

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The mind of humans is not always stable; they are full of trauma, obsession, and the other negative aspects that repressed deep in the unconscious. Eventually, the unconscious cannot contain more repressive thoughts, pains, and desires, and those negative aspects will leak through the emotions, dreams, and the other acts of conscious. Those anxiety feeling that made the human psyche unable to reach a 'pleasure' state was noted by Sigmund Freud as 'unpleasure' (Freud 1959, 5). Edgar Allan Poe, a famous American writer, was known to write the mentally ill character, even made them into the narrator of the story. This kind of narrator then became popular technique among the gothic horror (the works that combined the horror and romantic aspects) writers.

In literature, personal condition of the characters was presented by the author via description in their styles and point of view. The author has to be able to show the reader how their characters were thinking or feeling, either by the way of their action, their dialogue, or their internal monologue. Some authors choose the first person's point of view, in which the characters themselves narrated their actions, feelings, or thoughts by internal monologue. However, the description of the narrator is not always determine how his or her psyche actually are. This kind of narrator is called 'the unreliable narrator'. The concept of 'unreliable narrator' was popularized by Wayne C. Booth in his book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961).

The character's thought might be influenced by either severe mental problem or defense mechanism, or in some cases, both. The narrator might be a sociopath or psychopath, so when he does his evil plan, he would not feel regret or hesitation even when he know what he did was wrong. Another possibility is the narrator does not view his or her doing as 'evil', 'wicked', 'forbidden', or 'sinful'; he or she only considers his act as rightful even when the reader does not think so. There are another variety of reasons that make a character with first person point of view become unreliable, but the writer cannot describe more in this thesis.

In the Victorian era, a considerable literature has grown up around the theme of "the unreliable narrator", mainly found in gothic horror literature. For example, the psychological horror short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in which the main character, the unnamed female narrator, described her nervousness and uneasy feelings after her daughter's birth and when she and her husband moved into their new house and she was given a room with eerie yellow wallpaper, by "talking" to the reader by inner thought. The story of *The Yellow Wallpaper* was depicted the female narrator as a stand-in for both the writer and the audience, so we as the reader also able to feel what she feels. The horror novel *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley also use first person's point of view, narrated by Victor Frankenstein himself, an morally ambiguous professor who reanimated the titular monster and then suffered the consequences of 'playing God'. There are also some unreliable narrator in non-horror story, for example in *Ciaphas Cain* novel by Sandy Mitchell, where Ciaphas, the main character and narrator of the story, is a habitual liar and described himself sometimes as a coward,

yet his actions are heroic while his lying habits had to be pointed out several times in the novel. The difference between this narrator and the other narrator is we cannot believe their description about themselves or whatever happened in the story. The unreliable narrator happened when the narrator was lying repeatedly like in *Ciaphas Cain*, or have genuine mental issues like in the stories by Edgar Allan Poe, particularly “The Tell-Tale Heart”. If the unreliable narrator has possibilities to have some kind of mental issues, so the reader was technically looking ‘through the eyes of madness’.

In this project, the writer will analyze three of Poe’s short story: “The Tell-Tale Heart”, “The Black Cat”, and “The Cask of Amontillado”. “The Tell-Tale Heart” is a story of the narrator who killed an old man that sharing the home with him because the eye of the old man frightened him. “The Black Cat” is about a man who killed his cat, and intended to kill his new cat, but failed and killed his wife. “The Cask of Amontillado” is a story of Montresor, a member of a forgotten noble family, who wanted to kill Fortunato. Those three stories were chosen by the writer of this thesis due to the ironic narration in the story that described from the first person point of view, thus the writer of this thesis has to ‘enter’ the psyche of the narrators to understand the way their conscious, subconscious, and unconscious worked together. The psyche of the narrator were not explicitly told, but the description of their action was clearer and the writer could catch their psyche condition better.

During the data research, the writer found some articles that used Poe’s stories as their objects. The analysis of the articles have different focus of Poe’s

short stories compared with this thesis. Those previous studies are journal articles entitled *Character Doubles and Barrier Imagery in Poe's Work* by Jacqueline Bradley, and *Poe's Cask of Amontillado: A Tale of Effect* by John Freehafer. Bradley's study analyzed specifically into the 'sexually aggressive Oedipal impulse' (Bradley 2008, 55) of the characters of five of Poe's story: "William Wilson", "The Devil's Elixirs", "The Cask of Amontillado", "Berenice", and finally "The Tell-Tale Heart" using theory of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. The character in "William Wilson" and "The Devil's Elixirs" has same issues of alter ego or 'another self', in which Bradley analyze them as Superego or repressed identity of the character. In the story "The Cask of Amontillado", "Berenice", and "The Tell-Tale Heart", the writer used Lacanian theory of 'objet petit a' and the 'lack'.

Those three stories in which the character 'lacks' of something, usually representing an object of sexual desire or Oedipal object such as phallic imagery of power. Montresor in "The Cask of Amontillado" has desire to kill Fortunato after he humiliated him many years ago, thus take over 'the Phallus'. "The Cask of Amontillado" also shown the reader many of homosexual rape imagery as Montresor 'seduced' and aggressively dominated Fortunato, with some terms like 'thrust' and 'ejaculated' that are written in the story. In "Berenice", one of the character named Egaeus has 'monomania', a kind of mental illness that was described by the obsession of only one object. The narrator claimed that Berenice, his cousin, has been loved him for a long time, but in reality it was him who wanted her for himself; most specifically, he has unhealthy obsession of Berenice's teeth,

to the point that he subconsciously attack her, took all of her teeth, and buried her alive. The similar yet different case of ‘doubles’ was found in “The Tell-Tale Hearts”, where the main character has a peculiar paranoia of his old man’s eyes, and he was obsessed to getting rid of that eye, so as a result he mutilated and buried the old man. Both the character in “Berenice” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” creating the ‘barrier’ by gotten rid of their source of obsession; in other words, both Berenice and the old man in “The Tell-Tale Heart” were ended up buried by those characters.

The second journal article is a review of “The Cask of Amontillado”, titled *Poe's Cask of Amontillado: A Tale of Effect*. The writer, John Freehafer, argued that *The Cask of Amontillado* reflected ‘The War of Literati’ in the Poe’s era. He describes Montresor as Poe, Fortunato as his rival in literature, and Luchresi as the publisher. If this analysis of “The Cask of Amontillado” was correct in the interpretation, it means that this short story represents Poe’s desire to ‘bury’ his rival that he deemed unworthy of the award or popularity, and the rival was also rejected the editor before that. He also included the review from *Studies in Short Fiction* by Rea (there is no stated surname of the writer) that “The Cask of Amontillado” is ‘Poe’s theory of perversity, in which we want to hurt or to kill or to bury alive someone because he has been good to us’ (Freehafer 1968, 135).

Bradley’s analysis is the most similar with this thesis in term of the use of psychoanalytical criticism to analyze the narrator, but Bradley use both Freud’s and Lacan’s psychoanalysis and focused on different object of the main characters (the first person POV narrators). Bradley also did not only focused in the mental condition of the narrators of Poe’s short stories, but also the ‘barrier’, phallic

imagery, and Oedipal complex that were reflected by the narrators. The gaps between Bradley's analysis and this thesis are due to the focus of the article is the phallic imagery of Poe's stories, Bradley did not interpret the phrases "*the thousand injuries*" (Poe 1874, 3) that would be Montresor's major motivation to kill Fortunato. This thesis is also analyzed the term 'unpleasure' as something that disturb the psyche of the narrators while the article from Bradley did not analyze the 'unpleasure'. The review from Freehafer and Rea also both connected and contradicted the thesis writer's analysis of Montresor, in which the writer of this thesis used Freudian psychoanalysis to analyze the story, and they viewed Montresor as Fortunato's rival in wealth, and he was offended by Fortunato because he was being humiliated in the past. Freehafer is also stated about 'the perfect revenge' that Montresor did and analyzed both Montresor and Fortunato as characters based on the linguistic aspect and irony in the story that surrounded both characters. This thesis, while similar with Freehafer's article, did not analyzed Fortunato as much as Montresor, because the writer of this thesis focused more into the psyche of Montresor while Fortunato only serves as the source of Montresor's 'unpleasure'. Another gap from Freehafer's analysis and this thesis is, Freehafer, like Bradley, did not specified what is '*the thousand injuries*' (Poe 1874, 3) and the insult that drove Montresor to kill Fortunato, while in this thesis the majority of Montresor's analysis is to determine what is '*the thousand injuries*' and the insult that made Montresor held a grudge towards Fortunato.

The psyche of the 'unreliable narrator' in literature can be analyzed using psychoanalytical criticism based on Freudian psychoanalysis theory, in which the

writer analyzes the unconscious of the character by reading carefully the description of their inner thought and actions. The writer has to determine which part of human psyche (Id, Ego, and Superego) that influence the character more. In addition of analyzing the three parts of the human psyche, the writer also determine which defense mechanism that used by the character, also the probability of the events that induced trauma to the character and made him or her blocked or altered his or her memory. To describe the feelings of anxiety that caused the narrators done their deeds, the writer used a term 'unpleasure' (Freud 1959, 5) that was popularized by Sigmund Freud, and the term of 'perceptual unpleasure' (Freud 1959, 5) in which the danger of the source of the 'unpleasure' is only a perception made by the human psyche. The 'unreliable narrator' has a symptoms of 'perceptual unpleasure' or the 'unpleasure' that happens when they thought their victims as threats, which makes their narration of the story ambiguous or even ironic. The writer of this thesis is also analyzed the symbol of the narrators' psyche that was presented in the story.

The psychoanalytic criticism is suitable for analyzing literature because in making a literature, the author of those literature became 'creatively neurotic' (Stone 1976, 312) while exploring the content of their minds on the way to tell the others about their imagination, thus the literature can be analyzed with psychoanalytical criticism approach. For the possibility of defense mechanism in the mind of the narrator, the writer have to points out some dialogue or narration in the story that can be point out as proofs. The common type of defense mechanism that used in the literature using first person's point of view is denial, repression, displacement, regression, and sublimation. According to Vaillant, the term

'defense mechanism' is more likely described as '*innate involuntary regulatory processes that allow individuals to reduce cognitive dissonance and to minimize sudden changes in internal and external environments by altering how these events are perceived*' (Vaillant 1994, 44). The defense mechanism in short is conducted by the unconscious to ease the painful memories so the human mind stays functional.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The focus of analysis of this study can be summed up in three questions:

1. How does the narrators' unconscious affect their psyche in the three stories?
2. What are the symbols of the psyche of the narrators?
3. Is the 'unpleasure' of the narrators are all 'real' in the story?

1.3 Objective of the Study

This study is conducted to proven the role of the narrator's unconscious that affects his conscious in the story, also to point out the symbol of the psyche condition of all three narrators, as well as determine their defense mechanism which has been altered their psyche and caused their narration ambiguous or ironic. The writer also intended to determine whether the 'unpleasure' of those three narrators are the real threat for the narrators, or the 'unpleasure' are only their perception of something.

1.4 Significances of the Study

In literary research by psychoanalytic studies, there are a few researchers that focused to the aspect of 'unreliable narrator'. This study was intended to filling

the gap of the previous studies about Edgar Allan Poe's short stories by focusing to the 'unreliable narrator'. When the writer of this study conducts this writing, they also hopes that this study can give benefit to society, mainly in the society of University of Airlangga. The writer analyze thoroughly three of the gothic short stories of a famous American writer who often wrote in the theme psychological horror. For the scholar of University of Airlangga, the writer hopes that their writing can contribute to be a study material to conduct another analytical studies with psychoanalysis theory of Freud, or using the same object to analyze, or found the gap between this study and a recent studies within the same topic and theory.

Sometimes the using of first person's point of view in the literature can be confusing to some reader, especially the reader who thinks that the first person's point of view means that all of the description and contents of the story are true. However, in describing the story of some first person narrators, first person's point of view can be contradicted between the actions and thoughts of the character or narrator itself. This kind of narrator, as stated in the introductory, can be found in any kinds of literary works, especially horror. The 'unreliable narrator' happens when the thoughts of the narrator are ironic with the real events in the story, so the reader have to be keen while reading the story with 'unreliable narrator'. The 'unreliable narrator' is still popular in some modern literary works, not only in horror-themed story but any other theme, especially in a form of first person POV, can be 'unreliable' because of the irony of the narration and the real events of the story. This is also the purpose of this writing, because the writer wants to inform the reader about how to understand the 'unreliable narrator'.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- Unreliable narrator : A concept that has been popularized by Wayne C. Booth, about the narrator which the narration was untrustworthy or ironic with the real events of the story.
- Psyche : The Greek word of “soul”; the meaning of this terms was differ from Socrates, Plato, and Heraclitus, but widely accepted as the term of human’s soul (Robb 1986, 315)
- Unconscious : The deepest part of psyche that have two kinds: *“The one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious.”* (Freud 1923, 15)
- Defense mechanism : *“Innate involuntary regulatory processes that allow individuals to reduce cognitive dissonance and to minimize sudden changes in internal and external environments by altering how these events are perceived.”* (Vaillant 1994, 44)
- Unpleasure : A term from Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 1959, 5) meaning something in the psyche that disturb the human satisfaction of ‘pleasure’; something that made human psyche uncomfortable; a painful memories or thought; anxiety.