Edgar Allan Poe was born on the 19\textsuperscript{th} of January 1809 in Boston, Massachusetts and died at the age of 40 on the 7\textsuperscript{th} of October. Poe was considered one of the earliest American practitioners of the short story and the inventor of the detective-fiction and science-fiction genre. His works are heavy with the tone of death, mystery and macabre; such works were claimed to be his area of specialty.

The Tell-Tale Heart, one of his most famous short stories, was first published in 1843 in the January edition of James Russell Lowe’s \textit{The Pioneer}. This horror story and psychological thriller is truly significant in the fact that it is told from the first-person perspective of a madman; a feat not easily accomplished. Poe manages to pull this effect off to his advantage and through it, brings the reader into the mind and inner thoughts of a mentally disturbed murderer.

In The Tell-Tale Heart, the narrator is unnamed and most certainly mad, although he* persistently insists on his sanity throughout the short story. The old man he lives with suffers from a disease that causes him to have a “vulture-like” eye. And it is this very eye that has such an effect over the narrator that he plots to kill the old man. The narrator smothers the old man and proceeds to dismember him, concealing the body parts beneath the floorboards of the house. However, he hears the beat of the old man’s heart and, thinking that the police can hear it too and suspects him, confesses to the senseless murder.
As aforementioned, the narrator is unnamed. Closer inspection of the short story would reveal that the gender of the narrator is also not mentioned. However, I am inclined to believe that the narrator is a male, considering that it would take brute strength to hold a man down while you smother him to death, and to drag and conceal a body after doing so. It is also unclear what relationship the narrator and the old man share. It is possible that the narrator is a servant in the old man’s house, or, as is most often assumed, his son; he seems to live in that same house, and also know the inside of the house very well.

The narration, as done by the madman himself, is crucial to the story. It is done from the perspective of a psychotic murderer who refuses to admit to his insanity. That is most often the case; insane people do not readily admit they are insane. This is shown in the short story. From the beginning, he immediately scoffs the very idea that he is mad. However, his repetition of words and the constant insistence on his state of mind prove to be ironic, as will be discussed later. By taking his perspective, the reader has a confidential insight to his thoughts and a better understanding of his actions. It also lends an eerie tone to the story as he, step by step, detachedly plots to murder the old man.

The narrator is the main character in the story. He would be a flat character; portraying only one trait – his madness. From the beginning of the story, you know this character is mad. However, as the story moves along, one can also notice his meticulous behaviour in conducting the murder. In that sense, he is very much a
perfectionist. The old man is not a very important character in the story. He serves only as the victim of this madman’s craze and unfortunately is killed in the story without Poe revealing more of his character.

There are many literary devices employed in The Tell-Tale Heart. One of them would be the use of symbols. The most prominent symbol that appears in the story is the beating of the old man’s heart which the narrator describes, more than once, as a low, dull, quick sound, “such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton”. I believe that this beating of the old man’s heart that the narrator claims to hear is actually a manifestation of his guilt in murdering an innocent man.

This then, is what the whole story is centred on – that even mad people have a conscience. Another device would be verbal irony. The fact that he insists that he is not mad proves that he is mad. The repetition** of his words throughout the story provides an image of a man, eyes wide and restless. Hyperboles like, “I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell,” also serve to convince the reader that despite the narrator’s denial of insanity, such speech reveals the truth. Thus, this helps the readers to know that they are reading into the mind of a true madman.

The tone of the story is certainly one of suspense and thrill. One cannot help but eagerly await what comes next, as told by the narrator. Ultimately, we want to know what happens to this mad person. Poe is brilliant in creating the mysterious and strange atmosphere of such a circumstance. However, delving deeper into the story, I
realize that although the narrator is obviously psychotic, he is also just a man who, plagued by his own mind, has reached the end of his rope; finally arriving at meltdown point leading him to murder. The tone that can also be identified is nervous and frantic.

In conclusion, I would say that one of the strengths of this story is that Poe very convincingly carries off the character of a psychotic murderer. Poe did not at all mention in the story that the narrator is crazy, but that is exactly why we (the reader) can infer so. I must say, considering that I am unfamiliar with Poe’s works, this story has managed to pique my interest in his collection of short stories. The Tell-Tale Heart may be my first of Poe’s short stories, but it will definitely not be the last.
*The gender of the narrator is not mentioned in the story. For ease of this discussion, masculine pronouns will be used to describe the unnamed narrator.

**Examples of repetition from the text:

“...nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous...”

“...cautiously – oh, so cautiously -- cautiously...”

“It was open – wide, wide open...”