

# The tell tale heart essay

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



"The Tell Tale Heart" is a short story from a first-person narrator, whose name remains a secret. The narrator tells about his manipulative murder of an old man whom he was responsible to care for. He addresses the reader directly as he tells the story. The motive behind the story is to prove to the reader that the narrator is not insane. However, his narrative depicts mental imbalance and the reader is confronted with evil possibilities within human beings. In this work, I have provided a literary analysis of the above short story, and evaluated the success of the author in using literary devices. From the analysis, I have realized that, indeed, Edgar Allan Poe has succeeded in using the literary devices.

The story takes place in a random old house; however, the narrator does not reveal where he is while telling the story. It's stated that the old man would always keep his shutters tightly locked. One of the two screams in the story is heard by a neighbor, and the corps arrives immediately after the body is hidden. As the old man sleeps in his bedroom, horror plays in the dark, and he is not aware. The picture of the room is not given clearly; we can not see it. The only thing we can see is the bedroom and the bed. We can also predict what happens under the bed. However, the story captures our fears of dark and the evils associated with it.

The fact that the narrator spies at the old man every night while the man is asleep, not only scares, but also reflects immorality and irresponsibility. The narrator has ill motive: Killing the old man. However, he pretends and becomes completely friendly during the day. This is worrying.

This story is told from a first person narrator, who tries to prove his sanity. He portrays his ability to apply "dissimulation" with the old man. If his proof

of sanity is dissimulation, then it's no doubt, the narrator uses old dissimulation on the audience too. What the audience or the reader can depict at a glance is a great insanity, irresponsibility, and wickedness of the narrator.

The narrator confirms that he can hear everything that takes place in heaven, on earth, and several things in hell. How real can this be? No, it is not a reality. Is the narrator really sane as he wants us to believe? Indeed he has a sick mind and body. In several occasions, he pretends to be omniscient. He can tell how the old man thinks and feels. Take a look at the example below:

" Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief --oh, no! --it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night [...] it has welled up from my own bosom... I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been saying to himself ' It is nothing but the wind in the chimney -it is only a mouse crossing the floor,' or ' it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.' ... but he had found all in vain." (Edgar, 1843).

These ideas about the old man are just the narrator's reflections of his own experience. The narrator is not reliable at all.

The author has greatly employed Symbolism, Imagery & Allegory in his work. This can openly be seen by using such things as the old man's eye, the

watch, the lantern, and the bedroom.

We are told that the old man had the eye of a vulture which was pale blue, with a film over it. Blue-eye is a medical condition, but it has been used symbolically to mean that the characters have issues with their outlook. Everything is hidden from them, as they are stuck. As we read through the story, we are faced with confusion and frustrations. Other than its appearance, the eye does weird things. It has strange powers, though it seems dull and not seeing. The narrator is furious as he looks at the eye. It “chilled the very marrow in my bones”, says the narrator. The narrator goes ahead and hides the body of the old man. He then “replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye - not even his [the old man’s eye]- could have detected any thing wrong” (Edgar, 1843). This reveals that the eye was capable of seeing secret or hidden things. The eye is portrayed to have a bodyguard which is the heart. The heart creates an alert as the man trains the open eye beam. The heart also beats loudly in presence of the policemen just to alert the cops. Therefore, the eye can see and at the same time be seen.

The reference of the “Vultures eye” creates some hidden meanings.

Vultures are known to feed on dead or sick prey. However, we can not tell whether the old man is vulture-like or not, even though the narrator looks at him as one (Cleman, 2002). We can’t also tell whether the narrator is sick or dead even though he appears sick. Indeed, the narrator is sick, mentally, morally, and physically.

Other than the eye, the watch has been mentioned four times as it is used symbolically. The role of the watch is to “watch” time. Also, time can be said

to “ watch” death at a long distance. As the watch ticks, human beings move closer to the death. The narrator acts as a watch which “ watches” the death of the old man. Literally, the narrator controls the death time of the old man. He can therefore be referred to as a death watch. “ It was a low, dull, quick sound -much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton” (Reilly, 1969).

The heart of the old man is also portrayed as a watch which watches and counts the time till the man dies. The heart then becomes a zombie as it resurrects to tell about the time.

Another aspect of symbolism used by the author is the lantern. The lantern can be adjusted so as to regulate the amount of light. Most of the light is kept hidden by the narrator; only one ray is allowed to escape. The narrator uses the lantern as a weapon against the eye of the old man. The use of lantern symbolically suggests that even in the midst of darkness, some light can be hidden. Even in this dark tale, some light can still be found.

In his actions, the narrator exploits the vulnerability of a sleeping man thereby violating the bedroom etiquette. Human beings are always most vulnerable when in asleep in bed. The bedroom is meant to provide us with safety as we enjoy the comforts of the bed when we sleep. However, the narrator has used the bed as a weapon to kill the old man.

This story can be said to belong to the Genre of Horror or Gothic Fiction. We can see snapped minds, death, fear, the extremes of the human behaviors, crypts, dismemberment, and the juxtaposition of the profane and the sacred (Robinson, 1971). All these are signs which reveal to us that the story is a Gothic. Within the main genre, several sub-genres can be identified.

Supernatural forces are seen to be in play. This gives the “supernatural Gothic” as a sub genre. These forces literally cause all the scary and frightening actions in the story. An aspect of “explained Gothic” can be identified. At first, the story reveals that supernatural forces are in action. However, by the time the story ends, there is an explanation of everything. In Emily’s Tell-Tale Heart - Critical Analysis, “Ambiguous Gothic” is also identified. The story is too ambiguous and very much open for multiple interpretations. All the interpretations rely greatly on facts outside the story. The story does not actually make sense. There is no supernatural or any reasonable explanation for the actions in the story.

The story was written in 1843, more than a hundred years ago, and nobody knows or understands precisely what to deduce from it. However, based on individual opinion and understanding, it can be analyzed.

The tone of the story is “Dreadfully Nervous,” and “Sad”. The story can make the reader cry. The narrator is probably ill, both physically and mentally. He is so pathetic, and seems to have had a bad life. His life gets worse after the murder and the confessions.

The degree of the sadness in the story varies widely. In every line, we encounter nervousness which brings forth the sadness. On the overall look, or the first read, the story does not seem to be sad. The ridiculous arguments of the narrator amuse the audience or the reader, who tend to think that the whole story is a sick joke. However, after keen reflection and analysis, we realize that the story is about a man who has been plagued by the diseases of the body and the mind, and is in a state of stress, tension, and meltdown. Even though he is a murderer, the narrator remains a sad

figure.

The author has spiced up the story with a lot of ingredients beginning from the initial situation, through the conflict, complications, then to the climax. After the climax, there is suspense, denudation, and conclusion.

In the initial Situation, the narrator wants the reader to develop a picture which reflects that the narrator is not insane. He goes ahead and gives a proof for this. The initial situation is depicted by the narrator's decision to kill the old man. He wants to do this so that the old man's eyes stops gazing at him.

Conflict is developed when the narrator visits the room of the old man every night for a whole week. His intention is to kill the man so that the man's eye stops looking at him. However, the old man does not open his eye. Being that it is the "blue eye" of the old man and not the old man himself, who is the problem; the narrator does not kill the old man when the offending eye is closed.

The story does not have much complication. However, a form of complication is seen when the narrator attempts to kill the old man. For the narrator to kill the man, the old man must wake up and open his eye. If the man fails to wake up for months, the narrator has no choice, but to leave him.

The climax of the story is the point where murder is committed. The narrator decides to kill the old man using the man's own bed. He then cuts up the man's body and hides it under the bed.

There is a great suspense when the police show up, and the narrator remains very calm. He guides the police and invites them to the man's bedroom. The narrator begins to hear a terrible noise which gets louder and louder.

The noise continues to get louder and louder until the narrator can not bear it any more. Imagining that the noise could stop, he tells the police to look under the bed where they identified the old man's body.

Conclusion is made when the narrator finally identifies the sound. The sound is initially described as ringing. It then changes to a low, then dull, and finally quick. It is only in the last line where the narrator concludes that it was " the beating of [the man's] hideous heart!"

A Concisely Chaotic writing style has been employed by Poe. He has used curiously rough sentences which are each open to debate. There are several groups of short sentences like: " Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man" these thirteen words create a lot of complications.

According to eNotes Study Guide, there are longer sentences e. g. " So I opened it - you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily - until, at length a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye" this long sentence is less ambiguous and frustrating as compared to the shorter sentences. It gives precise and definite description, while the shorter sentences want us to look for meanings.

There is a perfect choice of the style of writing and each piece portrays an aspect of the chaotic mind of the narrator.

The title of this short story refers to the beating of the heart of the old man.

The old man's heart " tells tales" to the narrator. The narrator keeps the audience or the reader to pay attention. So, he keeps secrets and uses extreme exaggerations so as to achieve his ultimate goal.



Analyzing the tales that the old man's hear tell, we hear his heart beating when he comes to the realization that all is not well in his room on the eighth night. A tale of fear is told by the heart. This tale makes the narrator to be extremely angry as he develops the courage to commit the killing. After the death of the old man, we still hear the beating of the heart. This is reason why the narrator decides to cut up the body and finally burying it.

We all know that dead hearts do not beat. However, the narrator's guilt over his actions is directly projected onto the heart of the dead old man (Cleman, 2002). The heart tells a tale of the guilty feelings of the narrator.

The narrator's own heart is also referred to by the title. The true feelings and emotions of human beings lie deep inside the hearts. The whole story can be viewed as a tale told by the narrator's own heart, about the old man's killing.

The beginning of the story is indeed its ending as it reflects a continuation of the linear activities. The story starts as a continuation of a previous conversation. Let's take a look: " True! - nervous - very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?" This is a continuation. We can conclude that after the narrator shows the police the old mans body, this is what he says to the police. It may be a part of the interrogation with the police, which is then followed by the murder story. This story can be divided into five different plot stages namely: the anticipation stage, the dream stage, the frustration stage, the nightmare stage, and the destruction (death wish) stage. In the anticipation stage, the narrator has been stressed by the old man's eye for a very long time. So, he decides to do away with the eye by killing the man. The narrator's energies

are focused toward his intended action. The dream stage is marked by the eight nights which the narrator spies on the old man and finally murders him. He enjoys the whole process. His activities include the waiting, killing, cutting up of the body, and finally hiding the body under the floorboards. The arrival of the police marks the frustration stage. The police however seems not to suspect anything. The main problem is the ringing in the ears of the narrator, which gets louder and louder. This is the shadow figure that threatens the narrator. Nightmare stage is when the situation was out of control of the narrator. The sound gets louder and louder, but no one seems to hear it except the narrator. Finally, the destruction stage is where the narrator does not die; however, he condemns himself.

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