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"Do the Surroundings Matter?" —On the Thematic Ambivalence of the Urban Setting in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt"

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[A good story] establishes not truth but verisimilitude.
J. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, p. 11, *italics mine*

Among genres long since completed and in part already dead, the novel is the only developing genre. It is the only genre that was born and nourished in a new era of world history and therefore it is deeply akin to that era…
M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 4

The city of Los Angeles is ravaged by crime and immorality!
Escape From L. A. (1997)

This paper focuses on the thematic ambivalence of the urban setting in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". First, both the detective stories were written in 1841 and 1842, when the general American public was pursuing material wealth, and the large American cities kept expanding. However, a close textual examination of the two stories will reveal that the urban setting seems to be distantly connected with the theme, namely, the occurrences of the murders. On the other hand, once the socio-historical perspective is introduced, then the urban setting readily seems thematically related to the stories. Thus, the thematic ambivalence of the urban setting in the two stories is presented. On the other hand, if this thematic ambivalence needs to be perceived, Poe's stance on the trend of urbanization must be pinpointed. It turns out to be that Poe has taken a rather ambivalent attitude about urbanization of his times. Most of all, he has clearly translated his ambivalence into a descriptive nonchalance in his two stories. It is at this point where the truth about on the thematic ambivalence of the urban setting will manifest itself. That is, now that the author's judgment of urbanization is lacking, the urban

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setting can't be automatically related to the two stories. But if the two stories are examined in a broad socio-historical context, the urban setting may be correlated with the story theme.

Keywords: (Edgar Allan) Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", the thematic ambivalence of the urban setting, urbanization

Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe has long been reputed to be "the father of detection" in consequence of his three short detective stories featuring a detective figure, C. Auguste Dupin: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842), and "The Purloined Letter" (1845) (Symons, 1985, p. 35). Charles J. Rzepka (2005) also recognizes Poe as the first true establisher of the conventions of the detective story that define the genre through to the present day (2005, pp. 31-54)[1]. We have to note that Poe composed all of his three detective stories while he was living in Philadelphia, and that interestingly, the setting of both "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is Paris, a city Poe clearly had never been to.

At this point, several crucial questions have to be asked: Has Poe thematically introduced his urban experiences into "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" through his depictions of the urban setting of Paris? If so, how is the urban setting of Paris thematically correlated with the two detective stories? Basically, this paper has been written on response to the questions. To be more specific, I intend to answer the questions by following these steps: first, outline the trend of urbanization in Poe's times, then pinpoint Poe's stance in this trend, and then discover how Poe's attitude is mirrored in his detective stories.

The Trend of Urbanization in Poe's Times: From Social Realities to Ideology

Poe composed "The Murders in Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" in 1841 and 1842, when Andrew Jackson's (1767-1845) presidency just came to an end, the first Whig President, William Henry Harrison (1773-1841), just passed away right after elected, and John Tyler became the 10th American president. Meanwhile, the U.S. just weathered the Panic of 1837, when "all signs indicated that the country was in a serious depression. Hundreds of banks and other businesses failed. Land and commodity prices collapsed. Unemployment spread and wages fell" (Klose & Jones, 1994, pp. 165-173). Even so, ordinary American people then were still under such an impression:

> The men and women who came to live in America had a special dream, a special hope…a new republic, a safe place for liberty…The new nation became independent. It prospered and it grew larger…Americans were proud of their freedom, their prosperity and their democratic government. (Crothers, 1964, p. 81)

It is noteworthy that here American people's liberty or freedom also included their wish to pursue more materialistic wealth, which to some extent, had compromised their individualism. At that time, there was a

[1] In his Ph.D. dissertation, Billy Bin Feng Huang has thoroughly researched the background of the detective fiction genre and given a precise definition of a detective story. Then, he has concluded, "Poe was not the first detective story writer but definitely the progenitor of the detective genre. This is Poe's place in the history of the detective genre". See Billy Bin Feng Huang, "Say the Unsaid, Repair the Fractures—On the Narrative Ruptures in Edgar Allan Poe's Detective Stories", Ph.D. dissertation, National Chengchi University in Taiwan (R.O.C.), 2016.

> wholesale loss of Yankee individualism as both men and women deserted worn out farms for factories, where many began to feel what Emerson called "the disproportion between their faculties and the work offered them." Far too often, the search for a better life had degenerated into a desire to possess factory-made objects. (Baym et al., 1998, p. 925)

In a way, American people's greed ensued from American society's prosperity because American society then had become a joint-stock company where each member strove for a better securing of his or her bread (Baym et al., 1998, p. 925). On the other hand, with America's prosperity, a great deal of capital was amassed and concentrated, which, according to Henri Lefebvre, would be accompanied by urban development (1996, p. 69). "Urban space gathers crowds, products in the markets, acts and symbols. It concentrates all these, and accumulates them" (p. 101)[2]. Indeed,

> the sheer magnitude of these new cities radically affected the lives of city dwellers. The metropolises were after all five to ten times as large as the leading cities of half a century before…no important facet of urban life was left untouched by the rapid change in scale. (Warner, 1972, pp. 72-73)

As the major American cities expanded, they changed dramatically. One of the major urban developments then was the multiplication of their public and private amenities, in which contemporaries took justifiable pride (Fitch, 1996, p. 108). One the other hand, these ever-growing cities also had their own problems, such as the sky-high crime rates, overpopulation, etc. Above all, they became a large capitalistic market:

> The new markets relentlessly favored a different kind of businessman, called in those years a contractor or capitalist, whom today we could perhaps best describe as a hustler…the principal gains in production accrued to bosses who could organize their shopworkers for a steady production of uniform output. These emerging businessmen recruited labor from the old independent artisan shops…moved artisans, unskilled immigrants, women, and children into their own shops, where they could watch over them. (Warner, 1972, p. 73)

Urban capitalization doubtless has its severe, de-humanizing downsides. Take Boston for instance. Some urban capitalists in Boston were garment manufacturers; in their factories they reorganized their labor, lengthened the workers' hours, abolished the holidays, and oriented their businesses towards ever spiraling production and sales (Handlin, 1969, pp. 75-77).

All in all, in Poe's society, the major American cities became the centers of capital and industry; on the other hand, urban capitalization and industrialization, though emblematic of progress and prosperity of the U.S., invited various social problems, such as the exploitation of labor. Faced with these dark social realities, American people then were still ideologically programmed to pursue wealth and embrace whatever urban capitalization had brought them. This is what Eagleton terms the "GI", namely, the general ideology of the Americans then:

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[2] Speaking of urban space, Lefebvre associates it with production, stating that "the city constitutes a means of production". Paul Walker Clarke is even more specific, "Capitalist cities are cities of constant flux of capital…By mid-nineteenth century, the dominant economic character of cities shifted from centers of commerce to centers of production". Edward W. Soja proposes a "materialist interpretation of spatiality", "…social relations of production and class can be reconfigured and possibly transformed through the evolving spatiality which makes them concrete…Social and spatial structures are dialectically intertwined in social life…" See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 88. Paul Walker Clarke, "The Economic Currency of Architectural Aesthetics", *Designing Cities: Critical Readings in Urban Design*, Ed. by Alexander R. Cuthbert (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 30. Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 127.

> A dominant ideological formation is constituted by a relatively coherent set of "discourse" of values, representations and beliefs which…reflect the experiential relations of individual subjects to their social conditions as to guarantee those m is perceptions of the "real" which contribute to the reproduction of the dominant social relations. (1976, p. 54)

For Eagleton, the function of the GI is to stabilize individuals' relations to the productive apparatuses, and above all, the GI is composed of relatively coherent discourses. However, for Pierre Macherey, only in narrative can the truth about these so-called "coherent discourses" be truly seen. That is, if these discourses are situated in narrative, then their internal contradictions will readily manifest themselves, "…this ideology *[GI]* is emphatically not internally contradictory, for that would presuppose that it gave a complete description of reality, that it ceased to be an ideology". And the only way to perceive its "insufficiencies, its incompleteness" or "its g flawed coherence" (1978, p. 238, *italics mine*) is to put it in the narrative, as the latter "is not mechanically constructed as c a simple reflection or description of reality" (p. 278)[3].

The Thematic Ambivalence of the Urban Setting in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt"

As we know, the setting of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is Paris, as A. E. Murch points out:

> Poe never selected a background for any work without careful thought, and chose for each of his tales a setting to accord closely with its subject and atmosphere…It seems clear that in Poe's opinion there was some close affinity between France and the application of inductive reasoning to the detection of crime…the ideas which inspired him to plan this new type of story were associated in his mind with France because they had reached him from French sources. (1958, p. 68)

Murch's so-called "French sources" definitely refers to Eugène François Vidocq (1775-1857), an actual French detective on whom the characterization of Dupin is based, and the French police. Paris in 1841 was "the city with reformed, professional police" (Moore, 2006, p. 8). On the other hand, Lewis D. Moore observes the disconnection between the depictions of Paris and its characters:

> Poe introduces the city as a place of darkness…The public and private detective are thus bound together from the beginning of the detective story in an urban environment. The cities expand with people, trade, and crime…In Poe, Paris is a dimly lit city but no one in which Dupin and his narrator friend fear to walk at night. Poe does not equate the physical darkness with a moral one. (2006, p. 8)

According to Moore, Poe created Paris to be a dark place. However, not only does this darkness have no bearing on the characters' action but also it is irrelevant to the morals of the detective stories if there are any. Indeed, Poe's urban depictions are mostly given in "The Murders in Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". In

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[3] For Macherey, the internal contradictions of the ideology reflected in narrative are his so-called "unsaid" or "narrative ruptures". In "Literature as an Ideological Form", Etienne Balibar and Macherey focus on the ideological contradictions, arguing that literature is "produced finally through the effect of one or more ideological contradictions precisely because these contradictions cannot be solved within the ideology…literature 'begins' with the imaginary solution of implacable ideological contradictions, with the representation of that solution…" To be more specific, the text, "the ideological project of the author", or "the expression of one determinate class position", "is only one of the terms of the contradiction of whose oppositions the text makes an imaginary synthesis despite the real oppositions which it cannot abolish". On the surface, the text may seem to have incorporated these ideological contradictions, but actually, they remain unresolved and lead to the internal division of the text, namely, the unsaid or the narrative rupture. See Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, "Literature as an Ideological Form", *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*, Ed. by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), p. 284.

the "The Murders in Rue Morgue", the narrator and C. Auguste Dupin live in "a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not inquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion g of the Faubourg St. Germain" (Poe, 1944, p. 51). Then,

> It was a freak of fancy in my friend…to be enamored of the night for her own sake; and into this *bizarrerie*, as into all his others, I quietly fell; giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect abandon. The sable divinity would not herself dwell with us always; but we could counterfeit her presence. At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighted a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. (p. 51)

They live in a ghastly house located in a desolate area of Paris; their life is also dimly lighted. Here, U though Poe doesn't give a panoramic description of Paris' ambience, suffice it to say that readers can get a feel for the dark aura of the city. However, such an aura seems to have little bearing on their daily activities:

> By the aid of these *[the ghastliest and feeblest of rays]* we then busied our souls in dreams—reading, writing, or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true Darkness. Then we sallied forth into the streets, arm in arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford. (p. 51, *italics mine*)

The quoted passages can best confirm Moore's viewpoint: Darkness prevails in Dupin's surroundings as well as Paris. However, at its very best, it is merely responsible for Dupin's personal eccentricities. Hardly related to either the main characters' action or the happening of the murder, it only adds more color to the story every now and then:

> As the sailor looked in…the gigantic animal had seized Madame L'Espanaye by the hair…and was flourishing the razor about her face, in imitation of the motions of a barber. The daughter lay prostrate and motionless; she had swooned. The screams and struggles of the old lady…had the effect of changing the probably pacifc purposes of the Ourang-Outang into those of wrath. With one determined sweep of its muscular arm it nearly severed her head from her body. The sight of blood inflamed its anger into phrensy. (p. 88)

As the truth comes out in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the two diabolical murders have turned out to be an animal's crime of passion. Certainly, it has very little to do with the dark city of Paris. Or at least, from the perspective of textual analysis, Poe doesn't seem to present any evidence indicating that the urban surroundings directly pertain to the occurrence of the murders. As we know, a detective story thematically centers on a crime[4]. So in the case of "The Murders in Rue Morgue", the two horrific murders should doubtless be the theme of the story. If Poe's urban depiction in the story is as good as an embellishment at its very best, then it seems to be quite clear that the urban setting of the story doesn't bear much thematic significance.

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[4] In *The Reader and the Detective Story*, George N. Dove lists "the four identifiable qualities" of detective fiction: first, "a detective" or "an identifiable detection role"; second, "the account of investigation and resolution"; third, "a complex mystery that appears impossible of solution"; finally, the solution "known to the reader". And in "Literature under the Table", Ernst Kaemmel points out, "In the course of its development, the detective novel became concentrated very quickly upon portraying a detective's solution of a murder or another capital crime in a fictional plot". Thus, detective fiction can be differentiated from criminal reportage, or any other novelistic subgenre (1983, p. 57). That is, Kaemmel adds one more crucial qualification for detective fiction: fictionality. In his Ph.D. dissertation, Billy Bin Feng Huang, having reviewed these definitions of a detective story, has given a workable, precise definition to detective fiction, "a detective g novel refers to a fictional story that deals thematically with a crime as well as how it is solved by a c detective or someone like a detective". See George N. Dove, *The Reader and the Detective Story* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), p. 10. Ernst Kaemmel, "Literature Under the Table", *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, Ed. by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1983), p. 57. Billy Bin Feng Huang, p. 17.

And it is even more evident "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt":

> Here are the very nooks where the unwashed most abound—here are the temples most desecrate. With sickness of the heart the wanderer will flee back to the polluted Paris as to a less odious because less incongruous sink of pollution…It is now specially that, released from the claims of labor, or deprived of the customary opportunities of crime, the town blackguard seeks the precincts of the town, not through love of the rural…but by way of escape from the restraints and conventionalities of society. He desires less the fresh air and the green trees, than the utter license of the country. (pp. 136-137)

In the quoted passage above, Paris and its vicinity are negatively portrayed: Paris is a "sink of pollution", rife with "the restraints and conventionalities of society", and its suburbs seem more odious because of the "claims of labor", or "the customary opportunities of crime"; they are such a licentious place where "the unwashed most abound". Be that as it may, the filth of Paris is not intimidating for the Parisians. "Now at nine o'clock of every morning in the week, with the exception of Sunday, the streets of the city are, it is true, thronged with people" (p. 124). What's more, Poe explicitly states that Paris and its suburbs have ended up stifling and dirty because of "the intrusion of some ruffian or party of carousing blackguards" (p. 136). However, the murderer of Marie Rogêt is "a seaman" with a "swarthy complexion" (p. 147), not these thugs. That is, the unpleasant environment of Paris, on a textual level is not a crucial factor at all in the case of Marie Rogêt's death; a careful textual analysis of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" shall reveal that the urban setting of the story isn't a contributing factor in the death of Marie Rogêt, nor does it have much thematic significance.

In conclusion, the analysis above has shown that the urban surroundings seemly don't matter to Poe. Namely, Paris, like the city of Los Angeles, may be ravaged by crime and immorality, as the quote from the 1997 film, *Escape From L. A.*, says. But it is thematically irrelevant in both "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt".

On the other hand, let's not forget that the analysis above is strictly textually-based; that is, it is strictly built on the observations of the texts of both the stories. By no means does it suffice, particularly to those critics who believe that whenever a story with an urban setting is being dealt with, it must be noted that "the city has enjoyed a wealth of historical, cultural, and literary scrutiny in recent years" (Rachman, 1997, p. 653). As far as they are concerned, critics, in treating such a literary critic, must always bear in mind that there are "…larger historical processes, beyond the literary community, beyond literary texts" (Banta, 1995, p. 28). And if the perspective of historicism is added to the analyses of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", a completely different case scenario may manifest itself. First, in discussing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", Lawrence Frank has doubtless taken notice of Dupin's ratiocination, which is the core of the story, "…he *[Dupin]* pursues explanations always grounded in empiricist assumptions about causation and human consciousness". But meanwhile, he also emphasizes its "embryonic worldview" (1995, p. 171, *italics mine*). By its "embryonic worldview", Frank surely refers to how the internationalization of Paris is implicated in the story:

> Alfonzo Garcio, undertaker, deposes that he resides in the Rue Morgue. Is a native of Spain. Was one of the party who entered the house…The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Could not distinguish what was said. The shrill voice was that of an Englishman…
>
> Alberto Montani, confectioner, deposes that he was the first to ascend the stairs. Heard the voices in question. The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Distinguished several words. The speaker appeared to be expostulating. Could not

> make out the words of the shrill voice. Spoke quick and unevenly. Thinks it the voice of a Russian. Corroborates the general testimony. Is an Italian. Never conversed with a native of Russia. (Poe, 1944, pp. 84-85)

In the quoted passages, the exotic names of the witnesses, as well as their speculations about the languages of the shrill voice they've heard, bear testimony to the internationalization of Paris. Even when the truth has come out and the murderer has been identified as the Ourang-Outang, its background information is also indicative of how Paris has been internationalized:

> CAUGHT—In the Bois de Boulogne, early in the morning of the __ inst (the morning of the murder,) a very large, tawny Ourang-Outang of the Bornese species. The owner, (who is ascertained to be a sailor, belonging to a Maltese vessel,) may have the animal again, upon identifying it satisfactorily, and paying a few charges arising from its capture and keeping… (Poe, 1944, p. 87)

It turns out to be that the Ourang-Outang is from the Indian Archipelago. And its owner is a sailor working on a Maltese vessel. In a way, both the Ourang-Outang and its owners can be viewed as the evidence of Paris' internationalization, which surely ensues from urbanization or the capitalization of the 19th-century metropoles, as elucidated in Section II. From this point of view, the urban surroundings in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" do matter, now that the urban developments of the 19th century can be correlated with its homicide cases.

The urban surroundings in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" seem to matter as well because for those historically-inclined critics, they directly pertain to the happening of the murder in the story in terms of the crumbling social order and all-time high crime rate. Stephen Knight has argued that in reading Poe's detective stories, one shall never forget that they were composed when there were rapid social changes and urbanizing societies, and people were anxious about crime and social order (2004, pp. 18-25). Shokirova Markhabo is more specific in pointing out that Poe's detective stories create "a new literary form that celebrates the human capacity for logical reasoning as a means of understanding and ordering an increasingly complex world". Here, the bottom line is that the cities depicted in Poe's detective stories have become more complicated on account of their higher crime rate. As a result, if we want to analyze Poe's detective stories adopting the approach of historical contextualization, we have to take into consideration the factors of urbanization or changing perceptions of crime (2025, pp. 12-14). Bran Nicol also contends that in reading Poe's detective stories,

> the reader is immediately aware that they [Poe's detective stories] are in a city far removed from the safe, legible and predictable fantasy-world of the city of the flâneur. In the brutally murdered corpses around which each story revolves we are given a precise vision of the kind of "deep crime"… (2012a, pp. 80-82)

Above all, "Poe depicts the exciting and menacing aspects of urban reality…" (2012a, pp. 80-82, *italics mine*). That is, the story in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" literally takes place in an unsafe city where hideous crime keeps raging on.

In other words, the descriptions of the "gang of miscreants" in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" are indicative of the "changing perceptions of crime", namely, the organized crime in the metropolis:

> A gang of miscreants made their appearance, behaved boisterously, ate and drank without making payment, followed in the route of the young man and girl, returned to the inn about dusk, and recrossed the river as if in great haste…Each one of a gang so placed, is not so much greedy of reward, or anxious for escape, as fearful of betrayal. He betrays eagerly and early that he may not himself be betrayed. That the secret has not been divulged, is the very best of proof that it is, in fact, a secret. (Poe, 1944, p. 139)

The portrayal of the gang of the ruffians indicates the background of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", the growing organized crime in such a metropolis as Paris, even though they have eventually been proven unrelated to the murder of Marie Rogêt. As for the real murderer of Marie Rogêt, a naval officer with a swarthy complexion, "the complexion of this man is dark and swarthy; it was no common swarthiness which constituted the sole point of remembrance, both as regards Valence and Madame Deluc" (Poe, 1944, p. 140). It seems that Poe may suggest that this murderer could be an alien sailor, judging from his exotic skin color. If so, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" may be tangentially linked to the metropolitan internationalization in the 19th century. More importantly, the murderer has taken a series of intriguing actions after having committed the murder:

> If thrown from the shore a weight would have been attached. We can only account for its absence by supposing the murderer to have neglected the precaution of supplying himself with it before pushing off. In the act of consigning the corpse to the water, he would unquestionably have noticed his oversight; but then no remedy would have been at hand. Any risk would have been preferred to a return to that accused shore. Having rid himself of his ghastly charge, the murderer would have hastened to the city. There, at some obscure wharf, he would have leaped on land. (p. 141)

Instead of redressing his error of neglecting to attach a weight to the body of Marie Rogêt, the murderer has chosen to rush to the city of Paris, vanishing into the large local crowds. In other words, the theme of the murder has hereby been tied to the urban setting of the story.

Last but not least, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" consists of mainly newspaper reports. As we know, the newspaper is symbolic of "an urban, especially logocentric conception of the transmission of information…" Above all,

> …in the new bourgeois social organization that has emerged after the French revolution, the printed press has become the privileged vehicle for the Truth, responding to the brand new concept of "public opinion." By elaborating his new theory upon those found in the newspapers, Dupin enters a public debate—the object of which is to reach the Truth—that could only take place in the city, for it is where newspapers are both generated and read, and where the function as instruments of political and social debate. (Savoye, 2012, pp. 28-29)

Dupin's ratiocination in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is primarily founded on newspaper reports, and the printing press, a vehicle for the public opinion, is generally regarded as a major characteristic of a modern city like Paris. Thus, the connection between the urban setting and the theme of the murder is confirmed.

In a nutshell, the theme of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" or "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is unquestionably a crime. And a close textual analysis of either "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" or "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" will simply indicate that the urban surroundings seem to be thematically insignificant because of their glaringly severed connections with the theme. However, if the socio-historical perspective is added to our interpretations of Poe's detective stories, then the urban surroundings readily seem relatable to the story theme, or to be more exact, a consequential contributing factor of both the murders. This is the truth about the thematic ambivalence of the urban setting of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt".

Dissecting the Thematic Ambivalence: From Poe's "The Man of the Crowd"

First of all, let's look at some hard facts about Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt": Poe has chosen to place the murders in Paris, from which "Poe reflected the world he felt…around him", namely, the major antebellum American cities Poe has dwelled in (Dean, 2004, pp. 37-38). On the other

hand, it is true that the murders have occurred against the background of Paris, but the relationship between them has remained opaque. And it is from this opaqueness that the thematic ambivalence of the urban setting arises. As a result, the dissection of this thematic ambivalence can only be possible by pinpointing Poe's attitude towards the trend of urbanization discussed in Section II, and examining how Poe has out his attitude in the text. Also, Eagleton's concept of GI is discussed. As a matter of fact, Eagleton also puts forward the concept of AuI (authorial ideology), which is "the effect of the author's specific mode of biographical insertion into GI, a mode of insertion overdetermined by a series of distinct factors: social class, sex, nationality, religion, geographical region and so on" (1976, p. 58). Most of all, Eagleton elucidates the interconnections between GI and AuI:

> AuI is not to be conflated with GI; nor is it to be identified with the "ideology of the text." The ideology of the text is not an "expression" of authorial ideology: it is product of an aesthetic working of "general" ideology as that ideology is itself worked and "produced" by an overdetermination of authorial-biographical factors. AuI, then, is always GI as lived, worked and represented from a particular overdetermined standpoint within it. (p. 59)

Of course, Eagleton's use of the term "overdetermine(-ation)" manifestly indicates an Althusserian influence. In the simplest sense, AuI is an overdetermined product of GI; on the other hand, GI, after aesthetically reworked and authorially overdetermined, can become the ideology of the text.

Furthermore, Eagleton has added that in analyzing the ideology of the text, AuI may be "effectively homologous with" AI *(the Aesthetic Ideology)*, or "it may be 'canceled' as a specific factor" (p. 63, *italics mine*). To sum up, AuI isn't equivalent to GI or the ideology of the text; it is how the author has experienced GI. And the ideology of the text is aesthetically overdetermined by numerous authorial factors. In the case of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", our first priority is to pinpoint Poe's stance on urbanization (Poe's AuI). Then we shall find out how Poe's ideology is reshaped and placed in the texts of the two stories (the ideology of the text).

To begin with, Poe actually holds rather conflicting views on urbanization (the GI). "In the decades before the Civil War, Poe lived in Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City, witnessing firsthand the related phenomena of increasing urban density, growing city crime…" (Lee, 2010, p. 379). On the one hand, it is generally believed that "Poe viewed cities with intense suspicion as a corrupting force" (Soucier, 2014). Most of all, Poe "expresses a pet aversion for the mob, the crowd, for the monstrous agglutinations that especially cluster and swell in big cities and sometimes act as if they alone controlled democracies" (Dean, 2004, p. 35). As discussed in Section II, urbanization contributes to the growth of urban capital and population. If Poe has such distaste for big cities, then it seemly stands to reason that he may take a purely attitude of urbanization. However, this observation is actually one-sidedly simplistic because Poe's stories, on the other hand, are often indicative of "urban knowledge, or more precisely the desire for urban knowledge"; in his tales, particularly his detective stories, Poe often endeavors "to make urban alterity at least potentially intelligible" (Rachman, 1997, p. 660). That is, if Poe does make emphasize the intelligibility of a city, he ought not to give it a wide berth out of his contempt for it. Rather, he has to be very close to it. Linda Patterson Miller has put it to a nicety,

> Poe's relationship with the city was seldom so one-sided. Poe did regret the grislier aspects of city life which seemed to undermine both the American and human experiences; yet he was also charmed by the city's vitality and awed by its monetary and artistic promise. (1979, p. 325)

Miller's so-called "the city's vitality" or "its monetary and artistic promise" includes "the material technologies of printing and its ability or failure to produce the mental or spiritual transformation known as meaning" (Tresch, 2016, p. 877). For Poe, the city is equipped with the modern printing press that enables him to transform his writing activities into a lucrative business. As a writer, it is Poe's inevitable obsession[5].

Now that Poe is ambiguous on the phenomenon of the 19th-century urbanization, we shall then make effort to see how Poe has translated this ambiguity into the content of his stories. It should be noted that Poe's "stories make readers especially think, talk, and wonder about where they live, who they live with, and where they would rather be". However, as a fine writer, Poe "poses the questions: he doesn't give the answers" (Dean, 2004, p. 39). So clearly, Poe has transmuted it into nonchalance, or an attitude of indifference in his literary creations. G. R. Thompson has also observed:

> The relation of Poe to the sociopolitical problems of his times is particularly interesting because, though he wrote about contemporary political, economic, and political issues, he was much more insistently "literary" than most of his famous contemporaries…To him, science and ancient history and myth were of greater interest. (Thompson, 2004, p. xvi)

As Thompson notices Poe being "literary", Poe is actually being literarily non-judgmental and makes the urban scenery seem like an objective entity. In perceiving Poe's nonchalance, his "The Man of the Crowd" should be used as a point of reference. First of all, the setting of "The Man of the Crowd" is London, which is crawling with endless surges of crowds:

> This latter is one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, and had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momently increased; and, by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. At this particular period of the evening I had never before been in a similar situation, and the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me, therefore, with a delicious novelty of emotion. (Thompson, 2004, p. 233)

Stephen Rachman asserts that Poe has evidently based the urban portraiture of London on Dickens' Sketches on Boz (1836) (1995, p. 71). And above all, Rachman identifies Poe's "plagiarism", which "is rendered in a theater of retribution" (pp. 72-73). "Thus, Poe plagiarizes not simply to usurp another's authority, but to assert his own

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[5] According to Michael Allen, Poe grew up "in a South that was extending an aristocratic code from the original g Virginia gentry to the whole region to consolidate it against Northern pretensions". Kenneth Alan Hovey also points out that Poe himself even wrote, "The glory of the Ancient Dominion is in a fainting—is in a dying condition". However, Poe wasn't unconditionally affected by this upbringing. David Leverenz observes that in many of his stories, Poe is often "upending Southern aristocracy" and "satiriz(ing) emerging mass-market culture". Namely, while the Northern urban mercantilism repulsed Poe, Poe didn't exactly identify with the Southern gentry culture. Joan Dayan is more U specific in noting "Poe's fantasy of the South, the shadows of those who once lived "sweet lives" gradually dissolve "into the ebony water" and become "absorbed into the blackness". Richard Gray believes that Poe's ambivalent attitude is probably due to a historical ambiguity: In Virginia of the early 19th century, gentleman-planters were "always primarily businessmen" and "entrepreneurs", yet "anxious to assume the trappings of an aristocracy". Kenneth Silverman, in *Edgar Allan Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*, observes how Poe was vacillating among the contradictory expectations of gentry roles. For instance, he could be courtly with the ladies, a bantam cock in contending with his male literati, a dandyish-looking, heavy drinker, who loved bragging about his physical prowess, such as his swimming feats or running board jumping skills. See Michael Allen, *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 133. Kenneth Alan Hovey, "Critical Provincialism: Poe's Poetic Principle in Antebellum Context", *American Quarterly, 39*(3) (Fall 1987), p. 347. David Leverenze, "Poe and Gentry Virginia", *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, Ed. by Hawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 233. Joan Dayan, "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves", *The American face of Edgar Allan Poe*, Ed. by H. Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 196. Richard Gray, *Writing the South: Ideals of an American Region* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 12-13. Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar Allan Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 30, p. 123, p. 197, p. 332.

authority while questioning the tradition in which he asserts it" (p. 83).[6] We should note that Poe's London, though based on Dickens' descriptions, "relies on…the effacement of London's social relations…Poe erases the intimate moral relationship between people and the places they inhabit by subsuming these establishments under the guise of the crowd" (p. 76):

> By far the greater number of those who went by had a satisfied, business-like demeanor, and seemed to be thinking only of making their way through the press…Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around…There was nothing very distinctive about these two large classes beyond what I have noted. Their habiliments belonged to that order which is pointedly termed the decent. They were undoubtedly noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stock-jobbers—the Eupatrids and the common-places of society…conducting business upon their own responsibility. (Poe, 2004, p. 233)

In "The Man of the Crowd", all the intertwined social relations indicated in the quoted passage seem to be dissolved into the crowd; the distinction between the two groups of people is actually erased, as if the story is characteristic of "the concealment of the social relations" (Byer, 1987, p. 227). For Poe, people from every walk of life, are simply "conducting business upon their own responsibility". It doesn't really matter whether or not they are "Eupatrids/noblemen" or not, for all of them could be considered decent. As a consequence, what all readers can see is how the city has seemed like an "unfathomable mystery" because in reading this story, they've been led "into a search for the essence of the horror at the heart of the city, which finally fails to be revealed" (Mazurek, 1979, p. 26); in the end, readers have been made aware of "the inscrutability and impenetrability of the city" as well as the "generic instability of the metropolis" (Yeh, 2019, p. 928). Self-evident is Poe's attitude towards social problems in an industrialized nation like the U.S.: If the delineation of social relations is absent, so must Poe's judgment of social problems be. In my opinion, it is exactly what makes the urban setting in "The Man of the Crowd" seem like an unreadable entity to which no authorial interpretations are attached.[7]

As a matter of fact, I believe Poe has adopted a similar treatment in both "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". Namely, I think Poe has likewise turned his ambiguous, or conflicting viewpoints on the city into an indifference, or a nonchalant stance. Hence, the urban surroundings in both the stories are incapable of giving momentum to the action of the stories:

> *[Poe's setting]* abstracts the story from the complexity and confusion of the larger social world and provides a rationale for avoiding the consideration of those more complex problems of social injustice and group conflict that form the basis of much contemporary realistic fiction. (Cawelti, 1976, p. 97, *italics mine*)

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[6] In "What Is an Author?", Foucault states, "The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing…*[that]* serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts:…a point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction…" Based on this quote, Rachman has made his point, "If plagiarism can be rightly said to have any teleological purpose in Edgar Allan Poe's authorial strategy, then it seems to disturb the principle of unity to which Foucault refers". See Rachman, 82. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 111.

[7] In "Reading and Not Reading 'The Man of the Crowd'", Bran Nicol articulates for a multi-level reading of "The Man of the Crowd" because it "is more complex than a relatively straightforward visual mastery or contemplation or reaction to the stimuli of urban experience" (2012, p. 478). Borrowing Walter Benjamin's concept of a *flâneur*, who observes "with both pleasure and detachment", "a *badaud* spellbound and merging with the spectacle he sees", and "a detective actively following the enigmas, the narrative traces", Nicol contends that "The Man of the Crowd" "depicts [all] the three types of reading experience". See Bran Nicol, "Reading and Not Reading 'The Man of the Crowd'", *Philological Quarterly, 91*(3) (2012), pp. 476, 478. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Trans. by Howard Eilan and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 429.

Cawelti contends that Poe has averted the trouble of addressing the issue of the repercussions of the 19th-century urban growth. I think it’s especially this case when it comes to “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt”. As a result, the urban setting in either of the stories has become a framework into which the story themes are inserted. As Poe is reluctant to comment on any urbanization-related issues, the urban setting seems like an objective entity that hardly bears any thematic significance. And its thematic correlations will manifest themselves only when an historically-oriented analysis of either of the stories is introduced. This is the truth about the thematic ambivalence in the two detective stories of Poe’s (see Figure 1).

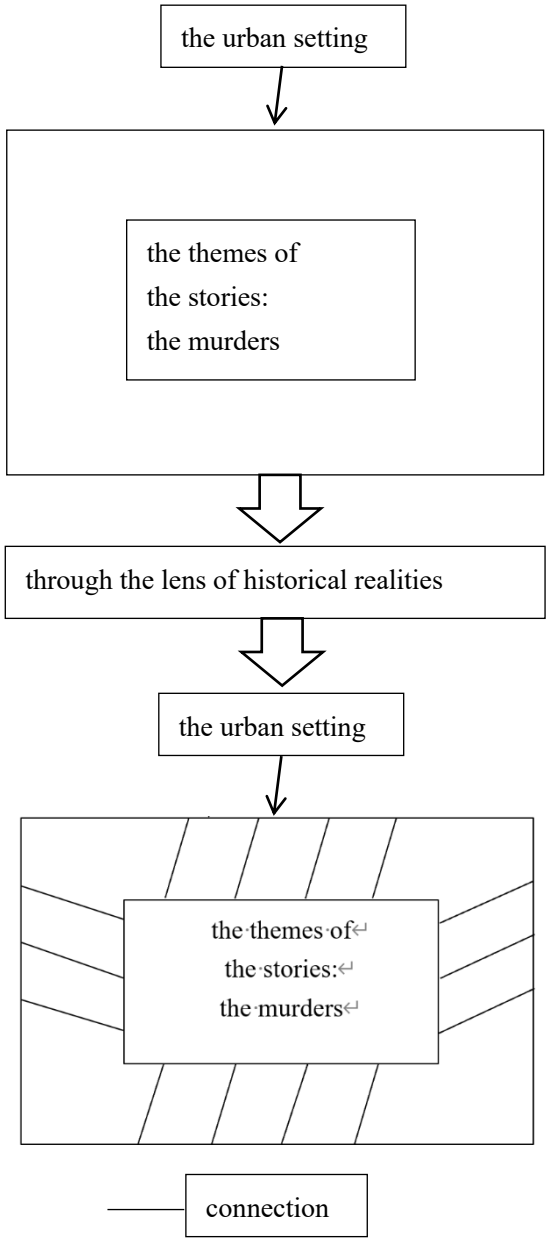


Figure 1. The truth the thematic ambivalence in the two detective stories of Poe’s.

By Eagleton's theorizations, Poe's equivocal attitude about the city /his AuI is how has lived out the phenomenon of urbanization in the 19th century/GI. Moreover, he has chosen to convert it into an attitude of indifference in the texts/ the ideology of the text. However, Eagleton has also argued that the ideology of the text is overdetermined by authorial-biographical factors. Here, a decisive factor must be singled out: Poe's consideration of his readers. According to Dean, "Edgar Allan Poe stands between Walt Whitman and P. T. Barnum, the poet and the entertainer" (2004, p. 37). In other words, catering to the general public has always been one of Poe's main concerns. And Allen is more specific in pointing out that Poe has been working in the tradition of the 19th-century journalism where both "the few" and "the many" are equally appealed to (1969, pp. 19-39). Certainly, "the few" and "the many" here refer to the upper class and the large crowds of the average Americans. In other words, whenever Poe is creating his stories, what the general public would think has always been on his mind. As stated in Section II, following the trend of urbanization is part of the shared ideology of the American public in the 19th century. If so, it makes perfect sense that Poe would refuse to judge the city and the consequences of its growth in his stories. It may even be looked upon as Poe's wise strategy to avoid affronting the American masses.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this paper, I've quoted J. Bruner and M. M. Bakhtin. The urban setting Poe has presented in his two detective stories is verisimilitude, or inexact descriptions of Paris. Through the agency of a purely textual analysis, the urban surroundings are seemly unrelated to the theme of the detective stories, namely, the occurrences of the murders. However, if the analysis is angled more socio-historically, then the thematic relevance of the urban setting in the two detective stories will automatically emerge, just as Bakhtin has observed. It is what I've called the thematic ambivalence of the urban setting. The theorizations about GI and AuI as well as the analysis of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" may come in handy in perceiving the truth behind this thematic ambivalence. It turns out that Poe's attitude towards the 19th-century urbanization is quite ambiguous. And it's especially so when Poe's unwillingness to offend his American readers is taken into consideration. Above all, Poe has translated this ambiguity into nonchalance, or aloofness in his treatment of the urban setting, which has given rise to the thematic ambivalence of the urban surroundings in hid two detective stories.

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