

Edgar allan poe's the tell-tale heart

Linguistics, English



Client's xx March Edgar Allan Poe Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" unfolds the story of a madman and how this person carefully planned and executed his crime against the old man whom the narrator lives with. There are various parts in the story wherein the narrator convinces the reader that he--the story does not actually reveal whether the narrator is a he or she but I will refer to the narrator as a he for the purpose of this assignment—is sane for he is capable of thinking, planning, and organizing a flawless crime. Poe, in the story, played around the subject of sanity and insanity and explored the subject of human evilness. Although the crime committed by the narrator is apparently punishable by law, one big question that arises is whether or not it is justifiable to sanction the narrator based on the prevailing law the time the story is written. The year 1843 began the evolution of the insanity plea in court alongside Poe's challenging personal situation and self-destructive nature, and these subjects are exemplified in the riveting story of The Tell-Tale Heart. The subject of insanity has been a highly controversial issue in law. Back in nineteenth century, the time when Poe wrote his story The Tell-Tale Heart, the insanity defense had been put in question. In 1843, the very same year the story of Poe was written, there was an assassination attempt on Robert Peel, the British prime minister. According to this case, the perpetrator Daniel M'Naghten was psychotic and intentionally killed an assistant to a prime minister of England because he thought that he was being oppressed (Collins, Hinkebein and Schorgl). During the trial M'Naghten pleaded not guilty due to insanity. The prosecution team, on the other hand, tried to prove the sanity of the defendant by showing how the defendant was able to plan and execute the crime (Collins, Hinkebein and Schorgl). In the

end, after several doctors and witnesses gave their statements, the presiding judge ordered to stop the case due to the mental condition of the defendant. Similarly in Poe's story, the narrator irrationally killed the poor old man because of the old man's eyes. In fact, the old man never treated the narrator unjustly and never insulted him in any way. The narrator, who admitted that he loved the old man, just went mad over these "vulture eyes" because he perceived these as evil eyes that haunted him every day and every night. He became so enraged and crazy that he carefully orchestrated a way to slay the old man. Despite of the obvious crime that the narrator has committed in the story, he claims to be very sane because he would not be able to successfully plan and execute his evil plan if he is mad, similar to the stance that the prosecution team had during the M'Naghten case. Yet, we still recognize the narrator in the story as unreliable because for one his credibility has been gravely compromised due to his mental state or psychological instability (Wilson and Lazzari 92). The narrator sees and hears things that an ordinary person does not. He perceives things around him in a very odd manner. The character of the narrator is instantly revealed in the beginning of the story. The story opens with the narrator creating a delusional claim that he is hearing things in the heaven and in the earth. Another description that helps me identify this specific type of narrator is the way the story presents frame wherein the narrator seems to be a character with hints to his unreliability (Kirszner and Mandell 34). Basically, this unreliability is not explicitly disclosed in the story but only suggested at. This then leaves the audience to question whether they can really trust the narrator or not and how the story should be understood. At

the time the story of The Tell-Tale Heart was written, Edgar Allan Poe was in an extremely difficult situation. His exceptional talent in writing did not help him with his finances. He received only a small amount of money from every piece of writing he produced, thus always broke. Poe was also in great distress due to the health condition of his wife, Victoria, who had tuberculosis. All of these challenges, not to mention Poe's addiction to alcohol, created a self-destructive and obsessively excited Poe that was exemplified in most of his literary characters like the narrator in The Tell-Tale Heart. A good example of this exemplification was how the narrator developed an obsession with the " eye" of the old man whom the narrator was taking care of. The narrator got obsessively bothered by this eye each time it looked at him until eventually decided to rid the eye by killing the old man. The story ended with the narrator admitting his own crime to the police officers who actually had no idea about what he did. He committed a seemed to be perfect crime yet, in the end, he destroyed everything he planned and worked hard the moment he confessed his crime. The story of The Tell-Tale Heart is an intriguing and compelling story of a person who is apparently experiencing a disturbing mental condition. Although he seems wise as he is able to orchestrate such flawless act of killing, still his very intention of slaying the old man, which was just the " eyes," appears to be so irrational. A sane individual would not kill a good old man in a sick and twisted manner like dismembering the body after slaying the person. Lastly, the story demonstrates how, in the end, the narrator suddenly hears ringing in his ears, a behavior that is not normal for any human being, which makes him confess his killing of the old man. Works Cited Collins, Kimberly, Gabe

Hinkebein and Staci Schorgl. The John Hinckley Trial and Its Effect on the Insanity Plea. n. d. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. Kirszner, Laurie G. & Stephen R. Mandell. Portable Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011. Wilson, Kathleen and Marie Lazzari. Short Stories for Students. Detroit: Gale Group, 1998.