

Edgar allan poe's paranoia

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Marra Wagner Sophomore English-Mr. Hornung 10/25/10 Edgar Allan Poe displays a disturbing paranoia in his short story "The Tell-Tale Heart." The narrator in the story, who is also the main character, begins to show signs of illness from the very beginning. His paranoia is shown when he can not look into the old man's "vulture eye" (384), which is the main cause of his paranoia. The narrator in this story shows signs of persecutory paranoia. Persecutory paranoia is "the most prevalent type of paranoia in which the patient believes that all those around them are enemies... they often turn [into] dangerous killers" (depression-guide.com). His paranoia is displayed when he is persecuted about the eye, he begins imagining things, and ultimately when he can not control his emotions any longer. The nameless main character of this story begins to show signs of paranoia right from the beginning. He speaks of the old man's eye as if it was out to get him, calling it "vulture eye" or "Evil Eye" (385). The narrator sees the eye as completely separate from the man, and as a result, he is capable of murdering the old man while maintaining that he loves him. The narrator's desire to "rid [himself] of the eye forever" (384) motivates his murder, but the narrator does not realize the fact that this will end the old man's life. When the narrator describes the murder, he specifically only looks at the man's eye as if it is a separate entity that he is after, even though the old man and the eye are one in the same. He explains, "I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot" (387). His paranoia of the "Evil Eye" causes him to end the old man's life altogether, however this strategy backfires when his mind begins imagining other parts of the old man's body working against him as

well. The narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" defends himself against madness in terms of heightened sensory when he says, "Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad?" (384). He used his acute hearing as a defense mechanism when in fact it is "common in many cases of paranoia" (depression-guide.com). The narrator views this hypersensitivity as proof of his sanity, not a symptom of his madness. His acute hearing ultimately overcomes him when he becomes unable to distinguish between real and imagined sounds. During his watching of the old man's eye, the narrator begins to describe his hearing once more by saying, "And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over acuteness of the senses?—now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton" (387). The narrator realises that this sound is the old man's heart, and as each moment passes the sound becomes louder and louder, eventually driving him to commit the murder of the "eye." Once the old man was dead, the beating ceased, however, it returned soon after, causing the narrator to become irritable towards others. The narrator's paranoia can be seen through his hypersensitivity and acute hearing throughout the short story. After the murder of the eye was committed, the narrator became satisfied with himself and his surroundings. When the police were called in to investigate the noise, the narrator acted in calm and in a very convincing manner. The narrator, in his perverseness, led the three police men straight to where he had hidden the old man's body. "My manner had convinced them," (389) the narrator explains of the situation. This kind of thinking began to change with his manner when he

began hearing the old man's beating heart once more. " The ringing became more distinct:-it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definitiveness-until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears" (389). As the noise grew louder, the narrator became more irritable of the situation. He began speaking " more quickly and more vehemently" (389), wanting to rid himself of the three men and the sound of the beating heart. His paranoia is shown through this irritability, and when he becomes more worked up he explains, " I foamed-I raved-I swore!" (389). The narrator believes that the fact that the three men are " ignoring" the noise means that they are mocking him in his madness. This mockery gets the best of him and eventually causes him to confess: "'Villians!' I shrieked, 'dissemble no more! I admit the deed!-tear up the planks!-here, here!-it is the beating of his hideous heart!'" (389). Unlike the similarly nervous and hypersensitive Roderick Usher in " The Fall of the House of Usher," who admits that he feels mentally unwell, the narrator of " The Tell-Tale heart" views his hypersensitivity as proof of his sanity. This narrator's outlook on his sharpened senses allows him to tell the tale in a precise manner, although he eventually lays out a tale of murder that betrays the madness he is trying to deny of himself. This story being told in first person allows the reader to see within the mind set of a man suffering from paranoia in a way that is personal yet seems somewhat forbidden.