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Exploratory Essay

Why Getting a Black Cat is a Bad Idea

So black cats supposedly bring you bad luck. In Edgar Alan Poe’s “The Black Cat”, the narrator has exactly that, a black cat, so based on the stories and myths that have been told based on black cats being symbols of death and misfortune, you can already have an idea as to where this is all going to go. Throughout his life, the narrator had a vast variety of pets, and was passionate about each and every one of them. He later on got married, and although his wife did not have the same amount of love for animals as he did, she allowed him to have one cat, a black cat. Little did she know that this cat would be the death of her, literally. Throughout the story, there is a twist of events, in which the narrator acts out on his wishful impulses, which later then causes him to have feelings of repression.

The narrator’s cat, Pluto, was a very affectionate cat. The narrator and the cat shared a special connection and were considered to be the best of friends. However, as time progressed, the narrator began to change. He began to become more irritable, and his temper worsened. There was one night in which the narrator had come home drunk. Since he was heavily intoxicated, he was not fully conscious and therefore, was not aware of what he was doing. The act he committed that night would be him acting on his wishful impulse, more specifically his unconscious mind acting on his wishful impulse. Freud defined wishful impulse as a feeling or impulse that has been pushed so far back, and any emotion connected to it can trigger a physical response. The cat knew that the narrator was not sober, and avoided him at all costs, since as stated before, the narrator’s temper had gotten worse, and being drunk, no one would know what to expect from him. This angered the narrator, and he grabbed a pocketknife he had and cut one of the cat’s eyes out. “The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body” (Poe) His wrath mixed with the heavy drinking knocked all sense of consciousness from his mind, leading him to act out on impulse and later on, kills his cat. The narrator later on in the story is not sure himself as to why he did what he did and chooses to say he was “possessed by a demon”. Freud states, “But the repressed wishful impulse continues to exist in the unconscious” (Freud 2215). Freud’s beliefs on the unconscious mind is that one’s wishful impulse remains in the unconscious, so when we act on it, we will have little to no memory of it afterwards because it is not in our conscious thoughts, hence why the narrator in this short story later realizes he had no reason to kill his cat. His emotions were heightened, due to him being drunk and unconscious, causing him to act impulsively in a violent mater towards the cat, which in the moment, was his wishful impulse.

Upon killing his cat, the narrator immediately chose to forget all about it, like it never happened. At this point, he is on a spiral. Later on in the story, the narrator proceeds t kill his wife, with an axe on her head. He tries to get rid of the body in the most particular way; he hides her body inside a wall in his attic and pretends like it never happened. When this happened, the police came searching to his house in order to further investigate the death of his wife, and the narrator us as calm as ever. He doesn’t fidget, get nervous, stutter, nothing that will show that it was him in fact who killed his wife. It was something normal for him at the moment. “Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever...The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained.” (Poe)This is called repression. Sigmund Freud defines repression as having a thought or feeling that is too overwhelming for an individual, so the individual “pushes” the thought away and becomes unaware of it. The narrator repressed his guilt or any emotion he had when and after murdering his wife, reasoning as to why he was not the slightest bit terrified or worried when the cops showed up and started looking around. Freud believes that if a feeling, thought, or impulse contradicts and goes against an individual’s morals and values, that that person is most likely to repress those feelings, and avoid at all costs, through resistance, to allow those emotions to surface. “This unpleasure was avoided by means of repression, which was thus revealed as one of the devices serving to protect the mental personality.”(Freud 2212) The narrator in the short story knew that feelings of guilt and regret were going to surface and take over him, causing him a significant amount of pain, so he refused to allow himself to feel or think of any of those things, leading him to the humorous reaction upon the police arriving.

In the end, it is unclear whether or not the narrator got caught for his crimes, and if he ever went to prison. This classic short story sets an example of how sometimes when someone acts on their wishful impulse, it can lead you into unpredictable situations, almost as unpredictable as your impulse. This later on can cause the individual to have feelings of repression, and later on resist ever feeling those emotions again. These concepts were developed by Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist and is now known as “the father of psychoanalysis”. The connections are evident and help deeper understand the logic behind the narrator’s actions. This story also sets the perfect example as to why drinking when you’re angry is a horrible idea, but most importantly, why you should never get a black cat.