

IRRATIONAL NARRATION AND ETHICAL ANOMIE IN THE BLACK CAT

*NARRAÇÃO IRRACIONAL E ANOMIA ÉTICA EM THE BLACK CAT*

*NARRACIÓN IRRACIONAL Y ANOMIA ÉTICA EN EL GATO NEGRO*

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**ABSTRACT:** Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat* offers a profound examination of madness, moral decay, and guilt, framed by the self-report of an unnamed prisoner facing execution for murder. The protagonist attributes his crimes to the corrupting influence of alcoholism, claiming that his actions were committed inadvertently and unconsciously. He further implicates the black cat Pluto and its successor as catalysts for his descent into suspicion, madness, and violence. His narrative, however, is fraught with contradictions and complexity, oscillating between fear, anger, loneliness, and self-pity, rendering it an unreliable account of events. A close reading of his confession reveals an underlying, deeply immoral conception of life ethics, including a distorted valuation of life and an obsessive desire for domination. These traits not only illuminate the narrator's mental disintegration but also underscore the story's broader themes of moral corruption and its devastating consequences. Through the protagonist's tragic downfall, Poe issues a cautionary critique of human darkness and the perilous erosion of ethical principles when left unchecked.

**KEYWORDS:** Gothic Literature. *The Black Cat*. Delirium. Guilt. Irrational Narration.

**RESUMO:** *O Gato Preto, de Edgar Allan Poe, apresenta uma análise da loucura, da decadência moral e da culpa por meio do relato de um prisioneiro condenado à morte por assassinato. O narrador atribui seus crimes ao alcoolismo, afirmando ter agido de modo inconsciente, e responsabiliza o gato Pluto e seu sucessor por sua crescente desconfiança e violência. Contudo, sua narrativa revela contradições, marcada por medo, raiva, solidão e autopiedade, o que compromete sua credibilidade. A leitura de sua confissão evidencia uma concepção profundamente imoral da ética da vida, com valorização distorcida da existência e desejo de dominação. Tais elementos expõem a desintegração psicológica do protagonista e reforçam o tema central da corrupção moral e de suas consequências. Ao retratar a queda trágica do narrador, Poe constrói uma crítica à fragilidade dos princípios éticos diante das pulsões humanas descontroladas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Literatura Gótica. O Gato Preto. Delírio. Culpa. Narração Irracional.*

**RESUMEN:** *El gato negro, de Edgar Allan Poe, presenta un análisis de la locura, la decadencia moral y la culpa a través del relato de un prisionero condenado a muerte por asesinato. El narrador atribuye sus crímenes al alcoholismo, afirmando haber actuado de manera inconsciente, y responsabiliza al gato Pluto y a su sucesor por su creciente desconfianza y violencia. Sin embargo, su narración revela contradicciones, marcadas por el miedo, la ira, la soledad y la autocompasión, lo que compromete su credibilidad. La lectura de su confesión pone de manifiesto una concepción profundamente inmoral de la ética de la vida, con una valoración distorsionada de la existencia y un deseo de dominación. Estos elementos evidencian la desintegración psicológica del protagonista y refuerzan el tema central de la corrupción moral y sus consecuencias. Al retratar la caída trágica del narrador, Poe construye una crítica a la fragilidad de los principios éticos frente a los impulsos humanos descontrolados.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Literatura gótica. El gato negro. Delirio. Culpa. Narración irracional.*

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## Gothic Literature and Morality

Literary works sometimes engage with ethical issues, employing depictions of characters' actions, narrative conflicts, and social contexts to elicit profound reflections on morality and values among readers. Consequently, some scholars propose the approach of literary ethical criticism, positing that literature is intrinsically intertwined with the moral dimensions of its characters.

The primary objective of literary ethical criticism is to analyze and interpret literary works through its critical terminology. Specifically, it focuses on conducting ethical analyses of the characters and events depicted in literary texts, uncovering the ethical values and moral inclinations embedded within them. Furthermore, it seeks to reveal the moral warnings and educational significance that literary works hold for both society and readers (Nie, 2019, p. 99).

This perspective underscores the notion that literary texts serve as a medium for exploring and interrogating ethical dilemmas, thereby contributing to broader philosophical and cultural discourses on human behavior and societal norms. This methodological framework enables critics to interrogate the moral valence of characters' actions—assessing whether they are right or wrong, ethical or unethical, just or unjust—thereby uncovering deeper thematic layers and illuminating the author's underlying moral perspective. Gothic literature, as a unique genre, is centered on elements of darkness, horror, and the supernatural, delving into the complexities and contradictions of human nature. The works place characters in extreme situations and moral dilemmas to test their ethics. It not only evokes emotional resonance in readers through its eerie atmosphere but also employs ethical quandaries to provoke contemplation on timeless themes such as moral responsibility, sin, and redemption. Thus, gothic literature delivers not only a visceral emotional impact but also a profound exploration of ethics.

*The Black Cat* is one of the most famous gothic novels by Edgar Allan Poe. It incorporates several conventional Gothic tropes, including themes of horror, madness, murder, supernatural curse, and haunting, as well as the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality. Without prioritizing the creation of a purely terrifying supernatural tale, *The Black Cat* shifts its focus to the psychological unraveling of a morally compromised protagonist stripped of any identifiable markers such as name, race, geographic origin, or social class. The novel delves extensively into the protagonist's psyche, tracing his initial affection and care for his

pets, followed by his descent into madness and violence. It meticulously documents his sporadic remorse after harming animals, his subsequent paranoia about being cursed, and his eventual apathy as he attempts to justify his heinous acts. Through this first-person account, the text reveals the protagonist's pathological relationship with his pets and his wife, and his fundamentally immoral life philosophy as well. These elements are primarily manifested in his distorted valuation of life, an obsessive desire for control, and a profound loss of reverence for living beings. By externalizing the protagonist's moral and psychological conflicts through Gothic imagery, the novel exposes the dark dimensions of human nature and the ethical decay.

The portrayal of the unnamed protagonist's alcoholism, violence, and mental breakdown in the novel reveals the duality of his psyche: occasional compassion toward animals coexists with the madness of abusing and killing them; sporadic remorse for the murders he commits is offset by his tendency to justify his crimes and soothe his guilty conscience afterward; while he sometimes offers rational explanations for supernatural phenomena to ease his fear of punishment, he also coldly and smugly employs various means to conceal his misdeeds. It is precisely this contradictory nature that makes the unnamed protagonist difficult to empathize with—he is never an innocent victim but rather a perpetrator devoid of basic morality.

### **Distorted valuation of life and Abuse**

Poe's first striking achievement is in creating the protagonist's distorted evaluation of life, which is reflected in his conflict with his wife over their values regarding life. Although he does not elaborate on his wife's specific idea or behavior toward animals in his narration, we can still piece together two contradictory existences from the fragments of his consciousness. The protagonist's attachment to animals is primarily utilitarian, stemming from his self-interest. He regards them as his "principal sources of pleasure," believing their loyalty and reliability far surpass human beings': "There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere Man" (Author, year, page). The conflict in their respective views on bioethics is particularly reflected in the protagonist's behavior toward a black cat named Pluto. His wife, "at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in

disguise” (Author, year, page). She repeatedly warned him not to offend or harm Pluto, lest it bring retribution. The protagonist, however, dismissed this and mocked his wife’s superstitions. Thus, although both the protagonist and his wife loved animals, their fundamental values regarding life were entirely different. His wife’s appreciation of life is rooted in a metaphysical reverence for the supernatural essence of life, reflecting a deeper, more intrinsic awe for existence itself. The work does not explicitly highlight this conflict but instead presents it as a superficial harmony, hinting at deeper underlying tensions.

The protagonist’s distorted evaluation of life is also reflected in his devaluation of the lives of animals. The novel explores his transformation from love to hatred for animals due to alcoholism and violence. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist considers himself a morally conscious individual, particularly evident in his affection for animals, which he and his wife raised together. The narrator takes pride in his gentle nature and love for animals, expressing satisfaction that his wife’s “disposition not uncongenial with” his own. However, as his mental state deteriorates, his assessment of life becomes grotesquely twisted. This highlights the sharp opposition between his utilitarian view of life and his wife’s reverence for life, creating a tension between ethical perspectives that resonates more deeply on an emotional level.

In fact, “Affect implies that bodies and emotions are open to each other. When we are open and vulnerable our boundaries are understood as permeable. Through this, we become more open to the suffering of multiple others. Vulnerability thereby engenders a heightened sense of responsiveness and response-ability to and with—rather than for—the other” (Sayers; Martin; Bell, 2022, p. 606) There is no mutual emotional openness between the protagonist and the black cat, rendering them incapable of perceiving each other’s moral suffering or developing an ethic of responsibility for the other. The shifting dynamics of the protagonist’s feelings toward the black cat, Pluto, directly reflect his distorted evaluation of life. His initial affection for Pluto gradually transforms into hatred, revealing the coldness and moral corruption within his heart. Once a beloved pet, the cat becomes the target of the narrator’s inexplicable rage. In a drunken fury, he gouges out Pluto’s eyes and later hangs the animal from a tree. These cruel acts expose a profound devaluation of animal life, as the narrator prioritizes his irrational impulses over the suffering of a creature he once cherished. His justification for these actions—blaming his deteriorating mental state on alcoholism—further underscores his delusional grasp of reality. The devaluation of animal life reflects the protagonist’s inability to reconcile his

actions with his self-image, leading to a complete moral collapse. The killing of Pluto marks a turning point in the narrative, as guilt and paranoia begin to consume the protagonist.

The story emphasizes the role of guilt and madness in distorting the protagonist's perception of life. When the protagonist adopts the second black cat, his warped evaluation of life escalates further. Initially, he sees the cat as a replacement for Pluto, but his paranoia and guilt transform his affection into irrational hatred. The cat's resemblance to Pluto and its missing eye serve as constant reminders of his past crimes, accelerating his descent into madness. He attempts to escape this guilt through further violence, but this only deepens his moral corruption.

The protagonist's killing of the black cat serves as an extremely dangerous signal, directly triggering an escalation of violence. "According to Locke, when children torment and kill an animal, it hardens their hearts towards men" (Bègue, 2022, p. 188) From animal cruelty to the eventual murder of his wife, the protagonist's actions demonstrate the complete collapse of his moral valuation of life. Ultimately, when he raises an axe to kill the second black cat and his wife intervenes to stop him, his rage drives him to turn the weapon against her instead. The story seems to suggest that disregard for animal life ultimately extends to disregard for human life as well. The devaluation of human life underscores the extent of the protagonist's psychological collapse, as he prioritizes his irrational impulses over the lives of those around him. His casual tone in describing the murder of his wife and the subsequent concealment of her body highlights his complete moral degradation. In the story's climax, the protagonist's crime is exposed due to the presence of the black cat, emphasizing the inescapability of guilt. This moment of revelation serves as a sharp indictment of his distorted perception of life—his attempts to devalue and destroy life, culminating in his lawful execution.

The protagonist does not reflect on this distorted view of life ethics. Instead, he attributes his crimes solely to external factors, such as alcoholism, animals distancing themselves from him, his wife's superstitions hindering him from killing the black cat, and so on. When he tortured and killed Pluto, the first black cat, he still felt a so-called sense of pity and hesitated to act. However, by the time he intended to torture the second black cat, he showed no mercy at all, even going so far as to kill his wife when she tried to stop his violence. Although the protagonist occasionally feels uneasy about his crimes of animal abuse, he never engages in deep self-reflection. Even when briefly driven by his conscience, despite his struggles and resistance, he ultimately fails. He lacks the awareness to empathize with the suffering of animals, let alone comprehend the meaning of respecting life. As he grows increasingly numb

to the pain of other living beings, he also loses the ability to share in their happiness. Each time the protagonist abuses an animal, he naturally does not feel happiness. Though he experiences brief moments of self-reproach and regret, his spirit only grows hollower and more tormented, setting the stage for the next round of drinking and even crueller acts of animal abuse.

The novel focuses on the protagonist's life ethics, embedding abstract moral principles within his concrete psychological activities and his actions toward other living beings. His madness and violent killing of life, coupled with his rational, cold-blooded disposal of corpses, alternate with his internal mental states—paranoia, distortion, self-justification, and smug arrogance. Throughout his narration, he merely treats the lives of animals and humans as tools for his benefit. The protagonist clearly fails to recognize the responsibility inherent in such life ethics, which foreshadows his moral degradation.

### **Desire to Dominate and Violence**

The protagonist's fondness for animals does not stem from recognizing them as living beings, but rather from viewing them as his personal possessions—objects that obey him. His affection for animals is, in fact, driven by utilitarian value. "This perspective reflects an anthropocentric rationale that conceptualises animals as objects and reduces them to a consumable commodity" (Sayers; Martin; Bell, 2022, p. 598). Such an extreme view of life reveals the protagonist's desire for absolute control, which is also one of the root causes of his ethical crisis.

His pathological need for dominance manifests in his treatment of both animals and his wife—not as autonomous beings, but as extensions of his own will. His initial "affection" for pets is merely a facade for possession. Their obedience reinforces his illusion of absolute authority. When this control is challenged—by the black cat's defiance, his wife's interference, or his own spiraling guilt—his response escalates into violence. Alcohol acts as both catalyst and excuse, dissolving thin restraints of morality while amplifying his rage against perceived insubordination.

His craving for dominance ensures that his seemingly harmonious relationships with animals and his wife are ultimately unsustainable. Later, he turns to alcoholism, abuses animals, and even resorts to violence against his wife—at times indulging in wanton verbal abuse, hurling foul language at her, and finally resorting to physical blows. These extreme behaviors

are, consciously or not, declarations of his tyrannical authority. He regards the creatures around him, even his wife, as mere extensions of his will, existing solely to satisfy his hunger for control.

From his narration, we can discern his profoundly unstable psyche. Incapable of restraining his volatile temperament with moral principles, he instead demands that animals—even his wife—instantly adapt to his shifting moods, venting his frustrations through animal abuse whenever displeased. These violent outbursts are inextricably linked to his pathological craving for control. Paranoid and hypersensitive, he constantly fears challenges to his authority. To the protagonist, the black cat holds no intrinsic value beyond being a disposable possession. He expects the cat to meticulously regulate proximity during their interactions—too close, and it irritates him; too distant or aggressive, and he perceives betrayal, breeding resentment. The slightest transgression can risk triggering his abuse or even fatal retaliation. His impulse to seize the cat may stem from loneliness, yet his rage and violence betray a deeper terror: the suspicion that his dominance might be undermined by the creature. Ultimately, his torture of the cat serves as a grotesque proclamation of supremacy, reflecting both his contempt for life and the total erosion of his moral compass.

The novel, through the protagonist's first-person narration, constructs the psyche of a mentally disturbed individual harboring an extreme obsession with control. His desire to dominate the black cat and his wife progressively intensifies as he attempts to assert his authority through violence. This craving for control manifests not only in his abuse of animals but also in his oppression of family members. He never regards the black cat as a life deserving of care, nor does he accept his wife's superstitious reverence for it as a supernatural entity. Instead, he remains egocentrically fixated, viewing animals—and even his own wife—as disposable personal belongings. The moment his dominance is challenged, he resorts to brutality without hesitation.

The protagonist's pathological need for control is further manifested in his rationalization of violence. His extreme egocentrism prevents any genuine self-reflection, leading him to blame external factors—social isolation, alcoholism, madness, and deteriorating temperament—for his actions. He even justifies his violence as punishment for the black cat's perceived betrayal, revealing his profoundly distorted moral compass. To soothe his conscience after torturing animals, he employs cold rationality as psychological armor. After killing the first black cat, he admits it was an outrage against nature. That very night, his house burns down, reducing all his possessions to ashes. While describing the ruined walls, he notes that

upon the white surface, a grotesque bas-relief appeared—the distinct figure of a gigantic cat. The image was rendered with terrifying precision, complete with a noose around its neck. Though frightened, his fear stems not from moral remorse, but from superstitious dread of the cat's posthumous vengeance. He hastily rationalizes that the fire couldn't possibly be related to the black cat Pluto's death, asserting this logic to prove he's no coward. Later, upon discovering the cat's corpse embedded in his bedroom wall—with the noose still around its neck—he briefly feels terror, only to suppress it again by speculating it might be someone's malicious prank.

At this point, the protagonist's pathological need for control is fully revealed through the narration. If he initially showed any affection, it was conditional—requiring absolute loyalty from animals and even his wife, with everything revolving around him. His insatiable thirst for dominance gradually spirals out of control, ultimately leading to violent outbursts. His wife's attempts to intervene further challenge his authority, exacerbating domestic violence. The protagonist's abuse and eventual murder of the black cat and his wife symbolize his assertion of dominance, his disregard for life, and the complete erosion of his morality. His extreme control complex becomes a vessel for anti-life ethics. Ironically, blinded by his egocentrism, he portrays himself as the victim throughout, blaming external circumstances for all his transgressions. Within this distorted self-perception, he constructs a self-centered universe where violence enforces his rule. When haunted by guilt after murder, he again resorts to rationalization—using both science and religion to self-soothe. Yet such comfort is fleeting, and he ultimately descends into madness. Despite repeatedly attempting to suppress moral unease through drunken violence or post-violence logic, his efforts to secure absolute dominance prove futile.

Critically, his brutality follows a chilling logic: the meticulous disposal of his wife's corpse (walling it up with false religious rationality) mirrors his earlier mutilation of the cat—each act is a performance of power, a grotesque assertion that even in death, his victims remain under his command. This obsession exposes the hollowness of his self-justifications; he clings to the delusion of control even as his life collapses into chaos, proving his dominion is nothing but self-destructive tyranny. It is just like what Aldo Leopold (1968) has pointed out,

In human history, we have learned (I hope) that the conqueror role is eventually self-defeating. Why? Because it is implicit in such a role that the conqueror knows, excathedra, just what makes the community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless, in community life. It always turns out that he knows neither, and this is why his conquests eventually defeat themselves (Leopold, 1968, p. 204).

## **Immorality and Insanity**

The protagonist's perverted life ethics and extreme control obsession, which place him at the absolute center, inevitably lead to catastrophic consequences. They are manifested not only in the suffering of animals and loss of lives, but also in how such violence against life rebounds upon the perpetrator himself, destroying him morally. Initially presented as a gentle cat lover, he gradually loses his humanity through alcoholism and growing violent tendencies, eventually meeting his doom in madness. This devolution reveals a profound truth: when an individual completely abandons moral constraints, he inevitably becomes socially isolated. Alcohol fails to relieve his loneliness; instead, it drives him to victimize weaker beings—first animals, then his wife, ultimately threatening society at large while mentally digging his own grave.

The protagonist remains hopelessly trapped in his delusional personal experience, employing unreliable narration to justify his extreme behaviors while attempting to elicit readers' sympathy. However, his narration generates profound terror in readers when he becomes incapable of distinguishing between self-perception and objective reality. He fails to recognize that his violent acts are the direct consequence of his deteriorating life ethics, instead making erroneous psychological attributions. Gradually, he grows convinced of his fabricated truth, willfully ignoring the recurring supernatural elements within the narrative. He never attempts genuine communication with others—including his wife—nor does he realize that he himself is the architect of the psychological torment imposed upon those around him.

From the perspective of social interaction, he has no close friends to confide in. This isolation prevents him from reflecting on his actions with others' guidance, depriving him of any external perspective to recognize the absence of life ethics within him. An examination of the protagonist's mental state reveals a distinct sense of loneliness. Initially, he attempts to alleviate this solitude by keeping pets. However, lacking fundamental ethical awareness toward life, his fleeting comfort soon fades. He turns to alcoholism and gradually grows indifferent toward the pets he once cared for. Though he claims to feel some pity for the black cat Pluto, restraining himself from harming it and using this restraint as a form of psychological self-consolation, we see that his compassion is only temporary. He doesn't realize, "beyond psychopathological factors, normative beliefs regarding the value of animals and their human

use may also be involved in animal mistreatment” (Bègue, 2022, p. 187) In his eyes, the black cat was merely a piece of property to be disposed of at will.

After drinking, he notices that Pluto even avoids him, and he reaches out to grab the cat. Unfortunately, the black cat, unaware of his loneliness and need for companionship, bites him in response. Startled and enraged by the bite, the protagonist sees no fault in himself—after all, as a pet, the cat should keep him company. His attempt to seize the black cat may be driven by loneliness and a desire for dominance, while the cat’s evasion and defensive bite are likely instinctive acts of self-preservation against potential abuse. Yet this defiance inevitably challenges his sense of control, escalating the conflict. His loneliness and fear of losing his central authority gradually push him into madness. After gouging out one of the black cat’s eyes, the last remnants of his conscience vanish, leaving only malice to fester within him. He lacks any reverence for life and is incapable of developing an ethical awareness toward living beings on his own. The shadow of drunken madness begins to envelop him. Though he occasionally recognizes his own mental derangement, he neither seeks outside help nor reflects on his actions. Instead, he seeks release through continued drinking and acts of violence until his demonic impulse resurges and drives him to kill the black cat. The name Pluto, derived from the Roman god of the underworld, serves as a grimly fitting omen for his descent into the abyss of darkness.

While recounting his atrocities, he occasionally expresses some fleeting moral remorse. He describes how tears stream down his face as he fastens the noose around the cat’s neck—a morbid display of inner conflict, revealing that while he can still perceive the evil in his actions, he is powerless to restrain himself. This hypocritical, sentimental pity exposes the perpetrator’s mechanism of self-deception: an attempt to mask his cruelty with self-pity. When violence within the household becomes utterly unrestrained, the most fundamental reverence for life will vanish, and the boundaries of ethics will blur. The supernatural detail of the white patch on the newly appeared black cat gradually taking the shape of a gallows is, in fact, an externalization of the protagonist’s subconscious—he knows instinctively that he has forfeited his humanity, becoming a traitor to the ethics of life. He confesses to blushing with shame, shuddering in dread, overwhelmed by regret and terror for his sins. Yet, when confronted with the unease of his conscience and the supernatural phenomena he fears might punish him, he resorts to scientific explanations to suppress his terror and maintain his delusion of control. This contradiction suggests that his descent into depravity is not a complete loss of conscience, but rather an active choice to surrender to it. Each act of brutality deepens his madness, dragging

him further into the abyss. By the time he murders his wife and entombs her body within the wall, he has fully become a mental prisoner of his own evil.

From the perspective of family dynamics, the protagonist initially describes his household as harmonious and happy. However, this is merely superficial and temporary. His awareness of life stands in stark opposition to his wife's, creating a rift that leaves them unable to truly communicate or connect. As a result, when he abuses the black cat, he not only ignores his wife's pleas to reconsider his actions but also grows resentful of her attempts to intervene. His self-proclaimed gentleness and benevolence at the outset form a horrifying contrast with his later brutality toward both his pet and his wife, revealing the insidious and gradual nature of his family's disintegration and his psychological collapse. Such decline often begins with subtle assertions of control and ends in absolute breaking.

The killing of the black cat marks the irreversible breakdown of his family relationships—a perilous turning point. The protagonist repeatedly blames his altered nature on alcoholism. Yet, while alcohol serves as a catalyst for his unraveling, it is never the root cause; drinking merely unleashes the malice long suppressed within him. When he gouges out the cat's eye with a knife, the violence—directed at a dependent, trusting creature—reveals its true nature: an assertion of absolute domination. Crucially, the victim is not just the cat but also his wife, who witnesses the atrocity. As violence becomes routine, their intimacy mutates into a fearful symbiosis. Her silent endurance inadvertently fuels its escalation, and this pathological dynamic culminates in irreversible tragedy. He entombs both the black cat and his wife's corpse within the wall. Here, the story's irony peaks: "Ironically, although aware of the changes in his behavior, the narrator does not analyze the reasons for his drinking nor for the resulting behavior. He portrays himself as simply an observer who conveys the facts and the consequences without emotion, excusing his behavior throughout" (Sova, 2007, p. 34). Even then, he refuses introspection, deflecting guilt onto external forces, releasing the black cat "whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman" (Author, year, page).

The murder of his wife serves as the final rite in the annihilation of his family. The axe that is meant for the black cat but instead splits his wife's skull symbolizes the uncontrollable contagion of domestic violence—it never confines itself to its intended target. His horrifying method of entombing the corpse within the cellar walls reveals how he has completely objectified family members, reducing his wife to a mere object that needs disposing of. With bitter irony, the very walls he takes such pride in fortifying become the exhibition ground for

his crimes. The gallows, a persistent symbol throughout the narrative, weaves the protagonist's self-annihilation into a grim, inescapable cycle. It begins with the lynching of the first black cat, continues with the spectral emergence of the second upon the entombed corpse (a colossal gallows is imprinted on the wall), and culminates in the feline's shriek betraying his crime—each step tightening the noose around his fate. The black cat's mournful wail pierces through all layers of self-deception, proclaiming a terrible truth: fractured family bonds ultimately make their voices heard in some form—even if that voice can emerge from beyond the grave.

His mental downfall stemmed precisely from what he believed to be the perfect crime. Convinced of his immunity from lawful punishment, he even gloated when police investigators found nothing amiss. Yet it was the very black cat he had entombed within the wall whose mournful cries ultimately exposed his guilt at the crucial moment. This supernatural turn of events symbolically represents the inescapable nature of sin—madness and violence inevitably recoil upon their perpetrator. His arrogance and overconfidence, ironically, hastened his own exposure. The protagonist's execution serves as more than legal punishment—it is the terminal cost of shattered ethics. His ruin follows no whim, but stands as the inescapable end of his depravity. The tale thus delivers its grim admonition: humanity's latent malice, unrestrained, festers like contagion until it devours even its host. His crime was not only the killing of his wife and feline victims, but the methodical erasure of his humanity. The gallows merely sealed what he had long since wrought upon himself.

The horror of *The Black Cat* lies not only in the protagonist's atrocities or the ghostly wail of the entombed cat upon his murdered wife's corpse—but in its revelation of morality's irreversible decay. Once the boundaries of ethics are breached, madness follows like a shadow until destruction is inevitable. With his unflinching prose, Poe delivers a chilling truth: true terror resides not in external punishment, but in how a man, steeped in sin, loses himself—until he becomes both the architect and the sacrificial offering of his own madness.

If we like, we may speak about “extending the moral community” to include nonhuman life-forms, species, or other entities. But while we may have obligations to such entities, with the few possible exceptions just mentioned they are not moral subjects in the sense just defined. They have no obligations to us. They cannot deliberate about a planetary code of ethics, nor can they represent their own interests over ours. If anyone is going to speak on their behalf, it will be us (Clowney; Mosto, 2009, p. 8).

Yet the protagonist of the story exists in solitary delusion, completely rejecting any external intervention of ethical factors. He drowns himself in alcohol and violence, willfully

blind to his own corruption, authoritarian tendencies, and moral decay. Each accidentally sobering moment after his violent outbursts—when he fully comprehends their devastating consequences—plunges him into utter despair. This drives him to seek renewed balance through further drinking and violence against those around him, creating a vicious cycle that ultimately proves to be a futile escape mechanism. His descent into madness, violence, and complete breakdown stems not only from hypersensitivity and paranoia toward his external environment, but more fundamentally from an internal absence of ethical consciousness regarding life itself. Under the combined assault of these internal and external factors, the protagonist's psyche completely collapses. Though he experiences brief moments of remorse after his acts of animal cruelty, these never translate into genuine reflection on his dangerous behavior. Instead, he obsessively conceals his crimes and manufactures justifications to console himself. These fleeting pangs of conscience don't represent true moral awakening, but rather a primitive fear of supernatural retribution or legal punishment. His criminal acts may appear as impulsive outbursts, but in reality, they constitute the inevitable consequence of his complete moral collapse—the predetermined trajectory of his self-destruction.

## **Conclusion**

From the perspective of life ethics, this novel explores the relationship between humans and their external environment, particularly how characters respond to environmental changes under the influence of their implicit anti-life-ethical consciousness, which serves as a critical factor in their psychological deterioration. The story distinctly implies the underlying life consciousness embedded within the narrative and the manifestations of life ethics as well. It can be said that *The Black Cat* is a work that uses external settings as a foundation to analyze and probe the ecological consciousness within a character's psyche. Through the protagonist's delusional self-narration, the story shifts away from conventional plot-driven storytelling, immersing the reader in his distorted reality with its nuance. This approach not only breaks from the traditional Gothic narrative style but also inadvertently exposes the protagonist's horrible life and ethical consciousness. Through this psychological excavation, the novel reveals the intense conflict between extreme egocentrism and life ethics, ultimately presenting a profound meditation on moral decay and mental breakdown.

The story presents a profound meditation on the conflict between humanity's inherent darkness and moral conscience through the protagonist's ethical degradation and violent acts. Trapped in a self-centered, closed psychological system, he remains oblivious to his disregard for life and the devastation he inflicts upon others—and ultimately, himself. His attempts to escape through alcoholism or to assert control through violence, while rationalizing his actions, prove futile exercises in self-deception. Far from being merely a Gothic horror tale or a portrait of a deranged psychopath, the narrative delves into the psychological undercurrents of anti-ethical consciousness, where fleeting pity, terror, and moral ambiguity collide. Through the protagonist's tragic descent, Poe issues a cautionary critique of humanity's capacity for darkness and the perilous erosion of moral principles when left unchecked. This story transcends psychological study; it stands as a moral parable, underscoring the fragility of human ethics and the catastrophic potential of their collapse. The protagonist's fate serves not only as an individual tragedy but as a universal warning—a stark reminder of the destructive consequences when morality unravels. The story thus serves as both a psychological study and a moral allegory, emphasizing the fragility of human morality and the destructive potential of its collapse.

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