

The black cat

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

"The Black Cat" is narrated by a man on the day before he is to be put to death for the crime of murdering his wife. He can be considered an unreliable narrator. This is because his deeds do not match his words. He states, "From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition" and "I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets" (514). He then gouges the eye out and later kills the family pet, a cat, in cold blood by hanging it from a tree.

He states that he is not mad. Yet he commits the deeds of a madman. The narrator uses flashback in his description of the events leading up to his execution. Poe uses foreshadowing to hint or give clues of future events. Some of his use of foreshadowing is subtle. At other times it is more obvious. The story begins with the overt use of foreshadowing. In the first line the narrator states, "For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief" (513).

This hints at the horrific events yet to take place. The family has many pets including birds, gold fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey and a beautiful and large cat whose fur is entirely black and is named Pluto. Black cats are symbolic of bad luck, evil omens, demons or witches. The wife of the narrator is purported to have referenced on more than one occasion that black cats are witches in disguise. Even the cat's name foretells the evil deeds that are to be committed.

In ancient Greek mythology Pluto is the name of the ruler of the underworld or Hades. In Latin literature Pluto was the ruler of the dead. After killing his wife with an ax blow to the head, he conceals the corpse behind a brick wall.

Unknown to the narrator, at the time, the black cat Pluto is also trapped in this hiding space. After unintentionally revealing the location of his misdeeds with a cane blow to the brick wall, the authorities discover the cat sitting on top of the corpse as a ruler would sit on a throne.

The meaning of name Pluto foretells this discovery: The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb! (518) One night after the killing of Pluto, the narrator is drinking in what he describes as a “den of infamy” a cat very similar to Pluto befriends him.

This cat is even missing an eye. But it is not divulged if it is the same eye (right or left) that was gouged out before the killing of Pluto. This leaves the reader to wonder if this is or is not Pluto returning from the dead. The second cat was jet black except for a white splotch covering its breast. The narrator sees this white splotch morph into the shape of a gallows. This foretells his final demise. “The Black Cat” is short but it is dark and very intense.

The skillful weaving of foreshadowing throughout keeps readers involved and peaks their interest. Readers are kept wondering what is going to happen next. The readers are taken on a journey of madness. The narrator’s psychosis has a cause rooted in the drinking of alcohol. When intoxicated he developed a very bad temper. The moral of “The Black Cat” is on the evils of overindulgence in alcohol. This excess of drink can change the very

character of people and cause them to commit terrible deeds, including the murder of a loved one.