Poe's Strategies of Seduction: Transference, Incongruity and the Undecidability of Meaning

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Abstract
What makes readers, particularly critics, revisit Poe? One of the objections that can be brought against most psychoanalytic interpretations of his life or work is its omission of "the why." Why write about Poe? What compels us to return to an author already surrounded by, to use Susan Sontag's words, "thick encrustations" of criticism and theory? There seems to be an undefined "something," a certain element "X" in Poe that irresistibly attracts (our) critical commentary. Designating this elusive quality "X" as textual "seduction," the following article attempts, in a sense, to define the undefinable: that is, to identify and describe some of the Poe-esque characteristics that continue to keep readers and critics glued to his work. Drawing principally from Jacques Lacan's model of transference, Roland Barthes' "erotics of reading" and Pierre Bayard's theory of "applied literature," this paper posits that some of Poe's strategies of literary seduction include, on the one hand, anticipated textual effects that operate similarly to transference in their double fulfillment of the analyst's role of S.s.S and S.s.R and, on the other, carefully constructed thematic incongruities that result in an ultimate "undecidability" of meaning.

Keywords
Poe, transference, psychoanalysis, literary seduction, interpretation

What links Poe to seduction and psychoanalysis? According to Ross Chambers, the act of narrating, of telling a story, involves a transaction: in exchange for the reader's attention, the narrator must disclose information. Yet in the act of un-concealment, he loses his authority over the reader. To prevent this, what the author needs to perform is "an act of seduction."[1] In the process of "narrative seduction" for which Chambers uses the term "narratorial" to distinguish it from "narrative" authority, the reader becomes a "seducee," the "seducee of literary seduction."[2] In this view, what Poe performs in "The Purloined Letter" is essentially to him an act of narrative seduction. Chambers' model of narrative seduction may be extrapolated to the psychoanalytic concept of transference which, not incidentally, also involves a certain degree of seductiveness.

In Lacan's theory of transference, the analyst fulfills two simultaneous functions: first, he is *le sujet supposé savoir (*the *S.s.S.)*, the "subject supposed to know" and second, he is presumed to know by virtue of "being a subject of desire."[3] As a subject of desire, the analyst must carry out the analysand's demand to "set out in search of unconscious desire."[4] The "subject supposed to know" in transference is also a "subject supposed to

1 Ross Chambers, "Narrational Authority and 'The Purloined Letter'" in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 285-307.

2 Chambers, "Narrational Authority," 14.

3 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1998), 265.

4 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 235.

feel,"[5] a *sujet supposé ressentir,* hereby designated as *S.s.R*. This interplay of knowledge and feeling is not without its significance in what concerns Poe's tales; whereas the "narrational authority" constitutes a "subject supposed to know," on the level of effect the text holds the promise to search for and articulate the reader's unconscious desire. The analyst, in transference, operates on two levels: knowledge and feeling. By the same token, in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), Poe refers to two levels on which prose should simultaneously operate: the level of "Truth" or "satisfaction of the intellect," and the level of "Passion" or "excitement of the heart."[6] Drawing from Lacan, Forrester associates the act of reading with transferential phenomena and seduction: "reading," he says, "is being seduced by the text."[7] Yet how does the text "seduce?" It does so by working, like transference, on two levels: the level of knowledge (corresponding to the *S.s.S*) and the level of feeling, of desire (corresponding to the *S.s.R*), or, to use Poe's words, by simultaneously addressing "the satisfaction of the intellect" and "the excitement of the heart"[8] For Sussman, the connection between literary seduction and transference takes the form of "wish-fulfillment." He posits that the most "seductive works," including Poe's, are the ones in which characters transgress the borders between private and public, thereby performing something which appears impossible in real life. This "wish-fulfilled" transgression constitutes, to him, one of the "formative instances of literary transference."[9]

Poe's philosophy of composition revolves around the idea of "effect;" the literary work exists inasmuch as it affects its reader, as it "intensely excites," as it offers "that pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure."[10] Pleasure is also what Roland Barthes' "erotics of reading" is concerned with. If his *Pleasure of the Text* is to be viewed as an account of the reader's taking of pleasure, Poe's "Philosophy of Composition", comparatively, functions as an "erotics of writing," an account of the writer's giving of pleasure. At the intersection of Poe's "Philosophy of Composition", Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* and Lacan's model of transference is desire: the desire of the analyst, which translates in our case to the desire of the text, which comprises both the desire of the text-as-analyst and the reader's/ critic's desire for the text. "The text you write," Barthes says, "must prove to me *that it desires me*."[11] "The Philosophy of Composition" is deeply concerned with the desire of the reader. In Lacanian terms, it may be said that Poe "sets out in search of unconscious desire" which he articulates in language.

How does a text prove its desire for the reader? It does so, Barthes says, by making him or her experience the "bliss" of language: "this proof exists: it is writing. Writing is: the science of the various blisses of language, its Kama Sutra."[12] "The Philosophy of Composition," on the other hand, shows how the "blisses of language"

5 John Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan, and Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 266.

6 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition" in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. A. Harrison (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1902), 198.

7 Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, 264.

8 Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," 198.

9 Henry Sussman, "A Note on the Public and the Private in Literature: The Literature of 'Acting Out'" in *Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Other Stories*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 56.

10 Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," 196-197.

11 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Mille (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 6.

12 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 6.

are created. In other words, if Barthes' speaks of the experience, Poe speaks of its production. In the following excerpt, for instance, Poe carefully ponders and anticipates the pleasurable sound-effect of the word-refrain "nevermore":

> *That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt: and these considerations inevitably led me to the long o as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with r as the most producible consonant. The sound of the refrain being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound.*[13]

Repetition also pertains to the science of "the blisses of language." It creates a kind of primeval rhythm that we are instinctively drawn to. Repetition produces a sense of concomitant sameness and newness: what is repeated is the same, yet, by the sheer force of its perpetual re-articulation, it becomes new: "repetition itself creates bliss. [T]o repeat excessively is to enter into loss, into the zero of the signified. But, in order for repetition to be erotic, it must be formal, literal."[14] The "eroticism" of repetition is something that Poe seems fully aware of when he explains that the "pleasure" of the refrain "is deduced solely from the sense of identity – of repetition."[15] Repetition does not only tap into "the bliss of language," but also constitutes a psychical process: one speaks, in psychoanalysis, of the compulsion to repeat, to return to the wound, to the trauma, to perpetually re-articulate a "dead desire."

Concerning Poe's "erotics of writing," it may be further added that the pleasure of the text does not lie in the discovery of its "nakedness." It is not necessarily in what it exposes that one takes pleasure. On the contrary, he points out that "there is always a certain hardness or nakedness which repels the artistical eye." (sic)[16] The text does not give pleasure by exposing itself, but by offering, instead "some amount of suggestiveness."[17] It is this suggestiveness which accounts for the text's literary "eroticism," for its seductiveness. "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes*?" asks Barthes. "In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure)," he continues "it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance."[18]

Moving somewhat abruptly from pleasure to murder, three of Poe's tales, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), "The Black Cat" (1843) and "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845) stand out in their having attracted an impressive amount of critical readings. Their critical popularity could be accounted for not by what they say but precisely by what they do not say, by the questions that linger after their reading: why have the narrators committed these murders? Are they mad? If so, what form of madness are they suffering from? What psychical mechanisms are to be found at the root of their madness? Are they perhaps feigning madness? Why do they kill, but, more than that, why do they kill and tell? Psychoanalytic critics have ventured different interpretations of these short stories, ranging from matters of anima projection, repression and paranoid-schizophrenia to sadism, masochism, castration, incest and male on male sexual abuse. The sheer variety

13 Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," 200.

14 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 41.

15 Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," 199.

16 Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," 207.

17 Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," 207.

18 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 10.

of critical responses alone demonstrates the texts' "seductiveness" in their capacity to provoke plural interpretations.

To begin, it may be said that all three texts do indeed deal with madness in one form or another. This is undoubtedly part of their appeal. As Barthes points out, there is a certain amount of "seductiveness" involved in textual madness: "the texts […] which are written against neurosis, from the center of madness, contain within themselves, *if they want to be read*, that bit of neurosis necessary to the seduction of their readers."[19] However, it is not solely their speaking of madness which engages readers and commentators. Rather, it is the *manner* in which they do it. All three "texts of madness," to borrow Barthes' label, start, paradoxically, with a denial of insanity: "Yet, *mad am I not* — and very surely do I not dream,"[20] says the narrator of "The Black Cat". "The Tell-Tale Heart" also launches with a rejection of madness: "TRUE! — nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous I had been, and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad?"[21] After an almost scholarly-like *preparatio* on the concept of the "imp of the perverse," our third narrator similarly assures us of his sanity: "Had I not been thus prolix, you might either have misunderstood me altogether, or, with the rabble, you might have fancied me mad."[22]

All three narrators seem to want to avert a possible "reading of madness," by endeavoring to persuade the readers of their "un-madness." Poe's "Eleonora," by contrast, opens, not with a negation, but with an assertion: "we will say, then, that I am mad."[23] What comprises the most provocative aspect of these tales is not the fact that they address lunacy, nor their initial negation (or in the case of "Eleonora" the assertion) of it, but the fundamental incongruity between what the narrators say and what they show or, as Shoshana Felman would say, between "the rhetoric of madness" and the "madness of rhetoric."[24] The narrators and the texts simultaneously negate and establish madness. Or, as in "Eleonora," the reverse takes place: insanity is proclaimed, but not exhibited. In consequence, what entices and keeps the reader interested is a fundamental incongruity which confers to the texts a status of permanent "undecidability" between saneness and madness. In Pierre Bayard's anti-hermeneutic model of psychoanalytic criticism, the notion of "undecidability" refers to the "indeterminable plurality of readings"[25] that a literary piece may evoke. One of the tasks of "applied literature," or "literature applied to psychoanalysis" is to show how the text incites plural readings, without necessarily submitting to them. In what follows, we will therefore explore the ways in which in Poe incongruity acts as a catalyst for what Bayard calls "undecidability."

The language of the three murderous narrators is imbued with contradiction and inconsistency. In "The Tell-Tale Heart," for instance, the narrator apparently strives

19 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 6.

20 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Black Cat," in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. A. Harrison (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1902), 143. Emphasis added.

21 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. A. Harrison (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1902), 88.

22 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. A. Harrison (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1902), 150.

23 Edgar Allan Poe, "Eleonora," in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. A. Harrison (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1902), 236.

24 Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 251-252

25 Pierre Bayard, "Is it Possible to Apply Literature to Psychoanalysis?," *American Imago* 56, no.3 (1999): 207-219, http://search.proquest.com/docview/197190383?accountid=15533.

to persuade the audience of his sanity by insistently employing words such as "healthily," "wisely," "cunningly," or "cautiously." As if anticipating our suspicions regarding his sanity, he offers a self-diagnosed "scientific" explanation: what we might mistake for madness is simply an "over acuteness of the senses."[26] Yet at the very same time that he proclaims his sanity, he also practically establishes his madness by affirming, in frantic exclamatory sentences, that the act of murder and subsequent dismemberment of his victim was committed because the old man possessed a terrifying "evil eye": "I think it was his eye! yes, it was this!"[27]; "it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye."[28] This essential incongruity is sometimes evident within the same paragraph: for instance, he tells us how he hears "all things in the heaven and in the earth" and "many things in hell," something which naturally raises the suspicion of madness, while immediately asking us to "observe how healthily — how calmly" he can tell us "the whole story."[29] In this paragraph, it is as if the "healthily-mad" narrator were saying: I am showing you that I am mad. Yet how can you think that I am mad? While assuring us of his "calm," the narrator actually describes feeling its opposite: "I grew furious as I gazed upon it,"[30] "it increased my fury."[31] The contradiction between what he professes (calmness, wisdom, cold-bloodedness) and what he exhibits (inexplicable fury, lack of control over his rage) is evident. To Felman, madness and its denial are interrelated: "*to talk about madness*," she says, "is always, in fact, *to deny it*."[32] Whether the narrator deliberately feigns madness by denying it or if he is indeed mad is a question which, although frequently approached in critical readings of the tale, can never be settled. While inviting various hypotheses, the text in this respect does not permit a full answer, but keeps the critical scene perpetually suspended between saneness and madness. This particular "unanswerability" is part of the text's strategy of seduction.

The presence of incongruity, however, is by no means limited to "The Tell-Tale Heart." In "The Black Cat," the narrator also makes a series of affirmations which he himself invalidates. He announces, for instance, that his "immediate purpose" is "to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events."[33] Yet his narrative, his exposition, is neither "homely," nor is it "without comment," while the murder and subsequent walling up of his wife and cat certainly do not constitute "mere household events." We see, therefore, how he asserts something and subsequently performs its opposite. His wife, he says, is "not a little tinctured with superstition," yet, at the same time, she makes "frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise."[34] The narrator's "homely" narrative is "wild," his exposition "without comment" is filled with comment, while his completely "un-superstitious" wife frequently refers to her superstitions. Asserting that he is "above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence

26 Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," 91.

27 Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," 88.

28 Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," 89.

29 Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," 88.

30 Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," 91.

31 Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," 91.

32 Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness*, 252.

33 Poe, "The Black Cat," 143.

34 Poe, "The Black Cat," 144.

of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity,"[35] he immediately proceeds to do exactly that, i.e. suggest the links between his hanging of the cat and the fire.

Superstitions appear in both "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat": in the first case, the "evil eye" and in the second one, black cats. Marie Bonaparte connects the evil eye of the old man in one story with the act of gouging out the cat's eye in the other one.[36] Yet if Bonaparte's interpretation further speculates about Poe's own oedipal dramas, we will briefly consider only the matter of superstition, indisputably a part of the realm of the unconscious. Addressing it in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud remarks that, in "persons afflicted with compulsive thinking and compulsive states," persons who are otherwise "very intelligent," superstition often "originates from repressed hostile and cruel impulses."[37] Repressing these impulses, the "afflicted person" cannot but project them on something exterior, something from "without": "he who has frequently wished evil to others, but because of a good bringing-up has repressed the same into the unconscious, will be particularly apt to expect punishment for such unconscious evil in the form of a misfortune threatening him: from without."[38] If one considers the narrator's initial "docility" and his self-proclaimed "tenderness of heart"[39] alongside his final remarks in which he calls the cat "the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder,"[40] Freud's theory on superstition as originating from "repressed hostile and cruel impulses" would certainly fit well. The problem is that it would fit a little too well.

However invalidated or confirmed, the narrator's pathology, which has been previously addressed in psychoanalytic readings, does not constitute the center of our discussion. What we are interested in is rather the text's "undecidability," its suspension between madness and sanity, as well as the way in which it anticipates rather than illustrates psychoanalytic theories. The fact that the narrator fits into a psychoanalytic pattern does not necessarily confirm his madness, as this may constitute a deliberate attempt to create the illusion thereof. So are we to interpret his murder as a result of unconscious forces, or are we being duped by the very same narrator into this interpretation? The raconteur of "The Black Cat" certainly seems to invite a reading of madness: "Hereafter, perhaps," he says, "some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place — 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."[41] But should we follow his invitation to label his murders as "nothing more than an ordinary succession" of psychical "causes and effects" (as many early psychoanalytic interpretations have done) or are we purposely being led into this direction by a keen connoisseur of the human psyche who uses his knowledge of human psychology precisely to this end? We may never know. And this is precisely what makes the text seductive.

35 Poe, "The Black Cat," 147.

36 Marie Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, A Psycho-analytic Interpretation*, trans. John Rodker (London: Imago Publishing: 1949), 499.

37 Sigmund Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. A.A.Brill (London: T. Fisher Unwin: 1914), 311.

38 Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 311.

39 Poe, "The Black Cat," 143.

40 Poe, "The Black Cat," 155.

41 Poe, "The Black Cat," 143.

All three protagonists in these tales try to persuade us of their sanity, while concomitantly trying to persuade us of their insanity. If in "The Tell-Tale Heart" the narrator's speech is frenzied, disconnected and repetitive, the first part of "The Imp of the Perverse," by contrast, is eloquent and persuasive: almost scholarly-like. Until he discloses the motive behind his lengthy *preparatio*, the narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse" uses the editorial pronoun "we" consistently: "we stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss;"[42] "we perpetrate them because we feel that we should *not*."[43] He lures us into his story by first telling us about ourselves, by revealing, with remarkable acuity, something about our own nature. Seductively, the raconteur slips into the role of "subject supposed to know." Recognizing our own "perverseness" in his words, we unconsciously relate to the text transferentially as analysands. As Arthur Brown points out: "if we are concerned with 'all the rest,' that is, not with interpreting a tale as if from a position outside of it but with seeing and recounting the way we are forced into a tale, made to participate in that which we cannot know, then we must admit to a kind of perverseness in our criticism."[44]

Having determined in what manner Poe's text functions as analyst, one may return to Bayard's reverse stance of literature applied to psychoanalysis, and ask not what psychoanalysis can tell us about literature, but what literature can teach psychoanalysis; in this case, what Poe's "Imp of the Perverse" adds to psychoanalytic theory. By following the intersections between Poe and Freud, it becomes evident that Poe not only anticipates psychoanalytic concepts, but he also, in a manner of speaking, re-writes them. "The Imp of the Perverse" begins with his denouncing phrenology's failure to take into account "a propensity which, although obviously existing as a radical, primitive, irreducible sentiment, has been equally overlooked by all the moralists who have preceded them."[45] In "The Black Cat" we learn that "of this spirit philosophy takes no account."[46] Elaborating his theory of the unconscious, Freud brings a similar objection to philosophy: namely, its failure to account for the specific region of the human psyche: "to most people," he says "who have been educated in philosophy the idea of anything psychical which is not also conscious is so inconceivable that it seems to them absurd and refutable simply by logic."[47] Both Freud and Poe denounce in previous theoretical models of the human mind a failure to take into account the unreasonable, the illogical, the unconscious "perverse" dimension of the psyche.

Yet what exactly is this concept of the "spirit" or the "imp" of the "perverse" which one finds at the juncture between "The Imp of the Perverse" and "The Black Cat"? It is, we are told, an "unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*,"[48] an "unconquerable" "force" through which we "act for no other reason" than we "should not,"[49] an "antagonistical sentiment" to "the desire to be well."[50] From Poe's description, this imp of perverseness appears very similar to what Freud designates as the Death Instinct.

42 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 149.

43 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 150.

44 Arthur Brown, "Death and Telling in Poe's 'Imp of the Perverse'," *Studies in Short Fiction* 31.2 (1994): 197.

45 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 145.

46 Poe, "The Black Cat," 146.

47 Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans. James Strachey (London: Random House: 2001), 13.

48 Poe, "The Black Cat," 146.

49 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 147.

50 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 147.

However, keeping in mind that most of Freud's early theory concentrates almost exclusively on Eros,[51] the "antagonistical sentiment" (sic) that Poe illustrates as early as 1845 therefore constitutes a reflex which Freud himself had initially overlooked.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, self-destruction is one of the characteristics of the Death Instinct, but also a trademark feature of the super-ego which re-projects aggressive tendencies of the id back upon the ego. Poe's "imp of the perverse" however, can be regarded as existing in a continuum which includes both the Freudian concepts of the death instinct, the self-punishing and auto-aggressive features of the super-ego, the id's aggressive tendencies, as well as, more interestingly, the idea of placing oneself in other kinds of danger. The self-destructiveness comprised in the concept of the "imp of the perverse" is not limited to aggression but includes, surprisingly, even procrastination. Unlike in Freud's reductive approach, this fundamental drive in Poe takes on more nuances, ranging from self-annihilation to circumlocution and the postponement of work. This constitutes not only an anticipation and an enrichment of psychoanalysis, but also a strategy of seduction: we are unconsciously lured into a transferential relation to the text by the presence of an *S.s.S* in the form of the analyst-narrator.

In the first part of the tale, we are therefore dealing with a "narratorial" voice which places itself in the position of a "subject supposed to know;" a subject supposed to know about us, about how we function psychically and thus, a subject able to search for unconscious desire. Even if one has not stood "on the brink of a precipice," peering into the abyss, "contemplating a plunge,"[52] who has not, faced with "a task before us which must be speedily performed," felt an "unfathomable craving for delay" and postponed it, despite the growing and pressing anxiety of its urgency, for no other reason "except that we feel *perverse*?"[53] Who has not ever taken pleasure in "tantalizing" a "listener by circumlocution?"[54] Arthur Brown posits that our own fascination with death also constitutes a feature of Poe's "seductiveness": "what forces us to the brink of the precipice in Poe's tales," he says, "is our fascination with death […] with the literal performance of death itself."[55] Death is transformed in literature into "an indestructible, if not living, force" which, like the text's fundamental undecidability, "prevents closure." In Poe's texts, the subject supposed to know is also, paradoxically, a subject supposed to know about what is ultimately *unknowable*.

It is the possibility of the transmissibility of something fundamentally "un-transmissible," the communication of the "un-communicable," which confers to Poe's tales an authority of presumed knowledge and accounts in turn for the irresistible lure into his works. The attraction to Poe's texts, it may be said, relies on the one hand on the reader's projection of authority (the authority of presumed knowledge, in its psychoanalytic sense, in addition to what Chambers defines as "narratorial authority") as well as the introjection of the image of self which harks back from the text. If in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" the narrators' simultaneous madness and "un-madness" determines the "undecidability" of their critical readings, the position of "The

51 It is only in his later writings (with a first mention in 1920's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) that Freud develops the idea of a co-existing instinct which, contrary to the life instinct, seeks the self-destruction of the ego and the return, through death, to the pre-organic state experienced before birth. Until that time Freud focused most of his theory of the unconscious on the pleasure principle as the sole and most significant driving force in the instinctual life of the psyche.

52 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 149-150.

53 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 148.

54 Poe, "The Imp of the Perverse," 148.

55 Brown, "Death and Telling in Poe's 'Imp of the Perverse'", 197.

Imp of the Perverse" as both Self and Other determines our instinctive transferential rapport to the text as both reader-analysands and critical "seducees."

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