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**The Uncanny and the Grotesque of the Self in the Short Stories of E.T.A.
Hoffmann and E.A. Poe**

**Tísnivo a groteskno Já v povídkách E.T.A. Hoffmanna
a E.A. Poea**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Anotace:

Tato práce je kontrastivní studií metod, kterými E.A. Poe a E.T.A. Hoffmann dosahují ve svých povídkách tísnivých a groteskních pocitů modelováním vnímání fiktivního světa vypravěči a postavami, jakož i užíváním specifických tísnivých a groteskních figur a konceptů a hry se čtenářem. Práce je dělena na dvě části, z nichž první, stěžejní část se věnuje tísnivým a groteskním konceptům ve skupinách vybraných povídek, druhá pak poskytuje teoretickou reflexi výsledných zjištění.

Abstract:

This thesis is a contrastive study of E.A. Poe's and E.T.A. Hoffmann's ways of achieving uncanny and grotesque effects in their short stories through modeling the perception of fictional world by narrators and characters as well as through the use of uncanny- and grotesque-specific figures and concepts and the play with reader. It is divided into two parts; the first core part studies uncanny and grotesque concepts in groups of selected short stories, the second part then provides theoretical reflection of the findings.

Klíčová slova: tísnivé, groteskno, Já, psychoanalýza

Keywords: uncanny, grotesque, Self, psychoanalysis

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1. Introduction

“[A]t what point shall the weird narrative begin?”
(E.A. Poe, “*Monos and Una*”)

This thesis concerns itself with the ways E.T.A. Hoffmann and E.A. Poe achieve and employ the uncanny and grotesque in their short stories. Its aim is to provide a contrastive study of a) different items of fictional reality in regard to their utility for achieving the uncanny and grotesque; of b) predominate tendencies Poe and Hoffmann display in using these respective items of reality and of c) roles played by narrative strategy in Hoffmann’s and Poe’s employment of these uncanny and grotesque notions. Throughout the work, emphasis is laid especially on the role of the self in inducing and coping with these notions.

The work is divided into two main parts – the first practical and the second theoretical – with thematic subdivisions. Practical part entitled ‘Long Story Short’ pays attention to the ways surroundings and relationships towards various instances of the ‘other’ and to oneself are established by Hoffmann and Poe to produce uncanny and grotesque effects, especially those touching the self.

Its first sub-chapter, ‘Settings Inside Out’, focuses in its first part, “‘Die Fundamente eines großen Schloßes’”, on construing settings of potentially uncanny and grotesque elements by combining specific tools of perceptual uncertainty typical of Gothic literature. It especially examines the uncanny and grotesque of perception. In its second part, ‘Certain (In)animate Objects: a Playground of the self’, shifting from perceptual to emotional uncertainty, that is closer towards the self, the first sub-chapter turns to the uncanny and grotesque of the cognitive confusion between the animate and inanimate and the uncanny and grotesque of emotional attachment to such *personal entities*.

The second sub-chapter, “‘The Uncanny Harbinger[s] of Death’”, moves to the taboo boundary of death and in its first part, ‘To Die, to Sleep’, it deals with various forms of death

and near-death experiences in the fictional actuality, as well as with Freudian death drive. Finally, second part of this sub-chapter, named , ‘*Doppeltgänger: Double and Let Double*’, provides an examination of the figure of *doppeltgänger* which encompasses all the previous uncertainties and the feelings of uncanny and grotesque thereof.

The second and last chapter of the work, ‘Telling Tell-Tales’, offers theoretical reflection of the concepts explored in chapter one. In its first sub-chapter, ‘*Déjà vu*’, the concept of *déjà vu* and its postulated counterpart, *inverted déjà vu*, are proposed as tools of further examination of uncanny and grotesque; and a brief summary of literary theory concerning the uncanny and grotesque and its development follows.

The second sub-chapter, ‘Spasms of Graphomania’, compares Hoffmann’s and Poe’s work in view of the uncanny and grotesque concepts examined in the first chapter, taking care to also compare the authors’ specific ways of employing narrative strategies, to finally set them in the context of play with the reader.

The weird narrative may start now.

2. Long Story Short

“You must all be quite anxious that I have not written to you for such a long long time.”¹
(E.T.A. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann”)

2.1 Settings Inside Out

Conventionally, the surroundings of a story and objects therein need to be described first. They may or may not be used in producing the feelings of uncanny and grotesque. Using settings and objects as sources of uncanny and/or grotesque effects, the author may suggest their uncanny and/or grotesque *nature*, making the impression that the uncanny and/or grotesque is their inherent quality (e.g. in Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*); or he may suggest the uncanny and/or grotesque distortion of the mediator(s) (i.e. narrator’s, character’s) ‘perceptions’ of settings and objects. For uncanny and grotesque feelings to arise here, these extremities are most likely to combine (e.g. in Hoffmann’s “Das öde Haus” or Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”). Another confusion to result in the uncanny may be based on a remarkable parallel between ‘reality’ and the narrator’s psychology (e.g. the vaulted cellar in Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado”). The uncanny effect will then most likely result from the inability of the reader to distinguish between the fictional ‘reality’ and ‘psychic states and processes’. The unreliability of senses causes an indirect endangerment of the self because of the inability to know one’s way around. When confusion of inanimate objects with animate ones arises, it results in two uncanny feelings. After the uncanny of perceptual uncertainty, there comes the uncanny of emotions made null by the suddenly ascertained lifelessness of their object, which endangers the self directly (e.g. Olimpia in Hoffmann’s “Der Sandmann”).

In any case, the uncanny and grotesque are marked by profound uncertainty about boundaries. This uncertainty is called uncanny when it lies between the normal and the ‘abnormal’ or horrible and its effect is a threat to the self, and it is called grotesque when it

¹ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007) 159. (Own translation of: “Gewiß seid Ihr alle voll Unruhe, daß ich so lange – lange nicht geschrieben.”)

lies between the horrible or disgusting and the ludicrous and its result is disruptive only to the point where it can be checked by the ludicrous, bizarre or absurd. However, the distinction between the uncanny and grotesque is also to a great extent a matter of distancing and perspective and, as Jentsch already says, “opinions as to what in this or that case can be described as having an uncanny effect will greatly diverge.”²

a. “Die Fundamente eines großen Schlosses”³

Das Öde Haus, The Fall of the House of Usher, The Cask of Amontillado, The Pit and the Pendulum, The Tell-Tale Heart, The Assigination, Der goldene Topf

As mentioned, it is generally possible to observe two distinct, although often combining, tendencies in establishing Gothic settings. The first one is characteristic in emphasizing their uncanny nature. This type of settings starts with the beginning of Gothic novel. I venture to take it for granted that feelings of the uncanny constitute the chief effect of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*. In his introduction to *Castle of Otranto*, E.J. Clery mentions the critics’ consensus that “the gothic castle is the main protagonist of the *Otranto*, and [...] the story [...] could be seen as an extension of the mood evoked by the setting.”⁴ This notion of the settings’ key role in establishing the Gothic story filled with uncanny moments is in accord with what Botting distinguishes as the 18th century Gothic *genre*, where settings sometimes seem to be the only justification for the proceedings of the plot. (It is, for instance, unimportant how Isabella, a guest at Otranto, knows about the *secret* passageway to St. Nicholas and the key to it seems to simply belong with her – it is only important to show the secret vaulted passage with its potentially uncanny underground darkness; and the absurd helmet that kills Conrad, the very trigger of involution, is of obscure origin, yet as a symbol of secrecy and aristocratic tradition, it needs to appear.) Therefore, this first original generic

² Ernst Jentsch, *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, Trans. Roy Sellars, 23 Jan. 2010
<http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf>, 3.

³ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 195.

⁴ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, (Oxford and NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), xv.

method that stresses historical Gothic implants the uncanny in the settings themselves, viewing the uncanny as their inherent quality or tying it with them very closely.

The base of the second way of establishing the settings in order to summon uncanny effects lies in suggesting the doubtful nature of the narrator's or character's 'perceptions'. In his *Gothic*, Botting distinguishes the original generic method from this later method of the 19th century Gothic *mode* that started to dissolve through other literary genres. Therefore, in an extreme case, the aim at the uncanny would be achieved through pointing to the doubtful nature of the narrator's and/or characters' 'perceptions' rather than to the peculiar 'nature' of the fictional surroundings.

Poe and Hoffmann blend the generic notion of settings with these much more psychological concerns of the Gothic mode that is not interested in the 'historical' Gothic as much as in the uncanny and grotesque of imagination and perception. The necessity to 'take settings for true' better expresses the fact that the settings of their stories would be incomplete if not reflected in and reflecting the minds, the self, of characters who inhabit them. It will become apparent that in most of Hoffmann's and Poe's stories, it is the states of mind and ways of perception of the characters and/or narrators that play a decisive role in constituting the settings. That is why Poe's and Hoffmann's short stories demand a very broad notion of settings which would go beyond the mere geographical or architectural, beyond the mere 'place to take place in'. Here, settings are rather a realm of negotiation between the fictional surroundings and the narrators' (and/or characters') 'perceptions'.

A very prominent use of settings that is quite visibly constructed as a cognitive object half way between the narrator and the places, where the unreliability of the narrator's or characters' senses comes to the fore, can be observed in "Das öde Haus" ("The Abandoned House") and "The Fall of the House of Usher". Both of these stories start with a discussion concerning the senses and perception. The company in the frame narrative of "Öde Haus"

discuss bats “in whom a remarkable sixth sense was discovered by the educated anatomist Spalanzani, that not only works as a roguish substitute for all the other senses but is also better endowed than all the others put together.”⁵ This sixth sense figures here as a feature highly desirable for efficient cognition and as such, it also constitutes a background from which the insufficiency of human sensory equipment comes out, introducing doubt not to the fictional ‘reality’ but to the (fictional) cognitive processes that shape it into the form of a “telling” (to use a closer rendition of the Czech “povídka”, or “short story”).

The settings of the main story, then, very quickly narrow down from the description of the town of ***n to a profound interest in an abandoned building. Hoffmann displays the European Gothic tradition here, describing luxurious streets of a small German town. “Imagine just how such a house must stand out among tastefully decorated, ostentatiously luxurious buildings.”⁶ The seemingly abandoned, decayed house represents a disruption in the natural equilibrium of relative small-town luxury and haunts it by reminding the citizens that there are some such buildings under the new facades of their own houses. It is this contrast that captures the attention of the narrator of the main story, Theodor. He is eventually only concerned with the story of the old house itself and in this sense, the house becomes a setting from which the story extends. The uncanny emerges at first from the suspicion that the house is haunted. It is further developed by Theodor’s having seen a figure in the window twice: considered a painting at the first instance, it seems to move at the second one. Other suspicions arise as Theodor observes several details like smell of meals coming from within and smoke coming from the chimney. He begins a search after the story that takes place in the house.

These settings of Theodor’s sought-after story are carried around in his mind into

⁵ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 159. (Own translation; “an denen der gelehrte Anatom Spalanzani einen vortrefflichen sechsten Sinn entdeckte, der als schalkhafter Stellvertreter nicht allein alles, sondern viel mehr ausrichtet, als alle übrige Sinne zusammengenommen.”)

⁶ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 162. (Own translation; “Denkt euch, wie solch ein Haus zwischen mit geschmackvollem Luxus ausgestaffierten Prachtgebäuden sich ausnehmen muss.”)

different dialogues whose own settings are never related above the necessary. He fills his settings gradually with more and more uncertainty when assembling fragmented information from various sources. In the end, Theodor enters the building to reveal a story that proves to fit in with its ‘uncanny nature’: the house is inhabited by an old servant tending an old insane countess whose intended had married her sister instead, causing her breakdown. The confrontation between the narrator’s disquieting ‘perceptions’ from the first part of the story and the ‘reality’ amplifies them as an ambiguous confirmation. We do need to note here that the Gothic extension of the plot from the settings in “Das öde Haus” works on more levels than that in *Castle of Otranto*, as the abandoned building *motivates* the narrative of investigation and houses characters that rather seem to be its equipment, or ‘indigenous fauna’ than inhabitants. This is, however, related to the modes of narration and to the uncanny of the (in)animate confusion, both of which will be dealt with later.

Similarly, the “mansion of gloom”⁷ approached by the narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher” is admitted to be described as an unclear perception at first. The narrator establishes his settings by oscillating between describing his first-time ‘perceptions’ and the ‘actual’ settings, wandering which of its features could have brought about his fancies. The narrator does not know why “but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervade[s his] spirit. [...] [T]he feeling [is] unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment *with which the mind usually receives* even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible.”⁸ At the beginning of his story, Poe emphasizes the way the old house is *perceived*; later, however, he combines this mode of perception with the generic Gothic of the old and decayed house. Like in “Das öde Haus”, the narrator needs to transport his initial imprints from site to site – from sight to sight, and establish the settings from various impressions of the same place.

⁷ E.A. Poe, (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), 77.

⁸ Poe, 76. [Emphasis added.]

[W]hat was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; [...] I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, *beyond doubt*, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. [...]

I have so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity – an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, [...] - a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.

Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly *the real aspect of the building*. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minuter fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation.⁹

Such as it stands, this two part description is a schoolbook example of the two ways settings are established in Gothic stories and the ways they can be combined. Even though it is a story of many other, rather generically typical Gothic sites (e.g. the tomb) and keeps in line with the American Gothic where the “edifice is a family house[, which, l]ike a Gothic castle, [...] is a gloomy and grotesquely ornamented repository of ghosts”,¹⁰ “House of Usher” also follows the methods of the Gothic mode by displaying the narrator’s ‘perceptions’ and his pondering on them. The ‘reality’ is constructed as interaction and negotiation between fictional ‘phenomena’ and observations of the narrator.

⁹ Poe, 76, 78-79. [First and last emphasis added.]

¹⁰ Fred Botting, *Gothic*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 118.

As mentioned, the narrator of “Das öde Haus” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” seem to carry their settings in their minds and explore their in later interactions. A story *about* settings and the narrator’s strife to comprehend them, “The Pit and the Pendulum” is very similar in this respect. The settings seem to be constructed gradually in the narrator’s mind. In the first three pages, the border of the narrator’s mind is never reached over but to fetch a few fragmentary images that accentuate the described emotions and states of mind and name the inquisition as their cause. Thus, a combination of the modal and generic Gothic is exercised even here. The generic settings then recede to emerge towards the end.

Though the narrator has “little object – certainly no hope – in these searches[,] but a vague curiosity,”¹¹ the middle part of the story consists of a detailed blind-mapping of the dark room in which the narrator is kept. The settings are being constructed in his mind before revealed in a clearer description when the light comes on and still better learned when the narrator is driven towards the central pit by the glowing metal walls. It even seems that the settings are much more intriguing when dimly described by a narrator of limited perception than in the end as a spectacular clear-cut image. The uncanny, however, stems from the blind uncertainty as boldly as from the threatening visuality because neither seems to mediate ‘reality’ reliably – the former is insufficient, the latter excessive.

In the above mentioned stories, settings are sites in or around which the narrated takes place. However, settings may be constructed to mirror the minds of narrators as well (especially in Poe’s short stories), so that the description of places complements their psychology. For instance, “The Cask of Amontillado” represents a perfect example of such settings that rather *use* the generically typical edifices to parallel the narrator’s mind. The generic settings in the fictional ‘reality’ are formed predominately by the underground vaults owned by the narrator, however, the beginning of the story makes it clear that the settings are

¹¹ Poe, 256.

twofold:

“You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. *At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled – but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, preclude the idea of risk.”¹²

Here, it seems, a complete reversal of the notions of settings in *Otranto* has been reached: the setting is a mere extension of the narrator’s mind. The damp underground vault where the victim is left to suffocate and starve to death represent at once the decay of the narrator’s thinking and its working: the victim, Fortunado, is brought to be buried and forsaken as worthless in the darkest place of the narrator’s mind before he is led to be walled at the end of the vault. The mind and the environment seem to be inextricably interwoven but the latter only appears after the former is revealed. The narrator’s reprobation of Fortunado is clearly very similar and certainly anterior to the live burial performed and the reader is left wandering which is more real, which matters more. The settings of ‘reality’ (and the plot) become a metaphor for the mind of the narrator (and the proceeding of his thoughts). Neither the reprobation nor the live burial would be complete, or indeed possible, without each other, which means that neither the plot nor the settings of the story are to be found in the fictional ‘psyche’ of the narrator *or* in the ‘reality’ but always in both at once.

A similar notion of settings applies to “The Tell-Tale Heart”. The narrator is an individual who cannot cope with the uncanniness of “a pale blue eye, with a film over it.”¹³ Instead of trying to check the feelings of the uncanny in the mind, he murders the man whose eye disturbs him so in ‘reality’. Settings once again become complementary to the mind, representing its *externalization*.

The grotesque in settings may either be only observed in the sense of over-

¹² Poe, 374.

¹³ Poe, 267.

ornamentation of the edifices, like in “The Assignment”, or in the frame of wondrous fairy-tale environment in “Der Goldene Topf”. In case of the said tale by Poe, it is the ‘grotesque’ meaning ‘overly decorated’, and perhaps even ridiculously so. The place to take place in is a nobleman’s palace filled with luxurious antiquities in the prototypical Gothic town of Venice.

In the architecture and embellishments of the chamber, the evident design had been to dazzle and astound. Little attention had been paid to the *decora* of what is technically called *keeping*, or to the proprieties of nationality. The eye wandered from object to object, and rested upon none – neither the *grotesques* of the Greek painters, nor the sculptures of the best Italian days, nor the huge carvings of untutored Egypt. [...] Glancing to and fro, in a thousand reflections, from curtains which rolled from their cornices like cataracts of molten silver, the beams of *natural glory mingled at length fitfully with the artificial light*, and lay weltering in subdued masses upon a carpet of rich, liquid-looking cloth of Chili gold.¹⁴

The artificial mingling fitfully with the natural in grotesque settings is analogous to the comingling of reports of ‘perceptions’ and description of ‘reality’ typical for the establishment of uncanny settings. However, as mentioned, the grotesque here retains its playful over-ornamentation mold.

This does not apply to the settings of “Das goldene Topf” where the over-ornamentation, playful though it is, claims a part on life – instead of comingling with it, the artificial replaces the natural. The whole story, subtitled as “A Fairy-Tale of the New Time”, represents Hoffmann’s attempt to construct a realm where there is no distinction between the real, the fictional and the ‘fictional’ (fictional to the fictional characters), which is suggested especially at the end of the story. Here the narrator (a representation of Hoffmann himself) who supposedly belongs to the reader’s reality, reports meeting his characters and

¹⁴ Poe, 40, 41. [Last emphasis added.]

experiencing the same wonders his protagonist had, thus moving freely across two boundaries (from reality over fiction to ‘fiction’).

The short story features a student named Anselmus who occasionally gains access to a previously unknown region of reality where what we might call ‘magic’ operates as a sort of loose causality. Some of the people in his surroundings come from this region and seem to feel Anselmus’ affinity to their world, and so does Anselmus himself. He falls in love with an ordinary girl but at the same time with a blue snake who is the daughter of *the Salamander* (archivist Lindhorst who uses Anselmus’ scribal talent to copy old documents) and a lily. Here, we may also observe how Hoffmann’s settings and characters *really* merge, e.g. when Anselmus,

at the last stroke of the tower watch of the Holy Cross Church, that quivered mightily through the air, wanted to grab hold of the door rafter [and] suddenly, the metal face twisted in a repulsive play of blueish glint into a grinning laughter. [...] [I]t was the apple-woman from the Black Gate. The pointy teeth clapping in the withered mouth[...] ¹⁵

Here, the relationship between the settings and the characters does not work merely on the level of metaphorical mirroring but it is described as *literally* taking place. The inanimate does not appear to be or threaten to come alive, it comes alive as a shape the characters take on. This is then fully integrated in the story as something natural, when the archivist Lindhorst casually provides Anselmus with a vial of a liquor, advising him to “kindly drip a little of [it] on her [the apple-woman’s] nose”¹⁶ next time she tries to scare him. Later, Lindhorst as the Salamander observes the student and his company from their punch-bowl where he is hidden

¹⁵ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Fantasiestücke in Callot’s Manier*, (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher klassiker Verlag, 2006), 243-244. (Own translation of “als er nun auf den letzten die Luft mit mächtigem Klange durchbebenden Schlag der Turmuhr an der Kreuzkirche den Türklopfer ergreifen wollte, da verzog sich das metallene Gesicht im ekelhaften Spiel blauglühender Lichtblicke zum grinsenden Lächeln. ... es war ja das Äpfelweib vom schwarzen Tor. Die spitzen Zähne klappten in dem schlaffen Maule[...]”)

¹⁶ Hoffmann, *Fantasiestücke in Callot’s Manier*, 257. (Own translation of “ihr gefälligst etwas Weniges von diesem Likör auf die Nase tröpfeln.”)

and escapes to the pipe of one of them to avoid injury when the bowel is to be destroyed.

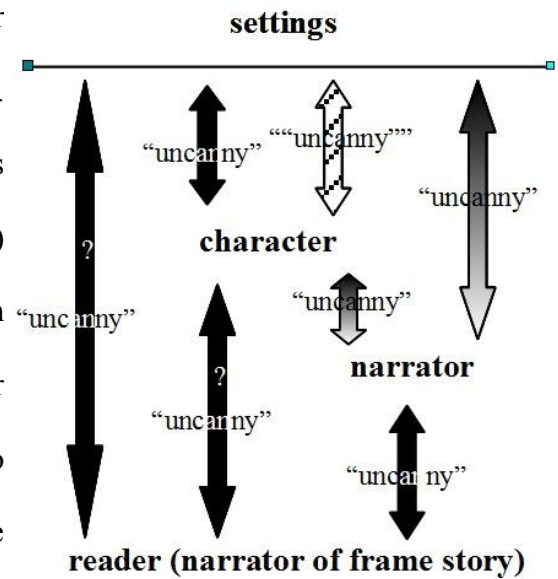
At times, the actuality of these transfers from one object to another may seem contestable to the reader as the character's false perception (the apple-woman door-knob seen by Anselmus), at other times, it is related as a bare fact (the Salamander's hiding transubstantiations). In any case, the boundary between characters and the settings is disrupted and a kind of *grotesque confusion* is created: the harmless and non-committal transubstantiation of characters does not seem to cross any taboo boundary, it never lacks in ludicrousness and always retains fantastic qualities. Hoffmann's serious narrative tone sharpens the edge of the grotesque by bringing the reader to the necessity of testing their (im)possibility.

We can see in these several examples that what Botting identifies in Poe's tales as "morbid fascination with darkly exotic settings *mirroring* extreme states of disturbed consciousness and imaginative excess"¹⁷ is the founding principle in most stories by both authors. The construction of settings works in various ways to capture both the uncanny and/or grotesque 'reality' and the distorted 'perceptions', or to mirror the minds of the narrators. Whether in terms of the very walls of castles, houses and cities, or in terms of the negotiation process between perception, states of mind and the sites, a *fundamental incompleteness* rules over the settings of Poe's and Hoffmann's stories. It is fragments and indecision that provide, respectively, the matter and the method of representing settings. This indecision that may be called the uncanny happens on several levels, as can be seen in Scheme 1.

In any realist's short story or novel, settings cannot be complete as they usually are mediated by the narrator, either directly or through the 'perceptions' of other characters. In the Gothic genre, the narrator (more likely to merge with the implied author) confronts the reader

¹⁷ Botting, 119. [Emphasis added.]

with the settings as directly as possible or through the perceptions of a 'reliable' character. In the Gothic mode, the narrator reports his (whether critically distrusted or taken-for-true) 'perceptions' of the settings; he reports such 'perceptions' of the character whose (doubted or believed) 'perceptions' of the settings serve to also reveal (or dim) them. The reader may relate with distrust to each of these objects and each of the relations between the objects and the



Scheme 1. Mediation of settings

fictional on-lookers, as well as to the reportedly uncanny feelings that arise from them. Thus, a cobweb of uncertainty is wittingly woven to bring about the uncanny or the grotesque.

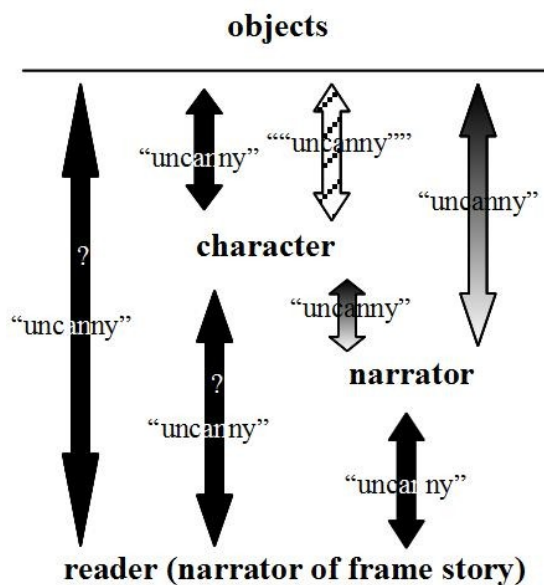
It is, however, their incompleteness that is distinctive for the Gothic and for Poe's and Hoffmann's work. The incompleteness of the 'actual' settings is characteristic of the Gothic genre (where 'incomplete' can also mean simply 'inexplicably such as they are'), whereas the incompleteness of their mediation is characteristic of the Gothic mode. This *fundamental incompleteness*, as will yet be shown, is a ground especially suitable for the uncanny because it indirectly poses a threat to the self: strange reality exists *within the known* that demands habituation and/or, which is more threatening, one cannot trust one's own senses; both confirm that "Gothic writing often leaves readers unsure whether narratives describe psychological disturbance or wider upheavals within formations of reality and normality"¹⁸.

b. Certain (In)animate Objects: a Playground of the self

The Oval Portrait, Das öde Haus, Der Sandmann Perhaps the most important confusion that lies at the core of uncanniness arises as a doubt whether an object should be allowed to

¹⁸ Botting 11.

participate on one's emotional life, or whether one *is allowed* to allow so; more specifically, whether or not an object is animate or inanimate. As such it represents the most important taboo boundary between appropriate and inappropriate ways of relating oneself to various



Scheme 2. Mediation of objects

instances of the other. It is not any more the matter of a mere confrontation with an object and an apperception [in the psychological sense] of its safety or dangers, but a lingering on the decision whether or not an emotional relationship is possible. The surface uncanny relies on the doubt pattern described in the previous part of this sub-chapter, the only change in the scheme being in replacing the settings in general by a specific object (see Scheme 2.). However, the

uncertainty whether a new reality 'actually' arises within the known and/or whether one's 'senses' can be trusted is aided by a new one: whether an emotional relationship may come into being and prove 'real' or whether such an existing relationship has been 'actual' or "fictional" (i.e. fictional for a fictional character, hence double inverted commas).

Instances of the purely cognitive uncertainty may be found in a number of Hoffmann's and Poe's stories, usually to introduce or support the uncanny of a greater momentum, i.e. the perceptual confusion is used separately from the emotional uncertainty. Such a case is presented in Poe's story "The Oval Portrait". This four-page story contains everything typical of Poe: an intoxicated narrator explaining his perceptions of a mysterious object, person or event – here, incidentally, all at once.

"It was the portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood. I glanced at the painting hurriedly and then closed

my eyes. Why I did this was not at first apparent even *to my own perception.*”¹⁹

What the narrator struggles towards when venturing to gaze at the painting on the following half-page is an *apperception* of the seen, so that the peculiarities of the piece of art ‘become apparent to his perception,’ as it were. He then finds “the spell of the picture in an absolute *lifelikeness* of expression.”²⁰

The story of the portrait follows in which the painter’s wife who posed as the model is said to have died at the last stroke of his paintbrush. This is where the narrator realizes that he might have not only been observing an artistic object, but rather the very event of its creation and the woman ‘captured’ in it herself, all at once. The simulacrum fills here at once with the life and the death of its subject and is rendered spectral. The initial perceptual uncertainty caused by life-likeness is ambiguously confirmed by the story of its origin, which paves the road to a much profounder, self-jeopardizing uncanny of the roles art may play in human life, especially the notion of its merging with reality (which will be dealt with separately later).

However, it is in combination with the emotional uncertainty that the perceptual in/animate confusion works most effectively. Observing the windows of the abandoned building, the narrator of “Das öde Haus” sees “a lovely, graceful girl” whose “eyes have [however] something dead-still about them, and a delusion of a life-like painting would have been possible, had not the arm and hand moved from time to time.”²¹ While using the German of an aesthetic analysis of a painting – it is “*the* arm and hand” (“Arm und Hand”), not “*her* arm and hand” (“*sein* [des Mädchens] Arm und Hand”) that moves; Hoffmann’s narrator insists that the girl is real – it is perceiving her as a life-like painting that is deemed deceptive. Clearly, the confusion between the animate and inanimate takes place on the level of

¹⁹ Poe, 188 [Emphasis added.]

²⁰ Poe 188

²¹ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 172 (Own translation of: “anmutige, holdselige Mädchen” and “hatten die Augen etwas Todstarres, und die Täuschung eines lebhaft gemalten Bildes wäre möglich gewesen, hätten sich nicht Arm und Hand zuweilen bewegt.”)

perceptions here. Much later in the story, however, Hoffmann's perceptual uncertainty in "Das öde Haus" proves to be a mere prelude to a mocking confirmation of the narrator's observations: when he enters the house later on, he finds that the female is a living creature indeed, however she is old and insane. Jentsch and Freud are unanimous that "most mental and many nervous illnesses [...] make a quite decidedly uncanny impression on most people"²² for they "excite in the spectator the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the ordinary appearance of mental activity."²³ Therefore, through this mocking confirmation of his premiss, the narrator faces the uncanny of a much greater momentum: the in/animate confusion confirmed. The spiteful way of half-fulfilling the narrator's expectations brings about ludicrousness that bends the uncanny into the grotesque, as his platonic infatuation to a dreamed of young lady is met with "Welcome – welcome, sweet bridegroom – the hour has come, the wedding is close."²⁴ of the 'actual' old insane countess.

Touching upon the issue of insanity, the focus now narrows from the perceptual in/animate confusion to the more intriguing uncertainty whether or not a given *personal entity* can reciprocate one's emotions. Starting on the surface too, it involves and jeopardizes the self the more directly the more emotional involvement is at stake. In practice, however, it is difficult to imagine a character or a real person who would doubt the object of their infatuation is a living being and who would continue in the romance without finding out the truth. Among the short stories studied here, Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" ("The Sand-Man") is a very helpful example to demonstrate this problem. In it, we find the protagonist Nathanael engaging himself in a relationship with the daughter of his professor Spalanzani, Olimpia. His infatuation begins as he is forced to move from his burnt-down lodging to a flat opposite Spalanzani's house. He can watch Olimpia every day and he later buys a looking-glass to do

²² Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 213.

²³ Royle 213

²⁴ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 184. (Own translation of: "Willkommen – willkommen, süßer Bräutigam – die Stunde ist da, die Hochzeit nah!")

so, falling in love with her gradually.

“Olimpia sat, as usually, at a small table with *the arms* resting on it and hands folded together. – Nathanael could now behold her wonderfully formed face for the first time. It was only her eyes that seemed to him quite peculiarly fixed and dead. Yet, as he was looking through the looking-glass sharper and sharper, it was as if damp moon-beams went glowing up in Olimpia’s eyes. It seemed as if the ability to see has just been kindled in them; *the look* was flaming livelier and livelier.”²⁵

As it turns out later, Olimpia is an automaton designed and assembled by Spalanzani. It is possible to observe how, with the use of articles rather than personal pronouns, the narrator’s description subtly suggests rather an object than a person (cf. italics above). It clearly is not Nathanael’s ‘own’ description that betrays Olimpia as an automaton: Nathanael never really questions Olimpia’s humanity. It is obvious that no uncanny is even reportedly felt by Nathanael ‘himself’ and he is free to undergo the dissolution of the ‘self’ in the process called infatuation. Neither the reader nor Nathanael are aware of the fact that Olimpia is an automaton. It is only with the knowledge of this that one can fully appreciate the description of Nathanael’s increasing infatuation to Olimpia and when any kind of analysis of the relationship concerning the uncanny and grotesque can be carried out. Only then can the reader watch how Olimpia becomes the playground where Nathanael’s ‘self’ paradoxically finds more reciprocity than in any other of his relationships (not even with his betrothed Clara, who he calls a “damn lifeless automaton”²⁶). He projects his unsatisfied needs into the relationship and interprets Olimpia’s repetitive “Ach – Ach – Ach!”²⁷ as appropriate responses

²⁵ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 32 [Emphasis added.] (Own translation of: “Olimpia saß, wie gewöhnlich, vor dem kleinen Tisch, *die Arme* darauf gelegt, die Hände gefaltet. - Nun erschaute Nathanael erst Olimpias *wunderschön geformtes Gesicht*. Nur die Augen schienen ihm gar seltsam starr und tot. Doch wie er immer schärfer und schärfer durch das Glas hinschaute, war es, als gingen in Olimpias Augen feuchte Mondesstrahlen auf. Es schien, als wenn nun erst die Sehkraft entzündet würde; immer lebendiger und lebendiger flammten *die Blicke*.”)

²⁶ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 28. (Own translation of: “[...]lebloßes, verdammtes Automat!”)

²⁷ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 36.

to everything he says. One of the events that enable the reader to suspect Olimpia's inanimate nature and Nathanael's playing with his 'self' comes when the relationship becomes more physical:

“‘Parting, Parting,’ cried he in wild despair. He kissed Olimpia's hand and bowed down to her mouth, *the* ice-cold lips touched *his* heated ones! - Just like when he had touched Olimpia's cold hand, he felt engulfed in inner horror, the legend of the Dead Bride flashed through his mind all of the sudden; but Olimpia pressed him to herself firmly and in the kiss, *the* lips seemed to awaken to life.”²⁸

Nathanael's always chasing his own tail, as it were, and never ending any interaction with Olimpia influenced by the more than subtle hints of there being 'something strange' about her – it would be impossible to cherish feelings to her then.

This is why until the actual inanimate nature of an object of emotion is disclosed, the uncanny feelings cannot be 'felt' by the character 'him/herself' but only felt-in by the reader. The point to be made here – that the uncanny of a relationship to an inanimate object only concerns the self of the person (or the 'self' of the character) who experiences it (and by extension those who approach this person or character with deliberate empathy or strong identification) – is supported by the fact that once the reader learns the 'truth', he or she finds the situation rather ludicrous, or, to use a more *precise* word, 'funny'.

The grotesque “involves the managing of the uncanny [or the disgusting] by the comic”²⁹ (as Michael Steig would have it), but not overriding it by the comic. In “Der Sandmann” and “Das öde Haus”, we can see two instances of the uncanny being checked by

²⁸ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 36. [Emphasis added.](Own translation of : “‘Trennung, Trennung,’ schrie er ganz wild und verzweifelt, er küßte Olimpias Hand, er neigte sich zu ihrem Munde, eiskalte Lippen begegneten seinen glühenden! - So wie, als er Olimpias kalte Hand berührte, fühlte er sich von innerem Grausen erfaßt, die Legende von der toten Braut ging ihm plötzlich durch den Sinn, aber fest hatte ihn Olimpia an sich gedrückt, und in dem Kuß schienen die Lippen zum Leben zu erwärmen.”)

²⁹ Michael Steig, “Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Winter, 1970), (Blackwell Publishing at Jstor), 25 May 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/428606>>.

the comical: both Nathanael and the narrator of “Das öde Haus”, whose name is Theodor, establish a one-sided emotional attachment to a woman of inanimate features, the ending of which is traumatic for them.

“Suddenly, Coppola threw the dummy over his shoulders and with a terrible, screeching laughter, he went rushing down the stairs so that the ugly dangling feet of the dummy clattered and rumbled against the wooden steps. - Nathanael stood petrified – too well did he see that in Olimpia’s dead-pale face of wax, there were no eyes, only black holes in their place; she was a lifeless puppet.”³⁰

However ‘funny’ the image of a dummy’s feet clattering down a flight of stairs or an old, insane countess’ wedding proposal may seem to a disinvolved person, it represents an emotional turmoil in someone who finds his feelings frustrated by the lifelessness of their object. (Thomson comes to a similar conclusion in his *The Grotesque*, using the example from “Der Sandmann” alone.³¹) As a unique and strictly one’s ‘own’ (or ‘proper’) way of experiencing the world, emotions lend an individual a significant portion of self-awareness and provide a self-definition through his/her relationships; all of which is uprooted by the realization that instead of life, s/he has been partaking in lifelessness. Thus, it is possible to draw a boundary between the uncanny and the grotesque of an object or event along the line of difference between the subjective and objective viewpoint respectively.

To make “Der Sandmann” even more exemplary in tackling the uncanny and grotesque of the in/animate uncertainty, Hoffmann plants uncertainty in other characters (as opposed to uprooting Nathanael’s assuredness), creating a reversed scenario in the society’s

³⁰ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 41 (Own translation of: “Nun warf Coppola die Figur über die Schulter und rannte mit fürchterlich gellendem Gelächter rasch fort die Treppe herab, so daß die häßlich herunterhängenden Füße der Figur auf den Stufen hölzern klapperten und dröhnten. - Erstarrt stand Nathanael - nur zu deutlich hatte er gesehen, Olimpias toderbleichtes Wachsgesicht hatte keine Augen, statt ihrer schwarze Höhlen; sie war eine leblose Puppe.”)

³¹ Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque*, (London: Methuen, 1972 [online version by David Lavery])
<http://davidlavery.net/grotesque/major_artists_theorists/theorists/thomson/thomson4.html> March 1, 2009.

reaction to Nathanael's episode.

“The story of the automaton had stricken roots deep in their souls and heinous distrust of human figures went spreading among them. To get a reliable conviction that they are not in love with a dummy, many lovers required that their lady sing and dance a little out of rhythm, that she brooder while reading out loud, knit, play with pugs, etc.; but first of all, that she not only listen but also sometimes talk in the manner that her talking would display actual thoughts and feelings”³²

In this situation, the uncanny would be felt by the poor young ladies who had to prove (and were perhaps made to doubt) their authentic humanity while the grotesque lies in the open preference of distortion to symmetry in the appearance and demeanour of a woman as well as in the methods of determining who is and who is not human. John M. Ellis extends this reversal even further, showing that “[b]ehaviour in the town had degenerated to an automaton-like quality, so that the town was vulnerable to the possibility of an Olympia; speech seemed no longer to relate to thought or feeling.”³³ On all these levels, it is the emotions of an individual that is made uncanny and the visible surface relationships that turn out grotesque under the influence of the in/animate confusion.

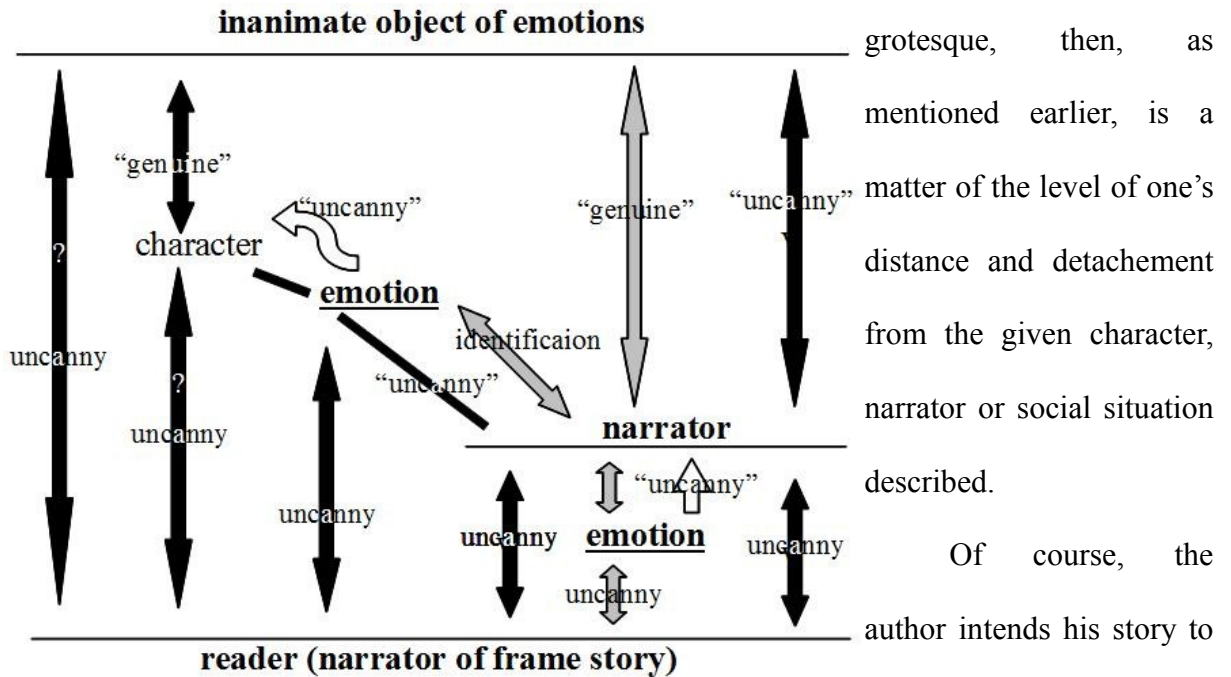
With the inclusion of emotions, the scheme originally used above complicates dramatically in the in/animate confusion: the object of one's feelings cannot be left such if doubt arises whether or not it is human. Therefore, an emotional attachment to an inanimate or inanimate-like entity ensues with ignorance of the object's lifeless nature or features (the perception of life in it is held for 'genuine') and the uncanny stems from the existence of

³² Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 43 (Own translation of: “die Geschichte mit dem Automat hatte tief in ihrer Seele Wurzel gefaßt und es schlich sich in der Tat abscheuliches Mißtrauen gegen menschliche Figuren ein. Um nun ganz überzeugt zu werden, daß man keine Holzpuppe liebe, wurde von mehreren Liebhabern verlangt, daß die Geliebte etwas taktlos singe und tanze, daß sie beim Vorlesen sticke, stricke, mit dem Möpschen spiele usw. vor allen Dingen aber, daß sie nicht bloß höre, sondern auch manchmal in der Art spreche, daß dies Sprechen wirklich ein Denken und Empfinden voraussetze.”)

³³ John M. Ellis, “Clara, Nathanael and the Narrator: Interpreting Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*”, *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 54. No. 1, (Jstor: Wiley-Blackwell, 1981), 4 Nov 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/405828>>.

emotions in an inappropriate relationship once its unseemliness is disclosed. It may be disclosed to the character who cherishes the emotions, to the narrator and/or to the reader.

Scheme 3 comprises all possible variants that overlap in various ways in different stories. The



Scheme 3. Emotion as primary source of the uncanny in the in/animate confusion

Although Jentsch already tells us that “opinions as to what in this or that case can be described as having an uncanny effect will greatly diverge”³⁴, it is for example much more likely that a first person narrator of an inner perspective would mediate an event concerning the in/animate confusion as rather uncanny whereas a third person narrator of an outer perspective would mediate the same event as rather grotesque. This can be illustrated on the examples of “Das öde Haus” and “Der Sandmann”. In the former, the narrator’s encounter with the old insane countess, though actually living, is described as very traumatic: “Deeply disgusted, I stumbled back; as if petrified by the flaming, terebrating look of a rattlesnake, I could not tear my eyes off the old gruesome woman.”³⁵ The effect of Theodor’s description in

³⁴ Jentsch, <http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf>.

³⁵ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 184 (Own translation of: “Von tiefem Entsetzen durchbebt wankte ich zurück; wie durch den glühenden, durchbohrenden Blick der Klapperschlange festgezaubert, konnte ich mein Auge nicht abwenden von dem graulichen alten Weibe, konnte ich keinen Schritt weiter mich bewegen.”)

the first person is arguably stronger than that of the third person description from Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann", though Nathanael's beloved *personal entity* is completely inanimate: "Nathanael stood petrified – too well did he see that in Olimpia's dead-pale face of wax, there were no eyes, only black holes in their place; she was a lifeless puppet."³⁶

However, the key peculiarity of the in/animate confusion lies in the fact that a character (or a real person) can *feel uncanny about their own feelings*. One's 'own' feelings generate a sort of 'meta-emotion' in the form of uncanny feelings (or a profound unsettling doubt) about the actual *ability* to have reliable emotions and feelings at all. This once again shows that feelings of the uncanny find their origin rather within a person's self when endangered by unreliability of cognitive and emotional powers than without as an inherent quality of settings and objects. As such, the feelings of the uncanny are, strangely enough, the characters' *own* and summoning them in the reader is a matter of narrative strategy.

2.2 "The Uncanny Harbinger[s] of Death"³⁷

Moving from the confusion between the animate and the inanimate, the discussion turns to the confusion between the living and the dead. This confusion represents another taboo boundary around which uncanny and grotesque feelings may arise in various forms. Poe and Hoffmann use it on many occasions as the directions in which uncanny and grotesque may develop here multiply with the omnipresence of death as a mirror of life. Sleep figures on the boundary between the in/animate and living/dead confusions, as it at once reminds of the mechanic nature of human body and of the strangely desirable unconsciousness of death.

Death is also a chief component of duplicity. A double, or *doppeltgänger*, represents in

³⁶ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 41 (Own translation of: "Nun warf Coppola die Figur über die Schulter und rannte mit fürchterlich gellendem Gelächter rasch fort die Treppe herab, so daß die häßlich herunterhängenden Füße der Figur auf den Stufen hölzern klapperten und dröhnten. - Erstarrt stand Nathanael - nur zu deutlich hatte er gesehen, Olimpias toderbleichtes Wachsgesicht hatte keine Augen, statt ihrer schwarze Höhlen; sie war eine leblose Puppe.")

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, transl. Hugh Haughton, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 142.

Rank's words an "energetic denial of the power of death"³⁸ and the partial death of one who has (and therefore is) a double. The double produces a state of an incompleteness without and of superfluousness with it around – it at once is and is not an instance of the *other*. In addition, the double seems to comprise in itself all the other confusions: the cognitive uncertainty, the in/animate confusion and the dead-alive one. It also functions as a carrier of various other uncanny notions and a narrative device very well suited for any story developing the uncanny.

a. To Die, to Sleep

Das Majorat, Colloquy of Monos and Una, Das Öde Haus, Assniation, Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar, The Premature Burial, The Descend into a Malström, The Imp of Perverse

The fear of death is an ambiguous one and so is the fear of (life) burial. On the one hand, "our unconscious is still as unreceptive as ever to the idea of our own mortality,"³⁹ making death a profound unfamiliarity to lurk, strangely surprising, from every item of reality. On the other hand, death and entombment represent a return to strangely familiar prenatal unconsciousness, as "[w]e move, in fact, from one uncanny to another, remaining within a strange space of substitution, of one fantasy for another, womb for tomb and tomb for womb[...]"⁴⁰ Thus, we find in death, the most mysterious and undiscovered, and therefore unfamiliar, fact of life, a strong familiar element. This un/familiarity of death makes it the quintessential uncanny reality which is in some sense found in anything that summons uncanny feelings. Once again, death poses an ambiguous threat to the self, by its capacity to both endanger and enchant it at once – by making it see potential *for itself in its own extinction*. The self-preservation instinct is subverted and the self is made unreliable as its own guardian.

As Poe proclaims through the character of Monos in his "Colloquy of Monos and

³⁸ Freud, 142.

³⁹ Freud, 148

⁴⁰ Royle, 144.

Una”, “by sleep and its world alone is *Death* imaged.”⁴¹ Really, the idea of sleep may summon uncanny feelings as the idea of a voluntary descend into unconsciousness and vulnerability. The closeness of sleep to death and afterlife is demonstrated, for instance, in Hoffmann’s “Das Majorat” (“Primogeniture”) where a ghost haunts an old castle by making scratching sounds on the walled-in portal previously leading to a ruined tower. In retrospect, we learn that some days after the downfall of the tower, the local baron was found dead in the ruins. The door was walled in for safety and an investigation ensued, proving that the old somnambulous baron was knocked down through the door while night-walking by an old treacherous servant named Daniel. The young baron is about to be informed about the findings as Daniel sleepwalks into the room:

The baron watched the old man soundlessly as he was scratching the wall[ed-in portal] with fearful moaning of deadly torments. The baron was overcome with horror. [...] “Daniel! Daniel! What are you doing here at this hour!” The old man burst into a horrifying howling squeal of a wounded animal [...] and collapsed.

The baron cried in despair: “Good God! - Good God! Had I not heard that sleepwalkers can die on the spot when called by their name? I! - What a wretch I am!’ - I have killed the old chap!”⁴²

It is then the ghost of this treacherous servant who murdered a somnambulist and died as one who haunts the castle. The defenselessness of a sleeping person combined with the way buried emotions may surface from the self make sleep and sleepwalking a most uncanny reality to the somnambulists as they are capable of betraying what should have stayed hidden

⁴¹ Poe 187.

⁴² Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 273-274. (Own translation of: “Lautlos starrte der Freiherr den Alten an, als dieser nun aber unter angstvollen Seufzern der Todesqual an der Wand [des ehemaligen Portal] kratzte, da faßte den Freiherrn tiefes Entsetzen. [...] ‘Daniel! Daniel! was machst du hier zu dieser Stunde!’ Da stieß der Alte [eines] grauenvolle heulende Gewimmer aus, gleich dem Todeslaut des getroffenen Tiers, [...] und sank zusammen. / Da schrie der Freiherr wie außer sich: ‘Herr Gott! - Herr Gott! habe ich denn nicht gehört, daß Nachtwandler auf der Stelle des Todes sein können, wenn man sie beim Namen ruft? Ich! - Ich Unglücklichster - ich habe den armen Greis erschlagen!’”)

and directly endanger their life and utmost privacy, as well as to the on-looker who observes the unconscious at work. However, it is probably the death-likeness of sleep in the time spent without any notion of time that makes it most uncanny: its temporality is never experienced *en route* but only as a retrospective reflection upon waking.

Death, on the other hand, represents an eternal sleep and it would be robbed of its uncanniness if it were not for sleep: there would be nothing familiar about death then (save the subconscious prenatal experience). This closeness between death and sleep is actually a very strong notion in Poe's "Colloquy of Monos and Una". Poe presents here the communication of two souls inhabiting the same grave who were lovers or husband and wife in life. The dissolution of the self in the event of death happens as a withering into a womb-tomb unconsciousness; more precisely, the descend into death Monos presents in his "weird narrative"⁴³ is described as a gradual dissolution of all ways the self relates itself to the perceived reality: reason, emotion and apperception; but not as the end of perception.

"[A]fter some days, there came upon me, as you have said, a breathless and motionless torpor; and this was termed Death by those who stood around me. [Paragraph break.] Words are vague things."⁴⁴ [...]

"It appeared to me not greatly dissimilar to the extreme quiescence of him, who, having slumbered long and profoundly [...] begins to steal slowly back into consciousness, through the mere sufficiency of his sleep."⁴⁵

There is no afterlife *per se* involved in death here. One way Poe achieves his uncanny is dissolving the seemingly clear-cut boundary between life and death, which the living people like to maintain, by presenting perceptions of a dying person. The other is stressing the neutrality of death, or rather the way death neutralizes everything. In the beginning, Monos

⁴³ Poe, 179.

⁴⁴ Poe, 182.

⁴⁵ Poe, 179.

seems to welcome his beloved Una. “Yes, fairest and best beloved Una, ‘born again’.”⁴⁶ The Colloquy, however, does not end in a way that would suggest its eternal lasting.

[I]n the strict embrace of the *Shadow*, came [...] the light of enduring *Love*. [...] Upon my mouldering bones, there descended the coffin of Una. [Paragraph break.] And now again all was void. The nebulous light had been extinguished.⁴⁷

Even love as the accomplished dissolution of self and its merging with another one is made null by the dissolution of death. However, death does not represent a radical separation of two conjoined souls here, but the inclusion of their relationship in an all-embracing apathy. “The sense of being had [...] utterly departed and there reigned in its stead [...] the autocrats *Place* and *Time*. [...] [F]or all this nothingness, yet for all this immortality, the grave was still a home[...].”⁴⁸

It is all the more peculiar then that both Hoffmann and Poe turn death around in other stories, namely “Das öde Haus” and “Assignment”, to signify all the greater connection between the lovers. In “Assignment”, the unhappy love of a married woman and a rich nobleman ends in simultaneous voluntary death: “‘Thou hast conquered – one hour after sunrise – we shall meet – so let it be!’”⁴⁹ Here, the reversal is complete – death, viewed by the living as the *ultima linea rerum* – is to prove the strength of their love to their own consciousness and to their living acquaintances. The uncanny element here is the conscious plunge into the endless unconsciousness of death.

Hoffmann’s simultaneous death of lovers is different in that they do not decide to commit suicide together. Their tie exists on the unconscious level.

“Unfortunate! Today on the 7th of – at noon Antonia collapsed, your treacherous portrait in the embrace of her loving arms, dead

⁴⁶ Poe, 178.

⁴⁷ Poe, 187.

⁴⁸ Poe, 187.

⁴⁹ Poe, 39.

to the ground!” - I went through a calendar where I noticed the colonel’s death and found that Antonia’s death hour was also his own.⁵⁰

The two principal uncanny notions observable in “Colloquy of Monos and Una” are questioning the immediate onset of death as the instant ceasing of perception (but also a denial of transition to a higher state of existence), and finding home in the unconsciousness of the embrace of grave. “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” represents the former notion. “[M]esmerized *articulo mortis*,”⁵¹ Valdemar is checked from dying in the common sense of the word, which enables him to pronounce the notorious “*I have been sleeping – and now – now - I am dead.*”⁵² It is no longer the idea of losing trace of one’s self in sleep or death that seems uncanny here, it is the possibility to manifest the self in them – or the return of the dead. The certainty with which the “*I say to you that I am dead!*”⁵³ “issue[s] from the distended and motionless jaws”⁵⁴ and “*burst[s]* from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer”⁵⁵ is probably the most uncanny element amidst the deep overall uncertainty of what exactly is happening there.

Discussing the death-related uncanny, Royle quotes Gordon Bearn’s pertinent proclamation that “[t]he absence of what ought to be present is eerie,’ whereas ‘*the presence of what ought to be absent is uncanny.*”⁵⁶ It is clear that, while it is not certain *where* exactly he is, Valdemar is not supposed to speak from his own dead-body if he is dead; therefore, the voice alone is uncanny even if not asserting its origin in the region of death. As Slavoj Žižek says, “[v]oice is not an organic part of human body. It is coming from somewhere in between

⁵⁰ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 183. (Own translation of: “Unglücklichseliger! Heute, am 7. - um zwölf Uhr Mittag sank Antonia, dien trügerisches Abbild mit liebenden Armen umschlingend, tot nieder! - Ich sah den Kalender nach, in dem ich des Obristen Tod angemerkt hatte und fand, daß Antonias Todesstunde auch die seinige gewesen.”)

⁵¹ Poe, 364.

⁵² Poe, 371.

⁵³ Poe, 373.

⁵⁴ Poe, 370.

⁵⁵ Poe, 373.

⁵⁶ Royle, 88.

your body” and “there is always this minimum of ventriloquist effect as if some foreign power took possession”⁵⁷ in the way voice exits the body. This generic uncanniness of voice is burdened here with the uncanniness of the *in-death* (for death figures here rather as a state than a border between states) location of the mind expressed by it.

However, the uncanny also forms its own context here: death and sleep (or hypnosis) should be mutually exclusive and their close connection here is uncanny on its own, too. The idea of a *personal entity* inhabiting this uncanny realm represents one instance of the uncanny buried in another and claiming its position by uncanny means; as if the diffuse jaws of uncertainty opened to offer a descend into the raw, immaterial grave of the unconscious. In the depth of hypnosis and death at once, Valdemar becomes the grave to himself – the grave of his self – and two truths assert themselves simultaneously in his ‘*I am dead*’: it cannot be him talking, but it can be no one else. He seems to be *buried alive* between sleep and death.

The grave draws its attractiveness from the strangely familiar (prenatal) unconsciousness associated with it (the tomb-for-womb confusion). When observed from outside, any manifestation of consciousness in any grave proves uncanny, as we can see in “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” Poe turns the perspective around in “The Premature Burial” where the horror of entombment is consciously perceived by a first-person narrator. Remarkably, death here is again connected with a kind of sleep – catalepsy. The narrator suffering from this condition takes great precautions not to be buried alive during his weeks lasting seizures. One of the most uncanny instances in the story is the narrator’s vivid vision during one of these prolonged cataleptic sleeps, as a figure who “was mortal, but [is] a fiend [...] cause[s] to be thrown open the graves of all mankind[.]” so that the narrator can see “the shrouded bodies in their sad and solemn slumbers with the worm. But alas! the real sleepers [are] fewer, by many millions, than those who slumber[.] not at all; and there [is] a

⁵⁷*The Pervert’s Guide to the Cinema, Part 1*, prod. Martin Rosenbaum, Georg Misch, Rarlp Wieser, Sophie Fiennes, dir. Sophie Fiennes, 2006, 150min, 13min 45 sec.

feeble struggling; and there [is] a general and sad unrest[...]⁵⁸ This vision encompasses the fear of being buried alive – of residing in the grave *conscious* – and the fear of the return of the dead – or those who are supposed to be dead.

It has been suggested in academic literature that Poe's title uses definite article although there are numerous stories of premature burial in it and the final scene is not a burial at all, so the reference can by no means point to these. His story does not deal with the phenomenon on a general level for the reference to be generic either.⁵⁹ This is key in understanding the morale of the story (for, rare as it is in Poe, there is a strong one here). In a way, the narrator of "The Premature Burial" develops a catalepsy of mind and conducts a funeral of his own ability to live by indulging in worries, fears and fancies. Therefore, *the* premature burial is his premature descend into death through his focus on its future possibility and disregard of the present reality of life.

In all that I endured there was no physical suffering, but of moral distress an infinitude. My fancy grew charnel. I talked 'of worms, of tombs, and epitaphs.' I was lost in reveries of death, and the idea of premature burial held continual possession of my brain.⁶⁰

In the end, the narrator experiences a feeling of having been buried alive as he wakes up in a coffin-shaped berth and before restoring his memory, he thinks he has been buried alive. This experience heals him ultimately: "I dismissed forever my charnel apprehensions, and with them vanished the cataleptic disorder, of which, perhaps, they had been less the consequence than the cause."⁶¹

The short stories "The Imp of the Perverse" and "A Descend into the Maelström"

⁵⁸ Poe, 331-332.

⁵⁹ Despite sincere effort, I was unable to find the source of this comment, though I am positive that it is not an original idea of mine. As it is a key idea, I cannot leave it out merely on account of missing the exact source information. Herewith, I at least acknowledge that it originated in the academic work of an author I have read in preparation of this work.

⁶⁰ Poe, 330.

⁶¹ Poe, 336.

explore another side of the uncanny attractiveness of death or self-destruction. It is explained by Freud's theory of 'death drive' which "is inextricably entangled, for example, with 'the instinct for mastery' and 'the will to power'"⁶² "A Descend into a Maelström" represents an uncannily strong Freudian 'instinct of mastery', as the survivor of the descend describes his emotions in terms of the Nietzschean maxim 'what does not kill him makes him stronger.' Prior to this, however, is the Jentschian uncanny of the unknown that accompanies "the intellectual mastery of the new thing."⁶³ Therefore, the willingness to risk one's life for a unique experience represents the uncanny of *wishing* for the uncanny of novelty.

I positively felt a *wish* to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make; and my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see.⁶⁴

In aesthetic terms, the emotion expressed here is close to the sublime, as the fisher senses the immensity of the maelström and realizes his own insignificance. It is, however, checked by the actual real threat of dying.

In "The Imp of the Perverse," Poe uses a vertigo that makes people commit trespasses or a giddiness "through [the promptings of which] we act, for the reason that we should *not*," "without any comprehensible object."⁶⁵ This "overwhelming tendency to do wrong for the wrong's sake"⁶⁶ is most probably connected rather with the second element of death drive that Freud calls 'will to power'. The narrator confesses committing crime from the sole reason that he should not – to claim power over social taboo and psychological inhibitions. This self-centered act is followed by self-centered fear:

'I am safe - I am safe - yes - if I be not fool enough to make

⁶² Royle, 93.

⁶³ Jentsch, <http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Poe, 165.

⁶⁵ Poe, 358.

⁶⁶ Poe, 385.

open confession!’

No sooner had I spoken these words, than I felt an icy chill creep to my heart. I had some experience in these fits of perversity [...] and I remembered well that in no instance I had successfully resisted their attacks.⁶⁷

The final mistake of the narrator in confessing his deeds reveals at the core of the ‘death drive’ “a dominance of a *compulsion to repeat*” which “is strong enough to override the pleasure principle.”⁶⁸ In pursuit of proving its power *again*, the self disregards not only the consequences for others but also for itself.

In most of the stories dealt with here, the uncanny either arises in very abstract terms or it is a result of several combining uncanny factors, thus making it difficult for the ludicrous to manage individual situations to grotesque effects. If it may be taken for granted, that the combination of ‘mechanic’ sleep and ‘unconscious’ death is too repulsive and gruesome to allow for a viewpoint from which they could appear grotesque, there are only two instances of the grotesque among these stories.

First, in “A Descend into the Maelström”, the fisher admits that his “principal grief was that [he] should never be able to tell [his] old companions on shore about the mysteries [he] should see.”⁶⁹ This proclamation degrades the supertemporal thirst of knowledge to the purpose of pub boasting. Such a petty distortion of a character that is willing to risk life for an ultimate boast is too distant and unfamiliar to a person who is capable of recognizing it to induce anything else than feelings of grotesque.

Secondly, in “The Premature Burial”, the narrator makes a fool of himself as he wakes up and mistakes his coffin-shaped berth for an actual coffin. The men on the ship where he sleeps are at once startled and amused. ““What do you mean by yowling in that ere

⁶⁷ Poe, 362.

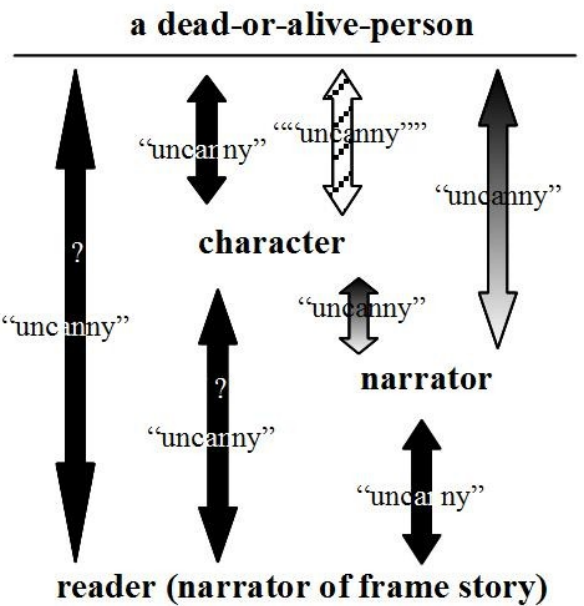
⁶⁸ Freud, 145.

⁶⁹ Poe, 165.

kind of style, like a cattymount?”⁷⁰ It is possible, therefore, to oscillate between the uncanny of life burial felt by the narrator and the ambiguous ludicrousness of witnessing someone pointlessly frightened. The reaction of the men is important for the grotesque because it betrays the apperception of the narrator’s scream: if one can make such riot, one must be alive.

In both these stories, it is the shapes life takes on itself, not death, that create an uneasily ‘funny’ situation. On the one hand, the petty character of the fisher in “A Descend into the Maelström” makes one worried about the shapes human character can take. In “The Premature Burial”, on the other hand, the crew are not startled by death but by a sudden excessive manifestation of life. Therefore, it is possible to proclaim with Wolfgang Kayser that “[t]he grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death.”⁷¹

The uncanny of the dead-alive confusion is in reception basically the same as the uncanny of in/animate confusion. It requires a double thinking of the person’s actual state. The popularly known scientific example of Schrödinger’s cat may force itself on the mind in this context. However, while Schrödinger’s cat can be thought of as dead *and* alive at the same time, in the dead-alive confusion one does want to determine whether or not the cat is alive but it is simply not possible. It has to be thought of as dead *or* alive. Even if this image were to be



Scheme 4. Mediation of the dead/alive confusion

followed, what would most likely be found upon opening the box where Schrödinger’s cat is

⁷⁰ Poe, 335

⁷¹ Geoffrey Harpham, *The Grotesque: First Principles*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 461- 468 , (Blackwell Publishing at Jstor), 14 Nov. 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/430580>>, 462.

locked with a vial of poison, is the vial broken and the cat still alive or the vial intact and the cat killed by the poison.

b. *Doppeltgänger*: Double and Let Double

Der Sandmann, Das Gelübde, William Wilson

From blurring the boundaries between reality and perception, the animate and inanimate, the living and the dead, there is but one step further to a figure that strangely encompasses all of these indecisions. Firstly, the double can arise solely as a way one chooses to perceive the similar and thus, it introduces doubt into perception (“Der Sandmann”). Secondly, it questions one’s originality and shatters the individual’s delusions of uniqueness by opening a possibility of his/her mechanical reduction into a copy (“Das Gelübde”). Finally, if one has and therefore is a double, it is virtually impossible for him/her to figure as a whole individual, whether in the presence or absence of his/her double: a part of the person is always lost in the identity confusion (“William Wilson”). One’s double is sometimes expected to be similar, if not identical, but it also is, by virtue of the vastly prevalent experience of the ‘other’ as ‘different from me,’ most unfamiliar: it is a person who threatens the familiarity of oneself. By lack of difference, the double also threatens the very definition of one’s own person.

The grotesque of the double from the first person viewpoint is virtually impossible. Any distortion of the double (i.e. one that retains very close similarity to its counterpart) makes its oppressiveness to its counterpart even worse. Again, the possibility exists to oscillate in the indecision between the objective ludicrous and the subjective uncanny when observing a person who tries to avoid one’s double. The only example to be found among these three is in Poe’s “William Wilson”, namely the childish narcissism observable in him as a grown man.

The short story “Der Sandmann” only uses the double as a mark of cognitive uncertainty enhancing other uncanny notions and as a narrative device to postpone its

disturbing climax. While the double is a significantly uncanny figure for the person or character whose double it is, a set of doubles that a narrator or protagonist confuses have to be connected with some additional uncanniness to summon the respective feelings. The uncertainty of who one is dealing with is not uncanny *per se* (cf. the difficulty of recognizing identical twins from one another). Thus, in Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann", it is not really the similarity between the lawyer Coppelius and the barometer-dealer Coppola that is uncanny.

In the letters that open the story, Nathanael portrays Coppelius first as "[an] ugly, fiendish man who consciously and purposely spoil[s] even the least joy for [them – Nathanael and his siblings]." ⁷² However, this only testifies to Nathanael's frustration, not to his finding anything uncanny about Coppelius. The lawyer is simply "widrig" (adverse), "abscheulich" (abhorrent), "häßlich" (ugly) and "widerwärtig" (repulsive) to Nathanael and his siblings, "that [they do] not want anything that he has touched." ⁷³

Later, however, Nathanael associates all possible uncanny notions with Coppelius before his double Coppola can summon any uncanny feelings: Coppelius is gradually identified with the baleful 'Sandmann'. Nathanael's mother uses the sentence "Sandmann is coming" ⁷⁴ in the idiomatic German turn of phrase meaning that "[they] cannot keep their eyes open as if someone had strewn sand in them." When thus explained that "[t]here is no Sandmann," ⁷⁵ Nathanael suspects that his mother "only denies Sandmann's presence." ⁷⁶ Thus, the familiar phrase turns into an ambivalent fear for Nathanael and he asks his nanny about 'Sandmann', who portrays him as

an evil man who comes to children when they do not want to go
to bed and throws a handful of sand in their eyes so they jump

⁷² Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 12. (Own translation of: "häßlich[er], feindlich[er] Mann, der [ihnen] recht mit Bedacht und Absicht auch die kleinste Freude verdarb.")

⁷³ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 11-12. (Own translation of: "daß [sie], was er berührte, nicht mehr mochten.")

⁷⁴ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 8. (Own translation of: "der Sandmann kommt")

⁷⁵ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 8. (Own translation of: "könn[en] die Augen nicht offen behalten, als hätte man euch Sand hineingestreut." and "Es gibt keinen Sandmann")

⁷⁶ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 9. (Own translation of: "den Sandmann nur verleugne")

out and get a bleed on the head. He then throws them in a sack and takes them to the half-moon as food for his little children who sit there in a nest and have curved beaks, like the owl, to pick out the eyes of the naughty human children.⁷⁷

Uncanny with its loose causality and casual cruelty, this fable about ‘Sandmann’ is enhanced by Freudian “anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, [which] is quite often a substitute for the fear of castration.”⁷⁸ The association of Coppélius with the uncanny ‘Sandmann’ is nearly accomplished when Nathanael finds out it is him who comes each time they have to go to bed early.

Nathanael then secretly observes his father working with Coppélius, during which the father looks somehow similar to Coppélius. When undisclosed, Nathanael is seized by Coppélius who tries to take away his eyes: “Now *we* have eyes – eyes – a lovely pair of children eyes.”⁷⁹ This ‘we’ seems to imply Coppélius’ connection with Nathanael’s father, who confirms this by standing by and loitering with Nathanael’s defense. This way, the Coppélius-Sandmann figure is supplemented by “the dreaded father, at whose hands castration is expected.”⁸⁰ If Freud can be any authority, this fatherly supplement becomes another necessary ambivalently familiar element that fuses with the repellent Coppélius to bring about the uncanny figure of ‘Sandmann’.

During another alchemistic session, Nathanael’s father is killed (possibly in an accident) and Nathanael blames Coppélius. Thus, Coppélius becomes also the embodiment of at once the unresolved Oedipal complex and the guilt that ensues upon the father’s death as a result of the subconscious wish for his death. Nathanael describes Coppélius as “an ugly

⁷⁷ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 9. (Own translation of: “ein böser Mann, der kommt zu den Kindern, wenn sie nicht zu Bett gehen wollen und wirft ihnen Händevoll Sand in die Augen, daß sie blutig zum Kopf herausspringen, die wirft er dann in den Sack und trägt sie in den Halbmond zur Atzung für seine Kinderchen; die sitzen dort im Nest und haben krumme Schnäbel, wie die Eulen, damit picken sie der unartigen Menschenkindlein Augen auf.”)

⁷⁸ Freud, 139.

⁷⁹ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 13. [Emphasis added.] (Own translation of: “Nun haben *wir* Augen – Augen – ein schön Paar Kinderaugen.”)

⁸⁰ Freud, 140.

ghastly demon who brings woe – misery – earthly and eternal doom wherever he steps.”⁸¹

Coppola is then not described by Nathanael in the two initial letters, except for identification with Coppelius.

This heavy notion of Coppelius is vaguely mirrored in Coppola, a barometer dealer with a funny Italian accent and grotesque demeanour, only because of his physical similarity with Coppelius. Instead of attempting to rob Nathanael of his eyes, Coppola offers him “[his - Coppola’s] eye”⁸² and a spyglass, or a “Perspektiv”⁸³. It is through his ‘perspective’, as John M. Ellis points out, that Nathanael discovers life in and falls in love with Olimpia. (The German word for ‘perspective’ is another *doppeltgänger*: ‘Perspektive’.) The supposed double seems so dissimilar to Coppelius – the destroyer of love and integrity – that Nathanael chooses to conclude that this “cannot [...] possibly be Coppelius’ cursed double and revenant.”⁸⁴ The only uncanny feature of this conclusion lies in the unnatural, extraordinary swiftness with which the threatening idea of Coppelius’ double is abandoned, once Nathanael acquires the ‘perspective’.

In his first letter at the beginning of the story, Nathanael is afraid of Coppola being Coppelius, however there is no opposite threatening confusion of Coppelius being Coppola. This suggests that Coppola may be Coppelius’ double but not the other way round, which makes the set of doubles as such deficient. For Nathanael, Coppola really functions as a mere icon for Coppelius and all he stands for. The truly uncanny moment arrives when Nathanael’s confusion among the ‘Sandmann’, Coppola and Coppelius reaches through Clara out of the text to the reader. Nathanael’s confusion is strictly private, and Clara and Lothar try to persuade him that he is wrong with the reader joining the safe side. Yet, Clara confuses the

⁸¹ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 12. (Own translation of: “ein häßlicher gespenstischer Unhold, der überall, wo er einschreitet, Jammer - Not - zeitliches, ewiges Verderben bringt.”)

⁸² Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 31. (Own translation of: “das sein [s]eine Oke”)

⁸³ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 31.

⁸⁴ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 32. (Own translation of: “keineswegs [...] Coppelii verfluchtes Doppeltgänger und Revenant sein könne.”)

three figures as she “at one point calls [them] ‘the advocate [S]andman[n] and the barometer-dealer Coppelius,’”⁸⁵ while the reader might (and in my first reading, I myself did) pass this part completely unaware of anything strange. This also shows Hoffmann’s ability to toy with his reader.

As Spalanzani discloses when Olimpia is being carried away by him, Coppola indeed is not the double or revenant, he is Coppelius himself: “Follow him – follow him, what are you waiting for? – Coppelius – Coppelius, he stole my best automaton.”⁸⁶ This realization is completely unsettling for Nathanael not by the uncanniness of the double, as there is actually no double at all, but by the realization that Coppola is just another way Coppelius found to inflict misery on Nathanael. Coppelius’ inexplicable, persevering intent to destroy Nathanael adds a final touch to his original uncanny effect but none to the uncanny of the double alone.

Therefore, it becomes clear that the double is not employed to exploit its own uncanny potential that lies in the partial mechanization and partial death of its counterpart. It only serves here as a device of cumulating Coppelius’ evil deeds so that Nathanael remains ignorant of the extent of his ‘Sandmann’-fatherly uncanny features till the end of the story. In conclusion, the double is only used to summon the uncanny of perceptual uncertainty and its own contribution to the overall uncanny effect of the story is in carrying the other more important confusions (namely the Sandmann-father-Coppelius figure) stealthily to the climactic finale.

A different use of the double, where its uncanny potential comes more to the fore, can be found in “Das Gelübde” (“The Vow”). Unlike in “Der Sandmann”, the view of the set of doubles is completely omniscient here. The uncanny of the set of doubles issues from the insistence of one of them that someone (his loved one) should consider them as a single

⁸⁵ Royle, 39.

⁸⁶ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 41. (Own translation of: “‘Ihm nach – ihm nach, was zauderst du? - Coppelius – Coppelius, mein bestes Automat hat er mir geraubt’”)

person. The most prominent uncanny immerses here from one double's embracing the other one, who is robbing him of identity, as an opportunity to win the love of his lady, albeit over the loss of own originality.

The story begins as a young lady of the fictitious name of 'Cölestine' arrives at the house of the mayor in the Polish town of L. to take refuge a few months before she gives birth to her illegitimate child. Some time after the birth, a soldier on a horse turns up at the house, proclaiming himself the child's father, breaking in and stealing the child to flee with it. The ensuing retrospective reveals that 'Cölestine' really is the baroness Hermenegilda of C. In this retrospective inner narrative, she postpones her wedding to baron Stanislaus of R. who subsequently takes army duty. Informed about the death of Stanislaus, Hermenegilda breaks down, proclaiming her originally denied love to him. Stanislaus cousin, baron Xaver of R., arrives shortly to deliver Stanislaus last message to Hermenegilda and is at first mistaken by the household for Stanislaus himself. "Stanislaus! – my beloved! – my husband!"⁸⁷ He does explain their error to them but falls desperately in love with Hermenegilda who, however, refuses to love anyone else than her late fiancé Stanislaus.

"Just tell me that he loves me, that Stanislaus loves me!" – quite encouraged, Xaver took Hermenegilda's hand and pressed it on his chest passionately. "Listen to your Stanislaus for yourself!" he cried and oaths of flaming love streamed [...] from his lips. He sunk to Hermenegilda's feet, she wrapped her arms around him; but when he wanted to jump up quickly and press her on his chest, he felt her pushing him away. [...] "You self-conceited *puppet!* Even if my bosom awakes the warmth of life in you, you are still not Stanislaus and cannot ever become him!"⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 294.

⁸⁸ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 296-297. [Emphasis added.] (Own translation of: "[S]age mir nur, daß er mich liebt, daß Stanislaus mich liebt!" – Da ergriff Xaver, ganz ermutigt, Hermenegildas Hand, die er heftig an seine Brust drückte. 'Höre ihn selbst, dienen Stanislaus!' so rief er, und nun strömten die Beteuerungen der glühendsten Liebe [...] von seinen Lippen. Er war zu Hermenegildas Füßen gesunken, sie hatte ihn mit beiden Armen umschlungen, aber indem er schnell ausprungen sie an seine Brust drücken wollte, fühlte er sich heftig zurückgestoßen. [...] 'Eitle *Puppe*, wenn ich dich auch zum Leben erwärme an meiner Brust, so bist du doch

Hermenegilda's remark identifies the soullessness which is required for pursuing the goal of filling a fiancée's shoes. In this respect, the double nears the in/animate confusion in Xaver.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the characters is impossible from the very beginning and it is not really caused by Xaver's being Stanislaus' double. Hermenegilda displays disability to love a real person before she becomes acquainted with Xaver: welcoming her injured fiancée Stanislaus upon his return from war and captivity, as the Polish at the time fought for liberation from the overwhelming Russian occupation, she proclaims in her undying romantic naivety that she would marry him "when the foreigners have been chased out of the homeland."⁸⁹ Desperate, Stanislaus returns to war. Hermenegilda only starts loving him after receiving the message of his death in battle. The later correction about his actual captivity is as unimportant to her as the subsequent message of his death in captivity. Therefore, Xaver's rival is Hermenegilda's mental construct of his *doppeltgänger* rather than the man himself. It is no longer 'reality' that places Stanislaus in Xaver's way, it is Hermenegilda's romantic aberration.

Hermenegilda acts like a psychically ill person, looking for her Stanislaus, wearing weeds with a thick black veil and finally having a vision during which she marries him and gives her virginity to him. The last manifestation of insanity is accompanied by a somnambulistic trance that Xaver mistakes for the longed-for expression of her feelings towards him – hence Cölestina's illegitimate child. Apart from showing two mechanically acting people under the influence of different frustrations, fulfilling each others' wishes in an empty, illusory ceremonial, this event is made uncanny by the fact that "the dates of Stanislaus' death and Hermenegilda's conception collided."⁹⁰ Even here, the figure of the double competes with other uncanny notions (like the fixed romantic idea of widowhood, the

nicht Stanislaus, und kannst es auch nimmer werden!")

⁸⁹ Hoffmann, 292. (Own translation of: "wenn die Fremden aus dem Vaterlande vertrieben sein würden.")

⁹⁰ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 308. (Own translation of: "Stanislaus' Todestag gerade mit Hermenegildas Angabe zusammentraf.")

omnipotent thought that brings Stanislaus to Hermenegilda to marry her, the return of the dead one, etc.). However, it is these that enable the full development of the double which gradually tears apart.

On the one hand, the double signifies a partial death of both doubles in a set. Xaver's rival is reportedly dead, then reportedly in captivity, and finally confirmed dead in captivity. For Xaver, Stanislaus means omnipresent partial death wherever he (Xaver) treads. On the other hand, "Das Gelübde" shows the doubles' other effect – the putative multiplication of life. For Stanislaus who 'actually' died, Xaver represents partial life. Ironically, it is only the coincidence of their being doubles that enables Xaver to try and win Hermenegilda for himself by actively reviving Stanislaus for the baroness:

He would only talk about Stanislaus and his unutterable love to his sweet bride but he knew how to let his own picture shine through the flames that he had stirred. Hermenegilda soon found herself in an egregious chaos and knew not herself how to split the two pictures: that of the absent Stanislaus and that of the present Xaver. His companion soon turned into necessity to the bewildered Hermenegilda.⁹¹

An explanation of this extraordinary willingness to merge with one's double may be attempted through Xaver's infatuation which, again, causes dissolution of the self. However, the repulsiveness of the idea of being considered and loved by the most beloved person in the world as (even just remotely) 'similar to someone else' is obvious to anyone who has ever loved. It may be considered as the least selfishness in perfect, self-giving love, the last remnant of usurping *eros* in altruistic *agape*; or as a necessity of knowing *whom* one is giving when giving oneself. Despite this, Xaver lets himself merge with his double. Nothing really

⁹¹ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 299. (Own translation of: "Nur von Stanislaus, von seiner unausprechlichen Liebe zur süßen Braut, sprach er, aber durch die volle Glut, die er dann entzündet, wußte er geschickt sein eignes Bild durchschimmern lassen, so daß Hermenegilda in arger Verwirrung selbst nicht wußte, wie beide Bilder, das des abwesenden Stanislaus und das des gegenwärtigen Xaver, trennen. Xavers Gesellschaft wurde bald der aufgeregten Hermenegilda zum Bedürfnis.")

seems to account for this “self-lessness” of Xaver’s that allows him to be selfish through not caring about his *own* status with his beloved. This acceptance of turning into an inanimate puppet, of his partial death in the double and in becoming a parasite on similarity is one of the most uncanny features not of the set of doubles, but of the character of Xaver and the ways he relates to the reality of being and having a double.

Ultimately, the plot of Xaver’s wooing tells the story of a slow suicide by the double. Covered under this notion may be a much more forceful motivation: to win over one’s double. In such a case, Xaver’s voluntary merging with his double could be interpreted in terms of the death-drive – the ‘will to power’ stronger than the pleasure principle, i.e. enough to risk death *in order to* overcome it (like in “The Imp of Perverse”). However, this explanation is still not exhaustive and the motivation for dressing in one’s double remains as unresolved here as it would always be, as “the double presents a limit that cannot be overcome.”⁹² The merge would ensure victory to both: a victory of one of a set of doubles over the other one is impossible.

Poe’s short story “William Wilson” testifies to the last sentence of the previous paragraph. Here the double is the narrator’s ‘own’, i.e. Poe does not offer a whole set of (suspected) doubles but one intruding person who threatens the identity of the narrator. “William Wilson” uses the double as an undesirable intruder, violently refused, as he signifies at all times partial death of his counterpart. Poe uses a *Bildungsroman* sujet where the double is at times vaguely explicable as a very close alter-ego, a separated twin of the main character or his split personalized conscience. Subsequently to the use of the double, there is “a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names.”⁹³ Through the first-person narration, Poe introduces his reader to the persona of someone who has “designated [him]self as William Wilson - a fictitious title not very

⁹² Botting, 93.

⁹³ Royle, 1.

dissimilar to the real one.”⁹⁴ The initials, two double-‘you’s, as if suggested that there is certain diffuseness of the I-you relationship, that to be/have a double demands considering oneself as a ‘you’ to the same extent as one considers oneself an ‘I’.

‘William Wilson’ is a man possibly in his thirties, who tells the story of his upbringing and education which is haunted by an individual of the closest resemblance and his perfect namesake (William Wilson). This other youth differs only in his whisper-like voice, his good, open-hearted temper and his being not as well off as ‘William’. The more desperately ‘William’ struggles to draw a clear line between himself and the double, the more his attempts encourage the possibility of their inextricable connection.

The double is presented as something alien within or in close vicinity of ‘William.’ Nicholas Royle mentions that “Freud sees the desire to invent the double as one which springs ‘from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism [...] which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man.’”⁹⁵ The possibility of ‘William’ actually wanting to have a double cannot be dismissed, as the displays of his narcissism betrays strong tendencies towards it. His double is not simply a person extremely similar to him by coincidence, he tries to be like ‘William’, mimicking all his living habits and idiosyncrasies. “[E]ven my voice did not escape him [...] it was identical; *and his singular whisper it grew the very echo of my own.*”⁹⁶ It seems as if the double only existed in order to follow ‘William’ around and watch his activities. Freud’s theory would also find support in the fact that ‘William’ cannot “shake off the belief of [...] having been acquainted with [the] being [...] at some epoch very long ago.”⁹⁷ In Freud’s own words, “the double is a creation that belongs to a primitive phase in our mental development, a phase that we have surmounted, in which it admittedly had a more benign significance.”⁹⁸ It is also this return to a surmounted notion of an externalized self that

⁹⁴ Poe, 101.

⁹⁵ Royle, 182.

⁹⁶ Poe, 104.

⁹⁷ Poe, 105-106.

⁹⁸ Freud, 143.

is responsible for the double's uncanny quality. The character of 'William' displays strong narcissism that reaches from his early age to the present and may actually only culminate in the invention of the double.

Upon mankind at large the events of very early existence rarely leave in mature age any definite impression. [...] With me, this is not so. In childhood, I must have felt with the energy of a man what I now find stamped upon memory in lines as vivid, as deep, and as durable as the *exergues* of the Carthaginian medals. [...] The morning's awakening, the nightly summons to bed; the connings, the recitations; [...] the play-ground, with its broils, its pastimes, its intrigues; – these, by a mental sorcery *long forgotten*[...] ⁹⁹

What the character proclaims contradicts itself to strip the grotesque of asserting one's perfection beyond the edge of reason. A simplifying ventriloquy may be of some use here: 'My childhood experiences were of course processed maturely and I remember them well, yet I have expulsed the frustrating remembrances of play-ground broils and intrigues from my memory.'

'William's' double, however, seems to be much more intrusive than the uncanny of its mere invention and existence. 'William' complains throughout the story, that in his double, his "natural rights of self-agency [are] so pertinaciously, so insultingly denied."¹⁰⁰ His double manifests itself through the uncanny of a "foreign body within oneself."¹⁰¹ That is why 'William' is simply helpless when confronted with his own invention.

It was noticeable, indeed, that, in no one of the multiplied instances in which he had of late crossed my path, had he so crossed it except to frustrate those schemes, or to disturb those actions, which, if fully carried out, might have resulted in bitter

⁹⁹ Poe, 100. [Emphasis added.]

¹⁰⁰ Poe, 114.

¹⁰¹ Royle, 2.

mischief.¹⁰²

The conclusion ‘William’ draws from the behaviour of this double keeps in line with the narcissistic duplication of oneself, as he opines that “[i]n his rivalry[, the double] might have been supposed actuated solely by a whimsical desire to thwart, astonish, or mortify *myself*.”¹⁰³ This slip-of-the-tongue formulation also betrays the self-induced nature of the double and ‘William’s’ identification with it.

Poe’s *doppeltgänger* differs from those of Hoffmann in that it is used alone to create the uncanny effects. Of course, various other notions connected with psychological doubling and splits of personality in general participate in constituting the ultimate uncanny *doppeltgänger*. Apart from the primordial double, ‘William’s’ double may be on the more practical level considered (not too conclusively) as his separated twin, as the “namesake was born on the nineteenth of January, 1813 - and this is a *somewhat remarkable coincidence*; for the day is precisely that of [his] own nativity”¹⁰⁴ and ‘William’ thinks to have known him from before which might suggest uterine memories.

The double may also be a projection, an alter-ego dwelling in the person of a schoolmate, in which case physical “similarity had [n]ever been made a subject of comment, or even observed at all by [their] schoolfellows.”¹⁰⁵ The notion of an alter-ego is supported by two quintessential proclamations that betray the character’s wish to acquire some of the good qualities of the carrier of his alter-ego. Although the double unnerves him, ‘William’ “could not bring [him]self to hate him altogether, ”¹⁰⁶ and he admits that “his feelings towards [the double] [...] formed a motley and heterogeneous admixture; - some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy

¹⁰² Poe, 114.

¹⁰³ Poe, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Poe, 102. [Emphasis added.]

¹⁰⁵ Poe, 104.

¹⁰⁶ Poe, 102.

curiosity.”¹⁰⁷

The double could also represent a split personalized scrupulous conscience, especially in cases where William checks ‘William’ from committing crime. Schizophrenia in general is then suggested in virtually all instances. One of the most striking is when ‘William’ is trying to cheat during a card game with his university fellows, when William walks in and betrays his intent and leaves. When being expelled from the company, ‘William’ is handed a coat, supposedly his own. “Retaining some presence of mind, [‘William’] took the one offered [him] by Preston; placed it *unnoticed* over [his] own.”¹⁰⁸

There are numerous situations when ‘William’, the narrator, is the only one who notices; situations when it is rather others who would notice. The episode with the coat is a critical point in creating the uncertainty whether or not William is real: if he can wear a coat and leave it behind, he must be. However, ‘William’, “the descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable,”¹⁰⁹ is remarkably the only one who notices.

The final scene of the story circles back to the beginning, where ‘William’ calls himself the “outcast of all outcasts most abandoned!”¹¹⁰ This connection is quite striking in view of the doubles’ power to elevate the tension between the forces of life (in its putative duplication) and the power of death (in the mutual cancellation of any identical quality). It is also a perfect literary confirmation of Freud’s primordial narcissism theory. ‘William’ is finally alive on his own, yet the loss of a double means an equal crisis of the self as having and being a double.

I [...] plunged my sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through
and through his bosom. [...]

¹⁰⁷ Poe, 102.

¹⁰⁸ Poe, 113. [Emphasis added.]

¹⁰⁹ Poe, 97.

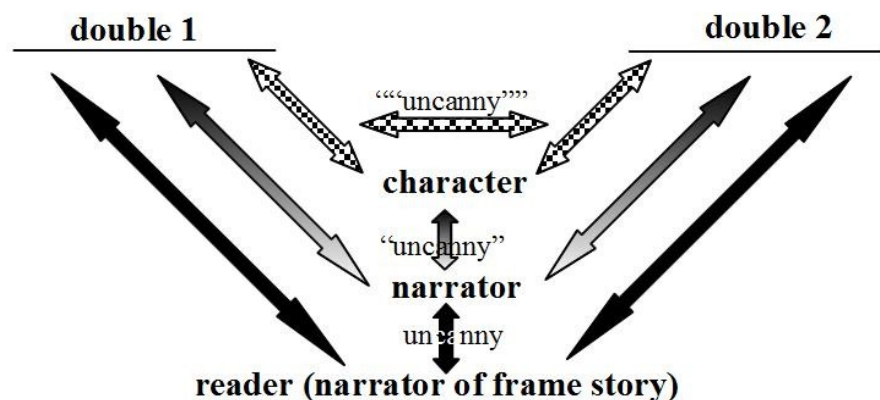
¹¹⁰ Poe, 96.

A large mirror [...] now stood where none had been perceptible before; and as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me. [...]

It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said. [...]

“In me didst thou exist – and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.”¹¹¹

The confusion of the double is the only figure so far that requires a split of attention. All other uncanny realities, i.e. settings, in/animate objects and dead/living people, so far found their split, double features on a single material base. The double is peculiar in that it finds extremely similar features on two different material bases whose mutual interchangeability is the cause of confusion for all the characters, the narrator(s) and the reader. There was no room left in the scheme to demonstrate the confusion between the two on the part of the narrator and the reader which is illustrated with the character, and the fact that the narrator may find the characters’ and the reader the character’s and the narrator’s confusion also uncanny.



Scheme 5. Mediation of doubles

¹¹¹ Poe, 116-117.

3. Telling Tell-Tales

“Every allegedly uncanny text is always a text about the uncanny.”

(Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*)

Real life as well as literary uncanny and grotesque have been subjects of theoretical inquiry which has been complementing the explorations of belles lettres. After observing various notions of the uncanny and grotesque in fiction, the focus now turns to the ways uncanny and grotesque are understood and illustrated in theory. Developing a theory of any concept means to repeat to a great extent that which has been illustrated in reality or fiction writing. This final chapter is meant to firstly provide theoretical reflection of the uncanny and grotesque, observing also briefly the development of their theoretical understanding. Secondly, Poe’s and Hoffmann’s notions of the uncanny and grotesque are compared with the emphasis on their narrative strategies, and put in the context of their play with the author.

3.1 *Déjà vu*

On the Psychology of the Uncanny, “The Uncanny”, The Uncanny, Gothic, The Grotesque

The uncanny as well as the grotesque prerequisite a situation where a single person or phenomenon requires double consideration (or vice versa; cf. the double) that creates uncertainty or indecision, respectively. Therefore, it is possible to understand them as modes of cognition that are ruled by a *déjà vu* state. This state brings about the confusion of key empirical oppositions. As a short circuit between perception and memory, it makes the unfamiliar familiar, upsetting the distinction between the past and present, old and new. It has been remarked with Jentsch that the uncanny accompanies “the intellectual mastery of the new thing.”¹¹² However, Jentsch also points out that there is another sense of the uncanny that has nothing to do with intellectual mastery *per se*, as it arises in the other direction: when the familiar is made unfamiliar. If there is the uncanny that appears in what has been called here a

¹¹² Jentsch, <http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf>.

déjà vu state, there should also be a reversed scenario.

Freud poses the issue of (un)familiarity at the onset of his essay “The Uncanny”, observing different uses of the term *unheimlich* in German. One of the most ‘transparent’ examples of what uncanny means in terms of (un)familiarity is found towards the end of the entry in Daniel Sanders’ *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* quoted by Freud:

“The Zecks are all mysterious [‘heimlich’].” “Mysterious? [...] What do you mean by ‘mysterious?’” “Well, I have the same impression with them as I have with a buried spring or a dried-up pond. You can’t walk over them without constantly feeling that water might reappear.” “We call that uncanny [‘unhomely’] [‘unheimlich’]; you call it mysterious [‘homely’]. [‘Wir nennen das unheimlich; Sie nennen’s heimlich.’]”¹¹³

Walking at the bottom of a dry pond with the feeling that water could reappear suddenly is a kind of *inverted déjà vu*. The *déjà vu* haunts our past and present and its effects are projected into the future that appears to wither once the category of time is thus disturbed. It is a *déjà vu* of epiphany because, as Royle points out, “it may appear, in some sense, the very announcement of the other.”¹¹⁴ The *inverted déjà vu*, then, haunts our present and future and its effects are projected into the past that appears unreliable and irrelevant. This *inverted déjà vu* state accompanies the other uncanny Jentsch talks about: the uncanny of “that which man himself semi-consciously projected into things from his own being [or his memory] now begins again to terrify him in those very things [and] he is not always capable of exorcising the spirits which were created out of his own head from that very head.”¹¹⁵

These states combine frequently to bring about uncanny and grotesque effects. For instance, the appearance of a spectral house with an indigenous atmosphere in “House of Usher” combines the ‘other’s announcing itself’ of the *déjà vu* and the ‘returning projections’

¹¹³ Freud, 129. [Emphasis added.]

¹¹⁴ Royle, 181.

¹¹⁵ Jentsch, <http://art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf>.

of *inverted déjà vu*. In “The Oval Portrait”, this overwhelming combination even makes the narrator close his eyes for a minute after first glancing at the young woman’s lively face. Seeing someone’s double is a perfect example of a *déjà vu*-like experience and seeing one’s own double means experiencing oneself as a *déjà vu*. On the other hand, fear of the return of the dead bears a strong notion of *inverted déjà vu* as the previous experience of life in the current dead-body. For instance, the simultaneous experience of watching Mr. Valdemar’s stirless lips and hearing a voice coming from them is very well comparable to the fulfilled fear of water soaking up through the ground of a dried-out pond one is walking across.

Nicholas Royle in his *The Uncanny* asserts that “[e]very allegedly uncanny text is always a text *about* the uncanny”¹¹⁶. In language, there can never be a meta-level detached from it entirely: it becomes the tool of its own description; and the same applies to the uncanny. Any literary-theoretical reading of a text of uncanny and grotesque is a constant search for the meaning of these words as well as of the concepts hidden behind them.

Freud’s attempts to describe the uncanny fails and his essay “‘The Uncanny’ is generally recognized as the text in which he most thoroughly finds himself caught up in the very processes he seeks to comprehend”¹¹⁷ as he “himself cannot control the uncanniness of his material or of the very process of writing.”¹¹⁸ According to Royle, Freud’s essay is a telling example of the way “[u]ncanny overflows psychoanalysis.” He then observes that “[a]nother name for uncanny overflow might be deconstruction,” as deconstruction shows “how the strange and even unthinkable is a necessary condition of ... [the] familiar.”¹¹⁹ This realization that the uncanny is always at work may have been one of the impulses for Royle to visibly stretch the boundaries of an academic publication to accommodate the uncanny.

¹¹⁶ Royle, 18-19.

¹¹⁷ Royle, 8.

¹¹⁸ Royle, 13.

¹¹⁹ Royle, 24.

His approach to the uncanny is rather literary than scholarly, at times even experimental in its literariness, and indeed, whenever the more scholarly approach is adopted, and Royle engages too much in the very mechanism he himself has been working on exploring, i.e. in the narrative telepathy, he, like Freud (greatest telepathic medium of the 20th century), becomes entangled in the uncanny. In his chapter on doubles, Royle gets nearest to his wisely chosen ideal of explaining uncanny through uncovering its agency in the very process of writing about it. In this chapter, Royle speaks for himself when describing his relationship to his namesake with whom he often becomes confused: there is no telepathy involved, no ventriloquy of fictional characters, no *déjà vu* to impose on the reader, the way Freud does in “The Uncanny” when summarizing “Der Sandmann”. As uncanny is a mode of perception, the autobiographical proves here to be the most effective explanation through relating a first-hand experience.

Nevertheless, Freud is surely not wrong in observing “*that many things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life are not uncanny in literature, and that in literature there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life.*”¹²⁰ It may have come of course of the uncanny’s nature as a mode of perception loaded with the recipient’s projections and primordial apperception that literary authors became the first ones to address the concept and until American deconstructionists proclaimed that “‘criticism is a part of the world of letters’ (not a mere service done to literature), and that it ‘has its own mixed, philosophical and literary, reflective and figural strength’”,¹²¹ adopting tools indigenous to the concepts they were examining, literary authors were the only ones who addressed it right.

The relationship between imaginative fiction and academic literature may, again, be construed as that between *déjà vu* and its inverted counterpart: imaginative fiction announces itself, producing the strange feeling of uncanny familiarity with its settings, objects, characters

¹²⁰ Freud, 155-156.

¹²¹ Martin Procházka, *Literary Theory: An Historical Introduction*, (Praha: Karolinum, 2008), 101.

and plots; while reading academic inquiry means seeing more clearly the effects that have only been sensed subliminally like the possibility of water in a dried-out pond.

3.2 Spasms of Graphomania

The Uncanny and Grotesque of the Self in the Short Stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann and E.A. Poe

When considering the ideas Hoffmann and Poe themselves had of the uncanny and grotesque and the ways they expressed them in their literary work, first thing one should note is perhaps the fact that they are both rather authors of Botting's Gothic mode. In their writing, "[p]sychological, rather than supernatural forces became the *prime movers* in worlds where individuals could be sure neither of others nor of themselves."¹²²

The uncanny of all phenomena that have been observed to make the Long Story Short chapter stems from this subverted psychological deity. The extent to which the author lets the autonomous psychological forces surface from his stories makes the first basic difference between Hoffmann and Poe. The other prominent difference to be mentioned here is in the predominate narrative strategy.

A generation before Poe, Hoffmann is still very much in touch with the Gothic genre and compared to Poe, his stories seem to be populated and equipped in a rather generic way. This begins with the settings. In "Das Majorat", we are presented with "the foundations of a large castle"¹²³ that has never been finished which are contrasted to the partly ruined and never re-built old castle. Hoffmann's unfinished new castle is a metaphor of the *fundamental incompleteness* identified in the settings of both authors, however its effect is still external to the minds of characters. On the other hand, there is Poe with his "Cask of Amontillado" or "Tell-Tale Heart" taking place first and foremost in the narrators' minds, where the incompleteness does not haunt by its distant presence but drives the plot, as the mind locks in itself the dramatic unity of place and thought, as it were.

¹²² Botting, 12. [Emphasis added.]

¹²³ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 195. (Own translation of: "die Fundamente eines großen Schlosses")

The situation is different with the in/animate confusion. The authors change places: Hoffmann uses the inanimate in situations where it poses a threat to the self of the individual in “Das öde Haus” and “Der Sandmann”, whereas Poe uses it without this endangerment to invite feelings of grotesque more readily; for example in “The Man Who Was Used Up” where his use of this confusion directly critiques the society which allows that “[m]odern technology ‘revives’ unutterably sorry humanity to create a public celebrity”¹²⁴ (an exalted army general is discovered to consist mostly of prosthetic body parts). It is true that Hoffmann’s automaton Olympia poses the same critique with even greater impact on the society, however his stories pay much more attention to developing strong emotional attachments that dissolve in an uncanny vacuum when their objects are proved inanimate.

In the uncanny of death and sleep, it is Poe who is closer to the self, as his death merges with sleep much more directly – Monos and Una die to lead an afterlife conversation which gradually withers into the unconsciousness of sleep. Both the relationship between the characters and death and between death and sleep are much closer than e.g. the death of the somnambulous servant Daniel in “Das Majorat”, where the uncanny lies in the mysterious relationship between sleep and death and in encounters with the servant’s ghost, rather than stemming from the closing in of the unconscious of sleep and death.

Hoffmann also uses *doppeltgänger* rather generically both in “Der Sandmann” and “Das Gelübde” – his doubles never meet and they are heavily loaded with other uncanny notions. He uses his doubles instrumentally to convey other uncanny notions. Poe, on the other hand, uses his doubles (or at least that in “William Wilson”) to introduce his “[p]lay with the reader which [he] explains as a romanticist free play of imagination”¹²⁵ as he exploits

¹²⁴ Zdeněk Hrbata et Martin Procházka, *Romantismus a romantismy*, (Praha: Karolinum, 2005), 152. (Own translation of: “Moderní technika ‘oživuje’ nevýslovnou lidskou ubohost a vytváří tak společenskou celebritu.”)

¹²⁵ Hrbata a Procházka, 153. (Own translation of: “Hra se čtenářem, kterou Poe vykládá romanticky, jako svobodnou hru imaginace[...]”)

the twofold identical nature of the double to maintain confusion whether or not the doubles are 'real'.

This play has to do with the other concept observed here, the grotesque. Geoffrey Harpham opens his article identifying first principles of the concept by saying that “[t]he grotesque is the slipperiest of aesthetic categories.”¹²⁶ It varies from the original late ancient grotesque of outlandish over-ornamentation, over Hugo’s ideas of it as the tool of truthful mimesis (“Preface to *Cromwell*”) and Steig’s already mentioned concept of the uncanny checked by the ludicrous over to a conscious play with the reader (which Poe’s calls the arabesque).¹²⁷

If any of these kinds is prominent in Hoffmann’s and Poe’s stories of the uncanny, then it quite logically is the grotesque as the uncanny or disgusting checked by the ludicrous. In Poe, it may be observed more often; e.g. in “The Tell-Tale Heart” narrator’s insistence on his skill and canniness; the final grave-scare of “The Premature Burial” narrator or the petty pub-boasting concerns of the narrator in “A Descend into the Maelström”. Feelings of grotesque may arise with the wedding proposal of the insane baroness in “Das öde Haus” or with Olimpia’s ugly feet clapping down a flight of stairs in “Der Sandmann” in Hoffmann’s stories. There might be more such instances in both authors’ short stories that have been considered here. All of them share the quality of certain detachment and in this type of the grotesque, it is distancing that decides between the uncanny (that directly threatens one’s self through its enigmatic confusion) and the grotesque (that subverts the idea of reality by an indecision between the inner and the outer interpretation).

However, the grotesque of the arabesque play with the reader is also very frequent with both writers. Hoffmann predominately uses multiple narrators, like in “Der Sandmann”, where there are three narrative voices two of whom epistolary, and intricate narrative

¹²⁶ Geoffrey Harpham, “The Grotesque: First Principles”, 14 Nov. 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/430580>>.

¹²⁷ Hrbata a Procházka, 153.

situations, like that of “Das Goldene Pot”, to force the reader into constant awareness of the narrator and change of narrative voices. One of the very intricate narrative devices is his use of the traveling enthusiast named Theodor in numerous stories. Apart from being Hoffmann’s middle name, Theodor is also the Greek version of the Hebrew ‘Nathanael’,¹²⁸ which makes the protagonist of “Sandmann” into another Hoffmann’s literary alter-ego. These overlaps into reality find one of their best instances in “Das Jesuitenkirche in G.” when the enthusiast is receiving a manuscript of a very peculiar painter’s life confession from a professor:

“The author of *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* [a collection of short stories by Hoffmann, where among others “Das Goldene Topf” appears] would have trimmed it and had it printed right away, which need not be feared from you, I trust.”

Professor Aloysius Walther knew not that the traveling enthusiast himself was standing before him, so I can give you, kind reader, the brief story [...]”¹²⁹

Poe, on the other hand, uses single first person narrators with a very out-of-place point of view, like the “The Tell-Tale Heart” narrator whose “compulsive storytelling”¹³⁰ motivated by his need to explain his crime and claim himself sane, renders the story uncanny. Another such narrator is found in “Ligeia”. His opium tinged perceptions discredit his tries to describe a creature of dubious features as beautiful, as he betrays his effort to justify his adoration quoting Bacon: “There is no exquisite beauty without some *strangeness* in the proportion.”¹³¹ However, he finds the key strangeness in too many features of his beloved: her forehead is of “commanding extent and repose” and “gentle prominence” above the temples, i.e. too large and wide for a woman; her nose is “aquiline” resembling those of “the graceful medallions of

¹²⁸ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke* [Gerhard R. Kaiser’s sequel], 410.

¹²⁹ Hoffmann, *Nachtstücke*, 119. (Own translation of: “Der Verfasser der *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* hätte es eben nach seiner tollen Manier arg zugeschnitten und gleich drucken lassen, welches ich nicht von Ihnen zu erwarten habe.” / Der Professor Aloysius Walther wußte nicht, daß er wirklich den reisenden enthusiasten vor sich hatte, [...] und so gebe ich Dir, mein günstiger Leser! des Jesuiten-Studenten kurze Erzählung[...])

¹³⁰ Royle, 12.

¹³¹ Poe, 49.

the Hebrews,” i.e. crooked in a manly way; her upper lip is short, her lower lip rests in “voluptuous slumber”, i.e. she probably has an overlap, etc. Here, Poe’s arabesque assembles a grotesque creature while also making a meta-textual commentary on the methods of bad art.

These compulsions to tell that combine with the grotesque and meta-textual critique of art are only matched by Hoffmann’s study of the compulsion to write that runs the story of “Das goldene Topf” where the art of scribal copying of grotesquely ornamental foreign scripts opens a gateway to a world where numerous grotesque events and objects appear, as well as to meta-artistic confusion between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’. The narration then crosses the border between reality and fiction as the narrator claims affinity to the fictional world he is describing, replaces his protagonist and gains access to the ‘fictional’ world his protagonist used to frequent.

This winsome diffusion of the borders between the real world and the fictional one which Hoffmann attempts very successfully at the end of what I have been unwittingly inclined to call ‘*his story*’ rather than ‘his short story’, “Das goldene Topf”, is an instance of the most artistic *because* most natural grotesque, for, as Gerhard Mensching says, “[t]he hallmark of the grotesque in the realm of the fantastic is the conscious confusion between fantasy and reality.”¹³² Such confusion even turns into a necessary condition if Thomson’s proposition that “[t]here is nothing abstract about the grotesque” be considered valid. Thus, in “Das goldene Topf” writing finally merges with experience.

¹³² Thomson, *The Grotesque*, 3 March 2009
<http://davidlavery.net/grotesque/major_artists_theorists/theorists/thomson/thomson3.html>.

4. Conclusion?

“A good story is one that knows that it has to end, but insists on not ending too quickly, on going on a journey that ends in its own fashion, on its own terms.”
(Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*)

This work’s goal was to bring together and compare selected short stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann and E.A. Poe in respect to their uses of the uncanny and grotesque. The term ‘use’ here entails the ways of producing and employing uncanny feelings. The production of these feelings occurs in the form of the narrator’s or character’s relationships to their environment and other fictional characters in it and its further employment, sustenance or gradation are achieved through narrative strategies.

The inquiry in here proceeds inward from the plain perceptual confusion towards confusions that directly endanger the self, which is the focal point of the work. Thus, settings are examined first and their formation is attributed to either the generic Gothic of uncanny/grotesque *sites* or to the modal Gothic of uncanny/grotesque *perceptions* and *apperceptions* of their mediators. Settings are realms to be negotiated in the mind and their constitutive feature is *fundamental incompleteness*. Grotesque appears here in the sense of over-ornamented design that has no reasonable foundation.

Closer to the self, this perceptual confusion combines with the in/animate uncertainty in relationship to *personal entities* whose humanity is being contested. The inanimate confused for human becomes a playground where the self projects its needs. Upon learning the truth, disappointment sets in from the actual back-circuiting narcissism taken for reciprocated love. Grotesque is in this case a matter of gaining distance from the afflicted self and seeing the ludicrous of the situation.

Yet a closer endangerment of the self is posed by the unconsciousness of death and death-like experiences, e.g. sleep; and the uncanny attractiveness of death in the death drive. Here, the uncanny lies in the familiarity of death as prenatal/every night experience of the

unconscious and the self's capability of seeing potential for itself in death. The grotesque is then only observable in some manifestations of the death drive if, again, viewed with detachment.

The most complex and intriguing figure of the double comprises the the previous threats to the self: perceptual uncanny of similarity to oneself, reduction of oneself to a copy, and the sense of being robbed of one's own life by the double. The double's distinctly own uncanny feature is then in its primordial origin described by Freud.

In relating these uncanny and grotesque particularities, Hoffmann seems to rather use intricate first/third-person omniscient (dis)integrated narrators and complicated sujets that utilize letter-writing, retrospective, narration within narration, and multiple narrators. Poe, then, seems to rather use the first-person integrated narrators and their rather chronological or inner-dialogue narratives.

The entanglement in the uncanny during the process of explaining it, that Jentsch, Freud and even other authors achieve, including those who had recognized it in their predecessors, seems to have found appropriate way of dealing with the uncanny in deconstruction, which has much to do with the disruption of the un/familiar confusion. Only when theory proclaimed itself part of literature and adopted its tools could it become successful. However, with the uncanny, much of the literary has been spilling over to the reality (like Hoffmann's alter-ego of the travelling enthusiast).

If the need for a tedious *déjà vu* of conclusion that introduces into the already read while bringing an abrupt death by uttering the last words, is what has been satisfied here, then

that

is

it.

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5.3 Films

The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema, Part 1, prod. Martin Rosenbaum, Georg Misch, Ralph Wieser, Sophie Fiennes, dir. Sophie Fiennes, narr. Slavoj Žižek, 2006, 150min, 13min 45 sec.

6. List of Schemes

Scheme 1.: Mediation of settings

Scheme 2.: Mediation of objects

Scheme 3.: Emotion as primary source of the uncanny in the in/animate confusion

Scheme 4.: Mediation of dead-or-alive person (character)

Scheme 5.: Mediation of doubles

7. Resumé

Tato práce srovnává vybrané povídky E.T.A. Hoffmanna a E.A. Poea a snaží se zjistit, jak v nich tito autoři dosahují pocitů tísnivého a groteskního, a jakými způsoby je dále využívají, udržují a graduji. Jejím cílem je nabídnout kontrastivní studii a) různých předmětností fiktivní reality s ohledem na jejich využitelnost pro dosažení tísnivého a groteskního; b) převažujících Hoffmannových a Poeových tendencí v užívání těch kterých předmětností fiktivní reality; a c) rolí, které v Hoffmannově a Poeově využívání následných tísnivých a groteskních dojmů sehrávají narativní strategie. Ohniskem zájmu těchto úvah je Já a jeho podíl na přivozování těchto dojmů a následné vyrovnávání se s jejich vlivy.

Práce je členěna na dvě hlavní části – první, praktickou, a druhou, teoretickou – s dalším tématickým dělením. Praktická část nese název „Zkrátka a dobře“ („Long Story Short“) a věnuje se Hoffmannovým a Poeovým způsobům vytváření prostředí a vztahů k různým formám „jiného“ i k sobě samému tak, aby měly tísnivé a groteskní účinky, zejména na Já samotné. Bádání zde postupuje z vnějšku dovnitř, tedy od prostých percepčních nejasností ke zmatkům, které přímo ohrožují Já a které jsou rovněž jedním z hlavních zájmů práce.

První podkapitola praktické části „Prostředí naruby“ („Settings Inside Out“) proto jsou nejprve prozkoumávána prostředí a předmětnosti, které se v nich vyskytují. V sekci „Fundamente eines großen Schloßes“ je formování prostředí na základě Bottingova rozlišení gotického žánru 18. století od gotického modu 19. a 20. století připisováno jednak generickému gotickému pojetí tísnivých či groteskních *lokací* (kde tísnivé a groteskní je „vlastností míst“) a jednak modálnímu gotickému pojetí tísnivých či groteskních *vjemů* a *apercepce* zprostředkovatelů těchto lokací (kde tísnivé a groteskní tkví ve způsobu nahlížení „reality“). Prostředí jsou zde spíše oblasti, které mysl „vyjednává“ s danými lokacemi a jejich ustavujícím rysem je *fundamentální nedokončenost*. Příkladem takového vyjednávání je

vypravěč „Pádu domu Usherů“, který ve svém popisu kombinuje své prvotní přeludné dojmy (modální gotický popis) s bližším ohledáváním domu (starého rodinného sídla, tradiční americké generické lokace) a snahou zjistit, co způsobilo jeho přelud (kombinace). Modální gotické pojetí se uplatňuje i v příbězích, jejichž prostředí reflektuje vypravěčovu mysl, jako například v Poeově „Sudu vína Amontilladského,“ („The Cask of Amontillado“) jehož vlhkých, hlubokých vinných sklepích vypravěč ze zášti zaživa pohřbí svou oběť, Fortunada, kterého ovšem již dříve musel v duchu pohřbít jeho naprostým zavržením. Groteskní se pak v prostředích projevuje jako přeornamentovanost bez vlastního opodstatnění.

V podsekcí „Jisté (ne)živé objekty: hřiště pro Já“ se od percepčních pochybností diskuse přesouvá k emocionálním nejistotám, tedy blíže k Já, když zkoumá tísnivé a groteskní kognitivní zmýlení v rozlišování živého od neživého a tísnivé a groteskní plynoucí ze vztahů k takovým *osobnostním entitám*, jejichž lidskost je napadnut(eln)á. Neživé předmětnosti zaměněné za lidské bytosti se stávají hřištěm, na němž Já projikuje své potřeby a získává jejich naplnění. Takový děj je možné pozorovat v Hoffmannově „Písaři“ („Der Sandmann“), kde se student Nathanael zamiluje do dcery svého profesora, Olimpie. Je možné zde sledovat, jak se Nathanael vyhýbá příležitostí odhalit fakt, že Olimpie je neživý automat, protože v takovém případě by nebylo možné ji milovat. Zjištění „pravdy“ vyústí ve zklamání nad tím, že co bylo pocíťováno jako vzájemná láska, byla ve skutečnosti spětná vazba narcisistní sebelásky a emocionální podílení se na „neživotě“. Vystává zde též pochybnost nad vlastními emocemi, které jsou jedním ze základních nástrojů sebeurčení a orientace ve společenském prostoru. Je tedy možné usoudit, že nejistota mezi živým a neživým nakonec vytváří pocit tísnivého ve vztahu k vlastním emocím – jakousi meta-emoci tísnivého. Groteskní je zde pak možné docílit získáním odstupu od postavy pocíťující tísnivé, což lze ilustrovat například tím, že dokud čtenář neví o Olimpiině pravé podstatě, může jen ve sjednocení s protagonistou tušit cosi „divného“, po tomto odhalení však považuje celou

situaci za „legrační“ ve významu „podivně zábavnou“ či „směšnou“ a do Nathanaela se nadále vžívá jen neochotně.

Druhá podkapitola první části práce, „Podivní heroldi smrti“ („The Uncanny Harbinger[s] of Death“) se od tabu vztahu k neživému přesouvá k hranici tabua vztahu k mrtvému, tedy k ještě bližšímu ohrožení Já. Sekce „Zemřít, spát“ („To Die, to Sleep“) se zabývá různými formami smrti a zkušenostmi smrti blízkými, jakož i Freudovským „pudem smrti“. Na prvním místě zde figuruje spánek jako každodenní zkušenost nevědomí a představa hrobu spojená s nevědomím a prenatalními vzpomínkami, které nejlépe odhaluje „Hovor Monose a Uny“ („Colloquy of Monos and Una“) – rozhovor duší manželů, kteří se setkávají v hrobě. Smrt není vnímána jako *ultima linea rerum*, je zde stavem, v němž se postupně dostavuje neutralizace veškerých *duševních* známek života – ve smrti se rozpouští i láskyplný vztah manželů, pro které smrt není radikálním oddělením, nýbrž zahrnutím jejich lásky, splynutím jejich Já, do vševládne apatie nevědomí. „Fakta v případě pana Valdemara“ („Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar“) pak nahlíží na problematiku návratu mrtvých, kdy ve zhyponotizovaném umírajícímu Valdemarovi zůstává život jen v podobě věty „Jsem mrtvý!“, která vychází z jeho nehybných úst. Téma pudu smrti se objevuje mj. v „Démonu zvrácenosti“ („The Imp of the Perverse“), jehož protagonista zavraždí člověka „jen proto, že se to nemá,“ – nedostížen pak svou výhrou nad společností získává pocit moci (pud smrti se projevuje touhou po moci...), ale nakonec je jeho Já schopno sledovat vlastní skázu, jen aby udělalo další věc, které se nedělá – protagonista se sám udá (... ale i nutkáním opakovat silnějším než princip slasti). Groteskní se zde projevuje opět jen v případě odstupu, zejména v případě projevů strachu ze smrti či pohřbení za živa („Předčasný pohřeb“ „The Premature Burial“) - když se protagonista probudí v posteli tvaru rakve a vyděšeně křičí strachem. Není to jeho strach ze smrti, ale jeho náhlý přehnaný projev života, který vyděsí jeho okolí: groteskní se projevuje jako rozporuplný strach z živého či forem, které na sebe život

„svévolně“ bere.

V poslední sekci první části práce zvané „*Doppeltgänger: Zdvojit a nechat zdvojovat*“ („*Doppeltgänger: Double and Let Double*“), se práce dostává k nejvýrazněji tísnivé figuře dvojníka. Dvojnictví má v příbězích funkci nositele všech předešlých nejistot: vyvolává percepční zmatek zdánlivým rozdvojením jednoho, nastoluje dojem neživosti v důsledku zdánlivé možnosti být zkopírován (tedy stát se kopií), a vždy částečně usmrcuje svůj protějšek a je jím částečně usmrcován. Vlastní tísnivost dvojnictví tkví ve Freudovské primitivní narcisistní snaze vytvořit si dvojníka jako popření síly smrti. V Hoffmannově „Piskaři“ funguje dvojník Coppola jako pouhou ikonou [ve smyslu znaku] člověka, který se pro Nathanaela stal ztělesněním dětského strachu, nevyřešeného Oidipovského komplexu, viny z něj a obavy z kastrace, ikonou právníka Coppelia. Na úrovni vypravěčské pak legrační Ital Coppola slouží k odložení dalších frustrací odvedením pozornosti ze svého dvojníka, dokud se neukáže, že Coppola je vlastně Coppelius. Vlastní dvojnická tísnivost tak těmto domnělým dvojníkům chybí.

Naproti tomu v Poeově „Williamu Willsonovi“ patří dvojník (další William Willson) přímo vypravěči, který svými domněnkami a činy podporuje primitivní narcisistní potřebu mít dvojníka, který by věnoval svou pozornost jeho životu, což ovšem nevyvrací dvojníkovu existenci. Poe však používá různé druhy rozdělení osobnosti, aby nastolil tuto nejistotu: William by mohl být jen alter-ego, dvojče, či oddělené personifikované svědomí, atd. Vypravěč William nakonec svého dvojníka zabije, aby ten ze zrcadla Williamovi sdělil, že v něm zabil sám sebe. William pak bloudí po Zemi bez klidu, protože jakožto dvojník nemůže člověk plně existovat ani s and bez svého dvojníka.

Na figuru dvojnictví navazuje druhá část práce nazvaná „Výmluvné příběhy“ („*Telling Tell-Tales*“) podkapitolou „*Déjà vu*“. Toto selhání kognice lze chápat jako rozdvojení zkušenosti na složku minulosti a přítomnosti, které společně narušují lineární vnímání času a

ohrožují budoucnost. Jde také určité zjevení, jelikož se podle Roylea v *déjà vu* předmětnosti „oznamují“, což souvisí s Jentschovskou tísnivostí učení se znát nové věci. Tísnivost však vyvstává i v kontaktu se známým, které se začne zdát neznámým. Freud při svém pátrání po významu slova „unheimlich“, „tísnivý“, naráží na pasáž odhalující nejasnost v jeho významu: dva mluvčí německého jazyka se v podstatě shodnou, že pro jednoho znamená „heimlich“, „tajný“, to samé co „unheimlich“, přičemž pocit, který každý z nich označuje jiným morfologickým opozitem, je prý možné pocítit, když jde člověk po dně vyschlého rybníku a obává se, že se voda může kdykoliv znovu objevit. Pro takový případ cítění dvojakého, které se zakládá na možnosti, tedy na přítomném a budoucím, které nebere v potaz minulou zkušenost, je v této kapitole postulován a nabídnut koncept *obráceného déjà vu*, který se doplňuje se svým protějškem. Tyto koncepty jsou v součinnosti nabídnuty k dalšímu osvětlování konceptu tísnivého.

Literární teorie věnující se tísnivému z velké části selhávala v jeho vysvětlení. Například Freud, jak poznamenává Royle, se ve své eseji stává obětí konceptu, který se snaží vyvětlit, a činí z ní příklad toho, jak tísnivé přetéká psychoanalýzu. Royle pak klade rovnítka mezi toto přetékání tísnivého (jakožto současné existence známého a neznámého v předmětu) a dekonstrukcí (jakožto událost odhalování neznámého v srdci známého), která jediná je schopna tísnivé objasnit. Je také zřejmé, že dokud dekonstruktivisté neprohlásili teorii za součást literatury a neosvojili si její nástroje, byli jedinými, kdo mohli tísnivé správně vyjádřit, právě literární autoři.

V druhé podkapitole poslední kapitoly, zvané „Grafomanské křeče“ („Spasms of Graphomania“) se práce snaží o srovnání Hoffmannova a Poeova díla s ohledem na koncept tísnivého a groteskního, tak jak byly prozkoumány v první části práce, a o jejich zasazení do kontextu hry se čtenářem. Závěrem srovnání je možné konstatovat, že Hoffmann si počíná namnoze generičtěji při výstavbě prostředí, smrt vnímá s odstupem živého člověka a dvojníky

používá převážně k rozvinutí jiných tísnivých dojmů, než jim vlastních, ovšem v zaměňování neživého za živé vytváří i za použití vypravěče třetí osoby působivější dojmy než Poe. Poe ovšem dosahuje takových dojmů ve svých prostředích a jejich rozpolceném zprostředkovávání, svým pojetím smrti jako stavu, nikoliv okamžiku, jakož i využitím pudu smrti, a v neposlední řadě je schopen vykreslit postavu dvojníka tak, že zapojí všechny ostatní nejistoty i vlastní tísnivost této figury v podobě naplnění ambivalentní primitivní narcistické touhy po dvojníkovi.

V líčení tísnivých a groteskních jednotlivostí používá Hoffmann spíše komplikované vševědoucí (ne)začleněné vypravěče první či třetí osoby a složité syžety využívající dopisy, retrospektivu, vyprávění ve vyprávění a mnohočetné vypravěče. Poe pak spíše zapojuje začleněné vypravěče první osoby s jejich vnitřními dialogy či chronologickými ději. Významné jsou přitom v jejich díle dva druhy nutkání: nutkání vyprávět a nutkání psát, jejichž využitím například v povídkách „Ligea“ (Poe) či „Das goldene Topf“ („Zlatý kořenáč“, Poe) vytvářejí skvělou hru se čtenářem a zároveň píše svého druhu literární kritiku.

The End