

The tell-tale heart: the greatness of insanity



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Edgar Allan Poe, a worldwide renowned author, lived a short, yet otherworldly life, and made a prosperous living writing his iconic themes of horror, murder, and mystery, all recognized throughout his famous short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart." In Poe's, "The Tell-Tale Heart," he does not specifically characterize the narrator's gender, contradicting the motive to kill and murder the old man. The reader assumes that the narrator is a male due to the violent tendencies displayed throughout the text, such as "dragging him to the floor, and pulling the heavy bed over him," to the "dismembering of the corpse by cutting off the head and the arms and the legs" (Poe, 195, 196). The narrator acts upon their instincts and reveals that "he" has the desire to be dominant.

If the reader were to place this story from a feminist perspective, in this particular time frame, women were perceived and mistaken to be weak and unintelligent, in which the superiority of men has taken over them. In the story, the narrator "loved the old man," which could resemble a woman's gentle care and hospitality for him, but because of this "pale blue eye," and these violent tendencies, she would be thought of to be plagued by this, and that "madmen" have absolutely nothing against the willpower of a woman's insight to kill (Poe, 193). The whole plot took a total of eight nights for the narrator to finally decide to murder this old man, which if it was in a feminist point of view, a woman would thoroughly consider her decisions and make use of her time. Although Poe leaves the narrator's gender unidentified, the perspective could be a combination of both the feminist and masculine point of view. The storyteller portrays both feminine and masculine qualities, seen in a quote from the story, "I knew what the old man felt," which is the

feminine side, “ although I chuckled at heart,” which is the masculine side (Poe, 194).

In “ The Tell-Tale Heart,” the protagonists’ fear of the old man’s eye is the main reason as to what drove him to “ dismember him and put him underneath the floorboard” (Poe, 196). The psychoanalytical perspective of the narrator reveals that he, or she, was not angry and had nothing to fear, which means that they were in rejection over the crime and had lost a sense of their unconscious mind. The story’s narrator had no valid reason to kill the old man except that he had “ the eye of a vulture - a pale blue eye, with a film over it” and after he was dead, they soon realized that it was a mistake because they were not thinking clearly (Poe, 193). This explains the beating of the heart that grew louder and louder, showing his pure insanity and guilt of the crime that was committed.

Two literary elements found in “ The Tell-Tale Heart,” is imagery and symbolism. Imagery is seen in the story because as the reader reads the text, he or she can visualize the multiple scenes of the narrator gently observing the old man every night and his pale blue eye, causing them to kill the old man because of his maniacal condition. This image of the eye helps the reader begin to understand what it is that really terrifies the narrator and what prompts him to get rid of it. Symbolism is also found in the story because of the eye depicting that it sees everything, which causes the narrator to be disturbed and tormented, explaining his insanity, and the heart, which represents the narrator’s guilt when they killed the old man. Both aspects are effective in the story because it gives the reader a narrower understanding of why the narrator planned to kill the old man.

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Poe, growing up as a child, did not really understand the concept of life and death, which could have contributed to the narrator's thinking that even if he had killed the old man, he would still come back to life. He thought that the eye was still alive and so was his heartbeat, which could have meant that the old man was still lingering around, even after he was brutally murdered. The narrator of the story was out of his mind and unreliable. Rather than being concerned with the murder or the consequences of their actions, the narrator is obsessed with proving their sanity, and obsession with this eye, leading to the death of the old man.