

To explore the immoral acts in “The Black Cat” of Edger Allan Poe: Analysis to find out cruel, immoral, and anti-feminist factors

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Abstract

In the story “The Black Cat” the writer uses his emotions and thought about different things. He acted as a disturbed personality who was initially happy in his life and spending a normal life, but after a certain age, his mind started changing. He was habitual of having pets and used to feed them on his own. Suddenly, he started taking alcohol, and his behavior got changed. Because of his changed behavior, his pets, especially the favorite cat Pluto avoided him, which angered the narrator, and he first injured it with his pen knife and then killed it. He brought another black cat of the same look and tried to kill that cat, but unfortunately, his wife came in between and the narrator killed his wife instead of the cat. At last, he concealed the body into the wall and thought that he could never be caught, but he made a mistake and was caught by the corps who visited him several times.

Introduction:

Cambridge Advance Learners Dictionary defines the term Feminism in following words:

“The belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state”. The term “Feminism” is taken to be a range of social and political movements. Through feminism, people (generally women) of different walks of life are gathered on a platform to fight for equal rights. It is very clear and believed that the literature that has been produced over the ages by female writers without taking into account the social realities what female authors had to face. Although, the women were not allowed to get formal education but still they could manage to be formal writers.

Article’s Objective:

Question: Does the short story “The Black Cat” of Edgar Allan Poe contain immoral, cruel and anti-feminist text?

Edgar Allan Poe wrote several genres of literature. He is supposed to be a pioneer of American Gothic literature, and the inventor of detective fiction and science fiction. Poe is a poet, an editor, and a story writer. Poe's most famous works are his short gothic stories—such as “The Black Cat” which is chosen to critically examine in terms of its anti-feminist approach and to find out immoral acts of a common man. Edgar Allan Poe is famous for his poetry and short stories and in particular for his tales of mystery and the macabre. While darkness and confusion can also be found in his short stories. The reason of this style of writing would be his life's incidents as his father had died when he was one-year-old only and his mother died the following year. After that he was taken by John and Francis Allan. As he grew up with Allan family, he found the necessities to spend his life are difficult to arrange. But life does not only want money to be spent, it needs social attachment as well which was missing in Poe's life.

Different articles and books were consulted to write down about the life and career of Edgar Allan Poe as it was needed to understand the impression of early life of Poe and his Education. To find out different aspects of the story some articles were also read. The bibliography of those articles and books is included below the actual text of the article.

Article Analysis:

In the story, named *The Black Cat*, Poe uses imagery and blurred ideas to move on. The writing style of Poe is “Gothic” which is operated between two different structural poles: Fantasy and Realism. This style of writing in which the writer does not stick to one side whether fantasy or realism, can make the reader confused. We can have example of this “Paranoia”: when the narrator describes his story he says “these events have terrified, tortured and destroyed me” which look very natural to the readers as it happens when someone commits that kind of bad act (misconduct & crime), he feels the impact of it afterward. But in reality even after three to four days and several visits of the corps after the murder of his wife, he was looking confident and he controlled himself and did not show any kind of fear or noticeable act. On the other hand, when he defines his story, he uses these words, terrified, tortured and destroyed. It means that the writer is not clear in his mind until the last moments of his life. In social life it is not observed generally that one is so harsh to his wife that the pets he possesses, feel the bad attitude even these kind of people cannot live with a family and often live alone, not retain relations with their neighbors, but the narrator's wife bore that typical kind of behavior. It is clear that his wife was completely dependent on the narrator and did not use to say anything in response as it was not mentioned in the narrator's word which means she never asked for her rights even for necessities. This also shows the selfishness of the narrator that he fulfilled his desires like having alcohol but in comparison to this, he kept his wife in so much pressure.

If we focus on the plot of the story, from the beginning, we find it quite immoral and unreal events that create confusion and make it an apocryphal story. For example, the narrator writes that he was fond of pets from his childhood and the habit continues till his adulthood. His parents had allowed him to have pets. Now if we see the practice of social life, in general, having pets at home needs continued care and responsibility as the pets cannot have food on their own because of their limited approach. On the other hand, the free animals can go anywhere and they are also habitual of searching food. This habit, having pets, needs more money to be spent on animal food and other needs of pets like proper cleanliness, place to live and regular checkup. This all need enough money to meet the expenditures but the narrator does not do any work to meet all these expenditures and because of this, the reader gets an image of something immoral and unusual. Apart of this aspect, the narrator talks about his marriage which was arranged in his early *Manhood* and the narrator was happy of the marriage even he and his wife were spending a good life in which the wife also used to take care of pets and never got irritated. Fantasy and Realism. This style of writing in which the writer does not stick to one side whether fantasy or realism, can make the reader confused. We can have example of this “Paranoia”: when the narrator describes his story he says “these events have terrified, tortured and destroyed me” which look very natural to the readers as it happens when someone commits that kind of bad act (misconduct & crime), he feels the impact of it afterward. But in reality even after three to four days and several visits of the corps after the murder of his wife, he was looking confident and he controlled himself and did not show any kind of fear or noticeable act. On the other hand, when he defines his story, he uses these words, terrified, tortured and destroyed. It means that the writer is not clear in his mind until the last moments of his life. In social life it is not observed generally that one is so harsh to his wife that the pets he possesses, feel the bad attitude even these kind of people cannot live with a family and often live alone, not retain relations with their neighbors, but the narrator's wife bore that typical kind of behavior. As he writes it in the following lines:

“I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.”

It looks a little immoral that in general pets irritate woman because she fulfills the needs of a home where washing, cleaning, cooking and other home chores are needed to be done and pets can create mess in homes specially if they are in numbers. But here Poe shows a different picture of the story where the wife also takes part in feeding and taking care of pets and never gets irritated. Furthermore, when the narrator talks about “Pluto”, the favorite cat of his, he also highlights a different approach of his wife for this pet who takes it as witch and for this she gives the reference of ancient notions. This difference of opinion with in one character, the wife, does not give a clear picture of the mentality of narrator’s wife. On one hand she is really careful and loving to pets and always ready to feed them, while on the other hand, she calls it a witch.

When the story moves forward, the narrator talks about his favorite pet, Pluto the Black Cat.

Pluto: favorite pet and playmate.

He attended me wherever I went about the house.

Prevent him from following me through the streets. Friendship lasted for several years.

In the above mentioned text, the narrator highlights the relation he had with Pluto. He also mentions that the pet was his “Playmate” too. Now this shows the focus of the narrator towards his favorite pet. He narrates it as his playmate which shows the relation of the pet with him. And when someone has attachment, which was not for a short span of time, this attachment gets the opponents to prepare each other to tolerate while in this case the tolerance is not visible. When we move forward, a change in the narrator’s attitude is noticed. As he mentioned himself that *“I grew day by day more moody, irritable and regardless of the feelings of others.”* Now these words are important to notice as the narrator did not have any child and he even not mentioned any work as his bread and butter in the story so what was the reason of his irritation it is not mentioned in the text. In general people who own pets are very humble as they have to spare time to fulfill the needs of pets. Here we need to understand the clear difference of a stray cat. For a stray cat one can have feeling of humbleness for the time being but on the other hand, the cat what a person possesses as pet, definitely enjoys more privilege. As the narrator had already mentioned about his friendship, he certainly did have emotionalism for the cat ceaselessly. On this point it looks quite immoral that one has that much attachment and it changes without of any particular reason.

The narrator further comments on his attitude which is extended towards his wife and he started misbehaving with his wife as well. He narrates *“Use intemperate language with my wife.”* Initially he mentioned in the story that his wife had been very helpful for him to deal modestly with the pets and he praised her but as the narrator gets irritated because of no reason his attitude changes towards her as well. At this point one can notice the approach and rough behavior of the narrator even with his wife. The narrator did not mention about his children so it can be understood that the couple did not have any child while on the other hand he did not even mention about his professional life that shows he had nothing to do to earn his bread and butter. Generally, these kind of couples have more close relations between them as they spend more time with each other and bear more understanding between them. In contradiction of this practice the narrator tried to keep his wife under pressure all the time. As it was traditionally the responsibility of a husband to take care of all needs of a wife, the narrator did not have the same school of thought and instead of fulfilling the needs of his wife, in place of praising her for her undeniable services to him and her humble and supportive attitude towards pets, he gets irritated without any reason. In addition to this he wrote *“I even offered her personal violence”* which is harsher to bear and a contradiction can be observed in his personality that on one hand he was humble to the pets and when he started having alcohol his attitude got changed but he controlled himself for the pets and he did not keep the same behavior with his wife who was more entitled of his humble behavior. Another important aspect is highlighted here with the attitude of the narrator that he did not even care of the rights of his wife. In story, he did not talk much about his wife but he talked more about the black cat which clearly mentions that his wife did not use to get required attention from the narrator even with the above mentioned lines he also showed un-understandable behavior like

For Pluto, however he still had retained sufficient regard/ no maltreating with the cat

The line presents impenetrable attitude with the wife. Strangely one can control himself for a pet but could not do the same with his wife who is more helpful for him in his own words. His wife needs more careful behavior as she used to look after different pets of the house which is an additional and tough responsibility along with other home chores; the family had different animals and all animals eat different food which was ultimately provided by the

narrator's wife. Furthermore, the narrator writes that the change of attitude was also felt by the pets. Here it is noteworthy that animals do not feel the normal change of attitude or difference of behavior but if anyone gets unbearably harsh, acts barbarically and shows ultimate anger then the change of behavior is felt by the animals. In social life it is not observed generally that one is so harsh to his wife that the pets he possesses, feel the bad attitude eventhese kind of people cannot live with a family and often live alone, not retain relations with their neighbors, but the narrator's wife bore that typical kind of behavior. It is clear that his wife was completely dependent on the narrator and did not use to say anything in response as it was not mentioned in the narrator's word which means she never asked for her rights even for necessities. This also shows the selfishness of the narrator that he fulfilled his desires like having alcohol but in comparison to this, he kept his wife in so much pressure. Another contradictory statement can be noticed in the text when the narrator talked about the night when the incident took place. The narrator used these words to explain about his position, he said;

Ifancied that it avoided my presence

Previously the narrator mentioned that his attention towards the cat was getting down. He did not like the unrestricted behavior of the animal initially, which is a real element of human personality, but here he noticed it more clearly even he was intoxicated. Another important point of the story is the introduction of the Black cat as he explains in detail about the physique of the animal as remarkably large. Cats generally do not have large bodies but he uses the word remarkably large which show the extra attention of the narrator towards the animal. In addition to this, he writes about the superficial element as the cat was *entirely black*, he used an additional word to show the attraction he wanted to give to the cat. And at last he says sagacious, to an astonishing degree which also shows the ornamental language he used for his cat. All these comments made by the narrator, clarify the interest of his towards that only pet and the affection he had with the cat. But when he attacked the cat's eye, the act cannot be borne by any mean.

He took from his waistcoat-pocket a penknife, caught the cat by its throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket!

In above mentioned lines again a massive change in the narrator's behavior can be noticed which is not easily tolerable as he directly attacked at the eye of the pet. In general, it is not an easy job to perform that on one hand a person shows his extreme love and care for a pet while on the other hand he is ready to attack on it and injured it brutally. In this case even the narrator's wife could not get the status she was entitled for, but an animal got more prestige than her. Although the narrator pretend here that he did it because of intoxication but he directly hit with power and aimed to Pluto's most important part so the pet cannot see all of its life. So damaging eye was not a simple or routine injury to give but it looks planned and aimed. The act what the narrator committed can ruin the cat's life. After that when the crime was finally committed he was not that much bothered but surprisingly he felt like "half of remorse" which is also very strange behavior of the narrator and shows that he was not actually guilty of the action he committed. When it is analyzed that a person nurtured an animal and satisfied all his needs at any cost, suddenly his behavior changes for one thing that is "Alcohol". It gets more complicated when the story moves on as the black cat fled the scene whenever the narrator returned back home. At this point, the narrator did not get ashamed and instead of being mortified on his act, he got irritated as the days were passing on; even he decided to give the black cat a final punishment for which he used a word "Perverseness".

One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree.

A very terrible line to read as one cannot expect to a person who owns several pets and claims that he fed personally one of his closest pet, a black cat; who claims that he had very long friendship with it even lasted for several years and at one point that person, the narrator is ready to hang his favorite pet for no valid reason. Furthermore, he shows his high level of cruelty that this time he did not think of hitting something to hurt the pet but hang it with a noose so the pet would definitely die. Notably, it was the time of morning not night when he used to come in the condition of intoxicated which is very unusual as most of the drunk people are free from the intoxication in morning but still he was so irritated and did the severe crime. As the story progresses further, it is known that the narrator found another cat of the similar look and the narrator soon got involved with it as he had involved with the previous one. The cat used to go with him everywhere he used to go but suddenly it came into the notice of the narrator that his wife is getting involved with the cat and on the other hand he started feeling dislike for the cat.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but—I know not how or why it was

And gradually, the degree of annoyance and disgust touched to its highest degree that one day when the writer was visiting one of his empty room the cat followed him there and because of its presence he got irritated. As the writer was going down through steep the cat diverted him and could throw him headlong, which exasperated the writer to madness and he tried to kill the cat. He lifted an axe and hit it to the cat but his hand was intercepted by his wife and in more anger and annoyed manner he buried the axe in his wife's brain which killed her on spot.

Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, I aimed ablow at the animal. but this blowwas arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded by theinterference into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrewmy arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain.

In the above mentioned lines, it can be observed that the writer was not careful for his wife as he was supposed to be. His wife always took care of the pets which was actually a habit of her husband and never complained about the extra work she had to do in this regard. The writer did not even give her respect that although she paid attention to him even in poverty she had spent time with but just a small interference for a cat became a reason for her death. After this shameful act of murder, the writer did not think of the cruel act even he writes that he knew he cannot take the body outside the house not in daylight and not in night. Instead of feeling grief for his wife, he thought about hiding the body. He was that much attentive that different ideas came in his mind, like digging a grave in the empty room or the worst one to cut the body into pieces and burn it into fire. This kind of approach can only be taken in to account when a person does not consider his opponent a valuable individual. His wife was not a newlywed bride, she spent years with him but the writer did not consider her and took her body to a wall which was broken due to a previous incident and concealed her body inside of the wall. In general, it is not an easy job to perform that on one hand a person shows his extreme love and care for a pet while on the other hand he is ready to attack on it and injured it brutally. In this case even the narrator's wife could not get the status she was entitled for, but an animal got more prestige than her. Although the narrator pretend here that he did it because of intoxication but he directly hit with power and aimed to Pluto's most important part so the pet cannot see all of its life. So damaging eye was not a simple or routine injury to give but it looks planned and aimed. The act what the narrator committed can ruin the cat's life.

Conclusion:

At the end it can be concluded that the story "the black cat" contains the elements which cannot be accepted in any society. On the other hand, some actions of the writer can be questioned as those were immoral to perform. On the whole the story has some mysterious text as well which provide attraction to the audience and like to read it till the end. Another important thing is the anti-feminist approach of the writer as he did not consider his wife a respectable personality and she suffered a lot in the whole story.

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