

State of Being Sane and Insane -Stylistic Analysis of the short story “The Tell-Tale Heart”

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” by using stylistic analysis to explore the narrator’s outward and inward world. Moreover, the analysis attempts to show the clash between the narrator’s state of being sane and insane. Since stylistic is considered as an important approach to explain the relation between language and its artistic function. The implicit and explicit state of the narrator’s behavior is deeply shown during the analysis of by focusing on transitivity, revelation of material pursuit of him and the characters in the story which have created foreground the narrator’s psychological disease. The use of parallel structure and the transitivity of material process, mental process strengthen and highlight the narrator’s abnormal behavior and contradicted treatment of the old man and having “vulture’s eye” as a base of the narrator’s obsession which made him moving stealthily many times during nearly the whole the story’s actions to get rid of his victim.

1. INTRODUCTION

The paper aims to explore how Poe depicts skillfully the psychological clash of being sane and insane of the narrator. He achieves this through showing the contradicted relationship between the narrator and the old man. He treats the old man in a friendly way in the broad day, meanwhile, he moves stealthily at night in an attempt to kill him because he has only got “vulture eye”. The author employs descriptive language effectively to present the psychological disorder of the narrator and the atmosphere of horror that dominates the whole story. So, Stylistic analysis is used to explore how the artistic effect of the story is achieved and how the theme of this literary work is expressed through the author’s choice of words and sentences structure.

About the author

Edgar Allan Poe was born in 19, 1808, in Boston, Massachusetts. He was known for his famous tales and poems of horror which were considered as base of modern detective story. His imaginative storytelling earned him the nickname “Father of Detective Story”. His, life like his literary works, was shrouded in mystery, and lines between fact and fiction. He died on October 7, 1849. (1) Moreover, Poe’s style of story writing leaves deep impression on a reader, as it is confirmed by Arafat (2021, p.171) : “ It can represent a work of realism, naturalism or fantasy, but chief characteristic a short story maintains is its unity. Poe called it

‘the unity of impression.’ However, this unity also includes the unity of effect, tone, and mood (Morn &Rausch 2004)” (2)

About the story

Poe used descriptive language that depicted the psychological state of the narrator skillfully. The unknown narrator narrated the story. Symbolically, the old man’s “vulture eye” initiated the narrator’s fear and insanity, which led him to kill the old man. Two settings can be identified; the physical setting and the mental one.

The physical setting

There were few details about the house in the story. The old man’s bedroom, where he was killed, was dark as he kept his shutters tightly locked.

The mental setting

The narrator’s mental disorder made him hear things in the sky and the earth. Moreover, it was enhanced by the old man’s “vulture eye” that drove the narrator into a state of insanity. The story began at the moment in which the narrator claimed his sanity. And he would prove that by telling a reader of his plan to kill the old man because of his ‘vulture eye’. The old man was innocent, but his eye was the only motive for the narrator to kill him. For seven successive nights, the narrator took his lantern and watched the old man until the narrator frightened the old man and made him open his eye.

Consequently, that drove the narrator into madness and went into the room and suffocated the older man in his bed. Then he dismembered the corpse, hid it under the floorboard of the room, and wiped out any trace that proved his sanity, as he claimed at the beginning of the story. The neighbors who heard the victim’s “shriek” called the policemen to investigate. They did not find anything suspicious, but the narrator, suffering from the acuteness of senses, heard the dead older man’s heart beating from under the floorboards. The heartbeats became too louder for the narrator to bear, and he imagined that the police officer heard them. So, he confessed to his crime.

2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Stylistics is defined by Nørgaard, et al. (2010:8) as “the ways in which meaning is created through language in literature as well as in other types of text”. In accordance with Simpson (2014:3) who states that “stylistics aims to investigate creativity of using language as it enhances our process of thinking by observing and understanding of how literary texts work. So we can explore language and its systems, rules and understanding various patterns in language”. Simpson (2004:7) adds “to do stylistics is to explore language, and, more specially, to explore creativity in language use and to enrich our way of thinking about it”. Moreover, Simpson presents two terms which are rigorous and replica. The first one refers to the explicit framework analysis and the second refers to use clear methods to enable other stylisticians to verify them.”

Furthermore, stylistics analysis is used to specify and classify the linguistic features being used. It can be an approach to understand the possible meanings in a literary text. Some writers state that stylistics analysis can serve the artistic function and its relation with language. This is confirmed by Verdonk (2002:3) who states “, it is concerned with the study of style in language”. Furthermore, the relation between stylistics and psychology , the empirical

views of the study of literature adopt the implementation of quantitative study of literary texts through observation and analytical perspectives which based on approaches used in the social sciences such as anthropology , psychology ,cognitive psychology and psycholinguistic. This relation between psychology and analysis of literary text is confirmed by Verdonk (2002) who states “foregrounding is the psychological effect a literary reader has as she is reading a work of literature. There is some evidence that foregrounding in literary texts strikes readers as interesting and capture their attention.”

To investigate the instability of the psychological condition of a narrator’s character, a psychological point of view in stylistic presents three aspects related to psychological analysis. Simpson (2014:134 -135) explained them as “the first one is “positive shading; as the narrator’s desires, duties, obligation and opinions of events are foregrounded. The denotic modal system is prominent and the narrative is rich in generic sentences and in verba sentiendi (words denote thoughts, feelings and perceptions). The positive shading perhaps is the most common point of view modality, underpinning a great many first and third person fictional works”. The second point of view is the “negative shade that is the narrative modality where an often ‘bewildered’ narrator or (character) relies on external signals and appearance to sustain a description. The epistemic modal system is foregrounded and the narrative is rich in ‘words of estrangement’. The narrator is often expressed through structures based on human perception (as if; it seemed; it appeared to be, etc.). Negative shading often characterizes ‘existentialist’ or ‘Gothic ‘styles of narrative” The third point is the Neutral shading which is characterized by a complete absence of narratorial modality and is typified by categorical assertion where the narrator withholds subjective evaluation and interpretation. This type of shading often comprises ‘neutral’ physical description at the expense of psychological development. Neutral shading embodies the principle of ‘objective realism’ in fiction and it corresponds to what the narratologists Guenette (1980) and Rimmon-Kenan ((1983) have called ‘external ‘focalization. Given the often sparse feel this engenders, narratives written entirely in a neutrally shaded modality are rare. “The art of narratology is an attempt to study texts that originally used by structuralists’ view of the 1960th.and extends to 1980 when it dealt with psycholinguistics and cognitive linguistics concentrating in ways of describing narrative of how people are able to read and understand stories”.

Since Narrative is important to stylistic exploration ,as it is meta –code ; aspects that differentiate between human beings and animals in a deep clear and creative language, stylistic analysis of interpersonal meaning shows how a text builds relation between characters ,M .A. Halliday (1994:68) presents the interpersonal meaning which deals with the narrator’s world. He describes three levels that are ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning focuses on communication and interact with one another to social relationship. (2)

The author discussed the idea of “mood that related to speech roles, function and “modality” to encode the attitude of either the character or the narrator. As for style of choice, the writer stated that “when language is used to represent the “goings” on of the physical or abstract world in this way, to represent patterns of experience in spoken and written , it fulfills the experiential function”. Halliday (1994:106) defined the idea of choice and its effects in understanding a literary text by stating “indeed, there are often several ways of using the resources of the language system to capture the same event in textual representation .what is

of interest to stylisticians is why one type of structure should be preferred to another, or why from several possible ways of representing the same “happings”; one particular type of depiction should be privilege over another. Choices in style are motivated, even if unconsciously, and these choices have profound impact on the way texts are structured and interpreted ”

Grammatical structure has an essential role in process of actions in a text. The term transitivity lays an important role in showing how actions within a literary text can be observed and analyzed. Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar (2004) refers to the ways of speakers to present meaning in through clause to transmit their experiences of the world and their mental views of reality. According to Halliday (2004:170): “Our most powerful impression of experience is that it consists of a flow of events, or 'going-on'. This flow of events is chunked into quanta of change by the grammar of the clause: each quantum is modeled as a figure – a figure of happening, doing, sensing, saying, being or having. As part of the ideational function of language, transitivity expresses processes that involve participants and circumstances. These processes are realized by the verb phrase. Each process requires a set of participants that are represented by noun phrases. In this way, recognizing the kind of participants reveals the identity of the process. Circumstances, which are generally realized by adverbs or prepositional phrases, are not limited to one kind of process, but are used generally with different kinds of processes. "Processes can be classified according to whether they represent actions, speech, states of mind or simply states of being". Meanwhile Simpson (1993: 88) states that the transitivity system mainly expresses 'who (or what) does what to whom (or what)’. Moreover, the role of agent or its absence in a text and how it affects the action is presented by Halliday (2014: 171-187) who has categorized six process types;” material, mental, verbal, existential, relational, and behavioral. The participants involved in the material process are 'actor, goal, scope, attribute, recipient, and client'. There should be at least one participant, someone or something to perform the action (e.g. the 'actor' with intransitive verbs). For example, compare these two: The boy (actor) ran (Material, action: intention). The teacher (actor) sent (Material, action: intention) a letter (goal) to the parents (recipient) yesterday (Circumstantial: Time). The mental process includes the three main categories of perception, reaction, and cognition and these are associated with two participants the first of which is obligatory. These are a 'senser', a person who performs the mental process, and a 'phenomenon', the entity that is felt, thought about, or perceived. For example: He (senser) heard (mental Pr.: perception) the news phenomenon on the radio (circumstantial: Place). The third kind of process is the verbal, which is associated with a 'sayer' as the main participant in addition to a 'receiver' and 'verbiage'. For example: The man (sayer) told (verbal Pr.) the boys (receiver) scary stories (verbiage).

Therefore, process can be applied to show a narrator’s actions and behavior whether they are external or internal ones .Halliday (2014:159) presents a deeper explanation’ ’the term “process” is used in an ...extended sense to cover all phenomenon ...and anything that can be expressed by verbs :event, whether physical or not , state, or relation” Then Halliday (ibid:107)adds “behavior processes are processes of physiological and psychological behavior , and they are on borderline between material and mental processes . Behavior process represent outer manifestations of inner workings , the acting out of processes of consciousness and physiological state”, The same writer (ibid :118) sates “mental process verbs can be subcategorized into three types :cognition(verbs of thinking , knowing, understanding

),affection verbs(verbs of liking, loving , fearing ,hating), and perception(verbs of seeing , hearing)" . Metaphor assists to provide a deep reflection of how human's mind interact .This is presented by Simpson (2014:95), who said "metaphor could be understood in a number of different ways as referring to the newness or uniqueness... the metaphor ideas are food is relayed through a variety of every day constructions like I cannot stomach that idea"; 'Your theory's half-baked" or His story is pretty hard to swallow. 'It is interesting that the pattern in such metaphors involves the mapping between an abstract target domain (ideas) and a

more physical source of domain(food).This pattern of 'concretization', where we try to capture the essence of an abstraction by recasting it in the terms of something more palpable , is replicated in a great many metaphorical constructions and it offers an important insight into the way the human mind works''

As parallelism is one of linguistic features of stylistics analysis, it is defined as presenting sentences or parts of sentences in similar patterns to make a connection between sentences in a text to be easily memorized. Short (1996:14) stated "parallelism is achieved when (some linguistic features are held constant (usually structural features) while others (usually lexical items , e.g. words , idioms are varied" For him "parallelism is one of the mechanism which writers have at their disposal for controlling the connections which readers make" Cook (1989:15) presented ,in accordance with Short, parallelism as "a device which suggests a connection ,simply because the form of one sentence or clause repeats the form of another." While Berlin(1995:3) stated "parallelism is these linguistic equivalences that we wish to examine in greater depth for they constitute the phenomenon" Leech(1977:67) states that "parallelism indicates a connection of equivalence among the parallel elements which show either similarity or contrast among them" ,whereas Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997:69) state that parallelism can be used in connecting states or events to make similarity(ibid:122). However, Biber, et al. (1999:901) said that structuring the clauses of a sentence in parallelism assist to present contrast between them as in: - She helps people. He deceived people.

Foreground means opposite of background. The term foregrounding was founded by the Czech theorist Mukarovsky (1932-1964) who defined it by stating "it refers to the range of stylistic effects that occur in literature, whether at the phonetic level (e.g. alliteration, rhyme),the grammatical level (e.g., inversion, ellipsis),or the semantic level (e.g., metaphor ,irony)" .Then Mukarovsky (1964:19)added "foregrounding is the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become. Objectively speaking: automatization schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme." This is confirmed by Leech (1968:57). and Short (19981:48) stated the idea of foregrounding is originally taken from the Prague School of Linguistics and it referred to "artistically motivated deviation" Mukarovsky (1964: 20) mentioned that "foregrounding can be noticed in everyday language in spoken discourse or journalist prose , but it can happen randomly. But in literary texts" the foregrounding is structured; it tends to be both systematic and hierarchical. That is, similar features may recur, such as a pattern of assonance or a related group of metaphors, and one set of features will dominate the others. This term is applied in

literary work which is commonly deviates from norms of society and could be exploited to investigate the importance and values of literary work at aspects of interest and surprise rather than the automatic pattern. So, the deviation from linguistic pattern and the social norms shapes the foregrounding that constructs the analogy of figure seen against background”.

Hunt and Vipond (1985) investigated the effects of textual features, in accordance with Labov (1972), who refers to "discourse evaluations." These are described as "words, phrases, or events" that are "unpredictable against the norm of the text" and that convey the narrator's evaluations of story characters or events. Since discourse evaluations resemble foregrounding. Hunt and Vipond's findings are noteworthy. In a study with readers of a short story, they found that readers were more likely to report that story phrases "struck them" or "caught their eyes" when presented with the original discourse evaluations than when those phrases had been adapted so that the same story events were described in relatively "neutral" terms.”

The linguistic implication of the story

Poe’s style of writing the story can be interpreted according to linguistics properties. Halliday (2004:3) states ‘‘ it can be explored from many different points of view. But we can distinguish two main angles of vision: one, focus on the text as an object in its own right; two, focus on the text as an instrument for finding out about something else’’.

Tone

The tone of the story is changeable. It shows the narrator’s behavior as of being sane and insane .He uses calm tone to tell the whole story and how he has planned carefully to kill the old man. He greets the old man in a hearty tone and calling him by name in the broad day to dismiss any suspension. Then he shifts to irrational and frantic tone by speaking in short sentences with exclamation marks that accumulate fear and tension in anxious tone that creates suspense in the story and lead to climax when the narrator’s fear drives him to madness and confess of his crime. (The old man’s hour has come! I foamed – I raved! - I swore! Oh God! What could I do!)

Characters

Poe’s style of writing succeeds in showing the physical actions which bring the true feelings of the narrator and how he behaves as being sane and insane.

The narrator

The narrator is not designated a name. He is the main initiator of nearly the whole actions of the story. His involvement with other characters in the story is revealed through his behavior, comment and actions. He states he has good relation with the old man and there is an apparent reason to kill him, except his “vulture eye”. He is proud of his calmness and planning carefully of killing the old man. The narrator claims of his being sane by stating” True!-nervous-very, very dreadfully nervous that had been and am, but why will you say that I am mad?” In state of being insane, the narrator has killed the old man in a merciless way and cut off the corpse into parts. By murdering the old man, the narrator confirms his guilty. Although, he states that there are invisible forces that make him commit his crime, he feels calm and confident. Then in a sane mood, he has received the policemen who come to investigate about

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the "shriek" that was by heard by the neighbors. He tells lies to conceal his crime by saying that the old man has been in a country and show them his belongings .The imagined loud " heart beats" of the victim represent the sense of the inner guilt of the narrator that makes him to confess of killing the old man.

The old man

He is an innocent character. Because he does not know of the narrator's plan to kill him. His room represents the physical setting of the story. The narrator said that he has not any desire in the old man possession. However, he is alert every night by the narrator who attempts to kill him for having "'vulture eye'". The narrator treats the old man in a kind way in the broad day, but he moves secretly every night into his room trying to kill him. This shows the contradicted and abnormal behavior of the narrator toward the old man. The innocence of the old man is obvious, but he is only guilty of his "vulture eye" in the narrator's opinion.

The neighbors

They heard the old man's "shriek of death". And they represent witnesses who prevent a criminal to escape his crime.

The policemen

They serve to accentuate the narrator's feelings of guilt. He imagines that they know he is the killer and they make a mockery of him by laughing loudly.

State of being sane

The narrator says there is not any obvious reason that makes him to kill the old man. Since the at the beginning of the story, he states that he has deliberately planned for his crime as a sound person in body and mind. He has confirmed that by presenting parallel sentences "Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never given me insult". These parallel sentences create balanced flow of ideas of proving the innocence of the old man to readers and serve as an approval of the narrator's guilty of deliberate intention of committing the crime as a sane person.

State of being insane

The narrator is obsessed of getting rid of the old man s' eye is the sole illogical reason for attempting many nights to kill him. He says."And every night, about mid night, I turned the latch of his door. And I did this for seven long nights-every night just at midnight –but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye- but I found the eye closed.

Parallelism

Choice of words can help to appreciate a literary text and its implication within told or untold. Richardson, J. C. and Schmidt, R, Eds.(2002:532) in view of " The way in which words combine to form sentences and the rules which governs the formation of possible and others of possible within a particular language" The narrator says" ,I knew the sound well. I

say I knew it well , I knew what the old man felt; I knew that sound well, too''. These parallel sentences show the narrator's insanity when he enjoys hearing the victim's shriek and similes happily after finishing his job.

Transitivity of mental process and material process

Verbs of material process

The verbs of (proceed, turned, opened, closed, thrust, went, move, leaped, sprang, dragged, pulled, and worked) represent material process. The transitivity of the process shows the agent's (narrator) attempt and deliberate actions of killing the old man. And these verbs reflect the narrator's dynamic interaction with the outer world; they are connected with his hands and feet. As if he is decisive in his actions and would not be disturbed by the outer world.

Verbs of mental process

Mental process verbs are conceived, unperceived, suspect, vexed, felt, think, dream, haunted, suspected and startled. These verbs demonstrate the static inner activities; since many of them directly show the true feelings of the narrator's inner world. The inward of narrator's actions are more vivid than the outward one's, though they cannot be seen.

Dynamic adverbs

Some adverbs like "steadily", "stealthily", "cunningly", "cautiously", are used to modify dynamic actions. These adverbs show how the narrator behaves calmly and carefully to commit the crime of killing the old man. They take salient status in sense, but they carry more heavy psychological feelings than the actions and they reveal the inner state of the narrator. So, the outward actions usually highlighted to hide the inward excitement.

Meanwhile, the adverb "louder" is repeated for fourteen times to show the narrator's hypersensitivity and abnormal behavior. Since he imagines that the neighbors and the police officers hear the beating heart of his victim.

Exclamation marks

The author uses exclamation marks intensively to show the change in the narrator's strong feelings. These exclamation marks are presented in the story to indicate the forceful way of the narrator's tone of speaking and tension: " True! The old man's hour had come! The old man's terror must have been extreme! " These exclamatory sentences show where the climax is reached: " It grew louder—louder! Almighty God!-no, no! They heard! -They suspected!-they knew! I felt that I must scream to die! I admit the deed! -tear up the planks! Here, here! -it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

Transitivity

When the process is not directed by the narrator (actor) toward the goal is identified as a medium. Davidse (1992) defines the process as "the generalized single participant which has neither true agency nor real affectedness associated with it". This process can be applied to

analyze the following grammatical metaphor of transitivity:” “All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim”. The narrator (actor) is the killer of the old man. The author raises the Goal phrase to the subject position, hence reducing of the “narrator” The personification of the Goal phrases signals transference from passiveness to activeness. Because “Death”, in approaching “as it is an inescapable fate.

Rhetorical Questions

They are stylistic devices which are based on interrogative statement that do not require answer on the part of the reader or speaker. The narrator claims his sanity:”—but why will you say that I am mad? How, then, am I mad?” ”---for what had I now to fear? And what had I to fear?” He entered into the dilemma of hearing the low, dull sound and he supposed it was heard by the policemen who investigated him:”--and what could I do? Oh God! What could I do? Was it possible they heard not?”

Phonological features

The author employs sound effects to impress readers by different sensory qualities. The story’s opening sentences describe the narrator’s abnormal mental condition. The auditory imagery by words of: “heard, hearing” begin with the same consonant/h/; the repetition of “so” and “slowly” with the sound /s/. The phrases: ‘not destroyed- not destroyed’ with the two consonants /n/and /d/, describe the effect of the disease of the narrator’s senses. The word “still”, begins with the consonant/s/ is used twice to describe the motionless and stiffness of posture of both the old man and the narrator:’ I kept quite still”, He was still sitting up”

Symbolism

Leech, G. & Short (ibid: 132) state that,” To a large extent, this implicit phonology is determined by choice of words structure at the syntactic level, where it can be regarded as an important ingredient of stylistic value “(132). This point of view can be adopted to analyze the symbolic meaning of the old man’s “eye vulture”. The homophones of “eye” have similar sound to the pronoun “I”. Symbolically, the image and the sound “I” can represent an attempt to destroy the egotism in oneself. So, the narrator plans to get rid of what he calls “precisely damned spot”. Although the bedroom and the bed represent a place of comfort and safety, Poe uses the bedroom as a site of murder and the bed as a weapon. (3)

3. CONCLUSION

The stylistic analysis shows the horrible atmosphere of a merciless crime of killing an innocent old man which is committed by an insane narrator. The narrator’s behavior during the whole story shows his clash between being sane and insane. He treats the old man in a normal and friendly way in the broad day, meanwhile he moves stealthily for several nights attempting to kill the old man due to his obsession with having “vulture eye” as a base of the narrator ‘s contradicted and unbalance psychological mood.

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Mohamed Abdrhman Ahamed Yousef has obtained his PhD in applied Linguistics from Sudan University of Sciences & Technology in 2031. He has been working in Jazan University for five years and currently in Bisha University, Saudi Arabia as an assistant professor in English Department. He has published papers in applied linguistics and stylistics. He is mainly interested in research in applied Linguistics & stylistics