

Critical analysis of the tell-tale heart essay sample



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The Tell-Tale Heart is a short story written Edgar Allan Poe and was first edited and published in January 1843 by Robert Carver and James Russell Lowell, the proprietors of in the short-lived inaugural issue of *The Pioneer: A Literary and Critical Magazine*. “The Tell-Tale Heart” is a classic gothic fiction genre and one of Poe’s famous collection of short stories. Edgar Allan Poe highlighted that effective short stories should be read in single sitting and must create a unity of effect on the reader, with no redundant word, as this impression essentially evoke the readers emotions. Poe insisted that. “If his very initial sentence tends not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step.” (Poe, 2014, p. 1). Charles May distinguishes between the novel and the short story by suggesting the while the former ‘exists to reaffirm the world of “everyday” reality; the existence of the short story is to “defamiliarize” the everyday’ (May, 1984, pp. 328-9). Raymond Carver also emphasized the need for conciseness, he suggested that when writing a short story, the writer should ‘Get in, get out. Don’t linger, Go on’ (Carver, 1994, p. 293). This essay will discover the extent to which “The Tell-Tale Heart” fits these generic descriptors (Poe, 2014)

The short story begins in medias res. The Anonymous narrator wants to persuade the reader of his rationality by confessing to murdering an old man because one of his eye according to the narrator ‘resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it’ (Poe, 2014, p.??) The narrator persuaded the audience to admire and applaud his courage, boldness, calculative and skilled progression of how he murdered the old man with a futon bed and carefully dismembered and concealed the body under the floorboards. Eventually, his conscience or mental disorder made him to hear

the dead old man's beating heart. The first-person narrative started in the middle of an imagery dialogue ' TRUE! —nervous' (p. 1). It could be an assurance of reliability or admission of guilt. This introduction fits the generic description of Poe's theories of gaining the reader's attention and every word contributing to the purpose of moving the story forward. The gender and location of the narrator is unknown, for ease of description, masculine pronouns will be used in this essay. The connection between the narrator and the old man is ambiguous, one can presume that they live in the same house as the settings of crime took place there in the middle of the night. The Tell-Tale Heart is a gothic horror tale hovering between psychological and supernatural symbolic fantasies of the human condition which Poe refers to as Arabesque.

' The Tell-Tale Heart' illustrates Poe's ability to depicts the dark side of humanity and is an example of stories dealing with psychological realism. Poe examines this paradox half a century before Sigmund Freud's theories of the mind. The narrator loves the old man except the eyes which he metaphorically compares to ' vulture's eye' and ' damned spot'. There is an odd juxtaposition between his motives and his action as he did not want to wake the old man up at the same time cannot kill him except the evil eye is opened. The narrator personified the eye and see it as a detached life from the old man, the narrator ironically moves from the preoccupation with the eye to the heart as his psychological state degenerates.

Poe's " The Tell-Tale Heart" fits his suggestion of using short story to convey artistic insight as the reader is likely to give attention for the brief time. The suspense he created on whether the narrator will kill the old man and then

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whether he will be caught, this mystery and irrationality makes irresistible and makes the reader to concentrate reading it to the end. He uses internal and external conflicts to create suspense in the story as the narrator is presented as the protagonist (story about him and the murder) and antagonist (his guilt flopped his plans).

The narrator's uses sporadic composition in its narrative. He seems to be superciliously excited as he uses infrequent syntactical arrangement, multiple dashes, repetition, aposiopesis, fragmented sentences, verbal irony, adjectives and adverbs, exclamation and question marks, rhetorical question and old fashion archaic term like 'hearkens'. The writing style is tersely muddled, Poe uses long and short sentences. The narrator recognise that he has a disease of heightened senses due to nervousness. Poe used a similar motif for Roderick Usher in 'The fall of the house of usher' (1839) and in 'The Colloquy of Monos and Una' (1841). He only care about defending himself of labelling as crazy rather than admitting murdering.

Poe uses symbols in telling the story and the underlying theme. Examples are 'the dark room', which could be stages in life as the narrator puts his head in the darkness every night, 'the lantern', objects that provide light, and light is often associated with uncovering truths... could be knowledge of his limitations which makes his 'blood runs cold' hence his conscience should be 'precisely upon the damned spot' before he kills it or the old man. The eye perhaps symbolizes the identity the narrator refuses to accept and the beating heart symbolizes the guiltiness characteristic of the narrator. the narrator repeated clock and time while waiting and watching is symbolic as well as the 'clock' is metaphorically represents the time of life left for the old

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man and countdown to the narrator's murderous action and crime. Time symbolises the approach of death. The narrator, who literally controls the time of death for the old man, compares himself to a watch's minute hand.

The passage of time in this short story is noteworthy. Time can be unbearably slow and astonishingly fast. Poe's emphasis on repetition and rhythm (ticking and beating) contributes to the tension of the tale.

The narrator's invasion into the old man's bedroom is a juxtaposition of the "sacred" and the "profane" as the bedroom is a place of haven and rest. Poe uses simile when describing the opening of the door to spy on the old man narrator describes his entrance into the room: "a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider"

Poe's story fulfils Austin Wright's idea that the action of a short story should be 'externally simple, with few developed episodes and no subplots and the secondary lines of action (Wright, 1989, pp. 51-2). The readers is invited to see the motivation behind the murder through focalization, direct speech,. Yet the flexibility of the narrator voice and the use of defamiliarisation ensure that the reader is able to