
The Image Of Narrator In The Tell Tale Heart

During Edgar Allan Poe's time, most writings and books were about the bible or related to religion. However, Poe wrote twisted, grotesque short stories that had a recurring theme: a narrator with a mental illness. In his short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart", the narrator has a mental illness, specifically schizophrenia. Looking at this story in a present-day court case point of view, the story can be analyzed to attempt to find out what sentence and punishment the narrator would receive.

To begin, the narrator from "The Tell-Tale Heart" shows symptoms of schizophrenia. According to psychiatry.org, a schizophrenic person may have "hallucinations, such as hearing voices, paranoid delusions and exaggerated or distorted perceptions, beliefs and behaviors." Poe's narrator experiences many of these symptoms in the story. After the narrator kills the old man, he believes he can hear the old man's heartbeat. Poe wrote, "The ringing became more distinct.... it continued and gained definiteness?until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears." The narrator seems to be having hallucinations of the sound of a heartbeat which is nearly impossible because a heartbeat is too quiet to hear and the old man is dead so his heart should not be beating. Another symptom psychiatry.org states is "bizarre behavior". The narrator definitely portrays this symptom in the story, specifically on the eighth night of watching the old man sleep, where he ran towards the old man and "dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him" (Poe). This behavior is definitely abnormal and can be categorized under a schizophrenic type illness.

Moving on to the narrator's case, he would most likely be charged with first degree murder. According to justia.com, first degree murder, "involves any intentional murder that is willful and premeditated with malice aforethought." This applies to this narrator because he was planning to kill the old man a couple of days before he murdered him. Poe wrote, "I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him." It is obvious that the narrator knows that he is going to kill the old man, and he has been waiting and watching him sleep for "seven long nights" (Poe). The punishment for first degree murder in California results in "Imprisonment in state prison for a term of 25 years to life; Life imprisonment in state prison without the possibility of parole; or Death (though it should be noted that capital punishment is currently suspended)" (statelaws.findlaw.com). The narrator could potentially receive one of the three punishments because of his despicable actions.

However, from diagnosing the narrator with schizophrenia, he could try to plead not guilty because of insanity. The insanity plea requires the defendant to "prove to the court that they didn't understand what they were doing; failed to know right from wrong; acted on an uncontrollable impulse; or some variety of these factors" (criminal.findlaw.com). A defendant can be found guilty but insane, meaning they would be sent to jail but can be given treatment for their illness. For this narrator however, it will be very difficult for the court to accept a plea of insanity from him. In the story, the narrator hides and tries to conceal the body of the old man. Poe wrote, "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 chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye--not even his-- could have detected any thing wrong." The narrator openly confesses to the readers that he

purposely hid the body for no one to find. This means that the narrator must have known that his actions were wrongful, which leads to the narrator knowing right from wrong. Since the narrator knows right from wrong, it goes against the requirements in pleading insanity.

To conclude, it would be very difficult for the narrator to plea for insanity in a present-day court house. The narrator most likely experiences some form of schizophrenia from looking at the evidence from the short story. The narrator obviously has a mental illness from his callous actions he commits with no remorse, but because he knew that what he was doing was wrong and could have gotten him into trouble, the court would not be able to accept it.

edubirdie.com