

Examining The Crime Triangle: A Study of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*

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Abstract

The primary aim of this research is to deconstruct the events leading to murder and subsequent concealment, isolating and analyzing how Poe meticulously establishes the necessary Routine Activity Theory conditions within the confined setting. This analysis seeks to validate the applicability of criminological theory as a framework for literary interpretation, particularly in the narratives of predetermined violence. This study employs a qualitative textual analysis methodology, utilizing Routine Activity Theory (RAT) as its major theoretical framework. This approach shifts the analytical focus from narrator's motive (madness) to the opportunity created by the environment. This research will demonstrate that the spatial-temporal and environmental conditions were the critical enablers. By reading the story through this lens, the paper argues that Poe constructs crime not as a purely psychological eruption, but as a calculated event shaped by opportunity, isolation, and environmental vulnerability. This study also provides a criminological explanation for the narrator's central act and reveals the "vulture eye" as a key trigger for the convergence of RAT's necessary elements of crime.

Keywords: Routine activity theory, Crime triangle, Environmental criminology.

Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe's visceral short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), prevails as a cornerstone of American Gothic literature, primarily examined through the lens of psychological horror and the narrator's descent into madness. Standard critiques often focus too much on the narrator's madness, attributing the crime solely to his psychological reaction to the old man's "vulture eye" rather than examining external factors. This interpretation attributes the murder as the result of a purely internal, unexplainable compulsion. However, such a focus risks overlooking the meticulously crafted spatial-temporal conditions that facilitate the crime, thereby neglecting a powerful alternative framework for understanding the narrative's central action.

This study shifts the focus from the narrator's madness to the specific opportunity for the crime. It suggests that both the murder and its concealment are best understood through the Routine Activity Theory (RAT) framework. Developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979, RAT is a key criminological theory asserting that a crime is likely to occur when three minimal elements converge in space and time: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson 588). These three pillars form what is known as the Crime Triangle. By analyzing how these elements intersect, we can visualize the structural "chemistry" necessary for a criminal event to take place. By applying RAT, this study treats the events leading up to the murder not merely as literary descriptions of obsession, but as a deliberate, fictional construction and establishment of the precise conditions that are necessary for a predatory criminal act.

While existing literary analyses have extensively explored Poe's use of symbolism, suspense, and psychological realism in "The Tell-Tale Heart", there remains a significant gap in the comprehensive application of established criminological theory as a framework for literary interpretation. Building on this foundation, traditional scholarship has frequently centered on the narrator's psyche, debating whether his confession emerges from a guilty conscience or a literal manifestation of his paranoia. Critics have closely examined symbols such as the "vulture eye" and the beating heart, frequently interpreting them through a psychoanalytic framework to explore themes of repressed trauma and moral decay. While these interpretations offer profound literary insight, they frequently view the murder as a result of the narrator's mental decay, overlooking the fact that the crime itself is a highly organized and carefully crafted event. These studies largely overlook the external logistics and situational details that Poe so precisely describes.

This study aims to bridge this gap by systematically analyzing the events of the murder and hiding the crime. It focuses on how Poe flawlessly establishes the Routine Activity Theory (RAT) conditions, required to commit the crime. Specifically, this analysis seeks to validate the applicability of RAT as a framework for interpreting literary narratives of predetermined violence. This research shows that the specific time and setting were the main factors that made the crime possible. It provides a criminological reason for the murder, proving that the "vulture eye" was the final spark that brought all the necessary elements of the crime together.

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis, utilizing Routine Activity Theory as its major theoretical framework. The research will first define the core tenets of Routine Activity Theory, establishing a clear analytical lens. Afterwards, the analysis will proceed to identify the three necessary elements of crime within the narrative. This section will be followed by a detailed exploration of how the “vulture eye” serves as the symbolic and literal key trigger that initiates the final, fatal convergence of these elements. Finally, the analysis will address the events of the concealment and confession through the lens of the crime triangle, highlighting how the physical environment, initially a cause of the crime, ultimately facilitates its discovery. This structured approach moves beyond the unreliable narrator’s psychological state to reveal the story as a masterfully crafted case study in situational crime prevention.

Literature Review

Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” has been examined as a powerful Gothic and psychological tale all long, with critics largely emphasizing the narrator’s unstable consciousness, guilt, and obsession. The story’s enduring appeal comes from the conflict between the narrator’s claim of having rational control and the unmistakable signs of mental disturbance in his speech and actions. As a result, critically, the murder is often seen as a product of his inner psychological collapse rather than as an event shaped by external conditions. This common interpretation provides an important foundation, but it also leaves room for a different kind of analysis that focuses on the situational structure of the crime instead of only prioritizing the narrator’s psyche.

A major strand of criticism reads the story through psychological and psychoanalytic frameworks. In such readings, the “vulture eye” is often interpreted as a symbol of fear, repression, paranoia, or moral disgust, while the beating heart becomes a sign of guilt, ego and the breakdown of the narrator's mental stability. Brett Zimmerman argues that the narrator’s obsession with the “evil eye” reflects a psychological condition resembling paranoid schizophrenia, while his repeated attempts to defend his actions suggest a lack of insight rather than conscious dishonesty (Zimmerman 39–48). More recently, Kholifah et al. contend that the audible beating heart beneath the floorboards symbolizes the narrator’s suppressed guilt, reading it as the voice of his Super-ego passing judgment on him, and arguing that this growing pressure gradually destabilizes his mental state and leads to his eventual confession (Kholifah et al. 1–8). The approach is valuable because it explains why the narrator’s voice is so intense,

unstable, and self-contradictory. However, it often treats the murder as a mentally unstable offender and pays less attention to the deliberate planning, timing, and environment that make the act possible. Therefore, the psychological model explains the narrator's state of mind more effectively than it explains the crime's practical execution.

Other scholars highlight Poe's use of Gothic symbolism, suspense, and atmosphere. The dark room, the lantern beam, the silence of the house, and the repeated nighttime visits, all contribute to a sense of dread and confinement. These features have been widely recognized as part of Poe's literary craft and as evidence of his ability to merge setting with psychological tension. Scholar Adibah Binti Haji Yusuf argues that these atmospheric devices are precisely what generate the story's Gothic sense of horror, mystery, and romance. Poe meticulously details the unsettling setting and directly links the physical environment to the narrator's accelerating psychological collapse (Yusuf 12).

Similarly, literary scholar Pamela Shelden argues that Poe's most significant innovation was the psychological transformation of Gothic conventions. Instead of depending on traditional Gothic elements such as haunted castles or monstrous figures, he relocates terror to the mind itself, that traps the reader inside the narrator's own fractured and irrational point of view (Shelden 75-80). Yet symbolic interpretations tend to focus on meaning rather than mechanism. They show how the story creates horror, but they do not always ask how the environment itself functions as a criminal opportunity.

Even Shelden's discussion of the "twisted point of view" interprets the darkened room and the narrator's rituals as reflections of his disturbed psyche rather than as situational factors that create the opportunity for murder. For the present study, that distinction is essential because the paper argues that the house, the hour, and the victim's vulnerability are not merely decorative details but necessary conditions for the murder.

Another critical approach focuses on the narrator as an unreliable voice. His insistence that he is careful, cautious, and sane directly conflicts with the violence of his actions and with the incoherence of his confession. Critics using this approach show that the narrative should not be accepted at face value, since the narrator's self-description is shaped by denial and performative control. This claim finds direct theoretical support in Theresa Heyd's pragmatic model of unreliable narration, which she applies directly to "The Tell-Tale Heart", arguing that

the fails as a credible witness because he repeatedly violates the cooperative principles of truthful communication without acknowledging those violations to the reader (Heyd 217-43).

According to Heyd, unreliable narrators can be classified according to the extent of their intentionality, with some consciously deceiving readers and others who are unable to perceive their own distortions. This framework is particularly useful for understanding the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart”, whose contradictions suggest self-deception rather than deliberate manipulation (Heyd 217–43). This perspective is useful because it explains why the reader is forced to question every claim the narrator makes. At the same time, most unreliable-narrator readings remain within literary analysis and do not fully connect the story to criminological theories of opportunity, target suitability, and guardianship.

Routine Activity Theory provides the theoretical bridge needed for such an interdisciplinary reading. Cohen and Felson argue that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian converge in space and time (Cohen & Felson 588). Their model shifts attention away from criminal pathology and toward the conditions that make crime possible. This move is especially useful for “The Tell-Tale Heart”, because the narrator’s repeated surveillance, the old man’s vulnerability, and the isolated domestic setting all resemble the structure of opportunity described by Routine Activity Theory (Cohen and Felson 588). In this way, the story can be read not only as a psychological tale but also as a fictional enactment of crime opportunity.

The idea of the crime triangle has also been supported in later criminological studies that links opportunity to situational prevention. Kleeman et al. note that Routine Activity Theory has practical value in explaining how crime emerges from environmental conditions and how altering those conditions can reduce offending (Kleeman et al. 87–92). Similarly, Bullock and Ekblom emphasize that crime prevention depends on understanding the relationship between offenders, targets, and the settings that make offending easier (Bullock & Ekblom 29–47). These studies strengthen the present paper’s claim that Poe’s story can be analyzed as a structured crime environment rather than only as a case of madness.

At the same time, there are critical limitations to Routine Activity Theory that must be acknowledged. Sutton argues that the theory’s “chemistry” model can be overly rigid because it presents opportunity as if it were a fixed and predictable outcome rather than something

shaped by human perception, uncertainty, and failed action (Sutton 1). This critique is particularly relevant to Poe's story, because the narrator's obsession is deeply subjective and emotionally distorted. Even so, the story remains a strong literary example of how opportunity, perception, and spatial control interact in the making of violence. Miro-Llinares also describes Routine Activity Theory as a useful framework for understanding how criminal events emerge from routine patterns and situational convergence (Miro-Llinares). This framing supports the present study's use of the theory as a lens for interpreting Poe's carefully staged narrative of murder and concealment.

Taken together, the existing literature shows two major tendencies. Literary critics have most often focused on madness, guilt, and symbolism in "The Tell-Tale Heart", while criminological scholars have concentrated on the conditions that make crime possible in real-world settings. What remains missing is a sustained study that brings these two fields together. This paper addresses that gap by using Routine Activity Theory to show that Poe's story constructs a crime environment in which motivation, target vulnerability, and the absence of guardianship converge. In doing so, it offers an interdisciplinary reading that moves beyond the narrator's psychology and highlights the spatial and temporal logic of the murder.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in Routine Activity Theory (RAT), a sub-field of environmental criminology first proposed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. RAT focuses on the criminal event itself unlike traditional criminological theories that seek to explain criminal behavior through the lens of social pathology, poverty, or psychological disturbance. It suggests that crime is a structural byproduct of the rhythm of everyday life. In the context of "The Tell-Tale Heart", this framework allows us to analyze the murder not as a symptom of the narrator's insanity, but as a result of the perfect union of situational factors.

To understand the application of RAT to Poe's work, one must first recognize the major shift this theory represents. Prior to 1979, criminology was dominated by the dispositional school of thought, which focused on what makes a person a criminal and theories focused on broken homes, biological traits, or psychological trauma. Cohen and Felson (1979) shifted this focus to what makes a crime possible. They argued that for a predatory crime to occur, there must be

a spatio-temporal convergence of three minimal elements i.e. a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian. This is often visualized as the Crime Triangle (or the Problem Analysis Triangle). In this research, the narrator's madness is categorized under motivation, but the theory suggests that motivation alone cannot produce a crime without the presence of the other two vertices of the triangle.

In standard Routine Activity Theory, the Motivated Offender is viewed as a constant presence. The theory does not spend time questioning why someone wants to commit a crime; instead, it assumes that motivated individuals will always exist if the right opportunity appears. However, when we apply this to a work of literature like “The Tell-Tale Heart”, we must refine how we define motivation. In this study, we do not view the narrator as a criminal in the traditional sense as looking for money or revenge. Instead, he is a goal-directed actor. His specific goal is the destruction of the “vulture eye”. By using RAT, we can set aside the medical debate over his madness and focus instead on his offender routine.

The narrator explicitly outlines this calculated focus, stating: “Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me... I think it was his eye! yes, it was this!” (Poe 1). The narrator does not act on a random impulse, he displays careful planning, advanced preparation, and the ability to hide his true intentions. He challenges the reader’s perception of his mental state by highlighting his organized approach:

You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work! (Poe 1).

These are the hallmarks of an organized offender who carefully weighs the risk of being caught against his need to reach his goal. He isn’t just a madman; he is a focused individual who treats the murder as a task that is to be managed.

To determine why the old man is chosen as the victim, we must look beyond his “vulture eye” and examine him being suitable as a target through the VIVA model. In Routine Activity Theory, target is not an accidental choice. It is a calculated assessment based on four specific factors: Value, Inertia, Visibility, and Access. While the narrator describes his motives as

psychological, the VIVA model reveals that the old man's physical circumstances make him a victim for a predatory act.

The first element, Value, refers to the offender's subjective assessment of what the target is worth. While a traditional criminal might seek monetary gain, the narrator's sense of value is entirely symbolic. To him, the worth of the target is tied exclusively to the old man's eye. The removal of this eye represents the ultimate prize because its presence causes the narrator mortal terror. In this distorted reality, the Value of the crime is the psychological peace the narrator believes he will gain once the eye is destroyed. This high subjective value makes the narrator to ignore the risks of the crime.

The old man's suitability is further increased by Inertia, which describes the physical difficulty of overcoming or moving a target. In Poe's narrative, the victim presents very low inertia due to his advanced age and physical frailty. This vulnerability is maximized by the narrator's choice of timing by attacking during the dead hour of the night. The narrator ensures the victim is in a state of sleep, which significantly reduces any risk for physical resistance. The narrator observes the victim's helplessness, as: "He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more... I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead" (Poe 4). As the old man cannot effectively fight back or escape, he becomes a low-inertia target that is easy for the offender to overpower.

The narrator details this surveillance: "And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it—oh so gently!" (Poe 1). The crime only proceeds when the specific object of the narrator's obsession, the eye, becomes visible on the eighth night: "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" (Poe 2). Additionally, access is completely open because the offender and the victim live in the same house. Since they share a home, there are no physical barriers to stop the narrator from reaching the old man. Ultimately, the old man serves as an ideal target. Within the narrator's organized plan, the victim is constantly visible, easily accessible, and entirely unable to protect himself.

The most important factor in preventing crime, according to RAT, is the presence of a Capable Guardian. A guardian is not limited to police officers; it includes anyone whose presence or proximity would discourage a crime. The Absence of a Capable Guardian is a structural reality

of the house's geography and the temporal setting (midnight), making the crime mathematically more likely to occur. The framework of this article also incorporates Situational Crime Prevention (SCP), a strategy derived from RAT. SCP suggests that by changing the environment, one can prevent crime. The narrator uses SCP in reverse. He designs the environment to ensure the crime *succeeds*.

The concealment of the body under the floorboards is an extension of the absence of guardianship. The narrator creates a void in the physical environment where the evidence of the crime is invisible to the guardians (the police) who eventually arrive. The eventual confession, therefore, is not a failure of the theory. Instead, it occurs because guardianship is restored when the police arrive, causing the narrator to lose the total control he previously had over the environment. His psychological composure breaks down as he is no longer able to manage the situation, he had so carefully designed.

By applying this to Poe, we bridge the gap between criminology and psychology. The narrator perceives an opportunity because of his distorted view of the vulture eye. This study uses RAT not to ignore the narrator's mind, but to show how his perceptions interacted with the physical reality of the house to create a crime-event. The theory provides the bones of the crime (the structure), while Poe's narrative provides the flesh (the psychological experience).

Routine Activity Theory provides a rigorous, non-subjective lens through which "The Tell-Tale Heart" can be viewed. By moving away from the madness, we see a story that is a masterpiece in Environmental Criminology. Poe does not just write a horror story; he constructs a perfect crime environment where the variables of time, space, vulnerability, and isolation are united to make the murder inevitable. This framework sets the stage for the analysis to follow, which will systematically prove how these three elements, offender, target, and guardian were the true enablers of one of literature's most famous acts of violence.

Research Methodology

This research employs an interdisciplinary methodology that bridges the fields of literary criticism and environmental criminology. The study is grounded in a deductive approach, utilizing the established principles of Routine Activity Theory (RAT). Traditionally, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is interpreted through a lens of psychology, which primarily focuses on the internal

state and thoughts of the narrator who is essentially the offender. However, this research utilizes RAT as a lens to treat the narrative as a simulated and perfectly designed crime scene.

By integrating social science into literary analysis, the study moves beyond the subjective debate regarding the narrator's insanity. Instead, it focuses on the environmental and situational factors that facilitated the crime. This methodology treats the text as a carefully constructed model of how opportunity and physical surroundings create the necessary conditions for violence, providing a more structured and objective interpretation of the central act.

The research is conducted through a qualitative textual analysis, involving a systematic and close reading of Edgar Allan Poe's original text, written in 1843. The analysis is organized into four distinct stages to ensure a comprehensive examination of the criminal event, beginning with the identification of the motivated offender. Instead of focusing on a clinical diagnosis of the narrator's mental illness, the first stage identifies evidence of planning, foresight, and goal-directed behavior. By highlighting the narrator's systematic actions, the study classifies him as a goal-oriented offender rather than just a patient. This shifts the perspective from his internal mental state to his external, calculated strategy.

The second stage of the research uses the VIVA model to evaluate why the victim was chosen. This part of the method analyzes how specific traits made the old man a vulnerable and suitable target for the crime. By analyzing the victim's incapacity and the symbolic value placed on his eye, the research demonstrates how the target's specific traits directly facilitate the crime's execution.

Following this, the study examines the environment to see how any protection was removed. It analyzes the isolated house, the silence of late night, and the use of darkness to show how the setting was cleared of anyone or anything that could have stopped the crime. This proves that the narrator chose the perfect time and place to ensure no one could intervene, leaving the victim completely defenseless.

Finally, the study concludes with a synthesis of spatio-temporal convergence, mapping the exact moment when the offender, the target, and the absence of guardianship aligned. This step explores how the vulture eye served as the trigger that transformed a nightly routine into a fatal act of violence. By following this structured method, the research demonstrates that the murder

was driven by a conscious alignment of physical circumstances. This interpretation presents the narrative as a definitive example of situational opportunity, moving the conversation beyond a simple analysis of the narrator's mental state.

Analysis and Findings

While the traditional reading views the narrator's motivation as madness, the RAT framework simply requires a motivated offender. The narrator clearly defines his persistent, goal-directed behavior: "It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night" (Poe 1).

This obsessive compulsion to destroy the "vulture eye" functions as the necessary criminal motivation, regardless of whether it stems from psychosis or malice.

You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution, with what foresight, with what dissimulation I went to work! (Poe 1).

This textual reference directly reinforces the motivated offender as an element of Routine Activity Theory. This serves as the narrator's aggressive claim that his actions were deliberate and carefully planned rather than random acts of insanity. Consequently, it establishes him as the focused and intentional offender required for the crime to occur. This classification holds true regardless of his psychological condition, as his actions follow a clear, strategic path toward a specific end. Crucially, the narrator's methodical planning and execution demonstrate the rational element acknowledged even in the behavior of some organized crime offenders, making him a highly capable, disturbed and motivated actor (Bullock et al. 2010).

The victim, the old man, becomes a suitable target through a combination of his physical state and the domestic setting. The text describes his vulnerability as he sleeps alone in a secured room, and his primary defect, the "vulture eye", is what the narrator wishes to eliminate. The physical suitability is heightened by the time of night and the isolated location. Furthermore, the target is not merely the man, but the act of destroying the eye, highlighting how even non-predatory crimes (like the focus on a feature rather than a possession) can be analyzed situationally. The narrator confirms this suitability by detailing the victim's incapacity,

It was a groan of terror, not of pain or of grief. I say it was a groan of mortal terror; which arises from the soul... he knew what the shadow was... he felt the presence of my head within the chamber (Poe 3).

This illustrates the target's realization of his own defenselessness against the approaching threat.

The absence of a capable guardian is perhaps the most heavily fortified element in Poe's setting. The crime is committed "at the dead hour of the night" (Poe 3), utilizing the darkness both as a concealment technique and a symbol of security against outside observation. The house itself acts as a sealed environment, ensuring that the only potential guardian is the victim himself: "His room was as black as pitch with thick darkness...The old man was lying awake...I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise" (Poe 3).

The narrator's ability to approach the sleeping victim nightly for "seven long nights" and finally commit the act on the eighth proves the extreme spatial and temporal isolation of the residence (Cohen and Felson 590). This isolation ensures that no other residents, neighbors, or passing watchmen could intervene, eliminating all effective guardianship and solidifying the convergence of the necessary elements for the predatory act. The narrator's nightly return to the old man's room shows how repetition itself becomes part of the crime structure. Each visit normalizes intrusion and increases his control over the space. In this way, routine activity becomes a direct condition for the offense.

For seven consecutive nights, the necessary crime conditions were established but incomplete; the "motivated offender" only lacked the sight of the feared eye to initiate the final act: "It was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye" (Poe 1). On the final night, the convergence is complete: "It was open—wide, wide open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness—all dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones" (Poe 4).

The abrupt and total appearance of the "vulture eye" completes the crime triangle by bringing the offender and target together in the perfect setting. It moves the narrator from a state of obsessive routine activity (the nightly stalking) to a criminal event (the murder), validating the situational approach's focus on identifying the circumstances that directly facilitate the crime

(Felson and Clarke 1998). Once the murder is complete, the focus shifts to concealment, and this is where the role of guardianship continues to shape events.

The arrival of the police officers brings a capable guardian back into the environment that the narrator had tried so hard to control. At first, they do not seem threatening, and the narrator even sits them in the same room where the body is hidden. However, their presence restores the guardianship he had removed throughout the story. His confidence begins to break when this happens: “I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears” (Poe 6). From the RAT perspective, the confession is not just a random psychological breakdown. It happens because guardianship returns to the scene. Since the narrator’s control depended on having no observers, the presence of the police is enough to destroy the conditions that allowed the crime and its concealment. This analysis demonstrates that Poe, intentionally or not, crafted a narrative that perfectly illustrates the principles of Routine Activity Theory, positioning his Gothic tale as an early and vivid case study in situational criminology.

The application of criminological theories like Routine Activity Theory to literary works, particularly to narratives of predetermined violence, serves a dual purpose. It offers a structured, non-subjective framework for interpreting fictional events, shifting the analytical burden from vague psychological states to measurable situational components. By using RAT, the study treats the text as a simulated crime environment, analyzing Poe’s construction of opportunity rather than relying solely on the narrator’s self-diagnosis. However, the suitability of the theory itself must be acknowledged. Critics argue that rigid models like RAT’s “Chemistry Model”, which require the “convergence” of elements, are built on the false premise of objective reality, ignoring the crucial role of human perception and contingency (Sutton 2018). Critic M. Sutton notes that opportunities “do not exist as foregone fortuitous outcomes” and highlights the reality of failed attempts and unexpected interventions, situations the “Chemistry Model” cannot adequately explain.

By using Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”, a text defined by the narrator’s intense, unreliable perception and flawed execution, this research inherently engages with this critique. The narrator’s fixation on a specific target and his nightly rituals demonstrates the very perceptual element that Sutton finds missing in the theory. Thus, this study applies RAT to highlight the structural opportunities within Poe’s setting, while using the narrator’s complex mental state to

examine the theory's boundaries. By doing so, it explores how a criminal's personal perceptions and mistakes can impact the actual execution of a crime. Although Routine Activity Theory explains the opportunity for the crime, it does not fully account for the narrator's irrational fixation. That psychological dimension remains important and shows the limits of the theory when applied to literature.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this research confirms that "The Tell-Tale Heart" is not merely a tale of a descent into madness, it is a profound narrative exploration of situational opportunity. By treating the text as a simulated crime environment, the study uncovers Poe's masterful construction of environmental factors that enabled the crime's execution. This application of a structured, non-subjective criminological model to Gothic literature provides a platform for readers to confront the implications of situational determinism in narrative. It fosters a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape criminal acts, in fiction and reality by highlighting how vulnerability, isolation, and opportunity can tragically converge, regardless of the offender's psychological state. Poe's story endures not just as a piece of psychological horror, but as a vivid illustration that even madness requires opportunity to act.

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