

THE MULHERN STORY LIBRARY — SALON READING GUIDE

The Tell-Tale Heart

Edgar Allan Poe · American Romanticism / Gothic · first published 1843

AUTHOR	Edgar Allan Poe
PUBLISHED	1843
ERA	American Romanticism / Gothic
THEMES	Madness, Guilt, Death
READER PATHWAY	Accessible adult / college entry

INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

A nameless narrator insists on his sanity even as he confesses to murdering an old man whose pale, filmy 'vulture eye' he could not bear. After hiding the body beneath the floorboards, he is undone by what he believes is the relentless beating of the dead man's heart.

HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Published in 1843 in *The Pioneer*, the tale is a landmark of Poe's psychological Gothic and an early study of the unreliable narrator. Its compressed first-person confession and rising dread shaped the modern short story and the detective and horror traditions that followed.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Unreliable narration, dramatic irony, foreshadowing, and the use of sound and repetition to build suspense. A useful opening text for considering how point of view governs reader trust.

SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does the narrator's insistence on sanity reveal about the story's deeper understanding of guilt?
- How does Poe turn sound into both a physical sensation and a moral accusation?

READ & RESEARCH

1. Full text at Wikisource — https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Tell-Tale_Heart
2. The Works of Edgar Allan Poe at Project Gutenberg — <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2148>