

Techniques for the Power of Imagination in Teaching Literature Versus Short Story

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Abstract

This paper intends to show the importance of imagination in teaching literature in general and short story in particular. Also it provides some techniques which may be used by the teacher through the wealth of available materials to provide a platform for sharing ideas and experiences and to explore some areas that are at the cutting edge of the most powerful teaching.

Edger Allen Poe's short story "*The Black Cat*" will be used to explain how the teacher may use many of the suggested techniques to fire his/her students' imagination.

Introduction

Literary texts have always been an important source of material for ESL/EFL classes as they demonstrate on a wide range of language use in authentic contexts. Particularly short stories are the most widely used literary genre in the foreign language classroom, with all levels of proficiency, all age groups and in many classroom activities. Literary texts have been considered as a valuable variety for the ESL/EFL classes to supplement the main course materials for the in-class and out of class activities of language teaching, learning and practice. This interest in using literature in language teaching lies in three interrelated elements: authenticity, culture and personal growth. First of all, literary texts

can be more beneficial than informational materials in stimulating the acquisition process as they provide authentic contexts for processing new language. Since literary texts contain language intended for native speakers, literature stands as a model for language learners to become familiar with different forms and conventions (Collie and Slater, 1991, 4; Ur, 1996: 201) . Containing real examples of grammatical structures and vocabulary items, the literary texts raise learners' awareness of the range of the target language and advance their competence in all language skills (Povey, 1967). Second, using literature in language teaching has the advantage of providing cultural information about the target language. Literary texts increase foreign language learners' insight into the country and the people whose language is being learnt (Collie and Slater, 1991) , which fosters learners' ability to interpret discourse in different social and cultural target language contexts (Savvidou,2004)[http://www.accessmylibrary.com / topics/ arts-humanities](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/topics/arts-humanities).

The Significance of Teaching Literature

We may ask ‘what do we mean by the teaching of literature?’ , Carter& Nunan (2001: 182) answer " literature is used and studied in many different ways and different contexts. The following are the most common emphases:

- Focus on teaching language vs. focus on teaching literature;
- language learning purpose (pragmatic focus) vs. academic/ analytical purpose(intellectual focus);
- linguistic orientation (stylistics) vs. literary critical orientation (the new criticism, post- modernism, etc.);
- learning how to study literature vs. studying literature.

"one of the functions of literature, perhaps, is to institutionalize the area where creative and original language use can be found and responded to with the intensity it requires" (Skehan, 1998: 32). In addition, Wright(1993: 3) adds that" extracting, appreciating, and creating beauty should be the main objective for studying literature".

Collie and Slater (1991: 196) list the advantages of using short stories for language teaching: short stories are practical as their length is long enough to cover entirely in one or two class sessions; they are not complicated for students to work with on their own; they have a variety of choice for different interests and tastes; and they can be used with all levels (beginner to advanced), all ages (young learners to adults) and all classes (summer courses to evening classes <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mihb3325>

Teaching Literature

For teaching literature, there are three main models: cultural model; linguistic model; and personal growth model. Carter& Long (1991: 2) argue that " the three models are not course mutually exclusive and should preferably be viewed as tendencies; but they do represent distinct models which are embraced by teachers as reasons or purposes for the teaching of literature and they are related to specific pedagogic practice" . The teacher, the students, and the text are the basic elements for the process of teaching, so each one participate in one way or another to make the process of teaching successful and creative .

The **teacher** is an effective controller in the process of teaching and he/she can create with the students the way he/she likes to make the process successful. Wilkins (1974: 53) mentions" the one remaining important variable in the learning situation is the

teacher himself" since he is the provider of the input and "The teacher's skill and personality" are instrumental in creating the condition of learning. And his skill is dependent on two factors: his own proficiency in the language and his knowledge and expertise in methods and technique of language teaching" (Ibid.) . Furthermore, the teacher has a very vital role in guiding the students and teaching them how to use their fantasy in imagining the whole actions and details of the work because "the teacher can offer practical advice to the student on how to use her talent" <http://www.ierng.net/confs/2003/proceeds/barber.pdf>. Campbell & Kryszewska (1992: 60) adds that "the teacher can be an active participant in the group, genuinely taking part in the activities, contributing ideas and opinions or relating personal experiences" .

Hines (1995: 2) states that "the teacher should remember that while the students may become frustrated truly exasperated, as they struggle with this foreign language, they have the faculty of imagination" . So, the teacher has a great responsibility to facilitate the using of the students' imagination. Mahir (1995: 12) assures that "learner will never consider a language class as dull if their teachers exploit the full potential of the human imagination" . And "we [the teachers] are using the student's imagination, not the teachers' " (Hines: 4) . The teacher should pay attention that imagination should be differentiated from understanding. Barrow further maintains that "the imagination must be developed indirectly, and it can only grow as a result of efforts by the teacher to impart understanding" <http://www.ierng.net/confs/2003/proceeds/barber.pdf>.

The **student's** significance in the successful teaching process must not be neglected. Since "in the past the question most frequently was 'which is the best teaching methodology?' Now the teacher ask 'How can my students best learn the language ?' The

focus has shifted from teacher to the learner, and with this has come the realization that each learner is an individual, and attitudes" (De López, 1989: 2), i.e., the student is the centre of the process of teaching. In teaching literature in general and short story in particular, the students should be aware of how to use the knowledge he/she has got from the text to comment on by using his/her fantasy to imagine the events, the characters,...etc.

Gnoinska (1998: 13) clarifies that" they [the students] lack creativity and imagination" as reasons that stand behind some difficulties that the students may face in studying literature. Imagination contributed to the creative process is quite accurate and if the student know how to use their imagination in studying literature, they will discover the effective aspects that colour the language employed, furthermore they will use their imagination and fantasy to enjoy themselves.

The **text** is very significant to support the teacher in creating a successful teaching process for his/her students. Carter & Nunan(2001: 184) state "clearly, the appropriacy of the texts selected for a particular class remains a crucial factor in the success of the approach. Texts which tend to be chosen are those that are not too long, not too complex linguistically, not too far removed from the world knowledge of the students, and not too anachronistic. Above everything else, however, the text has to have the capacity engage the interest of the students" to motivate them to use their imagination. Also" the narratives and the appeal of the poetic functional of language inherent in the same were therefore used as a means of practicing all four language skills" (Shepherd, 1990: 18). Carter& Long (1991: 3) advise that" to encourage personal growth the teacher has to stimulate and enliven students in the literature class by selecting texts to which students can respond and in which they participate imaginatively, by promoting the kind of conditions

for learning in the classroom which will make the reading of literature a memorable, individual and collective experience and above all, by enthusiasm for commitment to the teaching of literature as literature" .

Imagination and Teaching Literature Vs. Short Story

Imagination is defined by Hornby (2004: 646) as" the ability to create pictures in your mind". And "imagination is a natural structure of the mind which must be trained or attuned to appreciate the greatness of art, to develop a meaningful standard of taste" <http://www.subrerbis.com/essays/ imagination.rtf>.

The power of imagination is very significant in teaching literature as *Bruce Bawer* says" I simply think that we [the teachers] should keep in mind that no work of literature comes into being without a creative impulse-an imagination" <http://web2.ade.org/ade/bulletin/NO69/ 069022.htm>. Furthermore, Dr.Gemino says that" for me, the imagination is simply the finest form of intelligence: it comprises reasoned and intuition, our physical senses, feelings. And memory, all alive at all points of contact with reality" <http://www.up.edu.ph/pdf/lit-sci-im.pdf>.

Imagination plays a vital role in getting the linguistic benefit of studying literature and it should not be neglected. Obeidat (1997: 37) assures that" a remarkable and basic distinguished feature of literature which, as a matter of fact, must not go in noticed is imagination". Richmond (1993: 366) adds that process/product-style research into effective teaching has ignored what it means to be a good art teacher. Imagination as a quality of good teaching has similarly been ignored" <http://www.jstor.org/ pass/ 1494938> .

In general through teaching literature, attention should be paid to imagination and a great attention should be paid with teaching short story since "short story is an action so to teach it we will have 'the product is the creation of a shared experience based on words and imagination'" (Pederson, 1995: 3). The ability of imagination will help the student to imagine the situation he/she has to think of and create an image at his/her mind to have full understanding of the whole story. In short story or any short writing the writer is not going to write all the details of the actions , the description of the characters and their relationships so, the student has to use his/her fantasy to imagine how they may look like and he/she may have and show new and exciting ideas about the story also reflect his/her opinion and view, if and only if he/she knows how to use his/her power of imagination.

The teacher will be the person who is going to break the ice gently to help the students have full understanding by using their imaginations. Many activities may be used by the teacher to fire the students' imagination, McGruire (1995:12) asserts that "the number of variety and activities are limited only by the imagination of the staff and the amount of the time they have".The following are some of the techniques that may the teacher use to help the students use their imagination in studying literature in general and short story in particular; Poe' short story" *The Black Cat*", which is dating before 1900, is going to be used as an example to apply these techniques:

- **Prediction:** is one of the technique the teacher may use to help his/her students use their imagination. Bock (1993: 3-4) explains that" predicting (allowing students to formulate hypotheses about the text before reading commences) is further way of encouraging students to utilize what background information they posses and arousing their interest in the development of the story" . Through prediction, the students are

going to give their prediction about the work "It does not matter if their predictions are incorrect-the important thing is that they will be alert to what does follow to see whether it matches their expectation or not" (Ibid.).

In Poe's short story the teacher may ask his/her students about the title of the story: what do you think of the title "*The Black Cat*"? the students may be confused at first about what to say, so the students should be encouraged to use their imagination and make guesses or predictions about the story by linking meaning and imagination which will enter their memory. Or the teacher may ask them ,after reading part of the story, to predict what will happen next?, such as in "*The Black Cat*" will the husband kill the second cat? why? ; in this way the students know some information about the character of the husband and have incomplete image about the whole story, so, they may use their imagination and expectation to give their predictions.

- **Reading:** reading is one of the important and active techniques to help the students know how to use their imagination creatively because it involves the reader in:
 - a) sharing the world the writer has created. This occurs as a result of the imagination leaps we make in order to fit the created world with the world we know.
 - b) relating the experience of the text to experiences we ourselves have undergoing. This occurs as a result of an active shuttling back and forth between the ' fictional' world and the ' real' world.
 - c) Interpreting what the text might mean. The literary representation of the experience is not a direct one; it frequently indirect. This forces the reader to make connections, to read between the lines, to seek for

explanations and meanings. In literary texts such as rarely stated directly(Carter& Long, 1991: 16) .

when the student is the reader or the hearer , if the teacher reads, he is going to be involved in sharing the world of the writer and compares it with an experience he/she may have or hear about, as a result he/she is going to interpret what the text may mean by imagination.

As the personal growth model is "one of the main goals for teachers who are primarily committed to a personal growth model of literature teaching is to try to help students to achieve an engagement with the reading of literary texts" (Carter, 1991: 2) . Through such engagement student may acquire new beliefs, attitudes and behaviors as an effect of the literary texts which they have studied, for example " stories can have a deep impact on person's construction of knowledge and self"(Deacon & Murphey, 2001:10) .

Since" reading is more active a process than we think" (Ibid.) the student unconsciously has some images in his/her fantasy through reading , the teacher will" provide the students with new information that will help them comprehend the passage" (Stoller, 1994: 6). And these information" increase students concentration, stimulate curiosity, increase imagination and foster motivation, as well as give students a sense of purpose for reading" (Ibid.) .

In "*The Black Cat*" for example, when the student reads each paragraph, he will add new information about the husband character and the whole actions of the story. As result, they will be eager to know more and more and this will motivate them with a purpose for reading and the added information enrich their imagination to have a clear and complete image at their minds and in return this "it is important, though, to remember the virtue of keeping the material

fresh and not to limit the student's imagination" (Hines,1995:12) . When the teacher asks any question through reading, the students will express themselves by using their imagination and be creative. The teacher should learn his/her students how to read imaginatively i.e. to use their fantasy to imagine the words of the story not to read it as if they are reading indifferently a newspaper related to facts without thinking and imagining. When Poe said " ... *and found that it was a black cat – a very large one as Pluto. He looked like Pluto too – in every way but one. Pluto did not have a white hair anywhere on his body; this cat had a large white shape on his front*". Through these lines the student will have a simple image about the second cat according to Poe's description. So, they should read and imagine.

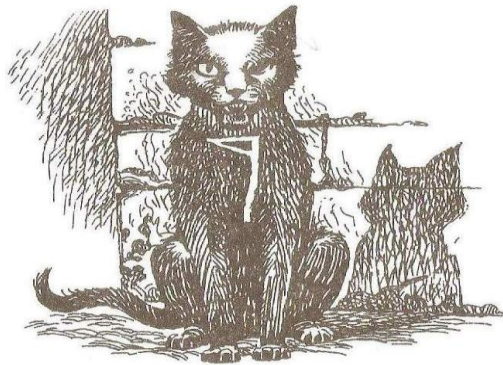
In the first five paragraphs the writer only describes his life, what he has or like , the kinds of the animals he has, and he concentrates on the cat; which was black and it has a name ‘ Pluto’ , through this introduction, the students are going to have a simple and tentative image about this man who was the hero and all the action go round him, and his desires in the story. This image may facilitate for them to comment on, discuss, and write about themes and create narratives that are meaningful for them. Also when the husband said" *Suddenly, I was not myself anymore. Someone else was in my body: someone evil and mad with drink!* " in these lines the writer describes the husband when he harmed the cat. So, when the student reads these lines, the students may imagine the whole situation of hurting the cat. Through reading the teacher may not be able to help his/her students too much, but he/she will let his/ her students fall into imagining if the language gets its hook into them. For example with plot imagination, they will imagine what they would read, see, feel, hear, smell and think, and their responses varied but all reflected their feelings.

- **Visual Aids:** poverty of imagination may make the process of teaching literature fail or weak. So, the teacher should be active enough to do anything which may foster his/ her students imagination. Picture is the simplest way to help and motivate the students to imagine and it offers a delightful information about the actions of the story. For instance, after reading the following lines which were about the cat, the favorite animal among the animals he liked" *The latter [the cat] was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black,.... "* the following picture of this cat which was the first cat in Poe' story" *The Black Cat*" may add new ideas and images about it and it may motivate their fantasy to imagine :



Picture (1) First black cat

The students may have seen a black cat before and this picture clarifies how black it was. Also the next picture of the second cat clarifies the difference between the two cats :



There, on the cat's front was the shape of that terrible machine of pain and death — the gallows!

Picture (2) The second cat

The action of the hanging cat on the wall after the fire is an important and strange action in this story. The need of a picture to explain it is very urgent for the students to help them have a unified image when he/she reads the following " *on the day succeeding the fire I visited the ruins. The walls with one exception, had fallen in. The exception was found in a compartment wall not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house and against which rested the head of my bedabout this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention....I approached and saw....* " .

So, the following picture explains not only the hanging cat ,but also how the husband astonished when he saw the people gathered to see this distinguished scene.



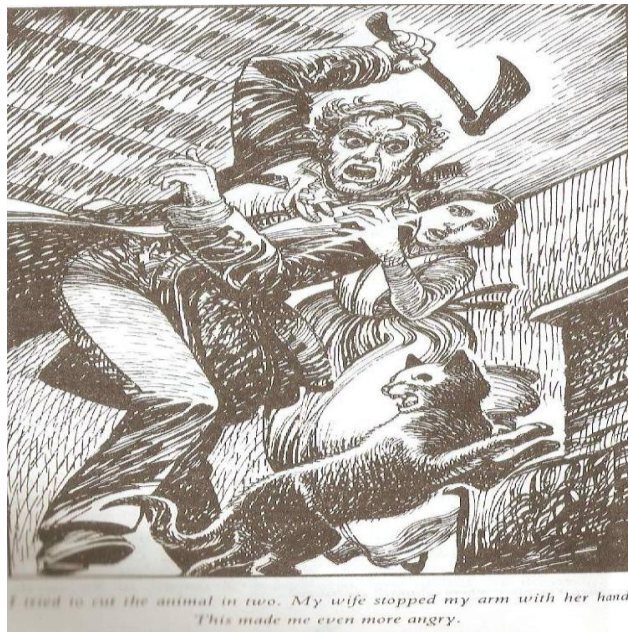
I saw a black shape in the new white plaster. It was the shape of a large cat, hanging by its neck.

Picture (3) The hanging cat

The students may create additions to the story using their own imagination to have a complete image of the action. Through pictures the students' imaginations are engaged and their creativity is fascinated.

When the students read the following lines they need to have a picture to help them imagine the scene of killing the wife, when the husband killed her by an axe instead of the second cat whom he determined to kill: "one day she [the wife] accompanied me, upon

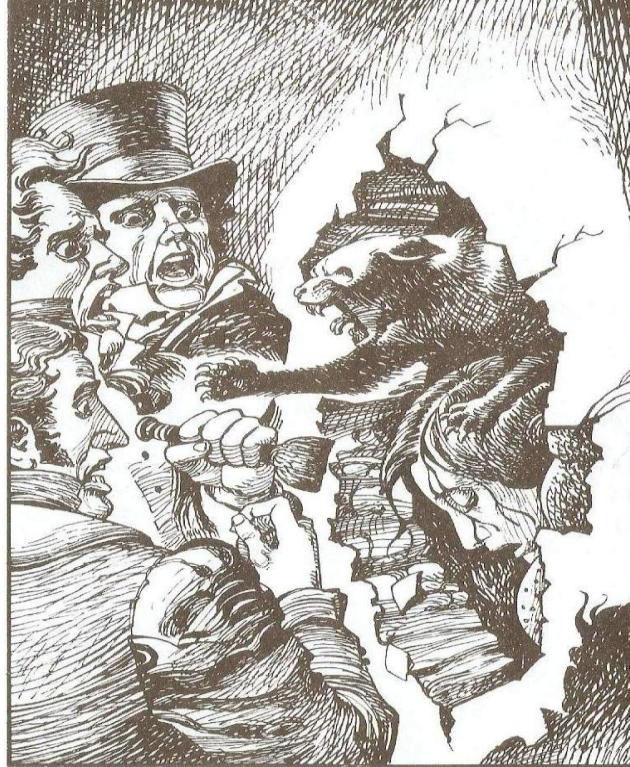
household errand, into the cellar of the building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the stairs, and nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a range more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain, She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan".



Picture (4) Killing the wife

Showing pictures of a story is useful and significant as Meiho& Fai Lil (1998:12) assures that" this activity attempts to stimulate students' imagination through construction of a story based on the words given to them".

The following picture clarifies the discovery of the murder ironically by the husband when he praised the well contracted wall



There she was with dried blood all over her head. And there was the cat, standing on her head.

Picture (5) The murder discovery

Using films is also useful as" the ultimate goal is arouse sensitivity in the learner and provide a stimulates to stretch his/ her imagination and creativity" (Massi & Merino,1996:20). Neale (1990:2) adds that" like no other art, film captures the imagination of people everywhere". The using of films is also useful for the teacher to support him/her to enrich the students' imagination in teaching literature because" good films can serve as a valuable pedagogical aid, both for classroom use and self-study" (Massi & Merino, 1996: 20) .

The students are going to combine their limited vocabulary and experience to comment on the action or actions i.e. the using of films is to clarify the action and to activate feeling words and so on . Moreover; " they [the films] allow for constant reinforcement in the acquisition of a foreign language; they provide a good medium for self study; they offer the learners the possibility of thinking critically as well as using their imagination" (Ibid.) .

The teacher is the guide and the controller of the process of teaching so, he/she can use his/her talent in many creative ways to help and teach indirectly his/her students to know how to use their imagination. Such as through the film the teacher may give a pause and discuss, comment or even ask questions about what have been shown. Hemei (1997: 47) assures that" to fire the imagination of your students, it may be a good idea to pause at certain point of video presentation during the first viewing and get students to predict what will happen next, or to deduce further information about the characters based on what they have picked up from video units" .

- **Learner –Based Approach:** It has been explained that the focus is shifted from the teacher to the learner .So, this approach is useful and makes the process of learning literature accessible through the following:
 - a) It allows more exploration of the literary text by the learner
 - b) It invites learners to develop their own judgement and to refine and develop their techniques for doing this so that they can apply them to a wider range of the text for their own benefit (Carter& Long,1991: 24-25) .

Learner based approach may be used by the teacher to widen the students' abilities to use their imagination. Campell & Kryszewska (1992:8) state that" a learner based approach offers a much more open-ended experience. A framework is given, but

the learners bear the possibilities for filling in the details, so that the same framework can evolve in completely different ways with different groups". i.e. learner based approach offers the variety through teaching because the students will be responsible for everything and the teacher is going to be the guide "by providing what the language students ask for ,at time they actually need to express themselves and they feel, they are responsible for asking, commenting, discussing the story.

After reading the story of "*The Black Cat*" , the teacher may use this approach through criticizing the story in general, and analyzing it to its elements so each students is going to comment according to what he/ she has thought and imagine" invariably student imagination produce an image the listener will recognize" (Hines, 995: 5). In this way, there will be a bunch of ideas according to the students' different and varied imaginations. Definitely, the discussion and the story appreciation will be by questions and the students will answer, the teacher may let students ask and answer each others , through this there will be questions no one can predict before which foster imagination with new sides they might not pay attention to, provoke interaction among them, and "learner based approach encourages students to work together and learn from each other" (Campell & Kryszewska,1992: 9) .

- **Asking questions and Critical Thinking:** asking questions is one of the attractive techniques which may be used through teaching short story because" these questions would take the students deeper into own characters and allow them to use their imagination within familiar context" (Krupp,1996:33). At the same time allows the critical evaluation of information, develops the capacity of reflection, the ability to relate ideas to make connections, to absorb, to reject, to decide, and to try to

out ideas, to find what is important and what is not. Chastain (1988: 142) cited from Talbine zahd (2003: 46) clarifies that "questions and answers (Q and A) form of high percentage of classroom activities that are supposed to get the learner involved in creation or re-creation of meaning through language".

Critical thinking is a very important technique in studying literature. If the student imagines what they read and hear, they will criticize and the teacher should pay attention to this in teaching literature. Wright (1993: 7) adds that "we [the teachers] are missing the magic of enjoyment; we are not gearing our techniques to reach that sensitive area of the students' minds, causing friction and stimulant to personal reaction and criticism". In critical evaluation, there will be interaction through the questions, and the idea is to expand their visionary capacity and allow them to imagine the fantastic.

Conclusion

Imagination is very significant activity in the mind and it should not be neglected and pay more attention to in teaching literature. Also it plays a valid role in developing the students competence to have a better grasp of literary work. So, the teacher of literature who is responsible for the whole process of teaching should shed the light on imagination and use any technique to motivate the student's imagination. Many techniques like reading, prediction, questions and critical thinking, and visual aids may the teacher use to help his/ her students have images at their fantasy and be aware to use this important power which they have and may not use.

THE BLACK CAT

BY

EDGAR ALLAN POE

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not - and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburden my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified - have tortured - have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but horror - to many they will seem less terrible than *baroques*. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace - some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature of the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. 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*.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a *cat*.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who 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. Not that she was ever *serious* upon this point - and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto - this was the cat's name - was my favourite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character - through the instrumentality of the fiend Intemperance - had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. 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? - and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish - even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill-temper.

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. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning - when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch - 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.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart - one of the indivisible primary

faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself* - to offer violence to its own nature - to do wrong for the wrong's sake only - that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree - hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart - hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offence - hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin - a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it - if such a thing were possible - even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of 'Fire!' The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts, and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found

in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire - a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words 'strange!' 'singular!' and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in bas-relief upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat*. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal's neck.

When I first beheld this apparition - for I could scarcely regard it as less - my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd - by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames and the *ammonia* from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. 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.

One night as I sat, half-stupefied, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of gin, or of rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat - a very large one - fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite, splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it - knew nothing of it - had never seen it before.

I continued my caresses, and when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favourite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but - I know not how or why it was - its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed me. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I

did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill- use it; but gradually - very gradually - I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk, it would get between my feet, and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. 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.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil - and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own - yes, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own - that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimeras it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will remember that

this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by slow degrees - degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my reason struggled to reject as fanciful - it had, at length, resumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name - and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster *had I dared* - it was now, I say, the image of a hideous - of a ghastly thing - of the GALLOWS! - oh, mournful and terrible engine of horror and of crime - of agony and death!

And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere humanity. And a *brute beast* - whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed - a *brute beast* to work out for *me* - for me, a man, fashioned in the image of the High God - so much of insufferable woe! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and, in the latter, I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of *the thing* upon my face, and its vast weight - an incarnate nightmare that I had no power to shake off - incumbent eternally upon my *heart*!

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates - the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of *all* things and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an

axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp, and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan.

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbours. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it into the well in the yard - about packing it in a box, as if merchandise, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar - as the monks of the Middle Ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fire-place, that had been filled up and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious.

And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crowbar I easily dislodged the bricks, and having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while, with little trouble, I relaid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brickwork. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself, 'Here at least, then, my labour has not been in vain.'

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; but it appeared that the crafty animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forbore to present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night - and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, *slept* even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a free man. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises for ever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted - but of course

nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of one who slumbers in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied, and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

'Gentlemen,' I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, 'I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By-the-by, gentlemen, this - this is a very well-constructed house.' (In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.) 'I may say an *excellently* well-constructed house. These walls - are you going, gentlemen? - these walls are solidly put together'; and here, through the mere frenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brickwork behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs on the Arch-Fiend! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb! - by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream,

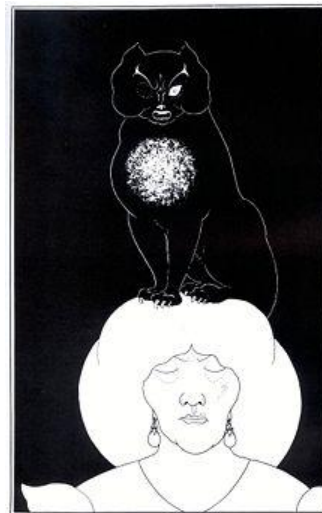
half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. 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!

The Black Cat by Edgar Allan Poe

The plot : [Summary](#)

On the eve of his death, an unnamed narrator opens the story by proclaiming that he is sane, despite the wild narrative he is about to convey. This narrative begins years before, when the narrator's honorable character is well known and celebrated. He confesses a great love for cats and dogs, both of which, he says, respect the fidelity of friendship, unlike fellow men. The narrator marries at a young age and introduces his wife to the domestic joys of owning pets. Among birds, goldfish, a dog, rabbits, and a monkey, the narrator singles out a large and beautiful black cat, named Pluto, as his favorite.



Though he loves Pluto, the narrator begins to suffer from violent mood swings, predominantly due to the influence of alcohol. He takes to mistreating not only the other animals but also his wife. During this uncontrollable rage, he spares only Pluto. After returning home quite drunk one night, the narrator lashes out at Pluto. Believing the cat has avoided him, he vengefully grasps the cat, only to be bitten on the hand. In demonic retaliation, the narrator pulls a penknife from his pocket and cuts out one of the cat's eyes. Though the narrator wakes the next morning with a partial feeling of remorse, he is unable to reverse the newly ominous course of his black soul. Ignored for certain now by the wounded cat, the narrator soon seeks further retaliation. He is overwhelmed by a spirit of PERVERSENESS, and sets out to commit wrong for the sake of wrong. He hangs Pluto from the limb of a tree one morning.

On the night of Pluto's hanging, the narrator's family's house burns down, but he dismisses the possibility of a connection between the two events. The day after the fire, which destroys all the narrator's possessions, he witnesses a group of neighbors collected around a wall that remains standing. Investigating their shouts of amazement, the narrator discovers the impression of a gigantic cat—with a rope around its neck—on the surface of the wall. The narrator attempts to explain rationally the existence of the impression, but he finds himself haunted by this phantasm over the course of many months. One night, while out drunk, the narrator discovers a black object poised upon a large barrel of alcohol. A new black cat has appeared, resembling Pluto but with a splash of white on his fur.

As with Pluto, the narrator experiences a great fondness for the mysterious cat, which no one has seen before. The cat becomes part of the household, much adored by his wife as well. However,

following the earlier pattern, the narrator soon cannot resist feelings of hatred for the cat. These murderous sentiments intensify when the narrator discovers that the cat's splash of white fur has mysteriously taken on the shape of the gallows, the structure on which a hanging takes place. The white fur reveals the mode of execution that claimed Pluto, and the narrator pledges revenge.

One day, descending into the cellar of the building with his wife, the narrator almost trips over the cat. Enraged, the narrator grabs an axe to attack the cat, but his wife defends the animal. Further angered by this interference, the narrator turns his rage at his wife and buries the axe in her head. Faced with the evidence of his crime, the narrator considers many options for the body's disposal, including dismemberment and burial. The narrator eventually decides to take advantage of the damp walls in the basement and entomb the body behind their plaster. Without any difficulty, the narrator creates a tomb in the plaster wall, thereby hiding the body and all traces of his murder. When he finally turns to the cat, it is missing, and he concludes that it has been frightened away by his anger.

On the fourth day after the murder, the police arrive unexpectedly at the narrator's apartment. Cool and collected, the narrator leads them through the premises, even into the basement. Though facing the scene of the crime, the police do not demonstrate any curiosity and prepare to leave the residence. The narrator, however, keeps trying to allay their suspicion. Commenting upon the solid craftsmanship of the house, he taps on the wall—behind which is his wife's body—with a cane. In response to the tapping, a long, loud cry emanates from behind the wall. The police storm the wall and dismantle it, discovering the hidden corpse. Upon its head sits the missing cat.

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