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ANIMALS AS PROJECTIONS OF THE SELF IN “THE RAVEN” AND “THE BLACK CAT”

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In

The Department of English

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Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary M. Balkun", written above a horizontal line.

Dr. Mary Balkun, Thesis Advisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Wargacki", written above a horizontal line.

Dr. John Wargacki, Second Reader

“The unconscious is what the Subject represses, and by definition is therefore not consciously expressible by the Subject; however, it constantly manifests itself, quite without the Subject’s intentions, in dreams, unsuccessful/self-defeating acts, slips of the tongue, and even pathological symptoms. These manifestations were for Lacan ‘the discourse of the unconscious’: discourse, because they always show the structure of language” (Bailly).

Since the nineteenth century, Edgar Allan Poe and his works have been under a microscope, carefully dissected by literary critics with varying theoretical approaches. One of Poe’s most profound works, “The Raven,” is a poem in which the narrator is mourning the loss of his beloved Lenore. One of Poe’s most grotesque works, “The Black Cat,” is a short story about domestic violence that ultimately leads to brutality and murder. In both works, Poe projects his narrators into the animals -- the raven and the black cat, respectively -- in order to fulfill the manifestation of his desires. Both animals are projections of the narrator’s subconscious desire, which allows him to embrace his manic, sadistic tendencies. The manifestation of desire through animals in these stories can be best understood through two lenses: Jacques Lacan’s theory about the mirror stage and contemporary animal studies.

Desire plays an important role within Lacan’s study of the Subject’s unconscious. In fact, Lacan “was determined to figure out how desire comes into being with the Subject, the role it plays in constructing the Subject, and how it plays its part in the Subject” (Bailly). Lacan believed that desire was the springboard for all creative endeavors as well as playing a vital role in structuring the Subject. In fact, Lacan argued that “...without desire, you cannot have jealousy, anger, disappointment, narcissistic wounding, or enjoyment. Symptoms including repetition compulsion, hysterical conversions, obsessions, and phobias, all arise from desire; desire is always at the root of whatever problem the analysand is experiencing” (Bailly). Desire builds around an object in order to fulfill a psychological need instead of a physical one. Thus, a conundrum is presented when the Subject realizes the difficulty in formulating a demand to

match this psychological need, which is almost impossible to articulate, let alone justify. In the case of the two Poe stories, the narrators are essentially stuck in the mirror stage of development and therefore impulsively act out in order to fulfill their desires due to a lack of language.

Lacan, a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, spent his life studying the “individual human psyche as a whole entity comprising inseparable conscious and unconscious elements; in Lacanian terms, the ‘birth of the Subject’” (Bailly). One of Lacan’s earliest contributions to the field is the mirror stage, which is a critical reinterpretation of Freud’s work:

Drawing on work in physiology and animal psychology, Lacan proposes that human infants pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror, or represented to the infant through the mother or primary caregiver) produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an “I”. The infant identifies with the image, which serves as a gestalt of the infant’s emerging perceptions of selfhood, but because the image of a unified body does not correspond with the underdeveloped infant’s physical vulnerability and weakness, this imago is established as an Ideal-I toward which the subject will perpetually strive throughout his or her life. (“Mirror”)

Ultimately, the Subject’s ego is established through the mirror stage since it is dependent upon external objects to act as an other. In fact, as the Subject matures and begins to utilize language to form social relations, “this ‘other’ will be elaborated within social and linguistic frameworks that will give each Subject’s personality (and his or her neuroses and other psychic disturbances) its particular characteristics” (“Mirror”).

Furthermore, Lacan believed that there is a structural mirroring between what we say and think, which is attributed to the way the human brain is organized. Lacan also stated that “the

unconscious is structured like a language,” since words are our building blocks while grammar is our structure (Bailly). In addition, Lacan claims that the absence of language creates an internal gap, which becomes the source of motivation that the ego seeks to entertain. In fact, as he writes, “Subjectivity, by definition, requires linguistic immersion on both conscious and unconscious levels. Therefore, desire is at once impossible to fulfill and inescapable” (“Personality”). This process creates a vicious cycle, because the Subject will continue to work toward this intangible desire knowing all the while that it can never be obtained. This is played out in “The Raven” and “The Black Cat” through the narrators’ relationships to their respective animals.

A contemporary critical approach that can also help us understand this relationship can be found in animal studies. This is a recently recognized field in which animals are studied in a variety of cross-disciplinary ways, while humans are understood as animals themselves. Current animal studies can also help us understand our interactions with domestic animals, in particular. In this case, Poe was ahead of his time, since he was studying both the positive and negative interactions between his narrators and their respective creatures in the early nineteenth century. Animal studies not only seeks to understand the relationships between human and animal; in addition, it attempts to understand animals as beings in themselves, separate from our knowledge. Animal studies also examines how humanity is defined in relation to animals, as well as how representations of animals create understandings and misunderstandings of other species. In order to do this, animal studies critics pay close attention to the ways that humans anthropomorphize animals, and they ask how humans might avoid bias in observing other creatures.

In terms of critical work on these stories, a number of critics have considered the ways that Lacan’s theories can be used to look at Poe’s work. Although there has been to date no

research done which examines Poe's "The Black Cat" through the lens of Lacan's theories, some research has been done which examines "The Raven." Danced Wardrop looks at desire and how it makes signification inevitable through language in "Quoting the Signifier 'Nevermore': Fort! Da!, Pallas, and Desire in Language." Due to the raven's repetition of "nevermore," Wardrop explains how the *Fort! Da!* game creates the Lacanian link between repetition and linguistics which creates the signifying chain. Michael Ziser, links Lacan and animal studies and looks at the zoosemiosphere to argue that the reflection in the mirror of the human subject originates in the animal in "Animal Mirrors: Poe, Lacan, von Uexkull, and Audubon in the Zoosemiosphere." Ziser focuses on the zoosemiosphere, the concept that human language belongs to the inanimate world of symbolic language rather than animal sign systems. Several other critics have examined these texts through the lens of animal studies. For instance, Heidi Hanrahan looks at pet-keeping in "A series of mere household events": Poe's "The Black Cat," Domesticity, and Pet-Keeping in Nineteenth-Century America. Hanrahan believes that this particular story merges the gothic and domestic to focus on our darkest desires and impulses in the home, which shatters the nineteenth-century stereotype of domesticity in America. William H. Gravely, Jr. looks at the literary factors that aided in Poe's creation of "The Raven" in "Christopher North and the Genesis of the Raven." Gravel explains how the raven's dark and ominous origins arose from John Wilson's "Noctes Ambrosianae. No. XLI" and "A Glance over Selby's Ornithology." However, there has been no research to date on "The Black Cat" exclusively from the perspective of animal studies. In fact, most of the research about animals in Poe's work focuses on the orangutan in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

It is through Lacan's theories about desire that one can best begin to approach "The Raven." In the poem the narrator is an isolated character whose desire is manifested in a raven.

At the beginning of the poem the narrator is alone with his thoughts, sifting through “many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore” (2). By reading this forgotten book of lore in front of a dying fire, the narrator’s desire begins to emerge as he mourns the physical loss of his muse, Lenore.¹ In fact, the narrator begins to reflect upon the death of his beloved and how he turned to literature in order to distract him from his sorrow:

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
 And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
 Eagerly I wished the morrow;- vainly I had sought to borrow
 From my books surcease of sorrow- sorrow for the lost Lenore-
 For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore-
 Nameless here for evermore (7-12)

Since she has passed, Lenore has become an intangible object, thus, becoming the narrator’s *objet petit a*.² Lenore has now become a construct of the narrator’s mind, most likely changed and manipulated to be the “radiant maiden” he longs for.³ Although the narrator is aware that Lenore is dead, he still whispers her name as if she will respond. In fact, each time the narrator whispers Lenore’s name “an echo murmured back the word ‘Lenore!’” (31). The narrator’s inability to accept the loss of Lenore is emotionally and intellectually incapacitating him,

¹ “The Thing attracts desire perhaps because it is the object of loss itself: the unsymbolisable and unimaginable reality of loss” (Bailly). The Thing is an observable behavior that initially seeks *jouissance*, yet usually ends in self-destruction. Thus, the Thing is considered to be the object the death drive.

² The *objet petit a* is desire pure and simple. The Subject will always desire something intangible rather than an actual object. In fact, Lacan specifies “that the *objet petit a* is the ‘imaginary cause of desire’ rather than ‘what the desire tends towards’, to emphasize that this is not a ‘real-world object’ (a thing), but an object in the sense of ‘object relations’-...” (Bailly).

³ Poe had already lost three of the women in his life that he truly loved. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was two, his step-mother died of tuberculosis when he was a young teenager, and Jane Stanard, a girl that Poe had loved for 14 years, went insane and died.

because he cannot stop thinking about her. It is as if the narrator subconsciously knows that he will never see Lenore again, even in the afterlife, and is desperately trying to prepare for the isolation that he feels now. In fact, that isolation is signaled by the word “nevermore.”

As one would assume, there is some uncertainty regarding Poe’s intent and meaning behind the word “nevermore,” since the raven is an embodiment of darkness and creates metaphysical and psychological implications in the poem. Most critics believe that Poe utilized this word due to his “cultivated penchant for impish hoaxing, mockery, and self-mockery” (Freedman). Not only is “nevermore” an obscure utterance, but the word is also spoken solely by an ominous raven, which anthropomorphizes the creature into possessing the human capacity for speech.

The narrator’s obsession with the lost Lenore becomes increasingly evident when he addresses the raven with three questions: What is your name? Will I ever find happiness again? Will I ever see my lost love, Lenore, again? To all three of these questions, the raven merely utters the word “nevermore.” This callous response not only devastates the narrator but can also be seen as the raven’s refusal to reply. In fact, “however we construe the raven -- whether as objective truth or a projection of the questioner's darkening psyche -- it offers no answer to the questions crucial to the inquirer's comfort and well being” (Freedman). Despite the raven’s perpetual response, the narrator is adamant in pursuing his quest for a more definitive answer to quench his desires.

In regards to the narrator’s first question, he inquires after the raven’s name by asking, “Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly/shore-/Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore” (49-51). The raven replies with “nevermore,” and this utterance can be seen as a refusal to answer the narrator’s question. On the other hand, the

raven's reply could be a way of rejecting the concept of a name in order to insist upon the idea of namelessness. Regardless, this response does not quell the narrator's needs; thus, he proceeds on with his inquisition.

The narrator's second question to the raven is about the prospect of eventual solace. Will he ever find happiness again or will he spend his days in perpetual misery? Desperate for this particular response, the narrator begs, "Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted-/On this home by Horror haunted -- tell me truly, I implore-/Is there -- *is* there balm in Gilead? -- tell me -- tell me, I implore!" (95-97). Again, the raven replies with "nevermore." In essence, the raven is telling the narrator that he will not find respite from his grief, and that he will live the rest of his days alone in misery. What little semblance of reality the narrator has been clinging to truly starts to deteriorate with the raven's response.

Afflicted with the absence of his lost love, the narrator's final question is if he will ever see Lenore again. In fact, the narrator implores, "Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,/It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore-/Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore" (101-103). Once more, the raven replies with "nevermore." This response can either indicate that the narrator will never hold his lover again, or that Lenore's name should remain unspoken in order to further punish the narrator and his desires.

One way to approach the narrator's inquisition is through Lacan's "Discourse of the Hysteric,"⁴ which is the catalyst that leads to true learning. In fact, "It is to the master signifier that the Hysteric addresses his/her questions, but he/she receives as an answer only the

⁴ The master's willingness to answer the Hysteric's questions is an effect of the unconscious connection with the objet petit a. "The hysterical questioning pushes the master signifier up to the limits of its knowledge and leads to the Hysteric's frustration when the limit is reached" (Bailly).

knowledge of that person, which the Hysteric enjoys for want of anything better, although these answers never constitute a satisfactory response to his/her desire” (Bailly). The way in which the narrator, as the Hysteric, phrases his questions is interesting on a lexical level since he does not simply ask the raven questions, he “implores” them. He is essentially begging the raven, the master signifier, to provide him with some type of clarity; however, the raven cannot console him in this manner, which causes the narrator to become even more obsessed with his desires.

The narrator is the Hysteric since he cannot seem to separate illusion from reality, thus becoming even more obsessed with his own desire. In fact, the relationship between the raven and the narrator exemplifies the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage. It is only through his interaction with the raven that the narrator can experience any sort of revelation regarding himself. The narrator as Hysteric emerges as he looks to the raven, the master signifier, and asks him profound questions with the intent of receiving satisfactory responses to fulfill his desire. Frustrated with the raven’s monotonous replies, the narrator yells, “‘Prophet!’ ... ‘thing of evil!- prophet still, if bird or devil!-/Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore, Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted-On this home by Horror haunted-tell me truly, I implore’” (93-96). The fact that the raven cannot answer his questions infuriates the narrator. The narrator then wonders whether the bird has been sent to save his sanity and provide companionship, or if the bird has been sent to mock him and emphasize his loneliness. The raven’s ominous presence serves as an immediate denial of desire through its refusal to respond to the narrator’s questions.

Another way to approach this relationship of the narrator to the raven is through the lens of animal studies. When the narrator first meets the raven he is intrigued in two ways. First, it appears that ravens are not indigenous to where the narrator is located since he asks if he has

wandered from the “Night’s Plutonian Shore,” a reference to the Greek god Pluto, who rules the Underworld (51). Second, the raven simply enters the chamber and sits upon the bust of Pallas, seemingly without any intent to move from that spot. Therefore, the narrator’s inquisition is symbolic for several reasons: The narrator is asking the raven abstract questions that cannot be answered. Thus, the raven’s reply of “nevermore” is essentially telling the narrator that these questions are too abstract and one cannot successfully answer them. Next, the raven almost takes on a religious connotation for the narrator as he seeks answers to his questions. In fact, many believe only God can answer such questions, and usually only when one is dead and meets Him/Her. The fact that the narrator makes these inquiries to the raven can either suggest how highly regarded the raven is to the narrator, or how desperate the narrator is for answers he knows he will never be able to have answered in life.

At first, the raven’s presence provides temporary relief for the narrator, which is made clear when he states, “Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,/By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore” (45-46). Although it is only for a fleeting moment, the narrator finds amusement in talking to the raven as if it were a noble person. However, what begins as a playful interaction between them slowly turns to torment. The narrator begins to feel despair when the raven refuses to answer his questions and only utters the foreboding word “nevermore.” In fact, the narrator’s mercurial demeanor changes the relationship between him and the raven as the poem progresses. Contrary to popular belief, “closely interacting bodies tend to tell the truth” of tension and brutality, not domesticity and well-roundedness (Haraway 26). We seem to think there’s a comradely relationship between humans and animals when in reality there is often tension and brutality. In fact, it appears that the narrator and the raven have merged as one animal being; yet the raven is less impulsive and

more humane, which creates a role reversal. There is also a subconscious anthropomorphism of the bird by the narrator, since the raven starts to exhibit human qualities based on how it interacts with the narrator.

The raven is actually a reflection of the narrator himself and thus exposes the narrator's own despairing psyche as he begins to descend into madness. If the raven is a projection of the narrator, and its behavior is mad, then the raven's maddening repetition of the one word could be seen as itself a sign of madness. In a desperate attempt to keep the raven from reminding him of his lost Lenore, the narrator yells: "Wretch...thy God hath lent thee- by these angels he hath sent thee/Respite- respite and nepenthe, from thy memories of Lenore!/Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!" (88-91). Driven to madness by Lenore, the narrator claims that the only way he may find relief from his sorrow is if he were to turn to heavy drinking. In fact, the narrator suggests that he should indulge in nepenthe, a drink that is used to induce forgetfulness of pain and sorrow. Thus, to chase away this everlasting sorrow, to escape these memories of Lenore, continuing his descent into madness should be coupled with drugs to dull the pain. The narrator is convinced that the raven's presence is in order to serve as a reminder that Lenore is dead. However, as the narrator continues to interact with the raven, the more he thinks of Lenore, thus, creating a vicious cycle. Interacting with the raven makes the narrator crazy, but he continues to do it. At the same time, the raven reminds the narrator of Lenore, yet he keeps interacting with the raven, creating a circular pattern that suggests madness.

Talking to the raven is the only way the narrator can learn anything about himself in order to become fully conscious, yet he doesn't want to do that. The raven is a symbol of lost hope, which is interesting since hope could allow the narrator to hold on to some semblance of reality in order to persevere through his sorrow. Without hope, the narrator cannot hold on to

reality and, thus, descends into madness. The more the narrator interacts with the raven, the more he becomes irate. This anger is not necessarily directed at the raven, but subconsciously the narrator is upset with his own life. He wants an explanation for all of the tragedies and hardship he has endured, and yet no one can supply him with any rational answer in order to console him. Ultimately, the raven's presence is telling the narrator that he must accept his sorrow, that he must admit defeat. Unable to accept this reality, the narrator yells:

“Be that word our sign in parting, bird or fiend,” I shrieked, upstarting-

“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken!- quit the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!” (105-111)

The raven is the voice of truth that the narrator cannot bear to hear. In fact, the raven is ultimately denying the narrator any form of hope in his life, let alone hope of seeing his lost love again. Thus, the narrator's descent into madness, in some ways, is the complete absence of hope, or the result of hopelessness. The raven is ultimately a sign of “hopeless mourning for the absent woman is also despair for the ultimate silence of the word and world. Woman/truth will not be discovered or pinned down” (Freedman). Freedman is essentially give a working definition of madness. The raven is silent aside from uttering “nevermore.” In fact, there is no evidence that the raven ever actually says anything. The whole interaction could have occurred in the narrator's mind. Perhaps the raven knew this stock phrase before he arrived at the narrator's chamber. As the narrator says:

Startled at the stillness broken by replay so aptly spoken,

“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store

Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore-
 Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
 Of Never-nevermore.” (66-71)

Thus, the narrator only understands the beauty of death and suffering.

Ultimately, the narrator must accept the inevitable: that he will always be alone and hopeless, never to be reunited with his lost love. While he sits back in his chair, he tries to calm himself down, “but he cannot banish the thought that whatever his attitude, innocence can never more be his” (Courson). By the end of the poem, the narrator has descended into madness, driven there by his desire as represented in the raven. He sits, exasperated, in his chair just staring at the bird, waiting to see if it will ever leave its perch above the chamber door. However, since the raven is a reflection of the narrator’s subconscious, it will never leave. The raven is the narrator’s projected psyche and he will be haunted by this bird’s presence from now until the day he dies. In fact, if the raven is the projected psyche of the narrator, its leaving would indicate that the narrator is dead. So the lingering bird symbolizes the narrator’s spiraling into madness rather than his dying. He says:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
 On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
 And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,
 And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
 And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor/
 Shall be lifted-nevermore! (113-119)

The stasis in which we leave the narrator in the poem is interesting for he is neither dead, nor alive. Instead, the narrator exists within limbo. Although he is physically alive, he longs for death in order to be reunited with Lenore. However, internally, the narrator is dead since he will never love anyone or anything as much as he loved Lenore. Furthermore, he will never feel anything other than desire to be reunited through death.

The same forms of psychological aggression and paranoia, and the black cat as a projection of the self, take on a much darker and more grotesque form in "The Black Cat." In this short story the narrator feeds into his sadistic desires, especially when intoxicated, and mutilates the family's black cat, Pluto. The progression of violence towards animals from mere annoyance to mutilation is evident as the story unfolds into madness. As noted earlier, Haraway believes that closely interacting bodies tell the truth. Thus, the narrator's actions and rationale for his brutality ultimately shatters domesticity, since owning a family pet emphasized well-roundedness and respect within society. "The Black Cat" entirely decimates this theory. Instead, the story disturbingly challenges the beliefs that animals construct domestic bliss by "showing them incapable of containing our narrator's base impulse. Using elements of gothicism--murder, mystery, concealed bodies--Poe, primarily through the narrator's treatment of a domestic cat, critiques and ultimately dismisses the comforting reassurances of domesticity" (Hanrahan 47). In fact, it is only through the narrator's sadistic desire to inflict pain that he forges any type of relationship with his pets and he does so in order to fulfill his need to be the aggressor. This does not save domesticity; instead, it creates perversity in the home.

To better understand the narrator's sadistic desires, one must first look at the actions brought about by his aggression and paranoia. Actions must develop within and through verbal communication in order to create meaning. In fact, the Subject must manifest verbally in order to

address another Subject. Thus, the Subject presents as capable of being understood through this act of verbalization:

We can almost measure [aggression] in the demanding tone that sometimes permeates his whole discourse, in his pauses, hesitations, inflections, and slips of the tongue, in the inaccuracies of his narrative, irregularities in his application of the fundamental rule, late arrivals at sessions, calculated absences, and often in his recriminations, reproaches, fantasmatic fears, angry emotional reactions, and displays designed to intimidate. (*“Ecrits”* 84)

Through speech the fragmented body emerges and the Subject may become capable of sadistic tendencies, such as “castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body...” (*“Ecrits”* 85). A structural crossroads appears between the nature of the Subject’s aggression and the ego as well as the objects of desire. This usually manifests without the Subject’s intentions within dreams, self-defeating acts, and pathological symptoms. In fact, there is a parallel between the type of aggressive reaction that is expected from a form of paranoia and the mental genesis that produces the delusion that is symptomatic of that form (*“Ecrits”* 90).

It is through desire and the way this is reflected in language and in relationships to animals that one can begin to approach “The Black Cat.” In the story the narrator is an aggressive character whose desire is manifested in his interactions with Pluto, the black cat of the title. The story begins with the narrator explaining how he always had a penchant for animals: “From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition...I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets” (531). During this time period in the American tradition of animal care, loving an animal with “no economic value

demonstrated that a home was functioning as it ought to. In the mid-nineteenth century, animals entered American households in new ways--almost as family members, and as signs of respectable domesticity. Good people--moral people--owned pets, took good care of them and taught their children to do the same” (Hanrahan 43). Therefore, properly caring for an animal helped children to become better adults. A happy pet owner was seen as a balanced, compassionate, and productive member of society. In fact, the narrator states how love for another living creature, let alone an animal, is one of the most “unselfish and unsacrificing” types of love a man can experience (531).

As an adult, the narrator explains how he married at a young age a woman who shared his affinity for animals. Shortly after their marriage they decide to procure a variety of animals to fill their home, such as “birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat” (531). This construct of domesticity allows the narrator to introduce Pluto, the black cat. Although his wife is infatuated with Pluto, the narrator blatantly states that the cat is still his favorite pet amongst the others who inhabit his home. In fact, he says, “I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets” (531-532). This companionship between the narrator and Pluto is evidently reciprocal. However, once the narrator begins drinking,⁵ his personality takes a turn for the worse and he begins to physically and verbally abuse his wife and pets, allowing his sadistic tendencies to emerge.

⁵ Poe was an alcoholic, much like his father. Due to his dependence on alcohol, Poe’s job performance suffered, as well as his writing. In regard to the literary production of his works, Poe’s mood swings fluctuated between periods of creativity and constant publication to periods of no work or publication. It is believed that Poe suffered from manic-depression, which explains why his writings became increasingly disturbing as time progressed because his affliction worsened.

Unlike the narrator in “The Raven,” the narrator in “The Black Cat” succumbs to his sadistic desires brought out by his alcoholism. In fact, the narrator’s initial interaction with Pluto results in what Lacan would call *jouissance*,⁶ or the enjoyment of a particular sensation for its own sake, since there is mutual respect between them. In hindsight, the narrator reflects upon how his tone gradually changes from completely complacent to calculatingly violent: “I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them” (532). While the narrator begins to slowly give into his desires and mistreat the rabbits, the monkey, and the dog, he refrains from mistreating Pluto and shattering their blissful bond. However, this preferential treatment toward Pluto changes the moment the narrator begins to consume alcohol, which ultimately triggers his death drive.

On one particular night, when he comes home completely drunk, the narrator finally gives into his sadistic desires. Miffed that Pluto does not engage him, the narrator angrily grabs the cat, who then bites him out of fear. Pluto’s defensive act perpetuates the narrator’s drunken aggression, which inspires him to maim the cat: “The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut

⁶ *Jouissance* is linked with the death drive, which tends to go beyond the pleasure principal to the point of death. It is through *jouissance* that desire wishes to sustain itself in order to attain some semblance of satisfaction. Lacan believes that “the suffering of loss is as important a part of the game as the satisfaction of retrieval; indeed, the suffering is necessary for *jouissance* to be possible, as the simple presence of the object... would not produce satisfaction” (Bailly). Furthermore, Lacan believes that the object cause of desire is synonymous to the object of anxiety, since the connection between desire and anxiety is the prime structural component within the Subject.

one of its eyes from the socket!” (532). It is through these aggressive actions that the narrator’s desire to inflict pain upon Pluto is completed as he shamelessly mutilates the cat’s eyeball.

Hanrahan notes the narrator’s careful use of language here: “the act of gouging the cat’s eye is preceded by the narrator’s soul and virtue seeming to leave him, and a thrill in doing evil taking their place. This act of brutality marks the narrator...as someone outside the bounds of domestic values and virtues” (Hanrahan 50-51). He reflects upon this event as similar to having an outer body experience and observes that his aggression propelled him into this animalistic state to overpower and conquer his most coveted companion. Thus, the narrator’s deep-rooted sadistic desire to inflict pain has been fulfilled.

Upon waking from this drunken night of brutality, the narrator feels slightly remorseful for his actions, but not entirely guilty. He states, “I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched” (532). Still, the narrator proceeds to drink to excess again in order to wipe the memory from his mind. This consumption of alcohol awakens his death drive once more, and he enters into a “justified” realm of brutality without any empathy.

Afterwards, as Pluto begins to heal, he naturally fears the narrator and flees every time he approaches. At first, the narrator is deeply saddened that the creature he once loved so much now fears him. However, the narrator soon becomes irritated, claiming that, “This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself-to offer violence to its own nature-to do wrong for the wrong's sake only -- that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute” (533). The narrator fully acknowledges the magnitude of his sadistic desire to inflict pain without

any remorse. Rather than rectify these feelings, he gives himself over fully to these acts of violence as a means of expression and cathartic release.

One morning, the narrator gives into his sadistic desires and intentionally slips a noose around Pluto's neck, hanging him from the limb of a tree. He claims that he hung Pluto "*because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence; -- hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin -- a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it-if such a thing were possible*" (533). The narrator acknowledges that his murder of Pluto is wrong, "and yet he does it anyway because he knows he should not, because he knows it will hurt something he loves, and because he knows it will hurt him" (Hanrahan 51). The narrator is also cognizant enough to acknowledge that these actions could affect his soul, if he happened to possess one. Ultimately, the narrator achieves some cathartic release having finally killed Pluto. This desire ultimately surpasses mutilation and enters the darkest realm of sadism and morbidity. It is through the murder of Pluto that the narrator's death drive finally emerges in full. In classical mythology, Pluto is the god of the underworld, thereby associating him with death. By killing Pluto, it is as if the narrator has effectively killed a god, thus, becoming a god himself. Furthermore, although the cat is a projection of the narrator, Pluto's death does not mean that the narrator actually kills himself. Instead, the narrator only kills a piece of himself, his morality. In fact, the narrator makes it abundantly clear that his soul doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. Because he has effectively killed death, the narrator now feels a sense of calm. While death is horrifying, it is as if the narrator thinks he is going to stop death, but in actuality he is speeding up the process by manipulating the lives of those around him. Pluto represents the living embodiment of the narrator's own death drive.

With Pluto's murder, the narrator is momentarily released from the death drive; however, he eventually succumbs to morbidity.

On the same day the narrator hangs Pluto, his house spontaneously catches fire during the night. He, his wife, and a servant make it out of the house just in time to see every possession of theirs swallowed up in the flames. Upon visiting the ruins of his house the next day he sees a crowd of people gathering around one remaining wall "...and [sees], as if graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat*. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal's neck" (533). Stunned by this apparition, the narrator justifies this anomaly as the result of some delinquent cutting Pluto's noose from the tree and throwing him into the window of the narrator's bedroom during the fire as a means of startling him from his sleep. It is through the events of this house fire that a psychological connection emerges: the possibility that the narrator is actually responsible for the fire himself, even unconsciously. As a man who drinks the way that he does, the narrator could have easily set fire to the house in one of his intoxicated stupors. The burning of his house can be seen as the first of many signs that the narrator has not defeated death. In fact, we may never know the true catalyst of this fire, but it is as if the gods have spoken and they renounce the narrator. On the other hand, this fire can be seen as the narrator embracing this god-like role, bringing the underworld up to the earth in order to prove his power of having "killed" death.

As months pass, the narrator cannot shake the thought of Pluto's death and his feelings of aggression toward the animal change to paranoia. In fact, the narrator's paranoia can be understood as the projection of his subconscious onto the deceased cat. He begins to focus, he says, on "the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and

to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented” (534). Although he has fulfilled his unconscious desire to inflict pain and eventually kills Pluto, the narrator cannot find peace. This anxiety begins to trigger the narrator’s over-active death drive. Subconsciously, the narrator is realizing that he didn’t actually kill death, that one cannot kill death. The narrator now fears that Pluto, or death, is haunting him, which is heightening his paranoia. This fear can be seen as the narrator acknowledging that he is not a god, but a mere mortal.

During this paranoid state, the narrator encounters another cat that eerily resembles Pluto:

I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat--a very large one--fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

(534)

This particular splotch of white fur covering the second cat’s chest can be interpreted in two ways: First, this cat is the reincarnate of Pluto and the white mark on his chest is related to where the noose would have been. Second, in a biblical sense the white markings could indicate he is innocent and pure of heart. Regardless, this second cat awakens the narrator’s death drive once more. In fact, the narrator seems to be reduced to taunting death since he cannot control this drive within him.

Apprehensive at first, the narrator is also impressed by the creature’s willingness to love him. However, it is not long until that narrator feels his sadistic desires arise once more. The narrator eventually feels disgust for the cat’s fondness for him; he says, “By slow degrees, these

feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually--very gradually--I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing” (534). Unbeknownst to the narrator, his skepticism towards this new cat is a side effect of guilt. He cannot move past the murder of Pluto, which hinders him from forging a relationship with this new creature. Furthermore, what is interesting about the narrator’s interaction with this new cat is that, aside from adopting him into his home, he never provides a name for him. Instead, he refers to the cat as “the creature.” This breaks the stereotypes of domesticity in the home since he accepted Pluto enough to provide a name, yet rejects the new cat by referring to him as a mere species, creating a definitive line between humans and animals.

The second cat is missing an eye just like Pluto, and the narrator finds himself irritated by this similarity. The second cat missing an eye can be indicative, in terms of the mirror stage, that the narrator lacks self-awareness in his brutality since he isn’t the least bit worried about getting caught. Ironically, this resemblance only causes the narrator’s wife to love the cat even more. Much like Pluto, this cat follows the narrator around in the same loyal manner. However, the narrator finds this irksome and states, “although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly-let me confess it at once-by absolute *dread* of the beast” (535). Since the narrator dreads the second cat for no logical reason, it is evident that he is spiraling out of control. The more this cat shows him affection, the more he longs to destroy it. The narrator’s descent into madness begins to emerge the more that he is in the presence of this new cat. The uncanny resemblance to Pluto, his wife’s attachment, and the cat’s loyalty finally cause the narrator to reflect upon his atrocities toward

Pluto and fear any sort of companionship with this new creature. Coming too close to this animal will throw him over the edge into madness. The second cat could, perhaps, be the actual embodiment of the death drive, and the narrator's closeness to him could lead to murder.

Ultimately, the narrator gives into his death drive and embraces his animalistic side. He explains:

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates—the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself (535-536)

The narrator is now completely immersed in his animalistic side. As Hanrahan notes, “if animals are so similar to human beings, then cruelty against them can no longer be easily dismissed. If animals are merely brutes put here to serve humans, then as such they deserve grateful, merciful treatment” (45). However, the narrator does not provide merciful treatment toward his pets. Instead, he inflicts varying degrees of pain upon them in order to feel a cathartic release. As Hanrahan observes, “the very boundaries that distinguished humanity and reason from animality and impulse are murkier than they might appear” (48). For instance, while the narrator does fit the description of an alcoholic, his most brutal actions occur when he is sober, thus, creating a murky boundary between self and animal.

The narrator's death drive takes over again but this time he moves from the killing of one kind of animal to another, his wife. While walking down the stairs into their basement, the cat cut between his feet, nearly tripping him down the steps. Completely enraged, the narrator takes up an axe and “aime[s] a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal

had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan” (536). Although the narrator, once again consumed by the death drive, tries to murder the cat, he cannot curb his rage enough to prevent the murder of his wife, who merely tried to defend the cat. In fact, those who treat animals cruelly tend to be the most troubled of souls, much like the narrator and his death drive. On the other hand, those who stand up to the abuser in an effort to protect the animal are generally seen as noble individuals, such as the narrator’s wife. By killing his wife who, in fact, is attached to the cat, his wife is now identified with that animal. It is through his intense death drive that the narrator’s rage and obsession become so intense that they lead to his accidentally murdering his wife.

After this event, the narrator sets forth to conceal the body, not calling the police or lamenting her death. Not only is the narrator convinced that he cannot be caught, but he doesn’t call the police because, now like an animal himself, animals do not have the capacity to empathize like a human. Instead, he knows he has to remove the corpse from the house without getting caught by his neighbors and begins to ponder how to dispose of it. The narrator contemplates his options of disposal:

At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard-about packing it in a box, as if merchandize, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of

these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar-as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims. (536)

As this reveals, the decision to wall up the body was not immediate. At first, the narrator contemplates cutting the body into small piece that can be easily burned in a fire. The concept of fire being used is interesting since Pluto's remains were thrown into the house during the fire that occurred shortly after his death. Next, he contemplates burying the body under the cellar floor. The narrator also considers tossing her body into the well on their property or packing it into a box for the porter to unknowingly dispose of. However, he finally decides to wall her body up, just as the monks did to their victims in the early ages. Ironically, the narrator equates himself to monks when disposing of his wife's body, aligns himself with religious figures.

The narrator explains his method of walling up the body based upon the construct of the basement. Within the basement is a wall that juts out further due to a false chimney or fireplace that has been filled with plaster. The narrator takes pride in the fact that he is able to blend the new plaster so that it cannot be easily distinguished from the old plaster. At the end of this endeavor the narrator expresses pride in his work, stating, "[w]hen I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed...I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself-'Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain'" (536-537). It is evident that the narrator is convinced that nothing is going to happen to him, that he will face no repercussions for his murderous actions. Once the narrator has disposed of the body he begins looking for the cat that had been the catalyst for his actions and resolves that he must kill the beast. However, the cat is nowhere to be found.

The narrator's act of walling up his wife is animalistic. When an animal kills its prey, it usually buries the carcass so that no other animal can find it and steal it. This also allows the

animal to go back to the place of burial, dig up the decomposed remains, and either continue to feast on the bones or to look upon this kill as some sort of trophy. The fact that the narrator kills his wife, walls her up, and takes pride in his burial is indicative of this animalistic state. It is as if the narrator has now become the cat. Once he buries his wife, he walks back upstairs and endures several days of peace and quiet.

When the police finally arrive to investigate the premises in order to find his missing wife, the narrator is not in the least bit concerned. In fact, he gloats, "I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained" (537). Overconfident at the prospect of escaping murder, the narrator detains the officers by bragging about the overall sturdy structure of his home. However, when he knocks on the wall where his wife has been buried, he hears a sound that resembles the cry of a child: "a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman -- a howl -- a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have risen only out of hell" (538). The narrator equates the cat's fearful cries to those of a small child, giving human qualities to the animal. This anthropomorphism is evident: the cat takes on the human form that impulsively calls out for help when the police are in the basement, whereas the narrator takes on a more animalistic role by trying to hide the evidence, cover his ears, and escape detection.

When the police open up the wall they find the rapidly decomposing body of the wife and the living cat. The narrator states, "Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!" (538). The cat

is both a projection of the narrator and his death drive. The narrator, in the throes of the death drive, thinks he can get away with anything since he has already killed twice without any consequence. However, the narrator has just discovered that this is not the case; he has been caught. The cat – and the death drive -- has led the narrator to his own death.

Reflections of the narrator's own mind, the cats expose his dark desires. It is Pluto who first exposes the narrator's sadistic psyche as he begins to descend into madness. In a desperate attempt to keep Pluto's death from reminding him of his animalistic side, he begins to focus on his other interactions, making sure he stays away from those he can harm. The narrator is then convinced that Pluto's ghost is there to serve as a reminder of his horrific brutality and haunt him for the duration of his life. It is the new cat who exposes the narrator's animalistic side when his unyielding aggression results in the murder of his wife.

The black cats are symbols of death and demonic tendencies. The more the narrator interacts with each cat, the more aggressive he becomes. This anger is not necessarily directed at the black cats themselves, but subconsciously the narrator is upset with his own life. In fact, it is interesting to see how the narrator becomes paranoid when he kills Pluto; however, he is not paranoid when he murders his wife and discovers the other cat to be missing. Instead, the narrator confidently believes that his death drive has surpassed its purpose since he feels he has defeated death.

According to Hanrahan, domesticity is “the system set up to control uncontrollable impulses, [that] brings violence out of the *master* instead of the animal” (Hanrahan 49). Through his uncontrollable impulses and violent desire, the narrator “has committed the following infamous acts of domestic violence: using a penknife to cut out one of Pluto's eyes; hanging Pluto from a tree the following morning, ‘in cool blood, . . . with the tears streaming from [his]

eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at . . . heart' . . . and, finally, killing 'the wife of [his] bosom' . . . with an axe and subsequently entombing her in a basement wall" (Sibriglia 24). The deeper the narrator's desire to inflict pain becomes, the deeper the sadistic pull he feels in committing these atrocities. It is through his interactions with the cat, that the narrator can give into his animalistic side.

In both of these works, Poe brings the reader face to face with a narrator whose nemesis becomes the animal he interacts with the most. It is through these interactions that the narrators' desires, impulses, and needs emerge. The narrators subconsciously project themselves onto these animals, showing that they are stuck in mirror stage, which is associated with infancy.

In "The Raven" the narrator is child-like in the way he interacts with the ominous bird. At first, the narrator is impressed when the curious raven enters his chamber in the dead of night and perches himself above the bust of Pallas. Instead of forcing the raven from his chamber, the narrator decides to interact with him by questioning his origins. Their interaction starts off in a docile manner; however, like any child, once the narrator does not get his way, he grows irate and takes his frustrations out on the innocent bird. When the raven does not answer the narrator's abstract questions pertaining to the afterlife, the narrator begins to yell at the bird and threatens to remove him from his home; however, the raven does not budge. Although the narrator does not physically harm the bird, his temper tantrum reveals his child-like disposition and his inability to cope with loss.

In "The Black Cat" the narrator is child-like in the way he interacts with both black cats. At the beginning of the story, the narrator explains how he always had a loving relationship with all of his pets since he was a small boy. However, as an adult, the narrator begins to find joy in causing each of his pets some modicum of pain. Like any child, the narrator loves it when his

favorite pet, Pluto, give him attention. When Pluto ignores the narrator, though, he aggressively grabs the cat and hurts him in order to teach him a lesson. This act emphasizes the narrator's child-like nature because when a child is upset he or she will often act out physically and hit others to show frustration since he or she has not fully developed the capacity to express emotions through language. Again, when the new cat almost trips the narrator as he is going down the basement stairs, the narrator decides to kill the cat with an axe and murders his wife instead. This particular narrator is much more aggressive and primitive in his reactions than the narrator in "The Raven," who simply yells and stomps his petulant foot.

In this infantile state, each narrator identifies with his respective animal. In fact, this identification allows the reader to see a vulnerability in each narrator as well. For instance, in "The Raven" the narrator identifies with the bird by acknowledging his ominous presence to represent death. Thus, the narrator's vulnerability is the constant state of mourning his lost love Lenore. Due to his overwhelming desire to be reunited with her in the afterlife, the narrator identifies with the raven as a means of gaining a better understanding of death. If it is possible to be reunited with Lenore, the narrator may be so inclined to take his own life in order to rid himself of the pain he feels in missing her. However, since the raven cannot provide the narrator with a concrete answer for this particular reunion, it creates uncertainty and anxiety that will forever haunt the narrator until his own eventual death.

In "The Black Cat" the narrator identifies with the cat by concealing his dark desires in the same sly manner as his pet. The narrator's vulnerability is the private, internalized pleasure of inflicting pain on smaller, weaker creatures. In nineteenth-century America, domesticity ruled the nuclear family that produced well-rounded citizens who would one day contribute to society in a positive manner. The narrator wears this façade in the domestic sphere of his home to avoid

detection by the outside world. However, much like a sly cat, the narrator begins to slowly give into his sadistic desires by casually maiming his pets. On the surface, the narrator looks like an average civilian contributing to the community, but internally the narrator is seething with violent rage which is slowly emerging in the privacy of his home. The effect of the narrator's death drive on the home is that it is no longer a safe domestic space. Instead, the house is more like a zoo, filled with legitimate animals as well as humans who have reverted to their primal selves in the most grotesque and brutal manner.

As each narrator "matures," he enters into social relations through language. In fact, language issues, or the lack thereof, arise between the narrators and their respective animal in each text. In "The Raven" the narrator and the raven exchange words through a dialogue. The narrator asks the raven various abstract questions in order to put his mind at ease, yet becomes increasingly exasperated when the raven's only reply is "nevermore." The raven's limited capacity for speech shapes the narrator's ego since the bird is destroying his hopes of seeing Lenore again. Conversely, the narrator's advanced capacity for speech shapes the raven's ego since he is holding the bird to such a high standard to provide impossible answers.

In "The Black Cat" there is a lack of language between the narrator and the black cats, except for the "child's cry" that the new cat emits when he is discovered buried alive in the basement wall. The cats never once "speak," whether it is a phrase like the raven's "nevermore" or an animal sound. Thus, when the narrator maims Pluto, it is his body language that speaks volumes. When the new cat almost trips the narrator down the basement stairs, he does yell at the creature while wildly wielding an axe that he buries in his wife's skull. Again, it is the narrator's aggressive body language that gives the reader a clear indication of his psyche. However, when the narrator knocks on the basement wall, startling the new cat, the creature emits a high-pitched

child-like cry that scares the narrator and alerts the police that something insidious lurks behind the mortar. This gesture, and the cat's response, is also indicative of the narrator's psyche. There is a change that shows the anthropomorphism of the cat and the animalism of the narrator: "Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall" (538). While the cat cries, the narrator falls into the wall cowering in fear that he has just been caught. This is the only example of "speech" that the narrator makes clear occurs throughout his recounting of events in the story. In fact, this lone speech act causes the narrator to see that he is not above death, nor is he a god. The narrator did not kill death when he murdered Pluto. Instead, Pluto's death triggered a series of events that eventually fulfills the narrator's own death drive since now he will actually be killed. In its single speech act, the raven represents the eternalness of death, whereas in "The Black Cat" the single speech act consigns the narrator to death.

Ultimately, when confronted with an ideal they can never attain, the narrators in "The Raven" and "The Black Cat" lash out in a child-like, aggressive manner, and the main cause is envy. In "The Raven" there is a doubling of the ideal: the first ideal is Lenore, but she is now unattainable; the raven then comes along to mock that impossibility and present a new one -- as specified in the "nevermore" it utters. Thus, these two ideals prove to the narrator that nothing will ever be the same for him: Lenore will never return, which ultimately means that the narrator will never again be whole. Since the narrator cannot deal with the unattainable ideal image, he yells at the raven in order to remove him from his chamber because his presence is a constant reminder of all that he has lost and cannot get back.

In "The Black Cat," Pluto is the ideal. Upon murdering him, the narrator receives the ultimate cathartic release that reveals his sadistic desires as the death drive. Due to his death, Pluto is now unattainable, which causes the narrator to go crazy with pent-up sadistic energy.

When the second cat comes along, his presence taunts the narrator with what can never actually be recovered. Therefore, the narrator is skeptical of the second cat's intentions and refrains from establishing a relationship until he is sure of the cat's motives. Ultimately, the narrator's response to this new cat is territorial. By murdering Pluto, he has symbolically killed the mythological god of the Underworld, and become a god himself. Relishing this authoritative position, the narrator becomes the alpha in his home and the second cat is then encroaching upon his territory, leading him to further engage the death drive and closer to his own death. This ideal proves to the narrator that nothing will ever be the same for him: despite what he believes, he will never kill death, nor escape it.

Poe's narrators are stuck in the mirror stage, which hinders them and does not allow their egos to grow and mature. Rather than developing crucial coping skills to deal with their desires, impulses, and needs, they irrationally act out, by yelling and hurting those around them as a means of self-expression. This is most obvious in the way each narrator projects himself upon a nearby respective animal in dealing with death. Ultimately, in both works loss and the death drive lead to madness and the finality of death. No one can beat death; it's an inevitability that cannot be escaped. In both of these works the animals serve as conduits of the knowledge that the ideal is never achievable and the end result always being the same: death.

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