

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DEATH DRIVE IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES OF EDGAR ALLAN POE: A FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe is widely acknowledged as a pioneering figure in Gothic and psychological fiction, renowned for his portrayal of madness, violence, guilt, and psychological degeneration. This study examines the manifestations of Sigmund Freud's concept of the Death Drive (Thanatos) in two selected short stories by Poe, namely "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart". Drawing upon Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the research investigates several dimensions of the death drive, including obsession with death, self-destructive tendencies, repetition compulsion, and the destruction of others. Employing a qualitative research design and the method of close textual analysis, the study explores the unconscious motivations and inner conflicts that shape the thoughts and actions of the narrators and characters. The analysis reveals that the characters are driven by powerful psychological impulses that frequently culminate in violence, guilt, remorse, and self-destruction. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that unresolved inner conflicts and disturbed mental states play a crucial role in the progression of the narratives. By integrating psychoanalytic theory with literary analysis, this study provides a deeper understanding of Poe's representation of the human psyche while highlighting the significance of Freudian concepts in the interpretation of Gothic literature. Ultimately, the research contributes to the broader field of psychoanalytic literary criticism by offering a nuanced examination of the death drive in Poe's fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is a very famous writer in American literature, specifically, in supernatural and horror fictions. He is a short story writer, poet, and literary critic who not only plays an important role in Gothic traditions but also in analyzing the human psyche. His works focused on mental anguish, psychological depth and uncertainty of human mind. In contrast to his contemporaries Poe emphasis on the darker and troubling aspects of human nature like insanity, remorse, compulsion and unavailability of death. That is why Poe is a key figure in studies that connect psychology and literature. His piece of writings always focused on how terror, death and fantasy are present in human mind. Indeed, Poe is the forerunner of modern literary fiction with psychological themes. His characters are unpredictable, possessed by internal conflicts, that fades the boundaries between reality and

imagination, life and decay. Moreover, this unique characteristic of Poe locates him in the combination of psychoanalytic interpretation with Gothic literature. The most repeating themes in tales of Poe are decay and demolitions that always predominated with specific force (Poe, Complete Tales and Poems, 2013). His tales like “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” emphasizes on self-destructive tendencies of remorse and ferocity (Poe, Complete Tales and Poems, 2013). In these short stories death is not considered as far-reaching event but part of human life that shapes the consciousness of the narrators. This continuous obsession with death and illogical instincts has made Poe’s fiction prime target for psychoanalytic interpretation.

Sigmund Freud is the father of Psychoanalysis, and he provides a structure for understanding, that how an unconscious part of human brain affects an individual often in devastating way. In literature, psychoanalysis plays an important role because it demonstrates how texts reflect unrecognized impulses, suppressed fears and instinctual drives of the characters. His ideas of suppression and unconscious have influenced a lot of writers in the Gothic genre and psychological literature. Applying psychoanalytic theory to Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories is highly productive because his characters are already irrational, illogical, and unstable. An essential Freudian concept related to Poe’s work is “Thanatos or Death Drive”. This concept was introduced by Sigmund Freud in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920. It consists of various dimensions like obsession with death, repetition compulsion, destruction of others, and self-destruction. “Death Drive” is also known as “Thanatos” which is an unconscious and innately inherited impulsive trait of humans towards death, decay, self-destruction, and destruction of others (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920).

All these dimensions are present in the selected short stories of Poe, and the purpose of this study is to analyzes the concept of “Death Drive” including its dimensions in the selected short stories of Poe which includes, “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”. (Poe, Complete Tales and Poems, 2013). These selected short stories offer a deep exploration of the human psyche, particularly emphasizing on the darker aspects of paranoia, guilt, human obsession with death, destruction of others, repetition compulsion and self-destruction. Furthermore, the central theme of Poe’s narratives is the Freudian concept of the death drive, which suggests an unconscious obsession with death, self- destruction and a return to a lifeless state. This research analyzes the selected short stories of Poe through the lens of Freudian’s concept of death drive, its dimensions and effects. Hence, it becomes clear that Thanatos covers a lot of psychological dimensions because it is not a singular phenomenon.

Literature Review

Many scholars have analyzed Edgar Allan Poe’s works through the lens of psychoanalysis, particularly in the context of Sigmund Freud’s theory. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the existing research on the psychoanalytic aspect of “The Black Cat”, “The Tell-Tale Heart”. Sigmund Freud in his most important work called “The Interpretation of Dreams”, explain the basic principles of psychoanalysis. The key components of Psychoanalytic Theory include: the structure of mind (The Id “operates on pleasure principle and emotional needs”, The Ego “operates on the reality principle, mediating between the Id demands and the realities of the external world” and Superego “Represent morality and societal norms”), levels of Consciousness (Conscious “mindful thoughts and feelings”, Pre-conscious “index of memories and information that can be brought to consciousness when needed”, Unconscious “thought, feeling and desires outside of conscious mind”), psychosexual stages of development, defense Mechanisms (A natural or unconscious strategies the ego uses to manage anxiety and conflict. It includes the mechanism of (repression, denial, projection, displacement, sublimation) and dream analysis (royal road to the unconscious for revealing repressed desires and conflicts). It is the most significant work of Sigmund Freud that profoundly influenced other fields like psychology, literature and arts (Freud.1900).

Psychoanalysis affects literature as Md explains in his article. He demonstrates that psychoanalytic theory has very important role in literature and in literary criticism, as it explores the psychological interpretation of the characters. Furthermore, it helps the readers to understand the personality of the writers from their birth to till death. The purpose of this research is to explore the effects of psychoanalysis on various author's writings. This theory was developed at the start of 20th century, and it was used by sociologists and psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler. However, the most prominent psychoanalyst is Sigmund Freud. Writers like D.H Lawrence, Albert Camus, Arthur Miller and Walt Whitman were influenced by Freud (Md,2017).

Freud's famous theory known as social theory was developed in a sexual constraint of upper and middle class. Later, when he introduced the concept of dual instinctual theory, the social theory was converted to a more complex formulation. Freud broadened his psychoanalytic penetration to culture, community and society, while analyzing individual psychology. The dual instinctual theory explains that there should be balance between Eros and Thanatos, which if contradicts leads to a frustrating life and neurosis. Societal rules always suppressed desires and created tension between the expectations of society and freedom of an individual. He used the term called sublimation where an individual needs to redirect these instinctual desires for cultural and personal development. He criticized the cultural and societal rules because they play an important role in suppressing the desires of human beings. His ideas were utopian but, he influenced other writers and thinkers who demanded to free human desires from society and criticize societal rules. Various postmodern writers like Lacan and Deleuze extended Freud's theories while defending to liberate the desires of people. Freud's theories give importance to the problem and tension between instinctual desires and societal demands (Tauber, 2012).

This research explains the key reason in the behavioral change of the narrator in the short story "The Black Cat". The narrator, as an animal lover, eventually changed into an animal killer. The researchers assumed that the motivation of change comes from inside (psychological state) and triggered by external events (alcohol, superstition). For this analytical conclusion of the assumption, he used Freud's theory of Thanatos, the death energy that includes aggression. The study concludes that the motivation to change comes first from inside (psychological state), while external events (alcohol, superstition) act as triggering phenomena. A person with a strong mind and mental health can change external events to do violence or things. According to the researcher, the narrator in the black cat fails to control itself despite having a defensive mechanism because of external factors like superstition, alcohol and the presence of the black cat. His Id is dominated by death instincts, fear, anxiety and repressed emotion while his ego and superego fail to mediate effectively (Pendidikan, 2014).

Buday analyzes the story of Edgar Allan Poe "The Black Cat" based on psychoanalytic approach with the focus on antisocial behavior coupled with the psychological phenomena of emotional transference. According to his analysis "The Black Cat" can be interpreted as a narrative dealing not with the supernatural, but rather with the natural and the causal. Furthermore, the analysis indicates a social element in the narrative that shows the unconscious disturbance of the protagonist which leads to psychopathic behavior. This behavior serves as a defense mechanism against frustration and societal pressures such as those tied to marriage. This research provides a new perspective to interpret and understand Poe's story (Buday, 2014).

In the short story "The Black Cat" the narrator kills his wife, and his cat but he does not consider it offensive rather he believes that his actions were caused by unusual reasons and one of the main reasons was alcoholism. The Narrator does not consider it as insanity because he always fears being connected with madness. In the start of the story the narrator was very fond of animals and his family members also glorify it. One of his favorite pets was a black cat named Pluto. His love for his wife and animals changed into violence and hatred. Then he kills the cat and hanged it in the tree. He explains to the readers that it was a sign of madness, but it does not affect him. When the cat bites Narrator he cut out

its eyes and then rationalizes his action by saying that it is something that is practiced by all human beings. Later, he kills his wife when she is trying to protect the second cat. He cut her body into several parts and hid it in the wall along with the second cat. He feels very happy and satisfied after that. However, he does not consider it madness again. When the second cat arrives, he feels guilty because he used to think about Pluto and the crime that he had committed to the black cat. However, he enjoyed it when he was hanging the black cat and while murdering his wife. All in all, he is not accepting his madness throughout the story. Poe's most short stories are macabre and gothic but in "The Black Cat", madness is the most important theme, and it is one of the major fears (Elswick, 2016).

Research has been conducted on the stories of Poe "The Black Cat" and "Tell-Tale Heart" by using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of phobias. The study helps to understand multiple psychological patterns of the human mind and its function. The study signifies the cathexes and their relevance with somatosensory orientation of conscious and unconscious state. The stories which include "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" contain motifs of murder, psychological turmoil, disturbing inner fantasy, and the existence of paranoia. In both stories, the narrators' actions reflect Freud's concept of the id overpowering the ego and superego, which leads the narrators to irrational and destructive behavior. According to research, in the story of "The Black Cat" the narrator's inner desires first force him to kill his beloved pet by taking out its eye and hanging the cat. The narrator fails to control his rage, he eventually kills the new cat and his wife, due to paranoia and fear. Similarly, in the story of "The Tell-Tale Heart", the narrator becomes obsessed with the old man's "evil eye," and kills the old man due to his inner disturbance and fantasies. This obsession leads him to committing murder without any guilt. These two stories show the state of mind disturbance, fears and unresolved emotions and violent acts. Symbolically, the cat's eye and the old man's eye represent Poe's inner struggles and emotional turmoil (Siddiqui, 2023).

In, "The Tell-Tale Heart" the researcher explores the horrifying events and mental disorders experienced by the character in the short story. The article represents gothic elements and psychoanalytical criticism of the story "The Tell-tale Heart" by Poe. The result of the study shows that the story contains gothic elements like horror, mystery and romance. In addition, the character has a disorder called schizophrenia which is a mental disorder. The narrator experiences the four stages of hallucinations and delusions; confronting, condemning, controlling and conquering which can deal with delusion and hallucination (Yusuf, 2018).

Scholars like Rista Nur Kholifa analyzed the story called "The Tell-Tale Heart" with respect to guilt and madness. According to the study, humans are emotional beings having the emotion of sadness, happiness, disturbance and guilt. Uncontrolled guilt can lead a human being into madness without any reason. In the story "The Tell-Tale Heart" the relationship between guilt, madness and the narrator are clearly visible. The research found that Ego was more dominant from guilt and madness. The story reveals that the narrator's growing hatred for the old man shows suppressed emotions that lead to madness and murder. After committing the crime, guilt emerges and creates internal conflict that slowly breaks the narrator's mental sense. The study provides an in-depth understanding of the human mind. His struggle shows the roles of Ego and Superego. At first, the narrator ignores his conscience and chooses violence, but later his Superego, or sense of guilt, forces him to confess his crime (Kholifa, 2024). "The Tell-Tale Heart" is one of the proficient short stories of Poe. The narrator's mind is very complicated, and most critics believe that his mind shows lunacy. There is very famous theory called "Theory of Mind" and that is divided further into two theories. One of them is "Simulation Theory" and the other one is "Theory-theory". Simulation theory explains that when a person is reading any piece of writing he will put himself into the position of the character and then he will understand that piece of writing. This theory is not applicable to this short story because the mind of the narrator is very difficult to understand. According to the "Theory-theory", readers analysis the story according to the prevalent

knowledge and experiences of common human beings. This theory is not also applicable because the narrator's actions are not logical and rational. The researcher concludes this paper by saying that this short story does not follow the logical, rational, and the real world's pattern. These traditional theories are not applicable to this short story maybe this story has a different reality (Hillerby, 2013-2014).

All in all, these studies highlights constitute an indispensable and critical foundation for dissection the different dimensions of death drive in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart". Death drive plays an important role in understanding the psychological agitation of the narrators. Various interpretations of the existing study reviewed ratify here that psychoanalytic theory is the productive ground for Poe's short stories.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative research design because the purpose is to investigate various psychological patterns in Poe's selected short stories. In contrast to quantitative research, which always focus on generalization and measurements, qualitative research emphasis for nuanced and close readings. Qualitative research allows the researcher to analyze Poe's selected short stories on thematic and symbolic level, by focusing on the implicit meanings that agree with psychoanalytic categories of Sigmund Freud.

Research Method

This research uses "close reading" as main data collection method to examining the selected short stories of Edgar Allan Poe which includes "The Tell Tale Heart", "The Black Cat", with reference to the death drive and its various dimensions. This study will employ I.A. Richard's Close Reading Method to analyze the selected short stories of Poe by focusing on the textual elements to uncover the underlying themes and meanings related to death drive. This technique facilitates examination of the way language is employed to reference and undertake the analysis of death, psychological tension and anxiety.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly his concept of the Death Drive (Thanatos), introduced in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920). Freud argues that alongside the life instincts that promote survival, growth, and reproduction, human beings possess an unconscious drive that inclines them toward destruction, aggression, and a return to an inanimate state. The death drive manifests itself in various forms, including an obsession with death, self-destructive behavior, repetitive patterns of harmful actions, and aggression directed toward others. As a leading writer of Gothic fiction, Edgar Allan Poe frequently portrays characters whose actions are shaped by irrational impulses, psychological disturbances, and destructive tendencies. Therefore, Freud's theory provides an appropriate framework for examining the unconscious motivations and inner conflicts of the narrators in The Black Cat and The Tell-Tale Heart. The present study analyzes the selected stories through four major manifestations of the death drive: obsession with death, self-destruction, repetition compulsion, and destruction of others.

Death Drive (Thanatos)

The concept of death drive was given by Sigmund Freud. It refers to the innately inherited impulsive trait of humans towards death, self-destruction and destruction of others. This drive is innate and unconscious nature of human behavior. This trait is juxtaposed to life instinct (Eros) which drives humans toward survival, development and self-preservation. Death Drive is repetitive and occurs in cycles. Freud presents different dimensions of death drive, covering desires for destruction, decay and self-injury. In literary works these dimensions are visualized in the character's actions, thoughts and their relationship

with death and destruction. The followings are some key dimensions of death drive, applicable to Poe's stories.

Obsession with Death

The characters of Poe exhibit a compelling attraction or attachment with death, whether through mourning of the death of a loved one, contemplating morality, or being drawn to the supernatural. In Poe's stories this is eminent as in "The Black Cat" the narrator is obsessed to kill the cats.

Self-Destruction

Self-destruction is also one of the dimensions of the death drive. In this dimension the death drive imposes itself upon the character and subdues him to commit self-harm. The character's behavioral tendencies are self-sabotaging leading to his own destruction. In Poe's stories such tendencies are shown in the forms of guilt, madness or conscious actions of self-ruin. The confession of the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" leading to his undoing under the pressure and stress of certain guilt and in "The Black Cat" the main character's inclination to alcoholism and violence ultimately causing his destruction to manifest this tendency.

Repetition Compulsion

Freud observes an inclination to unconsciously committing destruction repeatedly- no matter- whatever the results are, even, pain and failure is said to be the repetition of compulsion.

Destruction of Others

The death drive can cause destruction to others when directed outward. The behavior of such a character shows aggression and an urge to harm others, mostly his closed ones. In "The Black Cat" the narrator's violence towards his pet and wife eventually leading to their elimination and in "The Tell-Tale Heart" the main character's drive to destroy the old man shows the externalization of the death drive.

Data Collection Method

The focus of the empirical data in the present research refers to the representation of death drive, its dimensions and effects in the selected short stories of Poe which includes, "The Black Cat" and "The Tell Tale Heart". There are two sources of data collection methods. The primary source of data would be the two short stories of Poe which includes "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart". The secondary sources would be scholarly articles, biographies of the writer and their works, literary criticisms, and literary reviews of Freud's concept of death drive, and its dimensions.

Discussion

This study examines how the death drive operates through different psychological dimensions, including obsession with death, self-destruction, repetition compulsion, destruction of others in "The Black Cat," and "The Tell-Tale Heart". These stories are suitable for discussion of Thanatos because both narrators demonstrate destructive impulses that slowly move beyond their conscious control.

Obsession with Death and Self-Destruction in "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart"

In the "The Black Cat" the narrator destroys his life with several key actions. In the commencement of the story the writer portrayed him as a kindhearted man and husband living with his adorable pet cat named Pluto. Meanwhile, alcohol aggravates the darker nature of the narrator. He initially mistreated his wife and then Pluto. His aggression and involuntary pessimistic nature lead him to the brutal killing of Pluto. He became obsessed with death, and it is the first indication of self-destruction with inability to control his impulses.

As he says, “I took it from my waistcoat-pocket a penknife, and ...I cut one of the cat’s eyes from the socket.” (Poe, Complete Tales and Poem, 2013, p. 188).

In this statement, the writer portrays the narrator as appearing outwardly respectable, carrying a penknife in his waistcoat—a common and practical item. However, the narrator uses this knife to commit a horrific act of cruelty, first killing his beloved cat, Pluto, and then cutting out its eye. The loss of Pluto's eye symbolizes the narrator's moral blindness. By justifying his actions, the narrator reveals how he sabotages his own soul and rational mind. This brutal event even increased his inner guilt and aggression by deepening his madness. This can be interpreted as psychological suicide or damage, where his actions became more erratic and compulsive, leading him to murder his wife as well.

This murder is also a form of self-destruction where he became murderer, driven by his compulsions and a loss of self-control. His act is not justifiable, even as a criminal he feels that he has done heinous job. “The hideous murder accomplished” (Poe, Complete Tales and Poem, 2013, p. 190). The narrator used the word “hideous” for his murder because he was overwhelmed by unpleasant situation. After killing and hiding the body of his wife, the narrator is overwhelmed by guilt. He realizes that he has crossed all points of no return, committing an act that is irreversible and will inevitably lead to his own destruction. Ultimately, this act symbolizes the narrator's loss of his sense of differentiating between right and wrong. In “The Tell-Tale Heart” the narrator was obsessed with the old man’s eye, and this originates his destructive impulse. He wanted to get rid from his eye so that he decided to kill him. This indicates his self-destructive behavior where he was unable to control his impulses. His eye becomes a source of repression for him; “He had an eye of vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever, it fell upon me, my blood ran cold” (Poe, Complete Tales and Poem, 2013, p. 286).

This line shows his illogical obsession with the vulture eye of an old man. That wicked eye symbolizes decay, supervision, and fear of powerlessness. Because of his unconscious anxieties his blood runs cold for the old man. The object of Thanatos is his obsession with the eye and there is no hatred in his heart for the old man. The narrator believes that by taking out the eye of old man could give him some relief but in this was the first path towards his destruction.

Repetition Compulsion in “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”

In “The Black Cat”, Poe explores Freud’s concept of repetition compulsion—the tendency of individuals to unconsciously repeat traumatic experiences. The repetitions or cycle of violence becomes a central to the narrator's downfall. The narrator continuously loops his violent impulses, despite knowing about their disastrous consequences. First act of narrator’s violence begins when he harms Pluto. It was its first slip towards his uncontrolled rage. He could not stop himself from doing the wrong job with his loved ones. Even though he feels guilty, he fails to stop himself. The sensation of guilt in his mind moves him more towards the repetition of compulsion and violence. “One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree – hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart (Poe, Complete Tales and Poem, 2013, p. 188).”

The tear of the narrator clearly symbolizes his remorse but fails to interrupt the cycle of repetition of guilt and violence. The existence of the cycle of guilt and violence is a clear sign of repetition compulsion. In “The Tell-Tale Heart”, the repetition compulsion is shown through the visit of the narrator towards the old man’s room. He wanted to get rid himself from the vulture eye of an old man. He cares about him, but due to his wicked eye he wanted to kill him. His repetitive behavior of visiting the old man’s room, shows his obsession with reinforcing his actions. As he says; “For seven long nights, every night just at midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it oh so gently! (Poe, Complete Tales and Poem, 2013, p. 286)”. He visits the old man’s chamber for seven days and finally at the eighth day he killed him. The narrator use “Oh so gently”, shows that he feels very proud, which is opposite to the horrible action that he was going to do.

Self-Destruction and Destruction of Others in “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”

The story of “The Black Cat” follows Freud’s concepts where he argued that the death drive does not always lead to direct self-harm but can manifest as aggression toward others. In the story the narrator’s violence escalates from his beloved pet cat to the second cat and ultimately to his wife. His wife always acted as a gentle woman and always endured her husband’s abuse. But when she intervenes to protect the cat, the narrator blindly rages and aggression turns to her. The narrator murders her and hides her body inside the wall. “Goaded, by the interference of my wife, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain (Poe, Complete Tales and Poem, 2013, p. 190).”

The narrator’s act of murdering his wife is not a planned act, but rather a spontaneous act of aggression. It is a demonstration of the outburst and uncontrollable nature of the death drive. To counter his guilt for peace, he eliminates everything including human beings. However, he was not guilty of his crimes, despite trying to rationalize them. His confidence reflects an unconscious influence of Thanatos—the Freudian death drive—where destruction and self-sabotage play a crucial role. He believes he can escape judgment, reinforcing his delusion of control. However, Freud’s concept of the return of the repressed ensures that suppressed guilt and trauma inevitably resurface. No matter how much he tries to rationalize or dismiss his crimes, they ultimately lead to his downfall. In the story the narrator’s aggression in the initial state was not a big deal. But the problem started when his aggression increased day by day and the need for the product became the reason for murdering his Pluto and his wife.

The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” destroys his life by killing the old man. He really loved the old man except his vulture eye. This indicates his self-destructive behavior where he was unable to control his impulses. The narrator’s mind shows his fragmented psyche in the short story; “I made my mind to take the life of the old man and thus rid myself of the eye forever (Poe, Complete Tales and Poem, 2013, p. 286).”

This was his first attempt towards self-destruction and destruction towards the life of the old man. After killing the old man, he was thinking that how can he hid the body now. He threw lantern’s light into the old man’s eye and cut his body into “so many parts”. He felt happy but the guilt was there inside his heart. He started to hallucinate because he thought that he is still hearing the heartbeat of the old man. At the end his confession to police shows the handover to the death drive. Furthermore, this is the victory of death drive.

All in all, it becomes evident that Poe’s fiction powerfully dramatizes the unconscious psychological forces that compel individuals towards self-destruction, repetition compulsion, aggression, and the destruction of others. Across these narratives, Poe portrays characters who are unable to regulate their impulses, despite possessing moments of self-awareness, thereby illustrating Sigmund’s assertion that the Thanatos operates beyond logic and conscious control. In “The Black Cat” and “The Tell-Tale Heart”, the narrators exemplify the destructive effects of repetition compulsion, unconscious confession and guilt. These violent acts are not motivated by rational necessity, but death drive or Thanatos force the narrators to do that. Poe’s fiction illustrates that death drive is not merely a tendency towards physical death but a pervasive psychological force that governs human behavior with guilt and repetition. His characters consistently move towards their own ruin, even alternative paths are available, confirming Sigmund’s view that Thanatos’s works against rational will. Thus, Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories stand as a profound literary representation of death drive, revealing how unconscious forces can dismantle identity, mortality, relationship and life itself.

Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of Edgar Allan Poe’s selected short stories which consists of “The Black Cat”, and “The Tell-Tale Heart” through the psychoanalytic framework of Freud concept of death drive reveals that Poe consistently dramatizes unconscious forces that propel characters towards self-destruction, destruction

of others, aggression, and annihilation. Across these selected short stories, the characters are governed by compulsive behavior that governed beyond the rational principle, explaining Freud's claim that human actions are not solely driven by pleasure principle but also by inherent urge toward destruction and a return to lifelessness. In "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-tale Heart", Thanatos manifests through repetition compulsion, unconscious guilt and an implicit desire for punishment as narrators repeat enact violence. Psychoanalytic studies of "The Tell-Tale Heart" indicate that the narrator's mental disturbance and obsessive fixation on the old man's eye drive him to commit murder, as his internal psychoanalytic conflicts and unresolved urges lead to violent action (Gilang, 2024). In. Overall, the findings establish that Poe's fiction powerfully embodies Freud's theory of Thanatos by depicting characters who are unable to resist unconscious destructive impulses, thereby reinforcing the idea that self-sabotage, repetition, and aggression are intrinsic psychological drives that inevitably lead to ruin.

This study has analyzed the demonstration of Sigmund's concept of Thanatos or death drive through two selected short stories of Poe. These short stories are psychological in nature and consists of "The Black Cat", and "The Tell-Tale Heart". The present research paper has shed light on the concept of death drive, as put forward by Sigmund Freud, in the chosen short stories of Poe. Through detailed textual and thematic analysis, this research has illuminated the extent to which Poe's characters are driven by unconscious drives that show up as destructive impulses, a fatal preoccupation with death, repetitive reenactments of trauma, self-harming behavior, and aggression aimed at others. The application of Freud's psychoanalytic framework has been particularly useful in digging out the latent dimensions of Poe's short stories, making it easy for the readers to understand not only their macabre qualities but also the profound psychological tensions that form the inner lives of his narrators.

This study presents the idea that obsession with death is one of the most prominent traits of the personalities of Poe's characters. The narrators of "The Black Cat" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" present destructive forces that not only lead to the murder of others but also show the start of their psychological deterioration. These characters reflect Freud's point of view that the unconscious often works against the principle of life and rationality, compelling people toward destruction.

Another prominent dimension is self-harm. Characters across Poe's selected stories are the embodiment of the very idea of decay through their decisions, guilt, paranoia, and psychological ruin. The narrators of these selected stories confess their wrong doings due to the pressure of guilt, showing how death drive becomes a trait of their character leading to events and actions causing self-destruction.

The urge to repeat, as another dimension of the death drive, has also been explored as basic to Poe's narrative techniques. His characters are obsessed and trapped in cycles of reliving trauma, reenacting the past and revisiting destructive behavior. The devastation of others further shows how the death drive give voice to itself in ferocious violence. The narrators set free their unconscious anger upon their nears and dears—pets, wives, and an old man—hereby depicting Freud's claim that the death drive, when turned outward, establishes itself as aggression and violence. These instances of murder are not the results of thoughtfulness but from unconscious impulses, thereby emphasizing the irrationality of the unconscious. Poe's narrators thus show overwhelming depictions of Freud's idea that human beings harbor a hidden drive toward destruction that often surfaces without thoughtful explanation. Collectively, the results of this study uphold that Poe's fiction not only expresses Gothic horror but also offers fruitful ground for psychoanalytic investigation. His characters, though apparently irrational, reflect the unconscious struggles innate to human psychology. The manifestations of fascination with death, self-destruction, recurrence of compulsion, and destruction of others show how profoundly Freud's theory of the death drive resonates with Poe's literary imagination. In this way, Poe eliminates the gap between literature and psychoanalysis, signifying how art can help as an image of psychological truths that are otherwise concealed from conscious awareness.

The worth of this research paper lies in its input to both literary and psychoanalytic scholarship. By

applying Freud's theory of Thanatos to Poe's short stories, this study has established how psychoanalytic criticism can enlighten the complications of Gothic literature. Furthermore, it highlights Poe's significance in modern discussions of psychology and literature, as his tales disclose eternal truths about the fragility of the human mind, the inevitability of death, and the destructive appeal of unconscious drives. This study has also shown that the mysterious fear in Poe's work is not just supernatural but deeply psychological, deep-rooted in the struggle between life and death instincts.

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