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IMMORALITY AND LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY IN EDGAR ALLAN
POE'S SHORT STORIES 'BERENICE', 'THE BLACK CAT', AND 'WILLIAM
WILSON'

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Introduction

In this study, I am going to discuss the role of the loss of consciousness in 'Berenice', 'The Black Cat', and 'William Wilson' written by Edgar Allan Poe. I strive to explore through a psychological analysis the influence of this topic in the narrators' derangement, and, consequently, the commitment of crimes. In this analysis, I aim to understand the agents and motives of the crimes that impulse the main characters to moral decadence.

Overall, these works deal with controversial themes such as domestic violence, mental illnesses, repressed sexuality, and anxiety. In 'Berenice', repressed sexuality and mental illness are the main topics present in the plot, which are the responsible in the developing of obsessional behaviours. I believe that these topics are used to show the internal fight of the main character and how little by little his real intentions appear through the dissolution of his consciousness. The predominant topic in 'The Black Cat' are domestic violence and guilt and how these topics shape the main character while facing the different circumstances of his life, and how they contribute to his moral decadence. Finally, in 'William Wilson', identity is the main issue in the plot since the main character faces an internal fight with his conscience and his own will, which guide to self-destruction as he is unable to recognise other parts of his own identity.

Shu-ting Kao discussed violence in William Wilson, the role of it was to portray the narrator's attempt to represses his alter-ego through violence, which ended up in a

compulsive self-destruction due to the anxiety that William suffered. Regarding 'The Black Cat', Kristen Mollegaard analysed the uncanny in relation to domestic spaces. In general, she applied Sigmund Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' to explore the processes in which 'the invasion of something strange or unfamiliar into domestic space gives rise to anxiety and terror, which transform the perception of home (*Heim*) into the direct opposite (*das Unheimliche*, i.e. the uncanny)' (1). The author stated that animals are the agents of evil that lead to brutal murder in domestic spaces, in this case, 'The Black Cat' and 'The murders in the Rue Morgue', due to the estrangement produced by the different events inside of the stories.

Considering these ideas, I believe that these aspects help us to understand the fears, insecurities, anxieties of the main characters. Moreover, the loss of consciousness has a fundamental role to comprehend the hidden intentions of the narrators. Therefore, I consider that in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories 'Berenice', 'The Black Cat', and 'William Wilson', the main characters' loss of conscience highlights their insane psychological condition, which leads them to commit immoral actions.

In the first chapter of this study, I am going to discuss the loss of perception of reality as the reflection of the repressed nature of the main characters of the three short stories. I argue that through this process their repressed nature is mainly immoral, which generally appears when the characters lose their consciousness. In the second chapter, we are going to discuss the influence of obsessive ideas as striving force that blind the main characters

to commit crimes, as these ideas controlled their reality. Finally, in the third chapter, we will analyse the exposure of the crime as the demonstration of the repressed wishes of the narrators, which demonstrates the mental disturbance that the characters suffer. Finally, the conclusion of this analysis will be given.

Chapter I: The Loss of Perception of Reality

According to Benjamin F. Franking, Edgar Allan Poe's writings have been famous for exploring the origin and function of terror inside the mind. (180) In this exploration of the mind, we can perceive not only the complexity of the plot but also the unique psychological development of Poe's characters, which make his stories so intriguing and captivating. In order to carry out a psychological analysis, I am going to explore the mental nature of each of the main characters from the selected short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe. I argue that in 'The Black Cat', 'Berenice', and 'William Wilson' the loss of conscience leads the main characters to commit grievous actions towards other individuals, bringing to light their repressed nature and immorality.

In order to analyse these texts, I consider it extremely important to understand the concept of repression, since it would help us to comprehend the irrational, obsessive and compulsive nature of the main characters, as they tend to commit actions that could be considered as immoral when they are in a state of partial consciousness. According to *Freudian repression* by Michael Billig, every person has ideas, feelings, or thoughts that they would be unwilling to tell other people. The concept of *self-deceit* forms the basis for the development of the concept of repression; this concept means that certain secrets must be repressed, and consequently, the fact that these secrets are being repressed also must be repressed. Furthermore, repression plays a role in the origins of neurosis. Neurosis is

used to describe mental, emotional, or physical reactions that are drastic and irrational. One of the most famous patients that Freud treated with a severe case of neurosis was Elisabeth von R, who suffered from persistent pain in one of her legs. Although she did several medical tests, the doctors were not able to determine the causes of it. After an exhaustive analysis, Freud argued that her pain was caused due to secret thoughts or experiences of which the patient was not aware of because they were repressed (17). Taking into account these ideas, I believe that the main characters of the selected tales suffer a similar process, in which the loss of perception of reality has a fundamental role to the manifestation of their repressed thoughts.

‘The Black Cat’ narrates the story of a man that explains the previous circumstances that lead him to be sentenced to death. First, in his childhood, the narrator depicts himself as someone characterised by ‘*the docility and humanity of my disposition*’ (192). Then in his adulthood, he explains his current circumstances. Notwithstanding that in his adulthood he had a stable life, his temper and character were not the same as in his childhood due to his alcohol addiction. Throughout the story, there is not a clear hint of the origin of his addiction, as readers the only thing we know is that he is an alcoholic, as we can see in the following lines: ‘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.’ (193) In this quote, we can see that the male character admits that his condition is getting worse. Nevertheless, we still have

not a clear explanation of his decadence and unjustifiable violence towards his wife and pets.

As it was previously explained the concept of repression and *self-deceit*, the main character of ‘The Black Cat’ could have been hiding repressed thoughts about maltreatment of animals, and domestic violence. This can be seen when in his state of drunkenness, he is not able to control his outburst of rage, as when he admits that: “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.*” (193-194) (My emphasis) From this quote, we can say that when he is not totally conscious of his behaviour, he is not able to control himself. When he says ‘the fury of a demon instantly possessed me’, he instantly states that those behaviours are not part of his nature, which can be taken as a case of a repressed personality of the character, in this case a psychopath. Also, it could be said that he had hidden thoughts of enjoyment when he violently abused his animals and wife. Thus, it can be said that alcohol allows to open the access to the repressed or unconscious part of his persona.

As an example, after he had taken the eye of the cat, he seems to regret about the deed that he committed, since Pluto was one of his favourite pets in the house. This can be seen when he says: 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. (194) From this passage can be affirmed that as it might be the first time that he commits such an awful and cruel crime, he experienced a sense of remorse and guilt, since he was not aware that he could execute this violence to the ones he loved. Furthermore, when he says that 'when reason returned with the morning', we noticed that, by some means, his perception of reality could have been transformed due to the intoxication of wine. Nevertheless, after this incident, he persists on producing harm to his cat, which enhances the sense that the production of violence to others is the new source of pleasure of the main character.

Also, this can be seen when he murders his wife, he behaves differently. As soon as he kills his wife, he intends to find a place where he could hide her corpse, but there is no remorse. Therefore, it gives the impression that he does not regret about it, but enjoy it, as we can see when he says: My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. (200) Somehow, this statement made us wonder if the narrator wanted intentionally to kill his wife by the way he expressed the happiness that he felt, which can be taken as a confession of a repressed idea of getting rid not only the new cat but also of his wife. According to a study carried out by Felix Schirman, the definition of psychopathic personality referred to an individual who had little or no moral sense or social responsibility and who performed acts which were amoral without sufficient sense of guilt. I consider that this definition is useful to understand part of the behaviour of the

narrator since it seems that he acts like a psychopath, as he says that the ‘deed disturbed him but little’ and continues his life with little remorse. According to Kirsten Mollegaard, the narrator does not offer an explanation of killing his wife, other than the anger caused by her preventing him from killing the new cat. I partially agree with her statement although there is not a clear reason for killing his wife, it could be said that he does it for pure pleasure, as psychopaths tend to do it. From this part of the story, it can be seen how his mood drastically changed from someone extremely furious to someone cheerful, heightening the immoral nature of the character, as he intended to live his life without facing the consequences of his crime.

Analogously, we can find similar behaviour in ‘Berenice’ when Egeus loses completely the perception of reality, and, consequently, he takes out the teeth of his cousin. His obsession towards Berenice’s teeth started once his cousin’s health deteriorated together with her countenance. For Egeus, it was a total mystery how his cousin had changed due to the disease that affected her, as stated by Roger Schmidt in ‘A Literary History of teeth’: ‘Berenice is a complete mystery to him. An absolute mystery. So, when she is dying, when she is vanishing, he goes after the physical, he clings to the hardest, densest, most resilient, least mutable substance of her—her teeth.’ (28) I agree with his statement that Berenice represented a complete mystery to Egeus due to the sudden changes that she suffered, as a consequence of the disease that affected her physical features. But I would add that it is more than a mystery, I feel that Egeus starts

to develop a fetishist obsession from which he was not fully aware, as shown in the following quote: ‘The shutting of a door disturbed me, and, looking up, I found that my cousin had departed from the chamber. But from the disordered chamber of my brain, had not, alas! departed, and would not be driven away, the white and ghastly *spectrum* of the teeth.’ (102) From this, it is clearly evident that Egeus has a strange fascination towards the teeth as he calls them as a spectre that does not leave from his mind. Therefore, it can be taken as the starting point of the development of a fetishist obsession and the narrator's inability to identify it consciously.

Due to the mystery of Berenice's condition, Egeus develops an uncomfortable obsession towards her, which leads him to commit the bizarre removal of her teeth. Before the discovery that Berenice was alive and that her tomb was desecrated, he started to remember scenes of horror and how they were not clear enough to him, as when he says:

Yet its memory was replete with horror—horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity. [...] I had done a deed—what was it? I asked myself the question aloud, and the whispering echoes of the chamber answered me,—“What was it?” (104)

Perhaps, he unconsciously wanted to remove the teeth of Berenice but since she was alive, he could not do that because it would be a crime. Such in the case of the narrator of ‘The Black Cat’, the loss of the memories of that night could represent the fact that he was unwilling to tell other people what he has done. Additionally, we could even say that he was aware that what he was doing was not morally correct. Thus, in order to protect himself, his conscience decided to repress all the memories linked to that awful night.

Nonetheless, his conscience betrays him since he is not able to clean and to eliminate the evidence of the desecration of the grave, revealing that his obsession is not consciously controlled: 'He pointed to garments; they were muddy and clotted with gore. I spoke not, and he took me gently by the hand: it was indented with the impress of human nails. He directed my attention to some object against the wall. I looked at it for some minutes: it was a spade.' (104) The fact that the instruments used in the crime were not hidden revealed that Egaeus was not able to be completely aware of what he was doing during the night, which once more showed that through the loss of perception of reality his hidden wishes were brought into the light.

On the contrary, in 'William Wilson' happens all the way around. In this tale, the main character narrates the strange events that afflict him. He explains that whenever he goes, he finds a person that has his same name, features, clothes, and even behaviours. This strange apparition of this person puts him in unpleasant situations since he always appears when he intends to do evil behaviours. William portrayed himself as someone that 'grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions.' (169) In his description, it can be seen that the narrator was not used to be restricted regarding his passions and behaviours, and, since the other William appeared only to restrain him produced internal problems from which he was not able to control.

Therefore, it could be interpreted that, the disruption of his reality is produced because he had repressed the voice that tells him not to do evil things.

Considering these ideas, it can be said that the second William Wilson represented his conscience since it tended to appear in those moments when William behaved badly. Actually, William admits that his interferences are not desirable to him since they contradict his ‘ungovernable passions’, as it is seen in the following lines: ‘This interference often took the ungracious character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated.’ (176) From this, it is clear that the other William represents the conscience of the narrator, since he constantly appears when the protagonist tries to cheat, and for this reason, he perceives him as another person.

According to Shu-ting Kao, the second William Wilson irritates the first one when he does evil things, and the way to end with the supervision of the second Wilson is through self-destruction. I agree with this since the narrator stabs the other William when he is unable to fulfil his will. He remarks that when the second William appears some of his plans cannot be completely fulfilled. As when he states:

Could he, for an instant, have supposed that, in my admonisher at Eton—in the destroyer of my honor at Oxford,—in him who thwarted my ambition at Rome, my revenge at Paris, my passionate love at Naples, or what he falsely termed my avarice in Egypt,—that in this, my arch-enemy and evil genius, could fail to recognise the William Wilson of my school-boy days,—the namesake, the companion, the rival,—the hated and dreaded

rival at Dr. Bransby's? Impossible!—But let me hasten to the last eventful scene of the drama. (184)

As he was always doing his own will, he was unable to recognise that the second William was part of his own personality. Thus, he externalises the whisper of the other William as a complete stranger, and as another person that tries to imitate him and ruin his intentions. He was not fully aware of this part of his character since during his all life he did not have any restrictions. For this reason, he could not recognise his other part, 'the voice of morality', since it had been repressed for a long time, instead, he perceives it as another entity, another persona. Therefore, in this tale, the loss perception of reality heightens the immoral nature of the first William Wilson, and at the same time his incapacity to recognise his own voice, contrary to his immoral nature.

From this analysis, we have seen the importance of the loss of the perception of reality since it brings into light the moral issues that affect the main characters of these tales. On the one hand, the loss of self-control evidences the repressed nature of the narrator of 'The Black Cat', which serves to understand to violence is a source of pleasure for him. On the other hand, in 'Berenice', it could be seen that Egaeus was not able to control his repressed nature since he extracted Berenice's teeth when he was not able to perceive what was real or not. Finally, in William Wilson, the loss of reality perception lead the main character to destroy the voice that supervises him, his conscience, when he intents to do evil actions, which heightens the immoral nature of the narrator. Considering

these ideas, we could say that the repressed nature of the main characters contributes to highlight their immorality.

Chapter II: The Influence of Obsessive Ideas

As humans, we tend to be passionate towards a particular activity, work, or person, which is a natural characteristic that drive us to fulfil our goals. Nonetheless, this passion can also become something dangerous, when the pursuit of a specific goal is more important than the possible consequences that certain actions can have on other people. Obsessive ideas can lead someone into mental derangement when they are not properly treated. Professor Lennard J. David has worked with the history of Obsession in his book called *Obsession*. According to his investigation, the concept of obsession has been evolving through time. In its origins, it was closely related to demonic possession, but nowadays is considered to describe as the cause of mental illnesses. I believe that Lennard's work regarding this topic is relevant to take into account to understand the immoral behaviours of the main characters and how they perceive their own mental illness. Poe's characters, specifically, in 'Berenice' and 'The Black Cat' suffer from obsessional behaviours, yet they do not perceive it as a mental disease but rather as a demonic influence that take possession of their conduct. Moreover, It can be seen that the main characters share an important characteristic in common: they are constantly influenced by fixed ideas, which blind them and lead them to perpetrate terrible crimes towards innocent creatures.

Along with passion, curiosity is a fundamental attribute of human beings that allows us to explore and to understand what surrounds us. In 'Berenice', Egaeus was depicted as an introspective person that continuously reflected about an idea, smell, or object that engrossed his attention. (99) He tells us that this particular aspect of his personality, which consisted in the immersion in books and thoughts, sprung up from his childhood and accompanied him in his adulthood. At first, it seems that this attribute is not harmful to anyone, except for Egaeus himself, who expressed that 'I, living within my own heart, and addicted, body and soul, to the most intense and painful meditation.' (98) In this quote, it can be noticed that Egaeus is constantly haunted by fixed ideas in his mind that are not necessarily enjoyable for his life, which might be the precursor of his mental derangement at the end. We might think that this particular feature of his personality would be regulated in time, but, in the case of Egaeus, it was the lack of self-regulation that led him unto his moral decadence. This can be seen when the persistent idea of Berenice's teeth pushed him to lose his rationality and perception of reality. Taking into account that he portrays himself as a person *addicted* in body a soul to the most intense meditation, it could be said that this is a process he is unable to control, since there is a lack of regulation concerning his *passions*, which torture him daily. Thus, it can be said that his 'obsessions' (or the lack of regulation of his passions) are the responsible of his losing control of rationality and actions.

A similar process occurs in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, when Victor is immersed in a devoted and painful process for the creation of the monster. I consider that this comparison is relevant since obsession is the driving force in the plot, which leads the main character to the fatal finale. Victor went through different processes in which even his own health deteriorates due to the uncontrolled dedication in the creation of the monster; Likewise, Egeus' physical characteristics suffered the consequences of his addiction to knowledge, as when he compares himself to Berenice, as his opposite when he says: 'I, ill of health, and buried in gloom—she, agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy' (98) Kathleen Béres discussed the problem of the influence of ruling passions that lack regulations and how they lead Gothic characters to fatal denouements and sufferings. Overall, she states that enthusiasm is characterized as ruling passion that can lead into madness, mania or a phrenzy due to the lack of regulation which renders enthusiasm problematic. (359) I believe Béres is right about this, because Egeus and Victor were constantly afflicted with ideas they were unable to remove from their minds. For instance, Egeus stated that he was *buried in gloom*, which can be interpreted as discontent towards life. Possibly, he felt this way because, besides his books, there was nothing that internally awoke him or gave meaning to his life, until his passion towards Berenice's teeth arose.

A crucial problem with obsessive ideas and behaviours are that, sometimes, the consequences of actions are not considered at the time they are performed, as when Victor

was in the process of the creation of the monster. He was completely blinded by his aim, so he did not consider the possible consequences of the creation of a new creature, which could be dangerous for human beings, as when he says ‘During my first experiment, a kind of *enthusiastic frenzy* had blinded me to the horror of my employment’ (90)(my emphasis). Similarly, this can be seen in Egeus’ desire for Berenice’s teeth, expressed when he says: ‘In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a *frenzied desire*.’ (102) (my emphasis) From these quotes, it can be seen that both were completely blinded by their frenzy desire or enthusiasm, which produced, on the one hand, that Frankenstein did not consider the ethical consequences of his experiment, and, on the other, that Egeus became obsessed by the idea of the possession of the teeth and consequently the desecration and disrespect towards Berenice’s grave.

Therefore, it could be said that their moral sense is suspended due to the strength of their desires towards the object of obsession. In the case of Egeus, this can be seen when he says: ‘I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason.’ (103) From these words, we can observe that the fixed idea in the mind of Egeus leads him to lose his reason, he even seems to be aware of that when he claims that the possession of the teeth could restore him into his initial state. This passage heightens the effect of obsessional ideas, and how they lead the main characters into abnormal mental state that has negative consequences to other people.

In 'The Monstrous Idea', Kathleen Béres stated that people who were tender and who led sedentary lives, or indulged contemplative studies were the most likely to suffer from these passions. (40) I agree with this idea that these people are the most likely to suffer from the passions because it is not a coincidence that both Victor and Egaeus were affected by their incessant pursuit of knowledge, which distressed them not only in their physical appearance but also in their psychological sphere; Therefore, this frensy desire persuaded them to obtain their source of obsession at any cost, as when Victor created and chased the creature until his on destruction and Egaeus desecrated the tomb of Berenice to possess her teeth.

On the other hand, in 'The Black Cat', the main character was convinced that the new cat was a diabolic entity that seduced him into committing what it is inexcusable: the murdering of his wife. One of the possible explanations for this belief is that his wife mentioned that black cats where witches in disguise (193) As I mentioned before, the influence of fixed ideas can produce the loss of his or her rationality due to the strong influence that these ideas have in our minds. In the 'The Monstrous Idea', Scaramelli stated that there is a great paradox in relation to obsessive thoughts, the more a person tries to drive them out, the more they tend to become a haunting presence. I agree with her statement, and it can also be used to interpret 'The Black Cat' because the narrator was unable to drive out the superstition of the new cat and what it meant to him to see him

every day. The presence of the cat reminds the perverseness, the crime and the deranged psychological state of the narrator, because of the resemblance of the previous cat, and how he was unable to provide a reasonable justification for the damage that he produced to Pluto.

The fact that he had tortured him just because he knew he was wrong “to do wrong for the wrong’s sake only” (194), enhances the sense that he enjoyed it; and that he was blinded by the pleasure that these actions produced in him. Taking into account all of this, we could say that his discourse is full of contradictions throughout the narration, due to what he says at the end: 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. (201) (My emphasis) In the development of his story he admits that he tried to avoid the new cat due to the shame that he felt since it is the remembrance of the previous deed of cruelty that he committed (196) Moreover, this avoidance had a purpose which was to prevent him from “physically abusing it.” (196) From these lines, it could be said that he confesses that he was dangerous and that he was not able to control himself when ‘the spirit of Perverseness’ possessed him. The narrator was aware of his dangerousness and that he could produce harm to the ones he loved, as when he hanged Pluto in the tree, but he was unable to stop because at the same time it was a pleasurable moment for him.

Notwithstanding the fact that he tried to avoid the new cat, he was unable to remain calm because of the similarities with Pluto, which reminded him daily the outrageous damage to his favourite pet. Therefore, guilt consumed his reason, which led him to the feelings of fear and horror towards the creature, as when he says: ‘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 of Death!’ (197). It is intriguing that the speaker refers to the cat as a monster or ghastly entity because this animal did not produce any harm to him or for his wife; the cat was simply a pet. Actually, I believe that the second cat represents his inability to remove from his memory his perverse nature, which does not allow the character to live in peace. Consequently, he drew on the superstition that black cats were witches as a way to legitimate the destruction of the animal with the excuse that it was not his fault but the curse of the cat. Although it was a weird coincidence to find the second cat that resembled in many ways to Pluto, it was not sufficient to excuse the terrible deeds that he had done.

In the study ‘Animal Invasion’, Kristen argued that: The narrator blames his wife for mentioning the superstition about black cats, but in fact it is he, not his wife, who in his own over-heated imagination loses his humanity, and hence his reason, out of sheer dread for the cat. (15) I partially agree with her ideas, because I do believe that the

superstition about the cat made him lose his humanity and therefore his reason, through his overheated imagination. However, I feel that he blames more the cat rather than his wife, since he is constantly treating him as a monster that has bewitched him to do evil things, as in the following passage: ‘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’ (199, emphasis from the original text).

In the same way as in ‘Berenice’, the narrator was haunted by a spectre or monster that pursued and tormented him psychologically, worsening their rationality. For instance, in Berenice, it can be seen when Egaeus’ mind was not able to remove the idea of the teeth, which tormented him as a ghastly spectrum (102) and led him to profane Berenice’s body and tomb. Similarly, the narrator of ‘The Black Cat’ is tormented and horrified by the idea that the second cat was a monster, which drive him to commit the murder of his wife. When the narrator kills his wife in a fit of violence and then walls her up without any hint of remorse, which could be taken as the demonstration of his insane psychological state. In fact, he says that his happiness had been supreme, when the cat and his wife were no longer in the house, and that the guilt of the dark deed had disturbed him but little (200) From these lines, it can be noticed that he was aware of the deed that he was doing and that was not influenced by supernatural force of the cat. The problem is the fact that he enjoyed doing harm just for pleasure as a psychopath since he does not show sufficient sense of guilt of the deed. Nevertheless, when he was in jail instead of admitting that he

did that because he felt pleasure, he blamed the cat and that he was the responsible of his fate, which once more reflects the contradictory nature of the speaker.

In this chapter, we have seen the influence of obsessive ideas and how they guide the narrators to do immoral behaviours. In 'Berenice', the obsessional tendency towards the teeth along with the frenzied desire produce that Egaeus losses the perception of reality and consequently commits the desecration of Berenice's grave and body. In 'The Black Cat', the narrator's idea that the cat was the responsible of his decadence serves as an excuse to explain his crimes, and, also to hide the fact that he enjoys doing these acts. Both of them were influenced by ideas that heightened their contradictory nature, and fetishisms. These ideas help us to understand the immorality of the narrators and how they allow them to take the control of their life through fear and uncontrollable passions.

Chapter III: The Exposure of the Crime As the Reflection of the Characters'

Evilness

Throughout this dissertation, we have discussed the influence of the loss of perception of reality in the perpetration of crimes, which reflected the corrupted nature of the main characters. As well, we analysed the influence of obsessive ideas the main characters of 'Berenice' and 'The Black Cat' that controlled their reality until they could not take hold of their actions and execute awful crimes. In this chapter, I would like to discuss the exposure of the crime as the reflection of the triumph of their depraved behaviour. Although the main characters tried to hide their hidden wishes, they were unable to maintain them repressed, as the motives of committing those crimes were stronger than their common sense.

As we have discussed before, in 'Berenice', Egeaus was continuously struggling with the repressed desire towards the teeth, which led him to face the chaos of his mental chambers along with the loss of perception of reality. These two factors contributed to the development of 'fixed ideas' that governed his reality and consequently seduced him to fulfil his extravagant obsession. This can be clearly seen when he thought that he had awoken from a 'confused and exciting dream' (103), which reflected his hidden and obscure intentions.

According to Joan Dayan, there was something more than sexual desire expressed in the longing of the teeth, his fantasies were the expression of hidden sexual anxiety, and therefore, their possession would relieve the narrator from his sexual anxiety. Dayan is surely right about this since Egaeus gives some hints or expressions that reflect that his obsession towards the teeth represents something different than an object of admiration. Furthermore, I would add that he had a kind of fetishism towards those teeth since he was frequently referring to them as something he ‘coveted so madly’ or that their possession ‘could alone ever restore me[i.e. Egaeus] to peace’(103).

Egaeus depiction of the crime as an ‘exciting dream’, enhances the sense of his fetishist character. According to Roy Ellen, in the psychological literature, fetishism is described to refer to the use of a non-genital object to achieve sexual gratification, or an erotic attachment to inanimate objects or ordinarily asexual parts of the human body. In this sense, we can suggest that his ‘obsession’ is closely linked to sexual attraction or a type of fetishism that he is not aware of, which later awakes in him sexual anxiety towards them. Therefore, it can be noticed that the narrator described the dream in this way to highlight the pleasure that he felt while he was ‘dreaming’ the deed and not considering as a nightmare.

Nevertheless, when he discovers that this dream is not false but real, he frightens, since it is something that he unconsciously wants to hide, as when he looks at the box and

'shudders in regarding it' (104). Before the dream, this box had little or no significance for him as he said that 'It was of no remarkable character', but, after he was told that Berenice's grave was profaned, it gained more significance, because it was the representation of his most obscure wishes, which he wanted to maintain hidden in the chambers of his mind. Therefore, as tangible object contains his secret fetishism, he feels vulnerable and petrified since now it can be easily exposed to other people in the house.

Whether he was aware or not, that hidden part of himself took control of his life and led him to an unexpected denouement. His fetishist behaviour towards the teeth might have been mentally disturbing not only to him but also to those around him, and since he was unable to provide a reasonable explanation, he shrieks:

With a shriek I bounded to the table, and grasped the box that lay upon it. But I could not force it open; and, in my tremor, it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily, and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white, and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor. (104)

Egeaus was petrified by the secret that was hidden in the box. He unconsciously knew that that object was the realization of his dark devotion. And, at the same time, it exposed him in front of society, which heightened the victory of his unconscious evil propensities.

Similarly, in 'William Wilson' the narrator was disturbed by the other William as he consistently unmasked the hidden intentions of the narrator. As mentioned in previous

chapters, the narrator depicts himself as someone who is addicted to the ‘wildest caprices’ and ‘prey to the most ungovernable passions’(169), since he considered himself as ‘the master of his own actions’. Although he was able to do whatever he wanted, the speaker was interrupted by the other William, and at the same time, his evil propensities were brought to light in front of other people as in school, Oxford, and Naples.

In view of these events, William perceived that the other William was another person, who enjoyed interrupt his evil designs, but he was not aware that the second Wilson was part of his own identity. For some authors, the second William represent his conscience. For instance, Leonard W. Engel pointed out: ‘Throughout the tale, the schizoid narrator has repeatedly refused to recognize and acknowledge this other self. Whenever his *conscience* has gotten too close, he would feel threatened and would run to a different environment.’ (98) (My emphasis). Leonard’s claim of the other self as representation of his conscience is right, because William was the only one that could perceive the other, as his classmates did not perceive him. Also, as mentioned before, it was part of his repressed personality since he was bound to his voice which he considered as a ‘household law’. Therefore, it could be argued that he wanted to repress the other William in order to continue with his evil deeds.

A different interpretation to Leonard’s view, Shu-ting Kao claimed that “‘William Wilson” dramatizes the psyche’s disturbance due to the conflicts of the ego and the alter

ego, as well as the Self's plunge into the abyss due to the unconscious desire for death.'

(2) Although the conflict of the ego and the alter ego dramatizes the psyche's disturbance in this short story, the narrator does not seem to have been plunged into decadence for the unconscious desire for death. On the contrary, William Wilson wanted to get rid of the constant supervision or his 'alter ego' since it did not allow him to completely perpetuate his immoral behaviour. A good example of this is when he was at a party in Naples and was interrupted while he was about to have an affair with the landlord's wife. He acted in 'an absolute frenzy of wrath', and, 'turned at once upon him who had thus interrupted him, and seized him violently by the collar.' (185) From this quote, it can be seen that instead of having an unconscious desire for death, he was enraged with the supervision of the other since he hated that he could not fulfil what he wanted or to get exposed. Another reason to consider is that he did not show any clue that he was depressed or wanted to end up with his life. Instead, he was enjoying it.

When it comes to the crime, the narrator was possessed by the irritation that produced the presence of the other. He acted in this way in order to avoid that the second William exposed his intentions again, 'I was frantic with every species of wild excitement, and felt within my single arm the energy and power of a multitude. In a few seconds I forced him by sheer strength against the wainscoting, and thus, getting him at mercy, plunged my sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his bosom.'

(186) This quote can be interpreted as the desperate desire of the narrator of getting rid

of the constant supervision of the other William. If the other had not been killed, William would have not been able to live as he wanted. The core of the issue is that, as he perceived the other as another individual, he was not able to realize that what he was destroying the possibility of becoming a 'good' or 'moral' person, as the other says: "*You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.*" (186). The yielding of the other William in this quote represents the triumph of the narrator's depravity and the perpetual decadence in which he would end. This can be seen when the other self says that he was dead not only to the world but also to Heaven, heightening the fact that William was condemned to immoral behaviours.

In contrast with the previous tales, in 'The Black Cat', it is the narrator himself who confesses or exposes his crime. This could be due to the fact that of the very nature of the narrator, who enjoyed doing evil deeds and make them known to others. He asserts that: '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?' (194). From these words, it could be said that the narrator relished performing evil actions just by the pleasure he felt. According to Shu-ting Kao, the self-exposure of the crime is reminiscent of the plot of 'The Tell-Tale Heart', in which the narrator hysterically tells the police what he did. The Cat does indeed remind the plot of 'The Tell-Tale Heart', but I believe that both

protagonists differ significantly, when they reveal the crime. On one hand, the speaker of 'The Tell-Tale Heart' confesses the crime because he believes that the policemen were making fun of him for hearing the 'palpitating heart'. On the other hand, when the narrator of 'The Black Cat' declares that he had walled up the corpse of his wife, he said that unconsciously and in a triumphal tone. The narrator does this to show that he was smart since the police were not able to find any hint that his wife was murdered by him.

According to Joseph Stark, the narrator does not offer an explanation for the cause of his perversity. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I fully agree with his interpretation, since he blamed his evil acts on the cat. He does this as a way to justify or exculpate his actions. In relation to the revealing of the crime, he admits that he was really proud of the deed, not only because of what he had done, but also for his cleverness in hiding the corpse,

By the bye, 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 phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom. (200)

We could say that in these lines the narrator's behaviour shows the immoral nature of his personality. Also, as when he shrieks with 'half of horror and half of triumph' demonstrates the depraved or disturbed state of the narrator. Furthermore, as the pure representation of the triumph of his depravity.

To conclude, in this chapter, we analysed the role of the exposure of crime in these three short stories. On the one hand, in 'Berenice', the crime highlighted the fetishist personality of Egaeus, as the teeth were the source that produced sexual excitement in the narrator. On the other hand, in 'William Wilson', the deed represents the victory of his immoral behaviour since he destroys the other William in order to continue living without the supervision of his conscience. Finally, in 'The Black Cat', the self-exposure of the crime demonstrates the hidden desire to make known that he was proud of what he has done. These aspects are important to highlight since they heighten the immorality of the main characters as their crimes have hidden intentions or characteristics of their personality that unconsciously arouse in these specific moments, in this case the exposure of the crime.

Conclusion

Overall, in this analysis, we have discussed from different perspectives the principal motives of crimes in 'Berenice', 'The Black Cat', and 'William Wilson'. Through the loss of perception of reality, the main characters showed their repressed desires and identities, which contributed to add emphasis to the immoral behaviour of these narrators. Moreover, obsessive ideas were the precursors of wild passions that helped the development of deranged minds, and consequently, as a final result, the loss of consciousness. Finally, in the exposure of the crime, the hidden desires were revealed as the main characters faced stressful situations that led them to expose themselves, as their passions were stronger enough to take control not only of their minds but also their realities.

One of the strengths that I was able to find was that in the first argument, there was used specific terminology from the Freudian theory of repression, such as *self-deceit* and repression, in comparison with the other two arguments. Concerning the weaknesses, the second and third argument, were difficult to address since there was little or no information about 'obsession' and 'the crime' in Edgar Allan Poe's stories. Therefore, there was less specific terminology.

I would have liked to discuss these topics with more time in order to give an extensive analysis in relation to obsessive ideas and the implications of repression in of each of the

short stories. One of the difficulties that I had faced during the analysis was the research of secondary sources as the access to critical texts were restrained or blocked. Moreover, there was a lack of critical essays in regard to topics certain topics, for instance, the concepts of obsession, crime among others.

From this analysis, I have found intriguing the way that the author created these characters. The narration of each story transports the reader into the character's minds by opening the access to what distress them, their fears, and anxieties. Furthermore, the split speech, expressions and emotions enhance the effect towards the spectator, which I believe these are the aspects that make these stories so interesting to read.

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