

Character Development in “The Tell-Tale Heart”

Edgar Allan Poe wrote “The Tell-Tale Heart” in 1843. It is one of his most famous short stories. Below are the opening paragraphs of the story.

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. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily - how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. 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.

The Narrator

The narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” insists that he is not mad. How does Poe use language, punctuation and structure in the opening paragraphs to show that the narrator is, in fact, insane?

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Actual answers will vary. Correct answers could include references to:

1) The way Poe uses disjointed sentences, such as “I think it was his eye!

yes, it was this!”

2) The numerous exclamation points and dashes to show the narrator’s

excitement and incoherence, such as “TRUE! - nervous - very, very

dreadfully nervous...”

3) Poe’s use of language, such as “eye of a vulture,” which is a

fear-inspiring metaphor.