

The Tell-Tale Heart

By Edgar Allen Poe

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! One of his eyes resembled that 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 for ever.

Questions on the incipit of the story:

- 1) Do you see any Gothic features in this extract?
- 2) What type of narrator is it?
- 3) Which sense does he say is particularly strong? What do you think this implies about him? What do you think it implies about the story?
- 4) Find a rhetorical question. What is the narrator denying by asking this question?
- 5) What type of punctuation is used? What impression does it convey to the reader?
- 6) What are your impressions of this narrator?
 - a. Unreliable (someone who cannot be trusted)
 - b. Dangerous (someone who might kill a man for no reason)
 - c. Trustworthy
- 7) What questions do you have after reading this passage? What kind of suspense has the writer created for you?
- 8) What do you think will happen next?