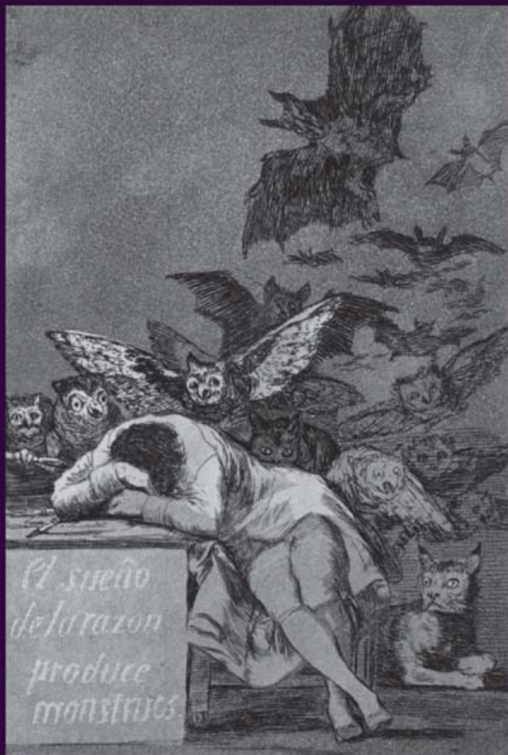
# Method in Madness: Control Mechanisms in the French Fantastic




Jutta Emma Fortin

# Method in Madness: Control Mechanisms in the French Fantastic

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Jutta Emma Fortin

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, ‘Il Sueno de la Razon Produce Monstruous (The Sleep of reason Produces Monsters)’, etching and aquatint on paper. Gift of Owen and Leone Elliott, The University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1976.44AQ. Reproduced with permission from the University of Iowa Museum of Art.

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*Chiasma* seeks to foster urgent critical assessments focussing upon joinings and crisscrossings, single, triangular, multiple, in the realm of modern French literature. Studies may be of an interdisciplinary nature, developing connections with art, philosophy, linguistics, and beyond, or display intertextual or other plurivocal concerns of varying order.

Michael Bishop
Halifax, Nova Scotia

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The language of the fantastic left its mark upon many different thinkers in 19th-century Europe. Marx's comparison of consumer goods to fetish objects, works by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam or other novelists about machines that assume lives of their own, or the diagnoses of psychological illness offered by doctors in Maupassant's tales all blur the lines between scientific description and beliefs in the magical. Building upon a wealth of critical studies devoted to the fantastic and upon Freud's theory of the unconscious, Jutta Fortin proposes that many classic stories of the fantastic undermine basic psychological mechanisms that are designed to help their users cope with shocking or disturbing events. By defining five of these defence mechanisms, and analyzing stories by eight writers that both illustrate and subvert such mechanisms, Dr. Fortin offers provocative reasons why fantastic stories appealed to those readers who wished to better understand human motivations.

Steven Winspur
Madison, Wisconsin, 2005

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# Introduction

## History and Theories of the Fantastic

Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay on "The Uncanny" has become an unavoidable cornerstone of any attempt to explore fantastic literature. Its analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" [The Sandman] presents the figure of the dreaded "sandman" as a projection of Nathaniel's anxiety related to a returned childhood castration complex.[1] While the essay has been much criticized – particularly on account of its focus on the boy's sexuality and its neglect of the mechanical doll (I shall return to this in chapter four) – no particular attention has been paid to Freud's view of the sandman as a projection of those affects which Nathaniel unconsciously externalizes from his own self in psychological defence.

Yet the idea of defence is central to the fantastic: this literature in fact dramatizes measures of defence and emotional control. Projection is not the only defence mechanism at work in fantastic narrative. In addition, the processes of fetishization, intellectualization, mechanization, and compulsion occur, as material objects are animated or achieve a god-like status; intellectuals engage excessively in scholarly discussion; women are manipulated by men as though the women were mechanical dolls; and obsessive-compulsive protagonists feel driven to perform specific acts. There appear to be no studies, however, which explore the connection between the features of this genre and the psychological defence mechanisms. This study looks at nineteenth-century French literature of the fantastic from such a perspective; the function of the fantastic in nineteenth-century society might thus be made explicit.

[1] See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (henceforth *SE*), ed. by James Strachey, 17 (London: Hogarth, 1955), pp. 217–256. In all subsequent references to the *Standard Edition*, the editor (James Strachey) as well as the place of publication (London) and the publisher (Hogarth) will be omitted. Generally, all references apart from first ones will be made in parentheses in the text.

In the last several decades, the fantastic has increasingly attracted scholarly attention. Structuralist, psychoanalytical and socio-historical approaches, among others, have contributed to a better understanding of this literature. It has remained problematic, however, to offer an adequate definition of the fantastic as a literary genre, to embrace the many texts exemplifying it and yet describe a single, distinct phenomenon. The divergent conclusions of those studies which have attempted this bear witness to the problem. Even the status of the fantastic as a genre has been challenged and "mode" preferred instead. Rosemary Jackson, in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, proposes to view the fantastic not as a genre, but as a literary mode to be placed between the opposite modes of the marvellous and the mimetic. In her theory, the marvellous is a world of fairies, romance, magic, and supernaturalism, characterized by a minimal functional narrative, whose omniscient narrator discourages reader participation. The mimetic, in contrast, claims to imitate an external reality, making the fictional world and the real one outside the text coincide. Fantastic narrative, according to Jackson, relies on the conventions of mimetic fiction to assert that it is telling the truth, only to break this assumption by introducing something untrue or unreal within these terms.[2] The present study retains "genre", understood as a literary category with identifiable characteristics, to designate the fantastic, although the fantastic has in fact defied efforts at definition.

Critics of the fantastic have often looked at the subversive potential of this genre. Traditionally, the fantastic in literature has been regarded as a threat to the rational. Pierre-Georges Castex, in *Le Conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant*, defines it as "une intrusion brutale du mystère dans le cadre de la vie réelle";[3] Eric Rabkin, in *The Fantastic in Literature*, sees in it a "diametric reversal of the ground rules of a narrative world".[4] As well as a subversion of the natural, the fantastic has been viewed as an escape from reality in the physical, social and psychological

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[2] See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), pp. 33–34.

[3] Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: Corti, 1951), p. 8.

[4] Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976), pp. 28–29.

domains. For Castex, its texts reflect the disappointment of the entire generation of the 1830s; its authors, unable to bear their reality, turn to the fantastic for distraction and comfort. According to Castex, the fantastic thus emerges from a more or less conscious refusal to deal with the world as it is, or even as it could be one day, as a result of those who would make the effort to change it (*Le Conte fantastique* 400). In a similar spirit of subversion and escape, Jackson sees in the fantastic – or fantasy, as she prefers to call it – a "literature of desire", which characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural restraints (*Fantasy* 3). Closely following Freud, Jackson argues that the fantastic "uncovers what is hidden and, by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar" (*Fantasy* 65). For Tzvetan Todorov, similarly, it is the social function of fantastic narrative to address otherwise unacceptable social and sexual taboos in the guise of such other-worldly forces as the devil.[5]

Jackson calls attention to the significance of not only the actual themes of the fantastic, but also the structure behind them. "The presentation of impossibility, as she asserts, is not by itself a radical activity: texts subvert only if the reader is disturbed by their dislocated narrative form." (*Fantasy* 23) In Jackson's view, the central theme of fantasy – an uncertainty about the nature of the real, dramatized by problems of knowledge and perception, dualism, transformation, and good versus evil – is related on the structural level to the dissolution of the classical unities of space, time and character.

Todorov's *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* offered the first sustained analysis of fantastic literature from a structuralist viewpoint. Todorov bases his definition of the fantastic on the concept of hesitation on the parts of both the protagonist and the reader in believing in the laws of nature: on confronting an apparently supernatural phenomenon, the reader must decide whether this phenomenon is "real" or only an illusion. The fantastic is characterized by precisely this uncertainty, an uncertainty which lasts only for as long as the reader hesitates in opting for either solution. Fantastic texts, then, are morally disturbing not only be-

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[5] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 166.

cause of the events or beings which they describe, but above all for the anxiety which the reader experiences in his or her uncertainty as to how to interpret these phenomena:

> Dans un monde qui est bien le nôtre, celui que nous connaissons, sans diables, sylphides, ni vampires, se produit un événement qui ne peut s'expliquer par les lois de ce même monde familier. Celui qui perçoit l'événement doit opter pour l'une des deux solutions possibles: ou bien il s'agit d'une illusion des sens, d'un produit de l'imagination, et des lois du monde restent alors ce qu'elles sont; ou bien l'événement a véritablement eu lieu, il est partie intégrante de la réalité, mais alors cette réalité est régie par des lois inconnues de nous. (Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* 29)

In making the reader's hesitation a condition of the fantastic, Todorov implies his or her integration into the text's reality, determined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events recounted. In Todorov's theory, the fantastic illustrates that fragile domain situated on the frontier between the two adjacent realms of the marvellous and the uncanny – the marvellous consists in the supernatural accepted; the uncanny is the supernatural explained.

Jackson urges the importance of situating fantastic texts within their historical and cultural framework (*Fantasy* 3). Tobin Siebers, in *The Romantic Fantastic*, illustrates the alliance between the fantastic and Romanticism by exploring their similar relation to superstition. He views both as rejections of the exclusionary practices of the Enlightenment, as a return of supernaturalism and superstitious thought.[6] José Monleón, in *A Specter is Haunting Europe: A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic*, likewise insists on the need to incorporate a historical framework in order to comprehend fully the nature and significance of the fantastic. He relates the evolution of fantastic literature to the development of the city in Western Europe and North America from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. In Monleón's theory, the fantastic arises out of, first, an epistemological question relating to an uncertainty about the nature of events; second, a socio-psychological problem which finds expression through the articulation of fear; and, third, ideological and historical circumstances in which the fantastic interconnects with other cultural and social currents. Monleón defines fantastic literature as an "artistic production articulating a

[6] See Tobin Siebers, *The Romantic Fantastic* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984).

social concern about the essence of nature and law, on the one hand, and the threats and fears derived from such a concern, on the other".[7]

But Monleón's study also adds another, new perspective to our understanding of fantastic narrative. Contrary to those scholars who had explored the subversive potential of this genre, Monleón argues that "the fantastic played exactly the opposite role: that is, the defense of the status quo and the preservation of economic order" (*A Specter is Haunting Europe* 14). In his view, the questioning of order is not necessarily a subversive act; the perspective from which that questioning is undertaken, as well as the alternatives derived from such an action, must also be taken into account. I concur with Monleón's argument that fantastic literature ultimately preserves the status quo insofar as things generally return to normal in its texts, as the fantastic phenomenon "disappears". But I argue that the fantastic is nevertheless subversive, since, at that point, it has already caused disturbing feelings, which cannot be neutralized *après coup*.

Finally, Deborah Harter, in *Bodies in Pieces: Fantastic Narrative and the Poetics of the Fragment*, addresses the relation of the fantastic to Realism. Before Harter's study, scholars had most often viewed these two literary forms as opposites, although Jackson in fact suggests reading the fantastic as an indicator of cultural ideals and taboos (*Fantasy* 23), and Irène Bessière likewise describes the fantastic as a narrative of opposites and of limits and as such "particulièrement apte à évoquer les traits extrêmes du réel".[8] In *Bodies in Pieces*, Harter is interested not so much in the differences between the fantastic and Realism as in their similarities. Ultimately, the difference between them, as she argues, lies far less in the world which they portray than in the opposing ways in which they strive to recompose it in their fiction. While the Realist novel points towards the wholeness of the world represented, fantastic narrative, as Harter suggests, evokes that same world in all

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[7] José B. Monleón, *A Specter is Haunting Europe: A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), p. 19.
[8] Irène Bessière, *Le Récit fantastique: La poétique de l'incertain* (Paris: Larousse, 1974), p. 62.

its partialness, even subjecting the human body to morselization. But Harter's study finds,

> in fantastic narrative and its "discourse of the body", more than just an underlying poetics of the fragment. It finds as well that just as the novel is fraught with parts that eventually give the lie to its desperate efforts at achieving unity – constructs the human body itself in ways that ultimately reveal its careful patchwork – so the fragment in fantastic narrative betrays a certain anguished gesture toward this literary form's own, different vision of wholeness. The differing strategies of these two genres – the one pressing toward, the other away from totalization – appear a paired set of terms in a single imaginative system in which fantastic narrative becomes for the realist novel far less an opposing than a reflective other, and in which realist discourse is discovered in all its fragmented, "fantastic" nature.[9]

Harter focuses on the insistent presence of bodies, notably bodies in pieces, in the literature of the fantastic. They lend their strangeness to texts whose uncanny effect relates not to the supernatural, but to the substance of a very familiar domain, which links fantastic narrative – "both as counterpart and as twin" (Harter, *Bodies in Pieces* 9) – to the project of Realism.

The theorist's task of defining the fantastic as a literary genre is complicated by its vague delimitation. Although scholars use the term "canon", one must emphasize its difficulty for this narrative form. As Harter suggests, one can say in a general way, however, that the fantastic is a tradition which has included especially, in French, selected tales by Charles Nodier, Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Prosper Mérimée, Gérard Nerval, Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and Guy de Maupassant, all writers of the nineteenth century (*Bodies in Pieces* 135). These are precisely those French authors to whom Todorov refers in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*. Castex, in his study of the fantastic, had likewise devoted a chapter each to these same authors, but he had excluded Nodier and included Lautréamont instead. But most theorists, as indeed nearly all those scholars mentioned above, examine fantastic narrative from numerous literatures, most often German, English, American, Russian, Spanish, and Latin American, and look at texts originating from the eighteenth through to the twentieth centuries, to elaborate a theory of the fantastic adequate to the

[9] Deborah A. Harter, *Bodies in Pieces: Fantastic Narrative and the Poetics of the Fragment* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), pp. 3–4.

variety and history of this genre. With respect to French literature of the fantastic, most critics agree that its full development took place in the nineteenth century, following the publication, in 1829, of Walter Scott's essay on "Du Merveilleux dans le roman" and of E.T.A. Hoffmann's fantastic tales in the *Revue de Paris*.[10] Its pioneer text, Jacques Cazotte's *Le Diable amoureux* (1772), dates from the latter half of the eighteenth century;[11] by the end of the nineteenth century, the form had exhausted itself (Castex, *Le Conte fantastique* 8).

I am concerned primarily with French fantastic literature here: I analyse texts by Balzac, Gautier, Mérimée, George Sand, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and Maupassant. I also refer to Hoffmann's important and influential tale, "Der Sandmann", to illuminate Freud's key essay on "The Uncanny", and examine the story more fully in comparison with Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future* in a subsequent chapter. One might note that George Sand is the only author mentioned here who does not equally belong to the canonical fantastic writers listed above. It is precisely because her work has been virtually excluded from critical studies of the fantastic that I have chosen to explore one of her fantastic tales here. While I have allowed my choice of texts to be guided largely by the corpus of canonical fantastic literature, I also depart from it. As with Sand's "La Fée aux gros yeux", Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" would not, perhaps, be placed immediately within the genre; nor would Mérimée's "Carmen" satisfy Todorov's full requirements of the form. At the same time, I have decided not to include in my study such pertinent, much-discussed fantastic works as Maupassant's "Le Horla", described by Louis Vax as a *chef-d'œuvre de la littérature fantastique*.[12] This is because this study makes use of those texts which best serve its purpose: rather than attempting comprehensiveness, it analyses selected tales in depth and it does not make it a primary aim to redefine the fantastic as a literary genre.

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[10] See Walter Scott, "Du Merveilleux dans le roman", *La Revue de Paris*, 1 (April 1829), 25–33. See also Jean-Luc Steinmetz, *L'Art et la littérature fantastiques* (Paris: PUF, 1990), p. 60.

[11] See Jacques Cazotte, *Le Diable amoureux* (Paris: Garnier, 1979).

[12] See Louis Vax, *Les Chefs-d'œuvre de la littérature fantastique* (Paris: PUF, 1979), pp. 151–160.

Throughout, I take for granted the fact that French literature of the fantastic is fundamentally a nineteenth-century phenomenon. The French fantastic reflects, as well as responds to, the particular circumstances in which it emerged. Although I will place emphasis on the relation of the preoccupations of this literature to its emergence in the period, a detailed historical discussion of nineteenth-century culture, as the fantastic evolves over the century, lies beyond the scope of this study. My study only alludes to such historical forces as Capitalism, industrialization and mechanization, and technological and scientific progress. Monleón, for example, in *A Specter is Haunting Europe*, aims to establish an ideological reading of the fantastic by framing the concrete socio-historical conditions which "produced and were reproduced" in this literature (Monleón, *A Specter is Haunting Europe* viii).

## The Fantastic and Psychological Defence

In this study, I borrow Freud's concept of psychological defence. In so doing, I do not wish to trespass on the field of psychoanalysis, but to use some of its categories to identify central features of fantastic literature from the century preceding the emergence of psychoanalysis. Before exploring the important relation between the mechanisms of defence and the fantastic, I shall briefly explain the Freudian concept of defence, as well as that of neurosis, whose observable symptoms the defence mechanisms ultimately produce.

The term "defence" first occurs in psychoanalytical discourse in Freud's 1894 essay on "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence": "defence hysteria" is used to distinguish it from hypoid hysteria and retention hysteria.[13] In this and subsequent works, Freud employs "defence" to describe the ego's defensive attitude in its struggle against painful or unendurable ideas or affects. He then replaces the term "defence" by "repression", but never clearly determines the relation between the two concepts.[14] In his 1926 paper on "In-

[13] Sigmund Freud, "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence", in *SE*, 3 (1962), pp. 45–68 (p. 47).

[14] See Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (Madison: International Universities Press, 1966), p. 42.

hibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety", Freud reverts to the old concept of defence "as a general designation for all the techniques which the ego makes use of in conflicts which may lead to a neurosis", retaining the term "repression" for one specific method of defence.[15] Although a place is thus made in psychoanalytical theory for other processes likewise serving the "protection of the ego against instinctual demands", the mechanism of repression continues to occupy a unique position (Freud, "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" 164). Repression acts only once – that is, sets in once – but it is a permanent institution demanding a constant expenditure of energy. This is what constitutes the strength of repression as a means of defence: it leaves relatively little psychic energy for the satisfaction of instinctual impulses. The other defence mechanisms operate whenever there is an accession of instinctual energy: they must assist the ego in its struggle against the id, in order to save the ego from the experience of anxiety or displeasure.

It is the task of the ego's defensive measures to maintain the most harmonious relations possible between the id, the superego and the forces of the external world. In the Freudian tripartite model of mind, the id is that region of the human mind which houses the instincts. Serving the pleasure principle, the id constantly and blindly strives immediately to satisfy pleasurable drives. It spends all its energy on seeking pleasure. The ego is the only province of the mind in direct contact with reality. It is governed by the reality principle. As Freud writes, "the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id. For the ego, perception plays the part which in the id falls to the instinct. The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions".[16] The superego consists in a set of rules of conduct and moral dictates which the individual learns in childhood and subsequently internalizes. The superego is guided by the idealistic principle. As with the id, it has

[15] Sigmund Freud, "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety", in *SE*, 20 (1959), pp. 87–174 (p. 163).

[16] Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id", in *SE*, 19 (1961), pp. 12–59 (p. 25).

no contact with the outside world and is therefore unrealistic and uncompromising in its demands for moral perfection.

In Freud's theory, a neurosis is the result of a conflict between the ego and its id.[17] The existence of neurotic symptoms in itself indicates that the ego has been overpowered in its struggle against the id; the ego suffers a defeat because defence has failed. Thus neuroses reflect a failure in the functioning of the ego. At the beginning of a neurosis, as Freud argues, "the ego defends itself against the instinctual impulse by the mechanism of repression. The repressed material struggles against this fate. It creates for itself, along paths over which the ego has no power, a substitutive representation (which forces itself upon the ego by way of a compromise) – the symptom" ("Neurosis and Psychosis" 150). Neuroses originate in the failure of repression; they consist in the return of the repressed instinct constantly forcing itself upon the mind in the form of a neurotic symptom.[18] As repression miscarries, other mechanisms of defence assist the ego in the prolonged struggle against the symptom. While the defence mechanisms were originally designed to keep the instincts under control, they end up compromising with the instincts and themselves produce the observable symptoms of the neurosis. On the other hand, the ego is victorious when its defensive measures carry out their task successfully – that is, when they restrict the development of anxiety and displeasure by keeping threatening material out of conscious awareness. Freud maintains that the defence mechanisms are not necessarily pathological or negative in character, but normal and universally used. Indeed he argues that they are always in operation to some extent. Just as Freud views all behaviour as motivated by instincts, he also regards all behaviour as defensive in nature.

The idea of psychological defence originated with Freud; Anna Freud gathered together the various defensive measures in her 1936 book on *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. What determines the ego's choice of mechanism remains uncertain. All defence processes work unconsciously. Typically, a variety of

[17] See Sigmund Freud, "Neurosis and Psychosis", in *SE*, 19 (1961), pp. 149–153 (p. 149).
[18] See Sigmund Freud, "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis", in *SE*, 19 (1961), pp. 183–187.

them are used simultaneously and repression is involved in all of them. It is significant that all defence mechanisms work by withholding from consciousness ideas or affects incompatible with the ego: it is their essence to deny or distort reality. In this they are reminiscent of the fantastic. Indeed the fantastic itself seems to consist in presenting as real what in fact is a distortion of reality. The psychologist Duane Schulz observes: "We are, in essence, lying to ourselves when we use these defenses but are not aware of doing so. Indeed, if we knew we were lying to ourselves, the defenses would not be effective."[19] From Freud's view, according to which defence is always in operation to some degree, it follows that we never know the "truth" about ourselves, but always have a distorted picture of our own reality. The truth behind our "appearance", then, only emerges when defence fails – that is, when the defensive mechanisms can no longer withhold our true reality from us. Such a situation results in a neurosis; the individual is overwhelmed with anxiety.

Anxiety is characteristic of neurosis; it is also a feature of the fantastic as a literary genre that it produces anxiety. Scholars always emphasize the significance of anxiety, understood as a distressing feeling or experience without a definite cause, in this literature (Castex, *Le Conte fantastique* 8; Monleón, *A Specter is Haunting Europe* 18; Steinmetz, *L'Art et la littérature fantastiques* 121). The present study relates the anxiety provoked by the fantastic directly to the defence mechanisms which occur in its texts. I argue that the uncanniness of the fantastic consists precisely in the fact that the fantastic makes defence visible and conscious. Ego-psychology postulates that the processes of defence must operate unconsciously in order to work. Even the very fact that some intolerable reality exists must be concealed from the conscious ego. In contrast, the fantastic is straightforward: it *dramatizes* mechanisms of defence and emotional control. In so doing, the fantastic makes visible a reality which should have remained invisible and thereby produces a sort of anxiety comparable to that of neurosis. Psychological defence works by "lying". In an effort to save the ego from anxiety and displeasure, the defence mechanisms present

[19] Duane Schulz, *Theories of Personality* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole, 1976), p. 32.

as reality a distortion of it. The same principle appears to be at work in fantastic literature. But in presenting as real that which is not, the fantastic follows an established convention of the genre, of which the reader is well aware. Indeed we expect fantastic literature to be full of "fantastic lies", whereas, in fact, the fantastic presents something very true to us. The lie of the fantastic consists in this: the fantastic *pretends* to be unreal and untrue, whereas, in fact, it reveals the *truth* behind the appearances of its characters. It shows us, the readers, as well as the characters in the tales, something that is uncanny not because it is unknown or unfamiliar to us, but because we, on the contrary, recognize our own reality in it – a reality which, in Freudian terms, "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" ("The Uncanny" 225).

Rosemary Jackson points out that "the fantastic has constantly been dismissed by critics as being an embrace of madness, irrationality, or narcissism. […] An implicit association of the fantastic with the barbaric and non-human has exiled it to the edges of literary culture" (*Fantasy* 172). In this Jackson sees an ideologically significant gesture, one "which is not dissimilar to culture's silencing of unreason" (*Fantasy* 173). Indeed both mental disorder and the fantastic have been identified as "other", as alien to ourselves. Yet both have also simultaneously exercised an irresistible attraction on scholars and lay readers alike, particularly, perhaps, in the nineteenth century. The attraction of fantastic narrative, including the pleasure of reading fantastic literature, seems to relate closely to the fact that the fantastic reflects the reader's own reality, which we nearly, but not quite, recognize as such, since we do not want it to be ours. Designating the fantastic as "other", as unreal and untrue, allows us to consider it "from a distance", as though there were no immediate connection between it and us. Relegating fantastic literature to the margins of literary culture means dealing with it by excluding it from awareness. These two "solutions" are not identical, but both can in themselves be viewed as mechanisms of defence employed to protect us from our own reality.

This study proposes to view the fantastic as an attempt at emotional control, or as an attempt at "managing" reality not by keeping it away from consciousness, but by directly addressing, formulating and playing out largely unacknowledged fears and desires.

The aim of the fantastic thus coincides with that of the psychological defence mechanisms. Its "strategy", however, is very different from theirs. This study sees in the fantastic as a literary genre a definite response to reality. More specifically, the study is concerned with the ways in which the characters of fantastic texts cope with reality. This literature in fact abounds with protagonists whose primary concern is to secure emotional stability in order to keep control over their own lives. For this, they resort to the very processes which psychoanalysis identifies as defence: they fetishize material objects and substitute them for humans; project their own unacceptable impulses and affects onto others; engage in intellectual discussion in a displacement of their personal problems; treat others as though the latter were mechanical dolls which can be controlled from outside and manipulated at will; and devote themselves entirely to specific activities which provide only short-term gratification. To borrow from Karen Horney, there is method in these protagonists' madness.[20] As with all psychological defence, the measures taken by these characters involve a flight from reality. In distorting the characters' views both of themselves and of others, the defence mechanisms substitute fantasy for reality.

But defence not only *occurs* in fantastic literature; it *constitutes* the fantastic. In this genre, the distortion of reality actually becomes reality, within the terms of the texts. As the fantastic emerges, the fetishized object changes into the woman whom it has come to replace; the hitherto paranoid projection of fear turns out to be a real danger; the scholar's intellectualization about an issue seemingly unrelated to his own reality materializes; the living woman is transformed into a mechanical doll; and the substitutive compulsion "inflates" to become the protagonist's sole activity. In thus translating the defensive processes employed by those characters into reality, the fantastic rationalizes their hitherto irrational fears. It shows that their fears are in fact justified. This is precisely what makes the protagonists of this literature truly vulnerable. It is as though the fantastic held up to them a mirror which reflects only their own fears, thereby intensifying their existing anxiety, rather than minimizing it. It is significant that the

[20] See Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), p. 59.

fantastic produces uncanniness precisely in its efforts to *resolve* anxiety by directly addressing specific fears and desires. Yet in so doing, the fantastic subverts the basic process of psychological defence. Defence "fails" in this genre, because the fantastic itself consists in changing psychic dangers into real ones, thereby provoking the very anxiety and displeasure which the processes of defence are ideally meant to prevent.

But the "failure" of the defence mechanisms in fantastic narrative does not mean that this literature fails as a means of emotional control. Indeed, bringing repressed material to the level of conscious awareness not only characterizes the fantastic, but also constitutes the basic aim of psychoanalysis. It is not a coincidence, perhaps, that both rely on that same principle: Freud in fact formulates his theory of the uncanny on the basis of the fantastic. Both the fantastic and psychoanalysis subvert an emotional stability while attempting the opposite – emotional control. Psychoanalysis purposefully breaks down defence with the ultimate aim of resolving repressed conflicts and psychological complexes. In encouraging the patient's expression of this intolerable material, analysis prompts the transgression of taboos on the personal, psychological level, if by "transgression" we mean not the actual violation of a taboo, but rather its mere articulation or exposure. Similarly, fantastic narrative characteristically consists in making a repressed reality visible. The "success" of the fantastic as a literature of the uncanny relates directly to its dramatization of taboos, and thus, as I have argued in the above pages, to the failure of defence. But just as psychoanalysis reconciles its own subversive and therapeutic potential and ultimately succeeds in establishing emotional control, so does the fantastic. Just as analysis allows, and indeed aims at, the patient's formulation of repressed fears and desires, so the fantastic, on the cultural level, allows the enactment of otherwise proscribed wishful fantasies. In this way, the fantastic, too, not only subverts an emotional stability, but also simultaneously absorbs the anxiety thus produced. This might be the function of fantastic literature in nineteenth-century society: the fantastic provides a space in which anxieties can be played out, while making clear to the reader (and thus to a potential subject) the very processes by which this occurs.

## Outline

Chapter one analyses Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" (1837), Maupassant's "La Chevelure" (1884) and Gautier's "Le Pied de momie" (1840) from the perspective of fetishization. The chapter discusses the insistence in fantastic narrative on the material object with its capacity to embody aesthetic, sexual and commercial values. I argue that the process of fetishization fails as an effective means of emotional control, because the fantastic itself consists in translating the fetishist's neurosis into reality. The fantastic shows up the ambiguity of fetishism by forcing the individual to look at the very reality which the fetish was originally designed to conceal. In "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", the destruction of the fetishized painting entails a double loss for its painter – that of the artistic masterpiece as well as the god-like lover. In "La Chevelure", the fantastic changes the sexual fetish, a woman's lock of hair, into that which it has come to replace, namely a living – and by implication dangerous – woman. Finally, "Le Pied de momie" depicts the mummy's commercialized foot not as just *any* living being: the foot becomes frightening, as it *asserts* its independence and refuses to be controlled by the humans to whom it belongs.

Chapter two examines George Sand's "La Fée aux gros yeux" (1873) and Mérimée's "Carmen" (1845) from the perspective of projection. The chapter proposes to read Sand's male protagonist, Monsieur Bat, as a projection of the paranoid Miss Barbara; and Mérimée's Carmen as a projection of her lover, Don José. I argue that the mechanism of projection fails as psychological defence, because in the fantastic it means adding to a diffuse, internal danger one that is real, rather than replacing the existing psychic danger with one that is merely perceived. In transforming Miss Barbara's persecutory paranoia into reality, the fantastic rationalizes her hitherto irrational fears of bats and of Monsieur Bat. By showing that these fears are actually justified, it makes Miss Barbara truly vulnerable. Similarly, in Mérimée's "Carmen", the process of projection subverts Don José's emotional balance, rather than ensuring its stability. The fantastic presents as Carmen's reality Don José's own shameful self-image and mirrors to him his own repressed fears as well as his intolerable desires.

Chapter three studies Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille" (1837) from the perspective of intellectualization. I argue that the fantastic subverts the process of intellectualization. While the individual should be personally detached from the object of intellectualization, in Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille", the archaeologist-narrator, in formulating his fanciful theory about the statue of Venus, reveals as much about his own problematic view of eroticism as he does about the statue itself. As the fantastic emerges and the narrator's issue of intellectualization is translated into reality, the statue kills the bridegroom on the latter's wedding night. As the narrator's fears materialize, the fantastic produces precisely those disturbing feelings which the process of intellectualization is designed to isolate. The chapter also discusses chapter four of Mérimée's "Carmen" in terms of intellectualization. While the historian-narrator pretends to be emotionally indifferent to the gypsy woman, Carmen, his supposedly scholarly treatment of gypsy culture in the final chapter reveals his personal attraction to Carmen and simultaneously points to his anxieties about his own culture.

Chapter four considers Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" (1817) and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future* (1886) from the perspective of mechanization. The chapter focuses on the male protagonists' attempts at controlling women in order to keep control over their own lives. The men manipulate women as though the latter were mechanical dolls and go so far as to substitute for the real women machines resembling women. I argue that the process of mechanization fails as an effective means of emotional control. As the perfection of automata makes their distinction from humans impossible, the female-figured machines deceive the men and become as uncontrollable as the living women themselves. The mechanization of the loved "women" not only wrecks the male characters' ambition of marrying them, but also shows up the limitation of the men's view of women as controllable machines.

Chapter five explores Maupassant's "Madame Hermet" (1887) and "Fou" (1882) from the perspective of compulsion. The chapter focuses on Madame Hermet's compulsive observation of the nonexistent marks "disfiguring" her face and relates her condition to a crisis of identity. I argue that compulsion fails as an effective means of control, because the obsessive-compulsive protagonist is reduced to seeking satisfaction in the compulsive activity. In addi-

tion, I suggest viewing the doctor-narrator's account of Madame Hermet's case as a manifestation of his own compulsion to comprehend the nature of the mentally ill. The case-study remains full of questions and hypotheses, however. "Fou" presents a judge's manuscript which bears witness to its writer's obsession with killing. I view the man's writing in terms of a process of control, which fails. Rather than providing a compensation for the proscribed act, the judge's writing allows him to justify his perverse desire to kill and ultimately reinforces its performance.

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# 1

# Fetishization

## Fetishization and the Fantastic

Fantastic literature has often been viewed in terms of its opposition to Realism. Critics have called attention to its divided psyches and its rendering of otherworldly states of being, its link to morbid states of the human unconscious and the alleged refusal of writers of this genre to cope with reality (Castex, *Le Conte fantastique* 400; Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* 131–147).[21] Yet the French fantastic is perhaps most compelling in what it *shares* with Realism – that is, its preoccupation with a profoundly material world (Harter, *Bodies in Pieces* 129). Nineteenth-century fantastic narrative abounds with physically sensible objects; many fantastic texts focus on art objects, pieces of furniture or knick-knacks and the relationships of humans to those things. Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" (1837) revolves around a painting, Maupassant's "La Chevelure" (1884) around a lock of hair found in the drawer of an antique dresser, and Gautier's "Le Pied de momie" (1840) around a beautiful mummified foot acquired as a paperweight in a Parisian junk shop. As the stories unfold and the fantastic emerges, life is projected onto these objects: the painting becomes the painter's mistress whom he jealously monopolizes; the lock of hair is transformed into a seductive woman; and the foot-paperweight is replaced by an Egyptian princess for whose hand the story's narrator asks in marriage in exchange for her own lost foot. Thus inanimate material objects are endowed with autonomous life. They are, in other words, fetishized.

[21] See also Louis Vax, *La Séduction de l'étrange: Étude sur la littérature fantastique* (Paris: PUF, 1965), p. 310.

Anthropologists of primitive religion, philosophers of modernist aesthetics, psychologists of sexual deviance, and sociologists of political economy all use the term "fetish" and the concept of fetishism.[22] Although the various disciplines claim no common theoretical ground, there is, as the anthropologist William Pietz argues, a common configuration of themes among all discourses about fetishism ("Fetish I" 5–10). In the literature of the fantastic, fetishism of all these sorts occurs, as inanimate material objects are animated, aesthetically admired, sexually desired, and commercially exchanged. Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" is about a painter's relationship to his unfinished painting of a beautiful woman, Maupassant's "La Chevelure" about a man's sexual fixation on a lock of hair, and Gautier's "Le Pied de momie" about the commodification of an Egyptian princess's foot.

In this chapter, I will explore these three stories from the perspective of fetishization. In so doing, I shall understand the term "fetishism" in the first instance in the strict anthropological sense: haphazardly chosen material objects are believed to be endowed with purpose, intention and a direct power over the material life of both human beings and the natural world (Pietz, "Fetish IIIa" 106). In the analyses of the individual stories, I will then relate this to art fetishism, sexual fetishism and commodity-fetishism. As Pietz argues, the term "fetish" has always named the incomprehensible mystery of the power of material objects to be social objects experienced by individuals as embodying determinate values or virtues ("Fetish I" 14). It is the corresponding insistence on the material object, with its capacity to embody aesthetic, sexual and commercial values, in nineteenth-century fantastic narrative which provides the focus for this chapter.

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[22] For a detailed historical discussion of this usage, see William Pietz's three articles on "The Problem of the Fetish, I", *Res*, 9 (1985), 5–17; "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish", *Res*, 13 (1987), 23–45; and "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism", *Res*, 16 (1988), 105–123. See also Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Lorraine Gamman and Meya Makinen, *Female Fetishism: A New Look* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994); Emily Apter, *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991); and Emily Apter and William Pietz (eds), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993).

## Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu"

In Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", the young artist, Poussin, arrives in Paris, where he meets the great painter, Frenhofer, and learns about the latter's unfinished masterpiece entitled *La Belle Noiseuse*. Although Frenhofer initially insists that he would never allow his painting to be "soiled" by another man's gaze, he finally agrees to show it in exchange for a viewing of the nude body of Poussin's mistress, whose beauty may inspire him for the necessary final touches to his masterpiece. On the day, the painting is revealed to be completely destroyed; only a woman's charming foot remains recognizable.[23]

Since the foot is a classic fetish object, notably in the Freudian sense, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" could be read, following Freud, as a case of the displacement of sexual desire onto a part-object substitute. In addition, the tale can be viewed in terms of an anthropological concept of the fetish. I suggest regarding the story's male protagonist, Frenhofer, as a quasi-religious fetishist and his mysterious painting of the *Belle Noiseuse*, to which he attributes autonomous life and which he fanatically locks away, as his fetish. Frenhofer's fellow artists, Porbus and Poussin, are forced to enter into this reality in a practical way, since their aim is to look at Frenhofer's masterpiece, so as to improve their own knowledge of painting and art.

In his work on the concept of fetishism, Pietz traces the origin of the fetish both as a word and as a historically significant object. In his theory, the fetish emerged in the cross-cultural spaces of the West-African coast during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Portuguese merchants arrived there to trade with the natives. Pietz's central argument is that the fetish could originate only in conjunction with the emergent articulation of the ideology of the commodity form, which defined itself at once within and against the social values and religious ideologies of two radically different types of society, as they encountered each other in an ongoing cross-cultural situation ("Fetish I" 5–8). For the European mer-

[23] Honoré de Balzac, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Marcel Bouteron and Henri Longnon, 28 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1963), pp. 1–34.

chants who arrived in West-Africa to engage in trade with the native inhabitants of the coast, fetishism posed a double problem. On the one hand, the god-like status of fetishes distorted the exchange value of specific objects to an extent which could make their acquisition impossible. On the other hand, in order to effect commercial transactions, the merchants had to accept preliminary swearing of oaths upon fetishes, which meant a perversion of the processes of economic negotiation and legal contact to which they were accustomed. Thus the European merchants found themselves entering into social relations and engaging in quasi-religious ceremonies which, from their viewpoint, should have been irrelevant to the conduct of trade (Pietz, "Fetish II" 24).

Just as the primitive inhabitants of the West-African coast projected religious values onto the material objects which they worshipped as fetishes, so in "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", the painter, Frenhofer, regards his unfinished painting of Catherine Lescault in a highly personal register, rather than in a material or even economic one. As with the European merchants, moreover, Porbus and Poussin have no choice but to comply with Frenhofer's wishes in order to reach their own goal of viewing the *Belle Noiseuse*. Although the two artists clearly perceive Frenhofer's fetish as problematic, the unfinished painting exerts a quasi-magical attraction on them, as it does on Frenhofer himself.

In his 1760 treatise on *Du Culte des deux fétiches*, Charles de Brosses refers to religious fetishism as a "culte directe".[24] As De Brosses argues, a fetish is not a material signifier referring beyond itself, but exists, rather, in its own right and is worshipped for its own sake. That is, in primitive religion, the fetish does not refer to the divine, but rather constitutes it in itself. In Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", the boundaries between signifier and signified likewise collapse with regard to Frenhofer's painting. The artist does not see a representation of a woman in his masterpiece: for him the painting really *is* this woman. While the painter thus humanizes his own work, it is interesting to note that he himself is described by the tale's narrator in terms of a painting:

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[24] Charles de Brosses, *Du Culte des dieux fétiches, ou, parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigrite* (Westmead: Gregg International, 1972), p. 64.

> Mettez cette tête sur un corps fluet et débile, entourez-la d'une dentelle étincelante de blancheur et travaillée comme une truelle à poisson, jetez sur le pourpoint noir du vieillard une lourde chaîne d'or, et vous aurez une image imparfaite de ce personnage auquel le jour faible de l'escalier prêtait encore une couleur fantastique. Vous eussiez dit d'une toile de Rembrandt marchant silencieusement et sans cadre dans la noire atmosphère que s'est appropriée ce grand peintre. (5)

The artist and the work of art here exchange semblances; Balzac dramatizes in a context of literary production what Marx termed "double alienation" with reference to the worker and his product. As with Marxist commodity-fetishism, here the artist not only bestows human qualities to his work, but also simultaneously relinquishes these qualities in himself. Frenhofer pours his own soul into his painting quite consciously and in fact criticizes Porbus on the grounds that the latter had not been able to do as much: "Tu n'as pu souffler qu'une portion de ton âme à ton œuvre chérie." (8)

Throughout the tale, art and life become confused. On the one hand, Frenhofer's discourse on art and artistic production implies that art must be life in order to be perfect or complete. Frenhofer severely criticizes the paintings of Porbus, Poussin and Mabuse, as well as his own, on the basis that these paintings are not alive (10). In lecturing that art and life must coincide, Frenhofer demands that a piece of art be not a signifier referring to some reality beyond itself, but that it be signifier and signified at once. Yet for the same reason that his painting of the *Belle Noiseuse* is in fact alive to him, Frenhofer no longer conceives of it as a piece of art, but rather as a woman superior to any artistic production (or living woman). Paradoxically, if the artist succeeds in breathing life into his work in an effort to create an artistic masterpiece, his work ceases to be art, for it actually becomes life.

In his treatise on primitive religion, De Brosses points out that fetish-worshippers must abstain from looking at their fetish objects as a sign of respect for the fetish-god (*Du Culte des dieux fétiches* 21). Frenhofer, too, refuses to let his students, Porbus and Poussin, look at his *Belle Noiseuse*. He does not even allow them to enter his studio and always keeps his masterpiece covered with a cloth. In "destroying" the piece by painting over it, the artist ultimately covers the woman on the canvas with a thick layer of paint. Scholars have interpreted the artist's "act of destruction" in failing to complete the painting as the failure of the genius to realize his

Pygmalionesque ambition.[25] But it can also be regarded as an act of protection by which Fenhofer ensures once and for all that no male looks can ever soil his beloved. The painter had locked his painting away for ten years. When Porbus and Poussin are finally able to persuade Frenhofer to unveil it for them, painting over the woman and thereby concealing her behind a layer of oil paint is the obvious way of rectifying his own momentary weakness in order to protect the woman from his fellow artists' looks.

Frenhofer's bizarre attitude towards his masterpiece makes sense if viewed from the perspective of fetishism. Since the artist's relation to the painted woman substitutes for all other human relationships, he wishes to protect the woman for her sake, but above all for his own. Frenhofer relates real, living women to the danger that they might disappear, that they might leave him. Hence his fear that his painting might literally come alive and his corresponding inability to complete the masterpiece: "Parfois, j'ai quasi peur qu'un souffle ne me réveille cette femme et qu'elle ne disparaisse." (25) The man's attachment to a fetish object rather than to a living woman reveals his excessive need to maintain control over his object relations. It would not be possible for Frenhofer to control a real woman with an independent will entirely. But he can certainly control the woman on the canvas, because it is he who has created for himself not only her extraordinary beauty, but also her "character" and "personality", according to his own wishes and desires.

Frenhofer not only prefers a material object to living women, but he also withdraws from human company generally. As he attaches himself increasingly to his painting, he simultaneously becomes detached from his fellow artists. He mistrusts, and becomes more and more jealous of, them: "Frenhofer recouvrait sa Catherine d'une serge verte, avec la sérieuse tranquillité d'un joaillier

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[25] See Marianne Kesting, "Das imaginierte Kunstwerk: E.T.A. Hoffmann und Balzacs 'Chef-d'œuvre inconnu', mit einem Ausblick auf die gegenwärtige Situation", in *Romantik – eine lebenskräftige Krankheit: Ihre literarischen Nachwirkungen in der Moderne*, ed. by Erika Turner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), pp. 37–62; Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac and the Myth of Pygmalion in Postrevolutionary France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 8–29; and Paisly Livingstone, "Counting Fragments, and Frenhofer's Paradox", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 39:1 (1999), 14–23.

qui ferme ses tiroirs en se croyant en compagnie d'adroits larrons. Il jeta sur les deux peintres un regard profondément sournois, plein de mépris et de soupçon, les mit silencieusement à la porte de son atelier." (34) The narrator here compares Frenhofer to a jeweller. By implication, Catherine is the painter's jewel. In fact, Catherine is at once an ornament created, valued and possessed by the artist himself and a jewel in the sense of a highly appreciated person or a loved one.

Indeed the painter insists throughout that he would never allow his wife-painting to be seen by other men: "Comment! s'écria-t-il enfin douloureusement, montrer ma créature, mon épouse? déchirer le voile sous lequel j'ai chastement couvert mon bonheur? mais ce serait une horrible prostitution! […] La faire voir! mais quel est le mari, l'amant assez vil pour conduire sa femme au déshonneur?" (25–26) While Frenhofer refuses to let his beloved be dishonoured by the other men's looks, this is precisely what Poussin agrees in exchange for a viewing of Catherine.[26] While Frenhofer's painting achieves a human status, the real woman, Gillette, is relegated to a mere object of exchange, which her lover readily barters.[27] In proposing to exchange a viewing of Gillette's nude body for that of Catherine's on the canvas, Porbus makes the woman and the painting objects of equal (exchange) value (25). Yet both are also simultaneously regarded as women, and Porbus asks: "Mais ce n'est pas femme pour femme? Poussin ne livre-t-il pas sa maîtresse à vos regards?" (27) A real woman here becomes an exchangeable object, and a material object becomes a man's wife. Yet it is not only that the two exchange their statuses; significantly, both the woman and the art object are relegated to the status of commodities and both are also simultaneously viewed in terms of living women.

Marianne Kesting calls attention to the rivalry between life and art in "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" ("Das imaginierte Kunstwerk" 41). The conflict is staged on two levels. On the one hand, Frenhofer's painting of the *Belle Noiseuse* is compared to, and indeed

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[26] See also Peter Whyte, "'Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu' de Balzac: Estétique et image", in *Text(e)/Image*, ed. by Margaret Anne Hutton (University of Durham Press, 1999), pp. 95–114 (p. 103).

[27] See also Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Peinture incarnée suivi de "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" par Honoré de Balzac* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), p. 62.

made to compete with, Poussin's beautiful mistress. For Frenhofer, artistic masterpiece and perfect lover in fact coincide in Catherine. For Porbus, too, the *Belle Noiseuse* is far more important than Gillette and it is he who suggests showing Poussin's mistress for a viewing of Frenhofer's painting. Finally, Poussin himself asks Gillette to pose nude for Frenhofer. When contemplating Frenhofer's unveiled painting in exchange, Poussin completely forgets about his own lover (34). Even the story's title indicates the superiority of the painting-woman, Catherine, over the woman, Gillette. The tale's first part is entitled "Gillette", the second "Catherine Lescault". The title of the tale itself, "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", emphasizes the significance of the work of art, while simultaneously, perhaps, questioning that same significance through the adjective "unknown". It is also interesting to think about the title of Frenhofer's painting, namely *La Belle Noiseuse* – the beautiful nuisance. This oxymoron points to the painter's ambivalence – towards the woman represented, or the artistic representation of her or possibly to the act of painting itself.

On the other hand, in a more general sense, art and life – and art and love – are shown to be incompatible: the artist must opt for one or the other. Gillette understands that posing nude for another man would mean the end of her love for Poussin (23). Poussin himself realizes that he cannot reconcile his passion for art with his love for Gillette. When he declares that their love is most important in his life, this implies that he can no longer be an artist: "J'aime mieux être aimé que glorieux. Va, jette mes pinceaux, brûle ces esquisses. Je ne suis pas peintre, je suis amoureux. Périssent et l'art et tous ses secrets!" (23) In showing his nude mistress, Poussin makes a choice: he opts for art and thereby renounces love. In contrast, Frenhofer does not ultimately show Catherine. He says: "Ha! ha! je suis plus amant encore que je ne suis peintre. Oui, j'aurai la force de brûler ma *Belle Noiseuse* à mon dernier soupir; mais lui faire supporter le regard d'un homme, d'un jeune homme, d'un peintre? non, non!" (26) Frenhofer eventually does burn his painting and thereby saves his beloved from any other man's gaze. Yet in destroying his masterpiece, the artist also deprives himself of his fetish object, and thus of the gratification which he had constantly derived from it.

In Frenhofer's reality, the painting-woman reconciles art and love. The process of fetishization provides the illusion of emotional control by saving Frenhofer from the conflict between the two. Yet because of the very fact that the *Belle Noiseuse* bridges the space between those two realms in the artist's life, the destruction of the painting-woman also entails a double loss, namely that of the artistic masterpiece as well as that of the loved woman. In fact, the destruction of the *Belle Noiseuse* also leads to the "destruction" of the fetishist himself: we learn that after burning all his paintings, Frenhofer himself dies in the night following the showing of his masterpiece (34). Thus fetishization ultimately fails as an effective means of emotional control. The balance which the fetishist establishes by creating for himself a fetish is highly precarious. Upsetting this balance leads to the destruction of both the fetishized object and its human fetishizer.

Although the painting in "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" never actually changes into the living woman for whom it substitutes in Frenhofer's psychic reality, the fantastic element of the tale clearly connects with the painter's fetishization of his painting – that is, with his own obsessive view of it as a god-like woman. Insofar as the artist's beloved coincides with his own artistic masterpiece, the tale can be viewed as an attempt via the fantastic to resolve anxieties about art and artistic production in nineteenth-century society. The fetishization of art-works in nineteenth-century fantastic literature reflects at once the significance of art in the period and the artist's often problematic relationship with his work. But although Balzac's tale is concerned most overtly with art fetishism, the story also points to its opposite, namely the artist's alienation from his work and, in practical terms, the commercialization of art.[28] We have seen that Frenhofer would never consider selling his painting of the *Belle Noiseuse*; he does not regard it in an economic register at all. And yet he expresses his appreciation of the other artists' works in terms of money. When Porbus shows Frenhofer his Egyptian figure of Mary, Frenhofer emphasizes the quality of the paint-

[28] See also Alain-Philippe Durand, "Grassou et Frenhofer: Chef-d'œuvre connu ou inconnu?", *Romance Quarterly*, 44:3 (1997), 131–142; and "Pierre Grassou" (1839), another of Balzac's tales about an artist, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Marcel Bouteron and Henri Longnon, 16 (Paris: Louis Conard, 1949), pp. 433–460.

ing by referring to its purely material value: “Ta sainte me plaît, dit le vieillard à Porbus, et je te la paierais dix écus d’or au delà du prix que donne la reine.” (7) Likewise, it is Frenhofer’s interest in buying Poussin’s sketch which reveals its artistic value in Frenhofer’s view: “Il [Frenhofer] tira de sa ceinture une bourse de peau, y fouilla, prit deux pièces d’or, et les lui montrant: – J’achète ton dessin, dit-il.” (14)[29] Therefore, Frenhofer himself connects artistic value directly with material value. While he elevates his own painting of Catherine Lescault to the status of a desirable and indeed god-like woman and equates the act of showing it with prostitution, he relegates the other artists’ paintings to the status of commodities, whose primary value consists in their exchangeability for money.

## Maupassant’s “La Chevelure”

As with Balzac’s “Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu”, Maupassant’s tale, “La Chevelure”, dramatizes the significance of material objects in nineteenth-century culture. The story presents a lover of antiquities, who, on a stroll through Paris, is quite literally seduced by an Italian dresser which catches his eye, as he passes by the window of an antique shop. The protagonist buys the piece, places it in his bedroom and continually caresses its surface. One night, he detects in a hidden drawer a wonderful lock of a woman’s hair, which henceforth becomes the centre of his attention.[30]

The tale’s protagonist is a collector of antique furniture, a lover of bibelots, who exhibits strong ties to the material objects in his home. The acquisition of antique pieces of furniture and the collecting of original art objects, and indeed of all sorts of more or less valuable knickknacks, was fashionable and common in nineteenth-century Paris. In his dossier in *The Arcades Project* on “The Interior, The Trace”, Walter Benjamin argues that the nineteenth

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[29] See also Michael D. Houston, “L’Artiste comme prostituée dans ‘Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu’ d’Honoré de Balzac”, *Romance Notes*, 37:1 (1996), 89–95 (p. 91); and Claude E. Bernard, “La Problématique de l’échange dans ‘Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu’”, *L’Année balzacienne*, 4 (1984), 201–213 (pp. 202–203).

[30] Guy de Maupassant, “La Chevelure”, in *Le Horla et autres contes cruels et fantastiques*, ed. by Marie-Claire Bancquart (Paris: Garnier, 1976), pp. 181–188.

century was *wohnsüchtig* (addicted to dwelling). Benjamin understands dwelling in its most extreme form as a condition of nineteenth-century existence.[31] As he writes, the nineteenth century conceived of the residence as a receptacle for the dweller, encasing the person with all his or her appurtenances deeply in the dwelling's interior. Benjamin evokes the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep folds of velvet ("The Interior" 220). For Benjamin, the original form of all dwelling is existence not in the house, but in the shell. Like a shell, the nineteenth-century private interior would thus bear the impression of its occupant ("The Interior" 220). Maupassant's madman and his bibelots are quite literally a perfect match: the man spends hours contemplating them; he touches, strokes and sleeps with them. Maupassant presents the story's protagonist as perverse, as suffering from necrophilia. In our society, material things are regarded as inappropriate objects for intense subjective investment. They must remain subordinated to persons and must not be substituted for them.[32] Yet the protagonist's madness – that is, his way of dealing with material objects – seems to be not a perversion, but rather an intensification, of what in Benjamin's thought constituted the attitude of an entire century.

"The collector was the true inhabitant of the interior", notes Benjamin, "he made the glorification of things his concern."[33] In buying things and conferring on them what Benjamin names a "fancier's value", the collector strips the objects not only of their commodity character, and thus of their mere exchange value, but also of their original use value ("Louis-Philippe" 168). Maupassant's collector is not interested in either exchanging his bibelots (once he purchased them) or putting them to any practical use: he wants to own them. "Ownership is the most intimate relationship

[31] Walter Benjamin, "The Interior, The Trace", in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (London: Belknap, 1999), pp. 212–227 (p. 220).
[32] See Janell Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 170.
[33] Walter Benjamin, "Louis-Philippe or the Interior", in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: NLB, 1973), pp. 167–169 (p. 168).

which humans can have with objects", writes Benjamin.[34] Indeed the acquisition of bibelots in itself provides the tale's madman with pleasure: "On regarde un objet, et, peu à peu, il vous séduit, vous trouble, vous envahit comme ferait un visage de femme. Son charme entre en vous, charme étrange qui vient de sa forme, de sa couleur, de sa physionomie de chose, et on l'aime déjà, on le désire, on le veut. Un besoin de possession vous gagne, besoin doux d'abord, comme timide, mais qui s'accroît, devient violent, irrésistible." (183) Significantly, the collector's acquisition of the object involves seductiveness on the part of the object itself and both pleasure and emotional disturbance on the part of its buyer.[35]

In Maupassant's tale, the Benjaminian "glorification of things" manifests itself in the madman's fetishization of his bibelots. At several points, he relates them to living women, thus feminizing the inanimate objects, as though he could project the women's lives onto them. For example, the madman compares the mechanical palpitation of his eighteenth-century watch to the heartbeat of the woman who once wore it (182). He also strokes his antique Italian dresser, a feminine symbol in itself, as though it were a woman: "Oh! je plains ceux qui ne connaissent pas cette lune de miel du collectionneur avec le bibelot qu'il vient d'acheter. On le caresse de l'œil et de la main comme s'il était de chair; on revient à tout moment près de lui, on y pense toujours, où qu'on aille, quoi qu'on fasse." (184) The protagonist here equates the bringing home of a newly purchased bibelot with a honeymoon. By implication, the acquisition of the object can be viewed in terms of a marriage: the collector's bride is the object itself, which the antiquarian exchanges for money. But while the collector buys a specific piece in order to own, and thus control, it, is he who is in fact possessed by the object's charm. He feels driven to caress it and must always think of it.

The wonderful tress of hair found by the protagonist in a hidden drawer of the dresser has a special status. Although it is inanimate, it is a relic of a dead woman, and thus, in a way, human.

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[34] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 60.

[35] See also Rémy G. Saisselin, *The Bourgeois and the Bibelot* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1984), pp. 131, 171.

Certainly, it is the most feminine of the madman's possessions. The man finds the attraction of the lock irresistible and constantly longs to look at, and touch, it: "Quand je rentrai chez moi, j'éprouvai un irrésistible désir de revoir mon étrange trouvaille; et je la repris, et je sentis, en la touchant, un long frisson qui me courut dans les membres." (186) Although the tress of hair cannot be put to any obvious practical use and is completely worthless in itself, it exerts a quasi-magical power on the madman: "Je l'aimais! Oui, je l'aimais. Je ne pouvais plus me passer d'elle, ni rester une heure sans la revoir." (187) In this way, the tress of hair is reminiscent of religious fetishism in primitive societies. Since the religious fetish object is chosen altogether haphazardly and can therefore be any material object, however useless or mundane, its power over the fetishist is incomprehensible in terms of Western European reasoning (De Brosses, *Du Culte des dieux fétiches* 18; Pietz, "Fetish I" 106).

The tress of hair can also be viewed as a fetish object in the strict sexual sense (Watson, *Literature and Material Culture* 177).[36] As the protagonist strokes, caresses and even sleeps with the lock, to him it becomes the focus of arousal in preference to a person. Thus "La Chevelure" can be read, following Freud, as a case of sexual, or pathological, fetishism. In the essay on "Fetishism", Freud suggests that a fetish is a substitute not for any penis, but for the mother's phallus, in which the little boy had believed during his early childhood and which he should normally have given up on seeing his mother's genitals. In the case of fetishism, however, the little boy refuses to believe that his mother has no penis, for the only way of explaining its absence would be that she was castrated, and this would mean that the boy's own penis is now in danger, too. Therefore, the boy denies the fact and continues to believe that his mother has a phallus. But, as Freud notes, the boy also simultaneously renounces the belief: "It is not true that the child emerges from his experience of seeing the female parts with an unchanged belief in the woman having a phallus. He

[36] See also Philippe Lejeune, "Maupassant et le fétichisme", in *Maupassant miroir de la nouvelle*, ed. by Jacques Lecarme and Bruno Vercier (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988), pp. 91–109.

retains this belief, but he also gives it up."[37] It is this mixture of credulity and disbelief which typifies the fetishist's attitude towards the object-simulacrum. Although the fetishist knows that the fetish constitutes nothing but a false or simulated phallus, he continues to regard it as real. This "bewitched" state of mind is a compromise, constructed, as Freud observes, "during the conflict between the deadweight of the unwelcome perception and the force of the opposite wish" ("Fetishism" 154). It allows the mother's penis to persist, but her phallus is no longer the same. It is replaced by the fetish, now absorbing all the interest which had formerly belonged to the penis. As Freud theorizes, the fetish thus remains both a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against it ("Fetishism" 156).

Since Freudian fetishism is based on the ambiguity that the fetishist believes at once that the mother was castrated and that she was not, the fetishist can never ultimately overcome his fear of castration. Yet in order to function sexually, he must be able to control his fear. For this, the fetishist resorts to a coping strategy which consists in dealing with the lack of the mother's phallus by substituting something else for it, generally a material object. In calling this object a fetish, Freud appropriates the anthropological concept of fetishism to refer to the importance of the object in his own theory. In Maupassant's "La Chevelure", this significance is reflected by the insistence on the protagonist's collectibles, notably the tress of hair, which also gives the story its name. Yet the lock of hair constitutes not merely a necessary requisite attached to the sexual object. Rather, it is detached from any particular individual and in fact becomes the madman's sole sexual object: "Je m'enfermais seul avec elle pour la sentir sur ma peau, pour enfoncer mes lèvres dedans, pour la baiser, la mordre. Je l'enroulais autour de mon visage, je la buvais, je noyais mes yeux dans son onde dorée, afin de voir le jour blond, à travers." (187) While the fetish in Freudian theory is meant to "restore" the "mutilated" sexual object to enable the fetishist to function sexually, the fetish here comes to replace any woman who could potentially be the fetishist's sexual partner. As the female other is thus extinguished completely, the fetishist must control only the fetish object – onto

[37] Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism", in *SE*, 21 (1961), pp. 152–157 (p. 154).

which he may project his own desires and which he may manipulate as he wishes.

Walter Benjamin writes of Baudelaire: "He took the part of the asocial. He achieved his only sexual relationship with a whore."[38] One can perhaps say the same of Maupassant's protagonist, although we learn that the madman had a number of sexual partners. However, his love relationships, rather than merely sexual ones, were not with prostitutes but with material objects. According to Benjamin, the ambiguity typical of the social relations and events in the nineteenth-century is "the figurative appearance of the dialectic, the law of the dialectic at a standstill" ("Baudelaire" 171). "This standstill is Utopia", as Benjamin suggests, "and the dialectical image therefore a dream image." ("Baudelaire" 171) For Benjamin, both the commodity and the whore provide such a dream image. But perhaps what is at stake here is not so much the fact that the commodity and the prostitute offer specific dream images as the fact that they in themselves provide a space in which their purchasers may live out their own dreams in exchange for money, rather than investing themselves socially in a relationship with an independent partner.

As Charles Madge points out, the idea of privacy as something to be valued has developed late in cultural history. Etymologically, a private person is one who has been deprived of the privileges and prestige with which society repays those who perform their allotted function in the group.[39] Benjamin observes that it was during the reign of Louis-Philippe that the living space, or the interior, first became distinguished from the work place for the private citizen ("Louis-Philippe" 167). "The private citizen, who in the office took reality into account", as Benjamin notes, "required of the interior that it should support him in his illusions." ("Louis-Philippe" 167) It is from the private citizen's suppression of both business and social preoccupations in creating his home that spring the "phantasmagorias" of the interior ("Louis-Philippe" 167). His private environment represents the entire universe for him, for he

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[38] Walter Benjamin, "Baudelaire or the Streets of Paris", in *Charles Baudelaire*, pp. 170–176 (p. 171).

[39] See Charles Madge, "Private and Public Spaces", *Human Relations*, 3 (1950), 187–199 (pp. 192–193).

gathers together in the interior objects of all sorts, thus assembling, in Benjamin's terms, "the distant in space and in time" ("Louis-Philippe" 168). Although Maupassant's collector, in "La Chevelure", might be described as a *flâneur* as well as a private citizen, his house is more homely for him than are the streets of Paris. For the true *flâneur*, as Benjamin argues, the street becomes a dwelling, and "he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls".[40] Benjamin also writes that the *flâneur* is someone abandoned in the crowd ("The *Flâneur*" 55). The tale's protagonist is a *flâneur* in the sense that he wanders through Paris anonymously and alone. He is a private citizen in that he takes home the bibelots purchased on strolling and thus becomes a "host of objects" (Benjamin, "The *Flâneur*" 47). The phantasmagorias of the protagonist's interior involve his fetishistic view of these objects, notably his attitude towards the tress of hair. But although the man "appropriates" his collectibles in his home, to make them his lovers, he also takes the lock of hair out of the home and into the city: "Je l'ai emportée avec moi toujours, partout. Je l'ai promenée par la ville comme ma femme." (188) In so doing, the madman seems like a *flâneur*, for he appears to be wandering about by himself. The man's psychic reality, however, is different. He believes that he is in quasi-human company. From such a perspective, it is not that the city by itself becomes homelike for the protagonist, as it does for the *flâneur*. Rather, the man extends his own home into the city by taking part of his interior into the streets. But the city does not "support him in his illusions", as does his private environment. It punishes him for withdrawing from human society and constructing his own reality. As the tress of hair is taken away from him and he is sent to a mental hospital, he loses at once his lover and his home: "Mais on l'a vue… on a deviné… on me l'a prise… Et on m'a jeté dans une prison, comme un malfaiteur." (188)

Valerie Steele emphasizes the dual meaning of the term "fetish", which denotes a magic charm, on the one hand, and a fabrication, an artefact, on the other (*Fetish* 5). The sexual fetish gives the illusion of control, for it substitutes for something feared lost or non-existent. It is a precarious construct, for it results from the

[40] Walter Benjamin, "The *Flâneur*", in *Charles Baudelaire*, pp. 35–66 (p. 37).

ambiguous belief that the mother was castrated and that she was not. In Maupassant's tale, the process of fetishization fails as an effective means of control, because it is not only *as though* the fetishized object were endowed with autonomous life, but the fetish *actually* comes alive, within the terms of the story. As the supernatural emerges, the tress of hair changes into the woman to whom it had belonged: "Elle est venue. Oui, je l'ai vue, je l'ai tenue, je l'ai eue, telle qu'elle était vivante autrefois, grande, blonde, grasse." (187) It is significant that the fantastic itself consists in transforming the fetish object into precisely that which it has come to replace, namely a living – and by implication uncontrollable and dangerous – woman. As the fantastic translates the protagonist's neurosis into reality, it shows up the ambiguity of fetishism and forces the fetishist to look at precisely the intolerable reality which the fetish was originally designed to deny.

The theme of the antiquarian is crucial here. The protagonist is a lover of antiquities – that is, of old objects, whose original owners have long been dead. These bibelots serve to bridge the space between himself and the women who once owned them, as he does now: "Comme j'aurais voulu la connaître, la voir, la femme qui avait choisi cet objet exquis et rare! Elle est morte! Je suis possédé par le désir des femmes d'autrefois; j'aime, de loin, toutes celles qui ont aimé." (182–183) The madman's interest in the past coincides with his fear of the future, which will bring death: "Le passé m'attire, le présent m'effraye parce que l'avenir c'est la mort." (183) The protagonist's antiquities also serve to preserve his own traces: "Living means leaving traces." (Benjamin, "Louis-Philippe" 169) Although the madman cannot give his own earthly being permanence, he might find the durability of his bibelots comforting. Indeed he stresses that his antique watch has not ceased to vibrate, to live its mechanical life. It has kept up its regular tick-tock since the previous century (182). Yet the man's attraction to the past seems maladaptive, in psychological terms. In fact, his fetishes, namely antique bibelots, as well as his object-choice, dead women, reflect the crux of fetishism which underlies the ambiguity of the sexual fetish: the belief in the female phallus and the renunciation of it. Just as the fetish is regarded as a token of triumph over the threat of castration, even though its existence is necessitated by the very fact that castration was (supposedly)

executed, so the protagonist feels safe from the danger of death in the company of antique bibelots, while indeed they are constant reminders of that same death.

## Gautier's "Le Pied de momie"

As with Balzac and Maupassant, Gautier projects life onto material objects. His tale, "Le Pied de momie", revolves around the animated mummified foot of the Egyptian princess, Hermonthis, which is bought by the Parisian narrator as a paperweight, but reclaimed by the mutilated mummy herself. In asking for her hand in marriage in exchange, the Parisian nearly succeeds in purchasing a bride by buying a paperweight.[41]

As with Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", Gautier's "Le Pied de momie" finds its focus in a female foot, a classic Freudian fetish object.[42] But in addition to the logics of sexuality, we shall see that a commercial rationale is also at work here. The obscure nature of the Egyptian princess's mummified foot is reminiscent of the "mysterious" character of the commodity, which Marx, in the section in *Capital* on commodity-fetishism, describes thus:

> A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour. It is as clear as noon-day that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves

[41] Théophile Gautier, "Le Pied de momie", in *L'Œuvre fantastique: Nouvelles*, ed. by Michel Crouzet (Paris: Bordas, 1992), pp. 139–150.

[42] See Franc Schuerewegen, "Histoires de pieds: Gautier, Lorrain et le fantastique", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 13:4 (1995), 200–210; and Jean Bellemin-Noël, "Notes sur le fantastique (textes de Théophile Gautier)", *Littérature*, 8 (1972), 3–23. For a discussion of foot-fetishism in another piece of literature, see Sigmund Freud, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*", in *SE*, 9 (1959), pp. 7–95.

> out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than 'table-turning' ever was.[43]

In Marx's theory, a definite social relation exists between men which assumes a "fantastic form of a relation between things" when the latter are produced for the purpose of exchange in the market (*Capital* 72). As these products are no longer regarded as articles of utility, as Marx argues, they come to be seen as independent beings endowed with life, entering into relation both with each other and with humans. The same is true for Gautier's mummified foot. The foot is endowed with autonomous life; it can move, reason and speak. Moreover, as with the Marxian commodity, the foot can be viewed as part of an entire system of exchange. Originally, it had been stolen by an Arab employed and paid by the shopkeeper of a Parisian *boutique de bric-à-brac*; then, it is offered for sale in the junk shop and purchased by the narrator; and, finally, it is exchanged by the mummy herself for the small pendant of the necklace which she is wearing. To complete the various trade-offs, the narrator proposes yet another exchange by asking for the princess's hand in marriage in exchange for her foot.

Marx calls the commodity a "mysterious thing", because "in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour" (*Capital* 72). The fetish-character of commodities thus resides in their own "social" character, which they acquire because they are produced by individuals carrying out their work independently of each other for the purpose of exchange: "Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange." (*Capital* 73) In fact, it is only in exchange that products acquire, as (exchange) value, one uniform social status, which is not obviously connected with their in-

[43] Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof", in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1968), pp. 71–83 (p. 71).

dividual use-value. Distinguishing between the use-value and value of a good is therefore only practically important when goods are produced for exchange in the market – just as commodities, in Marx's theory, become fetishized only in that context.

In developing the case of commodity-fetishism, Marx uses not only the language of the fantastic, but also one of its inherent strategies, namely fetishization. Gautier, in "Le Pied de momie", does as much. The tale dramatizes the significance of the commodity in nineteenth-century mercantile society by fetishizing a paperweight acquired in a junk shop. It points to the "mystery" of the commodity by presenting a paperweight in the form of an Egyptian princess's mummified foot. As with the Marxian commodity, the foot comes alive and starts leading an autonomous life as soon as it is bought by the narrator in the junk shop. There would be nothing mysterious about the mummy's foot if it were an integral part of Hermonthis, and if she thus used it "as a foot". In the tale, however, the foot is literally alienated from the princess: it is taken away from her, to be sold in the market. Yet the foot remains a part of the mummy, despite the fact that it becomes detached and independent of her. Like the commodity, then, the foot is neither a human being nor a material object, and yet it is endowed with life, as though it were human, and merchandized, as though it were an object. Indeed the foot is sold in the junk shop: thus it cannot be offered as a purposeful or even nameable item. As with all the other knickknacks for sale in such a place, the foot's sole utility resides in its exchangeability.

"Le Pied de momie" opens, according to the purest convention of the fantastic, with the narrator entering a Parisian *boutique de bric-à-brac*, looking for some original object which he can use as a paperweight: "Je voudrais une figurine, un objet quelconque qui pût me servir de serre-papiers, car je ne puis souffrir tous ces bronzes de pacotille que vendent les papetiers, et qu'on retrouve invariablement sur tous les bureaux." (140–141) The Parisian does not look for a paperweight as such. Rather, he browses in search of any uncommon object which will appeal to him and which he will then use as a paperweight. The fact that the narrator does not have any specific object in mind, while he knows to what use he will put it, points to the arbitrary character of the curiosity. The curiosity – or bibelot – is not produced to serve a well-defined purpose,

but rather exists *a priori* and autonomously, to serve one or more or even no purpose at all. Sima Godfrey observes that the narrator's insistence on purchasing a unique paperweight indicates his "alienation from society's central values".[44] The Parisian in fact leaves the junk shop with pride and a feeling of superiority over all those who do not possess, as he does, a fragment of the princess Hermonthis: "Je trouvai souverainement ridicules tous ceux qui ne possédaient pas, comme moi, un serre-papiers aussi notoirement égyptien; et la vraie occupation d'un homme sensé me paraissait d'avoir un pied de momie sur son bureau." (143)

In *Délires romantiques*, Pierre-André Rieben calls attention to the specific character of the *boutique de bric-à-brac*, the typically Parisian junk shop, which gathers together objects of all sorts and of all times.[45] In Gautier's tale, the narrator himself refers to the shop as a veritable *Capharnaüm* (139); all ages and all places "meet" in it. The only unifying criterion for this heterogeneous list of items is their superfluity or absence of use-value. Since all objects are sold in isolation from their original context, they are no longer identifiable in terms of their utility or purpose. Only as they are purchased are they assigned their function. The same is true for the mummy's foot. In fact, the Parisian assigns it a meaning entirely different from its original one, which implies that the object must have been empty, or emptied, of meaning in the first place (Benjamin, "The Collector" 203–211; Belk, *Collecting* 141).[46] Although the narrator intends to use the foot as a paperweight, he selects the piece above all because of its originality and aesthetic value. By purchasing the charming foot in the *boutique de bric-à-brac*, the Parisian ultimately transforms the princess herself into a fragmented commodity. In the period, as Rosalind Williams observes, "the merchandise itself was by no means available to all, but the vision of a seemingly unlimited profusion of commodities

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[44] Sima Godfrey, "Mummy Dearest: Cryptic Codes in Gautier's 'Pied de momie'", *Romanic Review*, 75:3 (1984), 302–311 (p. 305).

[45] See Pierre-André Rieben, *Délires romantiques: Musset – Nodier – Gautier – Hugo* (Paris: Corti, 1989), pp. 104–105.

[46] See also Kevin McLaughlin, *Writing in Parts: Imitation and Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 82; Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), p. 4.

is available, and, indeed, nearly unavoidable".[47] In commodifying an Egyptian mummy, the fantastic suggests that in a consumer society where commodities appear to be everywhere, the most curious objects may be commodified or are at any rate viewed as commodifiable.

While commodities are fetishized in Capitalist society, conversely, humans become like things, as, in Marx's terms, they "exist for one another merely as representatives of, and, therefore, as owners of, commodities" (*Capital* 85). The conversation between the Parisian and the shopkeeper in the *boutique de bric-à-brac* points to the alienation of people from each other in a society where they are "but the personifications of the economic relations that exist between them" (Marx, *Capital* 85). The mercantile attitude of both the narrator and the shopkeeper is obvious from the outset; they converse in purely commercial terms. "Combien me vendrez-vous ce fragment de momie?", inquires the narrator as his attention is drawn to the pretty foot (142). The shopkeeper replies, praising his merchandise: "Ah, le plus cher que je pourrai, car c'est un morceau superbe; si j'avais le pendant, vous ne l'auriez pas à moins de cinq cents francs: la fille d'un Pharaon, rien n'est plus rare." (142) Here, the shopkeeper eloquently insists on the uniqueness and authenticity of the princess's foot. In fact, the foot has no use-value for him, but its value consists exclusively in its exchange value, just as the Parisian for him is only important as a potential buyer of the foot.

Marx criticizes Capitalist society on the grounds that "the process of production has the mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him" (*Capital* 81). Gautier's foot reflects the commodity's mysterious character as well as its power over men. Although the mummified foot is only a fragmented thing to be used as a paperweight, it refuses to obey, as we shall see, the princess or the narrator and instead controls their relation. It is significant that even as a paperweight, the foot's purpose is to "keep control" over the narrator's disorder on his desk: "Pour la mettre tout de suite à profit, je posai le pied de la divine princesse Hermonthis sur une liasse de papiers, ébauche de vers, mosaïque indéchiffrable de ra-

[47] Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 3.

tures: articles commencés, lettres oubliées et mises à la poste dans le tiroir, erreur qui arrive souvent aux gens distraits; l'effet était charmant, bizarre et romantique." (143) Of course in its function as a paperweight, the mummy's foot is meant to "assist" the narrator in maintaining order, rather than "taking over" itself.

When the Parisian returns home after dinner, his attention is immediately drawn to his new acquisition, because an oriental smell emanates from the foot. The narrator initially experiences this as pleasant, but the smell of the foot soon becomes obtrusive and even gives him a headache (143). As the supernatural emerges, the furniture in the room starts rocking and produces strange noises. The foot, in particular, starts jumping about in a bizarre manner (144). With its strong and unpleasant smell, its strange movements and the irritating sounds which it produces, the foot noisily demonstrates its presence to the Parisian. While the latter had bought the foot as a charming accessory and even determined its use himself, the foot now becomes uncontrollable. Therefore, it ceases to be a source of pleasure for the narrator, but becomes, on the contrary, quite frightening: "J'étais assez mécontent de mon acquisition, aimant les serre-papiers sédentaires et trouvant peu naturel de voir les pieds se promener sans jambes, et je commençais à éprouver quelque chose qui ressemblait fort à de la frayeur." (144)

The mummy's foot refuses to be controlled: neither by the narrator, nor initially by Hermonthis. When the princess appears to reclaim the foot from the narrator, it also asserts its independent existence vis-à-vis her; she cannot initially take hold of it, for it will not let her seize it: "Le pied sautait et courait ça et là comme s'il eût été poussé par des ressorts d'acier. Deux ou trois fois elle étendit sa main pour le saisir, mais elle n'y réussit pas." (145) Hermonthis attempts to make the foot listen to reason, reminding it that she had always taken good care of it, but the foot replies: "Vous savez bien que je ne m'appartiens plus, j'ai été acheté et payé", and asks her: "Avez-vous cinq pièces d'or pour me racheter?" (146) From the foot's sad and sulky voice we know that it is not happy about its own commodification, and yet the foot acts in accordance with commercial rules. Although the foot has been completely estranged from its original function and cut off from its original wholeness, to be transformed into a fragmented

commodity, it nevertheless represents the bad conscience of those who do not comply with the rules of commerce. The foot itself conforms to those rules. It not only accepts, but actually insists on, the fact that it had been purchased and therefore no longer belongs to itself or to anyone else but its buyer. Indeed it is only with the Parisian's explicit consent that the foot allows the princess to reattach it to her mutilated leg.

In contrast, the shopkeeper does not hesitate to have the foot stolen in the first place, just as Hermonthis comes to reclaim it from the narrator without being able to pay for it. But the princess does not retrieve her foot without leaving the pendant of her necklace in return, so as to replace the narrator's paperweight: "Hermonthis, avant de partir, détacha de son col la petite figurine de pâte verte et la posa sur les feuilles éparses qui couvraient la table. 'Il est bien juste, dit-elle en souriant, que je remplace votre serre-papiers.'" (147) By the same token, the Parisian, who had appeared most willing to renounce the mummified foot and return it to Hermonthis, is quick to ask for the princess's hand in marriage when her father offers to recompense him (149): their relation is based on exchange.

As we learn, this commercialization of love has determined the relationship between all the characters whose meeting in the *boutique de bric-à-brac* generates the story. The shopkeeper, on the one hand, had wanted to marry Hermonthis long before, but she had declined his proposal (146). In order to pay her back, the shopkeeper had then had her foot stolen and offered it for sale in the junk shop, where the narrator buys it. The narrator, on the other hand, assumes that he has a right to ask for the princess's hand in marriage, in exchange for her foot. While the foot-paperweight is endowed with autonomous life, the woman, conversely, becomes like a commodity, both in the sense that she is to be exchanged between her father and the Parisian and in the sense that she is actually exchanged for her own lost foot. Viewing marriage as above all an economic institution in which the bride and her dowry are exchanged between her father and bridegroom is not uncommon to the period. What *is* new and significant is the portrayal of the commodification of love in close relation to the fet-

ishization of objects, on the one hand, and the objectification of women, on the other.[48]

Gautier's "Le Pied de momie" focuses on the commodified foot of an Egyptian princess; I have related the insistence on this object to the logic of modern industrial consumer culture. The autonomy of material objects in the fantastic can be viewed as the logical manifestation in literature of the fetish-character of the commodity. Just as commodities, in Marx's theory, appear to be endowed with autonomous life, so material objects are animated in fantastic narrative. Just as commodities, rather than humans, come to dominate social relations in Capitalist society, so objects substitute for humans in the fantastic. Pietz argues that the discourse of the fetish has always been a critical discourse about the false objective values of a society from which the speaker is personally distanced ("Fetish I" 14). There is no doubt that Marx is immensely critical of mercantile culture. "Le Pied de momie", too, can be viewed in terms of a critique of nineteenth-century society: it depicts, and ironically questions, the fetishization of a commodified object. In Marx's section on "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof", it is *as though* commodities were endowed with life. In "Le Pied de momie", the foot-paperweight *actually* comes alive and, to borrow Marx, enters into a relation with the human race. Marx uses the imagery of fetishism in an effort to illustrate the mystical character of commodities and ultimately to resolve the anxiety caused by their sudden abundance in the new consumer society. In "Le Pied de momie", the fantastic shows up the limitation of fetishization. The process does not work as a means of emotional control, because the animated foot is not depicted as just *any* living being. It becomes threatening as it *asserts* its independence, refusing to be controlled by the humans to whom it belongs.

[48] See also Balzac's "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu", Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann", Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille", and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*.

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# 2

# Projection

## Projection and the Fantastic

In its simplest form, projection refers to seeing one's own traits, emotions or dispositions in other people. A more rigorous understanding involves an accompanying denial that one has these feelings or tendencies.[49] Freud first defined the process of projection as the determining element of paranoia: "The purpose of paranoia is to fend off an idea that is incompatible with the ego, by projecting its substance into the external world."[50] Both the content and the affect of the unacceptable idea are retained in this way, but they are projected outwards and therefore no longer distress the ego. As Freud explains, "an internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its content enters consciousness in the form of an external perception".[51] Thus the process of projection replaces an internal, psychic danger with an external, perceptual one. "The advantage of this, as Freud observes, is that the subject can protect himself against an external danger by fleeing from it and avoiding the perception of it, whereas it is useless to flee from dangers that arise from within." ("Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" 126)

This chapter views fantastic literature from the perspective of projection; it uses Sand's "La Fée aux gros yeux" (1873) and

[49] See Roy F. Baumeister *et al.*, "Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Social Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial", *Journal of Personality*, 66:6 (1998), 1081–1124 (p. 1090).

[50] Sigmund Freud, "Draft H: Paranoia", in *SE*, 1 (1966), pp. 206–213 (p. 209). See also George E. Vaillant, "The Historical Origins and Future Potential of Sigmund Freud's Concept of the Mechanisms of Defence", *International Review of Psycho Analysis*, 19:1 (1992), 35–50 (pp. 40–41).

[51] Sigmund Freud, "On the Mechanism of Paranoia", in *SE*, 12 (1958), pp. 59–79 (p. 66).

Mérimée's "Carmen" (1845) to illustrate the connection between the process of projection and the fantastic. I suggest reading the French tutor, Monsieur Bat, in Sand's tale, as a projection of the Irish governess, Miss Barbara; and the gypsy, Carmen, in Mérimée's story, as a projection of her lover, Don José. The psychological mechanism of projection had not yet entered scientific discourse at the time when the two tales were written. Significantly, it was formulated and defined on the basis of the fantastic itself. Freud's 1919 essay on "The Uncanny" analyses E.T.A. Hoffmann's 1817 fantastic tale, "The Sandman", and interprets the dreaded figure which gives the story its name as a projection of the protagonist.[52] I shall begin by discussing this key text on the fantastic, before examining Sand's "La Fée aux gros yeux" and Mérimée's "Carmen".

## The Uncanny

Freud's paper sets out to determine the sense of the term "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) by exploring its linguistic use within the field of what is frightening. First, Freud relates *unheimlich* to its opposite and illuminates its various shades of meaning. Since the German term "*unheimlich*" is the opposite of *heimlich* (homely, native, known, familiar), one is tempted to believe, as Freud writes, that the uncanny is frightening because it is *not* known or familiar. Not everything that is unknown and unfamiliar, however, necessarily evokes fear. Freud therefore attributes the term "*heimlich*" to two distinguishable, but not contradictory sets of ideas. On the one hand, it refers to what is familiar and agreeable and, on the other, to what is concealed and kept out of sight. Freud finds that *heimlich* can even coincide with its seeming opposite, *unheimlich*, and deduces that *unheimlich* is a semantic sub-species of *heimlich*: the uncanny is that class of frightening things in which the uncanny element has been repressed and recurs. As Freud argues, it does not matter whether that which is uncanny had itself originally

[52] See also Sarah Kofman, *Freud and Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), in particular the chapter on "The Double is/and the Devil: The Uncanniness of the Sandman", pp. 119–162.

been frightening or carried any other affect. Every affect is transformed, when repressed, into anxiety. This sheds light on the linguistic extension of *heimlich* to its seeming opposite, *unheimlich*: "The 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 through the process of repression." (Freud, "The Uncanny" 244) Thus the prefix "*un-*" in *unheimlich* (as opposed to *heimlich*) can be regarded as a token of repression, rather than one of semantic opposition.

In the subsequent analysis of Hoffmann's "The Sandman", Freud relates the uncanny atmosphere in the story directly to the sandman – that is, the idea of being robbed of one's eyes.[53] In the tale, Nathaniel, a student of physics, recounts his childhood fears of the sandman – the lawyer Coppelius. These fears have been revived by the itinerant optician, Coppola, and result in fits of madness. When Nathaniel was small, his mother would send him to bed saying that the sandman was coming; from his nurse, Nathaniel learned that the sandman was a wicked man who would throw sand in naughty children's eyes and then steal their bleeding eyes from their sockets and feed them to his own children. Despite his fear, Nathaniel one night hides in his father's study in order to learn the identity of the terrible sandman, who turns out to be his father's lawyer. The boy betrays himself and just as the sandman-Coppelius is about to drop hot coals into his eyes, his father saves him. One year later, the father is killed in an explosion; Coppelius disappears. While still a student, Nathaniel seems to recognize the lawyer in the itinerant optician, Coppola, whose eye-like glasses terrify him. He falls in love with a "girl" whom he spies next door through a pocket spy-glass, but Olympia turns out to be an automaton, rather than a living woman. As her maker, Spalanzani, throws her bleeding eyes at Nathaniel, the student succumbs to

[53] Although Freud writes in the article's introduction that uncanny effects are created in story-telling by leaving the reader uncertain as to whether a particular figure is a human being or an automaton, he ends up hardly talking about the doll, Olympia, and argues somewhat inconsistently that the doll is not primarily responsible for the uncanny atmosphere in the tale ("The Uncanny" 227). I shall discuss this discrepancy in chapter four.

illness. In a last fit of madness, he attempts to kill his fiancée, Clara, before he takes his own life.[54]

Freud writes that the fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is common to both children and adults. He understands it as a displaced return of the dread associated with being castrated as a child. By relating Nathaniel's phobia about eyes to the anxiety belonging to a repressed castration complex, Freud therefore interprets the figure of the sandman as Nathaniel's father, whose castration the boy expects and fears. In this view, the uncanny sandman – that is, the father's lawyer, Coppelius, as well as the itinerant optician, Coppola – constitutes that intolerable part of the divided father-imago which Nathaniel projects onto a figure foreign to the father himself.[55]

The process of projection here serves the purpose of dealing with an emotional conflict. As Freud argues elsewhere, "a particular way is adopted of dealing with any internal excitations which produce too great an increase of displeasure: there is a tendency to treat them as though they were acting not from the inside, but from the outside, so that it may be possible to bring the shield against stimuli into operation as a means of defence against them".[56] In Nathaniel's case, projection is necessary as a means of defence, because his repressed castration complex returns with the arrival of Coppola. But the process of projection is not designed solely to serve the purpose of defence. It is, rather, a primitive mechanism to which our sense perceptions are also naturally subject. Indeed the projection of sense perceptions and of emotional and thought processes, as Freud theorizes, plays a major part in determining

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[54] E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann", in *Fantasie- und Nachtstücke: Fantasiestücke, Nachtstücke, Seltsame Leiden eines Theater-Direktors*, ed. by Walter Müller-Seidel (Munich: Winkler, 1960), pp. 331–363.

[55] According to Freud, in the story of Nathaniel's childhood, the figures of Coppelius and his father represent the two opposites into which the father-imago is split by emotional ambivalence: one threatens to blind him, the other saves him. The death wish against the blinding – that is, castrating – father, finds expression in the death of the real father in the story. While Freud argues that in Nathaniel's student days, the pair of fathers is matched by Spalanzani and Coppola, I would group the latter pair with Coppelius, the "bad" part of the father image. See "The Uncanny", p. 232.

[56] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", in *SE*, 18 (1955), pp. 7–64 (p. 29).

our perception of the world.[57] Since we therefore arrive at our view of the world in a highly personal way, by mingling reality with our own personalities, this view will necessarily be distorted not only according to our individual sense perceptions, but also according to our respective dispositions.

## Sand's "La Fée aux gros yeux"

George Sand's "La Fée aux gros yeux" focuses on the very problem of arriving at absolute reality. Echoing Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann", the tale dramatizes the search for definite meaning by placing its emphasis on the theme of seeing. In the story, the short-sighted Irish woman, Miss Barbara – the so-called *fée aux gros yeux* – is the governess of the twelve-year-old Elsie. The long-sighted Monsieur Bat is the tutor of the girl's two brothers. One night, as Miss Barbara and Elsie walk through the park, a bat attacks the governess; the bat disappears and is suddenly replaced by Monsieur Bat.[58]

Miss Barbara is given the nickname of *fée aux gros yeux*: *fée* because she is wise and mysterious; *aux gros yeux* because her eyes are huge and bright (129). Miss Barbara is peculiar in many ways. Most obviously, she refuses to wear glasses, although her vision is highly impaired. Therefore, she keeps bumping into objects, but claims that her eyesight is the best in the world (130). The governess strongly dislikes the other tutor, Monsieur Bat, by whom she feels persecuted without any good reason. Finally, she hardly eats or sleeps, leaves the light on through the night and hates idleness. Every night, she rushes back to her pavillion as soon as Elsie has gone to bed, in order to conduct research into microscopic beings, for which she has a veritable passion.

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[57] See Sigmund Freud, "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence", in *SE*, 13 (1955), pp. 18–74 (p. 64).

[58] George Sand, "La Fée aux gros yeux", in *Voyage dans le cristal*, ed. by Francis Lacassin (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1980), pp. 129–139. See also Kathryn J. Crecelius, "Female Fantastic: The Case of George Sand", *L'Esprit Créateur*, 28 (1988), 49–62; and Anne Richter, *Le Fantastique féminin d'Anne Radcliffe à Patricia Highsmith* (Paris: Complexe, 1995), p. 56.

Despite her strange ways, Miss Barbara is appreciated by all. The story's narrator tells us: "C'était la meilleure personne qui fût au monde." (129) In fact, it is she who has the most flattering image of herself. While Miss Barbara believes herself to be beyond reproach, she constantly points out Monsieur Bat's flaws and criticizes him for the most irrelevant matters, thus misjudging both the other tutor and herself. In so doing, she views him as the direct opposite of herself. The two tutors are in fact depicted as antithetical in the tale. Monsieur Bat is male, whereas Miss Barbara is female. He is long-sighted and his eyes suffer in the bright light, whereas she is short-sighted and dreads the dark. He enjoys eating, whereas she never has any appetite. Monsieur Bat likes walking in the garden in his spare time, whereas Miss Barbara never rests, but rather dedicates all her free time to her own research. Considering herself to be "good" and Monsieur Bat to be "bad", with herself always in the right and him in the wrong, the governess interprets all existing differences between them to fit her own unfavourable view of Monsieur Bat, on the one hand, and the high opinion which she has of herself, on the other.

Indeed Miss Barbara concludes from Monsieur Bat's healthy appetite that he must be greedy and cruel: "Elle lui en voulait d'être de bon appétit, elle le croyait vorace et cruel." (132) She, on the other hand, hardly eats at all, as though the pleasure of enjoying a meal, and indeed any sort of pleasure, were somehow incompatible with her duty and scholarship. Miss Barbara also finds Monsieur Bat's strolls in the park highly suspect: "Elle assurait que ses bizarres promenades en rond dénotaient les plus funestes inclinations et cachaient les plus sinistres desseins." (132) She even criticizes the tutor for his family name, Bat, which means "bat" in her own mother tongue, English, saying that he should have left the country or taken on a less offensive name (132). Finally, she blames Monsieur Bat for his impaired vision, as though he had wished for it and as though his long-sightedness said something about his person:

> – Ses yeux, ses pauvres yeux! répétait Barbara en haussant convulsivement les épaules, attends que je te plaigne, animal féroce! – Vous êtes bien dure pour ce pauvre homme, dit Elsie. Il a vraiment la vue sensible au point de ne plus voir du tout aux lumières. – Sans doute, sans doute! Mais comme il prend sa revanche dans l'obscurité! C'est un nyctalope et, qui plus est, un presbyte. (133)

While Miss Barbara inappropriately denigrates Monsieur Bat on the basis of his impaired vision, she praises her own eyes as "les trésors de sa vision" (130), even though she continuously bumps into objects all around her, because she is literally unable to see them from a distance. Her short-sightedness relates directly to her misjudgment of Monsieur Bat. Just as visually she sees things not wholly, but microscopically – "Elle voyait les plus petits objets comme les autres avec les loupes les plus fortes." (130) – so she also fails to judge Monsieur Bat adequately. She singles out a number of traits which she designates as flaws and deduces from them that his whole personality must be bad. Since the governess lacks all objective distance in her appreciation of Monsieur Bat, and indeed of most matters, she attaches inappropriate importance to small things, which, however, appear "big" to her, as though she were literally magnifying them.

Miss Barbara's irrationally negative view of Monsieur Bat can best be understood in terms of persecutory paranoia. On the matter of paranoia, Freud explains:

> The self-reproach is repressed in a manner which may be described as *projection*. It is repressed by erecting the defensive symptom of *distrust of other people*. In this way the subject withdraws his acknowledgement of the self-reproach; and, as if to make up for this, he is deprived of a protection against the self-reproaches which return in his delusional ideas.[59]

Freud's picture of the paranoid perfectly describes Miss Barbara: she mistrusts Monsieur Bat and feels persecuted by him, while at the same time she finds no flaws in herself. Therefore, Monsieur Bat can be viewed as a projection of Miss Barbara's own faults, which she displaces onto him and denies in herself. Elsie actually formulates this when the governess confuses her own shadow with the dreaded tutor: "Chère Miss Barbara, vous vous trompez, vous croyez parler à M. Bat et vous parlez à votre ombre." (133) The governess's failure to recognize her identity and that of the tutor can be related to her eyesight. Just as Miss Barbara is (wrongly) convinced that she and Monsieur Bat have nothing in common, so she is certain that her vision is perfect. Nothing can make her change her mind about the tutor, in the same way that nobody can

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[59] Sigmund Freud, "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence", in *SE*, 3 (1962), pp. 159–185 (p. 184).

make her wear glasses. Glasses might in fact put the world in perspective, wrecking her own egotistical, self-absorbed view of things, and ultimately forbid her to project her own self onto Monsieur Bat.

A number of incidents in the story suggest that Miss Barbara misjudges herself as well as Monsieur Bat. They reveal that the picture of the zealous teacher and caring governess which she has of herself does not correspond to reality. For example, the *fée* refuses to share with Elsie the secret of her nightly research despite the girl's constant begging and despite the fact that the girl could perhaps learn something from her governess's interest in microscopic beings. Yet Miss Barbara responds as follows: "Ma journée entière vous est consacrée; le soir m'appartient. Je l'emploie à travailler pour mon compte." (131) In a similar spirit of egotism, the governess ignores Elsie's tiredness on the way back from her pavillion to the main building and instead lectures the girl without end (137). Finally, when the bat attacks Miss Barbara, she runs away to lock herself in her pavillion. As Monsieur Bat rightly observes, she shows no concern for the girl for whom she is responsible:

> Votre gouvernante s'est réfugiée et barricadée chez elle en m'accablant d'injures que je ne mérite pas. Puisqu'elle vous abandonne à ce qu'elle regarde comme un grand péril, voulez-vous me permettre de vous reconduire à votre bonne, et n'aurez-vous point peur de moi? (138–139)

Here Monsieur Bat, whom the *fée* considers to be irresponsible throughout, takes care of Elsie, whereas Miss Barbara lets the girl down in a situation which she regards as highly dangerous. But Barbara does not acknowledge this, or any other fault, in herself. Rather, she concentrates on Monsieur Bat's flaws *instead* of her own. It is as though she magnified his flaws enormously, so as to render hers negligible in comparison.

Freud points out the fact that persecutory paranoids do not project outwards onto *any* foreign figure what they cannot recognize in themselves. Rather, they perceive in others a core of existing hostility or even mere indifference, which they then take up in their delusions of reference.[60] In fact, the enmity which the perse-

[60] See Sigmund Freud, "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality", in *SE*, 18 (1955), pp. 223–232 (p. 226).

cutory paranoid sees in the other person reflects his or her own hostile impulses towards that person. As for Miss Barbara in “La Fée aux gros yeux”, she might therefore project her own hostility onto Monsieur Bat in the form of evil. This unacknowledged hostility might originate in a desire to be like him. Although the governess apparently despises the tutor for his “stupid idleness” and is never without a “useful occupation” herself, she might simultaneously seek reversal. The *fée* might want to enjoy life, stroll in the garden and have nice meals, just like Monsieur Bat. But for her this is taboo: she feels compelled to work. The fact that Miss Barbara herself refers to her supposedly serious research not as work, but as a ball, suggests the ambivalence of her attitude towards it. The balls offer a compensation for her devotion to her research and the corresponding renunciation of pleasure, luxury and beauty: “Je donne un bal. […] Je dis un bal, un grand bal, répondit Barbara en allumant une lampe qu’elle posa sur le bord de la fenêtre; des toilettes magnifiques, un luxe inouï.” (134)

Barbara’s excessive fear of Monsieur Bat is linked to her particular terror of bats. She actually confuses Monsieur Bat and bats, calling the tutor a bat and vice versa: “Tuez-la, étouffez-la, Elsie! Serrez bien fort, étouffez ce mauvais génie, cet affreux précepteur qui me persécute!” (138) Indeed the tutor bears some resemblance to bats. His name most obviously points to his relation to bats, as do his sensitive eyes. In addition, Monsieur Bat is depicted as quiet, timid, dark-haired, always dressed in black, and as a meat-eater with pointed ears and a pointed nose, just like a bat (132). Moreover, when Barbara and Elsie walk from the main building to the pavillion, the fact that Monsieur Bat arrives at the pavillion before them, although they had left first, indicates that he might have flown there, like a bat (133). In Miss Barbara’s mind, Monsieur Bat and bats coincide: she finds both equally repulsive and is equally frightened of both. But it is not only that the governess associates the danger of Monsieur Bat with that of bats. She is frightened of Monsieur Bat not only as his fellow governess, but also through her identification with a fragile *fée:* this is a microscopic being and microscopic beings serve as potential prey to bats. Her double identity and correspondingly two-fold fears thus serve to intensify her anxiety.

In a manner typical of the genre, the fantastic translates Miss Barbara's paranoia into reality, as one night a bat resembling Monsieur Bat sets out to swallow the governess: "Elle [Elsie] secoua son mouchoir instinctivement pour faire échapper le pauvre animal; mais quelle fut sa surprise, quelle fut sa frayeur en voyant M. Bat s'échapper du mouchoir et s'élancer sur miss Barbara, comme s'il eût voulu la dévorer." (138) Here Barbara's fears in fact materialize: precisely that which she had been dreading all along becomes real. Thus the fantastic proves the governess's hitherto irrational fears as right and simultaneously confirms her conviction that Monsieur Bat is a dangerous bat. The fact that Barbara's idea of the tutor's reality is not merely a delusion, but that he really exists in the form of an evil bat makes the governess truly vulnerable. Had her delusion remained a delusion, it would have continued to replace an internal, psychic danger by a perceptual one from which she could flee. However, as Monsieur Bat turns out to pose a real danger in the form of a vicious bat, the fantastic subverts the process of projection by adding a second real danger to the existing instinctual one. Thus projection fails as an effective means of defence: the existing danger not only fails to be neutralized, but is, in contrast, doubled.

## George Sand and Idealism

Naomi Schor insists that it is impossible to write about George Sand without taking her idealist aesthetics into account. By Sand's idealism, Schor understands both "the heightening of an essential characteristic *and* the promotion of a higher good (freedom, equality, spiritual love)".[61] In her book, *George Sand and Idealism*, she explores the reasons why there is no place within the canon of nineteenth-century French literature for a woman author who combines feminism and idealism. She ascribes Sand's devaluation and exclusion from the canon not exclusively to Sand's gender, but above all to her association with a discredited and discarded representational mode. While mimesis is regarded as men's work, ideal-

[61] Naomi Schor, Introduction to George Sand's *Indiana* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994), pp. vii–xxii (p. xii).

ism, as Schor argues, is connected with women, who are supposedly unable to view the world without rose-coloured glasses. Hierarchy insinuates itself into this paradigm through the assumption that aesthetic value resides in the (virile) depiction of unembellished nature (Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* 44).

Yet the practice of an aesthetics of idealism, as Schor suggests, was for Sand not some sort of *a priori* female necessity, but rather a strategy for embodying her difference: "Sand made it quite clear that, in her view, to begin writing was to take one's place on a scene of competing representational modes." (*George Sand and Idealism* 48) Sand herself comments on her mode of representation in relation to Balzac, the Realist *par excellence*: "En somme, vous voulez et savez peindre l'homme tel qu'il est sous vos yeux, soit! Moi, je me sens portée à le peindre tel que je souhaite qu'il soit, tel que je crois qu'il doit être."[62] If we understand by Sand's difference her difference from Balzac, it in fact is in part sexual.

It is with reference to her novels that Sand defines her aesthetics here. How, then, does her treatment of the fantastic relate to her idealism? As we have seen, Sand's idealism involves the promotion of a higher good such as freedom, equality or spiritual love. Of course Sand was always concerned with promoting the extension of women's rights and the role of women in society. Indeed the publication of her fantastic tales was important for women writers of the period. In writing fantastically, Sand "trespassed" on a literary genre which virtually excluded women. Kathryn Crecelius criticizes Todorov for ignoring women fantastic writers in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*. She writes that Todorov falsely presents the fantastic as "a male genre that deals with particularly male preoccupations; woman as Other, the antithesis of religion and sexuality, castration, Oedipus conflicts, and so forth" ("Female Fetishism" 56). Todorov should have included George Sand in his comprehensive study: Sand wrote a number of fantastic tales and is the best-known French nineteenth-century woman writer. Yet one would have to admit that there are hardly any female-authored texts, apart from Sand's, which would

[62] George Sand, "Notice", in *Compagnon du Tour de France*, ed. by René Bourgeois (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1988), pp. 31–33 (p. 32).

qualify as fantastic. It is even more significant, then, that Sand did write in this genre.[63]

Schor argues that Sand's idealism was her way of distinguishing herself from Balzac's Realism. Sand's fantastic writing in itself demonstrates that her idealism was not her only mode of representation. But "La Fée aux gros yeux" is different from male-authored fantastic tales, too. While, as Todorov maintains, the stories written by men most often focus on the feminine as the primary bearer of the fantastic, Sand's "La Fée aux gros yeux" presents a female protagonist, Miss Barbara, to whom the fantastic appears in a male form, as Monsieur Bat. But it would be misleading to deduce that, by missing the common relation of male to female "other" in male-authored fantastic literature, Sand posits a relation of female to male "other". There is no such pattern in Sand.

"La Fée aux gros yeux" is about equality in the sense that it presents a man and a woman in the same professional position. Both work as tutors with young children; Monsieur Bat with the boys and Miss Barbara with the girl, Elsie. As Pierre Vermeylen observes, "l'instruction des filles a toujours été l'un des chevaux de bataille de George Sand".[64] Indeed Elsie's education is in the foreground in the tale, while we are told hardly anything about her brothers. But the story is also about Miss Barbara's own intellectual pursuits, namely her research into microscopic beings, on which she spends all her free time. In the quotation cited above, Sand claims that it is her aim to depict men in the way that she would like them to be; in the way that she thinks they should be. In *Histoire de ma vie*, she quotes Balzac, who said of her: "Vous faites bien de ne pas vouloir regarder des êtres et des choses qui vous donneraient le cauchemar. Idéalisez dans le joli et dans le beau, c'est un ouvrage de femme."[65] Yet this does not apply to Sand's fantastic works. In "La Fée aux gros yeux", the picture painted of Miss Barbara is not an idealistic one. The governess

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[63] Although she does not consider the fantastic, see Alison Finch, *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

[64] Pierre Vermeylen, *Les Idées politiques et sociales de George Sand* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1984), p. 27.

[65] George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, 2 (Paris: Calman Lévy, 1876), p. 162.

keeps picking on Monsieur Bat, with whom the reader in fact sympathizes, and she also attaches excessive importance to her research, neglecting Elsie in turn. Viewing the tale from the perspective of projection brings out the fact that the governess is concerned far more with herself and her own scholarly occupation than with Elsie or indeed anyone else. The fact that the bat attacks her questions her attitude towards both the tutor and the girl. Yet Miss Barbara's eagerness to instruct herself can be seen as an action which is carried out in compensation for that which she lacks. As the *fée*'s thirst for knowledge takes possession of her entire life, there remains no place for Sand's highest ideal, spiritual love.

Significantly, the image of the bat which attacks the governess comes from Elsie, as though the girl were on the side of Monsieur Bat, rather than on Miss Barbara's. Thus the bat's attack can be regarded as Elsie's projection – as her revenge on Miss Barbara. However, this attack does not ultimately harm the governess. Perhaps the figure of Elsie conforms most to Sand's aesthetics of idealism. The girl is depicted as curious and eager to learn, and although we know next to nothing about her parents, her social circumstances make it possible for her to be educated by a governess. In contrast to Barbara's narrow-mindedness, Elsie is tolerant: despite the tutors' curious ways, she accepts and appreciates both as they are, rather than judging them.

## Mérimée's "Carmen"

While Mérimée's gypsy woman, Carmen, and her lover, Don José, have most often been described in terms of opposites – that is, Carmen as diabolical and Don José as her gullible victim – I here suggest that the figure of Carmen be read as a projection of Don José's own shameful self-image.[66] As with Sand's "La Fée aux

[66] See Michael J. Tilby, Introduction to Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen et autres nouvelles choisie: Mateo Falcone – Tamango – La Vénus d'Ille*, ed. by Michael J. Tilby (London: Harrap, 1981), pp. 7–43 (p. 37); and Karl Hölz, "Der befangene Blick auf die Zigeunerkultur: Männliche Wunsch- und Angstvisionen in Prosper Mérimées ‚Carmen'", in *Beschreiben und Erfinden: Figuren des Fremden vom achtzehnten bis zum zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. by Karl Hölz,

gros yeux", Mérimée's story, "Carmen", subverts the defensive process of projection. Rather than "fleeing" from Carmen, Don José is irresistibly drawn to the gypsy woman, although he constantly condemns her ways. I will argue that it is by looking at Carmen, his double, that Don José is confronted with his own unacknowledged desires. This subverts his emotional balance, rather than ensuring its stability.

In the tale, two narrators, who are themselves linked, present the story of Carmen. One is a scholar from Paris, who arrives in Andalusia to finalize a publication on the battle of Munda; the other the Basque, Don José, Carmen's future lover. The Parisian narrator recounts with pride how he makes friends with the obviously dangerous Basque on his way to Cordoba. In the town, Carmen accosts the Parisian. He readily agrees to let her read his fortune, but she steals his watch. At the end of his stay in Spain, the Parisian meets Don José again. In the monastery where the Basque awaits his execution for the murder of Carmen, he tells the Parisian the story of his life.[67]

Carmen is presented as diabolical. The Parisian narrator calls her a "sorcière" (121) and a "servante du diable" (122). "Tu es le diable." (144), Don José says to her; and Carmen herself admits as much: "Tu as rencontré le diable, oui, le diable; il n'est pas toujours noir, et il ne t'a pas tordu le cou. Je suis habillée de laine, mais je ne suis pas mouton." (137) Critics of the tale concur: Marcel Schneider speaks of Carmen's "commerce diabolique";[68] Jean Freustré calls her a "véritable sorcière ensorcelante, une servante de Satan";[69] and for Michael Tilby and Nicholas Jotcham, she belongs to the supreme literary incarnations of the femme fatale.[70]

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Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff and Herbert Uerlings (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 93–117 (p. 113).

[67] Prosper Mérimée, "Carmen", in *Carmen et autres nouvelles choisies*, pp. 109–162.

[68] Marcel Schneider, *Histoire de la littérature fantastique en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), p. 247.

[69] Jean Freustré, *Prosper Mérimée (1803–1870): Le nerveux hautain* (Paris: Hachette, 1982), p. 126.

[70] See Michael J. Tilby, "Language and Sexuality in Mérimée's 'Carmen'", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 15 (1979), 255–263 (p. 255); and Nicholas

Yet Carmen shares with the devil not only her malice, mystery and magic, but also an essential duality. On the one hand, she is dishonest, hypocritical, promiscuous, unreliable, vicious, and cruel, but, on the other hand, she is also seductive, despite the fact that she is not even really beautiful. It is significant that men are attracted to Carmen, even though she does not correspond to their ideal of beauty. As we shall see, she is seductive for other reasons.

In addition to her dual nature, Carmen is reminiscent of the devil, because she, too, is the image of rebellion. Carmen provokes, transgresses boundaries and breaks laws. She does not respect the unwritten Spanish law according to which communal smoking among strangers establishes a relation of hospitality and reciprocal respect. She readily accepts a *papelito* from the Parisian and engages in a conversation with him, but this does not stop her from stealing his watch (120) and persuading Don José to rob the Parisian of his money on top of it (123). Carmen provokes Don José, on guard at the tobacco factory in Seville, by ridiculing him and throwing a flower in his face in front of all (127–128). She disrupts the work by stabbing a woman whom she had provoked in the first place and asks Don José to assist her in escaping on the way to the prison (128–131). In helping the gypsy smugglers, Carmen further defies the military government (138). But Carmen not only breaks the laws of the civil system from "outside", as a gypsy. She also rebels against gypsy laws by having a *minchorrô*, a lover, beside her *rom*.[71]

For Don José, on the other hand, rebellion is taboo. From his life story, which he himself retrospectively recounts to the Parisian scholar after Carmen's death and prior to his execution, we learn that Don José had been brought up to believe in a number of bourgeois, Christian ideals. He had aspired to become a highly ranked officer, is religious and patriotic, takes care of his elderly mother, and had wanted to marry a decent woman, possibly Basque, like himself. Because of their obvious incompatibility, we wonder how

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Jotcham, Introduction to Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), pp. vii–xxv (p. xvii).

[71] See Mary Blackwood Collier, "Carmen: Femme Fatale or Modern Myth? Mérimée's and Bizet's Image of Rebellion", *West Virginia Philological Papers*, 41 (1995), 30–37 (p. 31).

it was possible for Don José to fall in love with the gypsy and be unable to let her go. To understand Don José's irresistible attraction to Carmen, it is helpful to refer to Freud's concept of taboo, based on the emotional ambivalence which also describes Don José's attitude towards Carmen. In Freud's theory, a taboo results from a restriction or prohibition forcibly imposed on humans by some authority from outside, directed against the most powerful longings to which humans are subject. It is characteristic of a taboo that the prohibition does not succeed in abolishing the longing, but only represses it. Both the prohibition and the desire to violate the taboo therefore persist. As a consequence, those who obey the taboo will have an ambivalent attitude towards that which the taboo prohibits (Freud, "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence" 29–35).

Although Don José is himself law-abiding and constantly attempts to "tame" Carmen, his attraction to the gypsy indicates his own secret desire to be like her – free to choose and discard at will. Untamable, uncontrollable and unpossessable, Carmen can be viewed as a projection of Don José's own inclination to rebel and be free, which is prohibited.[72] Don José renounces his desire, but his attitude towards freedom remains ambivalent. This is reflected by, and simultaneously provides an explanation for, his contradictory feelings for Carmen, who is the image of freedom. Indeed Carmen embodies ambivalence: she at once attracts Don José and reminds him that he must not be like her. Typically, the conflict between Don José's desire and the prohibition remains unresolved. While Don José keeps trying to model Carmen upon his own supposed ideal, he always gives in to her and always at the moment following the articulation of his reservations regarding the gypsy woman. On accompanying her to the prison, for example, he first insists that he cannot possibly help her flee and says: "Nous ne sommes pas ici pour dire des balivernes; il faut aller à la prison, c'est la consigne, et il n'y a pas de remède." (129) At this point, Don José appears to be absolutely firm. Yet only a few minutes later, he assists Carmen in her escape by pretending to stagger. In contrast to the gypsy, Don José is unsure of what he wants. Indeed

[72] See Peter Cogman, *Mérimée, Colomba and Carmen* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1992), p. 45.

he always looks to the *consigne*, as though seeking support and approval for his wishes. Therefore, his attempts to tame Carmen resemble rituals, rather than serious obstacles. They suggest that his wish to tame her is not even real. In fact, Don José seeks reversal: he wants to be like Carmen himself, but this is taboo.

Retrospectively, meeting Carmen at the tobacco factory was in Don José's view pertinent to the course of his life. This is clear from what he tells the Parisian: "Je devins bientôt brigadier, et on me promettait de me faire maréchal des logis, quand, pour mon malheur, on me mit de garde à la manufacture de tabacs à Séville." (126) Don José considers the day on which he first sees the gypsy, helps her to flee after she had stabbed her fellow worker, and is himself sent to prison and demoted for this act, as a turning-point in his life. We, the readers, are likewise inclined to believe that Carmen's appearance transformed Don José into an entirely different man, causing him to discard all his aspirations. But this is not supported by the text. In fact, Don José's family had wanted him to study theology, but he had not obeyed: "On voulait que je fusse d'Église, et l'on me fit étudier, mais je ne profitais guère. J'aimais trop à jouer à la paume, c'est ce qui m'a perdu. Quand nous jouons à la paume, nous autres Navarrais, nous oublions tout." (126) It is significant that Don José liked playing *paume*, since he admits that this is what caused his fall. Like Carmen, he, too, was a rebel. He did not conform to his parents' ideas concerning his future. He, too, was a lover of freedom and of play. Moreover, a violent argument after a ballgame forced him to leave his hometown, Elizondo: "Un jour que j'avais gagné, un gars de l'Alava me chercha querelle; nous prîmes nos *maquilas*, et j'eus encore l'avantage; mais cela m'obligea de quitter le pays." (126) At the time when Don José meets Carmen, he is no longer innocent, but has done some wrong already. Therefore, there is no reason why we should regard his act of helping Carmen to escape as his first criminal act and cast him as her victim. It is not his first act of this nature and therefore does not deserve to be seen as the turning-point in Don José's life which proceeds to plunge him into misery. Rather, it is the logical continuation of something that, as the text suggests, started long before Carmen enters his life.

It is significant that Don José had always failed to assume responsibility for his own deeds. He believes that criminality and

immorality have entered his life only through Carmen, just as he makes the ballgame responsible for the fact that he did not pursue an education, and blames the argument after that one game for the fact that he left Elizondo, and his adversary from Alava for starting the argument in the first place. Insofar as Don José falsely denies all vice in himself, while calling Carmen a witch, a devil or a demon, Carmen can be viewed as a projection of precisely that which he denies in himself, a projection of his own shameful self-image.

Mérimée's story undermines the defensive potential of projection by presenting Carmen as Don José's lover. Since Don José does not stay away from Carmen, he must not only confront dealing with his own taboo desires, but must also constantly tame hers. Murdering the gypsy is Don José's ultimate way of domesticating Carmen. Yet while this means getting rid of the intolerable reflection of his own reality, it also involves losing the woman he loves. Indeed, when Carmen is dead, it is as though Don José had killed himself. He stays close to Carmen's body, *anéanti*, as though *he* were dead: "Elle tomba au second coup sans crier. Je crois voir encore son grand œil noir me regarder fixement; puis il devint trouble et se ferma. Je restai anéanti une bonne heure devant le cadavre." (165–157) One might think that in the end, Don José triumphs over Carmen, because he kills her. But in fact, she remains superior to him precisely because he stabs her: because *she* chooses to die by provoking him to the extent that he is forced to stab her, rather than showing any sign of compromise or repentance.[73] Even in the face of death, Carmen remains unchanged, faithful only to her own freedom. She insists: "Comme mon rom, tu as le droit de tuer ta romi; mais Carmen sera toujours libre. *Calli* elle est née, *calli* elle mourra." (156) It is precisely the scene of the murder which represents Don José's failure vis-à-vis the gypsy woman, who is depicted as dangerously powerful until the very end. Carmen does not scream or cry, but stares at Don José with her large, dark eye. Her Medusa stare reveals Don José's own fear of her, which he projects onto her. Her dark eye shows that in the very moment of killing Carmen, Don José is still frightened of

[73] See also Jacques Chabot, *L'autre Moi: Fantasmes et fantastique dans les nouvelles de Mérimée* (Aix-en-Provence: ÉDISUD, 1983), p. 190.

her. Thus the scene of the murder not only represents a last unsuccessful attempt at converting the gypsy woman, but it also reflects Don José's failure vis-à-vis himself, namely his failure to overcome his fear of Carmen.

On a more general level, domesticating the gypsy woman also means imposing the values of Don José's culture on hers. Although Don José is Basque and the narrator French, their values coincide. As David Mickelsen points out, "Spain was for Frenchmen both an exotic world characterized by leisure, permissiveness, and danger *and* a place where home values could ultimately be imposed".[74] Indeed, while Carmen repeatedly calls Don José a *payllo*, a stranger, using the term in a derogatory sense, the men regard gypsy culture as clearly inferior to theirs. In blaming Carmen's origin and circumstances for her "corrupt" character, the men fail to recognize that Carmen is not a typical gypsy at all, but essentially an individual: "Pauvre enfant! Ce sont les *Calés* qui sont coupables pour l'avoir élevée ainsi." (157)

But the image of gypsy culture depicted in "Carmen" not only points to the men's feeling of cultural superiority. It is also covered with their anxieties about their own culture. Jacques Chabot observes that Don José's ideal consists in "l'amour *tranquille*", "la passion *raisonnable*", "la morale honnête", and "la religion prudente" (*L'autre Moi* 207). Gypsy culture embodies contradictory ideals. It is characterized in particular by a lack of rules, restrictions and prohibitions. Indeed Carmen is depicted as impulsive, passionate, eloquent, independent, ever-changing, and free. In contrast, Western European culture, as exemplified by the inflexible, immobile and dumb Don José, lacks precisely this. Thus the representation of gypsy culture in "Carmen" can be viewed as a projection of that which Western European culture at once deplores and secretly desires: it reveals the prohibited and repressed desire of a

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[74] David Mickelsen, "Travel, Transgression, and Possession in Mérimée's 'Carmen'", *Romanic Review*, 87:3 (1996), 329–344 (p. 332).

"civilized" culture with tight social structures and strict norms of conduct to be as wild and uninhibited as the "uncivilized" gypsies.

# 3

# Intellectualization

## Intellectualization and the Fantastic

One feature of literary fantastic stories is their focus on "intellectuals" within the texts themselves. Scientists and scholars, travellers and museum-goers, antiquarians and collectors alike are concerned with explaining the riddles posed by the events which they confront. In Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille" (1837), two men of learning speculate at length about the meaning of the fragmented inscriptions engraved upon a statue of Venus. While the newly unearthed statue inspires great fear in the villagers, the archaeologist-narrator and his learned host, Monsieur de Peyrehorade, display a purely intellectual interest in it.[75] The tale opens with the narrator's Catalan guide recalling his fear on discovering the Venus's black hand under an olive tree in Monsieur de Peyrehorade's garden (82) and Madame de Peyrehorade blames the statue for breaking a workman's leg when he lifts it up (86). In contrast, we learn that her husband could not wait to examine the discovery (82), just as the Parisian narrator immediately enquires into its nature (82–83). Both scholars ridicule the villagers' superstitious fear of the

[75] On myth and superstition, see Frank P. Bowman, "Narrator and Myth in Mérimée's 'La Vénus d'Ille'", *French Review*, 23:5 (1960), 475–482 (p. 480). See also Louis Vax, *Les Chefs-d'œuvre de la littérature fantastique*, p. 79; Michel Vignes, "Le Retour des anciens dieux: La rêverie mythologique dans 'La Vénus d'Ille' de Mérimée", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 20 (1992), 283–294; Laurence M. Porter, "The Subversion of the Narrator in Mérimée's 'La Vénus d'Ille'", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 10:3 (1982), 268–277; Anthony E. Pilkington, "Narrator and Supernatural in Mérimée's 'La Vénus d'Ille'", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 4 (1975–1976), 24–30; Jacques Chabot, *L'autre Moi*, pp. 123–131; Anne Hiller, "'La Vénus d'Ille': Figuration d'un dualsime", *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 12 (1975), 209–219; and Alan W. Raitt, *Prosper Mérimée* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1970), pp. 184–185.

statue; they regard the Venus not as a threat, but rather as an intellectually challenging, and perhaps historically valuable, piece of bronze sculpture.

While the two men's enthusiasm about the statue is great, neither is particularly preoccupied with the forthcoming wedding of Alphonse, the host's son. The narrator considers it a mere inconvenience; his host refers to it as a "bagatelle" (85). Monsieur de Peyrehorade is convinced that the Parisian is *un homme grave* who is no longer interested in women sexually and has no doubt that he can provide his guest with something far more interesting than women. He naturally has the statue of Venus in mind (85). Michael Tilby concurs that Mérimée's scholars as a rule function as asexual beings. According to Tilby, Monsieur de Peyrehorade is too old; and the narrator an ageing bachelor and therefore unsuited for passion or marriage (*Carmen et autres nouvelles choisies* 34–35). It is true that the Parisian is not married and that he displays absolute indifference to love and passion. He never speaks about his own attitude towards women or about any love relations that he might have had, which might be natural in the context of a forthcoming wedding. Precisely the fact that the Parisian insists repeatedly on his disinterest in women, combined with his simultaneous enthusiasm about the statue, indicates that he is not asexual, but rather that his attitude towards eroticism is generally problematic. It is as though the Parisian shied away from the sensual, taking refuge in the intellectual or academic. His repressed interest in women appears to be displaced onto the statue.

I will argue in this chapter that the archaeologist-narrator engages in intellectual discussions about archaeology in a defensive displacement of his personal problem with the sensual, thus transforming – or sublimating – his sexual impulses into a socially productive and valued form.[76] The Parisian's style of thinking and

[76] The term "displacement" refers to the unconscious attempt to obtain gratification for id impulses by shifting them to substitute objects if objects which would directly satisfy the impulses are too threatening. Sublimation is a form of displacement in which the unacceptable id impulses themselves are transformed, rather than the object at which they aim. Instinctual energy is diverted into other channels of expression, ones that society considers not only acceptable, but admirable. Sexual energy, for example, may be sublimated into artistically creative behaviours. See Schultz, *Theories of Personality*, pp. 31–32; Calvin S. Hall and

verbalization is particularly relevant here: his treatment of the statue of Venus is characterized by an extreme emphasis on technical knowledge and seemingly objective judgment. While the villagers are frightened of the statue, the archaeologist-narrator views the sculpture from a purely intellectual perspective. Emotionally, he is entirely detached from it. Psychoanalysis refers to this unconscious isolation of affect – the simultaneous separation of threatening emotions from the associated thoughts or events and a reaction on a purely intellectual level – as intellectualization.[77]

The mechanism of intellectualization is one of the main techniques through which the broad defensive aim of isolation of affect can be achieved. In addition to the need to regard everything as an intellectual task and to emphasize the technical and objective, intellectualization is characterized by a preference for dealing with words, abstractions and symbolic references.[78] The maintenance of a precise and analytical, as well as detached and impersonal, approach allows for the avoidance of the raw impact of the affective and subjective aspects of one's experience. Since intellectualization involves a dissociation between one's thoughts and feelings, an experience may be rendered in a formally correct way and yet the account will fail to convey that which is felt.[79] Freud, in theorizing psychological defence, never used the specific term "intellectualization". Anna Freud coined it in her 1936 book on *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. I will rely on her account of intel-

Gardner Lindzey, *Theories of Personality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), pp. 50–51; Christopher F. Monte, *Beneath the Mask: An Introduction to Theories of Personality* (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p. 183; and Richard M. Ryckman, *Theories of Personality* (London: Wadsworth, 2000), p. 43.

[77] See Robert B. Ewen, *Theories of Personality* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993), p. 35; and Gerald Kestenbaum, "Toward a Definition of Intellectualization", *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, 6:4 (1983), 671–692.

[78] See C. Credaschi, F. Rossel and C. Mercera, "False Self: Personality or Defence? Comparative Study of Two Rorschach Protocols", *British Journal of Projective Psychology*, 36:1 (1991), 35–59 (p. 47).

[79] See J. G. Schimek, "Cognitive Style and Defenses: A Longitudinal Study of Intellectualization and Field Independence", *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 73:6 (1968), 575–580 (p. 576); and Ian Parker, "Postmodernism and its Discontents: Therapeutic Discourse", *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 12:4 (1996), 447–460 (p. 451).

lectualization in my exploration of the important relation between this defence mechanism and the fantastic.

Anna Freud describes intellectualization in the context of puberty. At the outset she draws attention to the paradoxical fact that adolescents often appear to become more intelligent during puberty, while one would normally expect the increased libido which characterizes this period in life to bear an inverse relation to the subject's intellectual activity (*The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* 158). Yet as Freud examines how the adolescents' apparent intellectual development fits into the more general picture of their lives, she realizes that the adolescents' mental performances in fact fail to be translated into reality in any useful way and remain unfruitful to a large extent. From this fact Freud deduces that adolescents derive gratification from the mere processes of thinking, speculating and discussing, while their actual behaviour is not necessarily influenced by the outcome of their "intellectual gymnastics" (*The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* 161). Indeed instinctual processes are translated into intellectual terms as a means of defence, protecting the ego from the intensified libidinal impulses and simultaneously providing substitute satisfaction. But the intellectualization of instinctual life is not a phenomenon confined only to puberty. As Anna Freud notes, it generally belongs to the earliest and most necessary acquisitions of the ego. Intellectualization is a normal process observable in all stages of human life. As with all defence mechanisms, however, it can also become pathological if, in Freud's terms, it "overruns the whole field of mental life" (*The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* 172).

In his eagerness to decipher the inscriptions engraved upon the statue and to philosophize about their meaning, Mérimée's archaeologist-narrator, in "La Vénus d'Ille", is reminiscent of Anna Freud's "intellectualizers". Since the tale presents the Parisian as a man of learning, one might wonder what exactly distinguishes intellectualization by the mentally healthy scholar from that of the adolescent or neurotic, using the process as a precaution against instinctual danger. The difference, as Freud observes, is that scientists pursue well-defined goals in an adequate manner. Their intellectualization is applied to a specific set of problems and guided by reason. Adolescents (in a healthy manner) and neurotics (pathologically), on the other hand, engage in abstract thinking

which may be absolutely unrelated to their own reality. Their use of intellectualization is not a purposeful means to an end, but rather provides gratification in itself (A. Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* 160–161).[80] Viewed from this perspective, Mérimée's scholars belong to the group of defensive intellectualizers, rather than to that of the serious scientists, for their arguments are as unfruitful as the thinking of Anna Freud's intellectualizing adolescents. In the cases of these men of learning, then, their intellectualization points directly to their egos' endeavour to protect themselves from instinctual impulses by means of thought, thus indicating an increase in libido which had deployed the defence towards the instincts in the first place.

In his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Todorov calls attention to the paradox of literary language in fantastic narrative. Todorov suggests that it is precisely when words are employed in the figurative sense that we must take them literally (*Introduction à la littérature fantastique* 66–67). It seems to me that by the same token, those characters in fantastic literature whom we can identify as defensive intellectualizers are most often presented as intellectuals. Indeed, as with "La Vénus d'Ille", Mérimée's "Carmen" presents an intellectual-intellectualizer: a historian-linguist whose categorizations of the gypsy race in the tale's last chapter can be shown to be completely ineffective and in fact wrong. The fantastic itself pretends to take these scholars' intellectualization literally and in turn presents them as true intellectuals – that is, scientists by profession – to us. Outside the fantastic, it would be absurd to relate the mechanism of intellectualization to science and learning, but inside this literature, a link can be established between intellectuals and intellectualizers.

In this chapter, I will view Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille" and "Carmen" from such a perspective. I will focus on the archaeologist-narrator's use of intellectualization and relate his speculations about the Venus to his own anxieties about eroticism – about sexuality, love and marriage. In so doing, I will address the signifi-

[80] See also Anna Freud in discussion with Joseph Sandler, "Discussions in the Hampstead Index on *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, 13: Instinctual Anxiety during Puberty", *Bulletin of the Hampstead Clinic*, 7:2 (1984), 79–104 (pp. 93–94).

cance of the Parisian's dislike of weddings; his contempt for the bridegroom, which coincides with his identification with the bride; and his ambivalent attitude towards both the Venus and the bride. It is significant that the fantastic subverts the mechanism of intellectualization. Whereas the object of the narrator's intellectualization should have no emotional relevance for him, the Parisian in fact reveals as much about his own problematic view of eroticism in discussing the statue, as he does about the Venus itself. Thus the Parisian's use of intellectualization not only channels his own anxieties, but actually articulates them. The fantastic plays them out, as the Venus kills the bridegroom on his wedding night. In this way, the narrator's neurotic intellectualization about the statue is translated into reality: the scholar escapes to congratulate himself on his choice of bachelorhood.

## Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille"

In Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille", the narrator, an archaeologist from Paris, arrives in a little village in the Pyrenees, where the ancient bronze statue had been unearthed. The Parisian is invited to the forthcoming wedding of his host's son, Alphonse de Peyrehorade. On the morning following the wedding, the bridegroom is found dead in his bed; the bride has gone mad.[81]

The Parisian's intellectualization involves denying one problem and dealing with another one instead. The archaeologist-narrator fails to acknowledge his own anxiety about eroticism, while he keenly attempts to make sense of the inscriptions engraved upon the statue of Venus. Thus he (unconsciously) replaces an instinctual problem with a different intellectual one. When he engages in deciphering the meaning of the fragmented inscriptions, the archaeologist-narrator at least sets out to solve a problem. But his efforts constitute a classical Freudian compromise in the sense that he chooses to tackle a non-disturbing problem, while the real, instinctual problem is too disturbing even to surface at the level of consciousness. It is typical, and indeed necessary for defence to

[81] Prosper Mérimée, "La Vénus d'Ille", in *Carmen et autres nouvelles choisies*, pp. 81–107.

function effectively, that the narrator's thinking is satisfying in itself. Thus the Parisian's use of intellectualization appears to match that of Anna Freud's adolescents. Yet whereas the latter engage in intellectual discussions about topics which are in fact emotionally irrelevant to them, we soon see that the Parisian's intellectualization about the statue relates directly to his real concern – namely his anxiety about women and sensual love.

The *conférence scientifique* held by the two scholars on the fragmented inscriptions engraved upon the sculpture's plinth and arm offers the clearest example of this.[82] In debating the twofold meaning of the Latin phrase, "CAVE AMANTEM", Monsieur de Peyrehorade advances the conventional translation, "Beware of the lover!" (90). He reads the inscription as a warning to its reader of the possible danger of lovers in general. The narrator, on the other hand, opts for the second possible translation, "Beware if she loves you!" (90). In contrast to his host, the Parisian thus attributes the warning directly to the statue itself. It is significant that his translation is influenced by the allegedly diabolical expression of the statue: "En voyant l'expression diabolique de la dame, je croirais plutôt que l'artiste a voulu mettre en garde le spectateur contre cette terrible beauté. Je traduirais donc: 'Prends garde à toi si *elle* t'aime.'" (90) The Parisian's supplementation of the second, significantly fragmentary inscription on the statue's arm, is likewise determined by the statue's evil expression. The narrator, troubled himself by the looks of the Venus, suggests supplementing the incomplete "TVRBVL…" in "VENERI TVRBVL… EVTYCHES MYRO IMPERIO FECIT" to "TVRBVLENTA": troubling, agitating (91).

Yet the statue's expression does not strike Monsieur de Peyrehorade as particularly diabolical or evil, a point on which the narrator insists. The Parisian's host explicitly expresses his discontent with the narrator's suggestion to substitute "TVRBVL…" with "TVRBVLENTA": "Vénus turbulente! Vénus la tapageuse! Ah! vous croyez donc que ma Vénus est une Vénus de cabaret? Point du tout, monsieur; c'est une Vénus de bonne compagnie." (91)

[82] Critics have pointed out the prominent use of scientific discourse in "La Vénus d'Ille" (Harter, *Bodies in Pieces* 112; Siebers, *The Romantic Fantastic* 69–70). This of course is typical of the use of intellectualization.

From the disagreement between the two scholars we may deduce that the narrator's insistence on the statue's evil says as much about himself as it does about the statue of Venus. The Parisian's speculations reveal his own repressed fear of eroticism, which he projects onto the Venus in the form of evil. Formulating his fanciful theory of the statue allows the archaeologist-narrator to channel his anxieties, thereby reducing some of the tension accumulated in the process of repression. But the Parisian's intellectualization also causes new anxiety insofar as its very object troubles him morally. It is significant that the narrator's intellectualization provides an effective defence, while it simultaneously provokes a sense of the uncanny.

Although the Parisian obviously considers himself to be intellectually superior to his host, his supposedly logical and inductive reasoning appears to be covered by his own unacknowledged fear of women. This results in the Parisian's strong view that the Venus represents a potential danger to men, a view which clearly points to his own fear of the statue. The narrator's reaction to Monsieur de Peyrehorade's translation of the second inscription illustrates this best. Monsieur de Peyrehorade proposes that: "A Vénus de Boulternère Myron dédie par son ordre cette statue, son ouvrage." (92) The Parisian fails to go along with the other scholar's proposition that the Greek sculptor, Myron, had offered the statue as a gift to some divine figure of the near-by town, Boulternère, who was named Venus. Whereas Monsieur de Peyrehorade holds that the offering was the statue itself, the narrator suggests that Myron had given some other present *to* the statue, supposedly in an effort to appease her (93). In speculating that Myron must have given the Venus an expiatory present to atone for his actions, the Parisian presupposes the statue's irritability and potential danger. Whereas the scholar had previously ridiculed the villagers' fear of the statue, his reading of the inscription is now influenced by that same fear.

It is interesting that in his use of intellectualization, the Parisian should fail to acknowledge his own fear of the statue of Venus, just as he denies his fear of women generally. This may be due to the fact that his substitute object of intellectualization (the Venus) is in fact very similar to his original object-choice (women). Indeed the archaeologist-narrator's intellectualization almost coin-

cides with his real, instinctual problem – namely eroticism and its potential danger for men. Whereas in Anna Freud's theory about intellectualization the subject philosophizes about a matter to which he or she is indifferent, the Parisian's intellectualization about the statue connects closely with his real anxieties about eroticism insofar as the statue itself presents the very danger which the narrator unconsciously fears and attempts to avoid. Yet the Parisian fails to see this connection, or even to acknowledge his fear of the Venus, although her supposed evil, as we have seen, largely determines his intellectual treatment of the statue. The potential danger of the Venus, about which the narrator speculates at length, has no obviously immediate relevance for him. Rather, it appears to him to be hypothetical, abstract and very distant. Thus the Parisian's intellectualization functions effectively as defence. The scholar actually derives gratification from discussing the statue representing Venus, although the sculpture, as the goddess of love, is an allegorization of his own reality.

The archaeologist-narrator is not only intrigued by the evil of the statue's expression, but he also simultaneously admires the statue's beauty. For the Parisian, this essentially consists in the seductive body of the Venus. Whenever the scholar speaks of her, he evokes her expression of cruelty and irony, on the one hand, and her feminine body, on the other. On viewing her for the first time, he comments: "C'était bien une Vénus, et d'une merveilleuse beauté. Elle avait le haut du corps nu, comme les anciens représentaient d'ordinaire les grandes divinités." (88); and later, "Quoi qu'il en soit, il est impossible de voir quelque chose de plus parfait que le corps de cette Vénus; rien de plus suave, de plus voluptueux que ses contours." (89) The Parisian's admiration of the statue's seductive beauty contrasts with his appreciation of the statue's evil expression. The narrator's overtly sexual overtone in describing the Venus is relevant here. The dual nature of the statue reflects the ambivalence of the narrator's own feelings towards eroticism. The statue's seductiveness can be read as a projection of the Parisian's own repressed desire of women, just as the alleged evil of the Venus points to the narrator's own fear of passion. Although this bachelor displays indifference to women, he is not asexual. Rather, his fear of the sensual makes love a taboo.

In his essay on "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence", Freud traces the origin of taboo both as a word and as a historically significant concept. He points out that the meaning of "taboo" diverges in two opposite directions. On the one hand, it means "sacred, consecrated"; on the other, "uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, unclean" (18). The opposite of "taboo" means "common, generally accessible" (18). Accordingly, taboo itself, in Freudian terms, "has about it a sense of something unapproachable" (18). This concept of taboo can be usefully applied to illuminate the narrator's problematic attitude towards love, as well as towards marriage, its institutional form. Most obviously, the Parisian is celibate. In addition to his own bachelorhood, the scholar generally considers marriage to be somehow sacred: marriage should be exclusively about love. But weddings are not celebrated accordingly. In the story, they involve coarse rituals and are above all about earthly pleasures. Weddings also conform to the concept of taboo in the sense that the Parisian does not wish to approach them, either in the figurative or literal sense of the term. On the one hand, the narrator does not use the term "*mariage*" to refer to the forthcoming wedding of his host's son. Instead he calls it "une situation intéressante", as though it were actually not a proper wedding, but a somehow less significant event (84). On the other hand, the Parisian is reluctant to attend Alphonse's wedding from the outset and also retires from it early, to go to bed.[83] This wedding even gives him a headache, making him suffer physically with disgust: "J'avais un grand mal de tête: et puis, je ne sais pourquoi, un mariage m'attriste toujours. Celui-là, en outre, me dégoûtait un peu." (100)

In Freud's theory, the desire to violate a taboo can never be abolished by a prohibition, but only be repressed by it ("Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence" 29–35). Freud argues that the most important taboos, including those on incest and death, became inter-

[83] Tobin Siebers writes that "the Parisian comes to Ille, announcing that he will be a kill-joy, and he is" (*The Romantic Fantastic* 63). The narrator is a trouble-fête not in the sense that he actually does something with the aim of spoiling or even preventing the wedding itself. Rather, his marked lack of enthusiasm about the event and his hostile behaviour vis-à-vis the bridegroom demonstrate his unwillingness to make any contribution towards its success.

nalized as part of our intrapsychic structure a long time ago. Renunciation, rather than any external authority, now constitutes the basis of taboo. Just as the taboo itself persists, so does our ambivalent attitude towards the taboo object. As for the Parisian's choice of celibacy, we may deduce precisely from his insistence on his disinterest in love that he in fact is desperate for it. It is significant that the fantastic itself transgresses the taboo on love which the Parisian imposes on himself. The forthcoming wedding frames the tale; the narrator is present at it; and he continuously thinks about the statue, which of course symbolizes love and marriage. Yet the satisfaction which the Parisian's intellectualization about the Venus brings might in fact be partly due to the specific object of intellectualization. Thinking about the Venus might provide vicarious fulfillment by virtue of this substitute object's similarity to the repressed original object, although that same similarity simultaneously produces uncanniness.

As with his speculations about the statue, the Parisian's treatment of Alphonse and the latter's bride points to the fact that his displayed disinterest in sensual love is not real. The narrator's hostile behaviour vis-à-vis the bridegroom, combined with his identification with the bride, strongly suggests that he envies Alphonse his bride. Tobin Siebers points out that the Parisian is determined to spoil the sport of the robust and athletic Monsieur Alphonse. Siebers notes that the narrator exists uniquely for the purpose of lampooning Alphonse's stupidity, lack of expression, poor taste, and statuesque physique (*The Romantic Fantastic* 63). Indeed the narrator's appraisal of the bridegroom is highly unfavourable:

> Au milieu des allées et venues de ses parents, M. Alphonse de Peyrehorade ne bougeait pas plus qu'un Terme. C'était un grand jeune homme de vingt-six ans, d'une physionomie belle et régulière, mais manquante d'expression. […] Il était ce soir-là habillé avec élégance, exactement d'après la gravure du dernier numéro du *Journal des Modes*. Mais il me semblait gêné dans ses vêtements; il était raide comme un piquet dans son col de velours, et ne se tournait que tout d'une pièce. […] D'ailleurs, bien qu'il me considérât de la tête aux pieds fort curieusement, en ma qualité de Parisien, il ne m'adressa qu'une seule fois la parole dans toute la soirée. (84)

Depicting Alphonse as motionless, dumb and lacking expression, the archaeologist regards the young man as a dull and mechanical marionette. While the artificial eyes of the statue of Venus strike

him as real and alive (90), he compares Alphonse, the athlete, to a Terminus, a Roman statue. The Parisian's view of the bridegroom thus constitutes a fantasmatic image of that which he fears that love does: petrify and silence, or, in other words, castrate.

While the narrator continuously finds fault with Alphonse's looks and conduct, the bridegroom confides in the Parisian. On the wedding night, Alphonse, unable to remove the ring from the statue's finger, turns to the Parisian, clearly frightened at the thought that the Venus might purposefully retain his ring (101). Yet the narrator, rather than comforting the confused bridegroom, suspects that Alphonse might be playing a nasty trick on him by sending him out in the garden to check on the statue in the pouring rain (101–102). In fact, it is not that Alphonse wishes to harm the Parisian; rather, the narrator projects his own contempt for Alphonse onto the latter's attitude. We initially sympathize with the Parisian's negative view of the bridegroom, for Alphonse's attitude seems rather mercenary indeed. Alphonse talks only about the chain of the narrator's watch, his own racing horses, his bride's large dowry, and the immense value of the wedding ring destined for her (94). Moreover, he still keeps the ring from a past amour. Alphonse would therefore seem to merit the narrator's hostility, as well as ours. But the Parisian's resentment for Alphonse cannot be attributed exclusively to the latter's callousness or to his own chivalry, because he dislikes Alphonse from the outset, even before he learns about the bridegroom's treatment of his bride.

The scholar revises his view of Alphonse at one point, namely when he watches the young man play *paume* shortly before the wedding ceremony. When playing, Alphonse is no longer paralyzed or worried about his elegant dress, but absolutely natural and even passionate: "Alors je le trouvai vraiment beau. Il était passionné. Sa toilette, qui l'occupait si fort tout à l'heure, n'était plus rien pour lui." (97) The fact that the narrator considers the bridegroom to be beautiful while playing might relate as much to the fact that the Parisian himself feels comfortable watching *paume*, a ballgame which excludes women, as to Alphonse's supposed natural passion. The Parisian might simply prefer Alphonse as a player of a masculine game to Alphonse the bridegroom.

The archaeologist-narrator's contempt for Alphonse relates directly to his identification with the bride. The scholar, who as-

sumes himself that Alphonse is unworthy of Mademoiselle de Puygarrig, pities her for having to marry Alphonse: "Quel dommage, me dis-je en quittant Puygarrig, qu'une si aimable personne soit riche, et que sa dot la fasse rechercher par un homme indigne d'elle!" (95) Significantly, the Parisian portrays Mademoiselle de Puygarrig as the opposite of her bridegroom – as natural and articulate, as well as beautiful and seductive (95). By pointing out the bride's qualities, the Parisian therefore simultaneously exposes Alphonse's inadequacies. Yet the bride herself does not appear to consider Alphonse so bad a match. Her merry mood at the dinner indicates that she is perfectly happy to become Alphonse's wife (95). The fact that she puts on a hat immediately after the wedding ceremony, so as to demonstrate her new status, confirms this (99). The Parisian, however, infers from the bride's happiness that she does not *yet* realize what Alphonse is like. He assumes that, because *he* despises Alphonse, all must share his feelings. He thus displaces onto the bride his own dislike of Alphonse.

The narrator sympathizes with the bride to an extent which makes him suffer on her account: "Je souffrais pour la mariée de la grosse joie qui éclatait autour d'elle: pourtant elle faisait meilleure contenance que je ne l'aurais espéré, et son embarras n'était ni de la gaucherie ni de l'affectation." (98) Here the Parisian suggests that the bride suffers, as he does, from the coarse joy around her. He interprets her happy attitude as composure, rather than happiness, ruling out the bride's enjoyment of her wedding *a priori*. Yet the second part of the above quotation demonstrates that the bride does not in fact suffer. Unlike the narrator, she is not repulsed by the *grosse joie*. Rather than suffering with the bride, the narrator suffers instead of her. The Parisian sympathizes with Mademoiselle de Puygarrig for something that matters only to him, but in fact is irrelevant to her. On the wedding night, the Parisian's identification with the young woman goes so far that he actually suffers physically on her account. Thinking about the supposedly poor girl, he cannot sleep or concentrate on his reading: "Je pensais à cette jeune fille si belle et si pure abandonnée à un ivrogne brutal. […] Que cette pauvre fille, me dis-je, doit être troublée et mal à son aise! Je me tournais dans mon lit de mauvaise humeur." (102) The Parisian, himself troubled and uncomfortable, here "experiences" precisely that which he assumes the bride to be under-

going. Significantly, his identification with the bride involves the vilification of the bridegroom: the scenario of the wedding night pictured by the narrator includes not only the pure girl, but also the brutal villain to whom she is abandoned.

In the Parisian's vision of the wedding night, the bridegroom is brutal and aggressive and his new wife is his victim. The narrator's view of the bride thus contrasts with his view of the Venus, whose danger he sees consistently. The bride is victimized by Alphonse, and the Parisian pities her for this reason, whereas the Venus herself victimizes her lovers, causing the narrator to pity them (89). I have argued that the narrator's image of the bride is coloured by his own hostility towards Alphonse. It might also be influenced by his wishful thinking. In order for the Parisian to identify with a woman, she must be a man's victim: only then can the Parisian safely assume that she presents no danger to men. But just as the scholar's attitude towards the statue is ambivalent, so is his attitude towards the bride. Just as the narrator's enthusiasm about the Venus and his fear of her do not exclude each other, so his sympathy for the bride does not exclude his simultaneous reservation towards her: "Son air de bonté, qui pourtant n'était pas exempt d'une légère teinte de malice, me rappela, malgré moi, la Vénus de mon hôte." (95) Here the Parisian links the bride's features to the statue's evil expression: his attitude towards both corresponds not to their realities, but is largely determined by his own general fear of women.

As the events become supernatural, the Parisian's doubtful view of eroticism materializes: the wedding ends in a tragedy; Alphonse himself is murdered. As the statue of Venus kills the bridegroom, the very danger which the scholar had consistently seen and which had determined his theory about the statue becomes real. The fantastic translates the Parisian's neurosis into reality and thereby rationalizes the narrator's hitherto irrational fears both of love and of the Venus. It shows that they are in fact justified. Rather than substituting a merely hypothetical danger for a real, instinctual one, the fantastic adds a second real danger to the existing libidinal one in the form of the Venus-bride-killer. Thus the fantastic undermines the defensive potential of intellectualization. The Parisian's use of intellectualization rationalizes and intensifies his anxiety, rather than resolving or minimizing it. Indeed the fantastic itself

consists in changing the Parisian's neurotic intellectualization about the Venus into reality. Intellectualization fails as an effective means of emotional control, because as the fantastic translates the Parisian's psychic reality into the reality of the tale, it provokes precisely those feelings of anxiety and displeasure which the mechanism of intellectualization was originally designed to isolate.

## Mérimée's "Carmen"

As with "La Vénus d'Ille", Mérimée's "Carmen" presents an intellectual narrator. A well-read historian-philologist from Paris arrives in Spain to finalize his research into Caesar. The scholarly narrator devotes an entire chapter to a supposedly scientific treatment of the gypsy race, to which Carmen of course belongs. But the Parisian's categorizations can be shown to be absolutely ineffective and indeed wrong. We know from the preceding story about Carmen that a number of the points made about gypsies in this final chapter are incorrect.

Most critics of "Carmen" do not bother to consider the tale's final chapter, which was only added to the existing version in the 1847 edition. Others have accused Mérimée of pedantry and showing-off. In Michael Tilby's terms, in the new fourth chapter, "Mérimée paraded his largely second-hand knowledge of gypsy culture" (*Carmen et autres nouvelles choisies* 35). The final chapter is not about the author's knowledge at all. Rather, it is about the *narrator's* attempt to categorize the gypsy race. It would be misleading to attribute the discrepancies between the final chapter and the three previous ones to Mérimée's own lack of knowledge, in particular since the contradictory claims made in chapter four are so obvious that one may conclude that they are purposeful. These contradictions are the narrator's and must be treated accordingly.

From the perspective of intellectualization, the tale's fourth chapter is remarkable in the sense that the narrator's need to deal with gypsy culture on a scholarly basis reveals the extent to which he, like Don José, is intrigued by Carmen. In the story about his

stay in Spain recounted in chapters one and two, the Parisian claims to be emotionally indifferent to the gypsy woman. He pretends to render an objective account of his encounter with her. The narrator's detachment seems to be confirmed by the fact that in chapter three he makes Don José relate himself his experiences with Carmen. Indeed the narrator states explicitly that Carmen does not interest him in any personal way, but that he likes to spend time with her exclusively for quasi-scholarly reasons: "Bon! me dis-je; la semaine passée, j'ai soupé avec un voleur de grand chemin, allons aujourd'hui prendre des glaces avec une servante du diable. En voyage il faut tout voir." (121) Yet the Parisian's curt reaction to Don José's intrusion into Carmen's *cérémonies magiques* suggests that his seemingly detached interest in Carmen is only a pretence for his personal attraction to her (122–123). The final chapter confirms this: although Carmen herself is not even mentioned in it, from the perspective of intellectualization, the chapter can be regarded as a manifestation of the narrator's emotional preoccupation with her.

In a manner characteristic of the process of intellectualization, the Parisian's treatment of gypsy culture in chapter four is marked by his own apparent indifference to the subject matter. It is typical of the fantastic that the narrator's intellectualization is clearly – and deceptively – identified as "serious learning". In "La Vénus d'Ille", as we have seen, this is achieved by calling the two men's speculations a *conférence scientifique*. Here the narrator devotes an entire chapter exclusively to a supposedly scholarly discussion of the gypsy race. We know from the tale's preceding chapters that the narrator knows Carmen well, both personally and also from Don José's account of her. Yet in his chapter on "the gypsy", the Parisian fails to make any references to Carmen, as though he had somehow forgotten that Carmen was a gypsy, or indeed as though he had altogether forgotten about her. In fact, the Parisian narrator makes a number of points which conflict with his knowledge of Carmen and the other gypsies. For example, he claims that gypsy women are never interested in men of a foreign race (158); and that gypsies are indifferent not only to religion, but also to superstitious beliefs (159). Having read the whole tale, we the readers know, however, that Carmen undoubtedly feels attracted to other men besides gypsies. Her relationship with Don José provides the

most obvious example of this. Moreover, the tale abounds with examples of Carmen's superstition. She constantly reads her own future and regards the course of her life as *écrit*, and even lets the narrator himself see her "witchcraft" (122). Therefore, it strikes us as most peculiar that the narrator above all should make such "mistakes" in the final chapter. The discrepancy between the Parisian's quasi-theoretical treatment of the gypsy race and his practical knowledge of it is even more remarkable insofar as he had constantly claimed that the whole point of knowing Carmen was to know a gypsy woman. Viewing the tale's final chapter from the perspective of intellectualization provides a clue to the Parisian narrator's seemingly peculiar isolation of Carmen within its pages. Intellectualization is about isolating affect: the fact that chapter four blocks out Carmen, while dealing with gypsies in a more general way on an intellectual basis, is precisely what points to the relation between Carmen and the chapter – and to the relation between Carmen and the narrator.

The Parisian's intellectualization about gypsies reveals the fact that Carmen seduces the Parisian, just as she seduces Don José. The relationship between the two men was established at the start, when the narrator had succeeded in "taming" the supposedly wild bandit, Don José, by smoking, eating and sleeping under one roof with him. The men's identification is further supported by the fact that both are narrators. Both tell the story of Carmen and their views on her in fact coincide. While both men are attracted to the gypsy woman, both simultaneously condemn her ways and both ultimately fail to understand her unique character. Don José tries to model Carmen according to his own ideal of woman; the Parisian narrator attempts to categorize her as a gypsy. But of course this does not work. Carmen is ever-changing and above all needs to be free: she absolutely resists categorization. Chabot suggests that Don José's drama consists in attempting to pin down the unseizable: "Le *drame* de don José, qui n'est pas un héros tragique, c'est d'avoir voulu *fixer l'insaisissable*, autrement dit d'avoir prétendu *faire prendre corps à un fantasme*." (*L'autre Moi* 207) This is not only Don José's drama, but the Parisian's, too. Just as Don José's efforts to tame Carmen fail, so the Parisian's attempts at categorizing the gypsy race are absolutely ineffective. Both men fail in the end. Don José, on the one hand, is defeated by Carmen:

he is going to be executed, because she had forced him to stab her. In any case, Don José is as good as dead without Carmen. The Parisian, on the other hand, is defeated by his material. At the end of the tale, he must silence himself and so he closes his mouth: "En voilà assez pour donner aux lecteurs de 'Carmen' une idée avantageuse de mes études sur le rommani. Je terminerai par ce proverbe qui vient à propos: *En retudi panda nasti abela macha*. En close bouche, n'entre point mouche." (162)

# 4

# Mechanization

## Mechanization and the Fantastic

In Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1886 novel, *L'Ève future*, a doll is constructed to replace a living woman. Scholars have linked the story to the anxiety which the rapid succession of technological discoveries and scientific findings in the nineteenth century produced and have asked questions about the threatening power of machines and science over humans.[84] Yet the novel is equally compelling for its reflection of a profoundly positivist attitude. There is a long tradition in modern Western philosophy of relating the natural to the mechanical in an effort to comprehend the former in terms of the latter. Since Descartes we are accustomed to thinking of the body as a machine, each age describing the body in terms of the age's dominant machinery.[85] In the nineteenth century, mechanical explanations provided an understanding not only of the physiology of humans and animals, but also of the human psyche and of society as a whole. In Freud's thought, machines offer the key to knowledge and control; he always relates the human psyche to a controllable apparatus, to a machine which per-

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[84] See Sylvain Matton, "Le Jeu de la technique et de l'imaginaire dans *L'Ève future* de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam", *Études philosophiques*, 1 (1985), 45–56; Marie Lathers, *The Aesthetics of Artifice: Villiers's* L'Ève future (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Rhonda K. Garelick, "Material Girls: Dance, Decadence, and the Robotics of Pleasure in *L'Ève future*", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 21 (1993), 461–478; and Asti Hustvedt, "The Pathology of Eve: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future* and *fin de siècle* Medical Discourse", in *Jeering Dreems: Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's* L'Ève future *at our fin de siècle: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by John Anzalone (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 25–46.

[85] See Carol Rifelj, "Minds, Computers, and Hadaly", in *Jeering Dreams*, pp. 127–139 (p. 127).

forms a complex task.[86] Similarly, Auguste Comte, in his *Cours de philosophie positive*, views society in terms of an organism in which each member or organ functions individually and yet as a mechanism in which the individual parts are arranged to work together.[87] Comte's central thesis is that metaphysical or speculative attempts at discovering extra-mundane causes of the natural world, at gaining knowledge by reason unchecked by experience, should be abandoned in favour of the positive method of observation and induction. The strength of positivism in the nineteenth century partly derives from the continuous and agreed progress which had been achieved in the natural sciences since Galileo. Comte demands that this method be employed in all sciences, notably the newly founded disciplines of sociology, psychology and anthropology.[88] While humans thus come to be studied as though they were machines, there is an important distinction between actually being taken for a machine and merely being regarded as one: the latter presupposes that man is not a machine, but is only treated as such for the purpose of study.[89] Since the positive scientist *chooses* to look at humans as though they were machines, this involves no uncanniness for him or her. Rather, the scientist relies on the positive method precisely because he or she is confident that by referring to mechanical explanations one can best comprehend the human.

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[86] Freud's "Project for a Scientific Psychology", in *SE*, 1 (1966), pp. 295–379, offers the most obvious example of this; it aims "to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles" (295). See also Frank Wittig, *Maschinenmenschen: Zur Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs im Kontext von Philosophie, Naturwissenschaft und Technik* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1997), p. 66; and Peter Gendolla, *Anatomien der Puppe: Zur Geschichte des MaschinenMenschen bei Jean Paul, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam und Hans Bellmer* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992), p. 58.

[87] See Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, ed. by Michel Serres *et al.*, 1 (Paris: Hermann, 1975), p. 31.

[88] See Jonathan Ree and J. O. Urmson (eds), *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 255. See also Arline Reilein Standley, *Auguste Comte* (Boston: Twayne, 1981), pp. 9–15.

[89] See Anthony Flew, "Descartes and the Cartesian Revolution", in *An Introduction to Western Philosophy: Ideas and Arguments from Plato to Sartre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), pp. 275–301 (p. 295).

Thus the relation between the human and the mechanical in *L'Ève future* can be viewed not as a cause of fear in itself, but rather as a means of emotional control. Regarding humans in terms of machines reveals the desire to comprehend human nature fully and consequently to be able to predict human behaviour. It is from such a perspective that I will view *L'Ève future* here. I shall read this novel against the background of E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" [The Sandman] and focus on the male protagonists' attempts at control. The men manipulate the women as though the women were mere machines and go so far as to substitute machines for them. But mechanization fails as an effective means of control in fantastic narrative. The effort to control the specifically human in the women, namely their feelings and intellect, results in the women actually changing into mechanical dolls. An uncanny atmosphere develops, as the distinction between humans and mere automata resembling humans becomes impossible. Not only are artificial dolls mistakenly taken for human beings, but humans, too, increasingly resemble machines. They are depicted as unnatural, inflexible, unspontaneous, and therefore as incapable of engaging in passionate relationships with others independent of themselves.

## Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann"

The theme of mechanical dolls in fantastic literature stems from Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" and recalls Freud's theory of "The Uncanny", to which the tale gave rise. In his analysis of "The Sandman", Freud refers the atmosphere of uncanniness in the story exclusively to the "Sand-Man who tears out children's eyes" and interprets Nathaniel's phobia with eyes as a displaced return of the infantile dread of castration ("The Uncanny" 227). Freud obviously does not consider it useful to discuss the seeming humanity of the doll, Olympia, with whom the student falls in love, taking the puppet for a real, living woman.[90] Yet in his introduction to the

[90] A number of scholars have criticized Freud for isolating the sandman as the focal point of interest in the tale while glossing over Olympia; see Helène Cixous, "Fiction and its Fantoms: A Reading of Freud's 'Das Unheimliche' (The

discussion of the tale, Freud had quoted, and agreed with, Carl Jentsch's argument that uncanny effects are created in story-telling by leaving the reader uncertain as to whether a particular figure is a human being or an automaton ("The Uncanny" 227). Why, then, does he end up neglecting Olympia?

It is crucial that on the relation of mechanization to the uncanny, Freud contents himself with quoting another, rather than developing the case himself. In "The Uncanny", Freud clearly sets himself the task of determining the sense of the term "uncanny". If he does not discuss the doll, Olympia, it is that her nature simply does not strike him as uncanny, as indeed he inconsistently claims further on: "Certainly whether an object is living or inanimate, which admittedly applied to the doll Olympia, is quite irrelevant in comparison with this other, more striking instance of uncanniness." ("The Uncanny" 230) Freud's exclusive attention to the figure of the sandman and to Nathaniel makes sense in the context of his own emphasis on instinctual drives and the neurotic conflicts arising between them and social demands. This focus may in fact account for his neglect of Olympia. Freud views her from Nathaniel's perspective, which is not uncanny, because for the student, there is no uncertainty as to Olympia's being a real, living woman. The reader's perspective, however, is different from Nathaniel's. We have doubts from the outset as to Olympia's humanity. For the reader, then, the uncanny atmosphere in the tale derives not only from the figure of the sandman, but also from the doll which seems human and in fact deceives Nathaniel.[91]

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Uncanny)", *New Literary History*, 7:3 (1976), 525–548 (p. 537); Shelley L. Frisch, "Poetics of the Uncanny: E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'Sandman'", in *The Scope of the Fantastic – Theory, Technique, Major Authors: Selected Essays from the First International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film*, ed. by Robert A. Collins and Howard D. Pearce (London: Greenwood, 1985), pp. 49–55; and Michelle E. Bloom, "Pygmalionesque Delusions and Illusions of Movement: Animation from Hoffmann to Truffaut", *Comparative Literature*, 52:4 (2000), 291–320 (p. 299).

[91] See also Laurence Dahan-Gaida, "La Science et ses œuvres: De la créature artificielle à la création littéraire", in *L'Homme artificiel: Hoffmann, Shelley, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*, ed. by Isabelle Krzywkowski (Paris: Ellipses, 1999), pp. 122–147 (p. 125); Andrée Job-Querzola, "Vie et mort de l'automate décadent: De l'artifice à l'homme artificiel", in *L'Homme artificiel*, pp. 97–109 (p. 103); and Paul-Laurent Assoun, "La Créature artificielle saisie par la psychanalyse: Féminin et inquiétante étrangeté", in *L'Homme artificiel*, pp. 176–188 (p. 180).

It is significant that Nathaniel falls in love with a puppet bound to be utterly dull and simultaneously criticizes his fiancée, Clara, precisely for her supposed lack of sensitivity and intellect.[92] While the student believes that Olympia is the only being that can understand him fully, the doll is of course incapable of any genuine emotion or rational judgment. Olympia is dispossessed of any individual identity; she owes her existence entirely to Nathaniel's narcissistic self-reflection. Clara, on the other hand, asserts her identity and independent existence by her opposition to him. When Nathaniel tells her about his childhood fears revived by Coppola, the itinerant optician, she considers her fiancé's condition from a psychological perspective with a view to improving it in the interest of all. But Nathaniel rejects Clara's explanation of his anxiety, together with her intelligence to which it testifies.[93] Rather than acknowledging her efforts, he goes so far as to call her a lifeless automaton: "Da sprang Nathanael entrüstet auf und rief, Clara von sich stoßend: 'Du lebloses, verdammtes Automat!'" (348) [Thereupon, Nathaniel sprang up indignantly and exclaimed, thrusting Clara away: "You damned, lifeless automaton!"][94]

Perhaps Clara's dullness, which is not real, can best be seen as a projection of Nathaniel's own fear of dullness onto her, and thus as another manifestation of the Freudian castration complex.[95] It is precisely Clara's independent intellect and feeling, which Nathaniel cannot manipulate as he wishes, which make it impossible for him to love her. In fact, it is not that she is too dull for him, but that, on the contrary, she is not dull enough for him to impose his

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[92] See Alienne Becker, "Hoffmann's Fantastic Sandman", in *The Dark Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Ninth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. by C. W. Sullivan III (London: Greenwood, 1997), pp. 23–31 (p. 24).

[93] See also Margarethe Kohlenbach, "Women and Artists: E.T.A. Hoffmann's Implicit Critique of Early Romanticism", *The Modern Language Review*, 89:3 (1994), 659–673 (p. 665).

[94] Translations of short passages from "Der Sandmann" quoted in the text are my own. For an English translation of the tale, see "The Sand-Man", in *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*, ed. by E. F. Bleiler (New York: Dover, 1967), pp. 183–214.

[95] In Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille", the narrator portrays the bridegroom as similarly dull as Nathaniel views Clara here. Both the Parisian narrator and Nathaniel seem to project their own fear of dullness onto Alphonse and Clara respectively.

own being on her. Nathaniel may fear that Clara's personality might be so strong as to make *him* dull, to dominate and numb him.

In contrast, Olympia presents no such threat. While Nathaniel cherishes her for her profundity, it is the opposite, namely her dullness, which makes her loveable.[96] Indeed it seems that some sort of doll is precisely what Nathaniel wants. Clara's personality not only fails to interest him, but even disturbs him to a point that he manipulates or ignores, and finally denies, it. In expecting Clara to respond precisely as he wishes, Nathaniel *wants* her to be like a doll, whereas she has her own will and personality. In fact, it is Nathaniel who is profoundly inflexible and unable to compromise. He only seeks one-way communication. Although he expects Clara to listen quietly, he never listens to her, but constantly speaks about his own concerns, recites his own poems and is preoccupied with his own fears. Thus it is not that Clara is insensitive or dull, but that *he* is entirely egocentric. What he really requires of his beloved is not response, but quite the contrary, namely absolute attention and unthinking agreement with whatever he says. This is what attracts him to the doll, Olympia: she is the perfect audience and her "Ach!" is available for the expression of both consent and dissent – whichever suits *him* in the moment.[97]

If Olympia is but an extension of Nathaniel's own self, this explains the outbreak of his second fit of madness. When Nathaniel was a child, the sandman-Coppelius had violently pulled off the boy's hands and feet before screwing them back on in different sockets and had threatened to tear out the boy's eyes on top of this

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[96] See also Hubert Desmarets, *Création littéraire et créatures artificielles:* L'Ève future*,* Frankenstein*,* "*Le Marchand de sable*"*, ou le je(u) du miroir* (Paris: Temps, 1999), p. 117; Thomas A. Kamla, "E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'Der Sandmann': The Narcissistic Poet as Romantic Solipsist", *Germanic Review*, 63:2 (1988), 94–102 (p. 95); and Ross Chambers, "De Grands yeux dans l'obscurité: Regard scientifique et vision occulte dans *Claire Lenoir* et *L'Ève future*", *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 9 (1972), 308–325 (p. 315).

[97] See also Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 131–133; and Lee B. Jennings, "Woman as Reality-Demarcator", in *Modes of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Twelfth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. by Robert A. Latham and Robert A. Collins (London: Greenwood, 1995), pp. 122–128 (p. 126).

(336). Thus the sandman had treated Nathaniel like a doll, whose limbs may be detached and assembled at will; the boy's human wholeness had been under attack. As the student sees Olympia's limbs hang from her body without life and realizes that her eyes have been torn out by Coppola, this situation repeats itself:

> Nun warf Coppola die Figur über die Schulter und rannte mit fürchterlich gellendem Gelächter die Treppe herab, so daß die häßlich herunterhängenden Füße der Figur auf den Stufen hölzern klapperten und dröhnten. – Erstarrt stand Nathanael – nur zu deutlich hatte er gesehen, Olimpias toderbleichtes Wachsgesicht hatte keine Augen, statt ihrer schwarze Höhlen; sie war eine leblose Puppe. (359) [Coppola threw the figure across his shoulder and rushed downstairs with a frightful yell of laughter, so that the figure's legs, which were hanging down in an unsightly way, gave a wooden rattling and rumbling as they knocked against the steps. Nathaniel was petrified: he had seen only too distinctly that there were no eyes in Olympia's deadly-white wax face, but only black holes instead of them. She was a lifeless doll.]

As with the incident provoking Nathaniel's first fit of madness, a supposedly human being is treated like a mere doll here. The first experience may appear uncannier than the second one in the sense that Nathaniel really is a human being and his fear thus justified, while Olympia is only a doll. But the very fact that Olympia is not a living woman makes the second attack even more unsettling for Nathaniel, for beyond coping with his anxieties about his own body, he must simultaneously deal with the discovery that his beloved is but an automaton. As Olympia is destroyed, Nathaniel not only loses the woman to whom he was going to propose marriage, but her destruction also wrecks his general view of women as controllable machines.

## Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*

As with Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann", a living woman is replaced by a mechanical doll in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*. In the novel, the American inventor, Thomas Edison, receives the rich Englishman, Lord Celian Ewald, at his house at Menlo Park in New Jersey. Ewald, who had saved the inventor's life long before, has come to say farewell. He intends to take his own life, because he loves a woman whom he deems utterly stupid and conventional,

despite her sublime beauty. To save him, Edison proposes to substitute an artificial woman named Hadaly for the real woman, the aspiring actress and opera singer, Alicia Clary. He will fashion Hadaly in the actress's exact image, yet she will be spiritually more satisfying. Edison requires twenty-one days to complete his work on Hadaly. After the three weeks, the Englishman will be free to kill himself, should he not fall in love with her. But Lord Ewald loves Hadaly and takes her back home to England. However, the boat from New York to Europe sinks and Hadaly and Alicia Clary are among the casualties. Ewald himself is so devastated as to feel dead, even if he does not literally die.[98]

Both "Der Sandmann" and *L'Ève future* rewrite, and subvert, Ovid's story of Pygmalion.[99] Originally, Pygmalion sculpts a statue in female form from a block of ivory, falls in love with it and prays to Venus for a wife like his own creation. The goddess grants his wish, Pygmalion marries his statue now come to life and the couple live happily ever after. "Der Sandmann" and *L'Ève future* likewise feature female creations endowed with life, but the motivation for these works is different, as is the process of their creation. Olympia and Hadaly are not created by one single, male artist who would fall in love with his own completed work, as did Pygmalion. Rather, a number of scientists and artisans participate in their creation. Yet Hadaly is fashioned to look like Alicia especially for Ewald and it is he who must inspire life in her: "Le modèle s'accuse, les traits apparaissent, mais sans teint ni nuances; c'est la statue attendant le Pygmalion créateur." (198) Anne Greenfeld suggests that Ewald's relation to Hadaly can be viewed in terms of an inversion of the Medusa-Perseus relationship, namely that of Pygmalion and Galatea. In such a relationship, the woman would be transfixed in stone, beautiful but entirely powerless, until a man's gaze would animate her. Like Galatea, Ewald's ideal woman must never become entirely independent of him. Her

[98] Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *L'Ève future*, ed. by Pierre Citron (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1979).
[99] See also Ivanna Rosi, "Hadaly/Idéal/Idol: Une réécriture artificielle du mythe de Pygmalion par Villiers de l'Isle-Adam", *Revue-Romane*, 35:1 (2000), 101–120; Marie Blain-Pinel, "Edison créateur, profanateur ou rédempteur? À propos de *L'Ève future* de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 97:4 (1997), 599–621.

wishes and desires must always correspond to those of her creator.[100] But perhaps what is at stake here is a Medusa-Perseus relationship. While Ewald views Hadaly as a controllable Galatea, the mechanical doll will turn out to be as threatening to him as living women. As Hadaly dupes Ewald, she resembles Medusa rather than Galatea and Ewald himself is as powerless as Perseus.

Although Nathaniel and Ewald animate the dolls with their own gaze, looking at the real women is impossible or harmful for them. Nathaniel most often reads to Clara, which saves him from looking directly at her ("Der Sandmann" 347–348). Moreover, in Nathaniel's gloomy poem predicting that Coppelius will destroy their love, Clara asks Nathaniel to look at her eyes. When he does so, he sees death staring at him ("Der Sandmann" 348). Finally, on the tower, Nathaniel sees Clara through his perspective, before he succumbs to a last fit of madness (362). By the same token, Ewald never looks at Alicia directly. On her arrival at Menlo Park she whispers in his ear and he bends before her (216). During the dinner it is Edison, rather than Ewald, who talks to Alicia (216–226). When Alicia addresses Ewald to ask him whether the artificial flower which Hadaly had given him is destined for her, he has even to close his eyes, *malgré lui* (226). The men's refusal to look at the living women points as much to their fear of the women's power and seductiveness as to their denial of the women's existence as beings independent of them.

Although Edison himself does not fall in love with his creation, he certainly regards Hadaly as worthy of a man's love. In his view, the doll is not only equal to real women, but is in fact superior to them. The artificial flesh of Hadaly's hand not only looks and feels precisely like human flesh, but it even surpasses it, for it does not age: "Oh! c'est mieux! – dit simplement Edison. La chair se fane et vieillit: ceci est un composé de substances exquises, élaborées par la chimie de manière à confondre la suffisance de la 'Nature'." (94) The seeming naturalness of the artificial hand is precisely what strikes Ewald as uncanny and yet the hand also simultaneously fascinates him: "L'Anglais semblait comme fasciné; il avait

[100] Anne Greenfeld, "The Shield of Perseus and the Reflecting Frame: Mirrors of Absent Women in *L'Ève future* and 'Véra'", in *Jeering Dreams*, pp. 67–76 (p. 69).

pris le bras et comparait avec sa propre main la main feminine." (94) In its combination of perfection and uncanniness, the human-looking fragment represents Hadaly as a whole. All her superficially sensible parts are perfect copies of Alicia's. Yet all of them are better in some way: more durable (her flesh) and more valuable (her golden lungs) than the original. Like the hand, Hadaly herself is at once a perfect copy of Alicia and her antithesis. In Edison's terms, she is no longer a woman, but an angel, no longer reality, but the ideal (86).

In his home at Menlo Park, the inventor is surrounded by various mechanical and electrical devices designed to ease and brighten up his life. The artificial birds which welcome Lord Ewald with human laughter exemplify this (135). It is significant that Edison endows artificial devices with human qualities and uses machines to carry out profoundly human activities. He even refuses to speak himself, instead using a phonograph with pre-recorded phrases:

> Edison s'approcha d'un phonographe dont le porte-voix communiquait à un téléphone et gratifia d'une chiquenaude le pas de vis de la plaque vibrante (car il dédaigne le plus possible de parler lui-même, excepté à lui-même). – Eh bien, qu'est-ce? que me veut-on? cria l'instrument dans le capuchon du téléphone avec la voix d'Edison légèrement nuancée d'impatience. (42–43)

While the artificial birds can speak, sing and laugh with human voices, Edison himself uses a machine in order to communicate verbally. Yet the phrase recorded to replace his own voice on the telephone is so rude as to discourage any caller from speaking. On Ewald's arrival, moreover, the inventor even touches the pistol in his pocket, as though he were going to use it against an unsolicited visitor (54) and Hadaly, too, carries a dagger for defence (123). Thus Edison, who lives by himself in his confined property at Menlo Park, withdraws from human society.

But the inventor not only mechanizes his own environment to the point that he becomes increasingly like a machine himself; he also treats other humans as though they were machines which can be used and manipulated for a specific purpose. Indeed he refers to Alicia as a mere "object of experience" (128). He had tricked her into coming to Menlo Park by promising her that she would be sculpted in marble. Of course, his real intention is to use her for his own purpose, namely to copy her beautiful body and voice in

order to complete Hadaly, the doll.[101] Neither Edison nor Lord Ewald shows much concern as to what is going to happen to Alicia once the men no longer need her. While Edison displays absolute indifference, Ewald intends to give Alicia a million guineas in compensation (68). The Englishman claims that he wants to render their separation less troublesome to Alicia in this way. But his "generosity" indicates that he is less concerned with making a new start easier for her than he is with purchasing his freedom from all responsibility towards her.

By offering money to Alicia, Ewald relegates their relationship to a form of prostitution. On the matter of money in prostitution, Walter Benjamin writes that money buys pleasure and simultaneously becomes the expression of shame: "Impudence throws the first coin onto the table, and shame pays out a hundred more to cover it."[102] Benjamin views money as not only a means of payment for physical love, but above all the client's attempt at ridding himself of his shame at purchasing love. Like Casanova, whose generosity vis-à-vis a certain procuress Benjamin cites in this context, Ewald is not greedy when it comes to paying Alicia. Both Casanova and Ewald give money generously: not to compensate the women for that which they did, but rather to "undo" what happened.

A similar lack of commitment may play a role in Ewald's decision to accept the deal with Edison. Although the Englishman does not categorically decline the inventor's offer of a supposedly perfect doll, he is reluctant to commit himself by accepting the offer (107). It seems that ideally, Ewald would like to enjoy a trial experience, without having to make a binding decision. This is precisely what is possible. Should Ewald not be satisfied with Hadaly, he can simply get rid of her, as Edison reassures him: "Oh! même après l'œuvre accomplie, puisque vous pourrez toujours la détruire, la noyer, si bon vous semble, *sans déranger pour cela le Déluge*." (107) The possibility to switch Hadaly on and off as he wishes would leave Ewald in absolute control over the relationship

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[101] See also Jennifer Forrest, "Scripting the Female Voice: The Phonograph, the Cinematograph, and the Ideal Woman", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 27 (1998), 71–95.

[102] Walter Benjamin, "Prostitution, Gamblimg", in *The Arcades Project*, pp. 489–515 (p. 492).

and additionally save him from the moral and financial trouble which the separation from Alicia entails. Love without commitment would thus become possible. Yet the idea that Hadaly should be drowned is morally troubling, although we know that she is but a machine. This is less to do with Hadaly's possible disappearance than with the essentially human way in which we imagine her "death" to happen. Certainly, Ewald does not like the thought of having to drown Hadaly. For him, a distinction exists between destroying her once she has been animated and not animating her in the first place. In fact, he seems more worried about a potential separation from Hadaly, the machine, than about his actual breakup with Alicia, his human lover. But he is preoccupied mainly with the idea that *he* would have to participate in Hadaly's destruction. Conversely, it is the smoothness of the separation from Alicia, who, as Ewald expects, is easily comforted by money, which renders that separation unproblematic.

While Hadaly is a machine which is regarded as a controllable woman, Alicia is a woman viewed as a humanized work of art. Alicia is the image of the Venus of Milo; she is the *Venus Victrix* animated (60–61). Ewald is in love with her extraordinary beauty, but finds the supposed incompatibility of her physique and personality intolerable (68). He criticizes Alicia for a lack of intelligence, charm and emotion and simultaneously claims with regard to Hadaly that such a creature would always remain only a puppet without any emotion or intellect (100). But a woman without any individual personality is precisely what he wants. Despite what he says, he is like Hoffmann's Nathaniel, who wants a woman to be beautiful, but silent and unthinking, just like Olympia and just like the statue of Venus in the Louvre. In fact, Ewald's description of the statue reveals his ideal of woman: "La *Vénus* de marbre, en effet, *n'a que faire de la Pensée*. La déesse est voilée de minéral et de silence. Il sort de son aspect ce Verbe-ci: – Moi, je suis *seulement* la Beauté même. Je ne pense que par l'esprit de qui me contemple." (74) If Ewald takes Alicia to the Louvre in order to confront her with her double in stone, he might secretly hope, as Sophie de Velder suggests, that the woman made from stone will inspire the living woman to be like her (79–80). He might hope that the statue will make its human imitation understand that she

must stop living, to think and act only as *he* wishes.[103] What happens here is the reversal of art fetishism: while the art fetishist endows the work of art with autonomous life and thereby elevates it to a human or god-like status, Ewald wants the woman to stop living autonomously, to become a work of art. The Englishman himself admits as much: "Contempler morte miss Alicia serait mon désir, si la mort n'entraînerait pas le triste effacement de traits humains!" (80)

Of course, what Ewald desires, namely a dead woman without a soul and yet in possession of her beauty, coincides not only with the Venus of Milo, but also with Hadaly, the doll. Hadaly is beautiful and can think only through the one who contemplates her. As Ross Chambers points out, she thus functions like an art object. Although she imitates reality perfectly, she is devoid of any content and allows her lover to project his own desires onto her.[104] But Ewald himself is not aware of this. He prefers Hadaly to Alicia precisely because he regards the doll as more authentic and genuine than the living woman. For Ewald, as well as for Edison, Alicia is false because her body and soul contradict each other. She is also false in the sense that she represents humanity and art and yet fails to reconcile them. Ultimately, the men consider Alicia to be false, because she contradicts *them*, because *her* reality does not correspond to *theirs* and because she therefore disturbs their appreciation of her. Conversely, the men view Hadaly as authentic precisely because she is in fact dispossessed of any individual identity. Since the doll does not disturb the men's gaze, the men see in her only what *they* want to see. Paradoxically, Hadaly's discrete nature not only distinguishes her from Alicia, but also makes her more authentic than the living woman for the men. Their ideal of a woman is a lifeless woman, one whom they can animate or leave inanimate – whichever *they* wish.

In "Being in Love and Hypnosis", Freud argues that when one is in love, a considerable amount of narcissistic libido overflows onto the object. In many forms of love-choice the object even

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[103] See Sophie de Velder, "Fantastique et créatures artificielles", in *L'Homme artificiel*, pp. 148–158 (p. 156).

[104] See Ross Chambers, "L'Ange et l'automate: Variations sur le mythe de l'actrice de Nerval à Proust", *Archives des Lettres modernes*, 128:5 (1971), 1–80 (p. 42).

serves as a substitute for our own unattained ego ideal. In Freud's thought, we love a specific object for the perfection for which we have striven ourselves and which we now attempt to procure as a means of satisfying our narcissism.[105] In Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's novel, significantly, Edison transforms the process of falling in love from an unconscious process into a mechanical, controllable one. In constructing Hadaly to be, in his terms, not real but ideal, Edison literally puts her in the place of Ewald's ego ideal. This mechanization subverts the normal process of falling in love. Here it is not that Ewald loves Hadaly for *her* perfection, but that Edison displaces Ewald's own supposed perfection onto her. Only in this way, namely by falling in love with himself, can Ewald fall in love with Hadaly. In constructing Hadaly especially to reflect Ewald's desires, Edison extinguishes her individual otherness entirely. Hadaly's identity can be defined only in relation to Ewald; it consists in her passivity and optical beauty for *him*. This is what she says herself: "Comme une femme, je ne serai pour toi que ce que tu me croiras." (251) The fact that the point of comparison for the doll is a woman is relevant here: it is as though the doll were actually a woman and as though it were typical for women to be but the reflection of men.

It is the essence of Hadaly's being that she is an optical copy of Alicia. Hadaly is a human simulation so perfect as to dupe all. Yet Ewald does not consider the possibility that she might deceive *him*. But this is precisely what happens. When he believes that he is walking through the park with Alicia, it is Hadaly who in fact accompanies him. For once, his supposed lover's company does not irritate him. As she listens to him with unknown patience and kisses him with new abandon, she becomes worthy of her physical beauty. But it is *Hadaly's* discretion and sympathy, rather than Alicia's, which lead Ewald to believe that his lover has changed. In fact, he thinks that he has motivated the transformation with his own love (243). But this is not true: Ewald is unable to change Alicia. He cannot manipulate her being as though she were a mechanical doll. It is significant that the deception by the automaton coincides with Ewald's falling in love with her. The uncanniness

[105] See Sigmund Freud, "Being in Love and Hypnosis", in *SE*, 18 (1955), pp. 111–116 (pp. 112–113).

of Ewald's revelation that the woman in his arms is not Alicia, but Hadaly consists not simply in the fact that he embraces a machine. Rather, it is that the machine deceives him, and precisely at the moment when he falls in love with her. At the very moment when Ewald realizes that he loves the woman before him, whom he takes to be Alicia, Hadaly's rings reveal to him that he is being duped by the doll. Thus Hadaly "does" precisely what he finds intolerable: she is not the woman whom he expects her to be. As Ewald learns that Hadaly deceived him, he understands that it is impossible to control her. As the machine takes control over him, the fantastic undermines the defensive potential of mechanization and simultaneously shows up the limitation of the process. The fantastic points to the possibility that machines might deceive humans when the simulation of human beings through automata is perfected and the distinction between them made impossible.

## The Mechanical Monster

Thus the process of mechanization fails as an effective means of emotional control in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*, as well as in Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann". The mechanization of women – that is, their actual substitution for mechanical dolls – involves the displacement of the very human attribute onto the artificial women which the men find so intolerable in the real ones, namely their uncontrollability. Both Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's Ewald and Hoffmann's Nathaniel react with horror when they understand that they are being duped by the dolls. Ewald feels cheated by Edison and wants to take revenge on him (*L'Ève future* 244). Nathaniel, too, is without any power to control the situation and is reduced to hurling himself onto Spalanzani ("Der Sandmann" 359). Thus the men's loss of control is accompanied by their loss of humanity: their behaviour becomes morally inhuman and monstrously violent.

On the social level, *L'Ève future* and "Der Sandmann" can be read as a critique of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, in which mechanized patterns of behaviour, the absence of meaningful conversation between humans and their increasing loss of natu-

ralness and spontaneity lead to the confusion of humans with mere machines resembling humans.[106] Olympia is introduced with success at social events including tea parties and balls. People take the mechanical doll for a living woman and Nathaniel even falls in love with her.[107] In particular the reaction to the revelation that Olympia is a doll says something about the superficiality of this society. Rather than tackling the problem at its source, which would above all involve the question of how Olympia's real nature could possibly have remained secret for so long, the other characters are concerned only with finding a culprit, on the one hand, and with making sure that *they* will never again be the victims of such deception, on the other. As a result, they are unable to learn their lesson and correct their own behaviour. On the contrary, the deception of the doll even leads them to mistrust each other. The acceptance of Olympia and Hadaly by members of a supposedly cultured middle class indicates that the latter recognize the dolls' externally controlled actions as persuasively similar to their own. These people themselves act according to an established and unchallenged code of conduct, which reduces human behaviour to set phrases and mechanical gestures. Edison himself observes this: "Même dans la vie, est-ce que toutes les conversations mondaines n'ont pas l'air de fins de lettres? En vérité, toute parole n'est et ne peut être qu'une redite: – et il n'est pas besoin de Hadaly pour se trouver, toujours, en tête-à-tête avec un fantôme." (181)

Hans Grob associates the renunciation of instinctive behaviour with the system of Capitalism, in which superfluous money and energy are no longer used to satisfy personal desires, but to accu-

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[106] See also Pierre Citron's introduction to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*, pp. 9–28 (p. 22); Alan W. Raitt's preface to his edition of *L'Ève future* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 7–33 (p. 11); Nadine Satiat's introduction to the novel (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), pp. 7–92; and Lienhard Wawrzyn, *Der Automaten-Mensch: E.T.A. Hoffmanns Erzählung vom Sandmann* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1990), p. 98.

[107] See Jean Charue, "Peut-on s'éprendre d'une femme-machine? Remarques à propos de 'L'Homme au sable' d'E.T.A. Hoffmann", *Études philosophiques*, 1 (1985), 57–75 (p. 75); Hanne Castein, "Zerrbilder des Lebens: E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'Der Sandmann' and the Robot Heritage", *The English Goethe Society*, 67 (1998), 43–54 (p. 45); and Siegbert Prawer, "Hoffmann's Uncanny Guest: A Reading of 'Der Sandmann'", *German Life and Letters*, 18 (1965), 297–308 (p. 303).

mulate even more wealth. For this, people must subject themselves to social norms and conventions, which often fail to correspond to their personal desires. In Grob's terms, they exchange their souls for bourgeois prestige, which eventually dehumanizes them.[108] As all social activity is computed by men coldly calculating their egoistic advantage over each other, communality and mutuality give way to personal self-interest. Thus human beings become increasingly like machines and their behaviour becomes correspondingly inhuman in a moral sense, too.[109]

*L'Ève future* and "Der Sandmann" can also be related to the trend in industrial mechanization towards a progressive elimination of the individual and human attributes of the worker. Since the process of labour is broken down into abstract and rational operations, the worker loses contact with, and becomes alienated from, the finished product. As Georg Lukács argues in *History and Class Consciousness*, his work is reduced to the mechanical repetition of a set of specialized actions.[110] The fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject, as the human qualities of the worker appear increasingly as mere sources of error: "Neither objectively nor in his relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process; on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system." (*History and Class Consciousness* 89) While the image of the machine had been used since Descartes to illuminate the physiology of the human body, Lukács here links the human with the mechanical in order to illustrate the mechanization of the worker as a consequence of the rationalization of the work-process. Marx himself had resorted to the imagery of the fantastic to vilify the product of modern industrial mechanization. He writes

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[108] See Hans Grob, *Puppen, Engel, Enthusiasten: Die Frauen und die Helden im Werke E.T.A. Hoffmanns* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), p. 80.
[109] See Ulrich Hohoff, *E.T.A. Hoffmann,* Der Sandmann*: Textkritik, Edition, Kommentar* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), p. 339.
[110] See Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (London: Merlin, 1971), pp. 83–222. See also Georg Simmel's chapter on "The Division of Labour as the Cause of the Divergence of Subjective and Objective Culture", in *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. by David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 453–463.

in *Capital*: “Here we have, in the place of the isolated machine, a mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories, and whose demon power, at first veiled under the slow and measured motions of his giant limbs, at length breaks out into the fast and furious whirl of his countless working organs.” (*Capital* 381–382)

# 5

# Compulsion

## Compulsion and the Fantastic

"Le fantastique, chez Maupassant, ce n'est pas l'intrusion brutale de phénomènes étranges dans la vie quotidienne. [...] Le fantastique, c'est tout ce qui rôde hors de l'homme et dans l'homme et le laisse, la conscience vidée par l'angoisse, sans solution, ni réaction."[111] As Louis Forestier here suggests, Maupassant's stories present protagonists who fall victim to external forces which they cannot control. Obsessive thoughts occupy their minds and they are driven to perform specific acts, often seemingly foolish ones, without wanting to. Thus these characters' entire lives revolve around compulsions which increasingly dispossess them of their own will and determination. In Maupassant's tale, "Madame Hermet" (1887), a woman in perfect physical health is convinced that she is suffering from smallpox. She devotes her days to counting and nursing the non-existent marks and scars on her face, unable to take her mind off her supposed disease.[112] Maupassant's "Fou" (1882) presents a judge respected by all who is secretly obsessed by the idea of killing. After hypothesizing about the "pleasures" of killing, he can no longer resist the temptation: he must first kill a bird, then a boy and finally an adult man.[113]

In psychological terms, compulsions are repetitive behaviours (hand-washing, ordering, checking) or mental acts (praying, count-

[111] Louis Forestier, Introduction to *Contes et nouvelles de Maupassant*, 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. xxi–lxii (pp. lx–lxi). See also Pierre Bayard, *Maupassant, juste avant Freud* (Paris: Minuit, 1994), p. 11.

[112] Guy de Maupassant, "Madame Hermet", in *Le Horla et autres contes cruels et fantastiques*, pp. 451–459.

[113] Guy de Maupassant, "Fou", in *Le Horla et autres contes cruels et fantastiques*, pp. 263–270.

ing, repeating words silently) which a person feels driven to perform in response to an obsession or according to rules which must be applied rigidly. These behaviours or mental acts are aimed at reducing distress: they serve as a psychological defence. Yet they are either not connected in a realistic way with that which they are designed to neutralize or are clearly excessive.[114] This view of the process of compulsion emphasizes a dynamic functional relationship between obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are regarded as mental events eliciting distress, such as thoughts of contamination or of responsibility for a disaster, unacceptable impulses, blasphemous images, etc., while compulsions consist in either overt behaviours or mental acts performed to reduce the distress associated with the obsessions.[115]

The state of Maupassant's two characters would be diagnosed today as "obsessive compulsive disorder".[116] Freud, whose 1909 study of the "Rat-Man" still persists as a leading case history, referred to such a condition as "obsessional neurosis" (*Zwangsneurose*). In Freud's view, the disorder results from a preponderant sadistic-anal-erotic sexual organization, which can arise in the individual from fixation at the anal level during development, or more commonly from regression to it as a consequence of frustration of functioning at the higher genital level. Freud suggests that the most frequent reason for genital-level frustration is intrapsychic, notably oedipal, conflict.[117] In the analyses of Maupassant's tales below, I will not follow the Freudian approach and focus on the sexual organization of the protagonists. Rather, I will pay at-

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[114] See *DSM-IV: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), p. 423; and Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), p. 152.

[115] See Edna B. Foa and Michael J. Kozak, "DSM-IV and ICD-10 Diagnostic Criteria for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: Similarities and Differences", in *Current Insights in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, ed. by Eric Hollander (Chichester: John Wiley, 1994), pp. 67–75 (p. 68).

[116] The disorder has variously been termed demonic possession, religious melancholy, scrupulosity, *folie du doute*, psychasthenia, and compulsion neurosis, writes Roger K. Pitman in "Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Western History", in *Current Insights in Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*, pp. 3–10 (p. 3).

[117] See Sigmund Freud, "Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis", in *SE*, 10 (1955), pp. 155–318.

tention to the more recent events in their fictive lives which triggered off the neuroses and to the neurotic symptoms themselves.

In Madame Hermet's case, the immediate cause of her obsessive compulsive disorder can be shown to be her son's death from smallpox. The woman's neurosis connects with her failure to support her son during the illness and with a crisis of identity provoked by her fears about her social role as she grows old. The symptoms consist in her firm belief that she herself is suffering from smallpox, which her son would have passed on to her while she was nursing him, and the corresponding medical treatment of her imagined marks. I shall also view the account of Madame Hermet's case as a manifestation of the doctor-narrator's own compulsion. In the tale's introduction, the narrator reveals his obsessive attraction to mad people and his compulsive desire to explain their mysterious nature.[118] Yet the case history of Madame Hermet abounds with questions and hypotheses: the doctor-narrator's efforts to gain insight into the "pays mystérieux de songes bizarres" remain unsuccessful (451).

In "Fou", the diary entries which make up most of the tale fail to provide a clue as to what might have triggered the male protagonist's neurosis. My analysis of the story will focus on the symptoms of the judge's mental disorder, namely his obsessive thoughts about killing and his compulsion actually to kill. The diary-form of "Fou" turns the preoccupation of the story towards the activity of writing. I propose to view the judge's regular diary-writing as a compulsive activity and as such as a process of emotional control. Ultimately, the man's writing fails as an effective means of defence, however, since it is precisely in writing that the judge justifies his obsession with killing. Rather than preventing the desired taboo action, here the judge's compulsion reinforces his desire to kill.

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[118] The narrator begins the story thus: "Les fous m'attirent. […] J'aime à me pencher sur leur esprit vagabond, comme on se penche sur un gouffre où bouillonne tout au fond un torrent inconnu, qui vient on ne sait d'où et va on ne sait où." (p. 451)

## Maupassant's "Madame Hermet"

Maupassant's tale, "Madame Hermet", presents a woman of approximately forty years of age, who has been living in a mental hospital for about five years, since her son, Georges, died from smallpox and she subsequently succumbed to madness. Madame Hermet disavows her son's death; she believes that Georges is now well and that *she* is suffering from smallpox. The woman is convinced that she caught the disease from her son when looking after him during the illness. This is what she tells the narrator's friend, a doctor like the narrator himself: "C'est en soignant mon fils que j'ai gagné cette épouvantable maladie, Monsieur. Je l'ai sauvé, mais je suis défigurée. Je lui ai donné ma beauté, à mon pauvre enfant. Enfin, j'ai fait mon devoir, ma conscience est tranquille. Si je souffre, il n'y a que Dieu qui le sait." (453)

But what Madame Hermet says is not true. In fact, she failed to either nurse her son or to provide him with moral support. Even on the night of Georges's death, when the fifteen-year-old begged to say farewell to his mother, she refused to enter his room for fear of being permanently disfigured by the marks caused by the disease. What Madame Hermet tells the doctor and firmly believes herself, is not what really happened, but it is what might have happened, had she been more considerate of her son's needs. Freud points out that to every compulsion there is a corresponding repression ("Project for a Scientific Psychology" 350–351). The illusory marks which Madame Hermet inflicts upon herself can be regarded as signs of her guilty conscience and as attempts at atonement, although she is not aware of this herself. As Freud observes, "the sufferer from compulsions and prohibitions behaves as if he were dominated by a sense of guilt, of which, however, he knows nothing, so that we must call it an unconscious sense of guilt".[119] Compulsions always reflect *unconscious* motives or ideas; the disorder forces the individual to carry out the compulsion without understanding its real meaning.

[119] Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices", in *SE*, 9 (1959), pp. 117–127 (p. 123).

At the mental hospital, Madame Hermet spends all her days looking in the mirror, staring at her face and counting the (non-existent) ugly marks on it: "Une femme âgée d'environ quarante ans, encore belle, assise dans un grand fauteuil, regardait avec obstination son visage dans une petite glace à main." (452) Compulsions are usually harmless and trivial things; they consist in making minor adjustments to specific everyday actions, which must always be carried out in the same, or in a methodically varied, way (Freud, "The Sense of Symptoms, 258–259). Although such actions do not seem to be particularly meaningful, even to the neurotic person, he or she cannot give them up ("Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices" 117–118). This also applies to Madame Hermet. She contemplates, counts and nurses her marks as though this were perfectly normal. Concern with the disease's symptoms would be expected of any mentally healthy person. But, quite apart from the fact that Madame Hermet only *imagines* these symptoms, she is occupied with them so excessively that she becomes incapable of doing anything else besides. In her case, the compulsive activity does not merely consist in a small ceremony carried out on a regular basis. Rather, it is as though the ceremony were somehow inflated, to the point that the woman's entire life revolves around it. While a compulsion is normally supposed to be an action for insurance, or a protective measure, here it ends up entirely dispossessing the individual of her own determination.

Madame Hermet suffers profoundly from the thought of being disfigured. Having to put up with the marks caused by smallpox is to her the equivalent of being ruined and destroyed: "C'est affreux, affreux! Je n'oserai plus me laisser voir à personne, pas même à mon fils, non, pas même à lui! Je suis perdue, je suis défigurée pour toujours. Elle retomba sur son fauteuil et se mit à sangloter." (452–453) The intensity of the woman's grief seems exaggerated relative to her thoughts about her physical appearance. But the seemingly inappropriate affect accompanying her obsessive thoughts can be justified. Originally, it belongs not to her conscious concerns about her beauty, but rather to her repressed self-reproaches concerning her responsibility for her son's death. The affect is displaced from these intolerable thoughts onto others for the purpose of defence. In relation to the shameful thoughts about Georges's death – whether they be justified or not

– the intensity of Madame Hermet's grief is entirely appropriate. On the other hand, it is the *mésalliance* between Madame Hermet's emotional condition and the associated idea of her disfigurement which accounts for the absurd character of her obsessive compulsive disorder.[120]

One might wonder whether Madame Hermet's feelings of guilt are actually justified. Certainly, she cannot be blamed for her son's death, which she could not have prevented any more than the doctor or Georges's tutor could have done. Even the fact that she failed to attend to her son for fear of dying of smallpox herself would be tolerable. Indeed we would sympathize with Madame Hermet, did we not know that she feared not so much the risk of death as the prospect of being disfigured permanently if she caught the illness. In addition, her neglect of Georges cannot be attributed exclusively to her own fear of smallpox, for she had not displayed much concern for her son's well-being even prior to learning the cause for his suffering. It is the tutor who spends day and night at the boy's bedside, while Madame Hermet checks on her son only briefly: "Elle demeurait quelques instants dans la chambre, regardait les bouteilles de drogues en faisant 'pouah' du bout des lèvres, puis soudain s'écriait: 'Ah! J'oubliais une chose très urgente; et elle se sauvait en courant et laissant derrière elle de fines odeurs de toilette.'" (456)

Although Madame Hermet now believes that she has fulfilled her duty as a mother, not only does the compulsive behaviour pattern itself indicate that this is false, but, as we shall see, so does her embarrassment associated with it. As soon as the two doctors enter her cell, she rushes to cover her face with a veil; only then does she greet them. When the attending doctor sets out to remove the woman's veil in order to "treat" her marks, she obstinately refuses to uncover her face, instead clinging to the veil with both her hands (452). It is only after the doctor's reassuring encouragement that she finally allows him to take the veil off: "Alors elle se laissa découvrir la figure, mais sa peur, son émotion, sa honte d'être vue la rendaient rouge jusqu'à la chair du cou qui s'enfonçait dans sa robe. Elle baissait les yeux, tournait son visage, tantôt à droite,

[120] See Sigmund Freud, "Obsessions and Phobias", in *SE*, 3 (1962), pp. 74–84 (p. 75).

tantôt à gauche, pour éviter nos regards.” (453) Madame Hermet is ashamed in front of the men: she not only self-consciously hides her marks, but also avoids making eye contact with the men. It fact, her marks seem to provide her with an excuse to hide under the veil, so as not to reveal her *self*. In reality, she is ashamed not of her supposedly disfigured face, but of something else. It is as though that shame were disconnected from its original cause and were now attached to another, less shameful one.

While compulsions usually seem senseless or foolish at first sight, Freud finds that in the course of treatment, they reveal themselves as “perfectly significant in every detail, that they serve important interests of the personality and that they give expression to experiences that are still operative and to thoughts that are cathected with affect” (“Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices” 120). This can be shown to be true of Madame Hermet. Indeed her disorder, whose symptoms we know from the doctor-narrator’s description of her present condition, perfectly matches the attending doctor’s characterization of her personality before her son’s death. Madame Hermet’s compulsion consists in constantly looking in the mirror, to examine possible changes in her face: “J’ai compté dix trous de plus ce matin, trois sur la joue droite, quatre sur la joue gauche et trois sur le front.” (452) As the narrator hypothesizes, it is precisely the act of examining her face in order to detect any changes, which will have occupied the woman’s mind before her son’s death, at a time when she was still mentally healthy:

> S’est-elle enfermée dix fois, vingt fois en un jour, quittant sans raison le salon où causent des amies, pour remonter dans sa chambre et, sous la protection des verrous et des serrures, regarder encore le travail de destruction de la chair mûre qui se fane, pour constater avec désespoir le progrès léger du mal que personne encore ne semble voir, mais qu’elle connaît bien, elle? (455)

Madame Hermet’s present compulsion coincides with the quasi-obsessive vanity which characterizes her entire life. Despite its seeming absurdity, the compulsion thus constitutes an indicator of the woman’s personality. Indeed the content of Madame Hermet’s former life would not have been substantially different from her present compulsive activity. Now as well as then, she is concerned exclusively with herself and particularly with the changes in her face and body as she grows older. The narrator even refers to her

aging as a *mal*, as though this natural process had been a disease then, just as her compulsion is pathological now. Moreover, Madame Hermet's occupation has a compulsive character in both stages of her life. She feels compelled to examine her marks in the mirror now, just as she was driven to pick up the mirror before, a mirror, which, in the narrator's terms, "on ne peut se décider à reposer sur la table, puis qu'on rejette avec rage et qu'on reprend aussitôt, pour revoir, de tout près, l'odieux et tranquille ravage de la vieillesse qui s'approche" (455).

On the matter of ageing, Susan Sontag observes that the "sacred pain of old age" is of a different order to the subjective, "profane" pain of ageing.[121] While Sontag sees in old age a genuine ordeal which men and women undergo in a similar way, she considers growing older an "ordeal of the imagination – a moral disease, a social pathology" from which mainly women suffer in our society ("The Double Standard of Aging" 19). Sontag compares the role of a woman to that of an actress and regards being feminine as a kind of theatre, with its appropriate costumes, decor, lighting, and stylized gestures. Being preoccupied with one's physical appearance is one of the norms of femininity; the invention of the feminine self proceeds mainly through clothes and other signs testifying to the efforts of women to look attractive and to their commitment to please (Sontag, "The Double Standard of Aging" 22–24). Of course, Madame Hermet belongs precisely to that group of women whose ageing is made so painful by a myth of beauty: "C'était une de ces femmes qui n'ont au monde que leur beauté et leur désir de plaire pour les soutenir, les gouverner ou les consoler dans l'existence." (454) At the age of thirty-five Madame Hermet's fear of "losing" her beauty – that is, all that she possesses and indeed all that defines her self – plunges her into a crisis of identity.

Erik Erikson maintains that ego-identity is a forever to-be-revised sense of reality of the self within social reality.[122] Although the exploration of identity is most pronounced during adolescence, issues of identity remain a life-long concern. A redefinition of

[121] Susan Sontag, "The Double Standard of Aging", in *The Other Within Us: Feminist Explorations of Women and Aging*, ed. by Marilyn Pearsall (Oxford: Westview, 1997), pp. 19–24 (p. 19).
[122] See Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 211.

one's ego-identity emerges commonly when major role-changes occur.[123] Personal feedback aids the individual in defining and revising his or her own self-definition and encourages the person to clarify, and to reflect on, a personal definition of the ego. At thirty-five, Madame Hermet's fears about her passing beauty force her to reconsider her identity. Yet in the tale, there is no person providing feedback. Madame Hermet is a widow and although all admire her, she is essentially alone. It is her mirror which substitutes for the personal, a mirror which in fact talks to her, as though it were human: "Et le miroir, le petit miroir tout rond dans son cadre d'argent ciselé, lui dit d'abominables choses car il parle, il semble rire, il raille et lui annonce tout ce qui va venir, toutes les misères de son corps, et l'atroce supplice de sa pensée jusqu'au jour de sa mort, qui sera celui de sa délivrance." (455) The extraordinary amount of time spent in front of the mirror reveals Madame Hermet's need for reassurance in her struggle for identity. But of course the mirror fails to be of any help; it only reflects the woman's own fears and anxieties. While the mirror thus intensifies the woman's anxieties, rather than reassuring her, its mockery and laughter suggest that the reality is entirely different.

In the hospital, too, Madame Hermet seeks personal feedback. She expects the doctors to respond to her misery and explicitly asks for their view of her supposedly disfigured face: "Oh! je souffre affreusement de me laisser voir ainsi! C'est horrible, n'est-ce pas? C'est horrible?" (453) By inflicting pox upon herself, Madame Hermet forces the doctors to give her the attention which she craves. They must see her regularly to check on the progress of her disease. It is hardly surprising that she should claim to be increasingly poorly; only in this way can she ensure the continuation of the doctors' frequent visits. In answer to the attending doctor's question, she thus complains: "Oh! mal. Très mal, Monsieur, les marques augmentent tous les jours." (452) By the same token, Madame Hermet is never entirely satisfied with the treatment received: "Elle prit la glace, se contempla longtemps avec une attention profonde, une attention aigüe, avec un effort violent de tout

[123] See Rolf E. Muuss, *Theories of Adolescence* (London: McGrath-Hill, 1962), p. 46; and James E. Marcia, "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3 (1966), 551–558.

son esprit, pour découvrir quelque chose, puis elle soupira: 'Non. Ça ne se voit plus beaucoup. Je vous remercie infiniment.'" (454) Madame Hermet presents herself as a victim of the disease and her marks as a sacrifice made for her son. In fact, the illness provides her with the attention which she craves. But the gratification which she derives from the doctors' care has two sides: in order to ensure the doctors' constant attention, it is necessary for the woman permanently to deal with her own "disfigurement".

Madame Hermet's reaction to the revelation that her son suffers from smallpox illustrates most clearly the extent to which she is concerned with her own physique. When she learns about Georges's disease, she gives a loud cry and dashes out of the boy's room (456). Rather than enquiring into the seriousness of the illness or comforting her son, she runs away to lock herself in her own room. On the following morning, her maid finds her pale with insomnia and trembling with anxiety. One would surmise that *she* is the one who is suffering, rather than her son. In fact, Madame Hermet behaves as though she had fallen ill as soon as she learns that Georges has smallpox: "Elle ne se leva qu'à midi, mangea deux œufs avec une tasse de thé, comme si elle-même eût été malade." (456) Yet she has the strength to go out and buy preventative remedies for *herself*: "Elle sortit et s'informa chez un pharmacien des méthodes préservatrices contre la contagion de la petite vérole. Elle ne rentra qu'à l'heure du dîner, chargée de fioles, et s'enferma aussitôt dans sa chambre, où elle s'imprégna de désinfectants." (456–457) While the woman makes no effort to ease her son's suffering, she takes good care of herself, as though she were nursing herself *instead* of him. The egotism displayed by Madame Hermet during Georges's fatal illness foreshadows the egocentric compulsive activity which characterizes her own mental disorder. On a more general level, the woman's behaviour suggests that the terms "mental health", on the one hand, and "mental disorder", on the other, do not constitute an antithesis of the kind which exists, for example, between "good" and "bad". Rather, they seem to represent stages in a continuing development.

The importance which Madame Hermet attaches to the perfection of her own appearance can be viewed as indicating the extent of the guilt underlying her neurosis. She tells the doctor-narrator that she has given her son her beauty and this is true, although not

quite in the sense in which she means it. By inflicting on herself the disfiguring marks of smallpox, she gives up that which had always been most significant and valuable in her life, namely her beauty, and puts up with that which she had always feared most, namely ugliness. The fact that Madame Hermet's disorder involves renouncing her beauty suggests that she must atone for something extremely grave. Yet even her attempts at atonement can be regarded as profoundly egotistic insofar as they serve her own peace of mind. Renouncing her beauty would have been an immense sacrifice for her son, had she done so for him. But now that he is dead, there is no longer any way in which he could benefit from it. Rather, it is she who wishes to clear her guilty conscience by means of this sacrifice.

In Freud's theory, the sense of guilt characterizing sufferers of obsessional neurosis can be justified by considering not only the actions which they perform, but also their unconscious thoughts. Freud argues that at the root of every compulsion lies a hostile impulse, or death wish, against someone that the patient loves. This impulse is repressed by a prohibition, which is attached to a specific act. By displacement, this act may represent a hostile act against the loved person (Freud, "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence" 72). It may be that Madame Hermet has hostile impulses towards her son, impulses which due to their unacceptability never reach consciousness. Madame Hermet's failure to care for Georges during his illness might confirm her hostility towards him. When she learns that Georges, increasingly poorly, wishes to see her and that the doctor now fears for the worst, Madame Hermet laments that she is too frightened to enter her son's room (457–458). The tutor's attempts at persuading her to grant Georges's last wish fail, instead provoking a nervous fit which makes the woman scream hysterically. Even the doctor is powerless: "Le médecin étant revenu vers le soir, fut informé de cette lâcheté, et déclara qu'il l'amènerait, lui, de gré ou de force. Mais après avoir essayé de tous les arguments, comme il la soulevait par la taille pour l'emporter près de son fils, elle saisit la porte et s'y cramponna avec tant de force qu'on ne put l'en arracher." (458) While Georges's desire to see his mother for a last time seems natural enough, she behaves as though something terrible would happen if she entered his room. We know that the woman is frightened of catching

smallpox, but her hysterical fear indicates that she must dread something else even more terrible. It seems as though she believed that Georges *wanted* to pass the disease on to her, that he *wanted* to harm her. But perhaps Madame Hermet projects her own hostility towards her son onto him. Perhaps it is not that he wants to harm her, but that, on the contrary, she has hostile feelings towards him and deals with them by means of the compulsive prohibition.

According to John Bowlby, the development of hostile or aggressive feelings by parents towards their child is common. In a mother, loving feelings are almost always coupled with an admixture of resentment and even of hatred. Bowlby refers this to the intense ambivalence of children towards parents and siblings in childhood. If the conflict between love and hate directed towards them was not regulated satisfactorily at that time, the individual is unprepared for a renewal of the conflict once he or she has become a parent him- or herself. The problem consists not simply in the recurrence of ambivalent feelings, but rather in the parents' inability to tolerate and to resolve them: "Instead of recognizing the true nature of their feelings towards the child and adjusting their behaviour accordingly, they find themselves actuated by forces they know not of and are perplexed at being unable to be as loving and patient as they wish."[124] The resulting guilt, as Bowlby observes, can lead to a "compulsive demand for reassurance and demonstrations of love and, when these demands are not met, to further hatred and consequently further guilt" (*The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds* 6). Madame Hermet's condition reflects this vicious circle. Her compulsion consists in calling the doctors' attention to the imaginary marks disfiguring her face, thereby demanding the attention which her son can no longer provide. But since the doctors' care does not ultimately satisfy her need, she reacts with more hatred coupled with more guilt.

It is significant that Maupassant's tale focuses on a contagious disease – that is, one in which touching plays a vital role in its transmission. Freud asserts that the taboo on touching is the oldest and most fundamental command of obsessional neurosis. In "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety", he theorizes that the avoidance

[124] John Bowlby, *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds* (London: Tavistock, 1979), p. 18.

of touching, contact or contagion play such an important part, because physical contact is the immediate aim of both the aggressive and the loving object-cathexes: "Eros desires contact because it strives to make the ego and the loved object one, to abolish all spatial barriers between them. But destructiveness, too, which could only take effect at close quarters, must presuppose physical contact, a coming to grips." (122) We have seen that a taboo is a prohibited action for the performance of which a strong inclination exists in the unconscious. If Madame Hermet cannot enter her son's room, this may result from her ambivalent feelings towards him. Her oscillation between wanting to see Georges and not daring to do so reflects this: "Elle consentit, se couvrit la tête, prit un flacon de sels, fit trois pas sur le balcon, puis soudain, cachant sa figure dans ses mains, elle gémit: 'Non... non... je n'oserai jamais le voir.'" (458) Madame Hermet might want to touch her son both because she loves him and because she wishes to harm him.

The woman's compulsion reflects the struggle between these two impulses. As with all compulsive activity, it constitutes a compromise between allowing the suppressed impulse and the one that suppresses it to find simultaneous and common satisfaction. Freud writes that "the obsessional act is *ostensibly* a protection against the *prohibited* act, but *actually*, in our view, it is a repetition of it. The 'ostensible' applies to the *conscious* part of the mind, and the 'actually' to the *unconscious* part" ("Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence" 50–51). Thus the compulsion which was originally designed to serve the purpose of defence now acquires the significance of a satisfaction. It is a general law of neurosis that the individual becomes increasingly reduced to seeking substitutive satisfaction in the neurotic symptoms. This happens to Madame Hermet on a magnified scale: her entire life revolves around her imaginary disease, as she can no longer derive gratification from anything but the treatment of it.

Pierre-Georges Castex defines the fantastic as a brutal intrusion of mystery in every-day life (*Le Conte fantastique* 8). Late nineteenth-century fantastic narrative no longer relies on mystery in the form of supernatural events or beings, but rather on the experience of mental alienation – on the psychic phenomena which were documented meticulously, but remained to be explained by medi-

cine. As Rae Beth Gordon points out, for the reader of the period "the 'natural' was in fact *more* terrifying than the supernatural, for the scientifically observable events of mental illness were irrefutably real, struck closer to home and, despite the efforts of science, remained mysterious, impenetrable and... fantastic".[125] Maupassant's "Madame Hermet" reflects, and responds to, the enormous interest which both Maupassant himself and the readers of his fantastic works showed in the phenomenon of madness. As madness surfaces on the level of consciousness and the anxiety provoked by the visibility of mental disorder is addressed and played out in fantastic literature, the fantastic itself simultaneously becomes "internalized". In Maupassant, the fantastic can no longer be located in a specific place *outside*, and foreign to, the protagonists of his tales, but the fantastic rather constitutes itself *inside* the characters themselves, as an integral part of their selves.

Gérard Delaisement writes that in "Madame Hermet", Maupassant "s'essaye à préciser l'intérêt qu'il dit prendre pour les fous" (*La Modernité de Maupassant* 159). In fact, it is the doctor-narrator who introduces the story by saying that madmen attract him – "Les fous m'attirent." (451) – and who sets out to justify in his introduction to Madame Hermet's case history his own compulsion to understand the mysterious nature of mentally disturbed people. The considerable length of the introduction relative to the story overall (one and a half pages out of eight) suggests the narrator's own emotional involvement in what he could view as simply a medical case. It is characteristic of the fantastic that the tale presents the narrator as a doctor and thus as someone whose interest in neurosis as a medical disorder would need no further justification. Yet the narrator's preoccupation with the mentally ill exceeds the "normal" interest of a doctor in a medical phenomenon. The doctor-narrator is obsessed with madmen and in fact derives gratification from treating them, although he cannot ultimately explain their nature. It is precisely the "mystery" of madmen which attracts the doctor: "J'aime à me pencher sur leur esprit vagabond, comme on se penche sur un gouffre où bouillonne tout au fond un torrent inconnu, qui vient on ne sait d'où et va on ne sait où."

[125] Rae Beth Gordon, "Le Merveilleux Scientifique and the Fantastic", *L'Esprit Créateur*, 28:3 (1988), 9–22 (p. 20).

(451) The doctor-narrator recounts the compulsion of Madame Hermet; precisely this can be viewed as a manifestation of his own compulsion to deal with madmen. They fascinate and irresistibly attract him. As irrational as the madmen themselves, the doctor feels driven to treat them, without knowing why: "Pourtant les fous m'attirent toujours, et toujours je reviens vers eux, appelé malgré moi par ce mystère banal de la démence." (452)

The doctor-narrator clearly states his skepticism about the possibility of explaining the "mystery" of mental illness and of defining what exactly constitutes the difference between the mentally ill, on the one hand, and the mentally healthy, on the other. He muses that just as it is no use observing the water of an unknown stream in one specific place, in order to make a general statement about it, so it is useless to examine the present mental state of madmen: "À rien ne sert non plus de se pencher sur l'esprit des fous, car leurs idées les plus bizarres ne sont, en somme, que des idées déjà connues, étranges seulement, parce qu'elles ne sont pas enchaînées par la Raison." (452) In the narrator's view, even the most bizarre ideas of mad people are not "new". They seem strange to us because they are not linked by reason. Freud maintains the same in relation to human imagination generally: "The creative 'imagination', indeed, is quite incapable of *inventing* anything; it can only combine components that are strange to one another."[126] Indeed the fantastic itself is not about inventing another non-human world; it is not transcendental. Rather, in Rosemary Jackson's terms, "it has to do with inverting elements of *this* world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* new, absolutely 'other' and different" (*Fantasy* 8).

In his efforts to penetrate the nature of the mentally ill, the narrator-doctor's own way of logical reasoning, which distinguishes him from them, becomes an obstacle. In regarding his own common sense as a "wall" between the mad people and himself, for which *he* is responsible, he identifies with them: "Cette vieille barrière, la logique, cette vieille muraille, la raison, cette vieille rampe des idées, le bon sens, se brisent, s'abattent, s'écroulent

[126] Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures to Psycho-Analysis, Lecture XI: The Dream-Work", in *SE*, 15 (1961), pp. 170–183 (p. 172).

devant leur imagination lâchée en liberté, échappée dans le pays illimité de la fantaisie, et qui va par bonds fabuleux sans que rien ne l'arrête." (451) Although a doctor, the narrator is not concerned with finding a remedy for the mentally ill. It seems, rather, that he wants to find a way of becoming like them.

Thus Maupassant's doctor-narrator is associated through the text not only with Madame Hermet, but also with obsessive-compulsive people generally. This association points to us, the readers, too, since we identify with the narrator and read his account of Madame Hermet's disorder. We are rational, as is the narrator; and we read the woman's story, as the narrator hears it from the other doctor, his friend. Just as the narrator identifies with Madame Hermet, so do we. In fact, our interest in Madame Hermet's story, which makes us read the tale, relates closely to our own identification with her. She fascinates us, just as she fascinates the narrator, because she ultimately reflects our own reality. The fantastic shows us Madame Hermet's reality as a possible reality of our own, presented in such a way that we can sense it as ours and can simultaneously relegate it as alien to ourselves.

## Maupassant's "Fou"

Maupassant's "Fou" presents the story of another madman; it records the experiences and thoughts of a male protagonist in the form of a diary. The story opens with the public notary discovering a manuscript-diary written by the late judge, who is renowned all over the country both for his sound judgment and for his own irreproachable life. The manuscript entitled "Pourquoi?" reveals the judge's secret obsession with killing and recounts a number of murders actually committed by him.

The manuscript also testifies to the judge's compulsive desire to understand the monstrously violent and murderous nature of human beings. The man's diary-writing can in itself be viewed as a compulsive activity, starting out as a mechanism of emotional control. Putting down in words his experiences and concerns can be regarded as the judge's way of coping with them. But the diary

fails as an effective means of defence, because, rather than compensating the man for the actual deed, writing allows him to justify his murderous desires. It is precisely in writing regularly that the judge loses the inhibition to kill in reality.

It is significant that the diary-writer is a judge – that is, a public figure who has the last say in judging, convicting and sentencing others – and that his manuscript is found in the cupboard which is normally used for locking away the files of the most serious criminal offenders: "Or, voici l'étrange papier que le notaire, éperdu, découvrit dans le secrétaire où il avait coutume de serrer les dossiers des grands criminels." (263) This suggests that the judge felt compelled not only to record his obsessive thoughts and to commit offences, but also to resolve the dilemma of his own personality by placing the diary with the criminals' files, where it belongs. Yet it is precisely by giving away his true identity, by revealing himself as a murderer to the public, that the man also fulfils his duty as a judge.

In presenting as a secret criminal the figure of a judge, "Fou" calls attention to the potential deception of mere appearances. But the tale also presents the man as mad and thereby offers an "explanation" for his perverse compulsion to kill. Yet the judge himself points to the fact that killing is not necessarily related to mental disorder; he raises the question of why killing is considered to be perfectly acceptable in specific circumstances, particularly in the case of war:

> Et on pourrait croire qu'on méprise ceux destinés à accomplir ces boucheries d'hommes! Non. On les accable d'honneur! On les habille avec de l'or et des draps éclatants; ils portent des plumes sur la tête, des ornements sur la poitrine; et on leur donne des croix, des récompenses, des titres de toute nature. Ils sont fiers, respectés, aimés des femmes, acclamés par la foule, uniquement parce qu'ils ont pour mission de répandre le sang humain. (265)

Maupassant himself regards war as nothing to be proud of. In an article published in the *Gil Blas* on 11 December 1883, he writes: "Quand j'entends prononcer ce mot: la guerre, il me vient un effarement comme si on me parlait de sorcellerie, d'inquisition, d'une chose lointaine, finie, abominable, monstrueuse, contre na-

ture."[127] It is in the context of journalism that Maupassant here uses the language of the fantastic in order to denounce war. Although in "Fou" he presents the horrors of killing within the terms of fantastic fiction, the tale can be read as a critique of his society, which tolerates the act of killing in the name of patriotism, as in the case of war, and in the name of justice, as in the case of capital punishment. In the story, the judge in fact abuses his judicial power and responsibility, as well as the confidence placed in him, by causing the execution of an innocent man for a murder which he himself had committed: "A mort! à mort! à mort! Je l'ai fait condamner à mort! Ah! ah! L'avocat général a parlé comme un ange! Ah! ah! Encore un. J'irai le voir exécuter!" (270)

The judge's diary is all about killing. It opens with the man's elaboration of more abstract thoughts on the matter. "Pourquoi donc est-ce un crime de tuer?" (264), is the question which he sets out to dismantle, in an effort not only to illustrate the inherent human desire to kill, but also to justify it. The judge maintains that killing is a "law of nature" and is our "mission", ideas which he bases on the supposed fact that animals and humans alike kill naturally. He asserts that we kill not only to nourish ourselves, but also because we derive pleasure from it. The judge rather speciously argues that in former times it was possible to satisfy the desire to kill without punishment by offering human sacrifices, while today the necessity to live in society has made murder a criminal offence (264). Apart from being untrue, this seems perverse more than anything else.

In the manuscript, the judge writes provocatively: "Tuer est la grande joie jetée par la nature au cœur de l'être! Il n'est rien de plus beau et de plus honorable que de tuer!" (265) From a psychoanalytical viewpoint, the man is right in claiming that killing belongs to the strongest human desires. Freud argues for this in "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence", but he theorizes that the act of killing is normally prevented in our society by a firm prohibition against the desire. In Freud's view, the desire to kill is unconscious; hence we do not normally recognize it in ourselves. He formulates the matter as follows: "We should have to suppose that

[127] Guy de Maupassant (Maufrigneuse), "La Guerre", *Gil Blas*, 1484 (11 December 1883), 1 (p. 1).

the desire to murder is actually present in the unconscious and that neither taboos nor moral prohibitions are psychologically superfluous but that on the contrary they are explained and justified by the existence of an ambivalent attitude towards the impulse to murder." ("Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence" 70) The importance of the taboo on killing in itself points to the profundity of the proscribed desire.

Since the desire to kill is unconscious and the prohibition against it "noisily" conscious, only the presence of the latter suggests the persistence of the first. As Pierre Bayard points out, the opposite of this is the case in Maupassant: "Chez Freud, l'inconscient est relié au *non-visible*, à ce qui se cache, à ce qui doit être dévoilé, *interprété*. Chez Maupassant, l'Autre a exactement le statut inverse, puisque, bien loin de se cacher, il est ce qui sans cesse se montre, dans un *excès de visibilité* ou de perception." (*Maupassant, juste avant Freud* 27) This is true for the tale, "Fou". While the judge's impulse to kill should normally remain in the unconscious, here it not only fails to be disavowed by him as alien to himself, but the judge also attempts to justify it as being perfectly acceptable. In this way, the prohibition to kill is in his case rendered increasingly ineffective. Bayard points out that a taboo prohibition normally owes its strength and its obsessive character to its unconscious opponent – that is, the concealed yet undiminished desire. Since the motives for the prohibition remain unknown, attempts at disposing of it by means of the intellect fail for a lack of any base of attack (*Maupassant, juste avant Freud* 27). As a result, the conflict between the two currents cannot be settled; hence the persistence of the (conscious) prohibition and the (unacknowledged) desire. In contrast, Maupassant's judge is perfectly aware both of his desire to kill and of the prohibition proscribing the act. Contrary to the Freudian subject, the judge can therefore reflect on them and decide for himself whether to obey the prohibition or not. As the man rejects the prohibition, the balance of power between the two contrasting currents is upset. While in Freud's theory, the proscribed impulse can never force its way through to performance, in Maupassant's "Fou", this emerges as a possible alternative.

Indeed, as the tale unfolds, the judge formulates a rather precise idea of what killing would be like for himself: "Ce doit être un

étrange et savoureux plaisir que de tuer, d'avoir là, devant soi, l'être vivant, pensant; de faire dedans un petit trou, rien qu'un petit trou, de voir couler cette chose rouge qui est le sang, qui est la vie, et de n'avoir plus, devant soi, qu'un tas de chair molle, froide, inerte, vide de pensée!" (266) The man constantly hypothesizes about killing; although his obsessive thoughts should not involve an impulse as violent as killing, it seems as though his perverse fantasies could successfully offer a compensation for the proscribed act itself. Yet while the judge controls the temptation and does not (yet) proceed to kill, he feels compelled to fantasize about killing to the point that he can no longer think about anything else:

> La tentation! La tentation, elle est entrée en moi comme un ver qui rampe. Elle rampe, elle va; elle se promène dans mon corps entier, dans mon esprit, qui ne pense plus qu'à ceci: tuer; dans mes yeux, qui ont besoin de regarder du sang, de voir mourir; dans mes oreilles, où passe sans cesse quelque chose d'inconnu, d'horrible, de déchirant et d'affolant, comme le dernier cri d'un être; dans mes jambes, où frissonne le désir d'aller, d'aller à l'endroit où la chose aura lieu; dans mes mains, qui frémissent du besoin de tuer. (267)

As Bayard suggests in a more general sense, it is as though the judge were caught in a prison of images imposing themselves upon him: "L'obsession fonctionne comme un enfermement progressif en une prison d'images. Limitée dans son horizon psychique à une représentation unique, qui se diffracte indéfiniment sur toutes les autres en réapparaissant derrière chacune, la victime se retrouve privée de sa capacité d'imaginer, soumise à une contrainte de penser et peu à peu dépossédée d'elle-même." (*Maupassant, juste avant Freud* 128)

A failure of repression is crucial for the development of the judge's neurosis. While the sufferer of obsessive compulsive disorder should disavow his or her obsessive thoughts as foreign to him- or herself, here the individual quite consciously derives pleasure from them. Ultimately, this leads the judge to give in to the temptation: "Je ne pouvais plus résister. J'ai tué une petite bête pour essayer, pour commencer." (267) As a rule of the disorder, the greater the temptation, the more severe the prohibition becomes in order to ensure that the intolerable impulse can never be realized. In "Fou", however, the man's desire to kill has a greater impact than the prohibition. As the judge loses his inhibition to

act, rather than merely think, his obsession is translated into reality and the compulsive activity coincides with the proscribed act.

It is typical that compulsive acts should "fall more and more under the sway of the instinct and approach nearer and nearer to the activity which was originally prohibited" (Freud, "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence" 30). A development of this sort can be observed in the judge's case. What the man desires most is to kill an adult man: "Il faut que je tue un homme! Il le faut." (268) In the manuscript, he writes that he first kills a bird; then strangles a little boy, without seeing any of the latter's blood; and finally kills a fisherman by cutting off the latter's head with a spade, rejoicing in the blood-bath which ensues. Thus the judge gradually approaches the act which he desires to perform most, just like the Freudian subject. But the judge actually reaches his goal, whereas the Freudian neurotic never ultimately gets there.

Freud argues on this matter: "At the same time, these impulses never – literally never – force their way through to performance; the outcome lies always in victory for the flight and the precautions. What the patient actually carries out – his so-called obsessional actions – are very harmless and certainly trivial things, for the most part repetitious or ceremonial elaborations of the activities of ordinary life."[128] This does not hold true in fantastic narrative. In Maupassant's "Fou", compulsions consist not merely in such trivial actions as hand-washing or in such harmless ones as diary-writing, but here the protagonist feels compelled to kill human beings. Rather than carrying out some other action in compensation for a taboo, the man ends up violating the taboo itself. Therefore, the mechanism of compulsion fails twice. On the one hand, the compulsive process of writing reinforces the performance of the prohibited action. On the other, the compulsive act of killing falls *entirely* under the sway of the instincts. As the compulsion thus coincides with the act which it should normally prevent, it is no longer a compromise. Rather, it serves the returned

[128] See Sigmund Freud, "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Lecture VII: The Sense of Symptoms", in *SE*, 16 (1963), pp. 257–272 (pp. 258–259).

instincts alone, thereby producing all of the forbidden pleasure which it was originally meant to reduce.

# Conclusion

A study of fantastic narrative in terms of processes of emotional control has two beneficial effects: it elucidates the individual texts and also contributes to the theory of the fantastic itself. The literature of the fantastic abounds with protagonists who, as we have seen, attempt to secure emotional stability by resorting to precisely those psychological mechanisms which psychoanalysis identifies as defence. In an effort to keep or gain control over themselves and their lives, these characters fetishize objects and substitute them for humans; project their own intolerable traits and impulses onto others; engage in intellectual discussion in a displacement of their personal problems; manipulate others as though the latter were mechanical dolls; and devote themselves to substitute activities which provide no satisfaction in themselves. But defence not only takes place in this genre; the fantastic itself, as I have argued, in fact consists in translating defence into reality, within the (fantastic) terms of the texts. By making the otherwise unconscious processes of control visible and conscious in order to dissolve anxiety by directly addressing largely unacknowledged fears and desires, the fantastic subverts the basic process of psychological defence. Defence fails in this literature, because the fantastic itself consists in transforming psychic dangers into real ones, thereby provoking precisely those disturbing feelings of displeasure and uncanniness which the defence mechanisms are ideally meant to prevent – and which are characteristic of the genre.

The process of fetishization fails as an effective means of emotional control in fantastic literature, because the fantastic, in translating the fetishist's neurosis into reality, shows up the ambiguity of fetishism and forces the fetishist to look at the very reality which the fetish is designed to deny. The mechanism of projection does not work as defence in the fantastic, because in this genre projection means adding a real danger to an internal one, rather than substituting for the psychic danger a merely perceptual one. The fantastic subverts the process of intellectualization. While the

individual should be personally detached from the object of intellectualization, the theories advanced by the scholarly narrators in fantastic texts reveal as much about the characters themselves as they do about their objects of discussion. As the fantastic transforms the seemingly abstract issue of their intellectualization into reality, it produces the very unpleasurable affect which the mechanism of intellectualization is meant to isolate. Mechanization fails to establish emotional control in the fantastic, because as human beings and machines resembling humans become interchangeable and the female-figured machines deceive the male protagonists, the mechanical dolls become as uncontrollable as the living women. Finally, the mechanism of compulsion fails as a means of defence in fantastic narrative. As the compulsive activity becomes the protagonist's sole source of gratification, the character is dispossessed entirely of his or her own determination. Rather than providing a compensation for a prohibited action, here the compulsive activity acts to reinforce the performance of the prohibition and ultimately coincides with the act which it is normally supposed to prevent.

An exploration of French fantastic literature from the perspective of control also brings out the fact that male writers of this genre focus on the feminine as the primary bearer of the fantastic. I have related the female characters to the male protagonists, since the women most often serve to reflect some truth behind the men's appearances. Although there is little fantastic writing done by French women authors of the period, it is interesting to examine the role of women therein and to consider these authors' treatment of the fantastic more generally. When one reads George Sand's "La Reine Coax", for example, one notices that the tale presents a young girl to whom the fantastic occurs in the form of the equally female *Reine Coax*.[129] The story is fascinating insofar as it conforms to a number of rules of the fantastic as a literary genre by subverting the rules of the fairytale. It furthermore offers compelling parallels between Sand's own personality, on the one hand, and both the protagonist, Marguerite, and her double, the frog

[129] See George Sand, "La Reine Coax", in *Contes d'une grand-mère*, ed. by Béatrice Didier (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), pp. 89–116; and Béatrice Didier, "Présentation", in George Sand's *Contes d'une grand-mère*, pp. i–xxvii.

queen, on the other. Unlike most male-authored fantastic texts, "La Reine Coax" is not about male preoccupations; it focuses on a female character with anxieties that might concern both women and men, particularly adolescents. The anxieties played out here, which are recurrent themes in Sand's fiction as well as her autobiographical writings, include the absence of the mother and father, the search for individual identity, the ambivalence towards luxury, money and outward beauty, etc. George Sand was drawn to the genre of the fantastic at the very end of her life. It might be most interesting to read her fantastic tales in terms of a reflective, rather than an opposing, "other" for her idealist novels. In her fantastic texts, Sand discovers, and simultaneously questions, her own idealist discourse in its fantastic nature.

In the present study, I have referred to Marx's *Capital*, notably the section on commodity-fetishism, in order to discuss Marx's treatment of fetishism in relation to Gautier's "Le Pied de momie". Both texts, as I have suggested, can be read as a critique of the mercantile consumer society in which material objects, rather than humans, come to control all social relations. For my chapter, Marx's section is particularly relevant not only for Marx's use of fetishization as a rhetoric device, but also for his contemporaneity with the main French fantastic writers. But the language of the fantastic was not only used in the nineteenth century, the period in which the fantastic as a literary genre flourished; it still abounds in social discourse today. Newspaper headings announcing the adoption of the physical euro in January 2002 spring to mind. In the British daily, *The Observer* of 30 December 2001, for example, we learn in an article entitled "The Unstoppable Rise of the Euro Empire" that even San Marino, Monaco and the Vatican are "surrendering" their own currencies to the euro: the new single currency "will create a new order" and all will be "drawn in". Here Faisal Islam portrays the euro as an unknown, dangerous entity, which has the power eventually to dominate the lives of all Europeans. In another article published in the same edition of the newspaper, the euro is presented as similarly threatening from a different perspective. Anthony Browne warns in "Watch out, the euro can make you sick" that the new currency not only "crushes national identity" and "pushes up prices", but that it can also make us physically ill: the euro coins can cause eczema as a result of the high

level of nickel contained in them. Finally, in the *Guardian* of 2nd January 2002, Stephen Moss writes in his article, "Do not Collect 200 Euros", that the "full horror" of the euro had not hit him until the moment in which he realized that *Monopoly* had produced a Europeanized version of the game with prices in euros. It would be interesting to examine such a discourse from the perspective of the fantastic, to reveal the specific preoccupations and linguistic strategies of the fantastic within this context. Here, too, the recourse to the fantastic will derive from a – more or less conscious – effort to appropriate a reality which seems "other" in its overwhelming newness. The fantastic may be a representational system especially suited to an era defined by the new, the age of modernity.

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