

Good a mad mans  
guilty  
conscience:analyzing  
poes the tell-tale  
heart research pap...

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



There can be no doubt that Edgar Allan Poe is one of the best writers in the history of American literature. One of his most well-known short-stories, “The Tell-Tale Heart” is a classic that has endured decades of critical research and analysis. Throughout this lengthy scholarship, it immediately becomes apparent that Poe is one of the premier gothic writers of his generation, with his ability to tell a story as if he was his own demented protagonists. Critics and scholars also conclude that Poe has mastered the writing style of the first-person narrator (Ronald 2). In “The Tell-Tale Heart”, Poe uses this to great effect. By using the first person perspective in the short story, Poe manages to immerse the reader within the psychological functioning of the narrator, however fragile it may be. In so doing, Poe creates the palpable tension so characteristic of the psychology behind his characters, and narrates the short story’s conflict both within the mind of his protagonist, and outside of the mental world wherein his demented thoughts operate. Clearly, the narrator in the short story is an insane man, but does he believe he is insane? No, the narrator believes that because he is clever and able to plan out a murder that he could not be insane (Poe 1). Is there a reason for the narrator to kill the old man? The narrator killed the old man not because the old man deserved to die, or because the old man abused him, or insulted him, but because he was an insane man obsessed with the old man’s bad eye (Poe 1). Some people believe the bad eye represents the narrators own ego and he believes he has to “rid” himself of his ego or eye if you will (Charles 3). But is this really the case, or are critics overanalyzing why a paranoid schizophrenic is paranoid? Who is the old man? According to Marie Bonaparte, the old man is the narrators step-father (240). What does the

ticking of the old mans heart represent? Some people like Alfred C. Ward, believe the ticking of the old mans heart represents the narrator's sanity and/or conscience (239). The ticking became quiet for a short time after murdering the old man (Poe 3). Perhaps this is because during this time he completely loses his mind, his conscious, and his sanity. After he completes this horrible crime, his conscience starts to get the best of him causing the ticking to become so loud that he honestly believes the police officers could hear the ticking as well (Poe 4). This not only proves to us that the narrator truly is a mad man, but it also shows us that his sub conscience was crying out with such guilt for committing such a horrible crime that despite his cleverness and ability to get away with murder his conscience just will not allow it.

May Charles E. hits the nail on the head with his description of the tell tale heart as being " a chilling tale of madness and murder" (Charles 1). There are several reasons why the tell tale heart is such an interesting story to read. First off the author is none other than the famous Edgar Allan Poe; a man who is known for being a " master" in his abilities to write as a first person-narrator (Ronald 2). Poe is one of the most famous gothic writers of all times. (Perhaps Poe is so famous for his style of writing that he is the one that is largely responsible for giving the writers of cartoon villains there inspiration and direction to create such obvious villains) The way Poe chooses to leave out the name of the narrator and address the reader directly with calm tones that steadily increase - as" Recommended Reading: 500 Classics Reviewed (1995) points out - really captures our attention from the start (4). Poe also has a great ability to keep our attention; like in this

story of tell tale heart where he chooses to use the ticking sound multiple times to keep us curious to what this sound could possibly be (Poe 3-4). Poe chooses to mentions that the narrator kills an old man early in the narrative to keep us in suspense and to keep us wondering when and why the horrible murder will take place (1)

The narrator starts out by trying to convince either a jury of the court room, the evaluators at an insane asylum, or maybe just a reporter trying to get the story of a murderer, (This much is not real clear and many people have different opinions.) that he is not a mad man, as a matter of fact he believes he is pretty clever (Poe 1). According to Marie Bonaparte he is a logical lunatic that denies his madness and believes he has a disease that he claims sharpens his senses, especially his hearing (240). Owe how comical can the delusions of a paranoid schizophrenic be from time to time, yes he surly does think learning that he has a disease explains it all. For some reason the narrator believes that because he is able to plan out a murder and uses “ wise precautions” to dispose of the body, that he is clever therefore could not possibly be mad (Poe 4). Perhaps the narrator is confused in thinking that insane people can’t be intelligent; perhaps everyone during that time believed that. The narrator claims that he is not a mad man and is “ dreadfully nervous” (Poe 1). Perhaps this is because he really knows that he is guilty and is in self denial, or maybe it’s just because he is a paranoid schizophrenic that is paranoid. Even though the narrator supposable loves the old man he kills, has no confrontation with him, does not want his money and admits that he can’t remember when the idea came into his mind to kill him, he still believes he is sane (Poe 1). Perhaps if it wasn’t for the “ death

watches" a bug that makes a ticking sound, than the man would have realized the ticking in his head (which actually is believed to be his conscious that is later discussed in more detail) was not normal and could have tried to get help before his madness becomes so horrible that it drives him to murder. (Charles 3).

We are all able to come to the conclusion that the narrator is clearly a mad man. The way Poe starts out by addressing that we will say the narrator is mad allows us to quickly come to the conclusion that the narrator probably is not a sane man (Poe 1). The more and more the narrator tries to convince us of his sanity the more and more he comes across as an insane person. May Charles E points out that that the narrator believes the calm and healthy way in which he tells the story is somehow proof of his sanity (1). In no way is that proof of anything as a matter of fact it only allows us to see him digging a bigger hole to lay in; figuratively speaking of course.

This murder story has several issues, all the while the crazy narrator keeping your attention on not only the murder that is going to soon be revealed but what is the reason behind it. One of the main issues that the story is centered around is the old man that lived in the same house as he lived in. This old man had a bad eye that seemed to bother the narrator so much that he believed he had to kill the old man and " rid himself of the eye forever" (Poe 1). The narrator explains to us that the only reason he kills the old man is because he can not stand the way the old mans blinded eye looks (Poe 1). According to Marie Bonaparte the old man was the narrators stepfather (240). Well if it is true that the old man was the boy's or mans' stepfather (this much is not clear) than there could be some deep issues that

one could only imagine and the depths of the story could go on and on. Well lets see here: dreadfully nervous, has a disease, hears voices, clearly this man is a paranoid schizophrenic as anyone could find in any psychology or health book that talks about the signs and symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. But for a quick very short moment lets discuss some mental health issues. We all hear voices, that's not what makes us crazy, people talk, we talk, sometimes we even talk to ourselves out loud if we're really trying to concentrate that is; that's not what makes us crazy. Its when people hear voices in their head from which they believe to be coming from an outside source is when someone truly has a problem. Now could he be psychotic and have other health issues as well? Well this much however is probably true; however there could be a lot of speculation with the little information at hand. The second paragraph in the tell tale where the reader mentions that the disease (Paranoid schizophrenia and who knows what else) does not dull his senses and how in all actuality it sharpens them, (referring to the ability to hear the ticking when no one else could) allows us to imagine that the narrator might be in an insane asylum and is looking back on what he had done after hearing from the doctors that he has a mental disease (Poe 1). Maybe this is not the case and he was aware of his condition and either did not have access to his medication, had stopped taking it, or at that time there was no medication for his disease. One could only speculate. However, it would make sense that it was at a time that people didn't know how to treat mental disorders and even didn't know much about them. Perhaps that is why he insist that because he can prove that he is smart that he could not possibly be mad (Poe 1). Maybe the step-

father was aware of his sons disease. This would make perfect since if we were to think about how scared the old man was when he hears something in his room (Poe 2-3). Perhaps the old man, or step-father if you will, knew it was not a mouse or something that was not important. Perhaps he knew how sick and deranged his son was, maybe he was aware of his deteriorating mental status and was absolutely terrified about the possibility of it being him, knowing what he is capable of doing. This really is just merely speculation because the old man cries out “ Who’s there?” instead of the name of his son (Poe 3). One of the problems with paranoid schizophrenia as found in many health and psychology books is that someone with this mental disease can go much longer than someone with other mental disorders without showing signs and or symptoms, this is known as the duration of untreated illness or DUI. Maybe his step-father had been watching his son deteriorate for quite some time. It is too bad that the outcome for this poor paranoid schizophrenic going for a long duration of not being treated results in him murdering an old man. Perhaps we can imagine him ending up getting the treatment that he needs so he can feel remorse for committing such a horrible crime.

This is not to say that Poe’s narrator is always rational. He may be able to carry out his crime with a cool precision, but as he himself explains, his determination to murder his old friend stems from an irrational fear of his eye:

Object, there was none. I loved the old man. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye with a film over it.

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 4)

Poe skillfully refrains from divulging exactly what the narrator fears, and his readers have consistently picked up the gauntlet and put forth their own theories. The filmed-over eye may also suggest that the old man is cut off from insight into the ideal and the beautiful and that the narrator's fear thus represents man's psychological dread that existence is meaningless, or more specifically, is a reflection of Poe's feelings toward the stepfather who called into question the meaning of his life. It may be argued that the feared " Evil Eye" is actually the " Evil I", that the narrator images himself as another and recoils from the vision. In this regard, the tale is founded on the " popular superstition" of the Evil Eye and points out that Poe may even be suggesting that it really is the old man's eye which drives the otherwise sane narrator mad (Poe 4). However we feel about these interpretations, we should perhaps realize that much of Poe's audience, and certainly Poe himself, would have been familiar with the theory that the insane were for the most part easily terrified, or composed, by the eye of a man who possesses his reason. They would have surmised that Poe's narrator is terrified by the mild and steady eye of a sane man.

Some people believe the ticking that is heard throughout the story by the narrator is in fact the narrators conscious (Ward 239). This would make perfect sense; a mad man hears a noise in which he believes to be coming from an outside source; however a fragment of his sub conscience knows this is not true. The narrator starts to hear a noise, a ticking sound, A. K. A.



his conscience; every time he thinks of something terrible his conscience becomes louder, and when he becomes completely mad his conscience subsides to the point to where he can no longer hear the ticking. This explains why when he enters the room and completely loses his mind for a brief moment the ticking stops. After he kills the old man he could not live with his conscience any longer (“ It grew louder — louder — louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! — no, no! They heard! — they suspected! — they knew! — they were making a mockery of my horror! — this I thought, and this I think. But anything [[was]] better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! — and now — again! — hark! louder! louder! louder! louder! —“ Villains!” I shrieked, “ dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — tear up the planks! — here, here! — it is the beating of his hideous heart!” ) the ticking became so loud that he became convinced he was not the only one that could hear it. His paranoia becomes so intense that he can no longer control himself; he insist that it is some type of conspiracy calling the police officers “ hypocrites” and accusing them of “ making a mockery” of his horror (Poe 4). He believes the officers have just got to hear the ticking. His guilty sub-conscience has won and he can not go on any longer with the agony and tortures mind games he believes the police officers are playing with him. He decides to give himself away, admitting the terrible deed to the police officers (Poe 4). He tells them to rip up the floor so he could show them the sound was coming from the old mans heart. This makes us wonder if the police officers had any idea of the horrible crime he has just

committed; and if in fact he wasn't a mad man could he have gotten away with murder (Poe 4)?

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