses. On a social level, the excerpt addresses such culture's views on the topic of madness and challenges the norms of sanity. It

requires readers to think about what they know and how people with mental disorders are viewed in society.

The following analysis of the line “**It is the beating of his hideous heart!**” (Poe, p. 15) from *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe (1841) shows the possibility of the meaningful and productive application of criminal discourse. From the linguistic point of view, such words as “**hideous**” and exclamatory mark express emotional agitation and horror. In common with abhorrence, the emotions in the narrator’s choice of words include repulsion and dread of the monstrous heart.

Even on the discursive level the line shows the attempt of the narrator to justify herself pointing the gun at the victim’s heart. Through this externalizing of responsibility to heart, the narrator manages to wash his hands off the crime and justify the murder because the heart that was making him suffer had to be stopped. Socially, the line serves to mirror other societal perspectives regarding crime and punishment. I believe the surreal descriptions given by the narrator when she describes the heart as ‘**hideous**’ is an appeal to the fear, the unknown and the uncanny hence supporting the narrative that the victim is a bad object to be erased. According to Freud’s (1919) theory of the Uncanny, one can infer that the narrator has a neurotic obsession with the heart due to his repressed psychology. The familiar sounding, but disconcerting tone of the line is evidently based on the representation of the heart as something known and at the same time strange and mysterious, associated with life and death.

According to Freud’s theory of the uncanny, the quote also adds to the creation of the uncanny when the audience or the reader realizes that the story is a figment of their imagination and imagines the insipid character inserting herself into their universe. In this context, Freud defined the uncanny as the renewal of the familiar becomes the strange. The narrator presents his delirium as a pestilent dream that has become part of his waking life, and has made dreams real and reality dreamlike, reiterating Freud’s principles of the uncanny. In the light of Fairclough’s 3D model, the selected texts fit perfectly in representing discursive practice of meaning making on themes of madness and confinement. It structurally portrays confinement and despair within the narrative context of the narrator. In socially, it portrays other thematic issues to so-called society such as the absence of rationale thinking and the

repercussions of insanity.

Conclusion

The research focused on one research question to explore power dynamics and anxiety of fear in the crime fiction of Edgar Allen Poe. Poe's use of language is not limited to the creation of suspense but contributes to the analysis of 19th century American society, including its anxieties, norms, and power relations concerning crime, social degeneration, and evil (Rosenheim, 1996). In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Poe's use of language and the themes depict societal attitudes at the time. This element of the tension between reason and irrationality is most evident in his tales in which the unreliable first-person narrators progressively breakdown and represent weak and fragile madness concern with the boundary between rationality and criminality. Hence, Poe's portrayal of linguistic construction of criminal identities, his reflection of social anxieties, and presentation of the 'uncanny' suggest his deep insight into the human mind and society. His use of language not only sets the mood of suspense but also provides historical and cultural analysis regarding 18th America.

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