

Toxic Masculinity in Short Story: 'The Black Cat' and 'the Tell-Tale Heart'

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ABSTRACT

Toxic masculinity is a manifestation of excessive masculine dominance, including violence, aggression, and suppression of emotions. This study analyses how toxic masculinity is reflected in two of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, *The Black Cat* (1845) and *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843). Using a qualitative approach and R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, this study reveals that toxic masculinity in both stories is seen through aggressive domination, violence against weak groups, and the failure of the main characters to manage their emotions. In *The Black Cat*, toxic masculinity manifests through violence against animals and his wife, fuelled by alcoholism. Meanwhile, in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the physical domination of an old man reflects the need to assert power. This research demonstrates the relevance of this phenomenon to the challenges of modern society and recommends interdisciplinary analyses to deepen the understanding of the impact of toxic masculinity on social relationships.

Keywords: Toxic Masculinity, Violence, Alcoholism

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INTRODUCTION

The public relates masculinity to character attributes that are essential to leadership and social domination. Masculinity not only represents physical power, courage, and independence, but it also frequently positions males at the top of the social hierarchy. This is seen in men's domination in many parts of life, both public and private, where they are frequently regarded as the primary decision-makers. Hegemonic masculinity as dominant masculinity dictating societal standards that repress not just women, but also alternative types of masculinity deemed 'weak' or subordinate (R. W. Connell, 2005a). People often associate hegemonic masculinity with power and control, in which males dominate women and other groups seen to have less social authority. R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinity as a social practice that sustains male dominance over women. Often, one achieves hegemony through cultural control, social institutions, and persuasion techniques that instill the belief that male dominance is natural or unavoidable. As previously said, masculinity is a character and notion that emerges within the framework of a certain culture and civilization, hence it is not fixed but rather evolves with time.

In medieval times, Society associates masculinity with respect for women and a strong dedication to religion and morals. They see the masculine male of the time as the defender and guardian of spiritual ideals, as men prove their dedication to religious teachings (Richards, 1999). However, in the current period, the notion of masculinity has changed. The

emphasis has shifted toward economic power and the position of the family provider. Society considers a man to be manly if he can financially support his family and serve as a stable economic backbone (Gould, 1974). In this day and age, many people frequently see masculinity as a desirable attribute, mainly due to its association with strength, leadership and toughness. However, behind this idealised image of masculinity lies a dark side known as toxic masculinity, a manifestation of an exaggerated or overly enforced dominance of masculinity, which has destructive effects on both the man himself and those around him (Sculos, 2017). In his theory, Kupers (2005) explains that toxic masculinity is often reflected in men's behaviour that promotes violence, intimidation and control through power. The term is frequently used to emphasize how constricted gender roles support patriarchal authority, promoting male domination in a variety of social contexts. Toxic masculinity damages not just women and marginalized groups, but also males by suppressing their emotions and preventing good social connections which promotes gender inequity and fosters a violent culture in society (Ramadhani et al., 2023).

In patriarchal societies, they consider intimate partner violence against women is normal as an expression of male control, reflecting structural inequalities that favour male dominance and female subordination (Rokhmansyah et al., 2018). When discussing violence, men often take centre stage as perpetrators, and place women as victims (Sitaresmi, 2022). Based on research, nearly one out of three woman faces sexual or physical harm during their life (Devries et al., 2013). R. W. Connell (2005b) describes that in a culture shaped by patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity is prioritized over subordinate masculinity, which is associated with weakness, cowardice and homosexuality. Subordinate masculinity is often the target of violence and discrimination.

This reflects a pattern of male dominance influenced by the social construction of hegemonic masculinity. Violence in society can also be fuelled by drinking alcohol. Drinking alcohol also has the potential to cause family conflict, crime, and reduce the quality of life for both the addict and the people around them (Hanifah, 2023). Alcohol is addictive, often causing dependence without the consumer realising it, which can then lead to health problems, such as psychiatric disorders, depression and anxiety. Substance abuse is a worldwide public health crisis and causes high rates of illness and death (Hammarlund et al., 2018). Violent behaviour and alcoholism not only occur in the real world, but are also reflected in literature such as *TBC* and *TTTH*. Literary works are often inspired by real-life experiences, reflecting social issues faced by society. As a form of human imaginative and creative expression, literature combines these ideas into narratives that reflect the conditions and complexities of life (Klarer, 2013).

Alcoholism is portrayed as the narrator in *TBC* that depicts the moral downfall of an unnamed narrator who transforms from an animal lover to a violent figure under the influence of alcohol. In his drunken state, he begins to torture his pets, Pluto. After cruelly killing Pluto, he finds another cat that resembles Pluto, but the presence of this new cat only worsens his mental state. His cruel acts culminate when he ends his wife's life in moment of fury and put her body in the wall of the house. In the end, the voice of the cat trapped behind the wall reveals his offense to law enforcement, leading him to his punishment. In the story *The Tell-Tale Heart* (*TTTH*), violence is also a central theme, where the victim is an old man who is killed by the protagonist, the motive for the murder being that the narrator is afraid of the old man's eyes. At the end of the story, the protagonist confess his crime to the police because he hears the creepy sound that disturbs him so much: the heartbeat of the old man he killed and hidden under the wooden floor. This murder demonstrates the dominance of the protagonist's physical strength which is much stronger than the old man.

Various studies have been conducted to analyse Poe's works, including *TBC* and *TTTH*, from different perspectives. Güzel (2023) applied Roland Barthes' five narrative codes-hermeneutic, proairetic, symbolic, referential, and cultural-to the short story *TBC*. The research explores how the story elements create meaning through narrative structure, symbolism, and cultural context. On the other hand, Muhandra et al. (2024) examined the comparison of the black cat myth in America and Indonesia, showing how the myth is accepted and perceived in different cultural contexts. Meanwhile, Sasa & Jweid (2022) explored the concept of psychic monomania in *TTTH* through paranoia, neurotic trauma and re-traumatisation, which triggered the protagonist's madness and violent acts. Studniarz (2021) in his article, discusses how the protagonist's madness illustrates the horror of the human condition. Kaur & Puri (2024) focus on the symbolism of the eye in the story, seeing it as a symbol of domination and surveillance that fuels the narrator's anxiety.

Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinity that will be used in this study has also been applied in the analysis of literary works. Messerschmidt (2020) in his article explains how young men are pressured to show 'super-masculine' behaviour in order to gain social status. Similar research conducted by Taylor (2019) in 'Hegemonic Masculinities and Children's Picture Books' illustrates that in children's storybooks, men are portrayed as strong and dominant, while women are often positioned passively. Furthermore, Gelūnas (2023) in his research argues that gaming behaviour is often influenced by values of hegemonic masculinity, such as competition and dominance. While many studies have applied Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinity and analysed *TBC* (1845) and *TTTH* (1843) from various perspectives, such as narrative, symbolism, and characters' psychological states, few have specifically explored the relationship between violence and alcoholism, in these stories. Therefore, this research contributes to fill the gap by analysing toxic masculinity in gothic fiction. Through Connell's hegemony masculinity theoretical approach, this study will examine how representations of aggressive behaviour due to alcoholism and violence against weaker man reflect the negative impact on social relationships. This article offers a deeper comprehension about how this classic literary work not only reflects the social conditions in the past, but also relevant for understanding contemporary social challenges related to gender-based violence and subordination.

METHOD

This research uses qualitative methods, since qualitative methods are very valuable tools in research in order to answer complex questions, such as how and why a phenomenon occurs (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). By using this approach, researcher can provide in-depth explanations that are relevant to the formulation of the problems raised in the study. Therefore, the author will describe the findings in detail and then analyse them employing the hegemonic masculinity framework introduced by R. W. Connell to identify elements of toxic masculinity contained in the works under study. The data sources in this study are taken from two short stories by Poe, *TBC* published in 1845 and *The TTTH* published in 1843. Kuckartz (2014) emphasises that the qualitative approach includes various types of data, such as texts derived from words, sentences, or images.

This study also employs textual analysis to closely examine the narrative elements within the stories. Data collection in this study began with a careful reading of the stories, followed by a process of identifying texts that show types of toxic masculinity, such as violence, domination, and the negative influence of alcohol. Once the relevant data was collected, the next step was to analyse the data based on Connell's theoretical concepts of hegemonic masculinity to understand how the main character reflects patterns of destructive behaviours. This analysis is then compiled in a descriptive form that relates the research

findings to the theory used, for the purpose of delivering a deeper understanding into the representation of toxic masculinity in the stories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Masculinity often places men in dominant positions in the social hierarchy, but excessive dominance leads to toxic masculinity, characterized by aggression, violence, and emotional suppression (Connell, 1990; Sculos, 2017; Ramdani & Wisesa, 2022). In *TBC*, the narrator exhibits dominance and aggression through violent acts against his pets and wife, fueled by emotional instability and alcoholism. Similarly, in *TTTH*, the narrator's calculated murder of the old man reflects aggression and suppressed emotions, driven by irrational fear. Both narrators embody toxic masculinity, showcasing its destructive effects on others and their own moral integrity.

Showing Toxic Masculinity: Alcohol as A Trigger Factor Through Violence

TBC portrays the narrator as a compassionate figure and gentle, characteristics that contradict the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which prioritises dominance, strength and violence as ideal traits. Hegemonic masculinity requires men to exhibit dominant traits such as control, assertiveness, independence, and competence, while traits such as friendliness, caring, and cooperation are considered subordinate traits (Aghniyaa & Pasaribu, 2023). The protagonist in this story cannot fulfil the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. According to R. Connell (2013), men are considered masculine if they conform to the form of masculinity expected by society. Because he does not meet these standards, the narrator uses alcohol as an escape from these expectations, which then triggers him to commit domination and violence in his household. Alcohol, becomes a symbol of escape from a sense of powerlessness and inability to fulfil hegemonic standards of masculinity, which then leads to violence as compensation for his failure. The protagonist's alcoholism plays an important role in his personality change. Dependence on alcohol triggers aggressive and destructive behaviour, including towards his surroundings, as presented in the following quote:

"I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition."

TBC (1845)

*"But my disease grew upon me -- for what disease is like Alcohol -- and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish -- even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper."**TBC (1845)*

The quote highlights Alcohol's effect as a key factor in the main transformation in the character's behavior in. Over time, the influence of alcohol makes the main character increasingly immersed in melancholy, easily irritated, and loses empathy for those around him. This loss of emotional control is reflected in his abusive and violent behaviour against his wife, implying that alcohol is the main trigger for the breakdown of interpersonal relationships in this story. In addition to impacting his relationships with humans, the drastic change in his nature is also felt by his pets, including his beloved cat, Pluto. The protagonist, who was once kind, gradually transforms into a harsh and terrible person, demonstrating how alcohol operates as a 'disease' that deteriorates his mental and emotional health. This behavior is consistent with Connell's theory, which states that alcoholism may be viewed as a type of escape from an individual's inability to meet standards of masculinity. In patriarchal societies, men are frequently expected to be harsh, protective, and strong. Alcohol addiction, aggression, and other masculine behaviors, such as smoking, are frequently employed to preserve this manly image (Sitaresmi, 2022). Hegemonic masculinity not only harms people physically and emotionally, but it also undermines their capacity to develop genuine relationships with others. Alcohol's impact on destructive conduct exacerbates the protagonist's social isolation. Alcoholism has a significant impact on his interpersonal

interactions, as he is more ostracized from society owing to his increasingly erratic conduct. According to Hanifah (2023), chronic drunkenness can result in organic mental health diseases, such as negative thinking, heightened emotions, and aggressive behavior. In severe cases, this can lead to criminal acts, including physical and verbal violence, sexual abuse, and murder. The main character experiences moral and social degradation that leads to cruelty towards his wife and pets, a clear illustration of how alcohol eats away at his self-control.

Violence Against Animals

In patriarchal households, men are often seen as leaders with the ultimate power to organise the family. His social role is determined by the 'model' or norms prevailing in society (R. Connell, 2013). When family members disobey, authorised men tend to show dominance to maintain their hegemonic masculinity. This dominance is often manifested through aggressive or abusive behaviour, which eventually creates a form of toxic masculinity. In *TBC*, the main character shows his dominance as the cat's owner when the cat disobeys his desires, biting and avoiding his presence. As a response, the narrator attempts to assert his masculinity through acts of violence to make his pet obey him. The violence he inflicts on his beloved cat, Pluto, by gouging out its eyes and eventually hanging it, is a clear example of aggressive and destructive behaviour associated with toxic masculinity. Therefore, physical violence is often a way to maintain masculine dominance, which in this case is reflected in the control and mistreatment of weaker beings (R. W. Connell, 2005b), this is reflected in the following quote:

*"One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me."*TBC (1845)

*"I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity."*TBC (1845)

This excerpt describes the violence committed by the protagonist in *TBC*, fuelled by alcoholism and uncontrollable anger. After coming home drunk, the protagonist feels that his pet cat, Pluto, is avoiding him, which makes him angry. The cat's reaction of biting his hand exacerbates his anger, and the protagonist loses control completely, letting his 'demon-like' rage consume him. The way the cat avoids and bites the protagonist makes him feel that his pet is disobedient. This non-compliance is perceived as a threat to his authority, which hinders him from achieving hegemonic masculinity. To assert his dominance, the protagonist eventually commits an act of brutal violence, intentionally removing one of the cat's eyes using a knife. Alcohol and toxic masculinity drive the protagonist to act aggressively and cruelly. His violence not only harmed his relationship with the people around him, but also with his pet, whom he had previously loved. These cruel crimes indicate the loss of emotional control caused by the combination of alcoholism and excessive masculine dominance, which drives the protagonist to commit violence without empathy. This conduct exemplifies toxic masculinity by dominating the weaker, both animal and human. masculinity includes both bad traits like aggression and emotional repression, as well as good traits like strength and courage (Scott-Samuel, 2009). The protagonist's brutality against animals represents an inability to control emotions, compounded by drunkenness.

This harmed his social ties and shown that animal cruelty is frequently a forerunner to violence toward humans, as was the case with his wife. Furthermore, the negative consequences of alcohol are evident in the main character's cognitive and mental faculties. Moreover, excessive alcohol intake over time can result in considerable brain damage, such as memory loss, bad judgment, diminished learning capacity, and certain psychiatric problems (Liana & Adolf, 2019). These impacts are reflected in the protagonist's increasingly illogical, impulsive, and hostile behavior. The harmful consequences of alcohol demonstrate that toxic masculinity not only harms others through physical and emotional abuse, but it

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also destroys the individuals caught up in this cycle, impairing their capacity to function healthily in social and personal situations.

Domestic Violence Against Wife

Social constructions generally place marriage as an instrument in which patriarchy is embedded, both in Eastern and Western cultures, even in a country as modern as America. Mabrouk (2020) states that in many cultures around the world, toxic masculinity refers to behaviours that pressure men to show no emotions other than anger, while encouraging actions that make them 'dominant' in certain situations. In patriarchal cultures, men as the highest authority in the household and the breadwinner often use violence as a way to assert their dominance and to command obedience from family members. This is reflected in the actions of the main character who does not only treat his pets cruelly, but also his wife. At one point, when his wife tries to prevent him from killing a new cat, he kills her with an axe. For the protagonist, his wife's action is considered a form of disobedience, so he uses violence to reassert his power. Domestic violence is one of the significant manifestations of toxic masculinity, where men consider that violence is a way to maintain control and dominance over women as illustrated in the following quote:

"The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan."

TBC (1845)

This quote describes the violence committed by the main character in *TBC*, in which his anger, fueled by a little encounter with his cat, ends in the violent murder of his spouse. When the cat nearly pushed him down the stairs, his rage exploded, and he swung the axe with the aim to kill the cat. When his wife attempts to stop him, his rage grows even stronger, and he brutally murders her without hesitation. This scene illustrates how domination, violence, and the inability to control emotions lead to the destruction of social relationships. Alcoholism and uncontrollable rage drive the main character to the brink of murder, killing his wife, someone he is supposed to protect. Masculinity requires males to be powerful, bold, and aggressive, whereas femininity requires women to be delicate, empathetic, and motherly (Wandi, 2015). This imbalance demonstrates how toxic masculinity destroys individuals and others around them, particularly in social ties where people are supposed to support and protect one another. Domestic violence is one of the most direct manifestations of male dominance over women. Social constructs that equate masculinity with power and control, and femininity with softness and reliance, allow for violence in domestic relationships. Women, who are frequently positioned as the weaker party, feel helpless and stuck in a cycle of abuse, leading them to prefer quiet over opposition (Sitaresmi, 2022). Violence is viewed in hegemonic masculinity as a means of reinforcing men's status as rulers in home relationships. This not only ruins the husband-wife relationship, but also demonstrates men's failure to fulfill their societal obligations as husbands and head of households (R. W. Connell, 1982). The violence committed by the protagonist promotes patriarchal dominance and gender norms that favor male control over women. It depicts how toxic masculinity not only harms personal relationships, but also contributes to the breakdown of societal connections in general. This behavior demonstrates that a power system based on aggression and dominance in gender interactions would eventually result in a total breakdown of the social order.

Violence Against Weaker Men

Violence affects not only women or pets, but can also target men who are physically weaker, such as the elderly. In *TTH*, the main character, a man, feels both scared and unsettled by the gaze of an old man who lives with him. These feelings of rage and fear go against the image of hegemonic masculinity, which generally includes dominance, courage

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and physical strength, and emphasises the suppression of emotions. When these standards of masculinity cannot be achieved, men often feel insecure and get angry. These feeling can drive them to use violence as a way to make dominant and in control of the situation (R. W. Connell, 1995). In this case, the protagonist tries to deal with his fear by showing his courage through violent acts against the old man. The narrator finally succeeded in taking the life of the old man whose eyes always made him feel uneasy and frightened. With a carefully conceived and calculating plan, he waited for the right moment to launch his action. On a quiet night, when the old man wakes up from his sleep, the narrator attacks brutally and without mercy. This action reflects the intensity of the narrator's obsession and cruelty, who feels that only by killing can he be freed from his anxiety over the old man's eyes as reflected in the following quote:

"With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once --once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eyes would trouble me no more."

TTTH (1843)

The quote depicts an extreme kind of violence committed by the narrator against an older man, who is represented as weaker and powerless. This violence exemplifies toxic masculinity dynamics, in which the offender targets males viewed as lesser in order to preserve a sense of superiority and control (Rogeta & Gafari, 2023). The violence against the old man is not just a form of physical dominance, but also a representation of the narrator's urge to demonstrate his control through violence, which is a defining feature of hegemonic masculinity and supports violent behavior. In this context, the narrator's actions depict violence against men who are considered inferior as a way to maintain his status as a dominant masculine figure. R. W. Connell (1982) states that in a patriarchal society, hegemonic masculinity holds a high position compared to subordinate masculinity which displays weak, timid, and homosexual traits. Although the old man poses no physical threat, the narrator still feels the need to erase his existence, suggesting that in the world of toxic masculinity, violence becomes a means to overcome feelings of insecurity and inferiority that the perpetrator may feel. The concept of toxic masculinity is often defined by aggressiveness, violence, and the prohibition to show the emotion of crying, which is considered as an attitude of weakness (Ramdani & Wisesa, 2022). His action related to Hegemonic Masculinity, which emphasizes strength and dominance, encouraging boys to prove their masculinity through violence (Rosen & Nofziger, 2019). The narrator even feels proud and satisfied after killing the victim, showing how toxic masculinity can distort rationalise violence against weaker men as right and necessary.

Lack of Emotional Control and Remorse

Men are often unable to express their deepest feelings as freely as women, so many men channel their inner conflicts through harmful defence mechanisms, such as, violence, anger, risk-taking or infidelity. All these behaviours, according to Robertson et al. (2015), are paradoxical responses to the sense of weakness, vulnerability and humiliation they feel. In *TBC*, the protagonist clearly demonstrates her inability to manage her emotions in a healthy way. His propensity towards violent acts, as well as his lack of remorse, are indicative of the form of hegemonic masculinity described by (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In a patriarchal culture, men are often taught to suppress emotions such as guilt or empathy, which are considered contrary to the idealised image of masculinity. The protagonist's action of hiding his wife's body after the murder is a manifestation of this emotional suppression, where he asserts his image of masculinity by ignoring guilt and empathy, as presented in the following quote:

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"This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar."

TBC (1845)

The quote shows the terrible emotional control of the main character after committing the brutal murder of his wife. After the heinous act, instead of showing any guilt or remorse, the protagonist calmly plans a way to hide his wife's body. He considers various options, from cutting the body into small pieces to burning it, or digging a grave in the cellar floor. This shows the character's inability to feel empathy or express normal human emotions, such as guilt. The protagonist's inability to control his emotions, as well as his indifference to the atrocities he commits, is one manifestation of toxic masculinity. This misguided emotional control leads to a cold and deliberate act of concealing the crime, without a hint of remorse. This reflects how in patriarchal cultures, men are often encouraged to display physical strength and aggressiveness as a form of pride (Efrilia, 2013). The inability to express emotions in a healthy way creates a moral distortion, where violence is considered a legitimate form of domination. This lack of remorse is also indicative of a deeper moral breakdown, where individuals trapped in toxic masculinity tend to view violent behaviour as something that can be done without considering social or emotional norms. Men often see themselves as free from moral or ethical constraints, which results in the destruction of their ability to build healthy and empathetic relationships (Demartoto, 2010). This insensitivity to emotions further deepens the distance between the perpetrator and society, where the character is isolated from his social world, trapped in a cycle of violence, hatred and indifference that damages not only himself but also those around him.

On the other hand, Lack of emotional control and remorse are also clearly evident in *TTTH*. The protagonist attempts to suppress feelings of guilt or empathy that do not align with the image of Hegemonic masculinity through the violent act of hiding the old man's corpse. Each step is carefully calculated by him, showing how the narrator is not only trying to remove any trace of his crime, but also takes pride in his ingenuity in doing so. This pride reflects the narrator's sense of superiority, who sees his actions as a great success, as if the murder was an achievement worthy of honour. This shows how the performance of masculinity lies not only in physical violence, but also in the intellectual dominance and emotional control shown by the narrator. This can be seen from the following quote:

"If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye -- not even his -- could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out --no stain of any kind --no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all --ha! Ha!"

TTTH (1843)

The quote highlights how the narrator commits a horrible deed without displaying any sorrow after the fact. The narrator does not feel terrible about his acts; instead, he meticulously and calculatingly conceals the victim's body. He disassembled the corpse calmly and emotionlessly, painstakingly rearranging the floor as if this barbaric deed were a technical assignment requiring expertise and accuracy. The narrator's extreme emotional control while committing such sadistic acts reflects his inability to feel empathy or remorse, two essential elements in normal human behaviour. Instead of feeling guilt, the narrator feels proud of his ingenuity in avoiding detection. This was evident when he gleefully explained how he had hidden the victim's body without leaving a trace. Men tend to be physically ambitious and consider aggressive behaviour a source of pride. In this context, violence

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becomes a tool to demonstrate superiority and power (Efrilia, 2013). individuals with Dark Triad traits tend to use emotional manipulation strategies to maintain dominance, which aligns with the norms of hegemonic masculinity (Waddell et al., 2020). Within the dynamics of toxic masculinity, violence and aggression are perceived as legitimate ways to assert control and dominance, while feelings such as remorse or empathy are suppressed or ignored. According to Scott-Samuel (2009) Toxic masculinity refers to a variant of masculinity characterised by negative attributes such as excessive toughness, aggressiveness, unnecessary risk-taking, and suppression of emotions. The combination of these factors gives rise to destructive actions, both towards oneself and others, as reflected in the actions of the narrator in this story. Although the protagonist in both stories commits horrific crimes, in the end he still shows his humanity. This is reflected in the feelings of guilt that arise at the end of the story, where he finally confesses his evil deeds to the police. This process of confession shows the inner conflict experienced by the protagonist, where despite being entangled in moral darkness, there is an awareness of his guilt that emerges as part of a complex human condition. Ultimately, even though the crime perpetrated is difficult to justify, his confession indicates a deep remorse and search for redemption.

CONCLUSIONS

This study identifies the forms of toxic masculinity in the short stories *TBC* and *TTH* by Edgar Allan Poe, focusing on the influence of violence and alcoholism on the main character's social relationships. The results show that toxic masculinity, characterised by aggressive dominance, inability to control emotions, and suppression of feeling expression, has a destructive impact on the protagonist's personality and social relationships. This phenomenon not only reflects the social conditions of Poe's time but is also relevant to the challenges of modern society, where toxic masculinity is often associated with gender-based violence, alcoholism, and weakened social relationships. In the context of today's society, an understanding of toxic masculinity can provide important insights to address these issues, including the influence of patriarchal culture on intergender relationships. Future research could extend this analysis by using feminist perspectives or queer theory to explore power and gender relations in greater depth. In addition, interdisciplinary studies involving criminology and addiction studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between violence, alcoholism and toxic masculinity, both in literary and real-life contexts.

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