

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

According to Bessel van der Kolk, “trauma is not merely an occurrence from the past but a lasting imprint that affects an individual’s mind, brain, and body”. He explains that trauma is not simply a frightening event, but rather the internal impact of an experience that goes beyond one's ability to cope. Trauma disrupts the nervous system, changing the way a person thinks, feels and acts (2014:21). Meanwhile Judith Herman state that, “traumatic events disrupt the normal support systems that provide individuals with a sense of control, belonging, and purpose”. Herman explains that trauma is not just about the horrific event itself, but rather how it destroys the psychological structures that normally make a person feel safe and empowered. (1992:33)

Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843) and *The Black Cat* (1843) are classic Gothic literature short stories that explore the psychological trauma of their unnamed main characters. In the former story, the main character becomes obsessed with an old man’s “vulture eye”. A vulture is a large bird that eats dead animals. It has a bald head, a strong beak, and sharp eyes that help it spot food from a distance. The eye reminds him of a vulture’s cold, watchful stare, which disturbs him deeply. Although the old man has done him no harm, the main character murders him, driven by irrational fear and growing inner tension. Overcome by guilt, he hallucinates the sound of the old man’s heartbeat, leading to confession. Similarly, the

latter story portrays a main character who transforms from a kind man to a violent murderer due to alcoholism and deep-seated emotional disturbance. After killing his pet cat and later his wife, he is haunted by guilt, which ultimately exposes his crime when a hidden cat cries out from behind a wall. Both stories illustrate the destructive impact of unresolved trauma, as seen through guilt, hallucinations, and eventual psychological breakdown, making them strong subjects for trauma theory analysis.

This research thesis will utilise Bessel van der Kolk's trauma theory to analyse Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, "*The Tell-Tale Heart*" and "*The Black Cat*". Both stories focus on unnamed main characters who say they are sane, but their actions and words show serious psychological problems. In the former story, trauma appears through the main character's strong fear of the old man's eye, his growing guilt, and the sound of a heartbeat he believes he hears. In latter story, the main character also shows signs of emotional trauma, as seen in his violent behaviour, regret, and final confession. By looking at how these trauma symptoms appear in both stories, the study will explore how trauma is shown in literature and how it affects the characters' view of reality. This study hopes to better understand how Poe presents the human mind and the lasting effects of unresolved trauma.

1.2. Research Questions

The research questions in this study are as follow:

1. What symptoms of trauma are experienced by the main characters in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*?
2. What factors cause the main characters' trauma in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*?

3. How does trauma affect the main characters in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*?

1.3. Objective of the Study

1. To analyse the symptoms of trauma of the main character in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*.
2. To analyse the causes of trauma of the main character in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*.
3. To describe the psychological effects of trauma on the main character in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*.

1.4. Scope of the Study

This research thesis will analyse how trauma affects the main character in *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat* using an extrinsic approach from Bessel van der Kolk's trauma theory, which examines the psychological impact of traumatic experiences. In addition, the research will employ an intrinsic approach, drawing on the theory of character, characterization, and conflict by Stanton, who identifies character and conflict as essential elements in literary structure. The study explores how past emotional disturbances and internal conflicts influence the character's actions, such as the obsession with the old man's eye in the former story, and the main character's violent behaviour and guilt in the latter story. It also examines how trauma shapes their perception of reality, for example, through hallucinations and irrational thoughts, which eventually lead to psychological breakdown and confession. This study specifically concentrate on the psychological dimensions of the main character, rather than exploring broader themes like morality or guilt from a

philosophical perspective. For brevity, *The Tell-Tale Heart* is referred to as the “former” and *The Black Cat* as the “latter” throughout this study.

1.5. Previous Studies

The writer discovers several earlier studies with related objects, subjects, and analytical methodologies. These studies are arranged chronologically based on the year of publication and include the theoretical approaches used by each author.

The first study is written by Amir (2015), entitled “*Analysis of the Short Story 'The Tell-Tale Heart' by Edgar Allan Poe*”, which applies discourse analysis to examine how Poe uses literary devices like irony, symbolism, and foreshadowing to depict the narrator’s psychological deterioration. The study identifies paranoia and delusion as central issues, showing how guilt manifests in hallucinations and leads to confession.

The second study is written by Nugraha (2021), entitled “*An Analysis of Id, Ego, and Superego in Edgar Allan Poe’s 'The Black Cat'*”, which applies Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory to examine the psychological aspects of the narrator. The study argues that the narrator’s violent behavior is a result of the dominance of the id, while the ego and superego fail to control his impulses, leading to destructive actions.

The third study is written by Fitriani (2022), entitled “*Moral Degradation Reflected in the Main Character of Poe’s 'The Black Cat'*”, which uses Kohlberg’s moral development theory to explore the narrator’s ethical downfall. The study suggests that the character undergoes moral regression, moving from conventional morality to a pre-conventional, self-centered moral stage driven by

anger, addiction, and pride.

The fourth study is written by Zaib & Shah (2022), entitled “*A Narrative Analysis of Edgar Allan Poe’s Short Story ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’*”, which utilises William Labov’s sociolinguistic narrative model to examine how the narrator constructs his reality through language. They argue that unreliable narration, repetition, and pacing contribute to the psychological depth and tension in the story.

The fifth study is written by Zeki (2022), entitled “*The Textual Analysis of ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ by Edgar Allan Poe*”, which employs textuality standards such as cohesion, coherence, and intentionality to analyse how meaning is constructed through language. The study suggests that the narrator’s instability is reflected in both diction and structure, reinforcing the theme of madness.

The sixth study is written by Purbo (2022), entitled “*Defamiliarization: A Formalism Study on How Words Can Create Compelling Narrative in Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’*”, which uses Russian Formalism theory, particularly the concept of defamiliarization, to highlight how Poe distorts ordinary experience into horror. The study analyses the use of fragmented sentences, exaggerated descriptions, and unreliable narration to reflect the protagonist's unstable mind.

The seventh study is written by Zulfadhli (2022), entitled “*A Study of ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ by Edgar Allan Poe as a Writerly Text*”, which applies Roland Barthes’ theory of the writerly text, emphasising reader participation and interpretive openness. The study explores narrative ambiguity and the narrator’s unreliability as a way to invite multiple interpretations.

The eighth study is written by Akbar & Siregar (2023), entitled “*The Black Cat: A Study of Guilt and Confession through Gothic Elements*”, which uses gothic

literary theory to analyze the symbolic use of the black cat, the hidden corpse, and supernatural occurrences. The study highlights how Poe blends horror and guilt through gothic tropes to depict psychological instability.

The ninth study is written by Sari (2023), entitled “*Plot Analysis of Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’*”, which adopts Kenney’s plot theory to analyse the structural elements of the story. She dissects the plot into exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution, and shows how Poe builds tension through sentence structure and pacing.

The tenth study is written by Smart Educenter (2023), entitled “*The Tell-Tale Heart: A Psychological Perspective on Trauma and Madness*”, which uses a psychological approach, specifically referencing theories of PTSD and schizophrenia, to examine the main character’s mental condition. The study connects the narrator’s hallucinations, guilt, and irrational behaviour to real-life psychological trauma.

The eleventh study is written by English Studies (2024), entitled “*The Tell-Tale Heart by Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Analysis*”, which offers a thematic analysis of guilt, madness, and time perception, without a specific named theory. The study discusses how Poe uses auditory imagery—especially the heartbeat—to represent inner conflict and intensify horror.

The twelfth study is written by Handayani (2024), entitled “*The Symbolism in Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’*”, which applies Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic theory to decode symbols such as the cat, alcohol, and the gallows. The study reveals how these symbols function as representations of guilt, justice, and self-destruction, reinforcing the story’s moral dimension.

The thirteenth study is written by Slepian (2024), entitled “*Analysing ‘The Tell-*

Tale Heart' by Edgar Allan Poe: Themes”, which explores themes of paranoia, guilt, and surveillance, analyzing how Poe’s use of symbolism (such as the “vulture eye”) reflects the main character’s fear of being watched and judged. Time and sound are examined as psychological triggers.

The fourteenth study is written by Wibowo (2024), entitled “*An Analysis of the Translation Methods of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Story 'The Tell-Tale Heart'*”, which applies Peter Newmark’s translation theory to study the effects of translation on Poe’s horror techniques. The study focuses on how rhythm, diction, and psychological nuances are preserved or lost in different translations.

Based on the fourteenth study by Wibowo, he analyses the former story by applying Newmark’s translation theory, with a particular focus on how rhythm, diction, and psychological nuances are preserved or altered in different translations. His study emphasizes the intrinsic and linguistic aspects of Poe’s work, especially the stylistic elements that contribute to its horror effect. But in this study, the study examines the psychological trauma experienced by the main characters in the former story and the latter story. By employing Bessel’s trauma theory and Stanton’s conflict theory, this research explores how trauma is manifested, what causes it, and how it shapes the characters’ descent into madness. Thus, while Wibowo highlights translation strategies and linguistic features, this study offers a different perspective by foregrounding the psychological dimensions of Poe’s characters.

1.6 Writing Organisation

This study is divided into four following chapters:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objective of the study, scope of the study, previous studies, and writing organisation.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter includes theories and methods that will be employed in the research. The intrinsic theory will use the theory of Stanton in his book “*An Introduction to Fiction*” (1965), and the extrinsic theory will use the theory of trauma from Bessel’s book entitled “*The Body Keeps the Score*” (2014).

CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS

This chapter includes the discussion and findings of the story. The theories from the previous chapter will be used in the analysis of the data and findings.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an overview of the entire content and the results of the research.

REFERENCE