The Black Cat: What Goes Around Comes Around Essay, Research Paper

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In his story “The Black Cat,” Edgar Allan Poe dramatizes his experience

with madness, and challenges the readers suspension of disbelief by using

imagery in describing the plot and characters. Poe uses foreshadowing to

describe the scenes of sanity versus insanity. He writes ?for the most wild yet

homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor illicit belief.

Yet mad I am not- and surely do I not dream,? alerts the reader about a

forthcoming story that will test the boundaries of reality and fiction. The

author asserts his belief of the activities described in the story when he

states ?to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburden my soul?(80).

Poe describes his affectionate temperament of his character when he

writes ?my tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of

my companions?(80). He also characterizes his animal friends as “unselfish” and

their love as ?self-sacrificing? illustrating to the readers his devotion to

them for their companionship. The author uses foreshadowing in the statement ?we

had birds, goldfish, a fine dog, a rabbit, a small monkey, and a cat?(80). The

use of italics hints to the reader of upcoming events about the cat that peaks

interest and anticipation. Poe also describes a touch foreshadowing and

suspension of disbelief when he illustrates his wives response to the cat when

he writes “all black cats are witches in disguise, not that she was ever serious

upon this point-and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than it

happened, just now, to be remembered”(80).

Poe expresses his early attachment to the cat and dramatizes the

character changes he experiences when he writes “our friendship lasted, in this

manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character-

through instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance-had (I blush to confess it)

experienced a radical alteration for the worse”(81). He warns the reader of new

events in a cynical tone and implies the beginning of the madness he denies. Poe

first illustrates this madness when he uses imagery to describe the brutal scene

with the cat when he writes “I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen knife, opened

it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes

from the socket!”

The author describes his emotional and physical state of being during

the unthinkable act as “I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable

atrocity”(81). He describes the morning aftereffect of his actions when he

states “when reason returned with the morning-when I had slept off the fumes of

the night’s debauch-I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse,

for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and

equivocable feeling, and the soul remained untouched”(81). Now Poe implies to

the readers that he has truly crossed over into madness by brutally attacking

the animal and feeling little or no remorse.

Next Poe dramatizes his change in character even further when he writes

“and then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of

PERVERSENESS,”(81) which once again alerts the reader of new events so shocking

that reading forward becomes an essentiality. The author illustrates a scene so

outrageous that the reader has to go beyond the suspension of disbelief they

have agreed to participate in. He writes “One morning, in cold blood, I slipped

a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;-hung it with tears

streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;-hung it

because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no

reason of offense;-hung it because I knew that in so I was committing a sin-a

deadly sin that would jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it-if such a thing

were possible- even beyond the reach of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible

God”(81-82).

Now the reader has crossed over the line of reality versus fiction. The

author continues to illustrate the inconceivable story when he describes the

scene after the fire that destroyed every part of the house except the one wall

that was still standing. Poe writes “I approached and saw, as if graven in bas-

relief upon the white surface the figure of a gigantic cat and there was a rope

around the animals neck,”(82) leading the readers to join the madness and

believe that this was the same cat that Poe had savagely destroyed earlier that

same day.

The author describes his need to replace the animal in order to feel

peace and after doing so, he finds himself once again feeling a abhorrence

toward the animal. He writes “but gradually-very gradually- I came to look upon

it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as

from the breath of a pestance”(83). Poe uses imagery to describes his disgust

with the cat when he states “that like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one

of its eyes,”(83) he now wanted to destroy this animal as well. Poe illustrates

the change of character he has experience since the beginning of the story only

now he has gone beyond the madness that has consumed him many times. He writes

“evil thoughts becomes my sole intimates-the darkest and most evil of

thoughts”(84).

The author uses more imagery when he writes the final abominable act of

evil. Poe confesses to the reader about the murder of his wife when he states ?

goaded by the interference into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm

from her grasp and buried the ax in her brain?(84). He explains how he disposes

of the body in detail and describes the relief he feels when he writes “I

soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, slept even with the burden of murder upon my

soul”(85). Poe informs the reader of his little remorse when he states” my

happiness was supreme, and the guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but

little”(85).

The author leads the reader to the final plateau of suspension when he

dramatizes the conclusion of the story. He explains the sounds he heard in

detail when the mystery unfolds regarding the missing cat he had not seen or

heard from since the murder. He writes “like the sobbing of a child, and then

quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous

and inhuman-a howl-a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as

might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in

their agony and the demons that exult in the damnation”(85). Poes use of

descriptive details allows the reader to feel the horrifying experience of a man

who believed he was free from the evil of madness. Poe ends the story after

utilizing every inch of suspension of disbelief the reader can afford. He sums

up the plot of the story when he writes “the hideous beast whose craft had

seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the

hangman,” (85) implying that the cat had induced the same torture on him that he

had brought on the first cat.