

Brandon J. Tomcheck

Tell-Tale Heart Essay

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English 10

Mrs. Stocki

The definition of insanity from the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services is “A person accused of a crime can acknowledge that they committed the crime, but argue that they are not responsible for it because of a mental illness or a mental defect.” (“Section 1: The Insanity Defense & the NGRI Finding”) It's possible he is crazy, but he is definitely not insane. The narrator is guilty, but not by reason of insanity.

The narrator knew that there would be consequences for his crime which the legal definition states; not only does the narrator take the time to dismember and hide the body of the old man, he's confident he will get away with murder. He even invites the police to stay and visit. “In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them to rest from their fatigue, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.” (Poe) He feared no consequences, but he also took pains to avoid them.

There is no evidence that shows that the narrator knew right from wrong. “You fancy me mad. Madmen knows nothing. But you should have seen me.” For seven long nights, he was going inside the old man's room to check for his evil eye. It was just his eye that was making him mad. He didn't hate the old man, he wrote that he loved him; it was just his evil eye. The narrator

may have thought his hatred of the man's eye was enough reason to kill him. He waited until the old man's eye was open to kill him.

Along with knowing right from wrong. The crime was premeditated. The narrator wrote "I proceeded – with what caution – with what foresight – with what dissimulation I went to work!" (Poe) Why would you need foresight and dissimulation if it wasn't premeditated? Any premeditation invalidates that he was unable to stop or control the behavior. He also spends multiple days contemplating the crime before following through with it. "Gradually I made up my mind to take the life of the old man" (Poe)

In conclusion there's no way the narrator can use the plea of not guilty by reason of insanity. The narrator may not have understood right from wrong but he did know there were consequences because he lied to the police. He dismembered and hid the body. He watched the old man every night, waiting for his eye to open. The crime was premeditated because he thought about it for days before doing it. It's possible he was crazy but definitely not insane, enough to use a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity.

Works Cited

Poe, Edgar A. *Tell-Tale Heart*. January 1843.

"Section 1: The Insanity Defense & the NGRI Finding." *Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS)*,

<https://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/library/forensics/ofo%20-%20section%201%20all%20sections.pdf>. Accessed 23 September 2024.