

Obsession in "the tell tale heart" by edgar allen poe



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If you like the rest of us humans, you must have felt so guilty about a situation that you had to divulge about what you did. Edgar Allan Poe, American writer and poet, illustrates in his story *The Tell-Tale Heart*, how an obsession can drive you to do things that you will only regret in the long run. He then portrays how one's guilt can ultimately lead to a lack of consciousness therefore pressuring them into confession.

Poe shows us that there are many themes throughout his story, but he focuses on three particular ones that can reveal his message: the idea of burial/covering, guilt/consciousness, and obsessions.

The first and foremost theme that Poe illustrates in his story is this idea of obsession. As we all know, an obsession is a thought that preoccupies or intrudes a person's mind and controls it. In the story, the narrator; a man who lives in the same apartment as the old man, shows his obsession with the old man's eye by comparing the eye to the eye of a vulture the ones that prey on dead animals and eat it (Poe 41). He explains what he thinks of the eye, and how it makes him feel. He felt as though the eye was evil and that he needed to get rid of it. In his mind, he compares the eye of the old man to the eye of a vulture because he feels like the eye can see through his illness and see inside his conscious. It's almost as if he's giving an excuse to kill the old man because of his eye just to cover up his own guilt or identity (his true self). The narrator reveals his obsession with the eye by stating Only that eye, that hard blue eye, and the blood in my body became like ice: he's so focused and obsessed with how the eye looks, that he doesn't try making sense of the real reason he wants to kill the old man (Poe 41). His obsession

is so clear and taking over his conscious that everytime he thinks of the eye or sees it, his body has a reaction.

Along with the theme of obsession, Poe illustrates the theme of burial with a motif of covering. Both are connected because the narrator's obsession drives him to kill the old man, and afterwards he wants to 'bury and cover' the body of the old man where no one could find it (Poe 44). As the narrator cuts up the body pieces he is carefully removing the floorboards and placed them in there so no human eye can suspect a thing (Poe 44). This theme of burial has a huge significance in the story because it shows how he planned everything out and buried all of the evidence to not be caught. Poe shows us the motif of covering through the theme of burial. He is not only covering the body up but it's how he kills the old man. I fell upon him and held the bed covers TIGHTLY over his head: the narrator states as he's killing the old man (Poe 43). This idea of covering applies to the way he kills the old man because he is covering his face, he is covering his eye but he is also covering something else. The covering relates to the stories use of the eye and sight to mean; discovery of secret sin. He is secretly burying his own heart because he is trying to cover up his madness/illness. This is a big repression and the main burial.

Connecting both themes of obsession and burial, the third theme that is portrayed for us is the theme of guilt or consciousness. Throughout the story the narrator is fighting between his conscious vs his guilt. Before he kills the old man he speaks of the beating of the old man's heart and how he continued to hear it until he finally killed him but at last the beating stopped: or so he thought it stopped because he was dead (Poe 43). In the story, the <https://assignbuster.com/obsession-in-the-tell-tale-heart-by-edgar-allen-poe/>

narrator is actually hearing the beating of his own heart and his conscious trying to convince him not to follow through with his obsession. This beating of his own heart is a way of his guilty conscious catching up to him and making him realize that he has done something awful. His guilt is so overpowered that even after he kills the old man he believes he can still hear it because when the cops showed up and completed their search, he says how the sound, became louder and he became frustrated with the fact that the police officers could not hear this loud sound. This conveys that the entire time he was not hearing the old man's heart, he was in fact hearing his own nervous heart beats. This beating ultimately drives him insane and causes him to confess that he had murdered the old man to the police. He figured that they already knew he had killed them because the sound was too loud but they didn't know. The sound was too loud for him because it was his guilt eating at his conscious and making him finally face the truth of what he did.

All of the essential themes that Poe has illustrated throughout the story, all connect to one another because the narrator's obsession: the old man's eye, drives him to kill and bury the body/heart, and causes a conflict between his guilt and his subconscious. Throughout the story, Edgar Allan Poe is trying to convey the message of in denial and acceptance. He wants us to see through the themes of burial, obsession and guilt and see how one's subconscious can ultimately eat us alive if we don't face what we did and accept what our mistakes are. In the story, the narrator isn't trying to cover up the murder, he is trying to cover up his illness and who he really is from himself because he cannot face the truth and it is a forbidden sin.