Psychoanalytical Analysis of “The Tell-Tale Heart”

Edger Allen Poe’s short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” shows a narrator being driven mainly by his ego. The narrator starts out by claiming that he is not mad and continues to make this claim throughout the story using a logical approach. As his story continues though it clearly shows opposite of it what he claims, but the narrator seems to refuse that he is insane and uses many arguments to prove it. The narrator is fixed on doing his crime with extreme caution, but in the end, his ego causes him to confess his deed.

When one first reads “The Tell-Tale Heart” they are inclined to feel that it is his id not his ego controlling him, but when you look closer more evidence seems to point to the fact that his ego is more in control. This not to say that his id and superego do not play apart in his action, for clearly they do, but the id and the superego only play a small part in the narrator’s thoughts.

From the beginning of the story it is clear that the narrator’s ego is in control. The last few sentences in the first paragraph clearly show this “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.” (Poe, 40)

The end of the first paragraph really shows. Logically speaking a mad man would not be able recount murder.

One critic refers the narrator as being “an egocentric who derives pleasure from cruelty.” (Pritchard, 144) This idea of the narrator being egocentric (or self-centered) is supported by another critic who says he shows the stages of “Ego-Evil.” (Ki, 25) The narrator shows his self-centeredness when he says, “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, 40) He is clearly obsessed with the eye and what it means to him and has no regard for the old man. The narrator adds to his self-centeredness through the boasting in his much caution and declaring, “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!.”(Poe 40-41, emphasis added) Towards the end his egocentric self causes him to confess his crime to the police, sense he feels they are mocking him.

The narrator’s egocentric personality is shown throughout the story. The way he tells the story even shows it. From his boasting of the different aspects that he did to the manner in which he speaks of his deed, it clearly shows he care little for the old man as long as he gets what he wants. His egocentric personality ended up causing him to confess when he could of not.

Works Cited
