

The narrator of the tell-tale heart

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



The protagonist of this piece is narrating his own story. According to Gerard Genette's theory, he would be classified as an autodiegetic narrator.

Therefore, the reader is limited to the protagonist's perception of his surroundings. Furthermore, this narrative situation allows for the reader to get a glimpse inside of the protagonist's head, in addition to being exposed to all the emotions flowing through him.

What can be said about the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and his depiction of the chain of events, particularly the ending?

The narrator of this story is unreliable because there are plenty of clues which point to him being mentally unstable. His revealing his decision "to take the life of the person" is not point where the reader begins to doubt his sanity. As a matter of fact, it is the first paragraph in which he states that he has "heard all things in the heaven and in the earth" and has "heard many things in hell." His claiming that his hearing transcends earthly tether indicates some form of insanity. Therefore, the reader is influenced right from the start. The story starts out with a very defensive note. He seems obsessed with proving that he's sane and is adamant about not having the label "madman" thrust upon him. He goes on to say that he will "healthily" and "calmly" recount the entire story. The narrator claims to harbor no hostile feelings towards "the old man". He declares affection for him. It's the man's eye, similar to "that of a vulture", which deeply triggers the narrator.

Consequently he decides that he will kill the man. However, it is quite apparent that his recitation is the antithesis of what one would describe as "calm". He exhibits a lot of enthusiasm; this is emphasized by the multitude

of interjections and the exclamation points. Furthermore, he strays off-topic a lot.

In the third paragraph he accuses somebody, maybe the reader or society of seeing him as insane. The addressee remains unclear throughout the entire story.

His plan to kill the man serves as evidence for his sanity. He believes that an insane person would not be able to think of such a brilliant, carefully laid out plan.

While the narrator does make the impression of being kind of impulsive, one can't deny that his plan is calculated. Since the man's eye sets him off, it is therefore kind of surprising that he didn't impulsively kill the man the first time he experienced this rage. He completely disregards the immorality of his actions. He never reflects about right or wrong, he doesn't seem to feel an ounce of guilt. However, one can argue that he isn't completely devoid of morality. Once again, this points to unreliability. The narrator claims that he had a solid, calculated plan, but it can be argued that it ranges on sheer impulsivity. Him being extremely kind to the old man is a way to relieve his guilt.

“ With what foresight” “ but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye.” He views the eye as a fragment completely separate from the man. Each time, however, the eye was closed. This deterred him from killing the man during one of those seven nights. This again indicates that he can

separate the cursed eye from the actual human-being; that he doesn't see them as one. Could this point to some sort of moral awareness? It is the eye that sets something off inside the narrator, it ignites a surge of emotions inside of him. It could be the one thing that diminishes the last bits of morality he still has left. Since the eye is not visible during those nights, the narrator is able to keep his composure, he is more mentally stable and still clings to somewhat moral values. One could speculate that since he likes the man, he doesn't want to harm him at all. However, he sees murder as the last resort. He wants the man to open his eye. The malicious emotions outweigh the last glimpse of humanity and morality he has left, he forgets about the affection he has for the man because darkness encompasses him at that moment. He is only able to take the man's life in this state. He was kind to him every morning, as not to raise any suspicions. Once again, one could also make the case that he does this to relieve subconscious guilt. On the eighth night, there was a change: he proceeded much more carefully. He was more aware of his special ability. It excites him that his actions and his malicious thoughts go unnoticed. It feeds into his delusions of grandeur. The man releases a "groan of mortal terror" after noticing that he is not alone, that he is being scrutinized. This sound is familiar to the narrator. Apparently, he has experienced terrors before and therefore has unleashed this same groan at midnight a few times before. The reader can't help