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# Concept Of Madness In The Imp Of The Perverse And The Black Cat

## The idea behind “THE IMP OF THE PERVERSE”

Since Middle Ages, society’s actions and behavior have been guided by laws, which have changed regarding the content over the years. However, it was originally invented in order to separate “wrong” from “right” and thus the human conscience developed. But, isn’t it exactly the forbidden and at the same time the mysterious that lures human beings to break these laws? Edgar Allan Poe processed his theory about this matter in “THE IMP OF THE PERVERSE” and included it as well in his short story “THE BLACK CAT”.

### 1. Forms of madness in the short story “THE BLACK CAT”:

One day before being executed, the narrator of the story “THE BLACK CAT” would like to free his conscience telling us the story about how he murdered his favorite pet, a black cat, and his wife.

Although he does not consider himself as mad and evaluates his crimes as “mere household events” (p. 1, l.6), there are some other forms of insanity. Firstly, his bad temper has developed over the years, in which he has lost his childish fondness for animals, apart from the devotion to his cat. Therefore, he must have known how to keep himself under control around his favorite cat, whereas he abuses his other pets and even his wife without any regrets in such moments (cf. p.2, l.43-47). After his addiction to alcohol has become worse, the black cat experiences the same violence. The lunacy lies in the sudden change of his personality, for which he does not provide the reader any specific reason.

During one of his outbreaks, he “deliberately cut[s] one of its eyes from the socket” (p.2, l.58-59) because it has avoided him. At first, he feels guilty as he “ha[s]so much of [his] old heart left” (p.2, l. 68), yet he hangs the cat.

The following incidents are mad situations due to their coincidental interaction. The fact that the narrator kills his cat is predictable thus far, however, in the same night a fire burns down his house. Additionally, only one wall maintains, on which the narrator perceives immediately his black cat with a rope around its neck. On the one hand, he shows complete apathy, but on the other hand, his conscience makes him see, and later on miss his cat so much that he is in search for a new one, successfully finding one that looks almost exactly like the dead.

As time goes on, the narrator is again annoyed by the new cat’s allegiance to him, even though that has been the reason he has adopted the new pet, so that one day he attempts to kill it unhesitatingly with an axe. Therefore, one can assume that the narrator might suffer from anxiety, which might especially seem mad in the century the story is set, as on the one hand he despises and even fears the cat’s fondness for him (cf. p.5, l.185-189) and thus rids himself of any similar behavior. Nevertheless, he regrets his deeds due to his following loneliness.

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Being furious about his wife prevented him from slaying the cat, he murders her instead and hides her body behind a wall of bricks he builds within a short time. For some days he has been expecting in anticipation to be conquered by his conscience, thereby revealing being capable of controlling natural human mechanisms as he must have held back the remorse. The question is why he has not been able to contain his anger at any time before.

Additionally, he claims to believe in God (cf. p. 7, l. 268) whereas his crimes are the opposite of what his duty due to God's commandments would be. These two aspects are as well part of his madness.

## **2. The theory of "THE IMP OF THE PERVERSE" in "THE BLACK CAT":**

The perverse about the humans' actions is the fact that the unreasonable of two options is the most appealing one to choose whether it harms others or one's self as being explained in "THE IMP OF THE PERVESE". However, the short story "THE BLACK CAT" deals with the same theory. Therein, the narrator commits multiple murders, motivated by the tempting feeling of doing the opposite of what he is supposed to do. There are several causes determined as his personal "Imps".

Firstly, the theory of the perverse is represented by the narrator's sudden change from a lovely, animal-liking boy to a cold-hearted alcoholic (cf. "THE BLACK CAT" p. 1, l.39). He has most likely been aware of the repercussions that the consumption of alcohol implicate, yet his curiosity about the feeling that would follow on the one hand and on the other hand the constant thought about it have made him surrender. Thus, all the other immoral events on his account are only the consequence of him making one bad decision. Therefore, the initiate impulse for his change has been his preference of the intoxicated feeling. His cruelty towards his wife and his pets follows (cf. p. 2, l.42-44). Although he has not noticed it back then, but his intoxication has covered his reason, so far that he injures his black cat and "drown[s] in wine all memory of the deed" (p. 2, l. 63-64). Thereafter, the narrator does not mention alcohol again, which lets the reader assume that he either conceals it or that he has no more access and is thus on sort of a withdrawal.

However, he hangs the cat because of, as he himself describes it, pure "PERVERSENESS" (p.2, l.71). Assuming that the narrator has been on a withdrawal as the remorse for his prior deed "[has given] place to irritation" (p.2, l.70), he longs for the feeling of being intoxicated. Nevertheless, as his subconscious might associate him torturing the cat with the condition of being drunk, he is selfish and murders the pet, although he knows it is wrong to punish someone else just to fulfill one's own desires. He then has nothing left that is related to his intoxication and he hallucinates the "relief upon the white surface [of the only wall surviving the great fire in his house], the figure of a gigantic cat" (p.3, l.104-105). This illusion torments him until he finds another that looks the same.

Furthermore, this new cat, which admires him, represents the forgiveness he receives for his deeds, however, instead of accepting it, the "Imp" forces him to punish himself and to not forgive himself by making him smash an axe into the cat's head. Therefore, when his wife prevents him from doing so, he murders her because of a "more than demoniacal [rage]" (p.5, l.202). His motive here is not anger, but his perverse propensity to do the wrong, in this case

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torturing him, that exists in every human being (cf. "THE IMP OF THE PERVERSE", p. 1, l. 2-3).

The last impulse being literally his death-sentence is that the narrator confesses to the murder of his wife, similar to the ending of "THE IMP OF THE PERVERSE", and is thus imprisoned and sentenced to be executed. If his conscience had not submitted him, he would have stayed undetected, which he has known, yet the "Imp" has been able to tame him.

Summarized, the madness in this short story lies in the narrator's paranoid behavior and in the coincidence of some incidents. However, the madness is only the result of the narrator's addiction to alcohol and therein lays the message of the story. It should demonstrate how dangerous the danger and repercussions of the consumption of alcohol and that once having exaggerated, regarding the amount, it will stay with one for a lifetime.

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