

**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**

**University of Tlemcen**



**Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of English**

**Section of English**

**The Burden of Guilt: Unravelling the Distorted  
Mind in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell Tale Heart*  
(1843)**

Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation

**Presented by**

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**Examiner**

**2024 - 2025**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, who gave me the gift of love and strength.

To my friends, with whom I've shared unforgettable moments.

And to all those who love me and have stood by me with their support.

your love made this possible.

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## Abstract

This research aims to investigate the way Edgar Allan Poe explores guilt in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and how guilt functions as a driving force behind madness and confession within the context of American Gothicism. The study focuses on the American Gothic genre, which is based on romantic ideas and turns attention inside to look at the disturbed mind and the destructive consequences of unresolved moral conflict. Poe's work serves as a complex connection between guilt, madness, and the psychological need to confess. This study uses a qualitative and analytical approach that depends on attentive reading and literary interpretation. It uses both Gothic theory and psychological criticism to break down the story's language, structure, and symbols. Ultimately, this study exemplifies Poe's transformation of guilt into a destructive internal force, exposing the fragility of the human mind.

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**General**

**Introduction**

## General Introduction

American literature has historically reflected the nation's evolving identity, cultural anxieties, and the complexities of the human experience. Among the genres that evolved in the nineteenth century, American Gothicism stand out for its unique capacity to examine the darker parts of human psychology. American Gothic literature, heavily influenced by European Romanticism, identifies many themes within an American framework, such as isolation, repression, and psychological complexity. Beyond the realm of haunted castles and supernatural forces, it shifted into the realm of internal terrors to investigate the human psyche and discover the dark facades found in humans' minds. This shift marked a pivotal moment in literary history, as external horror gave way to internal fears, particularly guilt.

At the heart of this shift is Edgar Allan Poe, a key figure in American Gothic literature. He exemplifies the psychological depth and moral tension that characterise the genre. Poe not only crafted stories of terror, but also crafted narratives that dissect the human spirit, often challenging the delicate balance between sanity and madness. His narratives, which are replete with psychological insight and symbolism, highlight the challenges faced by individuals who are triggered by isolation, remorse, and obsession. Readers often witness mental collapse within the characters who lose their sense of reason. Poe's narratives combine both psychological realism with Gothic aesthetics to explore the inner mind while enhancing psychological depth.

Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* is one of his most renowned and psychologically profound works. This short story offers a deep depiction of a narrator who is fixated on the old man's eye and driven by hyper-justification. The story functions as a literary laboratory for the purpose of studying how guilt appears, grows, and eventually prompts the narrator to confess. *The Tell-Tale*

*Heart* is a multifaceted investigation into the susceptibility of the mind to feelings of guilt and its steady decline into insanity rather than just a story about wrongdoing and its final results. The narrator's irregular speech and his obsessive repetition give the reader the ability to understand different dimensions of the fragmented brain, making the experience of guilt both vivid and disturbing.

This dissertation examines *The Tell-Tale Heart* through the lens of American Gothicism and psychological literature. It seeks to understand the way Poe uses literary tropes, such as unreliable narration, symbolism, and setting, to demonstrate the destructive nature of guilt and its weight. It also focuses on Poe's portrayal of madness as a psychological response to inner conflicts and suppressed emotion rather than a loss of reason. Therefore, the research relies on the larger Gothic tradition, in which confession and self-destruction are attempts at escaping inner turmoil. The story gives an overview of the human desire to reconcile with one's conscience, shedding light on the relationship between guilt and confession. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following questions

- How does Poe portray the psychological effects of guilt in the narrative?
- In what way does guilt act as a driving force behind madness and confession in Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and how does this represent the broader themes of American Gothicism?

This dissertation is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter provides theoretical and literary context by tracing Romanticism's influence on American Gothicism and analysing major genre features. Then, it shifts to the psychological components of guilt while focusing on the literary aspects of it.

This chapter review a combination of analytical and theoretical approaches to build a solid foundation for the study.

The second chapter provides a detailed examination of *The Tell-Tale Heart* while concentrating on the textual analysis of the story. This chapter aims to unravel the dark corners in human minds. A significant amount of attention is directed to the mental disintegration of the narrator, which illustrates his psychological slide from the initial burden of guilt to full madness, surrendering to confession. In this chapter a textual and analytical approach was employed to examine how guilt, madness, and confession are represented in *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

# **Chapter One:**

# **Literature**

# **Review**

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Romanticism, prioritizing emotion, intuition, and the profundities of the human spirit, fostered an environment conducive to the rise of American Gothicism. While Romantic ideals exalted beauty, imagination, and the sublime, they shifted toward darker concerns, including fear, isolation, and moral conflict.

The first chapter will discuss the characteristics that define American Gothicism, which is distinguished by its uncanny settings, emotional intensity, and psychological depth. Characters in this setting frequently deal with the fractured minds and repressed feelings, rather than external conflicts.

In American Gothic literature, guilt is the first psychological fracture that occurs as a force that breaks the line between sanity and madness. Guilt begins as a moral disturbance, then shifts into a driving force that consumes the individual. In Gothic works, guilt does not remain static, rather it develops until a clean collapse of the human's mind.

As guilt deepens, it paves the way to madness. The mind starts braking down while being unable to deal with the weight of guilt. Isolation, hallucinations, and strange conduct are all signs of the Gothic mind under pressure during this decline. In this case, madness becomes a reflection of inner torment, rather than a sickness. Madness also transforms the feeling of guilt into external chaos.

From the state of mental collapse, confession emerges as a reaction to the individual's inner turmoil. In American Gothic literature, confession is not a path for redemption but a way of seeking psychological release. Guilty characters often alleviate the burden of silence in a variety of ways, including denial, justification, and obsession with details.

This chapter also reveals that confession caused by madness and guilt reveals rather than resolves. It focuses on exposing the thin line between reason

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

and madness, showing that confession can be a sign of madness rather than redemption. It is an act driven by an urgent need to escape the weight of madness and guilt.

In American Gothic literature, guilt is the root of madness and its growth. The mind begins to break beneath its weight as it continues to fester in quiet, causing weak perception and lack of reason. This psychological unravelling frequently results in confession, which is forced on the individual, a final attempt to escape the burden of guilt.

### **1.2 Romanticism as a Path for American Gothicism**

American Romanticism is a movement that emerged in the early 19th century, more precisely between the 1820s and the 1860s. This movement arose as a response to the rationalism and industrialization of the Enlightenment era, favouring emotion, intuition, nature, and individual experience (Baym 22). It emphasized emotional depth as a source of truth and a meaningful dimension of human life.

The American literary critic and scholar Irving Babbitt, in his book *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919) introduces romanticism as an evolution from reason and its classical restraint towards emotion and intuition. As he asserts, “Romanticism is, in essence, the glorification of the individual’s inner life and his emotional response to the world” (Babbitt 23). This argument suggests that Romanticism is deeply personal, as it focuses on how individuals perceive the world rather than intellectual detachment and logical analysis.

American Romanticism developed as the country was trying to create its own identity, separate from Europe. By following a rapid change, American Romanticism moves from the European influence to a new distinctly voiced one that focuses on a shadowy psychological depth and a deeper interrogation of moral conflict. Writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

Nathaniel Hawthorne highlight the importance of intuition, self-reliance, and a profound connection to nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson declares, “The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other” (Emerson 6). A true nature lover has a balanced connection between their inner feelings and their view of the world.

Irving Babbitt, as a critic of Romanticism, highlights the dangers of Romantic individualism. He warns that the Romantic celebration of the natural, emotional, and unique individual can lead to the loss of practicality and rational thinking. He writes, “The romanticist’s exaltation of the ‘natural man’ often leads to a disregard for tradition and the common good” (Babbitt 78). He suggests that embracing uniqueness can be beneficial only by creating a balance between the shared values that hold society together and demonstrate a wide sense of responsibility.

While American Romanticism emphasized emotion, nature, and individual experience, it paves the way for American Gothicism as an extension and a reaction to American Romanticism. Both movements share a rejection of strict rationalism, yet romanticism focuses on beauty, intuition, and emotion over reason, while Gothicism is more focused on the psychological depths of the unknown.

### **1.3 Characteristics of American Gothicism**

American Gothicism is introduced as a movement that emerged in the early 19th century as a darker extension of American Romanticism, often characterized by elements such as darkness, the supernatural, and psychological complexity. It was influenced by the European Gothic traditions that emerged in the late 18th century, yet it shifted the gothic horror from external supernatural forces to internal psychological struggles (Habeeb 2). Therefore, American

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

Gothicism evolved from European Gothicism but with features reflecting American society.

Hogle, a prominent scholar of Gothic literature and American Gothicism, emphasizes that American Gothicism is often associated with themes of isolation, madness, and psychological horror. (Hogle 45-46). He also identifies features of American Gothicism in order to make a clear distinction from European Gothicism.

In exploring American Gothicism, it is essential to examine its key characteristics to comprehend how this genre reflects the deeper anxieties and contradictions of American culture and history (Spooner and McEvoy 63). Psychological depth is a crucial characteristic, as it often delves into the hidden anxieties and psychological struggles of its characters.

The focus on the complex mind of humans distinguishes American Gothic apart from other literary traditions. It prioritizes the deep dive into madness, the inner turmoil, and the hidden dark corners of the mind over the external threats. It also focuses on the mind's fragility as a fundamental component occupied with fear, guilt, and the unknown. Characters in such stories are frequently consumed by overwhelming anxiety, haunted by their past or by forces beyond their control (Hogle 124). In American Gothicism, characters descend into madness, representing the darker aspects of the human psyche.

American Gothic literature also tends to neglect the distinctions between good and evil while focusing on moral complexity. Characters often struggle with internal conflicts dealing with the grey areas of morality. Moral ambiguity also questions strict societal norms and reveals the paradoxes found in human nature. The focus here is often related to the psychological, cultural, and historical forces, as it mirrors deep anxieties of a nation in the middle of a huge challenge of defining its true identity (Hogle 146). Thus, moral ambiguity challenges the

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

reader to identify and make the difference between right and wrong, ultimately proving that the usual simple ideas of morality cannot explain the complex nature of humans.

In American Gothic literature, the use of the supernatural and the uncanny is found to make readers feel uneasy while exploring the boundaries between reality and imagination. Furthermore, the use of narrative tools of American Gothic literature is related to the psychological and cultural anxieties of the time, not to create suspense or horror. The supernatural appears often as ghosts, curses, madness, and unexplainable forces, while the uncanny is usually about breaking the lines between the ordinary and the extraordinary, distorted time and space, and inexplicable movements or sounds (Hogle 125). The supernatural and the uncanny in American Gothic literature function as metaphors for the high tension in American society, featured by the legacy of slavery, the colonial displacement of native peoples, and the clash of a nation emerging on ideals of freedom and equality.

In American Gothicism, psychological depth, moral ambiguity, and the supernatural and the uncanny are crucial to distinguish it from European Gothicism. These defining features explain the wide focus on the complexities of the human psyche, the blurred lines between morality and immorality, and the fragile boundary between reality and the unknown. The use of these elements is found to critique societal norms, reveal the cultural anxieties of the time, and tackle the darker corners of the human mind. Thus, American Gothic literature challenges readers to face the contradictions found in humans to create deeper reflection on morality, identity, and the dark nature of humans.

In American Gothic literature, guilt is the central heart whose force leads to madness and confession. The weight of guilt drives characters to split from reason and cause harm within the society. Therefore, it is crucial to examine perspectives of guilt to grasp its different dimensions.

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### **1.4 The Psychology of Guilt: A Cognitive Perspective**

In the early 20th century, the study of guilt emerged to help understand its psychological origins and the way it influences moral decisions. Sigmund Freud is considered a primary figure in exploring guilt as a moral emotion affecting human behaviour. Freud suggested that guilt as a psychological mechanism stems from the huge conflict found between the primitive self, which is a combination of primal instincts and desires, the ego, which balances reality and defers it from irrational impulses, and the superego, which imposes moral values (Freud 78). In this way, guilt is considered a result of societal expectations and the natural behaviour of men within society.

However, in the latter half of the 20th century, research about guilt started to flourish more. The significant book *Shame and Guilt* (2002), written by June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing, provides a clear understanding of guilt. In *Shame and Guilt*, Tangney and Dearing define guilt as a moral emotion that arises when an individual believes they have caused harm to others and failed to act appropriately. In this book, Tangney and Dearing also clarify the distinction between shame and guilt. By associating shame with the entire self, guilt focuses on wrong actions (Tangney and Dearing 45). From this, guilt leads to constructive behaviours after recognizing the mistake, while shame leads to negative self-perception, as it is self-focused and not related to any specific behaviour.

Tangney and Dearing used previous theories to own a strong foundation based on academic research rather than isolation. In the 1990s, the American social psychologist Roy F. Baumeister was able to examine the role of guilt throughout interpersonal relationships and moral behaviour. Baumeister debates that guilt serves as a significant behaviour that helps build healthy relationships within society, inspires reasoning, and protects social bonds. In 1994, they published an article named "Guilt: An Interpersonal Approach" (1994), In *Psychological Bulletin*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, to explain that guilt

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acts as a relationship regulator within society. The main aim of this article was about encouraging individuals to behave well, appreciate connections with others, and repair harm (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton 245). Clearly, this article highlights the idea that guilt has a constructive role casing moral habits such as empathy, maintaining responsibilities, and motivating amends.

People's experience with guilt differs completely even after committing the same harmful actions. Depending on psychological, cultural, and personal factors, the individual may produce reactions as a reflection of his mind. Guilt can lead the individual to self-punishment or confession, while others may ignore the overwhelming feeling in order to avoid psychological distress. Thus, guilt is tied to the individual's capacity for empathy but also self-reflection. Often shaped by societal norms and personal conscience, an internalized sense of morality gives rise to guilt (Freud 51). This means that two people committing the same act may not share the same feeling of guilt, each one will feel a level of guilt depending on their internalized moral framework.

Unresolved guilt provoked by psychological and moral factors leads the individual to lose his sanity and drop his sense of logic. As guilt takes over the mind, the notion of madness becomes visible. This shift from sanity to insanity shows the way the weight of guilt overwhelms the mind and triggers madness.

### **1.5 Madness and Morality: The Gothic Mind Under Pressure**

In Gothic literature, madness emerges as a result of a deeper moral or emotional crisis. While the medical field sees insanity as a severe mental disorder, Gothic madness arises from guilt, isolation, or unresolved trauma. Characters who lose their sanity are not mentally ill, but they are unable to carry the weight of their actions or desires. The literary critic Jerrold E. Hogle explains that madness is not only the loss of mental stability, but it is also a moral and psychological entanglement (Hogle 112). Hence, rather than being a psychiatric

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collapse, madness in Gothic literature is a profound moral and existential crisis motivated by emotions.

The Gothic tradition flourishes on this interaction between interior guilt and external behaviour. In several works, characters do not show any kind of remorse or regret, but they are plagued by symptoms of guilt such as paranoia, hallucinations, and obsessive behaviours. These symptoms are considered a slide into madness and a sign of an internal emotional conflict (Hogle 10). This means that dark emotions, such as guilt, are made visible throughout the events of the story. In this way, madness—as a result of guilt—is a way of delving into profound interior suffering.

Gothic madness is often shown through unreliable narrators or distorted realities, making readers unable to differentiate between reality and hallucination. This literary technique is used to focus on moral conflicts while making readers doubt the narrator's sense of good and wrong and his notion of ethical reasoning. In such stories, characters do not admit their wrongdoing, but they justify their actions and pretend that their behaviours have good reasons (Wall 18). This constant justification reveals much inner turmoil and irrational dread. The absence of credibility in such characters is a reflection of their own descent into unethical behaviour.

The literary scholar and critic Anne Williams argues that Gothic fiction enables readers to experience the instability of perception and moral uncertainty (Williams 22). Throughout Williams' definition, Gothic madness is not about personal struggle, but it is a way to examine the fragile boundaries between sanity and insanity, reality and illusion. Studying the purpose of madness alongside its languages in literature helps examine the way mental stability challenges logic.

### **1.5.1 The Purpose of Madness**

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Beside the historical explanation and the study of madness, it is crucial to reveal the way dominant narratives and historical frameworks have been excluding madness from meaningful participation in life and society.

The evolution of madness as a concept saw four main events. During the Middle Ages, people frequently viewed madness as divine or sacred. People used to associate madness with spirituality, suggesting that it might be a sign from God. Moving to the beginning of the dialogue between madness and reason, in which they are often linked together. During this period, people viewed madness as an integral part of reality, recognizing it as a potential source of truth. People believed that this reliance on madness is a kind of wisdom (Merquior 21). Essentially, people did not reject madness, but instead viewed it as a mystery that could benefit society.

Classical rationalism dominated the third era of the evolution of madness. This period of time is marked by the shift from madness to reason, while considering madness as a disease and disorder. People refuse to rely on madness and replace it with reality. In relation to this, the literary critic and philosopher Merquior states, "Rationalist reason put unreason under 'pathological' curse fraught with ethical overtones"(Kelmendi 48), this shows the way madness was no longer accepted as it was before.

The fourth moment is marked by the arrival of Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, as he gives giant importance to the segregation logic while still working in the field of psychiatry. Freud believes that inner conflicts can be found in both sane and insane people. While working with different people, Freud was able to give madness a voice by examining people with mental illness. Yet, his purpose was to understand madness, not to give it total freedom (Kelmendi 48). Hence, Freud's way is related on studying madness without separating it from sanity and then controlling madness by limiting its freedom.

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The stages of madness are based on a system that has deep historical roots. By analysing people, those who were considered mad were treated differently than the others. Based on the language used, insane people used a different language, allowing the society to classify them separately.

### **1.5.2 The Language of Madness**

It is crucial to focus deeply on the connection between madness and literature in order to understand the human behaviour within his society. Through the language used, madness becomes visible in literature. This link allows madness to be seen, represented, and understood via literary forms (Kelmendi 48). Therefore, the language of madness is necessary ahead of delving into literature.

Madness is often perceived in a negative form. Individuals suffering from insanity were often silenced, accused by their inability to form meaningful speech that aligns with reasoning. Those disturbed persons were also ignored by the society, as their speech may challenge the norms (Kelmendi 48). This means that madness was not accepted, as its language differs from the language produced by sane individuals.

The language of madness does not aspire to be reasonable or limited to the principles of logic. This language has a profound meaning while challenging the dominance of reason. Despite the fact that the language of madness may seem unusual and odd, it contains its own reality. This language does not aim to fit the society norms, but it is spoken as a personal representation (Kelmendi 50). Language of madness is a way to limit restrictions while allowing people with mental instabilities to have a voice within their society.

The language of madness emerges from silence, aiming to represent the individual while revealing original thoughts. Therefore, madness and language are deeply connected, as the mad individual uses a specific language within the

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

society. In literature, madness is represented throughout a language that differs from the one produced by stable individuals. (Kelmendi 52). This explains the way literature is the place where both madness and language meet together.

The progression from guilt to madness leads the human mind to confession. Since guilt is considered a powerful emotion that distorts the mind, individuals cannot carry the weight of it, which leads them to lose their sense of logic, descending into madness. In this way, confession emerges as a result of the inner turmoil and suffering.

### **1.6 Guilt as a Path for Confession**

The American social psychologist Roy Baumeister describes guilt as a clear discomfort that happens when the individual does something wrong or feels that others may perceive his behaviour as an error. Baumeister also introduces guilt as a feeling related to others while being driven by social incentives within the society (Baumeister et al. 244). Concerning this, the American psychologist and editor VandenBos said, "Guilt – a self-conscious emotion characterised by a painful sense of having done something that is wrong..." (VandenBos 424), explaining that guilt arises when we feel that we failed society norms.

Besides being an emotional reaction, guilt has also been introduced as a pro-social behaviour in service of the community. In 1972, psychologist Vladimir J. Konečn planned an experience to examine the effects of guilt on humans' behaviour. At first, an actor bumped into someone, letting his punch cards drop on the street, the actor made the person feel guilty as if he caused the accident to see his reaction. The accused man helped the actor after being triggered by guilt. After a while, the actor did the same thing but without making the random man feel guilty. As a result, people who felt guilty were more likely to help, while the rest ignored the situation (Konecni 31). Therefore, guilt leads individuals to adopt positive actions as a way to fix what they have done wrong.

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Confession is a psychological and cultural practice committed by the individual to admit wrongdoing, bring a sense of relief, and serve personal and social interests. The aim of confession is to achieve emotional relief and moral repair after the voluntary acknowledgement of a misdeed motivated by guilt. Therefore, confession helps the individual to reduce stress while offering a sense of personal growth and a relief from emotional burden. According to the psychologists Price Tangney and Ronda L., guilt is an emotion that encourages repair and confession to reduce stress and tension (Tangney and Dearing 25). Therefore, confession is not only a mirror for guilt, but it is also a way to acknowledge mistakes and express remorse with the intention to achieve integrity.

### **1.6.1 Language of Confession**

The language of confession is profoundly rooted in personal revelation, often blurring the line found between both reality and illusion. In literary works, guilt as a hidden dark thought leads to empathy and invites readers to think about their actions, focusing more on forgiveness, justice, or redemption. At the same time, confession allows the individual to free himself from pressure by revealing hidden actions, experiencing a new form of release (Foucault 59). In literature, confession is the way characters used to express their feeling of guilt. This direct expression releases the hidden turmoil and conflict found in characters.

In literature, the language of confession serves as a complex linguistic interaction and also functions as a means of reporting past events. The confessor tells of his wrongdoings, revealing his feeling of guilt. The person who receives the confession may share the same experience with the confessor or hold a certain authority. As the confessor is aware that the act of confession will lead to consequences, his decision explains the way guilt messes with his sense of reality (Shuy 13). Therefore, confession is associated with wrongdoings, shared experiences, or the recognition of outcomes.

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The language of confession produced by individuals may be different based on the situation or the way the person interacts within his society. In some cases, the confessor may reveal his actions while still protecting his image as a way to avoid harsh judgement. By revealing a part of the truth, the confessor tries to hide parts of the crime as a way to avoid punishment (Shuy 13). Therefore, the language of confession used serves the confessor's interests in certain situations.

Confessors' language is a combination between accepting the responsibility with its consequences and a strategy that makes actions seem less serious. Analysing the language used by confessors, they use certain words to show uncertainty and soften the situation, avoiding being direct and absolute. Confessors may also follow the strategy of the passive voice, meaning telling the events without revealing the self to protect personal distance. This language directs the attention to the events rather than the person who committed the crime or the wrongdoing (Shuy 65-70). Throughout the specific language used by confessors, they manage to deal with their feeling of guilt while trying to protect their image. This shows the way confession triggered by guilt is a social act rather than a moral one.

### **1.6.2 Confession Under Pressure: The Weight of Guilt and Madness**

Although confession is often envisioned as a solution to achieve settlement and inner peace, there are cases where the individual fails to make peace even after his action of confession. The way confession is expressed is the main factor that reveals its true nature. A confession lacking honesty, empathy, or recognition of the harm caused shows the narrator's distance from remorse (Lazare 101-103). Therefore, the absence of resolution makes guilt seem like an empty feeling, unable to force peace.

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

Confession under the weight of guilt is revealed throughout the disturbed language used by the confessor. In this case, the speaker's speech may be full of hesitation, repetition, and constant apology. The intense feeling of guilt creates an inner turmoil for the individual. This internal burden creates pressure, making the individual in constant search for a solution. Due to this, confession is the pathway for relief and peace, regardless of the aftermath consequences. (Tangney et al. 75-81). This descent into instability caused by guilt leads to the disappearance of the line between sanity and madness.

Building on the notion that the feeling of guilt leads to madness, a confession emerged from such state may mirror a psychological distress. Confessing while being mentally unstable leads to the use of a language that reflects the disturbed mind. The symptoms of insanity include the lost logical structure, statements that do not follow rational connection, and a distorted portrayal of the truth. In this way, the purpose of confession switches from being a way of seeking forgiveness, redemption, and fixing earlier behaviours to becoming an uncontrolled activity that is triggered by a troubled mind (Foucault 101-108). Ultimately, confession does not reflect the individual's redemption but the direct impact of guilt leading to madness. This connection between guilt, madness, and confession exposes the fractured line found between reason and chaos.

The cyclical interaction found between guilt, madness, and confession highlights a negative psychological pattern. Unresolved guilt can interrupt the individual's mental stability, resulting in a decline in his logic sense, causing madness. Insanity is a condition marked by unbalanced perceptions, fragmented ideas, and a disconnection from reality under the weight of chaos. In this state, the act of confessing may steam as a manifestation of the inner turmoil, rather than a plea for redemption. Confession transforms from an act to seek remorse and take responsibility to a representation of a disturbed mind triggered by guilt

## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

and madness (Szasz 150-155). Therefore, a confession stemming from guilt and madness is a desperate attempt to release the inner distress.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

Guilt is central in American Gothic literature, not only as a motif but also as a powerful force that drives the narrative and gives it its depth. Rooted in the emotional sensitivity of Romanticism, American Gothicism transforms inner conflict into haunting literary expression. Driven by guilt, characters are compelled to descend into a relentless mental decline. Madness comes out of this inner conflict and reflects it back, changing reality and letting the mind lose its sense. After the slip toward madness, the mind becomes a surface for fear, repression, and moral collapse. In Gothic literature, madness does not remain buried, it seeks a voice. Confession becomes an act that tries to relieve the mind and an attempt to deal with the weight of guilt. From guilt to madness to confession, American Gothic literature exposes the significant burden of the human conscience and the terror of haunting consequences that destroy the individual. The following chapter will turn to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, an example of American Gothic literature, where guilt dominated the mind.

**Chapter two: The  
Psychological Unravelling of  
Guilt in *The Tell-Tale Heart***

## Chapter two: The Psychological Unravelling of Guilt in *The Tell-Tale Heart*

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter conducts a thorough examination of Edgar Allan Poe's chilling short story, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, investigating the profound depths of the human psyche and the destructive influence of guilt. To provide a clear explanation, it is important to focus on Edgar Allan Poe's life and his contribution to American Gothic literature. His personal experiences—characterised by tragedy, grief, and psychological instability—are frequently reflected in the disturbed characters and gloomy themes of his literature. Poe's life contextualises his work and offers context for the emotional and psychological complexities he examined in his writing.

This chapter also explores characters whose actions shape the entire narrative. The analysis examines Poe's interactions in building suspense and representing inner turmoil. The importance of the claustrophobic and oppressive environment in enhancing psychological tension and reflecting the narrator's internal state will also be examined. In addition, the central themes of the narrative, including the immense guilt, the blurred lines between perception and reality, and the descent into lunacy, will be explored.

*The Tell-Tale Heart* examines powerful imagery of the old man's "vulture eye" and the loud beating hearts, and it expresses the narrator's conflict and paranoia within a dread atmosphere. The narrator's breakdown begins with a controlled act, but the burden of guilt erodes his sanity. This emotional suffering manifests as a heavy feeling, paranoia, and the delusion of a beating heart, which is a powerful symbol of his crime. This descent into madness ultimately leads to his downfall, while the pressure he feels compels him to confess in an attempt to silence the voice in his head. The outcome exposes the guilt that betrays his carefully maintained sanity.

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### **2.2 Edgar Allan Poe's Biography**

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 1809, in Boston to Elizabeth Arnold and David Poe, who were both actors. Poe lost his parents at a very young age, exactly on his second year of life. At that time his grandfather had fallen from great wealth to poverty, so he failed to support his grandson. Edgar Allan Poe went to England after being fostered by John and Frances Allan (Smith 1). Allan was a loving father, holding so much care for Edgar Allan Poe, yet the son did not feel comfortable depending on him.

Edgar Allan Poe's tragic background, marked by early loss and trauma, led him to search for independence as a personal pride. At the age of sixteen, he went to the University of Charlottesville, where he thrived in his educational pursuits (Smith 2), yet his rebellious side was always there. Edgar Allan Poe's self-destructive behaviour led him to start drinking and gambling, making his fortune vanish before he could earn it. By the year of 1826, he had reached a debt of 2000 dollars.

John Allen was disappointed by his son's reckless decisions. As a result, he chose not to pay Poe's second year of university, leaving him in a complex position (Ackroyd 58). Simultaneously with this unfortunate event, Poe had no choice but to take steps to resolve his dire predicament.

In 1827, Edgar Allan Poe went to the army after being financially cut yet still refused to follow orders, bringing upon himself discharge from the army. As a reaction, John Allan decided to stop supporting Poe, leaving him by himself at a very hard time. At this point, Edgar Allan Poe had to pass by a long journey to make a living as a writer, with the support of his aunt Maria Clemm, who consistently stood by his side. His literary career began with poetry but soon embraced other literary forms, leaving a unique imprint on American Gothic

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fiction. Poe carved a path to success, earning both financial prosperity and a certain level of recognition. (Ackroyd 59).

Edgar Allan Poe was able to win a hundred-dollar prize for his “work Mr Found in Bottle” (1833), making his first public recognition as a writer. He moved to New York after marrying his cousin Virginia Clemm, he kept writing till he found fame with “The Raven” (1845) after many years of struggle (Smith 2-3). His wife passed away in 1845, leaving him adrift in a sea of profound sorrow, as her presence was the only source of love, passion, and joy to him. About this, the author Dillon said: “The devotion of Mrs Clemm to Poe and the lovability of her character formed the sweetest strain, if not the only melody, heard amidst the discord of Poe's existence.” (Dillon 104). Hence, the tragic loss of his dear wife and his career troubles occurred simultaneously.

Edgar Allan Poe was struggling with neglect, he tried to seek help from Charles Dickens about the prospects of republication in London. At that time, Charles Dickens was at the peak of his success as an influential writer, while Poe was still considered an outsider in the literary world. Dickens never responded, leaving Poe in isolation. Meanwhile, Russia took the lead to bring Poe’s works to Europe after being called the unknown writer even in Britain (Smith 5). Before Poe’s death, Russian intellectuals admired his works, as they aligned with Russian literature and their focus on the human mind.

Edgar Allan Poe died on the 7th of October at the city of Baltimore (William 273). His misfortune was not limited to his life since he was remembered in a negative perception, even after his creation of inventive poetry by introducing new rhythms and melodies to American poetry (Dillon 8). Poe’s death is considered a mystery in American literary history. This event raised countless theories, yet the answer was never found.

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Although the exact reason for Poe's death remains a mystery, the cooping theory emerged around 1872 to explain that Edgar Allan Poe was a victim of electoral fraud since he was found near a polling place wearing clothes from an unknown source (Walsh 58–59). Poe's death was tragic, he left the world in silence as if he never existed, meanwhile his mind was full of voices, and each thought was a cry for rescue.

### **2.3 Plot Summary of the Tell-Tale Heart**

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843) is a famous short story that explores many themes, such as madness, guilt, and the human psyche. The unnamed narrator, who is also the protagonist of the story, insists on his sanity while recounting the events leading to the murder he committed. In this story, the victim is an old man with a vulture-like eye, which the narrator finds highly disturbing. Despite his claim of loving the old man, the narrator unintentionally becomes consumed by an obsession with his eye, leading him to attain peace by killing the man.

The events started when the narrator kept visiting the man's room for several nights planning for the kill. As the narrator carefully opens the door on the eighth night, a soft noise wakes the old man with a face full of dread. The narrator finally acts, smothering the old man with his bed, ending his life exactly how he planned (Poe 3-5). This quick action was enough to end the old man's life.

Once the old man was dead, the narrator makes sure that no trace of the crime remains visible after hiding the body beneath the floorboards. The feeling of triumph was cut by the arrival of the police to investigate the sound heard by one of the neighbours. The narrator was chatting with the officer with much confidence till, unexpectedly, his calm started to vanish under an imagined sound only he could hear. Overwhelmed by guilt, the narrator directly confesses the

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crime, revealing the dead body of the man (Poe 7-8). Triggered by the arrival of the police, the narrator was no longer able to hide his crime.

The narrative serves as an exploration of the human mind's fragility and an illustration of how guilt can overcome sanity and reason. With this, Poe was able to transmit a vivid image of the story, but also showing how guilt can consume the mind, driving the individual into a new behaviour.

### **2.4 The Characters**

The characters in *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe are very few, yet each character holds a certain position to help building the story.

**The Police:** In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the police have a crucial role as a force that triggers the narrator's confession. Their presence in the narration was very brief as a representation of law and order. Their arrival as an external authority caused much disturbance in the narrator's mind while they were investigating the absence of the old man (Poe 4). The calm attitude of the police and their methodical presence uncover the crime with minimal effort, not using any kind of aggressiveness or pressure towards the narrator.

**The old man:** In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the old man is a passive character, yet he has a significant role in the story. The focus of this story was the vulture-like eye of the man, which became the centre of the narrator's attention and a justification for his act (Poe 3). Despite his physical appearance, the old man is a harmless character. His vulnerability shaped him as an effortless target for the narrator. As the old man is silent, he is a symbol of innocence, morality, and the unstable mind of the narrator.

**The Narrator:** The unnamed character of this story serves as both the protagonist and the antagonist. This character is a deeply disturbed individual who insists on his sanity while showing insane conduct as proof of his descent into madness (Poe 3). His massive fixation on the old man's "vulture eye" reveals

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a huge obsession and paranoia. His lack of remorse exposes itself through the way of committing the crime and hiding the man's body under the floorboards with much excitement. The narrator's mind breaks under the weight of his guilt, leading him to confess his crime, though the sound he heard did not actually exist (Poe 5).

Reflecting on the narrator's character, it emphasises the fragility of mental stability and a commentary on the human condition. Throughout the story, his behaviour was swinging between calm and manic. He started as a confident individual planning the crime with much attention yet ended with failure after being defeated by guilt. The narrator often tries to prove his superiority, particularly when he describes his premeditated murder. The narrator is considered a tragic figure, as he embodies the dark side of a human full of irrational behaviour, paranoia, and guilt.

### **2.5 The Analysis of *the Tell-Tale Heart***

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843) represents the power of guilt when it comes to unravelling the human psyche. The unnamed narrator tells the story through a chilling first-person narrative while insisting on his sanity despite committing the crime. His hyperfocus on his sanity while being a murderer in cold blood reveals his deep psychological instability and denial, where guilt pushes the individual to obsessive justification rather than remorse (Freud 7). The narrator was driven by the power of guilt, excluding any sense of control and regulation.

#### **2.5.1 The Narrative Structure**

In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Edgar Allan Poe uses the first point of view. The narrator tells the story from his personal perspective, addressing the reader to transmit his thoughts and ideas. Poe's aim from making the story told from the narrator's side was to blur the line between rationality and insanity and to force

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the reader to question the truth of his account (Poe 3). This narration succeeded in creating an unreliable narrator, building suspense, and exploring guilt as a feeling that takes over the mind. As guilt absorbs the narrator's mind, the stillness and quietness haunt him, intensifying his guilt and driving him to insanity.

*The Tell-Tale Heart* is a story that follows a linear chronological structure but is often interrupted by the narrator's suspicious behaviour. This disjointed tale reflects the narrator's fragmented mental condition. The events leading to the murder are told in a chilling way, emphasising the narrator's compulsive planning, as he states, "And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone..." (Poe 4). The murder happens quickly, but the aftermath and the arrival of the police make the story's climax and fall. This is when the narrator loses control and finally admits the crime he committed (Poe 8). This specific structure shows the weight of guilt and madness, as well as a complete psychological collapse.

Additionally, the use of pacing is a crucial contributor to the structure of the narrative. Poe started by establishing a slow and deliberate pace, as the narrator tells about his nightly visits to the old man's room (Poe 4). This allows the reader to focus on the deep side of the narration while building suspense and tension. However, once he committed the crime, the pacing quickens, showing the narrator's mounting anxiety and frustration. The narrator loses his control, admitting the crime by saying, "Villains!" I shrieked, "Dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — Tear up the planks! — here, here! — It is the beating of his hideous heart!" (Poe 8). This frantic speech of confession is not a logical choice but a mirror to the narrator's breakdown and his collapse toward madness.

### **2.5.2 Exploring the Setting**

Throughout the story, Edgar Allan Poe offers few details about place, without mentioning the city, country, or even a specific historical context. This

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structure was actually intentional, as it adds a precise dimension to the story. The story mainly takes place inside the old man's house, particularly in his personal bedroom. This limited knowledge given exemplifies the narrator's isolation (Thompson 157). The lack of a specific location gives the story a psychological landscape rather than a realistic setting.

The narrator actually provides few vivid images as he keeps mentioning the overwhelming darkness of the house beside the creepy silence. This description creates suspense while it is considered a classic tool in Gothic literature. The darkness that has taken over the house mirrors the narrator's inner darkness and conflict, while the silence sheds light on the narrator's fragility and his disturbed mind (Poe 4). As the events unfolded in the blurred location, the timing played a crucial role in building tension, enhancing the psychological aspects of the story.

In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Poe uses timing as an element to add suspense and help understand the narrator's guilt during the events. The narrative unfolds during the night, reflecting the narrator's disturbed mind and his dark thoughts. In Gothic literature, night-time traditionally exemplifies fear, uncertainty, and also hidden sins to mirror the narrator's mental state and his instability (Kennedy and Gioia 78). For this, timing in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is related to the narrator's feelings, reflecting his rising anxiety and feeling of guilt.

During the many events, timing is related to the narrator's feeling of guilt. At the beginning of the story, the narrator uses precise timing since things were under control with a complete absence of guilt. After the murder and hiding of the body, time seems to slow down in parallel with the police's arrival. This unnatural perception of timing proves the growing guilt which made time freeze in the moment of the crime. Excessive focus on timing, mainly being fixated on the exact hour, serves as a reflection of the character's instability and his inner conflict leading to mental collapse (Peeples 34). Poe's stories are often fixated on

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obsession to shed light on the human mind and its darkest and most irrational aspects.

In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the atmosphere is dark, tense, and very obsessive. Each detail mirrors the narrator's sense of guilt, which creates a heavier atmosphere. From the very beginning, the darkness that dominates the story crafts an environment where guilt can grow and consume the narrator's sense of reality. In Gothic literature, the use of darkness is very repeated to represent psychological turmoil and mainly guilt (Botting 23). In this story, the repeated words used explain the narrator's mental state and his descent into madness to create tension (Hussain 245). In fact, tension can be detected throughout many parts, such as repeating the word "beating", which is directly associated with the heart to show the vivid image of guilt (Hussain 251). Therefore, tension is the primary force that shapes the events and drives the story forward.

Another dominated atmosphere is obsession, where the narrator's obsessive behaviour leads to his own destruction. The narrator's fixation on the vulture-like eye, not the man himself, shows the narrator's true self and a manifestation of his inner conflict (Poe 3). Concerning the action of killing the old man, the narrator was actually slow and careful as he took eight nights to finally commit the crime. This excessive patience shows the way obsession controls the narrator's mind (Poe 4). The narrator loses his sense of reality as his obsession made him hear the old man's heart even after burying him under the ground. In short, the narrator's obsession with the eye, the act of murder, and the man's heartbeat evolve into guilt.

### **2.5.3 Exploring the Main Themes in *The Tell-Tale Heart***

Edgar Allan Poe uses many themes in *The Tell-Tale Heart* in order to craft a complex narrative that can transmit the human experience, especially the inner

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turmoil. Guilt, madness, and death, are crucial in explaining the psychological tension and built the complexity of the events.

The theme of guilt dominates the entire story as the narrator's mental state is directly tied to it. The narrator's motive for convincing us that he was normal, not insane, was to hide his guilt. Moreover, him justifying the crime was also a way to refuse guilt by exonerating himself and directing the blame to the man's eye. The narrator's final confession of the crime is where guilt overcomes the narrator's mind and consumes him completely (Del Guercio 45). Wagner said, "With too many reasons to lie, people 'leak' the truth more often, defeating their attempts to deceive by giving nonverbal signs that they are lying." (Wegner 80). This explains how guilt is causing much overwhelm to the narrator. Therefore, guilt causes the narrator's loss of mind, leading to madness.

Another major theme in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is madness, as the whole story is based on the way insanity shapes the narrative. the narrator's claim of sanity "True! —nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?" (Poe 3), do not align with his paranoid behaviour. The narrator's decision to kill the old man proves his detachment from reality and his slide into madness. Eventually, the hallucination of hearing non-existent sounds is clear evidence of the narrator's madness.

The heartbeats haunted the narrator's mind, leading him to confess the crime after being defeated by guilt. "Unwanted thoughts turn up in a variety of psychological disorders...they are in center stage when people suffer from obsessions...and are also in many cases of depression...self-control problems...and even psychotic reactions such as schizophrenia" (Wegner 7). As guilt controls and madness takes over, death becomes a tragic outcome.

Beside guilt and madness, death is also a crucial theme since it drives the events and reveals the narrator's dark thoughts. In this narrative, the narrator saw

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death as a solution to escape problems, but instead, he ends up being destroyed by it (Silverman 114–115). The murder of the old man, which is justified as a necessity by the narrator, becomes the main reason for his collapse and unbearable guilt (Poe 3). In this story the narrator says, "I loved the old man" (Poe 3), at the same time, he committed the crime in cold blood, meaning that he was no longer able to recognise boundaries and understand the difference between reality and illusion.

To sum up, Edgar Allan Poe uses obsessed narrators in his works to explore the psychological aspects of his characters and to shed light on guilt and its consequences on human behaviour (Del Guercio 41). The lack of the narrator's personal information helps to focus on guilt, madness, and death, meaning neglecting his background to only concentrate on the psychological and emotional aspects (Del Guercio 48). Therefore, the obsessed narrator is an engine of the story as it shapes its structures and reveals the variation between sanity and madness.

### **2.5.4 Uncovering The Symbolism in *The Tell-Tale Heart***

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, is a short story full of symbolism in order to enrich the narrative and expose themes of guilt, madness, and death. Poe's uses the eye, the heart beats, and the repetition of words to carry a deep meaning representing guilt, madness and death.

In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the eye is more than just a physical element, it becomes the most significant symbol in the story. Poe's description of the eye gives it a lifeless, unsettling, and haunting image. The numerous details about the eye mirror the narrator's fragility, his collapse into madness, and also proves that the eye existed in reality. While the eye exists as a physical element, Poe was able to give it the role of a sign. The narrator's massive focus on the eye shows his instability, which was driven by guilt. Furthermore, the eye can be introduced as

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a defence mechanism, where the narrator blames the eye instead of dealing with guilt and his emotion (Halliburton 334). Therefore, the eye is a symbol for the narrator's internal conflict which is triggered by guilt.

Another powerful symbol in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is the heartbeats. After committing the crime, the narrator hears the beats to the point where he was completely disturbed by the sound. The hallucination reflects the narrator's departure from the truth and his slip into madness. Also, the sound goes louder, meaning that the narrator's guilt was rising continuously, leading him to confess (Hasan 20). From this, the heartbeats are not just an illusory sound, but they are a reflection of the narrator's conscience after committing the crime.

Repetition is also a powerful symbol used by Edgar Allan Poe in his short story *The Tell Tale Heart*. Throughout the narrative, the narrator is clearly repeating many words and sentences reflecting His inner chaos. This obsessive use of words proves his descent into madness while claiming sanity (Hasan 20). Repetition of "very, very slowly," "louder—louder—louder!" (Poe 3), actually shows the narrator's failure in acting normal. "You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing" (Poe 3), in here, the repeated claim of being mentally stable is actually to convince himself rather than convincing readers. Hence, the repetition used by the narrator is a way to run from the haunted guilt, and also to draw a realistic image for his mental state.

The eye, the heart beats, and the repeated words are major symbols related to guilt which is found in all the narrative levels. Edgar Allan Poe succeeded in showing the narrator's internal conflict and his failure in pushing guilt.

### **2.6 The Mind's Descent from Guilt to Madness**

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* is a short story that illustrates the weight of guilt as it grows stronger inside the narrator's mind, leading to massive psychological turmoil. The narrator's insistence on his mental stability creates

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tension, suggesting that this mind is already driven by insanity (Poe 3). Scholar Scott Peeples explains that this defence is seen as the narrator's recognition of his mental instability, a condition triggered by guilt. Peeples also explains that the profound obsession and fixation on the eye represents the narrator's internal conflict (Peeples 94). This meticulousness is the method used by the narrator as a coping mechanism to overcome guilt.

The narrator's behaviour in watching the old man for eight nights indicates his precarious state of insanity (Poe 4). This compulsive activity is viewed as a frantic effort to preserve control against guilt. Peeples examines the hyper-rationality of the narrator during the planning as proof of his delusion and a way to defend himself and escape guilt (Peeples 95). The act of invading the old man's room at night while being kind during the day shows the narrator's inability to connect with reality. Moreover, the narrator's detailed description of his actions shows that each movement is driven by the weight of guilt.

The narrator's fall is distinguished by a major event as a turning point in the story. The open eye sets off the quick and brutal act that lets out all of his stored guilt (Poe 5). In this story, the narrator dismembered the body and hid it beneath the floorboards as a way to conceal his guilt. As the police come, the narrator tries to be calm, ignoring the crime he just committed, yet the imagined sound of the old man's pounding heart took over the narrator's stillness. Peeples explains that the narrator's hallucination is a direct affirmation that guilt took over and caused madness (Peeples 96). Haunted by the heartbeats, the narrator's feeling of guilt distorts his perception, leading to madness, from which confession resulted as a tragic consequence.

### **2.7 From Madness to Confession: The Mind's Betrayal**

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The narrator's behaviour swept his sense of reality as a sign of a fractured psychological state, which stems from the deep feeling of guilt. Despite the murder he committed, the narrator kept mentioning his sanity, showing a complete separation from reality (Poe 3). From this, the narrator's confession is a break from reality toward obsession and guilt.

The narrator's mental collapse becomes clear after analysing his sensory perceptions, particularly his auditory faculties. The imagined sound of the old man's pounding heart reflects guilt and paranoia. Scholar Scott Peeples explains that the imagined sound was a hallucination to reflect the narrator's disturbed mind. His intense guilt had the power to create sounds in his head, making him detached from reality (Peeples 95). This emotional anguish leaves the narrator unable to tolerate guilt and madness.

*The Tell-Tale Heart* is a story where confession is more than admitting a previous action, it is the narrator's ultimate loss of control and sense of reality. His repeated insistence on sanity, together with the careful planning of the murder, shows his aim to keep things in order while providing evidence for his claim (Poe 3). The article "Rethinking Poe's Narrative Technique: A Brief Analysis"2023, presents that Edgar Allan Poe often writes about characters who try to control their inner turmoil, yet they end up being consumed by their dark thoughts (Pragya 121). Thus, the narrator's confession is proof of his collapse and his defeat against madness.

### **2.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the journey through *The Tell-Tale Heart* displays Poe's investigation of the human psyche under the crushing weight of guilt. The narrative carefully shows the narrator's descent into madness, illustrating the way internal anguish in a guilty conscience may obliterate the confines of reality. Ultimately, the narrative underlines the consuming nature of guilt, revealing how

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the mind, in its shattered state, may become its betrayer, leading to self-destruction and the inevitable discovery of the darkest sins. The haunting story, written by Poe, continues to be a powerful investigation of the precarious nature of sanity and the significant psychological outcomes that result from engaging in immoral behaviour.

# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

The transition from Romanticism to American Gothicism signifies a notable change in literary emphasis. They went from focusing on the emotional beauty of nature and the imagination of individuals to the darker, more intense parts of the human mind. American Gothicism, which is based on Romantic ideas, sheds light on the mind's inner conflicts and deals with issues like isolation, guilt, insanity, and moral decay. It drops the idealised view of the self and instead shows characters who are haunted by their consciences, overwhelmed by their own worries, and unable to escape the mental effects of their sins and actions.

Within this perspective, guilt appears not only as an emotional reaction but also as a severe psychological burden—one that distorts reality, inhibits reason, and eventually leads humans towards lunacy at the end of the day. This destructive inner energy is at the heart of the American Gothic tradition, which emphasises that guilt almost never results in redemption but rather functions as a powerful force that destroys the self's self-esteem and moral foundation. Therefore, confession is not an act pushed by the aim for repair, rather, it is an unavoidable collapse that occurs under the weight of overwhelming psychological pressure.

*The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe is a masterpiece that exemplifies this dynamic with an extraordinary level of intensity. Through the unnamed narrator, Poe creates a dramatic psychological portrayal of a fragile mind that is unravelling under the weight of guilt. The narrator seeks to justify his crime, arguing that he is sane and that he has reasonable justification. The language that he employs, which is characterised by repetition, fragmentary thoughts, and mounting agitation, is a clear indication of the instability that guilt has rooted within him. The hallucinated heartbeat, which is becoming louder and more oppressive, becomes an indication of the narrator's inability to resist

the mounting sense of guilt. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, confession is not a simple result of guilt, but it is a reflection of a disturbed mind triggered by guilt, which is a major characteristic of American Gothic literature.

Edgar Allan Poe examines the psychology of guilt by the use of first-person narration, which blurs the distinction between perception and reality. This technique allows readers to witness the narrator's descent to madness, which draws a vivid image of the experience. The breakdown of sense, his obsession with the old man's eye, and the increasing hallucinations show the way guilt can warp consciousness and destroy the self.

Poe makes a substantial contribution to the overarching themes that are associated with American Gothicism. The story that he presents illustrates the way the burden of guilt can be a driving force behind both insanity and confession. It transforms the mind into a battlefield where rationality and sense are defeated by emotion and moral consequence. Therefore, *The Tell-Tale Heart* does not exemplify closure or redemption, but it portrays the dreadful power of the human conscience, which is a crucial concept in the Gothic tradition.

The findings of this study reveal that exploring Romanticism as a path for American Gothicism grants a clear understanding of the psychological complexities that draw the dimensions of Poe's works. The fragility of the disturbed mind, the dark corners of morality, and the final breakdown that happens when guilt is left unresolved are the representations of American Gothic fiction, and his portrayal of guilt as a force that leads not to salvation but to self-destruction expresses these core concerns. Therefore, the burden of guilt in American Gothic literature unravels the mind, leaving behind a fragile fabric of sanity and chaos.

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