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Terror in the story "the black cat" (1843) by Edgar Allan Poe

How does Edgar Allan Poe create terror in the story "The Black Cat" (1843)?

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Introduction

I really like horror literature because the sensations they convey to me when reading the books of this genre are very exciting. Among my favorite writers in the Gothic literary genre is Edgar Allan Poe. I really like the style it has when it comes to writing, using adjectives on the characters and in the environment it's easier to imagine the story, create our own image as if we were watching a short film and thus feel like you're really within history.

For this research I decided to choose one of his works (The Black cat - 1843) in which I will analyze the literary resources he uses, the characters, among other things typical of him and how the way the story is told can hook the reader and transmit the characters of the story making us live a more vivid experience of their stories.

Edgar Allan Poe is considered as the father of the police or terror genre for his wonderful works of this genre, such as "The Raven (1845)", "Tales of mystery and imagination (1839)", "Heart tell-tale (1843)", among others, with whom he was gaining fame, however, at the beginning of his profession, he did not have the full support of his adoptive parents, especially his stepfather, especially his stepfather, but this and poverty did not stop him from writing his stories. There were many things that marked his life, influencing his stories and the way he did it, one of these important facts was the death of his wife from tuberculosis in 1847, in addition, a time of his life was carried away by games and alcoholism. I'll give more detailed information about him later, which will help me perform further analysis.

for this research I will take into account the book of "the black cat" as the main source, I chose this story since it is one of his best known tales, the plot is very interesting as well as the characters, especially by the symbols that he uses, in this case the black cat, leaving us pensive about what really happened with this cat , being a very mysterious and dark character, in addition, we can see a part of Edgar

Allan Poe's life represented, the problems he had with alcoholism in his youthful times, which leads us to think if he wanted to represent how he felt about drinking a lot of alcohol transforming him into a totally different person. It is therefore very important to know ma about your life and do an analysis of every detail of the story.

Chapter 1: Edgar Allan Poe

“Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality.” –Edgar Allan Poe

To be able to begin, it is very important knowledge on the life of Edgar Allan Poe, because what it could spend in his life can serve to him very much like inspiration to create personages, themes, stages, or even the whole history. It is for it that knowing more can help us to have a clearer idea on what he wants to transmit us in its works and helps us to know the relation that his worked has with its context or the real meaning behind this work.

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, the USA, in 1809. He a poet, storyteller and American critic. Its parents were itinerant actors of theatre, they died when only he was still a child. Edgar Allan Poe was educated by John Allan, a businessman of Richmond, and from 1815 to 1820 lived with this one and its wife in the United Kingdom, where he started his education.

After returning to the United States, Edgar kept on studying in private centers and attended to the University of Virginia, but in 1827 its love to the game and to the drink they took it to the expulsion. It left soon the employee's position that its adoptive father had assigned him, and travelled to Boston, where Tamerlane published in an anonymous way its first titled book and Other Poems, in 1827.

The poet paid the publication of his own work, and only 50 copies were printed on the first throw. At the beginning of the prolog, it placed a warning being called «a beginner», like excusing for its inexperienced experience, affirming that most of the compositions had been composed before 14 years. In 1832, and after the publication

of its third book, *Poems* (*Poems by Edgar Allan Poe*, 1831), one displaced Baltimore, where there married its prime Virginia Clemm, which it had fourteen years.

Poe conveys the dark, dirty side and at the same time that romanticism of the human being which influenced gender literature of the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century. He was especially notable for his contribution as a storyteller, as he was one of the first Americans to practice this type of genre, and he made way for many others to do so later, from Faulkner to Stephen King, to Eliot, all of them insigne American feathers. Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Barret, Thomas de Quincey and Ernst Hoffmann had the greatest influence on him.

1.1. Edgar Allan Poe context

Knowing more about the context where the story is based, it is easier to be able to interpret what he wants to show us Poe, since we can locate the story "the black cat" in a certain time and understand the customs and thoughts of the persons of that epoch to us.

In the story of "The black cat", the narrator says that his wife alluded to "the ancient popular notion, which was considering all the black cats like disguised witches". This cannot serve like reference to be able to locate us in the epoch in which the topics of witchcraft and of this style were very present.

In the middle age, the black cats were hunted in Easter and the Shrove Tuesday due to its association with witches and the devil. An example of this type of culture is the case of a witch called Rolande de Vernois, in 1590 he attested that "The devil presented before himself in the Sabbat in the shape of an enormous black cat" (quoted in *A Treasury of Witchcraft* de Harry E. Wedeck). Wedeck also registers the history of Elizabeth Francis, a witch judged in Chelmsford, England, in 1556. It was said that it had a cat of white spots called Sathan, which there had given him its grandmother who she told him to resign God and to serve to Satan, which was personified in the cat.

1.2. The terror

"Fear is one of humanity's oldest and most powerful emotions, and the oldest and most powerful fear is fear of the unknown." book The Supernatural Horror in Literature

It is important to know very well the meaning of the terror Poe to be able to recognize it in the course of the story, also, he is one of the most important exponents inside this type of narrative.

The terror is the most intense fear feeling, it can generate cold sweat, the palsy of the muscles and up to the death for cardiac unemployment. A terror story, it is a literary history that tries to generate this feeling in the reader. For this it presents histories linked to the most spine-chilling subject-matters for the human beings, as the death, the illnesses, the crimes, the natural disasters, the spirits and the supernatural beasts.

Terror is a very characteristic feeling of Poe's tales, in most it is very present through its characters, in the plot or as main themes. In the story "the black cat" we see him present in the narrator's emotions when he realized what he had done to the cat and the consequences that this had.

Chapter 2: "The black cat"

Before beginning analyzing the chosen story, it is fundamental to have a basic idea of the history to be able to understand better the analysis of the personages and the ways in which Poe tells the story, and thus understand how it is managing to convey the feeling of terror to readers.

The story treats about a young marriage in company of several domestic animals, between them a mysterious black cat was standing out. Nevertheless, everything changes when the husband (narrator) begins allowing to go for the alcohol, turning or aggressive and irritating man.

One day the alcohol turns him irascibly and in one of its moments of fury it finishes with the life of the animal. Time later, the second cat appears in its lives bringing chaos to the marriage, with the time the cat begins to prove to be aggressive with the narrator, doing that this one feels uncomfortable or frightened of.

One day, after almost having fallen down for the stairs for the fault of the cat, decides to end with the life of the cat, nevertheless, its wife covers the cat, causing its death. After having hidden the body he looks for the cat to conceal it along with the body of its wife, nevertheless it does not find it, time later, when the police come to its house looking for his wife a frightening scream is heard behind the wall, and there they find the corpse of its wife and to the cat on the head of her

2.1. Literary resources

Knowing more on the resources, we can understand because the texts do not have the same impact in a reader, it depends much of the plot and of the person that this thing reading, since they not all assimilate the information of the same way. The resources or literary figures serve as hardware that the authors of literature use to generate style effects in its texts. The target to use the literary resources is to be able to manage to receive the attention of the reader, altering the intention of the words, times or meaning of some prayers, making to seem to the most expressive text. The use of this resource can wound to characterize an author, since not all the texts use the same resources of the same way, it depends much of the style and what the author wants to transmit to its readership.

Poe uses three resources in the story "the black cat", adjectivation, hyperbole and simile, adjectivation are adjectives that describe scenario characters or situations, helping the reader to have a better picture of what is being talked about, this is present in the following example "A faint cry, cut short... and then it grew fast, to become a single scream, long, loud, continuous, anomalous, and inhumane." Hyperbole was used to exaggerate the reality surrounding the protagonist, an example is when he describes the horror he feels when seeing the black cat. "Woe, gloomy and terrible machine of horror and crime, of agony and death!" This helps to convey the feelings of the characters to the reader. Finally, the simile, this is used to compare two different realities as shown in the example "I had not finished sinking into silence the reverberation of my blows when a voice answered me from the tomb-first with a cry quenched like the cry of a child...." The latter serves so that the reader can get deeper into the atmosphere of history

2.1.1. Ironies

As the narrator tells his story, the reader discovers that this character has undergone a radical transformation that presents in his abuse of alcohol and the petty surface of his character, as a consequence of alcohol. The reader also discovers that the narrator is irrational, as he describes that his wife made "common reference to the early popular idea, all black cat witches on the cover" (Thompson, 1993). Although the narrator rejects this, the reader becomes increasingly aware of his irrational faith as the story progresses.

In the first part of the story, the reader predicts that he will aggressively harm his wife (Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 1993). However, are the procedures of the account, as proposed by the speaker, based on a sequence of causes and results, or are they certainly caused by the mystical?

In this story, Poe makes us imagine in the next action of the character, however, he surprises us with an unexpected decision, making readers want to continue reading in order to discover the ending, since it is not predictable.

2.1.2. Symbolism

Symbols are a literary figure, consisting of "an object, action or expression that means more than merely visible in its literal meaning. A literary resource with various meanings, often hidden" (from figurasliterarias.org).

Therefore, symbols are elements that are not in plain sight: the reader needs to make an effort to find true meaning, not everyone manages to find it or in some cases people have a different definition about the same symbol, knowing the true meaning, it is easier to understand the story, they could even give it another meaning since the symbols give more depth or bring more meaning to the story.

A very important symbol in the play are cats, which symbolize the narrator's consciousness. The first cat, Pluto, refers to death because of the name, Pluto, in Greek mythology, is the god of death and the underworld, and the black coat also represents to us the wickedness and the dark side of people. While the second cat represents the narrator's feeling of regret for his actions which lead him through a stressful life.

2.2. Content analysis

In this chapter I will discuss the most characteristic and important points of "the black cat", which mostly go throughout history making the story unique, so that the reader does not get bored of reading as it has no characteristics similar to other stories and helps him keep pace with the story so as not to get lost in the story. With this I will be able to know how Poe achieves the different emotions to his readers, this part of monograph is very important since it will help me respond to the rest of the information in order to complement it and be able to get a correct conclusion.

2.2.1. Tone

The Tone "is the way the story sounds, in your mind when you read quietly, in your ear when you read aloud. We believe that most of the "Black Cat" sentences have several tones, often seemingly in conflict with each other.

At first, when the narrator tells us that one day before writing the letter he will die and tells us: "I blush, I burn, I shudder, as I write the bloody atrocity" shows us how desperate the narrator feels with everything that is going on and so that the reader can put himself in his place, Poe uses adjectives to get a desperate tone and so the character's feelings can be felt by the reader. Use a play on words that have a strong meaning to make it easier to perceive that feeling. In this way Poe makes the reader

"in the reader's shoes" transmitting different emotions, leading us to a different reality.

2.2.2. Genre

The genre of narrative that is present in this tale is horror or gothic fiction, a popular genre in the time of Poe. Horror or gothic stories were designed to work in the senses of readers. The characters in these stories experience outrageous feelings and thoughts, commit appalling acts, and find themselves in extreme situations. One way to convey them is through the use of violence, imprisonment, death, dismemberment and burial in the stories as they make us feel shocked. In the black cat, most of the drama focuses on the home of the characters, making the feeling of horror grow in us, as being related to family problems in the home makes us imagine the things that could go wrong in our families, because this is supposed to be a safe place where we can feel protected, however, the story shows the opposite. Poe causes the mind of the reader to immerse itself in the mind of the murderer, making the reader want to continue reading to know what happens or why he began to have such attitudes, however, at the end of the story we do not have as many answers as we want to leave us in a great suspense

2.2.3. Gothic Literature

This is a genre that was first developed in Europe in the 18th century and was in vogue in England, Germany, and the United States until the early 19th century. In this type of genre, an atmosphere of mystery, horror and terror invaded the Gothic novel, most of the times supernatural elements such as ghosts and haunted houses are presented, or themes such as madness, death and hereditary curses. The term Gothic is now applied to a work that may lack "the medieval setting, but that develops a disturbing atmosphere of sadness or terror. In the story" The Black Cat "we can see that it is of the Gothic genre, since it presents us with the madness in the

character of the narrator, who killed his wife and cat, the plot agrees a lot with characteristics of the gothic literary genre.

2.2.4. Themes

The theme is very important in the writing of stories since it is the basic idea of the story and from there is where the characters come from, spaces of the story, the theme is what you want to convey with the story that is told. It is composed of other sub-themes within the story. The main theme of "the black cat" is the effects of alcohol, because the story begins with the uncontrolled consumption of alcohol by the narrator, which generates drastic changes in the main character, the narrator, leading to very recorded consequences, creating a history of terror.

The main effects that alcohol has on the human body are different, however, in most cases it greatly affects the ability of reasoning and judgment, it also greatly harms neurons, which can cause damage to the memory, reasoning capacity and behaviour of the person. All this is what happens to the storyteller, as we see a big change in his person from the time he was little until the day he finds himself telling his story, we can see him lose his judgment by killing the animal and his wife, doing things that a person aware of his actions would not do.

From the main theme appear the other sub-themes of the story, two of these are guilt, and madness. Guilt is present in the consequences of the narrator having taken his eye off his cat, since at first this was very special for the family, the narrator could not bear the guilt of having thus left his pet as he suffered much, and so he decides to kill him to stop suffering, however later there are very strange events for him, and that where the second sub-theme is present, madness, this is present in the thoughts you have about your dead pet, thinking that this one has revived to harm him, leading him to kill his wife by trying to end the life of his second cat.

Chapter 3: Character and ambience analysis

This chapter is very important to analyse how important the story "the black cat" is. The characters and the environment are what give life to the story, the characteristics of them helps us to reproduce an image in our mind as we read, as if we were inside the story, generating many emotions during the story, making the reader find himself more connected with the characters and the plot.

3.1. Description of the ambience

The black cat is a short story which, unlike other types of tales, it does not have many descriptions of the environment in which the story unfolds, there is no exact location of the village, no date or time at which the story is centered, the house in which they lived at the beginning we can deduce that this had luxuries, since they had employees, this meant that they maintained high status, after their house burned down they move to a more common one. The psychological environment that existed was that of fear, since the narrator lived paranoid because of the attitude of the second cat, because of the marks that he had reminded the cat that he had killed at the beginning.

Because of the lack of description of environment, Poe gives the reader the freedom to create their own scenario, this can affect between the feelings of the readers since it is up to them to imagine the level of terror in the story, it is up to them to imagine how dark the space of the story looks.

3.1.1 Pluto

Pluto is the narrator's pet, this cat was black, at first, the narrator described him as a beautiful and intelligent being, however, at the passage of time this became an irritable cat, making its owner feel upset, this character is very important in the story, he is with whom the narrator unleashes his fury, abusing him to death. After that one could say that it becomes the consciousness of the narrator, making him suffer the consequences of his actions.

3.1.2 The narrator's wife

This character is not mentioned in the story, however we can infer that he is a kind person, since knowing that her husband was a lover of animals she was going to accept having them to make him happy, in addition, when she realized that her husband was going hurting the cat got between them, causing his quick death.

3.1.3 The narrator

The narrator is an unnamed character, most likely young for having a young marriage and lack of children. He tells his story probably from a cell, as he tells us that he will soon be executed. He tells us his story since he was little, standing out for a docile and kind person, tells us about his tastes for animals and pets that he had and from a very young age he dedicated himself to caring for them until adulthood, one of the pets that stood out was the cat, after getting married continued to live surrounded by animals, however, with the passage of time he begins to be an alcoholic person, greatly affecting his personality, becoming an irritable, ill-humoured and thoughtless person. This leads to very recorded consequences, beginning with the death of his cat, with whom he unleashed his fury while drunk. The fact that he went so far and still kept drinking alcohol shows how little responsibility he had, causing others to suffer because of him.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can see that through the use of different resources that Poe uses in the story "the black cat" generates different feelings in his readers, such as horror, nerves, intrigue among others, causing them to enter the mind of the main character, and in this way the reader feels trapped by the plot.

This is how it conveys terror in their stories, their characters have unique characteristics just like the plot, as it makes them look as if it could really happen in real life, as seen in this story, where a person becomes a murderer and loses his sanity by becoming an alcoholic in a safe environment, his home, which causes great fear in readers who may feel uncomfortable or nervous, and you may wonder if they could end up like the characters in their stories.

By using alcoholism as a main theme, it makes it more meaningful, since alcoholism is very present in daily life, this indirectly leads to readers being more aware of the consequences that alcoholism can bring, it cannot necessarily end up as a serial killer, however there are cases of death by not being aware of their actions because they are under the effect of alcohol.

The difficulties I had in writing were presented more at first, by the fact of organizing the information I had, and the schedules I had, however once I began to imagine a small structure in my mind I was able to write it more easily making ideas flow better, being also a topic of my taste making it easier to write.

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