

# The question of cultural identity in Edgar Allan Poe's tales

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

**The Question of Cultural Identity in Edgar Allan Poe's Tales**

**Pitanje kulturnog identiteta u pričama Edgara Allana Poea**

(Smjer: Književnost i kultura; amerikanistika)

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## Contents

1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. 19 <sup>TH</sup> -CENTURY EUROPE AND AMERICA (CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT) .....	2
3. THE ROMANTIC PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE .....	6
4. THE ANALYSIS OF TALES .....	10
4.1. "Hop-Frog" .....	10
4.2. "Ligeia" .....	17
4.3. "Metzengerstein" .....	26
4.4. "The Man That Was Used Up" .....	32
4.5. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" .....	41
5. CONCLUSION.....	47
Works Cited.....	49
Abstract .....	55

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Edgar Allan Poe is known as one of the most controversial authors in nineteenth-century America. For a very long time he has been interpreted solely as an aesthete, but in recent years there have been endless discussions whether his works also contain subtle references to the political, social and cultural situation of the turbulent 19<sup>th</sup>-century America. Considering possible interpretations of Poe's works, this thesis will deal with different racial motifs in selected Poe's tales which can be read as Poe's commentary on the contemporary situation and therefore an important influence in shaping the cultural identity of the young nation.

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century in America was a tumultuous and unstable period due to the many rebellions and wars involving African Americans and Native Americans, and mostly because it was a period of nation formation and identity building. It is known today that the USA has built its national identity on various paradigms that have been deeply imbedded in the nation's consciousness due to its heterogeneity and the need to break off with the European tradition and culture, and create a new, democratic, prosperous and future-oriented nation. Hence, its oppressive, racial, violent and imperialistic history is something that the USA is trying to forget and suppress, but it is inevitably a part of their past, and also of their present.

In the introductory part of this thesis, after a short description of Poe's personal and professional life as a writer, I will give an overview of some of the most important social and political events that have most certainly affected Poe's writing. Furthermore, I will put Poe in the context of 19<sup>th</sup>-century American literature and also in the context of literary movements in Europe and worldwide. In the main part of my thesis I will try to provide examples of racism, violent oppression towards Native Americans and the influence of the Arab orientalism in Poe's tales, as an evidence of a different interpretation of Poe.

This will go to show that the problem of race was one of the major questions in Poe's days, but at the same time it was a controversial topic often discussed indirectly. Unlike many other nineteenth-century authors, Poe's opus was not generally read in terms of race, so my thesis aims to show that his works lend itself to such a revisionist reading. If Poe was part of nineteenth-century American literary canon for a number of reasons well documented by earlier scholars, more recent approaches suggest that his work deserves to be re-read through the lenses of race. So, in the last part of the thesis I will try to explain how Poe is an important author whose reevaluation in the literary canon should be considered, as well as how his works should be read as a commentary of the contemporary situation.

## 2. 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY EUROPE AND AMERICA (CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT)

This chapter will primarily deal with the cultural and political context of 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, as well as some crucial historical events that took place in Europe and spurred cultural and social changes in the US. The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of these events because they undoubtedly influenced and inspired Poe's writing. Poe's works abound with references to imminent events which concurrently left a mark on his writings and were an inspiration for imbedding his commentaries of the social and political situation and happenings in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America.

To begin with, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe was a period in history known for its many social, economic and political changes, and probably the most significant event was the French Revolution in 1789. According to Stromberg, the French Revolution is considered as one of the crucial events in human history because it led societies towards democracy, egalitarianism, republicanism and liberalism, as opposed to the previous dominance of absolute monarchies, feudalism and aristocracy (88). On the basis of these revolutionary events, the famous

document on human rights emerged called *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, moreover, women were encouraged to demand equal rights by marching on Versailles in 1789, and the changes in literature, art, culture and music inspired the emergence of the Romantic movement. Even though France is generally considered as the cradle of this major revolution in human history, we should also note that the American Revolution occurred in 1776, so Marks concludes that it preceded the French and possibly triggered the events in Europe because both the American and the French people had some similar causes which led to revolutions ("How Did the American Revolution Influence the French Revolution?"). At the time, both countries were dealing with an unfair taxation system, unlimited power of the ruler and unequal rights of the citizens, so Marks believes that "The Americans provided a working model of revolutionary success that wasn't lost on the French" ("How Did the American Revolution Influence the French Revolution?").

The social changes went hand in hand with changes in other spheres of life such as the two major industrial revolutions. The 1<sup>st</sup> Industrial Revolution marked the transition from hand production to steam powered machines. This led to an increase in production, industrialization, urbanization, overpopulation, rapid economic growth and the overall improvement of the standard of living.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1800's the population of the US experienced rapid growth and immigration due to the revolutions and overpopulation in Europe, and because America offered vast, unclaimed territories, a fresh start and "liberty, under the guise of religious freedom" (Burgum 484). Kennedy states that "American culture was initially imported in the name of God, wealth, and Anglo-Saxon civilization, then exercised in wresting the land itself from Native peoples, and finally domesticated in cruelties enacted upon African slaves to make that land profitable" ("A Historical Guide" 5). Due to its heterogeneity, a lack of history and shared customs, the young nation had no other choice but

to build its identity on these invented paradigms which have become deeply rooted in their consciousness. American belief in their superiority over other races, exceptionalism and their feeling of entitlement have been constructed during those years of nation formation in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, so in this part of my thesis I will point out some of the major historical events that helped shape American cultural identity and at the same time influenced Poe and his writing. Also, in the main part of my thesis, I will revert back to these cultural and political tendencies in the course of my readings of Poe's specific works.

In the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, America experienced many political and cultural transformations and was primarily preoccupied with its territorial expansion towards the west, wars with Indians, slave rebellions, abolitionism and ultimately the Civil War. Kennedy explains that "The decision to 'civilize' the continent, to annex Texas and wrest control of the Southwest from Mexico, fundamentally redefined national aspirations" ("A Mania for Composition" 1). The turning point in the westward expansion of the frontier was when the US purchased the territory of Louisiana from France in 1803. After the *United States Declaration of Independence* in 1776, the 13 colonies declared freedom from the British Empire and president Thomas Jefferson saw the purchase of the land west of the Mississippi as a great opportunity for implementing America's expansionist policy and a convenient excuse for colonizing Native Americans (Hickey 72). The next major historical event was the War of 1812 fought until 1815 between the United States and Great Britain because of the restrictions Britain imposed on America's trade rights. Donald R. Hickey states in his book that the conflict was actually a side-effect of the Napoleonic wars between France and Britain as well as Britain's latent desire to suppress America's expansion towards the West by supporting the Native tribes (1-3).

The early 19<sup>th</sup>-century was also a time of conflicts with Native Americans and the three major military conflicts took place in Florida between 1816 and 1858. The Seminole

Wars or the Florida Wars were military conflicts between the United States Army and the Seminole Indians who suffered great human sacrifices and lost their territories. The battles with the Indians marked the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century and influenced the cultural and political scene in America, and thus Poe as well. Beuka comments that the First (1816–1819) and Second Seminole War (1835-1842) were provoked by Natives' refusal to abandon their territory and relocate to reservations west of the Mississippi which American government forcefully wanted to impose by enacting the Indian Removal Act in 1830, also the territory of Florida was a safe haven for escaped slaves who fought vigorously alongside the Natives to defend their freedom (qtd. in Hernandez 27). Throughout the years, the Indians vigorously resisted, but in the end agreed to move peacefully and after the Third Seminole War (1855-1858), the remaining Natives in Florida were paid by American authorities to relocate.

Moreover, the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century in America was marked by Andrew Jackson's presidency whose government was known for extreme hostility and negative attitudes towards Indians and African Americans. Consequently, during Andrew Jackson's presidency, the most famous slave rebellion took place near Richmond, Virginia in 1831, which was also known as the Southampton Insurrection. The rebellion, led by an African American slave called Nat Turner, was put down within a few days with more than 50 rebel slaves killed by their slave-owners. Shelton concludes that this was just one of the many slave outbreaks in that period as the slave insurrections were becoming more common, especially in the American South (3). The Nat Turner rebellion was particularly important for reading Poe's works, as it happened near Poe's town and throughout his work he supposedly made a number of references to this event.

Furthermore, in her article, Rosemary King explains how America continued its expansionist policy under the idea of Manifest Destiny, so in 1845, Texas was annexed as the 28<sup>th</sup> state (64). Texas was originally owned by Mexico and until the Texas Revolution,



Mexican government decided to let Americans inhabit their territory. In the wake of the annexation, the Mexican American War (1846-1848) ensued because the annexation meant an addition of a new slave state which King believes caused a disproportion in the number of slave-holding states (65). In the end, the war ended with a peace treaty in favor of the US and a 15 million dollars compensation for Mexico as well as an even stronger felling of patriotism for Americans.

Having lived during the most tumultuous period in America's history, Edgar Allan Poe and his works were certainly influenced by the many events and changes in Europe and America. Throughout my thesis I will try to exemplify Poe's subtle references to contemporary events which shaped American cultural identity as well as the necessity of reading the works of an author within the historical and cultural context of his or her time. Kennedy also emphasizes that Poe was not just an aesthete, but a commentator of the political, social and cultural changes of his time:

We need to remind ourselves that he produced his violent fiction in the 1830s and 1840s, when the U.S. government was either confining Indians to reservations, "removing" them west of the Mississippi, or (in the case of the Seminoles) remorselessly decimating them; this was the same era when the perpetuation and extension of slavery were being defended by Southern apologists and challenged by abolitionists determined to expose the barbarities of the "peculiar institution." ("A Historical Guide" 5).

### 3. THE ROMANTIC PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

For the purposes of this thesis, I believe it is important to put Edgar Allan Poe in the context of the world literature and the literary, artistic and philosophical movement that influenced his writing. Poe lived and worked during the Romantic period. The Romantic

movement had its origins in Europe and gradually expanded to the US and Latin America. The movement emphasized the cathartic experience of intense emotions which are an authentic source of artistic creativity. The beauty of nature, its innocence and purity were a great source of inspiration for artists as well as the unknown depths of the human mind, more specifically the human subconsciousness and its emotional manifestation. The Romantic period in the United States, also known under the term American Renaissance, lasted from approximately 1820s-1860s, and for the most part it was very much similar to the movement in Europe.

However, there are some obvious diversities between European and American Romanticism due to the differences in historical, cultural and social background. Kennedy comments that "Unlike France, Greece, Germany, or Italy-which all underwent national revolutions in the wake of the American Revolution-the disparate colonies audaciously claiming to be united states lacked a language of their own, a shared legendary past, or a binding traditional culture" (Kennedy, "A Mania for Composition" 3). Because of the differences of ethnicities, culture, religion and the vastness of space, American romanticists were primarily interested in the rhetoric of nation unification, freedom, humanitarianism and reform as an attempt to escape the past and give way to the freedom of opportunities. What was characteristic of America as opposed to Europe, was the uncharted land which lured the immigrants from the overcrowded cities of Europe and the phenomenon of "forgetting" which Renan points out as "crucial to nation-building" in order to suppress the violent deeds that were necessary for nation formation (qtd. in Kennedy, "A Mania for Composition" 5). The young nation was supposed to be a complete opposite of Europe, so America built its national identity on the spirit of optimism, divine providence, democracy and the rhetoric of salvation.

Therefore, during these crucial years of nation formation, American romanticists put great emphasis on individualism, the pursuit of happiness became the ultimate ideal in the

new world, and the escape into nature was perceived as having therapeutic effect and as a source of spirituality. Some of the most common topics in the works of American romanticists were abolition, equality, the conflict between the spirit and the body, the nature of good and evil, melancholy, sensibility, a sense of nationalism, Gothicism, transcendentalism, nature as divine, native history, Manifest Destiny and many others. Poe was also under the influence of these changes and popular artistic tendencies, so his works abound with suggestive descriptions, symbolism, individualism, sensitivity, while his topics usually concern the supernatural and the occult as well as a deep interest in emotions and human psychology. He was also known for his heavy drinking and opium intoxications which had an effect of a desperately needed stimulant for his writing creativity. Nevertheless, his specific style of writing, melancholic atmosphere and Gothic motifs make Poe a typical representative of the Romantic period.

Gothicism also had European origins, so Frederic Frank makes a distinction between the Gothic tradition in Europe and America by stating that "While the English Gothic had dealt with physical terror and social horror, the American Gothic would concentrate on mental terror and moral horror" (qtd. in Goddu 8). Gothicism is characterized by the psychological terror of the dark and evil side of spiritualism. It involved motifs such as death, terror, mysticism, the macabre, the supernatural, melancholy and everything that had to do with the deepest and darkest parts of the human psyche.

What was characteristic of American Gothicism was that the tales of the beautiful frontier idyllic nature were replaced with gloomy sceneries of dangerous woods as well as morbid and scary events with characters driven by madness and mental illness. Gothicism and gothic motifs were a subgenre which was often used by writers for giving subtle commentaries of the potential dangers and issues of the contemporary American society and as Goddu comments, because of America's lack of history and its Puritan heritage, the

American gothic as opposed to European, took a turn inward, from the society to the psychological states and hidden depths of American souls (9).

Edgar Allan Poe's personal life and tragedies most certainly influenced his interest in the extreme grotesque, psychological trauma, the supernatural as well as his experience with mental illness accompanied by addiction. Therefore, I believe Poe found the Gothic genre most relatable because of his personal tragedies and his dysthymic (depression-prone) nature. What makes Poe a Gothic writer are his pervasive themes of death and decay, the creepy dislocated settings and his madness driven characters. Poe's infatuation with the death of a woman as a source of inspiration and his interest in the supernatural in all its shapes are perfect examples of Gothicism. Lima comments that "Poe's literary creations have undoubtedly enabled us to perceive the mystery and terror of our restless souls, showing that the manifestation of horror in creativity should be understood as a response to a world desensitized to violence and human perversity, and art is not immune to such destructive effects" (22). What spurred Poe's inclination to the dark movement of Gothicism is his confrontation with the dark and destructive side of creativity and negative impulses which were in the end the death of him, but at the same time served as a source of inspiration for his controversial works. Another important characteristic of Gothicism and of Poe's works are elements of irony and social satire, "This persistent use of irony also contributes to the association of the tragic and comic, which is another aspect of Poe's art that reveals its duplicity and tendency to create paradoxes, present in every work connected to the Gothic Creativity that results from the contradictions between beauty and horror" (Lima 24). Gothic is today considered as a form of art which freely expresses the omnipresence of terror, disturbing realities and its purpose is to warn us about the impending doom and corruption of society and the human soul, all of which were present in the South during Poe's lifetime and remain so today. Teresa A. Goddu explains that "the American gothic is most recognizable as

a regional form. Identified with gothic doom and gloom, the American South serves as the nation's "other", becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wants to disassociate itself" (3-4). To conclude, through Gothic content, Poe expresses dangers of discarding the haunting black presence in the South which America should acknowledge as a founding part of the nation's culture and identity.

#### 4. THE ANALYSIS OF TALES

For the purpose of my thesis, I have chosen five Poe's tales in which I will try to demonstrate the subtle racial references and many cultural and political comments by Poe. The tales *Hop-Frog*, *Metzengerstein* and *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* will serve as examples of the question of slavery in the South during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, *Ligeia* will illustrate the presence of the Arab Orient in Poe's works and finally, *The Man That Was Used Up* will be presented as Poe's commentary on America's violence against and oppression of Native Americans. I have chosen these three groups of people because I believe that their presence and influence probably was and still is omnipresent and whether their existence in American identity should be acknowledged or repressed still raises many debates.

##### 4.1. "Hop-Frog"

Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "Hop-Frog" was first published in 1849. It is a tale about a cruel king and his abused slave, a dwarf, which is believed to subtly represent the author's views on slavery. For a very long time, Poe was perceived as a writer who was very much concerned with aestheticism and showed little interest in the social and political issues of his time. On the other hand, Paul C. Jones states that 20<sup>th</sup>-century critics have been discussing whether there is more to Poe than just his apolitical romantic tales, perhaps a

complex commentary of some of the major debates of his time: "Much of this attempt to historicize Poe has focused on the issues of slavery and has reconstructed Poe as a typical antebellum Southerner, possessing aristocratic pretensions, racist opinions, and an overwhelming-though perhaps subconscious-fear of slaves and their potential for uprising" (239).

"Hop-Frog" or, the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs" is a typical Poe's tale which Jonathan Taylor describes as a "mixture of genres-of horror and comedy" (58). It is a story about a dwarf's violent revenge on his merciless master, or as Joan Dayan suggests, "Hop Frog", "the most horrible tale of retribution", is Poe's "envisioned revenge for the national sin of slavery" (258). According to the story, Hop-Frog and his female friend Trippetta were taken from their homeland and given to the king as presents. Hop-Frog is a jester whose main task is to keep the king entertained at all times. The king became particularly fond of the little dwarf because he was an embodiment of many characteristics that the king valued in a jester, As Poe describes, the king took great pleasure in Hop-Frog's sharp witticism as well as his comic, dwarfish physique, "both a jester to laugh with, and a dwarf to laugh at" (273). Hop-Frog and his friend Trippetta, who was also dwarfish but of exquisite proportions and very pretty, developed a friendship and mutual respect in their captivity far away from home. Poe describes how the two friends helped each other in every way they could: "Hop-Frog, who, although he made a great deal of sport, was by no means popular, had it not in his power to render Trippetta many services; 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" (274). In this part, we can perhaps assume Poe's allusion to the treatment of female slaves which were sexually exploited in those days. The event that triggers the plot is when king angrily throws wine into poor Trippetta's face which makes Hop-Frog angry and revengeful, so he comes up with a

great plan. He suggests a great masquerade party called "the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs" in which the king and his seven ministers dress up in costumes made of tar and flax making them look like orangutans to scare the guests. The story ends with Hop-Frog chaining them to a chandelier, pulling them up in the air and burning them alive. In the end, the dwarf and his friend escape and leave the guests terrified and appalled.

The analysis of racist motifs will be divided into two parts based on the content of the story. More specifically, in the first part of the tale Hop-Frog is presented as the poor, oppressed slave towards whom the readers develop a certain dose of empathy, but then in the second part of the tale, the roles are reversed and the slave becomes a dexterous trickster who outsmarts his master.

To begin with, the most obvious instance of racist motifs in "Hop-Frog" is the master-slave relation between Hop-Frog and the King. However, Jones believes that Poe is always careful in the use of racist motifs and symbols so that a direct link with the issues of African American slaves cannot be drawn. Therefore, Poe skillfully creates something Jones calls "average racism" by "setting his tale in a vaguely distant land and avoiding any direct references to the American social scene, especially the actual word 'slave', Poe employs a strategy of displacement that succeeded in 'depoliticizing' his tale and prevented it from offending Northern readers" (244-245). However, there are many subtle motifs, symbols and metaphors in the story which can easily be interpreted as having some racial connotations, especially the description of the dwarf's physical appearance, his helplessness and poverty. This can be read as Poe's attempt at creating sympathy for the deformed servant among the readers. Perhaps Poe's hidden motif was to raise public's awareness about the slaves' unfortunate position.

Poe's tales are very much based on the fear of the "Other", a concept emphasized by Toni Morrison in her book *Playing in the Dark*, which subtly codes who belongs to the

omnipresent and ingrained concept of superior whiteness and who is cast out as not belonging or being inferior. Poe's racial characters usually succumb to acts of violence against their cruel masters as a result of the constant oppression and rage. The tale "Hop-Frog" is also based on similar motifs, but unlike Poe's other stories, there is an unexpected feeling of empathy towards the dwarf/slave which Poe wanted to evoke in his readers. Jones concludes that "unlike the other stories where the slave figure is unquestionably an object of horror, in this tale, Poe first creates sympathy for his slave before finally revealing his truly horrific nature" (240). What many authors believed for a long time was that with this tale, Poe actually wanted to warn the readers about the dangerous abolitionist rhetoric and literature which was on the rise in those days. In Jones' article "The Danger of Sympathy: Edgar Allan Poe's "Hop Frog" and the Abolitionist Rhetoric of Pathos", he states two possible dangers of abolitionist propaganda which experienced a shift in the 1830s and 40s from boycotts, armed operations etc. to sentimental slave narratives. Firstly, Jones believes it will arouse a sense of sympathy towards slaves among white masters, which could then cause slave uprisings and the second possible danger was a misinterpretation of the institution of slavery and life in the South which would then create a false feeling of compassion (242). In both cases, so Poe would seem to argue, the sympathy directed at the slaves would be misplaced and even dangerous.

Furthermore, in the beginning, we are instantly acquainted with the character of Hop-Frog and the origin of his name. "I believe 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 seven ministers, on account of his inability to walk as other men do" (Poe 273). Hop-Frog, as his name suggests, could only move "by a sort of interjectional gait-something between a leap and a wriggle", but he was very dexterous in climbing due to his extremely muscular and well-developed upper body, almost as a compensation for what he lacked in legs (Poe 273). Many similarities or even stereotypes about African Americans can be inferred from Hop-



Frog's characterization, such as the abovementioned episode with the humiliating name because it was common to bestow the slaves with an invented name. Also, as Poe describes Hop-Frog as being very skillful at climbing and using any kind of ropes, he makes a remark that the dwarf "certainly much more resembled a squirrel, or a small monkey, than a frog," which is again a very popular comparison of slaves resembling monkeys (273). Hop-Frog's descent is also very unfamiliar and vague, but the author still makes a very clear allusion to the African continent as he states in the book that Hop-Frog was from "some barbarous region, however, that no person ever heard of-a vast distance from the court of our king" (Poe 273).

As already mentioned, my analysis is divided into two parts and "In these early descriptions of Hop-Frog's trials, Poe echoes the rhetoric of pathos that is characteristics of abolitionist literature" (Jones 246). However, a scene from which the whole tale takes on a rather different tone, again starts in a very subtle way and abounds with motifs which one should carefully reexamine. The king was in a bad mood and decided to force the poor cripple to drink some wine, even though he knew that it made the poor cripple excited and even draw him to madness. The many subtle, almost unrecognizable instances of the reversal which ensues Jones describes in his article, "Following this order, Poe inserts the bracketed phrase: "[here Hop-Frog sighed]", and then informs the reader that it also happens to be the poor dwarf's birthday" (901). Both statements are blatant attempts at eliciting sympathy for Hop-Frog, but Poe does not stop here. After offering the poor cripple a second goblet of wine and seeing the dwarf's hesitation, the cruel king "grew purple with rage", while poor Trippetta begged the master for mercy (Poe 275). "At last, without uttering a syllable, he pushed her violently from him, and threw the contents of the brimming goblet in her face" (Poe 275).

This was the moment that spurred Hop-Frog's violent revenge and encouraged him to take action, but also the moment when Poe's tale decidedly shifts from a typical abolitionist narrative to revealing the slave's true, deceiving mask. "This turn in the tale reflects Poe's

understanding of the concept of slaves "wearing a mask", the idea that slaves acted in one manner-as the simple, happy dependent-in order to satisfy their masters while disguising their actual emotions and feeling" (248). With this striking and shocking image, Poe wants to warn the readers of what actually lies beneath the slaves' smiling façade. He points out that there is something sinister and cunning behind their smiling faces, songs and humor, and this is what raises the question about whether this tale should be viewed as a typical abolitionist narrative or on the other hand, a complete parody of those narratives. The first sign of the slave's true nature is the harsh, low "grating sound" of Hop-Frog's repulsive teeth which resounded through the whole room as a sign of obvious anger and contempt, but which the dwarf reluctantly dismissed as false accusations. Jones believes that Poe actually wants to manipulate his readers into empathizing with the dwarf only to truly reveal his monstrous nature by illustrating the dangers of sentimental appeals and creating any kind of alliance with the slave (249). Moreover, Jones believes that the structure of the tale and the horror effect in the end could only be possible because of "the author's initially stressing sympathetic and comic elements" which mislead the reader in the beginning only to reveal the true face of the slave (249).

The story then continues with the perfect masquerade "the Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs" which Hop-Frog invented as his clever plan for revenge. The king and his seven ministers agreed to play out the game to scare and entertain the guests. They dressed up in tar and flax to resemble monkeys and willingly chained themselves to the chandelier according to the dwarf's instruction. Also, the doors to the saloon were locked and the key was given to the dwarf. "The beauty of the game", continued Hop-Frog, "lies in the fright it occasions among the women" (Poe 276). When the king and his ministers found themselves trapped in Hop-Frog's jest, the roles were suddenly reversed and the king became the suppressed one. Jones believes that through this story, Poe wants to warn us of the dangers that lie beneath the

slave's smiles and tears, and just as the king is deceived because he let down his guard, the readers are also in the same danger if they let empathy and feelings overwhelm them (253).

While the dwarf was escaping through the roof, the grating sound reappeared but this time it was obvious to whom it belonged. The dwarf's last sentence resonates, and in many ways highlights the point of this tale: "I now see *distinctly*, " he said, "what manner of people these maskers are. They are a great king and his seven privy-councilors, -a king who does not scruple to strike a defenseless girl, and his seven councilors who abet him in the outrage. As for myself, I am simply Hop-Fog, the jester-and *this is my last jest* " (Poe 279). Burning alive the king and his ministers was truly an atrocious jest, but as Taylor states "the animal-like dwarf places himself in command of the court through his superior intelligence, while the king and his ministers are forced to grovel in chains on all fours" (29). In this way, "their intellectual and moral bestiality is...given its physical dimension" (Taylor 29). By dressing themselves as monkeys, the ministers are actually reduced to the level of Hop-Frog.

Considering all symbols and metaphors, the tale "Hop-Frog" could be easily situated in a framework of the slave-master narrative. However, many authors have different perspectives on how one should read this tale. Whether it is a mockery of the whole genre of abolitionist narratives, very typical in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, or a cautionary tale of the dangers which lurk beneath these popular stories it is very difficult to tell with certainty without historicizing Poe. The victimization of the slaves in Poe's stories is unquestionable and, nevertheless, the potential of victims becoming the victimizers out of revenge is something that according to Jones, Poe wishes to warn the public about: "'Hop-Frog" ultimately reaffirms the status quo by arguing that slavery, despite some masters' abusive behavior, is preferable to giving slaves freedom and the means for violent retribution" (254). Also, it is important to mention that in his last jest, Hop-Frog also reveals the true nature of the king and his seven men. Taylor concludes that by turning them into orang-outangs, the climax of his

jest reveals the real, bestial nature of the king which only proves the illusion of the king's privileged position (67). In the end Hop-Frog and Trippeta succeed to escape by using humor and trickery, but through their game they also emancipate and liberate themselves.

#### 4.2. "Ligeia"

Edgar Allan Poe's short horror story "Ligeia" was first published in 1838. The very title of the story adds to the atmosphere of mystery right from the start because the woman's name is believed to be made up, just like many other names in Poe's works. The unusual, invented name could also make us question the existence of Ligeia's character due to the many opium induced episodes in which the narrator indulges. The story is told by an unnamed narrator who begins the story with a very vague description of his first encounter with his late wife Ligeia. He describes her looks, her exquisite beauty, dark hair and thin body, as well as her intelligence and her vast knowledge. The narrator is clearly fascinated by and very much in love with his wife and minutely describes her in an ostentatious manner. After her tragic death, against which she persistently and vigorously struggled, the narrator falls into a state of permanent and painful sadness which he tries to alleviate with opium. The narrator eventually decides to move from Germany to England and remarries Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine, who was a complete antithesis, a polar opposite to Lady Ligeia. Soon after their marriage, Rowena falls ill as well and dies under very strange circumstances in her bridal room which resembles a morgue. The narrator was sitting next to Rowena's dead body, when in the middle of the night, she slowly comes back to life, but transformed into Ligeia. The story can be interpreted from many perspectives, but some of the themes that I have chosen to write about are primarily examples of orientalism, the question of Ligeia's existence and Ligeia as an embodiment of the narrator's creative muse.

According to literary critics, the tale can be interpreted in two ways. Jack L. Davis and

June H. Davis state that according to the traditional view the story can be interpreted literally. Namely, the narrator's account of the story is taken as the truth, Ligeia is depicted as the perfect wife, and the tale puts particular emphasis on supernatural reincarnation of Ligeia into Rowena's body is (170). On the other hand, Davis and Davis suggest that the plot can also be interpreted as happening on both the literal and psychological level (170). The second explanation appears more plausible and more interesting, but it is also believed that it was actually Poe's intention to write a story which could function in both ways at the same time. Gruesser also introduces a third interpretation in which he asserts that Ligeia is actually a metafiction and that the tale can represent the relationship between the artist and his inspiration, intertwined with elements of orientalism and motifs of beautiful women (145). Ibrahim explains that "the second reading takes into account the mention of opium in the story and considers that the narrator is psychologically unstable as well as in a drug-induced fantasy and so he imagines a woman, the epitome of perfection in her style, intellect, looks, and personality" (37). Considering the unsettled political situation between the New Orient, or in other words, the Arab world and the US, I believe that the influence of Middle Eastern cultures and politics are very important for shaping the contemporary American situation and national identity, so one should examine all available sources, especially Poe, as one of the authors who used the Orientalist imagery.

To begin with, Edward Said, an American-Palestinian intellectual and scholar, in his famous work *Orientalism* examines the West's description of the Orient, especially the Arab world or the Middle East and defines it through the amplification of the polar opposites between the two worlds. Furthermore, Said clarifies the distinction between the Near East and Far East, and places greater significance on the Arab world as the main topic of Orientalist debates. Said argues that the West, which is represented by Europe and U.S., is largely prejudiced against the 'non-Western people' and regards the people from the Middle East as

'oriental Others' (qtd. in Al-Kamal 11). Said explains that the Orient is very often described as feminine, sensual, fertile, sexualized, passionate, irrational, but at the same time in a rather negative light and as a source of danger. On the other hand, the West is characterized as male, dominant, superior, developed, rational and flexible. However, this perception of the East, and this division of the world into East and West was primarily created by Westerners. Said concludes that "Orientalism and the Orient do not correspond with the actual 'real' Orient which is a Western-made concept", and he asserts that this concept is artificially constructed under the influence of the modern political culture and history, especially because of the British Empire's colonial power and imperialist tendencies (36). It is important to understand that the West traditionally made this division of the world between us, the West, and them, the East, in which the East was defined as the "Other". Ibrahim concludes that the Americans' interest in the East, especially the Oriental Arab, was spurred by the Barbary Wars that were fought at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century between Arab countries in North Africa and the U.S. (36). In the Barbary Wars, the American Navy fought against North African pirates who captured U.S. mariners and demanded ransom from American merchants on the Mediterranean Sea. Even though this event belonged to Poe's parents' generation more than to his own, the oriental influence is more than evident in many of Poe's tales and poems. However, Said concludes that Orientalism became more important for the United States only after World War II, when the country emerged as a major political and imperial force (qtd. in Schueller 603).

When examining mid-nineteenth century literature, it is important to contextualize the works. Therefore, it is inevitable to mention Oriental representations in the works of many authors of that period. Schueller emphasizes that "The fact that this intense interest in the Orient coincided with widespread European colonization of the East is one of the ignored subtexts of U.S. literary studies" (601). The presence of Orientalism in literary works was

actually an attempt at shaping national identity through colonialism and post-Enlightenment Euroamerican culture. However, according to Schueller, Poe seems attracted to Orientalism and the powerful motif that it purports, but at the same time he is aware and critical of the many horrors of colonization. Poe's poems and tales are undoubtedly shaped and inspired by Eastern influence and Orientalism, especially with elements of the Arab East and the Quran. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Poe had a rather positive attitude towards the East, one can even argue that he was intrigued and mesmerized by its mysteriousness and exoticism.

During Poe's lifetime, people were already aware of the presence of the Islamic New Orient in the U.S. and many influential politicians expressed their concerns about anti-Christian threats. The issue of Islamic religion was a controversial topic in Poe's time and as Marr explains, "there was a large representation of the Islamic world in America and this representation was an image seen in the minds of the Americans rather than actual representation of this world" (qtd. in Al-Kamal 32). Poe admired the diversities between East and West and he tried to present East in many of his works. Also, the various motifs that he uses in his works add a specific dimension to American literature and express a certain appreciation for Islamic culture. Al-Kamal concludes that "Poe put the Orient in the foreground as a major and formidable part of American Literature-and he did so at a crucial point in the early development of American literature" (6). Many critics today believe that European authors played a defining role in presenting the Orient and the Middle East to America, especially during the Romantic period which paid great attention to orientalist concepts and motifs. Even though Poe largely wrote Gothic stories, the references to the Near East are evident in Poe's choice of location, his description of heroines and the use of the arabesque and grotesque.

"Ligeia" will serve as an example story of Poe's references to orientalism. To begin with, the story can be divided into two parts, the event that divides the story is Ligeia's death.

The second part of the story follows the narrator's move to England, the abbey, his marriage to Rowena, and in the end Rowena's death. In the first sentence of the story, we find out that the narrator cannot remember his first acquaintance with Ligeia, he can't remember any details, the exact time or place, only that he met her in "some large, old, decaying city near the Rhine" (Poe 95). Right from the start, we are given enough material to question Ligeia's existence and suppose a drug induced episode. The narrator continues with a sentence about her paternal name that he also never knew, but it didn't bother him because he was enchanted with her beauty and intelligence. He describes her as tall, slender, and even "emaciated" in her later days. She moved with "incomprehensible lightness and elasticity" and she "came and departed as a shadow" (Poe 95). She had huge black eyes, a beautiful low, sweet voice, "marble hands", ivory skin and "raven-black" hair with glossy, luxuriant, curly tresses and a "Hebrew nose" (Poe 95). On the other hand, the narrator gives us a rather brief and generic description of Rowena as "fair-haired" and "blue-eyed", which leaves us under the impression that the narrator was bored and disinterested in his second wife Rowena (Poe 100). Schueller notices that unlike Ligeia, Rowena is referred to as Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine, who belongs to a "haughty family" (605). She is given a paternal, aristocratic name and is presented as the ideal, traditional Southern lady (615). Rowena's family is aristocratic but poor and that is why her parents forced Rowena to be imprisoned in a marriage without love which the narrator loathes and describes as a "thirst of gold" (Poe 100).

A possible interpretation from the Orientalist point of view could be that this opposition between the two women can be a reference to the differences between the East and the West, Ligeia representing the East and Rowena the West. Gruesser concludes that Ligeia is being described as a typical Eastern woman, while Rowena clearly represents a Northern European one (qtd. in Ibrahim 37). Ligeia is dark, sexual, passionate and possesses mystical knowledge, as opposed to the light, fair, monotonous Rowena. Ligeia's eyes are an important



oriental motif because they are described as "far larger than the ordinary eyes" (Poe 96). Her eyes are large, black, luminous "divine orbs" with a "strangeness" that was unfathomable for the narrator (Poe 96). There was something peculiar in the description of those eyes that induced a strange remembrance, in that he could not exactly define or analyze the sentiment, but he could intuitively recognize it in the strangest places such as in "the survey of rapidly-growing vine-in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean; in the falling of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people" (Poe 96). Her strangeness and exquisite beauty are emphasized with the frequent exotic oriental motif of the mythical doe-eyed woman and therefore connected with antiquity. Ligeia's beauty is described as "ethereal", even otherworldly which adds to her strangeness, exoticism and "otherness".

Furthermore, Ligeia is characterized as a woman of incredible intelligence and erudition, she was extremely proficient in classical languages and "the modern dialects of Europe", she was a source of immense knowledge for the narrator, "such as I have never known in woman" and she was deeply immersed in metaphysical studies (Poe 97). She possessed an "intensity in thought, action, or speech" as a result of her will and vigorous desire for life and knowledge. Schueller contends that "Poe's dark Ligeia, like the Near East Orient, is also the possessor of knowledge beyond that of the West", and the narrator longs for her clarity and prudence (609). This could also be interpreted as an analogy of the East's ancient knowledge and wisdom, as opposed to the Western youth and lack of experience. One day, Ligeia grew ill and weak, but her incredible and vehement desire for life grew stronger. Only before her death, did she express her deepest love for the narrator, which he describes as "idoltrous love".

After the loss of Ligeia, the narrator could no longer endure his sadness and loneliness, so he moved from the decaying city by the Rhine to England. He purchased an abbey in one

of "the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England", a gloomy, old and abandoned building. As a result of his opium-induced visions, in a moment of his mental alienation, the narrator decorated Rowena's bridal-room in an oriental way. The room was capacious and had a pentagonal shape with a Saracenic patterned censer, the draperies had "solemn carvings of Egypt", the carpets were in Bedlam patterns of tufted gold. There were a few ottomans, golden candelabra, Eastern figures and the bridal couch, which was of an Indian model, was made of ebony and decorated with canopy. In each corner of the room there was a gigantic sarcophagus made of black granite, and on the high walls there hung heavy and massive-looking tapestries. Arabesque figures and cloths of gold could be seen all over the room, and the "phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies" (Poe 101). The style of the abbey and most importantly, the bridal room, were full of arabesque motifs and patterns, so Ibrahim concludes that "The style of the Abbey links the setting to the Oriental character of Ligeia and reinforces the narrator's fondness for the Oriental, and especially the Arabic Oriental" (37). The room looked more like a crypt than a place for starting a new life, "the room becomes precisely that for Rowena, who exchanges the garments of a newlywed for the wrappings of a mummy" (Gruesser 147). Gruesser also suggests that the narrator turned the room into a poisonous, phantasmagoric environment on purpose, so that it will be impossible for Rowena to be sane and to reanimate (147). The infatuation with Ligeia, the lack of love for Rowena and the morbid atmosphere of the abbey contributed to Rowena's death. Gruesser even argues that by neglecting his real, young wife Rowena, and by putting her in such an environment, the narrator indirectly killed Rowena (148). However, one cannot be sure of the real nature of Rowena's death, precisely due to the narrator's excessive opium usage. Gruesser argues that the narrator's memory and his descriptions are under the influence of substances, so he surely cannot distinguish dreams from reality (148).

Another interesting reference to oriental motifs and the East can be inferred from the allegorical function of the abbey. The abbey was a place where Rowena was kept isolated, far away from the world and where she eventually died, but at the same time, it is a place of Ligeia's reappearance. Schueller suggest that the bridal chamber actually functions as a harem, because the bridal room housed two women, just like the Arabic harem (612). Given that the idea of sexual access to more than one woman spurs erotic fantasies and emphasizes the exoticism of the East, Schueller makes an interesting comment that "the harem had functioned as a site onto which Western travelers could project their erotic fantasies and act out their desires for domination" (612). Also, a parallel can be drawn here about the position of women in general. Schueller comments that the Southern lady and the slave woman were part of a polygamous system, or in orientalist terms, they belonged to the master's harem (613).

Another important question arises here about Poe's attitude towards women and their position in mid-nineteenth-century American society. Supposedly, Poe had antipatriarchal views and was an advocate of women's rights. Catherine Carter suggests that the character of Ligeia is actually an embodiment of the narrator's creative muse and that in her, Poe comprised a part of himself that he views as the "Other", not because of her gender, but because of what she represents (46). Poe's women are very often portrayed as extremely attractive on the one hand, and destructive and fatal on the other hand. They are a representation of what the author wants to acquire so eagerly, but in the end never succeeds. The women are a symbol of the writer's creative unconsciousness and inspiration which have been traditionally described as feminine and mysterious, so Carter concludes that "the Ligeia figure is indubitably an element of the psyche rather than a literal character and that the primary theme of the story deals with the disastrous consequences of trying to control that element" (48).

The question of Ligeia's existence is closely connected with the second approach to

reading this tale, and that is the interpretation of Ligeia as a product of imagination and her reincarnation as an opium induced hallucination. It is very difficult for the reader to establish what is real and what isn't, whether this metempsychosis really occurs or the narrator actually poisons his real wife Rowena in the moment of his drug induced madness. Davis and Davis state that, "In reality, there is no physical Ligeia: thus the horror of the narrator's murder of Rowena is intensified when the reader discovers that the deluded narrator murdered her to bring back an entirely imaginary first wife" (171). The evidence of Ligeia's metaphysical existence can again be inferred from many subtle details in the story, such as her invented name, the author's lack of knowledge about her origin, the excessive description of her beauty and her intelligence as well as her idolatrous love towards the narrator which she confesses just before her death, it all seems too unreal and exotic. Also, another detail that adds to the whole atmosphere is that "the most crucial event in the story, the apparent revivification of Ligeia who seemingly poisons Rowena and then takes over her body, occurs when the narrator is admittedly at the height of an opium hallucination" (Davis and Davis 175). In the end, when the reincarnated Ligeia rises from the dead, she comes alive only in the narrator's mind as a fictitious product of the narrator's madness, while his presumably real wife Rowena dies from his madness in a room which the narrator admits to have decorated to prepare the way for Ligeia's return.

To conclude, from a Western point of view, "Ligeia" abounds with oriental motifs and the story can serve as a clear demonstration of Poe's Eastern inspiration. However, Gruesser concludes that, "Neither Orientalism nor the character Ligeia correspond to the East as it actually is" (149). Ligeia is not a real Oriental woman, but a product of a Western male imagination and an embodiment of the taboos, mysteries and prejudice against the East. Schueller points out the importance of contextualizing literary works by observing that "The fact that colonialist ideology, as seen in Orientalist representation, formed an integral subtext

for even so seemingly apolitical a writer as Poe, suggests the importance of this subtext for nineteenth-century American literature" (617).

#### 4.3. "Metzengerstein"

"Metzengerstein" is one of Poe's earliest works and was later subtitled "An Imitation of the German". The short story was Poe's first printed work. It was published in the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* in 1832. The plot revolves around rivalry between two families, the Berlifitzing and Metzengerstein, and their fatal destiny, but the underlying topics are black savagery and the dangers of masterless slaves. The story is situated in Hungary, but the exact time and place are not mentioned, as is the case in many other Poe's works in which the notion of displacement is also present, probably to hide the real motivation for his writing. Even though the tale abounds with Gothic elements and Germanic names, it can easily be connected to contemporary situation in America. One can even argue that Poe deliberately exaggerates in order to create a satire of Gothic conventions, so the story could also belong to the genre of "burlesque of the horror fiction" (Fisher 487).

Considering the plot, and especially its beginning, many critics believe that the story has references to Poe's personal life and is actually autobiographical. The protagonist of the story is Baron Frederick Metzengerstein, a young aristocrat who became an orphan at the age of 15. Baron Metzengerstein is described as a wicked young man who supposedly sets fire to the stables of his neighbor and rival Count Wilhelm Von Berlifitzing. The Count dies in the fire trying to save his horses and immediately afterwards, Baron Frederick obtains a powerful, fiery steed with letters W. V. B. branded on its forehead. It is implied that the horse was a reincarnation of the old Count. In the end, the young Baron mysteriously dies riding on the back of the wicked horse into the flames of his Palace. The story begins with a Latin quote from Martin Luther which can be translated as, "Living, I have been your plague. Dying, I

will be your death" (Poe 241). This sentence can serve as an announcement of the horror and tragedy that will ensue, as well as a preparation for the fatal prophecy of both families: "A lofty name shall have a fearful fall when, as the rider over his horse, the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing" (Poe 241).

Even though the plot of the story seems very simple, Shelton believes that it is actually abound with allegory and symbolism, just as many other Poe's tales that seem oversimplified, but actually hide Poe's commentary on political and social situation of the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century America. The prophecy in the second paragraph of the story is closely connected with the doctrine of Metempsychosis, a Hungarian superstition about the soul which looms over the story until the end. Rowe defines the notion of Metempsychosis as the "transmigration of souls", or in this case, the transmigration of Count Berlifitzing's soul into the unnamed, mysterious horse (41). According to DeNuccio, the narrator supposes that the prophecy is the origin of the hostility between the two aristocratic families (72). Further in the story, the narrator concludes that the prophecy suggested the victory of the already more powerful family, which of course created a bitter resentment of the less influential one.

However, DeNuccio suggests the existence of dual metempsychosis. The first one between the Count and the horse, as an instrument for executing family revenge. The second, less apparent one, between Metzengerstein and the narrator over narrative control because in this tale, the narrator has no authority and no action (71). DeNuccio sums it up by saying that "in the process of recounting Metzengerstein's obsessive desire for unbounded subjectivity, the narrator enacts a parallel desire for narrative authority" (71). Next follows the depiction of the unfavorable neighboring relationship between the two families "that had been at variance for centuries", supposedly because of the jealousy of the "less wealthy Berlifitzings" (Poe 242). Thomas Olive Mabbot suggests that the two estranged families represent "two 'contiguous' and 'mutually embittered' estates that had long exercised a rival influence in the affairs of a

busy government" (qtd. in Lee 753). Maurice S. Lee concludes that this situation is analogous to the political situation in the United States, or more specifically the tension between the industrialized and abolitionist North, and the less developed and anti-abolitionist South.

Furthermore, as many critics believe that Poe's works were inspired and affected by questions of slavery and race, I believe it is important to mention that "Metzengerstein" was published only a couple of months after Nat Turner's revolt or Southampton Insurrection which took place in 1831 near Richmond. The insurrection happened during Poe's most fruitful years when he wrote some of his famous works. The Rebellion was put down very quickly, but there were many victims, both white and black. It is believed that this event served as an inspiration for many of Poe's stories in which Poe wants to warn his readers and his fellow citizens about the dangers of abolitionist rhetoric and slaves' rebellion. "Poe's tale seems to offer a symbolic, prophetic warning to the white southerners who lived in fear of these rebellions" (Shelton 3).

Maurice S. Lee believes that "Metzengerstein" stands as Poe's first serious treatment of slavery and race, offered in the form of a "cautious-and cautionary-political commentary" (753). Poe's personal background had quite an influence on his writing, so we can argue that the "infirm" and "doting", but extremely proud and honorable, old Count Berlifitzing, who cherished his precious horses and in the end lost his estate to his rival, represents Poe's turbulent and ambiguous feelings towards his aristocratic position. As Silverman puts it, "Poe shows both fealty and resentment toward South (and an adopted father) that was for him an occasional home in which he never felt fully welcome" (qtd. in Lee 754). On the other hand, the young baron is described as "not yet of age", wild and malicious, known for his "shameful debaucheries", "flagrant treacheries" and "unheard-of-atrocities", and therefore the culprit for the death of his neighbor. The hostility between the two families and the nature of their relationship, Lee also interprets as "an allegorical conflict between Berlifitzinger, the noble

slaveowner, and Metzengerstein, the lunatic abolitionist" (qtd. in Frank 376).

Poe's racial philosophy is perhaps best presented in the character of the mysterious horse and the tapestry episode. When the fire started, Baron Frederick was in the upper apartment of his family palace, in a room full of paintings and art showing his ancestors and family history. His mind was immersed in a tapestry of an "enormous, and unnaturally colored horse", which belonged to "a Saracen ancestor of the family of his rival", and in the background, the horse rider was dying from a Metzengerstein's dagger (Poe 243). Absorbed in the spell of the morbid picture, Frederick couldn't withdraw his eyes from the tapestry. When the young Baron heard the noise and tumult outside, still mesmerized, he wouldn't let get distracted. Suddenly, the head of the steed changed its position, it became extended in the direction of the Baron, its eyes became energetic with a "human expression, while they gleamed with a fiery and unusual red", its lips became enlarged and its teeth "sepulchral and disgusting" (Poe 243).

The motifs of apes and horses as allegories for slaves were very common in anti-abolitionist narratives, and especially in Poe's works. The untamed horse magically appears from the fire in the old Count's stable and even though its origins are unclear, it is branded with Berlifitzing's initials on his forehead which indicate that the horse belonged to the old man. Lee suggests that "the antebellum era linked horses and slaves as branded, bred, and brutish chattel" (755). Besides, Lee comments that the horse represents a slave and the young Baron an abolitionist because "Turner's Southampton revolt was blamed on "incendiary" abolitionists, the Baron is an 'incendiary' villain implicated in the disastrous end of his neighbor's chattel institution" (759). Considering the interpretation of the horse as an African American slave and the Count Berlifitzing as a southern slave owner, Shelton concludes that "the Baron Metzengerstein, could logically represent either the abolitionist movement or northern industrialists" (4). The Baron sees a potential wealth in the horse, but in the end, the



horse leads the young Baron into death and doom.

"Metzengerstein" also serves as a cautionary tale. Namely, the victims in this story are the horse's previous master, who is described as being "too fond of his chattel" and the new, young owner (Lee 755). Also, Shelton suggests that Poe actually wanted to warn both the passionate master of slaves, and Northerners who naively believed in the "redeemable value of emancipated slaves" about the dangers of abolitionism (5). Following the event of Nat Turner's rebellion, Poe poses the "most troubling prospect of abolition" and that is the question of "masterless slaves" (Lee 755). Poe alludes that the ignorant Northerners are foolish in their unrealistic optimism about the liberated slaves which he presented in the tragic death of Metzengerstein. The young Baron developed a "perverse attachment" to the menacing and devilish animal which in the end "plunges, with the Baron, into the flames of the burning Palace Metzengerstein" (Smith 356). The horse tricks his master with his "peculiar intelligence" and his "human-looking eye", which is exactly what Poe is warning his readers about, the masterless slaves are dangerous and a threat to society (Poe 246). As Shelton puts it, "All will die, Poe warns, at the hands of the chattel they foolishly underestimate, and only the ashes will remain of themselves and their estates" (5). The black and the white can only exist together in a master-slave relationship because without their masters, the slaves become uncontrolled animals and subsequently, chaos and disruption would ensue. Therefore, Smith concludes that the horse must be animated by Count Berlifitzing's soul, who was burned to death in his castle and wanted to revenge himself upon his murderer, just like the masterless slave will revenge on his master for the national sin of slavery (359).

After getting his trophy, the fiery horse, young Baron completely changed his demeanor, from a wild, rebellious and dissolute man he became extremely private and pensive, he was never seen without the companion of the "unnatural, impetuous, and fiery-colored horse" (Poe 245). He didn't participate in any social gatherings and no one was allowed to

come near the unnamed horse, let alone to groom it. The villagers had many theories about this sudden change of Baron's behavior, some thought that the young Baron was mourning his prematurely deceased parents, while others assumed that Frederick suffered from melancholy of the mind. But it was obvious that "the young Metzengerstein seemed riveted to the saddle of that colossal horse, whose intractable audacities so well accorded with his own spirit" (Poe 245).

Moreover, a little, deformed page whose opinions were often discarded by other members of the Baron's staff, made an impudent remark about an eerie peculiarity of the unnatural and hideous attachment between the horse and the young master. He noticed that the Baron never sat in the saddle without an almost imperceptible shudder and upon arrival, "an expression of triumphant malignity distorted every muscle in his countenance" (Poe 246). One evening, Frederick woke up in the middle of the night, sat on the horse's back as if possessed by a strange force, and rode the horse into the foggy forest. In the next moment, Metzengerstein's palace mysteriously caught fire and the young master came rushing on the back of the devilish horse straight into the flames. He was disoriented and had no control over the animal, so the "ancient prophecy" that predicts the fall of the two rich houses comes true in the end of the story. The young Baron Metzengerstein dies on the back of the mysterious, fiery horse possessed by the spirit of Count Berlifitzinger, who seeks revenge for his murder. The tale ends with "a cloud of smoke settled heavily over the battlements in the distinct colossal figure of a horse" (247).

Elements of Gothicism can also be found at the very beginning of the story when the readers are "immediately plunged into a quandary of doubts and uneasiness", and a very tense atmosphere looms until the very end (Fisher 489). An obvious example is the plot which is situated in a remote, distant area, with gloomy old castles and foggy scenery as well as the theme of vengeance and the invincible power of evil. Also, the young Baron Frederick

Metzengerstein is depicted as a typical Gothic villain. Mabbot comments that the young baron is "heartless, self-willed, and impetuous from childhood, he had arrived at the age of which I speak, through a career of unfeeling, wanton, and reckless dissipation, and a barrier had long since arisen in the channel of all holy thought, and gentle recollection" (qtd. in Fisher 490).

To conclude, there are many layers and possible interpretations of this story. We can even argue that the tale talks about the cruelty of human heart and its greed. The Baron inherits all his wealth and becomes a cruel master who in the end dies in a horrible fire, but no one actually mourns him or feels any grief for the deceased. Poe also compares the young Baron to the Roman emperor Caligula, who engaged in many debaucheries and was known for his cruelty and madness manifested by his appointment of his favorite horse as a consul. As mentioned before, Poe is known for his symbolism, so another possible interpretation can be that Poe wanted to warn us about the darkness of human heart, and that the cruelty of the human soul can be overtaken by the evil it has created, which in the end often destroys the perpetrator himself.

#### 4.4. "The Man That Was Used Up"

Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Man That Was Used Up", has for a long time been unjustifiably neglected. It was first published in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in August 1839, with the subtitle "A Tale of the Late Bugaboo and Kickapoo Campaign". Poe wrote the story during Andrew Jackson's presidency, amid American Indian Wars, which is an umbrella term for the conflicts between the European settlers and Native Americans. The wars began in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century due to the innumerable religious differences, cultural clashes, disputes over land, expansionism towards the West and the overall situation in Europe. According to Hickey, the culmination of the conflict was the Seminole Wars, known as the longest, the most expensive and the most controversial of the Indian Wars (179). Donald Hickey states

that the conflicts between Americans and the Seminole took place in Florida and it is believed that Poe's inspiration for the tale was General Winfield Scott who fought the Indians during the Second Seminole War (180).

After the Indian Removal Act in 1830, the Indians were forced to accept their defeat and move to Indian Territory. The war was a result of Jackson's aggressive policy of moving the Native Americans west of the Mississippi which resulted in many casualties and losses on both sides. Andrew Jackson forced a group of Southern Indian tribes to move which became known as The Trail of Tears. The removal resulted in many deaths due to the diseases and starvation on their route, so Hickey explains that the horrific event always remained an awful and shameful part of the US history, which the US government is still trying to forget (180).

Hernandez states that the invented tribe names in the story are a reference to the two threatening presences in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, the Indians and the African slaves. Supposedly, the Kickapoos were an actual Indian tribe and the name Bugaboo is "a variation of 'bugbear' from 'bucca-boo' (goblin), 'Bugibu' (demon), and 'bugge' (scarecrow)-a quite possible source of the name 'jigaboo', which is derogatory term for black people" (Hernandez 28). Poe uses these specific names to deliberately make references to the problem of violence towards Indians and to point out the unfavorable position of slaves. The presence of 'Bugaboos' in the South, more specifically, in Florida, is Poe's allusion to the escaped slave presence in those days and their resistance to white settlers.

"The Man That Was Used Up" is told by an unnamed narrator who is persistent in revealing the mystery surrounding the persona of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith. After their first encounter at a posh social gathering, the narrator is impressed by Smith's physical appearance as well as his knowledge and decides to go on a quest to find out what is that "remarkable" something surrounding the General's appearance, an "air distingué" and a "je ne sais quoi" in that man (Poe 339). The narrator notices that the general never

speaks of his battles with the Indians, but always repeats the same few sentences about the nation's rapid mechanical progress. After a series of visits to Smith's acquaintances and their drone-like answers about the General, the narrator resolves to visit the man himself at his home. There, he meets the General's black servant Pompey and finds out the darkly comic truth behind the General's impressive physique. As a result of the "tremendous swamp-fight, away down South, with the Bugaboo and Kickapoo Indians", the General is dismembered and reduced to a bundle of manufactured body parts that have to be put back together daily by his slave, Pompey (Poe 340). Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith is composed of a glass eye, wooden leg and an arm, shoulder padding, a wig, artificial teeth and he is unable to speak until an artificial palate is inserted because of his cut-out tongue. After this unexpected and shocking scene, the narrator finally comprehends the mystery surrounding the General, and concludes that Smith was "*the man that was used up*" (Poe 345).

"The Man That Was Used Up" is a satire of American society and America's expansionist agenda because it "raises vexing questions regarding the connections between matters of race, masculinity, and national identity as these concepts were imagined and constructed in Jacksonian America", and a wilderness tale because of the typical American frontier hero topic (Beuka 27). However, Poe makes an ironic representation of the typical American hero, because "Poe's satirical treatment of the hero figure reveals Poe's foresight in discussing American mythology in relation to an uneasy collective psyche whose advancement is achieved through violence and willed forgetting" (Hernandez 1). The typical American frontier hero was a white, courageous man who was an embodiment of the most cherished qualities in American society. He is a self-made man, fearless and brave. Frederick Jackson Turner explains that "The self-made man was the Western man's ideal, was the kind of man that all men might become", he is an embodiment of the qualities all men should strive to, and all of these qualities he acquired during his life in the wilderness, in a hostile

environment where he freely exercises his opportunities (qtd. in Hernandez 13).

Frontier narratives depicted the frontier hero as a noble man performing the will of God by bringing civilization and culture to godless Indian savages, and through this narrative, Americans tried to justify the violent westward expansion and Indian slaughter. The American public believed that the settlers were performing a good, morally justified deed by forcefully pushing the Indians west of the Mississippi, and therefore securing their Anglo-Saxon presence. Poe's wilderness tales deal with America's anxieties about slaves' revenge, whose secret agenda was to haunt their Anglo-Saxon perpetrators. Their violence against people of color was justified, necessary and inevitable for the birth of the contemporary American society and American selfhood. Hernandez explains that "From the moment European explorers and settlers set foot on North American soil they were met with the challenge of transforming a strange and often inhospitable environment into a place of religious and political freedom, as well as economic opportunity" (6).

Poe's Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith was an ironic depiction of the frontier hero who saved America from the barbarous and dreadful Bugaboo and Kickapoo savages. In the beginning, General's physical appearance is described as impressive and masculine, just like the frontier ideal, "six feet in height", "richly flowing" black hair, "unimaginable whiskers", "most brilliantly white of all conceivable teeth" and with "a pair of shoulders which would have called up a blush of conscious inferiority into the countenance of the marble Apollo" (Poe 339). The unnamed narrator is fascinated with General's physique and his charm, he was also an excellent orator and philosopher. The American frontier hero was supposed to mollify the anxieties over frontier violence and reassure the American public in the righteousness of their acts; however, towards the end of the story Poe satirizes and subverts the hero myth, by creating character who after the frontier battles becomes dismembered and has to be put back together limb by limb each day by his black servant,

Pompey. Hernandez explains that "Poe's treatment of the classic frontier hero is a reflection of America's expansionist agenda", because although the plot of the story does not take place on the frontier, Poe emphasizes the dangers of expansionist tendencies in the depiction of the General's butchered body (25).

In addition, the Indians tore the General apart piece by piece, he was left without an arm, a leg, teeth, his eyes were gouged out, his tongue cut and his shoulders and bosom massacred, and he has been scalped until all that remained of him was "a large and exceedingly odd-looking bundle of something" with "the funniest little voice, between a squeak and a whistle" (Poe 344). What Poe wants to suggest with General's deceptively compounded body is that America's identity is being built on an illusion of wholeness or unity, which is compromised by its race policies. Hernandez suggests that "American identity was achieved through the widespread exploitation and displacement of non-white people during America's expansion. The fate of the hero also prophesies a doomsday resulting from those exploits" (26). Smith is initially presented as the epitome of American masculinity, but in the end his secret is revealed, and his body proves to be the opposite, just like America's national identity. The General is just a social construct, "an imaginary tool of expansionism" who serves as "a reassuring force that alleviates fear of the wilderness and the threat of Indian retaliation" (Hernandez 29). Moreover, Poe uses General Smith as a warning against US imperialist agenda, and therefore the story becomes yet another Poe's cautionary tale. Hernandez suggests that Poe satirizes the American hero myth and reveals the underlying policies and dangers of US expansionist tendencies and therefore concludes that "Americans believe they are civilizing the world when, in fact, they're bringing about their own doom" (30). Furthermore, the story can be interpreted as Poe's commentary on the white social reaction to Indian Removal, which happened a few months before Poe's publication of the tale. Also, "The Man That Was Used Up" is Poe's first American story because the plot takes

place on the American soil, as opposed to his other stories which were usually situated somewhere in the gloomy parts of Europe or in some undefined and imaginative places which resembled the Old World.

As mentioned before, Hernandez asserts that the tale is a social satire of American expansionist ideology, but also a satire of a US General Winfield Scott (29). The general is supposedly an inspiration for the creation of a renowned Indian fighter, Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, whose real identity the unnamed narrator is trying to reveal in a number of interrupted interviews with mutual friends and acquaintances during social gatherings. By introducing the character of Pompey, a black slave who attends to Smith, Poe introduces the issue of Southern slavery. Ironically, the seemingly perfect man is actually a collection of manufactured body parts, who needs to be assembled every day for public display by his black slave. In this tale, Poe makes a role reversal of the master-slave relationship, because Smith in the end becomes reliant in Pompey for his everyday existence. The connection between General John A. B. C. Smith and General Winfield Scott is seen in their military ventures, but also in their private lives. Gerald Kennedy demonstrates that General Scott lost a part of his arm in the War of 1812, and was the chief commander of the army in the Second Seminole War in 1836 which ended in disaster and was also one of the key figures in America's expansionist spread across the continent during the Mexican-American War ("Unwinnable Wars, Unspeakable Wounds" 81). Despite the fact that he was called to testify in court due to his military incompetence, he still made significant political gains and was known for his eloquence. Kennedy describes how in the eyes of the public, he was closely associated with Indian Removal Act and due to his debility, he long relied on his black servant David (81). In addition, Hernandez believes that the General was also a close friend of Poe's family who sponsored Poe's nomination to West Point and was well known in Richmond (81).



Due to the rapid industrial growth and geographic expansion of the United States, the marvels of industrial technology are an important topic in "The Man That Was Used Up". Even though the readers are given few information about what exactly happened in the conflicts, Poe made deliberate, but subtle references to the Native American influence in shaping American identity. We can even speculate that General Smith hides the nation's racist tendencies behind the marvels of industrial advancement. Throughout the text, Smith repeats his amazement with industrial advancement of that time, "we are a wonderful people, and live in a wonderful age", "mechanical contrivances are daily springing up like mushrooms" (Poe 340). General Smith is composed of different parts made by some of the best experts from all over Europe, which makes the General a perfect real-life advertisement for Anglo-American technology. Chacón draws our attention to the importance of prosthetics industry which flourished both in Europe, due to the aftermaths of Napoleonic Wars, and in the US because of the many casualties in the Civil War (48). Therefore, Chacón suggests an interpretation of Poe's motif of prosthetics and artificial limbs as symbols of international trade and European empire, as well as national anxieties (48). Chacón believes that Smith is a representation of the body politic of the American nation because on the outside he appears progressive, prosperous and autonomous what corresponds to the nation's endeavors to establish greatness (50).

Also, Blake point out that Poe wants to show us how the society is acting like an ignorant mob whose opinion is easily shaped by governments and their hidden agendas (343). "The narrator's informants all know the General's cyborgian identity, but rather than view him as freakish or grotesque, they enthusiastically connect him to the wonders of the age" (Blake 343). In similar phrasing, all the interlocutors repeat almost the same sentences about Smith's "prodigies of valor" in the "horrid affair" down South with the "great wretches" and "savages" those Bugaboos and Kickapoos (Poe 342). Hernandez states that only after the

narrator discovers that Smith is a bundle of parts, can we understand the story's persistent interest in technology and the General's enthusiasm about the mechanical inventions (342). On the other hand, Indians lived trapped in their own course of history and refused to keep pace with the cultural and technological advancements, so the settlers saw their extinction as natural and inevitable.

"The Man That Was Used Up" is also Poe's commentary on the question of forging a nation, more specifically, the oppressive racial policies of the United States during the presidency of Andrew Jackson and his efforts to embody a sense of national identity and purpose in the figure of a masculine self-made man. Beuka states that through the character of General Smith, Poe offers an allegory for the illusion of wholeness compromised by contemporary race politics and a critique of the ideologies of manhood and citizenship advocated in the Jacksonian era (30). The tale is a commentary of contemporary American politics in which Poe used the backdrop of Indian Wars to critique the hypocrisy and chaos of Jacksonian America. In those days, America was beginning to form its national identity which was hard to establish because of its heterogeneity. America's white national identity was being formed on the notion of 'Otherness', more specifically by emphasizing the distinction between 'us' and 'them', in an effort to build a nation with a unified racial identity. Therefore, Beuka concludes that "Indian removal thus served both political and psychological functions in the building of a unified American nation" (34).

President Andrew Jackson had a vision of forming the new nation based on a cult of masculinity, which would serve as the ideal figure and a uniting force for the nascent nation. He tried to incorporate it through the myth of the frontier man and the self-made man. What Poe wants to reveal is the exploitative and genocidal racial tendencies of Jacksonian America. Beuka explains, "In the figure of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith, Poe fashioned a character who serves to expose the contradictions inherent in the ideology of

Jacksonian manhood" (36). At first sight, the General is an epitome of Jacksonian masculinity, he has a militaristic career, he is brave, adventurous, a hero in the eyes of the public, a model of valor, however, the narrator in the end reveals that his manhood is actually a sham and that he has been "used-up", dismembered and unmanned. Beuka comments: "The narrator's final position thus suggests that Smith's dismembered and artificial reassembly are symbolic of the larger fragility of the society he epitomizes" (40).

Today, American national identity relies on various culturally specific paradigms which have become deeply rooted in the nation's consciousness and society in general. Throughout history, the paradigms subtly became a part of the nation's identity because of its long history of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant settlers and racial oppression towards African American and Native Americans. In the beginning, the public was divided on the issues of slavery and the question of Native Americans, and the frontier was depicted as the intersection of wilderness and civilization. President Andrew Jackson believed that life on the frontier was a defining experience in establishing American identity. America has its origins in the Old World but always strives to move towards future and youth. Hernandez observes that "Early Americans were caught in the middle of an identity crisis, transitioning between old and new world. They maintained many of the cultural and religious practices brought over from Europe but had to adjust their value systems into something more compatible with their new, 'uncultivated' environment" (7). The settlers wanted to break free from European traditions and create a new, independent, democratic nation, but at the same time dismiss the Native American and Afro-American presence by establishing the notion of 'Otherness'. The settlers wanted to escape the Old World and the European colonial powers, but by accepting the Indian Removal Act they became the oppressor, just like the European imperialist. Furthermore, Chacón states that the narrator's use of the word "remarkable" when describing General Smith can be connected to the American exceptionalism paradigm and the General

could be a personification of an ascendant United States (53). Also, Americans believed in Manifest Destiny, a popular belief that they were the chosen people, sent by God on a mission to create a better world, to spread democracy, which then served as a justification for its violent, oppressive past and military oriented future.

To conclude, Poe's "The Man That Was Used Up" abounds with subtle, ironic references to popular American paradigms which Poe supposedly used to suggest the many contradictories on which the young nation's identity is being built, as well as the illusion of wholeness that serves to justify its racial and imperialist past.

#### 4.5. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is known as the first modern detective story. The tale was written in 1841, published in the *Graham's Magazine* and it also abounds with subtle motifs connected to racism, more specifically slave rebellions. Recently, some contemporary scholars have been reexamining Poe in terms of the social and political context of the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. One of the most important advocates of this theory is the famous Nobel prize winning author, Toni Morrison, whose attitudes and contributions will be examined at the end of this paper. As Terry J. Martin comments in his article, the main topic of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is that it "celebrates the brilliance of Dupin's solution and the apotheosis of his ratiocinative powers" (31). Poe often refers to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as his tale of ratiocination or in other words his tale of reasoning, of the functioning and peculiarity of the human process of thinking and inferring. At first glance, the question of slavery is often absent from Poe's works, but when we look deeper into the text itself, instances of racism can be easily read out. Also, what is important to mention is "Poe's troubled sense of himself as a southern aristocrat, and, finally, the precise and methodical transaction in which he revealed the threshold separating humanity from animality" (Dayan

241). Since Poe was born in Boston, but raised in Richmond, many scholars believe it influenced his controversial Americanness, being born in the North, but raised in the South.

The plot of the story revolves around the brutal and mysterious murder of two Parisian women, Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter, which was investigated by the narrator and his companion called Dupin. What is peculiar about this story is the orangutan murderer who unintentionally murders the two innocent women. Another interesting element is the fact that the character of the orangutan is a leitmotif present in other Poe's stories, such as "Hop-Frog" and "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether", which also contain many racial motifs and instances. Considering that this tale became a model of detective stories and an inspiration for future writers, it is important to comment on the historical reasons behind the emergence of this literary genre. Therefore, situational reading of literary works is essential for understanding plots, characters, and their incentives.

Nancy Harrowitz explains that this genre and an interest in criminology in general occurred due to the uncontrolled development of large cities and urbanization which then led to an increase in crime rates and created an anxiety and detective fiction as a response (qtd. in White 89). Before the analysis of racial motifs, it is also important to mention the structure of the story. The narrative is obviously divided into three parts, or three segments. In the first part, the narrator introduces us to the character of Dupin and his analytical genius, the second part presents witness testimonies, and the last part in which we are finally given the solution to the murder. The first part serves as an introduction to the rest of the story, or more precisely, as a commentary for a better understanding of the following two parts. Moreover, the last segment is also the most important one, because it deals with the problem of racism and slavery, more specifically it "obviously draws upon the charged nineteenth-century language of race, and in which the problem of slave violence, despite the story's Parisian displacement, enters most forcefully into the text" (White 95).

Various authors bring out different interpretations of this tale, of the situational and historical context, and the author's background. Considering Poe's affinity for using symbols and metaphors, all of these different interpretations can give us important insights into many details and topics that Poe deals with, more specifically to the topic of racism and slavery. According to Ed White, the strange characterization of the orangutan, or more specifically "anthropomorphization", in which the ape is given some human characteristics, not just to be able to commit a crime, but also to show the cultural differences, fears, anxieties and even xenophobia (89). Therefore, Harrowitz concludes that "Poe's text further demonstrates a corresponding displacement of racial anxiety and crisis onto the orangutan" (qtd. in White 89). However, Harrowitz asserts that the character of the ape is just *a figure* onto whom the author bestows many topics in the discourse, such as bestiality, sexualization, xenophobia, but on the other hand, the animal is never *the agent* who might flee and kill people (qtd. in White 91).

Even though Poe is known for his skillful ability to implicitly introduce racist motifs into his narratives, in "Hop-Frog" the slavery allegories are much more obvious than in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". John Bryant explains that "'Rue Morgue' is a dysfunctional antiritual of satire, an unreliable narrative that attacks readers but does little to clarify their condition because they never really know that they are being attacked" (32). It almost seems as if Poe tested the readers naivety or ingenuity with this hidden game of revealing or "catching on" the hoax that lies beneath the text and the story. As mentioned earlier, Poe liked to write his stories as cautionary tales against the dangers of slave rebellions. In his article, "The Ourang-Outang Situation", White emphasizes the importance of the third part of the tale which stands out the most when examining racist motifs. He states that in the last part, the readers finally find out the story about the humanoid ape that was captured in a distant country by sailors and brought to an urban, metropolitan city to be sold and in the end gets frightened by his master's whip, flees into the streets and intrudes into a house where he finds

two innocent women and kills them brutally, hides their bodies, gets captured and sold again (95). Here, Poe takes a clearer stand on what he thinks about and expects from African American slaves: allowed to run free, they will murder brutally and mercilessly. We can also notice that "Poe's victim is not the abusive master, but two innocent and "helpless" women who fall prey to an indiscriminate animal rage" (Shelton 3).

It is almost impossible not to see the obvious racial metaphors as "the last pages of the story are full of loaded and suggestive language. Words like 'fugitive', 'escaped', 'whip', and 'master' are used to reinforce the associations with black slaves" (Shelton 3). Poe skillfully hides the references to slavery by making them both obvious, and elusive at the same time. However, in those days, especially in the southern states, the news related to slavery rebellions was censored, so it seems as if Poe went to great lengths to hide the slave rebellion into a detective story set in Paris. White points out how "Culturally, the slave rebellion includes the feigned ignorance, the defiance, and the planning of slaves, the suspicion, terror, and ignorance of whites, the rumors and secrets in circulation during and after the event, and the struggle to control the aftermath of information" (White 97). What White actually wants to suggest is that "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is about slave rebellion and that there is no doubt that parallels between violent orangutan and the insurrectionary slave can be inferred, but that is just one part of the story (97). Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" is also about racial codes and secrecy in which the rebellions were organized. According to White, by situating the plot in Paris, Poe deliberately puts the story in a non-slave setting to hide the obvious connection to the South (104). To conclude, when reading literary texts it is of great importance to contextualize and historicize the narrative and the author, because only when we take that into consideration do we realize that *"the first American detective story is about Black resistance to slavery and the white racial code that aims to deny and combat it"* (White 105).

Furthermore, Edward Kozaczka identifies a story about sexuality or more specifically about the homosexual, "homoerotic" relationship between the narrator and Dupin (60). The two characters meet in an "obscure library", both searching for the same rare book, they live together and share a room in a "time-eaten grotesque mansion" which was long deserted. Because of their daily routine of extensive reading of books, they would be regarded as "madmen", so their seclusion was perfect and as the narrator discovers "We existed within ourselves alone" (Poe 5). Their relationship was not sexual, but something more similar to a friendship, or even mentorship. Kozaczka suggests that "Although Dupin and the narrator never engage in any literal sexual act, which means we should pause before reading them as homosexuals, their behavior borders too closely on the erotic not to be questioned at all" (62).

Moreover, Terry J. Martin also suggests that there are numerous sexual references in the tale, but he is more concerned with the feeling of guilt which arises in the orangutan after committing the crime (41). Even though the ape is an animal which commits a bestial act, the author gives it this human characteristic of guilt, or we can even say conscience. As readers, we even feel sympathy for the orangutan because we intuitively know that he was abused by his master and didn't know better, and being just an animal, the ape is not responsible for its acts. Perhaps we can even interpret this in a different way, contrary to the usual interpretations of Poe as a pro-slavery writer and understand this tale as Poe wanting us to empathize with the monkey, or in this case, with the abused and oppressed slave. As we already know, there are many different interpretations of Poe, especially when we put his works into the historical context of his time, and because of his deliberate surreptitious commentary of the contemporary situation, we can only guess about his real intentions, still the parallel between the orangutan and the slave and the sailor and the master is undeniable.

Likewise, Marta Miquel Baldellou writes about the close relationship between the primates and the blacks, a theory which became very popular in antebellum America. In his



story, Edgar Allan Poe mentions the French naturalist and zoologist Georges Cuvier, whose works Poe had studied and analyzed and may have become his admirer. Baldellou explains that "Georges Cuvier, of humble origins, was a high-respected self-made scholar. And due to his scientific contributions as a naturalist and zoologist, he became a major figure in natural science in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century" (129). Cuvier's work and his theories were popular before Darwin published his famous work *The Origin of Species* (1859), "Cuvier's volume is one of the many pre-Darwinian natural manuals of European origins to which the American readership had access" (Baldellou 128). In his works, Cuvier emphasized the importance of science and scientific reasoning whose main ground is in the observance of meaningful details which are then connected to make a coherent and significant whole. Baldellou suggests that "it is possible to identify Dupin's, and thus, Poe's, methods of reasoning, which resemble some of Cuvier's theories" (131). What Dupin adopts from Cuvier is his analytical method based on inferring various details in order to discover the solution. According to Cuvier's theory, a particular type of species can make an unexpected appearance in an unsuitable environment only through immigration, and not creation or breeding. Baldellou believes that these theories very much resonate with the orangutan's violent and sudden appearance in Paris and in Madame L'Espanaye's chamber (132). The ape was brought to the metropolitan area by a sailor, was removed from his natural habitat and in the end escaped from the captivity in his master's place.

Additionally, Christopher Peterson writes about the doctrine of black animality in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". It is important to stress once again that only in the last part of the tale we can make racial inferences, so many authors believe that the focus of the story is only ostensibly on the animal criminal, but really on the black slave. Peterson suggests that "According to White, the original pretense of Poe's story supposes that the crime has been committed by a human, whereas the second-degree pretense substitutes an animal agent only

to deceive the reader about the criminal's actual human character" (162). Evidently, there are many theories on how one should read Poe's tales and there is no doubt that Poe is a controversial author as suggested by various perspectives used in this thesis. What all the abovementioned authors have in common is the emphasis on historical and situational context when reading literature and their inability to agree on a common ground about Poe's attitudes towards slavery, but what is undeniable is that Poe's works abound with racial metaphors and symbols.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Edgar Allan Poe has always been considered as a writer who was primarily an aesthete, and little attention was given to him and his works from a more political and social perspective. However, in more recent years, many authors and critics have been reexamining other possible interpretations of Poe and his works and have tried to present Poe to the public as a commentator of the many contemporary problems. Also, another debate which appears is the question of what should constitute the literary canon which has an important role in American identity formation, as well as the ways of addressing the African American presence in American literature.

A problem which arises from the attempts to introduce different perspectives on Poe is his controversial Americanness. While some authors believe that Poe's works abound with subtle anti-racist motifs, others believe that due to his slaveholding family background, these motifs are actually references to his pro-slavery views. Despite the controversies, Poe has nevertheless left an important impact on American literature, and his works have contributed to the shaping of American cultural identity. What many contemporary authors suggest is the reexamination of the American literary canon because of the deliberate suppression of African American literature and its influence on American identity formation and its culture. It is

difficult to discern whether Poe was an advocate of racist ideology or simply a product of his time and context as well as a commentator of the contemporary situation, so we cannot draw any definite conclusions about Poe and his significance for the concept of American Africanism and its position in American literature.

Therefore, African American presence is an important part of American history and cultural identity which should undoubtedly enter the literary canon. Hence, the famous African American writer, Toni Morrison, states that "no early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe" (*Playing in the Dark* 32). Besides African Americans, Poe has also addressed the questions of Native Americans and the influence of American expansionist policies which can be seen in Poe's use of oriental motifs and his fascination with the mysterious East. The question of race is an inevitable part of American cultural identity whose presence has not been granted enough significance. Today, many critics believe that 19<sup>th</sup>-century authors, Edgar Allan Poe among them, were actually commentators of the contemporary political and social situation who cleverly hid their real attitudes behind allegories and metaphors. Therefore, Morrison suggest that "The reexamination of founding literature of the United States for the unspeakable things unspoken may reveal those texts to have deeper and other meanings, deeper and other power, deeper and other significances" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 139-140). What we should always keep in mind when reading literature is to contextualize and historicize the work and its author, but we should also be aware that "Invisible things are not necessarily "not-there"; that a void may be empty but not be a vacuum" (Morrison "Unspeakable things unspoken" 136).

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## Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe and his works have always been an important part of American literature and American cultural identity in terms of aestheticism and literary arts. However, little attention was given to Poe from a political and social perspective due to his subtle use of metaphors and hidden references to contemporary problems and events. Modern critics believe that because 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers were aware of the dangers of expressing personal views on social and political matters of that time, many of them deliberately disguised their personal outlooks. Therefore, critics suggest a reexamination of the American literary canon by acknowledging the Africanist presence, the influence of the Native culture, orientalism and American paradigms on American identity formation. One of the advocates of this new approach to literature is the African American author Toni Morrison, who claims that Poe is a key writer for understanding the Africanist presence in the American literary canon. She believes that due to his controversial Americanness, Edgar Allan Poe is a particularly interesting author whose works should be reexamined as an example of the hidden commentaries on many social and political events. Poe wrote his works during the period of American romanticism which is exemplified in Poe's choice of topics which are at the same time intertwined with Gothic elements and racist motifs. In this thesis, Poe's five tales have been analyzed for the purposes of discussing the controversy of his works, but also to show the importance of historicizing a literary work, its author and his background in order to properly understand the message that the author wanted to convey. The tales "Hop-Frog", "Metzengerstein" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" have been examined to show the Africanist presence in 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary works, "Ligeia" served as an example of Orientalist influence and American imperialism, and finally, "The Man That Was Used Up" is an exemplar of the contemporary political situation and problems with Native Americans. This discussion has been taken up to show the importance of Poe and his works in shaping the American cultural identity which has been marked by white supremacy, while other cultures in America have been suppressed and their importance has remained unacknowledged throughout history.

Key words: African Americans, American identity, Edgar Allan Poe, Native Americans, orientalism, slavery, race