

Edgar allan poe's gothic elements



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Traditional Gothic characteristics were originally exemplified by Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*. This text was the first novel of its kind to introduce, a suspenseful atmosphere, ancient prophecies, and metonymy of horror. Novels and stories frequently revisit the same elements when creating a gothic tale, but can also use other characteristics to create the same essence of *Castle of Otranto*. *The Black Cat* by Edgar Allen Poe uses an abundance of adjectives to set a gloomy scene, but also uses the narrator's emotional distress and supernatural curiosity to structure the gothic tale. Edgar Allen Poe is widely known for making some of the greatest Gothic texts, but also has very distinct characteristics throughout his, modeling after Walpole, but also creating a standard for future texts. Most of Poe's works are easily identified as gothic due to the theme of death and decay, although that is not always the theme being portrayed by the story until later in the work.

In *The Black Cat* it is made apparent, that death is a common subject, but the beginning is primarily an internal struggle within the narrator. As a writer, Edgar Allen Poe has to create characters with depth, that add to the suspense of the story. In response, most of his characters have some sort of mental illness, or eventually go mad. While reading from the narrator's perspective, the readers are concerned about the mental state of their story teller, but sometimes forget the context of the story being told. In the opening of *The Black Cat* the narrator says " Yet, mad am I not" proclaiming his mental state early, allowing the reader to look deeper into his character, but forgetting the scene setting given n the same same page. The opening also tells readers that the narrator is telling this story the day before his

execution, allowing readers the try and create a story before the narrator elaborates his confession. He says he married young and her " disposition not uncongenial with my own", ironic how happy his wife made him, but would later be literally be the hand of her unhappy fate. It is made quite apparent in the beginning, after stating that recent household events presented the narrator with horror, that this is a gothic text, but with some missing tell-tale elements such as a castle.

Continuing into the story, Poe's black cat character named Pluto, is introduced and creates a basis of preceding events. Looking at Pluto analytically, Pluto is the Roman God of the underworld, which makes sense because this creates that theme always present in gothic texts, but not yet alluded to in *The Black Cat*; death. This theme is not outwardly stated, but had to be interpreted when being presented to this character so early on. Death is a theme made apparent later in the text, but is often presented throughout gothic texts. When the narrator finally kills Pluto, the connection between his name and his fate is presented, when he " reappears" as an apparition in the fire. If the cat Pluto is being represented as a god, then it can be assumed he can reincarnate himself to terrorize the narrator who killed him. Poe choose to keep the theme death hidden to add suspense and a more iconic ending although usually presented early on. In the following scenes the narrator, still not evidently mentally ill, begins to illustrate his problem with alcohol, ultimately creating the dissolution of the first black cat. " I grew day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings for others." He claims another being possessed him to kill his cat, that it was not truly him who killed Pluto, but can the cruel murder be

attributed to his alcohol and in personal opinion, his mental state which is beginning to deteriorate at this point in in the story. The two themes that eventually coincide, madness and death, promote Edgar Allan Poe's classic Gothic structure.

Another Gothic element usually presented in gothic texts, has to do with the supernatural, which Poe almost always manages to present in his stories. In *The Black Cat*, Poe yet again keeps this theme hidden, making the reader interpret multiple things to come to the conclusion of a supernatural presence. The first example is the suggestion made by the narrator's wife of the similarity between cats and witches. In history, cats are associated with witches due to their malevolent nature, and their nocturnal lifestyle. After the death of the first cat the narrator sees the image of the cat with the noose around its neck while the house is on fire. It can be debated whether he sees the image due to his failing mental state, or if it is something supernatural, an effect of him killing the first cat. Once the cat is replaced with a coincidentally similar cat, the reader should wonder if the coincidence has to do with a celestial being, or in other words the dead cat. Poe decides to use the supernatural as a gothic element in his stories because of the interesting aspect in a dark story. At the time *The Black Cat* was written, readers were intrigued by the unknown, not too different than audiences of today. When a writer decides to explore topics like this, one that can be looked into further other than the context given, it excites readers therefore making it a popular, and much anticipated aspect in Gothic literature, but more specifically Edgar Allen Poe works. After seeing the apparent apparition, the narrator convinces himself, what he saw was untrue, but the

terror still haunts him “ it did not less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy.”

A Gothic story would not truly be Gothic without a suspenseful ending. After trying to murder the second cat, the narrator ends up butchering his wife, which gives the anticipated audience of the time the ending they await. The suspense and metonymy of horror, are crucial elements in Gothic literature, and usually are saved for the climax of the story, which Poe successfully created. In *The Black Cat*, the narrator claims the cat waited for him behind the walls, to have the police catch him as if the cat created a master plan. Although this idea is believable in this time period, readers could also still be thinking the of cat as a celestial being. This cat alone is represented by many gothic themes, without the context of the story, black, nocturnal, evil, and now supernatural which Poe uses to entertain readers. Thinking back to the beginning, readers must remember this is his confession, in which he blames the black cat for all his wrongdoings. If readers correctly interpreted the narrator's opening they would know the wife's outcome, another literary Element Poe's gothic texts are known for is the foreshadowing, although it is not a standard in his works.

Edgar Allen Poe uses literary elements to make his stories his own original texts although the Gothic genre was created. Poe writes his texts modeling *The Castle of Otranto*, but overall the style is based on the audience in existence and his preferred style of writing utilizing his typical elements. In *The Black Cat* the themes of death, the supernatural and madness are hand in hand with the melancholy setting to create classic works of Gothic Literature.

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