

Edgar allan poe's tell-tale heart an analysis essay sample



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Tell-Tale Heart revolves around madness and guilt revealing the “dark side” of human nature. The narrative is expertly told in the first-person point of view. It exemplifies Poe’s idea of creating a unity of effect in every work of literature. Tell-Tale Heart impresses the reader with a single dark theme communicated using every element of a short story like diction, characterization, plot, and dialogue.

Tell-Tale Heart is a vivid horror story as well as a psychological thriller where a nameless and a genderless narrator talks about an old man with a clouded eye. It is a simplistic tale of conscience, somewhat delivered in a feverish manner heightening the story’s mood. The narrator’s deranged orientation leads to an irrational fear of the old man’s clouded eye. “*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.*” (Poe 242). This evident distress causes the murder plot which covers a period of eight nights.

One very redeeming element that contributes to the whole essence of the work is the style. Poe has always been famous for his narrator manipulation and his typical use of his narrator’s “nervousness”. He frequently used this device to establish tone and plausibility through heightened states of consciousness. For Tell-Tale Heart this is very effective. Because of the story’s tone the reader is gripped – literally glued to the narration from start to finish.

If you have a keen eye, you would applaud how skillfully Poe utilized his element of style to create an overall effect. Notice how the narrator all throughout the story insists that he is not insane. Negating something that is obvious only gives emphasis of ones mental standing suggesting high possibilities of serious derangement or paranoia. Poe really made sure that the reader never forgets the narrator's state of mind. Another technique that Poe used to communicate his style is his employment of a nameless and genderless hero villain. Here the narrator can either be a woman or a man. This might be intentional knowing Poe's expertise. He might have wanted to envelop the reader in a cloud of suspicion. Whatever was his purpose the technique was effective.

Poe also made use of some foreshadowing as well as subtle ironies and vivid symbolism. Of course these still contributes to the total terror effect he wants to achieve. Poe actually mixed it all together: the narrator's evident terror of the eye, the old man's terror, and the narrator's terror of what is to come. Foreshadowing adds to the element of suspense in the story. One perfect example is "*A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine.*" (Poe 243) which foreshadows the limited time the old man has before his death. An irony on the other hand, creates intrigue in the story and as subtle as they are they act like tiny gleams of light in a dark path - little clues that reveal the truth. An example would be the tale's first lines, "*TRUE! nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why WILL you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses, not destroyed, not dulled them.*" (Poe 242)

Moreover, symbolism improves the story's plot. Two apparent symbols used by Poe include the blue eye and the beating heart. The blue eye can stand for something evil from the narrator's point of view. But this could also be seen in a way that the eye mirrors whatever is placed in front of it. Could it be that what the narrator is seeing is his own evil reflected in the old man's blue eyes? This could be another possibility and another perspective of interpreting the symbol. Likewise, the beating heart which the narrator believes to be the old man's heart actually symbolizes his own heart. It beats for fear (of being discovered and caught), for guilt (of killing an innocent old man), and for the truth (as they say what is hidden within the self will not stay concealed).

Similar to other authors of gothic fiction and horror, Edgar Allan Poe often relies on the incremental repetition of totemic words for their heightening *outré* effect. (Ketterer 192) In Tell-Tale Heart he repeated the words nervous, hears, eyes, cautiously, slowly, closed, steadily, stealthily, louder, and dead.

As one literary critique observed, Poe is emulated mostly for " the same terrible excitement . . . the same minuteness of finish - the same slow and fatal accumulation of details, the same exquisite coolness of coloring, while everything creeps forward with irresistible certainty to a soul-harrowing climax." (Kopley 231)

If I were to sum up Tell-Tale Heart's work essence in one word, I would pick " brilliant". No wonder it remains one of the most well-read classic of all time.

Works Cited

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