The Animal Motif in Selected Works of Edgar Allan Poe

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Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and Philosophy

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Sanja Runtić, Full Professor

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Motiv životinje u odabranim djelima Edgara Allana Poea

Završni rad

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Osijek, 2022.

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
Filozofski fakultet Osijek
Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

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Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti
Znanstveno polje: filologija
Znanstvena grana: anglistika

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Osijek, 2022.

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—Edgar Allan Poe, *Diddling, Considered as One of the Exact Sciences* (1835)

Abstract

This paper analyzes the animal motif in Edgar Allan Poe's selected works. It focuses on three animal motifs in four of Poe's works – the short stories "The Black Cat," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "Hop-Frog," and the poem "The Raven." The paper argues that the three animal motifs, the black cat, the raven, and the orangutan, personify certain elements of the human nature – feelings, emotions, human constructs, phenomena of the human society, and the stages of development of human consciousness – and that some of them can also be analyzed through the socio-historical lens as motifs associated with the oppression of African Americans and the history of slavery.

Keywords: Animal motif, cat, Edgar Allan Poe, orangutan, raven.

Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was an American literary critic, editor, story writer, and a poet who wrote in the period of Romanticism. He is best known for his poems and short-story collections, but in the literary world, he is also regarded as the father of the modern detective story. He often used animal names in the titles of his works and as motifs in the works themselves, for example: "The Black Cat," "The Raven," "The Gold-Bug," "Hop-Frog," "The Conqueror Worm," etc. His works are often dark and morbid; they contain many gothic elements and are surrounded by a veil of mystery that is related either to the animal motif itself or to the events described.

Many scholars agree that most of Poe's works were inspired by his real life, which, according to some of the documents, was very dismal and full of tragedies and sorrow. The best example of such a work is the story "The Black Cat" (1843), which depicts a narrator and his black cat, which follows him around, and how its presence slowly but surely drives the narrator to craziness. This story is discussed in the first chapter of this paper, which attempts to show that the animal motif in the story represents different layers of human subconsciousness.

The second chapter of this paper features Poe's poem "The Raven" (1885). It emphasizes that "The Black Cat" and "The Raven" share many similarities, some of them being that they are open for various interpretations and that there is no universal and concrete answer to the question what these animal motifs represent, the main reason being that they most likely represent unanimous and abstract psychological phenomena, such as emotions, consciousness, and states of mind.

The last chapter analyzes two short stories – "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and "Hop-Frog" (1849) through the socio-historical lens by correlating their animal motifs to the oppression of African Americans and the history of slavery.

1. The Motif of the (Black) Cat

The short story titled "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe was published in 1843, and it is considered to be one of the most famous and memorable gothic stories of all time. The story follows an unnamed author, his journey with alcoholism, gradual deterioration of one's mind and sanity, and his behavior towards his loved ones – his wife and his cat. The latter, as the title says, appears as the protagonist in the story. The short story contains elements of horror, which the narrator foreshadows himself from the beginning of the story. He is very aware of his condition and changes in his character, but that does not stop him from doing horrible things to his loved ones.

According to Alshiban, "*The Black Cat* allows for a multitude of interpretations. On the one hand, the story can be read as a tale of revenge, a tale of horror, a tale of the supernatural, an allegory for slavery, a critique of the criminal justice system, or as a self-portrait of Poe himself with the storyteller standing for the artist" (192). The story begins with the narrator's description of his marriage and his declaration of love for animals:

> 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*. (Poe, "The Black Cat" 88)

From this quote, it can be seen that the narrator has a great love for various animals, and this reflects even on his real life. The last animal which he names in this quote is especially singled out and written in italics because the author wanted to put emphasis on that motif for it to symbolize and foreshadow the main protagonist of his short story – the one that can be read out from the title – the cat. The cat from the quote, presumably Pluto, "is described as that primus inter pares [first among equals], an animal included in a general list and distinguished from it due to typography and onomastics" (Correoso-Rodenas 4). Namely, in Poe's essay, "Instinct vs. Reason – a Black Cat," which is a part of his autobiographical work and allows the reader to get to know him better and learn something more about him and his lifestyle and train of thoughts, Poe confirms that he is a proud owner of a cat: "The writer of this article is the owner of one of the most remarkable black cats in the world – and this saying much; for it will be remembered that black cats are all of them witches. The one in question has not a white hair about her, and is of a demure and sanctified demeanor" (Poe,

"Instinct vs. Reason" 2). This essay, which was published in form of an article in *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*, vol. 4, no. 5, on January 29, 1840, four years before Poe's short story "The Black Cat" was published, served to Poe like a diary entry and an inspiration for his fictional work. This can be proven by providing quotes from "The Black Cat," in which he wrote down his thoughts whose roots can be found in popular folk tales and which are still to this day a very common belief in many societies. That belief consists of people's inner fear of black cats because of the common superstition that black cats bring bad luck, and this prejudice stems from a belief that black cats are embodiments of witches. The author decided to give this sentiment to the narrator's wife, who, at least from what he says, was not superstitious at all, but she had an exceptional feeling that black cats are marked by some paranormal features. He presented this as a sarcastic comment which was not frequently used, but he still decided to mention it because he sensed that it could be important in the development of the story:

> 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. (Poe, "The Black Cat" 88)

In the ancient times, cats were a common motif and inspiration for many representative symbols in various cultures. For example, in ancient Egypt, they were seen as a personification of the goddess Bast(et), who was often portrayed as a woman with a cat's head (Ions 24). Cats were considered sacred in the honor of the goddess Bast. In that sense, cats were a praised species when they were first domesticated and were considered to be a symbol of virtue, strength, and dexterity and were worshipped as gods. The Sphinx, a cat with a woman's head or vice versa, is one of the most recognizable symbols of ancient Egypt, which was later on adopted by the ancient Greeks in the Hellenistic period. Yet, although the motif was more or less the same, cats in ancient Greece were not as religiously prominent, compared to ancient Egypt but, still, they were featured in many tales and epics, i.e., the Oedipus myth. However, they had a better connotation in ancient Egypt than in ancient Greece because Greeks considered them to be more mischievous. The medieval times were a

period when cats received a negative connotation. Because of their dark fur, people started treating black cats badly, believing that they were somehow connected with witchcraft. Witches always had their "familiars," which would do their bidding for them and would follow them along their way. Their favorite kind of animals to use as a familiar was thought to be a cat – a black one in particular. A reasoning behind this was the fact that cats are nocturnal animals and witches are creatures who show up mostly at nighttime, so it was a perfect match to connect black cats with black magic and witches. Due to the fact that the Middle Ages were rampant with superstition, black cats were accused of being harbingers of disease because of the black plague, which caused death to one third of fourteenth' century European population.

Because of such deeply rooted beliefs, even today, black cats do not have a good reputation and, therefore, have a lower adoption rate than cats of other colors. People are still seeing them as a threat. In many countries, such as the United Kingdom and Croatia, there is a widely spread persuasion that a black cat crossing your path is a bad omen and that something bad is about to occur in the near future, so most people tend to walk away when they see a black cat coming their way on the street.

Despite the author's description of his wife as not being superstitious and not believing that some otherworldly matters could influence people's lives, she still managed to notice something that caught the narrator's attention, contributed to his sense of delirium and made him even more neurotic:

> 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, assumed 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 of Death! (Poe, "The Black Cat" 93)

After one of the narrator's psychotic attacks, he takes a piece of rope, heartlessly wraps a loop around his cat's neck, and mercilessly takes away its life:

> 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. (Poe, "The Black Cat" 90)

A few days after that incident, when the narrator walks around at night drunk, he notices a black cat with a white stain coming his way, and it follows him all the way home:

> 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. . . . 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. (Poe, "The Black Cat" 89)

The narrator's wife is not familiar with the fact that he took the life of their pet, much less the manner in which he did it, so there is no reason for her to associate the spot on the new cat's neck with the imprint the gallows would have left behind. That is the detail that makes the whole story even more creepy and is the thing that drives the narrator even more insane.

The cat's appearance is not the only thing that sets it apart from the others; it also has a peculiar name that makes it sound more mysterious and unique: "Pluto – this was the cat's

name – was my favorite 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" (Poe, "The Black Cat" 88). It is a very common thing for pet owners to name their four-legged friends after deities based on their looks and behavior, but the symbolism of this pet's name is more than a coincidence. This name was also given to a dwarf planet occupying an orbit that crosses the orbit of Neptune (Pluto, Merriam Webster Dictionary) as planets are also named after miscellaneous gods and goddesses. Namely, Pluto is well-known as the Greek god of the underworld, whose former name was Hades, but this, later on, became a comprehensive name for the underworld itself. The name Pluto, or Greek Aïdes ("the Unseen"), sometimes also pronounced as Pluton, means "the Wealthy One" or "the Giver of Wealth" ("Hades"). This name may have originated from his partial allegation with a fertility god or because he gathers around all living beings in his repertory after their death. Pluto was in charge of overseeing the trial and punishment, but he was not ascribed a role of a judge, and he was not in charge of torturing the wicked, so that could be the reason why people do not consider him to be "an evil god," although he represents something most people are afraid of – death ("Hades"). In addition, Pluto was considered to be strict and inexorable, which helped him to maintain his authority, but, despite him being so strong and independent, there is one interesting thing about him, and that is that he was never seen outside his realm. He ruled with his queen, Persephone, and was always accompanied by his three-headed dog, Cerberus. According to Payerl, "by killing Pluto, it is as if the narrator has effectively killed a god, thus, becoming a god himself" (21).

The irony is that the narrator characterized his pet Pluto as an evil entity and would often call him names such as his tormentor, a monster, his Arch-Fiend, a brute, etc. After Pluto was killed, the narrator found another cat that looked exactly like Pluto, despite having a white mark shaped like gallows on his chest, which reminded him of Pluto and of the lethal wounds he caused him. Payerl also emphasizes that

> although the cat is a projection of the narrator, Pluto's death does not mean that the narrator actually kills himself. Instead, the narrator only kills a piece of himself, his morality. In fact, the narrator makes it abundantly clear that his soul does not matter in the grand scheme of things. Because he has effectively killed death, the narrator now feels a sense of calm. While death is horrifying, it is as if the narrator were thinking that he was going to stop death, but, in actuality, he is

> speeding up the process by manipulating the lives of those around him. Pluto represents the living embodiment of the narrator's own death drive. (21)

It can be assumed that the newly found cat with white marks is actually Pluto, who rose from the ashes and came back to haunt his owner, who caused him severe pain. This shows that the narrator is greatly influenced by his habits, emotions, and, of course, his pet animal. According to Correoso-Rodenas,

> This influence is so strong in some of the cases that the human characters of the stories build their actions and live according to what the cats are or what they seem to wish. This influence makes that the humans stop being free in order to satisfy the cats' perversity, although they (the humans of these stories) can also be understood as victims of their own obsessions, with the cats just as triggering factors. This would open a new interpretative hypothesis, which would place the cats as projections of the human characters' minds. (8)

Another, more likely, interpretation can be that it is just a regular black cat, but the narrator cannot fight his subconsciousness and sees the cat he killed because of an indelible feeling of remorse. Because the narrator does not want to accept the guilt and feelings that come with it, he decides to believe in the first theory, and that only leads him deeper and deeper into madness and ruin from which he cannot find a way out. However, the second interpretation is much more likely and much more plausible, so many people interpret it from that point of view. The motif of the cat actually represents the narrator's conscience – or, maybe, way deeper, his subconsciousness – Pluto is innocent but completely tainted with human malice after the narrator digs out his eye and hangs it up. He serves as a motif of perversity, violence, and torture but, later on, also as a feeling of remorse when the narrator, after the fire, becomes aware of what he has done, and his subconsciousness leads him into exposing himself and confessing what he has done to his beloved wife. In one moment, he was able to forget about Pluto, but the second cat came to him as a reminiscence of his wrongdoings because of his resemblance to Pluto, reminding him every day what he has done due to his unusual fur pattern. With the motif of gallows on his chest, the second cat summons the protagonist to judgment and repentance, which he tries to ignore and forget by killing it to and cementing it into the walls of his family house, along with the corpse of his wife, whom he also killed because of his intoxication with alcohol and insanity. Because hiding the physical evidence did not help him at all, his conscience forces him to confess his deeds in order to finally get at

least a fraction of redemption for his crimes and misdeeds.

Many scholars consider Poe's literary expression to be merely a reflection of the era in which he lived and of American society of his age. Amyanne Smith has an opinion very similar to this one, explaining that "his animal figures are able to show us problems and power of the categorical systems we use to structure our lives" (II) and offering a theory that "Through its animal figure, Poe's story invites the reader to question the conditions of nineteenth-century American domesticity" (25). Smith argues that there are four main categories in which Poe's characters could be placed: human, subhuman, nonhuman, and animal, but they do not have to remain in this category or function in such a way that other characteristics can be attributed to them, and they start to manifest features of the other characters' categories: "In the final scene of the story, the no-longer-human voice of the narrator succumbs to the more human voice of the black cat, as the grotesquely hybrid figure of the cat and the woman stands in front of the narrator and the police officers to reveal the horrifying consequences of the domestic contract" (Smith 25). Smith presumes that shifts in these categories "problematize the narrator's patriarchal power (granted to him for being a human male in antebellum America)" (33) and asserts that Pluto is the best example of this categorical change, putting the emphasis on the fact that he is the only character that has an actual name and that, "unlike his dehumanizing treatment of his wife, the narrator's treatment of his cat humanizes Pluto" (Smith 35).

This is evidence that everything that we as humans do is just a projection of ourselves, of our thoughts, our feelings, our minds. And lastly, according to Milan Kundera and his dialogue on the *Art of the Novel*,

> All novels, of every age, are concerned with the enigma of the self and as soon as we create an imaginary being, a character, we are automatically confronted by the question: What is the self? How can the self be grasped? It is one of those fundamental questions on which the novel, as novel, is based. (13)

Although this is a short story and not a novel, and even though we cannot get a better insight in the author's real life, we can still agree with Kundera because it is visible that the narrator's inner self is vividly presented through the character of the black cat, who serves as a personification of human's consciousness as well as the dark depths of the wicked human mind.

2. The Motif of the Raven

"The Raven" is one of Edgar Allan Poe's best-known poems. It was published in 1845 and, in the same year, it was included in his poetry collection book entitled *The Raven and Other Poems.* By publishing this wistful love poem, Poe earned himself a title of one of the most famous poets and writers in his homeland. The poem consists of 108 lines arranged in 18 stanzas and has the rhyme pattern abcbbb, which enhances the tone and melancholy of the lyrics. The whole poem is written by the rules described in Poe's essay *The Philosophy of Composition* (1846), in which he used "The Raven" as the main example of what a properly written and profound poem should look like. This narrative poem's storyline takes place on a dark December midnight, when the speaker gets accompanied by a peculiar visitor. The raven lands on his chamber door and keeps repeating the word "nevermore," while the speaker ponders about his true love, Lenore. As the time goes by, the raven continues to repeat the mentioned word and slowly drives the speaker crazy.

Like black cats, ravens are also very often associated with ill omens and misfortune. Because of their dark feathering, piercing croak, and because they feed on carrion, they are not the breed of birds most people usually consider to be their favorite; on the contrary, people perceive them as noisy and frightening entities. Harits and Sari argue that "in almost all of world's tribes mythology, raven is the symbol of a bad thing, rascal or trickster, the eyes of sinners, the evil bird, the bird from the dark, and in line with the witching activity as the zeal of witch hunters" (129). However, the symbolism of this bird is, of course, far more complex than that. Similarly to parrots, ravens also have syrinx, an organ that allows them to "utter" words and to mimic sounds from their environment. In "The Raven," the only word that the bird is able, or willing to pronounce is "nevermore." In his *Philosophy of Composition*, Poe states that he chose the word "nevermore" because of its stylistic purpose and because it is "the most producible consonant," and it fits perfectly into his rhyme scheme (163). Yet, knowing Poe and his literary expression, it is impossible to conclude that it has not got a semantical and symbolical role too. As Friedman explains,

> As one would assume, there is some uncertainty regarding Poe's intent and meaning behind the word "nevermore," since the raven is an embodiment of darkness and creates metaphysical and psychological implications in the poem. Most critics believe that Poe utilized this word due to his "cultivated penchant for impish hoaxing, mockery, and self-mockery.

According to Payerl, "Not only is 'nevermore' an obscure utterance, but the word is also spoken solely by an ominous raven, which anthropomorphizes the creature into possessing the human capacity for speech" (9).

Some similarities to the black cat in the previous chapter can be observed here. Many critics believe that the speaker is going insane and that he attributes human characteristics to the animal because of his craziness, but he does not believe that the raven can really speak and perceives it as a certain form of mockery. However, this is not the only thing that connects the raven with the black cat. Another similarity is the fact that, like the narrator in "The Black Cat," the speaker in "The Raven" addresses the raven with other, derogatory names, such as fiend, ominous creature, fowl, thing of evil, bird of devil, etc. Poe also considered the raven to have a fiery eye. The eye is a pretty common motif in many Poe's stories. For example, in "The Black Cat," the first misdeed the protagonist does to his pet Pluto is gouging out his eye, and in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator compares the old man's eye to the eye of another bird of prey – the vulture: "His eye was like the eye of a vulture, the eye of one of those terrible birds that watch and wait while an animal dies, and then fall upon the dead body and pull it to pieces to eat it" (Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart" 251). The raven's fiery eye proves that Poe used the raven as a motif that, for him, expresses fear. One more similarity between "The Raven" and "The Black Cat" is that both works allude to Pluto, the Roman god of the underworld, whom the protagonist sees as a harbinger of bad news, which are frequently connected to death. The moment when the protagonist gets really agitated with the raven is when he says the name of his beloved one, Lenore, and the raven replies "nevermore." This answer brings a sense of closure to the speaker but, at the same time, stirs his feelings, deepens his sense of solitude and loneliness, and causes even more pain in his heart due to his unrepentant love for Lenore.

Because of the raven's "talking" ability, some critics also believe that it symbolizes prophecy, wisdom, and insight in our world. The motif of wisdom is associated with ravens because of Odin, the supreme god and creator in Norse mythology ("Odin," Merriam Webster Dictionary). Odin, sometimes also referred to as Wodan, Woden, or Wotan, is believed to have given one of his eyes in exchange for wisdom. The wolf and the raven were dedicated to him ("Odin," Encyclopedia), and he is often depicted with two ravens beside him (Fig. 1.). People also considered him to be the god of poets; therefore, it is not a surprise that Poe included his symbol, the raven, in one of his most consequential poems.

Fig. 1. *Representation of the Nordic god Odin with two ravens and two wolves ("God Odin")*

Odin, who appears to be the god of wisdom in Nordic mythology is in Greek mythology represented as a goddess, Athena. The ancient Greeks believed that Athena, also named Pallas and Parthenos, was born without a mother from her father Zeus's forehead and, because of that, the attribute of wisdom is ascribed to her. However, her animal acquaintance and, later on, a symbol, is not a raven, but another breed of birds – an owl. Because of Athena and a strong Greek influence on Europe, the owl has become the best-known animal symbol of wisdom we know today. Poe, of course, took the motif of Athena and included it in "The Raven": "In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore; / Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he; / But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door— / Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—" ("The Raven" 38-41). In the poem, the speaker witnesses the raven's landing on the lintel of his chamber door that has a shape of Pallas Athena's bust. In the beginning of the poem, the speaker describes himself as half-asleep, and when the raven comes talking to him, he is still trying to convince himself that it is all just a dream. Yet, when he sees the bird landing on Pallas Athena, which symbolizes wisdom, his mind turns it into an allegory for the raven. To him, the raven becomes the embodiment of wisdom who brings him the answer and closure to his suffering. In many stories, ravens serve mediators between the spiritual world and the world we live in, the material world.

Once again, because of their dark, or even black, feathering, people like to associate ravens with death or misfortune. Some people like to associate the motif of the raven with rebirth and new beginnings. In that sense, one of the possible interpretations of "The Raven"

might be that the raven really brought the speaker bad news about the impossible encounter between him and his significant other, but, on the other hand, this can bring him a feeling of settlement and an opportunity to move on with his life. Payerl suggests that the best approach to Poe's "The Raven" is through the lens of Jacques Lacan's theories about desire. She claims that the speaker of the poem is "an isolated character whose desire is manifested in a raven" (Payerl 7). As stated before, the speaker was not completely awake and aware of things around him when the raven approached him, so it is possible that the raven is just a reflection of his feelings and desires, which his subconsciousness requires in order to keep him sane and to move on with his life.

3. The Motif of the Orangutan

This chapter will focus on the orangutan motif in Poe's two short stories: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "Hop-Frog." "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is well-known as the first modern detective story, and therefore, Edgar Allan Poe is considered to be the first detective story writer. This short story was published in 1841 in *Graham's Magazine*, and Poe liked to refer to it as one of his "tales of ratiocination." The story is told by an unnamed narrator who meets a professional detective, Auguste Dupin, who shares his surname with one of the largest mammal species – dolphins, in a library in Paris where they become acquainted and try to solve the mystery murder of Mrs. L'Espanaye and her daughter. After questioning the suspects and examining the evidence, they conclude that the perpetrator is an animal – an orangutan, or as Poe liked to write it – the Ourang-Outang.

Like any other of Poe's stories, this one also has many interpretations on what the motif of the orangutan represents in his stories. The most popular one among the scholars seems to be that the orangutan is a representation of nineteenth-century slaves in the United States of America and that "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" serves as a critique of the dehumanization of African-American slaves. According to Smith,

> In the nineteenth century, the orangutan was a politically charged animal figure. Poe chooses the orangutan intentionally to capture the social interest, concern, and strange unrest the liminal humanness of the orangutan was generating. As we have seen, animal rights movements were emerging across America and Europe. In addition, the scientific community was debating the relative humanity of the great apes. Scientists, writers, and even politicians were linking these animals to black Americans, using metaphorical concepts like the Great Chain of Being and new scientific ideas such as the emerging discourse on the evolution of species to animalize and thus marginalize black Americans. (51)

Elise Lemire confirms this theory by stating that "the specific anxieties about race that culminated in the May riot go a long way toward explaining both what may have prompted Poe to place a murderous orangutan in the bedroom of two white women as well as how his contemporary readers would have read the violent encounter" (178) and that it would be too naïve not to think that Poe took a motif of an orangutan to express his social critique. Although orangutans are considered to be anthropoid apes, there are too many hints that

allude that the motif of the orangutan is a metaphor for a slave. Poe uses words such as "master," "escaped," "fugitive," "dreaded whip," and "razor," which are the terms often used when describing slavery. The orangutan is described with many human attributes. First of all, he is capable of murder; witnesses describe his voice as humanlike; they claim that the words he spoke were articulated but they could not determine what language he was speaking in, and his owner reveals that he caught him in the bathroom shaving his face, which is not the activity a regular animal would do. On the other hand, Poe also ascribed the orangutan many animalistic features and described him as a brute and a beast that committed horrific crimes:

> It was a minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Islands. The gigantic stature, the prodigious strength and activity, the wild ferocity, and the imitative propensities of these mammalia are sufficiently well known to all. I understood the full horrors of the murder at once. ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue" 156)

What Ed White considers to be particularly interesting is the fact that the detective story is set in Paris in order to explain slave resistance (101). Christopher Peterson agrees with White's theory and adds that Poe did this intentionally "to distract the reader from the political context of slavery and slave rebellion" (157). The story encompasses a few European nationalities, people that are suspects to the crime, but, in the end, the criminal turns out to be not just non-European but also an animal. According to this, Poe's goal was to write an allegory for a certain phenomenon and give it a different setting to raise awareness about it so that more people could familiarize themselves with the topic. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" can thus be interpreted as a story within a story.

In Poe's not so well-known story called "Hop-Frog," the allegory of slavery and slave rebellion is much more prominent and more obvious. The short story "Hop-Frog" was published in 1849, eight years after "The Murders in The Rue Morgue." "Hop-Frog," or originally, "Hop-Frog; Or, the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs," follows the story of the title character, who is a dwarf and a cripple and has been taken from his homeland along with his best friend, Trippetta, to serve as jesters of a king who likes to make jokes. Very often they do some tricks for the king and his seven ministers while being exposed to mockery and insults. The situation escalates when the king gets angry and throws a glass of wine in Trippetta's face, which makes Hop-Frog really angry, and he starts plotting a revenge. He comes up with a plan to dress the king and his ministers as orangutans for the upcoming party. The king

accepts the idea, so Hop-Frog manages to carry out his plan and sets them on fire while he and Trippetta are escaping the court.

In the beginning of the story, the narrator reveals that Trippetta was treated differently from Hop-Frog: ". . . but she, on account of her grace and exquisite beauty (although a dwarf), was universally admired and petted; so she possessed much influence; and never failed to use it, whenever she could, for the benefit of Hop-Frog" (Poe, "Hop-Frog" 24). Because she was female, they did not treat her as roughly as they treated Hop-Frog in the beginning. Here we can see a representation of gender differences that has not lost its impact even today. However, despite being female, Trippetta is also a servant on the court. Kušić notices that this might be "an allusion to the treatment of female slaves which were sexually exploited in those days" (11). Hop-Frog, on the other hand, is tortured mentally on every given occasion, and Trippetta tries to help him as much as she can, to save him from humiliation. He is considered to be a fool whose only purpose in life is to amuse his superiors. He never refuses to perform for them, although he does not feel good doing it – but after the king orders him to drink wine, which he does not like and which makes him sick, and after the incident with Trippetta, he decides to take the matter in his hands and to take a revenge for everything they have gone through. At first, the readers develop a sense of empathy for the two of them, but later, when Hop-Frog switches his role in the story from an inferior to a superior character, opinions are divided. The protagonists of this short story are not real animals; they either have animal names or are dressed like them, but this does not mean that it is not a classic Poe story. On the contrary, this gives the story even more meaning because the characters voluntarily accept the roles that were given to them. Hop-Frog is not the protagonist's real name, and the narrator emphasizes that:

> The name "Hop-Frog" was not that given to the dwarf by his sponsors at baptism, but it was conferred upon him, by general consent of the several ministers, on account of his inability to walk as other men do. In fact, Hop-Frog could only get along by a sort of interjectional gait – something between a leap and a wriggle – a movement that afforded illimitable amusement, and of course consolation, to the king, for (notwithstanding the protuberance of his stomach and a constitutional swelling of the head) the king, by his whole court, was accounted a capital figure. (Poe, "Hop-Frog" 24-25)

The same changes were experienced by the slaves in the past. They would come to their

owners' plantations with their names, religions, customs, cuisine, etc. However, these traits would all be taken away from them and they were given new names and clothes, and were introduced to other customs in order to adapt into the new surroundings and fit their new role in society as slaves.

People in the palace made fun of Hop-Frog's physical disabilities and took them as a source of amusement. He, however, embraced his disabilities as his advantage to make better tricks and to entertain the people in the palace even more in order to gain their trust. They even compared him to other species of animals: "At such exercises he certainly much more resembled a squirrel, or a small monkey, than a frog" (Poe, "Hop-Frog" 25). In the past, it was popular to compare African-Americans to monkeys (Kušić 14) because of their skin-color, physique, and the places where they originated from. That was a perfect opportunity for Poe to take the motif of an orangutan to reverse the roles in the end so that the king and his ministers get the sense of what it is like to be perceived as a monkey and to be tortured. Many scholars have argued that this short story is a mix of genres, like almost every one of Poe's stories, mostly because of its allegorical sense. In this short story, humor borders with horror in its literal and allegorical context, and it can be interpreted through various points of view. It can be said that this story is a neo-slave narrative; it can also be defined a "mockery of the whole genre of abolitionist narratives," or as a cautionary tale (Kušić 19). Whichever option is chosen, it is not possible to say that this short story leaves anyone morally indifferent.

Many authors dealing with the theme of slavery in literature agree that Edgar Allan Poe was a very important figure in raising awareness of topics like these in literature. Toni Morrison even stated that "No early American writer is more important to the concept of African Americanism than Poe" (32). This might seem very surprising at first because Poe was neither of the African-American descent nor did he explicitly talk about racial and political situations. When something like this is said by a person who belongs to that community, it is a great honor and a sign that his message is truly heard among those who need additional support from the other members of the community they live in and that there is some space for the changes to be made in the future.

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