

# “A New Race of Immortals”: A Posthumanist Reading of “Poe Posthumous; or, the Light-House”

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## Abstract

This article proposes a posthumanist reading of Joyce Carol Oates’s “Poe Posthumous; or, The Light-House,” and argues that posthumanism provides human beings with a new way of living. In the story, the narrator comes to the Light-House at Viña de Mar to participate in a scientific experiment. As an “exemplary specimen of Homo sapiens,” the narrator endeavours to preserve human knowledge, which symbolises his superiority over nonhuman species. However, on becoming further involved in nature, he gradually abandons his anthropocentric thought, and learns to live with other species. The posthumanist thought finds its full expression in the symbiotic coexistence of multiple species and culminates in the narrator’s cross-species marriage to a female Cyclophagus. The juxtaposition of the decentring of anthropocentrism with the ascent of nonhuman agents highlights the posthumanist coexistence of humans and nonhumans.

**Keywords:** Light-House; knowledge; posthumanism; nonhuman; coexistence

## Introduction

“Poe Posthumous; or, The Light-House” is one of the short stories collected in Joyce Carol Oates’s *Wild Nights! Stories About the Last Days of Poe, Dickinson, Twain, James, and Hemingway*. Published in 2008, the story is often viewed as a rewiring and continuation of Edgar Allen Poe’s unfinished manuscript “The Light-House.” Appearing posthumously in the form of a diary, the story is about the life of Poe as a lighthouse keeper at Viña de Mar. Since its publication, the story has been interpreted from multiple perspectives. Brigitte Frase (2008) argues that it reveals dark desires that



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we “would be ashamed to examine by the light of day.” Britt Peterson (2008) focuses on the relationship between Poe and his image in the story and contends that “‘Poe Posthumous’ works extremely well as a tribute, but even independent of Poe’s legacy it is enthralling and wonderfully odd.” Likewise, David S. Reynolds (2008) reads Poe in the story as “a kind of lighthouse-keeper, a faithful attendant of the beacon of art.” Furthermore, Scott Hales (2010, 104) interprets Poe in this story as “Joyce Carol Oates’ reading of Poe” which “critique[s] the dehumanizing gaze of Poe’s narrative voice.” These scholars concentrate mainly on the relationship between Poe in history and Poe in the story, while neglecting the issue of species relationships. In fact, the whole story depicts the process of the narrator’s departure from human beings and his approach towards nonhuman species, while accentuating his underlying transition from anthropocentrism to posthumanism. For a more harmonious existence, human beings need to abandon the human-centred way of thinking and learn how to live with nonhumans. The story showcases such a life and reorients us in a world that is no longer dominated by human species.

Donna Haraway gives a succinct definition of the Anthropocene: “Popularized by Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen, Anthropocene names an age in which human industry has come to equal or even surpass the processes of geology, and in which humans in their attempt to conquer nature have inadvertently become a major force in its destruction” (Haraway et al. 2015, 535). The definition of Anthropocene emphasises the power of human operations in the process of changing the natural world. At the same time, it also indicates human ambition and arrogance in relation to conquering the earth. Rob Boddice (2011, 1) proposes that “anthropocentrism is expressed either as a charge of human chauvinism, or as an acknowledgement of human ontological boundaries. It is in tension with nature, the environment, and non-human animals.” In short, anthropocentrism assumes the centrality of human beings, and justifies human exploitation of nonhuman species.

Unlike anthropocentrism, posthumanism advocates the decentring of human beings, and the equality of species. As a paradigm shift, posthumanism challenges humanism’s concepts of men as wise, rational, self-regulating beings, and refuses to see humans as the dominators of the world. Rosi Braidotti (2013, 12) proposes that “[t]he posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are in the process of becoming” and that the posthuman subjectivity undergoes a transformation of “becoming-animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine” (Braidotti 2013, 66). Posthumanism as a kind of post-anthropocentrism, according to Braidotti, is suspicious of hierarchies operating in human society, and the primacy granted to human beings. It facilitates access to the recognition of the world, and advocates for equality between humans and nonhumans. Posthumanism challenges the boundary between human and nonhuman species and accentuates their interconnections in this world. At the same time, posthumanism is also a kind of post-dualism that stresses hybridity and multiplicity. In this way, posthumanism promotes the coexistence of human and nonhuman species. This article proposes a posthumanist reading of the narrator’s cross-species becoming

and argues that human beings should abandon anthropocentrism and learn to build new relationships with nonhuman agents.

### The “Exemplary Specimen of Homo Sapiens” from Philadelphia

As “an exemplary specimen of Homo sapiens” from Philadelphia, the narrator believes in the supremacy of the human species (Oates 2008, 24). In the story, Dr. Bertram Shaw, both a patron of Poe and the scientist who invited him to take part in the experiment, holds the same opinion. Poe as the narrator is delighted to participate in Dr. Shaw’s experiment, “in that way providing a helpfulness to scientific knowledge” and “to at least being ‘helpful’ to [his] fellows” (Oates 2008, 7). Once, he read Dr. Shaw’s article entitled “The Effects of Extreme Isolation Upon Certain Mammalian Specimens.” It recorded a series of cruel experiments on animals such as rats, pigs, monkeys, dogs, cats, and young horses to see the influence of isolation on their physical and mental health. During the process, the human observer simply stood aside to record the results calmly. The nonhuman species were deemed to be guinea pigs that could be sacrificed for knowledge without being respected. Rosi Braidotti (2013, 68) criticises this anthropocentric practice to “put the power of the human species over animals” as “an example of epistemic and material violence.” In the story, the face of Dr. Shaw is depicted as “stolid, bewhiskered, with glittering eyeglasses atop a sizable nose” (Oates 2008, 13). Eyeglasses, as a product of human intelligence, epitomise knowledge. Dr. Shaw’s identity as a scientist further reinforces anthropocentric notions. The narrator was glad to become a collaborator with his fellow Homo sapiens in carrying out the experiment. Besides, he devoted himself to the realm of liberal arts. He read the works of Plotinus, translated Jeremias Gotthelf’s masterpieces, and occupied himself by composing a book for posterity named *The Diary of the Fabled Light-House at Viña de Mar*. Here, Joyce Carol Oates has skillfully integrated artistic work with scientific research to exemplify human civilisation as a whole. The narrator’s emphasis on his identity, both as a writer and as a scientist, suggests his confidence in human intelligence and his pride in being “an exemplary specimen of Homo sapiens” (Oates 2008, 24).

In addition to the accentuation of intellectual life, the narrator draws a clear boundary between his own life and that of the external natural environment. In the diary, the beauty of nature is interpreted from a human perspective, especially for the sake of human observation: “Nature seems but a willed phenomenon” (Oates 2008, 8). The sky and the sea do exist, “yet without the Keeper of the Light, which is to say ‘I’ (‘eye’), could such beauty be revealed, let alone articulated?” (8). For the narrator, without human beings’ appreciation, the beauty of nature is meaningless. The linkage of “I” with “eye” implies an underlying anthropocentric notion. One essential step in human evolution is that we learned to walk with our upper body keeping straight, so that we can see more and develop our own aesthetics. “Walking upright with eyes” enables men to look ahead and think ahead and consequently produce philosophy and aesthetics (Freud 1961, 51–52). In the evolutionary process, Sigmund Freud writes, man’s “adoption of an erect posture” expands his sight and he gains an insight into the world:

“by means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance; and by means of the microscope he overcomes the limits of visibility set by the structure of his retina” (Freud 1961, 41). In this way, the human world is largely vision centred. Gradually, people get accustomed to a visual representation of the world and perceive it as the sole yardstick to interpret everything. The narrator “rejoice[d] in this, the supremacy of ‘I’” (Oates 2008, 8). Consequently, he aligned the “I” with the “eye,” and thus became an arrogant keeper of the Light-House, and a guardian of human knowledge. However, besides vision, there do exist other forms of sensory experience that can help us to perceive the world. In *What Is Posthumanism?* Cary Wolfe discusses the experience of the autistic writer Temple Grandin and concludes that for certain groups of people, touching can also be a way to experience the world. He also proposes to set visual ability “adrift within the generalized animal sensorium as ‘merely’ the equal of the dog’s sense of smell or the horse’s sense of touch” (Wolfe 2010, 134). Thus, if we confine ourselves within what we see, we lose the opportunity to experience many aspects of the world.

The narrator has a firm belief in his mastery of his dog. According to the classification of Cary Wolfe, the narrator falls into the category of “humanized humans” while his dog Mercury belongs to that of “humanized animals.”<sup>1</sup> The former category is “sovereign and untroubled” (Wolfe 2003, 101), while the latter refers to those “that we exempt from the sacrificial regime by endowing them with ostensibly human features” (Wolfe 2003, 101). In this relationship, human beings deem themselves to be saviours; however, they fail to understand a basic fact: animals also sacrifice their freedom to socialise with men. In the story, Mercury the dog was adopted and named by the narrator’s wife. Later, the narrator accepted it because of its beautiful appearance and lively character. In addition, for the narrator, as a pet Mercury did not have its own free will. When the narrator took pride in claiming his new identity as a lighthouse keeper, the excited barks of the dog were interpreted as the “confirmation” and “echo” of human sentiments. Although the narrator did not understand the dog’s language, he could assign meanings to it in accordance with his will. In their relationship, the dog must obey its master unconditionally. When Mercury tried to find food in the “Charnel House” against human orders, the narrator deemed that to be a betrayal, and took actions to assert his position as the master. Rosi Braidotti (2013, 68) in *The Posthuman* defines the relationship between masters and pets as “an oedipalized relationship (you and me together on the same sofa).” This dynamic tends to create a passive relationship because it is dominated by human beings, and the values of pets are judged by human masters.

Thus, at this stage, the narrator’s identity is still human-centred: he is a contributor to human knowledge, an observer of the island, and a master of the dog. He is a specimen of *Homo sapiens* who separates himself from nonhuman beings in nature and inserts

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1. Cary Wolfe (2003, 101) in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory* proposes that “the law of culture arranges its species significations on a kind of grid.” There are “animalized animals, humanized animals, animalized humans and humanized humans.”

himself into a higher position than other species. In human history, humans have for a long time put themselves at the centre of the world. The Enlightenment put human beings under the spotlight of reason. Rosi Braidotti points out that since the eighteenth century, there has been a concept of the “ideal man” which sets the “civilisation standard” for humanism. At the same time, it is also closely related with notions such as race, gender, class, age and so on. “In other words, the dominant subject is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit, and a full citizen of a recognized polity” (Braidotti 2017, 23). Michel Foucault criticises “the humanistic habit of placing ‘Man’ at the center of world history” (quoted in Braidotti 2017, 22). However, the crisis of *Anthropos* “enlists the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants, cells, bacteria, in fact the planet and the cosmos, are turned into a political arena” (Braidotti 2017, 26). From an anthropocentric perspective, human beings set up the boundary to show their uniqueness and their dominating position. However, at the same time, humans are also confined within the same realm, and lose access to plural ways of comprehending the world.

### The Descent of Anthropocentrism

At the initial stage, the narrator is still human-centred, but as he delves further into life at the Light-House, his anthropocentrism fades away, and his attention gradually turns to nonhuman counterparts. According to the diary, from Christmas Day to New Year’s Eve, the narrator “lost entries in this Diary” and he didn’t know the reason (Oates 2008, 20). This turning point symbolises the narrator’s rebirth. On New Year’s Day, the narrator “lost ‘sight’ of [himself]” because he broke the only mirror at the Light-House (21). As a product of human society, the mirror is a symbol of human civilisation. When looking into a mirror, people can see nothing but the reflection of themselves. Only when they turn away from the mirror can they start to notice the more-than-human world. According to Jacques Lacan (2006, 78), the mirror stage plays an essential role in the formation of human identity, and in “establish[ing] a relationship between an organism and its reality.” During the pre-mirror stage, an infant tends to have “heteromorphic identification” with multiple species in the surroundings, while at the mirror stage, the infant forms “homeomorphic identification” with his mother, and learns to see himself as a member of the human species (77). After that, the child enters the Symbolic, a world of laws and rules. The mirror stage is an important phase in human development. However, this progression is also a kind of regression because once the world of orders is entered, people are trapped in the linguistic world and lose their primordial connections with nonhuman species. Therefore, the breaking of the mirror concretises a landmark in the growth of the narrator, indicating his stepping out of the human-centred world.

When the narrator ceases to focus merely on himself, he starts to notice other things, and gains a deeper understanding of his dog’s nature. When Mercury violates his order not to find food in the “Charnel House,” the narrator tries to understand the dog’s canine nature because “a terrier is a very different sort of creature, born to hunt” and cannot

live without meat (Oates 2008, 22). After his tempestuous fury, while calming down, the narrator considers that to be “a matter of species,” and proposes that “Plotinus had not the slightest idea, nor even Aristotle; & not Gotthelf” (24). Here, the three great thinkers can be seen as representatives of human civilisation, but when trapped in a human society, they were prone to ignoring the natural instincts of other species. In contrast, when the narrator rids himself of the shackles of anthropocentrism, he recognises the difference between species, and regrets that he forced Mercury to behave against its nature. On the surface, the human and the dog have different eating habits; however, “it is man’s assimilation of animal instinct, therefore, that enables him to transcend instinct, which amounts to the freedom to eat as he will, which he learns from animals” (Oliver 2009, 53). The eating habits of humans, therefore, find their origins in those of other species. This is more than an acknowledgment. To respect the nature of nonhumans is an initial step towards having an appropriate understanding of humans’ position in the world. At this point, the narrator starts to see Mercury more as a companion species than a pet. Poe the fictional protagonist, to borrow the words from Haraway, learned “how to see who the dogs are and hear what they are telling us, not in bloodless abstraction, but in one-on-one relationship, in otherness-in-connection” (Haraway 2003, 45). When the dog was in danger, the narrator cast aside his disgust for the “Charnel House,” and “stumbled to Mercury’s side” to save the dog’s life (Oates 2008, 26). Unlike the previous oedipalised relationship, the narrator and the dog at this phase formed a mutual dependence. The narrator no longer forced the dog to follow his rules but let the animal act according to its nature.

In short, as his anthropocentric ideas decline, the narrator acquires a deeper understanding of nonhuman agents. His world previously functioned like an autopoietic system with a clear boundary from outside, but now the division blurs. The narrator recognises that, beyond the realms of human culture, there do exist other ways to perceive the world. By this means, he starts to feel the disappearance of his isolation and loneliness. Oates artistically orchestrates the descent of anthropocentrism and the ascent of nonhuman agents into an organic process. When coming to a realm much bigger than the limited human-centred world, the narrator realises that human beings are not masters of all things, and at the same time he starts to explore human beings’ appropriate position in nature. These two processes happen at the same time and cannot be separated from each other. The former causes the latter while the latter reinforces the former.

### The Agency of Nonhuman Species

When turning away from a human-centred way of life, the narrator gradually immerses himself in life on the island. In contrast to the Philadelphia society, Viña de Mar represents a natural world free from human domination. There the land, the sea, the plants and the animals are exempt from the control of human beings. On the island, the human being is only one part of nature, and the narrator has to learn how to coexist with nonhuman species and accept the insufficiency of human knowledge. Under the

influence of nonhuman agents, he not only changes his way of living, but also starts to reconstruct his life actively. A significant detail in the diary captures his new way of life: “The pen falls from [his] talon fingers, & much of [his] ink supply has dried up” (Oates 2008, 27). These two objects—pen and ink—are symbols of human civilisation; when they cease to function, the narrator’s daily routine is totally disrupted. The malfunction indicates the breakdown of human culture. This further propels his attention to the natural world around and about him. At the same time, with the shifting of his mind, his appearance also changes: the narrator’s fingers become talon-like and as a result he can no longer hold his pen. However, these talon-like fingers can help the narrator adapt to life on the island better. When he has to search for food around his hiding place, he can pluck the flying seabirds “out of the air by [his] talons (29). Although this transformation made him abandon his pen and ink, with the animal-like fingers, he becomes better adapted to the environment so he can survive on the island.

If the broken tools imply that the narrator can no longer sustain his intellectual life as before, the worms fundamentally change his life. In the story, the worms are only mentioned four times, but each of their appearances accelerates the narrator’s merging with the natural world. They are first mentioned when the narrator is reading Dr. Shaw’s record of his experiment on animals. Due to the humidity of the Light-House, the monograph became “wormeaten” and then “slipped from [his] fingers to the floor (20). The second time, the grubs appeared on the “dry, dun-colored biscuits” (22). The third time, “an infestation of weevils” appeared in the narrator’s rice cakes (22). The last time they appeared after Mercury’s death when the narrator’s books were all “worm- & weevil-riddled,” and his tinned foods were “contaminated by maggots” (27). As products of human intelligence, the food and books provide physical and spiritual pabulum for human beings, but they are easily destroyed by these little creatures in nature. Due to an insufficient food supply, the narrator’s eating habits also undergo some alteration. It is strange that his hunger “cannot be quenched. & yet, it has only begun” (28). In his illusion, he becomes “a coil of guts with teeth at one end, & an anus for excretion at the other” (29). The instinct for eating becomes the most important thing in the narrator’s life, replacing the desire to read and write. He begins to feed on sea creatures and “loathsome slimy” seaweed as Mercury the dog once did (17). Both love and communication between oneself and one’s “friends, family and loved ones” (Oliver 2009, 104) are based on assimilation, which means not only assimilation of words, but also of food. “Both words and food move through the orifices of the body, particularly the mouth” (104). Kelly Oliver (2009, 105) explains that “ultimately any lines we might draw between man and animal, animal and vegetable, living and nonliving, are always fluid and open to debate.” This is reflected in the story when, owing to the change of food, the narrator is assimilated by nature, and the boundary between human and nonhuman species is blurred.

The narrator’s life is changed both physically and spiritually by worms, but when he meets the Cyclophagus, he starts to actively reconstruct his life. Initially the narrator always mentions the monsters with disgust and refers to them as “hellish creatures”

(Oates 2008, 26). However, later he regards them with admiration, deeming them to be “worthy rival[s]” (30). The Cyclophaguses have both gills and nostrils, and fins and legs. Their tails are like those of dogs, and each of them have only one eye “twice the size of a human eye” (30). These marine creatures trust their “brainless instinct as *Homo Sapiens* has not (yet) mastered” (33). Here the image of Cyclophagus bears resemblance to the one-eyed creature in the ancient Greek play *Cyclops* by Euripides, who enslaved a group of human beings. In the play, Odysseus encounters a Cyclops and wants to exchange his wine for some food. But the Cyclops finds him and decides to eat Odysseus and his companions, so the human beings must blind the monster to save themselves (Euripides 2001). In the mythology, the human took advantages of the creature’s blindness for survival, but in this story, the human becomes the one who is blinded by his vision. For better survival, the Cyclophaguses in the story developed in an all-around way, but the human beings relied too much on their sense of vision and became short of living skills on an island. In the narrator’s opinion, the Cyclophaguses possess the living skills of different animals, so they are more skillful than human beings in many aspects.

During this period, the narrator resumes his long-forgotten animal habits, which have been greatly ignored and repressed by human beings in the process of evolution. He learns to “go on all fours” (Oates 2008, 31), and to feed on other animals, “tearing flesh from bone” with his teeth (29). Furthermore, as time goes by, the records in his diary gradually become fragmented, filled with blanks and missing punctuation. Later, the diary continues, but the marks of date disappear: first the day, then the month and the year. In the end, there are no longer any human-made indicators of time, and all he knows is that “it is still very hot, for the sun has stalled overhead” (34). With the disappearance of human language, the difference between human beings and animals is only a matter of degree rather than kind. In addition to language, there is more than one way for human beings to communicate with their nonhuman counterparts. In the story, the narrator’s communication with other species starts only when he becomes less concerned about his diary, and more absorbed in the world around him.

When the narrator learns the way to live with other species, he ceases to be the master of the Light-House, and instead becomes a part of nature. In this way, the human and the nonhuman share the same position. Initially, the anthropocentric thought “function[s] both to establish and protect a deeply unjust and hierarchical established order that allows for the unchecked exploitation of animals and other nonhuman beings” (Calarco 2014, 622), but at this stage it does not work any longer.

### The Cross-Species Marriage at the Light-House: “A New Race of Immortals”

It is noticeable that both at the beginning and the end of the story the narrator refers to the Light-House as “the Kingdom by the Sea” (Oates 2008, 7, 35). The Light-House is a significant setting that advances the story. It is not only the place where the narrator has spent most of his time but also an active foreground that transforms the narrator,



therefore its features and image deserve further interpretative effort. In *The Lure of the Sea*, Alain Corbin (1994, 11) proposes that the sea tends to be represented as a “supreme enigma,” and people remain troubled by its unknown mysteries. In the story, the sea is also described as “ever-shifting lava-like waters” (Oates 2008, 4). The water expanse is so vast that the narrator feels “overcome by the majesty of these great spaces” (3). When seeing various creatures washed ashore, he is sickened, and refers to them as “a horror” (19). For the narrator, the sea represents fear and disorder, provoking feelings of the sublime and even awe. In contrast, the land is the place of human order and rules, which is represented by Philadelphia society. According to the diary, “directly outside the Light-House doorway, there are layered rocks that give the impression of crude stairs, leading into the ocean” (15). It seems that there is no clear boundary between the sea and the Light-House. The building concretises an environment that embraces both features of the sea and the land. The Light-House does have its own rules for all living creatures, humans as well as nonhumans, but they cannot be comprehended by anthropocentric thought. When the narrator withdraws from human society, and abandons his anthropocentrism, he begins to understand the rules of nature and the way to coexist with other species.

Besides the features of its location, the image of the Light-House also undergoes a transformation. Human beings perceive the sea as a challenge, so they build lighthouses to guide them. When the narrator lit the lantern for the first time, he declared that “all ships be warned of the treacherous rocks of the coast” (5). He also believed in the sturdiness of the Light-House’s construction, so that “no mere sea, no hurricane, could defeat this solid iron-riveted wall” of the Light-House (10). The building, therefore, was a product of human intelligence to protect humans against the sea. However, after the death of Mercury the dog, the meaning of the Light-House changes. The narrator finds that during the windy nights, there are winds that “never cease to insinuate themselves into the cracks & crevices of the Light-House” (5). This suggests that the building is not as solid as he had believed. The building was designed and built by human beings, but it failed to live up to human expectations, let alone the conquest of nature. As for the origin of the Light-House, he was told of its “conflicting histories,” and he was “uncertain which to believe” (8). At this stage, the Light-House renders an unfamiliar image to human beings: it is not totally in the control of humans, and cannot be fully understood by them. Later, the narrator no longer lights the lantern for ships, and merely regards it as a place for living. Because of its geographical proximity to the sea, the Light-House also bears features of a seashore. It is around the shore that the narrator finds food for himself, and the sea becomes a source of food supply. The relationship between the human and the environment is no longer a dualistic and oppositional one. Additionally, in the story the surrounding area of the Light-House is inhabited by various nonhuman creatures, and the narrator has to learn how to coexist with them.

This kind of cross-species relationship reaches a climax when the narrator meets a female Venus-like Cyclophagus. He names her Hela and compares his protection of her from a male Cyclophagus who was “licentious & repulsive” to the Trojan War (33). The

narrator is deeply attracted by her, and later they even give birth to eight babies. These cross-species newborns possess biological features of the human and the Cyclophagus. Each of them is single-eyed like their mother, but is “unmistakably imprinted with its father’s patrician brow” and the Roman noble nose (3). In this way, the boundary between different species is unobtrusively blurred. The narrator acclimates himself so well to the life there that when sailors come to bring him back, he refuses to come, and regards them as invaders. Moreover, he decides to stay there for the rest of his life as “the progenitors of a bold & shining newraceofImmortals [new race of Immortals]” (35). Both the creation of the Cyclophagus and the narrator’s retreat from human civilisation represent a cross-species encounter. The human being is no longer the dominator of the world. He eats the same food and lives in the same burrow as the Cyclophagus. They share the same place with each other. So far, the narrator’s attitude has undergone a transformation from seeing nonhuman species as lower creatures to living together with them. His legacy also becomes a “newraceofImmortals” who lead a totally different life from individuals inhabiting Philadelphian society.

## Conclusion

In “Poe Posthumous; or, the Light-House,” Oates reveals her posthumanist vision through a fictitious biography of a great writer. In this story, the narrator experiences great transformations in his lifestyle and his attitude towards the nonhuman world. Initially, as “an exemplary specimen of Homo sapiens” (24) from Philadelphia, he is a contributor to human civilisation, as well as being an observer and a master. However, as time goes by, he gradually turns his attention to nonhuman species. The narrator no longer sees himself as the owner of the Light-House, but as a coexisting part of nature along with nonhuman species. Then he blurs the species boundary through his marriage to a female Cyclophagus. Matthew Calarco (2008, 143) proposes that “the human/animal distinction is, strictly speaking, nonsensical. How could a simple (or even highly refined) binary distinction approach be doing justice to the complex ethical and ontological matters at stake here?” In the story, Oates expresses her posthumanist message through the fictional Poe: the descent of the human agents and the ascent of their nonhuman counterparts are essential steps to the building of companion species relationships. Just like the newborn babies who possess the features of both their father and mother, only when human beings abandon their superior position can they form a symbiosis with other species and foster a peaceful world in which all species can prosper.

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