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SIGMUND FREUD

Translated from the German under the General Editorship of
JAMES STRACHEY
In Collaboration with
ANNA FREUD
Assisted by
ALIX STRACHEY and ALAN TYSON

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‘The “Uncanny”’
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The present translation is a considerably modified version of the one published in 1925.

This paper, published in the autumn of 1919, is mentioned by Freud in a letter to Ferenczi of May 12 of the same year, in which he says he has dug an old paper out of a drawer and is re-writing it. Nothing is known as to when it was originally written or how much it was changed, though the footnote quoted from *Totem and Taboo* on p. 241 below shows that the subject was present in his mind as early as 1913. The passages dealing with the ‘compulsion to repeat’ (p. 234 ff.) must in any case have formed part of the revision. They include a summary of much of the contents of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920g) and speak of it as ‘already completed’. The same letter to Ferenczi of May 12, 1919, announced that a draft of this latter work was finished, though it was not in fact published for another year. Further details will be found in the Editor’s Note to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Standard Ed.*, 18, 3.

The first section of the present paper, with its lengthy quotation from a German dictionary, raises special difficulties for the translator. It is to be hoped that readers will not allow themselves to be discouraged by this preliminary obstacle, for the paper is full of interesting and important material, and travels far beyond merely linguistic topics.

THE ‘UNCANNY’

I

It is only rarely that a psycho-analyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics, even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling. He works in other strata of mental life and has little to do with the subdued emotional impulses which, inhibited in their aims and dependent on a host of concurrent factors, usually furnish the material for the study of aesthetics. But it does occasionally happen that he has to interest himself in some particular province of that subject; and this province usually proves to be a rather remote one, and one which has been neglected in the specialist literature of aesthetics.

The subject of the ‘uncanny’¹ is a province of this kind. It is undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror; equally certainly, too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general. Yet we may expect that a special core of feeling is present which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. One is curious to know what this common core is which allows us to distinguish as ‘uncanny’ certain things which lie within the field of what is frightening.

As good as nothing is to be found upon this subject in comprehensive treatises on aesthetics, which in general prefer to concern themselves with what is beautiful, attractive and sublime—that is, with feelings of a positive nature—and with the circumstances and the objects that call them forth, rather than with the opposite feelings of repulsion and distress. I know of only one attempt in medico-psychological literature, a fertile but not exhaustive paper by Jentsch (1906). But I must confess that I have not made a very thorough examination of the literature, especially the foreign literature, relating to this present modest contribution of mine, for reasons which, as may

¹ [The German word, translated throughout this paper by the English ‘uncanny’, is *unheimlich*, literally ‘unhomely’. The English term is not, of course, an exact equivalent of the German one.]
easily be guessed, lie in the times in which we live; so that my paper is presented to the reader without any claim to priority.

In his study of the 'uncanny' Jentsch quite rightly lays stress on the obstacle presented by the fact that people vary so very greatly in their sensitivity to this quality of feeling. The writer of the present contribution, indeed, must himself plead guilty to a special obtuseness in the matter, where extreme delicacy of perception would be more in place. It is long since he has experienced or heard of anything which has given him an uncanny impression, and he must start by translating himself into that state of feeling, by awakening in himself the possibility of experiencing it. Still, such difficulties make themselves powerfully felt in many other branches of aesthetics; we need not on that account despair of finding instances in which the quality in question will be unhesitatingly recognized by most people.

Two courses are open to us at the outset. Either we can find out what meaning has come to be attached to the word 'uncanny' in the course of its history; or we can collect all those properties of persons, things, sense-impressions, experiences and situations which arouse in us the feeling of uncanniness, and then infer the unknown nature of the uncanny from what all these examples have in common. I will say at once that both courses lead to the same result: the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar. How this is possible, in what circumstances the familiar can become uncanny and frightening, I shall show in what follows. Let me also add that my investigation was actually begun by collecting a number of individual cases, and was only later confirmed by an examination of linguistic usage. In this discussion, however, I shall follow the reverse course.

The German word 'unheimlich' is obviously the opposite of 'heimlich' ['homely'], 'heimisch' ['native']—the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Naturally not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation is not capable of inversion.

1 [An allusion to the first World War only just concluded.]
under the word 'heimlich'. I have laid stress on one or two passages by italicizing them.¹

Heimlich, adj., subst. Heimlichkeit (pl. Heimlichkeiten): I. Also heimlich, heimelig, belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc.

(a) (Obsolete) belonging to the house or the family, or regarded as so belonging (cf. Latin familiaris, familiar): Die Heimlichen, the members of the household; Der heimische Rat (Gen. xii. 45; 2 Sam. xxiii. 23; 1 Chron. xii. 25; Wisd. viii. 4), now more usually Geheimer Rat [Privy Councilor].

(b) Of animals: tame, companionable to man. As opposed to wild, e.g. 'Animals which are neither wild nor heimlich', etc. 'Wild animals ... that are trained to be heimlich and accustomed to men.' If these young creatures are brought up from early days among men they become quite heimlich, friendly' etc. —So also: 'It (the lamb) is so heimlich and eats out of my hand.' 'Nevertheless, the stork is a beautiful, heimlich bird.'

(c) Intimate, friendlily comfortable; the enjoyment of quiet content, etc., arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house.² 'Is it still heimlich to you in your country where strangers are felling your woods?' 'She did not feel too heimlich with him.' 'Along a high, heimlich, shady path . . . beside a purling, gushing and babbling woodland brook.' 'To destroy the Heimlichkeit of the home.' 'I could not readily find another spot so intimate and heimlich as this.' 'We pictured it so comfortable, so nice, so cosy and heimlich.' 'In quiet Heimlichkeit, surrounded by close walls.' 'A careful housewife, who knows how to make a pleasing Heimlichkeit (Häuschlichkeit [domesticity]) out of the smallest means.' 'The man who till recently had been so strange to him now seemed to him all the more heimlich.' 'The protestant land-owners do not feel . . . heimlich among their catholic inferiors.' 'When it grows heimlich and still, and the evening quiet alone watches

¹ In the translation which follows in the text above, a few details, mainly giving the sources of the quotations, have been omitted. For purposes of reference, we reprint in an Appendix the entire extract from Sanders's Dictionary exactly as it is given in German in Freud's original paper except that a few minor misprints have been put right. (Cf. p. 253.)

² It may be remarked that the English 'canny', in addition to its more usual meaning of 'shrewd', can mean 'pleasant', 'cosy'.

over your cell.' 'Quiet, lovely and heimlich, no place more fitted for their rest.' 'He did not feel at all heimlich about it.'—Also, [in compounds]: 'The place was so peaceful, so lonely, so shadily-heimlich.' 'The inflowing and outflowing waves of the current, dreamy and lullaby-heimlich.' Cf. in especial Unheimlich [see below]. Among Swabian Swiss authors in especial, often as a trisyllable: 'How heimlich it seemed to Ivo again of an evening, when he was at home.' 'It was so heimelig in the house.' 'The warm room and the heimelig afternoon.' 'When a man feels in his heart that he is so small and the Lord so great—that is what is truly heimelig.' 'Little by little they grew at ease and heimelig among themselves.' 'Friendly Heimlichkeit.' 'I shall be nowhere more heimelig than I am here.' 'That which comes from afar . . . assuredly does not live quite heimelig (heimathlich [at home], freundschaftlich [in a neighbourly way]) among the people.' 'The cottage where he had once sat so often among his own people, so heimelig, so happy.' 'The sentinel's horn sounds so heimelig from the tower, and his voice invites so hospitably.' 'You go to sleep there so soft and warm, so wonderfully heimlig.' —This form of the word deserves to become general in order to protect this perfectly good sense of the word from becoming obsolete through an easy confusion with II [see below]. Cf: 'The Zocks [a family name] are all heimlich.' (in sense II) 'Heimlich? . . . What do you understand by heimlich?' 'Well, . . . they are like a buried spring or a dried-up pond. One cannot walk over it without always having the feeling that water might come up there again.' 'Oh, we call it 'unheimlich'; you call it 'heimlich'. Well, what makes you think that there is something secret and untrustworthy about this family?' (Gutzkow).

(d) Especially in Silesia: gay, cheerful; also of the weather. II. Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others. To do something heimlich, i.e. behind someone's back; to steal away heimlich; heimlich meetings and appointments; to look on with heimlich pleasure at someone's discomfiture; to sigh or weep heimlich; to behave heimlich, as though there was something to conceal; heimlich love-affair, love, sin; heimlich places (which good manners oblige us to conceal) (1 Sam. v. 6). 'The heimlich chamber' (privy) (2 Kings x. 27.). Also, 'the heimlich chair'. 'To throw into pits or Heimlichkeiten.'—'Let the steeds heimlich before Laomedon.'—'As secretive, heimlich, deceitful and malicious towards cruel masters . . . as frank, open, sympathetic and
helpful towards a friend in misfortune.' 'You have still to learn what is heimlich holiest to me.' 'The heimlich art' (magic). 'Where public ventilation has to stop, there heimlich machinations begin.' 'Freedom is the whispered watchword of heimlich conspirators and the loud battle-cry of professed revolutionaries.' 'A holy, heimlich effect.' 'I have roots that are most heimlich. I am grown in the deep earth.' 'My heimlich pranks.' 'If he is not given it openly and scrupulously he may seize it heimlich and unscrupulously.' 'He had achromatic telescopes constructed heimlich and secretly.' 'Henceforth I desire that there should be nothing heimlich any longer between us.' 'To discover, disclose, betray someone's Heimlichkeiten; to concoct Heimlichkeiten behind my back.' 'In my time we studied Heimlichkeit.' 'The hand of understanding can alone undo the powerless spell of the Heimlichkeit (of hidden gold).' 'Say, where is the place of concealment... in what place of hidden Heimlichkeit?' 'Bees, who make the lock of Heimlichkeiten' (i.e. sealing-wax). 'Learned in strange Heimlichkeiten' (magic arts).

For compounds see above, 1o. Note especially the negative 'un-': eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear: 'Seeming quite heimlich and ghastly to him.' 'The unheimlich, fearful hours of night.' 'I had already long since felt an unheimlich, even gruesome feeling.' 'Now I am beginning to have an unheimlich feeling.'...

... 'Feels an unheimlich horror.' 'Unheimlich and motionless like a stone image.' 'The unheimlich mist called hill-fog.' 'These pale youths are unheimlich and are brewing heaven knows what mischief.' "'Unheimlich' is the name for everything that ought to have remained... secret and hidden but has come to light" (Schelling).—

"To veil the divine, to surround it with a certain Unheimlichkeit."

—Unheimlich is not often used as opposite to meaning II (above).

What interests us most in this long extract is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word 'heimlich' exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, 'unheimlich.' What is heimlich thus comes to be unheimlich. (Cf. the quotation from Gutzkow: 'We call it "unheimlich"; you call it "heimlich".') In general we are reminded that the word 'heimlich' is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. 'Unheimlich' is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of 'heimlich,' and not of the second. Sanders tells us nothing concerning a possible genetic connection between these two meanings of heimlich. On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the Unheimlich, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light.

Some of the doubts that have thus arisen are removed if we consult Grimm's dictionary. (1877, 3, Part 2, 873 ff.)

We read:

Heimlich; adj. and adv. vernacular, occultus; MHG. heimelich, heimlich.

(P. 874.) In a slightly different sense: 'I feel heimlich, well, free from fear.' ...

[3] (b) Heimlich is also used of a place free from ghostly influences... familiar, friendly, intimate.

(P. 875: b) Familiar, amicable, unreserved.

4. From the idea of 'hомelike, belonging to the house, the farther idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret; and this idea is expanded in many ways... .

(P. 876.) 'On the left bank of the lake there lies a meadow heimlich in the wood.' (Schiller, Wilhelm Tell, I. 4.)... Poetic licence, rarely so used in modern speech... Heimlich is used in conjunction with a verb expressing the act of concealing: 'In the secret of his tabernacle he shall hide me heimlich.' (Ps. xxvii. 5.)... Heimlich parts of the human body, pudenda... 'the men that died not were smitten on their heimlich parts.' (1 Samuel v. 12.)...

(c) Officials who give important advice which has to be kept secret in matters of state are called heimlich councillors; the adjective, according to modern usage, has been replaced by geheim [secret]... Pharaoh called Joseph's name "him to whom secrets are revealed" [heimlich councillor]. (Gen. xli. 45.)

[According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a similar ambiguity attaches to the English 'canny,' which may mean not only 'cosy' but also 'endowed with occult or magical powers.']
THE ‘UNCANNY’


(P. 378.) *Heimlich* in a different sense, as withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious... *Heimlich* also has the meaning of that which is obscure, inaccessible to knowledge... 'Do you not see? They do not trust us; they fear the *heimlich* face of the Duke of Friedland.' (Schiller, *Wallenstein’s Lager*, Scene 2.)

9. The notion of something hidden and dangerous, which is expressed in the last paragraph, is still further developed, so that *heimlich* comes to have the meaning usually ascribed to ‘unheimlich’. Thus: 'At times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is *heimlich* and full of terrors for him'. (Klinger, *Theater*, 3. 298.)

Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*. Let us bear this discovery in mind, though we cannot yet rightly understand it, alongside of Schelling’s definition of the *Unheimlich*. If we go on to examine individual instances of uncanniness, these hints will become intelligible to us.

II

When we proceed to review the things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny in a particularly forcible and definite form, the first requirement is obviously to select a suitable example to start on. Jentsch has taken as a very good instance ‘doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate’; and he refers in this connection to the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata. To these he adds the uncanny effect of epileptic fits, and of manifestations of insanity, because these excite in the spectator the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the ordinary appearance of mental activity. Without entirely accepting this author’s view, we will take it as a starting-point for our own investigation because in what follows he reminds us of a writer who has succeeded in producing uncanny effects better than anyone else.

Jentsch writes: ‘In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton, and to do it in such a way that his attention is not focused directly upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be led to go into the matter and clear it up immediately. That, as we have said, would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing. E. T. A. Hoffmann has repeatedly employed this psychological artifice with success in his fantastic narratives.’

This observation, undoubtedly a correct one, refers primarily to the story of ‘The Sand-Man’ in Hoffmann’s *Nachtstücke*, which contains the original of Olympia, the doll that appears in the first act of Offenbach’s opera, *Tales of Hoffmann*. But I cannot think—and I hope most readers of the story will agree with me—that the theme of the doll Olympia, who is to all appearances a living being, is by any means the only, or indeed the most important, element that must be held responsible for the quite unparalleled atmosphere of uncanniness evoked by the story. Nor is this atmosphere heightened by the fact that the author himself treats the episode of Olympia with a faint touch of satire and uses it to poke fun at the young man’s idealization of his mistress. The main theme of the story is, on the contrary, something different, something which gives it its name, and which is always re-introduced at critical moments: it is the theme of the ‘Sand-Man’ who tears out children’s eyes.

This fantastic tale opens with the childhood recollections of the student Nathaniel. In spite of his present happiness, he cannot banish the memories associated with the mysterious and terrifying death of his beloved father. On certain evenings his mother used to send the children to bed early, warning them that ‘the Sand-Man was coming’; and, sure enough, Nathaniel would not fail to hear the heavy tread of a visitor, with whom his father would then be occupied for the evening. When questioned about the Sand-Man, his mother, it is true, denied

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1 [In the original version of the paper (1919) only, the name ‘Schleiermacher’ was printed here, evidently in error.]
that such a person existed except as a figure of speech; but his nurse could give him more definite information: 'He's a wicked man who comes when children won't go to bed, and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bleeding. Then he puts the eyes in a sack and carries them off to the half-moon to feed his children. They sit up there in their nest, and their beaks are hooked like owls' beaks, and they use them to peck up naughty boys' and girls' eyes with.'

Although little Nathaniel was sensible and old enough not to credit the figure of the Sand-Man with such gruesome attributes, yet the dread of him became fixed in his heart. He determined to find out what the Sand-Man looked like; and one evening, when the Sand-Man was expected again, he hid in his father's study. He recognized the visitor as the lawyer Coppelius, a repellent person whom the children were frightened of when he occasionally came to a meal; and he now identified this Coppelius with the dreaded Sand-Man. As regards the rest of the scene, Hoffmann already leaves us in doubt whether what we are witnessing is the first delirium of the panic-stricken boy, or a succession of events which are to be regarded in the story as being real. His father and the guest are at work at a brazier with glowing flames. The little cavedropper hears Coppelius call out: 'Eyes here! Eyes here!' and betrays himself by screaming aloud. Coppelius seizes him and is on the point of dropping bits of red-hot coal from the fire into his eyes, and then of throwing them into the brazier, but his father begs him off and saves his eyes. After this the boy falls into a deep swoon; and a long illness brings his experience to an end. Those who decide in favour of the rationalistic interpretation of the Sand-Man will not fail to recognize in the child's phantasy the persisting influence of his nurse's story. The bits of sand that are to be thrown into the child's eyes turn into bits of red-hot coal from the flames; and in both cases they are intended to make his eyes jump out. In the course of another visit of the Sand-Man's, a year later, his father is killed in his study by an explosion. The lawyer Coppelius disappears from the place without leaving a trace behind.

Nathaniel, now a student, believes that he has recognized this phantom of horror from his childhood in an itinerant optician, an Italian called Giuseppe Coppola, who at his university town, offers him weather-glasses for sale. When Nathaniel refuses, the man goes on: 'Not weather-glasses? not weather-glasses? also got fine eyes, fine eyes!' The student's terror is allayed when he finds that the proffered eyes are only harmless spectacles, and he buys a pocket spy-glass from Coppola. With its aid he looks across into Professor Spalanzani's house opposite and there spies Spalanzani's beautiful, but strangely silent and motionless daughter, Olympia. He soon falls in love with her so violently that, because of her, he quite forgets the clever and sensible girl to whom he is betrothed. But Olympia is an automaton whose clock-work has been made by Spalanzani, and whose eyes have been put in by Coppola, the Sand-Man. The student surprises the two Masters quarrelling over their handiwork. The optician carries off the wooden eyeless doll; and the mechanician, Spalanzani, picks up Olympia's bleeding eyes from the ground and throws them at Nathaniel's breast, saying that Coppola had stolen them from the student. Nathaniel succumbs to a fresh attack of madness, and in his delirium his recollection of his father's death is mingled with this new experience. 'Hurry up! hurry up! ring of fire!' he cries. 'Spin about, ring of fire—Hurrah! Hurry up, wooden doll! lovely wooden doll, spin about—.' He then falls upon the professor, Olympia's 'father', and tries to strangle him.

Rallying from a long and serious illness, Nathaniel seems at last to have recovered. He intends to marry his betrothed, with whom he has become reconciled. One day he and she are walking through the city market-place, over which the high tower of the Town Hall throws its huge shadow. On the girl's suggestion, they climb the tower, leaving her brother, who is walking with them, down below. From the top, Clara's attention is drawn to a curious object moving along the street. Nathaniel looks at this thing through Coppola's spy-glass, which he finds in his pocket, and falls into a new attack of madness. Shouting 'Spin about, wooden doll!' he tries to throw the girl into the gulf below. Her brother, brought to her side by her cries, rescues her and hastens down with her to safety. On the tower above, the madman rushes round, shrieking 'Ring of fire, spin about!'—and we know the origin of the words. Among the people who begin to gather below there comes forward the figure of the lawyer Coppelius, who has suddenly returned. We may suppose that it was his approach, seen through the spy-glass, which threw Nathaniel into his fit of madness. As the onlookers prepare to go
up and overpower the madman, Coppelius laughs and says: 'Wait a bit; he'll come down of himself.' Nathaniel suddenly stands still, catches sight of Coppelius, and with a wild shriek 'Yes! Fine eyes—fine eyes!' flings himself over the parapet. While he lies on the paving-stones with a shattered skull the Sand-Man vanishes in the throng.

This short summary leaves no doubt, I think, that the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes, and that Jentsch's point of an intellectual uncertainty has nothing to do with the effect. Uncertainty whether an object is living or inanimate, which admittedly applied to the doll Olympia, is quite irrelevant in connection with this other, more striking instance of uncanniness. It is true that the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation. He has, of course, a right to do either; and if he chooses to stage his action in a world peopled with spirits, demons and ghosts, as Shakespeare does in Hamlet, in Macbeth and, in a different sense, in The Tempest and A Midsummer-Night's Dream, we must bow to his decision and treat his setting as though it were real for as long as we put ourselves into his hands. But this uncertainty disappears in the course of Hoffmann's story, and we perceive that he intends to make us, too, look through the demon optician's spectacles or spy-glass—perhaps, indeed, that the author in his very own person once peered through such an instrument. For the conclusion of the story makes it quite clear that Coppola the optician really is the lawyer Coppelius\(^1\) and also, therefore, the Sand-Man.

There is no question therefore, of any intellectual uncertainty here: we know now that we are not supposed to be looking on at the products of a madman's imagination, behind which we, with the superiority of rational minds, are able to detect the sober truth; and yet this knowledge does not lessen the impression of uncanniness in the least degree. The theory of

\(^1\) Frau Dr. Rank has pointed out the association of the name with 'coppelia' = crucible, connecting it with the chemical operations that caused the father's death; and also with 'coppo' = eye-socket. [Except in the first (1919) edition this footnote was attached, it seems erroneously, to the first occurrence of the name Coppelius on this page.]

intellectual uncertainty is thus incapable of explaining that impression.

We know from psycho-analytic experience, however, that the fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible one in children. Many adults retain their apprehensiveness in this respect, and no physical injury is so much dreaded by them as an injury to the eye. We are accustomed to say, too, that we will treasure a thing as the apple of our eye. A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration—the only punishment that was adequate for him by the lex talionis. We may try on rationalistic grounds to deny that fears about the eye are derived from the fear of castration, and may argue that it is very natural that so precious an organ as the eye should be guarded by a proportionate dread. Indeed, we might go further and say that the fear of castration itself contains no other significance and no deeper secret than a justifiable dread of this rational kind. But this view does not account adequately for the substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies; nor can it dispel the impression that the threat of being castrated in especial excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion, and that this emotion is what first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring. All further doubts are removed when we learn the details of their 'castration complex' from the analysis of neurotic patients, and realize its immense importance in their mental life.

Moreover, I would not recommend any opponent of the psycho-analytic view to select this particular story of the Sand-Man with which to support his argument that anxiety about the eyes has nothing to do with the castration complex. For why does Hoffmann bring the anxiety about eyes into such intimate connection with the father's death? And why does the Sand-Man always appear as a disturber of love? He separates the unfortunate Nathaniel from his betrothed and from her brother, his best friend; he destroys the second object of his love, Olympia, the lovely doll; and he drives him into suicide at the moment when he has won back his Clara and is about to
be happily united to her. Elements in the story like these, and many others, seem arbitrary and meaningless so long as we deny all connection between fears about the eye and castration; but they become intelligible as soon as we replace the Sand-Man by the dreaded father at whose hands castration is expected.¹

¹ In fact, Hoffmann’s imaginative treatment of his material has not made such wild confusion of its elements that we cannot reconstruct their original arrangement. In the story of Nathaniel’s childhood, the figures of his father and Coppellius represent the two opposites into which the father-imago is split by his ambivalence; whereas the one threatens to blind him—that is, to castrate him,—the other, the ‘good’ father, intercedes for his sight. The part of the complex which is most strongly repressed, the death-wish against the ‘bad’ father, finds expression in the death of the ‘good’ father, and Coppellius is made answerable for it. This pair of fathers is represented later, in his student days, by Professor Spalanzani and Coppola the optician. The Professor is in himself a member of the father-series, and Coppola is recognized as identical with Coppellius the lawyer. Just as they used before to work together over the secret brazier, so now they have jointly created the doll Olympia; the Professor is even called the father of Olympia. This double occurrence of activity in common betrays them as divisions of the father-imago: both the mechanician and the optician were the father of Nathaniel (and of Olympia as well). In the frightening scene in childhood, Coppellius, after sparing Nathaniel’s eyes, had screwed off his arms and legs as an experiment; that is, he had worked on him as a mechanician would on a doll. This singular feature, which seems quite outside the picture of the Sand-Man, introduces a new castration equivalent; but it also points to the inner identity of Coppellius with his later counterpart, Spalanzani the mechanician, and prepares us for the interpretation of Olympia. This automatic doll can be nothing else than a materialization of Nathaniel’s feminine attitude towards his father in his infancy. Her fathers, Spalanzani and Coppola, are, after all, nothing but new editions, reincarnations of Nathaniel’s pair of fathers. Spalanzani’s otherwise incomprehensible statement that the optician has stolen Nathaniel’s eyes (see above, [p. 229]), so as to set them in the doll, now becomes significant as supplying evidence of the identity of Olympia and Nathaniel. Olympia is, as it were, a dissociated complex of Nathaniel’s which confronts him as a person, and Nathaniel’s enslavement to this complex is expressed in his senseless obsessive love for Olympia. We may with justice call love of this kind narcissistic, and we can understand why someone who has fallen victim to it should relinquish the real, external object of his love. The psychological truth of the situation in which the young man, fixated upon his father by his castration complex, becomes incapable of loving a woman, is amply proved by numerous analyses of patients whose story, though less fantastic, is hardly less tragic than that of the student Nathaniel.

Hoffmann was the child of an unhappy marriage. When he was

We shall venture, therefore, to refer the uncanny effect of the Sand-Man to the anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood. But having reached the idea that we can make an infantile factor such as this responsible for feelings of uncanniness, we are encouraged to see whether we can apply it to other instances of the uncanny. We find in the story of the Sand-Man the other theme on which Jentsch lays stress, of a doll which appears to be alive. Jentsch believes that a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one. Now, dolls are of course rather closely connected with childhood life. We remember that in their early games children do not distinguish at all sharply between living and inanimate objects, and that they are especially fond of treating their dolls like live people. In fact, I have occasionally heard a woman patient declare that even at the age of eight she had still been convinced that her dolls would be certain to come to life if she were to look at them in a particular, extremely concentrated, way. So that here, too, it is not difficult to discover a factor from childhood. But, curiously enough, while the Sand-Man story deals with the arousing of an early childhood fear, the idea of a ‘living doll’ excites no fear at all; children have no fear of their dolls coming to life, they may even desire it. The source of uncanny feelings would not, therefore, be an infantile fear in this case, but rather an infantile wish or even merely an infantile belief. There seems to be a contradiction here; but perhaps it is only a complication, which may be helpful to us later on.

Hoffmann is the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature. His novel, *Das Elischio des Teufels* [The Devil’s Elixir], contains a whole mass of themes to which one is tempted to ascribe the uncanny effect of the narrative; but it is too obscure and three years old, his father left his small family, and was never united to them again. According to Grisebach, in his biographical introduction to Hoffmann’s works, the writer’s relation to his father was always a most sensitive subject with him.¹

¹ [Under the rubric ‘Varia’ in one of the issues of the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* for 1919 (5, 308), the year in which the present paper was first published, there appears over the initials ‘S.F.’ a short note which it is not unreasonable to attribute to Freud. Its insertion
intricate a story for us to venture upon a summary of it. Towards the end of the book the reader is told the facts, hitherto concealed from him, from which the action springs; with the result, not that he is at last enlightened, but that he falls into a state of complete bewilderment. The author has piled up too much material of the same kind. In consequence one’s grasp of the story as a whole suffers, though not the impression it makes. We must content ourselves with selecting those themes of uncanniness which are most prominent, and with seeing whether they too can fairly be traced back to infantile sources. These themes are all concerned with the phenomenon of the ‘double’, which appears in every shape and in every degree of development. Thus we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another—by what we should call telepathy—so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchange of the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing—the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations.

The theme of the ‘double’ has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank (1914). He has gone into the connections which here, though strictly speaking irrelevant, may perhaps be excused. The note is headed: ‘E. T. A. Hoffmann on the Function of Consciousness’ and it proceeds: ‘In Die Elixire des Teufels (Part II, p. 210, in Hesse’s edition)—a novel rich in masterly descriptions of pathological mental states—Schönfeld comforts the hero, whose consciousness is temporarily disturbed, with the following words: “And what do you get out of it? I mean out of the particular mental function which we call consciousness, and which is nothing but the confounded activity of a damned toll-collector—excise-man—deputy-chief customs officer, who has set up his infamous bureau in our top storey and who exclaims, whenever any goods try to get out: “Hey! Hey! exports are prohibited ... they must stay here ... here, in this country...’”

1 [This phrase seems to be an echo from Nietzsche (e.g. from the last part of Also Sprach Zarathustra). In Chapter III of Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), Standard Ed., 18, 22, Freud puts a similar phrase ‘the perpetual recurrence of the same thing’ into inverted commas.]

the ‘double’ has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the surprising evolution of the idea. For the ‘double’ was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an ‘energetic denial of the power of death’, as Rank says; and probably the ‘immortal’ soul was the first ‘double’ of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of a genital symbol. The same desire led the Ancient Egyptians to develop the art of making images of the dead in lasting materials. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. But when this stage has been surmounted, the ‘double’ reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

The idea of the ‘double’ does not necessarily disappear with the passing of primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of the ego’s development. A special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our ‘conscience’. In the pathological case of delusions of being watched, this mental agency becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego, and discernible to the physician’s eye. The fact that an agency of this kind exists, which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object—the fact, that is, that man is capable of self-observation—renders it possible to invest the old idea of a ‘double’ with a new meaning and to ascribe a number of things to it—above all, those things which seem to self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of earliest times.

1 [Cf. The Interpretation of Dreams, Standard Ed., 5, 357.]

2 I believe that when poets complain that two souls dwell in the human breast, and when popular psychologists talk of the splitting of people’s egos, what they are thinking of is this division (in the sphere of ego-psychology) between the critical agency and the rest of the ego, and not the antithesis discovered by psycho-analysis between the ego and what is unconscious and repressed. It is true that the distinction between these two antitheses is to some extent affected by the circumstance that foremost among the things that are rejected by the criticism of the ego
But it is not only this latter material, offensive as it is to the criticism of the ego, which may be incorporated in the idea of a double. There are also all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will. [Cf. Freud, 1901b, Chapter XII (B).]

But after having thus considered the manifest motivation of the figure of a 'double', we have to admit that none of this helps us to understand the extraordinarily strong feeling of something uncanny that pervades the conception; and our knowledge of pathological mental processes enables us to add that nothing in this more superficial material could account for the urge towards defence which has caused the ego to project that material outward as something foreign to itself. When all is said and done, the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted—a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The 'double' has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.

The other forms of ego-disturbance exploited by Hoffmann can easily be estimated along the same lines as the theme of the 'double'. They are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people. I believe that these factors are partly responsible for the impression of uncanniness, although it is not easy to isolate and determine exactly their share of it.

The factor of the repetition of the same thing will perhaps not appeal to everyone as a source of uncanny feeling. From are derivatives of the repressed.—[Freud had already discussed this critical agency at length in Section III of his paper on narcissism (1914c), and it was soon to be further expanded into the 'ego-ideal' and 'super-ego' in Chapter XI of his Group Psychology (1921c) and Chapter III of The Ego and the Id (1923b) respectively.]

1 In Ewers’s Der Student von Prag, which serves as the starting-point of Rank’s study on the ‘double’, the hero has promised his beloved not to kill his antagonist in a duel. But on his way to the duelling-ground he meets his ‘double’, who has already killed his rival.

8 Heine, Die Götter im Exil.

what I have observed, this phenomenon does undoubtedly, subject to certain conditions and combined with certain circumstances, arouse an uncanny feeling, which, furthermore, recalls the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream-states. As I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another détournement at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery. Other situations which have in common with my adventure an unintended recurrence of the same situation, but which differ radically from it in other respects, also result in the same feeling of helplessness and of uncanniness. So, for instance, when, caught in a mist perhaps, one has lost one’s way in a mountain forest, every attempt to find the marked or familiar path may bring one back again and again to one and the same spot, which one can identify by some particular landmark. Or one may wander about in a dark, strange room, looking for the door or the electric switch, and collide time after time with the same piece of furniture—though it is true that Mark Twain succeeded by wild exaggeration in turning this latter situation into something irresistibly comic. [Mark Twain, A Tramp Abroad, London, 1880, 1, 107.]
close together—if we come across the number 62 several times in a single day, or if we begin to notice that everything which has a number—addresses, hotel rooms, compartments in railway trains—invariably has the same one, or at all events one which contains the same figures. We do feel this to be uncanny. And unless a man is utterly hardened and proof against the lure of superstition, he will be tempted to ascribe a secret meaning to this obstinate recurrence of a number; he will take it, perhaps, as an indication of the span of life allotted to him.\(^1\) Or suppose one is engaged in reading the works of the famous physiologist Hering, and within the space of a few days receives two letters from two different countries, each from a person called Hering, though one has never before had any dealings with anyone of that name. Not long ago an ingenious scientist (Kammerer, 1919) attempted to reduce coincidences of this kind to certain laws, and so deprive them of their uncanny effect. I will not venture to decide whether he has succeeded or not.

How exactly we can trace back to infantile psychology the uncanny effect of such similar recurrences is a question I can only lightly touch on in these pages; and I must refer the reader instead to another work,\(^2\) already completed, in which this has been gone into in detail, but in a different connection. For it is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a ‘compulsion to repeat’ proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children; a compulsion, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients. All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner ‘compulsion to repeat’ is perceived as uncanny.

Now, however, it is time to turn from these aspects of the matter, which are in any case difficult to judge, and look for some undeniable instances of the uncanny, in the hope that an analysis of them will decide whether our hypothesis is a valid one.

In the story of ‘The Ring of Polycrates’,\(^3\) the King of Egypt turns away in horror from his host, Polycrates, because he sees that his friend’s every wish is at once fulfilled, his every care promptly removed by kindly fate. His host has become ‘uncanny’ to him. His own explanation, that the too fortunate man has to fear the envy of the gods, seems obscure to us; its meaning is veiled in mythological language. We will therefore turn to another example in a less grandiose setting. In the case history of an obsessive neurotic,\(^4\) I have described how the patient once stayed in a hydrophathic establishment and benefited greatly by it. He had the good sense, however, to attribute his improvement not to the therapeutic properties of the water, but to the situation of his room, which immediately adjoined that of a very accommodating nurse. So on his second visit to the establishment he asked for the same room, but was told that it was already occupied by an old gentleman, whereupon he gave vent to his annoyance in the words: ‘I wish he may be struck dead for it.’ A fortnight later the old gentleman really did have a stroke. My patient thought this an ‘uncanny’ experience. The impression of uncanniness would have been stronger still if less time had elapsed between his words and the untoward event, or if he had been able to report innumerable similar coincidences. As a matter of fact, he had no difficulty in producing coincidences of this sort; but then not only he but every obsessive neurotic I have observed has been able to relate analogous experiences. They are never surprised at their invariably running up against someone they have just been thinking of, perhaps for the first time for a long while. If they say one day ‘I haven’t had any news of so-and-so for a long time’, they will be sure to get a letter from him the next morning, and an accident or a death will rarely take place without having passed through their mind a little while before. They are in the habit of referring to this state of affairs in the most

\(^{1}\) Freud had himself reached the age of 62 a year earlier, in 1918.

\(^{2}\) This was published a year later as Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920).

\(^{3}\) Schiller’s poem based on Herodotus.

\(^{4}\) ‘Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis’ (1909d) [Standard Ed., 10, 234].
modest manner, saying that they have ‘presentiments’ which ‘usually’ come true.

One of the most uncanny and wide-spread forms of superstition is the dread of the evil eye, which has been exhaustively studied by the Hamburg oculist Seligmann (1910–11). There never seems to have been any doubt about the source of this dread. Whoever possesses something that is at once valuable and fragile is afraid of other people’s envy, in so far as he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. A feeling like this betrays itself by a look¹ even though it is not put into words; and when a man is prominent owing to noticeable, and particularly owing to unattractive, attributes, other people are ready to believe that his envy is rising to a more than usual degree of intensity and that this intensity will convert it into effective action. What is feared is thus a secret intention of doing harm, and certain signs are taken to mean that that intention has the necessary power at its command.

These last examples of the uncanny are to be referred to the principle which I have called ‘omnipotence of thoughts’, taking the name from an expression used by one of my patients.² And now we find ourselves on familiar ground. Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe. This was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings; by the subject’s narcissistic overvaluation of his own mental processes; by the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic based on that belief; by the attribution to various outside persons and things of carefully graded magical powers, or ‘mana’; as well as by all the other creations with the help of which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to fend off the manifest prohibitions of reality. It seems as if each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as ‘uncanny’ fulfils the condition of touching

¹ [‘The evil eye’ in German is ‘der böse Blick’, literally ‘the evil look’.]  
² [The obsessional patient referred to just above—the ‘Rat Man’ (1909d), Standard Ed., 10, 233f.]
thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very
earliest times, and in which discarded forms have been so com-
pletely preserved under a thin disguise, as our relation to death.
Two things account for our conservatism: the strength of our
original emotional reaction to death and the insufficiency of
our scientific knowledge about it. Biology has not yet been able
to decide whether death is the inevitable fate of every living
being or whether it is only a regular but yet perhaps avoidable
event in life. 1 It is true that the statement "All men are mortal"
is paraded in text-books of logic as an example of a general
proposition; but no human being really grasps it, and our
unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of
its own mortality. 2 Religions continue to dispute the importance
of the undeniable fact of individual death and to postulate a life
after death; civil governments still believe that they cannot
maintain moral order among the living if they do not uphold
the prospect of a better life hereafter as a recompense for mundane existence. In our great cities, placards announce lectures
that undertake to tell us how to get into touch with the souls of
the departed; and it cannot be denied that not a few of the
most able and penetrating minds among our men of science
have come to the conclusion, especially towards the close of
their own lives, that a contact of this kind is not impossible.
Since almost all of us still think as savages do on this topic, it is
no matter for surprise that the primitive fear of the dead is still
so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on
any provocation. Most likely our fear still implies the old belief
that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks
to carry him off to share his new life with him. Considering our
unchanged attitude towards death, we might rather enquire what has become of the repression, which is the necessary con-
dition of a primitive feeling recurring in the shape of something
canny. But repression is there, too. All supposedly educated
people have ceased to believe officially that the dead can be-
come visible as spirits, and have made any such appearances

1 [This problem figures prominently in Beyond the Pleasure Principle
(1920g), on which Freud was engaged while writing the present paper.
See Standard Ed., 18, 44 ff.]

2 [Freud had discussed the individual's attitude to death at greater
length in the second part of his paper 'Thoughts for the Times on War
and Death' (1915b).]

dependent on improbable and remote conditions; their emo-
tional attitude towards their dead, moreover, once a highly
ambiguous and ambivalent one, has been toned down in the
higher strata of the mind into an unambiguous feeling of piety. 3
We have now only a few remarks to add—for animism, magic
and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to
death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex com-
prise practically all the factors which turn something frightening
into something uncanny.

We can also speak of a living person as uncanny, and we do
so when we ascribe evil intentions to him. But that is not all; in
addition to this we must feel that his intentions to harm us are
going to be carried out with the help of special powers. A good
instance of this is the 'Gettatore', 4 that uncanny figure of Romanic
superstition which Schaeffer, with intuitive poetic feeling and
profound psycho-analytic understanding, has transformed into
a sympathetic character in his Josef Montfort. But the question
of these secret powers brings us back again to the realm of
animism. It was the pious Gretchen's intuition that Mephisto-
philes possessed secret powers of this kind that made him so
uncanny to her.

Sie fühlt dass ich ganz sicher ein Genie,
Vielleicht sogar der Teufel bin. 5

The uncanny effect of epilepsy and of madness has the same
origin. The layman sees in them the working of forces hitherto
unsuspected in his fellow-men, but at the same time he is dimly
aware of them in remote corners of his own being. The Middle
Ages quite consistently ascribed all such maladies to the influ-
ence of demons, and in this their psychology was almost cor-
rect. Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that psycho-
analysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden
forces, has itself become uncanny to many people for that very
reason. In one case, after I had succeeded—though none too
rapidly—in effecting a cure in a girl who had been an invalid

3 Cf. Totem and Taboo [Standard Ed., 13, 66].
4 [Literally 'thrower' (of bad luck), or 'one who casts' (the evil eye).
—Schaeffer's novel was published in 1918.]
5 [She feels that surely I'm a genius now,—
Perhaps the very Devil indeed!
Goethe, Faust, Part I (Scene 16),
(Bayard Taylor's translation).]
for many years, I myself heard this view expressed by the patient's mother long after her recovery.

Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, as in a fairy tale of Hauff's, feet which dance by themselves, as in the book by Schaeffer which I mentioned above—all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove capable of independent activity in addition. As we already know, this kind of uncanniness springs from its proximity to the castration complex. To some people the idea of being buried alive by mistake is the most uncanny thing of all. And yet psycho-analysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness—the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence.  

There is one more point of general application which I should like to add, though, strictly speaking, it has been included in what has already been said about animism and modes of working of the mental apparatus that have been surmounted; for I think it deserves special emphasis. This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on. It is this factor which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices. The infantile element in this, which also dominates the minds of neurotics, is the over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with material reality—a feature closely allied to the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts. In the middle of the isolation of war-time a number of the English Strand Magazine fell into my hands; and, among other somewhat redundant matter, I read a story about a young married couple who move into a furnished house in which there is a curiously shaped table with carvings of crocodiles on it. Towards evening an intolerable and very specific smell begins to pervade the house; they stumble over something in the dark; they seem to see a vague form gliding over the stairs—in short, we are given to understand that the presence of the table causes ghostly crocodiles to haunt the place, or that the wooden monsters come to life in the dark, or something of the sort. It was a naïve enough story, but the uncanny feeling it produced was quite remarkable.

To conclude this collection of examples, which is certainly not complete, I will relate an instance taken from psycho-analytic experience; if it does not rest upon mere coincidence, it furnishes a beautiful confirmation of our theory of the uncanny. It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This unheimlich place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case too, then, the unheimlich is what was once heimisch, familiar; the prefix 'un' ['un-'] is the token of repression.

III

In the course of this discussion the reader will have felt certain doubts arising in his mind; and he must now have an opportunity of collecting them and bringing them forward.

It may be true that the uncanny [unheimlich] is something which is secretly familiar [heimisch-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfills this condition. But the selection of material on this basis does not enable us to solve the problem of the uncanny. For our proposition is clearly not convertible. Not everything that fulfills this condition—not everything that recalls repressed desires and surmounted modes of thinking belonging to the prehistory of the individual and of the race—is on that account uncanny.

Nor shall we conceal the fact that for almost every example

[Die Geschichte von der abgehaltenen Hand ("The Story of the Severed Hand").]  
[See Section VIII of Freud's analysis of the 'Wolf Man' (1918b), above p. 101 ff.]

[Cf. The Interpretation of Dreams (1900a), Standard Ed., 5, 399.]  
[See Freud's paper on 'Negation' (1925a).]
adduced in support of our hypothesis one may be found which
rebuts it. The story of the severed hand in Hauff’s fairy tale
[p. 244] certainly has an uncanny effect, and we have traced
that effect back to the castration complex; but most readers will
probably agree with me in judging that no trace of uncanniness
is provoked by Herodotus’s story of the treasure of Rhamps-
sinthus, in which the master-thief, whom the princess tries to
hold fast by the hand, leaves his brother’s severed hand behind
with her instead. Again, the prompt fulfilment of the wishes of
Polycrates [p. 239] undoubtedly affects us in the same uncanny
way as it did the king of Egypt; yet our own fairy stories are
crammed with instantaneous wish-fulfilments which produce
no uncanny effect whatever. In the story of ‘The Three Wishes’,
the woman is tempted by the savoury smell of a sausage to wish
that she might have one too, and in an instant it lies on a plate
before her. In his annoyance at her hastiness her husband wishes
it may hang on her nose. And there it is, dangling from her nose.
All this is very striking but not in the least uncanny. Fairy tales
quite frankly adopt the animistic standpoint of the omnipotence
of thoughts and wishes, and yet I cannot think of any genuine
fairy story which has anything uncanny about it. We have
heard that it is in the highest degree uncanny when an inanimate
object—a picture or a doll—comes to life; nevertheless in
Hans Andersen’s stories the household utensils, furniture and
tin soldiers are alive, yet nothing could well be more remote
from the uncanny. And we should hardly call it uncanny when
Pygmalion’s beautiful statue comes to life.
Apparent death and the re-animation of the dead have been
represented as most uncanny themes. But things of this sort too
are very common in fairy stories. Who would be so bold as to
call it uncanny, for instance, when Snow-White opens her eyes
once more? And the resurrection of the dead in accounts of
miracles, as in the New Testament, elicits feelings quite unre-
lated to the uncanny. Then, too, the theme that achieves such
an indubitably uncanny effect, the unintended recurrence of
the same thing, serves other and quite different purposes in
another class of cases. We have already come across one example
[p. 237] in which it is employed to call up a feeling of the comic;
and we could multiply instances of this kind. Or again, it works
as a means of emphasis, and so on. And once more: what is the
origin of the uncanny effect of silence, darkness and solitude?
discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny; it is as though we were making a judgement something like this: ‘So, after all, it is true that one can kill a person by the mere wish!’ or, ‘So the dead do live on and appear on the scene of their former activities!’ and so on. Conversely, anyone who has completely and finally rid himself of animistic beliefs will be insensible to this type of the uncanny. The most remarkable coincidences of wish and fulfilment, the most mysterious repetition of similar experiences in a particular place or on a particular date, the most deceptive sights and suspicious noises—none of these things will disconcert him or raise the kind of fear which can be described as ‘a fear of something uncanny’. The whole thing is purely an affair of ‘reality-testing’, a question of the material reality of the phenomena.\footnote{1 Since the uncanny effect of a ‘double’ also belongs to this same group it is interesting to observe what the effect is of meeting one’s own image unbidden and unexpected. Ernst Mach has related two such observations in his \textit{Analyse der Empfindungen} (1900, 3). On the first occasion he was not a little startled when he realized that the face before him was his own. The second time he formed a very unfavourable opinion about the supposed stranger who entered the omnibus, and thought ‘What a shabby-looking school-master that man is who is getting in!’—I can report a similar adventure. I was sitting alone in my \textit{wagen-lit} compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being \textit{frightened} by our ‘doubles’, both Mach and I simply failed to recognize them as such. Is it not possible, though, that our dislike of them was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction which feels the ‘double’ to be something uncanny?}

The state of affairs is different when the uncanny proceeds from repressed infantile complexes, from the castration complex, womb-phantasies, etc.; but experiences which arouse this kind of uncanny feeling are not of very frequent occurrence in real life. The uncanny which proceeds from actual experience belongs for the most part to the first group [the group dealt with in the previous paragraph]. Nevertheless the distinction between the two is theoretically very important. Where the

uncanny comes from infantile complexes the question of material reality does not arise; its place is taken by psychical reality. What is involved is an actual repression of some content of thought and a return of this repressed content, not a cessation of \textit{belief in the reality} of such a content. We might say that in the one case what had been repressed is a particular ideational content, and in the other the belief in its (material) reality. But this last phrase no doubt extends the term ‘repression’ beyond its legitimate meaning. It would be more correct to take into account a psychological distinction which can be detected here, and to say that the animistic beliefs of civilized people are in a state of having been (to a greater or lesser extent) \textit{surnourned} [rather than repressed]. Our conclusion could then be stated thus: an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surnourned seem once more to be confirmed. Finally, we must not let our predilection for smooth solutions and lucid exposition blind us to the fact that these two classes of uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable. When we consider that primitive beliefs are most intimately connected with infantile complexes, and are, in fact, based on them, we shall not be greatly astonished to find that the distinction is often a hazy one.

The uncanny as it is depicted in \textit{literature}, in stories and imaginative productions, merits in truth a separate discussion. Above all, it is a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life, for it contains the whole of the latter and something more besides, something that cannot be found in real life. The contrast between what has been repressed and what has been surnourned cannot be transposed on to the uncanny in fiction without profound modification; for the realm of plentuasy depends for its effect on the fact that its content is not submitted to reality-testing. The somewhat paradoxical result is that \textit{in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life.} The imaginative writer has this licence among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. We accept his ruling in
have reacted to real experiences; by the time we have seen through his trick it is already too late and the author has achieved his object. But it must be added that his success is not unalloyed. We retain a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit. I have noticed this particularly after reading Schnitzler's Die Weissagung [The Prophecy] and similar stories which flirt with the supernatural. However, the writer has one more means which he can use in order to avoid our recalcitrance and at the same time to improve his chances of success. He can keep us in the dark for a long time about the precise nature of the presuppositions on which the world he writes about is based, or he can cunningly and ingeniously avoid any definite information on the point to the last. Speaking generally, however, we find a confirmation of the second part of our proposition—that fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny feelings than are possible in real life.

Strictly speaking, all these complications relate only to that class of the uncanny which proceeds from forms of thought that have been surmounted. The class which proceeds from repressed complexes is more resistant and remains as powerful in fiction as in real experience, subject to one exception [see p. 252]. The uncanny belonging to the first class—that proceeding from forms of thought that have been surmounted—retains its character not only in experience but in fiction as well, so long as the setting is one of material reality; but where it is given an arbitrary and artificial setting in fiction, it is apt to lose that character.

We have clearly not exhausted the possibilities of poetic licence and the privileges enjoyed by story-writers in evoking or in excluding an uncanny feeling. In the main we adopt an unvarying passive attitude towards real experience and are subject to the influence of our physical environment. But the storyteller has a peculiarly directive power over us; by means of the moods he can put us into, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, to dam it up in one direction and make it flow in another, and he often obtains a great variety of effects from the same material. All this is nothing new, and has doubtless long since been fully taken into account by students of aesthetics. We have drifted into this field of research half involuntarily, through the temptation to explain certain instances which
contradicted our theory of the causes of the uncanny. Accordingly we will now return to the examination of a few of those instances.

We have already asked [p. 246] why it is that the severed hand in the story of the treasure of Rhamspinsitus has no uncanny effect in the way that the severed hand has in Hauff’s story. The question seems to have gained in importance now that we have recognized that the class of the uncanny which proceeds from repressed complexes is the more resistant of the two. The answer is easy. In the Herodotus story our thoughts are concentrated much more on the superior cunning of the master-thief than on the feelings of the princess. The princess may very well have had an uncanny feeling; indeed she very probably fell into a swoon; but we have no such sensations, for we put ourselves in the thief’s place, not in hers. In Nestroy’s farce, Der Zerrissene [The Torn Man], another means is used to avoid any impression of the uncanny in the scene in which the fleeing man, convinced that he is a murderer, lifts up one trap-door after another and each time sees what he takes to be the ghost of his victim rising up out of it. He calls out in despair, ‘But I’ve only killed one man. Why this ghastly multiplication?’ We know what went before this scene and do not share his error, so what must be uncanny to him has an irresistibly comic effect on us. Even a ‘real’ ghost, as in Oscar Wilde’s Canterville Ghost, loses all power of at least arousing gruesome feelings in us as soon as the author begins to amuse himself by being ironical about it and allows liberties to be taken with it. Thus we see how independent emotional effects can be of the actual subject-matter in the world of fiction. In fairy stories feelings of fear—including therefore uncanny feelings—are ruled out altogether. We understand this, and that is why we ignore any opportunities we find in them for developing such feelings.

Concerning the factors of silence, solitude and darkness [pp. 246–7], we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of the infantile anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free. This problem has been discussed from a psycho-analytic point of view elsewhere.¹

¹ [See the discussion of children’s fear of the dark in Section V of the third of Freud’s Three Essays (1905d), Standard Ed., 7, 224 n.]

APPENDIX

EXTRACT FROM DANIEL SANDERS’S WORTERBUCH DER DEUTSCHEN SPRECHES

Heimlich, a. (-keit, f. -en): 1. auch Heilimlich, heimelig, zum Hause gehörig, nicht fremd, vertraut, zahm, traut und traulich, anheimelnd etc. (a) (veralt.) zum Haus, zur Familie gehörig oder: wie dazu gehörig betrachtet, vgl. lat. familiaris, vertraut: Die Heimlichen, die Hausgenossen; Der heimische Rath. 1. Mos. 41, 45; 2. Sam. 23, 23. 1 Chr. 12, 25. Weish. 8, 4., wofür jetzt: Geheimer (s. d. 1.) Rath üblich ist, s. Heimlicher—(b) von Thieren zahm, sich den Menschen traulich anschließend. Ggstz. wild, z. B.: Thier, die weder wild noch heimlich sind, etc. Eppendorf. 88; Wilde Thier . . . so man sie h. und gewohnsam um die Leute aufzuechten. 92. So diese Thiere von Jugend bei den Menschen erzogen, werden sie ganz h., freundlich etc., Stumpf 608a etc.—So noch: So h. ist’s (das Lamm) und frißt aus meiner Hand. Hölty; Ein schöner, heimlicher (s. c) Vogel bleibt der Storch immerhin. Linck, Schl. 146. s. Häuslich 1 etc.—(c) traut, traulich anheimelnd; das Wohlgefühl stiller Befriedigung etc., behaglicher Ruhe u. sichern Schützes, wie das umschlossene, wohlsende Haus erregend (vgl. Geheuer): Ist dir’s h. noch im Lande, wo die Fremden deine Wälder roden? Alexi H. 1, 1, 289; Es war ihr nicht allzu h. bei ihm. Brentano Wehm. 92; Auf einem hohen h.—en Schattenpfeife . . ., längs dem rieselnden rauschenden und plätschernden Waldbach. Förster B. 1, 417. Die H.—keit der Heimath zerstören. Gervinus Lit. 5, 375. So vertraulich und h. habe ich nicht leicht ein Plätzchen gefunden. G[poetich]. 14, 14; Wir dachten es uns so bequem, so artig, so gemütlich und h. 15, 9; In stiller H.—keit, umzielt von engen Schranken. Haller; Einer sorglichen Hausfrau, die mit dem Wenigsten eine vergnügliche H.—keit (Häuslichkeit) zu schaffen versteht. Hartmann Unst. 1, 1, 288; Desto h.—er kam ihm jetzt der ihm erst kurz noch so fremde Mann vor. Kerner 540; Die protestantischen Besitzer fühlen sich . . . nicht h. unter ihren katholischen Unterthanen. Kohl. Irl. 1, 172; Wenns h. wird und leise/die Abendstille nur

² [Cf. p. 222.]