

Poes motifs- familiar,
yet different



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Poe's Motifs- Familiar, Yet Different What motifs does Edgar Allan Poe use? He actually has several recurring themes- but why? Why is Poe drawn to these things to use in his works? Some are related to his life, and some just enhance the stories. Three of the many motifs that Poe uses are death, animals, and masquerades. Poe had several pets, he loved animals- which would explain why he uses them so much in his stories. In *The Tell Tale Heart* the murderer dehumanize his victim by comparing him to an animal. The narrator claims to hate and murder the old man's "vulture eye," which he describes as "pale blue with a film over it." In *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the joke behind the crime is that the Orang-Outang did it. The total ridiculousness of the crime baffles the police, who can't think of who would commit a motiveless crime with such brute force. Dupin uses his brilliance to determine that the crime just couldn't have been done by a human. In *The Black Cat*, the murder of Pluto results from the narrator's insanity and alcoholism, the second cat however, behaves more cunningly, tricking the narrator into murdering his wife, and then meowing behind the wall the narrator covered her up with, alerting the police that someone was behind it. Earlier in the story, the narrator mentions he loves animals- much like Poe- and his parents gave him birds, fish, a dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat. In *The Cask of Amontillado*, Montresor mentions in his family arms there is a serpent with its large fangs in the heel of a foot stepping on it, and the motto "no one harms me with impunity." The second recurring theme Poe has used is masquerades.

You'll recall his use of balls and parties in a lot of his stories. For example, in *The Cask of Amontillado*, Montresor uses the carnival's masquerade to

fool Fortunato into his own demise. Masquerades carry the traditional meanings of joy and social liberation, reality is suspended, and people can assume another identity. In Hopfrog, a masquerade is thrown by the king -??? On some grand state occasion??“ I forgot what??“ the king determined to have a masquerade???- which Tripetta and Hopfrog plan- while planning something much more grim- Hopfrog??™s revenge on the king.

In The Masque of the Red Death, the retreat of Prince Prospero happens during the palace??™s lavish masquerade ball, when The Red Death arrives in a bloody costume and brings his guests their death in person. And lastly, the most gruesome and gory of all his motifs; Death. This theme happens the most often, because it??™s in nearly every single one of his stories. Why does Poe use death so much Possibly because many of his loved ones and relatives died, so it??™s all he has known.

Another reason is it adds an even more gothic feel to his stories, more dark and grim. One could name all his works that include death, but it??™s all of them. In Hopfrog after a carefully devised plan, the King and his Advisors are covered in highly flammable tar and flax, then rise above the crowd on a chandelier, where they are incinerated and all burn to death. In The Black Cat and The Cask of Amontillado, his wife and Fortunado are imprisoned behind a wall, left for dead. The Tell-Tale Heart, The Pit and the Pendulum, Never Bet the Devil Your Head, Annabelle Lee, The House of Usher- All have gruesome and descriptive death scenes.

The narrator is driven to madness by the old man and kills him, burying his heart below the floor, Nicholas goes insane and thinks he is his father, and

kills his former love and her lover, while his father killed his wife and her lover- both of these pairs died in a torture chamber, the main characters head is taken by the devil, but lives for several hours until dying, two lovers are separated- ??? That the wind came out of the cloud by night, Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.??? The list goes on and on and on. Edgar Allan Poe is a master at thinking up death scenes, they are all so elaborate and thought out and descriptive, so you can tell he had a dark and thoughtful mind. So, while death, animals, and masquerades are some of Poe??™s well known motifs don??™t mean they??™re the only ones. He has plenty more- all great writers do. These motifs affect his works by giving him a style- so one can know what to expect. But don??™t go thinking that he??™s predictable- he can still surprise someone and shock people in new ways, because each story is so different, but familiar. That??™s his genius- these motifs are used again and again, but he uses a different approach on each one.

That??™s the mark of a good writer, and a smart mind. That??™s what I think.