

The Tell-Tale Heart

The short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe is a psychological thriller about a man who murders an old man, and even after the man is dead and dismembered, he can still hear his heartbeat. It is about how the guilt from killing someone haunts you down and makes you insane until you admit what you have done.

The narrator in this short story is a first person narrator, which can be seen with the use of the pronoun 'I'. The pronoun 'I' refers to the protagonist, and the entire story is seen from his point of view. The protagonist is both a round and a dynamic character because he changes through the story. At first he feels great after killing the old man; "(...) in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph" (p. 201, ll. 40-41), but in the end when he keeps hearing the old man's heartbeat even after the old man is dead, he gets a really bad conscience and therefore he confesses.

The story is a monologue, where the narrator tells the reader about an episode of his life, and the way he tells it and asks the reader questions; "(...) but why will *you* say that I am mad?" (p. 199, ll. 1-2) makes it seem a little like the reader is his psychiatrist. The narrator tries to convince the reader that he is not insane, "You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen *me*. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded – with what caution – with what foresight – with what dissimulation I went to work!" (p. 199, ll. 15-17). He thinks that he is way too smart to be insane because he kills the old man without making any noises, and then he dismembers the dead body and hides it under the floorboard so that no one will ever find it. The fact that he finds himself smart by doing this and not insane just makes it even more obvious that he is insane, and therefore there is a discrepancy between the reader and the narrator. It is also a bit ironical that he does not think that what he did is wrong when it obviously is, and both of these things make the narrator unreliable. Another thing that contributes to the irony in the short story is that he says that he likes the old man, but he only treats him nicely when he decides to kill him and in the end he actually kills him, which does not make sense at all. If he likes the old man, the reader expects him to treat him nicely throughout the entire story and definitely not expects him to kill the old man. The fact that he only treats the old man nicely when he wants to kill him makes him think that he is

Kommentar [LL1]: Udmærket – godt med faglig terminologi

Kommentar [LL2]: Between their perception of the world

smarter than the old man; “ (...) calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept” (p. 199, ll. 31-35). He thinks that the old man cannot figure out that something is up when he is nice to him. From the outside it only makes him look stupid, because even though the old man does not figure it out it is way easier to figure out that something is wrong when he suddenly, out of nothing, starts treating him nicely. This example also contributes to his unreliability.

Kommentar [LL3]: Flot inkorporeret quote i din sætning!

The old man’s eye haunts him, and therefore he thinks that he has to kill the old man, but maybe the haunted eye, or the vulture and evil eye as he calls it, is actually a symbol of his own haunted soul. Whenever he looks at the eye he sees his own madness and then wants to get rid of it by killing the old man because he does not or will not believe that he is mad.

Kommentar [LL4]: Dette afsnit virker lidt fragmenteret, kunne med fordel have været sat sammen med det øvre

Edgar Allan Poe is known for writing psychological thrillers with an insane protagonist who deals with nightmares and obsession, which is definitely the case in this short story. The protagonist is both obsessed with and haunted by the old man’s eye and therefore he kills the old man. In the end of the story, when the old man is dead, the eye does not haunt him anymore but the old man’s heart haunts him instead; “(...) the noise steadily increased. Oh God! What *could* I do? I foamed – I raved – I swore! (...) I felt that I must scream or die! – and now again! – hark! louder! louder! louder!” (p. 202, ll. 8-17). The policemen, who visit him at the end of the story, cannot hear the sound of the old man’s heart because the old man is dead, but the narrator can, which also shows that he is insane. He ends up confessing, because the sound of the heart gives him up, or as the title “The Tell-Tale-Heart” indicates, the heart tells tales about what he did.

The short story is also full of gothic elements to create suspense, mystery and terror, to make it more exciting and to evoke a chilling effect on the reader. One of the gothic elements used in the text is the supernatural. The vulture eye and haunted soul are both supernatural elements and in the beginning, the narrator claims that he has a disease with heightened senses; “I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell” (p. 199, ll. 4-5). He can hear everything, also from supernatural places like heaven and hell, and he can also hear the heartbeat through the floor at the end of the story, even though there is no heartbeat because the old man is dead. There are also a macabre element in the

story; "First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings" (p. 201, ll. 21-24). It is a really macabre way he gets rid of the corpse. The theme love vs. hate, which also is a gothic element, can be seen in the text as well. First he loves the old man and then he kills him because he hates his eye.

There is no doubt that the protagonist in this short story is insane, and the gothic elements used in the text together with the narrator's unreliability and the way he tells the story all show how he gets more and more insane through the text. The sound of the old man's heartbeat at the end of the story haunts him down until he confesses, and shows, like other stories written by Edgar Allan Poe, that the deepest secrets always will be revealed.

Elevkarakter: 12