



**JACLR**

*Journal of Artistic Creation & Literary  
Research*

*JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access Graduate Student Journal of the Universidad Complutense Madrid that publishes interdisciplinary research on literary studies, critical theory, applied linguistics and semiotics, and educational issues. The journal also publishes original contributions in artistic creation in order to promote these works.

---

**Volume 2 Issue 1 (July 2014) Article 4**

**Daniela Sandoval Fierro**

**"The Psychopath in Dostoyevsky and Poe: A Psychological insight of a killer"**

---

**Recommended Citation**

Sandoval Fierro, Daniela. "The Psychopath in Dostoyevsky and Poe: A Psychological insight of a killer." *JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 2.1 (2014): 37-50  
<<https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>>  
©Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

This text has been blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

---

**Abstract:** My purpose in this paper is to explore psychopathic behavioural patterns in the characters of three well-known fictional works: the short narratives "William Wilson" (1839) and "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) by Edgar Allan Poe and the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. A psychopath is not a common killer, even if he might share some features of their behaviour like anti-social habits and violent tendencies. The paper will shed some light in the direction of understanding psychopathological traits by analysing contemporary bio-sociological research on the topic. The study explores this through the protagonists of these three fictional works. They are self-centred individuals who pursue their plans with calculation and lack of empathy only to undergo a sort of death after their wicked plans have been accomplished.

**Keywords:** Psychopathy, Fearless, Crime, Goal-oriented, Lack of Empathy, Behaviour.

**Daniela SANDOVAL**

## **The Psychopath in Dostoyevsky and Poe: A Psychological Insight of a Killer**

### **0. Introduction: Psychopathic profiles in Poe and Dostoyevsky.**

Edgar Allan Poe and Fyodor Dostoyevsky are among the writers who begin to explore psychological disorders in some of their works. In particular, their works "William Wilson" (1839), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) approach the topic of psychopathologies from the point of view of their protagonists. Psychopaths present an inner conflict, more visible in some, that appears at a superficial or at a deeper level. Their cold-blooded attraction for violence, the infliction of pain and cold-blooded death on their victims is evident. Empathy and fear are both feelings that seem to be lacking in their psychological profiles. These personality deviations can sometimes be traced back to their remote childhood. The topic is of particular interest to Poe and Dostoyevsky who in their works present killers who appear to be perfectly normal people.

There is nothing on earth that justifies killing another individual and yet history is full of war stories, murderous thieves and passion crimes. Documented records on the topic can be traced back as early as the biblical story of Cain and his younger brother Abel, the two sons of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. The oldest known copy of the biblical narrative is from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and dates to the first century BCE. Cain is described as a crop farmer and city-builder (Genesis 4:17) and Abel as a shepherd. Cain committed the first murder by killing his brother. Interpretations of Genesis 4 by ancient and modern commentators have typically assumed that the motives were jealousy and anger. Cain is described as bearing forever the mark of loneliness and social alienation that sets the murderer apart from the rest of human beings as God condemns Cain to exile: "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now [art] thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth." (Genesis 4:10-4:12) Modern scholars think that the story is a metaphor that refers the development of civilization, when agriculture replaced the ways of the hunter-gatherer.

One of the first theories on fratricide was developed by Sigmund Freud in relation to his formulation of the Oedipus and Electra complex. As a Jew, Freud was aware of the Midrash biblical version where Cain and Abel are not the only offspring of Adam and Eve. They are twins born with one sister each. In order to avoid incest, Adam decided that Abel would marry Cain's sister and Cain, Abel's sister. Cain refused while Abel respected the paternal law. The theme of fratricide has been passed on in various works of literary fiction. One example that approaches the plot in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is the struggle between the two sons of the Duke of Gloucester in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the legitimate son Edgar, and the illegitimate Edmund.

Apparently, the term 'psychopath' came into use in the late 1800s, and "it embraced a broad group of behaviour pathologies suggestive of psychopathology but unclassifiable in any of the categories of mental disorder." (Lykken, 2005, p. 3) There seems to be no apparent reason for the development of psychopathic disorders. There is no equation to explain it neither a way to foresee it or prevent it, but there are some biological and sociological factors that must be taken into account to explain psychopath behaviour. Contemporary neurological research on the topic is unable to explain whether psychopathological traits are inscribed in human DNA, or if such individuals are the result of their childhood experiences and upbringing. It is clear, however, that when an individual

decides to step down from the established sociological frame and take someone else's life, he or she is distancing himself (psychopaths are generally men) from the rest of society.

In this paper I will explore the short stories "William Wilson" (1839), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) by Edgar Allan Poe and the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. They all merge in the fact that each of them presents a killer who we discover gradually and who has a tragic ending. My goal is trying to study the characters' internal strife and lack of emotional self-control with regards to their relationships with others. In particular, I intend to explore psychopathic behavioural patterns in the characters of the above mentioned works from a sociological and a biological point of view.

In "William Wilson" we run into the main character of this story that grows as a hysteric person and has a personal drama because he is never in peace, as he believes there is another William Wilson that wants to imitate him and to be better than him. He feels that this doppelganger<sup>1</sup> (who even shares his name) haunts him.

This experience annuls him as an individual and makes his life a continuous struggle due to the fact that he feels this double is in constant need of nullifying him and the main character of this short story ends up taking his life, that is his own life. In this case we see how the crime bounces against his author, annihilating him by killing his alter ego.

The second short story that I aim to analyse, "The Tell-Tale Heart" is narrated by a mentally disturbed person that is obsessed with an old man who he seems to work for, or for whom he shows respect, as he calls him 'the old man'. Poe presents a character whose acts are driven by an insane obsession that impulses him to commit a murder. He presents himself as being sane but he is far from sanity. He has a fixed obsession on the old man's eye and the observation of this "evil eye" is what triggers his evil actions.

In *The Brothers Karamazov* we witness a family drama. Fyodor Pavlovitch, who got married twice and had three children just to let them be forgotten. He had a fourth child, the fatherless Smeddyarkov, who grew up to be a despicable being that ended up taking his father's life. This individual, the bastard parricidal son is someone who, just as his brothers do, secretly wishes the death of his father. Being him the only one to carry out this crime.

### **1. Analysis of what some psychopaths could have in common.**

The three fictional characters in the works under study share some characteristics as they fulfill a psychopathic profile. They have three features in common: Due to their compound of emotional experience, they have a different perception of life as they do not feel remorse for their actions, they have a goal directed behaviour that leads them to commit villainous crimes and it is precisely the aftermath of their atrocities what finishes them (the materialization of their plans marks their endings). I will try to analyse their lack of remorse from a biological point of view in this section and I want to analyse these points from a sociological perspective in the last one.

Biologically, psychopaths perceive other people in a completely different way than average individuals do. They seem to be emotionless and heartless, and their inability to establish intersubjective relations with others makes it easy for them to commit atrocious crimes.

Their lack of emotion is shown in the way they plan and meditate every move they make, fearlessly and calmly. In Poe's "Tell tale heart" and Dostoyevsky's novel we run into two characters whose premeditated actions end in a murder. Interestingly, psychopaths do not act impulsively. Their lack of emotion is shown in the way they plan and meditate every move they make, fearlessly and calmly.

One of the essential traits in the pathology, described in *The Psychopath: Emotion and the Brain* as "in urgent need of understanding" (Blair, Mitchell, & Blair, 2005) is the

---

<sup>1</sup> Doppelganger: 1) A ghostly counterpart of a living person; 2)a: Double, b: Alter ego, c: A person who has the same name as another. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

emotional impairment of psychopaths. "With respect to psychopathy, the relative absence of such states and traits, such as guilt, empathy, fear, and feelings of intimacy toward others, is probably most diagnostically relevant." (Patrick 108). "In short, psychopathy is an emotional disorder, which, if it develops into its full form, puts the individual at risk of repeated displays of extreme antisocial behaviour" (Blair et al. 17). Some research has been made about the last idea. The main supposition is that psychopaths react differently from average individuals when confronting what they might consider a threatening event. "Some endogenous factors may predispose individuals' basic threat responsiveness. An increased risk of reactive aggression has been seen in children and in adults suffering from depression and anxiety" (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay 31). Some studies stress the role of over-activity in certain areas of the brain that carry basic threat information (Drevets., 2003; Kagan & Snidman 1999). For some researchers, it is plausible that this over-activity has a genetic basis (Hettema, Neal, & Kendler, 2001; Johnson Mc Gue, Gaist Vaupel, & Christensen, 2002). Although research on this is not conclusive, endogenous factors do seem to predispose individuals to depression and anxiety and even increase the probability that they will express reactive aggression patterns in the face of dangerous environments (Raine 32; Blair, Mitchell, & Blair, 2005).

An article by Ronald D. Milo sheds light on a very interesting topic regarding psychopathy. In his article, there is a reference to the lack of moral in a psychopath: "The psychopath has been described as seeing nothing wrong with his behaviour and as lacking a moral sense" (Milo 485). The author also refers to the psychopath's absence of empathy when he says that "Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the psychopath is that he is entirely egocentric, without any concern whatsoever for the needs and interests of others" (Milo 485). Finally, Milo concludes that the psychopath can be described as lacking the concept of moral wrong- doing or as simply being indifferent to matters of right and wrong, and asserts that "I am inclined to think that the amorality of the psychopath consists not in a lack of moral understanding, but rather in his indifference to the rightness or wrongness of what he does" (Milo 487). Thus, Milo seems to suggest that it is not clear if the psychopath is indifferent to or does not understand the differences between wrong and right.

In "Edgar Allan Poe's Aesthetic Theory, the Insanity Debate, and the Ethically Oriented Dynamics of 'The Tell-Tale Heart'," a paper by Dan Shen, the author states that "The Tell-Tale Heart" is characterized by the first-person narrator's gloating over his own dissemblance. Indeed, the narrator description emphasizes his own cunning and premeditation: "You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!" (Poe, 1843:3) The words "wisely," "caution," and "foresight", referring partly to his well-prepared concealment of the corpse, point to the narrator's belief in his own powers. During the day, the man acts completely natural, he even dares to be kind to the old man. Shen points out that "At daybreak he would hypo- critically go into the old man's chamber, "calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night" (Shen 329).

Smerdyakov also shows many other psychopathological traits. For instance, he shows many signs of aforethought. He is manipulative and extremely cruel, going as far as creating a scenario where Mitya would commit the murder: "I expected him to kill Fyodor Pavlovitch. I thought that was certain, for I had prepared him for it ... during the last few days... He knew about the knocks, that was the chief thing" (Dostoyevsky 812). He shares with Ivan that when being questioned by the police, he even tried to seed some ideas into the police officer's mind. By doing this, he was being scheming as he was tying loose ends, he was inducing the prosecutor that Dmitri had stolen the envelope with the three thousand roubles and left the envelope on the floor. "I didn't say that openly to the prosecutor when I was being examined, but quite the contrary, I brought him to it by a hint, as though I didn't see it myself" (Dostoyevsky 818). Ivan was looking for answers in regards to Mitya's guilt so he visited his evil half brother very often and what Smedyarkov does is that he manipulates

Ivan in his second interview, making Ivan believe Mitya was the killer. Unfortunately this is confirmed to Ivan by Katerina's letter and this letter is what impulses the unfortunate circumstances that will affect negatively Mitya's trial. He finally confessed and he just did because he wanted too, and he insisted that he could have got away with his crime: "Aren't you tired of it? Here we are face to face; what's the use of going on keeping up a farce to each other? Are you still trying to throw it all on me, to my face? You murdered him; you are the real murderer, I was only your instrument, your faithful servant, and it was following your words I did it" (Dostoyevsky 808).

It looks like Poe's characters and Dostoyevsky's Smedyarkov struggle with self-punishment, a mechanism that is unconscious and that creates sensory disturbance in their perception. We shall not understand this as self-punishment because as I mentioned before when referring to Ronald D. Milo's article, when regarding social factors that lead to psychopathology, there are a lot of reasons to believe that a psychopath does not feel remorse as he has not developed a full grasp of what morality is like. Therefore, the disruption of perception killers perceive could be observed as the self-realisation of what it is to be responsible for your actions, this happens in the aftermath of their crimes. Consciousness characterizes external and internal perceptions within the whole mental phenomenon. Psychopathologies, however, unsettle perception. There is some sort of disconnection to reality in Poe's short stories and in Dostoyevsky. In "The Tell Tale Heart" we can feel the killer's words, who we can feel is a mentally disturbed person as he starts defending he is not mad when nobody had questioned his mental state beforehand "Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing but you should have seen me." (Poe, 1843:3) These lines show the killer's high level of insanity by claiming he is sane and justifying his perception: "TRUE!-nervous -very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses- not destroyed – not dulled them" (Poe, 1843:3). In Dostoyevsky, we perceive from Smedyarkov's confession to Ivan that he has completely lost his way and imagines truths. I will comment on this later on when approaching Smedyarkov closely.

Self-punishment mechanisms draw a thick line between a normal person and a psychopath. Psychopaths lack self-consciousness and carry on in life without remorse. Poe's character, however, is interesting in that he wears a mask of sanity that he only takes off at night. His cynicism is evident, and this makes the reader wonder why he lets of his guard and ends up being caught. The dreadful heartbeats in his head, since the old man is already dead, drive him to exposure at the end of the short story. Are they a sign of his guilt? It may seem that the man falls into a self-punishing pattern where he unconsciously may feel a certain responsibility for his criminal action. However, the story contains evidence that shows how the murderer lacks remorse, Poe's character sits on his victim "In as 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" (Poe, 1843:5). Throughout the story, the murderer, who seems to be confessing his crime to the police, defends his own sanity. However, the reader wonders whether this emphasis is perhaps a way to get away with the murder, pleading to be insane. The above mentioned article by Shen states "As noted above, the ambiguities presented in Poe's short story are very interesting because when at the time of publication the topic was a current one in the public debate and growing controversy over the "insanity defense," a discussion developed and popularized in the 1830s by James Cowles Prichard. 'Moral insanity' was the "focus of psychological studies and polemical arguments that were replaced by the category of psychopathic personality at the end of the century"(Shen 341). In "The Tell-Tale Heart" the narrator-protagonist displays typical symptoms of partial insanity or "moral insanity" (Shen 26).

Shen adds "The heart, by beating louder, deprives the cold-blooded and marble-hearted murderer of his after-murder ease in front of the policemen, making him increasingly irritated and horrified" (Shen 337). The critic draws a line between the initial state of the character and his state after the crime by saying that: "The contrast between the

protagonist's being "dreadfully nervous" as a rule and his being "singularly at ease" in front of the policemen ironically and dramatically underscores the point that he is absolutely beyond the sense of guilt. Thus, it further rules out the possibility that he is hearing his own heart beating out of guilt" (Shen 331). Shen indicates that Poe may not be pursuing a moral debate but dealing with psychology issues. Quoting Vincent Buranelli to add "sin and crime are absent from Poe's fictional world," that Poe does not touch morality" and that "the terrible deeds that abound there are matters of psychology, abnormal psychology, not of ethics" (Buranelli 72, quoted in Shen 325).

In Dostoyevsky, there are many passages in the novel that highlight how Smerdyakov has lost grasp on reality too. He thinks of Ivan as his accomplice when he says: "You don't mean to say you really did not know? He faltered mistrustfully, looking with a forced smile into his eyes" (Dostoyevsky 808). He goes as far as accusing Ivan for Fyodor's murder: "How it was done?" sighed Smerdyakov. It was done in a most natural way, following your very words" (Dostoyevsky 811). He sets an idea on Ivan's mind he states Ivan had unconscious murderous impulses towards his father and justifies his crime in front of him basing himself on this and deep inside in the fact that he does not believe in God, he has taken that from Ivan and therefore he thinks he was doing the right thing. Smerdyakov is influenced by Ivan's thoughts and he is aware of it. He tells him that he agreed on it by leaving town. With this quote Smerdyakov is exposing what he did, it implies that as Ivan is gone he will carry out his plans. Ivan heard the same words from a peasant he bumped into on his way to Smerdyakov's. Could we regard this as a premonition to Smerdyakov's fatal confession? "Ach, Vanka's gone to Petersburg; I won't wait till he comes back, Suddenly echoed in his head" (Dostoyevsky 808, 809).

Many paragraphs in the novel show that Smerdyakov is fearless. Is it has lack of attachment to reality what allows him to display his behaviour? Smerdyakov is described as cold and self-contained: "Smerdyakov, as before, watched him curiously, with no sign of fear" (Dostoyevsky 153). His detachment, his lack of empathy and fear, are also present in his final confession, where he shows that he lives in his own mind and that he is not capable of discerning what is real. His words show he has lost perception of reality. When Ivan demands the truth from Smerdyakov, we are told he was not anxious neither scared at all "Smerdyakov was not in the least scared. He only riveted his eyes on Ivan with insane hatred" (Dostoyevsky 808).

What is more, the tranquillity of his words and even his sigh strike the reader. He is a coldblooded being that after confessing such an atrocity offered Ivan some lemonade, he even commented on how refreshing lemonade was, as if they were having the most trivial of the conversations. "Won't you have some lemonade? I'll ask for some at once. It's very refreshing. Only I must hide this first" (Dostoyevsky 810). Here, he is talking about hiding the bills he stole. As in Poe's short stories, the reader should not understand his suicide as a self-punishment mechanism but as the fact that, once he has committed his crime, there is nothing else left for him on earth. I will further develop this idea in the next paragraph.

The protagonists of "William Wilson", "The Tell-Tale Heart" and The Brothers Karamazov share something else. The materialization of their plans is what determines their endings. Their obsessions and evil plans keep them alive and give them strength only until they have accomplished them. After that, there is nothing else left for them. However, they do not show remorse and their final actions (in the case of Poe's protagonist he hands himself to the police, and in Dostoevsky, Smerdyakov kills himself) are not forms of self-inflicted punishment. Poe's protagonist confesses openly his murder: "'Villains!' I shrieked, 'Dissemble no more! I admit the deed! --Tear up the planks! Here, here! --It is the beating of his hideous heart!'" (Poe, 1843: 7). Smerdyakov also allows us to foresee that his ending is to come when he returns Ivan the money he stole. "'I don't want it,'" Smerdyakov articulated in a shaking voice, with gesture of refusal. "I did have an idea of beginning a new life with that money in Moscow or, better still, abroad" (Dostoyevsky 810). I will later show how Smerdyakov wanted to be someone else and behaved accordingly wearing ostentatious

clothes but I want to remark that by returning the money he is showing us he does not have more plans in life.

## **2. What makes these psychopaths different.**

In the previous section, I have intended to analyse some common factors that the murderers under study have. In this one, I intend to show two factors that differentiate them. The first one is that even though they all undergo a conflict, their own personal crusades, they do so at two different levels. Some of them make their intentions more evident than others. The second thing is that they have different aggressive reactions, we will analyse these two reactions in the crime scene with regard to understand what prompted their evil actions.

Poe's characters plans are easier to understand from the starting point whereas Smerdyakov hides his intentions until the very end. Poe's characters are riddled with anxiety while on the contrary Smerdyakov is filled by an internal hatred and does not present any anxiety at all.

Some characters in Poe's short stories show their inner conflict openly. In "The Tell Tale Heart", we get to know from the beginning that the main character is undergoing a personal crusade: "It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night" (Poe, 1843:3). This character lets us know what his intentions are from the outset by saying this: "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 forever" (Poe, 1843:3). William Wilson is not a stable person as well and he is aware of his wickedness: "From comparatively trivial wickedness I passed, with the stride of a giant, into more than the enormities of an Elah- Gabalus (Poe, 1857:417).

Besides, the reader can feel Smerdyakov's lack of agitation when he confesses his crime to Ivan without blinking and is worried about taking care of his guest, telling him he should take off his greatcoat: "You'd better take off your greatcoat, or you'll be too hot" (Dostoyevsky 811). From his words we see he is not affected by the revelation he just made but acts in a natural, almost frivolous way.

In what follows I intend to show that their reactions can be explained as two distinct forms of aggression. In 'reactive aggression', "a frustrating or threatening event triggers the aggressive act and frequently also induces anger. Importantly, the aggression is initiated without regard for any potential goal (for example, gaining the victim's possession or increasing status within the hierarchy). In contrast, instrumental aggression (also referred to as proactive aggression) is purposeful and goal directed" (Blair et al. 12) and "Crucially, this emotional dysfunction puts the individual at risk for developing heightened levels of goal-directed, instrumental aggression" (Blair et al. 17).

In "The Tell Tale Heart", the protagonist experiments a series of obsessive perceptions that become unbearable. Despite the fact that Poe explains that: "The old man had never wronged me. He had never given me insult" (Poe, 1843:3). The experience of sound, the old man's heartbeat, that he somehow is able to hear constantly, drives him crazy. "I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage" (Poe, 1843:5). We can grasp in these lines that his frustration grows until it becomes anger. We perceive his struggle when he unhesitatingly shares that he can hear the old man's heart and that they neighbour may hear it too, that pushes him to act: "But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me --the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come!" (Poe, 1843:5). He hates the old man, and finally decides to kill him. Poe's story illustrates perfectly a case of 'reactive aggression' because an alarming event, the old man's eye detonates an aggressive act. The killer, who observed his victim at midnight did not act during the first seven nights as the old man's eye was closed: "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" (Poe, 1843:3). The night he committed the murder, he opened a little crevice in his lantern and full of horror saw that the eye was staring at him: "It was open --wide, wide open --and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness --all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot" (Poe, 1843:5).

In "William Wilson" the main character undergoes disruption in his perception. In his case, rather than a hearing hallucination, he has a visual one and he is completely aware of it: "Have I not indeed been living a dream? And am I not now dying a victim to the horror and the mystery of the wildest of all sublunary visions?" (Poe, 1857: 417). William Wilson presents with reactive aggression as well, it is his encounter with the other Wilson in Rome in a masquerade what triggers his lethal outcome. The other William interfered in his plans; he intended to conquer a lady, a gorgeous married woman who had communicated secretly with him before the masquerade. This doppelgänger's interference was unbearable to the protagonist, in his eyes that was the last straw. "In an absolute phrenzy of wrath, I turned at once upon him who had thus interrupted me, and seized him violently by the collar" (Poe, 1857: 435).

On the other hand, in Dostoevsky, Smerdyakov presents a case of 'instrumental aggression'. Smedyarkov's lack of empathy is striking as he is not preoccupied about Mitya's fate and he excuses his behaviour when he confesses everything to Ivan: "It was only with you, with your help, I killed him and Dmitri Fyodorovitch is quite innocent." (Dostoyevsky, 2009, p. 810). Smedyarkov does not help Dmitri and he leaves him at the mercy of his own luck. Ivan unravels Smedyarkov's plan by inquiring about the night the murder took place. In Smedyarkov's scheme, Grigory was a basic part as his testimony proved Dmitri was in the crime scene. Grigory declared he saw the house's door open and that incriminated Dmitri, setting him right on the spot of the crime but the truth is that when Dmitri was there, the door was closed and seeing it open was just part of Grigory's imagination. When discussing this with Ivan, Smedyarkov speaks of him and Ivan as if they were a team, he states they were both lucky that Grigory imagined the door was open: "It's just our luck he took that notion into his head, for they can't fail to convict Dmitri Fyodorovitch after that" (Dostoyevsky 817). Finally he acknowledged that he acted on his own and realized Ivan was not his accomplice. Such a revelation shatters his confidence: "Smedyarkov, as before, watched him curiously, with no sign of fear. He could still scarcely get over his incredulity; he still fancied that Ivan knew everything and was trying to "throw it all on him to his face" (Dostoyevsky 809). After confirming that his brother Dmitri was not a killer, he decided he would take Smedyarkov with him to the trial but Smedyarkov's intentions are far from that. After acknowledging Ivan's intentions he said: "There'll be nothing of the sort, and you won't go," he concluded at last positively (Dostoyevsky 820). The realization that Ivan is not his associate and that he wants to denunciate him causes him to take his life. There is resolution in his words, he knew for a fact that he would not go to the trial because he was going to commit suicide. We can see in each author a different type of aggressive reaction and although their evil actions happen in different way they fuse in something: after their crimes, these killers distance themselves from the rest of men.

### **3. Social factors that may contribute to psychopathy.**

In this last section, I will consider some social factors that may contribute to the appearance of psychopathy in individuals. Sociologically, it has been studied that a wide range of psychopaths have not undergone the elemental social processes most ordinary individuals go through. I will consider this fact in Poe's stories and I am going to pay close attention to The Brothers Karamazov in regards to this as the length of the text provides with more background to do so. I will develop that analysis by giving a look to Fyodor Pavlovitch's four sons, whose psychological traits could mark them as potential psychopaths if we study them



from a sociological angle and I will emphasize my analysis on Smedyarkov, the bastard son who executes the terrible deed that the brothers secretly long for.

When analysing social factors, it has been studied that in many cases psychopaths have not experienced some of the basic social processes that average individuals undergo, especially in their childhood, a crucial stage for development of personality. The Handbook of Psychopathy refers to this idea by defining a psychopath as someone who did not undergo a normal process of socialization. David Lykken explains that for him, a psychopath is "an individual in whom the normal processes of socialization have failed to produce the mechanisms of conscience and habits of law-abidingness that normally constrain antisocial impulses" (Lykken 7).

In "What is the Ultimate Cause of Psychopathy?" a chapter in the volume *The psychopath: emotion and the brain*, a correlation between psychopathy and attachment is established. (Blair et al., 2005) J. Blair, D. Mitchell and K. Blair mention the connection between anomalous attachment, conduct disorder and the appearance of the disease as factors that slow down the creation of morality in an individual. This malfunctioning generally begins to occur in infancy, in children who lack strong family ties and whose socialization is impaired. There is also evidence that indicates a relationship between people who break the law and elevated levels of disturbed attachment (Saltaris, 2002). Moreover, there are studies that point out the relationship between anomalous attachment styles, conduct disorders and aggression (DeKlyen, Speltz, & Greenberg 3-21; Lyons-Ruth., 1996; Lyons-Ruth, Alpern, Repacholi, 1993). Theories of attachment suggest that poor attachment contributes to psychopathy by disrupting the process that leads to the development of morality. The claim is that the neutral responsiveness characteristic of early interactions with parents provides a starting point for the development of concern and commitment towards others (Saltaris., 2002; see also Hare 39).

Parental attitudes are also important in the development of psychopathology. There are claims that inconsistent discipline, physical punishment, broken homes and childhood separations may have an impact (see Forth and Burke, 1998). For example, Lisa A. Marshall and David J. Cooke examined two main categories of childhood experiences in psychopathic and non -psychopathic offenders. These were, a) family dynamics including parental antipathy or neglect, and b) societal influences such as experiences and performance at school or an institution (Martial and Cooke 41). These authors underline that:

Family variables appear to influence the behavioural component of psychopathy. Antisocial parents and, perhaps, parental alcoholism will provide the child with antisocial models (and may also reflect genetic load) inconsistent discipline and a lack of supervision are likely to increase the child's opportunity for antisocial behaviour. None of these variables are likely to be casual (Martial and Cooke 42).

William Wilson lacks connection with his parents; he regards them as strangers who cannot control him as he has control of his wicked propensities. He offers the reader a psychological insight of his thoughts:

As I advanced in years it was more strongly developed; becoming for many reasons, a cause of serious disquietude to my friends, and of positive injury to myself. I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. Weak-minded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me. Some feeble and ill-directed efforts resulted in complete failure on their part and, of course, in total triumph on mine (Poe, 1857:418).

Poe's protagonist in *The Tell-Tale heart* is somehow related to his victim. We can tell for a fact that they have some sort of connection: "Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire" (Poe, 1843:3). He ventured to say he loved him and that he did not want his money but we do not get to so much of this connection as we do in Dostoyevsky's work because Poe's is a short story.

This idea took me to Smedyarkov too, who happens to be a son born out of wedlock that never had a home and fits in the first category mentioned above: he underwent parental neglect. "He was a young man of about four and twenty, remarkably unsociable and taciturn. Not that he was shy or bashful. On the contrary, he was conceited and seemed to despise everybody" (Dostoyevsky 152).

In addition to this, he never developed attachment to anybody and therefore did not develop a sense of morality and if he did, we can see from his actions that his is indifferent to what is wrong and what is right. Ivan reproached Smedyarkov for his acts and this was what the later replied "You used to say yourself that everything was lawful, so now why are you so upset too?" (Dostoyevsky 820). In Smedyarkov's eyes everything is legitimate and it is just because of that that he does not understand Ivan's censorship.

The socialization period is a crucial time during which individuals acquire the notion of what morally wrong means. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the reader is aware that Fyodor has never been a good father. Early in the novel he is described in the following terms: "The former buffoon showed an insolent propensity for making buffoons of others. His depravity with women was not simply what it used to be, but even more revolting." (Dostoyevsky, 2009, p. 22). Fyodor never patented his children. His first son was taken away very young, and the other two kids were raised up far from their home. "They were completely forgotten and abandoned by their father" (Dostoyevsky 11). Their education was paid by Yefim Petrovitch, who had also taken care of their mother as well as the orphans before passing away: "He educated them both at his own expense, and certainly spent far more than a thousand roubles upon each of them" (Dostoyevsky 11).

The author wants us to know that the children were aware of their situation, and offers a description of Ivan that presents some of his psychological features:

I will only say that he grew into a somewhat morose and reserved, though far from timid boy. At ten years old he had realized that they were living not in their own home but on other people's charity, and that their father was a man of whom it was disgraceful to speak (Dostoyevsky 13).

As if it were not enough to have an insensitive father, Ivan's mother's situation did not help either. There is a reference to Alyosha and Ivan's mother that portrays her as a sad being: "In the end this unhappy young woman, kept in terror from her childhood, fell into that kind of nervous disease which is most frequently found in peasant women who are said to be 'possessed' by devils. At times after terrible fits of hysterics she even lost her reason" (Dostoyevsky 11).

The reader can see the lack of a proper home environment in the personality of the three sons and in Smedyarkov simultaneously. The absence of a father figure is very obvious. The youngest son, Alyosha sticks to his early memories and when he returns to the town, he longs to see his mother's grave. "On his arrival in the town he made no answer to his father's first inquiry why he had come before completing his studies, and seemed, so they say, unusually thoughtful. It soon became apparent that he was looking for his mother's tomb" (Dostoyevsky 21). What is surprising is that Alyosha does not feel anything when he does so. "Alyosha showed no particular emotion at the sight of his mother's grave" (Dostoyevsky 23). This just illustrates the melancholy left by a broken home.

Although none of the three brothers commit their father's crime. There are many clues that point at the brothers as potential killers. Mitya is depicted as a murderous person on all accounts. There are also continuous allusions to the Karamazov's nature, as if ' It seems that only Alyosha is initially excluded of this, but Rakitin makes an allusion to his "Karamazov nature" as well. This occurs after the meeting at Father Zossima's cell, when he says to Alyosha: "You're a Karamazov yourself; you're a thorough Karamazov-no doubt birth and selection have something to answer for. You're a sensualist from your father, a crazy saint from your mother" (Dostoyevsky 95). With these words, Rakitin is telling Alyosha that he is just like the members of his family and he tries to drag him into temptation with Grushenka but Alyosha remains pure.

Rakitin makes a reference to Ivan's nature too he says: "He's a Karamazov too. What is at the root of all you Karamazov's is that you are all sensual, grasping and crazy!" (Dostoyevsky 96). In this same conversation, Rakitin ventures to insinuate that Ivan wants his Mitya to murder their father by stating that "Some murderous conflict may well come to pass from all this, and that's what your brother Ivan is waiting for. It would suit him down to the ground. He'll carry off Katerina Ivanova for whom he is languishing, and pocket her dowry of sixty thousand" (Dostoyevsky 215).

The book leads you to think Mitya may be the killer. That thought is supported by the opinions of several people because everyone exaggerated when talking about Mitya. For example, Madame Hohlakov, a wealthy acquaintance of Katerina Ivanova, exaggerates about the fatal night when Mitya visited her in order to get three thousand roubles from her. When recalling Mitya's visit, the lady exclaims, "how near death she had been" (Dostoyevsky 581). She even ventures to say she foresaw what would happen when she says "And how often I've looked at that awful man and always thought that man will end by murdering me. And now it's happened ... that is, if he hasn't murdered me, but only his own father" (Dostoyevsky 579).

Even Fyodor himself is scared of Mitya. When Mitya visits him, this is his reaction: "The old man rush to Ivan in terror. "He'll kill me! He'll kill me! Don't let him get at me!" he screamed, clinging to the skirt of Ivan's coat" (Dostoyevsky 171).

It looks as if Mitya's own words betray him as he openly shares his intentions with everyone in the town and he declares that he would kill his father in father's Zossima's cell. There is even more to Mitya's unstable attitude. When questioned at Mokroe, he speaks about the fatal day at Zossima's cell: "And the very same day, in the evening I beat my father. I nearly killed him, and I swore I'd come again and kill him, before witnesses! (Dostoyevsky 595). This speaking style betrays him and marks him as a dangerous man. Besides, he utters the following words in Mokroe: "If I didn't kill Fenya then, gentlemen, it was only because I hadn't time" (Dostoyevsky 606).

In the case of Ivan, the author presents him as someone incapable of controlling himself: "He had no clear idea what he would do, but he knew that he could not control himself and that a touch might drive him to the utmost limits of obscenity, but only to obscenity, to nothing criminal, nothing for which he could be legally punished." e." (Dostoyevsky 104)

The reader is thus driven to read even faster, eager to find out more about the circumstances of the crime, even if this is announced from the beginning. Its father Zossima's bending to Mitya what gets the reader on track, making us suspect something terrible is going to happen. This monk foresees Mitya's suffering and blesses Ivan as well. The morbid curiosity seems to be intrinsic human nature, and Dostoyevsky explores this as well. Only after the reader discovers that Smerdyakov is the murderer, the display of his plan lies before the reader's eyes. It is only then that the reader begins to understand Smerdyakov's mind.

Basing my hypothesis on the lack of family ties and lack of models of attachment, one can argue that Smerdyakov's criminal behaviour arises from internal resentment to his father. There is evidence in the text that shows that Fyodor may have cared for him to a certain extent. For example, after his first epileptic fit, he seems to take more interest in him, the narrator explains: "As soon as he heard of his illness, he showed an active interest in him, sent for a doctor, and tried remedies, but the disease turned out to be incurable." e" (Dostoyevsky 153). The narrator adds "He even forbade Grigory to use corporal punishment to the boy and began allowing him to come upstairs to him. He forbade him to be taught anything whatever for a time, too" (Dostoyevsky 153). Fyodor was nice to Smerdyakov was nice to him in some occasions, "He at once gave Smerdyakov the key of the bookcase. "Come, read. You shall be my librarian. You'll be better sitting reading than hanging about the courtyard." e" (Dostoyevsky 606).

These lines show Fyodor's keen interest in him and that is more than we could say about his interest in his other sons that grew in oblivion to him. The ambiguity that lies behind Fyodor Pavlovich's paternity is crucial in the novel. Fyodor proclaims Smerdyakov's illegitimacy, and the fact that he is the son of the village idiot. His very name is degrading, "Smedyarkov", a variation of "stinking" in Russian. In fact, Smedyarkov is described as producing an evil odour. Nevertheless, Fyodor allows the child to be brought to be cared for. "Fyodor Pavlovitch did not object to any of this, and thought it amusing, though he persisted vigorously in denying his responsibility. The townspeople were pleased at his adopting the foundling" (Dostoyevsky 121).

Grigory and his wife Marfa, Fyodor's housekeepers had recently lost a child, a six-fingered baby so they allow him to live at their house with Fyodor's permission." Grigory took the baby, brought it home, and making his wife sit down, put it on her lap. "A child of God-an orphan is akin to all," he said, "and to us above others. Our little lost one has sent us this, who has come from the devil's son and a holy innocent" (Dostoyevsky 121). They accepted Lizaveta's son in their house but Smerdyarkov never had real parents. Grigory was the closest thing he had to a father and he treated him overtly "as a monster" or even dared to ask him if he were a human being. "'He doesn't care for you or me, the monster,'" Grigory used to say to Marfa", and he doesn't care for anyone. Are you a human being?" he said, addressing the boy directly" (Dostoyevsky 152).

We see a case of disconnection with Grigory from his early childhood. While Grigory tried teaching him the Bible, Smedyarkov found contradictions in the books, and refused to learn. In his infant years he took pleasure in sacrificing animals, he particularly enjoyed hanging cats and burying them in a special ritual. "In his childhood he was very fond of hanging cats, and burying them with great ceremony. He used to dress up in a sheet as though it were a surplice, and sang, and waved some object over the dead cat as though it were a censer" (Dostoyevsky 152). His procedures made him a somewhat particular child who never established a connection with his foster father. After catching him red-handed in his rituals, he addressed these words to the boy: "You're not a human being. You grew from the mildew in the bathhouse. That's what you are" (Dostoyevsky 152) and Smedyarkov was severely affected by this.

Smerdyakov embraces socialism and atheism. He dresses in an ostentatious manner and shows openly a desire to call attention to himself by being a European dandy and changing his social status. At the same time he shows himself publicly as very different from what he really is. Is this due to a lack of a role model? Fyodor sent him to Moscow to be trained to be his cook. He spent some years there and it is mentioned that when returned he had changed. "On the other hand, he came back to us from Moscow well dressed, in a clean coat and clean linen. He brushed his clothes most scrupulously twice a day invariably, and was very fond of cleaning his smart calf boots with special English polish, so that they shone like mirrors" (Dostoyevsky 155). He turned out to be a great cook and "Fyodor Pavlovitch paid him a salary, almost the whole of which Smedyarkov spent on clothes, pomade, perfumes, and such things" (Dostoyevsky 155).

In his article, "The Children in The Brothers Karamazov," Rimvydas Silbajoris raises an interesting point in that Smedyarkov revelation leads Ivan to madness.

"It is Smerdyakov's deed which finally makes clear to Ivan the ultimate meaning of his intellectual challenge, and that meaning is death; for if Ivan is truly committed to the metaphysical murder of God, then he must, in the living reality of events, be his father's real murderer. The overpowering understanding of this guilt brings Ivan face to face with madness-the death of the spirit" (Silbajoris, 1963).

There are further references in the article that mention Ivan's influence on Smedyarkov and how his words have a deep effect on him. He takes from Ivan that everything is permitted as god does not exist (Silbajoris, 1963).

"If there is no God, as Ivan's arguments suggest, then the acts of injustice and cruelty are performed only by parents-monsters like his own father; and, since without God

"everything is allowed, " there can be no objection to the desire of children to revenge themselves, even to the point of destroying their cruel fathers" (Silbajoris 29).

Silbajoris states that Ivan's ideas trigger a terrible effect on Smedyarkov: "Yet Ivan's ideas have already done their fatal work: in the shrewd and yet cheap, darkly primeval and revoltingly "modern" mind of Smerdjakov they have already acquired the name of action."

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has explored psychopathic behavioural patterns in the characters of three well-known fictional works: the short narrative "William Wilson" (1839), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) by Edgar Allan Poe and the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. I have tried to analyse the characters' internal struggle from a sociobiological point of view. Although the length of Poe's short stories does not allow an in depth development of the character's background, the text provides interesting insights in how perceptual confusion is an important psychopathological trait. In the case of Dostoyevsky, Smedyarkov's character background is well established and the reader gets to see more of him.

#### Works Cited

- Blair, James; Mitchell, Derek; & Blair, Karina. Special Issue *The psychopath: Emotion and the brain. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 1 (2005): 6–17.
- Buranelli, Vincent. *Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Twayne, 1961. Print.
- DeKlyen, M. Speltz, Matthew Louis, & Greenberg, Mark T. "Fathering and early onset conduct problems: positive and negative parenting, father - son attachment, and the marital context." In *Clinical Child and Family Psychological Review* 1 (1998): 3-21. Print.
- Drevets, Wayne C. "Neuroimaging abnormalities in the amygdala in mood disorders." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 985 (2003): 420-444.
- Dostoyevsky, Fiódor. *The Brothers Karamazov* [e-Book 28054]. 2013. Retrieved from <[www.gutenberg.org/files/28054/28054-pdf.pdf](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28054/28054-pdf.pdf)>.
- Forth, Adelle E.; Burke Heather C. "Psychopathy in adolescents: assessment, violence, and developmental precursors." In R. D. Hare (ed.), *Psychopathy: Theory, research and implications for society* 25 (1998): 373-391.
- Hare, Robert D. *The Hare Psychopathy Checklist*. Multi-Health Systems, Inc. 1991. Print.
- Johnson, Wendy; McGue, Matt; Gaist, David; Vaupel, James W.; Christensen, Kaare. "Frequency and heritability of depression symptomatology in the second half of life: evidence from Danish twins over 45." *Psychological Medicine* 32 (2002): 1175–1185.
- Kagan, Jerome; Snidman Nancy. *Early childhood predictors of adult anxiety disorders. Biological Psychiatry* 46 (1999): 1536-1541.
- Lykken, David T. "Psychopathic Personality: The Scope of the Problem." In Patrick, C. J. *Handbook of Psychopathy*. New York, NY: Guilford Publications, 2006. Print.
- Lyons-Ruth, Karlen. "Attachment relationships among children with aggressive behavior problems: the role of disorganized early attachment patterns." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 64 (1996): 64–73.
- Lyons-Ruth Karlen; Alpern Lisbeth & Repacholi Betty. "Disorganized infant attachment classification and maternal psychosocial problems as predictors of hostile-aggressive behavior in the preschool classroom." *Child Development* 64 (1993): 572–585.
- Marshall Lisa A. & Cooke David J. "The childhood experiences of psychopaths: a retrospective study of familial and societal factors." *Journal of Personality Disorders* 13 (1999): 211–225.
- Milo, Ronald D. "Amorality" Oxford University Press on behalf of the Mind Association, *Mind* XCII (1983): 481-498 Retrieved from <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2254089>>.

Sandoval, Daniela. "The Psychopath in Dostoyevsky and Poe: A Psychological Insight of a Killer." *JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 2.1 (2014): 37-50  
<<https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>>  
©Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

Patrick, Christopher J. (Ed.) *Handbook of Psychopathy*. New York, NY: Guilford Publications, 2006. Print.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Works Of The Late Edgar Allan Poe With A Memoir By Rufus Wilmot Griswold And Notices Of His Life And Genice By N.P. Willis And J. R. Lowell*. New York, NY: Bedfield, 1857. Print.

Raine, Adrian. *The Psychopathology of Crime*. London: Academic Press, 1993. Print.

Shen, Dan. Edgar Allan Poe's aesthetic theory, the insanity debate, and the ethically oriented dynamics of "The Tell-Tale Heart". *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 63.3 (1995): 284-309 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncl.2008.63.3.321?origin=JSTOR-pdf>>

Salтары, Christina. Psychopathy in juvenile offenders: can temperament and attachment be considered as robust developmental precursors?, *Clinical Psychology Review* 22 (2002): 729-752.

Silbajoris, Rimvydas. "The Children in The Brothers Karamazov." *The Slavic and East European Journal* 7.1 (1963): 26-38. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/304787>>

Vitaro, Frank; Brendgen, Mara & Tremblay, Richard E. "Reactively and proactively aggressive children: antecedent and subsequent characteristics." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 43 (2002): 495-505.

**Bioprofile of the author:** Daniela Sandoval Fierro [Daniela.sandoval@estumail.ucm.es] was born in 1988 in Bogota Colombia. She studied in the bilingual Buckingham School where she learnt to focus her schooling through amiability, quality, excellence, innovation and transcendence. These values have influenced her as an approach to life and studies. She moved to Spain in 1999. She holds a Degree in English Studies from the Complutense University of Madrid and is currently studying Psychology at UNED. From a professional point of view, she has been teaching English since 2007. She started her professional experience working at several schools and then she worked at Vaughan Systems for several years. She lives in Bogota since 2013 and works at Berlitz now where she is an English instructor and a school coordinator at the bilingual school Santa Ana. Teaching at Berlitz she has had the chance of teaching several seminars and continues teaching the youngest ones, she feels a great vocation for this task which she began before starting her university studies.

**Contact:** <danna\_daniela@hotmail.com>