

Tell-tale heart character study

Business



"The Tell-Tale Heart," if a real person, and not a fictional protagonist of a story, would stand as testament to how insanity results in an extreme reliance on one's own self, causing any reliance on logic or other people, to fly out the window. This clear picture of an insane man's complete self-reliance is witnessed by the readers of the "Tell-Tale Heart", as we see the narrator's murder story unravel. We witness as the narrator tells of how he became more and more obsessed with an old man's cloudy, pale blue eye.

Off the bat, the unnamed narrator assumes automatically that while, we know nothing about him at all, we think he is insane. "TRUE! -nervous? very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?" (paragraph 1). The narrator's assumption that we think he is mad, was clearly put in by Poe so the reader can see off the bat that the narrator does indeed have faulty logic and a paranoid disposition. What logical, non-delusion person would automatically try to argue that he is sane to people who don't know a thing about him?

The only explanation for this type of behavior is that he is so random that we might think he is mad, because he lacks the ability to logically pinpoint that it is almost impossible that we know anything about him before reading the story he tells (after all, his name is never even revealed.) In that same 3 line paragraph, he shows yet again that he is extremely self-reliant.

He believes his nervousness gives him heightened sensory abilities. He in fact, believes he has such an acute sense of hearing that he can "... [hear] all things in the heaven and in the earth. Hear] many things in hell" (P 1).

This line reveals again, his tiny grasp on logic. As Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein claimed in "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus": "The world is the totality of facts in a logic-based system." based on this, it can be argued that because the narrator has such a tiny grasp on logic, he also has a very tiny grasp on reality- which is the basis of Insanity. The evidence of his insanity does not end here. The story the narrator is telling surrounds his strange obsession with a pale blue, film-covered eye that disgusts him.

The owner of the eye is an old man. The relationship between the old man and the narrator is unclear, but we know that the narrator takes care of him. They may be blood related because at some point during the passage, the narrator claims "for his gold I had no desire" (P 2). Which implies in the context that after the old man's death, the narrator thinks he would inherit the old man's wealth, which is something that is often given to the family member of a deceased person. However, the narrator says, "I loved the old man.

He had never wronged me.

He had never given me insult" (P 2). This shows that the two were very close, so perhaps they were not blood related, and the old man just had no family to give his wealth to after his death. The narrator then goes on to say, "I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture -a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees -very gradually -I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever" (P 2).

He just said he loved the old man, and now the narrator says, he loves with a seemingly infinitesimal amount of conflict.

This entertains two possibilities, both of which suggest a complete lack of awareness, and therefore, a tiny grasp on reality. The first possibility: He contradicts himself. He really does love the old man but at the same time he is also willing to easily kill the old man. This suggests lack of self-awareness because he is unaware of his own interests contradicting.

The second possibility: he is lying to us about loving the old man, and he is not far-sighted enough with his awareness to see that we can easily find straight from the passage, that he doesn't actually love the old man. The narrator ends up killing the old man, but not before he reveals to us some more crazy.

Seven nights in a row the narrator peeps through an opening in the door into the old Nan's house after dark without being seen or heard. Then the eighth night comes.

The setup of the story is done, and now Poe can (who uses the narrator as the story teller) finally starts revealing the insanity of the narrator through the actions of the narrator, instead of through what the narrator has to say, and the way he says it. On the eighth night of peeping the narrator's hand slips upon the tin fastening making a noise loud enough to wake the old man ("..

. The old man sprang up in bed, crying out –“ Who’s there? ” (P 5).) The old man gets scared and his heart starts to beat. It beats very loud and the narrator hears it.

Being as illogical and insane a person as the narrator is, illogical and insane ideas start popping into his mind: “ the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst.

And now a new anxiety seized me the sound would be heard by a neighbor! ” (P 11). This idea prompted him to lunge at the old man (who made a shriek) and kill him. The narrator then chopped up the old man he apparently loved so much, and put him under 3 planks of flooring in his room. When the police came to investigate the shriek, the narrator became so rovers and paranoid, that he hallucinated that he heard the heart of the chopped up old man still beating.

Instead of thinking things through and coming to the conclusion that he was just hallucinating because it is illogical for a dead man’s heart to be beating, he came to a conclusion based on complete self-reliance.

He thought that the heart was actually beating and that the police would hear it and find the body. He confesses. Because the story is told from what was the narrator’s perspective after the event took place, the readers can see what the narrator makes of the beating heart he heard after he heard it.

He still thinks it was beating, but thinks only he heard the heart (as it was inevitably revealed after the confession that the police did not hear it)

because he could hear things all the way in what was implied in the first paragraph to be heaven or hell (“...

L [hear] all things in the heaven and in the earth. [hear] many things in hell” (P 1).) Instead of depending on what is most logical—which in this case, is that he hallucinated the whole thing— he instead looks to self reliance and complete belief in oneself no matter how ridiculous one sounds. That is what an insane man does, and that is what he did.