



“The ‘Cats’ from Hell”: The Long Shadow of Poe’s Feline in the Short Fiction of Flannery O’Connor and Stephen King

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RESEARCH

ubiquity press

ABSTRACT

In one of his most famous stories ever written, “The Black Cat” (1843), Edgar Allan Poe chose an animal as a protagonist. However, this pet was going to have an afterlife as one of the most devilish creatures created by the pen of the Bostonian. More than a century later, Flannery O’Connor included a story in her MFA Thesis entitled “Wildcat.” Years later, in 1955, her most recognized story, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” was published. Both narratives include a cat, in this case not as a main “character,” but as the element that triggers the subsequent tragedy. In 1977, the magazine *Cavalier* published a short story by Stephen King under the title of “The Cat from Hell.” King’s cat also drives its owner to physical and mental destruction, as Pluto, the wildcat, and Pity Sing had done before it. This article is based on how three stories (O’Connor’s “Wildcat” –1947– and “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” –1955– and King’s “The Cat From Hell” –1977–) recreate the characters of the anonymous cat and of Pluto in their pages. Moreover, this article also intends to prove the influence of Poe’s “The Black Cat” on authors like Flannery O’Connor and Stephen King.

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KEYWORDS:

Edgar Allan Poe; Flannery O’Connor; Stephen King; Gothic; cats

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Correoso-Rodenas, J. M. ““The ‘Cats’ from Hell”: The Long Shadow of Poe’s Feline in the Short Fiction of Flannery O’Connor and Stephen King”. *Anglo Saxonica*, No. 20, issue 1, art. 1, 2022, pp. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/as.70>

The influence of Edgar Allan Poe on many twentieth and twenty-first century authors is, beyond any doubt, immense. How these writers use Poesque resources, characters, locations, among other aspects, has been studied in so many different ways that more and more arguments can be added every year, as Benjamin Franklin Fisher claims: “Poe’s Gothicism cast shadows over many later works of fantasy, science, and detective fiction – not to mention the numerous “modern Gothics” that continue to pour forth – just as it enters the work of Edith Wharton, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, Hart Crane, Stephen King, and much else” (91).¹ Flannery O’Connor and Stephen King are but two examples of this influence, sharing the peculiarity that both have included devilish cats in some of their most remarkable works. “THESE” cats, as presented by the authors, completely fulfill the category of Gothic characters and/or elements.² Poe himself refers to the: “[...] ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise.” (850) The relationship of both Flannery O’Connor and Stephen King with Poe has been proved by studies such as those by Harold Bloom (1986), Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne (1987), or Tony Magistrale (2014) among others.³

Besides, the authors themselves have recognized Edgar A. Poe as one of their main sources of inspiration. O’Connor, in a letter to “A”⁴ dated 28 August 1955, affirms about her readings: “The Slop period was followed by the Edgar Allan Poe period which lasted for years and consisted chiefly in a volume called *The Humorous Tales of E. A. Poe.*” (HB 98)⁵ The influence of Poe on O’Connor’s works does not only come from *The Humorous Tales*, but from many other texts. Indeed, “The Black Cat” will also appear in her (probably) best known novel: *Wise Blood* (1952). At the end of the novel, the main character, Hazel Motes, replies to his landlady: “‘Well, it’s not normal. It’s like one of them gory stories, it’s something that people have quit doing – like boiling in oil or being a saint or walling up cats,’ she said. ‘There’s no reason for it. People have quit doing it.’” (CW 127)⁶ Concerning Stephen King, this author has been pointed out as one of the most prominent inheritors of Edgar Allan Poe.⁷ Many of his novels clearly acknowledge that influence. According to Ramakrishna:

The influence of Poe on King is evident from his statements as well as his use of Poesque motifs in his own works. King tells Mat Schaffer in an interview that he discovered Poe when he was in grammar school and from Poe he went on and discovered people like Ambrose Bierce and some of the other classic short-story writers and H. P. Lovecraft (144).

King’s essay *Danse Macabre* (1981), too, locates Poe among the masters of the genre.

This article is based on how three stories (O’Connor’s “Wildcat” –1947– and “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” –1955– and King’s “The Cat From Hell” –1977–) recreate the characters of the

1 In a similar way to Ib Johansen. See Johansen, Ib. *Walking Shadows: Reflections of the American Fantastic and the American Grotesque from Washington Irving to the Postmodern Era* Brill/Rodopi, 2015.

2 Other authors could be brought to the discussion, like for instance Joyce Carol Oates (born in 1938). See, for example, Nadal, Marita. “Variations on the Grotesque: From Poe’s ‘The Black Cat’ to Oates’s ‘The White Cat’.” *Mississippi Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2004, pp. 455–471. However, the limits of this publication have prevented us of going any further, narrowing the debate to authors who are related by acknowledged influence).

3 The latter, a well-known Poe and King scholar, clarifies the nature of this relationship: “[...] I have always situated King’s writing as part of a distinctly American literary tradition – emblematic of the uniquely Gothic vein that connects him to a lineage beginning with the New England Puritans, with their emphasis on innate depravity, and a particular distrust of natural wilderness, as well as the most readily identifiable Dark Romantic skepticism of Poe, Hawthorne, Twain, and Lovecraft.” (356).

4 “A” will be later discovered to be her life-long friend Betty Hester.

5 Abbreviations used for Flannery O’Connor’s works:
HB: *The Habit of Being*.
CW: *Collected Works*.
CS: *Complete Stories*.

6 Furthermore, the critic and scholar Irving Malin states a new relation of O’Connor’s cats with Evil in his classic seminal book *New American Gothic*, when he describes the end of “The Life You Save May Be Your Own:” “Completely evil (like the Misfit), he nevertheless realizes that selling and abandoning people is disgusting: it takes the following comment of a boy to strengthen the insight: ‘You go to the devil!... My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a stinking pole cat!’” (68).

7 As, for instance, by D. Ramakrishna, who states: “[...] King acknowledges Poe’s influence on his writings, even going to the extent of making Poe and himself characters in ‘The Blue Air Compressor’ (1981) in a metafictional style [...]” (13).

anonymous cat and of Pluto in their pages,⁸ establishing a narrative continuum and presenting a collection of common characteristics analyzed in the following pages. These stories have been selected because of plot similarities, and because these cats look and act as if they were descendants of the ones created by the author of “The Black Cat.” These similarities and connections can be divided into six categories, that will help to build the structure of this paper: “external aspect,” “unknown origin,” “perversity,” “influence on people,” “tragic outcome,” and “reappearance of the cat after the tragedy.”

2. EXTERNAL ASPECT

The physical appearance of the protagonist animals of “The Black Cat” can be easily remembered. The anonymous narrator, before proceeding with the description of his relationship with the pet, offers a portrayal of the animal:

We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a *cat*.

The latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree (850, Poe’s emphasis).

Later on, Pluto will be substituted by a second cat, lacking the privilege of a name. The only “objective” information about this animal comes from the intoxicated testimony of the narrator: “It was a black cat – a very large one – fully as large as Pluto. [...] this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white [...]” (Poe 854) The advent of this second cat can easily be considered the first of the recreations of the black pet that will be shown in this essay. Poe took his own baton and continued the perverse line which had begun with the first cat’s death and whose influence and presence in readers’ memory still lasts until the present day.

“Wildcat,” the first of the two stories by Flannery O’Connor included in this study, offers a few details about the animal which turns the life of Old Gabriel into a nightmare, such as that it was (and is) a wildcat, something coming from outside the village and falling into the Freudian description of the uncanny. None of its external features is depicted (an explanation for this can be, perhaps, the blindness of the main character and victim, Gabriel).⁹ On the other hand, it is not known either how Pitty Sing (the cat of “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”) looks like. However, when Pitty Sing is first introduced in the story (about a page after its beginning), blackness appears in regard to him and its *doppelgänger*, the grandmother: “She had her big black valise that looked like the head of a hippopotamus in one corner, and underneath it she was hiding a basket with Pitty Sing, the cat.” (CS 118) This brief description links the cat of “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” with its two predecessors: besides the black valise included in the scene, the cat is actually hidden beneath it, creating in this way a dark refuge for it, a black cave-like space that will only be abandoned at the end of the story, in order to cause the fatal accident. This valise that covers it, too, is described as big, “[...] like the head of a hippopotamus in one corner [...]” (CS 118) establishing a possible relation to the animal appearing in “Wildcat,” certainly a huge one. Finally, when the accident happens, Flannery O’Connor gives the only known details about Pitty Sing: “[...] –gray-striped with a white face and an orange nose– [...]” (CS 124–125) Certainly, this is not a black cat, but its features somehow resemble those of Pluto and the second Poesque cat. Pitty Sing can be considered a decolorized version of Poe’s animals, or their specter. On the other hand, its white face and its orange nose link it to King’s cat. The first of these characteristics (the white face) is fully shared with its 70s’ descendant, and the second (the orange nose) may be a reference to that Hell pointed by King (in the title of his story) as the home of his macabre animal.

Finally, the cat introduced by Stephen King in his pulp fiction story can be considered a respectable descendant of the second Poesque cat, the one that came from the stupified dreams of a drunkard and provoked the final disaster of the tale. After the hired assassin Halston has been welcomed in the house of the old Drogan, he finds the animal purring on the

8 The last one even counts on the support of Ramakrishna’s testimony: “King’s horror tale, ‘The Cat from Hell’ (1977) has obvious echoes of Poe’s tale of murder and retribution, ‘The Black Cat.’” (151).

9 However, some other aspects of the cat’s looks are actually included within the story. One of them is its smell: “There it was one evenin’ –different from all the smells around, different from niggers’ and cows’ an’ ground smells. Wildcat.” (CS 29) It is unknown how Poe’s cats smelled, but their sense of perverseness (using his own expression) turns them into disgusting beings, making it easy to believe that their smell was not pleasant.

carpet and tries to play with it. However, an unknown sense of terror stops him, even if armed with a pistol: “Its face was an even split: half black, half white. The dividing line ran from the top of its flat skull and down its nose to its mouth, straight-arrow. Its eyes were huge in a gloom and caught in each nearly circular black pupil was a prism of firelight, like a sullen coal of hate.” (King 353) That white spot, not in the breast this time, but in the head, is a remarkable sign to be considered. Both cats are depicted as filled with hatred and, indubitably, both have that singular external feature.

3. UNKNOWN ORIGIN

The cats of the selected stories also share this characteristic, making them even more disturbing and scarier for the reader in a way foreboding the role they play in the tales. Neither the characters nor the readers are aware of where these cats come from, even if their destiny will be well-known and crucial. The first of the Poesque pets (Pluto) seems to have belonged to the couple for many years, at least since the moment they got married. The only note about its origin is given by the narrator (also of unknown origin) which includes it among the other pets the man owns. Pets are also depicted as the only obsession of the man, at least until alcohol appears on the scene:

I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets.

[...]

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. [...] We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and *a cat* (850, Poe’s italics).

Pluto is described as that *primus inter pares*, an animal included in a general list and distinguished from it due to typography and onomastics. Besides these distinctions, nothing is revealed about its origin. Later events will present it as a being who has a dark and intriguing future ahead. On the other hand, Pluto’s substitute is also portrayed as lacking a public origin. It is found as an adult animal and adopted by the alcoholic and murderous narrator:

One night as I sat, half stupified, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what caused me surprise was the fact that I had no 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 (854).

Unlike Pluto, this second and anonymous cat comes to illuminate the narrator’s moral and mental night. Unlike Pluto, too, this cat appears not in a comfortable and welcoming environment, as that of the newly married couple adopting it as a beloved pet, but involved in dark and hostile circumstances: at night, in a tavern and surrounded by the vapors of alcohol. This difference will be decisive in the future development of both animals: the first one, used to the comforts of a family will become a victim of vice and obsession; the second, “born” at the eve of an alcoholic breakdown of its future owner, will turn to be the agent of his destruction.

In the case of Flannery O’Connor, it is possible to appreciate an inversion of the two animals described by Poe. The first of her cats, which has the leading role in “Wildcat,” can easily be assimilated to the second Poesque cat: “‘When I was a boy, there was a cat once’, Gabriel started. ‘It come ‘round here huntin’ blood. Come in through the winder of a cabin one night an’ sprung in bed with a nigger an’ tore that nigger’s throat open befo’ he could holler good’.” (CS 26) In both cases, the cat is intimately linked to an obsession. While Poe’s is linked to the narrator’s dependency on alcohol, O’Connor’s is to the mania of Old Gabriel with the animal itself; the rest of his life is going to become a continuous purgatory anticipating the return of the mysterious beast to the village, and a preparation for this second coming. This “training” is not unjustified:

It was a thump, thump and maybe a snarl, away, muffled, and the shriek, far away, then louder and louder, closer and closer, over the edge of the hill into the yard and up on the porch. The cabin was shaking with the weight of a body against the door. There was the feel of a rush inside the room and the scream was let in (CS 29).

Besides this relation of the cat with an obsession that marks and poisons the existence of the main characters, both the second Poesque cat and the wildcat share the property of coming (or having been found) in a location associated with Gothic literature. While Poe's pet first appears in a dark tavern or bar, on top of a barrel, O'Connor's beast is said to be native to the forest next to the village: "Gabriel sniffed. 'It comin' out the woods for mo' than cows. It gonna git itsself some folks' blood. You watch. An' yawl goin' off huntin' it ain't gonna do no good. It goin' huntin' itsself. I been smellin' it'." (CS 27) Both the tavern and the woods are spaces typically used in Gothic literature. The first one is related to addiction which, according to Carol Margaret Davison, is a main feature of Gothic, since many of its main works and characters present a sense of addiction in one or another sense, being alcohol, sex and opium perhaps the most illustrative examples.¹⁰ The second has populated American letters more or less related to the Gothic since colonial times. For instance, we only have to remember classical examples like Mary Rowlandson's (ca. 1637–1711) *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682), the importance of the forest for the Salem Witch Trials (1692–1693), Charles Brockden Brown's (1771–1810) *Edgar Huntly* (1799), Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804–1864) *The Scarlett Letter* (1850), etc.¹¹ This would expand since the arrival of the 20th century, having Flannery O'Connor penned a story set next to a forest also with a narrow linkage to the Gothic ("A View of the Woods" -1957-).¹²

Then, the second part of the inversion mentioned above is established between Pluto and Pitty Sing, Poe's first animal and O'Connor's last. As already mentioned, both cats share the privileges of being named and of enjoying the comforts of a home. In both cases, too, neither the author nor the narrator offers any relevant information about how the cat entered the life of the families they are living with. It is assumed that both animals have been with their owners for a long time, certainly long before the beginning of the tragic occurrences that happen in "The Black Cat" and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." In fact, both Pluto and Pitty Sing are so beloved by their owners that they are contained within their most precious belongings.

Finally, Stephen King's animal is narrowly linked to Poe's second cat, since they appear in a specific moment and cause death and destruction around them. The night plays a key role in the first appearance of both cats. It is used to mark the altered state of consciousness of the future owner (by means of alcoholic poisoning or of regret) and what Edgar Allan Poe had pointed about "witches in disguise," assimilating the time of the witch with the time of the black and white cats. Both beasts have also in common being (apparently) abandoned and unprotected. Nobody seems to be in charge of them, and that is what moves the characters of "The Black Cat" and of "The Cat from Hell" to adopt the animals:

It was Gage who saw it first, whining and skulking around the house. He tried to drive it away. He threw sticks and small rocks at it, and hit it several times. But it wouldn't go. It smelled the food, of course. It was little more than a bag of bones. People put them out beside the road to die at the end of the summer season, you know. A terrible, inhumane thing (357).

Even if it is impossible to guess where those cats had been prior to their appearances, Stephen King points out a little detail to help the reader in this task. The ambivalence of meaning of the last syntagmas "A terrible, inhumane thing" (357) and the explicit title of the story induce the reader to suppose that the cat is indeed a supernatural being, something sent to take revenge for the thousands of cats murdered by Drogon on the altar of science. Then, King makes a new

¹⁰ For more information on this subject, see Davison, Carol Margaret. "The Gothic and Addiction. A Mad Tango." *Gothic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2010): 1–8.

¹¹ For more information, see Murphy, Bernice M. *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

¹² For more information about the relation of this story with gothic literature, see Correoso Rodenas, José Manuel. *La literatura gótica llega al nuevo Sur: Influencia y reformulación del gótico en la obra de Flannery O'Connor* Fundación Universitaria Española, 2020, pp. 234–239.

4. PERVERSITY

This essay has already dealt with the external features of the protagonist animals of these stories. However, little has been said about their “personality” or internal character. Among the common attributes these animals have, their purported perversity rises above all other, because it will become the triggering fact that will lead each of the stories to their *dénouements*. The four cats are seemingly not only perverse, but also full of hate and resentment. And they will act as the weapon for their owners to pay for their sins, as well. It must be said that, even if the cats are perverse, the humans in charge of them are not less evil. In this way, the three writers build a perverse owner-pet quartet. The Poesque narrator hides the secret of having killed Pluto; Old Gabriel has lived a life full of secrets with his family and his neighbors; the grandmother is a mean and selfish person who does not even hesitate to put her family’s lives at risk to satisfy her desires; and, finally, King’s Halston and Drogan have turned death into their way of life and business, having caused the death of thousands of humans and animals. So, the supposed perversity of these hellish felines is perfectly paired by that of the human protagonists of these stories.

The issue of perversity regarding the cats is not easy and would deserve a much more detailed attention. However, we can mention some remarkable studies as fundamental. Some of these would be Russell Sbriglia “Feeling Right, Doing Wrong: Poe, Perversity, and the Cunning of Unreason” or Sean J. Kelly “‘I Blush, I Burn, I Shudder, While I Pen the Damnable Atrocity’: Penning Perversion in Poe’s ‘The Black Cat.’” The first of these studies, bringing philosophical concepts to the discussion, links “The Black Cat” with other Poesque texts related to the concept of perversity. From there, the author establishes an interesting linkage of all these literary pieces with the aesthetic concepts of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), one of the most influential thinkers that shaped the Romantic movement. On the other hand, Kelly’s article travels from the general perspective offered in the previous example to the particularities of perversity within “The Black Cat.” However, an interesting connection can be drawn between both texts, for Kelly also relies on the influence of another influential German philosopher who contributed to shape the Romanticism: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Like Hegel, Kant also developed his own concept of the aesthetic perverse, and that is what is explored here, using the short story as a materialization of what was exposed by the genius of Königsberg.

In “The Black Cat,” this sense of perversity is announced twice, in regard to the two cats the anonymous narrator owns. The first time it appears is after one of the two tragic outcomes of the tale has been performed. Pluto has already been hanged and “The fury of a demon instantly possessed [...]” (851) the protagonist. After this terrible event has taken place (and by means of it), the dead cat inspires a new feeling in the soul of its owner, an emotion he had never experienced previously and which leads him to commit an even more terrible crime:

And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of human heart – one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man (852).

Even if that “PERVERSENESS” is not directly associated with the animal, it is undoubtedly through its ghostly presence that the man becomes such a primitive and perverse being, associated from now on with violence and bestiality.

The second mention to this sense of perversity in Poe’s story comes after the second and unnamed cat has joined the man in the (now) abusive and poisoned home. This perversity, unlike the previous one, will be described as directly related to the new pet (who receives its effects), which now scares the man: “[...] the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimæras it would be possible to conceive.” (855)¹³ The new cat now both inspires and annihilates the soul of the man, as Ann Radcliffe

13 This Poesque reference to Radcliffe’s concepts of terror and horror contribute, once again, to associate this story with the Gothic of the previous generation.

would say.¹⁴ The horror-inspiring animal has to be full of perversity in order to accomplish its macabre task: to fully destroy the man who has killed its predecessor.

The perversity of O'Connor's cats is better illustrated by her first beast, the wildcat; however, Pitty Sing will also be shown to represent a moment of high perverseness. As mentioned above, only a little is known about the animal which has become the obsession of Old Gabriel during his entire life. Unlike the rest of the pets included in this study, the perversity the wildcat displays is fully developed since its very first appearance, bringing, from the deepest and darkest part of the woods, death and pain with it. Indeed, when Old Gabriel narrates the story of the wildcat's first coming, he adds a macabre detail which is extremely useful to depict the "personality" of the cat: "[...] sprung in bed with a nigger an' tore that nigger's throat open befo' he could holler good;" (CS 26) a page or so later, Old Gabriel will conclude his narration with a prophecy: "It comin' out the woods for mo' than cows. It gonna git ifssef some folks' blood." (CS 27) The purported perversity of the beast is not satisfied with one murder; it needs more blood. As it will be seen for King's hellish pet, O'Connor's wildcat is going to have a victim in all of its appearances in the tale. Not as perverse as the wildcat (a force of Nature), Pitty Sing will deploy its perversity at its own level, only performing a small, exceptional action. Nevertheless, this little movement will provoke the assassination of the whole family: "The instant the valise moved, the newspaper top she had over the basket under it rose with a snarl and Pitty Sing, the cat, sprang onto Bailey's shoulder." (CS 124) Then, the animal scratches its owner's son's shoulder and causes his loss of control over the car. This (apparently) fortuitous accident marks the beginning of the last scene of the story, in which the whole family becomes the victim of The Misfit and his minions. (Un-)surprisingly, Pitty Sing will be the only survivor of a situation its claws had begun.

As mentioned above, King's cat needs to victimize a character in each of the scenes in which it is included. When the story opens, and Drogan is giving Halston the details of the unusual job he will be paid for, a small account of the animal's qualities is offered. Among them, its supposed perversity irremediably arises: "'He's very friendly,' Drogan said. 'At first. Nice friendly pussy has killed three people in this household. That leaves only me. I am old, I am sick... but I prefer to die in my own time.'" (354) A small, innocent creature, the cat has already been responsible for three deaths. Even if nobody talks about perverseness in this tale, the fact that the animal has already killed three people and being preparing the fourth murder, according to Drogan, makes it very difficult not to include this animal within the definition of "perverse." This quotation, too, links the perversity of the animal with that of the owner. Even if his life is coming to an end, he does not want to pay for his sins and crimes. His total lack of empathy towards cats makes him to prefer the murder of a little animal than to accelerate the end of his not so innocent existence. Then, the cat's inner evil might be understood as justice: Drogan will suffer seeing his beloved ones dying one by one before leaving this world, being punished in the same way the cat has been.¹⁵ Finally, what these (just or not) actions expose is that the cat is not an innocent animal, but a beast full of perversity.

5. INFLUENCE ON PEOPLE

Related to the previous characteristic of perversity, it must be said that these cats have an unnatural influence on the humans around them. Part of this influence can be explained because of the perversity that people attribute to them, with the humans being attracted to observe any macabre action performed near them; however, this does not justify the whole explanation of the matter. The influence these cats seem to have on their owners and other humans goes beyond any reasonable explanation and concedes them an(-other) quasi-supernatural quality. This influence is so strong in some of the cases that the human characters of the stories build their actions and live according to what the cats are or what they seem to wish. This influence makes that the humans stop being free in order to satisfy the cats' perversity, although they (the humans of these stories) can also be understood as victims of their own obsessions, with

¹⁴ In reference to her essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry," where the concepts of "terror" and "horror" are defined.

¹⁵ It is interesting to notice how both the cat and Drogan suffer the same punishment as is inflicted upon Victor Frankenstein: King's old scientist and businessman loses all the members of his family like Victor is deprived of his brother William, his friend Clerval and his wife Elizabeth. In the same way, it can be interpreted that all the cats Drogan had killed with his experiments ("[...] about fifteen thousand cats... uh, expired" -355-) were somehow related to the cat from Hell.

the cats just as triggering factors. This would open a new interpretative hypothesis, which would place the cats as projections of the human characters' minds.¹⁶

Once again, Poe's building of this feature is portrayed in two tempos, along the existence of the two cats which appear in "The Black Cat." Perhaps, this influence on the narrator is more easily perceived when dealing with the figure of Pluto. During a reasonable part of the tale, the man has not yet become obsessed with alcohol, so his soul and mind have more space to be taken by the cat.¹⁷ After describing the external features of the animal and having given account of its intelligence (also after having disserted about witches in disguise), the narrator deals with his peculiar relation with his pet: "Pluto – that was the cat's name – was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets." (850–851) The man feels so united with the animal that he does not allow anyone to be its food purveyor. Along with this, the fact that the cat goes with him wherever he is led to creates something similar to an aura of mystery around the human, an aura that will later on be substituted by the influx of alcohol and violence. Even if the couple owns many other animals (some of them very exotic, like the monkey), the man only feels obliged with the cat, as if this dark animal had a strange power over him. On the other hand, the influence of the second black cat is depicted in the already quoted sense of terror and horror that overwhelms the narrator's soul. He, previously a free man (previously to his own act of destruction that in a way enslaved him, an enslavement of his own doing), feels now doubly enslaved: by addiction and by his new adopted pet. At the end of the story, he will try to break the chains of one of these masters, only obtaining his own destruction as a reward.

The perverse influence of the wildcat on Old Gabriel has already been discussed. It has been mentioned, for instance, that only one sight of the animal has been enough to poison his entire life and his relatives', too. Because of the first arrival of the wildcat, Old Gabriel acquired a new sense of belonging to the land, making it impossible for him or his descendants to leave the place where the cat "Come in through the winder of a cabin one night an' sprung in bed with a nigger an' tore that nigger's throat open befo' he could holler good." (CS 26) He needs to wait for the second coming: "'Ain't no mistakin' a wildcat. Ain't been ne 'round here since I was a boy. Why don't yawl set a spell?' he added." (CS 27) A whole life of obsessive remembering is the present the wildcat gives Gabriel, along with the promise (a promise of which he is the only interpreter) of coming back. This quasi-religious sense Old Gabriel now feels is the great influence the animal has over his person, an influence that will only terminate with his death.

The relationship established between Pitty Sing and the grandmother is as strange as any relationship this lady can have with any being, human or animal. She has such a high concept of herself as to think she is the center of the Universe,¹⁸ and everyone around her must fulfill her wishes. At the very beginning of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," this peculiar and disastrous characteristic of the old lady is announced by June Star, the wittiest of her grandchildren: "'She wouldn't stay at home to be queen for a day'." (CS 117) The grandmother does not want to miss anything the family is doing in their holidays, even if that implies the risk of going through an area where a serial killer has fled prison. This aim of control over everything and her image of being the center of her relatives' lives is what pushes her to bring the cat with them. This unconscious and commiserate action will finally be the cause of the fatal accident which will lead the family to an inglorious death in the middle of a forest: "She didn't intend for the cat to be left alone in the house for three days because he would miss her too much and she was afraid he might brush against one of the gas burners and accidentally asphyxiate himself." (CS 118) Two different feelings are expressed in this statement. The last of them is probably the only sample of mercy expressed by the grandmother, and it is shown regarding a cat, not any of the members of her family. The other one, not casually written before, is her real preoccupation. She is not as worried about the cat's death as she is about how much it is going to miss her. Once again, she places herself at the core of the cat's universe. Then the question arrives: how does this cat influence the grandmother? Unlike the cases of Pluto and King's cat,

16 Unfortunately, the limits and scope of this this article are not enough to completely articulate this statement. However, future research can benefit of what is posited here, and develop interesting new fields of Poesque knowledge.

17 Although alcohol and violence are also present.

18 Which also opens an interesting research path for future actions.

in this story there are no previous explicit examples of the grandmother taking care of her pet. The only mention to this dedication is her insistence on bringing it with the family, even if it means to hide it under her luggage. However, having in mind the “perverse” nature of these cats analyzed above, it is not difficult to imagine, in a speculative level, that this cat had the plan of destroying the family, and the holiday trip is the perfect occasion to perform it. Then, the cat would have showed as the perfect pet with the grandmother, its only granter of a seat in the family car. This done, it would only have to wait until the perfect moment appears, when the family is next to The Misfit, a character with whom the cat will be seen to be in very good relations.

Finally, the cat portrayed by Stephen King shows the highest doses of intelligence. From the beginning, its true objective seems to be Drogan, the man responsible for the murder of fifteen thousand cats with his experiments, especially if we consider all the scenes of the story together. However, the cat will not attack him at first. Prior to this, it will eliminate any possible supporter of the old man, as seen above. The cat wants a face-to-face combat, and nobody can interrupt it, so from the valet to the hitman hired to kill it, everyone needs to be eliminated from the scene. On the other hand, the intelligence of this cat is so superb that it does not show its true intentions. Before proceeding with its macabre plan of eliminating its competitors, the animal makes the effort of gaining the family members’ confidence. Then, when they believe it to be a new friend, it is easier to commit the murders. It has already been quoted how the cat appears at the house’s door (“It was little more than a bag of bones” –357–), and this circumstance will be used by the hellish animal to provoke pity on the women in the house, who accept the task of feeding and taking care of it: ““She brought it inside herself, in her arms. It was purring, just as it is now. But it wouldn’t come near me. It never has... yet. She poured it a sauce of milk. ‘Oh, look at the poor thing, it’s starving,’ she cooed. She and Carolyn both cooed over me. Disgusting’.” (357–358) As it can be deduced from the quote, Drogan did not succumb to the cat’s charms. He will always see it as the true menace it is. Nevertheless, there will be nothing he can do: the animal will continue to increase its influence over his family to the point that his own sister and the *fiancé* he had in his young years will prefer the animal to him.

6. TRAGIC OUTCOME

All the aforementioned characteristics can only lead to a collection of tragic consequences. Indeed, the four stories included in this essay finish with a tragedy, expressed in the death of one of the main characters. As previously mentioned, the cats are directly involved on how these outcomes develop, playing key roles in them, as they have been doing during the entire stories. None of these pets is innocent of the deaths with which Edgar Allan Poe, Flannery O’Connor, and Stephen King decided to close their texts; on the contrary, they are the main cause. Without the cats, it can be deduced that these characters would have had a much greater opportunity to survive. In addition, the animals show a voyeuristic aspect since they like to witness the actions they have provoked, standing present during and/or after the tragedies they have provoked.¹⁹

Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Black Cat” can easily be divided into two different outcomes, each of them related to one of the cats starring in the tale. Both Pluto and the unnamed animal will have their own end and, finally, the second one will cause the end of the man. These Poesque tragic outcomes are undoubtedly related to the narrator’s second obsession: alcohol. Drinking will turn him from being an animal-loving person to coldly kill two cats (moved by deliberation the first and by passion the second) and to kill his wife. The first of the narrator’s murders can be related to that previously mentioned influence of the cat on him:

[...] hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it if such a thing were possible even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God (852 Poe’s emphasis).

By killing what he loves the most, the narrator is committing the most terrible sin. So, the revenge taken on him will have to be proportional. He has turned love into death, so death will be the only fair payment for his crime. Death and destruction will be the only consequences this

19 See Section V.

man can expect. Later on, it will be seen how the imagined death of Pitty Sing in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” follows a similar pattern (“[...] he might brush against one of the gas burners and accidentally asphyxiate himself” –CS 118–), establishing a new connection between the two animals. The ultimate cause of the death is the same: privation of oxygen; in addition, the mention of the gas burners is also related to the mysterious fire which destroys the narrator’s house in Poe’s tale:

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair (852).

However, this is just the first of the two tragic outcomes appearing in “The Black Cat.” The second one will be related to that revenge his sin has unleashed. The second cat, as the spectral image of Pluto it probably is, causes and witnesses the second and real tragic outcome of Poe’s story:

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed 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 (856).

It is the cat following the man what makes him take the axe, and consequently murder his wife, when trying to kill the animal.²⁰ Now, the cat’s task is accomplished, and its revenge has been taken. The man is now destroyed and alone, nothing is left for him. He can only wait for the police to discover his crime and for the justice to hang him, as he hanged Pluto. The cat has performed the last wink of its influence on its owner, exasperating him to madness.

As any reader of Flannery O’Connor would know, most of her tales, even if presenting a pleasurable plot, almost always finish with a huge tragedy in which the main characters lose their lives. “Wildcat” and “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” are not exceptions. The quiet life of Old Gabriel and of the family will terminate tragically by the influx of a perverse cat, directly the first (since it is the cat who kills the man), and indirectly the second (since the cat provokes the accident). The obsession of Old Gabriel with the wildcat he saw in his youth, along with his hope of seeing it again before dying, makes him a close observer of the signals that can bring news of the animal to the village. Then, the smell he feels proud of recognizing (“[...] different from niggers’ and cows’ an’ ground smells” –CS 29–) is a signal he can easily read. At the end of the story, he is totally ready to receive the wildcat; or he thinks so:

There was a sudden scratching by the chimney. He sat forward, tense, tight-throated. “Come on,” he whispered, “I here. I waitin’.” [...] He should have known that won’t it. It won’t no farther than the barn yet. [...] He smelled it right outside, noising the hole. He had to climb onto something! What he going toward it for? He had to get on something high! There was a shelf nailed over the chimney and he turn wildly and fell against a chair and shoved it up to the fireplace. [...] His stomach flew inside him and stopped hard and the shelf board fell across his feet and the rung of the chair hit against his head and then, after a second of stillness, he heard a low, gasping animal cry wail over two hills and fade past him; then snarls, tearing short, furious, through the pain wails. Gabriel sat stiff on the floor (CS 31).

Like the character of “The Raven,” Old Gabriel has to confront an unknown force. Even if he has been all his life preparing himself for this moment, when it comes nothing can be done. The cat, in this case both witness and actor, brings with it all the dark strength he has acquired in

20 However, the intentions of the narrator are not clear. For more information about the legal and criminal implications of “The Black Cat,” see the essay by Vicki Hester and Emily Segir, or the articles by Clark Moreland and Karime Rodriguez or by Susan Amper, included in the References.

the woods. Bats, darkness, and chaos are its weapons. O'Connor paints a quasi-religious scene in which a man must face a life full of disgraceful (and unconfessed) sins.

On the other hand, the outcome of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is less allegorical than the previous one, and more definite. Unlike at the end of "Wildcat," everyone knows what is happening in any moment of its *dénouement*. However, this tragic outcome in which the cat plays a central role is divided in two parts, creating a grotesque and macabre drama. The first part gives the cat all the prominence, and it is depicted as a car accident:

The instant the valise moved, the newspaper top she had over the basket under it rose with a snarl and Pitty Sing, the cat, sprang onto Bailey's shoulder.

The children were thrown to the floor and their mother, clutching the baby, was thrown out the door onto the ground; the old lady was thrown into the front seat. The car turned over once and landed right-side-up in a gulch off the side of the road. Bailey remained in the driver's seat with the cat –gray-striped with a white face and an orange nose– clinging to his neck like a caterpillar (CS 124–125).

This is the first scene of the tragedy that is going to destroy the whole family, being the second one the mass murder that will cover the next pages. Pitty Sing will certainly not kill the family, but its action (conscious or not) is what triggers the tragedy. However, Pitty Sing is not acting alone in this outcome: its *alter ego*, the grandmother, will be the first character involved in the car accident with her "[...] thought [that] was so embarrassing [...]," (CS 124) which is her inner recognition of her mistake, a satisfaction her family will never enjoy.

After this, the mass murder develops following an *in crescendo* pattern: the reader does not get many details of how the first victims are taken into the woods. As the crime goes on, more and more information is given, for example, when The Misfit steals Bailey's shirt:

Bobby Lee and Hiram came ambling back from the woods. Bobby Lee was dragging a yellow shirt with bright blue parrots in it.

"Thow me that shirt, Bobby Lee," The Misfit said. The shirt came flying at him and landed on his shoulder and he put it on. The grandmother couldn't name what the shirt reminded her of (CS 130).

The final act of this mass murder and of the tragedy closing the story is the assassination of the grandmother, of the person responsible of five innocents' (including a baby) deaths: "She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them." (CS 132)

However, according to what will be explored in the next section, this final shooting can be interpreted differently, as the definitive victory of Pitty Sing over its *alter ego*, becoming the only survivor and the holder of the evil which has destroyed the family; a burden the animal will have to share with The Misfit, because the criminal metaphorically gets part of the poison that has tainted the family life when he feels like he has been bitten by a snake. The new duo will continue its macabre mission in a time-space coordinate unknown for us.

As mentioned above, there is a gap in the storyline of "The Cat from Hell," a moment in which nobody knows what happens. The reader can only go to the consequences to guess the horror lived by Halston in those final moments. The outcome of this story and the final scene are mysteriously separated, a strategy used by Stephen King in order to create an open ending, just giving the indispensable details to picture the whole set.

After the hitman has accepted the "easy" duty of killing the cat, he takes it far from the house to perform his crime. However, the animal, like the second Poesque cat, cannot allow the murderous man to finish its existence, at least without paying a price. In this case, like in "The Black Cat," the price will be the highest possible, for the hitman will lose his life during the commission of his task. Besides, the pen of Stephen King could not only leave Halston dead, but the humiliation and defeat had to be complete. That is why the cat will reappear in the way it does:

Halston batted at the cat on the dashboard with his fist. It was blocking his field of vision. It spat at him, arching its back, but it didn't move. Halston swung again, and instead of shrinking away, it leaped at him.

Gage, he though. Just like Gage–

He stamped the brake. The cat was on his head, blocking his vision with its furry belly, clawing at him. Halston held the wheel grimly. He struck the cat once, twice, a third time. And suddenly the road was gone, the Plymouth was running down into the ditch, thudding up and down on its shocks. Then, impact, throwing him forward against his seat belt, and the last sound he heard was the cat yowling inhumanly, the voice of a woman in pain or in the throes of sexual climax.

He struck it with his closed fist and felt only the springy, yielding flex of its muscle.

Then, second impact. And darkness (366–367).

Once again, the action of the cat is exemplified by stabbing a driver with its claws, emulating the previous outcome designed by Flannery O'Connor. However, there are two main differences with the preceding story that contribute to link this tale with Poe's narration. The first one is the revelation Halston "suffers," when he says that "Gage [...]. Just like Gage–." (366) Indeed, the valet of Drogan was appointed to abandon the pet after it had already killed two people. However, this task was never going to be accomplished because the road trip ended tragically for the servant, who lost his life in a mysterious car crash. After it, the cat had returned home, convincing the old man he needed "professional" help to solve his problem. The same fate is going to fall over Halston, beginning a driving with no end. Poe's second cat also employed a similar resource to punish his killer. Even if there are no cars or other vehicles in Poe's story, the claws of the animal are also used to hit the wall, alarming the policemen who will arrest the protagonist. The second similarity lies on the last line: "Then, second impact. And darkness." (367) After the Poesque cat has condemned its owner by discovering the walled corpse, a figurative darkness falls over the story. The fate of the narrator can only be guessed,²¹ but there are not certainties in this respect. Probably, the first factor of this dubiousness is the narrator himself, who tells his own story to the moment of his detention. Nevertheless, Stephen King is going to complete this second gap, writing what happened time (minutes, hours?) after the collision.

7. REAPPEARANCE OF THE CAT AT THE END OF THE STORIES

Notwithstanding, these tragic and terrible outcomes are not enough for a group of beasts certainly conceived and born in Hell. A common characteristic of these tales is a final reappearance of the cats. The last pages (and paragraphs) are usually reserved by the authors to draw the last movements of these animals. These actions are always related to the horrible previous scenes in which they have been directly or indirectly involved. The cats, after having witnessed murders and provoked deaths, reappear triumphantly to collect the perverse honors of their accomplished deeds. This also establishes a new characteristic common to all the selected stories: an open ending. Indeed, since the animals do not die, their evil influence is still in the world; and, since the moment the full stop is typed, they can seek for new victims, as King's animal will explicitly do. All these stories are akin for a sequel, in which the cat will be (again and even more clearly) the main character.

Once again, as "The Black Cat" actually presents two black cats, it is necessary to differentiate between the two moments in which the animals reappear, as it was necessary to explain the two outcomes of the story. After their death, both animals come back from among the dead to torment their owner and murderer. As explained above, Pluto has an explicitly and well-developed reappearance, which is in the figure of the second anonymous cat. However, this will not be the only way in which the beloved pet stars a last scene. After the mentioned fire destroys the house of the narrator and his family, something more terrible than the material ruin is discovered: Pluto, the hanged animal, is somehow still in the house, haunting it and its inhabitants. The unearthing of the relief puts before the man what his life is to become after

21 The gallows are indubitably the most probable destiny of the character.

that moment: madness and death. The man's conscience is not at peace, so he needs to prove himself that what he thinks is not right. That is the reason why he visits the smoking ruins of his life. What he finds there is what he both expected and feared to see: his crime is not forgotten; he still has to pay for it.

The words "strange!" "singular!" and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given without an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal's neck (853, Poe's italics).

The most terrible work of art is depicted in the scenario where a crime was committed, so all the strength of that terrible event is engraved with the silhouette of the cat on the wall. Pluto needed to be avenged, and it will certainly be so. This first part of "The Black Cat," if considered as an independent story, is the only one of the selected texts which doesn't lack the mentioned explicit sequel: it has it in the second part of the narration, and the new cat is the direct successor of the dead one.

As mentioned above, the last paragraph of "The Black Cat" is reserved for a new reappearance, that of the second animal. If the second coming of Pluto had provoked the destruction of the house and the wealth of the family, the apparition of the second pet will be the cause of the imprisonment (and presumably the death) of the narrator. Once the police have exonerated the main character of giving more explanations about the strange noises coming from the house, the black beast starts the mission of ruining his fabulous plan. By tapping the wall (with its claws), the black cat assimilates itself to the tell-tale heart, and causes the same effect: the agents open a wall and discover the perverse truth lying behind the confident attitude of the narrator. It is the cat, and not the corpse of the wife which condemns the murderer, since the body would never have been found without the intercourse of the animal:

On my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. 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! (859).

The last sentence of this paragraph (and of the tale) is widely debatable. There is no previous proof of the man walling the animal with his murdered wife. However now, when the stones are removed, the beast reappears too. Nevertheless, there is a difference between this image of the cat and the ones depicted in the previous pages: its eyes. The reader has not got any information about the eyes of the cat in its descriptions (especially that of its encounter in the tavern). Now, the animal shows its real face, with red eyes, which links it directly (by means of the color's significance) both with a hellish creature and with Pluto and its *bas relief*, carved by fire.

"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is a perfect example of all the ideas explained in the introduction to this section: 1) in its end, Pity Sing comes back, clean of the blood it has contributed to shedding; and, 2) the story, as it stands, traces the perfect beginning for a second tale, a sequel. After The Misfit has finished his task by shooting the grandmother to death, some paragraphs are left before the end of the narration. Most of them are dedicated to the final conversation between The Misfit and his minion Bobby Lee, closing the *oeuvre* with an immortal sentence: "It's no real pleasure in life." (CS 133) However, before this talk, Pity Sing, a character which has been forgotten by the reader since it stabbed Bailey with its claws and caused the accident, reappears: "Without his glasses, The Misfit's eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking. 'Take her off and throw here where you thrown the others,' he said, picking up the cat that was rubbing itself against his leg." (CS 132-133)

Many details can be extracted from this short quotation. It was mentioned above that this ending can also be the beginning of a new series of murders, in which The Misfit and the "innocent" creature will be accomplices. Indeed, the paragraph closes with an explicit act of adoption: the criminal accepts the (also criminal) pet within his gang, beginning a new phase. As explained previously, Pity Sing does not accept any competitor, and that is why it allows

the shooting of the grandmother, the only person who had ever cared for it. This, along with the fact that The Misfit and Bobby Lee argue right after, can be interpreted as a signal of what is going to be the first perverse action of the new duo: the annihilation of Bobby and Hiram, its new competitors for the power and the influence on the true criminal.

A new connection between this tale and “The Black Cat” can be established by paying attention to The Misfit. Poe’s cats’ endings (death and end of the story) are narrowly linked to the red color. As it can be deduced from the quotation, The Misfit is now completely under the perverse influence of the animal, since he has “[...] eyes [that] were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking.” (CS 133) His red eyes associate him both with the fire that kills Pluto and the red eyes of the second cat at the closing of the Poesque tale. On the other hand, his defenseless-looking eyes contribute to emphasize what has been outlined in the previous paragraph: the cat has taken possession of him, and The Misfit is now to become a slave of the true beast in the story.

Finally, as it has been seen in the previous sections, the outcome of Stephen King’s story is the most tragic and shocking. In it, the animal physically reappears, literally destroying the body of the murderer:

“What the Christ?” He reached out, grasped the dead man’s shirt, and pulled it up.

Will Reuss looked – and screamed.

Above Halston’s navel, a ragged hole had been clawed in his flesh. Looking out was the gore-streaked black-and-white face of a cat, its eyes huge and glaring.

Reuss staggered back, shrieking, hands clapped to his face. A score of crows took cawing wing from a nearby field.

The cat forced its body out and stretched in obscene languor.

Then it leaped out the open window. Reuss caught sight of it moving through the high dead grass and then it was gone.

It seemed to be in a hurry, he late told a reporter from the local paper.

As if it had unfinished business (374).

These last paragraphs of the story are not only an exhibition of Stephen King’s aesthetics of the macabre and his usual display of blood and entrails. King’s cat is not the only one which physically destroys its enemy. This outcome, even with less clearness was also depicted by Poe and O’Connor. Poe’s narrator, by presumably being condemned to be executed, must face death. He assumes the hangman is going to be his executioner, so his neck (body) is going to get broken. In O’Connor’s “Wildcat,” the final fight between Old Gabriel and the animal ends with the man lying defeated on the ground, with all his body completely broken.

Once again, as seen for Poe’s and O’Connor’s cats, an open ending is left, and more crimes are delineated. However, in this case the forthcoming crimes are more obvious than in the other narrations: Drogan is going to be the next victim of the pet, closing then the circle of revenge it started by penetrating his house and destroying his family.

CONCLUSIONS

Various instances which help to demonstrate how Poe’s one specific story (“The Black Cat”) strongly influenced later well-recognized authors as different as Flannery O’Connor and Stephen King have been shown. These inheritors took certain elements from Edgar Allan Poe’s story and re-adapted them to their own social and literary contexts, and to their own plotlines. The cats have been used as common linkage between the stories. From then, the analyzed common structure is applied to very different plots. A quasi-Biblical fight with a mysterious being coming from the woods, the mass murder of a suburban, middle-class family, and the revenge of an animal genocide, are the topics chosen by O’Connor and King to honor the author of “The Black Cat.” Their hellish pets, as Poe’s ones, have neither beginning nor ending, making them obscure

creatures which belong to the rank of supernaturalism. On the other hand, the four cats play a similar role: they have to destroy the *status quo* and irreversibly change the situation. As Benjamin Franklin Fisher pointed out in the quotation cited at the beginning of the present essay, the shadow of Poe (and of his cats) is long enough to overwhelm different narrative styles and traditions, from Southern Renaissance to postmodern horror. The great “posthumous” influence of Poe’s “The Black Cat” has also been proved. This has aided to inspire prodigious minds that were to come, filling the imagination (and horrors) of writers and readers for more than a century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


This article is part of the activities of the Research Group “Poetics and Emerging Textualities: 19th to 21st Centuries” (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain), the Research Group “Multidisciplinary Studies in Literature and Art –LyA–” (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Spain), and the Research Groups’ Network “Aglaya: Cultural Myth-Criticism 2020–2,” sponsored by the regional government of Madrid.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Melanie Stanek Seitzer, MA (Writing Center, University of Nebraska at Omaha), for her style suggestions on the first draft of this paper, and to the University of Limerick (especially to David Coughlan, PhD) because the final version of this article was finished during the months I spent there.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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DOI: 10.5334/as.70

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Correoso-Rodenas, J. M. "The 'Cats' from Hell": The Long Shadow of Poe's Feline in the Short Fiction of Flannery O'Connor and Stephen King". *Anglo Saxonica*, No. 20, issue 1, art. 1, 2022, pp. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/as.70>

Submitted: 07 August 2021

Accepted: 20 January 2022

Published: 02 February 2022

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