

INTIMATIONS OF AMBIGUITY:
THE NARRATIVE TREATMENT OF THE UNCANNY
IN SELECTED TEXTS OF ROMANTIC
ENGLISH AND GERMAN PROSE FICTION

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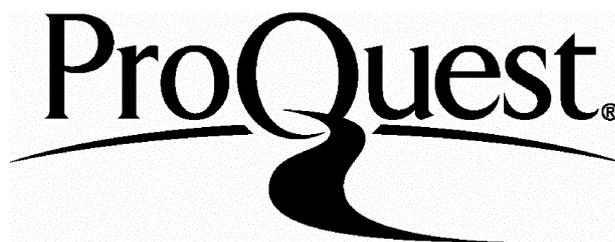
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis analyzes a number of texts in order to find evidence for two principal contentions. The first contention is that in the literature here examined stylistic and thematic elements cooperate in the narrative treatment of the uncanny. The notion of the uncanny is defined by the Freudian dialectic of the known and the unknown in 'Das Unheimliche' (1919). The second contention is that a tangible difference exists between the English and the German texts in respect of their narrative treatment of the uncanny.

Chapter 1 examines the dialectic nature of the imagery related to the motif of the veil in Radcliffe's *The Italian* and explores its role in the portrayal of the uncanny. Chapter 2 analyzes Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* and demonstrates how the text is destabilized by a tripartite compression of genres. The subject of Chapter 3 is Hoffmann's *Der Magnetiseur* and explores how a peculiar montage of narrative units unsettles the reader by raising certain expectations and then defeating them. In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which is examined in Chapter 4, the uncanny mainly resides in the nature of the creator-creature constellation and the relationship between individual and society. Chapter 5 examines Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* in which the uncanny derives from certain linguistic properties and the ambiguity of symbolic structuralization. The subject of Chapter 6 is James Hogg's *The Confessions*; here the uncanny chiefly originates from the irony underlying the narrators' communications.

In the conclusion I summarize the textual evidence of the interaction of stylistic and thematic elements in order to prove that the uncanny derives not only from the content of the narratives but also from the way in which they are narrated. I compare and contrast the English texts with the German texts to prove that there are differences in respect of the narrative treatment of the uncanny.

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PREFACE

It is, I believe, helpful if I clarify at the outset the aims of this thesis. I intend to offer detailed readings of a corpus of six prose narratives (three from English literature, and three from German literature). My contention is that the texts in question are conjoined by more than the temporal proximity of their publication (they appeared within the years 1797 to 1824). All of them are concerned with the workings of the human mind; all of them explore the complexities and uncertainties inherent in processes of human perception. Indeed, in their different ways they are all fascinated by ambiguity. In this sense, then, there is a central thematic preoccupation which engages with certain notions of the uncanny, understood as a particular kind of psychological uncertainty principle.

Moreover, I intend to argue that the theme of uncertainty informs the narrative mode of the individual works; by a number of techniques of stylistic and structural disturbance, the texts oblige the reader to share in the experience of displacement which is so central to the characters. Ambiguity of theme and of literary mode is, then, the characteristic signature of the texts which will concern me here.

I am well aware that, in literary-historical and in methodological terms, I am working within an established consensus of critical opinion. The Gothic novel in England and the German Romantic 'horror narrative' are established genres and

they emerge in response to a whole complex of energies, in both the cultural and socio-political spheres, which conspire to suggest the ways in which and the extent to which men and women are at best imperfectly aware of, and in control of, their experiential capacities. In order to discuss the particular forms which this cognitive uncertainty takes I shall employ the term 'uncanny', which I derive from Freud's work – particularly from the essay 'Das Unheimliche' of 1919. Once again, I claim no originality here: Freud's essay and the broader project of which it is part have become by now accepted tenets of our experience as modern readers. Indeed, in a sense one might even argue that in certain respects the Freudian argument has been overtaken (one thinks particularly of the work of Jacques Lacan) by much more 'totalizing' definitions of the uncanny, whereby all language is seen to be located within a complex slippage which is the hallmark of the unconscious as a force that disturbs and subverts the workings of the conscious mind. I do not pursue this sense of the uncanny in this thesis - chiefly because I find it too all-embracing for my specific textual purposes. Methodologically, I am following in the wake of Todorov and Brooke-Rose rather than of Lacan. Here again, I claim no originality.

It is, however, at the level of precise textual analysis that I hope and believe that this thesis makes a contribution. It is my contention that all the texts discussed - although they differ in literary quality - display an impressive complexity and interest in terms of the narrative effect which they have on the reader. Time and time again we find that ambiguity is not only stated and portrayed; it is also transmitted to us. Frequently there is a sophistication of narrative performance

which has often gone unremarked in the secondary literature concerned with these texts.

There is a further level at which this thesis, I trust, makes a contribution; it has to do with the comparative exercise at the heart of my project. I explore in detail texts from two different literary traditions. The upshot is an argument that clarifies points of overlap and points of divergence. As far as I am aware, a number of these comparative issues have not been seen in quite this way by my predecessors in the field. Even so, I am, of course, aware of a weighty debt to previous work. I wish to begin with a survey of literary-historical analyses which have addressed Gothic narrative in England and Germany, before then passing on to consider various methodological approaches to the all-important question of how it is that a narrative text generates ambiguity and uncertainty. My debt to other scholars is, as I have already indicated, great. The pages that follow acknowledge it.

INTRODUCTION TO GOTHIC PROSE LITERATURE AND SURVEY OF CRITICAL APPROACHES

1. The Gothic in Romantic Prose Fiction

In order to provide a literary–historical and theoretical context for the inquiry at the heart of this thesis, this introduction undertakes to survey some well-known territory. In the period from the late 18th century to the 1830s, in Germany as well as in Britain, a mode of fictional prose suggesting or even claiming the existence of the supernatural experienced a notable boom. One of its distinguishing features is the generation of fear and uncertainty as the dominant reader response. Manifestly the supernatural had figured in imaginative literature long before the late 18th century, but what is perhaps particular to the period which concerns us here is the sheer intensity of imaginative interest in the supernatural and its unprecedented popular dissemination. This dynamism, assisted by the ever increasing book market and the introduction of circulating libraries, with which it conquered an constantly growing readership, and which in turn again accelerated the production of similar literature, is remarkable, and its impact on the evolution of literature up to the present day is beyond dispute.

1.1. The English Gothic Novel

In Britain this literary phenomenon is commonly and conveniently called 'the Gothic novel'. Frederick S. Frank estimates in the preface of his guide to the English Gothic novel that no fewer than 4,500 to 5,000 'novels of the Gothic

variety' were published in the period from 1764 (the appearance of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* which, by virtue of its subtitle, *A Gothic Story*, is commonly held to establish the genre) to 1820 (when Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* was published, marking the end of the era of the Gothic novel).¹

The Gothic novel is regarded as the receptacle of the influence of various spine-chilling literary currents, among them the Jacobin novel. The Jacobin novel exploited the theme of the ambiguous and claustrophobic relationship of the hunter and the hunted, which also became a principal Gothic concern, and, at one level, it was a vehicle for sending a political message to its readers; implicitly or explicitly it advocated social reforms to remedy the social injustice it depicted. Traces of its political commitment arguably reside in many Gothic novels; and it can be said that the Jacobin novel and the Gothic novel overlap in several instances. Examples are the novels of Thomas Holcroft (*Anna St Yves*, 1792), Mary Wollstonecraft (*Mary, a Fiction*, 1788, and *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman*, unfinished but published posthumously in 1798), and William Godwin (*Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, 1794, and *St Leon*, 1799). The two latter authors are of particular importance as the parents of Mary Shelley.

The writings of this couple also inspired Charles Brockden Brown in North America who sought to develop a distinctly American literary style in his pursuit of the Gothic. His Gothic romances *Wieland* (1798), *Arthur Mervyn* (1799–1800), *Ormond* (1799), and *Edgar Huntly* (1799) testify to a brief but intense period of creativity. Brown was to exert a literary influence on his fellow-Americans Poe, Melville, Irving, and Cooper. As an outspoken opponent of Gothic superstition, his technique was the 'supernatural explained' (a technique very much associated with Ann Radcliffe) in which the allegedly preternatural is ultimately shown to be

¹Frederick S. Frank, *The First Gothics: A Critical Guide to the English Gothic Novel* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), p. ix.

susceptible of rational interpretation. The Gothic elements in his novels include murder, insanity, sexual aggression, secret orders, the persecution of the individual, and religious fanaticism. Significantly Brown gives the Gothic treatment to real-life events by basing *Wieland* on an actual family tragedy which occurred in New York in 1781 where a state farmer by the name of John Yates, in a fit of religious fanaticism, murdered his wife and four children. His writings were read and admired by Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, and her father William Godwin. The Gothic became temporarily an attractive mode to the Shelley–Byron circle, but while Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) has probably become the most famous Gothic novel ever, Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Gothic novels, *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St. Irvyne* (1811), are largely forgotten now.

Further influences on the Gothic novel are Jacobean revenge tragedies and Shakespearean drama (in particular *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*), with their use of ghost characters, and the sentimental novel, of which Samuel Richardson's novels are the classic examples. His *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747/1748) focus on the plight of the threatened virgin — a theme which was to be extremely popular with the Gothic novelists, giving the genre its unmistakable sexual charge.

The Gothic literary phenomenon was preceded by a Gothic revival in architecture. Before the Gothic building became a recurring motif in the novel, it was revived as an architectural design which defiantly deviates from the norms of classical aesthetic ideals. The importance of a mysterious atmosphere, full of hidden, dark spaces which invite the imagination to conjure up the fantastic, the bizarre, and the morbid, is characteristic of both Gothic architecture and Gothic literature.

The Venetian-born architect and engraver, Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–78), dissented from Winckelmann's ideals of Grecian symmetry and

moderation of proportion and was vigorous in publicizing his views. They are best illustrated by his *vedute* — engravings depicting Rome's monuments endowed with an overwhelming, even threatening majesty achieved by a magnification of proportion.² Piranesi also engraved the *Carceri d'invenzione*, places of imprisonment and torture of a breathtaking, sinister vastness, which remind one of Hoffmann's description of the prisons of the Inquisition as encountered by Medardus in *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815/16).

In his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (first published in the *London Magazine* in 1821) De Quincey refers to Piranesi's art to illustrate his opium-induced nightmares. De Quincey's interest in Piranesi was shared, albeit in a different frame of reference, by Horace Walpole. It is noteworthy that Walpole was also a fervent admirer of the English landscape garden which gained popularity at the time, and which sought to replace the orderliness and discipline of the French and Italian garden culture of the Renaissance and Baroque periods with a more natural, untamed style. Equally inspired by this new style, William Beckford, the author of *Vathek*, transformed his gardens into a wilderness at the centre of which he placed a building modelled on a Gothic abbey. Ironically, the building was a ruin before its completion, when Beckford commissioned William Turner to paint it in 1799. The ruin, precisely, as a site of order being overcome by chaos, was of great appeal to contemporary taste. The Gothic was held to be mysterious, numinous — a style that defied all notions of clarity, order, and control. Attracted by the Gothic, Walpole had begun the transformation of his villa, Strawberry Hill at Twickenham, into what was in his eyes a medieval domicile as early as 1748.

Symmetrical clarity was ousted by a predilection for vast and dimly lit spaces interspersed with obscured recesses, thus creating room for the unknown to

²See William Vaughan, *Romanticism and Art*, 2nd rev. edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), pp. 35–36.

lurk. Carefully designed ruins evoked not only the medieval past but also a voluptuous sense of disintegration and decay.

However, even fantasy unleashed creates conventions. The Gothic narrative is characterized by a number of recurring features; one thinks, for example, of its tendency to locate the atrocious goings-on in Spain, Italy or France. Very often the Inquisition plays a sinister role, which can be understood as an expression of contemporary English anti-Catholicism vis-à-vis the threat of a new upsurge of Catholicism in England and an Irish uprising. England was at war with revolutionary France from 1793 to 1815. The Irish Catholics, having failed to achieve emancipation under the English dominion, were openly seeking support from the French. Protestant–Catholic relations quickly deteriorated, and when the English government transferred policing powers to the radical Protestant Orange Lodges in order to re-establish order, the situation escalated. When a small troop of French soldiers tried to land in December 1796, this almost led to a Catholic victory. Only by deploying an overwhelmingly superior military force could the Protestants defeat the French. The Irish quickly took advantage and rebelled, and their rebellion was not suppressed until September 1798.³

On the other hand some Gothic novels such as William Beckford's *Vathek* (first published in English in 1786) take an altogether different direction with their interest in orientalism and exoticism. In Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) the settings comprise rural Ireland as well as an idyllic Indian island.

The Gothic reached a peak of popularity with Ann Radcliffe's novels in the 1790s, in particular with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794); in their wake numerous imitators arrived. Gothic conventions which were perpetuated by Radcliffe's novels and their imitations became so hackneyed that they, together with the deplorable

³Kurt Kluxen, *Geschichte Englands: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 3rd edn (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1985), pp. 504–505.

lack of literary quality of many Gothic narratives, incited Jane Austen and Thomas Love Peacock to satirize the genre in their novels *Northanger Abbey* (published posthumously in December 1817 with the date of 1818 on the title page) and *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) respectively.

The appearance of Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) marks the advent of a more explicitly violent and sexual type of Gothic literature. Here supernatural horror completely dominates the fictional world and does not receive a rational explanation at the end of the narrative. The scandal caused by *The Monk* escalated when Lewis, an MP, revealed that he was the author. He was forced to revise subsequent editions in order to avoid a possible lawsuit after he had been accused of blasphemy by Coleridge in his review of 1797.⁴

This new manifestation of the Gothic did not go unnoticed by various critics, and most scholars subdivide the genre of the Gothic novel into two categories.⁵ In the introduction to the volume on Mrs Radcliffe in *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* (Edinburgh, 1821–24, 1 September 1824), for example, Sir Walter Scott identifies Radcliffe as the founder of a distinct school of the Gothic. He praises her for her rationalism and her didactic use of the 'supernatural explained'.⁶ However, he also admitted that her rational explanations in the concluding chapters of her writings did not always satisfy the reader. In his article, first published in *Foreign Quarterly Review* (1827), he identifies another category of the Gothic by condemning those authors who treat of fear and the supernatural in a different and apparently purposeless and unrestrained way. This type of Gothic

⁴[Samuel Taylor Coleridge], review of *The Monk: A Romance*, by M. G. Lewis, *Critical Review*, 19 (February 1797), 194–200.

⁵Compare Robert Hume, 'Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel', *PMLA*, 84 (1969), 282–290.

⁶Repr. in *On Novelists and Fiction*, ed. by Ioan Williams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 102–119.

writing suffers from a lack of 'moral instruction' and is characterized by a 'wild and fantastic tone'.⁷ Scott regards German authors, above all E. T. A. Hoffmann, as the founders of this outrageous version of the Gothic, and, indeed, it was fashionable with many authors to claim that their works were translated or re-narrated from German originals. The designation 'German novel' often signalled a story in the footsteps of *The Monk*. A contemporary German traveller, Christian A. G. Goede, was bewildered to find the German novel held in such awe yet disrepute.⁸

James Trainer identifies *The Monk* as the protagonist of a new trend of the Gothic, magnifying the supernatural and violent, but erroneously claims that Jane Austen parodies this new trend in *Northanger Abbey*. Her character, Catherine Morland, is clearly the means to ridicule the Radcliffean Gothic heroine.⁹ Frederick S. Frank distinguishes between a 'moderate' type (following in the footsteps of Clara Reeves and Ann Radcliffe) which is characterized by a 'rapprochement between the terrific and the didactic' and the 'radical' and 'extreme' type which is concerned with 'the irrational demonic'.¹⁰ On a more positive note, Coral Ann Howells acknowledges both Radcliffe and Lewis as 'the great Gothic experimentalists'.¹¹

Not surprisingly, imitators existed who attempted to marry the popular elements of both schools, and one of them ought to be recorded here for the blatant announcement of plagiarism in the fusion of the titles of the bestsellers *The*

⁷Sir Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1 (1827), 60–98 (p. 72).

⁸Christian A. G. Goede, *England, Wales, Irland und Schottland: Erinnerungen an Natur und Kunst aus einer Reise in den Jahren 1802 und 1803*, 5 vols (Dresden: Arnoldische Buch- und Kunsthandlung, 1805), III, p. 83.

⁹James Trainer, *Ludwig Tieck: From Gothic to Romantic* (London and Paris: Mouton, 1964), pp. 17–18.

¹⁰Frank, p. xxiv.

¹¹Howells, Coral Ann, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1978), p. 3.

Mysteries of Udolpho and *The Monk*: T. J. Horsley Curties, *The Monk of Udolpho; A Romance* (London: J. F. Hughes, 1807).¹²

The most enduringly famous of all Gothic writings proved to be Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) which not only inspired various stage productions even during the author's life-time but has also spawned a large number of film versions. It has received much critical attention, particularly in recent years in conjunction with the rise of feminist criticism.

Charles Maturin's complex novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), as has been pointed out above, is held to conclude the era of the Gothic novel, but, although distinguished from the rest of the tradition by its Scottish origin and its peculiarly original quality, James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) is usually classified as a late variety of the Gothic novel.

Naturally the features which have come to be associated with the Gothic did not become extinct abruptly with a sudden demand for more realism in literature; even though the publishers of the Gothic novel ceased to mass-produce it, some of its characteristics fed into other literary currents such as the ghost story. An example is Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Old Nurse's Tale*, which was published by Charles Dickens in the Christmas supplement of his magazine in 1852, called *A Round of Christmas Stories by the Fire*. Dickens instigated the Christmas story which was usually a ghost story. He himself integrated ghost stories into some of his novels (e.g. *The Pickwick Papers*, 1837). Sheridan Le Fanu is probably the most established writer in a long and still continuing line of ghost story writers.

Gothic atmosphere also informs the Victorian novels, the most famous examples being Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's

¹²See Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (London: The Fortune Press, 1968; repr. 1969), pp. 336–341.

Villette (1853) and *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) and *Bleak House* (1853).

The interest in the psyche, especially in the abnormal and criminal psyche, displayed by the Gothic novel, coupled with a frequent fascination with unknown identities which are to be revealed towards the end of the plot is taken up by the detective story whose birth in England is credited to Wilkie Collins. His most famous novels are *The Moonstone* (1868) and *The Woman in White* (1859).

Gothic themes also survived in the modern novel of which Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* (1890) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) are only two examples. Like the more recent writings of Stephen King, many of the narratives with Gothic themes have been made into films, *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* being genuine movie evergreens.

1.2. The Gothic in German Romantic Prose Fiction

In Germany certain key developments in philosophy and intellectual history created a climate hospitable to Gothic literature. Immanuel Kant had foregrounded the question of the individual and its perception of self and other; laying particular stress on the extent to which the *a priori* categories of the human mind were inalienably present in the creation of what men and women experience and know.

Strongly influenced by Kant's acknowledgement of the creative role of the human mind in acts of perception, Johann Gottlieb Fichte went much further; he departed from Kant's emphasis on reason and reflectivity when he expounded in his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (first version published 1794) his concept of the subjective I. He affirms the absolute I as an active being which constructs, in an ultimate creative act, the objective world surrounding it. All

perception, he claimed, is the realization of the absolute I. 'Aller Realität Quelle ist das Ich' and, consequently, 'alle Realität des Nicht-Ich ist lediglich eine aus dem Ich übertragene'.¹³ It follows that the phenomenal world only exists because the I, in order to define itself, limits itself.

This doctrine was seized upon by some Romantics, in particular Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, who were both personally acquainted with Fichte, and developed into a radical subjectivism in which the artist was believed to be endowed with immense, almost god-like (or, conversely, devilish) creative power. The limits and regulations hitherto dictated by the objective world were now dismissed so that the imagination could have free rein, thus granting the individual soul unlimited freedom to create from an inward treasure store which was believed to be inexhaustible. In this way the yearning to investigate the expaenseless inwardness proved to be never-ending. The demand for drastic subjectivism on the one hand and universality and the infinite on the other hand shifted the perspective to the inner cosmos and encouraged the German Romantics to explore the depths of the mind. Dreams, visions, reminiscences, and presentiments were recognised as valid routes to the truth.

'Die Welt ist ein *Universaltronus* des Geistes — Ein symbolisches Bild desselben', Novalis wrote in his Teplitz fragment 30.¹⁴ In his fragments and studies of 1799–1800 he comments optimistically on Fichte's doctrine: 'Fichtes Ausführung seiner Idee ist wohl der beste Beweis des Idealismus. *Was ich will, das kann ich. Bey dem Menschen ist kein Ding unmöglich.*'¹⁵ However, the journey into the universe of the mind — 'nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg'¹⁶ — inevitably

¹³Fichte as quoted in Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer und die wilden Jahre der Philosophie* (Munich: Hanser, 1987), p. 191.

¹⁴Novalis, *Schriften*, ed. by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 3rd edn, 4 vols (Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1981), II: *Das philosophische Werk I*, p.600.

¹⁵Novalis, III: *Das philosophische Werk II*, p. 680.

¹⁶Novalis, II, p. 418.

led to less comforting insights. Some of the hidden forces of the mind — it could not be ignored — were of a destructive, frightening, and terrifyingly uncontrollable nature. Indeed, it could be argued that the uncanny served often to explode the (Fichtean) solipsistic system.

It is important to comprehend that German Romanticism was not only a pluralistic cultural phenomenon which sought to synthesize various art forms but also, on a much more expansive scale, aimed at overcoming the gap between being and consciousness by exploring the convergence of art, religion, natural and medical science, philosophy, and political and social thought. Science, too, exhibited an interest in secret sources of power. In his widely read *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaften* (1808), the natural philosopher and medical scientist, Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, devotes his thirteenth lecture to the then fashionable phenomenon of animal magnetism and connected manifestations which he interprets as tokens of the hidden, superior powers of the life beyond, which make a fleeting but decisive appearance in this mortal life.

The popularity of secret societies is yet another proof of the contemporary love affair with the impenetrable nexus which could shape the course of life. Just like scientific novelties, secret societies frequently pervade Romantic literature. If societies such as the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians, and the Illuminati could secretly spread benign and Enlightenment values, malign secret societies could just as well put into practice their evil designs. As it happened, most of the major secret societies set out in the course of Enlightenment ideals and, under the sway of a power-hungry leadership, descended into self-mystifying organizations with a dubious interest in alchemy.¹⁷ The genre of the *Bundesroman*, the novel of the secret society, testifies to the widespread interest this issue attracted.

¹⁷ Garleff Zacharias-Langhans, 'Der unheimliche Roman um 1800' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 1968), pp. 16–37.

These disquieting but thrilling currents find their expression in contemporary Gothic literature and its treatment of the supernatural. As a counterpart to the English Gothic novel the *Schauerroman* emerges. Counted among the more deserving exponents of the often trivial *Schauerroman*, as far as stylistic achievement is concerned, are Karl Grosse's *Der Genius: Aus den Papieren des Marquis C* von G** (1791–95), Leonhard Wächter's (alias Veit Weber) *Die Teufelsbeschwörung* (1791), Christian Heinrich Spieß's *Das Petermännchen* (1791–92), and Heinrich Zschokke's *Abällino, der große Bandit* (1794).

Even Schiller, one of the two giants of Weimar classicism, became temporarily enthralled with the subject matter of the supernatural in his powerful narrative *Der Geisterseher* (1789), though he ultimately became dissatisfied with it and left it unfinished. Various authors felt challenged to supply sequels, and *Der Geisterseher* influenced many novels, among them *Der Genius*.¹⁸

Significantly, *Der Genius*, as the most widely known novel of those mentioned above, is known to twentieth-century critics because it was read with great enjoyment by such greatly distinguished Romantic authors as Ludwig Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffmann. These two were not ashamed to acknowledge that they felt inspired by the novel: Tieck recorded it in a letter to his friend Wackenroder; Hoffmann made an enthusiastic note in his diary. Some of the inspiration E. T. A. Hoffmann experienced on reading *Der Genius* issued in his own Gothic novel, *Die Elixiere des Teufels: Nachgelassene Papiere des Bruders Medardus, eines Kapuziners* (1815/16), which was, despite various sympathetic reviews, only a limited success; a second edition was not published until after his death in 1822.

In contrast to the English authors of the Gothic, the majority of whom made use of the form of the novel as their predominant vehicle and thus enabled the critics to use the conveniently encompassing term 'Gothic novel' as common

¹⁸ Zacharias-Langhans, p. 12.

currency, German writers often cast their Gothic narratives in shorter narrative forms.

Thus Hoffmann's fascination with the theme of the supernatural breaking into the ordinary world, always with a disruptive and often with a bloodcurdling impact on his fictional characters and the reader, issued into a large number of shorter narratives. He wrote, for example, *Der Magnetiseur* (written in 1813 and published in the collection *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, 1814/15), *Die Bergwerke zu Falun* (written in 1818 and published in the collection *Die Serapionsbrüder*, 1819/21), and the famous *Der Sandmann* (written in 1815 and published in the collection *Nachtstücke* in 1816) all of which testify to his commitment to the narrative exploration of the mysterious and unsettling.

Before him other Romantics had chosen a more compact form as the vehicle of their treatment of the inexplicable and threatening. Herder had inspired a new awareness of the German fairy-tale, the folk song, and the legend, and had advocated their documentation and collection. In particular the fairy-tale was appropriated as a valuable literary form by the German Romantics. In their hands it metamorphosed from an oral tradition into a sophisticated literary form. Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, whose meticulous efforts in collecting tales from various oral sources were published as *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812/15) — the most renowned of the various fairy-tale collections published during the period — gave the *Märchen* an unprecedented status. The *Märchen* represents a major influence on Romantic authors such as Achim von Arnim, Novalis, Adelbert von Chamisso, and Clemens Brentano, who assimilated and adapted it for their purposes. The *Märchen* could not only convey the magic, the enchanting, the marvellous, and sometimes the cruel, as it had hitherto done, but also be invested with a terror of apparently supernatural origin. A highly efficient and organized form of narrative of an unprecedented perturbing calibre emerged. The critic of this short form of prose

fiction is constantly confronted with the problem of its generic classification. Sometimes it is denominated novella, but it is also often referred to as *Kunstmärchen* because of its intertextual relationship to the *Volksmärchen* convention. *Kunstmärchen* is the term I shall use for it in this thesis.

According to Max Lüthi, the European *Volksmärchen* is characterized by a simple plot which can be reduced to the functions of fight and victory, task and solution, and expectation and fulfilment. The typical range of characters comprises the protagonist (usually human, male or female) and the antagonist/s. Additional characters are often introduced to help the protagonist or send him/her to fulfil a task. They might also be introduced by way of contrast (e.g. unsuccessful brothers or sisters). The focus, though, is always on the protagonist. The characters and their environment receive little description. A magic gift or talent which enables the protagonist to succeed is an essential ingredient of the *Volksmärchen*. This supernatural ingredient, however, is merely an element of the plot sequence; it is not the subject of narrative reflection or commentary. The action progresses rapidly, and the plot usually consists of one strand only, ensuring clarity and simplicity.¹⁹

The *Kunstmärchen* shares the element of the supernatural with the *Volksmärchen*, but is more complex in respect of character development, plot, and narrative structure, as we will see in the chapter on Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*. It can contain astonishing instances of self-reflexion and philosophical rumination. Although it is in many ways informed by the *Volksmärchen*, it is not essentially a product of the oral tradition but belongs with the category of *Individualliteratur*.²⁰

The *Kunstmärchen* is most closely associated with specific narratives by Ludwig Tieck, which are significant with respect to the issue of narrative strategy

¹⁹Max Lüthi, *Märchen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1962), pp. 25–29.

²⁰Lüthi, *Märchen*, p. 5.

because they employ shifting narrative modes to evoke fear as a reader response. Tieck had previously demonstrated an interest in the sinister and morbid side of the individual psychology in his early novel, *William Lovell* (1795–96), in a way an unintentional counterpart of Goethe's more famous and optimistic *Wilhelm Meister* (1795–96). In epistolary form Tieck's novel narrates the moral decline of a young aristocrat under the influence of a stronger character who is planning William's moral and financial ruin all along. By contrast with the shorter narratives which Tieck was to publish in his *Phantasmus*, however, the anxiety which emanates from the novel is exclusively psychological and dispenses with the supernatural.

Phantasmus: Eine Sammlung von Mährchen, Schauspielen und Novellen (1812/16) is provided with a frame situation of a circle of friends who narrate fairy tales, plays, and novellas to each other and who are reminiscent of the Jena circle gathered around the Schlegel household. The *Phantasmus* collection comprises a number of *Kunstmärchen* which offer a sophisticated exploration of the uncanny: *Der blonde Eckbert* (previously published in 1797), *Der getreue Eckart und der Tannenhäuser* (first published in 1799), *Der Runenberg* (previously published as *Der Runenberg. Eine Erzählung von L. Tieck* in 1804), *Liebeszauber*, *Die Elfen*, and *Der Pokal*.

To some extent Baron Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué shared Tieck's interest in the demonic aspects of nature and incorporated them, though in a hardly unsettling manner, into a fairy-tale framework in *Undine* (1811), which is the only work of his which is still widely known today. The doppelgänger theme, a favourite with E. T. A. Hoffmann, is an eerie feature of his *Der Zauberring: Ein Ritterroman* (1813).

With Joseph von Eichendorff, whose work intriguingly combines a celebration of Romantic sensibility with the stern repudiation of its temptations, the tradition of Romantic narrative comes to an end. In his novellas Eichendorff

constantly warns against the demonic which resides in the individual's unbridled sensuality.

1.3. German and English Interliterary Influences of the Gothic

Not only popular with Mary and Percy B. Shelley, who had noted Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774) on their reading list, that sensational *Sturm- und-Drang* novel had triggered a widespread enthusiasm for German literature in Britain. In Germany the Shakespeare translations by A. W. Schlegel and Tieck's daughter, Dorothea, stimulated many of the Romantics. In his essay 'Shakespeares Behandlung des Wunderbaren', which forms the introduction to his stage adaptation of *The Tempest* (*Der Sturm*, 1796), Tieck praised the bard's use of the supernatural. According to Tieck, the 'Wahnsinn des Dichters' is a valuable source of ingenuity and creativity.²¹

M. G. Lewis, enthusiastic Gothicism and Germanist, spread the taste for German imaginative literature by translating a number of writings from the German, among them Zschokke's *The Bravo of Venice* (1804) and *Poems and Plays* by Schiller (1797), including *Cabal and Love*. The young Lewis was received by Goethe, who had already begun to be a living legend. He spent roughly seven months in Weimar (1792–93), acquiring the language and collecting German folklore material such as the lore of the Bleeding Nun who haunts his character Raymond in *The Monk*. His collections of poems, *Tales of Terror* (1801) and *Tales of Wonder* (1801), focus on the sombre side of human passion. The latter included

²¹Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, ed. by Uwe Schweikert and others, 12 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–), I: *Ludwig Tieck Schriften 1789–1794*, ed. by Achim Hölter (1991), p. 685.

translations of German poems by Goethe (e.g. 'The Erlking') and August Bürger ('Leonore').

In *Tales of Wonder* there is an interesting contribution by Robert Southey, 'Cornelius Agrippa's Bloody Book', a poem about a young man who is tempted to read in a prohibited magic book by Agrippa and unintentionally conjures up a demon who subsequently kills him by ripping his heart out. This incident is reminiscent of a similar episode in a German narrative written much earlier.²² It is based on a legend according to which an apprentice of Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535) conjures up the devil by coincidence. The German narrative is written by Leonhard Wächter (alias Veit Weber). His *Die Teufelsbeschwörung* was translated into English and published as *The Sorcerer: A Tale* (1795), a book also read by Lewis and Mary Shelley. Lewis never acknowledged that the powerful scene of Ambrosio's death in *The Monk* is almost entirely borrowed from *The Sorcerer*.

Lewis's *The Monk* also quickly reached Germany. E. T. A. Hoffmann was greatly thrilled by Friedrich Örtel's translation, *Der Mönch* (1797). It inspired him to write *Die Elixiere des Teufels* in which the main female character, the teenage Aurelie, is excited by the perusal of Lewis's steamy novel.

Die Elixiere was subsequently translated into English by R. P. Gillies in Scotland,²³ and extracts of this translation (*The Devil's Elixir*, 1824) were published in *Blackwood's Magazine*.²⁴ These extracts are preceded by a brief and not entirely correct summary of the admittedly very complex and even confusing plot, which raises doubt about the commentator's (probably John Gibson Lockhart) grasp of the novel.

²²M. G. Lewis, *Tales of Wonder*, 2 vols (London: Bell, 1801), p. 201.

²³[E. T. A. Hoffmann,] *The Devil's Elixir*, trans. by R. P. Gillies (Edinburgh: Blackwood; London: Cadell, 1824).

²⁴Review of *The Devil's Elixir*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 16 (1824), 55–67.

The first extract describes how Medardus experiences great success as an orator, which leads him to become vain, not to say megalomaniac, as the last line indicates: 'Almost unconsciously, I began to look upon myself as the *one elect*, — the pre-eminently *chosen* of Heaven' (my emphasis).²⁵ The terms 'elect' and 'chosen' have a Calvinist ring to them which is not present to the same extent in the German original. It can be seen as a by-product of the translation. After all, every translator has the discourse at his disposal which is characteristic of his own cultural background. Even a skilled and reliable translator sometimes produces effects of this nature which are not necessarily justified by the original text. Gillies might not have been a discerning critic, as his strangely wavering but appreciative appraisals of second-rate fate tragedies by now largely forgotten German playwrights suggest, but his translations were generally reliable and thorough.²⁶

The albeit contingent addition of Calvinist concepts to the English version of *Die Elixiere* acquires particular interest in view of the Calvinist discourse which permeates James Hogg's *The Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The extracts of Gillies's translation, *The Devil's Elixir*, were published along with a largely favourable review of the novel in *Blackwood's Magazine*, to which Hogg was a contributor. It may have incited him to write his fascinating novel in which the motif of the doppelgänger, inextricably linked to the theme of perception (both central concerns in *Die Elixiere*), is taken up and explored anew. R. P. Gillies also translated the less well-known *Das Schauerfeld* by Fouqué as *The Field of Terror; or, The Haunted Field* (1820). A useful overview of German literature in English

²⁵Review of *The Devil's Elixir*, p. 59.

²⁶See Rosemary Ashton, 'The Reception of German Literature in England from the Founding of *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817) to the time of Carlyle and his Disciples' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 1974), pp. 43–63.

translation, which includes also non-Gothic fiction, is given by Bayard Quincey Morgan's bibliography.²⁷

Blackwood's can be seen as a trailblazer regarding the increase of the British public's curiosity about German literature which had somewhat flagged after a short interest in German plays in the 1790s. This new rise of interest in things German was probably aided by the appearance of Mme de Staël's *De L'Allemagne* (1813). *Blackwood's* pioneering work began in November 1819, when the first part of the *Horae Germanicae* was published. Lockhart was a contributor, but Gillies claimed the authorship of most of the articles printed in this series which was devoted to German literature and which was to last until August 1828.²⁸

Coleridge (1772–1834), whose commitment to German culture is well-known, travelled to Germany to learn the language and the philosophy with the Wordsworths from 1798 to 1799. At Göttingen University he pursued the study of anatomy, physiology, and natural history. He produced a translation of Schiller's *Piccolomini* and *Death of Wallenstein* (1800), but his more important role is that of the mediator of German thought which, with its focus on perception and inwardness, represents an essential influence on European Romantic literature in general and on the Gothic in particular: The thought of Kant, Schelling, and Schubert was, thanks to Coleridge, made available in Britain. A. W. Schlegel (to whose lectures on Shakespeare given in Vienna he owed much) discovered the English dramatist as a new source of inspiration for the Romantics in Germany; in Britain, Coleridge had contributed his share to keeping the influence of Shakespearean drama alive.

²⁷Bayard Quincey Morgan, *A Critical Bibliography of German Literature in English Translation 1481–1927*, 2nd rev. edn (New York and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1965).

²⁸On the problem of authorship of the *Horae Germanicae* see Ashton, 'The Reception of German Literature', pp. 36–38.

In his notebooks (1808–09) he mentions Gothic romances of English and German origin in the same breath, thus acting as a witness to the coexistence and popularity of the English and German Gothic prose in Britain:²⁹

3449 14.23 The vicious taste of our modern Ratcliffe [sic], Monk Lewis, German Romances — Take as a specimen the last, I have read, the *Bravo of Venice*/in the combination of the highest sensation, wonder of effects produced by supernatural power, without the means — thus gratifying our instinct of free-will that would fain be emancipated from the thralldom of ordinary nature — & would indeed annihilate both space & time — with the lowest of all human scarce-human faculties — viz — Cunning — low thieves' Cunning — Trap door — picklocks — low confederacies &c/Can these things be admired without a bad effect on the mind—³⁰

With reference to Zschokke's novel, *The Bravo of Venice*, Coleridge expresses his ambivalent attitude towards the Gothic narrative treatment of the supernatural. His misspelling of Ann Radcliffe's name could be viewed as a revealing Freudian slip. As a poet he himself had thematized the supernatural and had exhibited a preference for moonlight and twilight (situations inviting blurred perception), that is, an atmosphere typical of the Gothic. His childhood reading of fairy-tales may be at the root of his fascination with the preternatural. He actually had described his poetic characters as supernatural, but they were not the conventional spectres of the Gothic novel. They are more appropriately described as metaphysical in that they are of more than physical significance, assuming a well-nigh archetypal stature. Although admiration is discernible in Coleridge's comment on Zschokke's handling of the supernatural (in the case of *The Bravo* it is 'the supernatural explained'), he is worried about its moral impact on the human mind.

²⁹See also Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought 1800-1860* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

³⁰*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Kathleen Coburn, 4 vols so far (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1957–), III, letter 3449 14.23.

De Quincey, another promoter of German literature in England, had translated Tieck's gruesome *Kunstmärchen, Der Liebeszauber (The Love Charm, 1812)*, rightly praising the author's craftsmanship.

In turn, many of the English Gothic novels reached German readers. A book entitled *Seltsame Begebenheiten im Schloße Otranto; eine gotische Geschichte; aus dem Englischen*, of which no copy seems to have survived, was probably a very early translation of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. *Die Burg von Otranto*, a translation by F. L. W. Meyer, was published in 1794. It was read by as illustrious a man of letters as Goethe.³¹ Ann Radcliffe's novels were translated by D. M. Liebeskind (*A Sicilian Romance* as *Die nächtliche Erscheinung im Schloße Mazzini*, 1792; *The Romance of the Forest* as *Adeline oder das Abenteuer im Walde*, 1792; *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as *Udolphos Geheimnisse*, 1795; *The Italian* as *Die Italiänerin oder der Beichtstuhl der schwarzen Büssenden*).³² Radcliffe's writings, next to those by Lewis and Thomas Holcroft, helped to fill the shelves of Tieck's sizeable private library.³³ A letter from Friedrich Schlegel to his brother August Wilhelm indicates that Tieck and the Schlegels read *The Castle of Otranto*:

Ferner hast Du den Walpole *geistreich* genannt. Freund! Bedenke Dich was Du thust, und wie sparsam strenge Kritiker mit einem solchen Lob seyn müssen. Wir — denn ich habe den ganzen Aufsatz mit Tieck zusammen gelesen — halten diesen Menschen für ein durchaus schlechtes Subjekt, und in der That begreife ich doch nicht wie einer der etwas so nach allen Seiten hin *unendlich* plattes

³¹See James Trainer, p. 23. In Goethe's *Sechzehn Epigramme* a verse is called 'Die Burg von Otranto'. Trainer also lists the various English Gothic novels which were translated into German to which I refer above.

³²For publications of Gothic novels in Germany see: Lawrence Marsden Price, *English Literature in Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), pp. 299–315.

³³These novels are listed in: A. Asher (auctioneers), *Catalogue de la bibliothèque célèbre de M. Ludwig Tieck* (Berlin: [n.pub.], 1849).

geschrieben hat, wie das Castel of Otranto, je etwas sagen könnte was geistreich wäre.³⁴

In 1806 Tieck met Coleridge in Rome, and Coleridge spoke favourably of him afterwards. Eleven years later Tieck visited London where he met Henry Crabb Robinson. Robinson introduced him to William Godwin, but unfortunately not much is known about any literary cross-fertilization.³⁵ Nevertheless, it can be said with confidence that Tieck was aware of literary currents in England, and that he was familiar with both the Gothic novel in England and its counterpart in Germany.

2. Critical Approaches to the Gothic

Gothic prose literature has provoked a host of critical responses in the course of time. Particularly English critics, the contemporaries of the Gothic heyday, reacted to the Gothic, thus confirming it as a distinct literary phenomenon and adding it to literary history. Freudian psychoanalysis and twentieth-century filmmakers brought it into the limelight, and the critical community of our times has rediscovered it for interpretation and revaluation, the most recent and innovative impulses deriving from feminist criticism.

The various critical approaches can be more or less roughly and helpfully categorized. One should keep in mind, though, that the following categories will partly overlap. For example, feminist criticism also deals with aspects of narrative strategy and makes use of psychoanalytical theory. The categories are also far from exhaustive but rather indicate main currents of criticism. Three points should be

³⁴Friedrich Schlegels *Briefe an seinen Bruder August Wilhelm*, ed. by Oskar Walzel (Berlin: Speyer & Peters, 1890), p. 417.

³⁵Roger Paulin, *Ludwig Tieck: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 208–212.

stressed at this juncture. First: precisely because of this overlap of approaches and because no one theory on its own is adequate for my purpose, I feel I am justified in being eclectic in my approach to the specific texts which are at the centre of this thesis. Secondly: in their different ways, a great number of the thoughts which I shall review highlight the issue of thematic and aesthetic ambiguity as an all important feature of Gothic writing. Hence it is this concept which is the red thread running through my chapters of detached analysis. Thirdly, I end this survey of critical approaches with a discussion of narrative strategy. This is in fact the briefest section in this survey because the concern with narrative strategy has, as yet, figured only briefly in studies of the Gothic. I have, however, given it the status of a category in its own right because it summarizes the approach which I shall be adopting. In the course of the enquiry I shall acknowledge previous works on narrative strategy in Gothic fiction. On the one hand this approach to the Gothic is firmly based on the critical tradition which has arisen as a response to the Gothic and makes use of established theory and terminology; on the other hand it opens the door to a new critical direction.

2.1. Contemporary Critics

The Gothic has always aroused controversy, but while in our century discussion of it has often revolved around whether it represents 'valuable' literature which deserves to be the object of 'serious' literary criticism (which, by the 1980s at the latest, it has undoubtedly become), contemporary response was primarily concerned with the moral, or rather immoral, impact of such a literature. At the time the issue of morality outweighed aesthetic objections. Some critics, however, also concerned themselves with aesthetic aspects. Critical opposition to this new and immensely

popular literature was frequently vented in magazine articles, as Victor Sage has pointed out.³⁶

While Thomas Love Peacock ridiculed not only the Gothic but the Romantic movement as a whole in *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), Jane Austen focused on the Gothic, working her humorous but hardhitting criticism into her novel, *Northanger Abbey* (written in 1798–99 and posthumously published in December 1817), by demonstrating the effect of the uncritical perusal of Gothic bestsellers on the fanciful mind of her heroine, Catherine Morland. Austen skilfully ridicules Radcliffe's strategy of suspense by deferral and the Gothic paraphernalia in general. On the one hand her hero Tilney chides the self-styled Gothic heroine, Catherine, for letting her imagination run riot; on the other hand he is sufficiently attracted to her to marry her — this is a fine parable for the attitude towards the Gothic: fierce criticism coexists with deep affection.

As already indicated above, Coleridge had moral qualms about various exponents of the Gothic. In his review of *The Monk* (1797) he showed himself particularly worried on behalf of young ladies. About two decades later Byron was to dismiss such anxieties in a letter to Richard Belgrave Hoppner from 29th October 1819. He wrote that 'the reading or non-reading a book — will never keep down a single petticoat'.³⁷ Coleridge, however, felt that women could be corrupted by novels of such 'libidinous minuteness' as *The Monk*.³⁸ As human beings have no real defence against supernatural cunning, a tale such as *The Monk* cannot exemplify a moral truth, Coleridge argued, thus alluding to the main character's ambivalent status as victimizer and victim. In addition, Coleridge found that in

³⁶*The Gothick Novel*, ed. by Victor Sage (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 10–12.

³⁷*Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols (London: Murray, 1973–82), VI, pp. 236–238.

³⁸[Samuel Taylor Coleridge], review of *The Monk: A Romance*, *Critical Review*, 19 (February 1797), 194–200. Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text.

many instances the plot of *The Monk* was 'not preternatural, but contrary to nature' (p. 196); the actual existence of the supernatural could not be denied with certainty but the characters' emotional response when confronted with extreme situations in the novel was not convincing. Coleridge also pointed out that, considering the many virtues Ambrosio displays to begin with, the speed with which his character morally deteriorated was unconvincing. Lewis was guilty of having written 'clumsy fiction' (p. 196). The style was often felt to be colloquial and banal when the fictional situation required a more elevated tone.

Scott's criticism of the Gothic use of the supernatural in some ways differed from Coleridge's position. He also demanded a moral purpose and praised the morality of Radcliffe's version of the Gothic, though not without censuring her denouements, and he strongly rebuked other authors, in particular E. T. A. Hoffmann in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* in 1827, for their unrestrained use of the supernatural. Scott was convinced that it should be employed in small doses only; otherwise the reader would be quickly satiated and it would lose its thrill.

Several years earlier, in 1824, the extracts from Gillies's translation of *Die Elixiere des Teufels* had been published in *Blackwood's*, accompanied by critical comments, probably John Gibson Lockhart's.³⁹ These comments are much more sympathetic to Hoffmann's generous use of the supernatural. Hoffmann is described as a man 'of rare and singular genius' who skilfully exploits 'the horrible' which is, after all, 'quite as legitimate a field of poetry and romance, as either the pathetic or the ludicrous'. 'It is absurdity to say that Mrs Radcliffe has exhausted this', Lockhart claims, continuing ungallantly, 'that very clever lady had not the brains to exhaust anything' (pp. 55–56). Then the sentence makes a point in defence of the Gothic which is as valid now as it was then:

³⁹[John Gibson Lockhart(?)], review of *The Devil's Elixir*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 16 (1824), 55–67. Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text.

Nothing that is a part, a real essential part, of human nature, ever can be exhausted — and the regions of fear and terror never will be so. — Human flesh will creep to the end of time at the witches of Macbeth, exactly because to the end of time it will creep in a midnight charnel-vault. (Review of *The Devil's Elixir*, 56)

In his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke had previously made a case for the value of terror and fear by connecting them to the sublime, calling their source 'productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling'.⁴⁰ As in the above quotation, 'the regions of fear and terror' affect the human psyche so powerfully because they appeal to the pain principle, and, as Burke puts it, pain is the 'emissary of this king of terrors', that is, death (p. 40). As the object of literature, the experience of pain is aestheticized. Thus modified and distanced, pain is experienced by the reader with a pleasurable thrill. This, of course, lies at the heart of the dilemma of Gothic literature. What constitutes a legitimate 'objective correlative' and what is merely a cheap thrill? This is a problem which has lost nothing of its topicality — on the contrary. Recent films like *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* have highlighted this ongoing controversy.

In order to demonstrate the universal affinity of terror and the sublime, Burke lists terms from various languages which 'signify indifferently the modes of astonishment or admiration and those of terror' (p. 58). One could add the German word 'Ehrfurcht' to his list to 'point out as clearly the kindred emotions which attend fear and wonder' (p. 58).

The Marquis de Sade, in contrast to most critics of the time, was not troubled about the Gothic's threat to moral standards, which will hardly surprise anyone. He interpreted the novels of Radcliffe and Lewis in terms of anxieties prompted by the French Revolution:

⁴⁰Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. by J. T. Boulton (London: Blackwell, 1958), p. 39. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Peut-être devrions-nous analyser ici ces romans nouveaux, dont le sortilège et la fantasmorgie composent à peu près tout le mérite en plaçant à leur tête *le Moine*, supérieur sous tous les rapports, aux bizarres élans de la brillante imagination de Radcliffe; mais cette dissertation serait trop longue, convenons seulement que ce genre, quoi qu'on puisse dire, n'est assurément pas sans mérite; il devenait le fruit indispensable de secousses révolutionnaires, dont l'Europe entière se ressentait.⁴¹

2.2. Psychoanalysis

When Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) developed and publicised his theory of the mind, the impact of his thought on our conception of humankind was dramatic. His book, *Die Traumdeutung* (first published in 1900 but written in the 1890s), was initially ignored but is now held to be one of the essential works of modernity. *Die Traumdeutung* explores the dynamics of the mind; its last chapter in particular contains Freud's theory of the mind. In 1904 he published *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens* which introduced his ideas about slips of the tongue (now designated Freudian slips), accidents, errors, and defective memory and their subconscious causes.

Freud's focus on the sexual instincts and unconscious processes as the principal driving force behind human behaviour opened up discussion of sexuality and related taboo issues. His impact on modern thought becomes visible by the way in which it has become part of daily discourse: His name is one of the few names which have become the prefix to '-ism' and which describe a whole new concept of looking at human life. Darwin had thrust upon the Western civilizations *The Origin of Species* with its claim that man was but an animal, albeit a highly developed one,

⁴¹Marquis de Sade, *Les Crimes de l'amour* (Paris: Massé, 1800; repr. Gallimard, 1987), p. 42.

when Freud was three years old, in 1859. Freud's theory dealt a further blow to religion as an agency that structures and controls supernatural experience. Former notions of the intact, autonomous self were shattered. Nowadays Freudian terminology such as repression, inhibition, fixation, and projection has achieved common-currency status. Moreover, his work has had profound influence on literary criticism, and Freud himself had a keen interest in literature, applying his theory to works of literature and using literature to substantiate his theory. His famous essay on 'Das Unheimliche' (1919), the uncanny in literature, is of particular significance for this thesis and has been acknowledged by many explorers of Gothic literature.⁴²

In the essay Freud traces the etymology of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. *Heimlich* is shown to have two different meanings. It can indicate what is homely and familiar as well as what is secret and hidden. What is secret and hidden, however, can in turn be *unheimlich*, above all when it manifests itself in outward form. And yet, even in its outward form, its otherness, it is still known to be part of the self — hence the crucial experience of ambivalence. Thus one nuance of *heimlich* coincides with its opposite. Identity and alterity are conjoined.

Freud emphasizes a statement of Schelling which is listed in Daniel Sanders' *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1860): 'Un-h. nennt man Alles, was im Geheimnis, im Verborgnen... bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist' (IV, p. 248). Furthermore, Freud quotes the following lines in the same spirit from the entry on *heimlich* in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1877):

4. aus dem heimatlichen, häuslichen entwickelt sich weiter der begriff des fremden augen entzogenen, verborgenen, geheimen [...].

⁴²*Studienausgabe Sigmund Freud*, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey, 10 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1981), IV, pp. 243–274. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

9. die Bedeutung des versteckten, gefährlichen, die in der vorigen Nummer hervortritt, entwickelt sich noch weiter, so dass heimlich den Sinn empfängt, den sonst unheimlich [...] hat. (Freud, IV, 249–250)

The meaning of the word *heimlich*, then, underwent an ambiguous development until it coincided with its opposite. Freud concludes that 'heimlich ist irgendwie eine Art von unheimlich' (p. 250).

Freud proceeds to link the uncanny to the return of the repressed. According to him, the return of the repressed is always frightening because the process of repression is alienating and transforms every affect, no matter whether originally pleasant or unpleasant, into a disturbing component. In order to substantiate his claim he analyzes E. T. A. Hoffmann's story, *Der Sandmann* (published 1816 in *Nachtstücke*), ascribing its uncanny effect to its depiction of the return of the repressed: referring the reader to his psychoanalytic theory, he interprets Nathanael's fear of losing his eyes as the fear of castration, reading the entire story as a representation of the fatal outcome of a castration complex. Nathanael's father and the advocate, Coppelius, represent respectively the good aspect (ensuring that the child Nathanael retains his eyes) and the evil aspect (threatening the child with the loss of his eyesight, that is, with castration) of the father imago. Nathanael's repressed wish for the evil father image to die results in the death of the good father. This split of the father imago into good and evil images is repeated in the second part of the narrative by the characters of Professor Spalanzani and the optician, Coppola. They create the robotic life-size doll, Olympia, with whom Nathanael becomes erotically obsessed. According to Freud, she embodies Nathanael's narcissistic complex, and his infatuation with her portrays his enslavement to this complex. Nathanael's castration complex entails a fixation on his father which alienates him from his bride, Clara.

For my purposes the key point is the link that Freud establishes between the uncanny and the repressed: the infantile complex is what used to be familiar but

what was subsequently repressed.⁴³ Its return to consciousness in adult life is so intensely and fearfully overwhelming that it results in a violent death. The nature of the conflict is prominently sexual. The fact that an underlying sexual motivation combined with the experience of the unsettling seems to inform Gothic literature in general suggests that psychoanalysis has indeed much to offer to those who explore such literature - for all the exaggeration to which it is sometimes prone.

As Ritchie Robertson points out, Freud did not notice the theme of the threat to domestic happiness that is generated from within the family unit: 'The Sandmann exists in a nursery tale, even before his real-life counterpart, Coppélius, intervenes in the family.'⁴⁴ However, the most common criticism of Freud's analysis of *Der Sandmann* focuses on his neglect of the role of Clara. Thus Ruth Ginsberg criticises Freud for ignoring the feminine aspects in the narrative and claims that woman is another source of the uncanny. The feminine is 'an incomprehensible aloof other; as the different that cannot be controlled by reducing it to a reflection of the same', it assumes a threatening aspect.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Elizabeth Wright objects to Freud's disregard of narrative strategy and textual devices and to his selective analysis of the repressed material.⁴⁶ She particularly reproaches him with misrepresenting the last scene of *Der Sandmann* so that it accords with his interpretation of the narrative.⁴⁷

Surprisingly only few critics ever concern themselves with Freud's claim that uncanniness is generated not only by the return of repressed complexes but also

⁴³See also Elizabeth Wright, *E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Rhetoric of Terror: Aspects of Language used for the Evocation of Fear*, Bithell Series of Dissertations, 1 (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1978), p. 3. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

⁴⁴See introduction to E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Golden Pot and Other Tales*, trans. and ed. by Ritchie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁴⁵Ruth Ginsberg, 'A Primal Scene Reading: Freud and Hoffmann', *Literature and Psychology*, 38, no. 3 (1992), 24–46 (p. 26).

⁴⁶Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London: Methuen, 1985; repr. Routledge, 1991), pp. 146–148.

⁴⁷Wright, *E. T. A. Hoffmann*, p. 2.

by the return of previously overcome primitive beliefs. Freud's examples for such beliefs include repetition, animism, and omnipotence of thought. I am convinced that Gothic texts challenge Enlightenment rationalization of these primary superstitions in one way or another and will demonstrate this in detail in the subsequent chapters. At this point it may suffice to say that repetition and animism are realized on a stylistic level: The repetition of motifs and occurrences is one of the most frequent devices; used sparingly it promotes unity in the text, but when exploited on a larger scale the impression of unity as an agent of reassurance and aesthetic containment is transformed into one of fatefulness and inevitability. In the resulting unity of claustrophobia, objects appear to acquire more than physical significance for the obsessed mind. The intensely slippery, metaphoric nature of Gothic language confronts the reader with the issue of animism, as it constantly intimates it on a stylistic level. In Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, for example, the use of metaphors frequently implies that the inanimate is alive. Thus the uncanny effect of the Gothic also inheres in its linguistic performance which addresses the reader's superstitious propensities of which s/he is unaware. Occasionally, Gothic language also intimates omnipotence of thought, as will be demonstrated in the chapter on *Der blonde Eckbert*. Many of the obvious trappings of Gothic fiction — particularly the fondness for underground chambers and recessed places — acquire a disturbing resonance when they are seen as metaphors for the dark recesses of the psyche.

The Gothic depends on the ambiguous interplay of psychic or inner reality and external reality. Although in his essay Freud does not acknowledge the role language plays in the tension which generates the uncanny, his achievement lies in the discovery of its anchorage in the once familiar:

Die Grenze zwischen Phantasie und Wirklichkeit [wird] verwischt [...], wenn etwas real vor uns hintritt, was wir bisher für phantastisch gehalten haben [...]. Hierauf beruht auch ein gutes Stück der

Unheimlichkeit, die den magischen Praktiken anhaftet. Das Infantile daran, was auch das Seelenleben der Neurotiker beherrscht, ist die Überbetonung der psychischen Realität im Vergleich zur materiellen. (Freud, 267)

The idea that not only repressed early childhood experiences can return from the unconscious, but also primitive beliefs of our ancestors can resume topicality and become the agency of the uncanny, will recur in the chapters of detailed textual analysis.

The depth-psychological preoccupation with mental processes and with the enigmas of the human mind is also the heartland of Gothic tales. In them the frontiers transgressed are epistemological, moral, and interpretative. Generally speaking, most critics influenced by Freud tend to read Gothic texts as representations of mental processes without strictly committing themselves to determine whose processes these really are, thus carefully avoiding an exercise in author psychoanalysis. However, recent feminist criticism has embarked on the enterprise of interpreting texts very much in the light of the author's biography, as will be demonstrated in the category of feminist–biographical criticism.

One of the most famous examples of psychoanalytical criticism is Leslie Fiedler's study of the Gothic in America, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). In the chapter on 'Charles Brockden Brown and the Invention of the American Gothic' he identifies the 'persecuted Maiden' as the 'archetypal theme' of the Gothic which is enacted on the surreal background of 'a world of ancestral and infantile fears projected in dreams'. The enduring success of the gothic fable, Fiedler claims, proves its archetypal nature. Fiedler refers the reader to a line from Walpole's play, *The Mysterious Mother*, which Ann Radcliffe quotes in *The Italian*: 'What is this secret sin; this untold tale, that art cannot extract, nor penance cleanse?' Fiedler enlightens us:

The answer in the original play is incest — incest of brother and sister–daughter bred out of an original incest of mother and son —

the breach of the primal taboo and the offence against the father! In more general terms, the guilt which underlies the gothic and motivates its plots is the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been striving to destroy; and the fear that possesses the gothic and motivates its tone is the fear that in destroying the old ego-ideals of Church and State, the West has opened a way for the intrusion of darkness: for insanity and the disintegration of the self. Through the pages of the gothic romance, the soul of Europe flees its own darker impulses.⁴⁸

Before this brief discussion of the impact of psychoanalysis on literary criticism of the Gothic is concluded, one further name must be mentioned. Having assimilated the Freudian theory of gender and the division of the psyche into conscious and unconscious regions, Jacques Lacan put major emphasis on a third concept: language. Lacan's ideas on language have played an important role in alerting critics to the issue of language and how it determines the way the human psyche and society is structured. His theory draws particular attention to the slippery nature of the meaning of language. Adopting the Freudian concepts of the oedipal complex and oedipal stage, Lacan points out that the child in the pre-oedipal state experiences itself as a unity with its mother. It is a state in which language has not yet been acquired. While still in this phase, the child enters the 'mirror-stage' in which it begins to realize itself as an individual. Lacan calls this the state of the 'Imaginary'. In this state of the 'Imaginary' the child imagines that s/he and the mother are everything to each other and thus exist in a self-sufficient completeness. It is followed by the oedipal state in which the child distinguishes gender and in which, in the case of a male child, the father is identified as a competitor for the mother's affection.

Significantly, the oedipal stage coincides with language acquisition. For Lacan language is essentially a 'Symbolic Order' which dictates the male child's submission to the 'Law of the Father'. This law prohibits direct desire for and

⁴⁸Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), p. 109.

communicative intimacy with what has been child's whole world — the mother. The child only knows who his/her father is by word of the mother. The relationship to the father, then, is instituted through language and a system of designated kinship. This system represents the foundation of rules reaching from property to law which determine the structures of a society.⁴⁹

David Collings's 'The Monster and the Imaginary Mother: A Lacanian Reading of *Frankenstein*', is an obvious example of how Lacanian theory may inform criticism. According to Collings, Victor Frankenstein is searching for a 'substitute Mother'.⁵⁰ The suitable person would be Elizabeth, but 'spurning the social realm in favor of the Imaginary' (p. 248), he wishes to create a substitute mother by creating the monster. Victor 'identifies with his mother, recovering her body in his own body as he attempts to become pregnant himself' (p. 248). Everyone belonging to the 'Symbolic Order' rejects Victor's progeny because the creature represents what society wants to remain repressed — 'the archaic, physical, nameless mother' (p. 252). The monster functions as 'Victor's Imaginary double, the mirror-self that haunts his every step' (p. 256).

Looking at Collings's reading of Mary Shelley's novel, one can see why Lacanian theory attracted the attention of feminist critics. It prompted many feminists to scrutinize the role language played in determining the relationship between the genders and their respective roles in society. Manifestly the present language had to be radically challenged and altered before gender-based expectations of the individual could be revised.

⁴⁹For a reader-friendly summary of the significance of Lacanian thought for literary criticism see Wright, *Psychoanalysis*, pp. 107–122.

⁵⁰David Collings, 'The Monster and the Imaginary Mother: A Lacanian Reading of *Frankenstein*', in Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. by Johanna M. Smith (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 245–258 (p. 247). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The following quotation from Collings's article concludes the discussion of psychoanalysis, as it acknowledges its decisive contribution to the way we look at literature in general and at Gothic writings in particular and at the same time cautions us about its limits. This cautious attitude can be readily extended to any other theory: 'It is as useful and interesting to interpret psychoanalysis as a form of literature as to interpret literature with the tools of psychoanalysis. Each thus profits from the other without becoming completely subject to the other's authority' (p. 246). In any event, the psychoanalytical approach to the Gothic tale alerts us powerfully to its ability both to explore and to generate psychic ambivalence.

2.3. Structural Approach

Much admired and often referred to, Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* is the classic among all attempts to get to grips with Gothic literature with the help of structural theory.⁵¹ Todorov differentiates between historical genres, which are the consequence of an observation of literary phenomena, and theoretical genres, which are deduced from a literary theory. The latter can be subdivided into 'elementary' (defined by the presence or absence of a single structural characteristic) and 'complex' (defined by the presence or absence of a conjunction of structural characteristics) genres (p. 21). He also insists that the notion of genre must be applied with flexibility to individual texts. A text can partake of more than one genre. 'The goal of knowledge', he wisely acknowledges, 'is an approximative truth, not an absolute one' (p. 23).

⁵¹Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. by Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

After the necessary theoretical groundwork he proceeds to define the fantastic; it is 'that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event' and it 'occupies the duration of this uncertainty' (p. 25). As soon as we overcome this uncertainty, either by concluding that we are, in fact, dealing with the supernatural, or by involving a rational explanation of the event in question, we cross the barrier to an adjacent genre and leave that of the fantastic. 'The concept of the fantastic is therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary', Todorov suggests (p. 25).

The fantastic represents the dividing line between the uncanny and the marvelous, as he names the neighbouring genres. The fantastic may exist in a text without the reader necessarily identifying with the characters; in any event, most texts include a representation of the reader's uncertainty. All first-person narratives (which often pretend to be autobiographies), for example, invite or even coerce the reader to assume the protagonist's point of view.

Todorov's fantastic requires three prerequisites of which the second is optional:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work [...]. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretation. (Todorov, 33)

The fantastic requires 'literal meaning' (literal being used here in the sense of non-figurative). Unlike prose fiction, according to Todorov, poetry does not have a 'representative aspect'; rather it 'rejects this aptitude to evoke and represent' and is inherently intransitive. Todorov points out that 'this opposition [...] is not an all-or-

nothing affair, but rather one of degree', and that it tends to blur in twentieth-century literature (p. 59).

He also rejects allegory which explicitly offers at least two meanings for the same expressions; this duplicity is not a result of the reader's interpretation but is clearly anchored in the text. The duplicity depends on and derives from a set of clear-cut narrative negotiations; there is, ultimately, no uncertainty, only ambiguity: 'If what we read describes a supernatural event, yet we take the words not in their literal meaning but in another sense which refers to nothing supernatural, there is no longer any space in which the fantastic can exist' (pp. 63–64).

He identifies the novel as the true realm of the fantastic. The mimesis of the familiar world, that is, the criterion of novelistic referentiality, is absolutely necessary for Todorov's theory, because it is that familiarity which is displaced by the uncanny.

He goes on to discriminate between two types of the Gothic novel: they represent either the supernatural explained (which he calls the uncanny, although after Freud's influential definition of the uncanny this might be considered to be a somewhat unfortunate choice of terminology) or the supernatural accepted (the marvelous). In order to deal with Gothic novels which sustain the fantastic for a long period but which ultimately issue into the marvelous or the uncanny he creates the two additional subcategories to supplement his model which now looks like the following:

uncanny | uncanny-fantastic | **fantastic-marvelous** | marvelous
(Todorov, 44)

The bar in bold in the middle represents the pure fantastic. The uncanny only satisfies the first criterion of the fantastic, that of novelistic referentiality. It is connected with a character's experience of fear, but can always be explained by the laws of nature. The sub-genre of the fantastic-uncanny, just like that of the

fantastic-marvelous, applies to narratives which oblige the reader to fluctuate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of events before the issue is ultimately settled one way or the other. The purely marvelous is subdivisible into what Todorov describes as the hyperbolic marvelous (the phenomena described are only supernatural in that they are of exaggerated dimensions, for example, giants), the exotic marvelous (supernatural phenomena are not designated as such and take place in unknown places so that the reader refrains from calling them into question), the instrumental marvelous (technologies which have not been realized in the period described but which are possible in the future), and the scientific marvelous (the rational explanation offered is not acknowledged by contemporary scientific laws).

Looking at the diagram, it is conspicuous how narrow a realm the pure fantastic occupies. Todorov himself conveys some unease about the scarcity of examples of this genre. A last sentence which reveals the narrative to have been a dream is sufficient to remove it from the genre of the pure fantastic. Given its volatility, can the fantastic constitute a genre? Is it not rather, as Christine Brooke-Rose suggests, an 'element'?⁵²

Brooke-Rose also observes that, despite his intention to define the fantastic as a theoretical genre, Todorov relies on the historical genre of the Gothic novel as the source of the fantastic. He explains that it emerged as a form expressive of contemporary taboos which then became redundant with the rise of psychoanalysis. Brooke-Rose is not satisfied that a theoretical genre should merely be a 'method of determining (and even of evaluating) historical texts' (pp. 67–68); it ought to be regenerative, that is, it should predict all possible developments.

⁵²Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 63. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Despite these criticisms, Brooke-Rose, in her study, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic*, expresses her admiration for Todorov's theory and uses it as the starting point for her own discussion of the fantastic. Like Todorov, Brooke-Rose emphasizes the need for flexibility when formulating literary theory. She acknowledges the limitations of theory by stating that she does 'not believe in the pure "science" of literature many have dreamt of, a totalising "system" or "universal" theory of literature called poetics' (p. 15). She adopts Todorov's basic divisions: the uncanny, the fantastic, and the marvelous. Her regenerative theory, however, includes texts which are, according to Todorov, non-fantastic by treating them as 'a displaced form of the fantastic' (p. 17).

It seems plausible that the fantastic, as defined by Todorov, is an element rather than a genre. The coexistence of two or more interpretations which are mutually exclusive, is a property which is also to be found in 'realist' texts. Even in conjunction with the supernatural, interpretative ambiguity may be the property of texts Todorov would presumably not include; to prove this point Brooke-Rose demonstrates that, strictly speaking, it is possible to make a referential reading of Dante's fictional journey, *Divina Commedia*, because the text does not determine anywhere whether it is a dream vision or not. Brooke-Rose also argues that 'medieval allegory in its more sophisticated form' is characterized by mutually exclusive interpretations, her specific example being *The Vision Concerning Piers Plowman* — William Langland's religious allegory which was written in the second half of the 14th century (pp. 68–71).

Nevertheless Todorov's approach has many virtues. It serves as an immensely useful starting point for my argument because it draws attention to the importance of structural intimations within the literary exploration of the uncanny. Sir Walter Scott, for example, weakened the authority of his commentary by the

imprecision with which he applied crucial terms such as fantastic and marvellous. A *metalangue*, or at least a number of *metamots*, are useful when discussing a number of texts; otherwise one runs the risk of endless paraphrasing and being glued too tightly to the level of the text. On the other hand, one has to be careful that the wish neatly to present one's research in a 'metalangue' does not lead to an overly selective recognition of findings. My contention is that in particular the slippery nature of the Gothic resists theoretical straightjackets.

Todorov highlights the issue of narratively generated uncertainty. Especially the notion of a text's literality is essential; as will be seen it proves central to my own analysis. In his examination of structural properties in the fantastic Todorov draws attention to the importance of micro-textual issues. For example, he examines a specific use of figurative discourse in the fantastic. 'The supernatural often appears because we take a figurative sense literally', he suggests:

If the fantastic constantly makes use of rhetorical figures, it is because it originates in them. The supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent: the supernatural. The supernatural thereby becomes a symbol of language, just as the figures of rhetoric do, and the figure is, as we have seen, the purest form of literality. (Todorov, 82)

Whether the supernatural is the product of language, or whether the (belief in the) supernatural has created figurative language is a question I will not even attempt to determine. The interesting issue raised is the way in which language makes an impact on the reader of fiction. A thorough examination of 'Gothic language' and whether and in what way and to what degree it contributes to the strong reader response which this particular type of prose fiction elicits is long overdue.

Brooke-Rose's analysis is concerned with this issue of narrative strategy, and her examination of language is thorough and sensitive. For example, she

examines the way in which the reader is encoded in the text, that is, whether and in what way (implicitly or explicitly) the reader is addressed by the text. In her analytic procedure she relies on Barthes's concept of codes as posited in *S/Z*, where Barthes performs his famous structuralist analysis of Balzac's narrative, *Sarrasine*.

A code is basically a signifying system operating in a text. Barthes comments in his 'Textual Analysis of a Tale by Edgar Allen Poe' that 'the codes are simply associative fields, a supratextual organization of notations which impose a certain notion of structure'.⁵³ In *S/Z* Barthes formulates five codes which he detects in Balzac's story: the hermeneutic code (which sets up an enigma by formulating a question and suggests an answer), the semic code (the flickers of meaning words can give away in a text), the proairetic code (the sequence of action), the symbolic code (recurring symbolic patterns usually consisting of antitheses), and the cultural or referential code (references to a certain area of knowledge, such as history, medicine, literature, etc.).⁵⁴

In addition Brooke-Rose differentiates between non-, over-, and under-determined codes. Non-determined codes are theoretically possible in that a text can have an unstructured, entirely accidental balance of over- and underdetermined codes, 'producing no structured metatextual tension for the encoded reader' (p. 125).

In an over-determined code the information is brought home in a way so obvious that it may be called patronising. An over-determined code can shift the reader's interpretational powers on to different types of code. Brooke-Rose's example is Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* (1819), in which over-determined action and hermeneutic codes may shift the reader's attention to the referential, semic, or symbolic code.

⁵³Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 261–293.

⁵⁴Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1975), pp. 16–21.

While the function of 'over-determination is to make clear [...] the function of under-determination is to blur', according to Brooke-Rose (p. 116). However, over-determination, paradoxically, can function as under-determination in that it can generate uncertainty; the example chosen by her is Poe's *The Black Cat* (1843). In this narrative the enigma is over-determined but remains unresolved, which constitutes the essence of the pure fantastic. In the realm of the pure fantastic, the balance between over- and under-determination is within the hermeneutic code, not between different codes, as, for example within *Rip Van Winkle*. If the balance between over-determination and under-determination is within the hermeneutic code, that is between two enigmas, the result is interpretative ambiguity. Thus Brooke-Rose delivers the theoretical foundation for an insight which has previously been articulated.

Drawing on Bakhtin, Brooke-Rose aptly characterizes the fantastic as essentially dialogical: The characters in it revolt against the author; a single 'correct' viewpoint of things depicted in the text is impossible. This is true not only for the more powerful Gothic texts such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (in which the protagonist Medardus calls the novel he writes in order to re-create his identity a web of lies — an instance of narrator-against-author rebellion), as we will see, but also for the conventional Gothic of Radcliffe, in which the authorially imposed rational explanation and the happy ending on the concluding pages are bought at the cost of incoherence .

A second fantastic text which Brooke-Rose closely examines is Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Her in-depth analysis of macro- and micro-textual structures is exemplary. She takes into account the author and the narrator's metatexts, whether implicit or explicit. She skilfully makes a case for the 'complexity and subtlety' (p. 229) of the fantastic where *The Turn of the Screw* is concerned — a point I intend to make about various Gothic writings in this thesis.

According to her theory, in brief, the fantastic is constituted by two mutually exclusive *fabulas* (the *fabula* being the outline or basic story content, the chronological summary of events) and 'consequently a superficially transparent non-replete (economical) *sjuzet*' (the actual narration, the narrative treatment or presentation of the *fabula*), 'which is in fact dense and utterly baffling' (p. 229), or, using Genette's terminology instead of the Russian formalists' one, by two *histoires* in one *discours*. In other words, Brooke-Rose confirms that two mutually exclusive interpretations coexist — one rational and one supernatural.

Like Brooke-Rose, Noël Carroll intends to formulate a regenerative theoretic model in his recent study *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. The object of his study is what he calls 'art-horror', which is horror aestheticised in art, as opposed to real-life horror (such as the Nazi crimes). His theory posits horror as a genre born of another genre: 'the product of a genre that crystallized, speaking very roughly, around the time of the publication of *Frankenstein* and that ever since has persisted in novels, magazines, films, etc. until the present day. It is 'a variation of the Gothic form in England and related developments in Germany'.⁵⁵

The fact that Carroll allocates Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* — a text which is so essential for this thesis — a place in his horror genre obliges me to discuss his otherwise not particularly relevant theory, albeit very briefly. This horror genre does not include Gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe, and Charles Brockden Brown's, as their enigmas are rationally explained. Nor does it, which is less surprising, include fairy-tales and myths. Although it belongs, according to Carroll, within Todorov's category of the fantastic-marvelous, 'it constitutes a distinctive species' (p. 17).

⁵⁵Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 13. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The criteria of horror are: One or more monstrous entities must be present; the monsters must represent to the human characters in the story an abnormality and a 'threat [which] is compounded with revulsion, nausea, and disgust' (p. 22); ideally this emotive response of the human characters to 'the monsters that beleaguer them' (p. 17) runs parallel with that of the reader or audience.

Carroll defines a monster as 'any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science' and subdivides them into two categories: fusion figures ('creatures that transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on', p. 43) and fission figures ('the contradictory elements are, so to speak, distributed over *different*, though metaphysically related, identities', p. 46).

After various additional definitions and examinations (e.g. of what constitutes an emotion, what is suspense, and why we are 'art-horrified') he develops his theory which is essentially one of plot. Most horror plots can be generated by 'the fourfold family of functions: onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation' (p. 118). Carroll subsequently discusses and articulates various types of plot.

His discussion of texts remains on a very sketchy and superficial level. His application of the theory fails to trace the reasons why some texts seem to address fundamental concerns and are enduringly famous while others seem to produce nothing more than a transient, 'cheap' thrill. In addition the notion that 'art-horror' can only be generated by abnormal creatures which are scientifically inexplicable seems to ignore the complexity and subtlety of texts such as, for example, *Frankenstein* in which the reader, in a truly dialogical fashion, is offered the monster's point of view, and in which the question arises whether 'monster' is not to be taken in the figurative sense as a label that may very well fit the 'human' Victor Frankenstein, or society as a whole. Thus this theory, apart from supplying a useful

definition of the doppelgänger, does not seem to contribute to and advance literary research in this particular field; rather it may prove helpful as a guideline to instruct the writers of horror-story penny dreadfuls.

2.4. Thematics

Recurring elements in Gothic literature invite a thematic approach. For a discussion of this type of approach it makes sense to differentiate between themes and motifs. Although it is not always easy to draw the line between these two concepts, it is helpful to use the term 'theme' in the sense of a constellation or situation of archetypical quality which represents a central pattern in the text. The term 'motif', on the other hand, is intended to describe an (often symbolically charged) image or a combination of words which frequently recur, often as a part of the theme. Thus, by way of example, the theme of the persecuted virgin and the motif of the castle are characteristic of Ann Radcliffe's novels.

In chapter IV of her book, *The Gloomy Egoist* (1932), Eleanor M. Sickels observes that the Gothic is persistently concerned with death and sin (which she calls themes but which I prefer to call preoccupation or concern). This preoccupation is enacted against a background of equally recurring motifs. She argues that the interest in death and sin and the motifs attached to them originate from graveyard verse; consequently, the Gothic feeds upon this older literary form:

It took the backgrounds of dim cathedrals, midnight churchyards, ghastly charnel houses and gloomy monastic ruins. It took the death theme, and embroidered it with all the terror of physical corruption and spectral visitation. It took the theme of sin, and added domestic and exotic demonology, age-old tales of contracts with Satan, and the expiatory sufferings of the Wandering Jew. And out of the theme of sin, which is never far from the theme of death, it built its arch-types

— the criminal monk, the tyrant, the strong dark hero inwardly consumed by remorse.⁵⁶

In the chapter 'The Gothic Romance' of *The Popular Novel in England: 1770–1800* Joyce M. S. Tompkins points out that the Gothic novel's concern with 'death and decay' and various connected themes reflects the topicality of such issues in eighteenth-century England.⁵⁷ In Gothic fiction the motifs of the decaying castle and the convent or monastery are symbolic manifestations of the theme of imprisonment. Imprisonment not only features in the Gothic novel but was also the subject of journalism at the time. Tompkins gives examples of late 18th-century magazines which carry reports on harsh prison sentences and the appalling conditions of prisons abroad, the Bastille the most notorious among them.

Another example of a theme of Gothic literature which mirrors a topical issue are secret societies (the Inquisition included). In 1773 the Pope had prohibited the Jesuit Order, but its members were widely believed to continue their conspiracy in an even more secretive and sinister fashion. Five years later the Spanish Inquisition had regained considerable power. This was an 'ominous sign of the gathering strength and oblique methods of forces of reaction', Tompkins observes.⁵⁸

In addition to these 'old' secret societies, new types of secret society gained topicality. They were assumed to be organizations of liberal thinkers and political and social reformers. With the French Revolution presenting the greatest threat yet to the monarchies of Europe, it was feared that they were forming conspiracies against Church and State. In England government spies were set on the poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge, because they were suspected of forming a conspiracy. In Germany Frederick the Great was apparently less concerned about possible

⁵⁶Eleanor M. Sickels, *The Gloomy Egoist: Moods and Themes of Melancholy from Gray to Keats* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p.160.

⁵⁷J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770–1800* (London: Constable; repr. Methuen, 1932).

⁵⁸Tompkins, p. 282.

conspiracies, allowing a renaissance of the ancient self-mystifying societies of the Freemasons and the Rosicrucians. Again Tompkins gives details of various publications which allege nationwide and European conspiracies to support his argument of the topicality of the Gothic interest in secret societies. Thus the Gothic may owe its themes in part to the political and social anxieties of its age — an argument very much in line with that advanced by the Marquis De Sade.

The Marquis himself has been acknowledged as an influential but sinister figure in the Romantic Movement by Mario Praz in his study of Romantic erotic sensibility⁵⁹. Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (first published English in 1933) is the most comprehensive thematic study of the 'pathology of Romanticism', as Frank Kermode puts it in his introduction to the edition of 1970. Gothic literature with its preoccupation with death and decay and its sexual innuendo is obviously one of the principal subjects of this erudite discussion of recurring patterns. The persecuted maiden, which Praz examines in the chapter headed 'The Shadow of the Divine Marquis', represents one of five types and themes identified by Praz. To each of them he devotes a chapter in which he traces the origin of the type or theme and its Romantic manifestations. Directly relevant to Gothic literature are chapters II, III, and, to a lesser degree, IV.

In chapter II, called 'The Metamorphoses of Satan', Praz identifies the germinal form of the satanic hero in Marino's *Strage degli Innocenti* which hints at Satan's Promethean rebelliousness. This new image of Satan then unfolds in Milton's *Paradise Lost* where Satan is firmly instituted as a rebel without a chance, fallen but beautiful and admirably courageous. This surprisingly heroic version of Satan moved not only the Romantics in England but also Schiller in Germany. He created the villain-hero Karl Moor in his play, *Die Räuber* (1781), with the

⁵⁹Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. by Angus Davidson, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

Miltonic Satan in mind. Praz detects in the Gothic villain–hero another metamorphosis of the heroic Satan in which noble characteristics fuse with evil passion. This complexity is the reason why, more often than not, the Gothic villain is more interesting than his counterpart, the maiden he chases, whose usually unbending and passive virtue often makes her a rather dull character in comparison.

Chapter III, ironically titled 'The Shadow of the Divine Marquis', deals with this very unfortunate female, 'the persecuted woman'. The threatened woman, usually a virgin, is one of the oldest literary subjects, but, according to Praz, it recaptured the imagination of writers and readers through its rebirth in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747). Locked in a relationship of flight and pursuit with the villain–hero, she is one of the hallmarks of Gothic literature and is particularly associated with Ann Radcliffe's and her imitators' writings.

Chapter IV treats of the *femme fatale* and is titled 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. The figure of the merciless, beautiful and alluring woman makes a less regular appearance in the Gothic than the persecuted maiden. Cruel women in the Gothic novel are more likely to be scheming abbesses. But in two important novels, which Praz lists, the cruel, sensuous, and beautiful woman plays a crucial role, which will be discussed in detail in the relevant chapters: Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* and Lewis's *The Monk*.

The Romantic Agony is above all a literary history of pathological Romantic types and themes, tracing their origins, charting their development, and locating them in the works of European Romanticism. Unlike Tompkins, Praz does not intend to explore what is at the bottom of such conspicuous interest in the morbid. Nor is he interested in narrative strategy. His achievement consists in establishing the Romantic fascination with the sinister side of human nature as a fact which is by now accepted as a matter of course. The strength of Praz's study resides in the

links it makes between English and German Romanticism, as, for example, in the case of *The Monk* and *Die Elixiere des Teufels*.

As *The Romantic Agony* includes Gothic literature but also explores a myriad of non-Gothic works, it proves that the themes which are pervading the Gothic are neither new nor limited to Gothic literature. Moreover, Eleanor Sickels's study shows that Gothic literature has no exclusive rights to motifs such as the charnel houses and castles. This is a reason why the attempt to define the Gothic by its apparently typical paraphernalia alone is a perilous undertaking.

A thematic approach is much more helpful if one attempts to interpret an individual text or a small number of texts. If an individual text or several texts seem to contain recurring motifs and/or themes they are often indicative of underlying patterns which can reveal deeper layers of meaning. Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*, for example, can be examined under the conspicuous aspect of keeping or betraying a secret, as Heinz Hillmann does in his essay on Ludwig Tieck.⁶⁰ He reveals how the entire narrative is patterned by the introduction of secrets and their subsequent explanation (which are only to a certain degree rational as they are peculiarly linked to a world of fairy tale). At the end of the narrative, when the reader expects the ultimate explanation and is allegedly given it, s/he is in truth ultimately baffled and shocked by a conclusion which completely defies explanation.

In her book *Das Märchen und die Moderne* Marianne Thalmann examines a whole range of Tieck's Kunstmärchen under the aspect of keeping and revealing secrets.⁶¹ According to Thalmann the texts contain the message that a secret — 'ein Erlebnis, das den Weg in das Ungewöhnliche oder Wunderbare genommen hat' — has to be honoured and kept. Then the hero will be remunerated. The hero only

⁶⁰Heinz Hillmann, 'Ludwig Tieck', in *Deutsche Dichter der Romantik: Ihr Leben und Werk*, ed. by Benno von Wiese, 2nd edn (Berlin: Schmidt, 1983), pp. 114–138.

⁶¹Marianne Thalmann, *Das Märchen und die Moderne: Zum Begriff der Surrealität im Märchen der Romantik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961), pp. 37–55.

suffers from agonizing guilt if he betrays the secret. Guilt is not incurred by the events which are kept secret. Although I disagree with Thalmann's claim that Christian from *Der Runenberg* is rewarded for keeping his secret, as the narrator calls him explicitly 'der Unglückliche' in the very last sentence, her study demonstrates how successfully a thematic approach can focus the interpretation of texts.

However, when the thematic approach is employed too narrowly and exclusively, in particular in the attempt to define a genre, it is bound to entail a reductive effect. In the case of Gothic literature it then represents yet another attempt to contain something which resolutely defies containment.

One of the more recent comprehensive studies of the Gothic, William Patrick Day's *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy*, identifies themes which are on the one hand specific enough and on the other hand flexible enough to make a statement about the Gothic in general. Day explores the Gothic with an outspoken interest in gender and identity.⁶² According to Day, the Gothic is partly 'an attempt by nineteenth-century culture to both express and relieve its fears about its own concepts of identity', and it has the power 'to transform these fears into pleasures' (p. 5).

Day emphasizes the fragmented and anarchic nature of the Gothic and its tendency to parody bourgeois conceptions. Its thematic focus is on the dual nature of the individual: 'The archetypal masculine and feminine coexists in a single individual' (p. 76). Also the family is of a twofold nature — the patriarchal, male-dominated one in which the patriarch 'robs the family members of their identities by forcing them to conform to his will' and the 'affective family' which 'submerges individual identity into the group' (p. 77). The tensions resulting from this duality

⁶²William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985). References to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

lead to psychological ambiguity and hence to identity crises. The identities offered as role models in romance did not fit the 19th century any more. Gothic literature mirrors a transformation concerning masculine and feminine identity and familial structures which was happening in society at the time. Especially the unresolved problem of sexuality is a recurring theme in the Gothic. One of Day's examples is Ann Radcliffe's *Udolpho* which celebrates the feminine ideal of strength residing in passivity and thus appears to affirm traditional values. However, Radcliffe 'cannot fully bring off the feat', as Day rightly claims (p. 107).

Indeed, his study abounds with ideas and claims, but unfortunately they lack more often than not textual evidence, which detracts from this study's inspiring potential. Furthermore, his reading of *Frankenstein* is flawed by inaccuracy: Day claims that the creature murders Victor (who in truth dies upon hearing that the vessel is bound to return to England instead of penetrating further into the polar region) and ignores the complexity of the creature's character.

Day comes to the conclusion that the Gothic, despite the recurring thematic elements, is of an eclectic nature. He points out its parodic undertow which subverts traditional gender definitions and suggests that the sexual innuendo of the Gothic reflects unresolved concerns about sexuality in society at large. Day's interest in gender, identity, and an underlying subversive agenda points towards the next critical tendency here discussed: feminism.

2.5. Feminist–Biographical Commentary

Naturally, feminist commentary chiefly concerns itself with the women writers of the Gothic. As there are no acknowledged German women writers in this field it focuses on English writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeves, and particularly on

Mary Shelley. The Brontës also come into focus because of their manifest use of Gothic elements.

Feminist commentary is largely informed by the author's biography and aims to examine a more or less hidden agenda within the text. This agenda concerns the author's identity as a woman in the society she inhabits. Frequently tensions are revealed between imposed and partly or wholly internalized gender-oriented role behaviour and the writer's desire to write and publish.

Due to its thorough research and originality and referred to by most subsequent studies, Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* is well on its way to achieving the status of a classic.⁶³ The chapter mainly concerned with *Frankenstein* and entitled 'Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve' is especially interesting with respect to this thesis. It examines the impact of Milton's re-creation of the myth of the loss of Paradise on female writers and female critical response to *Paradise Lost*. Its central and well-known image is that of Milton being ministered to by his daughters. It is of twofold significance: On the one hand this image represents female submission to manmade myths; on the other hand it may represent women's secret aspiration to achieve equality, thus being essentially anti-traditional. Mary Shelley, according to Gubar and Gilbert, overtly belongs to the former category. However, the 'fantasy of equality' breaks through the submission to Miltonic sexism in the shape of 'monstrous images of rage' in her novel *Frankenstein* (p. 220). The novel is characterized by 'moral ambiguity and symbolic slipperiness' (p. 229).

Scrutinizing Shelley's use of language, Gubar and Gilbert prove that Frankenstein as well as his creature can be allocated the role of Prometheus who features centrally in the book's subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus*. Both of them can

⁶³Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1979; repr. 1980). References to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

also be said to represent Adam, Satan, and God. This slippage — a point which will be vital to my own argument — indicates that the novel is in reality a 'psychodrama or waking dream that Shelley herself suspected she had written' (p. 230).

Gilbert and Gubar draw attention to the parallels between the book and Shelley's life. Her alienation from her father, William Godwin, which was due to her elopement with Percy B. Shelley, various unhappy pregnancies, her relatively isolated existence, and her motherlessness are expressed in the book by the experience of many characters.

According to Gilbert and Gubar, *Frankenstein's* apparent lack of Eve and its strong sexual innuendo indicate that, in fact, 'for Mary Shelley the part of Eve is all the parts'. Thus Shelley herself is God (author of the novel) and Satan as Eve (having produced, in her own words, such a 'hideous progeny', just as Victor is really Eve as he has given birth to the creature). Finally, the creature is a second-rate version of Eve, too. As a woman in society is a second-class citizen, so the creature is a second-rate human being, a filthy version of the divine creation. Looking at these aspects, *Frankenstein* is potentially a narrative in which Shelley examines 'the fearful tale of a female fall from a lost paradise of art, speech, and autonomy into a hell of sexuality, silence, and filthy materiality' — the tale of her own experience (p. 227).

Mary Poovey in her study, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, follows in the footsteps of *The Madwoman in the Attic* in that she detects a tension between Mary's occupation as an author and her wish to conform to the female virtues of passivity and submission. *Frankenstein* testifies to both the self-effacing and the self-expressive desires of Shelley. The author's concern with the 'antisocial dimension' of the 'imaginative quest' becomes visible in her treatment of Frankenstein and his quest which results in the creation of a monster, a 'product and symbol of self-serving desire'. Poovey claims that the creature enacts its creator's

desire: 'Just as Frankenstein figuratively murdered his family, so the monster literally murders Frankenstein's domestic relationships.'⁶⁴

Poovey acknowledges the important role narrative strategy plays in the integration of ambiguous messages which seem to be an essential part of the Gothic:

The monster carries with it the guilt and alienation that attend Frankenstein's self-assertion; yet, because Shelley realistically details the stages by which the creature is driven to act out its symbolic nature from *its* point of view, the reader is compelled to identify with its anguish and frustration. This narrative strategy precisely reproduces Mary Shelley's profound ambivalence toward Frankenstein's creative act; for by separating self-assertion from its consequences, she is able to dramatize both her conventional judgement of the evils of egotism and her emotional engagement in the imaginative act. Indeed, the pathos of the monster's cry suggests that Shelley identified most strongly with the product (and the victim) of Frankenstein's transgression; the objectified imagination, helpless and alone.⁶⁵

The disastrous consequences of unbridled ambition are also at the centre of Anne Mellor's study of *Frankenstein*. In *Mary Shelley: Her Life; Her Fiction; Her Monsters* she argues that the narrative is a portrayal of Shelley's need for a family and domestic affection and security.⁶⁶ As her companion, Percy, was restlessly pursuing intellectual beauty, this need was very difficult to satisfy. Her experience as a daughter deprived of her mother (Mary Wollstonecraft had died as a consequence of giving birth to Mary) and alienated from her father informs the novel. *Frankenstein* is a dramatization of 'the consequences of the failure of the

⁶⁴Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 124–126.

⁶⁵Poovey, p. 129.

⁶⁶Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life; Her Fiction; Her Monsters* (New York and London: Methuen, 1988; repr. Routledge, 1989).

family, the damage wrought when the mother — or a nurturant parental love — is absent'.⁶⁷

Like most feminists, Mellor agrees with Ellen Moers's claim that *Frankenstein* is profoundly concerned with the anxieties surrounding childbirth.⁶⁸ On a stylistic level, she traces Percy B. Shelley's revisions of Mary's text and evaluates them. Far from being improvements as Rieger (the editor of the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*) and Murray state⁶⁹, she claims, they undermine the plain and forceful diction of the author, rendering it stilted and tedious.

Laura P. Claridge offers further evidence of the novel's concern with the 'lack of domestic affection' and suggests that its comment on parent-child relationships implies an application to society as a whole.⁷⁰ Shelley's claim in the preface that she intended to 'exhibit the amiableness of domestic affection and the excellence of universal virtues' is only a cover-up, as in reality Victor is, according to Claridge, a neglected child with parents who concentrate too much on each other. Claridge points out that in the second revised version of the novel Shelley omits the father's assistance and share in Victor's scientific interest; Victor is left to his own devices and actually comments himself on the fateful want of his father's attention to his education.

Elisabeth Russell's article, "'All is shew — & I but a shadow": Mary Shelley; Self and Text' was also written with Gilbert and Gubar's reading of the novel as a rewriting of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in mind.⁷¹ Similarly to Poovey, Russell shows how *Frankenstein* is an expression of Shelley's anxiety about her

⁶⁷Mellor, p. 39.

⁶⁸Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, (London: Allen, 1977), pp. 90–99.

⁶⁹E. B. Murray 'Shelley's Contribution to Mary's *Frankenstein*', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, 29 (1978), 50–68.

⁷⁰Laura P. Claridge, 'Parent-Child Tensions in *Frankenstein*: The Search for Communion', *Studies in the Novel*, 17 (1985), 14–26.

⁷¹Elisabeth Russell, "'All is shew — & I but a shadow": Mary Shelley; Self and Text', in *The Representation of the Self in Women's Autobiography*, ed. by Vita Fortunati and Gabriella Morisco (Bologna: University of Bologna, 1992), pp. 17–28.

conflicting identity as a woman and as an author and about Romantic literary imagination.

Like Gilbert and Gubar, she detects parallels between the creature and Shelley. Both are motherless like Eve and learn about their origins by reading; Shelley reads her mother's writings and the criticisms thereof, and the creature reads about his creation in the diary of Victor Frankenstein. Both struggle to construct an identity for themselves with the help of language. While Mary seeks to construct it by writing fiction, the creature stakes his hopes on the acquisition of spoken language. By speaking he attempts to make friends and find communion with the De Laceys. He is devastated when he finds out that language does not guarantee successful communication.

Russell interprets the disastrous developments which result from Victor's attempt to appropriate the female prerogative of childbearing as Shelley's comment on the male Romantic poets' attempt to appropriate the terminology of motherhood and procreation for literary creation: 'If the appropriation of the metaphors of motherhood are used for self aggrandisement rather than for sympathy and compassion, the end product will be a monstrous abortion of the mind.'⁷²

According to Russell, Mary eventually fares better than the creature; while she was still anxious about her identity as an author at the time she was writing *Frankenstein*, she asserted herself in that role after Percy B. Shelley's death, as becomes apparent in her last novel, *The Last Man* (1826), and in her journals.

With their interest in the apparent subversion of overt adherence to traditionally male literary norms, the feminists have highlighted the issue of language and textual arrangement. The significance of narrative strategies is frequently recognized, as, for example, in the case of *Frankenstein*. Here in particular the peculiar narrative arrangement of the various voices in *Frankenstein*

⁷²Russell, pp. 25–26.

into what could be called a Russian dolls' shape has been noted. Thus the feminists pave the way for a new approach to the Gothic which is chiefly focused on how narrative strategy and language operate in the text, and on the textual devices by virtue of which ambiguity is created on every page.

2.6. Narrative Strategy

It has become clear that the focus on narrative treatment in the Gothic is not entirely new. It is true, however, that the issue of narrative strategy in Gothic prose fiction has not yet received the attention it deserves, for it is my contention that the Gothic is as much characterized by the way it depicts its subject as by its thematics. I intend to examine whether the uncanny is, as I suspect, represented by an interaction of structural as well thematic aspects. I hope that my readings will persuade other lovers and scholars of Gothic literature to explore more texts in the same or a similar way so that the remarkable craftsmanship in the Gothic, which has gone largely unnoticed, can be more generally recognized.

Some pioneering research in this particular field has already been done and needs to be acknowledged. In his article, 'Reading One's Life: An Analysis of Tieck's *Der Blonde Eckbert*', Martin Swales proves how central the peculiar relationship between form and content of the narrative is in that it profoundly affects, not to say manipulates, the reader.⁷³ A brief summary of Martin Swales's insights must suffice here, but I will further refer to his study in the chapter on *Der blonde Eckbert*.

⁷³Martin Swales, 'Reading One's Life: An Analysis of Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*', *German Life and Letters*, 29 (1975–76), 165–175. Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text. See also David Horton, "'Verwirrung" in *Der blonde Eckbert*', *German Life and Letters*, 37 (1983–84), pp. 322–335.

The deeply disturbing impact of this narrative depends on Tieck's skilful use of 'fictional modes': that of the *Volksmärchen* convention and that of generalizing psychological commentary. Thus he creates two contradictory interpretative possibilities. Ambiguity is increased by the occasional but well-calculated insertion of verbs in the subjunctive mode. Tieck evokes a sense of neat containment but simultaneously and subtly undermines it. The division on a stylistic level into frame story and *Binnengeschichte* and on a thematic level into the protagonists' married life and the wife's peculiar childhood, which seems to stabilize the tale, becomes increasingly blurred as the story progresses. As fairy-tale simplicity is more and more invaded by psychological complexity this twofold division ultimately collapses with a fatal outcome for the protagonists: The story issues not only in the physical death of Eckbert but also in the deathblow for the reader's struggle to make sense of events with the deceptive assistance offered by the text. The questions raised by the text 'resist reliable answering because of the narrative perspective that sustains the whole story':

This narrative perspective, as I have tried to suggest, involves a very careful process of suggesting certain interpretative expectations to the reader—only to fulfil them imperfectly or not at all. And structurally, the same holds true. We have two interlocking stories (interlocking in the very precise sense that the act of recounting the first story precipitates the second). Bertha leaves her birthplace, meets the old woman, and then marries Eckbert and makes her home with him. Eckbert leaves his home, and enters the realm of the old woman where he is told something about Bertha's birth that indissolubly links her to him. The appearance of the old woman at the end of the story, then, has all the appearance of supreme structural finality, and yet it raises questions rather than supplying answers. (Swales, 'Eckbert', 173–174)

Swales confirms that horrifying subject matter is insufficient for a genuinely disturbing representation of the uncanny. It is the narrative treatment that renders the reading of this narrative so unsettling. The Freudian dialectic of the uncanny, of

'the known and the unknown, of the familiar and the strange' (Swales, *Eckbert*, pp. 174–175) on the one hand, and of the normally secret being revealed on the other hand, as already discussed in the category of psychoanalysis, pervades *Der blonde Eckbert*.

This dialectic also informs E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815/16), as Elizabeth Wright has shown in her incisive study, *E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Rhetoric of Terror*. In the chapter headed 'The Language of Intensification: A Comparison of the Treatment of Themes of Terror in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Elixiere des Teufels* and Karl Grosse's *Der Genius*', she explores how rhetoric can be used to evoke fear as primary reader response (pp. 14–49). For example, the use of a reflexive verb in connection with an inanimate subject ('die Tür schloß sich') implies that the inanimate has a life of its own. Another example of the many means of evoking fear by creating uncertainty is Hoffmann's insertion of unanswered questions. Medardus's questions concerning mysterious events in his life intensify the disturbing sense of unknowableness and lack of real self-determination.

Particularly significant is Wright's discovery of the use of polysemy in *Die Elixiere des Teufels*. Hoffmann uses the different connotations of the term 'Sturz'. It signifies on the surface the Count Victorin's physical fall which is unintentionally caused by Medardus. Additionally, it signifies the precipice of the mountain from which Victorin falls. Furthermore, it is the metaphor of a lapsarian experience, forecasting Medardus's fall from innocence. The fact that Victorin will be Medardus's double upon whom he projects the sinister side to his character and who will haunt him throughout the narrative, creates uncanniness very much in the Freudian sense. As will be demonstrated in this thesis's examination of Hoffmann's novel, this polysemy is even more significant than Wright suggests. It is one of the

central patterns and it is introduced very early on in the novel and then frequently recurs in key episodes of Medardus's life.

Wright also mentions the symbolic meaning of the episode in which the abbess embraces the child Medardus and bruises him with the cross around her neck. This predicts that the embrace of mother Church will bring pain to Medardus. Wright sights the tip of the iceberg, as the cross, in fact, is at the centre of another symbolic network which informs much of the novel.

Both Elizabeth Wright and Ulrike Horstmann-Guthrie agree that the strong psycho-pathological innuendo of the novel creates a tension between a psychological and a supernatural interpretation of its events. In her paper, 'Narrative Technique and Reader Manipulation in Hoffmann's *Elixiere* and Hogg's *Confessions*', Horstmann-Guthrie examines how this unsettling interpretative ambiguity is sustained by narrative strategies.⁷⁴

Both novels consist of a fictional autobiography accompanied by an editorial commentary. Although Hogg's editor develops into a fully fledged character and even protagonist, while Hoffmann's editor only plays a limited role, as Horstmann-Guthrie points out, they function on a similar level. Both pretend to be in control of the material they present to the reader but ultimately become entangled in its unresolvable ambiguities and fail to deliver the clarifications promised. In the case of *Die Elixiere* the editor betrays his confusion in the passage which prefaces the chronicle of the mysterious old painter:

His attempts to clarify the complicated relations in the family of Medardus' ancestors by providing more details about individuals mentioned by the painter only add to the confusion. And the information offered in the chronicle itself by no means resolves all ambiguities and uncertainties in Medardus' account of his life: the

⁷⁴Ulrike Horstmann-Guthrie, 'Narrative Technique and Reader Manipulation in Hoffmann's *Elixiere* and Hogg's *Confessions*', in *Anglo-German Studies*, ed. by R. F. M. Byrn and K. G. Knight (Leeds: The Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, 1992), pp. 62–74. References to this article are given after quotations in the text.

presence of the painter himself, for instance, who has apparently wandered the earth for centuries, is never explained. For all its recourse to documentation, this fictitious editorial does not succeed in elucidating all mysteries in the autobiographical narrative. (Horstmann-Guthrie, 64)

In *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner* the editor's language contains value judgements which soon reveal that he is not as impartial and objective as he initially claims. He also alleges an authority which suggests that he is well in control of his material; however, while his Enlightenment point of view denies the possibility of supernatural agency, he cannot rationally explain the mysterious occurrences pervading the story of Robert Wringhim.

Both authors address the reader repeatedly and pretend to offer information which will explain the ultimately inexplicable:

Both Hoffmann and Hogg introduce narration by minor characters, witnesses to events, to provide missing links and information which is supposed to throw light on the main plot. In *Elixiere*, these are Reinhold's account of the recent history of Baron von F.'s family [...], the forester's explanations concerning the mad monk [...], the physician's and the prior's disclosures [...]. All of these, rather than providing answers, raise more questions concerning Medardus' experience. In the *Confessions*, Bessy's testimony on a comic, and Bell Calvert's account of the duel on a more serious level, far from clarifying matters, add to the uncertainty. (Horstmann-Guthrie, 67)

Horstmann-Guthrie also points out that both novels have humorous interludes which on the surface relieve tension and distance the reader. However, they leave an aftertaste of the uncanny with the reader. The superstition of the characters in the interpolated tale of the people of Auchtermuchty and the episode in the weaver's cottage in the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is ridiculed, but the inexplicable supernatural occurrences have sinister implications. In *Die Elixiere* the comic characteristics of Belcampo are qualified by his unexplained knowledge of Medardus's fate and his half wise and half mad ramblings.

Humorous scenes are also a regular ingredient in Ann Radcliffe's novels. They seem to offer a respite from the built-up of suspense and at the same time delay the longed-for explanation of enigmas. Comic characters, usually servants as in Shakespeare's plays, provide disruption, and disruption, as Elizabeth R. Napier points out, is the hallmark of the Gothic.⁷⁵ Moreover, she discovers that patterns of intentional as well as unintentional disruption and subversion are the cause of the inherent instability of the Gothic which is so disturbing for the reader.⁷⁶ The narrative devices identified by Napier include speeding, delaying, instability of focus, exaggeration, fragmentation, and disorientation. The disruptive effect of the Radcliffean strategy of tempting the reader to share mostly the heroine's and sometimes the hero's subjective and highly-strung imagination, particularly by dint of 'indirect interior monologue', only to subsequently suggest a rational view, was early recognized by literary critics.⁷⁷

Textual self-subversion or undermining, coupled with the suggestion of supernatural agency, I agree, are at the heart of the Gothic. They generate uncanniness as the Gothic's most palpable reader response. While the Gothic seems to have engendered a great number of texts which strike one as trivial and sensational, there are various writings characterized by an undiminishing power to attract filmmakers, 'innocent' readers, and critics. It is my contention that much of their perennial appeal is based on their use of narrative strategy to sustain the uncanny. More evidence is needed concerning the methods of subversion these texts employ in order to demonstrate that the uncanny is as much a property of form as of content. The aim of this thesis is to explore these methods and to reveal the

⁷⁵Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

⁷⁶Napier, p. 44.

⁷⁷See Howells, p. 33.

fascinating degree of craftsmanship that has gone into the generation of the uncanny in Gothic literature.

The literature of the uncanny has frequently proved contentious for no other reason than that it has a tendency to stir the unconscious of the reader. This explains why those Gothic texts which obviously transcend the purely sensational remain at the centre of controversy. They treat of the repressed, but the repressed is not neatly controlled and embedded in a narrative, that is, aesthetically objectified. Rather, it somehow goes beyond the concerns of the Gothic hero/ine and touches what lies repressed in the reader. This is partly what makes the reading of this type of literature such an uncanny (self-)experience.

Chapter One

Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*: The Dialectic of the Veil

A belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary;
men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.⁷⁸

In the 1790s the novels of Ann Radcliffe had a resonance sufficiently great to earn the author literary fame and to associate her name with the Gothic novel *per se*. Indeed her art was felt to be so innovative and influential that she was credited with the status of the founder of a veritable 'school' of Gothic writing.⁷⁹

While her first published work, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), did not attract much critical acclaim and enjoyed only limited popularity, her second tale, *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), was favourably received by Scott and devoured by enthusiastic readers. Her ensuing literary fame grew considerably with the *Romance of the Forest* (1791) and reached its peak with *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797). While *Udolpho* proved to be most popular with the contemporary readership, an increasing number of 20th-century critics and scholars consider *The Italian* to be her finest novel, mainly because of an increased psychological complexity of character. In particular the antagonist, Schedoni, exhibits, in the midst of all his evil passions, flickerings of a humanity unprecedented in the villains of previous novels. Her last novel, *Gaston de Blondeville*, which was posthumously published in 1826, represents a break with Radcliffe's famous method, the 'supernatural explained'. Here she introduces for once a genuinely supernatural agency. In addition, this is the only novel in which she attempted to write fiction with an authentic and carefully researched historical setting. This may have been an attempt, conscious or unconscious, to meet Scott's criticism, and to provide adequate motivation and contextualization for the supernatural. Compared to the foregoing novels, however, the result is rather

⁷⁸ Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (1911; repr. London: Everyman's Library, 1991), p. 188.

⁷⁹See Introduction pp. 14–15.

tedious to read and lacks the addictive power which is associated with Ann Radcliffe's stories and which earned her the title of 'enchantress'.⁸⁰

In *The Italian*, Radcliffe is still faithful to her characteristic narrative method, 'the supernatural explained'.⁸¹ As is the case in the preceding narratives, the novel is informed by a peculiar tension which derives most obviously from the balancing act of suggesting supernatural agency on the one hand and satisfying the demands of moral didacticism, which condemned superstition, on the other. Thus the Radcliffean novel is not only the battleground of good and evil characters but also that of two opposed views of the world. These views — one may be termed rationalist and is the inheritance of Enlightenment thought, the other one may be named emotive and is associated with Romantic ideas — are defined by their epistemology. Appropriately, the working of these two conflicting epistemologies interlocks with the all-important theme of perception. Perception occurs in the novel in two principal forms: deception and revelation. The apparently clear-cut dialectic of deception and revelation, however, is itself deceptive, as will be seen. This in part explains why the happy ending of *The Italian*, as that of her other famous novels, fails to convince and satisfy the reader.

But before these narrative issues will be dealt with in detail, I wish to consider a number of problems concerning the place of Radcliffe's novels in this thesis. As its title suggests, the objective of this thesis is to analyse the narrative strategies of prose texts of the Romantic period which treat of the uncanny. Normally we think of the uncanny as of an experience which is unsettling, disturbing, and/or horrifying. The uncanny in Radcliffe's novels, however, fails to chill the spine of the modern reader. While Radcliffe's contemporary readership felt

⁸⁰Tompkins, p. 262.

⁸¹Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian; or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents: A Romance*, ed. by Frederick Garber (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

very much thrilled by her treatment of the uncanny, the reader response in the 1990s in western Europe has palpably changed. Reading *The Italian* nowadays has not the same thrilling appeal as reading, for example, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* has. At its best it is skilfully suspenseful, at its worst it is characterized by bathos. The heroine's and, even more so, the hero's sensibility, their proneness to prolonged moral reflection in situations which demand crisp decision-making to ensure survival may have appealed to early nineteenth-century readers but to the modern reader they are little short of ridiculous.

This suggests that, instead of generating fear, the fearful potential of the uncanny in Radcliffe's narratives is, in large measure, dated and dependent on socio-cultural conditions of Radcliffe's times. Radcliffe must have implicitly treated of issues which were not publicly and openly discussed but which were of widespread though latent concern. The strong sexual undercurrent that informs the Radcliffean novel and its focus on sexual politics has not gone unnoted by scholars. Female anxiety in the face of a precarious dependence on a husband or father figure is one of the principal themes of the narratives and reflects a very real problem of the women of the author's time. Marriage might bring security but presented a threat to financial independence, which in turn threatened self-determination. The bourgeois woman had little opportunity to earn her living. Even authorship, one of the few money-making careers open to women, was a questionable business for ladies. Maybe this was why Radcliffe herself never joined the *literati* circles in London where she could have been a celebrity. In her insightful study of Radcliffe's writings in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762–1800* E. G. Clery demonstrates

how the legal situation of Radcliffe's heroines mirrors that of women in England towards the end of the 18th century.⁸²

Thus Radcliffe thematized topical issues in the safe guise of romances set in foreign parts, removed in time and space. Mediterranean settings, apart from conjuring up an exotic, warmer, and more colourful climate which was a hotbed of strong passions, had the additional advantage of being Catholic societies. Radcliffe could smuggle in criticism of contemporary English society while also securing credit for being patriotic because of her anti-Catholic tendencies.

Despite the historicity of Radcliffe's version of the Gothic and its dated potential to frighten the reader, it still treats of the uncanny as characterized by the dialectic of the known and the unknown. The uncanny makes itself felt in the form of a peculiar tension which informs *The Italian* and which makes reading the novel, if no longer a genuinely disturbing, then certainly a disquieting experience. The question that needs to be raised at this point is whether this discomfort is created by thematic concerns alone, or whether narrative strategies also play a significant part.

Obviously Radcliffe makes abundant use of Gothic paraphernalia. Mysterious and threatening figures lurk in dark ruins, ghastly crimes are perpetrated behind convent and monastery walls; hints at unknown origins and terrible crimes of the past mystify and are meant to terrify the reader; a virtuous maiden is persecuted by a vicious villain.

Typically for the Gothic, the atmospheric build-up of threatening mystery is complemented by a lingering suggestion of pan-determinism. Everything seems to be indicative of a grand unknown design. It begins with the mysterious monk, who approaches Vivaldi repeatedly in the ruins near the villa Altieri to warn him. He is described as a 'shadowy figure' in 'dark drapery' (p. 20). Vivaldi likens him to 'some

⁸²E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 115–130.

supernatural messenger of evil' who 'appeared so suddenly, and vanished so suddenly, that' he (Vivaldi) was 'almost compelled to believe he was literally a spiritual being!' (p. 50). He is unable to resolve his fluctuation between a natural and a metaphysical explanation of the appearances:

He was awed by the circumstances which had attended the visitations of the monk, if monk it was; by the suddenness of his appearance, and departure; by the truth of his prophecies; and, above all, by the solemn event which had verified his last warning; and his imagination, thus elevated by wonder and painful curiosity, was prepared for something above the reach of common conjecture, and beyond the accomplishment of human agency. His understanding was sufficiently clear and strong to teach him to detect many errors of opinion, that prevailed around him, as well as to despise the common superstitions of his country, and, in the usual state of his mind, he probably would not have paused for a moment on the subject awakened, and, though he was unconscious of this propensity, he would, perhaps, have been somewhat disappointed, to have descended suddenly from the region of fearful sublimity, to which he had soared — the world of terrible shadows — to the earth, on which he daily walked, and to an explanation simply natural. (Radcliffe, 58)

In *The Italian* it is, for once, the male hero who tends to believe in the supernatural. Vivaldi's propensity to consider supernatural agency is generated by his emotional state which is exhilarated and tense due to his passion for Ellena. In reality, instead of being a supernatural agent in possession of the secret context which underlies events, the enigmatic figure is a human being who knows about Schedoni's criminal past and who acts as Schedoni's assistant in the intrigues against Ellena. The mysterious monk of Paluzzi appears on the scene as early as chapter I of the first volume and makes several puzzling appearances. The mystery surrounding him is resuscitated in chapter V of the third volume, more than three hundred pages later. There he makes another series of enigmatic appearances in the prisons of the Inquisition where Vivaldi is being examined. Repeatedly, Vivaldi is led to

contemplate supernatural interference. Again the narrator voices covert criticism of his fanciful imagination:

Vivaldi checked the imperfect thought, and, though his imagination inclined him to the marvellous, and to admit ideas which, filling and expanding all the faculties of the soul, produce feelings that partake of the sublime, he now resisted the propensity, and dismissed, as absurd, a supposition, which had begun to thrill his every nerve with horror. (Radcliffe, 347)

This implied criticism, just like that contained in the previous quotation, is qualified by the elaborate information that Vivaldi's sensibility not only makes him prone to be superstitious but also establishes a rapport with the sublime. In addition, the narrator adheres to the policy of avoiding clarification of the issue by interpolating a number of comments, such as 'if indeed, that enemy was an inhabitant of the earth!' (p. 328). Their source cannot be determined: They could be those of the narrator or interior monologue on the part of Vivaldi.

Much in keeping with the well-known delaying tactics of Radcliffe, the real circumstances surrounding the Monk of Paluzzi are not discovered to Vivaldi and the reader until chapters VII and VIII of the third volume, where the strands of the story come together. In a sometimes exasperatingly laborious and confusing denouement it comes to light that Schedoni is in fact the Count di Marinella, who had confessed that his obsession with his brother's wife had caused him to commit fratricide and to rape the dead man's widow, thus forcing her to marry him. Moreover, his unfounded jealousy soon led him to kill his unhappy wife. The mysterious monk of Paluzzi is in fact Schedoni's former friend, Nicola di Zampari, who bears Schedoni a grudge because of certain broken promises. By improbable coincidence Nicola becomes acquainted with the deathbed confession of the assassin who perpetrated the fratricide on behalf of Schedoni. With the help of this and other evidence Schedoni's identity and guilt are proven and he is sentenced to

death. He dies before he can be executed, not without committing a third murder: He poisons his accuser, Nicola, and then himself.

Now that the apparently supernatural agency has, in truly Radcliffean fashion, given way to rational explanation, details, which somehow seemed to be fragments of a mysterious but meaningful whole, part and parcel of an underlying nexus, are revealed to be purely coincidental. Thus part of the carefully constructed impression of unfathomable context collapses.

A set of narrative delaying strategies which the reader has to endure until s/he reaches this point of climactic but unfulfilling enlightenment, has been identified and listed by Elizabeth R. Napier in her study, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form*. These strategies include fragmentation, exaggeration, lack of focus, and interruption. Napier also detects a tension generated by the interplay of two narrative modes at work in Radcliffe's writings:

The tendency to anchor the fiction in a real, historical past, the inclination to 'flatten' character to produce a more balanced tale, the use of coincidence to hint at a providentially superintended universe — often appear to be sources of problems rather than coherent stabilising points within the stories (and hence disrupt the novels unintentionally), other techniques of the Gothic function deliberately to create an atmosphere of unease that is directly conducive to the 'Gothic' mood of fearful suspense. The result is a form of writing — and an experience of reading — that is essentially disruptive and subversive (though not always intentionally so). Part of the distinctive experience of the Gothic may actually derive from the reader's unconscious displeasure at the conjunction of these two structural modes: with its characteristic pattern of alternating static moralising passages with scenes of often hectic action, it seems to demand an activity of consolidating on the part of its readership that its own design subverts. The result is a form that is fundamentally unstable, both in theory and in practice.⁸³

⁸³Napier, p. 42.

In *The Italian* the technique of alternating episodes of expansive moral contemplation with scenes of intense physical movement of characters through space is retained. Thus Ellena is moved swiftly through space by her enemies and her lover, Vivaldi, in a rhythm of abduction and flight which is suspended in intervals by her confinement in small rooms such as monastic cells or the gruesome chamber of the decaying manor at the coast. Such periods of detainment are filled with moral rumination about the appropriateness of her conduct.

The psychology of the characters in the novel, however, is slightly more developed than in Radcliffe's previous novels. The villain, Schedoni, assumes some aspects of the tragic hero. With all his sharp intelligence and reasoning he becomes the victim of his flawed perception of human motivation. The flickering of doubt and remorse he exhibits when he is led to believe that Ellena is his daughter, indicate that even the morally corrupt are not entirely evil. Even so, the reader is never left in any doubt about who is morally good (Ellena di Rosalba, Olivia, and Vivaldi). Similarly the cruel Marchesa experiences intervals of remorse and ultimately repents her crimes. Vivaldi is characterized by his passionate nature and strong imagination. These characteristics are responsible for his heroic traits as well as for a credulity which makes him vulnerable.

It is problematic and always speculative to determine which narrative structures are actually deliberate strategies and which are accidental effects. However, it is fair to propose, as Napier does, that the text, at times, has a subversive dynamics suggestive of a lack of authorial control. This impression that Radcliffe's aesthetics could be better developed is created by a lack of that reassuringly unifying patterning of recurrent stylistic elements which most readers (and scholars) crave and which signal that the author is in control. Naturally, one can argue that the disjointedness and incoherence in the handling of stylistic devices which characterizes Radcliffe's 'supernatural explained' is a narrative

performance which enacts on a stylistic level the characters' experience of their world and role in society.

If the reader is disappointed and irritated at the end of *The Italian* when the mysteries are briskly dissolved and supernatural agency is abruptly rationalised, the concluding pages spell out why the denouement of the story is so unconvincing:

The fête which, some time after the nuptials, was given by the Marchese, in celebration of them, was held at a delightful villa, belonging to Vivaldi, a few miles distant from Naples, upon the border of the gulf, and on the opposite shore to that which had been the frequent abode of the Marchesa. The beauty of its situation and its interior elegance induced Vivaldi and Ellena to select it as their chief residence. It was, in truth, a scene of fairy-land. [...] The style of the gardens, where lawns and groves, and woods varied the undulating surface, was that of England, and of the present day, rather than of Italy; except 'Where a long alley peeping on the main,' exhibited such gigantic loftiness of shade, and grandeur of perspective, as characterise the Italian taste. (Radcliffe, 412)

While the supernatural is dispelled, the evil forces in human society have not been exorcized. They live on outside the lovers' aesthetic dwelling but remain in sight, ready to re-invade: The Marchesa's former favourite residence is visibly situated opposite Ellena and Vivaldi's villa. Strikingly, their little Edenic refuge is the England of the author's age. Is this a last unsubtle patriotic gesture on the part of Radcliffe? One is inclined to answer in the negative, as it all sounds too good to be true. And, indeed, a few lines later the true nature of this 'paradise' (p. 413), as Paulo calls it, where class distinctions disappear and all is light and merry-making, is spelled out: The 'villa resembled a fabric called up by enchantment, rather than a structure of human art' (p. 413). By stating the utopian nature of the location, the patriotic gesture is transformed into an implied critique of English social reality.

Before the lovers are united in this rather theatrical ending (where the servant Paulo takes the stage supported by a chorus of merry singers), they have to brave a long

odyssey. Most of the important themes and the connected imagery which pervade the novel are contained in the introductory pages preceding the first chapter which set the novel decidedly in place (Naples in Italy) and time ('several years' earlier than 1764, that is some 35 years before the novel's publication). While this preface invites the English reader to identify with the English traveller who is confronted with Radcliffe's version of Italian religious culture and who is very critical of the things he learns, affairs are not as clear-cut as they appear to be on the surface. The reader, along with the Englishman, enters the Santa Maria del Pianto, a church belonging to the order of the Black Penitents. The interior of the church differs from the usually richly ornamented Italian churches and introduces Radcliffe's concern with the Burkean sublime:

The interior of this edifice had nothing of the shewy ornament and general splendor, which distinguish the churches of Italy, and particularly those of Naples; it exhibited a simplicity and grandeur of design, considerably more interesting to persons of taste, and a solemnity of light and shade much more suitable to promote the sublime elevation of devotion.

(Radcliffe, 2)

The Englishman, who is never named or in any other way personalised and implicitly represents the cultured and well-to-do English gentleman of the age of Enlightenment, discovers that this architecture, though so aesthetically pleasing, offers refuge to an assassin. While architecturally this church is described as atypical of Italian Catholic architecture, it is typical in that it harbours criminals and protects them from legal prosecution. The same obscurity which inspires the imagination with a notion of the sublime or even grants an intuition of the sublime, proffers concealment to the criminal. Paradoxically, this act of concealment is an act of revealing in its double sense: The verb 'to reveal' derives from Latin *revelatio*, which means 'to draw back the veil';⁸⁴ at the same time, the prefix 're'

⁸⁴Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 161.

suggests repetition and reinstatement of a former condition. Thus an act of revelation, of divulging information, paradoxically implies an act of *re-veiling*. The church reveals the criminal to the Englishman, but conceals him from the life outside and withdraws him from legal responsibility. This is exactly the dialectic which informs the entire novel on various levels, a dialectic of revelation and concealment.

The preface also promotes a peculiar blurring of identities. The first person the reader is tempted to identify as the Italian of the novel's title is the nameless and mysterious stranger who turns out to be an assassin. As the friar explains this to the English travellers, a discussion develops between the Englishman and the 'Italian gentleman', henceforth called 'the Italian'. This not only creates the impression that, just like the Englishman, he is representative of his culture as they discuss their contrasting views, but it also invites the reader to think that the novel is titled after him. Later on, Schedoni above all seems to merit this appellation, but, in fact, apart from the English travellers in the preface, every character in the novel is Italian, which suggests either that the precise reference of the title is obscure, or that the story told is characteristically Italian. This impression is reinforced in the discussion between the Englishman, the friar, and the Italian friend:

'An assassin!' exclaimed one of the Englishmen; 'an assassin and at liberty!'

An Italian gentleman, who was of the party, smiled at the astonishment of his friend.

'He has sought sanctuary here,' replied the friar; 'within these walls he may not be hurt.'

'Do your altars, then, protect the murderer?' said the Englishman.

'He could find shelter no where else,' answered the friar meekly.

'This is astonishing!' said the Englishman; 'of what avail are your laws, if the most atrocious criminal may thus find shelter from them? But how does he contrive to exist here! He is, at least, in danger of being starved?'

'Pardon me,' replied the friar; 'there are always people willing to assist those, who cannot assist themselves; and as the criminal may not leave the church in search of food, they bring it to him here.'

'Is it possible!' said the Englishman, turning to his Italian friend.

'Why, the poor wretch must not starve,' replied the friend; 'which he inevitably would do, if food were not brought to him! But have you never, since your arrival in Italy, happened to see a person in the situation of this man? It is by no means an uncommon one.'

'Never!' answered the Englishman, 'and I can scarcely credit what I see now!'

'Why my friend,' observed the Italian, 'if we were to shew no mercy to such unfortunate persons, assassinations are so frequent, that our cities would be half depopulated.' (Radcliffe, 2–3)

It seems a matter of course that the reader sympathizes with the Englishman who is appalled that a murderer goes unpunished as he is protected by the Catholic Church. The Englishman's rhetoric, his metonymy, joins the most sacred symbol, the altar, with the most atrocious crime, murder, which implies that in its essence Catholicism itself is underpinned by corruption and criminality. It is a religious institution whose worshippers bring food offerings to criminals and treat them like quasi deities. The apparently nonchalant commentary of the Italian gentleman extends the corrupt and criminal nature of the Church to Italian society as a whole. He states not only that the granting of sanctuary to criminals is a common phenomenon throughout Italy but also claims that the Church acts from necessity as half the population of urban Italy is made up of murderers and the country could not afford to lose such a significant number of its citizens.

The sheer excess of this accusation necessarily invites a different reading of this passage. The speech of the Italian gentleman speech must be taken with a pinch of salt. It is ironic in effect, although one cannot determine whether it is deliberately ironic. If half of the population were murderers, the other half would probably be murdered. In addition, the Englishman's question whether the assassin in the Santa Maria del Pianto 'is, at least, in danger of starving' reveals a cruel and, considering the morals of the New Testament, a fundamentally un-Christian

attitude. Not for a single moment does he consider that being confined to the church is, far from being at 'liberty', to be imprisoned.

The confessional in the church, which figures centrally both in the subtitle of the novel and in the preface, is emblematic of the complex issue of revelation and concealment. It is the very confessional in which the confession has been made that will cause the downfall of Schedoni in the subsequent narrative:

'But observe yonder confessional,' added the Italian, 'that beyond the pillars on the left of the aisle, below a painted window. Have you discovered it? The colours of the glass throw, instead of light, a shade over that part of the church, which, perhaps, prevents your distinguishing what I mean!'

The Englishman looked whither his friend pointed, and observed a confessional of oak, or some very dark wood, adjoining the wall, and remarked also, that it was the same, which the assassin had just entered. It consisted of three compartments, covered with a black canopy. In the central division was the chair of the confessor, elevated by several steps above the pavement of the church; and on either hand was a small closet, or box, with steps leading up to a grated partition, at which the penitent might kneel, and, concealed from observation, pour into the ear of the confessor, the consciousness of crimes that lay heavy on his heart. (Radcliffe, 3)

Even the window becomes a representation of the proximity of covering and discovering. On the one hand it allows the light to enter the church and in this way reveals the confessional; on the other its panes are painted and 're-veil' what they seem to expose. Just as Gothic architecture uses the presence and absence of light to conjure up an impression of expansive space and sublimity, Radcliffe makes use of it to paint a scene in which the connected dialectic of revelation can be explored.

The confessional itself occupies a central position in Catholicism and epitomises this dialectic on two levels: While the penitent is 'concealed from observation' he reveals his crimes. 'The consciousness of crimes' is then forgiven. To forgive is to forget, as the proverb suggests; crimes can be banished from the

conscious mind through ritual. Thus 're-veiled', however, they may not be properly exorcized but may haunt the perpetrator and be dragged to the surface and bring about his dissolution in the future. This is, of course, is exactly what will happen to Schedoni.

The development of the plot is similarly governed by the double sense of revelation. As the plot unfolds, clues are offered to Ellena and Vivaldi, but instead of explaining problems, they in reality *re-veil* the true state of affairs. Thus in chapter IX of volume II, Schedoni is led to believe that he is the father of Ellena, mistaking the little portrait around her neck for a depiction of himself. It is not until chapter IX of the third volume that this error of deduction is corrected and Ellena's origin is known to be sufficiently honourable and noble to make a suitable match for Vivaldi. In general, as the story takes its course, a devastating panorama emerges of the atrocities planned by Schedoni and the Marchesa and the sinister forces which govern the fate of the innocent. The utopian happy ending does nothing but throw an imperfect veil over the fact that, although a few minions of evil have been eradicated, the bulk of these forces persists to threaten the individual. Thus the denouement of the plot is an act of revelation in its double sense.

Significantly, imagery connected with the veil pervades the entire novel. Though some critical commentary has been written with respect to the veil as motif in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, its striking presence in *The Italian* seems to have gone unnoticed. In every single chapter, almost on every page, the veil occurs in one way or another. Recurrent connected vocabulary, including words such as 'disclose', 'disguise' and 'guise', 'masked', 'shrouded', 'cloak', 'deceive', 'conceal' and 'reveal', 'wrapt', 'discover', and, of course, 'veil' constitute the appropriate discourse of a thematization of the dialectics of revelation.

The symbol of the veil itself is an ancient one, and it plays, for example, an important role in Indian mythology surrounding Maya and has become associated with deception and illusion. The veil of Maya is the phenomenal world as we perceive it through our senses. The act of perception is twofold in its nature: On the one hand it can manifest itself as a blissful power and can enable characters of moral purity and strength such as Ellena to gain access to the sublime through the contemplation of nature; on the other hand perception can be illusive and misleads morally corrupt characters like Schedoni and the Marchesa into believing that they are in ultimate control of others.

In his/her imaginative act of reading the novel, the reader too is confronted with the problem of perception. Though morally flawless and evidently the key to experiencing the sublime, is Ellena's perceptive equipment sufficient to deal with life in human society? In fact, all the characters in *The Italian* are in one way or another deceived in their attempt to make sense of the world and to find their place in it. The lovers are deceived by the intrigues of the Marchesa and Schedoni. Vivaldi falls victim to the illusion of supernatural agency. The Marchesa is deceived by Schedoni's flattery and fails to see that she herself is manipulated by him and his craving for power. Even Schedoni, the master of deception, is deceived by his limited powers of imagination and lack of sensibility — he overestimates his manipulative powers and fails to understand the motivation of other human beings. The reader is left in confusion whether Vivaldi and Ellena's terrible and strenuous odyssey was a nightmare or whether their wedlock in fairy-land is the illusion.

Evidently, the veil is also a symbol with a strong erotic charge. The seven veils of Salome, the archetypal *femme fatale* in the biblical story of John the Baptist come to mind immediately. As an erotic emblem it retains its ambiguous status in that it draws attention to what it simultaneously conceals: female sexuality. When Vivaldi first encounters Ellena, she is veiled:

The sweetness and fine expression of her voice attracted his attention to her figure, which had a distinguished air of delicacy and grace; but her face was concealed in her veil. So much indeed was he fascinated by the voice, that a most painful curiosity was excited as to her countenance, which he fancied must express all the sensibility of character that the modulation of her tones indicated. He listened to their exquisite expression with a rapt attention, and hardly withdrew his eyes from her person till the matin service had concluded. (Radcliffe, 5)

Far from protecting Ellena from male desire, the veil raises Vivaldi's sexual curiosity and impels him to find out where she lives. At the doorstep of her home Ellena's guardian, Bianchi, stumbles and Ellena is obliged to let go of her veil for a moment. For a fraction, 'the breeze from the water caught the veil, which Ellena had no longer a hand sufficiently disengaged to confine, and, wafting it partially aside, disclosed to him' (p. 6) her face. As soon as the situation allows Ellena 'hastily drew her veil' (p. 6). This brief episode is emblematic of the novel as a whole: Insights are brief and partial and quickly re-veiled. A variation of this scene of first encounter appropriately occurs in the concluding part of the novel, though this time through the eyes of the servant, Paulo, who beholds 'the tender complacency of Ellena's, which her veil, partly undrawn, allowed him to observe' and who 'could scarcely refrain from expressing the joy he felt' (p. 411).

In western wedding ceremonies the bride's veil is lifted by the bridegroom; her sexuality is dedicated to him. In order to lift the bridal veil, Vivaldi needs to entice Ellena to lift the figurative 'veil of retirement' (p. 9), that is, to relinquish her withdrawn life and to expose herself more fully to society. Unfortunately, his parents dismiss her as an unsuitable match. Although this may be overbearing, it is in keeping with common thinking. When Vivaldi confesses his love for Ellena to his father, the Marchese intends to 'tear the veil from' his 'eyes' (p. 29) and declares his infatuation as a delusion. Vivaldi's determination to make Ellena his wife is matched by his mother's equally strong determination to thwart his purpose. This

conflict is the engine which drives on the plot. Her sinister intrigues, manipulated by the equally sinister intrigues of Schedoni, are spinning a web in which the lovers are caught and which is only unravelled after many dangerous adventures. Eventually the Marchesa is punished for her crimes with a fatal illness. The Marchesa's death is strikingly convenient in bringing about the happy ending, as she, contrite in the face of death, obliges her husband to sanction the lovers' marriage. Ironically, she would also have been herself a devastating liability to her family, considering her murderous designs against her daughter in law.

Schedoni, who is eager to 'throw an impenetrable veil over his origin' (p. 34) assists the Marchesa in the plan to abduct Ellena and to take her to a convent ruled by a corrupt and merciless abbess. The abbess attempts to force Ellena 'to accept the veil' (p. 83). The only alternative to becoming the bride of Christ given to Ellena by her persecutors is to lift the bridal veil to a husband chosen by the wrathful Marchesa. The convent walls conceal Ellena from the outside world, but they are also the setting in which she encounters the nun Olivia, who, it is later revealed, is her mother:

Among the voices of the choir, was one whose expression immediately fixed her attention; it seemed to speak a loftier sentiment of devotion than the others, and to be modulated by the melancholy of an heart, that had long since taken leave of this world. Whether it swelled with the high peal of the organ, or mingled in low and trembling accents with the sinking chorus, Ellena felt that she understood all the feelings of the breast from which it flowed; and she looked to the gallery where the nuns were assembled, to discover a countenance, that might seem to accord with the sensibility expressed in the voice. As no strangers were admitted to the chapel, some of the sisters had thrown back their veils, and she saw little that interested her in their various faces; but the figure and attitude of a nun, kneeling in a remote part of the gallery, beneath a lamp, which threw its rays aslant her head, perfectly agreed with the idea she had formed of the singer, and the sound seemed to approach immediately from that direction. Her face was concealed by a black veil, whose transparency, however, permitted the fairness of her complexion to appear; but the air of her head, and the singularity of her attitude, for

she was the only person who remained kneeling, sufficiently indicated the superior degree of fervency and penitence, which the voice had expressed.

When the hymn had ceased, she rose from her knees, and Ellena, soon after, observing her throw back her veil, discovered, by the lamp, which shed its full light upon her features, a countenance, that instantly confirmed her conjecture. (Radcliffe, 86)

For Olivia, the veil is a symbol of exclusion from the secular world. Unlike Ellena she has voluntarily chosen to withdraw to a convent. The veil signals her devotion to Christ and is also a symbol of the institution which grants her refuge. It protects her from the murderous pursuit of Schedoni who has victimized her in a horrible way. At his hands she suffered the loss of her first husband, rape and a forced marriage to her rapist, and a vicious knife attack. With the help of her sister she deceived her attacker into believing her dead and escaped by taking the veil. For all the naivety of Radcliffe's text, the veil functions throughout as an impressive (and sustainedly ambiguous) symbol. One cannot but wonder if it does not relate to the situation of the woman writer in early 19th-century England: both revealing herself in and concealing herself behind her fiction. Radcliffe's art enshrines the two dimensions of revelation (revelation as the act of divulging truth *and* as an act of *re-veiling* it).

While the switch to fairy-tale mood appears in *The Italian* to be a slip with an unforeseen dynamic, the deliberate use of fairy-tale mode in *Der blonde Eckbert* adds a startling dimension to the narrative. Ludwig Tieck's *Kunstmärchen*, which differs so radically from Radcliffe's ladylike approach to the Gothic and has retained all of its disturbing potential, is the subject of the next chapter. Thus we move from the school of terror to the more uncompromising school of horror.

Chapter Two

Ludwig Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*: War of the Worlds

Forget the dead, the past? Oh, yet
 There are ghosts that may take revenge for it,
 Memories that make the heart a tomb,
 Regrets which glide through the spirit's gloom,
 And with ghastly whispers tell
 That joy, once lost, is pain.⁸⁵

Tieck's novel, *William Lovell* (1795–96), appeared simultaneously with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and represents in some ways a negative of it. Instead of being an optimistic *Bildungsroman* which depicts the individual's learning process through exposure to art and love, and which concludes with the hero as a well-adapted, useful member of human society, *William Lovell* describes a process of moral decline with a strong psychological interest in the pathological psyche. This psychopathological interest also informs Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*.⁸⁶ Although his novella was only published in the year after *Lovell*, it is a far more startling representation of the dissolution of the individual psyche. Its narrative form dismisses the elaborateness of the previous epistolary form in favour of a radically economical organization of its contents. Unlike Radcliffe, Tieck freely introduces the supernatural in his representation of the uncanny. However, the novella's stunning innovation lies, as will be discussed, in its original use of the *Volksmärchen* and *Volkssage* modes and its unusual self-reflectivity. The uncanny is essentially the result of the crossing and increasing blurring of thresholds which are normally considered firmly to separate conflicting realms. These thresholds are both of a thematic and of a stylistic nature. As a rule, of course, the border between stylistic and thematic concerns frequently becomes indistinct. By exploiting the

⁸⁵Percy Bysshe Shelley, second stanza of 'The Past' (1824), in *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970; repr. 1988), p. 553.

⁸⁶Ludwig Tieck, *Schriften*, ed. by Uwe Schweikert and others, 12 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–), VI: *Phantastus*, ed. by Manfred Frank (1985). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

interplay of style and theme, Tieck creates one of the most unsettling reading experiences imaginable, a genuine *maelstrom* of disaster.

Most critics have noted the fairy-tale as the conspicuous narrative mode of Tieck's narrative.⁸⁷ To be more precise, though, there are two neighbouring narrative conventions at work: the *Volksmärchen* and the *Volkssage*, as defined by Max Lüthi.⁸⁸ While the narrative frame is dominated by the convention of the *Volkssage*, Bertha's tale reproduces predominantly the formal features of the *Volksmärchen*. The use of these conventions sets up certain expectations on the part of the reader and generally evokes two genres which are based upon the ancient tradition of story-telling. Incidentally the issue of narration is also on the agenda of *Der blonde Eckbert*.

Lüthi points out that, unlike the *Märchen*, the *Volkssage* 'macht [...] Anspruch darauf, geglaubt zu werden' (*Volksmärchen*, p. 46), and this is why it displays a tendency to name authentic localities and to name its characters. Thus in the frame story of *Der blonde Eckbert* an authentic locality is offered in the form of 'in einer Gegend des Harzes' (p. 126), and the characters have names (Eckbert, Bertha, Walther, etc.). These formal features, however, are only of secondary importance for the genre. They are indicative of the fact that the *Sage* asks to be believed; accordingly, its characters are believable: They are psychologized individuals who are part of their surroundings, who have a defined relationship to their community, even if this relationship is rather defined by a lack of social contact, as they have only one friend and live a comparatively isolated life in their castle.

⁸⁷Compare, for example, Paul Gerhard Klussmann, 'Die Zweideutigkeit des Wirklichen in Ludwig Tiecks Märchenovellen', in *Ludwig Tieck*, ed. by Wulf Segebrecht, *Wege der Forschung*, 386 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), pp. 352–385; Horton; Swales, 'Eckbert'; Ripperre; Marianne Thalmann, *Märchen und Moderne*.

⁸⁸Max Lüthi, *Volksmärchen und Volkssage: Zwei Grundformen erzählender Dichtung* (Bern: Francke, 1975), pp. 22–46. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Another important observation by Lüthi concerns the treatment of the supernatural: 'In der Sage ist das Wunder ein schwer begreifliches Hereinragen des Ganz Anderen in die menschliche Welt; verwirrend und erschütternd wird ein Bruchstück des äußerlich vielleicht nahen, innerlich aber unheimlich fremden Jenseits sichtbar' (*Volksmärchen*, p. 41). In both genres the supernatural remains unexplained: 'Im Märchen wie in der Sage [bleibt] das Wunderbare letztlich unerklärt. Das Unheimliche der Sage wirkt aus einem dunklen und unerforschten Raum in die Menschenwelt hinein; niemand sagt uns, von wem die zaubermächtigen Helfer oder Gegner des Märchenhelden ihre Kraft haben' (*Volksmärchen*, p. 22). While Märchen figures (as they lack real character, they should not be referred to as characters) never reflect on the supernatural but take it for granted, Bertha and Eckbert repeatedly reflect on it, as will be seen, and, indeed, they are so shaken that they ultimately cannot survive the encounter with it. Thus they conform closely with Lüthi's description of the characters of the *Sage*:

Die Menschen der Sage sind offen für Tiefenerlebnisse aller Art; sie empfinden Angst, Lust, Qual; die Lähmungen und Verstümmelungen, welche Jenseitige ihnen zufügen, schmerzen sie heftig und machen sie zu Krüppeln; die Krankheiten, die ihnen angeworfen werden, lassen sie langsam dahinsiechen; die Berührung mit dem Ganz Anderen wirft sie in lähmende Schwermut oder treibt sie in den Wahnsinn. Nichts läßt uns so sehr die unheimliche und vielschichtige Tiefe der Seele spüren wie Schwermut und Wahnsinn. Das Märchen kennt keine wahnsinnigen Menschen. Seine Menschen sind *Figuren*; sie haben nichts in sich, das plötzlich in Wahnsinn umschlagen könnte. (*Volksmärchen*, 31)

Even in the first paragraph of *Der blonde Eckbert* a discordant tone can be detected which signals that Eckbert and Bertha are characters with an inner life. Eckbert is described as an average-looking man with a 'blassen eingefallenen Gesichte' (p. 126). This symptom of ill health suggests the hero's lack of vitality. The notion of lack is then further expanded to lack of children and lack of social contact: 'Sein Weib liebte die Einsamkeit eben so sehr, und beide schienen sich von

Herzen zu lieben, nur klagten sie gewöhnlich darüber, daß der Himmel ihre Ehe mit keinen Kindern segnen wolle' (p. 126). The yearning for children could be the explanation for Eckbert's 'Melancholie' and 'Verschlossenheit' (p.126). The use of 'schiene' indicates an instance of uncertainty: Is the narrator unsure of their relationship; is something wrong with their relationship? His only friend is Philipp Walther, to whom he feels kindred in spirit. For a fraction the tale has left the safe ground of the indicative mode. The reader is already warned that things may not always be accepted at face value. This is the starting point for a long series of ambiguities which will increasingly invade the tale.

The first explicit warning is made in the form of a remark which interrupts the narrative flow. The abrupt change of tone ensures that the reader reflects upon this remark which various critics have noted.⁸⁹ It takes the form of a generalizing psychological comment:

Es gibt Stunden, in denen es den Menschen ängstigt, wenn er vor seinem Freunde ein Geheimnis haben soll, was er bis dahin oft mit vieler Sorgfalt verborgen hat; die Seele fühlt dann einen unwiderstehlichen Trieb, sich ganz mitzuteilen, dem Freunde auch das Innerste aufzuschließen, damit er um so mehr unser Freund werde. In diesem Augenblick geben sich die zarten Seelen einander zu erkennen, und zuweilen geschieht es wohl auch, daß einer vor der Bekanntschaft des andern zurückschreckt. (Tieck, 126–127)

This paragraph anticipates the psychological motif that underlies the narrative. As Victoria L. Rippere describes it, both Bertha and Eckbert suffer from the compulsion to confess.⁹⁰ Formulations such as 'unser' and 'wohl' urge the reader to consent, thus involving him/her further. Considering the generality and the elegant formulation of this commentary, this invitation to the reader seems to bear little risk. In truth this is a snare, as the commentary is, to say the least, cruelly euphemistic. Nothing prepares the reader for the gruesome realization of the

⁸⁹See Swales, 'Eckbert'; Rippere; Thalmann, *Märchen und Moderne*, p. 49.

⁹⁰Rippere, p. 475.

psychological dilemma it describes. A phrase like 'geben sich die zarten Seelen einander zu erkennen' in no way steels us for the fatal consequences of Bertha's confession. In retrospect, the commentary is cruelly ironical.

The gesture of ultimate trust is made when the late hour and unfriendly weather occasion Walther's staying overnight. The intimacy of being under the same roof, enclosed by the dark of the night, opens the hearts of the friends to ever more confidential communications. Eckbert takes Walther's hand; this intimate gesture precedes his wife relating her pre-marital life story. Strikingly, he does not ask Bertha beforehand whether she is willing to tell her story; after all, it is her very personal story. The fact that he considers his wife's story as the most intimate information about himself, and that Bertha does not object, is suggestive of a considerable degree of identification between the two characters, and, indeed, it has been pointed out that their names even share the syllable 'bert'.⁹¹ Eckbert is determined to share the knowledge of his wife's past with Walther. In order to emphasize the significance of this moment, the narrator places it at midnight, the witching hour — an uncanny moment in which the crimes of the past may return by dint of supernatural agency, often with severe impact on the present.

As Bertha begins to speak, we notice an element of unease in her speech. She is apologetic and makes clear that she only tells her story because she feels obliged to do so by her husband. Significantly, she urges Walther not to mistake it for a 'Märchen' (p. 127), however strange it may sound. In this remarkable instance of textual self-reflectivity, we are warned that, despite its narrative mode which is very much that of the *Volksmärchen*, Bertha's tale is not a fairy-tale. The act of story-telling now becomes explicitly an issue of the novella. Here Bertha expresses

⁹¹John M. Ellis, *Narration in the German Novelle: Theory and Interpretation* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 89.

in obvious terms what the ambiguous modes like the use of 'scheinen' and the subjunctive reinforce throughout the narrative.

Over roughly ten pages (which constitute the centre and longest part of the novella) Bertha relates her story. As the daughter of a poor shepherd (she is unaware that she is living with foster parents) she has an unhappy childhood and often indulges in escapism from harsh realities into the realm of fairy. She fantasizes how she would 'überschütten' her parents 'mit Gold und Silber' (p. 128) and would enjoy their rapture; her daydreams are filled with spirits who present her with treasures. The ideas which occupy her imagination so vividly are typical motifs of the *Volksmärchen*. We are told how these wishful fantasies render her increasingly unable to cope with the demands of the mundane world:

Die wunderbarsten Phantasien beschäftigten mich, und wenn ich nun aufstehen mußte, um irgend etwas zu helfen, oder zu tragen, so zeigte ich mich noch viel ungeschickter, weil mir der Kopf von all den seltsamen Vorstellungen schwindelte. (Tieck, 128)

Her foster father feels that she becomes ever more of a burden and his patience, already worn by the misery of poverty, is soon exhausted. Bertha is well aware that poverty is the reason for her foster parents' unhappy marriage. Although she mentions her foster mother, she is mainly concerned with her own relationship to her foster father who abuses her. This relationship comes to a head when Bertha is eight years old. Her father believes it is time that she made her contribution to the household and is furious when she cannot comply with his wishes. He cruelly punishes her, and in the following night Bertha is so desperate to escape that she runs away. As Lüthi points out, the *Märchen* 'beginnt seine Erzählung mit Vorliebe gerade bei dem Punkt, wo der Held sich von seinem Dorfe löst und als Einzelner in die Welt hinauswandert' (*Volksmärchen*, p. 29). Although Bertha also corresponds to a traditional fairy-tale hero/ine in that she is isolated by her inadequacy, she always remains fundamentally a reflecting character.

In the course of the flight the fear of isolation and the unknown seizes her. In the original version of 1797 in the *Volksmärchen*, Bertha briefly interrupts her story at this moment of her narration: She is apologetic again — this time for her verbosity. Her verbosity is a sure sign of her emotional involvement in the subject of her story. This can be interpreted, in Victoria L. Rippere's sense, in terms of confession compulsion: 'Sooft ich von dieser Geschichte spreche, werde ich geschwätzig, und Eckbert, der einzige Mensch, dem ich sie erzählt habe, hat mich durch seine Aufmerksamkeit verwöhnt' (p. 74). The important point is that Bertha has not yet come to terms with her past, and that the intimacy of Bertha's communication is stressed once more. The rumination of things past, one's personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, may be therapeutical. In this case articulation acts as ventilation and affords relief. On the other hand, unlocking sinister secrets from one's past problems may resemble the opening of Pandora's box: Once the lid is lifted, the evils within can be contained no longer. This is exactly Bertha's and Eckbert's dilemma.

First, however, Bertha continues to relate her story, and the reader follows her into a peculiar experience of limits transgressed, which challenge her as well as the reader's sense of familiarity:

Die Felsen um mich her gewannen jetzt eine andere, weit seltsamere Gestalt. Es waren Klippen, so auf einander gepackt, daß es das Ansehen hatte, als wenn sie der erste Windstoß durcheinander werfen würde. Ich wußte nicht, ob ich weitergehen sollte. Ich hatte des Nachts immer im Walde geschlafen, denn es war gerade zur schönsten Jahreszeit, oder in abgelegenen Schäferhütten; hier traf ich aber gar keine menschliche Wohnung und konnte auch nicht vermuten, in dieser Wildnis auf eine zu stoßen; die Felsen wurden immer furchtbarer, ich mußte oft dicht an schwindlichten Abgründen vorbeigehn, und endlich hörte sogar der Weg unter meinen Füßen auf. Ich war ganz trostlos, ich weinte und schrie, und in den Felstälern hallte meine Stimme auf eine schreckliche Art zurück. (Tieck, 129–130)

This quotation contains an example of a dynamic reciprocity between internal and external landscape. The more desperate she grows with the feeling of isolation, the more surrealistic her environment becomes. The rocks begin to pile up and seem to enlarge. On the one hand they are 'furchtbar' and oppressive; on the other hand they peculiarly lack substance and appear to Bertha to be weightless like theatre props. This ambivalent impression of the external is followed by her loss of internal orientation; she is unsure whether to continue her journey. The syntax of the sentence starting 'Ich hatte des Nachts' consists of a sequence of clauses which aptly evoke the emotional strain of increasing isolation intensifying and ultimately culminating in the complete loss of orientation of 'hörte der Weg unter meinen Füßen auf'. Not only the rocks but also the clauses are 'aufeinander gepackt'. The loss of internal security is prompted by the loss of physical structure: 'endlich hörte sogar der Weg unter meinen Füßen auf'. The use of 'unter' instead of 'vor meinen Füßen' is striking and implies that she is physically suspended in the air. Moreover, night breaks, and Bertha is virtually enveloped by nothingness. A mental condition is complemented by physical reality. According to Todorov the fantastic is to be found where the gap between the inner and the outer world is blurred.⁹² A less fantastic, but nevertheless terrifying, version of the extension of the mental to the physical and back into the mental is represented by the echo of Bertha's desperate screams.

The increasingly surreal landscape signals the passage into the world of the fairy-tale. In this experience of limits suicidal intentions are only just counterpoised by the instinctive fear of death. Although the minute description of her despair defies the simplicity of the *Volksmärchen* convention, the introduction of fairy-tale themes is plain: Bertha, like so many fairy-tale protagonists, finds herself in a forest-wilderness and climbs a tree in order to regain orientation. As she continues

⁹²Todorov, pp. 36–38.

her wanderings at the break of dawn (a symbol of another threshold in life), the atmosphere changes:

Gegen Abend schien die Gegend umher etwas freundlicher zu werden, meine Gedanken, meine Wünsche lebten wieder auf, die Lust am Leben erwachte in allen meinen Adern. Ich glaubte jetzt, das Gesause einer Mühle aus der Ferne zu hören, ich verdoppelte meine Schritte, und wie wohl, wie leicht ward mir, als ich endlich wirklich die Grenze der öden Felsen erreichte. (Tieck, 131)

With reviving hopes the surroundings seem to grow somewhat friendlier. The use of 'schien' and 'glaubte' raise doubts about Bertha's perception. The previously threatening and surreal aspects of the surroundings might after all depend on Bertha's frame of mind. Alternatively, an interdependence between internal and external landscapes could exist — they appear to influence each other. The change in Bertha's mood is complemented by a transformation of the landscape. She describes that moment of crossing a threshold in terms of extremes: 'als wenn ich aus der Hölle in ein Paradies getreten wäre'. The step from hell to paradise is only this simple in the *Märchen* where the 'Jenseitsreich ist im Grunde gar nicht jenseitig, sondern nur örtlich fern' (Lüthi, *Volksmärchen*, p. 27). And, indeed, fairy-tale motifs seem to dominate from now on.

First Bertha meets an old woman, a strange character, who is a conflation of the witch and Christian hermit; she has a crutch and sings 'mit kreischendem Ton ein geistliches Lied' (p. 131), offering wine and bread to Bertha. The woman responds to the situation in the fairy-tale fashion; she makes the decision of taking Bertha with her without further ado; she shows no surprise whatsoever about finding a little girl all on her own in such a lonely spot; in short she shows none of the self-reflection that characterizes Bertha.

At this point of her narrative, Bertha the narrator makes an analytical comment which stresses the significance of this moment in her life: 'Meine junge Seele bekam jetzt zuerst eine Ahndung von der Welt und ihren Begebenheiten. Ich

vergaß mich und meine Führerin, mein Geist und meine Augen schwärmten nur zwischen den goldenen Wolken' (p. 132). As she is led away by the old woman, Bertha drifts into a kind of meditative condition, taking in the hues of the sunset. She loses her consciousness, just as Eckbert will when he comes to enter the old woman's realm.

Following Bertha to her new home with the old woman, the reader seems to step deeper and deeper into a fairy-tale scenery. The song of a magic bird praising the seclusion the forests afford, the 'Waldeinsamkeit', greets them on their arrival. As causality is suspended in favour of coincidence, the extraordinary intermingles with playful facility with the ordinary. Lüthi claims that, paradoxically, because every occurrence and existence in the fairy-tale is isolated and 'in sich abgekapselt' and does not need to relate to each other (*Volksmärchen*, p. 36), the strangest occurrences can be linked to each other with ease:

Wenn infolge der Isolierung Nächstes zu Nächstem ohne Beziehung bleiben kann, so vermag umgekehrt zufolge eben dieser Isolierung Fremdestes mit Fremdestem mühelos in Verbindung zu treten. Nicht trotz der Isolierung, sondern wegen der Isolierung. Wären die Gestalten und Dinge des Märchens eingebaut in feste Bindungen, wie die der Sage, wären sie verhaftet in Dorfgemeinschaft und Sippe, in bestimmten Lebens- und Denkgewohnheiten, dann wären sie nicht frei für das Eingehen immer gerade der Bindungen, welche die einzelnen Situationen erfordern. Elemente, die ineinander verzahnt sind, sind nicht geeignet, immer gerade dort sich einzufügen, wo es nottut; sie sind zu sehr spezialisiert. Menschen und Dinge der Sage, Teil einer festen Gemeinschaft, bleiben an diese und damit an den Ort gefesselt. Die isolierten, in sich geschlossenen Märchenfiguren aber sind fähig, sich 'frei' zu bewegen, sich tragen zu lassen, überall, wo es nottut, Anschluß zu finden, leicht jede beliebige Verbindung einzugehen und sie ebenso leicht wieder zu lösen. Die Isoliertheit der Märchenelemente gewährleistet ihre *potentielle Allverbundenheit*. (*Volksmärchen*, 39)

The reader, of course, along with Bertha, is puzzled about this unexpected predominance of fairy-tale register. In her first night Bertha reflects on the dream-

like quality of her surroundings. Thus the reader has to share the inexplicability of her new existence; somehow Bertha's former fantasies have materialized:

Ich blieb nicht lange munter, ich war halb betäubt, aber in der Nacht wachte ich einigemal auf, und dann hörte ich die Alte husten und mit dem Hunde sprechen und den Vogel dazwischen, der im Traum zu sein schien, und immer nur einzelne Worte von seinem Liede sang. Das machte mit den Birken, die vor dem Fenster rauschten, und mit dem Gesang der Nachtigall ein so wunderbares Gemisch, daß es mir immer nicht war, als sei ich erwacht, sondern als fiele ich nun in einen anderen noch seltsamern Traum. (Tieck, 133)

Bertha quickly settles to her new home and achieves with ease what seemed to be out of reach before; she learns to spin and becomes an accomplished housekeeper. Soon she accepts the fairy-tale conditions around her as a matter of course and conforms in many ways quite closely to the figure of the *Märchen* heroine; her reflectivity seems to dwindle.

The old woman seems to spring directly from the genre of the *Märchen*: Time does not take a toll on her; she is an isolated figure without indication of an inner life, and thus conforms to the 'abstrakt-flächenhaften Stil' of the fairy-tale. One day she reveals to Bertha that each of the bird's eggs encloses a pearl or a precious stone. This revelation coincides with Bertha's beginning adolescence, when she is twelve years old. Although Bertha has adapted well to her role as the fairy-tale heroine, her reflectivity and her submission to biological ageing still remind the reader of the peculiarity of the whole situation. As is the case in fairy-tales, every new piece of information serves to drive forward the plot. The knowledge of the precious eggs, combined with the frequent and long absences of the old woman, offer the opportunity of transgression — a common ingredient of the fairy-tale. In fact, transgression frequently functions as the driving force behind the plot in both fairy-tales and Gothic literature. The opportunity is given along with the stimulus to seize upon it by the old woman herself. Firstly, she offers Bertha 'einige alte geschriebene Bücher, die wunderbare Geschichten enthielten' (p.

134). These tales within a tale within a tale stimulate the girl's imagination and give her a sense that she lives in a limited world. They furnish her with images upon which to focus her awakening sexuality:

Ich hatte auch von Liebe etwas gelesen und spielte nun in meiner Phantasie seltsame Geschichten mit mir selber. Ich dachte mir den schönsten Ritter von der Welt, ich schmückte ihn mit allen Vortrefflichkeiten aus, ohne eigentlich zu wissen, wie er nun nach allen meinen Bemühungen aussah: aber ich konnte ein rechtes Mitleid mit mir selber haben, wenn er mich nicht wieder liebte.
(Tieck, 135)

Bertha's reflectivity is rekindled. Her desire is no longer auto-erotic but requires an image of the other upon which it can be projected, as yet an undefined fantasy of an attractive knight. Again she projects herself into a different world — this time the adult world. She now prefers to be at home alone because then she can lead an autonomous life as 'die Gebieterin im Hause' (p. 135).

The second stimulus is a moralizing comment made by the old woman:

'Du bist brav, mein Kind!' sagte sie einst zu mir mit einem schnarrenden Tone; 'wenn du so fortfährst, wird es dir auch immer gut gehen: aber nie gedeiht es, wenn man von der rechten Bahn abweicht, die Strafe folgt nach, wenn auch noch so spät.'
(Tieck, 135–136)

It is the contemplation of this mysterious comment which inspires Bertha with a sense of material wealth:

Ich überlegte alle Worte genau, ich hatte wohl von Reichtümern gelesen, und am Ende fiel mir ein, daß ihre Perlen und Edelsteine wohl etwas Kostbares sein könnten. Dieser Gedanke wurde mir bald noch deutlicher. Aber was konnte sie mir mit der rechten Bahn meinen? Ganz konnte ich den Sinn ihrer Worte noch immer nicht fassen. (Tieck, 136)

Sexual desire, together with the notion of property, signal the end of the abstractness of fairy-tale existence and simultaneously the end of Bertha's childhood innocence. The sense of good and evil and the experience of guilt is soon

to come. Two years later, when Bertha is fourteen, these seeds bear fruit. Bertha the narrator marks this threshold moment with a generalizing psychological comment which resembles in tone the comment made by the narrator in the frame story: 'Es ist ein Unglück für den Menschen, daß er seinen Verstand nur darum bekommt, um die Unschuld seiner Seele zu verlieren' (p. 136).

Her fantasies of herself as a member of the adult world become so intense that the limitations of her home grow unbearable. Bertha realizes that the possession of the bird and the treasures can procure her a position in that world. This knowledge is followed by a painful process which results in the decision to leave her restrictive abode: 'Es war ein seltsamer Kampf in meiner Seele, wie ein Streiten von zwei widerspenstigen Geistern in mir' (p. 137). The most painful factor seems the necessity of leaving the dog (whose name she has significantly forgotten) to a fate of likely starvation.

Her journey takes Bertha back to her place in what is to her the ordinary world. This threshold moment is again marked with an analytical comment by Bertha the narrator: 'Wie die menschliche Natur vergeblich ist, so glaubt ich jetzt, meine vormalige Reise in der Kindheit sei nicht so trübselig gewesen als meine jetzige, ich wünschte mich wieder in derselben Lage zu sein' (p. 138). By coincidence she returns to her old village. The appearance of financial considerations serves as the unmistakable indicator of the ordinary world; Bertha has to sell some of the precious stones to keep herself alive. Her childhood wish for a triumphant return to her parents, to shower them with riches, is not granted — they have died in the intervening years.

In the course of time ordinary life supplants her memories of her life in the forest and she lives in relative contentment until the stolen magic bird, who has not sung (and thus had ceased to be a magic bird) for a long time, suddenly resumes its song in an altered version. The verse now deplores the loss of the peaceful life in

the forest ('Waldeinsamkeit', p. 139) and anticipates a future time when Bertha will regret having left the forest. The song is ambiguous; it can be understood as a nostalgic reminder of the loss of a prelapsarian condition or as a warning of punishment to come. The latter reading recalls the warning of the old woman. Bertha's guilty conscience revives. As the bird repeats the song over and over again, Bertha becomes increasingly anxious. At last she is driven to silence it. Half intentionally and half involuntarily (nothing is clearcut in this tale), she kills it. The effort is in vain; her guilty conscience persists and Bertha becomes paranoid with the thought that the old woman will rob or even murder her in turn one day.

The next stage in her life is marked by her marriage to Eckbert, which leads us, somewhat abruptly, back into the present and the frame story. The fairy-tale elements in Bertha's narration have set up an expectation of a happy ending, but it has not materialized. We know from the opening of the story that their marriage lacks fulfilment; as the old woman predicted, nothing has 'gedeiht'. The abrupt and low-key ending of Bertha's story and the sudden return to the frame situation generates unease in the reader. This is reinforced by Bertha's immediate withdrawal, after Walther's knowledge of the little dog's name reveals that he is inexplicably linked to Bertha's past — a supreme moment of thresholds being crossed. All of a sudden Walther is transformed from a well-known friend into an enigmatic person who is inexplicably connected with the strange world of the old woman.

Eckbert and Walther also retire. Although Eckbert is as yet unaware of this strange event, he is already full of remorse at having shared Bertha's story with Walther. At the same time he feels guilty for his distrust. The following day shows how badly Bertha is affected; she is too ill to attend breakfast. Walther's leave-taking seems to Eckbert less cordial than it ought to be: 'Es fiel ihm ein, daß Walther nicht so herzlich von ihm Abschied genommen hatte, als es nach einer

solchen Vertraulichkeit wohl natürlich gewesen wäre' (p. 140). At this point the narrator suggests that any change in Walther's behaviour might be in Eckbert's imagination by introducing the sentence with the phrase 'es fiel ihm ein' and by using the verb in the subjunctive mode. The insertion of another generalizing comment on the workings of the human mind strengthens this impression: 'Wenn die Seele erst einmal zum Argwohn gespannt ist, so trifft sie auch in allen Kleinigkeiten Bestätigungen an' (pp. 140–141).

In the subsequent paragraph, however, a change of tone becomes notable: 'Bertha war krank und konnte nicht zum Frühstück erscheinen; Walther schien sich nicht viel darum zu kümmern und verließ auch den Ritter ziemlich gleichgültig' (p. 141) Whereas 'schien sich nicht [...] zu kümmern' still leaves room for conjecture, 'verließ auch den Ritter ziemlich gleichgültig' is a confirmation of a change in Walther's behaviour on the part of the narrative voice. This uncertain message to the reader makes it difficult to evaluate the situation.

From this time onward Bertha's health grows poorer and Walther's visits grow shorter and rarer. This pains Eckbert, but however much he tries to conceal his torment, the others cannot fail to notice it. The reader finds it once more impossible to determine whether the infrequency of Walther's visits is a consequence of Eckbert's hostility towards him, or, vice versa, whether Eckbert's anxiety is a result of an actual change in Walther's behaviour. As was the case with Bertha and her surroundings in her tale, it is impossible to determine cause and effect.

One day Bertha, who cannot recover, lets Eckbert know that she fell ill as a consequence of the shock she received on Walther's knowing the little dog's name. Her death follows soon after this confession. While she is on her deathbed, her unaware husband is out hunting and shoots Walther. After the murder nothing is resolved; in fact, Eckbert's state of mind is troubled by more contradictory

emotions. He simultaneously feels 'leicht und beruhigt' (p. 142) and is driven home by a disquieting presentiment. At the castle he finds his wife dead and is informed by the servants that her last words concerned Walther and the old woman. The connection between the two is explicitly voiced and vaguely anticipates the old woman's identification with Walther.

While Eckbert was melancholic throughout his married life, which found expression in his pale and 'eingefallenen' features, he is now, as a widower, 'ganz mit sich zerfallen' (p. 142). His guilty conscience haunts him; and his psyche rapidly disintegrates under the pressure of contradictory emotions. He longs for friendship but is at the same time afraid of it. The discrepancy of his comparatively contented and peaceful life in the past and the destitution of his present life is so intense that his existence appears to him somehow unreal; it is yet another moment of reflectivity in which he comments on his life as seeming 'in manchen Augenblicken mehr wie ein seltsames Märchen, als wie ein wirklicher Lebenslauf' (p. 143). At this point Eckbert spells out the dialectic modes in which he experiences his life: *Märchen* and his *Wirklichkeit*. The inability to make sense of the interplay of these modes result in a fundamental uncertainty which undermines Eckbert's existence. The reader experiences a similar ambiguity on a stylistic level; an increasing uncertainty about the nature of the tale is generated by the dialectic of *Märchen* convention and the mode of *Volkssage* with its claim to reality. This uncertainty is intensified by the interpolation of psychological commentary. As Eckbert struggles to make sense of his enigmatic experience, the reader is driven to make sense of this tripartite compressing of genres, but this undertaking is doomed, and, as we will soon see, the moment when the modes of *Volksmärchen* and *Volkssage* fuse is essentially a moment of dissolution.

In his desperate attempt to find a *modus vivendi* by ending his isolation and making friends, Eckbert repeats his wife's fatal mistake. When he meets Hugo who

offers him the companionship he craves for, Eckbert is compelled to confess his guilt. He seeks to alleviate his guilty conscience and confesses the death he has caused. Again the inevitability of intimate discourse generates distrust towards his friend. Once more the narrative voice creates uncertainty in the reader's judgement of the ensuing situation:

Es schien aber seine Verdammnis zu sein, grade in der Stunde des Vertrauens Argwohn zu schöpfen, denn kaum waren sie in den Saal getreten, als ihm beim Schein der vielen Lichter die Mienen seines Freundes nicht gefielen. Er glaubte ein hämisches Lächeln zu bemerken, es fiel ihm auf, daß er nur wenig mit ihm spreche, daß er mit den Anwesenden viel rede und seiner gar nicht zu achten scheine. [...] Er glaubte sich verraten, und eine schreckliche Wut bemeisterte sich seiner. Indem er noch immer hinstarrte, sah er plötzlich Walthers Gesicht, alle seine Mienen, die ganze, ihm so wohlbekannte Gestalt, er sah noch immer hin und ward überzeugt, daß niemand als Walther mit dem Alten spreche. (Tieck, 144)

A long sequence of verbs in the subjunctive mode casts doubt upon the external reality of what Eckbert perceives. In addition the reader has been informed of Eckbert's mental derangement; therefore, when he believes he has witnessed the transformation of Hugo into Walther, this may be explained as a hallucination, a faulty perception on the part of Eckbert. And, indeed, Eckbert himself questions his mental state in another moment of reflectivity: 'Oft dachte er, daß er wahnsinnig sei, und sich selber durch seine Einbildung alles erschaffe' (p. 144).

To regain his composure Eckbert decides to seek distraction by travelling. On horseback he enters a rocky landscape that is reminiscent of the one Bertha had to cross. He, too, goes through an experience of limits, and the rocky landscape serves as a gateway to the old woman's fairy-tale world. Having lost his way he addresses himself to a peasant who points out a direction leading past a waterfall. This waterfall is the landmark passed by Bertha on her journey to the house in the forest. Eckbert is struck by a peculiar and alarming idea concerning the peasant: 'Was gilt's, sagte Eckbert zu sich selber, ich könnte mir wieder einbilden, daß dies

Niemand anders als Walther sei? – Und indem sah er sich noch einmal um, und es war Niemand anders als Walther' (p. 145).

Again the suggestion is made that the act of perceiving can be an act of transformation. On this occasion, the possibility that the transformation is a figment of Eckbert's imagination is undermined by the narrative voice. The narrator actually seems to confirm Eckbert's impression: The indicative 'war' implies that it is indeed Walther whom he sees. Eckbert seems to have stepped into a supernatural world — the fairy-tale world of Bertha's apprenticeship. The enigmatic world of Bertha's narrated time now usurps that of the frame story. In relation to the fairy-tale world, the frame story constitutes, of course, the world of the *Erzählzeit*. Eckbert's passage into this world, just like that of his wife, is characterized by a dreamy mood: 'Er stieg träumend einen Hügel hinan; es war, als wenn er ein nahes munteres Bellen vernahm, Birken säuselten dazwischen, und er hörte mit wunderlichen Tönen ein Lied singen' (p. 145). The 'as if' adds the essential ingredient of uncertainty. The song of the magic bird has slightly changed. It now expresses the joy of regained 'Waldeinsamkeit' and implicitly conjures up the notion of paradise regained. The next sentence is significant:

Jetzt war es um das Bewußtsein, um die Sinne Eckberts geschehn; er konnte sich nicht aus dem Rätsel herausfinden, ob er jetzt träume oder ehemals von einem Weibe Bertha geträumt habe; das Wunderbarste vermischte sich mit dem Gewöhnlichsten, die Welt um ihn her war verzaubert und er keines Gedankens, keiner Erinnerung mächtig. (Tieck, 145)

The joyful tone of the bird's song reinforces the expectation of a happy ending that the mode of fairy-tale implies. For Eckbert the recovery of the state of blissful innocence seems possible, as bird and dog are alive again. The confrontation with this 'Zauberwelt' draws Eckbert into a vortex in which he loses memory and reflection. This suggests that he returns to the mental state of infancy where there is no awareness of the individual as separate from the world.

Anticipating a happy ending, though, the reader is once more baffled by the horrifying (dis)solution. What begins as a dream of infantile wish fulfilment, rapidly transforms into a nightmare. In the deeply unsettling conclusion of the narrative, the enigma, far from being resolved, is brought to a fatal climax. The scene which depicts Eckbert's physical and mental annihilation deceptively beckons with the discovery of the secret causality (the incest between brother and sister) the character and reader crave to make sense of the world and the narrative respectively. It turns out that Eckbert has long since 'geahnt' that there was something inherently wrong with his relationship to Bertha; this premonition has been shared by the reader ever since s/he noted the slight tone of discord in the introductory passage. The reader's hope for coherence, however, is ultimately frustrated and the denouement does not really resolve problems. The explanation, when it comes, explains nothing; the enigma remains. The end is characterized by a note of cutting mockery: In Eckbert's dying moment the bird repeats its joyful song.

The ending Tieck has chosen for his tale conforms with the narrative conventions it exploits in that the supernatural remains unexplained. It is focused in the figure of the old woman, who represents what Todorov calls one of the constants of the literature of the fantastic: 'the existence of beings more powerful than man'.⁹³ The old woman is such a being at its most ambiguous. Firstly, it remains unclear whether she is a witch (an evil force) or a hermit (a good force). In view of the mercilessness of Eckbert's punishment for marrying his half-sister unawares, she seems to represent in essence an evil force. Secondly, the source of her power over the lives of Bertha and Eckbert remains inexplicable.

⁹³Todorov, p. 109.

Her power is mysteriously and inextricably linked to discourse, either written or spoken. It is the wonderful stories in old books she gives Bertha to read, combined with her moral commentary, which trigger Bertha's break with the 'Waldeinsamkeit'. The warning implicit in the bird's second version of the song gives life to her anxiety that the old woman might retaliate. Moreover, it is Bertha's story that gives cause for a lasting anxiety on her husband's part. Instead of containing the threat by articulating it, the act of narrating it to Walther has the most fatal consequences. Eckbert feels compelled to kill his friend. Another drastic consequence is Bertha's fatal illness. Here the word of power is the name of the little dog. Lastly, when Eckbert encounters the old woman, it is her discourse that literally kills him. A well-known saying suggests that looks can kill; here it is words which kill. Her communications have the effect of physical blows. Discourse is the utterance of thought; thought originates from the mind. Discourse enters the mind and structures thought in turn, too. In *Der blonde Eckbert* the spoken word affects the physical existence.

Moreover, the blurring of the limit between mind and matter is increased by the uncertainty that surrounds visual perception. The peculiar interdependence of the act of perceiving and the object perceived throws fundamental doubt on the nature of perception. The suggestion of Eckbert's perceptive act being a transformative act implies the sinister potential of a radical subjectivism reminiscent of Fichte's theory of perception. The claim that 'aller Realität Quelle ist das Ich' entails for Eckbert self-destruction. On the other hand, Eckbert's vision could be explained by hallucination. The horrific conclusion, though, undermines such a convenient rational explanation. In fact, it transfers the problem on to a different level. The problem of perception and making sense is left with the reader.

Bertha's and Eckbert's problematic experience of the fluidity of the mental and the physical realm is duplicated by the reader's experience of the blurring of

narrative modes which are distinct from each other. While the frame story is largely dominated by the convention of the *Volkssage*, the *Binnengeschichte*, Bertha's narrative, is governed by the convention of the *Volksmärchen*. Both conventions, however, are destabilized by the interpolation of psychological commentary — the third generic element in the narrative. Psychological commentary injects a degree of reflectivity which is alien not only to the *Märchen* but also to the *Sage*. The onset of radical disruption of the distinction of the two predominant conventions occurs when Walther recalls the little dog's name which Bertha had forgotten. The otherwise insignificant word 'Strohman' is symbolic of a world which seemed to be contained in the past and by its fairy-tale quality. Its utterance is the 'Open Sesame' not only to the influence of the characters' early childhood on their adult life but also to elements which seemed to be neatly contained by a fairy-tale. What was previously an abstract figure in an abstract world — the old woman — breaks into the ordinary world of Bertha and Eckbert with serious consequences.

If the reader pays careful attention to details from the beginning on, however, the distinction of the two narrative modes of *Sage* and *Märchen*, as has become clear, is never really complete. After all, a biography of an adult must comprise the chronologically coherent experience of childhood, adolescence as well as adulthood. Every presence is shaped by a past, and the attempt to disrupt their coherence by destroying the evidence of the past (here the symbolic dog and bird) spells disaster. The repressed is ever ready to emerge, and in Eckbert's and Bertha's case, the attempt to control experience by narrating it is not therapeutical but lethal. Instead of exorcizing the evil by articulating it, narration resurrects it. The severity of this return of the repressed (the uncanny) is doubly shocking as the characters' guilt, their incestuous relationship, is, as with many of their actions, without conscious intention.

Similarly Tieck lets the neat distinction between narrative frame (*Erzählzeit*) and the narration it frames (*erzählte Zeit*) collapse. When the *Binnengeschichte* catches up with the frame story, the reader suddenly realizes that the expectation that a narrative frame can contain the inexplicable, thus symbolically offering the reader in literary form the stability we yearn for but which life lacks, was an illusion. We are left with ambiguity compounded at every turn. In his novella, *Der Magnetiseur*, E. T. A. Hoffmann also exploits the interplay of narrative framing and the narratively framed. Unlike Tieck's narrative, Hoffmann's novella consists of a combination of more than just two narrative units.

Chapter Three

E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Der Magnetiseur; Eine Familienbegebenheit*:

Mesmerizing the Reader

Below the surface-stream, shallow and light,
 Of what we *say* we feel — below the stream,
 As light, of what we *think* we feel — there flows
 With noiseless current strong, obscure and deep,
 The central stream of what we feel indeed.⁹⁴

Although *Der Magnetiseur* (published in the collection *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier: Blätter aus dem Tagebuche eines reisenden Enthusiasten*, 1814/15) is one of Hoffmann's less well known pieces of prose fiction and has not attracted much critical acclaim, it is a striking example of the author's skill in exploiting the potential of stylistic and thematic interplay to create a sense of a mysterious sphere, sinister and marvellous, which surrounds the mundane world.⁹⁵ The novella is composed of a number of narrative units, as they may be called, which are separated from each other by clear spacing as well as by their narrative mode. The result is a peculiar structure which bears resemblance to a montage. The first narrative unit is a narrative frame embracing two conventionally told narratives (with beginning and ending and events in chronological order) and one humorous tract. All three parts are concerned with the subject of dreams. This unit is titled 'Träume sind Schäume'. Without further explanatory commentary, it is followed by two fragmentary letters, written by Marie and Alban respectively, both characters featured in the preceding narrative unit. The letters, in turn, precede the next unit — 'Das einsame Schloß' — again without narrative transition. This unit ushers in the last one which takes the form of diary entries.

This unusual structure is similar to the narrative organisation of various other stories by Hoffmann. *Don Juan* and *Der Sandmann*, for example, also

⁹⁴ Matthew Arnold, untitled (1869), in *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 313.

⁹⁵E. T. A. Hoffmann, [*Sämtliche Werke*], 6 vols (Munich: Winkler, 1976-81), I: *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke* (1976). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

combine various separate narrative units. The structure of *Der Magnetiseur*, though, is more complex and puzzling, as a careful analysis of the relation of each unit to the others will reveal.

The title *Der Magnetiseur* sets up the expectation that the story will focus on a mesmerist. The subtitle *Eine Familienbegebenheit* suggests a setting, namely that of a family circle. The use of 'eine' and 'Begebenheit' invites the impression that the subject of the narrative to follow is only one of many events that have taken place within that family circle — extraordinary enough to be narrated in the economical organisation of the novella, but nothing completely out of the ordinary.

With this in mind the reader tackles 'Träume sind Schäume' and is, with great immediacy, confronted with a friendly company, the members of an aristocratic family (the baron, his daughter Marie, his son Ottmar) and a close friend, the painter Franz Bickert, who are passing the evening in leisurely conversation, the topic of which is the nature and significance of dreams. The tradition of this type of narrative framing arouses expectations of an agreeable evening of story-telling.

According to Ottmar's conviction dreams are a threshold to a mysterious realm from which hidden powers emanate and affect human life in the ordinary world. The Baron, however, opposes his son's enthusiastic view. The comment he makes at this early moment in the story seems innocent enough, but it is the first part of a carefully established pattern (the tip of the iceberg, so to speak) which aptly introduces gradually the mesmeric forces which will bring disaster: "Mich dünkt", unterbrach ihn der alte Baron, wie sich von einer Erinnerung, in die er versunken, gewaltsam losreißend, "ich höre deinen Freund Alban sprechen" (p. 142).

This is the first time Alban is mentioned; we do not yet know who he is and what role he is to play, but he is already associated with manipulative powers.

Remarkably the baron does not say his son *sounds like* Alban, but he feels it is Alban himself who is speaking. The figurative meaning suggests that the baron thinks his son is Alban's parrot; the literal meaning, however, suggests that Ottmar is possessed by Alban. Mesmeric influence is also anticipated by the circumstance that the baron has to struggle free from a memory as if it were under the spell of somebody's will in order to make his comment. As the story unfolds the reader will find more and more proof that the vitality of family members is already undermined by mesmeric influences.

Although the baron vehemently opposes the idea that dreams can have any significant impact on life, he immediately contradicts himself by saying that some of his dreams have been so 'qualvoll, daß ich oft darüber erkrankte' (p. 142). Moreover, the story he then relates indicates that his well-being has indeed been impaired by an event in his youth in which a dream occupied a central position. His rationalist attitude is an act of wishful denial, an attempt to fight and suppress the anxiety caused by that event.

As in *Der blonde Eckbert*, the act of narrating troubling experience is essential. Will articulation help to exorcize it by containing it, as the apparent cosiness of the setting leads the reader to believe, or, on the contrary, will it unleash its evil influence? The baron's story stems from his youth when he was a cadet in a military academy, and it represents the first *Binnenerzählung* within the frame: At the academy he grows attached to a major who has a doubtful past and is notorious for his volatile temperament: He can be 'im höchsten Grade jähzornig' (p. 144) and is dreaded for his 'ausgedachte Grausamkeit'; on the other hand he can be 'gutmütig und weich'. If his looks and vigour are extraordinary for a man well into his fifties, so is the response he inspires in his cadets and in particular in the young baron: In spite of the terror he inspires 'hing alles an ihm auf eine ganz unbegreifliche Weise' (p. 144). The major's unique charisma seems to derive from a magic source:

Und wenn er diesem oder jenem, dem etwas besonders gelungen, die Hand drückte, so war es, als habe er ihn, wie durch eine unwidersehbliche Zauberkraft zu seinem Leibeignen gemacht, denn den augenblicklichen schmerzvollsten Tod hätte er gebieten können, und sein Wort wäre erfüllt worden. (Hoffmann, 144)

The motifs of the hand contact, the concentrated stare, and the compelling discourse will come up repeatedly in the narrative units; they represent the mesmeric ritual by which the mesmerist wins control over his subject's body and soul:

Es war, als würde ich von einem höhern Wesen gezwungen, treu an dem Mann zu halten, als würde der Augenblick des Aufhörens meiner Liebe auch der Augenblick des Untergangs sein. Erfüllte mich nun mein Beisammensein mit ihm auch mit einem gewissen Wohlbehagen, so war es doch wieder eine gewisse Angst, das Gefühl eines unwiderstehlichen Zwanges, das mich auf eine unnatürliche Art spannte, ja das mich innerlich erbeben machte. War ich lange bei ihm gewesen, ja hatte er mich besonders freundlich behandelt und mir, wie er dann zu tun pflegte, mit starr auf mich geheftetem Blick meine Hand in der seinigen festhaltend, allerlei Seltsames erzählt, so konnte mich jene ganz eigne wunderbare Stimmung bis zur höchsten Erschöpfung treiben. Ich fühlte mich krank und matt bis zum Umsinken. (Hoffmann, 145–146)

The contradictory feelings of terror and affection and the experience of dependence the major evokes are matched by those Alban rouses in Marie. In this way an early link between the allegedly philanthropic Alban and the sinister major is established.

On certain days the major acts like a madman, fighting against an apparently imaginary enemy. As a rule this occurs at the equinox — the time which Hoffmann regularly chooses for the disruption caused by the influence of the mysterious world which underpins ordinary life.⁹⁶ Whenever the baron describes the enigmas that surround the major, he carefully avoids a straightforward indicative mode, by inserting 'es schien', 'es war mir, als' etc., thus emphasizing the

⁹⁶As Lothar Pikulik points out, Hoffmann repeatedly uses that time of the year as a threshold between the ordinary and the fantastic world. See Lothar Pikulik, *E. T. A. Hoffmann als Erzähler: Ein Kommentar zu den 'Serapionsbrüdern'* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), p. 30.

uncertainty of perception and the inscrutability of events. Similarly he refuses to confirm or take for granted the rumours surrounding the major by introducing them into the narration by cautious clauses such as 'so hieß es, er könne' and 'daß man wohl wisse, wie'.

One night in a particularly vivid dream, the young baron sees the major entering his chamber and performing the mesmeric ritual in order to cast a spell on him. Calling himself his god and master, the major proceeds to enter the baron's brain with a scorching instrument. At this point he awakes, bathed in sweat, and it is as if the major's voice is calling him from afar. Assuming that this is still a reverberation of the dream, he opens the window to let in some fresh air. To his great horror he spots the major leaving the academy grounds through the gate. With noisy vehemence the gate is closed. The baron is alarmed and wakes up the old inspector, who has also heard the bang of the gate but has taken it for a delusion. As they are trying to enter the major's room they find it locked from within (just like the gate). They break down the door and find the major lying dead on the floor, in full uniform, with his sword drawn, and his faced terribly distorted.

This episode introduces several themes which recur in *Der Magnetiseur*, thus contributing to the unity of a work that consists of several distinctive units: the mesmeric ritual, going through closed doors, the loss of independence on the part of the mesmerized individual and, closely associated, the notion of belonging to someone, body and soul (either by willingly selling one's soul in return for extraordinary powers or by being dominated by a stronger will), the energy-draining effect of mesmerization, and the motif of the military figure. The military figure recurs in Bickert's account of his own dreams as the 'Bramarbas von Offizier' (p. 149), in Ottmar's story in the shape of the Italian officer, in Marie's letter in the form of her beloved Hypolit who is at war, and from Bickert's diary we learn that

Ottmar himself has become a soldier and dies on the battlefield.

Moreover, certain word groups are introduced that will be duplicated in the other narrative units. The baron, for example, designates the major as 'Freund und Gebieter' (p. 146); in Ottmar's (or Alban's) story, the boy Theobald becomes young Auguste's 'Gebieter' (p.159); and in her letter Marie acknowledges Alban as 'Herr und Meister'. The story of the major also establishes a pervasive vocabulary of mystery and inscrutability: 'unbegreiflich', 'unglaublich', 'wunderlich', 'nicht natürlich', 'unnatürlich', 'seltsam', 'unbeschreiblich' etc. (pp. 143–147). On the frame-story level, similar words are being used by the baron, when he talks to Bickert about Alban. The atmospheric implications of the use of adjectives such as 'besonders', 'seltsam', and 'sonderbar' (pp.162–163) defy the impression that the frame offers a measure of security. In Marie's letter the vocabulary of inscrutability is taken up again and extended: 'unbegreiflich', 'nicht wissen', 'wundersam', 'unbekannt', 'sich nicht entsinnen' etc.(pp. 164–168).

The next narrative enclave in the frame narration of 'Träume sind Schäume' consists of Bickert's humorous ideas on the subject of dreams. In fact he develops a brief theory of dreams, claiming that dreams are the products of imagination. Our inner life, so he says, is a somewhat distorted reflection ('wie in einem Hohlspiegel aufgefangen', p. 148) of natural phenomena that surround us: 'Ich behaupte keck, daß niemals ein Mensch im Innern etwas gedacht oder geträumt hat, wozu sich nicht die Elemente in der Natur finden ließen; aus ihr heraus kann er nun einmal nicht' (p. 148).

Bickert goes on to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary dreams. The former are dreams he prepares before going to sleep by conjuring up adventures and acquaintances (mostly humorous) from the past, as if creating a theatre play. The latter are of a less agreeable nature; some are explanations our

'Geist' makes up for outside impressions the origin of which it cannot find because the bodily senses are asleep. In this category he also places dreams which reflect the fear of social inadequacy and existential fears (here he relates his dream experience of being disassembled like a jointed doll, reminiscent of Nathanael's childhood encounter with Coppélius in *Der Sandmann*).

Although Bickert does his best to demystify Ottmar's notion that dreams are the entrance door to the 'Geisterwelt' and to dispel the gloom generated by the baron's narration, we can find even in his rationalist and worldly theory a hint of a realm transcending the ordinary world:

So meine ich, daß unser Geist, hält er sich bescheiden in den ihm angewiesenen Schranken, aus den angenehmsten Erscheinungen des Lebens bequem den Hefen bereiten kann, aus dem dann die Bläschen aufsteigen, die nach Ottmars Ausspruch den Schaum des Traumes bilden. (Hoffmann, 148–149)

He admits to the existence of 'Schranken'; therefore, he also acknowledges a world outside the ordinary sphere of human experience.

The next story is told by Ottmar, but in reality it is Alban's story and Ottmar merely acts as Alban's medium. It is also through Ottmar that Alban has found his way into the baron's family. The story of Alban and how he helped his friend, Theobald, to cure his beloved Auguste is meant to exemplify the 'höhere Art des Träumens' (p. 151) which fascinates Ottmar so much and which he believes to be the bridge to higher knowledge and to transport the dreamer into the proximity of the divine. This conviction he owes to Alban.

Ottmar's narration will exemplify something else on a different level which, though it has already been previously suggested, will come as a shock — namely that narration can have an impact in the ordinary world. The end of the baron's narration has already been marked by Marie's significant response: 'Ach, bester Vater! — welche schauerliche Begebenheit, ich sehe den fürchterlichen Major in

seiner dänischen Uniform vor mir stehen, den Blick starr auf mich gerichtet; um meinen Schlaf in dieser Nacht ist es geschehen' (p. 147). What was initially the subject of narration has become a frightful vision. When Ottmar expresses his intention to tell the story he has heard from Alban, she comments in a similar vein: 'Albans Erzählungen sind gemeinhin, wenn auch nicht schrecklich und schauderhaft, doch auf eine solche Weise spannend, daß der Eindruck zwar in gewisser Art wohltätig ist, aber man sich doch erschöpft fühlt' (p. 154).

Obviously Alban's discourse is mesmerizing; if in some respect beneficial, as Marie is led to believe, it is also peculiarly energy draining. Ottmar has metaphorically and literally become Alban's mouthpiece. When he at last remembers Auguste's name, he is already halfway into the story, which leaves the impression that he is not entirely in control of the narration and possibly prompted by an unknown source.

Magnetism is again the central issue of the narration; this time it is represented from a more positive viewpoint as a healing power. At university, as students, Alban and Theobald become close friends. The theme of selling one's soul is used as a metaphor to describe the relationship between Alban and Theobald. The latter devotes himself with 'ganzer Seele' to Alban who, in turn, becomes Theobald's mentor in his studies of magnetism (p. 154). Alban himself 'war [...] dem Mesmerismus mit Leib und Seele ergeben' (p. 155), which, literally taken, suggest that mesmerism is a power that endows Alban with power but also controls him.

In many ways Theobald represents the counterpart of Alban: He does not pursue magnetism for the gain of power but for the gain of knowledge, and he describes his quest in romantically religious, though not Christian, terms: 'In dieser Hinsicht sollte sein kontemplatives Leben eine Art Priestertum sein, und ihn wie in

immer höheren Weihen zum Betreten der innersten Gemächer in dem großen Isistempel heiligen' (p. 156).

On his return home Theobald finds that his bride Auguste does not recognize him. His mother explains that an Italian officer had been accommodated in their house during his absence, and that Auguste and he had quickly and fervently fallen in love. When he had to leave to join battle, Auguste began to suffer from terrible visions of his death on the battlefield.

Auguste's obsession is described in terms of 'wirkliche Verstandesverwirrung' (p. 156) and 'Wahnsinn' (p. 160). Following Alban's advice, the desperate Theobald proceeds to cure Auguste from her tormenting obsession by sitting at her bedside, taking her hand, focusing his eyes and willpower on her, and repeating his name over and over again. He transports her back into their childhood to the event that holds a key position in regard to their loving relationship. This is another instance where Hoffmann confirms that childhood experience most powerfully affects adult life. The realization of this also persuades Alban to revive Marie's memory of childhood fairy-tales and by slipping into the role of the much beloved 'romantische König' (p. 165) who saves her. The key event in Theobald and Auguste's relationship occurred when young Theobald heroically endured an undeserved punishment which Auguste should have received:

Augustens Schmerz war grenzenlos, alle ihre Heftigkeit, ihr gebieterisches Wesen war verschwunden, der sanfte Theobald war nun ihr Gebieter, dem sie sich willig schmiegte; mit ihrem Spielzeug, mit ihren schönsten Puppen konnte er schalten und walten, und wenn er sonst, um nur bei ihr bleiben zu dürfen, sich fügen mußte [...] Aber so wie das Mädchen jetzt mit ganzer Seele an ihm hing, so war es auch, als habe das für sie erlittene Unrecht Theobalds Zuneigung zur glühendsten Liebe entzündet. (Hoffmann, 159)

The development of Auguste's and Theobald's love relationship originated from a feeling of obligation and gratitude (the same feeling which Alban artificially inspires in Marie by disguising himself as her healer) on the part of Auguste, which

converts her into the exponent of traditional female role behaviour, no longer dominating the relationship. On the whole, love is represented as a form of possession.

While regression to childhood succeeds in making Auguste recognize her obsession with the Italian officer as the result of a 'fremde Gewalt' and the work of 'feindliche Geister' (p. 160), Alban's will fails to remove Marie's love for Hypolit in a similar fashion because it, unlike Auguste's relationship to the officer, is of a genuine and mutual nature and anchored in a shared past in which Alban has no share. The story of Theobald and Auguste is told with Marie in mind. It is the invitation extended by Alban via Ottmar to identify herself with Auguste and Alban with Theobald. And indeed, it affects her most radically: She faints into a cataleptic condition. Again the act of narration is revealed as an act of power.

As Ottmar calls out for Alban's assistance, this call is answered by Alban's miraculously immediate entry. In the scene in which Alban takes care of Marie many of the motives, which were introduced by the various *Binnengeschichten* as superficially securely cocooned elements, openly issue into the frame story: Alban performs the mesmeric ritual on Marie, and he apparently can also walk through closed doors. The baron even associates Alban with the major and calls him his 'feindlicher Dämon' (p. 163). He suggests a link between the outbreak of his daughter's illness and Alban's first visit. Furthermore, he feels that his 'morsches Familiengebäude' is under threat. This claim is substantiated by various indications that the family members are somewhat morbid. The baron himself is haunted by dreams which make him ill; Ottmar is a 'New Age' enthusiast with a fatal lack of judgement; Marie suffers from a nervous disorder and — regaining consciousness — calls out 'ohne Qual will ich sterben' (p. 160). The common denominator of their various manifestations of morbidity is Alban (in his own person or in the shape of his doppelgänger-mesmerists).

As 'Träume sind Schäume' suddenly ends, the impression of an apparent stability of the frame story has been severely dismantled on various levels within the frame story itself: Firstly, the last *Binnenerzählung* is cut off abruptly; secondly, Marie's consciousness is extinguished; thirdly, the company rapidly disperses. The impression of disruption is also intensified by the unexpected and unexplained change of narrative mode to a fragmentary letter from Marie to her friend Adelgunde.

A letter is by definition a written document and as such it exudes a high degree of authenticity, and although it is written in the first person singular, the reader is kept at a distance and is not really compelled to identify. Moreover, correspondence is a private matter and not addressed to the reader but to Adelgunde who, as becomes clear in the course of the letter, is the sister of Marie's beloved Hypolit. Nevertheless, the letter involves us in intimacy. The letter is the perfect device to let Marie speak about herself in her very own way without interference; it also evades the problem of letting an adequately modest and ladylike female character reveal to the reader something of her innermost being without losing all propriety. Marie's letter reveals indeed her innermost concerns. Especially the message between the lines is of significance, and soon there is a strong sense that the act of narration in the epistolary form serves not to contain but to unleash uncanny agencies.

The very first sentence makes mention of a war going on in the world outside (as in the story of Theobald and Auguste). The family members are not only under threat from within their family circle but also from without. The sense of deceptive stability and vulnerability is confirmed on a wider plane. In fact, war seems to be ubiquitous throughout *Der Magnetiseur*, either as a raging battle or in the form of a military academy, and it is part of the life experience of most of the male characters: The baron, who used to be a cadet; the major, the Italian officer

and the officer in Bickert's dream, Hypolit, and eventually Ottmar are each of them representatives of the military system. While they seem to be aware of the existence of the enemy without and the necessity of the military, they all fail to recognize the danger from the enemy within. Two characters alone stand out: Neither Alban nor Bickert is directly associated with the military. They are both artists in their own right, the former, admittedly dubious, a mesmerist and the latter a painter. They are the exponents of opposite values; the former stands for the aspiration to conquer mysterious and supernatural powers and to become god-like (but turning demonic instead), and the latter stands for a the more modest and honest striving for the perfection of artistic skills without metaphysical aspirations.

In the letter to her friend Adelgunde Marie describes the disorder she has suffered from lately:

Alles kam mir verändert vor. — Laut gesprochene Worte, Fußtritte bohrten wie Stacheln in meinen Kopf. Zuweilen hatte alles um mich herum, leblose Dinge, Stimme und Klang und neckte und quälte mich mit wundersamen Zungen; seltsame Einbildungen rissen mich heraus aus dem wirklichen Leben. Kannst Du es Dir denken, Adelgundchen, daß die närrischen Kindermärchen vom grünen Vogel, vom Prinzen Fakardin von Trebisonde und was weiß ich sonst, die uns Tante Klara so hübsch zu erzählen wußte, nun auf eine für mich schreckbare Weise ins Leben traten, denn ich selbst unterlag ja den Verwandlungen, die der böse Zauberer über mich verhängte — ja es ist wohl lächerlich zu sagen, wie diese Albernheiten so feindselig auf mich wirkten, daß ich zusehends matter und kraftloser wurde. Indem ich mich oft über ein Unding, über ein Nichts bis zum Tode betrüben und wieder eben über solch ein Nichts bis zur Ausgelassenheit erfreuen konnte, zehrte sich mein Selbst auf in den gewaltsamen Ausbrüchen einer innern, mir unbekanntem Kraft.

(Hoffmann, 164)

The symptoms of her disorder are manifold: Her hearing has become hypersensitive; she suffers from hallucinations of a world where things inanimate speak to her. Again the awful power of story-telling emerges: Fairy-tale characters from her childhood, like the evil wizard, threaten her. Her emotional response to

normally insignificant matters is inexplicably extreme. Her distorted perception and the hallucinations are so overwhelming that she can neither control them nor relate adequately to the ordinary world any more. An increasing loss of vitality ensues.

Marie describes one of her peculiar phobias in detail:

So hatte ich einen solchen Abscheu gegen Lilien, daß ich jedesmal ohnmächtig wurde, sobald, war es auch in weiter Ferne, eine blühte; denn aus ihren Kelchen sah ich glatte, glänzende, züngelnde Basiliske auf mich zuspringen. (Hoffmann, 164)

The sexual imagery is unmistakable; her fainting fits are caused by the threat of phallic basilisks. Later in the letter Marie explains what lies at the root of her fear. The passage refers back to 'Träume sind Schäume', thus establishing a chronological order offering corroboration of the previous narrative unit.

Neulich saßen wir, der Vater, der Bruder, der alte Bickert und ich traulich abends beisammen; Alban war, wie es seine Gewohnheit ist, noch auf weitem Spaziergange begriffen. Es war die Rede von Träumen, und der Vater sowie Bickert wußten davon allerlei Wunderbares und Ergötzliches zu sagen. Da nahm auch Ottmar das Wort und erzählte, wie nach Albans Rat, und unter seiner Leitung, es einem seiner Freunde gelungen sei, eines Mädchens innige Liebe dadurch zu gewinnen, daß er ohne ihr Wissen, wenn sie schlief, in ihrer Nähe war, und ihre innersten Gedanken durch magnetische Mittel auf sich leitete. Dazu kam, daß der Vater und auch mein alter treuer Bickert sich, wie sie noch nie in meiner Gegenwart getan, bestimmt und hart gegen den Magnetismus, und auch in gewisser Art gegen Alban erklärten — alle Zweifel gegen den Meister erwachten mit doppelter Stärke in meiner Seele — wie wenn er sich geheimer höllischer Mittel bediente, mich zu seiner Sklavin zu fesseln; wie wenn er dann geböte ich solle, nur *ihn* in Sinn und Gedanken tragend, Hypolit lassen? Ein nie gekanntes Gefühl ergriff mich mit tötender Angst; ich sah Alban in seinem Zimmer mit unbekanntem Instrumenten und häßlichen Pflanzen und Tieren und Steinen und blinkenden Metallen umgeben, wie er in krampfhafter Bewegung seltsame Kreise mit den Armen und Händen beschrieb. Sein Gesicht, sonst so ruhig und ernst, war zur grausigen Larve verzogen, und aus seinen glutroten Augen schlängelten sich in ekelhafter Schnelle blanke, glatte Basiliske, wie ich sie sonst in den Lilienkelchen zu erblicken wähnte. Da war es mir, als gleite ein eiskalter Strom über meinen Rücken hin, ich erwachte aus einem Ohnmacht ähnlichen

Zustande; Alban stand vor mir — aber, du heiliger Gott! nicht *er* war's, nein! jene entsetzliche Larve, die meine Einbildung geschaffen! (Hoffmann, 167–168)

Marie describes how the stories she has heard and the baron's and Bickert's critical attitude towards Alban and his mesmeric methods had made her doubt Alban's character. She writes about her fear that Alban's motives might not be as altruistic as she has been led to believe, that he might try to separate her from Hypolit and make her his slave. In a sudden vision (this is the moment she faints in 'Träume sind Schäume') she had seen Alban exerting mesmeric influence on the representatives of flora, fauna and inorganic matter. She describes his face as a distorted 'Larve', suggesting it is mask-like or ghost-like, and from his eyes, which remind her of the lilies (probably 'Feuerlilien', that is orange lilies, as his eyes are 'glutrot'), 'schlängelten sich in ekelhafter Schnelle blanke, glatte Basiliske'. Clearly, Alban is a sexual threat to Marie, and behind his mesmerizing gaze lewd intentions are lurking.

Next Marie describes the appearance of Alban at the point she regained consciousness. To her great horror her vision was confirmed by looking at him. By the time she writes the letter, however, she is again under Alban's spell, rejecting her former doubts as delusions and accepting the thoughts he imposes on her as beneficial. The imagery she employs to depict her relationship is still characterized by its sexual innuendo but is no longer threatening:

Zuweilen muß ich plötzlich an Alban denken, er steht vor mir, und ich versinke nach und nach in einen träumerischen Zustand, dessen letzter Gedanke, in dem mein Bewußtsein untergeht, mir fremde Ideen bringt, welche mit besonderem, ich möchte sagen, golden glühendem Leben mich durchstrahlen, und ich weiß, daß Alban diese göttlichen Ideen in mir denkt, denn er ist dann selbst in meinem Sein, wie der höhere belebende Funke, und entfernt er sich, was nur geistig geschehen kann, da die körperliche Entfernung gleichgültig ist, so ist alles erstorben. (Hoffmann, 166)

The physical threat of rape has been transfigured to a spiritual intercourse. Significantly, Alban is no longer a power to be reckoned with from without but from within. By now the threat lies in withdrawal. Alban, however, has not succeeded in substituting himself for Hypolit.

Marie's letter is followed by the 'Fragment von Albans Brief an Theobald'. It corroborates the existence of the character of Theobald known from the last *Binnenerzählung* of 'Träume sind Schäume'. It is primarily written by Alban with the intention of justifying his manipulative methods against Theobald's criticism, according to which they are immoral. Beginning on a more general level, Alban develops his theory of the purpose and use of mesmeric powers. His world view is principally Darwinist: The strong supplant the weak. 'Alle Existenz ist Kampf', he insists, and applies this rule also to the 'geistiges Leben' (pp. 169–170). It is the 'unbedingte Herrschaft über das geistige Prinzip des Lebens' that he aspires to, because it would grant him the ultimate bliss: 'Das Streben nach jener Herrschaft ist das Streben nach dem Göttlichen, und das Gefühl der Macht steigert in dem Verhältnis seiner Stärke den Grad der Seligkeit' (p. 170).

From this general and theoretical view he now narrows the focus to his particular concern: Marie. Not physical attraction, thus Alban claims, but spiritual bonding draws him to Marie, but when he describes his alleged soul mate, the depiction of Marie's body is so enthusiastic that the reader feels he deceives himself about his motives:

In Wahrheit, ich muß mich darauf beziehen, daß Du mich kennst, ja daß Du von jeher mein ganzes Tun und Treiben in den höheren Tendenzen, die dem Volke ewig verschlossen, begriffen. Du bist daher überzeugt, daß eine schlanke Gestalt, die wie eine herrliche Pflanze, in zartem Wuchs üppige Blätter und Blüten treibend, aufgeschossen; ein blaues Auge, das emporblickend sich nach dem zu sehnen scheint, was die fernen Wolken verschleiern, — kurz, daß ein engelschönes Mädchen mich nicht in den süßlich schmachtenden Zustand des lächerlichen Amoroso versetzen kann. — Es war einzig

und allein die augenblickliche Erkenntnis der geheimen geistigen Beziehung zwischen Marien und mir, die mich mit dem wunderbarsten Gefühl durchbebte. (Hoffmann, 172)

It is notable how Alban applies the terminology of war to describe his mental struggle for the domination of Marie's affection. The love Hypolit and Marie feel for each other is declared a 'feindliche Kraft', and Hypolit is defined as 'Feind' and 'Opposition', necessitating a 'Kampf' (p. 172). Instead of admitting that his longing for Marie is in essence sexual and originates in human nature, he maintains that their union is spiritual and intended by Nature. Therefore, he feels entitled to employ the most radical and potentially fatal methods:

Marien ganz in mein Selbst zu ziehen, ihre ganze Existenz, ihr Sein so in dem meinigen zu verweben, daß die Trennung davon sie vernichten muß, das war der Gedanke, der, mich hoch beseligend, nur die Erfüllung dessen aussprach, was die Natur wollte.
(Hoffmann, 172–173)

From Marie's letter we know that he is mistaken when he thinks 'Hypolits Bild kann in ihr nur noch in schwachen Umrissen existieren' (p. 173), and if Alban's power is as strong as it seems, Marie's life is endangered because she can neither forget Hypolit nor struggle free from Alban.

Alban's letter fragment is succeeded by the next narrative unit entitled 'Das einsame Schloß'. The first three sentences signal that it is a prose narration and contain a new and completely unexpected element:

Das Gewitter war vorüber, und in rotem Feuer brennend, brach die sinkende Sonne durch die finsternen Wolken, die schnell fliehend in den tiefen Gründen verdampften. Der Abendwind rührte seine Fittiche, und wie in schwellenden Wogen strömten die Wohlgerüche, die aus Bäumen, Blumen, Gräsern emporstiegen, durch die warme Luft. Als ich aus dem Walde trat, lag das freundliche Dorf, dessen Nähe mir der Postillion verheißen, dicht vor mir im blumigen Wiesengrunde, und hoch hervor ragten die gotischen Türme des Schlosses, dessen Fenster im Schein der Sonne glühten, als wollten innere Flammen hervorbrechen. (Hoffmann, 174)

We apparently step into an atmosphere of a crisis overcome and of light breaking through, signaling the end of events in *Der Magnetiseur* and promising the reader's enlightenment. In the description of the castle a threatening undertone is unmistakable; the windows glow with the reflection of the sun, 'als wollten innere Flammen hervorbrechen'. This image for the eyes of the house is reminiscent of that previously used to describe the mesmerist's eyes: the major and Alban have 'feurige Augen' (p. 162), as Bickert puts it, and for Marie Alban's eyes are 'glutrot' (p. 168). It is as if Alban possesses the place, or rather as if he has incorporated it, which is just what he had in mind with Marie: 'Marien ganz in mein Selbst zu ziehen, ihre ganze Existenz, ihr Sein' (p. 172). In 'Träume sind Schäume', the baron refers to his family with the metaphor of the 'morschen Familiengebäude' (p. 163). As will soon become clear, the castle is indeed the setting of the first narrative unit, and the suggestion that Alban has usurped the building is true in the figurative sense; he has wiped out the family. The fact that Bickert could only take care of the literal 'Familiengebäude', the family estate, is bitterly ironic.

Moreover, these first three sentences of 'Das einsame Schloß' indicate a fundamental change; for the first time in *Der Magnetiseur* the reader steps into the open air, and the perspective moves from outside to inside the castle. As yet the identity of the castle has not been disclosed by the narrative. Its importance, however, is beyond doubt because it is not only at the centre of the perspective but also the subject of the title.

The perspective, it soon emerges, is that of a new narrator. The first-person narrator is probably the biggest surprise this narrative unit holds in store. The narrator's identity is only revealed approximately a page further down, when the reader discovers that he is a 'Bevollmächtigter' acting for the Baron von F. who, in turn, is named as the present owner of the 'Schloß'. Next the reader follows the narrator to attend an old man's funeral. As the priest approaches the narrator, more

information is supplied which begins to establish a link between this narrative unit and the previous ones. It is the funeral of Bickert who had lived as a caretaker in the deserted castle. The reader now begins to understand that it must be the domicile of the baron's family and that something has happened to them.

As the narrator is led through the castle he gathers more information: Bickert had lived there alone for the last three years and had painted the walls with 'tiefsinnigen Allegorien'. An image of 'eine häßliche Teufelsgestalt, die ein schlafendes Mädchen belauscht' (p. 175) is a recurring theme, and the reader infers that this is not an allegory but a depiction of Alban and Marie. The theme of Bickert's paintings is also the theme that pervades Hoffmann's *Der Magnetiseur*.

The narrator, whose task it is to clarify the administration of the estate for the new owner, also clarifies the fictional origins of the narrative units. Going through Bickert's documents, it emerges, to the reader's surprise, that Bickert is the author of 'Träume sind Schäume' and the collector of both fragmentary letters. Subsequently, the narrator provides notes from Bickert's diary, pointing out that with their help 'rundet sich das Ganze' (p. 176).

The first paragraph enthusiastically records Hypolit's return. His arrival obliterates Bickert's suspicions that Alban is a demonic figure. However, in the second paragraph, we find that his doubts are raised again by Alban's strange behaviour. The happy ending anticipated above seems forgotten. Bickert's diary entry from the day before Marie and Hypolit's wedding records how he and the baron unexpectedly meet Alban in the corridor, who is apparently coming from Marie's chamber late at night. Once more the baron identifies him with the major from his past. Bickert is suspicious: 'Sollte der feindliche Dämon, der sich dem Baron schon in früher Jugend verkündete, nun wie ein über ihn waltendes böses Prinzip wieder sichtbarlich und das Gute entzweiend ins Leben treten' (p. 177). This can be taken, metaphorically and without any supernatural implications, to

mean that the baron's happiness is once more under threat by the manipulative powers of a sinister individual. A literal reading, however, implies that the major and Alban are two incarnations of the same demon.

The subsequent entry communicates Marie's sudden death at the end of the wedding ceremony. Two brief entries follow, demonstrating that Bickert now firmly believes that Alban has murdered Marie and recording that Hypolit also blames Alban. Alban has fled, and Hypolit blames Ottmar. A duel is to take place on the following day. Bickert's entry after the duel is certainly euphemistic and possibly ambiguous: 'Hypolit ist geblieben! – Wohl ihm! er sieht sie wieder. – Unglücklicher Ottmar! – Unglücklicher Vater!' (p. 177). One has to read twice to realize that Hypolit has been killed — the clue to the outcome of the duel is in 'er sieht sie wieder'. The pronoun 'er' refers to Hypolit and 'sie' to Marie; they meet again in the life beyond.

The final entry records the death of the baron preceded by Ottmar's redemptive death on the battlefield. Bickert decides to live in the castle and to dwell in the memories of his dead friends. From his rationalist–humorist attitude — his refusal to concentrate on anything other than ordinary experience — he is converted to a life oriented to the spirits of the past and to those of the afterlife. Bickert's explicit death wish reinforces the impression of morbidity:

Oft werd ich ihre Stimme hören – manches freundliche Wort der holdseligen frommen Maria, mancher gemütliche Scherz des unwandelbaren Freundes wird wie ein Geisterruf wiederhallen und mich aufrecht und stark erhalten, des Lebens Bürde leicht zu tragen. – Es gibt für mich keine Gegenwart mehr, nur der Vergangenheit glückliche Tage schließen sich an das ferne Jenseits, das mich oft in wunderbaren Träumen mit lieblichem Schimmer, aus dem die geliebten Freunde lächelnd mir zuwinken, umfängt. – Wann! – wann werde ich zu euch hinüberwallen? (Hoffmann, 178)

Far from reassuring the reader, this quasi transfiguration of the painter (note how Bickert now calls Marie 'Maria') represents a disturbing conclusion. After all the

reader has just come to realize that an entire family branch has been brutally eradicated, and instead of being comforted by poetic justice, the reader is left ignorant as to the fate of the murderous villain.

The plot of *Der Magnetiseur* is communicated in an essentially disruptive organisation of the novella. Initially, with the help of 'Träume sind Schäume', an atmosphere of urbanity and security is conjured up. As one *Binnengeschichte* follows the other in a casual rhythm, the expectation is raised that the entire novella consists of a stable narrative frame which houses a number of *Binnengeschichten*. The deceptiveness of that impression is thematically signalled by Marie's fainting and stylistically confirmed by an unexplained change of narrative mode to the epistolary form initially, followed by a first-person narrative which introduces diary entries. When, in the last few pages of the novella, the reader comes to realize how the narrative units are related to each other and has unscrambled the plot, s/he experiences a shock: While s/he was reading 'Träume sind Schäume', the characters were no longer alive. The expectations the characters had for their lives, just like those the reader had for the novella, have been frustrated.

Der Magnetiseur shares the interest in the issue of narrative framing and the act of narration with Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*, as we have seen. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the concern of the next chapter, narrative framing takes a very different form. As in Tieck's novella, narration is the compelling force behind the narrative.

Chapter Four

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*:

The Uncanny as a Human Condition

Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,
 Scarce can endure delay of execution,
 Wait, with impatient readiness, to seize my
 Soul in a moment.⁹⁷

In England the literary genre that was above all others firmly committed to the uncanny and the supernatural (or to the 'supernatural explained', as in the case of Ann Radcliffe's novels) is, as we know, that of the Gothic novel. In contrast to Germany it was a predominantly female domain, although many of the female authors and their novels have long since fallen into oblivion. Apart from Ann Radcliffe it is the male representatives of the genre, above all Matthew Lewis, Charles Maturin, Horace Walpole, and William Beckford, whose fame as authors of the Gothic has proved lasting. Only relatively recently, under feminist pressure, has a re-examination of Gothic novels by female writers begun.

There is, however, one exception to this rule — a novel which never really had to be rediscovered as it has retained an undying international fame which places it in a class apart from its bloodcurdling contemporaries. In fact this extraordinary tale is one of those few stories which have found a way into our hearts and have become unforgettable. The story of *Frankenstein* lingers there with companions such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island*, and *Dracula*. Although *Frankenstein* has already received thorough critical attention, it persists in attracting literary criticism, and this chapter is yet another attempt to find out more about the compelling impact of *Frankenstein*.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ William Cowper, 'Lines Written During a Period of Insanity' (1816), in *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. by H. S. Milford, 4th edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; repr. 1947 and 1950), p. 289.

⁹⁸ Mary Shelley, *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, ed. by Nora Crook with Pamela Clemit, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1996), VI: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

No other Gothic tale has assumed such mythical qualities or contains a more powerful depiction of the archetype of scientific man. Particularly in our age, when genetics is already revolutionizing our lives, it has lost nothing of its topicality. The questions whether and how the freedom to experiment and to use new technologies should be restrained, and whether it is ethical to own a new life form and what responsibilities such ownership entails are passionately discussed.

Nowadays, the acquaintance with the story is more likely to be made in its film version. Those who have seen a pre-90s version and not the most recent by Kenneth Branagh, probably mistake the name of Frankenstein for that of the monster. Anne K. Mellor observes that error is the 'intuitively correct reading of the novel'.⁹⁹ The question thus addressed is whether the creator or his creation is the monster.

The most lasting impression on me personally was made by the creature with Boris Karloff in the lead. I remember well the initial terror I then felt at the idea of a being constructed of fragments of corpses collected in forbidden, nocturnal expeditions. The notion of the dead becoming animate is a Gothic theme of undiminished fascination. In the novel, however, the face of the creature is not marked by terrible scars resulting from being stitched together piece by piece. The creature's loathsome ugliness depends on three features: his terrible eyes are described as 'dull yellow', 'watery' and 'seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets'; his lips are 'straight black'; his skin is 'yellow' and 'shrivelled' like parchment and 'scarcely covering' the body it contains — a body which resembles a mummy' (pp. 39–40).

The features are unmistakably marked by the hues of death, which explains the terrifying impact the creature has on onlookers and their instinctively violent reaction. Consequently, the creature never has the chance to demonstrate the

⁹⁹Mellor, p. 38.

endearing and affectionate aspects of his character — generosity, compassion, and above all a desire for virtue — which lie within the horrifying shell that is neither of his own choosing nor within his control. The responsibility for the repulsive shell is Frankenstein's. This is clearly a tragic constellation with the creature as the protagonist.

On the other hand Frankenstein also has the make-up of a tragic hero. He possesses many noble qualities: As Walton writes to his sister, he is 'so gentle, yet so wise' and 'cultivated' (p. 19), 'with an eye so full of lofty design and heroism' (p. 164). In addition to his compelling charisma, his achievements as a scholar and scientist surpass that of others. Consequently, his is a story

Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,
And is yfallen out of heigh degree
Into myserie, and endeth wretchedly.¹⁰⁰

Frankenstein's tragic flaw is inseparably linked to his achievements; his yearning to know and his scientific expertise lead him to create a being which he does not have the strength to control. Knowing is the sin against paradisiac nature and entails the banishment from the Garden of Eden. For Frankenstein scientific knowledge will alienate him from the domestic idyll for the rest of his life.

As he abandons his initially innocent creature to the cruel encounter with the human species, the tragic outcome is inevitable. Anne K. Mellor reads the novel as a portrayal of 'the consequences of the failure of the family, the damage wrought when the mother — or a nurturant parental love — is absent'.¹⁰¹ The issue of the absence of parents, in particular of the mother, was personally relevant for Mary Shelley. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had died shortly after her birth of

¹⁰⁰Chaucer's definition of tragedy in the prologue to 'The Monk's Tale' of the *Canterbury Tales*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 240–241.

¹⁰¹Mellor, p. 39.

postnatal infection, and, indeed, the theme of parentlessness pervades her entire *oeuvre*.

After Frankenstein's creature, who is unable to control either his social circumstances or his impulsive nature, has strangled Frankenstein's baby brother, William, in revenge and has contrived to divert capital punishment for this crime to Justine, Frankenstein's decline is unavoidable. Frankenstein is on the one hand responsible for the murders because he gave life to their perpetrator; on the other hand he is innocent because they are committed against his will and beyond his control. Similarly the creature is guilty because he commits the crime and at the same time *non compos mentis* because he acts under the influence of an evil passion provoked by the cruel reception he undeservedly suffers from the world. Just as the creature has little control over his outer form, so, too, he has little control over his inner life. He is capable of affection and kindness, but he is also (particularly when rebuffed) capable of murderous violence. Thus he enshrines a general human dilemma.

These dualistic viewpoints generate an ambiguity as to who is the protagonist and who the antagonist in *Frankenstein*. Significantly, both creator and creature fit alternately the role of Satan, God, and Adam, which emphasizes their parallel nature and brings, despite their opposition, the idea of a doppelgänger relationship into play. For Robert Walton Frankenstein is 'godlike in ruin' and seems to feel 'the greatness of his fall' (p. 160); the creature observes to him: 'You are my creator, but I am your master' (p. 130). In similarly equivocal terms he addresses Frankenstein as 'you my arch-enemy, because my creator' (p. 108). In the revised edition of 1831 Frankenstein does not only repeatedly designate his creature 'demon', 'fiend', and 'devil', but also refers to himself when he talks of 'the fiend that lurked in my heart' (p. 210), and the creature comparably refers to 'the fiend within me' (p. 216).

Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which the creature reads in his secret refuge at the De Lacey's, furnishes the creature with the archetypes of the Christian world and also points forward to the end of a clear-cut conception of good and evil. The creature in his doomed state identifies with Milton's Satan as the Romantic hero. Thus he makes use of Miltonic terminology, calling his temporary refuge, a shepherd's hut, 'a retreat as Pandaemonium appeared to the daemons of hell' (p. 79). When Frankenstein meets his creature, 'the filthy daemon', for the first time after the act of creation and the subsequent abandonment, the encounter takes place at the lake of Geneva in a thunderstorm which he terms a 'noble war in the sky' (p. 54). The setting is reminiscent of Milton's fallen angels at the lake of fire and suggests that hell is located on earth.

The creature recognizes that his situation is partly like that of Adam and partly like that of Satan: 'I ought to be thy Adam', he addresses Frankenstein, 'but I am rather the fallen angel' (p. 74). His permanent isolation and lack of companionship, however, place him apart from both. His revenge, then, essentially consists in rendering Frankenstein similarly lonely and isolated. In this way his creator is also to experience the loss of a fundamental human need — the feeling of belonging.

The approximation of creator to creature in terms of situation within the biblical triangle of God, Satan, and Adam is underlined by the approximation of their language, namely speech and body language. Both are eloquent speakers and use similar phrases and vocabulary (particularly when in a suicidal mood), and they share the mannerisms of gnashing and grinding their teeth and uttering groans.

These wild mannerisms bespeak their equally passionate temper. The experience of pain and despair kindles a violent rage in both. While the creature's wrathful thoughts are accompanied by destructive acts (first against the natural environment and then against human kind), Frankenstein manages to refrain from

violence. Nevertheless, his rage also becomes visible through physical expression — it shows in a 'phrenzy in [...] manner' (p. 153) and abrupt changes of temper from apparent tranquillity to 'an expression of the wildest rage' (p. 159). These analogies between creature and creator invite a psychoanalytical reading which acknowledges both as parts of the same psyche. The novel could thus be read as an allegory of the conflicting forces of the psychic apparatus.

In many instances Frankenstein's self-accusations support a claim for the novel as essentially a doppelgänger story. On being confronted with Clerval's corpse in Ireland, he exclaims: 'Have my machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life? Two I have already destroyed; other victims await their destiny.' (p. 136) In his feverish ravings he calls himself 'the murderer of William, of Justine and of Clerval' (p. 136). Furthermore, he refers to himself as 'the author of unalterable evils' (p. 68) and claims that the three victims 'all died by my hand' (p. 142).

Many instances in the text suggest that Frankenstein suffers from a mental disorder that unleashes the savage part of his personality. He repeatedly succumbs to nervous fevers; his eyes become inflamed, and a fire seems to burn inside his self. This fiery imagery describes a man who has lost control of himself. In the second half of the book an increasing number of allusions to his deranged mental state appear. After Elizabeth's and his father's deaths, he finds himself locked up in a madhouse. When the Genevan magistrate, whom he addresses after his release, does not credit his story about the creature being the murderer of Elizabeth, the depiction of himself strongly suggests that he suffers from megalomania:

I trembled with excess of agitation as I said this; there was a phrenzy in my manner, and something, I doubt not, of that haughty fierceness, which the martyrs of old are said to have possessed. But to a Genevan magistrate, whose mind was occupied by far other ideas than those of devotion and heroism, this elevation of mind had much

the appearance of madness. He endeavoured to soothe me as a nurse does a child, and reverted to my tale as the effects of delirium.
(Shelley, 153)

Frankenstein's identification of his situation (no matter whether the creature is or is not an independent agent) with laudable heroic ambition sounds truly delirious. In pursuit of the enemy, he believes himself in rapport with the spirits of his beloved relatives and Justine, hears voices (laughter and whispers supposedly originating from the creature), and declares 'the furies possessed me [...], and rage choaked my utterance' (p. 155).

Describing pursuit in terms of divine enterprise, a martyr's cause, is carried to the extreme when Frankenstein imagines his needs on his restless wanderings are taken care of by the spirits of the dead and the weather:

The fare was indeed coarse, such as the peasants of the country ate; but I will not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had invoked to aid me. Often, when all was dry, the heavens cloudless, and I was parched by thirst, a slight cloud would bedim the sky, shed the few drops that revived me, and vanish. (Shelley, 155)

Two pages further on, Frankenstein himself links the notion of a divine quest with that of an obsession:

I pursued my path towards the destruction of the daemon, more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul.
(Shelley, 156)

While he juxtaposes an impetus of which he is not in control and a craving from the core of his being, identifying the former with divine will (a power from without), a psychoanalytical reading immediately identifies an 'unconscious' power as a manifestation of the unconscious psychic processes (a power from within).

Although the text often suggests that creator and creature may be the embodiments of a single personality, two instances explicitly subvert a conclusion of this kind: the creature is actually sighted by the peasants (though we would have to trust Frankenstein's own account) and, more importantly, by the crew of Walton's

ship. While the crew can only observe the creature from a considerable distance and take note of his gigantic stature, Robert Walton comes face to face with him. The few words they exchange corroborate Frankenstein's story in its essentials. The invitation the text extends to interpret the creature exclusively as a projection of Frankenstein's inadmissible self is ultimately relativized by the novel's insistence on the actual autonomous existence of its characters. The symbolic dimension of the characters (William might symbolize innocence, Justine's death could stand for the death of justice etc.) adds to the surprising richness of this comparatively short novel.

Another compelling angle from which *Frankenstein* can be viewed is that of education — a topic in which the author had a personal interest. Mary Shelley's reading list of 1815 comprises Rousseau's *Les confessions: suivies des Rêvèries du promeneur solitaire* (1781) and *Émile; ou, de l'éducation* (1762) — books which thematize the nexus of education, social and natural environment. In *Émile* Rousseau records three fundamental postulates. Firstly, he claims that 'tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses, tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme'.¹⁰² This assumption constitutes the basis of the concept of the noble savage. Rousseau believed in Man's innate sense of justice and injustice and his desire to be virtuous. The impact of societal corruption on the individual is an issue also taken up by Shelley's novel. Secondly, Rousseau emphasizes the crucial role of the mother:

La première éducation est celle qui importe le plus, et cette première éducation appartient incontestablement aux femmes: si l'Auteur de la nature eut voulu qu'elle appartint aux hommes, il leur eut donné du lait pour nourrir les enfants. (*Émile*, 35)

¹⁰²Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile; ou, de l'éducation*, ed. by Michel Launay (Paris: Garnier-Flammanion, 1966), p. 35. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

The mother's primary function, then, is that of nurturing the child. The father ought to be in charge of teaching the child:

Voulez-vous donc qu'il [the child] garde sa forme originelle, conservez-la dès l'instant qu'il vient au monde. Sitôt qu'il naît, emparez-vous de lui, et ne le quittez plus qu'il ne soit homme: vous ne réussirez jamais sans cela. Comme la véritable nourrice est la mère, le véritable précepteur est le père. (*Émile*, 51)

Although man is innately good, education is necessary to prepare him for the confrontation with a society which Rousseau believed to be thoroughly corrupt. Without this imperative guidance, such a savage but noble character would inevitably be transformed into a monster: 'Dans l'état où sont désormais les choses, un homme abandonné dès sa naissance à lui-même parmi les autres serait le plus défiguré de tous' (p. 35).

In many respects the novel is an illustration of Rousseau's theory. *Frankenstein* and the major part of Mary Shelley's shorter prose fiction deal with characters who grow up under the guidance of one parent only. Like Mary Shelley herself most of them are motherless. Her fiction frequently explores how the lack of parental guidance and protection affects her characters' lives. Victor Frankenstein loses his mother early on, and his father is insufficiently attentive to his education, as Victor claims in chapter 11. This might have furthered his tendency to self-isolation. The creature is not only not of woman born and motherless in every way but also abandoned by his father. His only guidance is a discourse, written and spoken, which does not address his special needs. This discourse essentially consists of the stories of passionate, Romantic heroes and does not prepare him for his own confrontation with human society.

Each time the creature encounters human beings he is rejected and abused and his survival is endangered. His aspirations to a virtuous life beneficial to fellow creatures are continuously thwarted in the cruellest manner. The abnormal

appearance of the creature inspires the most violent reaction in everyone he encounters. The question arises whether any naturally born human being would not also be transformed into a murderous monster by the treatment the creature has to endure and by his hopeless prospects.

In addition, the reader soon perceives that society and its institutions at large leave much to be desired. Injustice is one of its common evils: Elizabeth is left a destitute orphan after her father has vanished in the war and the state has confiscated his fortune; Safie's father is unjustly sentenced to die; De Lacey and his daughter are locked up because the Paris courts are enraged after Felix has rescued the Turk; the virtuous Justine is mercilessly condemned to die for a murder she never committed. Religious intolerance is another social evil: the Turk, a Muslim, is at a disadvantage in a Christian country; he in turn betrays Felix because he abhors the idea of an infidel marrying his daughter. It is striking that Mary Shelley herself avoided the problem of religious conflict by revealing Safie to be secretly a Christian, thus making her a more appropriate partner for Felix. Moreover, the xenophobic Irish are immediately prejudiced against the foreign Victor Frankenstein.

Even innocence coupled with a pleasant appearance does not guarantee fair treatment to Justine. Mankind in its gregarious capacity is depicted as fundamentally corrupt and savage and poses a potentially fatal threat to any individual. This permanent danger which underlies the individual existence, ever ready to break through the surface, and which the creature innocently unleashes, is a major source of the uncanny in *Frankenstein*. This looming danger originates from the mass of fellow human beings who are organized in a fundamentally corrupt society.

Mary Shelley's parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, had written extensively about the corrupt structures of society in the *Enquiry*

Concerning Political Justice (1793) and in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) respectively. In his novel *Caleb Williams; or, Things as They Are* (1794) Godwin had associated human experience of uncanniness with the injustice of the system at large. *Frankenstein* bears many similarities to *Caleb Williams*: the paranoia of the hero, the motif of flight and pursuit, the peculiar interdependence of the two main characters, and the exposure of corruption and injustice. After Justine's death Elizabeth describes her despair with an image similar to that which is used by Caleb:

Alas! Victor, when falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of certain happiness? I feel as if I were walking on the edge of a precipice, towards which thousands are crowding, and endeavouring to plunge me into the abyss. (Shelley, 69)

While Elizabeth still expresses her experience of the threat society represents to the individual as a subjective feeling, Caleb, in looking back, states it as a fact which, in retrospect, makes the hope he formerly nourished for personal happiness an illusion: 'Alas, it was thus that I amused myself with the visions of distant years while I stood in reality on the brink of a precipice!'.¹⁰³ The despair Caleb voices resembles that of Frankenstein's creature:

I cursed the whole system of human existence. I said, 'Here I am, an outcast, destined to perish with hunger and cold. All men desert me. All men hate me. I am driven with mortal threats from the sources of comfort and existence. Accursed world! that hates without a cause, that overwhelms innocence with calamities which ought to be spared even to guilt! Accursed world! dead to every manly sympathy; with eyes of horn, and hearts of steel! Why do I consent to live any longer? Why do I seek to drag on an existence which, if protracted, must be protracted amidst the lairs of these human tigers?'¹⁰⁴

Both novels demonstrate how society discredits those once outcast and assigns to them the role of the hated monster. It soon becomes clear, however, that

¹⁰³William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. by David McCracken (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 293.

¹⁰⁴Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, pp. 251–252.

the monstrous behaviour is on the side of the society which relentlessly pursues the outcast. When Mary Shelley makes the impeccable character Elizabeth utter that 'now misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood' (p. 69), it is implied that the threat to humanity comes from within — the threat to the individual ultimately threatens humanity as a whole.

Mary Shelley explicitly criticizes the clergy by describing the extortion of Justine's untruthful confession. The metaphysical threat is added to the physical. Justine's confessor completes society's monster-making procedures by supplying the victim's official consent:

Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments, if I continued obdurate. (Shelley, 62)

Society, then, has the tendency to cast out and marginalise the individual which in some way or other qualifies as a victim. Once the individual is earmarked as a monster it becomes the legitimate target of a cruelty and brutality which inhere in the human species and which merely seem controlled by social structures such as institutions. These institutions, Shelley suggests, only superficially protect the individual from the barbaric impulses but allow them to continue under the cloak of civilization and social reform. Tragically, not even the experience of being victimized prevents the individual from assuming the role of the victimizer himself: Felix instinctively pursues the creature without mercy.

The individual and domestic happiness are endangered by a second factor — a misconception of virtue held by the individual himself. Frankenstein's ambition to create a better race and thus to achieve immortal fame brings death to those closest to him and ultimately to himself. He has wasted his intellectual potential in the attempt to improve humanity as a whole while neglecting his family. The catastrophic failure of his undertaking implicitly represents a criticism

of the Godwinian idea of the superior importance of utilitarian to family welfare. Apart from Frankenstein the novel is inhabited by other men, who are driven by a reckless desire for glory, a signal that the misconception of virtue is a predominantly male characteristic. There is, for example, Robert Walton — the unyielding captain for whom the discovery of a new sea route is more valuable than the lives of his crew. Similarly, his lieutenant is 'a man of wonderful courage and enterprise' and 'madly desirous of glory' (p. 13).

In addition to this association of ambition and madness, a point strongly made in reference to Frankenstein, the novel demonstrates how unhealthy and unnatural Frankenstein's studies are. He is so exclusively concentrated on his research in Ingolstadt that he loses touch with nature altogether: the seasons pass by unnoticed while his health declines. Being cut off from natural processes is paralleled by his alienation from domestic happiness and represents another form of banishment from the paradisiac condition.

In *Caleb Williams* Godwin had previously developed the idea of misconceived virtue turning into vice. Mr Falkland, a man of many appealing traits of character and sophistication, is so obsessed with his honour (which consists in essence of a flawless reputation) that he indirectly causes the death of two innocent men and wrecks his own life and that of Caleb. The character of Mr Falkland is Godwin's vehicle for the message that cultural refinement and love of honour and virtue do not automatically produce justice, and their presence does not exclude barbarity and evil passion. On the contrary, they may render the ways of injustice and tyranny dangerously subtle.

In lecture IV of his *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1815), a book read by Mary Shelley in 1818 and possibly earlier, A. W. Schlegel wrote on Aeschylus' *Chained Prometheus*:

Prometheus does not suffer on [sic] an understanding with the power by whom the world is governed, but he atones for his disobedience, and that disobedience consists in nothing but the attempt to give perfection to the human race. It is thus an image of human nature itself: endowed with a miserable foresight and bound down to a narrow existence, without an ally, and with nothing to oppose to the combined and inexorable powers of nature, but an unshaken will and the consciousness of elevated claims.¹⁰⁵

Here the transgression consists of the perfection of humankind; the rebellious act of disobedience is seen in a positive light, and Schlegel interprets Prometheus's condition as that of human nature. *Prometheus* is also an item on the reading list of the Shelleys and becomes directly relevant for *Frankenstein*. Walton and above all Frankenstein (who is explicitly designated as a modern Prometheus in the novel's subtitle) are driven by Promethean ambition. Schlegel's view of Prometheus describes Frankenstein as he looks upon himself and as he is seen by Walton. Although Frankenstein narrates his own story and even insists on editing Walton's notes, the result of it, as has become clear, is a critical view of the potential dangers of the Promethean attitude.

In many respects the novel anticipates the social issues explored by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) — a narrative which features another powerful Promethean figure. The corruption at the heart of civilization as a whole and the barbarity of the individual which can be unleashed when favoured by circumstances is the subject of both novels. Kurtz, like Frankenstein, is a man of superior intelligence and ability. With the power of his voice he rules the savages like a god. For Frankenstein science is instrumental to his claim to divinity, but he, too, is a man of eloquence. Both are Promethean figures in that they are titans who, aspiring to divine status, challenge the gods. While Kurtz cheats the gods out of their sacrifices, Frankenstein steals (if not the spark of fire from Hephaistos) the spark of

¹⁰⁵A.W. Schlegel, *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. by John Black, 2 vols (London:printed for Badwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1815), I, pp. 112–113. The preposition 'on' in the first line is not misquoted but a misprint or the peculiar product of Black's translation.

life. Ultimately, both prove too weak to live up to the challenge. In accordance with the ambiguity as to who represents the protagonist and who the antagonist in *Frankenstein*, the creature, too, is a Promethean figure. He is of a titanic stature and more than mortal strength, and his status is unclear — half man and half something else. Last but not least he revolts against his maker.

The resulting chain of catastrophic events in Victor Frankenstein's life, his tragic death, and the suffering of the initially innocent creature whose only way out is suicide do not leave much room for optimism. Whether Walton has learned his lesson, whether he is 'perfectible', as Godwin believed mankind to be, remains unclear. Although he gives up his plans of exploring the pole, it may well be that he only breaks off his desperate and risky venture because the crew threaten him with mutiny and leave him no choice. Undoubtedly, however, *Frankenstein* is far from endorsing Godwin's positive conception of human nature and society as being 'perfectible':

Such was man in his original state, and such is man as we at present behold him. Is it possible for us to contemplate what he has already done, without being impressed with a strong presentiment of the improvement he has yet to accomplish? There is no science that is not capable of additions; there is no art that may not be carried to a still higher perfection. If this be true of all other sciences, why not of morals? If this be true of all other arts, why not of social institutions? The very conception of this as possible, is in the highest degree encouraging.¹⁰⁶

In contrast to Godwin's certainty, *Frankenstein* enshrines ambivalence at every turn, an ambivalence that unsettlingly perceives the human self as constituted of both nobility and depravity. Moreover, the issues are not ultimately reducible even to binary oppositions. Is the creature the dark side of Frankenstein? Is he inherently good but prone to violence? Is he more brutalized than brutal? Does

¹⁰⁶William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. by Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993), III: *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, p. 30.

nature or nurture determine one's character? Mary Shelley's text both reflects and reflects on these issues. Our uncertainty and irresolution as readers do not derive from our interpretative incapacity, but rather from the powerful ambiguities of Mary Shelley's art.

In the novel's revelations of the uncanny which underlies the whole of society, the bloody turn of the French Revolution reverberates. It had demonstrated to Europe how good intentions, the will to bring about social reform and equality, could lead to uncontrollable developments which cost innumerable lives and which would ultimately lead to the establishment of a new dictatorship. The Girondists created in the shape of the revolution a monster which they could not control and which was to be their destruction.¹⁰⁷ Thus recent history justified the highly equivocal view of human nature Mary Shelley presents in her novel; although *Frankenstein* points out the elevating moral potential, it strongly emphasizes the darker tendencies of human nature and is far from endorsing the Godwinian conviction that, owing to humanity's characteristic of progressive improvement, 'days of greater virtue and more ample justice will descend upon the earth'.¹⁰⁸

The narrative structure of *Frankenstein* is extraordinary; although it does not exploit the self-subversive potential of narrative framing as in the case of *Der blonde Eckbert* and *Der Magnetiseur* to create uncanniness on a stylistic level, it does, however, add to the compelling intensity of the narrative. Like *The Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, *Der blonde Eckbert*, and *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, Mary Shelley's novel capitalizes on the narrative form of the confessional

¹⁰⁷For revolutionary analogies of Frankenstein see Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (Longman: London and New York, 1989), pp. 190–192.

¹⁰⁸William Godwin, 'Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon' (London: Taylor and Wilks, 1801), repr. in *Uncollected Writings*, ed. by Jack M. Marken and Burton R. Pollin (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1968), p. 374.

tale. This gives the reader the most intimate insight into the mind of the narrating character. In this particular case both main characters are given the chance to relate their side of the story, as Frankenstein faithfully relates the story told by his creature.

The entire material is embraced in the epistolary novel, a form then fashionable. Of the four letters of the would-be pole explorer Robert Walton the last contains Victor Frankenstein's narration which contains the creature's narration which contains the story of the De Lacey's. The narrative structure peculiarly resembles a set of Russian dolls which are opened up one by one until the reader reaches the centre part, the story of the De Lacey's; from there the reader moves back, again layer by layer, to the all-encapsulating frame story of Walton's expedition.

In this way the reader is effectively drawn in to the core of the novel. Half of this core contains the creature's theoretical experience of the noble potential of humankind. Its manifestation in the form of the domestic idyll of the De Lacey's is obtained after much hardship inflicted by society at large and is a doubtful atonement for any injustice suffered from the outside world. The other half holds the subsequent disenchantment with this domestic idyll which for the creature seemed a hopeful alternative, the dawning of a happier existence than he had previously experienced. Moving back to the external narrative layer, the reader has learned that the life-threatening mechanisms of injustice and misconceived virtue are recorded in each of the narrative layers, just as they occur at the various levels of human intercourse. Just like the set of Russian dolls, every layer duplicates the message of the previous one.

This idiosyncratic narrative organization invites the reader, by encapsulating the narratives in Walton's letters, to identify with his sister, Mrs Saville. In the process of reading, this association in a way situates the reader within the outermost

layer. This draws 'the things as they are' in the non-fictional world under scrutiny, and, alas, the same message of injustice and cruelty is inscribed into the real world. The strong sense of inevitability generated by the narrative organization urges the reader to conclude that the uncanny is part of the human condition itself. It is striking how the strictly symmetrical structuralization of the material contrasts with its content — the experience of the potentially uncontrollable unleashed. However, while the thematics of the uncontainable is neatly arranged into a succession of ring-like shapes layered around a centre, the impression of aesthetic containment is qualified by its peculiarly expansive movement. In a centrifugal dynamic, similar to the ripples on the water surface when a stone is thrown, the message of the novel is carried to the reader. While this narrative organization is noteworthy in its capacity as an efficient carrier of messages, it is not necessarily a source of the uncanny. The uncanny appeal resides within the issue of self and other both in the creator-creature constellation and the relationship between self and society.

The next chapter will analyze another work which employs the confessional form and the theme of the doppelgänger in its exploration of the uncanny. E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* is also concerned with the role of social institutions in the individual's life and exposes them as fundamentally ambivalent.

Chapter Five

E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*: Institutionalized Sexuality

Bodily desire, like a morass, and adolescent sex welling up within me exuded mists which clouded over and obscured my heart, so that I could not distinguish the clear light of true love from the murk of lust. Love and lust together seethed within me. In my tender youth they swept me away over the precipice of my body's appetites and plunged me in the whirlpool of sin.¹⁰⁹

Aurelie, the main female character in E. T. A. Hoffmann's novel *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, describes in a letter to her motherly friend, the abbess of a Cistercian convent, how deeply she was affected by reading a German translation of M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). E. T. A. Hoffmann explicitly establishes an intertextual relationship in his novel *Die Elixiere des Teufels* with *The Monk*, which he knew as *Der Mönch* (1797), a German translation by Friedrich von Örtel. *The Monk's* appearance has been claimed to mark the advent of a new type of Gothic novel. Ann Radcliffe's novels, in which much of the uncanny depends on the suggestion of supernatural occurrences which are then rationally explained at the end of each story, represent the successful exponent of Gothic prose fiction which is characterized by an interest in the fear engendered by a particular event or occurrence. The new type of Gothic prose fiction, the school of horror, which emerges with Lewis, mediates a much more far-reaching and subversive concept of fear that springs from the encounter with the incomprehensible, which has a disastrous and irrevocable effect on the protagonist. The German version of the Gothic was considered to resemble the school of Lewis rather than that of Ann Radcliffe. Though *Die Elixiere des Teufels* bears some similarity to Lewis's novel, it is by far more complex than most *Schauerromane*.

¹⁰⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (written in 397–398), trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961) p. 43.

Despite Heinrich Heine's view of the superiority of Hoffmann's novel to that of Lewis ('In den *Elixieren des Teufels* liegt das Fruchtbare und Entsetzliche, das der Geist erdenken kann. Wie schwach ist dagegen *the Monk* von Lewis, der dasselbe Thema behandelt.'¹¹⁰) it could not compete with it in terms of popularity and financial success. Hoffmann's hope that his novel might serve him as a 'Lebenselixier', as he had written to Kunz in a letter of 24 March 1814, remained unfulfilled in this respect.

When Heine wrote of 'dasselbe Thema' he must have had in mind the conflict of spiritual and physical imperatives and the toll it can take on the individual. The issue of the powerful awakening of repressed sexuality and its destructive potential lies at the heart of both novels. Both authors chose a hero who is part of an environment characterized by the extreme demand of sexual denial it makes upon its inhabitants. Neither Ambrosio nor Medardus has been significantly exposed to the vicissitudes of life in the outside world. Monastic life screens them from the demands and opportunities of life outside. In turn they have to repress their sexuality. The two monks sublimate their sexual drive by developing their considerable talents as orators. The evident power of their speech tempts them to think of themselves as elevated above their fellow human beings. Further similarities exist in respect of other characters, as for example in the case of Aurelie and Antonia, but they are neither strong nor important.¹¹¹ In general it is fair to say that, despite Lewis's painstaking efforts to explain Ambrosio's psychology, Hoffmann develops his character's inner life to far greater depths. In fact the internal crisis is the dominant subject of *Die Elixiere*.

¹¹⁰Heinrich Heine, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. by Hans Kaufmann, 10 vols (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1980), III, p. 556.

¹¹¹Thematic similarities are recorded by Wolfgang Nehring, 'Gothic Novel und Schauerroman: Tradition und Innovation in Hoffmanns *Die Elixiere des Teufels*', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Deutsche Romantik im europäischen Kontext*, ed. by Hartmut Steinecke, *E. T. A. Hoffmann Jahrbuch*, 1 (Schmidt, 1992), pp. 36–47.

In *Die Elixiere* the hero's crisis is caused by the inability to control a destructive sexuality which is genealogically anchored and thus brings into play the issue of predetermination. In the letter to Kunz in Bamberg of 24 March 1814, Hoffmann emphasises the role of fate in the hero's life:

Das Büchlein heißt: die Elixiere des Teufels, aus den nachgelassenen Papieren des Paters Medardus, eines Capuziners. Es ist darin auf nichts geringeres abgesehen, als in dem krausen, wunderbaren Leben eines Mannes, über den schon bey seiner Geburt die himmlischen und dämonischen Mächte walteten, jene geheimnisvollen Verknüpfungen des menschlichen Geistes mit all' den höhern Prinzipien, die in der ganzen Natur verborgen und nur dann und wann hervorblitzen, welchen Blitz wir dann Zufall nennen, recht klar und deutlich zu zeigen.¹¹²

Like many English novelists of the Gothic genre, Lewis selected the institutions of Catholic worship as his settings. The demonizing treatment of Catholicism was a legitimate matter of patriotism at the time. Moreover, the institution of the monastery provides the perfect setting for a study of repressed sexuality. Therefore, it is not surprising that Hoffmann follows in Lewis's footsteps by placing his hero in a Capuchin monastery. His depiction of the institutions of Catholicism, however, is more differentiated than that of Lewis. While he exposes the Vatican as corrupt and the Dominicans as mercilessly cruel in their pursuit of power, he draws a favourable picture of the Capuchins in Medardus's monastery as well as of the monastery near Rome which takes him in and which is the place where he will find out about his origin.

The focus (to use a term typical of Hoffmann) of Medardus's life is the painting of St Rosalia. This crucial motif in *Die Elixiere* was indisputably inspired by *The Monk* in which Matilda's painting prepares the ground for Ambrosio's seduction. Hoffmann also read Fouqué's novel *Der Zauberring: Ein Ritterroman* (1813) and felt inspired by it. One of its motifs is the painting of a woman. The

¹¹²E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 454.

image has a strong effect on the hero, and in the course of the narrative he finds out that it is a depiction of his long-lost mother. The motif of the doppelgänger also makes an appearance. A short episode dealing with Otto von Trautwangen's identity crisis when he confronts his heathen double, who soon turns out to be his half-brother, had a profound effect on Hoffmann. In Fouqué's novel, however, the conflict is not between the mythologies of Christianity and of Antiquity, but of Christianity and of Norse mythology.

Hoffmann seizes upon the motif of the painting and expands it, creating astonishing ramifications. 'Bild' is a central term in *Die Elixiere*. Far from being exclusively a designation for 'painting', 'Bild', as we shall see, becomes an essential source of imagery and the leitmotif of the novel which runs in a great variety of manifestations through the entire novel. In many respects, Hoffmann's concern with the imaginative potential of his protagonist, and with his attempt to develop to emotional and cognitive maturity, reminds one of the *Bildungsroman*. Yet *Die Elixiere* cannot be classified as a *Bildungsroman* because, despite his long wanderings, Medardus has not really succeeded in solving the conflict between the contending forces of his soul by the time he writes his confession. Thus Johannes Harnischfeger argues that 'im Unterschied zu den klassischen Bildungsromanen, die den Prozeß der Individuation als ein Sich-Bilden und Reifen innerer Anlagen vorstellen, gestaltet Hoffmann die Sozialisation seines Helden als einen gewaltsamen Prozeß, der dem Individuum von außen auferlegt wird'.¹¹³ The opening pages of volume II demonstrate that Medardus is far from resigned to his fate. He is still very painfully aware of the loss of Aurelie. He conjures her memory up in lively colours and the pain of unconsummated love is still not overcome:

Und sie kam, sie wollte dein sein ganz und gar. Du umfingst sie voll
glühenden Verlangens und wolltest, losgelöset von der Erde

¹¹³Johannes Harnischfeger, 'Das Geheimnis der Identität: Zu E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Die Elixiere des Teufels*', *Mitteilungen der E. T. A. Hoffmann-Gesellschaft*, 36 (1990), 1–14.

auflodern in inbrünstiger Sehnsucht! – Aber das Mysterium blieb unerfüllt, eine finstre Macht zog stark und gewaltig dich zur Erde nieder, als du dich aufschwingen wolltest mit ihr zu dem fernen Jenseits, das dir verheißen. [...] Du, Fremder! Unbekannter! hat dich je solch namenloser Schmerz zermalmt, so stimme ein in den trostlosen Jammer des ergrauten Mönchs, der in finstrer Zelle der Sonnenzeit seiner Liebe gedenkend, das harte Lager mit blutigen Tränen netzt, dessen bange Todesseufzer in stiller Nacht durch die düstren Kloostergänge hallen.¹¹⁴

The narrator's attempt to find consolation in the mental creation of a 'Liebestod' as the ultimate fulfilment of his yearnings remains unconvincing.

If one cannot place the novel in the category of *Bildungsroman*, one could denominate it a *Bilderroman*. Hoffmann is masterly in his exploitation of the ambivalence of images. As the motif of 'Bild' is, as will become obvious very soon, closely connected with the generation of the uncanny, it deserves a careful and detailed analysis. In his *Handwörterbuch* Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli records the following information under the entry 'Bild und Bildzauber':

Ebensowenig wie heute ein primitives Volk existiert, das keine Religion besitzt, gibt es ein Volk, das nicht die Anfänge einer bildenden Kunst kennt. Wir finden eine solche daher bereits im Paläolithikum. Und zwar dient die primitive Darstellung einem dreifachen Zweck: A. Sie ist entsprungen dem ästhetischen Bedürfnis [...]. B. Die bildliche Darstellung hat im praktischen und logischen Bedürfnis ihren Grund; sie dient der Mitteilung. [...] C. Die bildliche Darstellung geht aus dem metaphysischen Bedürfnis hervor und gehört dem Gebiet der Religion und Magie an. [...] Das Bild, wenn es eine Person darstellt, [kann] einen Menschen darstellen; dann ist es im primitiven Glauben ein Doppelgänger dieses Menschen und ist zugleich Träger seiner Kraft.¹¹⁵

The connection made between two age-old needs of humanity, pictorial representation and religion, is relevant to the discussion of *Die Elixiere*.

¹¹⁴E. T. A. Hoffmann, [*Sämtliche Werke*], 6 vols (Munich: Winkler, 1976-81), II: *Die Elixiere des Teufels/Lebensansichten des Katers Murr* (1977), p. 153 Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

¹¹⁵Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des detschen Aberglaubens*, 10 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1927-47).

Catholicism especially responds to the need for artistic representation of mythological figures. Bächtold-Stäubli also points out the doppelgänger relationship which has over the centuries been attributed to the painting and its object. This idea, so deeply rooted in humankind, is taken up in *Die Elixiere* by Hoffmann who compounds its inherent complexity.

The story of the painting which decorates the Capuchin church in B. and which so dramatically affects Medardus's life, begins long before his birth and is recorded in 'das Pergamentblatt des alten Malers' (p. 228). It relates the life of the mysterious painter named Francesko and its impact upon subsequent generations. Numerous parallels to Medardus's own life suggest an uncanny re-enactment of life patterns which Medardus is powerless to resist. Francesko, the son and heir of the duke of P., resigns his claim to power in order to continue his apprenticeship with the famous Leonardo da Vinci. This master exerts a benevolent influence, taming Francesko's proud and passionate nature and converting him into a pious artist. After Leonardo's death, his artistic expression takes a new direction: He scorns his old mentor, and instead of the 'frommen, einfachen Stil', he develops 'eine neue Manier, die mit der Üppigkeit der Gestalten und dem prahlenden Farbenglanz die Augen der Menge verblendete, deren übertriebene Lobsprüche ihn immer eitler und übermütiger machten' (p. 229). Leonardus is also the name of Medardus's mentor, the prior of the German Capuchin monastery. A period of tender affection and respect for his mentor, during which Leonardus encourages Medardus to develop his rhetorical talent in the service of faith, comes to an end when Medardus's success as a preacher leads him to arrogance, vanity, and the obsession that he is 'ein besonders Erkorner des Himmels' (p. 31). Soon this entails an increasing alienation from the monastic environment.

The changes Francesko and Medardus undergo represent a withdrawal from the Christian principles of modesty and self-denial in the service of the Church.

Francesko returns to pre-Christian, pagan ideals by portraying mythological figures of Antiquity whose uninhibited sensuality enraptures him.

Medardus no longer preaches to inspire his audience with faith in the mythological figures of the Catholic Church but styles himself a new Messiah, causing a 'religiösen Wahn' (p. 31) to seize the town. At this point Hoffmann uses his well-known imagery of indirect vision to indicate a lack of self-knowledge, bringing into play the variation of the notion of 'Bild' when he has Leonardus say:

Der Beifall, ja die abgöttische Bewunderung, die dir die leichtsinnige, nach jeder Anreizung lüsterne Welt gezollt, hat dich geblendet, und du siehst dich selbst in einer Gestalt, die nicht dein eigen, sondern ein Trugbild ist, welches dich in den verderblichen Abgrund lockt. (Hoffmann, 32)

The image (which represents one of the crucial meanings of 'Bild') that Medardus has projected of himself is the image of a saint, but it is a 'Trugbild' because it appeals to the senses rather than the spirituality of the world outside the monastery which is 'lüstern' and 'leichtsinnig'. The reference to the 'Abgrund' to which Medardus's new direction is leading anticipates the event of his doppelgänger's fall into the ravine; the notion of 'Abgrund' is part of another carefully established pattern of motifs that is significant. As Francesko has changed the images he paints, Medardus has changed the image he rhetorically paints of himself. Both have fallen under the spell of sensuality. Both are to undergo a key experience. Financial pressures oblige Francesko to paint the image of St Rosalia for the Italian Capuchin monastery. He blasphemously intends to paint the saint according to a famous 'Venusbild' and, consequently, to place a 'heidnisches Götzenbild' (p. 230) in the monastic church. A religious vision forces him to cover the bare body of Venus in a 'dunkelrotes Kleid' and an 'azurblauer Mantel' (p. 231) — the appropriate clothes for a saint. Francesko finds himself strangely incapable of supplying his painting with a face; he becomes the victim of an affliction that suspends his artistic power.

His plight coincides with the ailment which befalls Medardus after his vision of the Maler (Francesko himself who, possibly inspired by the figure of the Wandering Jew in *The Monk*, must roam the earth until his sins are expiated) which robs him temporarily of his rhetorical power. That resistance of the saint's face to being painted is echoed by the veiled face of Aurelie, the woman who confesses her passion for Medardus.

Similarly the symbolic act of drinking the elixirs is re-enacted. The consumption of 'Syrauser Wein' (p. 231) marks the onset of a crisis that will alienate Francesko and Medardus from Christian principles and entangle them in crimes of passion. Brother Cyrillus has taken great care to enlighten Medardus (and the reader) about the power with which an object is endowed by faith alone; a symbol is far from being a weak representation of what is absent. The effect of *Einbildungskraft* (which is the term employed from the first half of the 17th century to designate what Hoffmann referred to as *Phantasie*) is not to be underestimated.¹¹⁶

Francesko and Medardus commit blasphemy by drinking the wine — an act which is both times connected with the story of the temptation of Saint Anthony. In Francesko's case it is consumed as a libation to pagan gods, while Medardus drinks it in the knowledge that it is believed to be the devil's elixirs. Wine as sacrificial libation which replaces blood is also an essential part of Catholic rituals of the Eucharist, but here, by its symbolic charge, it becomes the symbol of turning against Catholicism. Furthermore, wine has long been associated with intoxication and inspiration; by intoxication man partakes of the mode of life of the gods, and it is the proper drink of the poet. Accordingly, the draught rekindles Francesko's and Medardus's artistic powers. Intoxication also lowers the psychological barriers. Last

¹¹⁶*Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, ed. by Wolfgang Pfeifer and others (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), p. 174.

but not least it should be mentioned that poisoned wine is twice intended as the bringer of death for Medardus. First it is offered to him by Euphemie, who subsequently dies of it herself, and later it is offered to him by the Dominicans in Rome, but on this occasion he manages to pour it down his sleeve.

After the consumption of a less toxic wine, Francesko has a second vision, but this time the pagan Venus competes with the face of St Rosalia. Although the vision of the latter causes him to faint, the painting has mysteriously assumed the features of Venus by the time he regains his senses. Like the pagan sculptor Pygmalion, Francesko covets the incarnation of the image:

Er [...] flehte so wie er zur Frau Venus, daß sie seinem Bilde Leben einhauchen möge. Bald war es ihm auch, als finge das Bild an, sich zu regen, doch als er es in seine Arme fassen wollte, sah er wohl, daß es tote Leinwand geblieben. Dann zerraupte er sein Haar und gebärdete sich wie einer, der von dem Satan besessen. Schon zwei Tage und zwei Nächte hatte es Francesko so getrieben; am dritten Tag, als er, wie eine erstarrte Bildsäule, vor dem Bilde stand, ging die Türe seines Gemachs auf, und es rauschte hinter ihm wie mit weiblichen Gewändern. Er drehte sich um und erblickte ein Weib, das er für das Original seines Bildes erkannte. Es wären ihm schier die Sinne vergangen, als er das Bild, welches er aus seinen innersten Gedanken nach einem Marmorbilde erschaffen, nun lebendig vor sich in aller nur erdenklichen Schönheit erblickte, und es wandelte ihn beinahe ein Grausen an, wenn er das Gemälde ansah, das nun wie eine getreuliche Abspiegelung des fremden Weibes erschien.
(Hoffmann, 233)

The desire for the 'Bild' to become alive has an uncanny effect: It suspends a law of nature by rendering the animate (Francesko) inanimate ('erstarrte Bildsäule') and by apparently calling the inanimate (the 'Venusbild') to life (the 'teuflische Weib', p. 235). Lewis employs the same disturbing reversal when depicting the supernatural intervention of the Bleeding Nun who nocturnally haunts Raymond by suspending his life energies. Another instance is reminiscent of Lewis's novel: Like Matilda, the 'Teufelsweib' is later on revealed to be the devil's instrument of temptation. To some degree this episode amounts to the creation of a female trinity, consisting of

Venus (in Jungian terms the archetype of instinctual woman and mother), the 'Teufelsweib' (the incarnation of the goddess), and St Rosalia (the spiritual element) — a blasphemous mimesis of the Christian Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The substitution of this highly sexually charged principle for the patriarchal Christian one, particularly as its creator claims that 'die Schöpfung des Malers, die reine Abspiegelung des ihm inwohnenden göttlichen Geistes sei' (p. 229), prompts retaliation. The sexual union of Francesko and the 'Teufelsweib' marks the beginning of a legacy of sin; the curse of an overpowering and destructive sexuality clings to subsequent generations, including that of Medardus and Aurelie.

The fateful painting of Venus dressed as St Rosalia is sold to the German Capuchin monastery, while a copy of it remains in Italy. Medardus associates the depiction of their uncanny ancestress as St Rosalia with Aurelie, even before he can know that they look alike, because they are dressed alike. The incarnation of passion is, as is the case with Medardus, thinly covered in the dress of spirituality. On this occasion the blasphemous trinity has been slightly altered: Aurelie, also a distant relative of the 'Teufelsweib', has assumed the role of the incarnation or 'daughter'.

Die Elixiere is not only a novel about 'Bilder' as works of art and objects of religious (and other) adoration, but, being an artistic creation itself, it also operates with an intensive and extensive use of *bildliche Sprache* (imagery). The notion of 'Bild' also represents a seemingly endless source of imagery, vocabulary, and meaning. It resembles a hat from which the magician Hoffmann produces one surprise after the other. Aspects of language and of theme are frequently interwoven to create an extraordinary kaleidoscope of effects.

It is hardly necessary to mention Hoffmann's well-known preoccupation with vision, nor does the proximity of 'Bild' and vision need to be explained, but the

way he connects 'Bild' to vision is unusual; as early as the first page the notion of 'Bild' makes an entry. Here the editor alludes to the 'Heiligenbilder' und 'Freskogemälde': 'Durch die dunklen Zweige der Platanen schauen dich Heiligenbilder recht mit klaren lebendigen Augen an; es sind die frischen Freskogemälde, die auf der breiten Mauer prangen' (p. 7). Here 'Bild' is clearly used in the sense of 'painting', as the second half of the sentence clarifies. Nevertheless, even before Medardus's narrative commences, the figurative language of the editor implies the vitality of the painted images. 'Bilder' are not only objects to be looked upon, but they are also implied to have the uncanny ability to observe the observer. This implication anticipates the Pygmalion motif to which direct reference is made in the second volume of *Die Elixiere*, as already discussed above, and which is inextricably linked to the forces that determine Medardus's life.

As Medardus begins to narrate his life, he describes the memories of early childhood in terms of 'die lieblichen Bilder' (p. 11). He recalls his childhood in idyllic images. These two semantic possibilities, painting and image, are sometimes co-present, as, for example, when Medardus encounters Aurelie in the monastic church. The encounter unleashes an overwhelming sexual desire in Medardus:

Von ihrem Bilde verfolgt, wälzte ich mich auf dem harten Lager und rief die Heiligen an, nicht, mich zu retten von dem verführerischen Gaukelbilde, das mich umschwebte, nicht, meine Seele zu bewahren vor ewiger Verdammnis, nein! – mir das Weib zu geben, meinen Schwur zu lösen, mir Freiheit zu schenken zum sündigen Abfall.
(Hoffmann, 42)

Using 'Bilde' in this context generates uncertainty as to whether Medardus refers to the painting of Rosalia or to the image of Aurelie. Interpretative uncertainty interlocks with uncanniness. 'Bild' is no longer a notion that is secure and limited; its meaning is at least twofold. Just as Medardus is experiencing the onset of a crisis because he cannot reconcile spirituality and sexuality, language is submitted to a crisis in which it, in turn, loses its innocence. The question arises where the

metaphor ends and where literality begins. Again the formulation suggests that the inanimate is endowed with a life of its own. At this point, then, Hoffmann introduces the Pygmalion motif on a linguistic level.

Even though the 'Bild' that haunts Medardus is derogatorily termed a 'Gaukelbild' and thus classified as a deceptive vision, its impact on Medardus is so powerful that he longs to be released from his vows. Images of the psychic world have as palpable an impact on the individual as their flesh-and-blood counterparts. For Medardus it will become increasingly difficult to distinguish the images originating from his mind from those his eyes take in from the outside world. The German word for 'to imagine' (in the sense of creating mental images which contradict outside reality) is the reflexive verb 'sich einbilden'; its etymology goes back to the Middle High German *inbilden*, which meant 'einprägen, in der Seele abbilden'.¹¹⁷

Like the authors of *Frankenstein*, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and *Der blonde Eckbert*, Hoffmann makes use of the narrative form of the confessional. This is not only a narrative form that suggests itself for the purpose of psychological study as it grants the most intimate insight possible into the human psyche, but it also contributes to an unsettling, claustrophobic effect, as the reader — in order to read the novel — is constantly drawn into identifying with the protagonist–narrator.

Medardus describes the possession of the woman as 'sündiger Abfall', which recalls my earlier comment on the symbolic pattern linked with 'Abgrund'. As Elizabeth Wright has pointed out in her insightful study of Hoffmann's use of language, the word 'Sturz' (a synonym of 'Abfall') embraces various meanings.¹¹⁸ In the description of the first encounter of Medardus and Viktorin, when the former

¹¹⁷*Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, p. 174.

¹¹⁸Wright, *E. T. A. Hoffmann*, p. 21.

unintentionally causes the fall of the latter into the ravine, Hoffmann exploits the polysemy of the word 'Sturz' (the physical process of falling, Medardus's lapsarian experience, and the slope of the mountain). Wright convincingly argues that 'Sturz' is of more than physical significance, and as Viktorin becomes Medardus's double, this additional linguistic dimension adds to the uncanny incident.

I would like to add to the pattern discovered by Wright: In retrospect Viktorin's fall is an unexpected fulfilment of Medardus's desire of being granted the 'sündige Abfall'. The term 'sündiger Abfall' in the quotation above evidently belongs to the same pattern. Here it embraces two prominent connotations: that of secession from his faith and the institution by which it is represented and, on a more suggestive level, that of 'Sündenfall'.

Words, then, can embrace several meanings; they are potentially polysemous. This linguistic experience complements Medardus's (and the reader's) experience of a fragmented identity. Part of this experience consists in Medardus's recurring confusion of inner and outer world. When Viktorin's servant, the hunter, mistaking Medardus for his master, questions him concerning the whereabouts of his uniform, Medardus answers:

'Die schleuderte ich hinab in den Abgrund', antwortete es aus mir hohl und dumpf, denn ich war es nicht, der diese Worte sprach, unwillkürlich entflohen sie meinen Lippen. In mich gekehrt, immer in den Abgrund starrend, ob der blutige Leichnam des Grafen sich nicht mir drohend erheben würde, stand ich da. (Hoffmann, 47)

This is a splendid example of how language — the choice of words and syntax — creates a second dimension to the communication made. Firstly, the two adjectives 'hohl' and 'dumpf' describe the quality of voice and a mental state under shock, but they also suggest a space inside Medardus that corresponds with the 'Abgrund'. The natural landscape, a scene of disaster, is echoed by a mental landscape. In the second sentence the natural landscape is actually absorbed by the mental landscape.

By placing the participle construction 'in mich gekehrt' at the beginning of the sentence, the impression is created that what follows is inside Medardus's mind. This in turn implies that Viktorin is part of Medardus's mental make-up. Later in the novel, when it becomes clear that Viktorin has survived the fall, it is as if a part of Medardus has gained a life of his own. In addition, the use of the impersonal 'es' complements grammatically Medardus's denial that he himself is speaking and that he is responsible for his action. The interpolation of 'es' separates subject from verb, that is, Medardus from action. The human subject is no longer grammatically the subject of the sentence.

Medardus essentially welcomes Viktorin's existence. Even though their physical likeness startles him and remains enigmatic for a long time, it presents him with the opportunity to project the sinister facets of his personality on this alter ego. This superficially and temporarily solves the problem of his fragmented identity and saves him from the death sentence. His doppelgänger serves as a scapegoat.

Hermogen, the brother of Medardus's beloved Aurelie, is another doppelgänger figure and family relation of Medardus; he personifies another facet of the hero's mind. Against the wish of his family, for a reason they cannot understand, he wants to withdraw into a monastery. Reinhold, a loyal friend and servant of the family, argues that with the courage and energy of his youth, he should be able to transcend his fate (which is, by the way, a hope that Medardus entertains until it is no longer tenable). Hermogen disagrees:

Hermogen trat einen Schritt zurück, und den Alten mit einem düsteren, wie im verhaltenen Zorn glühenden Blicke, der etwas Entsetzliches hatte, anstarrend, rief er mit dumpfer, hohler Stimme: "So wisse denn, daß ich selbst das Schicksal bin, das mich vernichtet, daß ein ungeheures Verbrechen auf mir lastet, ein schändlicher Frevel, den ich abbüße in Elend und Verzweiflung. – Darum sei barmherzig und flehe den Vater an, daß er mich fortlasse in die Mauern! [...] Muß ich? – muß ich bleiben ? – Ja, wahrhaftig, Alter,

du hast recht, ich muß bleiben, und meine Buße wird hier
schrecklicher sein, als in den dumpfen Mauern. (Hoffmann, 50)

Unwittingly Medardus overhears what is a description of his own dilemma. Hermogen seems to know about the original sin committed by his ancestor which he has to expiate by a life of self-denial. In contrast to Medardus, who flees monastic life, Hermogen yearns to withdraw from the world. He maintains that penance outside the monastery will be more terrible than penance inside it and he unintentionally forecasts Medardus's experience of the outside world. Hermogen resigns himself to his fate while Medardus struggles against it. Killing Hermogen will be part of Medardus's rebellion.

Like Medardus's voice in the previous quotation, Hermogen's voice is described as 'dumpf' and 'hohl'. These adjectives, it should be noted, are very much associated with the sound which is heard during funerals when a handful of soil is thrown on the coffin. The reference to the monastery in the form of the metonymy 'dumpfe Mauern' (the hollow is indirectly represented by the space the walls surround) implies an association of mental space and the institutionalized life referred to; it powerfully evokes the terrible isolation it entails, which might well be described as being buried alive. In this case the monastery appears an extension of the self. Medardus has yet to learn that monastic life is not the cause of his conflict, but that his fate, inextricably linked to his own person, body and soul, is of a nature that necessitates such terrible isolation.

A variation on the theme of confused perception and yet another version of the Pygmalion motif is the approximation of woman made of flesh and blood and her painted likeness. The complex relationship between the painting and its flesh-and-blood alter ego is, as we have already seen in the 'Teufelsweib' episode, essentially uncanny. This uncanny quality is further reinforced by the use of language. The following episode is a striking example: Soon after his disastrous adventures at the castle of Aurelie's father, Medardus has slipped into worldly dress

and is determined that, with his changed appearance, he has left behind his old, criminal identity. In the 'Handelsstadt' he visits an exhibition of paintings which mysteriously depict the scenes of his childhood, and which oblige him to recall what he would like to repress. The painted images trigger the same intense response as their originals, especially the portrait of Aurelie: 'Mit gierigen Blicken verschlang ich Aureliens Reize, die aus dem in regem Leben glühenden Bilde hervorstrahlten' (p. 93).

The painted image is more than lifelike; the use of metaphor instils vitality into Aurelie's painted image. It arouses the same emotional and sexual response as the real Aurelie. Again the question arises whether this is meant metaphorically or literally.

Naturally, the term 'Bild' operates in close connection with the perception of the organ designated the eye (optical sense) as well as the perception of the inner eye (the mind). In the house of the forester Medardus has a disturbing experience. Again the dominant mode of perception is that of the 'Bild'; on this occasion the effect of the blurring of external and internal world is reinforced by sound:

Ich warf mich auf das Lager und fiel, ermüdet wie ich war, bald in tiefen Schlaf, aber es folterte mich ein entsetzliches Traumbild. – Auf ganz wunderbare Weise fing der Traum mit dem Bewußtsein des Schlafs an, ich sagte mir nämlich selbst: 'Nun, das ist herrlich, daß ich gleich eingeschlafen bin, und so fest und ruhig schlummere, das wird mich von der Ermüdung ganz erlaben; nur muß ich ja nicht die Augen öffnen.' Aber demunerachtet war es mir, als könne ich das nicht unterlassen, und doch wurde mein Schlaf dadurch nicht unterbrochen: da ging die Türe auf, und eine dunkle Gestalt trat hinein, die ich zu meinem Entsetzen, als mich selbst, im Kapuzinerhabit, mit Bart und Tonsur, erkannte. Die Gestalt kam näher an mein Bett, ich war regungslos, und jeder Laut, den ich herauszupressen suchte, erstickte in dem Starrkrampf, der mich ergriffen. Jetzt setzte sich die Gestalt auf mein Bett und grinsete mich höhnisch an. 'Du mußt jetzt mit mir kommen', sprach die Gestalt, 'wir wollen auf das Dach steigen, unter die Wetterfahne, die ein lustig Brautlied spielt, weil der Uhu Hochzeit macht. Dort wollen wir ringen miteinander, und wer den andern herabstößt, ist König, und

darf Blut trinken.' – Ich fühlte, wie die Gestalt mich packte, und in die Höhe zog, da gab mir die Verzweiflung meine Kraft wieder. 'Du bist nicht ich, du bist der Teufel', schrie ich auf und griff wie mit Krallen dem bedrohlichen Gespenst ins Gesicht, aber es war, als bohrten meine Finger sich in die Augen wie in tiefe Höhlen, und die Gestalt lachte von neuem auf in schneidendem Ton. In dem Augenblick erwachte ich, wie von einem plötzlichen Ruck emporgeschüttelt. Aber das Gelächter dauerte fort im Zimmer. Ich fuhr in die Höhe, der Morgen brach in lichten Strahlen durch das Fenster, und ich sah vor dem Tisch, den Rücken mir zugewendet, eine Gestalt im Kapuzinerhabit stehen. – Ich erstarrte vor Schreck, der grauenhafte Traum trat ins Leben. (Hoffmann, 104–105)

Medardus experiences this confrontation with Viktorin, who has completed the identity swap by slipping into Medardus's old Capuchin habit, as a dream image. As the laughter he hears in his dream lingers on as he wakes up, dream and waking experience run into one another. It becomes impossible for Medardus (and the reader) to differentiate clearly between inner and outer world — for him it seems as if the dream vision urges itself upon the phenomenal world: 'die lebendige Erscheinung des grauenhaften Mönchs, hatte sich so fest an das Traumbild gereiht, daß ich kaum zu unterscheiden vermochte, wo der Traum übergegangen sei ins wirkliche Leben' (p. 106). The failure to distinguish seeing as projection (the dream image) from seeing as perception goes hand in hand with the inability to identify Viktorin. To begin with he describes him as 'dunkle Gestalt'; then he thinks he recognizes himself but continues to describe his other self as 'Gestalt', until he finds the energy to sever the 'Gestalt' from his own identity and to describe it in terms of 'Teufel' and 'Gespenst'.

Soon the startling encounter is explained. His host, the forester, relates to Medardus how Viktorin has come to live with his family. During his stay in the forester's home, which coincidentally used to be the former 'Jagdschloß' of the Fürst, Viktorin enacts with the forester's daughters Medardus's sexual advances on Aurelie at her father's castle. The daughters' attribute of being 'bildhübsch' (p. 118) includes them in the pattern of the 'Bild' motif and serve to elaborate the woman as

an object of conflicting attention, that is, of spiritual as well as sexual adoration. The analogous adjective 'bildschön', meaning 'very beautiful', is thought to have originally meant 'schön wie ein (Heiligen)bild'.¹¹⁹ Aurelie is also described as 'bildschön' (p. 150), and the setting of Medardus's (alias Leonard) advances to her will be the prince's 'Lustschloß'.

As Medardus journeys on to the 'Residenzstadt', unaware that his double is also being taken there, he becomes acquainted with the prince and receives an invitation to join a game of Faro at court. The prince's tips seem unlucky, and Medardus loses large amounts. His fortune changes when he decides to dispense with his host's advice. The queen proves his lucky card and is the focus of a disturbing interlude. Suddenly Medardus believes he can discern the features of Aurelie on the card; while the narrated Medardus has no doubt that he holds a depiction of Aurelie in his hand, Medardus the narrator has changed his view of the card episode:

Ich zog aus meinen Karten, ohne sie anzusehen, blindlings eine heraus, es war die Dame. – Wohl mag es lächerlich zu sagen sein, daß ich in diesem blassen leblosen Kartengesicht, Aureliens Züge zu entdecken glaubte. [...] Es waren an zweitausend Louisdors, die mir das Glück durch die Dame zugeteilt, und unerachtet ich nun aller Verlegenheit enthoben, so konnte ich mich doch eines innern unheimlichen Gefühls nicht erwehren. Auf wunderbare Art fand ich einen geheimen Zusammenhang zwischen dem glücklichen Schuß aufs Geratewohl, der neulich die Hühner herabwarf, und zwischen meinem heutigen Glück. Es wurde mir klar, daß nicht ich, sondern die fremde Macht, die in mein Wesen getreten, alles das Ungewöhnliche bewirke und ich nur das willenlose Werkzeug sei, dessen sich jene Macht bediene, zu mir unbekanntem Zwecken. Die Erkenntnis dieses Zwiespalts, der mein Inneres feindselig trennte, gab mir aber Trost, indem sie mir das allmähliche Aufkeimen eigener Kraft, die bald stärker und stärker werdend, dem Feinde widerstehen und ihn bekämpfen werde, verkündete. – Das ewige Abspiegeln von Aureliens Bild, konnte nichts anderes sein, als ein verruchtes Verlocken zum bösen Beginnen, und ebendieser freveliche

¹¹⁹See *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, p. 173.

Mißbrauch des frommen lieben Bildes, erfüllte mich mit Grausen und Abscheu. (Hoffmann, 128–129)

The use of 'wohl' and 'glaubte' in the second sentence signals a critical distance to this episode. Anew Medardus finds himself the victim of the opposing pulls of spirituality and sexuality and again sexuality is associated with pictures, in this case on playing cards.

There seems no end to the significance of painted images in Medardus's life. The next 'Bild' he encounters is the portrait painted by Francesko (the Maler) of the father who died at his birth and whom Medardus perfectly resembles. Showing him the portrait, the Leibarzt explains why this extraordinary resemblance is the cause for the princess's dislike of Medardus by telling him the catastrophic story of Francesko's passion. The secret wedding ceremony in which Francesko attempts to marry the sister of the princess (the future abbess) is disrupted by the inexplicable appearance of the Maler. These events anticipate Medardus's fruitless attempt to marry Aurelie.

The effect upon Medardus of the Leibarzt's narrative equals a revelation. Medardus realizes immediately that the Leibarzt is relating the story of his origin; he also recognizes the pattern of re-enactment: 'Klar stand es vor meiner Seele, Francesko war mein Vater, *er* hatte den Prinzen mit demselben Messer ermordet, mit dem ich Hermogen tötete!' (p. 149).

Medardus resolves to break the spiral of re-enactment which, he feels, is imposed on his life by the 'böse feindliche Macht' by leaving for Italy; at that very moment, however, Aurelie's entry shatters this resolve. Her presence affects Medardus so powerfully that he loses control of his body and of his senses:

Ich stand nicht fern von Aurelien, sie schien mich nicht zu bemerken – ich wollte hin zu ihr, aber wie mit eisernen Banden gefesselt, vermochte ich nicht, mich von der Stelle zu rühren. – Noch einmal den Major scharf anblickend, war es mir plötzlich, als stehe Viktorin bei Aurelien. Da lachte ich auf im grimmigen Hohn: 'Hei! – Hei! Du Verruchter, hast du dich im Teufelsgrunde so weich gebettet, daß du

in toller Brunst trachten magst nach der Buhlin des Mönchs?
(Hoffmann, 155)

This short scene in which the major's conversation with Aurelie triggers such a strong response in Medardus is reminiscent of the scene in Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* in which Eckbert watches Hugo together with an older knight:

Indem er noch immer hinstarrte, sah er plötzlich Walthers Gesicht, alle seine Mienen, die ganze, ihm so wohlbekannte Gestalt, er sah noch immer hin und ward überzeugt, daß niemand als *Walther* mit dem Alten spreche. – Sein Entsetzen war unbeschreiblich; außer sich stürzte er hinaus, verließ noch in der Nacht die Stadt und kehrte nach vielen Irrwegen auf seine Burg zurück.¹²⁰

During the act of seeing, the mind (partly motivated by a guilty conscience) supplies an image that replaces the object. Medardus and Eckbert experience an hallucination and respond by taking flight.

Medardus would like to converse with Aurelie himself, and the major, as a rival, arouses his jealousy. His hallucination is in part wishful thinking, and by projecting an image of his doppelgänger, he avoids facing up to his own sexuality yet again. Medardus's confused state is highlighted by the fact that the personification of the unwanted side of his personality is so successful that Medardus feels his doppelgänger is a competitor.

To ensure that Medardus's life experience, which is largely ruled by the inheritance of a sinful sexuality, cannot be dismissed as a long chain of hallucinations, Hoffmann interpolates a few pages of documents which do not originate from Medardus's pen. Aurelie's letter to the abbess, the manuscript of Francesco (the painter), and father Spiridion's 'Nachtrag' corroborate the existence of inexplicable, fateful powers which affect the progeny of Francesco and the 'Teufelsweib'. Francesco's manuscript contains the detailed record of the often criminal manifestations of a destructive sexuality. For generation after generation,

¹²⁰Tieck, VI, p. 144.

patterns of sexually motivated behaviour are re-enacted in a truly labyrinthine genealogy.

The significance of Aurelie's letter lies in the way it complements a large part of Medardus's experience. It re-enforces the relevance of the 'Bild'. As Medardus's female counterpart her life is determined by similar incidents. A painting of her mother's illicit lover, who coincidentally is Medardus's father, affects Aurelie strongly enough to constitute the foundation of a fixation, which is later explained by the fateful inheritance from her ancestry: 'Nicht wegwenden konnte ich den Blick von dem fremden herrlichen Mann, der mich mit lebendig strahlenden Augen anschaute' (pp. 196–197). Again the use of language insinuates a peculiar vitality of the inanimate. The effect, however, seems only short-lived.

With the onset of puberty, the memory of the image slips back to her consciousness as the answer to her sexual yearning:

Ich weiß selbst nicht, wie es kam, urplötzlich erschien mir das vergessene Bild jenes unbekanntes Mannes so lebhaft, daß es mir war, als stehe es vor mir, Blicke des Mitleids auf mich gerichtet. 'Ach! – soll ich denn sterben? – was ist es, das mich so unaussprechlich quält?' So rief ich dem Traumbilde entgegen, da lächelte der Unbekannte und antwortete: 'Du liebst mich, Aurelie; das ist deine Qual, aber kannst du die Gelübde des Gottgeweihten brechen?' – Zu meinem Erstaunen wurde ich nun gewahr, daß der Unbekannte das Ordenskleid der Kapuziner trug. – Ich raffte mich mit aller Gewalt auf, um nur aus dem träumerischen Zustande zu erwachen. Es gelang mir. Fest war ich überzeugt, daß jener Mönch nur ein loses trügerisches Spiel meiner Einbildung gewesen und doch ahnte ich nur zu deutlich, daß das Geheimnis der Liebe sich mir erschlossen hatte. (Hoffmann, 197–198)

As it did for Medardus, the painted image has become an animated mental image for Aurelie. The 'Traumbild' communicates to Aurelie that it is bound by monastic vows, thus involving her in the inevitable conflict of spiritual and physical demands and thereby opening the possibility of sinfulness. The association of the image with sin had previously been made by Hermogen's interpretation of the painting as a

depiction of the devil. Moreover, the identity of the image has notably shifted: Medardus has replaced his father Franz (Francesko). Aurelie's defensive reaction consists in denouncing the image as a trick of the imagination.

Reading *Der Mönch*, Aurelie comprehends the destructive potential of sexuality. Ambrosio's crimes of passion foreshadow the devastation Medardus will inflict upon her family. The image of the unknown monk is marked by a fundamental duality — it becomes simultaneously the embodiment of her 'höchstes Lebensglück' and the life-threatening 'grausige Schreckbild' (p. 195).

The monk becomes the epitome of the magnetic destructive sexuality that imperils her:

Und doch konnte ich nicht gebieten der Liebe zu dem Mönch, der in mir lebte. Nun erst wußte ich, daß es frevelhafte Liebe gebe, mein Abscheu dagegen kämpfte mit dem Gefühl, das meine Brust erfüllte, und dieser Kampf machte mich auf eigne Weise reizbar. Oft bemeisterte sich meiner, in der Nähe eines Mannes ein unheimliches Gefühl, weil es mir plötzlich war, als sei es der Mönch, der nun mich erfassen und fortreißen werde ins Verderben. (Hoffmann, 198–199)

The idiosyncratic formulation of the first sentence suggests that the monk (who epitomizes destructive sexuality) is an integrated part of Aurelie's inner life. This can be seen both as a reflection on the unusual intensity of the fixation and as a reflection on its incestuous nature. Aurelie realizes that love does not necessarily take the form of a redemptive concept but that for her it might emerge in the shape of destructive sexuality. Aurelie establishes a link between the possibility of destructive sexuality surfacing and the experience of the uncanny.

Reinhold's praises of a Capuchin monk's powerful preaching acquaint Aurelie with Medardus's existence, and she surmises that he must be the flesh-and-blood alter ego of the man who so much engages her imagination. Entering the Capuchin church she spies him at the confessional. The reader relives the

encounter s/he has already experienced from Medardus's point of view. This time it is described from Aurelie's viewpoint:

Das Morgenlicht brach eben in farbigen Strahlen durch die bunten Fenster, ein Laienbruder reinigte die Gänge. Unfern der Seitenpforte, wo ich hineingetreten, stand ein der heiligen Rosalia geweihter Altar, dort hielt ich ein kurzes Gebet und schritt dann auf den Beichstuhl zu, in dem ich einen Mönch erblickte. Hilf, heiliger Himmel! – es war Medardus! Kein Zweifel blieb übrig, eine höhere Macht sagte es mir. Da ergriff mich wahnsinnige Angst und Liebe, aber ich fühlte, daß nur standhafter Mut mich retten könne. Ich beichtete ihm selbst meine sündliche Liebe zu dem Gottgeweihten, ja mehr als das!... Ewiger Gott! in dem Augenblicke war es mir, als hätte ich schon oft in trostloser Verzweiflung den heiligen Banden, die den Geliebten fesselten, geflucht, und auch das beichtete ich. 'Du selbst, du selbst, Medardus, bist es, den ich so unaussprechlich liebe.' Das waren die letzten Worte, die ich zu sprechen vermochte, aber nun floß lindernder Trost der Kirche, wie des Himmels Balsam, von den Lippen des Mönchs, der mir plötzlich nicht mehr Medardus schien. Bald darauf nahm mich ein alter, ehrwürdiger Pilger in seine Arme und führte mich langsamen Schrittes durch die Gänge der Kirche zur Hauptpforte hinaus. Er sprach hochheilige, herrliche Worte, aber ich mußte entschlummern wie ein unter sanften, süßen Tönen eingewiegtes Kind. Ich verlor das Bewußtsein. Als ich erwachte, lag ich angekleidet auf dem Sofa meines Zimmers. (Hoffmann, 199–200)

This extract from Aurelie's letter corroborates Medardus's account of this episode up to the point where he responds to her confession. She characterizes his answer in terms of 'lindernder Trost der Kirche' while he describes the moment of his speech as one in which he manages only with a great effort to retain control (p. 41). Aurelie, after she has confessed her passion, suddenly expresses uncertainty concerning the monk's identity. In Medardus's version no other person partakes of the situation, while Aurelie claims to be guided to the exit by a pilgrim.

Before the confession she is determined and sure of her actions and her perception. The verbs are in a straightforward indicative mode. In the course of the confession that changes; verbs indicating uncertain perception ('fühlte', 'war es mir, als' followed by the subjunctive 'hätte' and by 'schien') qualify clauses describing an

increasing loss of control. First Aurelie loses her faculty of speech; then her motor control is taken over by the pilgrim who takes her into his arms and directs her to the church's exit. His speech induces her to fall asleep until her loss of self-control culminates in the loss of consciousness.

Waking up she finds herself on the bed in her room. She draws the following conclusion:

Du siehst, meine liebe, fromme Mutter, daß meine Beichte bei dem Mönch Medardus nur ein lebhafter Traum in einem überreizten Zustande war, aber die heilige Rosalia, zu der ich oft flehte, und deren Bildnis ich ja auch im Traum anrief, hat mir wohl alles so erscheinen lassen, damit ich errettet werden möge aus den Schlingen, die mir der arglistige Böse gelegt. Verschwunden war aus meinem Innern die wahnsinnige Liebe zu dem Trugbilde im Mönchsgewand. Ich erholte mich ganz und gar: und trat nun erst heiter und unbefangen in das Leben ein. – Aber, gerechter Gott, noch einmal sollte mich jener verhaßte Mönch auf entsetzliche Weise bis zum Tode treffen. Für eben jenen Medardus, dem ich im Traum gebeichtet, erkannte ich augenblicklich den Mönch, der sich auf unserm Schlosse eingefunden. 'Das ist der Teufel, mit dem die Mutter gesprochen, hüte dich, hüte dich! – er stellt dir nach!' so rief der unglückliche Hermogen immer in mich hinein. (Hoffmann, 200–201)

By interpreting the confession episode as a dream, Aurelie rationalizes an event that has actually happened but has ended so inexplicably. A real-life experience is re-interpreted as an experience of the mind. As it cures her from the turmoil she has been suffering from her fixation on the monk, Aurelie concludes that her yearning for him was insane and that he was nothing but a trick of the imagination.

Before long, however, the flesh-and-blood Medardus enters her life in her father's castle. Medardus represents a threat from both outside and inside. He uncannily seems to be part of Aurelie's mental make-up and at the same time he is part of the outside world. This equivocal identity is echoed by Hermogen's warning: Medardus is the devil who is after her, he shouts. The strange formulation 'in mich hinein' implies that the conflict is taking place in Aurelie's mental realm.

The continuous uncertainty Aurelie and Medardus experience when they try to interpret what is happening to them in order to do what is right, and the constant difficulty they have in determining identities and origins, is carried on by various ambivalent symbols: the cross, the rose, and the thread. The frequency of their appearance is noteworthy. They perpetuate the problem of interpretative uncertainty. All three are ancient symbols of pre-Christian origin. Christianity has appropriated the cross and the rose to its own use, and in particular the cross, through the story of the New Testament, has become the Christian symbol *per se* throughout the Christian world. In various cultures the cross was a symbol of life. It represented, for example, the body of a human being with outstretched arms, symbolizing the divine potential in humankind. On a more universal scale, it served as a representation of the Tree of Life; in the Middle Ages it was frequently y-shaped and represented the world-axis. For the cultures of the Assyrians and the Celts it stood for creative power and eternity. At the same time, the cross also acquired a strongly negative symbolic charge through the ancient form of punishment of crucifixion.

To most of us the symbol of the cross has become closely connected to death; graves, for example, are traditionally marked by crucifixes. Christ died on a cross; and the fact that it was wooden calls to mind that the cross was also symbolical of the Tree of Life, and in Christian art it is often represented as a living tree. The tree is also our symbol of the depiction of a family's genealogy. The cross is not only connected with the death of Christ but also with the redemption and eternal life through self-sacrifice. Even within the Christian framework, then, the cross is essentially ambivalent.¹²¹

¹²¹See under the entry for 'cross': Bächtold-Stäubli; Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology: Folklore and Symbols* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962); J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. by Jack Sage, 2nd edn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962; repr. Routledge, 1993); Ad

In *Die Elixiere* the symbol of the cross urges itself upon Medardus on several occasions, but the first time it is mentioned is in the preface of the editor:

Entschließe dich aber, mit dem Medardus, als seist du sein treuer Gefährte, durch finstre Kreuzgänge und Zellen – durch die bunte – bunte Welt zu ziehen und mit ihm das Schauerliche, Entsetzliche, Tolle, Possenhafte seines Lebens zu ertragen, so wirst du dich vielleicht an den mannigfachen Bildern der Camera obscura, die sich dir aufgetan, ergötzen. (Hoffmann, 8)

'Kreuzgänge' is not only the term for a the half-open walks which are a particular feature of monasteries, but also refers to Medardus's wanderings through the world; *Kreuz* is also used as a synonym of *Schicksal*, *Mühsal*, and *Not*.

Very early on in childhood Medardus, then still called Franz, is confronted with the symbol of the cross:

So gedenke ich ferner noch eines alten fremdartig gekleideten Pilgers mit langem grauen Barte, der mich oft auf den Armen umhertrug, im Walde allerelei bunte Moose und Steine suchte, und mit mir spielte; unerachtet ich gewiß glaube, daß nur aus der Beschreibung meiner Mutter sich im Innern sein lebhaftes Bild erzeugt hat. Er brachte einmal einen fremden wunderschönen Knaben mit, der mit mir von gleichem Alter war. Uns herzlich und küssend saßen wir im Grase, ich schenkte ihm alle meine bunten Steine und er wußte damit allerlei Figuren auf dem Erdboden zu ordnen, aber immer bildete sich daraus zuletzt die Gestalt des Kreuzes. (Hoffmann, 12)

The pilgrim, whom Hoffmann identifies in a letter to Kunz of March 24th, in 1814, as Joseph with the 'Christuskind', informs the hero's mother of the sin her son inherited from his father and recommends that he should become a monk.¹²² The colourful stones Franz gives to his mysterious play-fellow who creates a variety of patterns with them, represent the aspects of the 'bunte Welt' mentioned by the editor. Ultimately they always come to depict the shape of a cross. The use of the reflexive 'bildete sich' implies that they are invested with a peculiar power of their

de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (Amsterdam and London: North Holland Publishing Company, 1984).

¹²²E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Briefwechsel*, I, p. 454.

own. Everything suggests that the cross is the ultimate destination of Franz's life, but his mother is determined to let Franz find out for himself. He himself must interpret the signs he confronts.

The second confrontation with the cross takes place when his mother takes him to the Cistercian abbess. In her person he meets for the first time somebody who is part of the mysteries of his origin. In the nunnery he is 'von dem Gefühl eines inneren Grauens ergriffen' (p. 13). In retrospect, the following incident seems an omen:

'Was ist dir Kleiner, fürchtest du dich vor mir? – Wie heißt Euer Sohn, liebe Frau?' – 'Franz', erwiderte meine Mutter, da rief die Fürstin mit der tiefsten Wehmut: 'Franziskus!' und hob mich auf und drückte mich heftig an sich, aber in dem Augenblick preßte mir ein jäher Schmerz, den ich am Halse fühlte, einen starken Schrei aus, so daß die Fürstin erschrocken mich losließ, und die durch mein Betragen ganz bestürzt gewordene Mutter auf mich zusprang um nur gleich mich fortzuführen. Die Fürstin ließ das nicht zu; es fand sich, daß das diamantene Kreuz, welches die Fürstin auf der Brust trug, mich, indem sie heftig mich an sich drückte, am Halse so stark beschädigt hatte, daß die Stelle ganz rot und mit Blut unterlaufen war. (Hoffmann, 14)

An act of affection by a representative of his family inflicts pain. The abbess is also a representative of the church, and it is the central religious symbol that impresses itself painfully upon the child. Church and family inflict pain on the individual. With the sign of the cross those chosen for a special purpose are marked; therefore, this event forecasts Medardus's destination for monastic life. In an inversion of the norm, the redemptive significance which traditionally inheres in the cross seems to withdraw behind the damaging effect it has on the individual.

Later on this 'Kreuzeszeichen' (p. 168) on Medardus's throat serves as a means of identification during his trial. It initially enables the judge to identify Leonardus as the monk who perpetrated the terrible crimes at the castle of Aurelie's father, and with its help brother Cyrill can determine that the alleged Leonardus is

in fact Medardus. At this point where Medardus seems at last to be forced to own up to the sinister side to his character, it is found that his doppelgänger Viktorin is equally marked by a cross on his throat. The cross of the doppelgänger, in a way, is a sign of a sham redemption for Medardus. It encourages Medardus to continue the projection of his destructive sexuality on Viktorin so that he can continue to seek redemption in a union with Aurelie.

Soon after his release from the remand prison, Medardus learns from the Leibarzt that Viktorin is his half-brother and that Euphemie was his half-sister. The ensuing shock is so immense that he is struck down by illness. Days later, when he feels his strength return, he ventures into the open. The deranged Viktorin has volunteered as the scapegoat for Medardus's crimes which relieves Medardus of his guilty conscience:

Ja! – ein schwerer Traum dünkte mir, nicht nur die letzt vergangene Zeit, sondern mein ganzes Leben, seitdem ich das Kloster verlassen, als ich mich in einem von dunklen Platanen beschatteten Gange befand. – Ich war im Garten der Kapuziner zu B. Aus dem fernen Gebüsch ragte schon das hohe Kreuz hervor, an dem ich sonst oft mit tiefer Inbrunst flehte, um Kraft, aller Versuchung zu widerstehen. – Das Kreuz schien mir nun das Ziel zu sein, wo ich hinwallen müsse, um, in den Staub niedergeworfen, zu bereuen und zu büßen den Frevel sündhafter Träume, die mir der Satan vorgegaukelt; und ich schritt fort mit gefalteten emporgehobenen Händen, den Blick nach dem Kreuz gerichtet. – Stärker und stärker zog der Luftstrom – ich glaubte die Hymnen der Brüder zu vernehmen, aber es waren nur des Waldes wunderbare Klänge, die der Wind, durch die Bäume sausend, geweckt hatte, und der meinen Atem fortriß, so daß ich bald erschöpft stillstehen, ja mich an einem nahen Baum festhalten mußte, um nicht niederzusinken. Doch hin zog es mich mit unwiderstehlicher Gewalt nach dem fernen Kreuz; ich nahm alle meine Kraft zusammen und wankte weiter fort, aber nur bis an den Moossitz dicht vor dem Gebüsch konnte ich gelangen; alle Glieder lähmte plötzlich tödliche Ermattung; wie ein schwacher Greis, ließ ich langsam mich nieder und in dumpfem Stöhnen suchte ich die gepreßte Brust zu erleichtern. (Hoffmann, 183–184)

Here it becomes clear to what extent the actual existence of his doppelgänger in the outside world represents a great relief to Medardus. It equals a total (though temporary) reprieve from all sins committed. When Medardus senses that 'der furchtbare Doppeltgänger mich daher ganz verlassen zu haben schien' (p. 183), the implication is dubious: The doppelgänger is now a separate entity, but by the same token it is suggested that he used to be an integral part of Medardus's inner life. Suddenly his adventures and crimes seem to have been a nightmare from which he has just woken up. In turn, he begins to describe in the indicative mode what we know to be a dream, namely that he has just woken up in the garden of his Capuchin monastery which he imagines he never left. He approaches the imposing crucifix, the focus of his prayers and his penance for his sinful dreams. His failure to reach the cross is symbolical: although the faith and the demand it makes upon its disciple is constantly present in his mind, Medardus will never really find the redemption he is hoping to obtain. Instead the attempt to reach it drains him of his life-energy. Sin, then, can only be avoided by cruel self-sacrifice; for Medardus the mortification of the flesh is only possible through the mortification of the self.

This message will once more be imparted to Medardus on his return from Italy to his own monastery. As he flees in dread from the place of his former crimes, the castle of Aurelie's father, now a place of devastation, he sits down to rest. The depiction of his surroundings is reminiscent of the above quotation: 'Ermüdet setzte ich mich an den Fuß eines Baumes in das Moos nieder; unweit davon war ein kleiner Hügel aufgeschüttet, auf welchem ein Kreuz stand' (p. 263). A peasant informs Medardus that the crucifix was erected to commemorate a Capuchin monk who was believed to have been killed on this spot. In this gruesomely ironical situation Medardus comes face to face with his own grave. The way of the cross to which Medardus is destined, is the way of absolute self-denial, of life in death.

At the point when the released convalescent Medardus alias Leonardus has the vision of the cross, however, he is far from resigning himself to his cruel fate. His vision is cut short by the arrival of Aurelie. Her appearance becomes in Medardus's wishful thinking the alternative way of redemption. The focus of his vision is no longer on the cross but on her 'Himmelsaugen', but she is also associated with death ('Marter' and 'Tod'). As he separates from Aurelie after their mutual declaration of love, he realizes that what he had held to be a crucifix was in reality a 'dürre, grauer Stamm' (p. 184).

The ambiguity of this symbolism perfectly illustrates Medardus's dilemma. In his quest for his own identity, Medardus frequently draws contradictory conclusions which are symptomatic of the duality ruling his life. The transformation of the crucifix into dead wood might suggest that redemption through faith and self-denial has, at this particular moment, withdrawn from him; nevertheless, it also suggests that the way of the cross (monastic life) is essentially infertile and has no real healing potency. Love, by contrast, appears to be the more promising way of redemption, full of hope for continuity. Medardus has yet to learn to accept the knowledge that it is inevitable that the 'Stamm' (which is also the term Medardus uses for 'family tree') is inherently sinful and has to become extinct.

A variation on the 'dürre, graue Stamm' can be seen in Medardus's left arm, the flesh of which is eaten away by poison. The poison is administered to him by a member of the Dominican order because they feel threatened by Medardus's popularity with the Pope and the people of Rome. The 'abwelkender Arm' (p. 258) and his threatened life inspire Medardus with the idea that he should stay in Rome and expose himself to assassination in order to attain the status of a martyr. However, a vision soon reveals to him that this is no alternative solution to the problem of his existence.

He has no choice but to accept his fate, *sein Kreuz zu tragen*. The ineluctability of fate is appropriately depicted in the symbolical encounter with the doppelgänger which takes place after the disasters on his and Aurelie's wedding day have shown that the union of the lovers cannot be the way to redemption. Medardus's flight leads him into the forest where his doppelgänger unexpectedly appears and jumps on his back, clinging so firmly to him that he cannot be shaken off. The expression *sein Kreuz tragen* or *nehmen* which can be traced back to the story of Christ who was forced to carry his own cross to his execution, is further linked to the human back in that the term *Kreuz* is also used to describe the lower back area.¹²³

Besides the symbol of the cross that of the rose is similarly ancient and universally used. In Egyptian mythology it is sacred to Isis, and in the context of the story of Apuleius's Golden Ass her roses signify the pure devotion which can redeem the heart of man as it redeemed the ass. Roses served also as emblems for the Graces and symbolized spring fertility, and Eos (Aurora) was described as 'rosy-fingered Dawn' by Homer in the *Odyssey*. Moreover, the rose is sacred to Aphrodite; it first blossomed at the time she was born from the sea.

The Romans knew it as the Flower of Venus, the romanized version of Aphrodite; her prostitute-priestesses wore it as a badge of office. The sexual symbolism is most blatant with Arab poets who applied the expression 'the rose of love' to the female genitals. In early Christian times the rose became a compulsory badge to be worn by prostitutes and was meant as a mark of disgrace. Despite its obtrusive sexual symbolism the rose was appropriated by Catholicism and became part of the worship of Mary. Like Aphrodite before her, Mary was addressed in terms of Holy Rose, Rose Garden, Rose Bush etc., but its symbolism of sexual love

¹²³See *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. by James Hastings (Edinburgh: Clark; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 529.

underwent a transfiguration to one of spiritual love; in Catholicism it came to serve as a symbol of charity, divine love, forgiveness, martyrdom, mercy, and victory. The rose is the emblem of Christ, Mary, Rosalia of Palermo, and several other saints.¹²⁴

The evidently ambivalent symbolism of the rose bears some relevance to its use in *Die Elixiere*. Like the cross it is part and parcel of symbolic patterns that become apparent in the novel and that represent a challenge to Medardus and the reader. These patterns imply an underlying causality which governs Medardus's life and they have to be deciphered for the salvation of his soul. Their inherent ambivalence sustains the ambiguity that is so essential for the generation of the uncanny.

With its ambivalent symbolic history, the rose is the suitable emblem of the duality of the female principle. Aurelie, who embodies the consummation of love, is a reincarnation of 'Frau Venus'; thus the rose signals redemption through consummation. According to J. E. Cirlot, 'the golden rose is a symbol of absolute achievement'. As Aurelie ('aurum' is Latin for 'gold') is repeatedly associated with the rose, in particular with its fragrance, she might be viewed in these terms. For Medardus possession of her certainly is the consummate goal.

On the day their union is to take place, Aurelie's wedding dress is ornamented with roses:

Als ich zu Aurelien eintrat, kam sie mir, weißgekleidet und mit duftenden Rosen in holder Engelsschönheit geschmückt entgegen. Ihr Gewand, so wie ihr Haarschmuck, hatte etwas sonderbar Altertümliches, eine dunkle Erinnerung ging in mir auf, aber von tiefen Schauer fühlte ich mich durchbebt, als plötzlich lebhaft das Bild des Altars, an dem wir getraut werden sollten, mir vor Augen stand. Das Bild stellte das Martyrium der heiligen Rosalia vor, und geradeso wie Aurelie, war sie gekleidet. (Hoffmann, 205)

¹²⁴For the symbolic uses of the rose here listed see, under the entry 'rose', Walker; de Vries; Jobs.

Although the similarity of Aurelie's and St Rosalia's dress momentarily disquiets him, a look into his bride's eyes seems to promise him the redemption he seeks in their union.

Their wedding day significantly coincides with Viktorin's day of execution. As Medardus has projected the sinister part of his psyche on Viktorin, his death is a necessary part of the redemption Medardus is longing for. Aurelie's resemblance of the martyr, however, implies that this solution is doomed to fail. The confrontation with his scapegoat shatters Medardus's projective construct, and suddenly the symbolic charge of the roses is gruesomely altered: Instead of representing redemption in the union of lovers, they symbolize impending martyrdom. Suddenly Medardus draws his knife and, in a frenzy, attacks her; although he is convinced that he has killed her, he has actually missed her. Therefore, the roses only seem to become wounds. The significance of this scene, however, lies in its anticipation of the moment of Aurelie's investiture, in which Viktorin's murderous attack initiates the making of a martyr.

The rose plays a role in the worship of St Rosalia who upholds the spiritualization of love as the way of redemption.¹²⁵ Medardus understands that the union with Aurelie is denied to him. As mentioned above, his popularity in Rome and the threat the Dominicans represent to his life inspire Medardus with the suicidal idea of designing a martyrdom for himself. But the perversely pleasurable vision of his own death in the streets of Rome turns sour; his wound (the rose of the

¹²⁵St Rosalia was a virgin who lived as a hermit, first in a cave on Mount Coschina and then in a stalagmitic grotto on Mount Pellegrino in Sicily, and dedicated her life to 'the love of my Lord Jesus Christ'. Hoffmann fashioned St Rosalia a martyr to suit his purposes. Her emblem, the rose, is also linked to St Médard, the bishop of Vermandois. It is said that he introduced the *Rosière*, a local festival on which the maiden who has been found the most exemplary was crowned with roses and presented with a small amount of money. See *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, ed. by Herbert J. Thurston and Donald Attwater (London: Burns & Oates, 1956; repr. 1981).

martyr) is not red — his self-sacrifice is refused. He seems the only human being who is forbidden to partake in the redemption through Christ's death:

'Soll auf der ganzen weiten Erde ich, *ich* allein nur trostlos der ewigen Qual der Verdammten preisgegeben bleiben?' da regte es sich in den Büschen – eine Rose, von himmlischer Glut hochgefärbt, streckte ihr Haupt empor und schaute den Medardus an mit englisch mildem Lächeln, und süßer Duft umfing ihn, und der Duft war das wunderbare Leuchten des reinsten Frühlingsäthers. 'Nicht das Feuer hat gesiegt, kein Kampf zwischen Licht und Feuer. – Feuer ist das Wort, das den Sündigen erleuchtet.' – Es war, als hätte die Rose diese Worte gesprochen, aber die Rose war ein holdes Frauenbild. – In weißem Gewande, Rosen in das dunkle Haar geflochten, trat sie mir entgegen. – 'Aurelie', schrie ich auf, aus dem Traume erwachend; ein wunderbarer Rosengeruch erfüllte die Zelle und für Täuschung meiner aufgeregten Sinne muß ich es wohl halten, als ich deutlich Aureliens Gestalt wahrzunehmen glaubte, wie sie mich mit ernsten Blicken anschaute und dann in den Strahlen des Morgens, die in die Zelle fielen, zu verduften schien. (Hoffmann, 260–261)

The red rose remains the symbol of redemption, but it has to be re-interpreted. The love for Aurelie has to be cleared of sexual desire in order to become the way of redemption. She has to be disembodied and etherealized, and their union must only be spiritual. Suitably, her image 'verduftet'; it manifests itself no longer as a body (incarnation) but as a rose fragrance. Medardus concludes that his worship of her must be spiritual; therefore, he hurries to the altar of St Rosalia to pray after his vision.

He also concludes that he must return to his own monastery and confront the flesh-and-blood Aurelie as the ultimate trial. Arriving at the village near his monastery, he spies a procession carrying a crucifix, symbolizing the fate he has to resign himself to. The procession is part of a special celebration. The altars in the church are decorated with roses. Soon it becomes clear that Medardus's trial consists in witnessing Aurelie's investiture on the following day. Her transfiguration is appropriately marked by her monastic name: Rosalia.

On the following day Medardus witnesses the investiture. Aurelie's wedding to Christ, her ultimate gesture of self-denial, is a re-enactment of their wedding day in the 'Residenzstadt' on a spiritual level:

Ich faßte mich mit aller Gewalt zusammen, ich schaute auf, und erblickte Aurelien, vor dem Hochaltar knieend. O Herr des Himmels, in hoher Schönheit und Anmut strahlte sie mehr als je! Sie war bräutlich – ach! ebenso wie an jenem verhängnisvollen Tage, da sie mein werden sollte, gekleidet. Blühende Myrten und Rosen im künstlich geflochtenen Haar. Die Andacht, das Feierliche des Moments, hatte ihre Wangen höher gefärbt, und in dem zum Himmel gerichteten Blick lag der volle Ausdruck himmlischer Lust. Was waren jene Augenblicke, als ich Aurelie zum erstenmal, als ich sie am Hofe des Fürsten sah, gegen dieses Wiedersehen. Rasender als jemals flammte in mir die Glut der Liebe – der wilden Begier auf. [...] Es war mir als habe Aurelie teil an dem Frevel, den *ich* nur beging, als sei das Gelübde, das sie zu leisten gedachte, in ihren Gedanken nur der feierliche Schwur, vor dem Altar des Herrn *mein* zu sein. – Nicht die Christusbraut, des Mönchs der sein Gelübde brach verbrecherisches Weib sah ich in ihr. – Sie mit aller Inbrunst der wütenden Begier umarmen und dann ihr den Tod geben – *der* Gedanke erfaßte mich unwiderstehlich. (Hoffmann, 280–281)

On this occasion the roses are not the emblem of traditional marriage but reflect Aurelie's transformation into Rosalia, the nun. Unlike Aurelie, Medardus fails to transfigure his sexual desire into 'himmlische Lust'. Confronted with the object of his desire, Medardus's passion proves to be as unbridled as ever. To cope with his overwhelming sexuality, he responds with a partial projection of his sexual appetite on to Aurelie, claiming that in reality she intends not a union with Christ but a union with him, Medardus. His excitement is so intense that the destructive nature of his sexuality is fully revealed.

Medardus barely manages to restrain himself, when the doppelgänger carries out what Medardus has failed to achieve on his and Aurelie's wedding day: He murders her with a knife, converting the ornamental roses into fatal wounds and making Aurelie a martyr. The rose, potentially a symbol of the union of lovers and

the procreative act, has been decisively turned into a symbol of purity and spirituality through suffering and self-denial.

As it happens, 'Rosalia' is also the name of a ceremony in antiquity during which it was customary to place roses on tombs as an offering to the spirits of the deceased as a symbol of regeneration every year in the month of May.¹²⁶ In the concluding pages of Medardus's narrative, the rose has assumed a similar symbolism: Regeneration presupposes death. Aurelie can only 'live on' as a martyr. What remains of her are fragrant roses and her painted likeness as St Rosalia.

This outcome draws on a tradition of tales of saints in which blood is associated with roses. One of these, relating to St Benedict, is of particular interest here. The same violent overthrow of sexuality and its transfiguration which is the subject of *Die Elixiere* is featured in the story of St Benedict: he lived as a hermit in a cave of the rocks of Subiaco, when he became enamoured of a young woman. In order to quench his desire, he threw himself into thorny bushes and transformed his body into a vast bleeding wound. When St Francis visited him he made the sign of the cross over the thorny bushes which were red with St Benedict's blood, thus converting them into roses.¹²⁷

Roses, then, have become the symbol of sexuality overcome and transfigured, just as in *Die Elixiere*. Throughout *Die Elixiere* the rose's symbolic charge has been ambivalent, until it is determined in the conclusion. Throughout the novel, it has added to a dense network of ambiguities which keep Medardus and the reader in constant interpretative uncertainty. The reader recognizes recurring symbols such as the rose and the cross as parts of symbolic patterns which

¹²⁶See under the entry 'rose' Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles: mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, figures, couleurs, nombres* (Paris: Laffont, 1969; repr. rev. 1982).

¹²⁷See Rev. E. C. Brewer, *A Dictionary of Miracles* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884), pp. 447–450.

encourage him/her to interpret them, but as they embrace conflicting messages, they tend to resist unravelling.

Die Elixiere is an intricately woven text, constantly challenging and resisting interpretation. The term text, it should be mentioned, is derived from the Latin *textus*, originally designating 'Geflecht, Gewebe'. The structure of a text, its texture, implies the existence of a thread, which leads me to the last symbolic pattern I wish to discuss. The thread assumes various appearances in *Die Elixiere*. It first manifests itself in the shape of a fairly commonplace metaphor in the 'Vorwort des Herausgebers':

Nachdem ich die Papiere des Kapuziners Medardus recht emsig durchgelesen, welches mir schwer genug wurde, da der Selige eine sehr kleine, unleserliche mönchische Handschrift geschrieben, war es mir auch, als könne das, was wir insgeheim Traum und Einbildung nennen, wohl die symbolische Erkenntnis des geheimen Fadens sein, der sich durch unser Leben zieht, es festknüpfend in allen seinen Bedingungen, als sei *der* aber für verloren zu achten, der mit jener Erkenntnis die Kraft gewonnen glaubt, jenen Faden gewaltsam zu zerreißen, und es aufzunehmen mit der dunklen Macht, die über uns gebietet. (Hoffmann, 8)

Here, as in numerous literary works, the thread functions as a metaphor for fate. As such it can be traced back as far as Greek and Roman mythology, where the fates are three sisters who control the destinies of mortals. In Greek mythology the sisters Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos are called Moirai; in Roman mythology they are called Parcae. They correspond with the Nornir in Norse mythology: Urth represents the past, Verbandi the present, and Skuld the future. They are all spinners of the thread of life.¹²⁸

The nature of the thread implies continuity and absolute connectedness. In *Die Elixiere*, the thread — the course the individual's life is to take — is a secret to which there is access only in moments of lowered consciousness such as dreams

¹²⁸See Jobes, under the entries 'fates' and 'norns'.

and 'Einbildung'. Such insights, according to the fictional editor, must not tempt the individual to take control of his/her fate. Resisting one's fate inevitably leads to catastrophe as it does in the case of Euphemie. In mythology, the severing of the thread of life equals death. Instead one must resign to one's lot as Aurelie is prepared to do. Significantly, she also dies violently.

For Medardus the problem does not merely lie in the powerful pull of his sexuality but also, on a more general scale, in interpreting his life with the help of dreams and visions, and in resigning himself to the fact that he is not in control. His dilemma resembles that of the reader who intends to interpret the narrative of Medardus's life, and who is frequently tempted to believe s/he is in control of the subplot at work, only to experience how it slips from his/her grasp yet again. This unsettling experience is created, as we have seen, by ambivalent language and symbolism which complement the themes of the uncanny — that of the doppelgänger and that of the fragmentation of the self — on a stylistic level.

In the 'Eingeschaltete Anmerkung des Herausgebers' the editor refers back to the thread while introducing the 'Pergamentblatt des alten Malers', which is, just like Medardus's narrative, difficult to follow due to its complexity of contents and to the nature of the handwriting:

Wir, ich meine dich und mich, mein günstiger Leser! wissen aber viel zuwenig Deutliches von den Ahnungen und Träumen des Bruders Medardus, als daß wir, ohne zu lesen, was der Maler aufgeschrieben, auch nur im mindesten das Band zusammenzuknüpfen vermöchten, welches die verworren auseinanderlaufenden Fäden der Geschichte des Medardus, wie in einen Knoten einigt. (Hoffmann, 227)

In order to realize context and structure in the events in Medardus's life, the reader needs to read the narrative of Francesko (the 'Maler'). Without knowing Medardus's ancestry, the story of his origin, we cannot make sense of his life. However, the genealogy that follows is so astoundingly intricate and complicated that it even leads the experts to erroneous conclusions, although it has to be added that we do

not need to untangle this genealogy to comprehend and accept that Medardus has inherited a destructive sexuality which develops into the blight of his life.¹²⁹

The primary object of his destructive sexuality is Aurelie, herself an offspring of the 'Teufelsweib', but with a more passive sexuality — toned down to fit the contemporary expectations of female behaviour. After his disastrous stay at the castle of Aurelie's father he associates her with that thread which endows his life with continuity and meaning. In order to be morally entitled to a union with Aurelie, he shifts identities:

So war es mir, wenn Träume mir die Begebenheiten im Schlosse wiederholten, als wären sie einem anderen, nicht mir, geschehen; dieser andere war doch wieder der Kapuziner, aber nicht ich selbst. Nur der Gedanke an Aurelie verknüpfte noch mein voriges Sein mit dem jetzigen, aber wie ein tiefer nie zu verwindender Schmerz tötete er oft die Lust, die in mir aufgegangen, und ich wurde dann plötzlich herausgerissen aus den bunten Kreisen, womit mich immer mehr das Leben umfing. (Hoffmann, 91)

Medardus manages to repress the crimes which must be an obstacle on his way to gain Aurelie's love by blaming his doppelgänger. However, the success of such repressive mechanism must remain superficial because Aurelie is also the factor that links ('verknüpfte') him to his former identity and thus does not allow him to shed his former self completely. Self-determination, that is, the control of one's role in life and of one's mind can only be partial as the thread is not in one's hands.

When the prince invites Medardus alias Leonard to join the society at court for a game of faro, he comments on the nature of gambling. The use of the thread metaphor signals to the reader that this comment is a miniature life philosophy:

'Das ist ein herrliches Spiel', fuhr er fort: 'in seiner hohen Einfachheit das wahre Spiel für geistreiche Männer. Man tritt gleichsam aus sich selbst heraus, oder besser, man stellt sich auf einen Standpunkt, von

¹²⁹In his otherwise magnificent *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Rowohlt, 1992), p. 338, Rüdiger Safranski writes that Aurelie is Medardus's half sister, although this applies to Euphemie only; Aurelie is much more distantly related. See pp. 339–347 for a discussion of the inheritance of a destructive sexuality.

dem man die sonderbaren Verschlingungen und Verknüpfungen, die die geheime Macht, welche wir Zufall nennen, mit unsichtbarem Faden spinnt, zu erblicken imstande ist. Gewinn und Verlust sind die beiden Angeln, auf denen sich die geheimnisvolle Maschine bewegt, die wir angestoßen, und die nun der ihr einwohnende Geist nach Willkür fortreibt.' (Hoffmann, 125)

The principle that governs human existence is perfectly indifferent; it is a machine called chance. The individual may set it off but what it does is beyond control. The point made here, though arrived at so very differently, is also the dominant message of Shelley's *Frankenstein*: The uncanny is above all a human condition. The thread is our fate but the pattern it follows is coincidental. One can observe it from a distance but one cannot really interfere.

Consequently, the weaving Medardus attempts in his futile struggle to change his fate can be nothing more than a pseudo-pattern of life, prone to fall apart under the pressure of the workings of the real thread. Thrown into prison and charged with the crimes he has committed, Medardus alias Leonard concentrates on the fabrication of his false identity. He is in dire need of a suitable origin and claims to be of Polish extraction. To corroborate this (third) identity he re-invents himself:

Der kleinste Umstand mußte reiflich erwogen werden; aufzuschreiben beschloß ich daher den Roman, der mich retten sollte! – Man bewilligte mir die Schreibmaterialien, die ich forderte, um schriftlich noch manchen verschwiegenen Umstand meines Lebens zu erörtern. Ich arbeitete mit Anstrengung bis in die Nacht hinein; im Schreiben erhitzte sich meine Fantasie, alles formte sich wie eine geründete Dichtung, und fester und fester spann sich das Gewebe endloser Lügen, womit ich dem Richter die Wahrheit zu verschleiern hoffte. (Hoffmann, 171)

In these lines of textual self-reflection 'Dichtung und Wahrheit' are contradictions: Medardus's fictional autobiography is a veil of deception, a text of endless lies. This may also be a warning to the reader of *Die Elixiere*, which is after all also of an autobiographical nature, not to take anything at face value.

Although Medardus's fiction gains momentum as it grows, it becomes meaningless when he encounters his alter ego in his cell. In Viktorin he recognizes the repressed part of his personality; the shock of self-recognition induces him to consider confessing his crimes, but Viktorin unexpectedly prevents this step by assuming the identity of Medardus, and the real culprit is set free and left to resume the detours in store for him.

As Medardus's wanderings approach their conclusion, a final reference is made to the metaphor of the thread. His return to his own monastery completes the cyclical movement of the narrative. Tried by a last intense struggle against the desires of the flesh, he witnesses Aurelie's assassination and how her death is translated into martyrdom. He describes his state of mind in the following words:

Kein irdischer Schmerz über Aureliens Tod, kein Entsetzen über die Erscheinung des Malers konnte mich fassen, denn in meiner Seele dämmerte es auf, wie nun die rätselhaften Schlingen, die die dunkle Macht geknüpft, sich lösten. (Hoffmann, 282)

Medardus has undergone a process of transfiguration. This transfiguration is not lasting, as I have pointed out earlier on, but for the moment it is valid. The message contained in the sentence is, yet again, far from being clear-cut. On the surface, the image of the 'Schlingen' which 'sich lösten' seems to be welcome news. One meaning of the term 'Schlinge' is 'noose' or 'snare'; therefore, Medardus has ultimately escaped the sexual trap set for him by his sinful inheritance. In addition the 'Schlingen' can be read in terms of the mysterious 'Verschlingungen' of his fate; at last the pattern of fate is revealed and its purpose is fulfilled.

The implication that the solution of Medardus's fate, the atonement of his ancestor's sins, necessitates dissolution, casts a different light upon this outcome. Aurelie's dissolution marks the onset of Medardus's dissolution. If the thread begins to dissolve death is approaching. Medardus must follow, though less spectacularly, in Aurelie's footsteps; he dies, on exactly the same day, a year later.

The metaphor of the thread and the web of fate is complemented by the motif of dress. Clothes are closely associated with the principal concerns of the text — identity and sexuality. Again the novel sends out two contradictory messages which reflect Medardus's problem: can he manipulate his fate and find personal happiness in the love of woman, or must he resign himself to a life of self-denial?

The monastic habit is symbolic of the latter, and when Medardus disposes of it in a hollow trunk of a tree, this is an act of rebellion and (sexual) liberation. Changing one's clothes is tantamount to taking control of the thread. This feat would be a gesture of hope if it were not connected to the attempt to discard his responsibility for the heinous crimes committed in the castle. Along with his dress, Medardus means to change his identity, and indeed there is initially some indication in the comments of various characters that this undertaking might be successful.

Reinhold, for example, advises Hermogen to stop wearing the clothes of a 'Weltgeistlicher':

Ich beschwöre Sie, Hermogen! werfen Sie diese verhaßte Kleidung ab. Glauben Sie mir, es liegt eine geheimnisvolle Kraft in diesen äußerlichen Dingen; es kann Ihnen nicht mißfallen, denn ich glaube von Ihnen ganz verstanden zu werden, wenn ich in diesem Augenblick freilich auf fremdartig scheinende Weise der Schauspieler gedenke, die oft, wenn sie sich in das Kostüm geworfen, wie von einem fremden Geist sich angeregt fühlen und leichter in den darzustellenden Charakter eingehen. [...] Meinen Sie denn nicht, daß wenn dieses lange Kleid nicht mehr Ihren Gang zur düstern Gravität einhemmen würde, Sie wieder rasch und froh dahinschreiten, ja laufen, springen würden, wie sonst? Der blinkende Schein der Epauletts, die sonst auf Ihren Schultern prangten, würde wieder jugendliche Glut auf diese blassen Wangen werfen, und die klirrenden Sporen würden, wie liebliche Musik, dem muntern Rosse ertönen, das Ihnen entgegenwieherte, vor Lust tanzend, und den Nacken beugend dem geliebten Herrn. (Hoffmann, 49)

Reinhold suggests that outward appearance and state of mind are related in that clothes exert an influence on the individual's mood. They are invested with a

peculiar power and might bring with them an alien spirit which supplants the individual's own. Reinhold is convinced that what he thinks to be Hermogen's genuine and happier self will return with his former gay and worldly apparel. His clerical outfit limits his freedom of movement and does not allow for the expression of happiness; therefore, happiness is also suppressed in the mind. Despite a certain persuasiveness the argument ignores a crucial question: what caused Hermogen to change into clerical dress in the first place?

Reinhold is one of the characters who believes that the individual has the power to change its fate. Hermogen (another off-spring of Francesko and representative of a fragment of Medardus's self), in contrast, is an exponent of the conviction that the individual cannot evade what lies in store, because what is truly fateful is inextricably linked to the individual's self: 'ich selbst [bin] das Schicksal' (p. 50).

Medardus, who overhears this argument, clings to the more optimistic of these two conflicting attitudes towards fate. When he flees from the castle he throws off the Capucchin habit and changes his hairstyle to fit his worldly clothes in a willed act of transformation:

Ich warf die Kutte ab, in welcher ich noch das kleine verhängnisvolle Messer, Viktorins Portefeuille, so wie die Korbflasche mit dem Rest des Teufelselixiers vorfand, und bald stand ich da, in weltlicher Kleidung mit der Reisemütze auf dem Kopf, so daß ich mich selbst, als mir der Bach mein Bild heraufspiegelte, kaum wiedererkannte. Bald war ich am Ausgange des Waldes, und der in der Ferne aufsteigende Dampf, so wie das helle Glockengeläute, das zu mir herüber tönte, ließen mich ein Dorf in der Nähe vermuten.
(Hoffmann, 79)

As in Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert*, the setting of transmutation is the forest. The evidence is disposed of, and the new worldly dress transforms Medardus almost beyond his own recognition. By the time he leaves the forest his character has changed. His point of view, as reflected in his outlook on the landscape, is

optimistic and forward-looking. Not even the sound of bells, probably originating from the village church, evokes unpleasant memories, as Medardus has thrown them with his habit into a hollow tree: 'Die Kutte hatte ich in einen hohlen Baum verborgen, und mit ihr all die feindseligen Erscheinungen auf dem Schlosse in dem finstern Wald gebannt' (p. 79).

Peter Schönfeld or Pietro Belcampo, whose life is characterized by duality of a less sinister nature than that which runs through Medardus's existence, strengthens Medardus in his belief that by means of outward changes (a new image) he can re-invent his identity. He perfects Medardus's new hairstyle and ensures that he wears clothes to suit the desired identity. In conformity with Schönfeld's philosophy, dress of the body is associated with dress of the mind. As the outward appearance and body language can be altered through new clothes, the inner life can be altered by 'redressing' the mind:

Existiere ich überhaupt nur durch mein eignes Bewußtsein, so kommt es nur darauf an, daß dies Bewußtsein dem Bewußten die Hanswurstjacke ausziehe, und ich selbst stehe da als solider Gentleman. (Hoffmann, 215)

This allusion to Johann Gottlieb Fichte's (1762–1814) speculative and idealistic *Wissenschaftslehre*, according to which the absolute I ('absolutes Ich') produces its own conscious being ('bewußtes Sein'), the individual empirical I ('individuelles empirisches Ich') along with the phenomenal world, represents the extreme alternative to fatalism.

In consequence of his unshakeable belief in the power of the act of volition, Schönfeld explains Medardus's failure to assert his new identity as Leonard, a Polish nobleman, in terms of a poor choice of dress:

Was sage ich? hätte mein Damon Ihnen, ehrwürdigster aller ehrwürdigen Mönche, statt des flohfarbnen Fracks einen Sonnenmatin umhängen können, in dem die reichen, übermütigen Bürger der Gottesstadt zu Stuhle gehen, wahrhaftig es wäre, was

Anstand und Würde betrifft, alles anders gekommen; aber so hielt Sie die Welt für einen gemeinen glebae adscriptus und den Teufel für Ihren Cousin germain. (Hoffmann, 218)

By the time Schönfeld pronounces these words, Medardus has lost all hope of ensconcing himself in a worldly identity. His trust in the validity of Schönfeld's philosophy has dwindled away.¹³⁰

In the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli points out some superstitions which have arisen in reference to clothes. The following extract from the entry for 'Kleid' summarizes what Medardus has to learn about clothes:

Das Kleid ist ein Teil der Persönlichkeit, aber nicht der Sitz der Seele. Für das Seelenleben stellt das Kleid [...] durchaus nichts Wesentliches dar. Seine Zauberkraft geht vielmehr vom Körper des Menschen aus. Durch die enge Zugehörigkeit zum Körper scheint das Kleid mit geheimen Lebenskräften ausgestattet.

One's outward appearance is part of one's personality, but it is not the origin and essence of the self. Even according to superstitious belief the magic that may inhere in clothes originates from the individual. Clothes may be endowed with personal magic, but it cannot be absorbed by simply wearing them; identity is more than surface. Medardus's hope of changing his identity by changing his packaging turns out to be an illusion. From illusion it is but a short step to deception. Euphemie, Aurelie's alter ego, in contrast to her, is the exponent *par excellence* of the will to self-determination (which includes the ruthless manipulation of others). She serves as an example of what happens to those who indulge and worship their sexuality instead of denying it and worshipping Christ. During his penance in the Italian Capucchin monastery, a dream confirms what also her name suggests — her outward perfection is nothing but a persona:

¹³⁰On the failure of Schönfeld's philosophy and his characterization as a 'Scharlatan' and bringer of comic relief see Detlef Kremer, *Romantische Metamorphosen: E. T. A. Hoffmanns Erzählungen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993), pp. 230–237.

Ich sah Euphemien, wie sie in üppiger Schönheit mir nahte, aber laut schrie ich auf: 'Was willst du von mir, Verruchte! Nein, die Hölle hat keinen Teil an mir.' Da schlug sie ihr Gewand auseinander, und die Schauer der Verdammnis ergriffen mich. Zum Gerippe eingedorrt war ihr Leib, aber in dem Gerippe wanden sich unzählige Schlangen durcheinander und streckten ihre Häupter, ihre rotglühenden Zungen mir entgegen. (Hoffmann, 222)

Her robe mantles her true nature. Her sexuality is sinful, barren and beyond redemption. She is a bringer of spiritual death. As in numerous Gothic novels, female sexuality is associated with hell.

The robe and what it cloaks plays a noteworthy role in connection with the vital motif of the 'Bild' — Francesko's painting, which marks the beginning of all evil. Francesko resolves to sell the depiction of Venus masked as St Rosalia to the monks. In the instant he has finished painting her naked body, a vision of St Rosalia's face impedes his painting Venus's face; Francesko does not dare 'das Gesicht zu vollenden, und um den nackt gezeichneten Körper legten in anmutigen Falten sich züchtige Gewänder, ein dunkelrotes Kleid und ein azurblauer Mantel' (pp. 230–231). Hoffmann's use of language fuels the uncanniness of this episode; the reflexive mode of the word 'legen' imparts the impression either that the robes have a peculiar life of their own, or that, instead of Francesko, some invisible entity is at work. There is another puzzling indication; as we already know, ultimately the painting shows an image of Venus. We also know that clothes are insufficient to change the essence. The Christian apparel is a deception; underneath the principle of uninhibited sensuality and sexuality is lurking, and this very blasphemy on canvas and a copy of it become the focus of Christian worship. There is much to be said for the interpretation that Catholicism incorporates the sensuality, which was a major attraction of paganism, in its symbolism; however, this also insinuates that underneath the mantle of spirituality, sexuality is ever ready to break forth, which exactly corresponds with Medardus's experience.

It is Medardus and Aurelie's task to transfigure the essence, the self. 'Einkleidung', the act of investiture, is not enough. Medardus cannot extinguish his destructive sexual impulses. As Hermogen said, one's self is one's fate. The inherited destructive sexuality is an inseparable part of the self; consequently, only the dissolution of the self can end the curse. Aurelie, the incarnation of Medardus's sexual desire, just as the 'Teufelsweib' was the incarnation of Francesko's desire (and of which Aurelie is a reincarnation), must die. As his sexuality is a vital component of Medardus's self, his own dissolution is to follow soon.

In Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere*, then, the uncanny is shown, at a thematic level, to be anchored in the human condition; it manifests itself in an uncontrollable sexuality. The hero has to solve the conflict caused by his sexuality. Either he follows his destructive impulses and dies a spiritual death, or he terminates these impulses and dies a physical death. Until he realizes this tragic constellation and resigns himself to the latter alternative, he has to undergo a prolonged and difficult process of interpreting the occurrences in his life. These occurrences constantly invite conflicting interpretations. On a stylistic level this translates into inherently ambivalent symbolism and ambiguous rhetorical usage. The process of repression and the return of the repressed are represented both thematically and stylistically. Again I would like to point out that thematic and stylistic concerns overlap. The uncanny resides in the doppelgänger figures, which, in turn interlock with the Pygmalion motif, and in the manipulation of language (in particular in respect of grammatical structures and metaphoric language).

Medardus struggles to communicate his experience of what appears to be the metaphysical which rules and wrecks his life and which he refers to as 'die Macht'. The meaning of paintings and other (mental) images, which appear to have

some important bearing upon his life, can only be fathomed by the act of interpreting their symbolism. But far from helping Medardus to find his role in life, the signs defy his attempt to extract reliable meaning. This experience that any attempt to tidy up loose ends and make sense through an interpretative act is doomed to fail, is shared by the reader. The autobiography itself presents Medardus's work of art; its symbolic patterns imply a *metalangue* the reader is challenged to unravel, but with its ambiguous imagery it resists single-minded interpretations. Moreover, the act of re-creating one's life with the powers of the imagination is also doomed to fail, as becomes clear when Medardus tries to reconstruct his identity by writing 'den Roman [seines] Lebens' in the Fürst's prison. Contrary to the Romantic optimism about the life-shaping powers of the imagination, Hoffmann seems to insist that any creative act is bound to fail, be it that of original creation or that of interpreting a work of art. Yet to say that, of course, is to repress the complex ambiguities of his achievement in *Die Elixiere*, because his text is not a failure. Manifestly it works. However, its very success erodes the terms and conditions of its own success. Paradoxically, the more convincing it is, the more it undermines itself. Seldom has ambiguity been more powerfully engendered in a narrative text.

Chapter Six

James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*:

From Humour to Horror

Nemo me impune lacessit.¹³¹

If Lewis's *The Monk* played a role in the creation of *Die Elixiere*, Hoffmann's novel, in turn, represented an important influence on James Hogg's novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).¹³² *Die Elixiere*, as already discussed in detail in the Introduction, came to Hogg's attention through R. P. Gillies who was working on an English translation, *The Devil's Elixir* (published in 1824). *The Confessions* not only bears various similarities to *Die Elixiere* (religious aspects, doppelgänger theme, etc.) but also shares several features with its more famous predecessor, *Frankenstein*, which was published six years previously. First of all it displays an interest in social determinism. It explores how two brothers grow to be two contrary personalities and how social constellation contributes to bring about their tragic deaths. Robert, the religiously obsessed protagonist, murders his much more worldly-minded brother George. In the end Robert dies by his own hand.

This story is not only one of fratricide but also one of the end of a family line. It begins with the marriage of the only mildly God-fearing laird of Dalcastle, Mr Colwan, to the much younger Rabina, a fierce Calvinist. Rabina does not take to her husband in the least, and after a failed attempt to run away, she is forced to return to her husband by her father. The couple remain incompatible; therefore, two separate households are soon established. It is not long before their first son George is born. The laird acknowledges him as his own flesh and blood, but refuses to do so with the second son, Robert: 'A brother [to George] he certainly was, in the eye

¹³¹No one provokes me with impunity. — Motto of the Crown of Scotland and of all Scottish regiments.

¹³²James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

of the law, and it is more than probable that he was his brother in reality. But the laird thought otherwise' (p. 18).

It is never clarified whether Robert might not be the son of Reverend Wringhim after all. Various instances speak for Wringham as the biological father: Rabina shows no interest in her first son who was undoubtedly fathered by the laird, and after Rabina has moved to Glasgow, she and her son Robert live under the same roof with the Reverend Wringhim.

By refusing to enlighten the reader on this matter, Hogg apparently intends to point out that the way one is brought up has a greater influence upon personality formation than one's genetic origin. Although the issue of social determination less central in Hogg's novel than in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, its importance where the motivation behind Robert's actions is concerned cannot be overlooked. By failing to recognize the significance of Robert's social background, the editor exposes his limited perception. For him the world is black and white, that is, George is good and Robert is evil. This simplistic approach initially and superficially endows the frame story with an illusively stabilizing and reassuring quality. By the end of the novel, notwithstanding, it will become clear that to impose a black-and-white moral order on this world is unsatisfactory and self-deceptive.

Robert's upbringing is dominated by two factors: Firstly, his adopted father and Rabina instil into him the stern principles of a fanatic interpretation of Calvinism; the belief in absolute predestination, namely, that one is either to be justified by or fallen from grace, soon governs Robert's existence. Encouraged by his peers, he acquires the power of religious argument as a means of accommodating personal shortcomings and, often enough, sheer meanness to strict Calvinist principles. The second factor he imbibes from early on is an inexorable hatred of the old laird and his brother George.

George naturally represents a hateful rival to Robert; he is the successor to the family estates and title, and — a fact which is more significant and hurtful to Robert — he receives all his father's love, while Robert is completely rejected. Robert is not wrong when he, somewhat pathetically, says of himself that he 'was born an outcast in the world' (p. 97). As the laird and George are sinners and belong to the 'wicked', so Robert learns, their 'extinction from the face of the earth' is most desirable.

Under the religious guidance of Reverend Wringhim and his mother Rabina Robert becomes an antinomian.¹³³ As he cannot live up to the strict demands of Calvinist principles, he develops a projective strategy. The only way of meeting his own and his peers' expectations is by projecting his own shortcomings on those who outdo him and those who criticize him. He succeeds, by exploiting the power of religious argument and the equivocal potential of Calvinist discourse, in deceiving himself entirely. By calling those he dislikes 'the wicked' and himself 'a scourge in the hand of the Lord', he justifies the damage he inflicts upon them; nevertheless, he lives in constant dread of damnation, admitting that he is 'prone to lying' :

One lie always paved the way for another, from hour to hour, from day to day, and from year to year; so that I found myself constantly involved in a labyrinth of deceit, from which it was impossible to extricate myself. (Hogg, 108)

The fatality and the maelstrom of sin Robert is drawn into ever more deeply and unstoppably in the course of his life is aptly expressed by the rhetorical figure of

¹³³Antinomianism is a form of political anarchism that is directed against the Moral Law of the Old Testament (primarily the Law of Moses): 'In its widest sense the term is used to designate the doctrines of extreme fanatics who deny subjection to any law other than the subjective caprices of the empirical individual, though this individual is credited as the witness and interpreter of the Holy Spirit.'

See *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: Clark; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1915, pp. 581–582. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

the climax. In this instance, however, fatality does not mean fatefulness or predestination (which is Robert's magic word) but the anticipation of deadly consequences. Significantly Robert 'intricates' *himself*.

Calvinist doctrine is extremely complex and often paradoxical, as, for example, on the central issue of human freedom and predestination. 'Predestination', it is emphasized in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 'is no *fate*'; nevertheless, 'freedom [...] is only one factor in the complicated web of human life':

There is always the other and concurrent factor of external Providence. Man has the decision of what he will do in a given situation, but only in a limited degree does he *create* the situation. To a certain extent, of course, he makes or unmakes his circumstances, but never wholly. In every case there is an admixture, generally a preponderance, of causes over which he has no control. He did not, e.g., choose his own parents, his station in life, the course of events that brought him into contact with this one and that one, gave him his opportunities, led to his relationships, etc. [...] At every point we are touched by forces we did not make.

(*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 148–149)

If predestination is not fate it may be seen in terms of genetic and social determination which yet leaves some space for volition. The question how Absolute Predestination and the idea of an over-all divine design behind all that exists and happens can be reconciled with the relevance of the human freedom to will is a difficult one. As far as human volition is concerned the *Encyclopedia* states the following:

It is only by Divine decree that these are permitted to enter and operate as causes in the actual world at all. From this Eternal point of view there seems no evading the conclusion that the ultimate responsibility for the plan of the world must rest with the infinitely wise Creator. Even evil cannot enter, or run its mischievous course, save as, in infinite wisdom, He has resolved to allow it.

(*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 149)

The use of the verb 'to seem' on the part of the person who is responsible for this contribution to the encyclopedia indicates speculation rather than certainty and reconciles me to the confusion that this point of Calvinist doctrines has caused me.

The problem of free will and Absolute Predestination is closely linked to that of sin — a concept which is central to Robert's experience of the world. 'Sin', it is stated, 'springs from the will of the creature', but God permits sin:

It lies with God in His providence, [...] not simply to permit sin, but in His wisdom to say when, where, and how sin in humanity shall be permitted to break out; in what forms, along what lines, in what persons, to what heights, it shall be allowed to develop; and how its results, when these arise, shall be disposed of. (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 149)

This view of sin has very unsettling consequences for the individual who can never fathom the Divine purpose behind the permission of sin. It implies that the atrocities committed by Robert are all part of a grand design; how far, then, is Robert wrong to consider himself the sword in the Lord's hands? How much comfort does it offer to the victims of the sinner? And how can this be reconciled with the Calvinist image of a loving and merciful deity? If the reader now imagines being bombarded with such paradoxical principles day in day out, s/he begins to understand Robert's twisted personality. If life is a 'complicated web', so is Calvinism. Coincidentally, Hogg chose the web as the recurring motive to describe Robert's dilemma.

Being unable to accept superiority in another, Robert maliciously weaves a net of intrigues to catch out a fellow pupil whose performance at school he cannot rival. The boy, whose name — M'Gill — seems ironically similar to that of Robert's future satanic friend Gil-Martin, is expelled from school as a consequence. Robert never realizes that he becomes progressively entangled in the network of his evil deeds which in the end will cut him off from the community and which will leave suicide as his only option.

By twisting Calvinist principles so that they serve as excuses for or justifications of his own vicious feelings and actions, Robert develops a tactic to cope with a world he chiefly perceives as hostile. He denounces, for example, M'Gill's mother as 'a witch' (p. 109) and justifies his rejection of his own mother and his maltreatment of her in the following way: 'I confess it freely, and believe it was a judgement from heaven inflicted on her for some sin of former days, and that I had no power to have acted otherwise toward her than I did' (p. 114).

The Calvinist doctrine of Predestination conveniently answers in Robert's eyes for his numerous shortcomings; the conviction of being one of the chosen few will grant him complete freedom. Turning against the more moderate Calvinist tradition, he interprets his 'freedom from all sin' (p. 115), as he calls it, as freedom *to* all sin.

In contrast to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, social structures in Hogg's *The Confessions*, though portrayed critically and exposed to be corrupt, do not represent a sinister life-threatening force that opposes Robert and dehumanizes him to an extent that he resorts to violence. Here social structures do not generate uncanniness; nor does Robert's immediate social environment, even though it explains the origin of some of Robert's vices. The generation of uncanniness in Hogg's novel (and in this *The Confessions* is quite unique) is connected with the device of irony and Robert's involuntarily equivocal language.

The issue of irony and equivocality has to be discussed in connection with the second similarity *The Confessions* bears to *Frankenstein*. It consists in the dualistic nature of the second main character, Gil-Martin, whose existence is simultaneously symbolic and literal, and in his eerie relationship to Robert. As in the case of the monk Medardus in Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, the doppelgänger is linked to the loss of stable identity. If one ascribes to Robert the role of the protagonist, Gil-Martin acts the role of the antagonist. Their relationship

closely resembles that of Frankenstein and his creature; it is characterized by a peculiar interdependence. Both want something from each other: Gil-Martin wants to gain power over Robert's soul and to lead him to self-destruction. He also uses Robert to rid himself of people who, for some reason or other, are a thorn in his side, like the pious Presbyterian Blanchard. In return, Gil-Martin offers Robert the companionship and reassurance he lacks.

Their first encounter is emblematic of the controversy surrounding the figure of Gil-Martin:

We approached till no more than a yard intervened between us, and then stood still and gazed, measuring each other from head to foot. What was my astonishment, on perceiving that he was the same being as myself! The clothes were the same to the smallest item. (Hogg, 116–117)

Gil-Martin is identical with and yet different from Robert, and — as in the case of *Frankenstein* — the reader is strongly tempted to interpret Gil-Martin as a symbol of evil and uncontrollable forces from within, but the symbol also insists on its autonomous existence and presents a force from without. Arabella Calvert is one of several people who testify to his actual existence.

Robert ironically imagines that Gil-Martin is his guardian angel, which is the first of many wishful explanations for this mysterious stranger. This idea, however, is contradicted by his instinctive reaction, and so is Gil-Martin's own explanation of his advent, according to which he has come as 'a humble disciple' of Robert's (p. 117): Gil-Martin triggers 'an involuntary inclination to escape from him' (p. 118) in Robert. He seems to read Robert's mind, and he displays a particular interest in confirming 'the impossibility of ever those falling away, who where once accepted and received into covenant with God' (p. 118). Despite his repeatedly expressed desire to worship God in unison with Robert, he actually keeps Robert from praying altogether.

Once Gil-Martin has left, Robert feels 'a deliverance' (p. 118) and has a premonition that the stranger 'was like to be an acquaintance that was to stick to me for good or for evil' (p. 180). In retrospect Robert comments in a way far different from his usual boastful self:

Whether it behoves me to bless God for the events of that day, or to deplore them, has been hid from my discernment, though I have inquired into it with fear and trembling; and I have now lost all hopes of ever discovering the true import of these events until that day when my accounts are to make up and reckon for in another world.
(Hogg, 119)

These lines are written with a modesty uncommon in Robert, and they are also distinguished by a moving tone of anxiety and despair. In moments like this Robert comes close to an insight into his existence and the driving forces behind his actions, but the insight remains superficial and is volatile and quickly repressed by his old ways of dealing with himself and the world.

Gil-Martin enters Robert's life on the morning the Reverend Wringhim (an ironically characteristic name) announces that Robert is one of the elect. In an emotional scene Robert is welcomed into the club of the Justified. Without doubting the announcement for a single moment, Robert listens with delight to the claim made by his adopted father: 'All the powers of darkness', he says, 'shall never be able to pluck you again out of your Redeemer's hand' (p. 115).

For most readers the doctrine of the Elect is difficult to accept anyway, but to assume that Robert is one of the Elect is yet more incredible. Strangely enough, Robert never reflects upon the fact that he has never experienced the 'work of the Spirit of God in conversion' himself. He unquestioningly accepts his regeneration, although it comes as something entirely unexpected. The only personal spiritual (if thus it may be called) experience he undergoes on that particular day, which happens to be his eighteenth birthday, is his first encounter with the mysterious Gil-

Martin in the open. He feels a magnetic 'sort of invisible power' emanating from the stranger. Robert's retrospective comments are vital:

As we approached each other, our eyes met, and I can never describe the strange sensations that thrilled through my whole frame at that impressive moment; a moment to me fraught with the most tremendous consequences; the beginning of a series of adventures which has puzzled myself, and will puzzle the world when I am no more in it. That time will now soon arrive, sooner than anyone can devise who knows not the tumult of my thoughts, and the labour of my spirit; and when it has come and passed over, — when my flesh and my bones are decayed, and my soul has passed to its everlasting home, then shall the sons of men ponder on the events of my life; wonder and tremble, and tremble and wonder how such thing should be. (Hogg, 116)

Throughout Robert's memoirs the distance between the narrated 'I' and the narrating 'I' is marginal. Although, as in this instance, Robert comments on past events, his powers of self-reflection remain as minimal as before. The tenacity with which he upholds his self-deception is truly uncanny and tragic. The only change consists of an undertone of despair and fear that shines through his narration and breaks forth every now and then. Robert's self-comments (of which the one quoted above is an excellent example) are, however, so equivocal that they allow and more often than not even strongly suggest another, more plausible interpretation of his fortunes.

Interpreted in a way very different from what he had in mind, Robert's prophecy has come true by the time the reader, one of 'the sons of men', has perused the novel. By then s/he knows that Robert was indeed not far away from death, and that his soul's everlasting home, if such a place exists, is likely to be hell. Last but not least, the reader, like the editor, 'wonders' what to make of Robert's story.

By keeping Robert's discourse equivocal, the author injects a powerful ironical undercurrent into the novel. This undercurrent often generates comic effects and to some extent affords the reader relief by ridiculing Robert, who is peculiarly unable to control the meaning of his language. In the course of the novel,

however, Robert's situation grows so desperate and tormenting that the humour he unintentionally creates becomes sufficiently black to transform the impulse of laughter into one of dread. The idea that any one could so constantly articulate the circumstances conspiring to turn his life into a disaster, unintentionally and unawares, is utterly disturbing. The truth will out, no matter how relentlessly repressed.

Before long Robert astonishes and amuses the reader by believing Gil-Martin is Czar Peter of Russia who is said to be travelling through Europe incognito. Gil-Martin's attention flatters Robert's vanity. Henceforward Robert addresses his new master as 'prince' (p. 139), which suggest another name by which Satan goes — 'Prince of Darkness'. Asking him whether his subjects are Christians, he receives the following reply: "All my European subjects are, or deem themselves so," returned he; "and they are the most faithful and true subjects I have" (p. 139). This formulation suggests that those guilty of religious righteousness are most prone to become the devil's prey. This suggestion is later reiterated in the story of the people of Auchtermuchty.

Gil-Martin has a preternatural characteristic which is introduced without further ado and accepted by all the characters (excepting the fictional editor) as a matter of course: by assuming the appearance and the body language of a particular person, he gains access to that person's mind. This feature is the supernatural version of Hogg's very own talent. Disguised as 'Mr Spy' in his magazine *The Spy*, first published in September 1810, he describes his unusual ability to adopt other personalities as a way of gaining access to the workings of their minds:

I am now become an observer so accurate, that by contemplating a person's features minutely, modelling my own after the same manner as nearly as possible, and putting my body into the same posture which seems most familiar to them, I can ascertain the compass of their minds and thoughts, to a few items, either on the one side or the

other, — not precisely what they are thinking of at the time, but the way that they would think about any thing.¹³⁴

Soon Gil-Martin manipulates Robert's every thought. He gains a power over him that does not go unnoticed by Robert:

But the most singular instance of this wonderful man's power over my mind was, that he had as complete influence over me by night as by day. All my dreams corresponded exactly with his suggestions; and when he was absent from me, still his arguments sunk deeper in my heart than even when he was present. (Hogg, 134–135)

Gil-Martin primes his protégé to kill Blanchard — a man Robert fears and detests for preaching that every individual causes his own fall. By day the killing is discussed, and by night Robert dreams about it. Thus he is gradually conditioned to commit murder. At the crucial moment in this otherwise gradual process of decision taking, Robert looks to God for advice:

I turned round hesitatingly, and looked up to Heaven for direction; but there was a dimness come over my eyes that I could not see. The appearance was as if there had been a veil drawn over me, so nigh that I put my up hand to feel it; and then Gil-Martin (as this great sovereign was pleased to have himself called,) frowned, and asked me what I was grasping at? I knew not what to say, but answered, with fear and shame, 'I have no weapons, not one; nor know I where any are to be found.'

'The God whom thou servest will provide these,' said he; 'if thou provest worthy of the trust committed to thee.'

I looked again up into the cloudy veil that covered us, and thought I beheld golden weapons of every description let down in it, but all with their points towards me. I kneeled, and was going to stretch out my hand to take one, when my patron seized me, as I thought, by the clothes and dragged me away with as much ease as I had been a lamb. (Hogg, 137–138)

To have one's sight impaired by mist, fog, or — in this particular case — 'dimness' is emblematic of a lack of insight and faulty perception. Significantly the 'veil' envelops both Robert and Gil-Martin; both are cut off from true spirituality; they

¹³⁴Quoted from David Groves, *James Hogg: The Growth of a Writer* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), p. 22.

have lost sight of God. Unfortunately Robert fails to realize this message. Again he does not notice the ambiguity in the tempter's reply which implies that the god he serves is not God. Although Robert notices that the weapons in his vision are pointed *against* him, he fails to understand their import. The use of the conjunction 'but' suggests that Robert has some instinctive understanding that something is not quite right. As the weapons are 'let down' through the veil, that is, they originate from heaven and pierce through the veil of misperception, they must be interpreted in terms of a divine warning. Furthermore, Gil-Martin drags Robert away from the vision as the wolf drags away the 'lamb' to its death.

While Robert usually defends his misperceptions with unhesitating tenacity, he is always doubtful of the warnings he is given. Verbs expressing perception are repeatedly introduced by a doubtful 'I thought'. Just before he shoots Blanchard he 'thought he heard a sweet voice' of warning (p. 140). This warning, however, remains as unheeded as the one he will be given on top of Arthur's Seat, the hill where he has followed his brother George.

Gil-Martin, himself a master of equivocal discourse, exploits Robert's strategy of twisting speech into his service. He encourages Robert's ways and uses Calvinist principles to justify crimes Robert is initially reluctant to commit. By targeting Robert's blind spot, namely, that he is by nature a coward but cannot bear to be called one, he provokes him to commit a number of crimes.

When Robert questions Gil-Martin about his name and origin, the latter is at his most ambiguous: 'It is not my *Christian* name', he replies and says about his parentage:

'I have no parents save one, whom I do not acknowledge,' said he proudly; 'therefore, pray drop that subject, for it is a disagreeable one. I am a being of very peculiar temper, for though I have servants and subjects more than I can number, yet, to gratify a certain whim, I have left them, and retired to this city.' (Hogg, 129–130)

Robert's curiosity has touched upon his friend's weak spot — his friend has something to hide about his background. Like Robert he has only one acknowledged parent. The insinuation that Gil-Martin might be not the guardian but the fallen angel, whose Christian name is Satan, becomes so powerful in the course of Robert's autobiography as well as in the 'Editor's Narrative' that the reader feels disposed to contradict the editor when he disputes the devil's literal existence. For the editor the devil has merely a literary existence, sometimes as a simile and sometimes as a metaphor for the evil in human nature; he is at best the personification of dark forces. For him Gil-Martin is an actor in a religious allegory.

With infinite cleverness the narrative employs the very device which is closely associated with the editor's 'Enlightenment superiority', namely irony, to promote the anti-Enlightenment belief in supernatural phenomena. Robert himself refuses to believe that his friend is the devil incarnate by assuming him to be the Tsar. Paradoxically, the unconscious irony which underlies his memoirs suggest that Gil-Martin *is* Satan. If only Robert had believed in it, he could have been saved from committing murder and suicide. This produces a further unsettling effect on the modern reader, who is likely to join the Enlightenment point of view and to resist the temptation to accept the intrusion of the preternatural into every-day life.

During the interval between Blanchard's death and the encounter with George on the hilltop, Robert has undergone a severe crisis. This crisis is an episode which suggests that the devil is a product of mental derangement. Robert describes the crisis in the following words:

I was seized with a strange distemper, which neither my friends nor physicians could comprehend, and it confined me to my chamber for many days; but I knew, myself, that I was bewitched, and suspected my father's reputed concubine of the deed. I told my fears to my reverend protector, who hesitated concerning them, but I knew by his words and looks that he was conscious I was right. I generally

conceived myself to be two people. When I lay in bed, I deemed there were two of us in it; when I sat up, I always beheld another person, and always in the same position from the place where I sat or stood, which was about three paces off me towards my left side. It mattered not how many or how few were present: this my second self was sure to be in his place; and this occasioned a confusion in all my words and ideas that utterly astounded my friends, who all declared, that instead of being deranged in my intellect, they had never heard my conversation manifest so much energy or sublimity of conception; but for all that, over the singular delusion that I was two persons, my reasoning faculties had no power. The most perverse part of it was, that I rarely convinced *myself* to be any of the two persons. I thought for the most part that my companion was one of them, and my brother the other; and I found, that to be obliged to speak and answer in the character of another man, was a most awkward business at the long run.

(Hogg, 153–154)

Many instances in Robert's condition bespeak mental illness. For once he calls himself the victim of a 'distemper' and 'delusion', and his obsessive personality speaks for itself. The idea of being possessed by a demon, or 'bewitched', as Robert believes, is no uncommon symptom of schizophrenia. Robert's religious megalomania would further support the diagnosis of this illness. In his two selves he recognizes George and Gil-Martin. Although he describes them as 'selves' he does not identify with either of them. It is as if he has become a spectator of events carried out in his mental realm but which are beyond his control.

Robert is convinced that he has not left his room in Mr Millar's house for a month. If one believes this, one accepts that George has been pursued during this period by a demon who can assume Robert's looks. If one disbelieves it, as the editor does, this implies that it was Robert himself who has been following his brother about to appear at his right side.

Nevertheless, various instances speak in favour of Robert's account of the month in question. The apparition seems to manifest itself inexplicably out of nowhere, and it is always aware of George's whereabouts. On the top of Arthur's

Seat George himself draws the conclusion that 'a horrid demon' has assumed his brother's features to haunt him.

The editor rejects a supernatural explanation for the phenomenon; yet his very own language strongly suggests the preternatural. He describes the image haunting George in terms of 'a fiend of more malignant aspect' (p. 35) and 'unaccountable being' (p. 36); he records that George kept his destinations secret from 'all flesh living' (p. 35), which implies that Robert's apparition is not a mortal creature. The 'fierce apparition' watches George's every step with 'fiendish glances', and this oppressive situation becomes 'more inexplicable' (p. 37). 'The attendance of that brother was now become like the attendance of a demon' (p. 37), the editor writes, thus restraining the preternatural to the rhetorical figure of the simile in accordance with Enlightenment bearing.

The fact that the reader recognizes the frequently ironic dimension in the editor's treatment of Robert and other characters distances him/her from the protagonist; instead, s/he is invited to share the editor's feeling of superiority. In the frame story the editor contributes to the discredit of Robert by calling him a 'wretch'. This is also a way of manipulating the reader to join him on the apparently safe and distant plane from which he views Robert's memoirs. If the reader scans the 'Editor's Narrative' more attentively, however, this turns out to be shaky ground.

The editor frequently displays his conviction of occupying a superior position from which he views the events of the past by underpinning his narration with his ironic and jovial style. His credibility, however, is undermined by his bias and a striking lack of compassion. These shortcomings are particularly obvious when he describes the wedding night of the laird and Rabina. While the drunkenness of the groom is depicted as merely amusing, there is not a trace of sympathy with the bride's anxiety. After all she is an inexperienced young woman who most likely had no say whatsoever in the choice of her partner who is

'considerably advanced in life' (p. 1) and described as 'a droll, careless chap' (p. 2). Her unhappiness about the unattractive match drives her deeper into her religious fanaticism. On the wedding night, when the laird enters the bedroom to claim his conjugal rights, her only way of defending herself consists in praying. What is essentially an instance of female powerlessness is mercilessly ridiculed by the editor:

To show her unconscionable spouse that she was resolved to hold fast her integrity, she kneeled down and prayed in terms so potent, that she deemed she was sure of making an impression on him. She did so; for in a short time the laird began to utter a response so fervent, that she was utterly astounded and fairly driven from the chain of her orisons. He began in truth, to sound a nasal bugle of no ordinary calibre, — the notes being little inferior to those of a military trump. The lady tried to proceed, but every returning note from the bed burst on her ear with a louder twang, and a longer peal, till the concord of sweet sounds became so truly pathetic, that the meek spirit of the dame was quite overcome; and after shedding a flood of tears, she arose from her knees, and retired to the chimney-corner with her Bible in her lap, there to spend the hours in holy meditation till such time as the inebriated trumpeter should awaken to a sense of propriety. (Hogg, 5–6)

Rabina may be a bigot but her distress is very real. The last subordinate clause in particular shows the editor's lack of empathy with her situation; 'holy meditation' is a euphemistic paraphrase for her prolonged misery and dread of the unloved husband (euphemistically called an 'inebriated trumpeter') waking up. 'Sense of propriety' is the editor's way of saying 'a condition sufficiently sober to have intercourse'. As Rabina fears nothing more than the moment the laird reaches this condition, the sentence is heavily ironical.

Although she escapes the laird on their wedding night, her protestations are ultimately of no avail, as the laird is determined to claim what is legally his:

'Come along, I say, my charming Rab. If you were the pink of all puritans, and the saint of all saints, you are my wife, and must do as I command you.'

'Sir, I will sooner lay down my life than be subjected to your godless will; therefore, I say, desist and begone with you.'

But the laird regarded none of these testy sayings: he rolled her in a blanket, and bore her triumphantly away to his chamber, taking care to keep a fold or two of the blanket always rather near to her mouth, in case of any outrageous forthcoming noise.

The next day at breakfast the bride was long in making her appearance. (Hogg, 8)

The comic tone of this episode is obvious; in essence, however, this passage is a (non-)portrayal of forced intercourse. Even if one takes into consideration that for the contemporary reader the concept of marital rape did not exist, the bias of a narrator who presents masculine cruelty as funny is manifest.

The editor's callous attitude becomes yet more obvious when he relates how Rabina is brutally punished by her father who, instead of affording her refuge, intends to make her new home more attractive to her by inflicting corporal punishment and a bread-and-water diet on her in her former abode. The beating is jovially described as 'not indeed very deadly' and the father is only 'pretending to be in a great rage'; nevertheless, she is beaten 'with many stripes' and imprisoned like the meanest criminal (p. 9).

The editor is furthermore discredited by his discourse in that it is also, though less perceptibly as in the case of Robert, equivocal and sometimes unintentionally ironical. When describing the old laird, he exclaims with wit and conscious irony 'woe be unto him if he was not soon convinced of the fallacy of such damning security!' (p. 2). This exclamation, uttered deliberately in the same fanatical Calvinist language Robert uses, implies that Robert's unshakeable conviction of being one of the Elect lies at the bottom of the laird's undoing. There is, however, a second implication which escapes the editor because of his partiality for the old laird: Self-righteousness and uncritical self-satisfaction are a dangerous foundation for anybody's outlook on life. They perilously cloud one's perception, and what one fails to perceive cannot be acted upon and prevented. This lesson is

unconsciously articulated by the editor, who is yet another person who fails to learn it.

In this way the author carefully establishes parallels between the two narrators. The fact that Robert victimizes his fellow-beings by exploiting the flexibility of Calvinist principles, and the equivocality of the discourse affiliated to these principles, heightens the irony of his becoming a victim of his own only too efficient strategy. To entangle oneself, as Robert has, so obstinately, irrevocably, and fatally in a religious and philosophical construct and the discourse that is part and parcel of it, is a disturbing possibility. By exposing also the editor as a victim of his own attitudes and the resulting one-sided perception, though with less severe consequences, the morale of the story comes closer to the reader's own mental doorstep.

One critic describes the editor as 'a high-handed, close-minded Tory', and it is possible that James Hogg had a particular group of men in mind when he created the editor-character.¹³⁵ At the time the *Justified Sinner* was written and published Hogg was working for William Blackwood. A series called *Noctes Ambrosianae* was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* from 1822 to 1835; it followed in the footsteps of the tradition of the fictional *Spectator Club* and the non-fictional *Mirror Club*.

The *Noctes* consist of a sequence of highly ironical dialogues on current political, cultural, scientific, and gastronomic issues. They were held by a circle of witty editors who met on a regular basis in a place called 'Ambrose's Inn'. Although the regulars represented are on the one hand fictitious characters, they functioned on the other hand as the mouthpieces of the witty and hard-hitting journalists

¹³⁵Groves, p. 22.

working for William Blackwood. Christopher North was the *nom de plume* for John Wilson, Odoherty for Maginn, Timothy Tickler for Robert Sym and Delta for D. M. Moir. Only De Quincey and James Hogg were denominated by non-fictitious attributes: the Opium Eater and the Ettrick Shepherd respectively.

James Hogg, however, was not only a contributor to but also a victim of the *Noctes*. He was ridiculed as an uncouth, superstitious, and presumptuous character — a criticism which aimed at his humble origin. Despite his underprivileged upbringing (he had no more than half a year's school education and no family fortune to boast of) he had made his way into the world of the Edinburgh *literati* and claimed a position as a poet and contributor to *Blackwood's*. He was always to remain an oddity within this world. If he often became the focus of ridicule for the Blackwood journalists, he also proved that he could deal out as well as he received. The parodies of the Lake Poets in *The Poetic Mirror* (1816) are a sufficient proof. In particular his Wordsworth parody, *James Rigg*, imitates the Wordsworthian style so well, while it exposes the poet's weaknesses with so subtle an irony, that critics were uncertain whether it ridiculed or eulogized the Lake Poet.

Blackwood's and the *Noctes* are linked in another way to Hogg's *The Confessions*. In the August issue of 1823 James Hogg published a letter addressed to Christopher North, the fictional editor of the *Noctes*. This letter contains the description of the unearthing of the body of a young man who had killed himself allegedly on a hilltop called Cowanscroft more than a hundred years previously. The young man is said to have worked as a shepherd for a Mr Anderson of Eltrive.

One day he went out in the company of his master's son, a young lad by the name of James. When James expressed the wish to return home, the young man pressed him to remain with him, threatening to cut his own throat if left alone. The boy, however, could not be prevailed upon to stay by a threat as sinister as this. Later that day another man, coincidentally passing through the area, observed

'something like a man standing in a strange frightful position at the side of one of Eldinhope hay-ricks'. On approaching he could see that it was the young man who had hanged himself with the hay rope that was used to tie down the ricks. As the rope was extremely brittle, it was believed that he had been assisted by the devil. Moreover, the same witness had claimed that '*he could almost give his oath* that he saw two people engaged busily about the hay-rick, going round it and round it', seemingly 'dressing it'.¹³⁶

This very letter, in an almost complete form, makes a subsequent appearance in Hogg's novel which was published in the following year in London, the full title being *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Written by himself: With a Detail of Curious Traditionary Facts, and other Evidence, by the Editor*. It represents Hogg's canny way of linking himself to a tale of the uncanny he dared not publish under his name, for his tale was not only extremely horrifying but would also have offended the influential Calvinists. In his autobiographical *Memoir of the Author's Life* (first published 1807 and revised, brought up to date, and published in *Altrive Tales* in 1832) he writes:

The next year, 1824, I published "The Confessions of a Sinner"; but it being a story replete with horror, after I had written it I durst not venture to put my name to it: so it was published anonymously, and of course did not sell very well — so at least I believe, for I do not remember ever receiving any thing for it, and I am sure if there had been a reversion I should have had a moiety.¹³⁷

In addition, this strategy was a clever way of providing his sensational tale with a real-life background. The pretence that a tale of horror is a genuine manuscript which stems from earlier times and has fallen into the hands of the publisher, narrator or a character in a preface, is a device not uncommonly used by the novelists of Gothic tales. It is essentially a way of dressing the incredible and

¹³⁶James Hogg, 'A Scots Mummy', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 79 (August 1823), 188–190.

¹³⁷James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1927), p. 55.

supernatural in a veil of authenticity and at the same time of liberating the author from any responsibility for a narrative of this kind. If a tale of the uncanny is anchored in local lore and geography its uncanniness is certainly reinforced.

A similarly bold claim to authenticity is made on the frontispiece of the original edition which announces that the subsequent 'Private Memoirs and Confessions' are accompanied by 'Traditionary Facts and Other Evidence, by the Editor'.

The term 'authentic' is chiefly employed in the following sense: 'entitled to acceptance or belief, as being in accordance with fact, or as stating fact; reliable, trustworthy, of established credit'.¹³⁸ The issue of authenticity in this sense is the problem at the core of this unique novel and is inextricably linked to the uncanny. It is the all-pervasive theme that holds together the novel's narrative segments. The organization of the contents is highly original: Robert's autobiography represents the narrative unit which supplies the novel with its title. Here the question arises whether Robert's mysterious acquaintance is the devil incarnate or a hallucination and thus a sign of mental disorder.

Robert's story encapsulates the narrative of the people of Auchtermuchty, handed down by word of mouth, told by Robert's servant Penpunt, recorded by Robert in his memoirs, and at last allegedly published by the (fictional) editor. The tale asserts that the devil does indeed come to tempt the self-righteous and vain amongst God's followers. Again the question arises whether this is a tale of superstition, a religious allegory, or an authentic story. At the centre of this problem lies the figure of Gil-Martin whose dualistic nature I discussed earlier. Although the modern reader will most probably refuse to believe in the devil incarnate, the novel as a whole refuses to take sides on this matter; it rather promotes an uncomfortable coexistence of mutually exclusive possibilities.

¹³⁸*OED*.

The fact that the editor's narrative is not as authentic (in the sense of trustworthy) as the reader is initially led to believe, renders the apparent stability of the frame story deceptive. The tale of horror resists the reassuring containment in a frame. Despite the editor's attempt to present himself as an objective recorder of diverse pieces of information, his subjective involvement in the material he treats of becomes evident on various occasions. Only in contrast to Robert's openly subjective relation of events can the editor uphold his claim to objectivity on the surface, but as soon as the reader scrutinizes the 'Editor's Narrative' closely s/he will wonder whether the information presented by the editor–narrator might not be as unreliable as the description of the grave's location given in Hogg's letter.

Hogg presents his tale of horror within the framework of two genres: that of the self-confessional and religious autobiography and, which is unusual for a Gothic tale, that of the Scottish historical novel. Far from setting his horrifying tale abroad in a Catholic Mediterranean country, as many of his English fellow-novelists of the Gothic did, he places it firmly on Scottish ground within the period of political and religious conflict towards the end of the 17th century, with a fanatical Calvinist as its hero. The division within Robert's family mirrors the political and religious division of the country. Silvia Mergenthal sees in the novel's refusal to take sides where the two interpretational alternatives are concerned a refusal to overcome the division of Scotland on a fictional level:

Die historische Spaltung Schottlands, deren fiktionale Überwindung ideologisches Programm der historischen Romane der Zeitgenossen Hoggs ist, wird damit in Hoggs Text perpetuiert; *Private Memoirs* sperrt sich gegen harmonisierende Ideologien.¹³⁹

The Confessions resists not only harmonizing ideologies but also harmonizing interpretative approaches. The coexistence of two mutually exclusive

¹³⁹Silvia Mergenthal, *James Hogg: Selbstbildnis und Bild zur Rezeption des 'Ettrick Shepherd'* (Frankfurt a. M. and Paris: Lang, 1990), p. 421.

interpretations (Gil-Martin as a devil incarnate or as a symptom of insanity) is the grand-scale exploration of the issue at the heart of the doppelgänger theme: the disintegration of the self caused by defective perception. Like *The Italian*, *Der blonde Eckbert*, *Der Magnetiseur*, *Frankenstein*, and *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, *The Confessions* concerns itself with the distorted perception of the obsessed individual. The uncanny resides in the irony which characterizes the language of the two important characters: Robert's unintentional irony, as we have seen, exposes what he so vehemently represses, namely the fear that he is doomed by the crimes he has committed to destroy the evidence of his inadequacies; the fictional editor's irony, though intentional, instead of demonstrating his superiority, testifies to the prejudices and limitations of perception it is meant to hide. Once again, the attempt to control experience by articulating it is doomed as language develops a dynamic of its own and becomes shifting ground.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary of the Principal Findings

In the course of this exploration of the narrative treatment of the uncanny, several aspects have crystallized. In *The Italian* the central theme is the dialectic of revelation and concealment. This dialectic is represented in many ways: In the plot it is enacted by the clues given to the protagonists (in whom the reader is inscribed) and which seem to offer explanations of the enigmatic events in their lives. But far from enlightening the protagonists, these revelations serve to conceal the truth. Often the fulfilment of the narrative's promise of enlightenment is withheld until it is almost forgotten. When finally the true state of affairs is revealed, and a panorama of vile intrigues is unveiled, the overemphasized happy ending — the wedding of the lovers — is suspicious as it acts as a cover-up of the sinister forces which continue to underpin human society. This and various other thematic representations of revelation and concealment (including the confession, the confessional box, and the church in the preface) are aided by a pervasive vocabulary of pairs of verbs (reveal/conceal, disguise/guise, discover/cover etc.). Coincidentally, a linguistic representation of the dialectic of revelation and concealment is enshrined in the verb *to reveal*, which recurs on many pages. It stems from Latin *revelatio* and literally means 'to draw back the veil'; however, the prefix 're' implies a reinstatement of a former condition. Thus an act of divulging information paradoxically becomes an act of *re-veiling*. The verb *to reveal*, then, in microcosmic form, encapsulates the grand theme of the novel. Appropriately, the veil with its ambivalent nature (of drawing attention to what it conceals) is at the heart of the novel's extensive imagery. It occurs frequently in either literal shape (the motif of the bride's veil and the nun's veil) or as a metaphor. Thus ambiguity is

firmly anchored on various levels and manifest both in the subject of the narrative and in the way it is narrated.

At the heart of *Der blonde Eckbert* lies the problem of personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* which interlocks with the theme of perception. It is represented by the crossing of thresholds to realms which are conceived of as separate. Thus the relationship of the internal as opposed to the external, for example, is called into question: In several instances the impression is created of the reciprocity of mental and external landscape, which blurs the separation of inside and outside. In other instances the act of perceiving is suggestive of an act of transforming. These cases of the blurring of the limit between mind and matter also signal the protagonists' crossing of the threshold from their ordinary world into the world of fairy-tale. The two environments largely coincide with the narrative modes of the *Volkssage* and the *Volksmärchen* respectively which operate in the novella. Bertha's and Eckbert's problematic experience of the fluidity of the mental and the physical realm is duplicated by the reader's experience of the blurring of these narrative modes. While the frame story is predominantly narrated according to the convention of the *Volkssage*, the inset story is characterized by its *Volksmärchen* features. The blurring effect between the two stems chiefly from the interpolation of psychological commentary which injects a measure of reflectivity which is alien to both conventions. When the magic word 'Strohman' is uttered which symbolically functions as the gate between the events in the inset story and the frame story, this resembles the lifting the lid of Pandora's box: The abstract fairy-tale figure of the old woman steps into the world of the frame-story; the fragile separation between the fairy-tale of the *erzählte Zeit* and the mundane world of the *Erzählzeit* collapses. This means that the barriers between Bertha's childhood and married life break down. The reader is confronted with the fact that the mysterious experience of Bertha's youth resists explication by generic mode and containment

by narrative framing. Similarly, Bertha has to realize that her childhood experience and the guilt she incurred resists exorcizing by narrating. Instead it insists on being consequential. Clearly, *Der blonde Eckbert* thoroughly and effectively exploits the potential of the method of narration in the depiction of the uncanny. Astounding instances of the narrative's ambiguous self-reflectivity echo the reader's perplexity: Where is the boundary between the imaginary and the ordinary?

Narrative framing is also an important issue in respect of *Der Magnetiseur*. The narrative consists of several clearly distinct units. They are arranged in a way that first sets up certain expectations on the part of the reader and then refuses to fulfil them; instead, it offers a chilling and completely unexpected denouement. The first narrative unit is a frame story accommodating interior stories which explore the nature of dreams. Superficially viewed this narrative arrangement and the setting (an intimate circle meets in the parlour to converse at leisure) evoke security. The abrupt ending and a number of thematically anchored signals covertly hint at the fragility of the apparent stability. Subsequently, the narrative surprises the reader by its sudden and unexplained switch to epistolary mode (two letter fragments). These first three narrative units are linked by a conspicuous vocabulary of inscrutability. Even more disconcerting is the next change to a first-person narrative which, after raising several questions, reveals that its narrator is actually an outsider who is needed to unscramble the plot as the entire family of the initial narrative unit ('Träume sind Schäume') have met with a violent death. Alban, the mesmerist, deceived the other characters (and himself) as to his motive and then wrought destruction on their lives, and Hoffmann, the mesmerizing author, frustrates the expectations conjured up at the beginning of the novella. Along with the character of Bickert, whose healthy humoristic rationalism seemed to dispel the danger of magnetism, the reader is confronted with the dreadful aftermath of Alban's manipulations. 'Träume sind Schäume' and, even more visibly, the

fragment of Marie's letter repress the realization of danger, but the truth will out. Only when the consequence of Alban's manipulations is imminent does the true nature of mesmeric power dawn upon Bickert. Similarly, the reader only realizes the true nature of the story at hand when the end of the novella is imminent.

While in *Frankenstein* the striking symmetry of the narrative organization would seem initially to contrast oddly with its thematic concern with the uncontrollable, it ultimately serves to intensify the message of the uncanny. The reader is inscribed in Mrs Saville, the recipient of Walton's letters. In this way the reader and his/her environment become the outermost of the narrative layers and s/he is invited to discover the social injustice depicted in the other narrative layers. Principally the uncanny derives from two thematic sources in *Frankenstein*: On the one hand the uncanny springs, as it does in *The Italian*, from references which signal the constant threat posed by society to the happiness of the individual and the domestic idyll. Society's institutions, far from restricting cruel and unjust impulses of the mass, are corrupt and even assist in the persecution of the innocent. On the other hand the uncanny springs from the individual self. Single-minded ambition, the Promethean passion, and a disregard for human affection can unleash devastation beyond control. This is explored in the ambiguous creator-creature relationship which suggests that the creature is the expression of the darker impulses of Frankenstein's psyche and also a physically separate entity. Thus two mutually exclusive interpretations of the novel are implied: Is Frankenstein insane, or, as the novel in the last instance seems to insist, has the creature an autonomous existence? As the uncanny is rooted in the individual psyche and perpetuated in social structures, it is a human condition; it expresses itself in recurring ambiguities and cognitive uncertainties.

Die Elixiere is essentially a story of identity crisis: A young monk faces sexual awakening, and his powerful sexuality defies repression. In his attempt to

find his role in life, only two alternatives seem to be available: Either he denies his sexuality and sublimates sexual devotion into spiritual devotion, or he forfeits spiritual redemption in favour of sexual fulfilment. In the course of his life he tries to interpret a number of dreams, visions, and events. These seem to be flickerings of an unknown grand design behind his existence. However, their signification is fundamentally ambivalent. Confronted with a symbolic network and various repetitive patterns, the reader similarly tries to make sense of events in the novel. However, instead of aiding interpretation, the haunting symbolism sustains two mutually exclusive interpretations: It invites both the spiritual and the sexual solution. As in *Frankenstein*, the uncanny is explored in the form of the doppelgänger. Here the doppelgänger is linked to the Pygmalion motif which is, in turn, connected with an extensive and complex imagery surrounding the notion of 'Bild'. The uncanny resides in the painted image of the sexually desired object which seems to come alive to haunt the onlooker. Similarly, language assumes a life of its own: It becomes suggestive of the supernatural and can unexpectedly shift perspective. The unusual use of syntax and the impersonal 'es', for example, create representations of the uncanny at a micro-textual level. Polysemy and other rhetoric devices (originally discovered by Elizabeth Wright) make the language multidimensional. Thus the duality of Medardus's nature and the resulting identity crisis are duplicated by the slipperiness of language. Last but not least, the nature of the novel's denouement, which is overtly depicted as the solution decreed by fate, is called into question by the gruesome transformation of Aurelie into a martyr. It is also undermined by the instances of narrative self-reflectivity in the prison episode in which Medardus tries to create a new identity for himself by writing the novel of his life.

The Confessions creates a tension between the narrative frame and the material it embraces which destabilizes the narrative. The fictional editor, the chief

character of the frame, imparts the impression that he is in control of the material he presents to the reader, while Robert, the protagonist of the inset autobiography, is eerily unable to control his language. The unintentional ambiguous dimension of Robert's communication brings everything to the surface he does not want to realize. His strategy of repression and projection hurries him to his doom. Once more the doppelgänger is the representation of the uncanny and the interpretative challenge. The reader is offered two principal points of view on the subject: While Robert, in his autobiography, maintains his autonomous existence, the narrator in the frame story, the fictional editor, vehemently denies the existence of such an apparently supernatural being. The tale of the people of Auchtermuchty (which is an enclave of Robert's confessions) speaks for the existence of supernatural beings and articulates what Robert's confessions have been suggesting all along: The doppelgänger is the devil incarnate. The editor tries to impose his point of view by discrediting Robert as a narrator. As he attempts to explain the confessions rationally, his own use of metaphor constantly suggests the supernatural despite himself. In respect of Robert the doppelgänger is suggestive of the repressed criminal tendencies; in respect of the editor the doppelgänger is suggestive of repressed superstitions. The editor himself is discredited by the arrogant, unsympathetic and prejudiced attitude which his language unintentionally exposes. Just like Robert he communicates more than he intends. The reader, who is more likely to identify with the editor than with the obsessive Robert to whom he feels superior, has to learn that not only Robert but also the editor lacks proper judgement and is a victim of his own narrow-mindedness and the resulting one-sided perception.

2. Comparison and Contrast of the English and German Texts

The findings above clearly prove that the uncanny is not restricted to the subject matter but can also be specifically generated by the way a text is narrated. The importance of the act of narration is indicated by the fact that, apart from Radcliffe, all authors use main characters as narrators. I want, by way of conclusion, to ask if any tangible difference exists in the narrative treatment of the uncanny in the English and German texts respectively.

In respect of the subject matter no material national difference is discernible. All texts partake to a certain degree of the grand theme of the crisis of perception which interlocks with the theme of identity crisis. The characters are deceived about others or themselves and struggle to find a stable identity and their place in the society they inhabit. The onset of crisis normally coincides roughly with the protagonists' sexual awakening. The threat to the individual emanates from two sources: within and without. Either the darker impulses of the self threaten the individual's wholeness and/or the corruption, prejudice, and brutality at large in society and perpetuated by its institutions threaten the protagonists' happiness. The threat posed by society is mostly revealed by straightforward descriptive episodes, often set in places of imprisonment in which the protagonists are confined. Alternatively, it may be depicted in the shape of its microcosmic representative, the secret society. The manifestation of societal forces casts a doubtful light on the notion of self-determination.

The most conspicuous representation of the uncanny as an aspect of the self is the figure of the doppelgänger. Both English and German texts use it to suggest a personification of the sinister side of the protagonist's personality which somehow cannot be integrated and has become uncontrollable and which may serve the protagonist as the scapegoat onto which he projects the unacceptable and unwanted side to his character. On the nature of the doppelgänger the texts supply

contradictory evidence which simultaneously suggests and denies him as an autonomous being, thus sustaining the dialectic of the uncanny — he is at one and the same time alien and familiar.

The ensuing promotion of the coexistence of two mutually exclusive interpretative approaches is a strategy detectable in both literatures. It involves the reader in the problem of perception which is faced by the characters. The problem of perception brings into play the question of the existence of supernatural agency. All texts use the supernatural or the suggestion of the supernatural. Nowhere, however, is the supernatural as radically used and sustained without explanation as in the two German texts, *Der blonde Eckbert* and *Die Elixiere*. *Frankenstein* proffers a scientific explanation which is explicitly anchored in the 1818 preface thought to be written by Percy B. Shelley. Still — here, as in *Der Magnetiseur*, science is dangerously transgressive in that it lays claim to metaphysical powers. Radcliffe, and with her an entire school of the Gothic, strongly suggests the supernatural but ultimately dismisses it and explains phenomena rationally. Hogg's *Confessions*, which is, as will become clear, in many ways exceptional, sustains a strong case in favour of the supernatural despite its inscribed rational explanation. By undermining the authority of the editor, *The Confessions* weakens his vehement repudiation of the supernatural.

Nevertheless, all the texts, no matter whether they seek to explain the supernatural or not, share the characteristic of a doubtful denouement. Their endings, in one way or another, and this includes even *The Italian* — the only novel which explicitly closes on a happy ending for the protagonists — are not as conclusive as the reader would wish. This is because many of the problems pointed out and the ambiguities raised in the course of the narratives are not really resolved. For example, in *The Italian* and *Frankenstein* the corrupt and threatening societal organizations are not destroyed but merely retreat into the background. The

enigmatic nature of Robert's autobiography in *The Confessions* receives no convincing explanation. Alban, the mesmerizer of *Der Magnetiseur*, and his dangerous powers live on. In *Die Elixiere* the transfiguration of Medardus is a cruel sham. Finally, in *Der blonde Eckbert*, the horrifying end seems inappropriately cruel for a crime committed unawares and the enigma surrounding the old woman persists.

In addition to these similarities some other parallels exist: All narratives show their characters suffering from parental absence or neglect. Thus, Ellena's father is dead and her mother is absent; Bertha's parents have given her away to be fostered; the mother in *Der Magnetiseur* is absent; Medardus's father is no longer alive; Frankenstein's mother dies when he is still young and his father neglects his education; the laird of Dalcastle refuses to acknowledge Robert as his son. This condition of parental absence ensures that the protagonists lack to a certain degree sufficient guidance, protection, and a balanced upbringing and are more vulnerable to an identity crisis.

Moreover, English and German texts show a similar measure of interest in places of imprisonment as settings such as subterranean prisons, castles, monasteries etc. In addition to using these places as settings the German authors conspicuously exploit architectural and natural landscapes as an outward manifestation and extension of mental landscape. While in *The Italian* the subterranean prisons of the Inquisition may be vaguely suggestive of Vivaldi's journey through his subconscious, the implication of the mental into external surroundings is more palpably realized in *Die Elixiere*. Medardus, for example, confronts his other self in the wilderness of the forest, and the monastery, with its 'dumpfe Mauern', echoes Medardus's voice which is 'dumpf' and is the architectural extension of Medardus's psyche. External landscape is used as a stage for the dramatization of the mental processes. This is indicative of a more radical

exploration of the relationship between inner and outer worlds. The disjunction between these two realms is particularly marked in the German texts. Freud sees in this 'Überbetonung der psychischen Realität im Vergleich zur materiellen' the essence of neurosis.¹⁴⁰ Coincidentally, it is also one of the hallmarks of German Romanticism. The German Romantics explicitly explored the nature of self and other. Inspired by Fichte's theory of the 'absolute I', the early German Romantics produced an idealistic radical subjectivism. Tieck's novella and Hoffmann's novel are literary explorations of the problematic and complex nature of the boundaries which separate self from other. Both the reader and the characters are implicated in the struggle to establish borderlines. In *Frankenstein* as well as in *The Confessions*, Frankenstein and Robert respectively experience no such uncertainty in their relationship to their doppelgänger; for them the boundaries between what they perceive as their self and the other are clearly drawn. It is the symbolic dimension of the doppelgänger which suggests to the reader that he may represent a part of their personality. In Radcliffe the separation of self and other is altogether unproblematic; the characters do not have to struggle to define themselves, rather they have to defend their happiness against their fellow human beings. It is not the psychological but her social identity Ellena has to struggle to define.

Not surprisingly, it is the German texts with their focus on *Innerlichkeit* which are characterized by a more thorough use of the potential of language to represent the uncertain nature of the self's boundaries. The German language, particularly as employed in *Die Elixiere* and *Der blonde Eckbert*, is characterized by cognitive slippage. A few syntactic manipulations suffice to shift perspective, as we have seen in *Die Elixiere*. In *Der blonde Eckbert* the unorthodox use of a preposition can bring about an overlapping of the inner and outer landscape. In many instances language defies single-track interpretation, thus it duplicates on a

¹⁴⁰Freud, IV, p. 267.

linguistic scale the narrative's thematic concerns. The theme of ambiguous identity finds its representation in the ambiguity of language.

If the English texts are less concerned with the boundaries of the individual's psychological identity, they are, proportionally, more concerned with the relationship between individual and society. In Radcliffe's novel the focus is clearly on the vulnerable social position of the woman. In *Frankenstein* society and its institutions persistently threaten the innocent and virtuous individual. In their own way, both novels are reminiscent of the contemporary debate about social reform which the French Revolution endowed with unprecedented urgency. Both novels are also explicitly anti-Catholic, though *Frankenstein* less obviously so. Of the German texts only *Die Elixiere* concerns itself with Catholicism, and the picture it draws of Catholic institutions is more complex and ambivalent. In Germany, which at the time was not a nation state, rather a *Kulturnation*, Anti-Catholicism was, unlike in England, not on the political agenda. Political units such as, for example, the duchy of Wurttemberg, had both Catholic and Protestant populations. Nor was Anti-Catholicism on the agenda in Scotland, which may explain its absence in Hogg's *The Confessions*.

Another difference between the English and the German texts is discernible in the use of frame story and inset story. Hoffmann and Tieck destabilize their narratives by creating an unusual relationship between frame and inset story. Reader expectations are set up and subsequently frustrated. Hogg, however, also exploits the destabilizing potential of the frame–inset construction.

The Confessions is also the only text in English which shows evidence of a deliberate and extensive use of the potential slipperiness of language to represent the uncanny. His unique strategy is irony, as we have seen. In Robert's case the ironic undercurrent which for the reader brings everything to the surface is involuntary. In the case of the fictional editor, the irony is intentional, but the

exposure of rather unpleasant character traits it entails is not. Furthermore, the editor's metaphors suggest the existence of the supernatural he so vehemently denies. Hogg's intensive use of language in the representation of the uncanny seems to testify to a greater proximity to the German literature of the uncanny.

Hogg's novel also shares the characteristic of explicit self-reflectivity with the German texts by commenting on the doubtful nature of the narrative it purports to present. This brings the question of generic identity into play, though in a different vein than in Tieck's novella: Is Robert's story allegoric or is it a depiction of the invasion of the ordinary world by the inexplicable? Ultimately the editor, on the last two pages of his report, is left as much at a loss in his attempt to make sense of Robert's story as Robert himself was.

Could the similarities Hogg's novel bears to the German texts in respect of the narrative treatment of the uncanny, along with its setting and historical background, be explained by the Scottish origin of *The Confessions*? One could speculate that the historical position of Scotland, its annexation to England, promotes a Scottish recourse to culture (as opposed to politics) as a means of creating national identity. This, in turn, might be a factor in the make-up of a specifically Scottish inwardness.

3. Last Reflections

Ending this thesis on such a speculative note points forward to the research which I hope to inspire and for which this thesis has no room. After I have gathered evidence that both form and content are inseparably implicated in the narrative treatment of the uncanny, there are many more texts which need to be analyzed, in the English as well as in the German language. They need to be compared and contrasted in order to confirm a more general application of my discovery of a material difference in the narrative treatment of the uncanny between English and

German texts. And if my findings are corroborated thorough research has to be undertaken into the reason for this difference. For the present, however, I hope that this thesis will stimulate a fuller understanding and enjoyment of the literature it examines.

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