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TO PEER INTO THE ABYSS

A Psychoanalytical Analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's
The Imp of the Perverse

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Introduction -

1.1 - Abstract	p. 2
1.2 – Introduction	p. 2

Hypothesis & theory -

2.1 - Hypothesis	p. 3
2.2 - Method	p. 11

Analysis -

3.1 – The destructive tendencies of Edgar Allan Poe	p. 12
3.2 – The Imp of the Perverse.....	p. 16

Conclusion -

4.1 - Conclusion	p. 25
------------------------	-------

Bibliography & References -

5.1 – Bibliography & References.....	p. 27
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§ - 1.1 – ABSTRACT

This essay is based on the premise of psychoanalytical literal theory through a perspective of the author-imprint, or the mirroring neural-effect of the author as an external persona - a force influencing, constructing and enforcing traits, intertextual messages and sublime meanings of the subconscious in the primary text material – the short story *Imp of the Perverse*, published by Edgar Allan Poe in 1845. The aim is to view this short story in light of Poe's empirically documented destructive personality, proposing that the message of the story, in itself, is more than simply a tale, but part of a larger contextual idea sprung from the pained soul of the author. As primary source for the hypothesis statement, theories by Freud and the later constructions on psychoanalysis as a tool for interpreting literature have been used, such as the collected works of Kurzweil & Phillips (*Literature and Psychoanalysis*). Further reference will be made to extensive autobiographical works on Poe himself, combined with specific research within the psychoanalytical field by authors such as Dr. Liebig (*Criminal Insanity and Hypersensibility in Edgar Allan Poe*), M. Bonaparte (*The Life and Works of E.A. Poe, a psycho-analytic interpretation*) and more. The results of this paper found that the dysfunctional lifestyle and neurotic tendencies of Edgar Allan Poe strongly indicate a connection between his psychological state, his experiences and the message of *The Imp of the Perverse*. The claim, then, is that Edgar Allan Poe did indeed fuel his short story with direct elements of his own psyche and moral values.

1. 2 – INTRODUCTION

Many are the names of published authors in the world – successful in their own right – but few are the names of the truly memorable. Fewer still are the names of truly great authors; men and women who possess a seemingly unique ability not only to carve new directions and whole genres of fiction in their wake; but sometimes even to define a whole generation. Edgar Allan Poe may not be the literal Shakespeare of his time; but he does hold a definite place amongst the true pioneers of American literature, impacting many of his followers, laying the foundations for the modern horror, detective and short story genre and format.

Poe's views on art and writing, tangled with his journalistic career as a writer and editor, would spread seeds of thought and inspiration down through the years. As many proteges before him, Poe

would endure much hardship and suffer from a considerable degree of crisis throughout his life – leaving him with the scars of stress and trauma; which can be traced in the dark patterns that are so typical of his works in the morbidly poetic. Questions arise as to what extent the mysterious author projected of his own mind to conjure these dark tales. Are the writings of Edgar Allan Poe the results of a life covered in darkness, and thus a message coded in narrative; or simply the results of a vivid and morbid fictional imagination?

§ - 2.1 – HYPOTHESIS

This essay will for the sake of clarity, readability and scientific presentation be organized into three sets of questions or layers of analytical discourse. The three parts are interconnected as different blocks or elements of the close-reading experience, the primary consideration and usage of the main text material – thus, they are not to be viewed as separated elements of a divided scientific work - but as joint parts of a whole. The overall task is to answer in itself the larger question of possible existence or linkage between the psychoanalysis of the author and his life itself – fused with his work. In order to examine this broader detail we will make use of a select set of minor, pinpointed questions. The different aims are (1) - to establish, through support of past research and empiric evidence as presented mainly by Bonaparte and Pruette, the base of a destructive persona and/or disorderly personality in Edgar Allan Poe. (2) - to investigate through literal psychoanalytical theory the concept of the personal dilemma of the author in literal relation to the text *The Imp of the Perverse* – that is if, and how, psychological disturbance of the persona and destructive neural patterns of behavior may have affected this story produced by Edgar Allan Poe. Interpretation will be based on the theory of the socio-psychological effects of mirroring, and the alienation of the self, as argued by Freud, Bonaparte and Lacan. (3) - to examine, analyze and decode the short story *The Imp of the Perverse* from an psychoanalytical literal perspective, to see if there exists a clear indication that the projection of the author into the text could be stated to carry his personal view and outlook on the taboo and forbidden.

Through these points then, the straightforward aim is to prove that there is a clear psychological tie between the destructive tendencies of the author and his textual work, which then should be applicable in the interpretation of *The Imp of the Perverse*. By first attempting to establish a firm hold on Edgar Allan Poe's destructive past, it is possible in the second step to see whether or not

these destructive tendencies could have been projected into the short story from the author himself; possibly opening up to a view which shows whether or not Edgar Allan Poe included elements of his own personal views – derived from personal experience – into the fictional narrative that is *The Imp of the Perverse*.

Fundamental theoretical support for the premise of this psychoanalytical paper is naturally found in works within the field of psychoanalytic research, which will construct the basis of the hypothesis, as well as providing definition for the necessary specialized terminology and argumentation.

Amongst the primary conceptualizations are Freud's theories of the ego¹, super-ego² and disorderly processes of identification as a means of subconscious construction of projection and self-alienation³.

According to the Freudian field of psychology, each individual is made up of conscious and subconscious parts – the conscious part of the mind above the 'surface' functioning as the knowingly cognitive controller of needs, actions, wishes and motivational drives. The conscious, then, provides our freedom to choose what actions to perform; and thus we are able to a certain extent to use and manipulate this plane of our conscious selves. The unconscious as a multifaceted and much more complex *apparatus* strives to maintain mental balance through interconnected relations with the *id*, *ego* and *super-ego* – as subconscious processes, constant in effect and drive, our potential of manipulation and intellectual insight of them are considerably diminished. In relation to psychoanalytical aesthetic theory, every artist could be considered to utilize elements of all levels of the conscious and subconscious layers – creating, in crafting, a creative process where all matters of artistic impulse of the human mind interconnect – a machinery of the sublime, which in order to make something has to pour from not only a plane of knowledge and logic of the cerebral cortex (as with mathematics), calibrated physical motorization of the motor cortex (as with

1 According to Freud, the ego, in very simplified terms, is the formation or construction of the self in relation to the ID or *pleasure principle* – governed by the *reality principle*, it is the acknowledgment that instant gratification and pleasure without thought might produce negative effects or response from possibly harmful external factors. In learning, organizing and repressing impulses of the ID, the ego utilizes a great number of skills to achieve results strategically rather than mindless doing.

2 The Super-ego is a dualistic element in relation to the ID and ego – sub-dividable into two parts; ego ideal and conscience. While the ego ideal strives towards fulfilling the projection of the individual's socialized ideals of perfection triggered by the loss of perfection in adolescence, the conscience governs moral matters of right and wrong in accordance with the beliefs of the individual; aiming to restrain and restrict the ID through 'correct' values projected down through the ego. Internalized sense of right, wrong, punishment and reward.

3 In Freudian terms; the mind is capable of projecting painful or potentially harmful thoughts, memories, impulses and blame from the individual unto others – in this process, certain errors might occur, giving birth to malfunctioning processes in relation to the self.

activity, sports, handcraft) or the clouded depths of conscious or unconscious imagination and creativity (as with storytelling, brainstorming) – rather, all of these potentially divided elements are inevitably linked together as the basic foundation of creative construct – the primary principle of artistic creation.

Pinpointing the connection between the ideas of the persona⁴, as alienated from the self and influencing it on a conscious or subconscious cognitive plane, and the ideas of the author influencing his own produce (willingly or not) with at first glance hidden meanings and messages, Bonaparte's extensive volume of psychoanalysis on Edgar Allan Poe will be of critical importance. As creator of what is, perhaps, the most extensive research ever carried out on Poe from a psychoanalytical perspective, Bonaparte holds a firm grip on the complex psychological profile of Poe - concluding that the American novelist without a shadow of a raven's doubt suffered from several neural disabilities and psychological disorders.

As literally a student of Freud and the school of psychoanalytical elemental perspective, Bonaparte's interpretation is profoundly loyal to Freudian heritage, quoting massively from prime sources - constructing an argument transpiring traditional views of creative psychology and related levels of action-to-mind-to-action based interaction within the mind of the inventing artist. By primarily building upon Freud's theories of *The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming*⁵, whilst adding features of specialized elements of the interpretations and subconscious meanings of symbolism ascribed by Freud in relation to dreams in general – Bonaparte strives to solidify a claim where authors of questionable mental health are unquestionably altered in their process of creative writing, doomed to weave internal struggle into the external text material; while conjointly pinpointing Edgar Allan Poe as a prime example of this theory;

Works of art or literature profoundly reveal their creator's psychology
and, as Freud has shown, their construction resembles that of our
dreams. The same mechanisms which, in dreams or nightmares,

4 In this essay, the terminology of 'persona' is not specifically used in accordance with a classical Jungian interpretation, but rather as a collective of Freud and Lacan's views tied to a broader psychological perspective of the 'persona' as simply a term for the individual; self-image and ideas of the one's own person.

5 In simple terms, Freud's work describes the relations between the cognitive process of daydreaming in children and adults and how this is closely related to the active processes of fantasizing during actual dreaming while sleeping. Particular focus is placed on how these concepts link to the creative processes poets use.

govern the manner in which our strongest, though most carefully concealed desires are elaborated, desires which often are the most repugnant to consciousness, also govern the elaboration of the work of art. (Bonaparte 639)

Arguing that every author who is partaking in any form of creative process which produces end results of textual material is effectively performing a split of personality into diverse psychic elements, slicing both conscious and unconscious parts of the neural persona into elements of the story, Bonaparte claims that any poet or artist will portray themes from the ontogenetic complexes haunting that artist in particular. Thus, the author and her persona is imprinted in the text while consecutively writing it; the author is disembodied – and re-embodied – in fusing with the creation of characters in the narrative. Even infantile and adolescent memories may lay foundation for repressions and negative projections that emerge much later; affecting to notable degrees the thoughts and choices executed by the adult individual.

This nucleus of repressed emotional experiences and ideas form a core of instincts – a sum-total of complexes merging with the conscious and unconscious into preconscious elements – representatives of cognitive processes which are neither as intangible as strictly unconscious thought or as clearly crisp as conscious choice. Being preconscious repressed memories from traumatic experiences both in childhood and adult life, these factors are indeed, in a general sense, covert and hidden from the mind, with the key difference being that they may arise and influence the cognitive plane and consciousness in given suitable situations. In the minds of Freud and successively Bonaparte, conjuring narrative text and creative writing may be examples of such processes. In resemblance, this phenomenon of hidden and unconscious components is similar to fleeting processes of dreaming, by night as well as day.

Lacan's theories of dual-relationships - the mirroring effect⁷ and the self as an institution of external alienation depict a condition or process during the life of an infant (and later the adult individual) where external images (such as that of reflections in a mirror) affect the already residing ego under construction, shocking it by so conceiving replications or identical imagery of the self – thus ultimately pushing the ego to not only be able to see and contemplate upon the visualized image of the body, but making it absolutely necessary for the mind to use external representations to

understand and mentally relate to the self[In the words of Lacan himself;

... the mirror stage establishes the ego as fundamentally dependent upon external objects, on an other. As the so-called individual matures and enters into social frameworks that would give each subject's personality (and his or her neuroses and other psychic disturbances) its particular characteristics. (Lacan 5)

In itself, the mirroring of one's persona and the mentioned dependency may be interpreted through this theoretical perspective as a doppelganger effect – identification being pushed upon the conception of an other, an entity paradoxically external and incorporated at the same time. This reflex of the mind to actively establish an 'I', an himself or herself, would then fall into a broader theory of this doppelganger – this exterior and subconscious persona – as a symbiosis with the own self, affecting and influencing back and forth in a devious game of the diffuse psychic dilemma present in all individuals. In context of this field of research, Lacan's theories would be used to establish the *other* as a projection or alienation of the self outside of the author, a cloned personality carrying different psychic elements (according to Freudian theory, most likely complexes and destructive tendencies), which then could be said to mirror these qualities and habits upon the author and his or her textual product.

Related to the matter at hand, and to Lacan in particular, are the theories presented by Robert Con Davis in his work *Lacan, Poe and Narrative Repression*. Taking root in Freudian views on the transformation of persona in language as well as Lacanian claims of the mirrored external mindsets influencing the primary personality, Davis launches an interpretation of the relationship between repression and textual unconsciousness. The repetition of repression in writing as an act, Davis argues, is an important factor in understanding and analyzing texts from a psychoanalytical perspective. Authors could be considered to 'vent' their anxiety and mental disorders, problems and hidden wishes into the text itself – consciously or not. In order to locate as well as understand these repressions, some matter of repetitive behavior or theme should be found and utilized, as to not make interpretations and conclusions only chaotic or random. In the case of Poe; this process is simplified due to his heavily morbid and thematic nature, rarely diverting from his well established and unique style.

For connectivity between the hypothesis of textual connection between Edgar Allan Poe's problems of personality and his work in *Imp of the Perverse*, some foundation of autobiographical background is required – for this, Pruette's research in *A Psycho-analytical Study of Edgar Allan Poe* is used, as to present some informative detail of the man behind the text; recognizing the fact that when dealing with two elements in relation to each other, some bridge material must be brought in for the sake of clarity. Pruette delivers a detailed personal presentation of Poe's life from infancy unto mysterious death, carefully outlining his actions, relations and decisions in life and career from a psycho-analytical perspective, touching as well upon certain examples and sets of material which the author has produced in order to advance the image of a man scorned by fate and ill pre-determined conditions leading a morbidly productive existence which ended with as much horror, mystery and details of the macabre as his own tales.

Beginning with the complexity of Poe's broken relationship with his biological parents, Pruette explores in deeper fashion the later complications with Poe and his new found home with the Allan family. Yet again, Pruette argues, Poe was faced with coming from a place of loss and grief from losing his true parents – a deep psychological wound which could have been 'healed' with proper care, nurture and acceptance along the lines of childhood; upon experiencing, enduring and ultimately leaving this pre-adult stage of his life however, the author-to-be was faced with having no choice but to grow up in a home which did not accept him. In leaving a traumatic stage and entering upon another – realizing that the new home was but little better than the old [one] and in such regards perhaps only in matters of convenience and practical nature given the financial stability of the Allans; Poe could be argued to from an early point have developed a severe alienation from other people around him - adults, children, men and women alike. Dealing with the textual material produced by the author in itself, Pruette's investigations turn into precise interpretation when touching upon *Imp of the Perverse* itself, arguing that the short story is directly related to a involuntary destructive behavior executed by Poe as to hurt and affect his life in obvious negative fashion; despite being very well aware of these potential dangers.

The *Imp of the Perverse* came to him in actual life and forced him to make appearances which he could neither have desired nor have calculated to benefit himself. (Pruette 384)

Pruette completes his psychoanalytical palette by adding elements of extreme narcissism to the established feelings of alienation and abandonment. Emotionally disabled from an early age, the neurotic tendencies might in this line of reasoning be considered to have grown rather than diminished; giving birth to chronic emotional patterns of anxiety and disbelief in sound elements of social conduct and interaction – sociocultural building blocks such as trust, friendship, respect, being able to compromise and accustom might have seemed foreign and unnecessary to Poe. Thus aware of his own objectification and lack of normative characteristic patterns of orderly behavior, Poe might have infused in himself a pride of extreme proportions in order to uphold feelings of superiority – justification through deviation – establishing the odd self as a self of higher value than that of others, effectively producing a sharp ego capable of viscous wickedness in order to keep the status quo of alienation in place; to defend against the potential hurtful elements of the outside world. In line with this reasoning – conscious or not – Poe could be said to develop an introvert emotional relationship with himself; desiring above all else not to create mutual affectionate relationships with others, but simply to be the object of worship and immediate receiver of warm emotion – a desire to be loved, rather than to actively love another.

Dr. Liebig argues a standpoint in which Edgar Allan Poe is clearly heavily affected emotionally, cognitively and action-wise by mentally traumatic and psychologically harmful experiences during his lifetime – experiences which seep into his literal work and the textual contexts in which he chose to operate. The novels, poems and articles that Poe produced would be argued to follow certain sets of themes or motifs, in which loss, grief, sadism, fear and vengeance are overtly common. These themes and motifs would according to Liebig find root in the darker experiences of Poe's own trauma – the locked events and memories which he underwent laid ground for a dynamic spur of destructive feelings of anxiety and grief – effectively influencing the stories and characters of his textual realm. Several traumatic experiences of Poe's life are mentioned as primary material for such possible sources of mental disability – amongst the stronger evidence and key elements is the complex nature in which the child but briefly comes to know and intimately relate to his parents, the untimely manner in which these temporal figures disappear, and in particular, the loss of the mother (Liebig 427).

As argued by Liebig; the tragic tear of losing not only the physical dimension of intimacy - as well as the mental dimension of feeling appreciated and loved – robbed Poe of any basic understanding,

conception or identification with what normative emotional love between a mother and a child is like. The child would be prone to a neurotic state of mind, inflicting a restless and erratic cognitive compass of how to handle premature as well as adult relations, and having problems of dire nature to ever feel genuinely appreciated, loved or accepted by parental figures as well as other adults around him.

The history of Poe's family shows a decided neuropathic inheritance. His foster parents never understood or sympathized with the highly sensitive and excitable child and, although his boyhood was passed as the spoiled son of indulgent parents, he never received the parental affection or family sympathy that he craved. (Liebig 426)

Prevented, perhaps disabled, in the construct of normative sound and healthy psychological bondage to the adult realm and the elements of parenthood, the young Poe was left to filling in the gaps of his emotional life by his own accord, effectively establishing an overly sensitive and prejudicial view of how to engage, act and react to external adult parties. This dysfunction would show in relation to both genders – towards men a leering suspicion and disbelief, grown from feelings of abandonment and betrayal of the father figure who rarely involved himself in the brief chance given to spend time with his son, and who left both the young boy and his sick mother in perhaps their most sincere time of need – towards women a heavy reliance and dependence combined with a mad embellishment of the female soul and surface.

This problematic position would be enforced by emotional polarization – men as 'enemies' of constant character, either as fleeting backstabbers who are prone to deceit, lies and abandoning responsibility, and women as 'allies' of temporal character; trustworthy, caring, giving, impossible to criticize but also prone to disappearing, often by the macabre ways of death and disease. Making no male friends openly or unofficially while idolizing women and relying on their support mentally, financially and physically, an obvious emphasis and conception of gender which is uneven and unequal arises, undoubtedly affecting Poe's conception on the roles and qualities of men and women as human beings.

Combined and perhaps inseparably tied to the Freudian outlook and processes described above; it is

Fredrik Åslund, for Prof. Marko Modiano
English C (60 – 90hp), HiG - 31-5-2012

vital when performing an analytical interpretation of psychoanalytical literary theory to include a classical textbook source which will form the basic principles to follow. As such, *Literature and Psychoanalysis* by Kurzweil & Phillips is included; of which certain explorations of the Freudian daydreaming and the principles of creativity will be of particular value. Kurzweil & Phillips debate not only the creative processes of fictional writing stemmed from fantasy as its primary source – but furthermore how these processes in themselves will leave the author in a state of sub-divided cognitive transition – separation of the creative mind – a literal split of self-observation into multiple part-egos inhabiting all characters and elements of a story; born from the necessity to actively breathe life into all of these roles (lest they be neglected or simply not included in the narrative). Thus, through creative writing there will then always be some sort of projection in a daydreaming-like state; the author projecting himself and looking out from the fictional eyes of characters made up, juggling red threads, sorting narrative components – interconnected as well as individually from each other (Kurzweil, Phillips 10).

§ - 2. 2 – METHOD

The analytical research will be conducted through the use of psychoanalytical literary theory, backed with several sources from the psychoanalytical field, the relationship between literary production and psychological phenomena, as well as works and past research specifically targeted on the history and thematic tendencies of Edgar Allan Poe, author in question. By using these works to establish a firm background or academic wallpaper, giving perspective as well as necessary information for interpretation, the intention is to analyze the primary text with these elements in mind – using close reading as a way to locate and bring out words, passages and ideas which may point clearly to the possibilities of Edgar Allan Poe's own voice piercing through – not as attempting to merely depict a short story about a murder as means of mindlessly entertaining an audience; but to give samples of his own views and ideas of a certain psychological principle – our views and nature of the taboo and how it relates to our instincts and impulses.

Through closely following select phrases of the short story *Imp of the Perverse*, small elements of text will emerge, allowing us to interpret these against the background of theory and biographical information gathered. First and foremost our theoretical material and hypothesis have been presented; secondly, some biographical background will be provided, as motivated above. This

section on the destructive tendencies of Edgar Allan Poe is valuable – possibly critical – as without reference of actual events, experiences and traumas; any sort of psychological or psychoanalytical interpretation focused on neural disorders will simply lack resource and base. A patient with no history and no memories – *tabula rasa* – is after all, untreatable.

§ - 3.1 – THE DESTRUCTIVE TENDENCIES OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

In order to fairly interpret the connective linkage between Edgar Allan Poe, a destructive persona and the text material he produced, it is imperative to first establish a basic understanding of the factual events and actions that formed the author behind the 'imp'. For obvious reasons, this will serve merely as shallow introduction - as dedicated autobiographical descriptions of the author consisting of any accuracy or detail do not allow themselves to be confined to such limited space. Furthermore, these biographical elements are brought in from a psychoanalytical viewpoint; attempting to construct a basis for a psychoanalytical literal argument – thus, the purpose is one of psychological profiling rather than entertaining storytelling.

Edgar Poe was born on the 19th of January 1809 in Boston to a pair of poor actors; David and Elizabeth Poe. Though David carried a grand heritage inherited from his father, David “General” Poe – highly regarded for his successful military career and relations with the famous Lafayette – his son was not shaped in the same ambitious mold. Although early attempts at pursuing a career in law, David soon deserted the strict household in order to pursue a much stronger, aesthetic desire; to act on stage. Upon joining a touring company known the Charleston Players, he was before soon introduced to and joined in marriage with Elizabeth Arnold, widow of a pianist from a similar theatrical company (Bonaparte 1 - 3). Despite grave poverty and carrying the weight of a physically and mentally challenging profession, Elizabeth gave birth to three children. Sick with tuberculosis and an alcoholic, David deserted or died under unclear circumstances in 1810, leaving behind a wife struck with symptoms of the same disease. Eventually bedridden in Richmond, the end for Elizabeth came in 1811 – a passing which evoked the maternal pity of a particular Ms. Allan, one of Elizabeth's few visitors during her slow passing. Inclined not to leave the now lonely Edgar, Frances Allan aimed to assign herself caretaker of the child; something which Mr. Allan – a scotch merchant of considerable wealth – remained reluctant to even after the decision was made to allow Edgar into the home; thus, he was never formally adopted in juridical terms.

So came Edgar eventually to live with the Allans in their homestead, a child questioned but not mistreated; accepted though only to an extent; sibling, brother and son without blood or relation to provide the last push into the comforting arms of childhood. Though Edgar's foster mother attempted to love the new family member, and did so in most regards of the time successfully; he was reportedly a sensitive child of delicate nature. Reluctant of violent and rough game, he tended to play and spend time with girls rather than boys; and when given the opportunity he preferred the company of his new 'ma' and aunt Nancy to that of his stern foster father, prone to corporal punishment and whipping. Showing great talent for reading, reciting poetry and the arts, Edgar also received a detailed religious education from the pious Ms. Allan, who often would bring the boy to church (Bonaparte 8 - 12). His intellectual education began at the early age of six in a small Richmond school. As is obvious, the author-to-be enjoyed an intellectually stimulating environment which did not lack resources, spiritually or materially, providing an early head-on in most matters of the intellectual and aesthetic arts.

Growing older, Edgar entered a preparatory school of good standing due to the considerable, if unstable, economic situation associated with his new home. At English and Classical School he would learn French, Latin, mathematics and English literature – subjects which came easily to him, reinforcing his status as a student of intellectual prowess and ambition. It is also during this time the young man started writing poetry and shorter works. His prestigious fellow students would, however, not accept his hollow heritage as the son of an actress and a drunkard – harassment which flared insecurity and inferiority complexes. In 1826 Edgar entered the University of Virginia for a brief but intense period - with very limited restrictions on student behavior or activity, the young and often wealthy academics initiated a life of decadence and mindless consumption of alcohol and gambling. Strongly affected, Edgar developed an addiction to alcohol and a dysfunctional relationship towards all matters of responsible economics (Bonaparte 30 - 32). Now heavily in debt and with a foster father who refused to pay for neither debts nor tuition fees, the young man had to leave the university. Conflict between Edgar and John Allan climaxed; pushing the author to join the military academy of Westpoint in order to ensure an independent income. Initially the young Edgar seems to have made quite a reputable and successful career; rising to the rank of sergeant-major, but with time, the restless academic started to despise and openly hold in contempt the repetitious duties and submissive code of conduct. As resignations to withdraw from duty were

rarely approved; Edgar saw no choice but to draw upon himself necessary ills and crimes to suffer a court-martial followed by a dishonorable dismissal from his services. Now without occupation and direction, Poe would suffer an additional blow in 1829 – the death of his foster mother Ms. Allan; a macabre event which affected him severely, and shredding any remaining ties with Mr. Allan and his old home.

Written out of the inheritance at this point, Edgar Allan Poe was condemned to a life of continuous poverty; attempting to pass the daily bread by signing up for mediocre editorial and freelance jobs at magazines and newspapers, climbing only so far as to reach the position of chief editor for certain publications, only mildly successful. Despite this, Edgar Allan Poe was by his stubborn choice of career the first American author to ever live exclusively off his work as a writer. In 1835, Edgar married his 13-year old cousin Virginia Clem in secrecy, and yet again in an open ceremony the year after. Publishing his own works, short stories as well as poems and critical reviews, Poe received mixed reviews and was not to be considerably successful from any perspective until the publication of *The Raven* in 1845. The sweet nectar of sudden rise to fame must have seemed short-sighted for the dedicated author however; as Virginia developed symptoms of tuberculosis - the very same condition which robbed him of his beloved mother - and she followed Elizabeth's destiny the next year, only 23 years of age. To combat the loss of his young wife, Edgar is reported to have found comfort in an abusive ingestion of alcohol as well as morphine and opium (Bonaparte138 - 143). The horrid condition of his mental state mirrored that of his physical; poverty and the cold winters took considerable toll on Edgar. Delving ever deeper into emotional misery driven by loss and despair of the woman he loved – and depended upon for stability – Edgar Allan Poe entered a state of depressive hypomania⁶.

Still grieving, the talented bohemian was now a widower and not out of sight from other women; amongst them a particular Mrs. Whitman – poet of some esteem, widow, cultivated and intellectual. Despite her obvious affections however, Poe fell high over heels for Annie Richmond – young, beautiful, frail, virtuous; but married. Caught between these women and an apparent need for confirmation and affection, Edgar initiated affairs with both parties; swinging between marrying and offering his endless love and devotion between them as a pendulum. However, neurotic and dysfunctional patterns of intimacy, his erratic behavior and addictions would keep the poet from

⁶ A less severe state of full mania, hypomaniac symptoms consist of considerable increased activity and energy, decrease of sleep, racing thoughts and a heightened need for social interaction.

Fredrik Åslund, for Prof. Marko Modiano
English C (60 – 90hp), HiG - 31-5-2012

ever handling a courtship properly or marrying again.

On the 3rd of October, 1849, Dr. Snodgrass was called upon by a hastily scrawled piece of paper; pleading him for immediate assistance at Cooth and Sergeant's Tavern. Hurrying upon the location, he found possibly the greatest poet of America sitting lowly in an armchair;

...his face... haggard, not to say bloated, and unwashed, his hair unkempt, and his whole physique repulsive... His clothing consisted of a sack-coat... ripped more or less at its seams... his shirt was both crumpled and badly soiled... (Bonaparte 203)

Brought steadily to the hospital, Poe's condition worsened with time;

To this state succeeded tremor of the limbs... constant talking – and vacant converse with spectral and imaginary objects on the walls. His face was pale and his whole person drenched in perspiration... When I returned I found him in a violent delirium, resisting the effort of two nurses to keep him in bed... Having become enfeebled from exertion, he became quiet, and seemed to rest for a short time; then gently moving his head, he said 'Lord help my poor soul' and expired.

(Bonaparte 204)

As shown, the story of Edgar Allan Poe is one clouded in details of despair; framed by reoccurring traumatic experiences and psychological downfalls. Tying to femininity and the protection of motherly women at an early age; he faced repeated loss of these important figures who provided security, comfort, support, love and intimacy. Advanced by his severe addictions to alcohol and intoxicating substances such as morphine and opium, the neurotic elements of his persona were severely enlarged and aided in their expansion of his psychological identity. Supported by Pruette and Bonaparte both; there remains little doubt that Edgar Allan Poe suffered from evident mental disorders, strong complexes and a tendency to actively – however conscious or not – perform destructive actions and habits upon himself, without clear or evident respect for his own psychological or physical well-being. It is as if the author himself knew the horrors of humanity, and willingly or not, faced with immense pain and staring into the face of the taboo, he invented his

own idea – and ideal – of the perversity of life.

§ - 3.2 – THE IMP OF THE PERVERSE

Presented below is an excerpt from *The Imp of the Perverse*. This selected passage will remain the exclusive focus of the argument at hand; though it should be noted for reference that *The Imp of the Perverse* is in itself a slightly longer story, containing much more dramatic and fictional elements than those presented for the argument of this paper – a story of the perfect murder, and the gruesome thoughts that go with such macabre events. Of particular interest are the psychological ideas of the taboo and destructiveness of man; presented below:

We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss – we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness, and dizziness, and horror, become merged in a cloud of unnameable feeling. By gradations, still more imperceptible, this cloud assumes shape, as did the vapor from the bottle out of which arose the genius in the *Arabian Nights*. But out of this our cloud upon the precipice's edge, there grows into palpability, a shape, far more terrible than any genius, or any demon of a 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. 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. And because our reason violently deters us from the brink, therefore, do we the more impetuously approach it. There is no passion in nature so demoniacally impatient, as that of him, who shuddering upon the edge of a precipice, thus meditates a plunge. To indulge for a moment, in

any attempt at thought, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and therefore it is, I say, that we cannot. If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backward from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed.
(Poe 277)

In order to attempt to map whether or not Edgar Allan Poe mirrored or projected parts of his dysfunctional persona and mind into *The Imp of the Perverse*, it is vital to establish an understanding of the argued logic and message contained within the short story itself. Through close reading, passages of psychological value emerge – passages which then are highly usable as tools for interpretation when put in comparison to the destructive past of Poe. These interpreted passages will then be subjected to the psychoanalytical literal theories of Freud, Bonaparte and Lacan; as to shine light on the actual – if present – degree of projection or sub-division of himself that Poe actually performed in his work.

Destructive elements emerge early in the text, showing symbolism which may be interpreted as closely related to the principle of how facing choices produces feelings of illness, reluctance and nausea. From a sound psychological perspective, such triggers or epicenters of negative feelings would in themselves produce a reasonable reaction for the body and mind to protect and preserve itself; *to shrink from the danger* - actively diminishing the potential threat and cutting possibilities which may produce such demise. Yet in the textual material we find described what Edgar Allan Poe believed to be the paradox – that the body and mind could be bound – shackled by fascination of the fearful; seemingly unable to leave and avoid the situation even if it was clearly deemed as dangerous. Traces of such self-destructive patterns are found in Poe's lifelong addictions to substances and alcohol; his seeming lack of respect towards his own wellbeing, life and health – as told by Bonaparte; when his wife died he would visit her grave often during harsh winters; heavily intoxicated, barely clothed, sitting for hours on end – as if unable to leave - until being forcibly led back to safety (Bonaparte 141).

As described, Poe was a heavy user of morphine as well as opium, and would use the substances often to soothe the pain of living, relieve him of everyday troubles and allow him to dream up new literal concepts even by day; as he sought necessary not to allow his mind to 'run dry' from the trifles of everyday life. The use of opiates allowed Poe to “peer into the abyss, to grow sick and

dizzy” from what the drugs possibly allowed him to see. Although the use of drugs was seemingly accepted in his own household, the effects of long term use must have been apparent for Poe and his immediate environment. With this stated - although Poe was happy to confess his spiritual torment at every given moment – these elements are but diffuse connections at best to the illness which is possibly described by effects of drug abuse in the text. As such – without clear interpretations, it remains questionable whether or not Poe actually referred to his abuse in terms of feelings (of nausea and sickness) in *The Imp of The Perverse* – rather, it is more important to view the factual history of his addictions as a backdrop which allows us to understand the feelings of involuntary choice an addict might experience. It is almost as if Edgar Allan Poe exercised a type of ignorance on certain qualities of his own persona in this fashion – hiding them, in personality as well as writing. As a repressed individual, it is not a stretch to conclude that Poe would in fact do so, in line with Lacan's views on the process of mirroring – that is, in simplicity; if the author himself is repressed, the unconscious knowledge of abuse may be projected into the text through the doppelganger motif – pushing destructive tendencies away from the self and unto the characters or moral of the fictional narrative. From a Lacanian perspective; this could be viewed as an act of shielding - in the extrovert conjuring of an armoring alien identity, for Poe undoubtedly through his writing, the individual is given a spatial tool of displacement; of hiding certain elements of the persona from reality – the *umwelt*⁷.

However - although Edgar Allan Poe evidently was a victim of a repressed mind and lifestyle, this does not necessarily or automatically constitute a full Lacanian projection. Thus this portion of analysis must be problematized. The question then being if the drugs were a part of Poe's persona which he unconsciously pushed into *The Imp of the Perverse* – or if the drugs, possibly, served as a conscious form of activity to ventilate the already present feelings of neurotic anxiety, thus making the activity of abuse a direct tool which then affected the contents of the narrative. As argued by Robert Con Davis, repression is a key element to any form of metaphorical writing or production of prose – a vital ingredient in the primal process of creative writing – in order for the text to become and be a text an element of repression is already in place within the textual material itself (Davis 984). Thus, simply by writing and pursuing the career of being an author, Poe often and actively entered a state of repression; establishing and pushing thematic elements into the narrative while in

⁷ German for ”environment” or ”surrounding”, the *umwelt* is in Lacanian terms that which is outside of the infant and persona – the reality which the I inhabits. The *umwelt* is connected to the *innenwelt* through the mirror stage.

a frenzied state. This notion of writers engaging in the process of creative writing unto extreme levels of activity or even entering a state of creative frenzy is considered by Davis to be a form of ventilation – a pipeline in which the psychological instability is vented, processed and eventually – controlled. Since it is very possible – even probable – that Edgar Allan Poe wrote parts of *The Imp of the Perverse* while under the influence, such theories of voluntary frenzied ventilation in writing are not out of place and need to be considered in contrast to the text itself - as well as the Freudian and Lacanian schools of projection and alienation of the self – for any interpretation to be fair, although a clear answer is hard to find.

If such claims are to be made however, it is important to motivate and explore indications within *The Imp of the Perverse* which might point to acts of experience of the core principle described – that is, if Poe himself ever underwent the indicated problem he portrays. After all, if there is no source (experience) then there is no end result to conjure (problem in facing the taboo). Important phrasing is found in the following sentences; “Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness, and dizziness, and horror, become merged in a cloud of unnameable feeling”. Highly detailed and carefully depicted, this painting of an individual at a crossroads with all the demons and dangers of life themselves is perhaps too explicit and profound to be considered anything but the seeds derived from personal experience. Such interpretations are highly suitable for Edgar Allan Poe; as shown to have been a prime example of an individual haunted by his own inadequacy towards the hard decisions in life; projecting blame and commonly entering the comfortable state of the martyr. There are also two vital choices of wording; the use of *we* and *our*, pointing to a conscious act of including any reader into the perplex dilemma. Thus, it is possible to interpret the above passage as indeed something which the author himself came to face during perhaps multiple instances in his lifetime; and furthermore how he believed this to apply to not just himself but every man and woman. To Liebig, there would be no misconceptions that any such narrative of the depressive or insane character would be anything other than the personal experiences of Poe shining through (433). According to Kurzweil and Phillips, noting signs of personal experience possibly emerging from within the text is part of the psychoanalytical close-reading experience, as tendencies or themes deriving from experience are of particular value when interpretation of the author's psyche is to be made (55 - 66).

As seen by Poe's own tendency to actively embrace a destructive lifestyle, it is highly probable that

he did not encounter these situations simply by bad luck or chance; but also by a hidden drive for the macabre and spiritually painful, as for by his own statement – melancholy was, in itself, delicious (Liebig 432). Looking at this attraction of situational grief and how Edgar Allan Poe believed it to be portrayed and felt by the common man, a pattern of psychological bondage appears – a conception that when caught in events of misery and threat there are subconscious elements which prevents the individual from being in full and absolute control; a hidden force of darkness in which the fascination for the taboo arises – emerging deeply from within the longing and horrified soul of the observer. This line of reasoning is closely related to Poe's own history as a notorious daredevil in social contexts and a gambler of money; often putting his neck out with stinging criticism as result, as well as gladly betting away any stable economic funding during his university years. To Poe – facing dire choices and gambling upon a possible destructive result was, in itself, too exciting an opportunity to simply pass up.

The haunting of the involuntarily ghost of the taboo is easily followed as it evolves in the primary text material – described by Edgar Allan Poe as taking on several forms and twisted imaginary shapes – initially growing as a genie from Arabian folklore, a personification and projection of the mystical and powerful idea of being overwhelmed by a supernatural force; eventually transforming into something “far more terrible than any genius, or any demon of a tale” – the very idea of a single thought – the idea of the taboo and its ultimate hold on the human spirit. A sense of immediate threat and hostility is infused in the text and delivered to the reader, perhaps as a sign of warning derived from the authors self-instilled fears of the unknown possibilities of breaking the taboo – perhaps simply as a fictional painting used for dramatic purposes in depicting a visual likeness of the psychological impulses described. In whatever case, there should be little doubt that the author himself imagined his own principle with considerable fear and caution - an acknowledgment of the dire consequences of a belief which may have sprung into personal truth. By transcending the idea of the taboo and repressions that come with it from something merely figurative into something literally personified; Edgar Allan Poe attempts to describe for the reader how something as subtle as giving into a thought or a concept may very well morph the cognitive experience into a psychological real element – and once conjured, it will be there to stay until satisfied.

Gratification and the satisfaction principle is key to Poe's argument, as the threat and fear of the

original notion of something taboo is weighed, balanced and measured against the induced sense of satisfaction the forbidden act would produce if ever acted upon. He imagined the notions of giving into the idea of the taboo act as “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”. Obvious themes of deriving pleasure from forbidden acts emerges. For Edgar Allan Poe, the forbidden fruit would have to be the sweetest, simply because of the inherent powerful moral and psychological experience of horror it would produce in consumption. As such, once the opportunity of forbidden action is produced and the valuation - and evaluation - of threat upon the individual and the ego versus gratification in performance of the deed is done; the idea and possibility of breaking against the taboo; giving into the forbidden; would grow stronger and stronger. This process would according to Poe's own mind be a psychological battle of wills - of instinct and the socially loaded parts of the ego and super-ego:

... impulse incorporates desire and the affect linked to that desire; the behavior through which that longing can be pleased and the object at which that action is intended for a single, not amalgamated concept of instinct production. If the satisfaction of a gut feeling threatens the existence of the creature (as perceived by the ego), a process of domination occurs. In this process the instinct presentation is transferred into the sub- or pre-conscious. This process is not always dupe evidence, and parts of the instinct presentation, such as the effective component, may come back to consciousness.

(Liebig 431)

For Poe, the instinct of the taboo and the fear of giving in for such primal pleasures could indeed be subjected to a sorting inside the psyche; a domination of wills which could push such desires aside if need be – a typical Freudian perspective which is repeated by Bonaparte (639 - 642), who acknowledged Poe's apparent insight in the workings of the persona, but also his probable disability to effectively handle a sound separation between the different levels of the id, ego and super-ego; hindering them from working together in effective conjunction. All the same, when discussing the motifs and subtle messages of *The Imp of the Perverse*, it is important not to succumb to the idea that Poe meant for no room of alternative in his philosophy of the will – or need – to actively seek a destructive nature; such a mindset would make the argument in itself absolute, meaning that every

individual faced with such dire choices would indeed seek to actively perform destructive actions that affected them negatively – a philosophy which, if true, would prove both illogical and if effected plunge the world into chaos. Rather, it is probable that Edgar Allan Poe felt that these kinds of neural patterns of behavior affected certain individuals more than others – felt and possessed by all men and women universally – but acted upon in a continuous fashion more profoundly by those who were wounded psychologically through trauma. As such, even if the melancholy described in the initial passages of *The Imp of the Perverse* should be treated as sincere writings; we must also acknowledge the alternatives which arise when combined with certain principles of psychoanalytic thinking which Poe himself contributed to during his lifetime, so as not to make our spectacle of interpretation too narrow.

In the writing to follow, a theme of longing and fantasy – daydreaming – is introduced; “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”. This passage serves to portray the vivid desire described by Edgar Allan Poe in his description of how the now manifested instinct or need of the forbidden taboo is given wings of imagination – the unlucky individual in which these desires have sprung is not merely allowing them to rest in the subconscious or hidden levels of his or her psyche; but is actively using the capacity of human imagination in order to perceive and feel how the experience would be. This projection of thought is most likely critical to Poe's line of reason; as it is only after embracing and projecting the image of the consequences within the fantasy of the forbidden as we are enchanted by it – without imagination, there would be no perceived end result; thus making any valuation or choice inside the moral equation null and void. For someone who throughout his life saw absolute necessity in the processes of wild imagination, of daydreaming (forcibly induced in artificial form by alcohol and hallucinatory substances if need be) as a way to reach out into art, creativity and beauty; it is not surprising that such requirements would be found in Poe's formula of the forbidden mechanics of the human soul. This fact acknowledged, it is a bitter paradox that the author felt intimidated by his own psyche and impulses all the same – as Bonaparte claims – Poe repressed the majority of his macabre psyche into the subconscious; but feared the horrific thoughts and impulses that it could produce and leak out into the cognitive conscious (463 - 465).

How voluntary were these actions of self-destructiveness? It seems that Poe did suffer under a sense of involuntarily action; compelled by a sense of need and desire which was not subjected to earthly matters of logic and rationality – that he, as a genius and artist of self-esteemed grand value (naturally fueled by his fame), was subjected to matters, wishes and ambitions that needed no sound explanation or motivation based in normative social conduct; whether the end results were positive or negative for his own self seems to have paid him no interest whatsoever. According to Bonaparte, Poe found alcohol to be a liberating force; providing means to enter the deep original instinctual state of the soul, however violent or unmoral such a state might be considered (462). In relation to Freudian theory, such views on the primal nature of man are not without basis – the idea of the id is after all as a nucleus of primal needs and wants, striving for naught but to be liberated in action to satisfy those needs. If the restricting abilities of Poe's ego and super-ego were dysfunctional; this would explain his seeming inability to restrict himself from performing destructive actions.

Question thus arises as to whether Poe was fully aware and conscious of this destructive nature or not – and if so – to what extent. In itself, the *Imp of the Perverse* is a text of introvert dialogue; of an author examining his own soul at the seams. As such it seems obvious that the producer of such textual material would possess considerable insight into his own persona and psyche. Such initial claims might prove problematic however, as according to Freudian psychoanalytical theory presented by Bonaparte, Edgar Allan Poe suffered from multiple personality disorders which combined with a considerable drug abuse would have clouded his line of reasoning and blurred the distinctions between the consciously cognitive and the unconscious sub-domains of the id, ego and super-ego. In many regards and for several intents and purposes, although never officially diagnosed or treated – Poe was clinically and psychologically for all intents and purpose a psychopath (Bonaparte 83). In such regards, and in relation to his writing, it remains difficult to point to any clear tendencies of the extent to which he may have been aware of his destructive behavior – but as is obviously and clearly shown in the first passage of *The Imp of the Perverse*; there exist insight into the psychological phenomena of the taboo, and to the lamentations and seemingly involuntarily course of action such a crossroad of choices might produce. If not fully aware of his own nature, Poe definitely knew of his erratic ways – simply too obvious even for himself to ignore – and his anxiety of feeling the imp upon his shoulder was vented in writing *The Imp of the Perverse*.

Finally touching upon the latter parts of the text material, the conclusive theme of the primary text emerges with a vivid description of how Poe's philosophy of forbidden indulgence carries the grave potential of destruction; "...to indulge for a moment, in any attempt at thought, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and therefore it is, I say, that we cannot. If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backward from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed". In the mind of Poe; as previously stated a victim of destructive behavior, to give in to the principle of the taboo – to give in to the imp – would always equal destruction. It is unlikely however that Poe meant for destruction in this context to be interpreted as the ultimate and final death; permanent termination; as this would mean that anyone suffering under this complexity – as himself he apparently did – would meet an untimely end if they ever fell prey to the principle of the perverse imp, something which would contradict the fact that Edgar Allan Poe repeatedly did so. Rather, it is probable that the passage is descriptive of the steady decline which Poe himself underwent, and the road of destruction he imagined himself to be set upon – a road which could only be strayed from if the individual is lent some assistance; a friendly arm to check us. According to Bonaparte, the very essence of the theme of *The Imp of the Perverse* echoes to the primitive destructive principles of the id, ego and super-ego (463). In this description also emerges thus an element of companionship and care-taking which ties to the described dysfunctional instances of Edgar Allan Poe's inability to make friends (especially male ones), and his heavy reliance upon strong women for support.

Having thus gone through and analyzed critical parts of *The Imp of the Perverse*, as well as touched upon the principles of how Poe tied events and experiences from his own life through projection into the text itself; matters still continue in which these specific elements of projection or alienation of the self need to be observed more closely. Of particular importance remains as to exactly how the theories of alienation and creative projection are to be applied to the author and text at hand – in order to do this, certain points of connection need to be established in relation to the text as well as Poe's personal history. As is argued by Bonaparte, there can exist no form of creative writing without some sort of projection – some sort of dreaming state, where fantasy and knowledge come together in a process of textual construction; without this, there could be no state outside of the author in which things could be conjured to be used in the story. Without the Freudian process of daydreaming, authors would be limited to merely describing things they already know; exactly as they are. Rather, Edgar Allan Poe – as any author – produced a text in *The Imp of the Perverse*

which is full of unconscious and conscious memories and complexes which are more or less masked and projected straight into the author's work (Bonaparte 640). Furthermore, Bonaparte claims that the addiction to drugs no doubt acted as a major element of creation for Poe – in itself, the drugs served to further the daydreaming process of creation, stirring the pool of infantile experiences and making these subconscious traits float up to the surface. By transcending from subconscious hidden elements into a sort of pre-conscious, the author then draws from in his state of fantasizing in writing. Along this string of literal theory in terms of displacement and alienation; Poe would be considered to have fantasized about the underlying message of *The Imp of the Perverse* before and while writing it – to have in effect divided the preconscious parts of his persona down into the text and at the same time by mirroring having parts of that projection reflected back upon him; creating a back-and-forth system of fantasizing and creating – thinking and writing, writing and thinking. Without reference for the message at hand – to feel at mercy with the imps of the taboo, forcing him to perform evil and unmoral actions to damage himself – Poe could never have conceived the narrative story and actually come about to pen it.

As observed then, a simultaneous mechanism between the subconscious, preconscious and conscious were at work in the mind of Edgar Allan Poe while writing *The Imp of the Perverse* (Bonaparte 654). Through analytical interpretation, the passages described earlier point to a connection to his neurotic state of mind and abuse of drugs; something which the psychoanalytical literal theory of Bonaparte (and Freud, respectively) believe to be prime ground for the author to displace himself out of the persona and into the text. This process of having several parts of the author being put into the text as well as being reflected back is closely related to Lacan's views on the process of mirroring, furthering the claim that Poe would have underwent similar experiences while he crafted *The Imp of the Perverse*. In itself, the concept is neither new nor surprising; as Kurzweil and Phillips argue, there is a common tie between neurosis and the creation of art (103 – 107).

§ - 4.1 – CONCLUSION

In this paper several aspects of Edgar Allan Poe have been observed, as to illustrate and interpret his persona as well as how this persona has come to affect his short story *The Imp of the Perverse*. By embracing the fields of broad psychoanalytical theory as well as specific psychoanalytical literal

theory and empirical evidence on Edgar Allan Poe's destructive tendencies; a theoretical backdrop has been constructed – a background which then has been used to answer the questions of whether or not Edgar Allan Poe infused his own personal opinions and experiences into *The Imp of the Perverse*. Through the descriptive psychoanalytical research by Bonaparte and Pruette, it has been made evident that Poe suffered from neurotic and erratic patterns of behavior, sprung from traumatic events of loss and psychological suffering in his childhood. After repeatedly suffering emotional damage up until adulthood, Poe's mental health deteriorated even further; advanced and exploited by a severe addiction to stimulants, drugs and alcohol. These combined abuses serve to portray a source from where the problems of involuntary destructive behavior might have grown from; a epicenter of trauma and sorrow which spiraled the author into a lifestyle filled with attempts to repress large parts of his own psychic disabilities, consciously and unconsciously, while still aware of his own negative nature.

As is obvious, Poe wrote *The Imp of the Perverse* while being a victim of not only physical but also mental vices – negative habits and patterns which he could not combat successfully. These actions and choices undoubtedly inspired him to write the short story; in itself a story which contains a large amount of connections to not only his life, but also to how his mind worked. In the ways which psychoanalytical literal theorists describe how it is absolutely necessary for any author to project parts of their mind; memories and experiences into the text – it should be evident that Edgar Allan Poe did not simply produce a work of fiction where he made up views which he did not possess himself – to him, the imp of the perverse was real, wickedly sitting upon his shoulder and whispering thoughts of evil deeds into his already deteriorated mind – whispering, unto death.

Still, it remains a critical point of question as to whether Edgar Allan Poe was indeed writing in full conscious accord when he sat down in 1845 to complete his tale of the sadistic imp. Although psychoanalytical theory dictates that there must be some sort of projection or alienation of the author's self in place; it has not been made clear in the results of this paper if this projection was made fully consciously – fully unconsciously – or cognitively combined. In the analysis of *The Imp of the Perverse*, interpretations are not specific enough to point to a straight answer, especially without any sort of admittance or revelation from the author himself concerning the text at hand. As such, further research into the detailed schematics of Edgar Allan Poe's psychic state is required, preferably combined with a larger amount of textual material and stories to work with. With this,

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English C (60 – 90hp), HiG - 31-5-2012

even greater knowledge and insight could be acquired into one of the truly greatest – and most hideously broken – minds of the first professional American author.

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