

Essay on the tell-tale heart

[Life](#), [Love](#)



The short story *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe focuses on the psychological inconsistencies that define madness. The author introduces us to an unnamed narrator who claims that he is extremely nervous but not insane. In defending his sanity, he shares a story where he confesses to have killed an old man. In the story, his actions were neither motivated by the passion nor desire for money, but the fear of the old man's pale blue eye. He loved the old man and had nothing against him except the man's horrible eye. He decides to kill the old man in order to be free of the horrible eye. I believe this short story provides a perfect study of mental deterioration and paranoia. Poe is very economical with the details simply to intensify the narrator's obsession with his claim of sanity, the old man's horrible eye, and the heartbeat. The use of pointed language together with the author's economic style creates the narrative content and exemplifies paranoia. The story highlights the psychological inconsistencies that lead to murderous profile. For instance, the unnamed narrator admits in the opening sentence that he had been very dreadfully nervous, yet cannot understand why he should be thought to be mad. In defending his sanity, he makes reference to his heightened sensory capacity. To him, hypersensitivity is a proof of sanity and not a symptom of madness. With this knowledge in mind, the narrator tells his story precisely and in a complete manner, making perfect use of stylistic tools of narration to drive his mentality of sanity. Nevertheless, the narrator is mad in the sense that he fails to link his narrative and the content. He precisely tells the story, but innocently reveals a tale of murder that negates his sanity. The story content betrays the sanity he tries to defend.

Contradiction is also depicted in the tension between love and hate. A psychological mystery is explored herein. According to the author, sometimes people do great harm to those whom they love and need in their lives. The narrator loves the old man, and is neither vengeful nor greedy for his wealth. His only problem is the man's vulture-eye. In proclaiming his sanity, the narrator believes that the old man's eye gives him the burden of guilt. So, he decides to separate the good man from his evil eyes. One thing the narrator fails to realize is that the eye is an inherent part of the old man's identity which cannot be separated from him. He sees the eye and the old man as completely separate and believes that he can kill the man and at the same time maintain his love for him. He is motivated by the desire to eliminate the man's evil eye. However, he doesn't realize that eliminating the man's eye will end his life. He decides to deprive the man his humanity by dismembering him. His mind then imagines that other parts of the old man's body are working against him.

Despite being hypersensitive to sound, the narrator is not able to differentiate between the real sound and imagination. His perverted sense of reality makes him obsessed by the low beats of the heart, yet denies him the concerns about the old man's shrieks. The narrator is concerned about the heartbeat which has no significant effect, but ignores the shrieks that are loud enough to attract the attention of the neighbors and draw the police to the crime scene. This is real madness!

The arrival of the police officers shows that the author is more interested in the powers of the mind than the external powers. The narrator appears normal before the police officers. He leads them without any suspicion, and

even takes them into the man's bedroom without the officers suspecting a thing. However, his paranoia and guilt is too strong that he betrays himself. The more he appears to be good mannered and proclaims the same, the more his guilt makes him mistake his own heart beat to that of the old man. In his confession to the crime, the narrator addresses the police officers as villains. He cannot differentiate between his own villainy and the real identity of the officers. Real madness!

Poe is very economical with his words. This creates some ambiguity which exemplifies the madness in the story. For instance, he conceals the names of the narrator and the old man, their occupation, where they live, and how they relate. The anonymity and ambiguity create another sense of confusion to the reader, leaving the reader with a lot of opinions. First, the narrator may be a son or servant of the old man. The old man's vulture eye may symbolize parental /master's surveillance or the guiding principles of right and wrong. The eye may also symbolize secrecy, representing lack of information about the narrator or the old man. The murder is carried out only when the eye is found open.

Work Cited

Kennedy, X. J., & Gioia, D. Backpack Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing, 4th Edition. Longman, 2011.