

Forebodings Uncanny Approaches to Evil

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Introduction

In her essay “Le double e(s)t le diable” [*The Double is/and the Devil*] Sarah Kofman argues that what makes E.T.A. Hoffmann’s tale *The Sandman* uncanny [*unheimlich*] is the element of repetition. Scenes and themes are repeated and characters are doubled, causing both the reader and the protagonist of the story to doubt what is real and what is imaginary: it remains ambiguous till the end whether there really are evil forces at work or rather if the protagonist is suffering from some sort of pathology. Sigmund Freud, who famously used *The Sandman* as the central example in the second part of his essay “The Uncanny,” ignores much of the ambiguity of the story in order to make it fit his hypothesis about the uncanny nature of repressed childhood complexes, especially the castration complex. In the third part of the same essay, however, Freud leaves behind the story of *The Sandman* and turns to other examples to explain the uncanny nature of repetition and doubling. I engage both Freud and Kofman in a rereading of Hoffmann’s tale to argue that one inherent dimension of uncanny experiences is a suspicion or foreboding of evil. This aspect of experiences of the uncanny is arguably absent from Freud’s own renowned descriptions as well as those of several of his commentators. My argument to this effect necessitates a retelling of *The Sandman* in order to make clear those aspects of the story that Freud obscures or neglects. Most relevant for my argument here is that the kind of evil that uncanny experiences foreshadow is hidden and secretive, perpetually at work behind the scenes of normal, everyday human existence. This evil is detected in the most pedestrian occurrences that this evil, but never with certainty; it is always lurking just beyond the reasonable explanations with which one tries to expel it.

From Heimlich to Unheimlich

In the first part of his essay “The Uncanny,” Freud proposes two different methods to investigate the phenomenon of the uncanny or *das Unheimliche*. First he will provide a linguistic account of the word *heimlich* (homely, familiar, cozy) and its negative counterpart *unheimlich* (unhomely, uncanny); then he will put his etymological findings to the test with case studies and other examples of *Unheimlichkeit*. Both methods, Freud promises, will yield the same result: “The uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”ⁱ Freud’s linguistic account of the ambivalent opposition between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* shows that the familiar becomes uncanny when it appears to harbor some hidden evil.

The most literal translation of *heimlich* is “homely” in the sense of “belonging to the house or the family,” or “cozy.”ⁱⁱ What belongs to the house and is familiar from one perspective, however, is “concealed” to the outsider or the one who does *not* belong to the house. As a continuation of this concealed aspect of the familiar, *heimlich* can even mean “secretive” or “deceitful.”ⁱⁱⁱ This explains why what is *heimlich* is “inaccessible to knowledge:” what is *heimlich* is familiar to the person “belonging to the family,” but hidden from the outsider.^{iv} To feel *heimlich* means to feel free from fear in a friendly, intimate setting where one is “withdrawn from the eyes of strangers.” Freud’s overview includes many additional shades of meaning, showing that the word *heimlich* is itself ambiguous. Though it always refers to the familiar, what

is *heimlich* can be either homely or strange depending on one's perspective. The familiar can appear as alien or even dangerous (as evidenced by the word "deceitful"), and so what is *heimlich* can become *unheimlich*, blurring the boundary separating the two "opposites." The negative *unheimlich* Freud first defines as "eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear" is a clear opposite of *heimlich* as "familiar" or "cozy." But the fear aroused in the uncanny is of a very particular kind: "*Unheimlich*' is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."^v Freud concludes his etymological investigation into the uncanny: "Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*."^{vi} Both what is *heimlich* and what is *unheimlich* can have an element of danger because one suspects there is more to it than meets the eye. This hidden quality that makes the familiar uncanny is a suspected evil, all the more threatening because it manifests itself in everyday occurrences.

The evil detected in an uncanny experience is an evil that belongs "to the home" and is familiar. Freud writes: "This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."^{vii} Something that used to be *heimlich*, familiar, homely, has become a source of *Unheimlichkeit* because it has been (unsuccessfully) repressed. According to Freud, the uncanny nature of the Sandman is explained by the repressed infantile fear of castration. Sarah Kofman successfully critiques Freud's argument concerning the castration complex and points out that many other aspects play into the *Unheimlichkeit* of Hoffmann's story. I will not, therefore, pursue the issue of repressed infantile complexes but focus on another source of *Unheimlichkeit* described by Freud: surmounted primitive beliefs.^{viii} These are the kind of beliefs that, according to Freud, a rational person reasonably rejects, such as the belief in the evil eye or the belief that the ghosts of the dead will return. Even though reason tells one to reject these beliefs, traces of these old convictions remain and when one experiences something that appears to confirm the old beliefs, we feel uncanny. In "Fiction and Its Phantoms," Hélène Cixous writes: "To surmount does not mean to expel: new convictions are sometimes overwhelmed by a return to the old beliefs which a real fact, such and such extraordinary coincidence, seems to confirm. . . the text of reality always uncaps it anew."^{ix} To further explain the suspicion of something evil at work in everyday reality, it serves to turn to the instances of the uncanny in Freud's text, which find their source in these "old beliefs."

Undeniable Instances of the Uncanny

Though Freud opens his essay with the statement that he feels compelled to investigate the phenomenon of *das Unheimliche*, a topic largely ignored in the field of aesthetics, he admits that he "must plead guilty to a special obtuseness in the matter, where extreme delicacy of perception would be more in place."^x This obtuseness need not be an obstacle, however, since Freud can turn to literary sources where one can find many instances of the uncanny recognizable even to those lacking in delicacy of perception. So it is for this reason that, after offering an etymological account of the words *heimlich* and *unheimlich* in the first part of his essay, Freud turns to E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* to explore the "qualities of feeling" related to the uncanny in the second part. In the third part of his essay, however, Freud completely ignores the "case" of the Sandman and offers several additional examples of the uncanny that make the reader question Freud's supposed obtuseness in the matter. Furthermore, these additional examples can aid the understanding of the uncanny nature of *The Sandman*, and so I will discuss them before engaging Hoffmann's story. One of the examples in the third part of the essay runs as follows:

We naturally attach no importance to the event when we hand in an overcoat and get a cloakroom ticket with the number, let us say, 62; or when we find that our cabin on a ship bears that number. But the impression is altered is two such events, each in itself indifferent, happen close together – if we come across the number 62 several times in a single day, or if we begin to notice

everything which has a number – addresses, hotel rooms, compartments in railway trains – invariably has the same one, or at all events one which contains the same figures. We do feel this to be uncanny. And unless a man is utterly hardened and proof against the lure of superstition, he will be tempted to ascribe a secret meaning to this obstinate recurrence of a number; he will take it, perhaps, as an indication of the span of life allotted to him.^{xi}

As Cixous describes this passage, “an inanimate number can become an evil spirit,” but only if there is some trace left in us of the primitive belief in, for instance, a universe governed by hidden rules and patterns of which we now and then catch a glimpse. The obstinate recurrence of the number 62 in the above example is taken as evidence by those susceptible to the uncanny whose reaction would be something like: “So it is true that there exists a predestined order and that we can come to know it if we pay attention to the numbers we encounter in everyday existence!” Something as *heimlich* as a simple number becomes decidedly uncanny through repetition.

Freud then turns to even more forceful examples describing “undeniable instances of the uncanny.”^{xii} He mentions a neurotic who wishes to book a room in an establishment but cannot get the room of his choice because it is already occupied by an old gentleman. The neurotic is annoyed and says: “I wish he may be struck dead for it.” Two weeks later the old man dies, and the neurotic has the uncanny feeling that he has brought on the man’s death. Freud remarks that the *Unheimlichkeit* of this situation would have been stronger still if less time had elapsed between the neurotic expressing his annoyance and the man’s death. It turns out, however, that the neurotic and other patients like him are able to point to many similar incidents: they run into someone they were just thinking of, and they have presentiments of accidents or deaths. What makes these incidents uncanny is that it gives people the feeling that their mere thoughts can have a (dangerous) effect on reality, a belief Freud refers to as the “omnipotence of thoughts.”^{xiii} About the possibility of affecting reality through thought, Freud writes:

We – or our primitive forefathers – once believed that these possibilities were realities, and were convinced that they actually happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have surmounted these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation.^{xiv}

When something happens that appears to confirm the belief that we *can* kill a person by a mere wish, or that there *is* a predestined order in which it has been decided that we will not live past sixty-two, we feel uncanny. Hitherto innocuous words and numbers suddenly appear to be linked to a hidden pattern or have the power to make an accident occur. Again: in order for this uncanny feeling to take hold, the old beliefs must be surmounted but not expelled; to the person immune to the uncanny, however, “the most remarkable coincidences, the most mysterious repetition of similar experiences – none of these things will disconcert him.”^{xv}

I now turn to an account of Hoffmann’s tale *The Sandman* in light of these preliminary remarks. Through an integration of Freud’s linguistic account of *das Unheimliche* and his consideration of surmounted primitive beliefs, I argue that in the uncanny one finds evidence for a hidden evil. This evil can only be glimpsed and suspected because it hides in the most familiar and everyday occurrences; it is not out in the open but secretively at work in and behind the pedestrian and commonplace. Those immune to the uncanny can easily explain it away, but as Freud suggests, these people are very few in number since by far most of us carry some trace of old beliefs that are triggered by any “evidence” provided by new experiences.

The Sandman

Referring to Freud's discussion of Hoffmann's fictional tale *The Sandman*, Cixous writes: "Freud's own text, here, functions *like* a fiction."^{xvi} It is Freud's opinion that writers can create uncanny situations better than anyone else, and Cixous suggests that Freud, too, wants to provide a literary answer to the enigma of the uncanny. Freud recounts the story of Nathaniel, the protagonist of *The Sandman*, as a "case history," making it into a "linear, logical account."^{xvii} This explains one of the most striking aspects of Freud's account, namely that the narrator of the original story has disappeared entirely. As Neil Hertz remarks in "Freud and the Sandman," the narrator has been replaced by Freud himself.^{xviii} And as Cixous argues, this selective retelling eradicates all doubt, leaving no room for intellectual uncertainty.^{xix} Freud also ignores the particular structure of the story: *The Sandman* opens with three letters, giving it an air of authenticity, and it is only after these letters that the narrator makes himself heard and explains that he could only begin the story of Nathaniel by not beginning at all, that is, to open the story with the three letters between Nathaniel, Lothaire, and Clara.^{xx} The reader of Hoffmann's story first encounters only the letter writers and their account of the events, while the reader of Freud's *summary* of the story knows from the beginning which interpretations can be trusted, and which should be dismissed. The readers of Freud's essay who have read only Freud's summary, and not Hoffmann's tale itself, are therefore not experiencing the intellectual uncertainty created by the opening letters. My retelling of the story, however, is not meant primarily as a critique of Freud's summary and treatment of *The Sandman*, but as an investigation of evil as it appears in the experience of the uncanny. In what follows it will become clear that this approach to evil benefits far more from Freud's remarks on the uncanny outside of his discussion of *The Sandman* than from his explanation of the *Unheimlichkeit* of Hoffmann's story in terms of the castration complex.

The Sandman opens with a letter from Nathaniel to his friend Lothaire. Nathaniel writes that "dark forebodings of a cruel, threatening fate tower over me like dark clouds" as the result of a "horrible occurrence:" the visit of a barometer dealer named Coppola. Nathaniel explains the "circumstances of the most peculiar kind" that made this seemingly trivial event take on this measure of importance. When Nathaniel was young, he writes, someone used to come to the house on certain evenings to visit his father. The children only heard this person's step and never saw him when he arrived; before they could catch a glimpse, their mother sent them off to bed with the words: "Now, children, to bed – to bed! The Sandman's coming, I can see." Nathaniel was not reassured by his mother's explanation that the Sandman was not a real person but only a way of saying that Nathaniel was sleepy and needed to go to bed. His nurse gave him a far more satisfactory picture of the Sandman:

He is a wicked man, who comes to children when they won't go to bed, and throws a handful of sand into their eyes, so that they start out bleeding from their heads. He puts their eyes in a bag and carries them to the crescent moon to feed his own children, who sit in the nest up there. They have crooked beaks like owls so that they can pick up the eyes of naughty human children.

When Nathaniel got older he realized that the nurse's tale could not be true, but he never managed to completely overcome his fear of the Sandman, and the strange, evening visits to his father continued to both scare and fascinate him. One night Nathaniel decided to hide in a cupboard in his father's room to get a view of the mysterious visitor and found out that the Sandman was in fact the hideous advocate Coppelius, a friend of his father who always took pleasure in scaring him and his siblings and taking away their appetite at dinner with his disgusting presence. For Nathaniel, the Sandman now no longer was the bogey from the nurse's tale, but "a hideous, spectral monster, who brought with him grief, misery and destruction – temporal and eternal – wherever he appeared." Coppelius and Nathaniel's father set to work in the study and started a fire in a hidden hearth. From his hiding place, Nathaniel thought he saw human faces in the fireplace, with holes where the eyes should be. When he heard Coppelius roar: "Eyes here eyes!," Nathaniel shrieked and was caught by the lawyer who dragged him to the fire place. Nathaniel

describes in his letter how Coppelius was about to sprinkle red-hot coals into his eyes when his father begged his friend to stop; instead, Coppelius screws off Nathaniel's hands and feet and then puts them back on again mumbling "There's something wrong here... But now it's as good as ever. The old man knew what he was doing!"^{xvi} Nathaniel loses consciousness and when he wakes Coppelius is said to have left town. The family was happy now that the evening visits had ended until, about a year later, Coppelius returned for one last time. During the night there was an explosion and Nathaniel's father was found dead in his study; Coppelius had disappeared. This story about his childhood leads Nathaniel back to his "dark forebodings:" the barometer dealer whose visit had upset Nathaniel, now a student, was none other than Coppelius. Nathaniel claims that the former lawyer has now taken on the name Coppola and works as an optician.

A letter from Clara, Nathaniel's fiancée and Lothaire's sister, follows Nathaniel's letter. It turns out that Nathaniel distractedly addressed to Clara the letter he had meant for Lothaire, and so it is Clara who writes in response. About the "dark fatality" Nathaniel described she says that "all the terrible things of which you speak occurred merely in your own mind, and had little to do with the actual external world." She insists that there must be a perfectly reasonable explanation for all the events that occurred: Coppelius and Nathaniel's father were conducting alchemical experiments which led to the explosion, and Coppola just reminds Nathaniel of the awful man whom he holds responsible for his father's death. Clara suspects that her letter will not please Nathaniel and that he will blame her for seeing only "the variegated surface of the world" and having a "cold nature. . . impervious to any ray of the mysterious." But Clara emphasizes that she, too, believes in the possibility of a "dread power which endeavors to destroy us in our own selves," but that if there is indeed such a power, it can only take hold because we ourselves "grant it the room which it requires to accomplish its secret work." She sums up her advice to Nathaniel: "Be convinced that these strange fears have no power over you, and that it is only a belief in their hostile influence that can make them hostile in reality." She adds that she will scare away Coppelius with "loud peals of laughter" and that "he shall neither spoil my sweetmeats as an advocate, nor my eyes as a Sandman."

Nathaniel writes back not to Clara but to Lothaire, dismissing Clara's "philosophical epistle" and mocking her "intelligent professorial definitions." Nathaniel claims no longer to believe that Coppola and Coppelius are the same person anyway, yet he still feels ill at ease as a result of the barometer dealer's visit. In the same letter, Nathaniel describes his first sight of Olympia, the mysterious daughter of Spalanzani, the physics professor. He cuts short his account of Olympia, however, and announces that he may just as well tell Lothaire about her in person when he returns home in two weeks.

At this point in the story there is a sudden shift in perspective. The three letters have followed each other without explanation, but now a narrator appears who says he felt compelled to tell us of Nathaniel's life but could not find a way to open his story; this is why he chose to "not begin at all" and have the story start with the three letters instead. This narrator now continues the story about Nathaniel's return to Lothaire and Clara. Initially, Nathaniel appears to have forgotten his gloomy thoughts, but soon it becomes clear to those around him that "everything, his whole life, had become to him a dream and a foreboding, and he was always saying that man, although he might think himself free, only served for the cruel sport of dark powers." Nathaniel further claims that one cannot resist these powers and that one is better off resigning oneself to one's fate. "Clear-headed" Clara has no patience for what she calls Nathaniel's mysticism. About Coppelius she says: "so long as you believe in him, he really exists and exerts his influence; his power lies only in your belief." Nathaniel in turn lectures her on a variety of doctrines of evil to which she responds that Nathaniel himself is an evil principle with a hostile effect on her coffee – if he does not stop reading to her, "none of you will get any breakfast." Clara finds Nathaniel's dark stories increasingly tedious, and even to Nathaniel himself the picture of the Sandman is starting to fade until he revives the image of Coppelius in a poem. In this poem, Nathaniel is about to be married to Clara but

Coppelius appears, takes Clara's eyes, throws them into Nathaniel's chest, and then throws Nathaniel into a "fiery circle" where he spins around as in a hurricane. Clara screams that she still has her eyes and that what burnt Nathaniel's breast were drops of blood from his own heart, but when the circle stops spinning and Nathaniel looks at Clara, "it is death that looks kindly upon him from her eyes."

Nathaniel is scared of his own creation when he first reads the poem to himself, but soon this feeling is replaced by satisfaction and he goes to Clara to read her. She expects another tedious tale about evil but then sees how an "internal fire deeply reddened his cheeks" and "tears flowed from his eyes." She asks him to throw the poem into the fire after which he calls her an "inanimate, accursed automaton" and runs off.

After a reconciliation with Clara, Nathaniel returns to his room in the city where he again encounters Coppola. He is afraid at first but decides to put his fear aside as he promised Clara and even buys a small spy-glass from him. Through it, he can look at Spalanzani's daughter Olympia who sits very still in her room across the street nearly every day. After Nathaniel receives an invitation to a grand party organized by Spalanzani to introduce his strangely secluded daughter to the public, Nathaniel spends the entire evening with Olympia. In conversation, she never even looks away from his face and listens to him without the slightest interruption except the occasional sigh "ah, ah!" Spalanzani appears pleased with the connection between his daughter and Nathaniel, but Nathaniel's friend Sigismund lets him know that everybody else thinks there is something wrong with Olympia, who is referred to as a "wooden doll" and a "wax face." She moves like a wound-up clockwork, Sigismund says: "we all find your Olympia quite uncanny, and prefer to have nothing to do with her. She seems to act like a living being, and yet has some strange peculiarity of her own." Nathaniel responds: "Olympia may appear uncanny to you, cold, prosaic man. . . She utters few words, it is true, but these few words appear as genuine hieroglyphics of the inner world, full of love and deep knowledge of the spiritual life, and contemplation of the eternal beyond." Never had he known such an admirable listener, the narrator adds.

Nathaniel has forgotten all about Clara and is about to propose marriage to Olympia when he finds her father, Spalanzani, fighting the optician Coppola in Olympia's room. The two men are tugging on opposite ends of what appears to be a female figure. Coppola turns out to be the stronger and takes off with the figure slung over his shoulder. Nathaniel "had seen but too plainly that Olympia's waxen, deathly-pale countenance had no eyes, but black wholes instead – she was, indeed, a lifeless doll." Spalanzani cries: "After him – after him – what are you waiting for? Coppelius, Coppelius – has robbed me of my best automaton – a work of twenty years . . . – the clockwork – the speech – the walk, mine; the eyes stolen from you." Nathaniel indeed sees a pair of eyes lying on the ground and when Spalanzani throws the eyes at Nathaniel's chest madness seizes him and he screams "ho – ho – ho – a circle of fire! Of fire! Spin round, circle!" while attacking the professor. Friends restrain Nathaniel and bring him first to the insane asylum and then home to Clara and Lothaire.

Nathaniel again recovers and comes to appreciate the "heavenly purity" of Clara's mind. Walking around in the small town where they now live, Clara and Nathaniel decide to climb the town hall steeple. At the top, Nathaniel takes from his pocket the little spy glass he had bought from Coppola to look at a "curious little grey bush" Clara points out in the distance. Putting the telescope to his eyes, Nathaniel finds Clara in the way of the lens. Nathaniel lets out horrible laughter as he cries "Spin round, wooden doll! – spin round!" and tries to throw Clara down from the tower. Lothaire rushes up and saves her, but when people down at the ground prepare to go up to restrain the mad Nathaniel, the advocate Coppelius has arrived at the scene and says: "Ha, ha – just wait – he will soon come down of his own accord." Nathaniel spots Coppelius from the top of the tower, yells out "Ah, pretty eyes – pretty eyes!" and jumps to his death. Coppelius disappears in the crowd.

Repetition and Disquieting Strangeness

In Freud's summary of the story, a few things stand out. He conflates Nathaniel's first encounter with Coppola with the second, omits the scene in which Coppelius rearranges Nathaniel's limbs, and makes no reference to Nathaniel's dark poem. Furthermore, Freud states that "we may suppose" that Nathaniel sees Coppelius through the spy glass on top of the tower, whereas in fact Nathaniel sees Clara who was standing in between Nathaniel and the "curious little grey bush." Nathaniel sees Coppelius only after Clara has been rescued and brought down from the tower. Contrary to Freud's account, it appears that it is the sight of Clara through Coppola's telescope which brings on the last fit of madness in Nathaniel.^{xxii} Furthermore, Freud insists that the end of the story makes clear that Coppola and Coppelius are the same person and that "there is no question, therefore, of any intellectual uncertainty here."^{xxiii} Freud argues that since, on the one hand, there is no doubt at the end of the story about the identity of Coppola and Coppelius, and, on the other, the uncanny effect of the story remains even though the intellectual uncertainty has been resolved, intellectual uncertainty has nothing to do with the uncanny effect of the story. This argument is problematic because even at the end of the story it remains unclear whether Coppola and Coppelius were indeed the same person. Freud therefore cannot legitimately use this supposed identity to support his claim. More importantly, I argue that intellectual uncertainty is at the very core of both the *Unheimlichkeit* of Hoffmann's story and Freud's own suggestions elsewhere in his essay.

Kofman explains that Freud's quick conclusion about the Sandman's identity at the end of his account is understandable since the end of the story appears to suggest that Nathaniel's perspective was right. Still, his perspective remains just that, one perspective among others, and it is therefore not decisive: « il y a peut-être, ici, une coïncidence tout à fait "étrange" entre le fantasme et la réalité. »^{xxiv} The end is ambiguous, and doubt about the Sandman remains.

Neil Hertz' remarks support this reading of the story: in answer to the question "Is the tale psychological or daemonic?" he suggests that Nathaniel's compulsion is neither "exactly exterior and 'daemonic'" nor "exactly inner and psychological."^{xxv} Nathaniel and Clara present the two sides of this ambiguity: Nathaniel claims to be a plaything of dark powers; Clara claims that the dark powers are within ourselves or even identical with us.

In his essay, Freud observes that "the factor of the repetition of the same thing will perhaps not appeal to everyone as a source of uncanny feeling."^{xxvi} We must recognize, however, that under certain circumstances repetition is very likely to arouse an uncanny feeling, even in Sigmund Freud himself, who earlier claimed to be "obtuse" in these matters and relatively insensitive to the uncanny. Freud's examples, it is implied, should convey an uncanny feeling even to the obtuse. Freud describes how someone who is caught in a mist and trying to find one's way home keeps returning to the same spot one is trying to get away from; in another example someone collides with the same piece of furniture time and again in a dark room.^{xxvii} About these examples Freud says: "It is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of 'chance.'"^{xxviii} Surprisingly, Freud does not use this insight in his discussion of Hoffmann's story. As Kofman points out, Hoffmann shows that *la folie* and *la raison* are not neatly separated, but Freud sides with Nathaniel's perspective precisely because this allows him to draw a neat distinction between the two.^{xxix} The fantastic and reality coincide, and it is impossible to establish clear distinctions between the real and the imaginary: "brouillage particulièrement apte à provoquer, selon Freud, l'inquiétante étrangeté."^{xxx} Everyday reality takes on an uncanny aspect, I have suggested, when one is not sure whether the evil forces one suspects are merely a product of the imagination; it is because the evil is hidden in and behind everyday existence that

it takes on its disquieting nature. Freud's examples of undeniably uncanny situations all concern seemingly innocent phenomena that suddenly appear to mask an inescapable evil.

Conclusion: Diabolical Mimesis

Nathaniel clearly takes some sort of pleasure in this sense of hidden evil. His correspondence permits him to masochistically and narcissistically re-enact his past without the possibility of interruption by his reasonable fiancée.^{xxxi} In his dark poem Nathaniel seeks to revive the evil forces and impress them upon others. Even when he was young and kept drawing pictures of the Sandman he was purposefully reviving his horror. Fiction, and in particular his own work, appears to have a stronger effect on Nathaniel than life itself: he brings himself to tears with his own poem. Kofman introduces the concept of « diabolical mimesis » to emphasize the dangerous nature of these creations : « La littérature comme mimésis que se substitue à la vie est une perversion de la créature qui rivalise avec Dieu : Mimésis diabolique. »^{xxxii} Nathaniel's actions reflect the diabolical nature of this type of mimesis when he calls Clara an automaton and desires to marry the doll Olympia. Nathaniel's relationship to Olympia is the inverse of his relationship to his real-life fiancée. What Nathaniel wants is « une femme inerte et frigide, pur miroir de lui-même, qui puisse donc écouter ses poèmes sans protester. »^{xxxiii} It is exactly Nathaniel's love for his « creatures » that allows him to confuse the inanimate with the animate because it is he who gives them life.^{xxxiv}

It could be suggested that, in line with Kofman's remarks, one should label the uncanny instances central to Freud's argument diabolical repetitions. The doubling and repetition which bring on uncanny experiences are diabolical because they appear to point at evil forces at work behind the scenery of everyday human existence. It is important to recognize this diabolical nature of the uncanny because it helps us understand the threatening and alienating effects of an evil that is hidden and secretive. The phenomenon of the uncanny itself, on the other hand, should be understood as a foreboding or suspicion of evil; without reference to evil, I have argued, the discussion about the uncanny ignores what the uncanny experience is an experience *of*: secretive, hidden evil.

Notes

ⁱ Freud, "The Uncanny," (1919), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr., ed., rev. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1971); reprinted as an appendix to Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche (The "Uncanny")," *New Literary History*, vol. 7, no. 3, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Spring 1976), 620.

ⁱⁱ 621

ⁱⁱⁱ 622

^{iv} 624

^v 630

^{vi} 624

^{vii} 634

^{viii} 639

^{ix} Hélène Cixous, "Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche (The "Uncanny")," *New Literary History*, vol. 7, no. 3, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Spring 1976), 545-6

^x 620. As Sarah Kofman points out, this could lead one to wonder why Freud feels compelled to understand the uncanny if it does not affect him. Sarah Kofman, « Le double e(s)t le diable, » *Quatre romans analytiques* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1973), 139.

^{xi} Freud, 632. Cixous remarks that Freud had himself reached the age of 62 as he was writing "The Uncanny." 644, note 17. Also: "This banal evocation of the little mysteries of everyday experience shows how an inanimate number can become an evil spirit." 541

^{xii} 632

^{xiii} 633

xiv 639

xv 639

xvi Cixous, 531

xvii Cixous, 533

xviii Neil Hertz, "Freud and the Sandman," *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime*. (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 2009), 304.

xix Cixous, 533-5

xx See also Hertz, 306.

xxi Kofman: Les paroles prononcées par Coppélius sont celles d'un rival de Dieu (le vieux) qui constate, avec dépit, son échec dans sa tentative de faire mieux que lui. Kofman adds that Nathaniel is not being castrated but rearranged; he is being treated as if he were a machine with separate parts. Kofman, 163.

xxii Kofman suggests that what Nathaniel sees through the spy glass is Clara as he described her in his poem, "death looking kindly upon him from her eyes." Kofman, 151

xxiii Freud, 628

xxiv Kofman, 150.

xxv Hertz, 309, 307.

xxvi Freud, 631.

xxvii Freud in Italy: three times he finds himself in "a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt." 631

xxviii Freud, 631-2

xxix It is exactly the "brouillage des limites du normal et du pathologique, de l'imaginaire et du réel, que situe *L'homme au sable* plutôt dans les oeuvres du premier type d'inquiétante étrangeté que dans celles du second. »152

xxx Kofman, 158

xxxi Kofman, 155

xxxii Kofman, 159. This, of course, is why Coppola could only create Olympia by stealing Nathaniel's eyes: the eye in Hoffmann's story creates life, but only an artificial life.^{xxxii} Nathaniel always sees double, unable to distinguish the real from the imaginary, the animated from the inanimate. Lunettes and lorgnettes always function as temptations and Nathaniel has an irrepressible desire to see.

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