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*The Black Cat, through Freudian Lens*

In *The Black Cat*, by Edgar Allen Poe, the unnamed narrator goes from loving animals and being happily married to his wife to abusing them and even becomes an assassin. Sigmund Freud, a well-known psychoanalyst, introduced many psychoanalytic concepts. In Freud's *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, he introduces concepts such as condensation and displacement. He elaborates on the motives behind people's actions and decisions. Freud assures that most of it has to do with past experiences and whatever one may have stored in their unconscious mind. In *The Black Cat*, the unnamed narrator awakens the content in his unconscious mind after he experiences being an alcoholic. Freud's concepts better explains the psychology behind the narrator's actions in the short story. *The Black Cat's* narrator negatively changes his behavior throughout the story which is explained through Freud's psychoanalytic concepts of condensation and displacement.

Condensation as Sigmund Freud would say is a term used to describe an object that represents other ideas. In this short story, one can identify the black cat as a condensed representation of love at first and hate later on in the story. In the beginning, the narrator finds himself connected to the cat very well that he believes the cat owes him a certain level of loyalty as explained on page 4 "Pluto-- this was the cat's name -- was my favorite pet and playmate...It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets" (Poe,

The Black Cat). In this part of the story, the narrator finds himself deeply connected to the black cat. This, however, changes upon him becoming an alcoholic. Instead of Pluto being this symbol of love and friendship he becomes a symbol of hate. The cat wasn't able to cooperate with him once he had become an alcoholic which led the narrator to become angry with the cat. The narrator's addiction to alcohol changed the way he was towards people and life in general day by day with no explanation. He states " 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" (Poe, 4). At first, the anger had been towards humans which he later replaced with animals making him put all the blame on the cat for his dysfunctional mentality.

Like condensation, the concept of displacement also helps understand the unnamed narrator's negative, mental transition. Freud once explained that displacement is the term used to describe when a person places his or her impulses towards an acceptable or less threatening target rather than an unacceptable one. This concept is represented through the unnamed narrator in The Black Cat when he shifts his anger towards the cat. In the story, there are only a few human characters, which of the few we find the narrator himself and the wife whom he kills by the end of the story. Although the narrator and his wife's character is important, the cat's character is just as important because the anger he has within him escalates and transfers between all three characters. Due to his drinking habits, he finds himself having these mood swings that lead him to act violently with his animals and his wife. One night he comes home drunk and lashes out at the cat so bad that he eventually kills the cat. Although it could have been expected that his anger ended there, one day another cat appears that reminds him of the old cat. Since he had shifted all anger he had been feeling towards his first cat, as soon as he saw this look-alike of the old cat he

began to feel all emotions again. He stated, "For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me" (Poe, 9). The emotions that he had felt towards his wife initially and later placed on the old cat, Pluto, awakened in him again. This is the example of displacement through the narrator. He tried to shift the anger he had within him onto something that he can control more and would be more acceptable than the other. As Freud puts it, displacement is when one tries to express its emotions onto someone or something that would be more accepted by society. He knew that killing his wife which was his initial source of anger would be unacceptable, this is the reason he places his anger on the cat. Killing an animal is still wrong however in terms of killing a human, it is a lot more acceptable.

After viewing Edgar Allan Poe's short story, *The Black Cat*, Freud's concepts of condensation and displacement are greatly useful when trying to understand the negative transition of his mental state. The concept of condensation is seen when the narrator condenses all his anger into the cat, doing so to try to keep his anger in one place rather than his wife and the rest of his animals. Displacement, on the other hand, explains why the narrator chooses to kill the animal. The narrator's mental state had been worsening day by day making him resort to killing the cat which moved the anger he felt towards something more acceptable than killing his wife.