

METAMORPHOSIS FROM INNOCENCE TO CRIMINALITY IN POE’S “THE TELL-TALE HEART”: A SYMBIOTIC INTERPLAY OF THREE NARRATIVE UNIVERSALS AND FREUDIAN PARAPRAXIS IN UNVEILING THE UNCONSCIOUS

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Abstract

This article cracks the structural and unconscious semantic facets of Edgar Allen Poe’s short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” collected from his anthology *Mystery Tales of Edgar Allen Poe* (1907) operating Mier Sternberg’s theory of three universals of narratives that comprise suspense, surprise, and curiosity embedded in the Freudian lens of parapraxis. Suspense – retaining the reader’s interest in the plot in the pursuit to know what will happen next, catalyzing hope and fear – extracts the automation of developing hope and fear pattern throughout the possessing atmosphere of the story. The restoration of the everyday peaceful situation after the macabre description of the planning and execution of the old man’s murder blooms into surprise with the reversal of the reader’s hope about the narrator’s fate by his lurking fearful doom. The awe-stricken reader is engaged in curiosity only to find the logical interpretation of the perplexed happenings in the story through Freudian slip/parapraxis – unintentional speech utterances giving clues to the unconscious motives behind human actions – revealing the story of the old man’s murder by the narrator as an allegory of a past crime of the narrator’s child abuse by the old man. Hence, the innocent-looking old man turns out to be a gruesome criminal in unearthing the play of the narrator’s tongue slips.

INTRODUCTION

Crime fiction features a mysterious crime plot of violent nature, mostly a murder, with a criminal foil to an investigator who strives to resolve the crime to infuse social justice. The genre of crime fiction is umbrella to many crime related sub-genres including detective fiction (Todorov, 2019), armchair mysteries (Radcliffe, 2018), locked room mysteries (Stoermer, 2008), forensic

fiction (Palmer, 2001), espionage fiction (Hepburn, 2008), hard-boiled fiction (Smith, 2000), femme fatale (Farrimond, 2017), and inverted detective fiction (Ebury, 2020) etc. Inverted detective fiction secures a special place among these as the discussion point of this paper. This particular type of crime fiction inverts the characteristics of crime fiction since its very narrator plays as the antagonist of the story. The criminal is psychologically

challenged and has a positive and innocent image in the eyes of the people. But his psychological complexity compels him to confess his/her crime, enthralling the investigating authorities.

Best known as the father of mystery fiction (Freeland, 1996), Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849) is a versatile literary genius bearing a huge legacy in American literature to have worked as a poet, short story writer, editor, and critic. Influencing great horror writers, his works not only have film adaptations but also translations in almost all languages. He introduced the concept of detective in fiction, giving birth to detective as well as inverted detective fiction. Major thematic dimensions his works explore seem to be death, trauma, revenge, greed, guilt, fear, mystery, psychological realism, lost love, macabre, horror, alienation, and madness, etc. Poe's style informs dark romanticism which is the mixture of romantic and the gothic elements (Howard, 2015) with a focus on dark imagination of inexplicable situations about ruins, mysteries, and horror (Howard, 2015). Dark romanticism portrays one's dark emotions, informing the grotesque and morbid atmosphere present within human psychology. These unknown emotions make one prone to guilt, revenge, evil, destructive behaviour, madness, and sin. Such behaviours tend to unveil the unconscious urges of mankind making man the victim of his own existence. Hence, dark romanticism is a reaction against transcendentalism which focuses on inherent goodness. Contrarily, dark romanticism focuses on inherent evilness (Ahmed, 2018).

1. Literature Review

Mabbot (Poe et al., 2000) in his preface to "The Tell-Tale Heart" confers that the unnamed narrator is mad since his story seems plain showing no clear and logical motif for killing the good old man except the superstition of evil eye. However, many explanations are delved deep to come up with a logical reasoning about the motif of the crime. Poe is asserted to have created a doppelganger of his protagonist because the seemingly normal protagonist contains his very narrative but also in seeking its effect. The concept of **suspense** is materialized as the audience takes interest in the narrative events to know how the events unfold or what happens next in the future

events (Sternberg, 2003). Suspense is the ambiguity between what the narration tells and what actually turns out at the closure. Suspense, hence, seems to be the uncertainty of future events. This uncertainty is the play between two mutually exclusive components, i. e., hope and fear, where the former is positively charged about the future while the latter is negatively. Hope can be aroused from unfavourable or favourable set of events about the avoidance or acceptance of the expectation respectively. While, fear can be the possibility or impossibility of the undesirable or desirable expectation respectively. While, **surprise** employs the reader's unconscious thinking pattern about the information gaps which are later revealed in the story (Sternberg, 2010). These are chronological gaps which are revealed towards the end. These are the events which are not described at first. This prior absence of knowledge leads to surprise later. The reader misses these missing links / information gaps or twisted chronologies. Their belated revelation, on surprise, forces the reader to reread those missing links which he/she has over-run previously and build its link with the previous knowledge compelling the reader to repattern or reorder the events. This new linkage to the previous situations fits well and binds the narrative together logically. Surprise is the imperception, the unexpected, the false impression, the undesirable, or the unanticipated. Going against the expectation is the surprise. The surprise comes at the end and retrospects or repatterns the events again. What motivates surprise is **curiosity** – a desire to know. The search for how of every event is curiosity. Curiosity impels the reader to fill the missing gaps in the text. Curiosity, rather, is all about the past events. Curiosity diverts the reader's attention to the cause of the event, which the reader fabricates in his/her mind. The reader's answer to this question is the effect of curiosity, in which the reader formulates a logical reasoning for that event. That is to say, curiosity is a movement from a gap to the gap-filling of the story. It keeps the reader's mind

run backward while the story goes forward (Sternberg, 2011).

Sigmund Freud laid the foundation of psychoanalysis to come up with the underlying causes behind human actions (Hossain, 2017) through his revolutionary contributions in the field of exploring human mind and its workings (Beystehner, 1998). The perplexing mysteries of human mind surface themselves in utterly undoubtful symbolic ways (Sollod & Monte, 2008). One of them is Freudian slip, given in Freud's 1901 book "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life", that engages connotative association of words to unlock the dark repressed desires lying in the unconscious to operate the conscious. It refers to the unconscious revelation of repressed desires or intentions through speech errors (Jacoby & Kelley, 1992). This process revolves around the sayings that one does not mean to say actually or one blurts out something unintentional. These slips are the expressions of hidden thoughts and feelings. These can be other things one desperately wants to utter out but is unable to do so or feelings yet unrealized and unentered in one's conscious world. According to Freud, these slips are not only meaningful but can also be a window to one's unexpressed thoughts and feelings (Freud, 1960). For an instance, a study reveals that people having a fear of receiving electric shocks, often persist in making "shock-related" tongue slips. Freud has identified three parts of human personality being id, superego, and ego. Id, compared with devil on somebody's shoulder, is the part that contains instinctual desires or impulses pursuing pleasure principle by fulfilling basic desires. Superego, compared with good angel on somebody's shoulder, engages conscience, ethical restraints, and societal moralism of right and wrong. Whereas, ego, compared with a man having good and bad angel on both of his shoulders, decides according to the situation in or against the favour triggered by the id to maintain the balance between id and superego. (Freud, 1949) Freud, further, has divided human mind into three parts, i. e., conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. The conscious is the part that has current memory about surroundings. The subconscious can recall the

memory on a little attention. While the memories in the unconscious are forgotten and can never be retrieved. The experience causing pain, shame, or anxiety etc. are discarded from the conscious towards the unconscious. Moreover, the impulsive desires, especially sexual, which are discarded by the ego make repression in the unconscious, i. e., the desires are repressed never to appear on the surface (Niaz et al., 2019). But they find their way out through comedy, denial of the unwanted, displacement with some other substitute, sublimation of the repressed desire, or Freudian slip under defense mechanism (Holland, 1999). Freudian slip or parapraxis is the revelation of these repressed desires by error through the play of word association. It is the study of these verbal errors. The effects of these revelations are against the conscious purpose of the speaker.

1. Discussion

This section comprises the interpretation of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" observing Sternberg's theory of three universals of narrative – suspense, surprise, and curiosity. In the first section, suspense unlayers the plot of the story by going through a bumpy ride of hope and fear. Surprise makes the second section leaving the reader spell-bound by reversing his/her expectation about the ending of the story. In the third section, curiosity makes an exhausted search to dig out the missing links using Freudian tongue slips at play in the text for the proper comprehension of the story.

1.1. Suspense

Suspense keeps the reader bound to the narrative through the creation of readers' increasing interest as to what will happen next (Sternberg, 2003). Hope and fear play a major role in this regard since they elongate the twisted narrative chronologies, introducing expectations about the favourable or unfavourable future happenings to induce relevant emotions in the reader. Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" being a category of crime fiction, is full of suspense from start to end. The main plot of the story revolves around a complex play of hope and fear of the narrator's salvation and damnation, respectively. At the very outset of the story, the reader develops a hope that the narrator will be saved. To counter this

hope, there is a fear that the narrator is guilty of the old man's murder. The complex narrative of the story engages a zig-zag pattern of hopes and fears, creating pleasant and fearful effects throughout the story. The grotesque description of the old man's execution in itself creates a horrible effect. Moreover, the agitated and pleasant behavior of the narrator diffuses relevant emotions. However, towards the end, the hope of salvation is countered with the fear of damnation.

Generally, the reader sympathizes with the protagonist of the story. The unnamed narrator of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" is the protagonist of the tale, relating his own story. The narrator's disease creates the reader's sympathy for him, developing hope for his salvation. The narrator seems to be suffering from some disease that has sharpened his senses. His sense of hearing has become the most acute since he can hear everything present in the sky and the earth, not to mention the sounds of hell. These sounds keep his brain bursting. He becomes so agitated in this condition that his narrative voice at the very outset of the story shows him so nervous as if he were in some trans while he addresses someone. He says that he is not mad and is suffering from the disease. It means that he is considered mad – guilty of some crime, being mad – creating a fear in the reader about the narrator's damnation. The narrator says that his nervousness does not give any right to the other party to assume him to be certified with madness. His sharpened senses have made him wiser, not insane. His sanity can be proved by the fact that he can narrate his whole story with patience and calmness. The reader thinks that the narrator is not mad, as the other party assumes him developing a hope for the salvation of the narrator.

The narrator starts telling the tale. He says that he plans to murder the old man whom he loved, yet he does not know why such idea occurred to him. Neither did he want the old man's valuable belongings nor the old man gave him any harm or insult. But he could not forgo the idea after its birth. The reader sympathizes with the innocent old man and is worried about his fate. The narrator goes on to relate with confirmation the cause of this plan happens to be one of the old man's eye which looked like that of a vulture. It was pale blue with a film over it. The description of the vulture eye in itself is

a horrified thing creating the emotion of fear in the reader. The narrator adds that the eye turned the narrator's blood cold whenever it fell upon him. This fearful condition of the narrator keeps increasing with the passage of time until he determines to get rid of it carried through the execution of the old man. This account on the part of the unnamed narrator fills the reader with fear about the narrator's fate if he actually executes this plan.

The narrative continues with the execution of this plan. The narrator's planning of the execution is too patient, cautious, foresighted, and dissimulated to be carried out by some lunatic. His problem was the old man's eye and nothing else in the old man's personality. To kill the old man, he had to see that eye open. For this purpose, he visits the old man's room at midnight for seven continuous nights. He gently opens the door the little and gradually enters his head in it to have a full view of the old man sleeping on the bed. Then he carefully puts a closed lantern in the room and turns it on only a little enough to produce a very thin ray of light. He, then, adjusts this ray to fall only on the old man's vulture eye so that the old man might open it. Failing to have it opened, he leaves. Every next morning, the narrator visits the old man to have a courteous discussion about the old man's health and life. The description of this planning itself makes the reader frightened. The reader encounters mixed feelings of hope and fear at this stage. The reader hopes that it will continue and nothing will happen. The old man will keep sleeping and the narrator will not kill him. But, at heart, the reader also fears about the fact what will happen if the old man opens his vulture eye.

The following narrative tells that the eighth night becomes the old man's destined night. The narrator's expertise in slowly opening the door and entering his head and the lantern in it makes him proud. Giggling at the idea that the old man cannot even dream of the narrator's evil design, he awakens the old man who moves immediately in suspicion. The Room's utmost darkness encourages the narrator to stay while his thumb accidentally touches the tin fastening making the afraid old man sit in his bed quickly and ask who is there. The narrator neither replies nor moves for the whole next hour. The old man also does not lie down back and

remains attentive to any single sound which might be produced. In a mixed feeling of hope and fear, the reader continues the narrative to know what will happen next.

The narrator hears a light groan of fear, which, he knows, arises from the bottom of the soul while being upmost startled. The narrator has himself been hearing this sound arising from his own body at midnight creating the deadening terror in his heart. Having known this feeling of the old man, he sympathizes with the old man too. The reader hopes that the narrator might leave the old man now. In spite of trying, the old man is unable to ignore this suspicion – as might be chimney wind, a mouse, or cricket chirp – as causeless for the last an hour. His suspicion on the narrator grows because death has stalked him. Then the narrator opens the lantern and throws its dim ray on the vulture eye making the old man's face and other personality traits invisible. Finally, he finds it open. The reader fears that the narrator will kill him now.

The narrator tells that the very sight of the vulture eye chills his bone marrow and he starts hearing a low and dull sound like that of a cotton-wrapped-watch getting quicker and louder with every passing second. He says that it is the sound of the old man's heartbeat to indicate the old man's growing fear. During the dreadful silence of that old house at midnight, this horrible sound increases the narrator's fear to his limits. He thinks that the louder beat might be heard by a neighbor. Losing control, he yells, turns on the whole lantern, and enters the room. Being terrified, the old man shrieks. The narrator drags the old man to the floor instantly and pulls the large bed over the old man. Smiling at his success, the narrator keeps hearing the old man's heart beat for a while, ceasing to beat eventually. After some time, he removes the bed, puts his hand on the old man's heart, and feels no pulse. The reader is left with no hope of salvation for the narrator now and fears his damnation.

The narrator goes on to unravel his wise plan for the concealment of the old man's body. At first, he dismembers the old man's body parts. He, then, takes out three floor planks, buries everything between the scantlings, and cleverly covers the floor again leaving no blood spot or anything like that behind. The floor becomes too clean to be detected

as suspicious by any human eye by four O'clock. The reader regains the hope that the narrator will be saved now since no proof is left. He/she supports the narrator because the old man's ugly eye was a disgusting thing for others to look at. The narrator has helped the old man get rid of that matter by killing him.

The narrator continues that the door knocks. He opens the door to find three officers to search the premises for a shriek which was heard by a neighbour in the night. The narrator welcomes them, tells them that he himself shrieked in his dream last night and the old man was not in the country. He courteously accompanies them to search the whole house including the old man's room with his belongings safe, secure, and undisturbed. Having convinced the officers of the normality of life there, he brings chairs in the old man's room for the officials to rest for some time. He himself places his chair on the very spot where the old man's corpse was buried. They start having a pleasant chat about familiar things while the narrator replies normally. The reader's hope is reassured about the narrator's salvation because the gruesome setting has been replaced by commonplace one.

But this everyday setting does not last long as the narrator again starts listening to a sound which keeps increasing with every passing second. It changes from ringing to a low, dull, and quick sound of a cotton-wrapped watch. He knows that it is the sound of the old man's heart. He tries to distract himself by striding on the floor, engaging in the pleasant talk of the officers, swinging in the chair, talking louder, and gesturing violently, etc. but to no use. As his agitation keeps increasing, he thinks that the officers not only hear this sound but also know his crime. They are only pretending to mock him. As his agonizing state becomes intolerable, he yells confessing his crime and asks them to tear up the planks to find the old man's corpse. The reader is left in awe by the nullification of the hope of salvation with the fear of damnation.

1.1. Surprise

Surprise is the reader's unconscious thinking pattern (Sternberg, 2010) while going along the flow of the story. Having submerged in this flow, the reader misses the twisted chronologies at work in the plot.

Their later revelation gives into surprise. The ending of Poe's "Tell Tale Heart"

also unfolds to diffuse a surprise. While reading along the story towards the end, the reader might miss the link that on the very outset of the story, the narrator tells some characters facing him that he has decided to kill the old man. When the narrator is finished with removing all the signs of the murder, he resumes normal behaviour since his strange previous agitation before, during, and after killing the old man is gone. None can imagine that the narrator himself will reveal his very crime.

It is observed that the police arrive at the sight. The narrator deals with them pleasantly. His manners are normal for he has nothing to worry. The narrator says that the shriek was his own during a nightmare and the old man was out of country. He shows the police the old man's neat and tidy room with the old man's undisturbed, intact, and safe belongings. No sign of robbery is found in the room. No question of the old man's disappearance or death arises since there is no blood stain or anything suspicious discovered in the room. The narrator convinces the officers of the normal routine of life. Hence, the reader hopes that there will be none to disclose the crime for there is no eye witness except the narrator neither is there any sign of the old man's body. The peaceful, calm and pleasant atmosphere has been created in the story. The officers have a pleasant talk with the narrator. No more description of some incoming hideous happening is felt. The normal atmosphere hints at the happy life of the narrator thereafter.

This peaceful setting does not last long because the surprise ending awaits the reader as the unexpected is to happen next. Suddenly, the narrator's unconscious state of mind does not let him continue normally. His auditory sense induces him into a great agony. He is knocked to death through the ringing in his ears, which clears itself to be the low, dull and quick sound of the old man's heart. His ear drums seem to burst but the police still chat pleasantly. He thinks that they are making a fool out of him through hypocritical acting while they too hear that sound. Having these thoughts, he confesses his crime ultimately. The reader is left awestruck with

such a foolish or courageous act to tell the tale of his hideous crime on the part of narrator himself when there was no chance of him to be detected as the criminal.

This surprise ending converts the attention of the reader towards the "Tell Tale Heart" as an inverted detective fiction (Ebury, 2020). The innocent looking narrator proves to be the criminal in the end. The police do not identify him as criminal. But, the narrator's own psychological state forces him to confess his very crime which was not expected to be discovered by the investigating authorities.

1.2. Curiosity

Curiosity is the rereading of the story to find the cause of every event (Sternberg, 2011). Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" leaves the reader with many unanswered questions which are found in curiosity. Such as from which disease the narrator is suffering from and why? Why does he hate and love the old man at the same time? Why is the house called the "old house" (Poe, p. 147, 1907)? What is his relation with the old man? Doesn't anyone else than both of the narrator and the old man live there? Why does he murder the old man only because of his natural defect (vulture eye)? Why does he plan such a horrifying execution of the old man in such a terrifying way and wait for the perfect execution? Why does he choose the bed for the weapon of murder, dismember him, and bury him under the floor? Why does he act normal before the officers when he himself confesses his crime before them? Answers to all these queries can be found through the analysis of the text from the Freudian slip perspective which is the unconscious revelation of repressed desires, intentions, or feelings through speech errors (Jacoby & Kelley, 1992). These slips are considered a window to the unspeakable emotions, feelings, experiences, or intentions (Freud, 1960). There are many such slips present in the text of "The Tell-Tale Heart" which prove that the criminal activity shown in the story is the displaced allegory of a past crime of child abuse.

Curiosity starts with answering to the surprise question, i. e., why does the narrator confess his crime? It is simply because the narrator loves the old man (Poe, 1907). If that is the case, why

does he kill him? It is because he hates him too since the old man is guilty of child abuse. The opening of “The Tell-Tale Heart” with a stress on the word “TRUE” (Poe, p. 144, 1907) serves as the narrator’s tongue slip to discover the truth behind his crime, i. e., his motive for the old man’s murder. The mention of the old man’s vulture eye as the narrator’s only motive behind the old man’s murder is the biggest tongue slip in this regard. The narrator likens the old man’s eye to that of a vulture because a vulture symbolizes sexual abuse (Qudsia, 2018). Vulture is the predator of the dead. It eats its prey without knowing the prey’s consent and feelings. Moreover, the survivors of sexual abuse often relate the image of the eye as the male gaze while telling their tales of abuse.

The narrator says: “I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye with a film over it.” (Poe, p. 144, 1907) None of the other personality traits of the old man disturbs him. Even to kill him, he waits for the old man’s vulture eye to open for seven nights. He throws a dim ray of lantern light only on his eye. When he finally finds it open on the eighth night, all other body parts of the old man are invisible. It means only the old man’s gaze is disturbing for the narrator. Whenever the old man gazed at him with that intent, the narrator used to go dead. The only cause of the old man’s murder is his vulture eye which is symbolic of sexual abuse. Furthermore, the narrator’s nervous and anxious speech, sudden agitated behavior, hyper alertness about any slightest noise, sleeping discomfort, fast heartbeat, and headaches make him suffering from psychosis and post-traumatic stress disorder. The victims of post-traumatic stress disorder often replay that experience (Mayo Clinic, 2024). Similarly, the narrator reenacts that experience but in a displaced meaning to kill the old man as a coping strategy of this trauma.

This male-on-male incest is more specifically a father-son-incest depending on the missing links conveyed through tongue slips in the story. The narrator’s parapraxis “old house” (Poe, p. 147, 1907) suggests that he along with the old man has been living in the same house for a very long time. The narrator can any time visit the old man’s room. He knows many things about the old man as his valuable

belongings, his timing of sleep, his sleeping atmosphere with utmost darkness through closed shutters, his heartbeat sound, and even his groan. He also relates his love and sympathy for the old man. The old man has always been kind to him for the old man neither insulted him nor inflicted any harm on him. the narrator was kind to the old man also. All the personality traits of the old man were likened by the narrator, except the vulture eye. The narrator keeps the old man unnamed because he tells the unspeakable act of his own father. He confesses the crime because he wants justice for the old man too. All these parapraxes throw light on the relationship between the narrator and the old man as father and son.

The whole story of “the Tell-Tale Heart” is the displaced allegory of the narrator’s child abuse at the hands of his father. His planning of execution, weapon of murder, method of murder, dismemberment of the old man’s body, and wiping out of the corpse all employ tongue slips to connote sexual abuse. His speech employs sexually horrifying tongue slips to narrate his story of killing the old man but this vocabulary is the retelling of his own abuse in a displaced sense.

To tell about the source of thought about killing the old man, the narrator articulates sensually sadistic vocabulary like “haunted” (Poe, p. 144, 1907), “conceived” (Poe, p. 144, 1907), “desire” (Poe, p. 144, 1907), “passion” (Poe, p. 144, 1907), and “blood cold” (Poe, p. 144, 1907) etc. The parapraxis of “haunted” (Poe, p. 144, 1907) and “stalked” (Poe, p. 146, 1907) connote various layers of meaning. The old man seems to have been chasing the narrator in the hair-raising darkness and silence of the night every mid-night, which deadly terrified the narrator as the narrator says about noise he hears: “Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me.” (Poe, p. 146, 1907) Reenacting the same practice, the narrator haunts the old man for eight continuous nights in the same dark and quiet setting. Just like this horrifying chase of the victim (narrator as a child), the idea to kill the criminal (the old man) haunts the narrator. Moreover, the slip posits that both the narrator and the old man face trouble having a sound sleep.

The narrator utters the parapraxes – “caution”

(Poe, p. 144, 1907), “foresight” (Poe, p. 144, 1907), and “dissimulation” (Poe, p. 144, 1907) – while planning the old man’s murder. They imply that the old man had been too careful and long-sighted during his criminal execution that nobody else would notice him. The old man also used to live a double life as the slip “dissimulation” (Poe, p. 144, 1907) suggests. Every following morning after the abuse of the narrator, he assumed the role of a caring father to convince the narrator that nothing had happened the previous night. The same role reversal is reenacted by the narrator when he visits the old man every night to kill him but fails to make the old man open his vulture eye. Every following morning, he visits the old man for a pleasant everyday talk in a hearty manner as if nothing had happened.

During the execution of the narrator’s plan to kill the old man, the narrator uses misplaced sexually charged speech expressions that retell the process of his abuse. The parapraxes such as opening the door gently, making a suitable opening for his head gradually, pushing his head very slowly, and taking hours to adjust the head (Poe, 1907) connote penetration during abuse.

The narrator’s expertise in making no noise during the task makes him proud enough to assume that the old man would not know his evil design but his giggle awakens the old man immediately. Comparably, the old man, during his crime, encounters this thought about the seemingly sleeping boy. In the manner that the slightest noise makes the old man awake from his sleep, the narrator’s sleep has been the same. As though the narrator does not leave the place, using darkness as a veil, after knowing that the old man has become suspicious about the narrator’s presence, the old man does not leave the boy during his abuse in a similar fashion. Acting as the old man remains alert after getting no reply for an hour, the narrator, as the child victim, used to do the same. To the same degree the old man does not ignore his suspicion on the narrator being present in his room by thinking of the disturbance as might be caused by some chimney wind, rat, or cricket chirping, the narrator used to do alike during his victimhood. The aforementioned suspicion does not help the old man save himself because “Death in approaching him had stalked with

his black shadow before him and enveloped the victim.” (Poe, p. 146, 1907) Equally, as a child victim, the narrator used to be enveloped by his abuser.

The narrator emphasizes that he knows the sounds the old man makes, either of groan or increasing heartbeat because the narrator has himself felt them when he was dead afraid for being abused at midnight. The narrator’s use of the old man’s bed as a murder weapon in the old man’s bedroom is symbolic of the old man’s misuse of the narrator’s bed in the narrator’s bedroom. The narrator amputates the old man’s body parts as an allegory to the objectification of the narrator’s body parts by his abuser, the old man. He conceals the old man’s body in the old man’s bedroom just like the old man used to conceal his heinous secret in the narrator’s bedroom. To such an extent the narrator convinces the officers that no offence had been taken place there, the old man used to convince others of the normality of the routine, likewise. As the narrator’s psychological state cannot let him keep his secret from others’ eyes, the old man was also failed in his attempt to keep it as a secret buried in the narrator’s bedroom.

2. Results

Mier Stunberg’s three universals of narrative – suspense, surprise, and curiosity – unlayer the complex plot of Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”. Suspense – the reader’s interest in the story through a play of hope and fear about future events – in Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” revolves around the unnamed narrator’s salvation or damnation. The hope of salvation and fear of damnation chase each other in a zigzag pattern throughout the story ending with the fear coming true as we see in the following manner:

HOPE

FEAR

The narrator is suffering from a disease of acute hearing sense (psychosis). He should be cured of it.

The narrator is not mad.

The innocent old man will not be killed for no reason.

The narrator plans the old man's murder in his defense. Otherwise, the old man's eye might have killed him.

The narrator will not kill the old man since the old man does not open his eye.

The narrator sympathizes with the old man's fearful state. He might leave the old man now.

The narrator wipes out every proof of the crime. He will be saved.

The narrator is mad and might be guilty of some crime.

The narrator might kill the innocent old man.

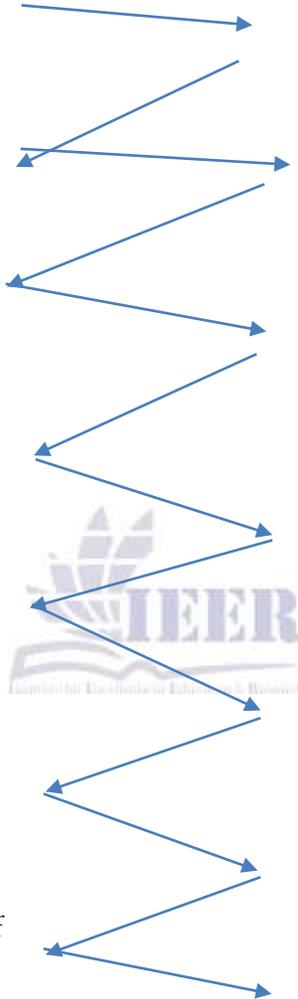
The old man's vulture eye is a horrifying thing to make him a laughing stock. People should not look into his eye.

The narrator visits the old man's room at midnight for seven nights and tries to open his vulture eye through a thin ray of the lantern.

The narrator will kill the old man if he opens his vulture eye.

The sight of the old man's vulture eye agonizes the narrator enough to compel him to kill the old man.

The narrator confesses his crime before the officers when none knows the crime.



Surprise – the missing link in the narrative by the reader, which is revealed towards the end and is opposite to the reader’s expectation – ends Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” as the reader keeps thinking that the narrator will be saved since he has resumed his normal mask in the story before the police. But, contrary to the reader’s expectation, the narrator confesses his crime without any external force. Actually, the reader misses the fact that on the very outset of the story, the narrator is telling his tale of crime to someone. In the end, this missing link reinforces itself to give this surprise ending.

Curiosity resolves the missing links present in the story to come up with a meaningful interpretation of the complex plot through tongue slips at work in the text. Such a surprise ending becomes the result of a childhood trauma of sexual abuse at the hands of the father. The narrator reenacts his abuse in a displaced act of killing his abuser. The text seems to be the catharsis of the narrator since he tells all the details of his childhood abuse symbolically while telling about his crime of killing the old man.

Conclusion

To conclude the whole discussion, we can say that this paper attempts to unveil the structure and meaning of Poe’s short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” utilising Mier Stenberg’s theory of three Narrative Universals which comprises Suspense, surprise, and curiosity, where curiosity is the application of Freudian concept of parapraxis or tongue slips to reveal its hidden meaning. Suspense is the play between hope and fear about the future event as to what is next. Suspense makes the zigzag pattern between hope for the narrator’s salvation and fear for the narrator’s damnation throughout the plot of “The Tell-Tale Heart” depending upon the narrator’s crime of killing the old man because of the old man’s vulture eye. It ends with the fear of the narrator’s damnation coming true as a surprise. Surprise is the opposite of the reader’s expectation. The restoration of the peaceful atmosphere of the story after burying the old man wins the reader’s sympathy vote for the narrator, assuming that he has killed the old man in his defense. The reader hopes that the narrator will be

saved. But the unexpected confession of the narrator reverses the hope of salvation for the narrator by the fear of damnation to yield a surprise ending. Leaving the reader in awe, the surprise ending demands an answer to every happening in the story, which is carried out through curiosity. Curiosity, using tongue slips as clues, finds answers to illogical happenings in the story, making them the most logical ones. The parapraxis that builds the story, appeals to the relation between the narrator and the old man as father and son, and the son’s criminal act of killing the father as the son’s revenge for his childhood abuse by his father. The tongue slip of the vulture eye symbolizes the act of forced sexual abuse. Other tongue slips like haunt, desire, passion, heartbeat sound, groan, and head, etc., connote horribly sexual imagery. Moreover, the detailed dialogues of the process of killing, dismembering, burying, and confessing the crime of the old man’s murder reveal themselves to be the displaced allegory of father-son incest. Hence, the motive of the murder becomes the trauma of childhood abuse that the narrator has been suffering from. He frees himself of the guilt in the end through his confession of the crime, making “The Tell-Tale Heart” an inverted detective fiction.

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