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**“THE BLACK CAT”**

In 1809, Edgar Poe was born in Boston and became an orphan very young. He spent his childhood in Virginia in a fairly well-off host family. After some university studies, he tried to pursue a military career. Poe began his literary career by publishing an anonymous collection of poems “Tamerlane” and other poems. In 1833, the story “The Manuscript Found in a Bottle” is award-winning and has recognized by peers. In 1835 he devoted himself to literary criticism in Richmond's Southern Literary “Messenger”, where he became an assistant and developed his own style. For the next ten years, Poe collaborated with writing in many newspapers, until trying to find his own, he published some works including many tales. In 1837, he went to New York with his wife, but in poverty, he continued, despite everything to write and publish tales: The “Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym”, “Ligeia”, “The Fall of Usher House”, “William Wilson” and “The Golden Scarab”. In 1844, he moved to New York and worked at the Broadway Journal, where he became the owner. He published his poem, “The Raven”, in 1845, which was a great success. In 1849, Poe died at the age of 40 from a delirium tremens attack. Is it madness, alcohol, drugs, disease? Nobody can answer. “Black Cat” is a short story first published in 1843 on the front page of The Saturday Evening Post in Philadelphia. The tale exposes the harms of alcohol that exacerbate the negative and violent feelings of the human being. Thus, little by little, the cat becomes the double of its master, like a real demon inside and evil. Alcohol releases the devastating impulses and negates any sense of guilt.

The story follows a diptych structure (that is, two parallel parts) that mimics the progression of violence and dementia, the progression of the narrator's madness. The narrator says he has loved animals since childhood, a love he shares with his wife for their many pets, including a black cat named Pluto, to whom he is particularly attached. He is an alcoholic and tells that an evening of drunkenness, he gets carried away against his cat particularly affectionate and snatches an eye with his penknife. The cat flees him terrified and the narrator seems to regret. But his remorse turns into unbearable irritation, so he hangs him from the branch of a tree in the garden. During the night, the house burns mysteriously, forcing the narrator to flee with his wife. The next day, the narrator returns to the ruins of the house and discovers on a wall the shape of a cat tied by a rope. He tries to find a rational explanation: someone would have thrown the cat against the wall to warn him of the fire. Sometime later, he finds another one-eyed cat that looks like Pluto aside from a white patch on his chest, he brings him home. Little by little, he hates the cat, then gets frightened by watching the white spot turn into a gallows. One day when the narrator is in the cellar of their new house, he gets into the cat, he grabs an ax and tries to kill the animal. His wife wanted to hold him and he killed her. To hide the corpse, he places it in a hollow wall and refills the hole. The cat disappears. The police come to investigate and eventually inspect the cellar. Sure of him, praising the solidity of the foundations of the house, the narrator taps on the wall-coffin and there a horrible cry seeming to come from the Hells answers him.

The story concludes that the main character goes from a loving and warm man who adores animals to someone abusive and consumed by his emotions. He proclaims himself a victim of the spirit of perversity that combines with addiction to alcohol to justify his transformation into a murderer. Indeed, this evil drives him to hang his beloved cat Pluto and he understands the evil of his crime in addition to feeling guilt. By adopting a second cat to drive out his feeling of wrong turns out to be a big mistake, because he feels only animosity towards him and succumbs to an unhealthy obsession. His mental health decreases throughout the story, but it is really the lack of morality in the accidental murder of his wife who represents the last pillar crossed by the character to achieve madness. The beginning of the tale presents clues that adorn the text with a fantastic dimension. The cat is black, indicative of a bad omen and the witch's pet as mentioned by the narrator's wife. Moreover his name "Pluto" is already an announcement of the symbol that the cat carries: the god of the hereafter, hated and dreaded because he reigns over all that death reap. The binary structure highlights the progression of the evil, remorse towards the excess of an unjustified crime which no longer weighs on the conscience; from the act of gratuitous violence to a deliberate crime. The narrator goes from remorse to lack of regret about the crime. Moreover, he oscillates between moments of lucidity about his state and moments of furious madness , linked in evidence to alcohol; between the need to rationalize (explanation of the drawing on the wall) to the acceptance of the diabolical presence (the final cry of the tale).

References

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