

### “The Tell Tale Heart”: A Narrative by Edgar Allan Poe who is a Paranoid Schizophrenic

The short suspenseful story written by Edgar Allan Poe called, “The Tell-Tale Heart”, clearly implies that the narrator suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, and recalls memories of committing a brutal murder of an old man he loved. Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that affects how people like the narrator think, behave, and feel. It is difficult for them to tell the difference between real and imaginary experiences, to express feelings, or to behave appropriately. The speaker’s thoughts and actions are reflective of a schizophrenic who experiences visual hallucinations, irrational fears, and auditory hallucinations. Throughout the story, the narrator hallucinates and claims he saw things that normally, we as humans, would not be able to see.

The visual hallucinations that the narrator had, confirms that he is a schizophrenic who claims to have seen things that he imagined. He acknowledges that one of the old man’s eyes, a pale blue with a film over it, “resembled that of a vulture”. Because of the old man’s harmless eye, he wanted to kill the old man and this idea haunted him “day and night”. Each night as the narrator steadied the ray of light upon the eye, he saw “the hellish tattoo of the heart” increasing. When the speaker rose to kill the old man, he affirmed that he saw “death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim”. The narrator also had irrational fears, which led him to take the life of the old man which he claims to have loved.

People who suffer from schizophrenia, like the narrator, have irrational fears of harmless things that they don’t like, or they think they are in danger of. In this case, the speaker feels that the old man’s eye is evil and he is afraid of it. When the narrator sneaked up on the old man every night, the silence of the house was “so strange a noise” it excited him to “uncontrollable terror”, which is an unusual behaviour for a normal human being. He also stated that the terrors that distracted him “welled up from [his] bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo”. The speaker shows absurd fears especially at the end of the story, when the officers visit the old man’s house. While the officers smiled and chatted pleasantly, the narrator thought that they suspected him of the murder, so he shouted loudly, and out of control, “anything is better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision”. So, instead of

“enduring the beating of the old man’s heart”, he suddenly panics and reveals himself as the culprit behind the murder.

As well as irrational fears, the narrator also endured auditory hallucinations (when he heard, things he could have imagined, or minute sounds with his sharp hearing). The speaker avowed that “the disease”, which is schizophrenia, had sharpened his senses “-not destroyed-not dulled them”. He also claims to have heard “all things in the heaven and in the earth”, and “heard many things in hell”. Another example of an auditory hallucination that the narrator experiences, was when he could hear “low, dull, quick sounds” such as the ticking of a watch “when enveloped in cotton”. He also acknowledged that he heard “the beating of the old man’s heart”. All of this, along with the other hallucinations and irrational fears that the narrator goes through, it allows you to see that the narrator suffers from schizophrenia.

When the short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” was written, science had not characterised schizophrenia. Today, we know what schizophrenia is, and the many symptoms of this sickness. The speaker reveals that he is ill by the visual hallucinations, irrational fears, auditory hallucinations that he experiences. By putting together the clues that Edgar Allan Poe gives us in the story (example: the narrator thought that by killing the old man, he would free the old man of his evil vex eye), we can state the obvious, the narrator is a person who suffers from paranoid schizophrenia.