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A Change of Identity

Sigmund Freud includes his theories of psychoanalysis throughout the short story “The Black Cat” by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe introduces the narrator who disguises his emotion to display an altered identity. Some stimulants and triggers evoked dormant emotions and caused erratic behavior. Hidden personalities were altered and exhibited through his reckless actions. In “The Black Cat”, the narrator is categorized under Freud’s psychoanalytic concepts, demonstrating a change in personality and character through displacement and repression.

The narrator is described as a loving animal caretaker. As Poe continued to revelate the narrator’s character, traits and behaviors changed. The narrator’s behavior alters causing a tragic event. Poe states “ For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me -- for what disease is like Alcohol!” (Poe n. pag.). The narrator uses alcohol as a defense mechanism. This void, enabled him to displace emotions. Alcohol caused a change in behavior, the narrator identifies emotions of anger, irritation and intemperance. He releases this through physical and mental mistreatment and utlimately murder. “One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer” (Poe n. pag.). According to Freud, displacement is a shift in the focus of emotional intensity. The narrator’s actions caused an imbalance and altered perception of his reality. He avoids guilt and the conflict of this horrendous act by replacing Pluto. In doing this, he is relieved to find out that he no longer have to deal with feeling that guilt.

Although, the narrator displaces his emotions of love on to a cat similar to that of Pluto, it goes as far to still having triggers of his beloved cat. “I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place” (Poe n. pag.). Narrator clearly presents the concept of displacement. He cannot rid himself of this haunting act, instead he must replace Pluto’s intense affection on to the stray cat he lays his eyes on. In order for him to fully get rid of this haunt, he had to find someone who looks like Pluto, so that he can move on.

Freud once said, repression is the process of pushing thoughts or impulses to the unconscious mind. This concept is seen in the story, where Poe states, “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 equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed” (Poe n. pag.). The narrator blocks his feelings of Pluto’s murder, he uses alcohol to cope with his repression. When one drinks alcohol, they tend to forget things easily which makes unwanted thoughts easier to be pushed back to the unconscious mind. With these overbearing thoughts, the narrator lost the sentiments he once had. “At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly -- let me confess it at once -- by absolute *dread* of the beast” (Poe n. pag.). The narrator holds back the thought of the crime that he committed which traumatized him because what he did destroyed his relationship with Pluto. He doesn’t want to relive those nightmares of Pluto. Blocking those thoughts caused him to present an unrevealed personality. Resulting in becoming more violent towards Pluto’s replacement and ultimately his wife.

Poe shows repression towards the end of the story when the narrator is seen covering up a crime he has done. “The bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious” (Poe n. pag.). The narrator tries to put aside another crime he committed, the murder of his wife. The walling of his wife’s corpse relates to separating the conscious and unconscious. The wall symbolizes repression, trying to forget the heinous murder made by him. The narrator doesn’t want to get caught by himself, he doesn’t want to feel that pain, the guilt, the sorrow for his wife’s death.

In “The Black Cat” the narrator is seen using displacement and repression to change his personality and character throughout the story. The narrator’s behavior changes drastically when he begins to drink, he becomes abusive towards his pets and wife. This change of behavior resulted in the death of Pluto and his wife. The memory of the murders were repressed by the narrator because it was too much to bear. Poe wrote this story to explain why the narrator is about to receive the death penalty, to explain the effect alcohol had on him and his behavior.

**Cited Page:**

##### The Black Cat By Edgar Allan Poe

Robert Giordano - https://poestories.com/read/blackcat

##### Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis

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