



Edgar Allan Poe's Depiction of the Human Mind

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Poe's Short Stories

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1 Introduction

“I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity” is a frequently quoted passage from one of Edgar Allan Poe’s letters to George Washington Eveleth in 1848 (The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, Poe’s letters). The question that is relevant here is how Poe expressed his interest in psychology in his works and which psychological phenomena were incorporated that collide with psychoanalysis.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that Poe anticipated Freudian imagery, although Freud did not start publishing his works until roughly fifty years after Poe’s death. Furthermore, this paper will show how Poe’s writing style mirrors ideas in Freudian theories and how his short stories can be interpreted through the lens of different aspects of Freud’s psychoanalysis.

The questions that these previous statements conjure, are: Why Freud? What do these theories entail? What makes psychoanalysis a valid method to interpret literature? And how can this be applied to literature that was produced before psychoanalysis was even a concept? How does Poe approach psychological elements and in what way does he incorporate them into his works?

All of these questions will be answered in the course of this study. For now, I would like to make some remarks on the structure of this paper. The introduction will provide a short overview on Freudian theories. Furthermore, central research questions and a general introduction into the history of American psychology will be the focus of this chapter. At the end of the introduction, I will explain why this topic is still fascinating and why writing this paper is relevant for literary research. In a further step, the Gothic era with its characteristics and Poe’s idiosyncrasies in his adaption of Gothic writing will constitute the pillars of the second chapter. The third chapter focuses on general, analytic parallels between Freud and Poe, which serve to establish a connection between the authors and clarify the similarities in their relationship to literature. It will also provide an introduction into the uncanny. In the fourth chapter, the analysis and close reading of “The Fall of the House of Usher” is supported with certain aspects of Freudian theories. The focus lies on the representation of Freud’s tripartite model of the ‘id’, the ‘ego’ and the ‘super-ego’. Furthermore, the conflict that may arise between these three instances will be examined. The fifth chapter consists of an analysis of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Black

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Cat.” This story incorporates elements, which deal with the fear of castration and ‘transference’, two different theories by Freud. In the sixth and last chapter of the analysis, Poe’s “The Imp of the Perverse” will be investigated. This chapter is the closest to Freud’s studies, because it is a short study of a drive that, according to Poe’s narrator, everybody has encountered at some point in their lives. With the help of Freud’s ‘pleasure principle’ and his theory of two innate distinct drives, the true meaning of ‘the imp of the perverse’ will be defined. Furthermore, the above-mentioned tales will be closely examined for indicators of the uncanny. Last, the conclusion will sum up the main results that were gathered by means of the analysis and tie up loose ends.

First, I would like to briefly introduce the concepts by Sigmund Freud, which will be used in order to analyze the texts. Freud’s idea of the psychological apparatus (“Psychical Apparatus”, Oxford Reference. *A Dictionary of Psychology*) promotes that three instances ‘live’ in every person’s mind. He distinguishes the conscious from the unconscious and describes the consciousness as the surface of the psyche (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3953): “All perceptions which are received from without (sense-perception) and from within – what we call sensations and feelings – are Cs. [conscious] from the start” (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3953). Everything that is hidden and internal, classified as “thought processes” (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*) belongs to the unconscious. Essentially, psychoanalysis tries to bring unconscious processes to the surface. Therefore, unconscious thoughts need to be transferred into the pre-conscious or latent, before they can reach the consciousness and be treated there, according to the mental disorder they cause (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3948).

The ‘ego’ is developed through our perception system and rests on the surface, or consciousness (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3953). Over time, two other components develop from the ego. The first one is the ‘super-ego’ – or conscience, where the values and morals that have been established by the individual’s environment, the society and parental ideals, lie (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 5010). The second is called the ‘id’ - where all desires and instincts, as well as biological drives, are stored in the unconscious¹ (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 5004f.). The ‘ego’

¹ “In Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality, the unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories outside of conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. Freud believed that the unconscious continues to influence behavior even though people are unaware of these underlying influences.” (“What is the Unconscious?”)

functions as a mediator between all components and is dependent on reality. Freud's theory claims that these three instances need to be in balance, in order to be healthy. If this is not the case, mental disorders can appear.

Another theory by Freud is the 'Oedipus complex' and the 'castration complex' that deduces from the former. The idea that underlies the 'Oedipus complex' is that every child has sexuality and a fully formed libido, which is acquired shortly after birth (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 4963). The libido wants to bind itself to objects of its own choice (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 4966). This is called 'cathexis' ("Cathexis". Oxford Reference. *A Dictionary of Psychology*). Freud claims that every child's first object choice is the mother (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 4997). Boys, in contrast to girls, imitate the father and eventually want to replace him. According to Freud the female 'Oedipus complex' is different, since little girls also want to have a penis, and when they find out that their mother has given birth to them without this precious body part, they resent her and fixate on their fathers (Freud, *Complete Works*, 5000). The female 'Oedipus complex' is not relevant for this thesis, which is why further studies concerning this topic will not be necessary. When the mother realizes that she is the desired object of her son, she threatens the boy with castration by the hands of the father (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 4997). The fear that this image produces is called 'castration complex' and brings the 'Oedipus complex' in boys to an end (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 5001).

In the course of the analysis, the thesis will deal with two more Freudian ideas. One of them is called 'transference', which the *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* characterizes as follows: "the process of moving something from one place, person or use to another" (Hornby, 1645). Freud describes it as a process, where emotions that are directed at one person, are falsely connected to another person or object that has nothing to do with these emotions (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 2236).

Last but not least, Freud's 'pleasure principle' and the 'death drive' will arrest our attention. The 'pleasure principle' functions on different quantities of excitation. The ego always seeks pleasure (low quantity of excitation) and avoids unpleasurable feelings (high quantity of excitation) at all costs (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3716). Freud found out that, while we have a tendency to adhere to this principle, there are other processes that don't abide by its rules (Freud, *Complete*

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Works, *ibid*). In order to explain this, Freud distinguishes between two different sets of instincts. The branch that is important for this thesis is the one that holds the ‘ego-instincts’, also called ‘destruction’ or ‘death drive’ (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3745). The first priority of this drive is the effect of putting an organism back into its original state, which is being inanimate, or, namely, dead (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3740). All of the above-mentioned concepts will find inclusion in the analysis of Poe’s short stories. More information on them will be provided in the respective chapters.

Regarding the research questions posed on the first page, I would like to explain the question how Freud can be relevant to a thesis concerned with literature that was created before psychoanalysis even came to be, and why psychoanalysis is relevant as a means for interpretation. Firstly, I would like to refer to a statement made by Carroll D. Lavery in her doctoral thesis *Science and Pseudo-Science in the Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*. She points out that “Freud is reported to have said, ‘The poets and philosophers before me have discovered the scientific method with which the unconscious can be studied’” (Lavery, 88). This matches Clive Bloom’s claim, who states in his book *Reading Poe Reading Freud – The Romantic Imagination in Crisis*:

Literary analysis and psychoanalytic interpretation have a long association. From the earliest beginnings of psychoanalysis Freud applied his technique to the elucidation of works of literature. His analyses are filled with allusions from great authors, and, moreover his case-studies, when they tackle the interpretation of his various patient’s dreams, approach a certain practice of reading. (Bloom, 1)

Both statements confirm that literature and psychoanalysis are inevitably linked. Moreover, the relationship between Poe and Freud is special, because they mirror each other: “Freud uses the discourse of fiction to find truth and Poe exploits the discourse of truth to create fiction” (Bloom, 4). In order to define what the ‘truth’ is in Poe’s case, it is necessary to investigate what psychological discoveries were made during the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, psychology was slowly becoming an autonomous field of study. Previously, psychology was considered a branch of philosophy. For the duration of Poe’s life it remained there and matured after the civil war, by becoming its own scientific field. Benjamin and Baker point out that “clearly, there was a practice of psychology, if not a profession, long before there was a science” (Benjamin; Baker, 3). Thus, the roads for pseudo-sciences were open to infiltrate

psychology and the field was streaked by completely differing beliefs, many of which have been discredited today. During Poe's time the study of psychology, combined with moral philosophy, metaphysics and logic, which were considered the foundation of all psychological studies (cf. Roback, 36f.), was solely a study of consciousness: "There were only sensations, so far as we can be certain, and the self, or what others would designate as the soul, was merely a bundle of sensations" (Roback, 35). One of the phenomena of the early nineteenth century that belong to the study of psychology was, for example, phrenology – a concept where the bumps in a person's head are measured to predict certain tendencies in their character (cf. Benjamin; Baker, 2). The underlying belief system of this method is that "different parts of the brain were responsible for different emotional, intellectual and behavioral functions" (Benjamin; Baker, 4). Furthermore, there was physiognomy – a method that is similar to phrenology, except for the fact that the indicators for tendencies were found in the features of the face, rather than in bumps on the head. Both of these techniques were later discredited. Additionally, introspection was *en vogue* - a method of uncovering psychological functions by examining one's own conscious thoughts and feelings (cf. Doman, Introspection: Definition & Explanation). One last phenomenon that should be included is mesmerism, which followed the strategy of curing patients with the help of magnets. The patient was put under "a kind of fainting spell" (Benjamin; Baker, 17), which made his/her symptoms stop for several hours. Benjamin and Baker note that the spell is a kind of hypnosis (ibid), a method that was later picked up by Sigmund Freud. Poe included mesmerism in at least two of his short stories².

As mentioned before, the lines between pseudo-science and science were blurred in the nineteenth century, and therefore, beliefs differed greatly from one person to the next. Thus, it is necessary to examine what Edgar Allan Poe was really interested in and why. There are some sources that claim that part of Poe's interest in psychology stems from the fear of losing his own mind, as can be read in the letter to George Eveleth that was mentioned in the beginning (The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, Poe's letters). Hence, critics such as Marie Bonaparte, a pupil of Sigmund Freud, are quick to claim that a reason for Poe's interest in psychology was his own twisted mind. Bonaparte sees a pathological necrophiliac in Poe, who expressed his

² Cf. Poe, *Complete Tales and Poems*. Mesmeric Revelation. pp. 88-96 and The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar pp. 96-104

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everlasting love for his dead mother in his short stories and poems (Wright, 40). She uses the interpretation of dreams for her analysis, because she believes that tales can be read as dream states of the author (Wright, *ibid*). Elizabeth Wright notes that:

She [Bonaparte] takes Poe's tales as the manifest part of the dream and believes that, by finding associations from persons and incidents in Poe's life, she is recovering the latent part. The problem is not so much in what she does [...], but in what she claims: that this is where the true meaning is to be found. (Wright, 41)

Freud urged his pupils to be cautious of this point of view. He saw the risk of confusing the dream-work, which are processes of the mind that work to distort repressed feelings into the manifest dream (the narrative), with the latent dream-thoughts (Wright, 42), a term which refers to “connoted representations, affects, wishes, and conflictual patterns, all deeply marked by infantilism and fantasy” (Encyclopedia.com. Latent Dream Thoughts). In confusing these two distinct concepts, the actual meaning of the dream – or in Bonaparte's case, story – is in danger of being misinterpreted. Moreover, Bonaparte's method is reductive, because she assumes that every symbol in Poe's tales that can be interpreted psychoanalytically was integrated unconsciously by the author. James Gargano opposes to this view by closing his article “The Question of Poe's Narrators” as follows:

Poe, I contend, is conscious of the abnormalities of his narrators and does not condone the intellectual ruses through which they strive, only too earnestly, to justify themselves. In short, though his narrators are often febrile or demented, Poe is conspicuously ‘sane’. They may be ‘decidedly primitive’ or ‘wildly incoherent’, but Poe, in his stories at least, is mature and lucid. (Gargano, 181)

Thus, he proclaims that Poe is completely conscious of what he writes and how he portrays certain psychological phenomena. However, Marie Bonaparte's study is not to be rejected completely. She is reasonable in her comparison of stories to dreams, as tales can serve as wish-fulfilment for the author, and her observation is definitely interesting. While I agree with Gargano in thinking that most of what Poe includes in his tales was intentional and calculated, I will point out that certainly not all phenomena that are to be observed in Poe's stories can be viewed as conscious placements. A solution to this problem is nearly impossible, because only the author himself could give testimony to which degree he was aware of the grave impact of the events he describes. The fact that the stories show parallels to psychoanalysis might not have been a fully conscious decision at all times. However, Poe was fascinated by

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the thought that discoveries would be made that could provide insight into the human nature to a higher degree than they did in his own time. In his story "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," one of the characters has a near-death-experience that he cannot explain. When he tells the character Templeton that he has no explanation, but is sure of the fact that it was not a dream, Templeton answers:

Nor was it [...] yet it would be difficult to say how otherwise it should be termed. Let us suppose only, that the soul of the man of to-day is upon the verge of some stupendous psychal discoveries. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 685)

This is exactly why this topic is so interesting. A man, who is afraid of losing his mind, writes tales about characters, whose minds slowly deteriorate, or, who are corrupted by a force stronger than them, to do wrong, as can be seen in the analysis of "The Imp of the Perverse." Additionally, he is aware that there is more to come in the field of psychology, which will explain certain inexplicable phenomena. According to Laverty the comment he ascribed to Templeton could be interpreted as his own wish that man would make such discoveries. (58). Even Bonaparte admits in the beginning of her chapter on "The Black Cat":

It is almost as Poe had sensed the remote advent of psychoanalysis which, alone, has given us the means to reduce to a series of causes and effects, emanating in fact, as he himself says, from "homely and domestic happenings" [...] (Bonaparte, 459)

This again stands in accord with Freud's notion that the poets and philosophers before his time uncovered the mysteries, which he later put into words. This constitutes the base for the development of psychoanalysis. In the light of these observations, one might argue that Poe is one of these poets, which renders the thesis' approach of interpreting Poe's stories through the lens of Freudian theories relevant. Maroš Buday points out:

Adopting psychoanalysis as an interpretive model of Poe's fiction offers a truly remarkable analytical viewpoint because it delves into the depths of the characters' psyche and has the power to completely transform the general ambience of the story, giving it a new prism for fictional reality as experienced by the protagonists of Poe's stories. Because the focus of psychoanalytical interpretation is put on the main character's perception of reality and Poe's stories [...] are narrated predominantly in the first person, it is imperative to perceive the events of the narrative strictly through the lens of the protagonists' psyche. (Buday, 12)

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This comment is a strong argument for my approach. There is a vast variety of treatises that deal with an author-oriented approach. The term for connecting the dots in the works of an author, in order to make assumptions about his life is called “psycho-biography”. There have been numerous attempts of this kind that have been made by critics, such as the afore-mentioned Marie Bonaparte, D. H. Lawrence and Joseph Wood Krutch (Stovall, 418). Floyd Stovall states, “These are not literary critiques at all, but clinical studies of a supposed psychopathic personality” (Stovall, *ibid*). He also refers to Allen Tate, who declared that these critics act as if the works of Edgar Allan Poe had barely any intrinsic meaning at all. “[T]aken together they make up a dossier for the analyst to peruse before Mr. Poe steps into his office for an analysis” (Tate, 240f.) Tate’s and Stovall’s opinion, that the conscious part of Poe’s art has almost always been overlooked when psychoanalysis was used as a tool for interpretation, is the reason why I chose the opposite approach. This thesis focuses solely on the stories and their symbolism and psychoanalytic value that comes from within. I will argue that Poe consciously implemented psychological phenomena in his works. However, most of his endeavors into the human mind surpassed his time and age and can be read through a psychoanalytic lens, a technique which was devised long after Poe’s death. I do not wish to make claims about Poe’s personality or the circumstances of his authorship. The focus of this thesis lies solely on studies about Poe’s anticipation of Freudian imagery, before they were formed into concrete concepts and publicized.

2 Gothic Fiction: An Era of Violence, Horror and Fear

The era of Gothic fiction, during the time of Romanticism, is one of the earliest periods in American literary history. But what are the characteristics of this genre and what makes it so unique? How does Poe adapt these aspects and turn it into successful Gothic stories? This chapter focuses on the background of Gothic fiction and its history. In the following pages, the most striking characteristics and the social context that had an impact on this genre will be mapped out.

2.1 History of the Gothic Tradition

“The term ‘Gothic’ [...] originated in a confluence of history and architecture” (Fisher, 73). From the 11th century onward, a northern Germanic people, whose values differed greatly from the Greco-Roman classical civilization, travelled across Europe. They broke with the Romanesque tradition of behavior and building strategies, and thus, brought forth a different type of architecture (cf. Fisher, *ibid*). This people are known as the Goths. Most of the cathedrals in northern Europe and the British isles are constructed in the Gothic style (cf. Fisher, *ibid*). This kind of architecture is characterized by high windows, which allowed the light to flood the interior. Vaulted or pointed arches are omnipresent in the interior, supported by “flying buttresses” on the outside for stabilization (cf. Fisher, *ibid*). “What was essential to architectural soundness was often deemed ‘grotesque’ by those who beheld the tangible forms”, claims Fisher (*ibid*). The word ‘grotesque’ is also used in the Gothic tradition of literature and the structure of the buildings served as an inspiration for the settings of tales and poems. Fisher also states that, although the high windows let in more light, “a sense of considerable shadowiness or obscurity is inescapable when one enters Gothic buildings or their cloisters” (Fischer, *ibid*). In Continental Europe most of these buildings are still preserved. However, when Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church in Great Britain, most of the Gothic buildings there were no longer maintained and are now mere ruins (cf. Fisher, 74). “In addition to the symbolism in the ruined architecture, the British mind came to associate a downright immorality with some of the thinking and practices in Roman Catholicism” (Fisher, *ibid*). Moreover, the flowing robes of nuns and monks became an inspiration for ghostly figures and “plausible models for supernatural beings” (Fisher, *ibid*). To cast an even poorer light on the clergy, rumors were spread that they buried insubordinate people alive, as punishment (Fisher, *ibid*). Fisher points out that the fear of being buried alive “persisted well into the early years of the twentieth century” (*ibid*). The clergy therefore became a model of monstrosity, which was incorporated into Gothic fiction.

Gothic fiction is a genre of literature that is characterized by the aesthetic of being fully in touch with one's feelings and emotions. The Gothic tradition is not limited to literature, since it can also be found in other forms of art, such as paintings,

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architecture and landscape gardening (Stevens, 10). David Stevens states in his book *The Gothic tradition*:

There are so many Gothic associations that the whole concept may seem at times indefinable and elusive. Nevertheless, emerging from this rather uneven, often misleading semantic field is a sense of the Gothic as recovering and renewing a tradition which valued feelings and sensibility, and which had been all but usurped by the developing dominance of reason as the key to all human problems. (Stevens, 9).

Gothic fiction emerged in the eighteenth century, at the height of Enlightenment, which is the successor of medieval times and “a reaction against superstition and blind adherence to tradition in favour of scientific, open enquiry” (Stevens, *ibid*). Gothic fiction reached its height in the early nineteenth century (cf. Fisher, 76). The system of belief that the Gothic tradition is based on claims that emotions are the primal function of humanity “and can therefore be seen as more profoundly human than the insistence of rationality and social progress” (Stevens, 10). However, relying on the newest technology and scientific findings, it was relatively ‘safe’ to indulge in irrational phantasies (Stevens, *ibid*), which is the reason why Gothic stories were still popular. Furthermore, with the increase of literacy, reading was no longer a domain that was reserved entirely to the aristocracy, but instead it became also accessible for “the up-and-coming middle class” (Stevens, *ibid*).

Allan Lloyd Smith writes in his book *American Gothic: An Introduction* that Gothic fiction is about the return of the past, “of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present” (Smith, 1). He states that analyzing Gothic tradition is a study of repetitions (cf. Smith, *ibid*). This means that the American Gothic writers learned from each other. Poe learned from German Gothicists, and later on influenced Hawthorne, who in turn had an influence on James’ writing and so forth (cf. Smith 1f.). Smith also states that repetition is a Gothic trait in the sense that Freud defined repetition as part of the uncanny (cf. Smith, 2). The uncanny will be discussed in the analysis of the short stories in greater detail.

According to Smith, “it is frequently assumed that Gothic fiction began as a lurid off-shoot from a dominant tradition of largely realist and morally respectable fiction” (Smith, 3). The story titled *The castle of Otranto* by the British writer Horace Walpole, published in 1764, is considered one of the first works of fiction that explores Gothic themes (cf. Smith, 3). It is important to note that earlier British

writers, such as Samuel Richardson, Daniel Defoe and Thomas Nashe had included some of the themes that became important for the Gothic genre. These authors are the precursors of Gothic fiction (cf. Smith, *ibid*). Walpole's basic plot or motifs incorporate "the vicious pursuit of innocence" (Fisher, 74): Innocents are exploited for money, lust or power.

Issues of identity and power, often relating to family situations of lineage or marriages (which in their turn might affect history, and which in later Gothic works often were centered in smaller numbers of characters, ultimately to operate within the consciousness of just one character), along with sexuality and gender considerations, came to hold greater importance than the eerie settings that provided mysterious backdrops for equally mysterious speeches and actions in previous Gothic works. (Fisher, 74)

Images taken from the Renaissance, such as military situations or other situations of social agitation, are also found in *The Castle of Otranto*, as well as supernaturalism, in form of a gigantic helmet that crushes one of the characters (cf. Fisher, 75). Walpole also explores sexual violence, brutality and death, as well as incest in his novels (cf. Fisher, *ibid*). Benjamin Fisher states, "Such themes were intensified in many later Gothic works, so readers hostile to Gothicism have charged that they are little better to pornography" (Fisher, *ibid*). He also points out that if pornography is linked to Gothicism, the element of humor is also incorporated in Walpole's novel:

Many readers of Walpole's novel find that the hyperbolic language and high-pitched emotions verge so strongly toward the ridiculous as to suggest a strong comic impulse indicative of his satirizing the melodramatic qualities potential in horrors. (Fisher, 76)

This pop-culture element, whether it is placed intentional or not, is a vital ingredient for Gothic fiction in numerous authors' works. For example, William Beckford's novel *Vathek* (1786) contains strong indicators for a satire.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, German authors came to adapt the Gothic tradition, but they were faced with harsh criticism by the Anglo-American readership. They deemed their adaptation of Gothicism as too extreme. Poe is also described with the epithet 'German' in some of his critics' works (Fisher, 76), which was considered a disparaging term. The American Gothic tradition was also influenced by its British forefathers, due to their circumstances, "American writers were effectively still a part of the British culture, working in an English domain and exposed, both intellectually and in terms of their market place, to British models"

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(Smith, 3). Smith concedes that, although the British influence was inevitable, the models of American writers were “highly specific” (ibid), and in turn, influenced British writers, as well as the American colleagues.

2.2 American Gothic

It has been established that American writers were still dependent on their British forefathers. However, American Gothic writers struggled with different circumstances, in contrast to the British, which led them into different directions (cf. Smith, 4). Since the continent was relatively ‘new’, the retrogressivity of Gothic fiction was rather obstructive: American writers did not have medieval settings, such as castles that could be used as settings and a lack of history to base their stories upon (cf. Smith, ibid). Moreover, Benjamin Fisher claims in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe* that:

A related consideration, and this one in existence almost before a steady stream of creative writings came from the pens of Americans who undertook authorship, was a desire to create a literature that would manifest the nationalistic trends infusing American life. (Fisher, 76)

Therefore, Americans deemed the so-called ‘Old World literature’ as inferior “in the face of the cultural milieu on the new continent” (Fisher, ibid). The founders of this new American literary Gothicism are William Dunlap and Charles Brockden Brown (Fisher, 77). Charles Brockden Brown transferred the originally British tradition of Gothic writing onto American context in his novel *Edgar Huntly, or Memoires of a Sleepwalker*, which was published in 1799. American writers needed new strategies to produce plausible and serious fiction. This resulted in an examination of different themes. Instead of castles, remote houses were used and stories were concerned with the frontier experience “with its inherent solitude and the potential violence” (Smith, 4). Charles Brockden Brown was also concerned with this particular experience and transferred the originally British tradition of Gothic writing onto American context in his novel *Edgar Huntly, or, Memoires of a Sleepwalker*, which was published in 1799 (Lewis, 3). The Puritan heritage was remodeled into tales, as well as the relative absence of a developed society and racial issues that were dealt with in American Gothic fiction (cf. Smith, ibid). Smith finds:

That these circumstances invented and even required a Gothic style is shown by the inclusion of ‘Gothic’ elements within such clearly non-Gothic texts as James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy* (1821) or *The Prairie* (1827). Such texts are not so

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much working to *adapt* the Gothic mode; instead the Gothic emerges from the conditions they seek to describe. (Smith, *ibid*)

This means that Gothic elements were often a side effect of the circumstances American writers faced, and not merely a fashion that was conjured out of thin air.

According to Smith, “[h]allmarks of the Gothic include a pushing towards extremes and excess, and that [...] implies an investigation of limits” (Smith, 5). The Gothic writers delved into cruelty, fear and sexual degradation among other themes and dwelled in the sensationalism of this “universally deplored yet extremely popular form of writing” (Smith, *ibid*). Through the exploration of extremes and excesses “Gothic fiction tends to reinforce culturally prescribed doctrines of morality and propriety” (Smith, *ibid*). Explorations of necromancy, occultism, demonism and religious profanities are characterized by Smith as “a dark side of Enlightenment free thinking” (Smith, 6), or as “an increasingly excluded occultist tradition in western culture” (Smith, *ibid*). The inspection of extreme situations and actions can also be connected to “widespread social anxiety and fears” (Smith, *ibid*). Smith names the oppression of women and children in the patriarchic system before he turns to the reasons of fear in Americans:

In American Gothic, while this [oppression of women and children] remained a major theme, race and slavery, or fear of what was then called miscegenation, also emerges, along with the settlers' terror of the Indians and the wilderness, and later perhaps some suppressed recognition of Native American Genocide. (Smith, 8)

To sum it up, uncertainties about the ‘new world’ engaged American authors, as they slowly developed a literary tradition that expressed what they felt, and played on the collective fear of a nationality, which had to come to terms with the reality of settling on a new continent. This constitutes an extreme situation, which gives reason to argue that this also led to the examination of excesses in literature, which were mentioned before.

Smith expresses that the architecture of the settings, which was previously elaborated on, is one of “the most striking features” of Gothic fiction:

In early Gothic these were often medievalist, involving ancient stone buildings with elaborate ‘Gothic’ arches, buttresses, passageways and crypts. This was to become the *mise en scene* of Gothicism, replete with trappings of hidden

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doorways and secret chambers, incomprehensible labyrinths, speaking portraits and trap doors. (Smith, 7)

The age of the settings was often used as a pleasurable exploration of “pastness” (Smith, *ibid*) that was interesting to Romanticists as “an aesthetic appreciation of a previously scorned inheritance” (Smith, *ibid*). A certain nostalgia and longing for simpler times was to be felt at the time, a side effect of the up-and-coming industrialism and commerce. Thus, changes were most unwelcome and dismissed. The fear of becoming an oppressive society through these new structures was often hidden behind this rejection of change (cf. Smith, *ibid*). Smith points to the painter Piranesi, whose painting shows a labyrinth of Gothic structures and torture utensils in dark chambers (cf. Smith, *ibid*). The painter was successful in capturing the atmosphere of the Gothic, which Smith describes as, “a chiaroscuro of shadows and indeterminate illumination inducing a sense of futility, despair, and the loss of hope among brutal realities of cruel and conscienceless power” (Smith, *ibid*). Fisher explains that the Gothic atmosphere “was an atmosphere conducive to anxieties in the protagonist and, depending on the situation of the story, among other characters in general” (Fisher, 75). Landscapes gave a similarly oppressive impression by dwelling “on the exposed, inhuman and pitiless nature of mountains, crags, and wastelands” (Smith, *ibid*). Eventually, these notions of architecture, oppressiveness and landscapes became metaphors that allowed the authors to transform simple buildings, or rooms, into Gothic settings “and the mere darkness or barrenness could call up the Gothic mood” (Smith, *ibid*). These settings were often used to express the mental state of characters, as can be observed in some of the works of Edgar Allan Poe and other Gothic writers, such as Herman Melville or Nathaniel Hawthorne:

Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) focused first on the forbidding jail so important to life in seventeenth-century Boston, shifted to the scaffold, and then made landscapes reflect the lights and shadows in human life and character. (Fisher, 75)

This quote by Fisher illustrates how Hawthorne used the popular themes discussed above effectively in his novel.

The supernaturalism in Gothic fiction is one of the central characteristics of this genre. Smith refers to the paradox that is created by the inclusion of science as an explanation of the former mysterious, and its use to create new pseudo-scientific explanations for “sinister capacities bordering on the miraculous” (Smith, 6).

Sometimes science was used to draw connections to occultist pre-scientific doctrines, in order to indicate the terrible results that stemmed “from any meddling with nature”³ (Smith, *ibid*). Later on, when the writers became increasingly interested in the human mind, the lines between the former clearly separated concepts of the supernatural, the fantastic and the uncanny were blurred. The last of these three became the primary model that guided the writers in their production of Gothic fiction. It is important to note, in respect to my thesis, that Edgar Allan Poe was one of the first American writers who anticipated Freud's imagery. Although Edgar Allan Poe was born at the beginning of the century in 1809 and died in 1849, he already showed a great interest in the uncanny and an exceptional understanding of the human mind, almost 50 years before most of the writers immersed into these concepts.

The fact that the philosophy of Gothicism was particularly focused on the human mind is not only evident in literature, but also in a painting by Francisco de Goya called “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos” (Smith, 10). Translated this means that ‘the sleep of reason produces monsters’: “when reason sleeps as everything must, the hitherto repressed monsters will emerge, both threatening and terrifying precisely because they have been repressed” (Stevens, 11f.). The reason why this painting is included in this thesis is its message, which anticipates some of Freud's theories, exactly as Poe's short stories do. This proves that glimpses of Freudian theories were already graspable for the artists of this epoch. This sounds plausible, because Freud himself refers to the past, as his inspiration for psychoanalysis (Lavery, 88). However, there is still the question of what part Poe plays in the Gothic tradition.

2.3 Poe's Idiosyncrasies: A Distant Reading

Fisher claims that Edgar Allan Poe reformed terror tales “into what have been recognized as some of the most sophisticated creations in psychological fiction in the English language” (Fisher, 78). Poe's understanding of psychological plausibility being eminently compatible with Gothicism provided an advantage for him in creating haunting pieces of literature (cf. Fisher, *ibid*). However, his primary dream

³ i.e. Shelly's *Frankenstein*

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was to become a poet, which is why he focused on poetry early on in his career (Fisher, *ibid*). When examining his poetry, many Gothic characteristics can be found in works, such as “Tamerlane.” This poem is important, because the protagonist is the forerunner for many angst-ridden and lonely characters in several other poems. After the dream to be a poet had failed – or, at least, did not prove to be lucrative – Poe wanted to sell what was profitable and started to work on his tales (Fisher, 79). Poe began to sell his stories to newspapers and magazines (Fisher, *ibid*). Fisher establishes some of Poe’s most used themes by focusing on his tale “Metzengerstein,” which is

filled with terror-fraught escapades in remote Hungary: family feuds and resultant revenges; a family curse; a supernaturally animated tapestry rather than a haunted portrait; a supernatural, fiery-colored gigantic horse (the reincarnation or metempsychosis of old Count Berlifitzing into his favorite kind of animal to wreak his revenge). (Fisher, 80)

Most of the themes named in Fisher’s examination have already been mentioned in the pages above. However, some of them, such as the “supernaturally animated tapestry” and the “supernatural horse” are new. According to Fisher, these images are a herald for the “otherworldliness” of the cat in Poe’s “The Black Cat,” which was published a decade later (Fisher, 81). “The emotionally overwrought protagonist” (Fisher, *ibid*) is also a theme that becomes one of the most important characteristics of Poe’s short stories. The characters are not only emotionally disturbed, but frequently function as the personified pure evil. The emotional turmoil they go through is in essence, “death-dealing acts [...], weltering in guilt, remorse, and confusion” (Fisher, *ibid*). Furthermore, one of the most striking features in Poe’s tales is the way Poe constantly plays with “perimeters of the natural and supernatural, or the sober and the mirthful” (Fisher, 82), as well as “the truth-versus-fiction theme” (Fisher, *ibid*).

The vast majority of Poe’s narrators are unreliable. Wayne C. Booth argues in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, “I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not” (Booth, 158f.). While this might work for different types of fiction, where the bounds of the depicted reality are clear, it is rather unhelpful in Poe’s case. The reality of Poe’s world in fiction is never clearly defined. There are numerous inexplicable or supernatural forces that torment the characters. Ansgar Nünning also sees the problematics of this explanation:

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This canonized definition does not really make for clarity but rather sets the fox to keep the geese, as it were, since it falls back on the ill-defined and illusive notion of the implied author, which hardly provides a reliable basis for determining a narrator's unreliability. (Nünning, 85)

How then, are we supposed to know whether a narrator is unreliable or not? Nünning concludes: "The trouble with all of the definitions that are based on the implied author is that they try to define unreliability by relating it to a concept that is itself ill-defined and paradoxical" (Nünning, *ibid*). Moreover, he claims that "an implied author's norms are impossible to establish and [...] the concept of the implied author is eminently dispensable" (Nünning, 87). I strongly agree with this statement, since the implied author is not the norm and the author's role is insignificant for the approach used in this thesis. The fact that defining an unreliable narrator is difficult, is undeniable. Considering these aspects, the question of whether there are signals that disclose unreliability, or not, arises. It can be argued that there are certain significant signals that emphasize unreliability:

Unreliable narrators tend to be marked by a number of definable textual inconsistencies which function as clues to unreliability. Two of the most prominent of these are internal contradictions within the narrator's discourse and discrepancies between his or her utterances and actions. (Nünning, 96)

Furthermore, the conflict between the events of the story and the manner in which they are depicted can be an indicator for an unreliable narrator, as well as their "verbal habits" (Nünning, *ibid*) that can be used to draw conclusions about the narrator's personality.

Poe often uses first person narrators who introduce themselves as highly rational beings and attempt to paint a picture of an average person. This construction of characters invites the reader to trust the narrators in the beginning. Through the course of the tale, it eventually becomes clear that the narrators are not as trustworthy as they seem. Some of them are criminals with an underdeveloped conscience⁴, while others struggle with mental illnesses, such as depression⁵, melancholy⁶ or megalomania⁷. Constructing a seemingly reasonable narrator and letting this image crumble little by little offers advantages to the author. On the one hand, if a rational

⁴ See "The Imp of the Perverse"; "The Black Cat"

⁵ See "The Fall of the House of Usher"

⁶ See "The Raven"; "Ligeia"

⁷ See "William Wilson"

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being presents the reader with incredible or uncanny events, the eerie effect the story should have on the reader is easily achieved. If the narrator was presented as delusional from the very beginning, this would not be possible. It would prepare the reader for the outcome and also urge them to be cautious and doubt the description of incidents. On the other hand, unreliable narrators in disguise allow plot twists, in which the reader realizes that the narrator is not the person they claim to be. This realization puts another complexion on the matter. Incidents and feelings the narrator portrayed before might seem less credible, convey the mental state of the character, and/or reveal the depictions by the narrator as flat out lies.

Using a first person narrator serves Poe well in his endeavors to explore the human mind. It provides insight into the emotions and thought processes of a character, without interference by another authority. This means that there is no external judgment of the characters. Therefore, the moral compass of the narrator is the baseline for the course of the story. It is at the reader's discretion, whether they believe the narrator or not. The fact that there is no interfering authority is thought-provoking. It puts the readers into the position of the judge. They are presented with certain procedures and processes that demand a sentence. As a consequence, the readers have to task themselves with finding clues and investigating, if there are any contradictions in the story, or sentiments that do not fit the situation. Is the narrator really mentally ill, or are they simply misguided? Are they superstitious and tend to over-interpret events? Are there natural causes, which the narrator might have missed, that led them to the situation in which they are in now? In what manner does the narrator speak? All these questions have to be answered by the reader, and ultimately define how the tales is perceived. This leaves room for many different interpretations and numerous viewing opportunities. The afore-mentioned questions also stand in accord with Ansgar Nünning's perception:

In the case of an unreliable narrator, dramatic irony results from the discrepancy between the intentions and value system of the narrator and the foreknowledge and norms of the reader. For the reader, either the internal lack of harmony between the statements of the narrator or contradictions between the narrator's perspective and the reader's own concept of normality suggests that the narrator's reliability may be suspect. (Nünning, *ibid*)

This again evokes the notion that the reader is the ultimate judge of whether a narrator is reliable or unreliable.

Yet, the most striking feature is that Poe's interest in psychology can be observed in such a large number in his stories. The reason for the selection of short stories that I am going to analyze in chapter 4, 5 and 6 is the variety of aspects of psychoanalysis conveyed in the stories. Stories, such as "The Tell-Tale Heart," "Berenice," "Ligeia," "William Wilson," and "The Raven" deal with themes as, for instance, the treacherous conscience, the deterioration of the mind, the loss and revival of a loved one, the evil twin and a kind of dream-state in mourning, which allows the protagonist to communicate with a raven. While these themes are fairly common in Gothic fiction, Poe broadens the range of Gothic by focusing on psychological insights. This was also a common practice in Gothic fiction, although this trend appears mostly in works that were published after Poe's death. Therefore, the next chapter provides insight into the analytic and stylistic parallels that can be found in Poe's and Freud's work, and thus, link both authors to each other. Since the uncanny became a guideline for Gothic fiction, some general observations about the uncanny and its etymology are also included.

3. The Relationship between Sigmund Freud and Edgar Allan Poe

Sigmund Freud was a German neurologist, who developed a method to explore, what he calls, 'the unconscious'. During Poe's time, the unconscious was not a concept in psychology yet, but it can be seen that literature and Freud's method, psychoanalysis, are linked to each other and have thrived upon each other (cf. Bloom 1f.). Poe's interests are various and traverse through a large number of different aspects. Carroll D. Lavery puts it as follows:

His interest in formal psychology is shown by his various comments on the mind, memory, taste and genius, the interpretation of the concept of time and space, and the relation between body and soul, and by his studies of conscience, personal identity, dreams, and to a slight extent, other subjects. Further use of the introspective study of the mind and what he called the soul is demonstrated in his many stories that portray the terror of an individual facing circumstances which are novel and unique in their ability to torture man's sensibilities and to inflict bodily and mental pain. At least three of his stories turn on psychological tricks. (Lavery, 45)

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This shows that the afore-mentioned works in Chapter 2 that were included in the distant reading of Poe's works are mere examples, and do not cover all aspects of his inquiries.

Before the examination of the previously introduced phenomena can begin, I would like to mention that Freud's theories are often problematic, because some of his theories are based on pure speculation, rather than on science. Therefore, it can be said that psychoanalysis is not an exact science. Freud mentions "exact science" exactly ten times in his works, (Freud, *Complete Works*, 585, 593, 3188, 3189, 3863, 3864, 4102, 4771), but almost exclusively to degrade it, or to underline his claims. He never refers to psychoanalysis as an exact science, because this method can only help to interpret the patients' statements. That interpretation is hardly objective is common knowledge. Thus, psychoanalysis is dangerously open to errors⁸. However, when working with literature, and especially this thesis, the interpretation of the short stories constitutes the main part. Therefore, it seems fitting to apply concepts, which are largely based on their ability to interpret processes in the psyche, to short stories, whose author was also greatly interested in psychology and incorporated themes, which are linked to processes in the human mind frequently in his works. Carroll D. Lavery emphasizes this by commenting that

Poe's knowledge of medicine, which was finally beginning to look at insanity as disease rather than moral delinquency, augmented his awareness of the subject. The medical and general magazines of the early 1800s contained discussions arguing the wisdom of treating insane patients humanely, doing away with whips and chains, and substituting sympathy and a sense of human dignity. Poe, reader of journals, knew of the mild stir these articles made in the world of thought. (Lavery, 46)

This is once more an indicator that Poe was eager to learn about psychology and put his research into fiction. However, his endeavors are not solely based on research: Poe also "believed that by intuition one could gain the highest knowledge and truth and that without it a thinker must be a laggard" (Lavery, 53). Lavery also notes that these ideas derive from philosophers such as Descartes, Plato and the German, Schelling. This is exceptionally interesting, since Freud also refers to Schelling in his work *The Uncanny* (4, 13). Thus, Poe and Freud were inspired to some degree by the

⁸ A possible source for such errors can be the "[b]elief that the patient presents chaotic or defended material to the therapist who must break through the distortions to arrive at the mutative interpretation. That is, the patient needs his/her life to be explained by the therapist" (Levenson; Slomowitz, 92). Thus, the therapist is superior to the patient and arrives at an interpretation of the patient's life that might not even be true, but is accepted by the patient, because of their subordinate position.

same philosophers. However, their inspirations are not the only aspect they shared. In the following subchapter, general parallels between Poe and Freud that are not tied to a certain text by either one of the authors, shall be explored.

3.1 Parallels between Poe and Freud

The exploration of general parallels creates a tie between Poe and Freud that is not dependent on the meaning of texts. It is an observation of the approach of the authors and how they are bound to literature. This serves as a guideline that tells the reader how to fully understand the meaning behind Poe's texts in the reading process. The assumption that Poe and Freud are similar in their relationship to literature can be proven by referring to a quote by Clive Bloom, "[To] Freud each 'patient' was a text, whose fictional life was available for interpretation, whose words, syntax and style were subjects to a 'reading' which would reveal hidden and more profound depths" (Bloom, 13). Poe's art of constructing stories follows the same procedure. The 'patient' is the narrator, who needs to be investigated and who sets the tone for a tale that has to be read in a certain manner, in order to arrive at a sophisticated interpretation of the depicted events.

Parallels between Poe and Freud are the main interest of Clive Bloom, who collected them in his book: *Reading Poe Reading Freud: The Romantic Imagination in Crisis*. In the beginning of the book he writes:

I chose Poe and Freud because of the 'unwritten' and curious relationship that their texts have with one another [...] The fascination with Poe is not, I would argue, due to his curious pathology or that of his tales. It rests, principally, in the *mirrored* concepts psychoanalysis is forced to 'recognize' in Poe's texts. (Bloom, 3)

This means that it is not the structure, which Poe chooses to produce his texts and the similarities between different tales that interest Bloom, but the concepts of psychoanalysis that are duplicated by Poe. My approach stands in accord with this. However, I strongly disagree with Bloom's opinion that Poe changes the mirror images, and thus, forces psychoanalysis to retrace its own steps (cf. Bloom, *ibid*). This is a contradiction in itself. Claiming that the aspects Poe put in his stories *mirror* psychoanalysis entails that they are a perfect reflection of the concepts at hand. A mirror image is always a perfect reflection of the person looking into it, which leads

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to the question of why this fact would not be applicable to literature. Therefore, one might argue that Bloom's point of view, in respects to his attitude towards the relationship of Poe's texts and psychoanalysis, is inaccurate.

A parallel that arrested Marie Bonaparte's attention is that Poe's prose poem "Eureka" strongly resembles Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. A detailed treatise of the relationship of these two texts would go beyond the scope of this thesis, which is why I am forced to restrain my observations to very general phenomena that can be seen at the surface. Marie Bonaparte argues that the resemblances "are purely artificial, yet she validates Freud's concepts by, among other texts, analysing 'Eureka', as if Poe was somehow dimly aware of the very Freudian concept of the 'life' and 'death' drive" (Bloom, *ibid*). "Eureka" is by far not the only poem that focuses on this Freudian concept. Later, this thesis will deal with these drives in one of the short stories in greater detail.

Bloom notices that "both Freud and Poe's texts traverse a landscape neither of science nor fiction; a world belonging neither to the psyche nor the text" (Bloom, 4). Both texts are not scientifically bullet-proof and make no claim to be considered as such. Poe and Freud are opposites (the one uses discourse to find truth, the other turns this on its head and uses truth to build discourse). Bloom concedes:

However, considered as types of narrative the two discourses are curiously able to intermesh – it is quite possible to use a Poe tale as an *analytic text* which itself can be 'applied' if this narrative 'equivalency' is accepted as a conditioning factor in the production of both sets of texts. (Bloom, *ibid*)

This observation is interesting, since it shows some similarities in Poe's and Freud's process of text production. Poe indulges in his detective stories in elaborations about analysis and analysists, whose speculations convey similarities to a guideline for analysis⁹. Freud, on the other hand, *wrote* a specific guideline for analysis, which also indulges in elaborations and speculations. Moreover, Bloom states:

In their form as detective 'novellas' Freud's case narratives show us the patient as a 'character', whose (re)construction belongs in the space between the realms of reality and fiction. The detective novel piles up clues which at its end it will synthesize in the same way that Freud (re)constructs the 'clues' left by his patients. (Bloom, 17)

⁹ Cf. the tales "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Purloined Letter" and "The Case of M. Valdemar"

Thus, another parallel between Poe and Freud is the manner of reading the 'text' to understand the consequences. Bloom argues that Freud's "'novels' of science" (Bloom, 16) have to be read backwards. "They are narratives in reverse. Which in the act of reversal revive the very pastness of the past as an event of dramatic and traumatic consequence in the present (and by extension the future)" (Bloom, *ibid*). This is also true for a number of Poe's stories. Two of the texts that are to be analyzed, are constructed in the same way: The criminal in "The Black Cat," as well as the one in "The Imp of the Perverse," recount the events that led them to their current position: convicted and waiting for their execution.

Another similarity is that Poe and Freud both used the *absence* of proof in fields they were not concerned with, as proof for their own stance. Freud, for example, argues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that biology has not found proof that animate objects die of interior causes (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3746). The confusion in biology about 'natural death' does neither prove, nor deny his speculations. However, this does not stop Freud from using this confusion for his own purposes and strengthening his argument with the absence of scientific answers. Poe tries something similar in his observation about the 'nebulae'. A telescope was invented that proved that so-called 'nebulae' are actually a cluster of stars, and thus, showed that 'nebulae' were not real (Bloom, 47). However, Poe used the absence of 'nebulae' as proof of the existence of such a phenomenon at the beginning of the universe:

Poe begins by stating that the universe has been scientifically considered to have begun with nebulae and that the empirical proof of this is that nebulae have been observed in outer space. However, Poe now turns this proof on its head by stating that if nebulae did still exist his theory would be wrong, therefore the discoverers of nebulae are themselves wrong and nebulae no longer exist. As the then 'modern' Rosse telescope 'proved' nebulae not to exist so Poe's theory is proven correct in that nebulae only existed at the dawn of time. (Bloom, *ibid*)

In other words, the absence of 'nebulae' is proof enough for Poe that the universe began with 'nebulae', and the logical consequence is the non-existence of 'nebulae' nowadays. This method of finding proof by the absence of it does not differ from Freud's approach, except that Poe's strategy of argumentation is much more complicated and much feebler than Freud's. It almost seems as if Poe attempts to confuse the reader to the point, where he/she gives up trying to understand what the

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author says, and accepts the provided answer unquestioningly. Bloom notices that Freud uses another trick similar to Poe's: he introduces his theories, which are based on speculations, as hypotheses, makes no attempt at concealing this and then goes on to treat his theories as facts in the next sentence (cf. Bloom, 51). This is a common practice of Freud, which serves to goad the reader into perceiving theories as proven facts, without making an explicit claim that they actually are. The constant asseverations of him being aware that these 'facts' sound unbelievable, add to this effect. "I have now reached the point at which I must abandon the support of the analysis. I am afraid it will also be the point at which the reader's belief will abandon me" (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3527). Bloom notes that this comes exceptionally close to a passage in Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"(Bloom, 22), where it says, "I now feel that I have reached the point of this narrative at which every reader will be startled into positive disbelief. It is my business however simply to proceed" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 101). Clive Bloom insinuates that Poe parodies later psychologists, such as Freud (cf. Bloom, 22). I disagree with this statement, because this sentence has a distinct function, that I am sure, Poe and Freud were aware of: Although the belief of the reader is dismissed, the reaction is exactly the opposite. Precisely because the notion is put forward that the events are incredible, and the narrator is *aware* of it, this sparks acceptance of the unbelievable in the reader's mind.

The phenomena of the uncanny stand in close relationship with the supernatural and unbelievable. Definite examples of these will be incorporated in the analysis of the short stories. But before the analysis can begin, some ground rules have to be established about the uncanny and inquiries into its etymology are required.

3.2 The Uncanny: An Introduction

In his book *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud mentions several themes, which Poe also included in his short stories. Poe was a master of creating uncanny atmospheres and of playing on ancient fears that have always had a sinister effect on readers. In *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*, Benjamin F. Fisher mentions in his chapter about "Poe and the Gothic tradition" that "critics sounded negative notes, concerning his 'Germanism'" (72). The term 'Germanism' was created when German authors adapted British Gothicism and turned it into something even more gruesome:

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Thus, the notion of all things German as barbarous reared its head once again, and one frequently encounters the epithet 'German' as a term of disapprobation from the 1790s on through Poe's time. (Fisher, 75)

Poe opposed to this criticism in his preface in the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, where it says:

If in many of my productions terror has been the main thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul – that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results. (Poe, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, 4)

This statement provides insight into Poe's understanding of the psyche and leads to Freud, who analyzes these "legitimate sources" in his treatise about the uncanny. He states that the uncanny "belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 1). Freud defines the concept of the uncanny as "the class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar¹⁰" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 1f.). His investigations lead him to the etymology of the word, "The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning 'familiar', 'native', 'belonging to home'; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 2). Afterwards, he points to the character of secrecy in correspondence with the word, since this is another meaning of *heimlich* in German.

In general, we are reminded, that the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight. (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 4)

After his studies of the word *heimlich*, Freud concludes that in some cases it "develops towards an ambivalence until it finally coincides with the opposite, *unheimlich*" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). To prove his statement, he adduces a German sentence, where the word *heimlich* refers to dark angles the eye cannot behold at night, and thus, said dark angles become uncanny (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). He emphasizes that not all phenomena, which are uncanny, are unfamiliar and

¹⁰ The range of events and incidents that fall into this category is very broad: it reaches from the existence in the womb, that is compared to being buried alive (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 15) to the question whether an inanimate object is alive or dead (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 7). It traverses through the realm of compulsive repetition (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 11) and the connection of the eyes to the castration complex (cf. *The Uncanny*, 7).

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new, but they include something that adds to it and gives it the requested effect: “The uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 13). In other words, it is something that is familiar to us, but has been forgotten- whether this process of forgetting (or suppressing) was a conscious act or not - is irrelevant: the effect of the uncanny stays the same.

Freud claims that a large number of events that would be uncanny in real life do not necessarily have to have the same effect in fiction. To emphasize his point, he turns to the world of fairytales:

In fairy-tales, for instance, the world of reality is left behind from the very start, and the animistic system of beliefs is frankly adopted. Wish-fulfilments, secret powers, omnipotence of thoughts, animation of lifeless objects, all the elements so common in fairy-stories, can exert no uncanny influence here. (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 18)

Freud argues that this effect is created, because the problem of possibility of events is excluded fully by the setting of the story, and thus, there is no conflict of judgment, whether phenomena that have been surmounted are in fact real, or not. Freud states, “We order our judgment to the imaginary reality imposed on us by the writer, and regard souls, spirits and specters as though their existence had the same validity in their world, as our own has in the external world” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). Thus, the uncanny effect fails to materialize. However, when the writer claims that his world is within the realm of our common reality, all these themes would regain their uncanny power. “But in this case, too, he can increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality, [...] he deceives us into thinking that he has given us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). This describes what Edgar Allan Poe constantly does in his short stories. He presents supposedly objective and rational narrators, who tell the most fanciful of stories. His narrators are often unreliable, but the uncanny effect they bring about is not forfeit, as long as the reader accepts the stories they have to tell.

Last but not least Freud puts forth the idea that reinforces the deceit of the reader.

[H]e [the author] should keep us in the dark for a long time about the precise nature of the conditions he has selected for the world he writes about, or that he should cunningly and ingeniously avoid any definite information on the point at all through the book (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 19).

Poe never admits that his settings of the tales belong to the realm of the supernatural, but he never states that his tales are reality either, except when he puts these words in his unreliable narrators' mouths. The author largely relies on creating gloomy and fantastic atmospheres, rather than on descriptions of the circumstances of his fictitious world. Thus, his stories do not only operate on themes of the uncanny, but also appear to be mysterious, and therefore, they appeal to a vast variety of readers.

In the next chapter, the close reading of three carefully selected short stories will begin. These stories show precisely, how Poe incorporated psychological themes into his texts that were later picked up by Freud and transformed into concrete concepts. I have previously stated that I agree with James Gargano, who claims that Poe is aware of the characters' underlying psychological problems and also with Stovall's approach, that Poe is in fact a conscious author. I do not claim by any means that the author's predisposition did not have an impact on his writing, or that he was fully conscious of what he had depicted at all times. I am merely of the opinion that the stories have a high degree of psychoanalytical value in themselves and I have chosen this approach for the exact reason that psychoanalytic critics have failed to pay attention to this crucial aspect.

4 The conflict of 'Super-Ego'/'Ego'/'Id' in "The Fall of the House of Usher"

In "The Fall of the House of Usher," Poe shows an extraordinary understanding of the conflict within the psychological apparatus, a term that was coined by Freud ("Psychical Apparatus". Oxford Reference, *A Dictionary of Psychology*). The tale was first published in 1839 in *Burton's Gentleman magazine*, before it was printed in Poe's *Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque* in 1840 (*The Literary Encyclopedia*, "The Fall of the House of Usher"). In the analysis of this chapter, the different instances of the psyche that are represented in the tale will be the main focus, as well as the conflicts that can arise in the human mind if these are not in balance. Additionally, the hidden meanings that lie in figurative tropes will be investigated and speaking names will be analyzed. To conclude the chapter, the placement of uncanny themes in the course of the tale will be examined. This chapter is dedicated to show that Poe consciously incorporated themes that refer to the mental state of the characters and that he

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understood that these struggles are not to be explained away, but should be treated as a disease. Whether the placements of the characters as representatives of the ‘super-ego’, ‘ego’ and ‘id’ were a conscious act, is debatable. However, considering Poe’s belief in intuition as the highest power of knowledge and his influence by philosophers who also inspired Freud, one might argue that, even if the parallel was not a fully conscious decision, Poe was still able to intuitively glimpse some aspects that would later become a serious issue in psychology. Shulman also struggled with the question of how many aspects in Poe’s tales are consciously placed. His statement is:

My view [...] is that in much of his fiction Poe had unusual insight into often obscure mental processes and that, although he may not have grasped consciously all the implications – what human being ever does? – for purposes of his art he had remarkable understanding and control. (Shulman, 245f.)

My thesis stands in accord with this, since I am also of the opinion that Poe did not stumble upon these concepts, but carefully studied them and incorporated most of the themes consciously.

4.1 Representation of Freud’s ‘Super-Ego’/ ‘Ego’/ ‘Id’

The first step in analyzing “The Fall of the House of Usher” is to look at the characters and find out what they each represent. There are three characters in the tale: Roderick Usher, the protagonist, who suffers from “nervous agitation” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 232); Roderick’s twin sister Madeline; and the narrator who is a childhood friend of the Ushers. But how does Poe portray them and in what way do they fit into a Freudian reading?

Roderick’s symptoms are addressed in a letter to his childhood friend, the narrator, “The writer [Usher] spoke of acute bodily illness – of a mental disorder which oppressed him – and of an earnest desire to see me [...]” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). The protagonist in the story functions as the ‘ego’, or more specifically, an ego that was damaged by its ‘super-ego’ and is now split. This means that either the reality was unbearable, or the ‘id’ managed to push some desires from the unconscious to the surface, with the ‘ego’ not being able to parry this outbreak (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 5007). If the latter is the case, the ‘ego’ of the individual is confronted with its conscience, the ‘super-ego’, which will punish the ‘ego’ by establishing a feeling of guilt (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3801). In order to avoid

negative emotions evoked by the 'super-ego' and/or the 'id', the 'ego' tries to split into two parts – the 'normal' one, which is still dependent on reality and another one, which is solely governed by the desires of the unconscious and is detached from reality (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 5007). If the 'other one' is stronger than the 'normal one', a mental disorder- as mentioned in the letter - ensues (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). The 'super-ego' and the 'ego' are in conflict in Usher's psyche, because Roderick struggles with unwanted desires, which he tries to suppress. This effort and the guilt the 'super-ego' creates are so crippling that Usher almost loses his mind. Melancholy can also cause such a split, according to Freud:

A leading characteristic of these cases is a cruel self-depreciation of the ego combined with relentless self-criticism and bitter self-reproaches. Analyses have shown that this disparagement and these reproaches apply at bottom to the object and represent the ego's revenge on it. [...] But these melancholias also show us something else, which may be of importance for our later discussions. They show us the ego divided, fallen apart into two pieces, one of which rages against the other. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3801)

In the first paragraph, Poe writes that the narrator finds himself "within view of the melancholy House of Usher" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 231). This establishes a link to Freud's claim that melancholy can cause a split in the human ego. In the case of "The Fall of the House of Usher," one might argue that the conflict between the 'ego', 'super-ego' and 'id' in the protagonist's mind creates this kind of melancholy, reinforced by the rapid malady of his sister. This is such a heavy burden to bear that it results in a split 'ego'. Moreover, when Roderick's sister dies, her death fortifies this, which is common in mourning the loss of a loved object.

Furthermore, the split 'ego' is emphasized by the constant duplication of images in Poe's short story. This becomes apparent in the very opening of the tale, when the narrator describes the landscape and the House of Usher itself. "I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn [...] and gazed down [...] upon the remodeled and inverted images of the grey sedge, and the ghastly tree stems, and the vacant eye-like windows" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*), explains the narrator, when he sees the house mirrored in the dark water. This is the first image of duplication that is closely followed by the second one, an observation of the house itself, "Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely visible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a

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zigzag direction” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 233). Even the house is split from top to bottom, although the rupture is barely visible. Claudine Herrmann and Nicholas Kostis noticed in their paper “‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ or The Art of Duplication”, which was published in the journal *SubStance*, that, while the narrator reads the invented story “The Mad Trist,” the sounds in the story are duplicated by the noise Madeline makes, as she climbs out of the family tomb (cf. Herrmann; Kostis, 40f.). The appearance of a story within a story is called *mise en abyme*, which functions as a further duplication. Moreover, Herrmann and Kostis go so far as to split the name “Usher” into “Us and her” (cf. Herrmann; Kostis, 36) and the names Roderick and Madeline into “Rod/ Rick” and “Mad/Line”, excluding the “e” as a link between two meanings (cf. Herrmann; Kostis, 39f.). Said meaning in these splits and their correlation to the characters will be discussed later in this chapter.

Roderick’s “tenderly beloved” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 235f.) sister Madeline represents the ‘id’. The notion of incest, whether carried out or stemming from a shared intimate intellectual relationship (cf. Herrmann; Kostis, 38), hovers upon the narrator’s description of the siblings. Roderick admits “with a bitterness which I [the narrator] can never forget” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 235) that his nervousness is partly due to his sister’s fatal illness, as she was the only one who was keeping him company (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*) for all these years, since none of the twins had heirs (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 232). This notion is strongly emphasized by the narrator’s comment that “sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 240). In his madness, at the return of Madeline, Roderick even speaks of being able “to distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 245). Roderick’s behavior in regards to his sister is questionable several times throughout the story and when Madeline dies, “[...] the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 241). Even for twins, the brother-sister-relationship seems too close for comfort, as is displayed by the effect the inevitable turn of events has on Roderick. The premature burial of his sister is a mere defense mechanism of Roderick, trying to suppress his desires for his sister. He tries to bury the ‘id’, and thus, stop it from harassing him. In her article about trauma and the uncanny, Marita Nadal claims that Madeline stands for “the grim phantasm, FEAR” (Nadal, 187), which Roderick speaks of earlier in the story (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 235). One might argue that this sentence was used as a

foreshadowing to the tragic end of the tale, when Roderick cannot contain his sister – the 'id' – any longer and dies of fear.

This leaves the question how the narrator's role comes into play. The narrator functions as a kind of 'positive super-ego', or a moral watch dog. Roderick is so tormented by his nervousness, which is really a representation of his struggle with his unwanted desires that he wishes for another authority to distract him. Shulman comments that:

Poe has real insight into that basically irrational strategy by which the mind attempts to preserve itself from its own forces of madness, disease and disintegration by rigidly isolating itself and by assuming that the threat is external when in fact it is internal. (Schulman, 248)

Roderick has been isolated in his mansion with his conflict of mind before the narrator arrives. He informs the narrator of "the solace he expected me to afford him" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 235). Immediately, the narrator knows that something is wrong, which becomes apparent by the "sense of insufferable gloom" (Poe, *Complete Tales* 231) he feels on his approach to the House of Usher. In countless other reports of the narrator's agitation, he tries to uncover the origin of these strange nervous dispositions, but cannot find a satisfactory explanation, which is why he ascribes these feelings to a mere superstition, "There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition – for why should I not so term it? – served mainly to accelerate the increase itself" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 232).

At one point, the narrator dives into the nature of Roderick's malady, "It was, as he said, a constitutional and a family evil, and one for which he despaired to find a remedy – a mere nervous affection, he immediately added, which would undoubtedly soon pass off" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 235). The narrator is an extremely rational person who tries to explain his strange feelings away and is satisfied with Roderick's reasoning. The reason why the narrator is not appalled by Roderick is exactly why the head of the House of Usher invited him. He is a counterpart to Roderick's own 'super-ego', who does not punish him for his desires, but distracts him instead. The narrator tells the reader that

I was busied in earnest endeavors to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together [...] And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempts at cheering a mind from which darkness,

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as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe in one unceasing radiation of gloom. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 236)

Soon, it becomes clear that Roderick does not experience the expected solace in the company of his friend – or a more positive, loving ‘super-ego’ - and falls into his depression all the more. The narrator is not able to bring Roderick any peace of mind, but instead, finds himself “infected” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 241) by his host’s unhealthy demeanor, after the lady Madeline dies and is encoffined in the mansion’s long vaults. The narrator goes on by admitting, “I struggled to reason off the nervousness which had dominion over me” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*), which makes it more evident that the narrator is unable to fit the role of the positive ‘super-ego’, Roderick wished he were. On the contrary, the narrator now becomes suspicious, as he hears “certain low and indefinite sounds which came [...] at long intervals, I knew not whence” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*) at night, which are the first signs of life of the entombed lady Madeline – the suppressed ‘id’ Usher is so desperate to keep locked down. The narrator realizes fairly soon that he cannot help his friend and powerlessly bears witness to the horrible events that result in the literal fall of the house into the tarn, before he flees the scene.

Freud terms this ‘infection’, experienced by the narrator, ‘identification’. This is a process of the mind that is one of the earliest forms of emotional attachment, and is to be found in the antecedents of the ‘Oedipus complex’. There are two different ties to objects: 1) Either the object is what the ‘ego’ wants to be (tied to the subject) or 2) the object is what the ‘ego’ wants to *have* (tied to the object) (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3798). The latter stands in close correspondence with the ‘Oedipus complex’, while the former is a form of ‘identification’. A little boy wants to be as strong and big as his father, his father being his idol. Freud claims that ‘identification’ describes the aspiration to become more like the subject that functions as the idol (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3797). In another variation of ‘identification’, Freud observes that if the beloved object becomes sick, the subject that loves also becomes sick and mirrors the behavior of the beloved one (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3798). Freud describes this mechanism as follows, “[I]dentification has appeared instead of object-choice, and that object-choice has regressed into identification” (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). He also points out that ‘identification’ is only partial and solely borrows singular character traits (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). This second form of

'identification', where the subject mirrors the loved one's behavior, is the key to the narrator's 'infection'. His endeavors at cheering up his dear friend fail, which makes him feel guilty, so he unconsciously changes his approach and shares a character trait with the beloved person instead.

The sentence "The writer [Usher] spoke of acute bodily illness – of a mental disorder which oppressed him – and of an earnest desire to see me [...]" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*) is also of interest, regarding the utterance about the bodily illness. Poe believed that body and soul are two entities that are inextricable (Lavery, 67). Freud shared this belief and terms pain that stems from psychological traumas 'conversion'¹¹. He states:

We must regard the process as though a sum of excitation impinging on the nervous system is transformed into chronic symptoms in so far as it has not been employed for external action in proportion to this amount. Now we are accustomed to find in hysteria that a considerable part of this 'sum of excitation' of the trauma is transformed into purely somatic symptoms. It is this characteristic of hysteria which has so long stood in the way of its being recognized as a psychical disorder. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 79).

This means, that the psyche alone is not able to fight off the excitation without taking damage to the nervous system. According to Richard L. Kardin, the term "hysteria" is classified as "a psychoneurotic disorder characterized by violent emotional outbreaks, disturbances of sensory and motor functions, and various abnormal effects due to autosuggestion" (Kardin, 18). This is exactly what Roderick Usher experiences:

He suffered much from a morbid acuteness of the senses; the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odors of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 235).

The conveyed symptoms are textbook psycho-somatic ones. This is another indicator of Poe's understanding of mental disorders as illnesses, rather than as nervous fits. This observation concludes the first part of this chapter.

¹¹ The term 'conversion disorder' is still used by psychiatrists nowadays (Dictionary.com. Definitions. Conversion disorder)

4.2 Figurative Tropes and Their Meanings

This subchapter is dedicated to the symbolic value that Poe incorporated in this story. At this point, Herrmann's and Kostis' observation that the names of the characters can be split is crucial for this analysis. Through it, the imbedded meanings in these splits shall be defined. The name 'Usher' is split into 'us' and 'her', namely the men, Roderick and the narrator, who pour all their effort into distracting the mind from its unwanted desires and finally entomb the 'id' – 'her', the lady Madeline – together (cf. Herrmann; Kostis, 39).

The sister's name can be split into 'mad' and 'line'. The first part of the name symbolizes Roderick's madness, triggered by his nervousness, or better, depression, and Madeline as the reason for his pain. The second part points to the direct line of descent, as commented on by the narrator earlier, "I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race [...] had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch, in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent [...]" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 232). With the family name also comes the aforementioned family evil, the depression Roderick suffers from. This puts another meaning into the two parts of Madeline's name: when they are read together they point to a *mad line*, in this case a defective trait in the family line. Herrmann and Kostis noticed this in their paper too (cf. Herrmann; Kostis, 40) and argue, "It is at the very moment when Roderick speaks of the race of the Ushers that Madeline appears to incarnate this mad race of artists, which feeds on incest, transgresses limits, and inscribes itself textually in the very lines of the story" (Herrmann; Kostis, *ibid*). The lady Madeline's name is additionally interesting with regard to its origin. In Greek it means "high tower," which could be interpreted as a phallic symbol ("Meaning and Origin of: Madeline", familyeducation.com)

Last, Roderick's name can be split into 'rod' and 'rick'. According to Herrmann and Kostis "[t]he first syllable 'rod' means stick, magic wand and power [...] while 'rick' or 'wrick' means to twist or twisted" (Herrmann; Kostis, 39). The first syllable, translated into "magic wand," can also be interpreted as a phallic symbol. Both twins have phallic symbols in their names, which makes the notion of incest persistent. The second syllable of Roderick's name translated as 'twisted', points to Roderick's mental disorder, as well as his twisted sexuality, which is the cause of the disorder.

The House of Usher itself bears different meanings. First of all, it is both the house itself and a name for the race of the Ushers (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 232). As Herrmann and Kostis put it: “the container and the contained” (41). Its “insufferable gloom” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 231) is a precursor for the tragic events that will take place at the scene. Furthermore, the house can be seen as a representation of Roderick's mind. Some of the duplications in the story refer to the building, with its “crumbling condition of the individual stones” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 233) and the “barely visible fissure” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). In *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*, Benjamin F. Fisher presents the idea that many Gothic authors, such as Shelley or Hawthorne, also used landscapes and buildings to portray the emotional distress of their characters (cf. Fisher, 75). In the beginning, the narrator mentions “vacant eye-like windows” (Poe, *Complete Tales* 231). Thus, Poe gives the house the appearance of a human skull. The interior of the house is characterized by “dark draperies” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 234) that hang on the walls and the narrator is not able to look at the rooms as a whole, because “the eye [...] struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). This mental picture strongly resembles Freud's theories of the unconscious: It is hidden, although it is there. Furthermore, the narrator recalls, “An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). All these images are reflections of the distorted mind of Roderick Usher.

There are similarities in the condition and environment of the twins. One might argue that this is an unconscious procedure, signifying that Roderick is controlled by his unconsciousness. This could be the result of his ‘ego’ not being strong enough to suppress it, and especially after the death of his sister, the façade slips. According to Herrmann and Kostis, Roderick's studio resembles the tomb, Madeline is buried in, since the ceilings of his chambers are also vaulted (cf. 39).

Additionally, Roderick's appearance is disheveled and he is described as a being with “cadaverousness of complexion” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 234) and “lips somewhat thin and very pallid” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). In addition, “the now ghastly pallor of the skin” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*), and “the silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). All these are images

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that disturb the author, when he beholds the figure of Roderick for the first time, after they have not seen each other for years. He goes on, “I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). Roderick’s description resembles the one of a dead body, as the “cadaverousness” conveys. Herrmann and Kostis argue that Roderick “is buried alive figuratively [by his appearance], while his sister will be buried alive literally” (Herrmann; Kostis, 39).

The atmosphere changes around the House of Usher when the characters’ situation becomes threatening. During the storm, the house seems to be surrounded by “faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 242). Poe portrays the house as breathing. The exhalation could also be an indicator for Madeline’s lingering presence. Although she – supposedly - took her last breath, she is still in the house and Usher is mourning for her, not able to let her go yet. At the climax of the tale, the deceased sister returns and Roderick’s mind deteriorates completely, underlined by the barely visible crack in the walls widening, and ripping the house fully apart. Roderick dies, mirrored by the fall of the actual house.

4.3 Aspects of the Uncanny in “The Fall of the House of Usher”

The basic rules of the uncanny have been established in Chapter 3. Next, the focus lies on concrete themes of the uncanny in “The Fall of the House of Usher.” First, Freud introduces the idea that uncertainty whether an inanimate object is really dead or alive, can become part of the uncanny (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 5). He refers to E. Jentsch and his theory that “uncanny sensations [are] created when there is an intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animated one” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 8f.). In Poe’s case, the house in “The Fall of the House of Usher” is such an inanimate object that seems to be alive. This would also explain the narrator’s nervousness and anxiety when he approaches the house. Numerous events in the tale give the house an animated character. Poe characterizes the house as a human skull, which makes it seem both dead and alive (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 231). One might argue that it is alive, due to the fact that the entire building is a representation of the master of the house’s mind, and at the same time, it may be argued that it is dead, because it is still

a house after all. Even Roderick is convinced that the house has sentience. He lets the narrator know about his theory:

The condition of this sentience had been there, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones – in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many fungi which overspread them [...] Its evidence – the evidence of sentience – was to be seen, he said, [...] in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 239)

This passage emphasizes that the house is in fact a living being, that can feel and is aware of its own and its inhabitants' situation.

The tempest is another representation of an inner struggle. During the tempest, the house appears to be mirroring lady Madeline's last breath (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 242). After the lady passes, Roderick is in mourning, and at the same time claims later, that he heard her fight against her entombment many days ago (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 244). As Madeline fights to escape her premature burial, the tempest rages outside, as if it mirrors the emotions of the lady. Just as she returns and the narrator flees, the tempest "was still abroad in all its wrath", which is a representation of her rage, leading her to kill her twin (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 245) before the house collapses into the tarn, which "close[s] sullenly and silently over the fragments" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). When Roderick's mind deteriorates completely, the house collapses in itself without exterior cause, which is another indicator that the building is aware of what is happening.

The doppelgänger or 'double' motif is incorporated in "The Fall of the House of Usher," too. Madeline and Roderick Usher are twins that look almost identical, "A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 240), comments the author when he sees Madeline in her coffin. Freud establishes that the doppelgänger is a part of the uncanny. Originally, the 'double' was seen as a warranty against extinction. However, he points out that these ideas "have sprung from the soil of unbound self-love" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 9) or as he calls it, "primary narcissism" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). Primary narcissism is an innate aspect that materializes in the early stages of human development, when the 'super-ego' is not formed yet, "We have said that it [the 'super-ego'] is the heir to the original narcissism in which the childish ego enjoyed self-sufficiency" (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3801). Later on, Freud refers to Otto Rank and his studies of the

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uncanny. Rank claims that the positive infantile notion of the 'double' turns and suddenly the 'double' "becomes the ghastly harbinger of death" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). This is true in Poe's tale in two distinct cases. On the one hand, Madeline suffers from a fatal illness and the narrator feels anxious when he solely catches a glimpse of her, as she passes him in the hallway. He recalls, "I regarded her with an utter astonishment, not unmingled with dread; and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 236). The narrator's first impulse makes Madeline a property of the realm of the uncanny. Without any trigger he is filled with dread at her appearance. Additionally, the twin is also the reason why Roderick dies in the end. After her return from her premature entombment she "fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 245).

Freud also admits that not everyone will react in the same way, when facing themes of the uncanny (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 10). Therefore, the doppelganger motif might seem terrifying to a group of people, while others would not feel the same sense of terror when being confronted with these images. This begs the question of why the doppelganger motif does have the notion of being terrifying in the first place. Freud explains that the doppelganger was a friendly connoted image in the earlier stages of the development of a person. The 'double' is important for the development of the 'ego' and 'super-ego' (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). The 'super-ego' is created as a 'double' of the 'ego' that can treat it as an object. Therefore, it is also able to self-criticize and evaluate other people's actions (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). While the psychological development traverses through several stages, the image of the 'double' turns and becomes dreadful (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). The same happens to Roderick Usher. At first, his role as a mediator between his 'super-ego' and the 'id' is positively connoted, because his sister is his only friend and soul mate. However, as she becomes a threat to the 'super-ego', the connection between the twins becomes a problem, which results in his twin sister becoming a symbol of terror, which needs to be eradicated.

Additionally, the idea of being buried alive arouses a feeling of uncanniness in human beings. Freud introduces this idea very straight forward, "To many people the idea of being buried alive while appearing to be dead is the most uncanny thing of

all” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 14). According to Freud, this form of terror stems from a distorted transformation of the earliest stage of human existence:

[Y]et psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy, which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was filled with a certain lustful pleasure – the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence. (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 14)

This means, that the thought of being in the womb as an embryo, where the baby is safe, is inverted, and brings forth the horrible idea of being buried alive, with no escape. Freud brings the intra-uterine existence into the realm of the uncanny, when he claims:

It often happens that male patients declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *heim* [home] of all human beings [...] In this case, too, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, homelike, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ is the token of repression. (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 15)

In Poe's tale, Roderick's sister, Madeline, is buried prematurely and claws her way out of the tomb, which leads to our next theme of the uncanny.

Said theme is the idea of the return of the dead, and death itself. It is common knowledge that everybody must die at some point in time. However, Freud argues that, while everybody *knows* this, no-one realizes what this actually *means*. He prescribes this to the fact that the scientific knowledge with regard to death was insufficient, since biology had not been able to determine, whether death is inevitable, or could – under the right circumstances – be avoided altogether (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 13). Furthermore, he states that “There is scarcely any other matter, however, upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times [...] as that of our relationship with death” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 13). Thus, as Sigmund Freud puts it charmingly, people tend to think “as savages do on this topic” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 14), and the fear of the dead and death was not eradicated over time. Roderick is rightfully afraid of his sister's return. His sister does not only return, but also takes Roderick with her in her final moments, before she really dies. This correlates with the notion Freud puts forth, “Most likely our fear still contains the old belief that the deceased becomes the enemy of the survivor and wants to carry him off to share his new life with him” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*).

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It should be noted, that some languages describe ‘*ein unheimliches Haus*’ as a ‘haunted’ house. This collision of the uncanny with the theme of death and spirits proves once more that death and the uncanny depend on each other. In “The Fall of the House of Usher” Roderick sings a rhapsody called “The Haunted Palace,” which strongly resembles Roderick’s own situation, merely in a more glorious form, another *mise en abyme*. The narrator does not have the feeling that the House of Usher is haunted in particular. However, he is certainly convinced that the atmosphere, the gloominess and his feelings of terror are not normal.

Freud argues that repetition can become a distinct aspect of the uncanny when it is an unintentional repetition, for example, getting lost in the streets and arriving at the same spot repeatedly (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 11). In Poe’s tale “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the narrator reads the story of “The Mad Trist” to his friend, and while he reads, there are sounds to be heard that create an echo to the tale. The narrator reads the part of the story where the knight Ethelred breaks into the hermit’s house, when he suddenly claims:

At the termination of this sentence, I started, and, for a moment, paused; for it appeared to me [...] that, from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came, indistinctly to my ears, what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Lancelot had so particularly described. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 243)

This process repeats itself several times as the narrator reads on, but his nature becomes disturbed by the eerie sounds that seem to repeat what he had just read. He characterizes his feeling as “a wild amazement” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*), when he is sure that his senses did not deceive him, and he hears the echo louder and clearer than before, “Oppressed, as I certainly was”, he feels “a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 244). After the third echo in the story, he becomes “completely unnerved” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). This is aggravated by the fact that “an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 15). The atmosphere becomes sinister and the narrator cannot shake off the unpleasant feelings, as the tale converges to its climax and the uncanny is getting more intense, due to the unintentional repetition of sound.

Sigmund Freud also refers to the theme of fiction in his work *The Uncanny*. He differentiates between “the uncanny that is actually experienced, and the uncanny as we merely picture it or read about it” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 16). Another differentiation he makes concerns the origin of the uncanny feelings. The uncanny either builds on repression, or on views that our primitive forefathers had, which were discarded or “surmounted”, as Freud puts it (*The Uncanny*, 17). He explains that fiction has an advantage regarding the uncanny, because it “is a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life, for it contains the whole of the latter, and something more besides, something that cannot be found in real life” (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 18). The distinction of the origin is irrelevant in this case, because fiction does not need to provide accountability to reality (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). Another advantage of fiction is the vast variety of possibilities to create uncanny themes (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). It is at the author's discretion, whether he wants to create a world that is close to reality, or create a world of phantasm, where everything is possible (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). The reader has to accept the author's regimen in every case, when reading his book (cf. Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). It is important to note that this is exactly why unrealistic events in a book are not questioned. In “The Fall of the House of Usher”, the return of the lady Madeline is somewhat unrealistic. Both Roderick and the narrator had buried her in a remote place in the house, with a “door, of massive iron” and “immense weight [that] caused an unusually sharp, grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges.” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 240). It is highly unlikely, that Madeline would have been able to move it, let alone lifting the coffin lid that was “replaced and screwed down” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). Furthermore, she had been left in the vault for eight days without food or water. This leaves three options: 1) Either, lady Madeline developed supernatural, also called hysterical strength, through her rage, similar to mothers, who produce enough adrenaline to lift cars of their babies. This explanation would fit the supernatural character of Gothic fiction. Option 2) is to view the return as a hallucination witnessed by both men, who have “infected” each other with their nervousness, and thus, the narrator's mind deteriorates too or 3) the narrator and Roderick are in fact one person, as Herrmann and Kostis claim in their article (cf. 38). However, the effect of Madeline's return remains the same, and the reader does not question the circumstances, especially when reading for the sake of pastime. An

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analytic reading, in contrast, raises questions, such as the possibility of Madeline's return. For the sake of consistency and due to the fact that the supernatural is a characteristic of Gothic fiction, it is assumed that option 1 is the right version.

4.4 Résumé

To sum it up, this chapter has shown that Poe's tales exhibit themes of the conflict between the 'super-ego' and the 'ego', and the destructive powers this produces, which leads to a complete deterioration of the mind. Moreover, Poe was able to depict the protagonist's conflict, which results in a split 'ego', in great detail, by duplicating many of the images he creates. He incorporates this into the appearance of the house and its surroundings, into the circumstances of the characters and through a technique that is known as *mise en abyme*, where stories are included in a story or pictures are included in another picture. Furthermore, he incorporated multiple themes of the uncanny in his tales to create a sinister atmosphere and to play on innate fears of humanity. The names of the characters were not chosen randomly, but speak for the traits the characters either represent or possess. Additionally, the setting mirrors what the characters feel, because it is a representation of the characters' states or mental disorder. All these findings provide evidence that Poe carefully explored psychological phenomena that were not regarded in his time and age. Even though he did not know about the three instances that would be developed, he intuitively structured the relationships of the characters in a way, which legitimizes the adduction of psychoanalysis, in order to interpret Poe's themes. In the next chapter, the focus differs completely from the observations that have been made in "The Fall of the House of Usher." The themes of the 'ego', 'super-ego' and 'id' are excluded and replaced by observations of two different Freudian ideas: 'Transference' and the results of the 'Oedipus complex'.

5 'Transference' and the 'Castration Complex' in "The Black Cat"

Poe's tale "The Black Cat" features another set of ideas that Freud has incorporated into his works. The tale was first published in the Philadelphia *Saturday Evening Post* (also known as the *United States Saturday Post* for a short period of time), in August 1843 (*The Literary Encyclopedia*, "The Black Cat"). Poe succeeds in creating an example *par excellence* of an unreliable narrator, who seems to be a textbook psychopath (Hester; Segir, 175). While this observation would give reason to analyze the narrator in great detail, due to his interesting depiction, the focus of this subchapter lies largely on the theme of the 'castration complex', and its derivation. Another reason for the exclusion of psychopathy is Freud's strict use of the term 'psychopathology' as an umbrella term for all mental disorders. The concept of 'transference' is necessary, in order to understand the text fully.

In the case of "The Black Cat," it is possible to render Marie Bonaparte's interpretation, which solely functions to make assumptions about the author's life, inaccurate. It is inaccurate, in terms of the portion of the story, where the narrator kills his wife and walls her up in the cellar. In order to understand this, one must turn to John E. Reilly's article "A Source for the Immuration in 'The Black Cat.'" In this article, Reilly points out that Poe's idea for the short story stems from an article in a newspaper (cf. Reilly, 93). The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* issued an article about a man in Massachusetts, who found a relatively well preserved body in the walls of his cellar, when he was seeking to enlarge it (cf. Reilly, *ibid*). The victim was female and the cause of death was a bullet wound in the head (cf. Reilly, *ibid*). Poe's depictions are quite similar: the victim is female too and the fatal injury is a head wound. The only difference is the murder weapon: while the victim was shot in the article, Poe's narrator splits his wife's head with an axe. Even the method of immuring the body in a pre-existing wall and the position of the victim are the same in Poe's short story (cf. Reilly, *ibid*). Reilly concludes:

Parallels between 'The Black Cat' and the news item would be no more than coincidental if Poe did not read the news item in the *Public Ledger* before writing his tale-ideally shortly before. And there is good reason to believe that this is precisely what occurred. Not only was Poe living in Philadelphia (having moved there four years earlier) when the *Public Ledger* reprinted the item from the *Greenfield Democrat*, but he enjoyed the good will and lively support of the

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Public Ledger throughout the six years of his residence in the city, so much so that it is difficult to imagine he was not a regular reader of the newspaper (Reilly, 95).

Furthermore, he states that “The Black Cat,” although it was not published until 1843, was written earlier than that. Thomas Ollive Mabbott takes the testimony of Poe’s illustrator to date the exegesis of the text “at ‘late in 1842’, roughly five months after the article was issued in the *Public Ledger* (Reilly, *ibid*). However, this is merely estimation on accounts of the illustrator, who might have been contacted after the text had been written. “If Poe wrote his tale immediately upon reading the item, then we can date composition at up to four or even five months earlier, in the summer of that year” (Reilly, *ibid*). Reilly makes a compelling argument in this paragraph and exposes Marie Bonaparte’s interpretation of the reasons for the immurement, which she sees as a re-phallicisation of Poe’s mother (Bonaparte, 481), as mere speculation. Bonaparte tends to confuse Poe’s lyrical I with the author himself (Wright, 41). She claims that they are interchangeable. This is considered a cardinal sin among literary critics. James Gargano wrote an article where he questions Poe’s narrators. His statement on “The Black Cat” is summed up in the following passage:

A close analysis of ‘The Black Cat’ must certainly exonerate Poe of the charge of merely sensational writing. The final frenzy of the narrator, with its accumulation of superlatives, cannot be ridiculed as an example of Poe’s style. The breakdown of the shrieking criminal does not reflect a similar breakdown in the author. Poe, I maintain, is a serious artist who explores the neuroses of his characters with probing intelligence. He permits his narrator to revel and flounder into torment, but he sees behind the torment to its causes. (Gargano, 181)

Although Gargano is threading on thin ice here, since there is no possible determination to what degree Poe really did “see behind the torments,” I agree with him, because the vast variety of symbolic themes in the story cannot be coincidental. Robert Shulman states that Poe’s insights into the human mind are exceptionally compelling:

The most interesting Poe criticism of the last decade has established that Poe’s aesthetics and cosmology are central to an understanding of his fiction. I propose to reverse the usual recent emphasis and, while taking Poe’s theory¹² seriously

¹² “Poe divides the mind into three faculties of Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. Taste, we recall, is the most important faculty, since it does not deal with Truth or moral values but with Beauty and finally with that ideal, supernal Beauty, Unity and Perfection that, on Poe’s view, man and the universe originated in and have since fallen away from the multiplicity, disintegration, and the ‘state of progressive collapse’ we now know. Eventually, the universe will disintegrate, Poe argues in *Eureka*, personal identity will be lost, but, more than compensating for this ‘inevitable annihilation’, the

into account, to emphasize the psychological revelations of the fiction. Whereas the usual psychological study of Poe treats the fiction as an unconscious manifestation of the author's problems, or as an unconscious confirmation of orthodox Freudian categories, it seems to me that in his best stories Poe has a genuine understanding of unconscious processes and imaginative powers. (Shulman, 245)

I strongly agree with Shulman's comment on Poe's understanding of the mind. The inclusion of Freudian theories in my paper does not serve the purpose of confirming these theories, but the purpose of proving that Poe had an exceptional understanding of the mind, as can be seen by his anticipation of Freud. While Bonaparte's interpretations, along with those of her colleagues, D. H. Lawrence and Joseph Wood Krutch, are obviously occasionally misguided, her study is not to be discredited altogether, as several of her observations are useful and well advanced in other respects.

5.1 Poe's Unreliable Narrator

In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat," the 'overt narrator', who is to be hanged the next day, recounts a series of horrible events that he describes as "mere household events" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 223). The narrator states in the opening of the story:

To me, they [household events] have presented little but horror – to many they will seem less terrible than *baroques*. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace – some intellect, more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*)

This statement is powerful because it directly refers to psychology. The narrator hopes to find an explanation in science. This part seems as if Poe was conscious of the fact that psychology knew little during his time. This passage is also what causes Marie Bonaparte to say that Poe seems to be dimly aware of the discovery of psychoanalysis in the near future (Bonaparte, 459). The narrator informs the reader that he had always enjoyed the presence of animals, so much that his friends ridiculed him for his passion (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 223). He also believes that the love of an

original, Divine Beauty, Life and Unity will prevail. In the meantime, under the guidance of Taste, by rearranging earthly forms and through suggestive imagery and music, poetry can begin to satisfy our inborn thirst for this eternal Beauty and Divine Perfection. By exciting our souls, Taste and the poem can elevate us and give us insight we crave, the vision of eternity, the vision of an eternal realm of Beauty and Unity superior to anything we can know on earth" (Shulman, 246)

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animal is purer than that of humans (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). These statements contradict the reader's expectation of how the narrator treats his pets. Maroš Buday notes, "The narration of the story is written in a very rational manner; therefore the protagonist's irrational behavior towards his cat presents a discrepancy in his perception of reality" (Buday, 12). The discrepancy is an indicator for an unreliable narrator. Poe makes use of presenting the narrator as a completely rational being, as he does so often, in order to gain the reader's trust at the very beginning. The narrator presents himself as humble and sober when he writes this story down:

For the most wild yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad I am not – and very surely do I not dream. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 223).

This passage presents the very opening of the story and is interesting in numerous ways. Firstly, as it was already established, Poe uses a seemingly rational being to create an atmosphere where the reader trusts the narrator. They do not know anything about the narrator yet, and he has not given them any reason to suspect that he is not honest to the reader. Secondly, James Gargano states that the narrator draws a well-thought-out image of himself and of the reasons for his horrible deeds

in bringing to his defense a well-reasoned theory with perhaps a strong appeal to many readers. Still, the narrator's pat explanation is contradicted by the development of the tale, for instead of being pushed into crime, he pursues a life which makes crime inevitable (Gargano, 181).

Through the course of the story, this adds to the thrill of the events, because it creates a shocking twist when the façade slips and the narrator shows his true colors. Thirdly, the passage "I neither expect nor solicit belief" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 223), and the asseverations that the narrator is sane, are smart moves, because they reinforce the rational atmosphere of the story, and make the reader curious. The expected abandonment of the reader's belief has been discussed in Chapter 2. It produces the opposite effect of what is said. Being warned about incredible events is deemed trustworthy, and therefore, the reader's first instinct is to believe the narrator. The loss of trust in the narrator's senses stands in accord with the psychology of Poe's time, when psychology was only concerned with what could be perceived. Therefore, to gain credibility, an affirmation of the narrator's sanity is necessary; otherwise the carefully constructed image of the narrator would crumble before it is intended to.

5.2 Fear of the Castration Complex

There is one sentence in the opening, which indicates a relation to a Freudian theory. The narrator speaks of the events that have tortured him, "Yet I will not attempt to expound them" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 223). This raises the question of why he does not try to explain the events. One might argue that there are two options to read this statement. The first option is that the narrator simply does not *know* how to explain what happened, while the second option claims that he does not *want* to, because he is not *willing* to explain what really happened. This stands in close correspondence to Freud, who establishes that the 'ego' reacts defensively when suppressed wishes push forward (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3717). The 'ego' does not want to admit that there are forces at work that come from within, because that is an unpleasant feeling (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). According to Freud's 'pleasure principle', the 'ego' wants to avoid unpleasantness at all costs (Freud, *Complete works*, *ibid*). Thus, it offers resistance and pushes unwanted desires back into the unconscious (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). In light of this theory, the statement can be read as a resistance of the narrator to admit and tackle his psychological conditions. Moreover, this resistance is what led him to abusing his animals and killing his wife. Therefore, this sentence, however short and simple it may be, offers insight into what is going on under the surface.

Soon it becomes clear that the narrator is not the perfect caretaker of animals. He speaks of a "Fiend Intemperance," which is a metaphor for alcohol (Buday, 12) and becomes abusive after he comes home "much intoxicated" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 224). "I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). After the cat bites him, the narrator becomes infuriated and gouges out the cat's eye with a knife. The narrator speaks of the healing socket as a "frightful appearance" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*), that is only partially due to the physical condition. Why partially? Because the dread and horror have another cause that is not linked to the appearance, but to Freud's idea of the 'Oedipus complex' and its connection to the eyes. This begs the question: What role does the damaged eye play in relation with Freud's theories and the narrator's hatred? Freud states:

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We know from psychoanalytic experience, however, that this fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible idea of childhood. Many adults still retain their apprehensiveness in this respect, and no bodily injury is so much dreaded by them as an injury to the eye. We are accustomed to say, too, that we will treasure a thing as the apple of our eye. A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that a morbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration. (Freud, *The Uncanny*, 7)

This is the cause of the narrator's vile emotions towards the pet. Freud's idea of the 'castration complex' springs from the narration of Oedipus. This Greek mythical figure unknowingly discarded of his father and replaced him as the lover of his own mother. Freud ascribes this so-called 'Oedipus complex' to every human child (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 741¹³). Thus, he claims that children have sexual drives early on, acquired shortly after birth (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 4963). The first connection children have to an "erotic object" (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 4996) is to the mother's breast, which feeds them. (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). At first, they do not realize that the breast is not part of themselves (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). As the development goes on, they understand that the breast is not within them but a part of the mother (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). This is why the first object choice of the libido is the mother (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). When she becomes aware of the affection of this kind, mainly by masturbation of the child, she threatens that the father will come and cut the young boy's penis off, if he does not cease to touch himself (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 4997). When Oedipus finds out about what he has done, he blinds himself, which is, according to Freud, "a mitigated form of the punishment of castration" (Freud, *The Uncanny*, *ibid*). Therefore, missing or damaged eyes have an uncanny effect on people, since they are a proxy for the threatening notion of castration¹⁴. The cat reacts aggressively, out of fear, which Freud always connects to male features. Therefore, it is only fitting that the narrator chooses a form of castration to avenge himself. The question of how the 'castration complex' is relevant arises with regard to this story. First of all, it has been established that the narrator was ridiculed for his love of animals. "My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 223). While it is never officially stated how the friends made fun of

¹³ See Footnote

¹⁴ Cf. The killing of the old man in „The Tell-Tale Heart“ because of his eye: „I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees – very gradually – I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever“ (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 303).

the narrator, one might argue that adolescent boys are often concerned with actions that count as 'manly'. Spending one's time caressing pets does not fall into a gender-role-dominated view of 'manly' activities. Seeing the woman as a castrated being (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 5000), the boy, who indulges in 'unmanly' behavior and thus, in activities attributed to females, becomes himself symbolically 'castrated'. Furthermore, the second cat, like Pluto, also misses an eye and becomes very dear to his wife. Thus, two beings who symbolize the fear of castration are the narrator's constant companions.

After the act of cutting Pluto's eye out, the cat avoids the narrator, which in turn causes the narrator's horrid attitude towards the pet. In a blind fury, he hangs the cat in his backyard. What follows is a very interesting passage:

[...] hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin – a deadly sin that would 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. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 225)

Even for the most passionate animal lovers, this self-condemnation beyond return seems excessively extreme as a reaction to killing a cat. The inexplicable reaction raises a key question, which is highly important for the understanding of the story: Is it really about the cat? This question will be answered in the next subchapter.

Before leaving the fear of the castration complex, there is more evidence to take into account, incorporated into the second half of the story. After Pluto dies, the narrator takes a cat home, which he found in one of his frequently visited dens. Soon, he discovers that he detests this second cat, too. Later, on some household errands, the married couple descends down the stairs into the cellar. The cat, that almost causes the narrator to fall down the stairs to the cellar, is the figurative last straw that broke the camel's back. The narrator picks up an axe and tries to kill the animal, but is obstructed by his wife. His fury knows no bounds when he lifts up the axe again and splits his wife's head apart. Buday makes an interesting observation in the narrator's demeanor, when he attempts to hide the body, "There is a radical shift in the narration present, as the protagonist completely and utterly dehumanizes his wife. An animate human being becomes a mere it" (Buday, 14). This becomes apparent in the following passages:

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At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for *it* [my italics] in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting *it* [my italics] in the well in the yard – about packing *it* [my italics] in a box, as if merchandise, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take *it* [my italics] from the house. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 228)

The same phenomenon happens when the narrator speaks about the cat. While he refers to Pluto as “he” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 224), he now refers to the new cat as a “beast, [...] for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put *it* [my italics] to death” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 229). However, the narrator is unable to find the cat and allows himself to be lulled into a false sense of security. “The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a freeman” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). When the narrator speaks in such a manner of the cat, it becomes obvious that he does not only hate the cat, but he is also terribly afraid of it. The reason is clear at this point. The cat represents the fear of castration and, is thus, a proxy for his fear. The cat vanishing with the second symbol for castration, which is the woman, gives the narrator reason to believe that he has overcome his psychological torment. James Gargano observes:

[T]he narrator cannot understand that his assault upon another person derives from his own moral sickness and unbalance. Like his confreres, too, he seeks psychic release and freedom in a crime which completes his torture. To the end of his life, he is incapable of locating the origin of his evil and damnation within himself (Gargano, 181).

After contemplating differing methods of ridding himself of the body, the narrator arrives at the decision to immure his wife in one of the existing walls of the cellar “as the monks of the Middle Age are recorded to have walled up their victims” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 228). The allusion to medieval times is a definite characteristic of a Gothic story. There is a kind of irony in the position of the body within the walls. When the police find it, “The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, *stood erect* [my italics] before the eyes of the spectators” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 230). The body is walled up in a standing position and Poe explicitly uses the word ‘erect’ that reminds the reader, especially when reading the story in Freudian terms, of an erect penis. The irony of the story is that the woman, who was considered a symbol for the castration complex and had to die for it, now seems to represent a phallus. Thus, it presents a mockery of the narrator’s fear, solely overtrumped by the ghastly cat on the head of the corpse who also seems to mock the narrator, by wailing and

howling treacherously in the walls, which leads to the discovery of the body. The character of an evil witch that was jokingly ascribed to the cat now comes into full view, and is no longer a joke, but determines the narrator's fate and makes sure that he will face it. Shulman comments on this part of the story:

In any case, the concluding image of the decayed, gore-clotted corpse and the 'seducing' beast, 'with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire' brings to a suggestive focus Poe's insights into the disturbing power of blocked sexuality, guilt, and demonic hatred. (Shulman, 258f.)

The following subchapter is concerned with another Freudian theory enabling the investigation of the story in terms of transferring emotions that are directed at a person, to an innocent proxy.

5.3 Transference: Wife or Cat?

Maroš Buday from the University of Prešov in Slovakia dedicated an entire article to questions, such as: Is it really about the cat? This question was established in the previous subchapter. The answer is no, it is not about the cat. In fact, Buday claims that what causes the narrators action is a psychoanalytic phenomenon that Sigmund Freud named 'transference' (Buday, 13). When 'transference' occurs, a person channels their negative emotion towards a person, or an object, and transfers them to another person, or object, that plays no part in the cause of the anger. Buday states:

The key component to transference is that the subject towards whom an emotion is felt has to be human but the subject towards which the emotion is conveyed via its displacement, can be a human, animal or an inanimate object. (Buday, ibid)

It is simply an innocent substitute and an outlet for the affected person's negative emotions, especially if the actions following these emotions are frowned upon, and therefore, the satisfaction of these emotions is suppressed by the 'ego'. An example of a form of 'transference' is a person, who is angry and slams the table in front of him. However, this is definitely a milder form of 'transference' than the one portrayed in the tale. Freud describes this in his *Studies on Hysteria* as a "false connection" (Freud, *Complete Works*, 267). It is, in fact, a wish that the unconscious has formed, and that needs to be fulfilled. If the 'super-ego', which overpowers the 'ego' and the 'id', does not grant this wish, and suppression is not an option either, a

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proxy needs to fill its place. In the case of “The Black Cat,” one might argue that the cat is a proxy for the narrator’s wife, since she is the only human person in the story, apart from the policemen that search the house at the end (cf. Buday, 13). This also functions as an explanation why the narrator reacts in such a seemingly exaggerated way to killing his cat. His emotions are heightened, because the anger was not directed at the cat, but at his wife.

The narrator is not aware of what really triggers his actions. He speaks of a force that has corrupted him:

The spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to *vex itself* – to offer violence to its own nature – to do wrong for the wrong sake’s only [...]. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 225)

This force is otherwise known as ‘the imp of the perverse’. I will restrain from tackling this theme in all its forms, because there is an entire story with the same name by Poe, which will be the focus of the next chapter. “The Imp of the Perverse” and what this term actually stands for will be analyzed closely there. For now, the term can be summed up as an innate drive to do wrong, although the person is absolutely aware of the negative consequences that he and the people in his environment will have to face, as a result of giving in to “the spirit of perverseness” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). The results most strongly affect the person, who carries out the action ¹⁵. It is a valid question, whether this drive actually exists, or if it is just a paltry excuse of the narrator to justify his actions. One might argue that the ‘imp of the perverse’ is a theme that seemingly borders on the supernatural in the nineteenth century, but the processes that conjure it can be explained by modern psychology. Shulman notes:

In view of Poe’s achievements in ‘The Black Cat’ it would be unwise for criticism to concentrate on the ‘unfathomable’ metaphysical faculty of perverseness and to overlook or minimize Poe’s unusually specific and profound understanding of the processes of obsession, displacement, hatred and self-hatred. (Shulman, 259)

I agree that the focus should be on Poe’s “unusually specific and profound understanding,” which is why I have chosen this approach for my thesis. Shulman’s comment also emphasizes the relevance of this story in the analysis of the works of Poe.

¹⁵ Cf. Chapter 6 “ ‘Ego-Instincts’ and Conscience in “The Imp of the Perverse”, subchapter 6.3 for further information

The fact that his wife, whom the negative emotions are directed at, loves the second cat dearly, causes the narrator further reason for grief. Buday puts it as follows:

In just a few short sentences, the narration takes an unexpected turn and the subject of the **cat** finally assumes the position of the original subject of transference - **the wife**. In other words, the narrator's wife and the cat at which the hatred of the protagonist is directed, both become one and the same thing. (Buday, 13)

This statement is interesting, because it opens an investigation into the similarities between the cat and the wife. Besides the fact that both stand for the 'castration complex', regarding the woman as a being that is already seen as castrated from a very early stage in her life and one that was robbed of one of his eyes, an additional argument can be made. Sometimes the minimization of a cat as a 'pussy' builds a bridge from the animal to the genitals of a woman. The words 'cat' and 'pussy' are interchangeabilities for the word 'vagina'. Therefore, it makes sense that the narrator comes to view the wife and the cat as the same thing, since they both carry multiple parallels in their symbolic values. Last but not least, Freud notes that the genitals of a woman spark uncanny feelings in men, because the memory of being in the uterus was forgotten and got distorted, as was established in the previous chapter about "The Fall of the House of Usher." The narrator himself senses that his reaction to the cat is irrational:

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil- and yet I should be a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own – yest, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own – that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me[...] (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 227)

He intuitively feels that other forces are at work here, yet he is unable to pinpoint the source.

Shortly afterwards, the narrator notices a change in his spirit: "[T]he good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates - the darkest and most evil of thoughts" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 228). The narrator realizes that his previous methods of suppressing and transferring his emotions for his wife are no longer enough. He becomes abusive towards his wife too, who "was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). This concludes the endeavors of investigating concrete Freudian aspects in terms of 'transference'. In the next

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chapter, the themes of the uncanny that have already been shortly introduced in reference to the female genitals will be analyzed in more detail.

5.4 Aspects of the Uncanny in “The Black Cat”

Supernatural and uncanny themes are included in a vast variety of Poe’s stories. The tale “The Black Cat” is no exception. A fire destroys the narrator’s house almost completely, except for one wall which shows the silhouette of a hanged cat (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 225). The narrator’s flimsy attempt at explaining it away is not to be taken seriously (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 226). One might argue that the image of the hanging cat is a supernatural foreshadowing of the beast being his doom. Additionally, the cat is already introduced as a bad omen in the first pages of the tale. The narrator and his wife observe that Pluto seems to be exceptionally smart. “In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 223). Witches belong to the realm of the supernatural and, although the narrator’s wife never took what she said seriously, it will prove to be accurate to some degree.

Although most of the uncanny themes in Poe’s tale “The Black Cat” totally differ from the ones in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” some of them have similar causes. The ultra-uterine existence as uncanny has already been discussed above. The return from the dead, which is also a notion introduced before, is incorporated into the tale by the second cat, which fully resembles the cat Pluto, except for a white splotch on its chest, which represents another foreshadowing of the narrator’s fate:

The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but by slow degrees – degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my reason struggled to reject as fanciful – it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name [...] it was now, I say, the image of a hideous – of a ghastly thing – of the GALLOWS! (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 227)

The narrator first characterized the splotch as “indefinite” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 226). Since he was drunk, or as the narrator puts it, “half stupefied” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*) in “a den of more than infamy” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*), it makes sense that he did not see the shape clearly. However, as seen in the passage quoted above, the shape is everything but indefinite. The first cat drew its final breath on handmade gallows by the narrator. This is why authors such as James W. Gargano claim that the

second cat is “the reincarnated cat” (Gargano, 181). This notion is reinforced by the fact that the cat does not seem to have an owner, “I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it – knew nothing of it – had never seen it before” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 226). The behavior of the cat is another indicator, when the narrator observes that “it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 226). Once again, the narrator is faced with two representatives of castration fear and he soon starts to detest the cat. “I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of pestilence” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 227). The cat seems to follow him everywhere, a symbolic indicator that the narrator cannot get rid of his fear of castration. In several passages in the text, the narrator compares the new cat to Pluto and withholds from abusing it solely due to the memories of what he had done to his first cat. Not only does he detest the cat, it also fills him with “dread”, “terror and horror” (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). These feelings are due to the possible reincarnation of the pet, which is a distinct feature of the uncanny: The return of the dead.

5.5 Résumé

To sum this chapter up, the ‘castration complex’ that derives from the ‘Oedipus complex’ and the ‘transference’ of feelings are the main Freudian themes that can be observed in Poe’s “The Black Cat.” The pet is a mere proxy for the wife, which is why the narrator treats the, at first so beloved, pet in a horrible, psychopathic manner, and gives in to the ‘spirit of perverseness’, which will eventually become his complete downfall. He shows hardly any remorse, or guilt, which would give reason to interpret that the narrator does not have a fully developed ‘super-ego’, which functions as the conscience in human beings. Numerous themes of the uncanny can be observed in symbolic representatives. Poe’s depiction of the events make it possible to dig deeper into the causes and draw a perfect picture of a man, who fails to see, what the root of his evil thoughts and deeds is, and who shows little to no interest in exploring the reasons for his violent outbursts. This carefully constructed portrait of a psychopath shows that Poe was aware, how this mental illness works and what the results are. The integration of clever moves, such as excluding an interpretation by the narrator himself, enable the reader to analyze the story closely

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and build their own mental picture of what has happened and what the causes and effects of these events were. Again, this is a hint of Poe's awareness of a time, when these sources and the results could be named and descriptions of the phenomena he depicts would ensue¹⁶. This validates a reading through the lens of modern psychology. The next chapter focuses on a short story that comes closest to Freud's concrete theories¹⁷. The subject that will be the focus of this chapter has already been shortly encountered, when the narrator in "The Black Cat" spoke of the "spirit of perverseness" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 225), that came over him and corrupted his soul. What this notion of perverseness really is and what it entails will be answered in the following chapter.

6 'Thanatos' and Conscience in "The Imp of the Perverse"

"The Imp of the Perverse" by Edgar Allan Poe presents a special case, because it is rather a study of certain drives that determine the human condition, than a short story. However, it is still constructed in the form of a tale, because the study is led by a narrator, a criminal who awaits his death¹⁸. The short story was published in the summer of 1845 in *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, and reprinted later in the same year in *The May Flower for 1846* (The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore. "The Imp of the Perverse. Historical texts"). This tale is the most revealing example of Poe's extraordinary understanding of the psyche. In this special tale, his knowledge about unconscious processes is not only implied, but explicitly written down in great detail. What "The Imp of the Perverse" implies and why this drive is so strong can be seen in Freud's detailed study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. A complimentary reading of both texts is therefore a prerequisite to understand the tale fully.

6.1 The Imp of the Perverse

To demonstrate how Poe includes his knowledge of the unconscious drives in his story, this chapter starts by analyzing certain passages, where the narrator speaks of psychological phenomena, exactly as Freud does. In the first example, the narrator

¹⁶ See pp. 6f., where I elaborated on Poe's attitude towards future discoveries

¹⁷ Apart from Poe's prose poem "Eureka"

¹⁸ cf. The narrator in "The Black Cat" is in a similar position and also makes the "Imp of the Perverse" responsible for his actions

speaks about the impulse to talk in terms that would confuse the listener, solely for the purpose of making him angry:

That single thought is enough. The impulse increases to a wish, the wish to a desire, the desire to an uncontrollable longing, and the longing (to the deep regret and mortification of the speaker, and in defiance of all consequences) is indulged. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 281f.)

This passage exhibits a striking resemblance to Freud's definition of wish-fulfilment, or, the opposite, denying the 'id' the satisfaction of the wish. The "uncontrollable longing" the narrator speaks of, is in reality the 'id' pushing its drives to the surface and, depending on the person, pushing through sooner or later. Thus, they overpower the 'ego', the instance that is tasked with regulating these wishes, either granting or denying them, according to the situation. This shows that Poe knew that psychology was not sufficient in solely regarding the perception system as the whole spectrum of the human psyche. He also criticizes phrenology for ignoring the theory that is discussed in this story (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 280). Furthermore, Poe lets his narrator directly speak of the mystery beyond the 'pleasure principle' in "The Imp of the Perverse." The narrator talks about the combativeness of phrenology and 'the imp of the perverse':

Its [combativeness] principle regards our well-being; and thus the desire to be well is excited simultaneously with its development. It follows, that the desire to be well must be excited simultaneously with any principle which shall be merely a modification of combativeness, but in the case of that something which I turn *perverse*, the desire to be well is not only not aroused, but a strongly antagonistical sentiment exists. (Poe, *Complete Works*, 281)

This passage is crucial, because it refers directly to the concept that Freud speaks of in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Simultaneously, it introduces a new notion of psychology, which was not taken into account in the nineteenth century.

6.2 The Pleasure Principle

Freud states in the opening of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

We have arrived at these speculative assumptions in an attempt to describe and to account for the facts of daily observation in our field of study. Priority and originality are not among the aims that psycho-analytic work sets for itself; and the impressions that underlie the hypothesis of the pleasure principle are so obvious that they can scarcely be overlooked. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3715)

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In this passage, he stresses once more that psychoanalysis does not want to claim to be an exact science, and that his observations are in fact purely hypothetical. It was already established in Chapter 3 that introducing processes as hypotheses and treating them as facts in the same breath is a common practice of Freud. The ‘pleasure principle’ describes processes in the mind that produce either pleasure or something that is unpleasant (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3715). Freud relates these states to “the quantity of excitation that is present in the mind but is in no way ‘bound’” (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). Unpleasant feelings occur when there is an increase in excitation. Pleasure, on the other hand, is felt when the quantity of excitation decreases (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). The ‘ego’ is trying its hardest to avoid unpleasantness at all costs.

In the course of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud’s speculations lead him to conclude that there are drives that do not obey the ‘pleasure principle’, and therefore, our mental apparatus is driven by different forces. He introduces this as follows:

It must be pointed out, however, that strictly speaking it is incorrect to talk of the dominance of the pleasure principle over the course of mental processes. If such a dominance existed, the immense majority of our mental processes would have to be accompanied by pleasure or to lead to pleasure, whereas universal experience completely contradicts any such conclusion. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3716).

These statements make it very clear that the ‘pleasure principle’ is insufficient to explain certain phenomena, one of them being the drive, which Freud calls ‘the imp of the perverse’, and that the ‘pleasure principle’ does not solely govern actions and emotions, as was assumed previously. Freud is still of the opinion that there are tendencies to abide by the ‘pleasure principle’, but it is not the only phenomenon that guides our thought processes. Thus, Freud’s speculations lead him *beyond* the principle. He finds that the ‘ego’ is not only responsible for regulating pleasure, but that it is also dependent on reality (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3717). If the ‘id’ still manages to fight its way out of the unconscious, it poses a threat to the whole system. Freud states:

Under the influence of the ego’s instinct of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the

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temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure. The pleasure principle long persists, however, as the method of working employed by the sexual instincts, which are so hard to 'educate', and, starting from those instincts, or in the ego itself, it often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the whole organism as a whole. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3717)

This long, but not readily omissible, passage, illustrates how indispensable the reality is for a healthy psyche and how complex the interaction of the instances inside our heads is. Distortions in reality can cause serious mental disorders, which have the ability to throw the whole organism into mayhem¹⁹. This should be kept in mind for the later analysis of the narrator.

Freud's thoughts about compulsive repetition also play an important part in this theory. While the compulsion of repetition can be observed in neurotics who revive unpleasant situations and relive them over and over again in their treatment (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3725), this compulsion can also be found in children (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3720f.), who repeat throwing away toys or playing "peek-a-boo," as well as in healthy adults who repeat the same mistakes:

The impression they give is of being pursued by a marginal fate or possessed by some 'daemonic power' [...]. The compulsion which is here in evidence differs in no way from the compulsion to repeat which we have found in neurotics, even though the people we are now considering have never shown any signs of dealing with a neurotic conflict by producing symptoms. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3726)

The question this provokes is: What does the compulsive repetition have to do with the 'pleasure principle' and what lies beyond?

The principle of repetition is not contradictory to the 'pleasure principle'. Children want to repeat events that bring them pleasure, for example, telling the same story when they go to bed multiple times. However, not only pleasurable feelings compel the human mind to compulsively repeat these acts, since there is another notion that lies beyond the surface and is the embodiment of the 'imp of the perverse'.

¹⁹ Cf. Roderick Usher's conflict with the 'id' in "The Fall of the House of Usher"

6.2 Freud's 'Death Drive'

Freud's definition of drives gives great insight into the significance of the compulsive repetition, "Let us suppose, then, that all organic instincts are conservative, are acquired historically and *tend towards the restoration of an earlier stage of things* [my italics]" (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3740). Every impulse that is external is disturbing and jumpstarts the compulsion to go back to "an earlier stage" (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). This is essential in constructing Freud's new theory. If every living organism wants to go back to an earlier stage, the logical consequence is that every living thing seeks death, because death, or being inanimate, is the origin of every living organism.

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that '*the aim of life is death*' and, looking backwards, that '*inanimate things existed before living ones*'. (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*)

Biology has failed to produce evidence that death is not internal, so Freud turns this on its head and takes this as proof for his stance (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3746). In order to explain his theory, Freud distinguishes between two main instincts: the 'ego-instincts' and the 'sexual instincts' (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3745). On the one hand, we have the 'ego-instincts': They are conservative and aim to bring the organism back in its original state, namely, they aim for death (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). The 'ego-instincts' are also called 'Thanatos', who is the Greek god of death (Gerber). The 'sexual instincts', or 'Eros', on the other hand, run in another direction: they are tasked with the survival of the organism and reproduction. This seemingly creates a strong antithesis, because the instincts differ completely from another, since they are direct opposites. The libido is the center of the 'sex drive'. Usually, the libido fixates on an object, which is also called 'cathexis'. However, there are cases where the libido fixates within the 'ego' (called 'introversion') and does not undertake the action of cathexis. Freud calls this the 'narcissistic libido'²⁰ (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3753). Freud further states that the original antithesis

²⁰ When the libido is withdrawn from an object-choice, it is drawn back to the 'ego', before it can change and fixate on a new object. The term „narcissistic libido“ is another term for „ego-libido“. This correlates with the repetition compulsion, too. All object cathexes are proceeding from the narcissistic libido and circle back to its origin, once the connection to an object is torn, because the narcissistic libido constitutes the earliest stage of development. Under the premise that drives are conservative, this is an automated process, that can be repeated endlessly, depending on how many objects in life the libido fixates on (Freud, *Complete Works*, 1532).

between the drives cannot be upheld. Some of the 'ego-instincts' are also libidinal and therefore, sexual, (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*) and thus, they are concerned with the task of reproduction, while they still remain in the department, that has been tasked with death (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*). This means, that a distinction between those drives cannot be easily made. There is only one aspect that makes distinguishing the drives possible: while libidinal drives are presented externally on the surface of the psyche, the 'ego-instincts' are hidden and belong to the unconscious (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*).

Freud's studies show that the base for psychoneurosis is a conflict between these drives. He was influenced by Schopenhauer who sees death as "the 'true result and to that extent the purpose of life' while the sexual instinct is the embodiment of the will to live" (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3750). One might argue that thus, Freud's newly established 'death drive' is a synonym for Poe's 'imp of the Perverse'.

Poe's narrator describes the 'imp of the perverse' as

an innate and primitive principle of human action, a paradoxical something, which we may call *perverseness*, for want of a more characteristic term. In the sense I intend, it is, in fact a *mobile* without motive, a motive not *motiviert*. Through its promptings we act without comprehensible object; or, if this shall be understood as a contradiction in terms, we may so far modify the proposition as to say, that through its promptings we act, for the reason that we should *not*. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 281)

He is completely aware that this feeling creates a paradox to the primal instinct of survival. However, the narrator sees no reason for this urge, while Freud ascribes it to the repetition compulsion. Nonetheless, they are talking about the same phenomenon. Earlier in the subchapter, it has been observed that the processes of the 'pleasure principle' were clear to Poe. However, referring to the method of introspection, the narrator insists on the reality of the drive which functions *against* the 'pleasure principle', "No one who trustingly consults and thoroughly questions his own soul, will be disposed to deny the entire radicalness of the propensity in question" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). Therefore, Poe takes a stand against phrenology, the practice that was most common during his lifetime. In fact, the first two pages of the tale are solely concerned with the criticism of phrenology, because this method does not pay attention to the concept of 'the imp of the perverse' (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, 280f.).

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Poe's narrator also characterizes procrastination as the 'imp of the perverse's' doing and in describing this process, borders on the principles of the unconscious:

This craving [procrastinating] gathers strength as the moments fly. The last hour for action is at hand. We tremble with the violence of the conflict within us, - of the definite with the indefinite – of the substance with the shadow. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 282)

The shadow is the 'imp of the perverse'. The 'death drive' is a part of the unconscious, but the concept of the unconscious was a completely unknown territory until fifty years after Poe's death. Still, Poe has the courage to let his narrator explicitly state that there is something *indefinite* within us, which produces conflict. This displays a major discovery made by Poe, and once more, provides support to the thesis that Poe anticipated Freud's concepts. His use of the word 'substance' refers to the parts of the 'ego' that lie on the surface, i.e. the perception center of the human mind. The writer is aware that he needs to work. This is the 'definite' or 'substance' Poe's narrator speaks of. However, although he knows better, something urges him to put the work off until tomorrow. This is the 'indefinite', the 'shadow' and ultimately, the core of 'the imp of the perverse', which lies in the unconscious of every living thing, according to Freud.

Poe's narrator digs deeper after this observation and takes contemplating suicide as an example. Staring into an abyss, the observer is petrified and urged to take a step back, but something holds him at the edge:

Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness and dizziness and horror become merged in a cloud of unnamable feeling. By gradations, still more imperceptible, this cloud assumes shape [...] *our* cloud upon the precipice's edge, there grows into palpability, a shape, far more terrible than any genius or any demon of tale, and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 282).

What Poe's narrator does here is to explain the dichotomy between the 'ego-instincts' and the 'sexual instincts'. His use of the oxymoron "delight of horror" adds emphasis to this conflict, since the drives are themselves paradox. Poe's narrator goes on to underline this image further:

It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height. And this fall – this rushing annihilation – for the very reason that It involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome images of death and suffering which have ever

presented themselves to our imagination – for this very cause do we now the most vividly desire it. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, ibid)

The contemplation of suicide is one of the core features of 'the imp of the perverse'. It circumvents all obstacles that prevent the organism from returning back into its original state, and therefore, is the ultimate solution for the 'death drive' to reach satisfaction.

6.3 Sadism, Masochism and Their Relationship to the Conscience

The role of the narrator is 'invisible' in the first few pages, which is described as a 'covert narrator'. He is never introduced during the discourse of the characteristics of the 'imp of the perverse'. It is not until the second last page of the tale that the reader is informed that the narrator is in death row, while he writes the story down. The reason why he chose to stay 'hidden' is found in the following passage:

Had I not been thus prolix, you might either have misunderstood me altogether, or, with the rabble have fancied me mad. As it is, you will easily perceive that I am one of the many uncounted victims of the Imp of the Perverse. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 283)

Poe uses one of his oldest tricks in this passage. The treatise about 'the imp of the perverse' seems logical and created by a clear mind. Therefore, the reader is hesitant to discredit this criminal's word, since he is to a certain degree acquainted with the described phenomenon. If Poe had introduced the narrator as a criminal in the opening of the story, the reader would have been influenced by the narrator's depiction, would not have been as attentive, and might not have believed the narrator from the start. After such rational discourse about innate drives and discussions about 'definite' and 'indefinite' entities, the narrator's state as a sane and realistic intellectual is credible. There are no markers that indicate that the narrator is unreliable. He never contradicts himself and there are no discrepancies between his actions and the depiction of the following events. This is intriguing and a novelty in light of Poe's usual first person narrators. In "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Black Cat" there were some indicators that the reader should not trust the narrator. Solely the fact that the narrator is a convicted murderer is somewhat unsettling and conjures mistrust in the reader. The clear-headedness of the criminal is impressively displayed in the structure of a story, which seems to be a lecture, or a

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study of a scientific phenomenon, even if the terminology is not yet sophisticated enough to define this strange trait that every human shares with their peers. Robert Shulman states in his article “Poe and the Powers of the Mind”:

In his best fiction Poe achieves acute insights into the mysteries, processes, and terrors of the human personality without draining our shared inner life of its basic mystery. After all the attacks and denigration, after all the emphasis on his dubious metaphysics or even more unfortunate personal pathology, we can still go to Poe’s fiction for illumination that writers of a more sophisticated era are oddly handicapped from providing. (Shulman, 245)

Poe’s narrator thinks that ‘the imp of the perverse’ forced him to confess, and thus, seal his death sentence. He starts to explain to the reader how he killed a man and thought he was completely safe. He took every precaution to stay undiscovered as the murderer:

For weeks, for months, I pondered upon the means of the murder. I rejected a thousand schemes, because their accomplishment involved a *chance* of detection. At length, in reading some French memoirs, I found an account of a nearly fatal illness that occurred to Madame Pilau, through the agency of a candle accidentally poisoned. The idea struck my fancy at once. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*)

This passage lets the reader know that the narrator is a well-read and highly intelligent human being. He is aware of the dangers of several plans, and acts deliberately. However, he committed first degree murder, in order to inherit his victim’s estate (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*) without any emotion towards the victim, and their relationship to each other. This is an indicator that the narrator’s goal was solely directed at the money and he would stop at nothing to get it. Although his remarks regarding the murder are extremely brief and to the point, the manner in which he planned, executed and hid the proof of the crime, tells the reader enough about the narrator and shows that he is not only highly intelligent, but also completely cold-blooded:

But I need not vex you with impertinent details. I need not describe the easy artifices by which I substituted, in his bed-room candle stand, a wax-light of my own making for the one which I there found. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*)

He shows no remorse or shame. On the contrary, he seems to be proud of his handiness and calls the details “impertinent.” The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary characterizes this term as “rude and not showing respect for somebody who is older or more important” (Hornby, 780). Thus, even the choice of wording

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emphasizes the narrator's disregard for the person he has robbed of their life. The narrator in the story of "The Black Cat" is in a similar situation, but he at least *attempts* to conceal his psychopathy by showing some fake emotions of remorse and regret. The individual in "The Imp of the Perverse" does not hide the fact that he is absolutely ruthless. This is emphasized by the following passage:

It is inconceivable how rich a sentiment of satisfaction arose in my bosom as I reflected upon my absolute security. It afforded me more real delight than all the mere worldly advantages accruing from my sin. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 283)

The narrator seems to get a kick out of being undiscoverable. This is actually more important to him than the "mere worldly advantages," i.e. the money that he inherited. Gradually, this feeling of absolute security grows into an obsession:

But there arrived at length an epoch, from which the pleasurable feeling grew, by scarcely perceptible gradations, into a haunting and harassing thought. It harassed because it haunted. I could scarcely get rid of it for an instant. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*)

His obsession with the thought of security gives him the audacity to even say the words "I am safe" aloud in a public place (cf. Poe, *Complete Tales*, *ibid*). The narrator becomes so distraught by this that he starts to run, as if he could flee from his own consciousness. Or should I say conscience?

The 'imp' has previously been established as a synonym for Freud's 'death drive', or 'ego-instincts'. In all the encounters with the 'imp of the perverse', the reason for doing wrong is exactly because the person knows that it is indeed *wrong*. When we look at the use of the word in the story, there are two observations, what the 'imp of the perverse' implies. Firstly, the 'imp of the perverse' does not convince the narrator to commit murder, although this action is universally perceived as the epitome of 'wrong'. The narrator does not see anything perverse in murdering another human being. The real effect of the imp is portrayed rather late in the course of the story, when the murderer *confesses* to the crime. Therefore, describing the 'imp of the perverse' as a mechanism that wants to do wrong, solely for the purpose of doing wrong, is inaccurate. It is, in fact, a longing to do unlawful deeds, in order to harm *oneself*, an action that Freud ascribes to masochism:

The most common and the most significant of all the perversions – the desire to inflict pain on the sexual object, and its reverse - received from Krafft-Ebing the

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names of 'sadism' and 'masochism' for its active and passive forms respectively. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 1484)

Freud's belief was that sadism is an aspect in the psyche that is developed during the oral phase of children. He states that in this stage, destruction (or devouring, food) is equaled with pleasure (Freud, *Complete Works*, 3755).

[L]ater, the sadistic instinct separates off, and, finally, at the stage of genital primacy, it takes on, for the purposes of reproduction, the function of overpowering the sexual object to the extent necessary for carrying out the sexual act. (Freud, *Complete Works*, *ibid*)

In short, sadism is an aggressive power that finds pleasure in inflicting pain and dominating an object. Masochism, the opposite of sadism, is also found innate in the human's psyche. However, Freud distinguishes between the primary and the secondary masochism. The primary and innate masochism can be split into the erotogenic and moral masochism, while the secondary masochism is a special predisposition:

Sadism which cannot find employment in actual life is turned round upon the subject's own self and so produces a secondary masochism, which is superadded to the primary kind. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 1484²¹)

Therefore, secondary masochism is also an aggressive power, however, differentiated from sadism by its target: the own 'ego'. One might argue that 'the imp of the perverse' is secondary masochism, inflicted by the missing thrill of another victim. The narrator has only killed one man, and received great satisfaction by doing so. Over the course of the story, the narrator becomes haunted by the thought of his absolute safety. The satisfaction is gone and the aggressive tendency demands discharge.

Secondly, it seems that the narrator confuses the 'imp of the perverse' with the force that is called 'super-ego', or conscience. Freud confirms that there is a peculiarity that is called an "unconscious sense of guilt" (cf. Freud, *Complete Works*, 3968). This is what manifests in the narrator's behavior. Freud connects this with the 'Oedipus complex' in children. He claims that the more rapidly the 'Oedipus complex' is overcome, "the stricter will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego later on – in the form of conscience or perhaps an unconscious sense of guilt"

²¹ See footnote

(Freud, *Complete Works*, 3968). So how do the concepts of masochism and the unconscious sense of guilt fit together? Freud states that

[M]asochism creates a temptation to perform 'sinful actions', which must then be expiated by the reproaches of the sadistic [towards the ego] conscience [...] or by chastisement from the great parental power of Destiny. In order to provoke punishment from this last representative of the parents, the masochist must do what is inexpedient, must act against his own interests, must ruin the prospects which open out to him in the real world and must, perhaps, destroy his own real existence. (Freud, *Complete Works*, 4081)

This description of masochism strongly resembles Poe's 'imp of the perverse'. There is no total security which of these forms of expiation ultimately poses as the narrator's calamity. It could be the "reproaches of the sadistic conscience," which seems somewhat implausible, because the narrator seems to have little to no conscience, as he feels no regret, remorse or any related emotion. The latter solution to masochism, in the form of 'Destiny', and how to obtain it, could be another explanation about what is happening in the narrator's case. However, one might argue that Poe makes no attempt to even imply a whiff of the narrator's fate being his destiny. One might argue that Poe would never miss the chance to leave hints, if there were other forces at work. Therefore, it is safe to presume that the narrator is, after all, confronted with his conscience instead of 'Destiny'. This indicates that the narrator might not have fully overcome the 'Oedipus complex'. One might argue that his victim, although it is never named, could be his father. The inheritance, and the age of the person, which is uncovered to some extent by the word "impertinent," could be an indicator for this special relationship between the murderer and the victim. In this case, the narrator would have killed his father, which is a parallel to the myth of Oedipus. This would also explain why his 'super-ego' is crippled. Then again, this is exactly why he terms the urge 'the imp of the perverse'. He does not know his 'super-ego', how to respond to it or how to term it differently. It is important to note that the 'super-ego' or 'ego-ideal' is different in every person. Freud attributes this to the mixture of the destructive drive and the self-preservation instinct (Freud, *Complete Works*, 2151²²).

Freud postulated that the unconscious is the reservoir of the drives and that there were two basic inborn drives: libido, the erotic-sexual drive and aggression.

²² See footnote Number 2

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Accordingly, the basic human emotions, which express these drives, are love and hate. (Brown, Fromm, 197)

The liaison in which they occur forms certain predisposition of a character. However, the mixture of passive and aggressive drives is not cast in stone. They can change according to the situation and newly assemble in a different mixing ratio, which implies new predispositions. In the narrator's case, one might argue that the 'destruction drive' makes up a larger portion of the ratio than the 'self-preservation drives'. The pressure of this, combined with a 'super-ego', which slowly but surely starts to torment the narrator, overpowers him. He tries to run from it, but does not come far:

I bounded like a madman through the crowded thoroughfares. At length, the populace took the alarm, and pursued me. I felt *then* the consummation of my fate. Could I have torn out my tongue, I would have done it [...] I turned – I gasped for breath. For a moment I experienced all the pangs of suffocation; I became blind, and deaf, and giddy; and then some invisible fiend, I thought, struck me with his broad palm upon the back. The long-imprisoned secret burst forth from my soul. (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 284)

The narrator's instinct to run from his own conscience causes the police to pursue him through the streets. He does not seem to understand, although he is highly intelligent, as was established before, that he cannot run from his own conscience. This is another indicator that this man has never encountered this faculty of his mind and the mental overload expresses itself in a ridiculous reaction. The narrator does never seem to be aware that he even *has* a conscience. This explains why the feelings of guilt and remorse are absent in the course of the story. At the very end, the narrator still does not comprehend that his conscience is overpowering him: he speaks of an "invisible fiend" that pounded on his back, which is a metaphor for the conscience, no longer being able to stay silent and represents its final blow to push through to the surface and spit out the dark secret, and seal his fate²³

6.4 Résumé

All in all, the analysis of "The Imp of the Perverse" has shown that this term is a description that fits two concepts, namely, Freud's 'death drive' and under different circumstances, the 'super-ego', or conscience, which is not identified correctly. This

²³ "The Imp of the Perverse" is not the only short story by Edgar Allan Poe that ends this way. In "The Tell-Tale Heart" another murderer is overthrown by his 'super-ego' and confesses to murdering an old man, who was his mentor at the same time.

incorrect identification is due to an underdevelopment, caused by the insufficient compensation of the 'Oedipus complex'. This is the chapter that is exceptionally close to Freud, because it is structured as a study. The elaborations about the 'imp of the perverse' lead Poe to different appearances of the drive. He explores the unconscious in terms of "definite" and "indefinite" (Poe, *Complete Tales*, 282) material that wrestle with each other in the psyche. Thus, he intuitively found one of the concepts that Freud wrote down in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. It is important to note that Poe's narrator spends a significant amount of time discrediting the psychological strategies of his time. Therefore, one might argue that Poe was, once more, aware of the insufficiency of the findings in psychology, to explain certain phenomena that do not lie on the surface. This means that Poe acknowledged that there are in fact experiences and processes evading themselves from an observation solely guided by what can be perceived. The narrator stays covered for a long period of time, before he is introduced. He is, once more, an unreliable narrator and a killer, who feels no remorse. Poe's understanding of unconscious processes is portrayed in the descriptions of the 'imp of the perverse'. It has been concluded that the narrator is a sadist, who cannot find an outlet for his aggression, which is why the aggression is turned around at himself and torments him, until he can no longer stay silent and confesses, what he has done.

7 Conclusion

All in all, the analysis of three carefully selected short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, which deal with different aspects of psychoanalysis, ranging from Freud's tripartite model of the psyche to innate drives, self-defense mechanisms and fears resulting out of the 'Oedipus complex', have shown that Poe anticipated Freudian imagery in his works. Poe is one of the most influential writers in American literary history, due to his influence on the Gothic tradition. The selection of texts was based on their ability to showcase differences of aspects that can be interpreted through psychoanalysis. Poe wrote several stories dealing with the same elements (i.e. a character overpowered by his guilty conscience is found in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Imp of the Perverse"; mourning and melancholia are included in "Ligeia," "The Raven," and "The Fall of the House of Usher"; etc.). However, it is highly important to mention that Poe had knowledge of a broad range of psychological phenomena.

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Therefore, the selection of the texts is intended to include and discuss a variety of aspects of the human psyche Poe was aware of. The literary theory of psychoanalytic analysis is the main method that was used to produce these outcomes. Figurative tropes, such as speaking names and the condition of the settings in correspondence to the thoughts and feelings of the characters were investigated and added to the list of results, where Freudian theories can be found and applied to these texts.

Poe's works belong to the realm of Gothic Fiction, which was a popular genre in the 19th century (cf. Chapter 2). The genre features themes, such as violence, horror, death and incest, among various other transgressions, which the American society dealt with. Often, the disagreeable circumstances of the writers in the 'new world' demanded an exploration of these gruesome topics. Poe augmented this field of themes by focusing on psychoanalytic processes that he could depict through the incorporation of a first person narrator. This strategy of storytelling makes feelings and thoughts, which would otherwise be inaccessible, visible. Although several authors frequently incorporated landscapes and settings which mirrored the emotional state of characters, Poe's insights exemplify an understanding of the human psyche surpassing that of his colleagues. An increase of psychological themes was noticeable in the late 19th century, long after Poe's death in 1849.

Poe's broad spectrum of interest was fueled by the psychological phenomena discussed in his time, such as mesmerism, phrenology and physiognomy. However, he did not only include common practices of his time, but criticized them for being insufficient in explaining phenomena which do not show themselves on the surface or consciousness, but lie hidden in the remote places of the mind that are difficult to map out, since they belong to the realm of the unconscious. His criticism came from his own endeavors of uncovering the mysteries of the mind. Roughly fifty years after Poe's death, the term 'unconscious' was used by Freud, which means that Poe discovered aspects which were still unknown to psychology in the 19th century. This stands in accord with Freud's claim that the poets and philosophers before him had uncovered the material that makes an exploration of the unconscious possible.

Sigmund Freud invented a method that focuses on the unconscious. His goal was to bring repressed and distorted memories into the conscious part of the mind through speech therapy, in order to treat mental disorders. This method is known as psychoanalysis. However, psychoanalysis is not an exact science, since it can only be used to interpret the patients' statements. It is important to note that this leaves

room for errors in the interpretation. The interpretations provided by the therapist are highly suggestive and the patients might accept them solely for the sake of the therapist's superiority. Therefore, one has to be careful when implementing this method, in order to arrive at a sophisticated and logical interpretation. The curious relationship between Freud and Poe exists, because there are certain parallels in the approach of each of the authors (cf. Chapter 3). While Freud used fiction to find truth, Poe used truth to create fiction. Further parallels can be found in Poe's prose poem "Eureka" and in the dismissal of the reader's belief, which exists in the works of both authors. Clive Bloom argues that Poe's work produces mirror images of psychoanalysis, and is therefore of great interest for a psychoanalytic reading.

Poe is an exceptional example of an author, who carefully searched his own mind to produce texts that exemplify the mental states of his characters. A significant number of Poe's narrators are unreliable, due to the first person narration. This is signaled by discrepancies between the story and the narrator's statements, or by inappropriate and exaggerated reactions to a situation.

Various critics of Poe, such as Marie Bonaparte (who was Freud's pupil), Joseph Wood Krutch, and D. H. Lawrence have attempted to produce a "psycho-biography" of Poe. His works were used to make assumptions about his personality. However, this method is rather reductive, because it devalues the intrinsic meaning of the tales and assumes that Poe was unconscious of his implementation of elements that can be viewed in a psychoanalytic light. The approach of this thesis differs greatly from their attitude. The aim of this thesis is to show that Poe was aware of the psychological phenomena he describes and to simultaneously establish that his understanding of psychology was well advanced. Starting my research with the *Complete Works* of Sigmund Freud proved to be highly effective, because it helped to determine the frame of this thesis, and at the same time, gave information about what to look for in a close reading of Poe's short stories. Rereading Poe's short stories was helpful in setting the tone for the interpretation and mapping out the aspects of psychoanalysis that were fundamental for the analysis. Additionally, accounts from different individuals, who studied Poe's work, such as James W. Gargano, Carroll D. Laverty, Floyd Stovall and Robert Shulman were included, who claim that Poe's placements of symbols and integration of psychoanalytic elements were indeed conscious decisions. These declarations were useful, in order to provide further

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support for the main statement. In the course of this thesis, I have shown that Edgar Allan Poe implemented various themes that belong to the realm of psychology. The eloquent descriptions of phenomena that were not concrete concepts yet, prove that his endeavors in uncovering the mysteries of the human mind surpassed his time and age, by traversing through the ‘unconscious’, which Poe calls the ‘indefinite’ and bordering on principles of the soul, such as the ‘pleasure principle’ or the ‘ego-instincts’, as displayed in “The Imp of the Perverse” (Chapter 6), that fueled Freud’s speculation 50 years later. Furthermore, Poe’s stories exhibit that he was extremely interested in the reasons for fear in a human being, underlining this by his integration of uncanny motives that play on innate and ancient fears. He was also aware of the phenomenon that is called ‘transference’ and incorporated this in his story “The Black Cat” (Chapter 4). The countless allusions to the ‘castration complex’ in the “Black Cat” are various and so cleverly placed that it seems impossible that the incorporation was an accident. However, this does not mean that every single element that can be read through the lens of psychoanalysis in Poe’s works was placed consciously. Poe believed that intuition was the highest power of knowledge. Therefore, one might argue that he stumbled over some psychoanalytic themes by accident, while others were included after careful consideration. For example, one might argue that the placement of characters as representations for Freud’s tripartite model in “The Fall of the House of Usher” (Chapter 4) were an intuitive decision, since the three instances in the mind were not a concept yet and said concept is rather abstract. However, their interaction strongly resemble Freud’s model and exemplify how serious issues can ensue, if the three instances are not in balance. Moreover, Poe paints an accurate picture of a person, who suffers from a clinical depression and experiences psychosomatic symptoms (Chapter 4), as well as portraits of criminals (Chapter 5 and 6), who have an underdeveloped conscience which they cannot identify as such. My approach is merely a demonstration that the majority of these elements were deliberately included, and therefore, this thesis builds a counterpart to the psychobiographies that have been mentioned. This approach urges the reader to pay attention to the symbolism and pre-Freudian imagery in the text rather than on the person behind the curtain, or namely, the author. There is no question whether or not Poe’s personality influenced his writing. While it certainly did, the role of the author is rather insignificant for the approach favored in this thesis. Therefore, the author’s personality can be excluded from the in-depth research. Freud’s theories are

interesting when working with literature, because they were inspired by fiction. Thus, using psychoanalysis as a tool for an interpretation within the frame of literary criticism is relevant. This thesis has demonstrated that for future reference, it would be highly important to emphasize the inherent significance of the text and apply the method of excluding the position of the author, in order to produce genuine literary criticism. Studies using this approach are rare, which is why there is an inadequate account of secondary texts that deal with this matter. Poe deserves credit for the conscious part of his art that was neglected in most psychoanalytical studies concerned with his writings, which is why this aspect is of high importance for future studies of his works.

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