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# The Tell-Tale Heart

Edgar Allan Poe, the father of short stories and of detective fiction, is one of the literary greats hailed from America. I'm not American, but his works have always been a point of interest to me. I even joined his official fanclub! But that's not what's important; what is, however, is his short story named 'The Tell-Tale Heart'.

The story tells of a young man attesting his sanity to the reader whilst telling a story of how he decided to kill an old man he was taking care of due to nothing but his unease and an eye he found discomfort in, quite an interesting and morbid story! I chose this specific story due to my familiarity in it and the lack of any adaptations (or any proper one, if I'm very honest.) In order to make it palatable to audiences, I also decided to rewrite some parts of the story such as adding newer plot points, characters, and changing some character goals completely. In the end, I was able to rewrite my favourite story into a tragic love story / dark comedy similar to the likes of Sweeney Todd which seemed like something theatrical audiences might be interested in.

Let's look at the reasons why I chose to adapt Edgar Allan Poe's short story instead of, let's say, The Raven; It's easier. Even if people knew The Raven more, the story is too little to do anything. It isn't really an adaptation anymore, it's a theatre production based on the poem. It's important to note that even if The Tell-Tale Heart's stage production isn't one and the same, I merely added new characters and new storylines to give a backstory. Making a production about The Raven requires me to write an hour or two hours worth of storylines to even get to the scenes the poem talks about. The same could be said for the other stories, save maybe the Cask of Amontillado and The Murders in the Rue Morgue, but the stories themselves wouldn't capture people's attention as much. I should know! I'm part of the author's official fanclub. So, I chose a story that is compelling enough, with a significant amount of passages in time, something similar to what audiences already like, but isn't all too well known with no adaptations that I know of. Couple that with the additions I've created and you've got yourself a production that could maybe snag a few bucks from its audience and leave the stage happy!

The summary of the original story is as follows:

"The Tell-Tale Heart" is a first-person narrative told by an unnamed narrator. Despite insisting that they are sane, the narrator suffers from a disease (nervousness) which causes "over-acuteness of the senses".

The old man, with whom the narrator lives, has a clouded, pale, blue "vulture-like" eye, which distresses and manipulates the narrator so much that they plot to murder the old man, despite also insisting that the narrator loves the old man and has never felt wronged by him. The narrator is insistent that this careful precision in committing the murder proves that they cannot possibly be insane. For seven nights, the narrator opens the door of the old man's room to shine a sliver of light onto the "evil eye." However, the old man's vulture-eye is always closed, making it impossible to "do the work," thus making the narrator go further into distress.

On the eighth night, the old man awakens after the narrator's hand slips and makes a noise, interrupting the narrator's nightly ritual. The narrator does not draw back and after some time, decides to open the lantern. A single thin ray of light shines out and lands precisely on the "evil eye," revealing that it is wide open. The narrator hears the old man's heart beating, which only gets louder and louder. This increases the narrator's anxiety to the point where they decide to strike. They jump into the room and the old man shrieks once before he is killed. The narrator then dismembers the body and conceals the pieces under the floorboards, ensuring the concealment of all signs of the crime. Even so, the old man's scream during the night causes a neighbour to summon the police, who the narrator invites in to look around. The narrator claims that the scream heard was their own in a nightmare and that the old man is absent in the country. Confident that they will not find any evidence of the murder, the narrator brings chairs for them and they sit in the old man's room. The chairs are placed on the very spot where the body is concealed; the police suspect nothing, and the narrator has a pleasant and easy manner.

The narrator begins to feel uncomfortable and notices a ringing in their ears. As the ringing grows louder, the narrator concludes that it is the heartbeat of the old man coming from under the floorboards. The sound increases steadily to the narrator, though the officers do not seem to hear it. Terrified by the violent beating of the heart and convinced that the officers are aware of not only the heartbeat but also the narrator's guilt, the narrator breaks down and confesses. The narrator tells them to tear up the floorboards to reveal the remains of the old man's body.

- Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Tell-Tale\\_Heart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tell-Tale_Heart))

Wow, *creepy*, just what we need to spark discussion! Time passes very frequently in the short story so I can extend each scene into the story from a few sentences into full-on acts in a play. But as with any short story, it can't be enough, so I decided to give a few additions that Edgar Allan Poe himself might agree with.

My newer outline is as follows:

Boston, a deranged man now incarcerated and put under supervision, tries to persuade a visiting doctor on his 'innocence'. Of course, the doctor doesn't believe him. But Boston doesn't falter. He begs the doctor to visit him every day to hear his full story, and so the doctor does. In the course of many visits, he manages to tell the doctor everything.

With his words, the stage begins to change and so does he. Now as a young nervous scholar, he falls in love with a girl named Janet and ends up taking care of her sickly father, John, as both a favour and a way to curry Janet's favour. Him and Janet become an item without John's knowledge and their passion blooms up until Janet gets sick. She soon passes away due to meningitis leaving him to stop his studies to care for her sick and mourning father.

To his neighbours, he's like an angel for taking care of John. But what they, and Boston himself, don't know is that taking care of your dead lover's father for months on end can take a mental toll especially when you're never given time yourself to grieve. Boston doesn't really understand why he feels this way so he brushes it off thinking nothing of it. Everything was going fine until someone (or something) that looks exactly like Janet seemingly appears everywhere he goes. After a while, he starts hearing 'her' talk to him, their conversations mostly in flirtations and *her feeling sorry for taking care of John*. This is where his guilt and frustrations manifest.

He doesn't know. He doesn't know why he's getting frustrated, but he must have a reason. For he isn't insane but very sound in mind. He's a scholar! He *loves* the old man like a father. He can't

have no reason, and 'Janet' agrees with his need to get away! So he thinks and thinks until he arrives at the conclusion that the old man's vulture-like eye must be the reason why he feels this way. That according to his scholarly opinion, John's eye holds some sort of evil that he needs to remove. He then hatches the cruel plan.

This is where the original story starts. He plans what he does quite extensively so as to assure no mistakes are to be done when he fulfils the job; he makes sure that the doors don't creak, as well as the floors and the beetles- those wicked beetles- that make so much sound that distract him. Seven nights pass by with him trying to shine a sliver of light onto the old man's eye but to no avail. On the eight night, he began to lose it. He cooks a wonderful meal for John, wishing that the sacrifice is ample enough for the beast to leave his eye open for him to see. And that night, he did. He accidentally makes some noise that prompts the old man to awaken and be frightened. Boston manages to shine a light onto John's evil eye and that became the hay that broke the camel's back, as the thump of the old man's heartbeat and the lack of Janet's seemed to get more loud and even more maddening. He strikes. The old man shrieked, before he turned to pieces. He placed them underneath the floorboards.

We are now, once again, in the institution with the doctor listening in. Boston, hearing the voices from a time past, starts trying to remove himself from the shackles. He continues, talking about the three policemen that arrived on his doorstep due to the shriek, how he charmed them enough to invite them in, how he placed the chairs directly on top of where each body part was hid, how he had a splendid conversation with his audience, and how he heard a thump. Even at the very room they were both in, he could still hear the thump. He tells the doctor how he heard the old man's heart thump loudly, too loud for anything else. At that point, he was sure that the policemen must have heard it and were thinking on how to apprehend him. He then screams as if he were back at that very night, shrieking how John's heart is buried under the floorboards and how he killed him that night. The doctor rushes out to ask for assistance as Boston struggles even more, before he starts calling for Janet once again, asking for her aid.

Phew, that was morbid! Of course, there doesn't seem to be any comedy here but that's because it's an outline, not a script. There are many reasons as to why I added a love interest, one being that Edgar Allan Poe himself finds the loss of a significant other to be an important topic in his works. In his words or something like that, he believes that art should only be about beauty. What he found beautiful is melancholy and love, which led him to write The Raven, a poem about a man who has lost his lover and descended into madness. In fact, you might find a lot of Edgar's stories centred around losing a lover! But that's because he has lost many of his to death too. In some sort of way, I added that aspect as a way to embody him and respect him when retelling a story like this. Boston is named after Edgar's pen-name, "A bostonian", John is named after the author's father of whom he loathed, and Janet is named after Jane Stith Stanard who Edgar looked up to, his first love really, before she died.

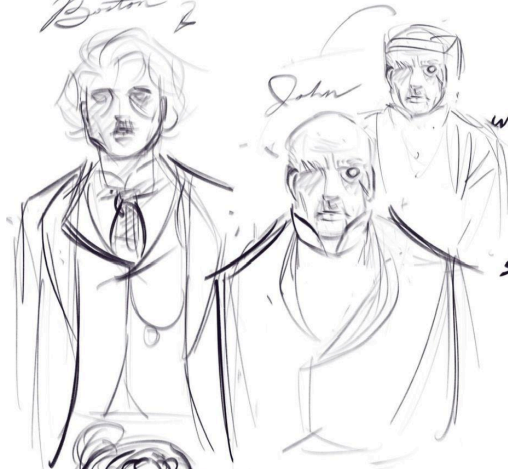
Below are some images of ideas that I made and some costume design choices, as well as some stage design and lighting ideas.

*A brief description: In the beginning of the show, Boston's actor will be hidden in shadows as to hide his eyes which aren't yet shadowed with makeup. He will wear a straightjacket designed to look like a normal shirt when put under a suit and tie. Over time, his eyes will start getting darker like classical stage plays in showcasing mad and passionate characters. John shall be given contact lenses which will change in colour as the show*

progresses. Janet only needs to change the colour of her clothes to show when she's alive, dead, a stranger, or spirit. The play will include shadow-puppetry and will also involve shadow actors for Boston's actor to act with; this will act as him and his thoughts. At the very end or during the climax of the play, we will raise the translucent flats to showcase the gigantic wooden/paper puppets. The lighting will go from natural to red (like red riding hood's bright red), and the clothes would generally go from neutrals to more unnatural colours as time goes on. These unnatural colours would be based off of the poisonous dyes of the era; Scheele's Green, London Purple, Uranium Orange, and finally, a very bright unnatural red.

## The Tell-Tale Heart

Boston 2

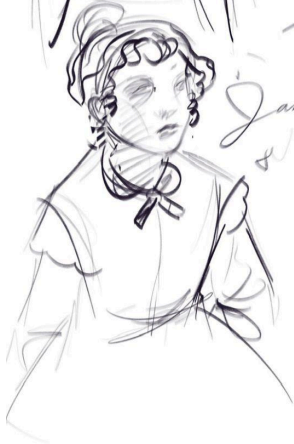


John

what? A spin on  
Edgar Allan Poe's  
classic story

Story: John falls in  
love with girl and  
ends up taking care  
of her father as a  
favor. After Janet  
passes away due to  
meningitis, he ends up  
stuck under her father  
who murders for her.

Janet



Motif:  
Deathwatch  
Beetles

Colours: Brown, Black,  
**BRIGHT RED**

John



- Based on Edgar's  
dad. To show the  
inspiration, his clothes  
are based on regency

- Contact lens for  
"hawk eye".

Boston



- Based on Edgar  
Allan Poe

IDEA:  
He spends the entire  
play in hospital  
clothes.



Over time,  
his eyes will  
be similar to  
mad eyes from old  
theatre



Shirt arms get  
unbound, means  
the end

IDEAS

