Comparison Of The Tell-Tale Heart And The Black Cat

Edgar Allan Poe was an American writer, editor and literary critique. He is best known for his poems and short stories such as “the Raven” and “Annabell Lee”

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts in June 1809 and passed away in October of 1949.

In this essay, two texts will be analysed and compared to find a definitive answer to the proposed question; “Text with similar content will inevitably reveal similar messages, discuss this statement with reference to your two prescribed texts”

The two texts that will be discussed are “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat” both of which are short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe.

“The Black Cat” was published in august of 1843. The stories show the study of the psychology of guilt.

“The Tell-Tale Heart” was also published in 1843. The story is told through an unknown narrator whom throughout the story, convinces the reader of the narrator’s sanity while simultaneously describing the murder the narrator committed.

In each of these short stories, the theme of an “Unknown Narrator or Insane Narrator” is present.

In “The Tell-Tale Heart” (By Edgar Allan Poe) nothing is known about the narrator at the beginning of the story, besides that, he is telling the story from his first-person perspective. As the reader continues through the story, the narrator describes the way he murdered an old man while convincing the reader of his sanity; “if still, you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body.”

This quote also shows the paranoia that the narrator feels while describing the events after the murder, another instance that supports the underlying theme of paranoia is after the murder when the narrator is being investigated by the police and the narrator can hear the beating of the heart under the floor;

“Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! --no, no! They heard! --they suspected! --they knew! --they were making a mockery of my horror!-this I thought, and this I think.”

In “The Black Cat” (By Edgar Allan Poe) there is once again nothing known about the narrator at the beginning of the story, besides that he is telling the story from a first-person perspective. From the beginning, the narrator informs the reader that he does not expect them to believe him;

“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.”

This shows a clear difference from “The Tell-Tale Heart” & “The Black Cat”, in “The Tell-Tale Heart” the narrator wholely believes in his own sanity, and is trying to convince the reader of that from the beginning of the story, though it is clear to the reader that he is not sane.

Alternatively, in “The Black Cat” the narrator is very aware of his personal insanity and does not expect the reader to believe in his story or that he is sane, the narrator is very self-aware of his actions & the consequences of those actions, in “The Black Cat”. Another example of the narrator’s self-awareness in “The Black Cat” is that he tells the reader at the beginning of the story that he is due to die the next day, but does not allude to why;

“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.”

Both short stories explore the theme of murder and the murder being related to a change in Previous Relationships.

In “The Tell-Tale Heart” the narrator is believed to live with the old man, they are said to be friends but as time goes on the old mans “Vulture Eye” continues to fall upon him, making him “go cold each time it fell upon me”.

This leads the narrator to believe that killing the old man would “Rid myself of the eye for good”

The way the ‘vulture eye” constantly falls upon the narrator is what changes the relationship between the narrator and the old man, and is what causes the narrators insanity and drive to murder, but the close relationship the narrator has with the old man is what causes the guilt, shame and paranoia that pursues the narrators mind after the murder has taken place.

In “The black cat” the narrator is believed to be happy, he lives with his wife, servent and cat called Pluto, but as the story begins the reader learns that the narrator is acholic, and he begins to get angry at his loved ones and one night, after he suspects the cat, Pluto, whom he loves, is avoiding him, he cuts out the cats eye. After sleeping off his drunken haze, the narrator lives to regret his decisions, and this breaks the relationship between the narrator and Pluto.

Later in the story, after Pluto dies, the narrator meets another black cat almost identical to Pluto, who follows him around and eventually he becomes annoyed with the cat and attempts to murder it with an axe, his wife intervenes and the narrator ends up killing his wife. The Narrator hides his wife’s’ dead body behind a newly constructed wall in the basement and does not see the cat in the days that pass after the murder, which leaves him with intense feelings of paranoia and guilt.

In conclusion, both stories shine light on the underlying themes of Paranoia, Insomnia & Guilt as well has to have plot lines of Murder and Unknown Narrator.

Both stories show perspectives of insomnia, one showing someone who is not aware of their insomnia, and convincing people of their sanity, and showing a perspective of someone who is

very aware of their paranoia, and not expecting the sane to believe in them.

Both stories also explore the themes of covering up a murder but having said cover-up drive the narrator insane. In “The Tell-Tale Heart” is it shown by the constant beating of the heart that can be heard by the narrator, and in “The Black Cat” it is shown by the absence of the cat in the nights following the murder.