

**The Language of Madness: Analyzing the Repetition and Obsession  
in The Short Story “The Tell-Tale Heart” through Discourse Analysis**

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**Abstract**

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This study examines the discursive construction of madness in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* through repetitive linguistic patterns that reflect psychological instability. By using a descriptive qualitative method within a Discourse Analysis framework, the data were analyzed through keyword frequency analysis, lexical repetition identification, and metafunctional interpretation of repeated keywords such as "louder," "eye," "heart," and "knew" based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The findings reveal that repetition has functions not only as a stylistic device, but also as a linguistic representation of paranoia, obsession, guilt, hallucination, and delusional certainty. From Halliday's metafunctional perspective, in Textually, repetition contributes through lexical cohesion and thematic continuity, while in Ideationally, it reflects process shifts from objective reality into distorted mental experiences. From a psychoanalytic perspective, repetitive language patterns symbolize neurotic anxiety, Id dominance, Ego collapse, and defense mechanisms such as denial and projection. The conclusion of the study is that repetition in Poe's short stories goes beyond its cohesive function and serves as a discursive marker of psychological disintegration. These findings demonstrate the value of integrating stylistic, discourse-analytic, and psychoanalytic approaches in revealing the relationship between language patterns and psychological characterization in literary texts.

**Kata Kunci:**

*Analisis Wacana,  
Systemic Functional  
Linguistics  
Psikoanalisis,*

**Abstrak**

Studi ini meneliti konstruksi diskursif kegilaan dalam *The Tell-Tale Heart* karya Edgar Allan Poe melalui pola linguistik berulang yang mencerminkan ketidakstabilan psikologis. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dalam kerangka Analisis Wacana, data

*Pengulangan, Edgar  
Allan Poe*

dianalisis melalui analisis frekuensi kata kunci, identifikasi pengulangan leksikal, dan interpretasi metafunksional dari kata kunci yang berulang seperti "lebih keras," "mata," "hati," dan "tahu" berdasarkan Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik Halliday dan teori psikoanalitik Freud. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengulangan tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai perangkat stilistik, tetapi juga sebagai representasi linguistik dari paranoia, obsesi, rasa bersalah, halusinasi, dan kepastian delusi. Dari perspektif metafunksional Halliday, secara Tekstual, pengulangan berkontribusi melalui kohesi leksikal dan kontinuitas tematik, sedangkan secara Ideasional, hal itu mencerminkan pergeseran proses dari realitas objektif ke pengalaman mental yang terdistorsi. Dari perspektif psikoanalitik, pola bahasa yang berulang melambangkan kecemasan neurotik, dominasi Id, keruntuhan Ego, dan mekanisme pertahanan seperti penyangkalan dan proyeksi. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa pengulangan dalam cerita pendek Poe melampaui fungsi kohesifnya dan berfungsi sebagai penanda diskursif dari disintegrasi psikologis. Temuan ini menunjukkan nilai pengintegrasian pendekatan stilistik, analisis wacana, dan psikoanalitik dalam mengungkap hubungan antara pola bahasa dan karakterisasi psikologis dalam teks sastra.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Language is viewed as a resource through which people represent their experience, construct meaning, and negotiate social relationships in everyday interaction. In discourse analysis, language is not only treated as a channel for conveying information, but it can also be used as a resource that speakers use to construct social roles, relationships, and shared understanding. Discourse is understood as "language in use," where meaning is inseparably bound to the situational and social context of the speaker and hearer (Brown & Yule, 1983). In literary texts, especially in psychological fiction, linguistic patterns can function as resources through which readers infer a character's mental condition and emotional instability (Brown & Yule, 1983; Halliday, 1995).

Within this perspective, Discourse Analysis (DA) becomes relevant for examining how language constructs psychological meaning in literary narratives. Halliday proposed that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) can provide an

important framework. The reason is that language is understood as a representation of human experience through metafunctions, especially ideational and textual metafunctions. While ideational metafunction allows people who want to examine how experience and perception are linguistically represented, textual metafunction explains how cohesion and continuity are constructed within discourse. By using this theory, repetition can be understood not only as a stylistic device, but also as a cohesive and psychological marker within narrative discourse.

According to Keraf (2009), repetition refers to the reappearance of sounds, syllables, words, or sentence structures for emphasis in an appropriate context. In this theory, types such as epizeuxis, tautotes, anaphora, and other forms of repetition can testify how repeated language can create emotional pressure and narrative intensity. In psychological literary works, repetitive language patterns can also represent obsession, anxiety, and instability. This psychological dimension is further explained through Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concepts of the Id and Ego, which describes the conflict between unconscious drives and rational control. When the Id dominates and the Ego fails to regulate instinctive desires and anxieties, psychological symptoms such as obsession, paranoia, guilt, and distorted perceptions can emerge. Therefore, Freud's theory provides a useful framework for interpreting repetitive language as a manifestation of the narrator's psychological instability.

In Edgar Allan Poe's short story, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, it shows about a narrator whose repetitive language patterns reflect paranoia, obsession, and psychological instability. Throughout the story, the narrator repeatedly insists that he is still sane while describing about murder and hearing the imagined beating of the old man's heart at the same time. These recurring expressions suggest that repetition not only functions as a stylistic feature, but can be a linguistic representation of psychological disturbance as well.

There have been several previous studies that have examined the relationship between psychology, literature, and discourse. For example, Cuevas et al. (2024) analyze psychological issues in literary characters, while Mosafat and Rezaei (2022) examine thematic meaning in literary works through discourse

perspectives. In addition, Delfia et al. (2023) and Noprival et al. (2022) investigate lexical and grammatical cohesion, particularly repetition as a cohesive device, whereas Rosita and Syamsiyah (2020) focus on stylistic features in literary texts. Overall, these studies mainly emphasize psychological themes, stylistic elements, or structural discourse features separately.

However, studies that integrate stylistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and psychoanalytic criticism at the same time to explain how lexical repetition constructs psychological discourse in literary narratives are still limited. Several previous studies tend to examine repetition as a rhetorical or cohesive feature without focusing on its frequency, lexical distribution, and psychological implications. From a psychoanalytic perspective, repeated linguistic patterns can represent unconscious conditions such as obsession, repression, paranoia, and neurotic anxiety. Thus, repetition should be understood not only as a stylistic strategy, but also as a discursive marker of psychological instability.

This study is important because it expands the previous studies on *The Tell-Tale Heart* by demonstrating that lexical repetition functions not only as a stylistic or cohesive feature, but also as a linguistic representation of the narrator's disturbed mental state. Through the integration of stylistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and psychoanalytic criticism, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how repetitive language patterns construct a discourse of madness within literary narratives. Moreover, this study contributes to discourse and literary studies by showing how lexical frequency and distribution may reveal obsession, paranoia, guilt, and the narrator's psychological collapse through language use.

The purpose of this study is to examine how lexical repetition in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* constructs a discourse of madness through stylistic, metafunctional, and psychoanalytic perspectives. Specifically, this study analyzes the frequency and distribution of repeated words and interprets how such repetition patterns may reflect the narrator's obsession, paranoia, guilt, and psychological breakdown as manifestations of the conflict between instinctive drives and rational control described in Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to examine lexical repetition in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The data source was the short story itself, while the primary data consisted of repeated lexical items identified throughout the narrative. The selected data included lexical items that occurred repeatedly and demonstrated relevance to the narrator's psychological condition, obsessive thoughts, emotional tension, or perception of reality. Data were collected through close reading, textual observation, and note-taking techniques.

To organize the analysis, each repetition was assigned a code according to the repeated lexical item and its frequency of occurrence. The coding process classified the data into repetition categories, metafunctional functions, and psychoanalytic interpretations. This procedure enabled a systematic examination of the relationship between linguistic repetition and psychological representation in the narrative.

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, repeated lexical items were identified and classified using Keraf's (2009) stylistic theory of repetition, including Epizeuxis, Tautotes, Anaphora, Epistrophe, Symploce, Mesodiplosis, Epanalepsis, and Anadiplosis. Repetition patterns that did not strictly conform to these structural categories were classified as General Repetition when they functioned primarily as contextual emphasis.

Second, the identified repetitions were analyzed using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. The textual metafunction focused on lexical cohesion through reiteration and thematic continuity, while the ideational metafunction examined transitivity patterns and process shifts, particularly the transformation from objective descriptions of reality into subjective, paranoid, and hallucinatory experiences.

Third, Freud's psychoanalytic theory was applied to interpret the psychological significance of repetition. The analysis focused on manifestations of Id dominance, neurotic anxiety, obsessive fixation, Ego failure, and defense mechanisms such as denial and projection. Through this framework, repeated

lexical items were interpreted as linguistic indicators of the narrator's psychological instability and mental deterioration.

To ensure data validity, theoretical triangulation was employed by examining the data through stylistic, linguistic, and psychoanalytic perspectives. The integration of these three theoretical frameworks helped strengthen the consistency and credibility of the findings. Finally, the data were interpreted descriptively to explain how repetition functions stylistically, linguistically, and psychologically in constructing the narrator's madness throughout the story.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that lexical repetition in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* functions not merely as a stylistic ornament, but as a discursive marker of psychological instability. Through Keraf's stylistic framework, the repetitions are categorized into Epizeuxis, Tautotes, Anaphora, and General Repetition, while Halliday's metafunction theory demonstrates how these repetitions contribute to textual cohesion and semantic transformation. Freud's psychoanalytic perspective further shows that the repetitive patterns reflect the narrator's increasing domination by neurotic anxiety and obsessive impulses (Freud, 1923; Yousef, 2022; Alsaahafi, 2020).

**Table 1: Frequency and Linguistic Categorization**

| Key-words | Frequency | Stylistic Category (Keraf) | Ideational Metafunction (Halliday)             | Textual Metafunction (Halliday)                | Psychological Dynamics (Freud)                   |
|-----------|-----------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Louder    | 13        | Epizeuxis                  | Transitivity:<br>Shift to<br>Mental<br>Process | Lexical<br>Cohesion:<br>Reiteration            | Id Impulse<br>Explosion<br>(Neurotic<br>Anxiety) |
| Eye       | 7         | Repetition<br>(General)    | Transitivity:<br>Shift to<br>Mental<br>Process | Lexical<br>Cohesion:<br>Reiteration            | Rhythmic Focus<br>& Id Aggression<br>Stimulus    |
| Heart     | 5         | Tautotes                   | Transitivity:<br>Shift to<br>Mental<br>Process | Lexical<br>Cohesion:<br>Reiteration            | Id Anxiety<br>Projection<br>Mechanism            |
| Knew      | 5         | Anaphora                   | Transitivity:<br>Shift to<br>Mental<br>Process | Transitivity:<br>Shift to<br>Mental<br>Process | Lexical Cohesion:<br>Reiteration                 |

### *Stylistic Category*

#### **Louder**

The keyword “louder” is the most frequently repeated pattern, occurring thirteen times at key moments leading up to the story’s climax. The repetition appears around the middle of page 6 and near the end of page 8, the narrator repeats the word “louder” many times in a sentence. On page 6, the narrator says, “It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant” and “But the beating grew louder, louder!”. On page 8, the narrator says, “It grew louder—louder—louder!” and “I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!—”. In these sentences, the repetition occurs directly and consecutively within the same sentence without interruption. This type of immediate and intensive recurrence is classified as Epizeuxis, a direct repetition, meaning that the important word is repeated several times in a row (Keraf, 1991).

#### **Eye**

The repetition of “eye” appears seven times across several sentences in the same narrative sequence. The repetition are found on page 3 and page 4, where the narrator continuously refers to the old man’s eye. On page 3, the narrator says, “I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever.” On page 4, the narrator says, “I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did 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.” The repetition does not occur immediately in one clause, but is spread across several related sentences and narrative descriptions. Because the lexical distribution occurs periodically rather than instantly within a single clause, it is categorized as General Repetition, a repetition of sounds, syllables, or parts of a sentence that are considered important to provide emphasis in the appropriate context (Keraf, 1991).

### **Heart**

The keyword “heart” appears five times within a concentrated narrative segment on page 6 during the murder scene. The narrator repeatedly mentions the word “heart” in several connected sentences, such as “It was the beating of the old man’s heart.”, “Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased.”, “I thought the heart must burst.”, “But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound.”, and “I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes.” The repetition appear closely within the same narrative construction and continuously emphasize the sound of the heartbeat. This type of repetition with a concentrated narrative segment is categorized as Tautotes. The reason is because of its close lexical accumulation in a single execution scene; repetition of a word over and over again in a construction (Keraf, 1991).

### **Knew**

The keyword “knew” appears repeatedly around the top of page 5. The narrator repeats the word in several consecutive sentence units, such as “I knew it was the groan of mortal terror.”, “I knew the sound well.”, “I say I knew it well.”, “I knew what the old man felt,” and “I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise.” The repetition repeatedly appears at the beginning of clauses or sentence units to stress the narrator’s certainty and psychological awareness. The keyword “knew” appears repeatedly at the beginning of consecutive sentence units and is therefore classified as Anaphora; repetition in the form of repeating the first word in each subsequent line or sentence (Keraf, 1991).

### ***Ideational Metafunction***

#### **Louder**

The keyword “louder” appears as the most dominant repetition pattern, occurring thirteen times in crucial moments near the climax of the story. Around the middle of page 6 and near the end of page 8, the narrator repeats the word “louder” many times in a sentence. On page 6, the narrator says, “It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant” and “But the beating grew louder, louder!”. On page 8, the narrator says, “It grew louder—louder—louder!” and “I

felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!—". This repetition intensify the narrator's focus on the sound of the heartbeat, making the sound appear increasingly overwhelming and uncontrollable. Although the sound initially seems to originate from the "old man" heart, the excessive repetition suggests that the narrator experiences it internally as psychological pressure rather than as a normal external sound. Simultaneously, the Ideational Metafunction indicates a process shift in which the sound no longer represents objective auditory reality, but transforms into a paranoid mental perception (Harahap et al., 2024).

### **Eye**

The repetition of "eye" appears on page 3: "I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever." On page 4, the narrator says, "I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did 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." The repeated references to the "eye" gradually shift its meaning from a normal physical body part into something threatening and disturbing. The narrator continuously associates the eye with fear, coldness, and evilness, showing that the "eye" no longer functions merely as an object of sight, but as a symbol that dominates the narrator's thoughts and emotions. However, the repetition also marks a semantic transformation in which the "eye" shifts from a physical object into a symbol of obsessive paranoia and fixation (Metekohy, 2021; Harahap et al., 2024).

### **Heart**

On page 6, the repetition of "heart" appears across several connected sentences: "I knew that sound well too. It was the beating of the old man's heart.", "Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased.", "I thought the heart must burst.", "But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound.", and "I

placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes.” The repeated mention of the “heart” emphasizes the narrator’s growing obsession with the beating sound during the murder scene. As the repetition continues, the heartbeat becomes unnaturally intense and persistent, even after the old man is supposedly dead. This suggests that the sound is no longer presented as a realistic physical phenomenon, but as an auditory manifestation of the narrator’s guilt, fear, and psychological instability. In Ideational terms, the repeated references to the “heart” indicate a shift from physical hearing into hallucinatory auditory perception associated with guilt and fear (Metekohy, 2021).

### **Knew**

The repetition of “knew” appears around the top of page 5: “Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed.” Through the repeated use of “knew,” the narrator repeatedly insists on his certainty and understanding of the old man’s condition. However, the excessive insistence on certainty creates the impression that the narrator is trying too hard to prove his sanity and awareness. Instead of reflecting rational knowledge, the repetition gradually reveals unstable thinking and distorted self-perception. Nevertheless, the repeated insistence on certainty gradually transforms into a sign of delusional cognition rather than rational awareness (Harahap et al., 2024; Metekohy, 2021).

### ***Textual Metafunction***

#### **Louder**

The keyword “louder” appears as the most dominant repetition pattern, occurring thirteen times in crucial moments near the climax of the story. Around the middle of page 6 and near the end of page 8, the narrator repeats the word “louder” many times in a sentence. On page 6, the narrator says, “It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant” and “But the beating grew louder, louder!”. On page 8, the narrator says, “It grew louder—louder—louder!” and “I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!—”. The continuous repetition keeps the reader’s attention focused on the increasing sound of the heartbeat and creates a sense of rising intensity throughout the narrative sequence. As the repetition becomes faster and more excessive, the narrative tension also becomes stronger and more climactic. Functionally, Halliday’s Textual Metafunction shows that the repetition strengthens lexical cohesion and accelerates narrative tension through climax intensification (Bakuuro, 2017; Metekohy, 2021).

#### **Eye**

The repetition of “eye” appears on page 3: “I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever.” On page 4, the narrator says, “I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did 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.” The repeated use of the keyword consistently maintains the reader’s focus on the narrator’s obsession. By repeatedly using the same keyword across the connected sentences and pages, the story maintain the same topic and links one narrative idea to another. Halliday’s theory suggests that this repetition maintains textual cohesion and thematic continuity within the paragraph (Bakuuro, 2017; Matthiessen, 1995).

### **Heart**

On page 6, the repetition of “heart” appears across several connected sentences: “I knew that sound well too. It was the beating of the old man’s heart.”, “Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased.”, “I thought the heart must burst.”, “But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound.”, and “I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes.” The repeated mention of “heart” continuously redirects the reader’s attention toward the sound of the heartbeat during the murder scene. Because the same keyword is repeatedly used within a concentrated narrative segment, the sentences become strongly connected and maintain a unified narrative focus. Through Halliday’s Textual Metafunction, the repetition functions as a micro-cohesive device that reinforces the narrative focus (Bakuuro, 2017; Harahap et al., 2024).

### **Knew**

The repetition of “knew” appears around the top of page 5: “Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed.” The repeated use of the keyword frequently bring the reader back to the narrator’s claim of “certainty and understanding”. This kind of repetition creates a clear thematic thread throughout the paragraph and helps to organize the narrator’s thoughts into a connected sequence centered on self-assertion. Halliday’s metafunctional analysis demonstrates that the repetition strengthens thematic continuity and guides the reader’s attention toward the narrator’s self-assertion (Bakuuro, 2017; Matthiessen, 1995).

### *Psychological Dynamics*

#### **Louder**

The keyword “louder” appears as the most dominant repetition pattern, occurring thirteen times in crucial moments near the climax of the story. Around the middle of page 6 and near the end of page 8, the narrator repeats the word “louder” many times in a sentence. On page 6, the narrator says, “It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant” and “But the beating grew louder, louder!”. On page 8, the narrator says, “It grew louder—louder—louder!” and “I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!—”. The increasingly excessive repetition reflects the narrator’s inability to control his thoughts and emotions as the sound becomes more intense in his perception. The repetition also creates the impression that the narrator is mentally overwhelmed by fear and pressure, causing his rational awareness to gradually collapse. From Freud’s psychoanalytic perspective, the excessive repetition symbolizes the narrator’s uncontrollable neurotic anxiety, reflecting the collapse of the Ego under the pressure of the Id (Freud, 1923; Setiawan et al., 2021). Unlike earlier studies that mainly examined repetition as a stylistic intensifier, this study demonstrates that repetition also operates as a linguistic manifestation of psychological disintegration.

#### **Eye**

The repetition of “eye” appears on page 3: “I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever.” On page 4, the narrator says, “I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did 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.” The narrator repeatedly focuses on the “eye” as if it were the source of fear and disturbance rather than an ordinary physical feature. The continuous repetition

shows that the narrator cannot remove the image of the eye from his mind, indicating an unhealthy fixation that gradually dominates his thinking and actions.

Freud's framework interprets this fixation as evidence of the narrator's obsessive impulse and unstable psychological condition, where the Ego fails to regulate irrational fear and destructive desire (Freud, 1923; Larasati, 2022; Nuru, 2022). This finding extends previous psychoanalytic readings of *The Tell-Tale Heart* by showing how lexical repetition itself structurally reinforces the narrator's obsession.

### **Heart**

On page 6, the repetition of "heart" appears across several connected sentences: "I knew that sound well too. It was the beating of the old man's heart.", "Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased.", "I thought the heart must burst.", "But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound.", and "I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes." The repeated references to the "heart" show the narrator's growing obsession with the beating sound during the murder scene. Although the old man is physically powerless, the narrator continues to perceive the heartbeat intensely, suggesting that the sound originates more from his psychological state than from reality itself. The repetition therefore reflects the narrator's increasing fear, panic, and emotional instability.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory interprets the heartbeat as the projection of the narrator's internal anxiety and repressed guilt, revealing the Ego's inability to maintain rational control (Freud, 1923; Setiawan et al., 2021). This supports previous findings regarding Poe's psychological narration, yet this study specifically highlights how repetitive lexical structures construct the discourse of madness through linguistic form itself (Yousef, 2022; Amir, 2017).

### **Knew**

The repetition of "knew" appears around the top of page 5: "Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just

at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed.” The narrator continuously repeats the word “knew” to emphasize his certainty and awareness. However, the excessive insistence on “knowing” creates the impression that the narrator is trying too hard to convince both himself and the reader of his sanity. Instead of demonstrating rational confidence, the repetition gradually exposes insecurity and unstable thinking.

From Freud’s perspective, this repetition reflects the Ego’s defense mechanism of denial, as the narrator continuously attempts to justify his sanity despite obvious psychological instability (Freud, 1923; Setiawan et al., 2021). In contrast to previous studies that interpreted the narrator merely as unreliable, this study demonstrates that the linguistic structure of repetition itself actively constructs the narrator’s unreliability and psychological collapse (Sudarna & Yulina, 2025; Yousef, 2022; Alsahafi, 2020).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that lexical repetition in Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart* functions as a significant linguistic resource for constructing psychological instability and madness. Rather than serving merely as a stylistic device, repetition contributes to the representation of the narrator’s distorted perceptions, obsessive thoughts, and unstable mental state. The findings demonstrate that linguistic patterns can play an important role in shaping psychological meaning within literary discourse.

Theoretically, this study contributes to discourse analysis, stylistics, and literary studies by showing that repetition operates not only as a cohesive and rhetorical feature but also as a discursive mechanism through which psychological experience is represented. The integration of Keraf’s stylistic theory, Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics, and Freud’s psychoanalytic theory provides an

interdisciplinary framework for examining how linguistic structures contribute to the construction of meaning and characterization in literary texts.

Practically, the findings may serve as a useful reference for literary criticism, discourse analysis pedagogy, and literary discourse studies. The study demonstrates how linguistic analysis can be combined with psychological interpretation to produce a deeper understanding of literary narratives. Furthermore, it may assist students and researchers in applying interdisciplinary approaches when analyzing the relationship between language, discourse, and psychological representation in literary works.

Future studies may expand this approach by examining other Gothic literary texts, comparing alternative psychological frameworks, or incorporating corpus-based methods to investigate repetition patterns across larger collections of literary discourse.

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