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The Uncanny

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I

Only rarely does the psychoanalyst feel impelled to engage in aesthetic investigations, even when aesthetics is not restricted to the theory of beauty, but described as relating to the qualities of our feeling. He works in other strata of the psyche and has little to do with the emotional impulses that provide the usual subject matter of aesthetics, impulses that are restrained, inhibited in their aims and dependent on numerous attendant circumstances. Yet now and then it happens that he has to take an interest in a particular area of aesthetics, and then it is usually a marginal one that has been neglected in the specialist literature.

One such is the 'uncanny'. There is no doubt that this belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread. It is equally beyond doubt that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general. Yet one may presume that there exists a specific affective nucleus, which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. One would like to know the nature of this common nucleus, which allows us to distinguish the 'uncanny' within the field of the frightening.

On this topic we find virtually nothing in the detailed accounts of aesthetics, which on the whole prefer to concern themselves with our feelings for the beautiful, the grandiose and the attractive – that is to say, with feelings of a positive kind, their determinants and the objects that arouse them – rather than with their opposites, feelings of repulsion and distress. In the medico-psychological literature I know only one study on the subject, that of E. Jentsch;¹ and this, while rich in content, is not exhaustive. True, I have to own that, for

reasons that are not hard to divine, and inherent in the times we live in, I have not undertaken a thorough survey of the literature, especially the foreign literature, that would be relevant to the present modest contribution, which is therefore presented to the reader with no claim to priority.

Jentsch stresses, as one of the difficulties attendant upon the study of the uncanny, the fact that people differ greatly in their sensitivity to this kind of feeling. Indeed, the present writer must plead guilty to exceptional obtuseness in this regard, when great delicacy of feeling would be more appropriate. It is a long time since he experienced or became acquainted with anything that conveyed the impression of the uncanny. He must first put himself in the proper state of feeling and so put himself in the way of experiencing a sense of the uncanny. Yet such difficulties play an important part in other areas of aesthetics too; hence one need not, for that reason, give up hope of finding cases in which the feeling in question will be unequivocally acknowledged by most people.

There are thus two courses open to us: either we can investigate the semantic content that has accrued to the German word *unheimlich* [of which the nearest semantic equivalents in English are 'uncanny' and 'eerie', but which etymologically corresponds to 'unhomely'] as the language has developed, or we can assemble whatever it is about persons and things, sense impressions, experiences and situations, that evokes in us a sense of the uncanny, and then go on to infer its hidden nature from what all these have in common. I can say in advance that both these courses lead to the same conclusion – that the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar. How this can be – under what conditions the familiar can become uncanny and frightening – will emerge in what follows. I must add that the present study actually began with a collection of individual cases and that the findings were only later corroborated by what we are told by [German] linguistic usage, but here I shall work in reverse order.

Unheimlich is clearly the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, *vertraut*,² and it seems obvious that something should be frightening

precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar. But of course the converse is not true: not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening. All one can say is that what is novel may well prove frightening and uncanny; some things that are novel are indeed frightening, but by no means all. Something must be added to the novel and the unfamiliar if it is to become uncanny.

On the whole Jentsch does not go beyond relating the uncanny to the novel and the unfamiliar. For him the essential condition for the emergence of a sense of the uncanny is intellectual uncertainty. One would suppose, then, that the uncanny would always be an area in which a person was unsure of his way around: the better oriented he was in the world around him, the less likely he would be to find the objects and occurrences in it uncanny.

This definition is clearly not exhaustive. We will therefore try to go beyond a mere equation of the uncanny with the unfamiliar and turn first to other languages. But the dictionaries we consult tell us nothing new, if only perhaps because we ourselves speak a foreign language. Indeed, we gain the impression that many languages lack a word for this particular species of the frightening.³

LATIN (K. E. Georges, *Kleines Deutsch-Lateinisches Wörterbuch* 1898): 'ein unheimlicher Ort' ['an eerie place'] – *locus suspectus*; 'in unheimlicher Nachtzeit' ['in the eerie night hours'] – *intempesta nocte*.

GREEK (from the dictionaries of Rost and Schenkl): *xénos*, 'foreign, alien'.

ENGLISH (from the dictionaries of Lucas, Bellows, Flügel and Muret-Sanders): *uncomfortable*, *uneasy*, *gloomy*, *dismal*, *uncanny*, *ghastly*, (of a house): *haunted*, (of a person): *a repulsive fellow*.

FRENCH (Sachs-Villatte): *inquiétant*, *sinistre*, *lugubre*, *mal à son aise*.

SPANISH (Tollhausen 1889): *sospechoso*, *de mal agüero*, *lúgubre*, *siniestro*.

Italian and Portuguese seem to make do with words that we would call periphrases. In Arabic and Hebrew the 'uncanny' merges with the 'demonic' and the 'gruesome'.

So let us return to German. In Daniel Sanders' *Wörterbuch der*

Deutschen Sprache of 1860 we find the following information on the word *heimlich*, which I reproduce here in full, drawing attention to certain passages (vol. I, p. 729):⁴

Heimlich. *adj.* (*sb.* -keit, *pl.* -en):

1. also *Heimelich*, *heimelig*, 'zum Hause gehörig, nicht fremd, vertraut, zahm, traut und traulich, anheimelnd etc.' ['belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, dear and intimate, homely, etc.']

a) (*obsolete*) 'zum Haus, zur Familie gehörig, oder: wie dazu gehörig betrachtet, vgl. lat. *familiaris*, "vertraut"' ['belonging to the house, to the family, or: regarded as belonging to it, cf. Lat. *familiaris*, "familiar"',], *die Heimlichen*, 'the members of the household'; *der heimliche Rath*, 'the privy councillor', Genesis 41, 45 [Luther: *Und nannte ihn den heimlichen Rat*, 'And called him the privy councillor'; AV: 'And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah', to which the following gloss is supplied: 'Which in the Coptic signifies *A revealer of secrets* or *The man to whom secrets are revealed*'; 2 Samuel 23, 23 [Luther: *Und David machte ihn zum heimlichen Rat*, 'And David made him privy councillor'; AV: 'And David set him over his guard (gloss: "or council")'].] [Here follow references to I Chronicles 12, 25 and Wisdom 8, 4, where the word *heimlich* does not appear.] The usual title for this office is now *Geheimer Rath* (see **Geheim 1**). See also *Heimlicher*.

b) 'von Thieren zahm, sich den Menschen traulich anschliessend. Ggztz wild' ['of animals: tame, associating familiarly with humans; antonym: wild'], e.g. *Thier, die weder wild noch heimlich sind* etc., 'Animals that are neither wild nor tame'. Eppendorf, 88; *Wilde Thier . . . so man sie heimlich und gewohnsam um die Leute aufzuecht*, 'Wild animals . . . that are brought up tame and accustomed to humans', 92. *So diese Thierle von Jugend bei den Menschen erzogen, werden sie ganz heimlich, freundlich* etc., 'When these little animals are reared among humans they become quite domesticated, friendly, etc.' Stumpf 608a etc. – Hence still [in the 18th century]: *So heimlich ist's (das Lamm) und frisst aus meiner Hand*, 'It is so tame (the lamb) and eats out of my hand', Hölty; *Ein schöner, heimlicher* (see

c) *Vogel bleibt der Storch immerhin*, 'The stork remains a beautiful tame bird all the same', Linck. Schl. 146. See **Häuslich** ('domestic') 1 etc.

c) 'traut, traulich anheimelnd, das Wohlgefühl stiller Befriedigung etc., behaglicher Ruhe u. sichern Schutzes, wie das umschlossne wohnliche Haus erregend' ['intimate, cosily homely; arousing a pleasant feeling of quiet contentment, etc., of comfortable repose and secure protection, like the enclosed, comfortable house'] (cf. **Geheuer**): *Ist dir's heimlich noch im Lande, wo die Fremden deine Wälder roden?*, 'Are you still at ease in the country, where strangers are uprooting your woods?', Alexis H. 1, 1, 289; *Es war ihr nicht allzu heimlich bei ihm*, 'She was not altogether at ease with him', Brentano Wehm. 92; *Auf einem hohen heimlichen Schattenpfade . . . längs dem rieselnden rauschenden und plätschernden Waldbach*, 'On a high, peaceful, shady path . . . beside the purling, murmuring, babbling woodland brook', Forster B. 1. 417. *Die Heimlichkeit der Heimath zerstören*, 'To destroy the tranquillity of the homeland', Gervinus Lit. 5, 375. *So vertraulich und heimlich habe ich nicht leicht ein Plätzchen gefunden*, 'It was not easy for me to find such a quiet and restful spot', Goethe 14, 14; *Wir dachten es uns so bequem, so artig, so gemütlich und heimlich*, 'We imagined it so comfortable, so pretty, so cosy and homely', 15, 9; *In stiller Heimlichkeit, umzielt von engen Schranken*, 'In quiet homeliness, enclosed within narrow bounds', Haller; *Einer sorglichen Hausfrau, die mit dem Wenigsten eine vergnügliche Heimlichkeit (Häuslichkeit) zu schaffen versteht*, 'A careful housewife, who knows how to create a pleasant homeliness (domesticity) with the meagrest of means'; Hartmann Unst. 1, 188: *Desto heimlicher kam ihm jetzt der ihm erst kurz noch so fremde Mann vor*. 'All the more familiar did the man now appear to him, who but a short while before had seemed such a stranger', Kerner 540; *Die protestantischen Besitzer fühlen sich . . . nicht heimlich unter ihren katholischen Unterthanen*, 'The Protestant owners do not feel at home among their Catholic subjects', Kohl, Irl. 1, 172; *Wenns heimlich wird und leise/die Abendstille nur an deiner Zelle lauscht*, 'When it becomes tranquil, and the evening's hush quietly harkens only at your cell', Tiedge 2, 39.

Still und lieb und heimlich, als sie sich / zum Ruhen einen Platz nur wünschen möchten, 'As quiet and dear and homely a place as they could wish to rest at', Wieland 11, 144; *Es war ihm garnicht heimlich dabei*, 'He did not feel at all at ease in all this', 27, 170, etc. – Also: *Der Platz war so still, so einsam, so schatten-heimlich*, 'The spot was so quiet, so lonely, so shadily restful', Scherr Pilg. 1, 170; *Die ab- und zuströmenden Fluthwellen, träumend und wiegenliedheimlich*, 'The ebb and flow of the waves, dreamy and restful as a lullaby', Körner, Sch. 3, 320, etc. – Cf. esp. **Unheimlich**. – Often trisyllabic, esp. in Swabian and Swiss authors: *Wie 'heimlich' war es dann Ivo Abends wieder, als er zu Hause lag*, 'How "cosy" it again seemed to Ivo in the evening as he lay at home', Auerbach D. 1, 249; *In dem Haus ist mir's so heimelig gewesen*, 'I have been so much at ease in the house', 4, 307; *Die warme Stube, der heimelige Nachmittag*, 'The warm living room, the cosy afternoon', Gotthelf, Sch. 127, 148; *Das ist das wahre Heimelig, wenn der Mensch so von Herzen fühlt, wie wenig er ist, wie gross der Herr ist*, 'That is true ease, when a man feels in his heart how little he is and how great the Lord is', 147; *Wurde man nach und nach recht gemüthlich und heimelig mit einander*, 'Little by little they became very comfortable and familiar with one another', U. 1, 297; *Die trauliche Heimeligkeit*, 'Cosy intimacy', 380, 2, 86; *Heimelicher wird es mir wohl nirgends werden als hier*, 'I shall probably feel nowhere more at home than here', 327; Pestalozzi 4, 240; *Was von ferne herkommt . . . lebt gewiss nicht ganz heimelig (heimatlich, freundnachbarlich) mit den Leuten*, 'Whoever comes here from afar . . . certainly does not live wholly at ease (on homely, friendly, neighbourly terms) with the [local] people', 325; *Die Hütte, wo er sonst so heimelig, so froh / . . . im Kreis der Seinen oft gesessen*, 'The cottage where once he had often sat so comfortably, so happily, in the circle of his family', Reithard 20; *Da klingt das Horn des Wächters so heimelig vom Thurm/da ladet seine Stimme so gastlich*, 'Now sounds the watchman's horn so familiarly from the tower; his voice now invites us so hospitably', 49; *Es schläft sich da so lind und warm/so wunderheim'lig ein*, 'There you can fall asleep so soft and warm, in such a wonderfully restful fashion', 23 etc. **This spelling deserves to**

become universal, in order to protect this excellent word from obsolescence through easy confusion with sense 2. Cf.: *'Die Zecks sind alle heimlich'* (sense 2). *'Heimlich? . . . Was verstehen Sie unter heimlich?'* . . . *'Nun . . . es kommt mir mit ihnen vor, wie mit einem zugegrabenen Brunnen oder einem ausgetrockneten Teich. Man kann nicht darüber gehen, ohne dass es Einem immer ist, als könnte da wider einmal Wasser zum Vorschein kommen.'* *'Wir nennen das unheimlich; Sie nennen's heimlich. Worin finden Sie denn, dass diese Familie etwas Verstecktes und Unzuverlässiges hat?'* etc., ('The Zecks are all mysterious.' 'Mysterious? . . . What do you mean by "mysterious"?' 'Well, I have the same impression with them as I have with a buried spring or a dried-up pond. You can't walk over them without constantly feeling that water might reappear.' 'We call that uncanny ["unhomely"]; you call it mysterious ["homely"]. So, what makes you think there's something hidden and unreliable about the family?') etc., Gutzkow R. 2, 61. (1)

d) (see c) especially Silesian: 'cheerful, serene', also of weather, see Adelung and Weinhold.

2. 'versteckt, verborgen gehalten, so dass man Andre nicht davon oder darum wissen lassen, es ihnen verbergen will' ['concealed, kept hidden, so that others do not get to know of it or about it and it is hidden from them'. Cf. **Geheim 2**, from which it is not always clearly distinguished, especially in the older language, as in the Bible, e.g. Job 11, 6, *die heimliche Weisheit*, 'the secret wisdom'; [AV: 'the secrets of wisdom']; 15, 8 *Gottes heimlichen Rat*, 'God's secret counsel'; [AV: 'the secret of God']; 1 Cor 2, 7, *der heimlichen, verborgenen Weisheit Gottes*, 'the secret, hidden wisdom of God'; [AV: 'the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom'], etc., similarly *Heimlichkeit* instead of *Geheimnis*, Matth. 13, 35 etc., [Luther: *was verborgen war*, 'what was hidden'; AV: 'things which have been kept secret', etc.]: *Heimlich (hinter Jemandes Rücken) Etwas thun, treiben*, 'to do or engage in something secretly (behind someone's back)'; *Sich heimlich davon schleichen*, 'to steal secretly

away'; *Heimliche Zusammenkünfte, Verabredungen*, 'secret meetings, assignations'; *Mit heimlicher Schadenfreude zusehen*, 'to watch with hidden glee'; *Heimlich seufzen, weinen*, 'to sigh, to weep, secretly'; *Heimlich thun, als ob man etwas zu verbergen hätte*, 'to act secretly, as if one had something to hide'; *Heimliche Liebschaft, Liebe, Sünde*, 'secret liaison, love, sin'; *Heimliche Orte (die der Wohlstand zu verhüllen gebietet)*, 'secret places (which propriety requires to be hidden)', 1 Sam. 5, 6 [Luther (1545): *und schlug Asdod und alle ihre Grenze an heimlichen Orten*, 'and smote Ashdod and all their boundaries in secret places'; [AV: 'and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof']; Vulgate: *et percussit in secretiori parte natium*, 'and smote them in the more secret part of the buttocks'];⁵ 2 Kings 10, 27: *Das heimliche Gemach (Abtritt)*, 'the private room (privy)' [AV: 'draught house']; Wieland 5, 256, etc., also: *Der heimliche Stuhl*, 'the secret stool', Zinkgräf 1, 249; *In Gräben, in Heimlichkeiten werfen*, 'to cast into pits, into hidden places', 3, 75; Rollenhagen Fr. 83 etc. – *Führte, heimlich vor Laomedon/die Stuten vor*, 'Secretly led the mares out before Laomedon', Bürger 161 b etc. – *Ebenso versteckt, heimlich, hinterlistig und boshaft gegen grausame Herren . . . wie offen, frei, theilnehmend und dienstwillig gegen den leidenden Freund*, 'Just as hidden, secretive, treacherous and malicious towards cruel masters . . . as open, free, sympathetic and obliging towards a suffering friend', Burmeister g B2, 157; *Du sollst mein heimlich Heiligstes noch wissen*, 'You shall yet know what I secretly hold most sacred', Chamisso 4, 56; *Die heimliche Kunst (der Zauberei)*, 'The secret art (of sorcery)', 3, 224; *Wo die öffentliche Ventilation aufhören muss, fängt die heimliche Machination an*, 'Where public ventilation has to cease, secret machination begins', Forster, Br. 2, 135; *Freiheit ist die leise Parole heimlich Verschworener, das laute Feldgeschrei der öffentlich Umwälzenden*, 'Freedom is the quiet watchword of secret conspirators, the loud war-cry of open revolutionaries', Goethe 4, 222; *Ein heilig, heimlich Wirken*, 'A sacred, secret force at work', 15; *Ich habe Wurzeln/die sind gar heimlich,/im tiefen Boden/bin ich gegründet*, 'I have roots that are very secret; I am grounded in the deep soil', 2, 109; *Meine heimliche Tücke* (vgl. *Heimtücke*), 'My secret craft' (cf.

Heimtücke [a compound noun combining the adjective and the noun of the previous phrase]), 30, 344; *Empfängt er es nicht offenbar und gewissenhaft, so mag er es heimlich und gewissenlos ergreifen*, 'If he does not receive it openly and conscientiously, he may seize it secretly and without conscience', 39, 22; *Liess heimlich und geheimnisvoll achromatische Fernröhre zusammensetzen*, 'Had achromatic telescopes constructed covertly and secretly', 375; *Von nun an, will ich, sei nichts Heimliches / mehr unter uns*, 'From now on I desire that there shall be nothing secret between us', Schiller 369b. *Jemandes Heimlichkeiten entdecken, offenbaren, verrathen*, 'To discover, reveal, betray someone's secrets'; *Heimlichkeiten hinter meinem Rücken zu brauen*, 'To concoct secrets behind my back', Alexis, H. 2, 3, 168; *Zu meiner Zeit / befliss man sich der Heimlichkeit*, 'In my day one studied secrecy', Hagedorn 3, 92; *Die Heimlichkeit und das Gepuschele unter der Hand*, 'Secrecy and underhand dealings', Immermann, M. 3, 289; *Der Heimlichkeit (des verborgenen Golds) unmächtigen Bann kann nur die Hand der Einsicht lösen*, 'The powerless spell of the mystery (of hidden gold) can be undone only by the hand of understanding', Novalis 1, 69; *Sag' an, wo du sie . . . verbirgst, in welches Ortes verschwiegener Heimlichkeit*, 'Say, where do you hide them, in the unspoken secrecy of what place?' Schiller 495; *Ihr Bienen, die thi knetet der Heimlichkeiten Schloss (Wachs zum Siegel)*, 'You bees, who knead the lock of secrets (wax for sealing)', Tieck, Cymb. 3, 2; *Erfahren in seltnen Heimlichkeiten (Zauberkünsten)*, 'Experienced in rare mysteries (magic arts)', Schlegel Sh. 6, 102 etc. cf. *Geheimnis*, Lessing 10: 291 ff.

For compounds see 1 (c), especially the antonym formed with **Un-**: 'unbehagliches, banges Grauen erregend' ['arousing uneasy, fearful horror']: *Der schier ihm unheimlich, gespenstisch erschien*, 'Which seemed to him utterly uncanny, ghostly', Chamisso 3, 328; *Der Nacht unheimliche, bange Stunden*, 'The eerie, fearful hours of the night', 4, 148; *Mir war schon lang' unheimlich, ja graulich zu Muthe*, 'For a long time I had an uncanny feeling, indeed a feeling of horror', 242; *Nun fängts mir an, unheimlich zu werden*, 'Now I am beginning to feel uneasy', Goethe 6, 330; *Empfindet ein unheimliches Grauen*.

'Feels an uncanny horror', Heine, *Verm.* 1, 51; *Unheimlich und starr wie ein Steinbild*, 'Uncanny and motionless like a stone statue', Reis, 1, 10; *Den unheimlichen Nebel, Haarrauch geheissen*, 'The eery mist, called haze (or blight)', Immermann, *M.*, 3, 299; *Diese blassen Jungen sind unheimlich und brauen Gott weiss was Schlimmes*. 'These pale youths are uncanny, concocting God knows what mischief', Laube, I, 119; *Unheimlich nennt man Alles, was im Geheimnis, im Verborgenen . . . bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist*, 'Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open', Schelling 2.2, 649, etc. – *Das Göttliche zu verhüllen, mit einer gewissen Unheimlichkeit zu umgeben*, 'To veil the divine and surround it with an aura of the uncanny', 658, etc. – *Unheimlich* is rare as the antonym of sense 2); Campe lists it, but with no illustrative quotation.

For us the most interesting fact to emerge from this long excerpt is that among the various shades of meaning that are recorded for the word *heimlich* there is one in which it merges with its formal antonym, *unheimlich*, so that what is called *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich*. As witness the passage from Gutzkow: 'We call that *unheimlich*; you call it *heimlich*.' This reminds us that this word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other – the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden. *Unheimlich* is the antonym of *heimlich* only in the latter's first sense, not in its second. Sanders suggests no genetic connection between the two senses. On the other hand, our attention is seized by Schelling's remark, which says something quite new – something we certainly did not expect – about the meaning of *unheimlich*, namely, that the term 'uncanny' (*unheimlich*) applies to everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open.

Some of the doubts that arise here are cleared up by the data in the German Dictionary of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig 1877, IV/2, 873ff.):

Heimlich: adj. and adv. *vernaculus, occultus*: Middle High German *heimelîch, heimlich*.

p. 874: In a somewhat different sense: *es ist mir heimlich*, 'I feel well, free from fear', [3] *b*) *heimlich* is also used of a place that is free of ghostly influences . . .

p. 875: *β*) familiar; friendly, confiding.

4. Starting from the homely and the domestic, there is a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret. This notion is extended in a number of ways . . .

p. 876: *links am see*

liegt eine matte heimlich im gehölz

Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell* I, 4

(To the left by the lake

lies a meadow hidden among the trees.)

. . . Uncommon in modern usage is the combination of *heimlich* with a verb denoting concealment: *Er verbirgt mich heimlich in seinem gezelt* (Psalm 27, 5), [AV: 'In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me']. Secret places on the human body, the pudenda: *welche Leute nicht sturben, die wurden geschlagen an heimlichen örten*, I Samuel 5, 12: 'Those who did not die were smitten in secret places', [AV: 'And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods'].⁶

c) Officials who dispense important advice on affairs of state that is to be kept secret are called *heimliche rätthe* ('privy councillors'); in modern usage the adjective is replaced by *geheim* (q.v.): *Pharao nennet ihn (Joseph) den heimlichen rath*, 'Pharaoh named him the privy councillor', Gen. 41, 45;

p. 878: 6. *heimlich* as used of knowledge, mystical, allegorical: *heimliche bedeutung* ('secret meaning'), *mysticus, divinus, occultus, figuratus*.

p. 878: in the following *heimlich* is used differently for what is withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious . . .

but then *heimlich* also means 'locked away, inscrutable': . . .

merkst du wohl? sie trauen uns⁷ nicht,
fürchten des Friedländers heimlich gesicht.

Schiller, *Wallensteins Lager*, scene 2

(Do you see? They do not trust us,
they fear the inscrutable face of the
Friedländer [i.e. Wallenstein].)

9. The notion of the hidden and the dangerous, which appears in the last section, undergoes a further development, so that *heimlich* acquires the sense that otherwise belongs to *unheimlich* (formed from *heimlich*, 3 b, col. 874: *mir ist zu zeiten wie dem menschen der in nacht wandelt und an gespenster glaubt, jeder winkel ist ihm heimlich und schauerhaft*, 'I sometimes feel like a sleepwalker who believes in ghosts: every corner seems to him eerie and frightening'), Klinger, *Theater*, 3, 298.

Heimlich thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, 'the unhomely') is in some way a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homely'). Let us relate this finding, which still has to be explained, to Schelling's definition of the uncanny. Separate investigations of cases of the uncanny will enable us to make sense of these hints.

II

If we now go on to review the persons and things, the impressions, processes and situations that can arouse an especially strong and distinct sense of the uncanny in us, we must clearly choose an appropriate example to start with. E. Jentsch singles out, as an excellent case, 'doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate'. In this connection he refers to the impressions made on us by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata. To these he adds the uncanny effect produced by epileptic fits and the manifestations of insanity, because these arouse in the onlooker vague notions of automatic – mechanical – processes that may lie hidden behind the familiar image of a living person. Now, while not wholly convinced by the author's arguments, we will take them as a starting point for our own investigation, because he goes on to remind us of one writer who was more successful than any other at creating uncanny effects.

'One of the surest devices for producing slightly uncanny effects through story-telling,' writes Jentsch, 'is to leave the reader wondering whether a particular figure is a real person or an automaton, and to do so in such a way that his attention is not focused directly on the uncertainty, lest he should be prompted to examine and settle the matter at once, for in this way, as we have said, the special emotional effect can easily be dissipated. E. T. A. Hoffmann often employed this psychological manoeuvre with success in his imaginative writings.'

This observation, which is undoubtedly correct, refers in particular to Hoffmann's story "The Sand-Man", one of the 'Night Pieces'

(vol. 3 of Hoffmann's *Gesammelte Werke* in Grisebach's edition), from which the doll Olympia found her way into the first act of Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*. I must say, however – and I hope that most readers of the story will agree with me – that the motif of the seemingly animate doll Olympia is by no means the only one responsible for the incomparably uncanny effect of the story, or even the one to which it is principally due. Nor is this effect enhanced by the fact that the author himself gives the Olympia episode a slightly satirical twist using it to make fun of the young man's overvaluation of love. Rather, it is another motif that is central to the tale, the one that gives it its name and is repeatedly emphasized at crucial points – the motif of the Sand-Man, who tears out children's eyes.

A student named Nathaniel, with whose childhood memories this fantastic tale opens, is unable, for all his present happiness, to banish certain memories connected with the mysterious and terrifying death of his much-loved father. On certain evenings his mother would send the children to bed early with the warning 'The Sand-Man is coming.' And sure enough, on each such occasion the boy would hear the heavy tread of a visitor, with whom his father would then spend the whole evening. It is true that, when asked about the Sand-Man, the boy's mother would deny that any such person existed, except as a figure of speech, but a nursemaid was able to give him more tangible information: 'He is a bad man who comes to children when they won't go to bed and throws a handful of sand in their eyes, so that their eyes jump out of their heads, all bleeding. He then throws their eyes in his bag and takes them off to the half-moon as food for his children. These children sit up there in their nest; they have hooked beaks like owls, and use them to peck up the eyes of the naughty little boys and girls.'

Although little Nathaniel was old and sensible enough to dismiss such grisly details about the Sand-Man, fear of this figure took root even in him. He resolved to find out what the Sand-Man looked like, and one evening, when another visitation was due, he hid in his father's study. He recognized the visitor as a lawyer named Coppelius, a repulsive person of whom the children were afraid when

he occasionally came to lunch. He now identified Coppelius with the dreaded Sand-Man. In the remainder of this scene the author leaves us in doubt as to whether we are dealing with the initial delirium of the panic-stricken boy or an account of events that must be taken as real within the world represented in the tale. The boy's father and the visitor busy themselves at a brazier that emits glowing flames. Hearing Coppelius shout 'Eyes here! eyes here!' the little eavesdropper lets out a scream and reveals his presence. Coppelius seizes him and is about to drop red-hot grains of coal in his eyes and then throw these into the brazier. The father begs him to spare his son's eyes. This experience ends with the boy falling into a deep swoon, followed by a long illness. Whoever favours a rationalistic interpretation of the Sand-Man is bound to ascribe the child's fantasy to the continuing influence of the nursemaid's account. Instead of grains of sand, red-hot grains of coal are to be thrown into the child's eyes, but in either case the purpose is to make them jump out of his head. A year later, during another visit by the Sand-Man, the father is killed by an explosion in his study, and the lawyer Coppelius disappears from the town without trace.

Later, as a student, Nathaniel thinks he recognizes this fearful figure from his childhood in the person of Giuseppe Coppola, an itinerant Italian optician who hawks weather-glasses in the university town. When Nathaniel declines to buy one, Coppola says, 'So, no weather-glass, no weather-glass! I've got lovely eyes too, lovely eyes.' Nathaniel is at first terrified, but his terror is allayed when the eyes he is offered turn out to be harmless spectacles. He buys a pocket spyglass from Coppola and uses it to look into the house of Professor Spalanzani, on the other side of the street, where he catches sight of Olympia, the professor's beautiful, but strangely silent and motionless daughter. He soon falls so madly in love with her that he forgets his wise and level-headed fiancée, Clara. But Olympia is an automaton, for which Spalanzani has made the clockwork and in which Coppola – the Sand-Man – has set the eyes. The student comes upon the two quarrelling over their handiwork. The optician has carried off the eyeless wooden doll; the mechanic, Spalanzani, picks up Olympia's bleeding eyes from the floor and throws them at

Nathaniel, from whom he says Coppola has stolen them. Nathaniel is seized by a fresh access of madness. In his delirium the memory of his father's death is compounded with this new impression: 'Hurry – hurry – hurry! – ring of fire – ring of fire! Spin round, ring of fire – quick – quick! Wooden doll, hurry, lovely wooden doll, spin round –'. Whereupon he hurls himself at the professor, Olimpia's supposed father, and tries to strangle him.

Having recovered from a long, serious illness, Nathaniel at last seems to be cured. He finds his fiancée again and plans to marry her. One day they are out walking in the town with her brother. The tall tower of the town hall casts a huge shadow over the market-place. Clara suggests that they go up the tower together while her brother remains below. At the top, her attention is drawn to the curious sight of something moving along the street. Nathaniel examines this through Coppola's spyglass, which he finds in his pocket. Again he is seized by madness and, uttering the words 'Wooden doll, spin round', he tries to cast the girl down from the tower. Her brother, hearing her screams, comes to her rescue and quickly escorts her to the ground. Up above, the madman runs around shouting out 'Ring of fire, spin round' – words whose origin is already familiar to us. Conspicuous among the people gathering below is the lawyer Coppelius, who has suddenly reappeared. We may assume that it was the sight of his approach that brought on Nathaniel's fit of madness. Some of the crowd want to go up the tower and overpower the madman, but Coppelius says laughingly: 'Just wait. He'll come down by himself.' Nathaniel suddenly stands still, catches sight of Coppelius and, with a cry of 'Yes! Lovely eyes – lovely eyes', throws himself over the parapet. Moments later he is lying on the pavement, his head shattered, and the Sand-Man has vanished in the milling crowd.

This brief summary will probably make it clear beyond doubt that in Hoffmann's tale the sense of the uncanny attaches directly to the figure of the Sand-Man, and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes – and that intellectual uncertainty, as Jentsch understands it, has nothing to do with this effect. Uncertainty as to whether an object is animate or inanimate, which we were bound to

acknowledge in the case of the doll Olimpia, is quite irrelevant in the case of this more potent example of the uncanny. It is true that the author initially creates a kind of uncertainty by preventing us – certainly not unintentionally – from guessing whether he is going to take us into the real world or into some fantastic world of his own choosing. He is of course entitled to do either, and if he chooses, for instance, to set the action in a world in which spirits, demons and ghosts play a part, as Shakespeare does in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* and, rather differently, in *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we must yield to his choice and treat his posited world as if it were real for as long as we submit to his spell. But in the course of Hoffmann's tale this uncertainty disappears; it becomes clear that the author wants us too to look through the spectacles or the spyglass of the demon optician, and even, perhaps, that he has looked through such an instrument himself. For, after all, the conclusion of the tale makes it clear that the optician Coppola really is the lawyer Coppelius¹ and so also the Sand-Man.

There is no longer any question of 'intellectual uncertainty': we know now that what we are presented with are not figments of a madman's imagination, behind which we, with our superior rationality, can recognize the sober truth – yet this clear knowledge in no way diminishes the impression of the uncanny. The notion of intellectual uncertainty in no way helps us to understand this uncanny effect.

On the other hand, psychoanalytic experience reminds us that some children have a terrible fear of damaging or losing their eyes. Many retain this anxiety into adult life and fear no physical injury so much as one to the eye. And there is a common saying that one will 'guard something like the apple of one's eye'. The study of dreams, fantasies and myths has taught us also that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is quite often a substitute for the fear of castration. When the mythical criminal Oedipus blinds himself, this is merely a mitigated form of the penalty of castration, the only one that befits him according to the *lex talionis*. Taking up a rationalistic stance, one may seek to reject the idea that the fear of damaging the

eyes can be traced back to the fear of castration; one finds it understandable that so precious an organ as the eye should be guarded by a commensurate anxiety. Indeed, one can go further and claim that no deeper mystery and no other significance lie behind the fear of castration. Yet this does not account for the substitutive relation between the eye and the male member that is manifested in dreams, fantasies and myths; nor can it counter the impression that a particularly strong and obscure emotion is aroused by the threat of losing the sexual organ, and that it is this emotion that first gives such resonance to the idea of losing other organs. Any remaining doubt vanishes once one has learnt the details of the 'castration complex' from analyses of neurotic patients and realized what an immense part it plays in their mental life.

Moreover, I would not advise any opponent of the psychoanalytic view to appeal to Hoffmann's story of the Sand-Man in support of the contention that fear for the eyes is something independent of the castration complex. For why is this fear for the eyes so closely linked here with the death of the father? Why does the Sand-Man always appear as a disruptor of love? He estranges the unfortunate student from his fiancée, and from her brother, his best friend; he destroys the second object of his love, the beautiful doll Olympia, and even drives him to suicide just when he has won back his fiancée and the two are about to be happily united. These and many other features of the tale appear arbitrary and meaningless if one rejects the relation between fear for the eyes and fear of castration, but they become meaningful as soon as the Sand-Man is replaced by the dreaded father, at whose hands castration is expected.²

We would therefore venture to trace back the uncanny element in the Sand-Man to the anxiety caused by the infantile castration complex. Yet as soon as we conceive the idea of ascribing the emergence of the sense of the uncanny to an infantile factor such as this, we cannot help trying to derive other examples of the uncanny from the same source. 'The Sand-Man' also contains the motif of the apparently animate doll, which was singled out by Jentsch. According to him we have particularly favourable conditions for generating feelings of the uncanny if intellectual uncertainty is

aroused as to whether something is animate or inanimate, and whether the lifeless bears an excessive likeness to the living. With dolls, of course, we are not far from the world of childhood. We recall that children, in their early games, make no sharp distinction between the animate and the inanimate, and that they are especially fond of treating their dolls as if they were alive. Indeed, one occasionally hears a woman patient tell how, at the age of eight, she was still convinced that her dolls were bound to come to life if she looked at them in a certain way, as intently as possible. Here too, then, the infantile factor is easily demonstrated. But, oddly enough, 'The Sand-Man' involved the evocation of an old childhood fear, whereas there is no question of fear in the case of a living doll: children are not afraid of their dolls coming to life – they may even want them to. Here, then, the sense of the uncanny would derive not from an infantile fear, but from an infantile wish, or simply from an infantile belief. This sounds like a contradiction, but possibly it is just a complication, which may further our understanding later on.

E. T. A. Hoffmann is the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature. His novel *Die Elixiere des Teufels* [*The Elixirs of the Devil*] presents a whole complex of motifs to which one is tempted to ascribe the uncanny effect of the story. The content is too rich and intricate for us to venture upon a summary. At the end of the book, when the reader finally learns of the presuppositions, hitherto withheld, which underlie the plot, this leads not to his enlightenment, but to his utter bewilderment. The author has piled up too much homogeneous material, and this is detrimental, not to the impression made by the whole, but to its intelligibility. One must content oneself with selecting the most prominent of those motifs that produce an uncanny effect, and see whether they too can reasonably be traced back to infantile sources. They involve the idea of the 'double' (the *Doppelgänger*), in all its nuances and manifestations – that is to say, the appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike. This relationship is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other – what we would call telepathy – so that the one becomes co-owner of the other's knowledge,

emotions and experience. Moreover, a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged. Finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names, through successive generations.

The motif of the double has been treated in detail in a study by O. Rank.³ This work explores the connections that link the double with mirror-images, shadows, guardian spirits, the doctrine of the soul and the fear of death. It also throws a good deal of light on the surprising evolution of the motif itself. The double was originally an insurance against the extinction of the self or, as Rank puts it, 'an energetic denial of the power of death', and it seems likely that the 'immortal' soul was the first double of the body. The invention of such doubling as a defence against annihilation has a counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of expressing the idea of castration by duplicating or multiplying the genital symbol. In the civilization of ancient Egypt, it became a spur to artists to form images of the dead in durable materials. But these ideas arose on the soil of boundless self-love, the primordial narcissism that dominates the mental life of both the child and primitive man, and when this phase is surmounted, the meaning of the 'double' changes: having once been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

The concept of the double need not disappear along with this primitive narcissism: it may acquire a new content from later stages in the evolution of the ego. By slow degrees a special authority takes shape within the ego; this authority, which is able to confront the rest of the ego, performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism, exercises a kind of psychical censorship, and so becomes what we know as the 'conscience'. In the pathological case of delusions of observation it becomes isolated, split off from the ego, and discernible to the clinician. The existence of such an authority, which can treat the rest of the ego as an object – the fact that, in other words, man is capable of self-observation – makes it possible

to imbue the old idea of the double with a new content and attribute a number of features to it – above all, those which, in the light of self-criticism, seem to belong to the old, superannuated narcissism of primitive times.⁴

Yet it is not only this content – which is objectionable to self-criticism – that can be embodied in the figure of the double: in addition there are all the possibilities which, had they been realized, might have shaped our destiny, and to which our imagination still clings, all the strivings of the ego that were frustrated by adverse circumstances, all the suppressed acts of volition that fostered the illusion of free will.⁵

However, after considering the manifest motivation behind the figure of the double, we have to own that none of this helps us understand the extraordinary degree of uncanniness that attaches to it, and we may add, drawing upon our knowledge of pathological mental processes, that none of this content could explain the defensive urge that ejects it from the ego as something alien. Its uncanny quality can surely derive only from the fact that the double is a creation that belongs to a primitive phase in our mental development, a phase that we have surmounted, in which it admittedly had a more benign significance. The double has become an object of terror, just as the gods become demons after the collapse of their cult – a theme that Heine treats in 'Die Götter im Exil' ['The Gods in Exile'].

The other disturbances of the ego that Hoffmann exploits in his writings are easy to judge in accordance with the pattern set by the motif of the double. They involve a harking back to single phases in the evolution of the sense of self, a regression to times when the ego had not yet clearly set itself off against the world outside and from others. I believe that these motifs are partly responsible for the impression of the uncanny, though it is not easy to isolate and specify the share they have in it.

The factor of the repetition of the same thing will perhaps not be acknowledged by everyone as a source of the sense of the uncanny. According to my own observations it undoubtedly evokes such a feeling under particular conditions, and in combination with

particular circumstances – a feeling, moreover, that recalls the helplessness we experience in certain dream-states. Strolling one hot summer afternoon through the empty and to me unfamiliar streets of a small Italian town, I found myself in a district about whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Only heavily made-up women were to be seen at the windows of the little houses, and I hastily left the narrow street at the next turning. However, after wandering about for some time without asking the way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence began to attract attention. Once more I hurried away, only to return there again by a different route. I was now seized by a feeling that I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad to find my way back to the piazza that I had recently left and refrain from any further voyages of discovery. Other situations that share this feature of the unintentional return with the one I have just described, but differ from it in other respects, may nevertheless produce the same feeling of helplessness, the same sense of the uncanny. One may, for instance, have lost one's way in the woods, perhaps after being overtaken by fog, and, despite all one's efforts to find a marked or familiar path, one comes back again and again to the same spot, which one recognizes by a particular physical feature. Or one may be groping around in the dark in an unfamiliar room, searching for the door or the light-switch and repeatedly colliding with the same piece of furniture – a situation that Mark Twain has transformed, admittedly by means of grotesque exaggeration, into something irresistibly comic.

In another set of experiences we have no difficulty in recognizing that it is only the factor of unintended repetition that transforms what would otherwise seem quite harmless into something uncanny and forces us to entertain the idea of the fateful and the inescapable, when we should normally speak of 'chance'. There is certainly nothing remarkable, for instance, about depositing a garment in a cloakroom and being given a ticket with a certain number on it – say 62 – or about finding that the cabin one has been allocated bears this number. But the impression changes if these two events, of no consequence in themselves, come close together, so that one

encounters the number 62 several times in one day, and if one then observes that everything involving a number – addresses, hotel rooms, railway carriages, etc. – invariably has the same one, at least as part of the whole. We find this 'uncanny', and anyone who is not steeled against the lure of superstition will be inclined to accord a secret significance to the persistent recurrence of this one number – to see it, for instance, as a pointer to his allotted life-span. Or suppose one is occupied with the writings of E [wald] Hering,⁶ the great physiologist, and that within the space of a few days one receives letters from two people named Hering, posted in different countries, although one has had no previous dealings with anyone of that name. An ingenious scientist has recently sought to show that such occurrences are subject to certain laws – which would necessarily remove the impression of the uncanny. I will not venture to pronounce on whether he has succeeded.⁷

How the uncanny element in the recurrence of the same thing can be derived from infantile psychology is a question that I can only touch upon here; I must therefore refer the reader to another study, now awaiting publication, which treats the subject in detail, but in a different context. In the unconscious mind we can recognize the dominance of a *compulsion to repeat*, which proceeds from instinctual impulses. This compulsion probably depends on the essential nature of the drives themselves. It is strong enough to override the pleasure principle and lend a demonic character to certain aspects of mental life; it is still clearly manifest in the impulses of small children and dominates part of the course taken by the psychoanalysis of victims of neurosis. The foregoing discussions have all prepared us for the fact that anything that can remind us of this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny.

But now, I think, it is time to turn away from these relationships, which are in any case difficult to pass judgement on, and seek out unequivocal cases of the uncanny, which may be expected, once analysed, to determine the validity of our hypothesis once and for all.

In Schiller's poem *Der Ring des Polykrates* ('The Ring of Polykrates') the guest turns away in horror because he sees his friend's

every wish instantly fulfilled and his every care at once removed by fate. His host has become 'uncanny'. The reason he himself gives – that whoever is excessively fortunate must fear the envy of the gods – still seems obscure to us, its meaning being veiled in mythology. So let us take an example from a much simpler setting. In the case history of a patient suffering from obsessional neurosis⁸ I recorded that he had once visited a hydropathic institution and found that his health improved greatly. However, he was sensible enough to attribute this improvement not to the healing properties of the water, but to the location of his room, which was next to the office of a very kind nurse. So, on returning for a second visit, he asked for the same room, only to be told that it was already occupied by an old gentleman. Whereupon he gave vent to his annoyance with the words, 'Then he should be struck dead!' A fortnight later the old gentleman did suffer a stroke. My patient found this an 'uncanny' experience. The impression of the uncanny would have been even stronger if a much shorter interval had elapsed between his uttering the words and the untoward event that followed, or if he had been able to report numerous similar experiences. In fact, he was never at a loss for such corroboration. Indeed, not only this patient, but every obsessional neurotic I have studied, could tell similar stories about themselves. They were not at all surprised when, perhaps after a long interval, they ran into someone about whom they had only just been thinking. They would regularly get a letter by the morning post from a friend of whom they had said, only the night before, 'He's not been heard of for ages.' In particular, accidents and deaths rarely happened without having flitted through their minds a short while before. They would describe this phenomenon in the most modest terms, claiming to have 'presentiments' that 'usually' came true.

One of the uncanniest and most widespread superstitions is fear of the 'evil eye', which has been thoroughly investigated by the Hamburg oculist S. Seligmann.⁹ It appears that the source of this fear has never been in doubt. Anyone who possesses something precious, but fragile, is afraid of the envy of others, to the extent that he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their

place. Such emotions are betrayed by looks,¹⁰ even if they are denied verbal expression, and when a person is prominent owing to certain striking characteristics, especially if these are of an undesirable kind, people are ready to believe that his envy will reach a particular intensity and then convert this intensity into effective action. What is feared is thus a covert intention to harm, and on the strength of certain indications it is assumed that this intention can command the necessary force.

These last examples of the uncanny depend on the principle that I have called 'the omnipotence of thoughts', a term suggested to me by a patient. We can no longer be in any doubt about where we now stand. The analysis of cases of the uncanny has led us back to the old *animistic* view of the universe, a view characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with human spirits, by the narcissistic overrating of one's own mental processes, by the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic that relied on it, by the attribution of carefully graded magical powers (*mana*) to alien persons and things, and by all the inventions with which the unbounded narcissism of that period of development sought to defend itself against the unmistakable sanctions of reality. It appears that we have all, in the course of our individual development, been through a phase corresponding to the animistic phase in the development of primitive peoples, that this phase did not pass without leaving behind in us residual traces that can still make themselves felt, and that everything we now find 'uncanny' meets the criterion that it is linked with these remnants of animistic mental activity and prompts them to express themselves.¹¹

This is now an appropriate point at which to introduce two observations in which I should like to set down the essential content of this short study. In the first place, if psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising from an emotional impulse – of whatever kind – is converted into fear by being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny, and it would

be immaterial whether it was itself originally frightening or arose from another affect. In the second place, if this really is the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why German usage allows the familiar (*das Heimliche*, the 'homely') to switch to its opposite, the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, the 'unhomely') (p. 134), for this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed. The link with repression now illuminates Schelling's definition of the uncanny as 'something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open'.

It now only remains for us to test the insight we have arrived at by trying to explain some other instances of the uncanny.

To many people the acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts. Indeed, we have heard that in some modern languages the German phrase *ein unheimliches Haus* ['an uncanny house'] can be rendered only by the periphrasis 'a haunted house'. We might in fact have begun our investigation with this example of the uncanny – perhaps the most potent – but we did not do so because here the uncanny is too much mixed up with the gruesome and partly overlaid by it. Yet in hardly any other sphere has our thinking and feeling changed so little since primitive times or the old been so well preserved, under a thin veneer, as in our relation to death. Two factors account for this lack of movement: the strength of our original emotional reactions and the uncertainty of our scientific knowledge. Biology has so far been unable to decide whether death is the necessary fate of every living creature or simply a regular, but perhaps avoidable, contingency within life itself. It is true that in textbooks on logic the statement that 'all men must die' passes for an exemplary general proposition, but it is obvious to no one; our unconscious is still as unreceptive as ever to the idea of our own mortality. Religions continue to dispute the significance of the undeniable fact of individual death and to posit an afterlife. The state authorities think they cannot sustain moral order among the living if they abandon the notion that life on earth will be 'corrected' by a better life hereafter. Placards in our big cities advertise lectures that are meant to instruct

us in how to make contact with the souls of the departed, and there is no denying that some of the finest minds and sharpest thinkers among our men of science have concluded, especially towards the end of their own lives, that there is ample opportunity for such contact. Since nearly all of us still think no differently from savages on this subject, it is not surprising that the primitive fear of the dead is still so potent in us and ready to manifest itself if given any encouragement. Moreover, it is probably still informed by the old idea that whoever dies becomes the enemy of the survivor, intent upon carrying him off with him to share his new existence. Given this unchanging attitude to death, one might ask what has become of repression, which is necessary if the primitive is to return as something uncanny. But it is there too: so-called educated people have officially ceased to believe that the dead can become visible as spirits, such appearances being linked to remote conditions that are seldom realized, and their emotional attitude to the dead, once highly ambiguous and ambivalent, has been toned down, in the higher reaches of mental life, to an unambiguous feeling of piety.¹²

Only a few remarks need now be added to complete the picture, for, having considered animism, magic, sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, unintended repetition and the castration complex, we have covered virtually all the factors that turn the frightening into the uncanny.

We can also call a living person uncanny, that is to say, when we credit him with evil intent. But this alone is not enough: it must be added that this intent to harm us is realized with the help of special powers. A good example of this is the *gettatore*,¹³ the uncanny figure of Romance superstition, whom Albrecht Schaeffer, in his novel *Josef Montfort*, has turned into an attractive figure by employing poetic intuition and profound psychoanalytic understanding. Yet with these secret powers we are back once more in the realm of animism. In Goethe's *Faust*, the pious Gretchen's intuition that Mephisto has such hidden powers is what makes him seem so uncanny:

*Sie fühlt, dass ich ganz sicher ein Genie,
Vielleicht wohl gar der Teufel bin.*

[She feels that I am quite certainly a genius, perhaps indeed the very Devil.]

The uncanny effect of epilepsy or madness has the same origin. Here the layman sees a manifestation of forces that he did not suspect in a fellow human being, but whose stirrings he can dimly perceive in remote corners of his own personality. The Middle Ages attributed all these manifestations of sickness consistently, and psychologically almost correctly, to the influence of demons. Indeed, it would not surprise me to hear that psychoanalysis, which seeks to uncover these secret forces, had for this reason itself come to seem uncanny to many people. In one case, when I had succeeded – though not very quickly – in restoring a girl to health after many years of sickness, I heard this myself from the girl's mother long after her recovery.

Severed limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm (as in a fairy tale by Hauff), feet that dance by themselves (as in the novel by A. Schaeffer mentioned above) – all of these have something highly uncanny about them, especially when they are credited, as in the last instance, with independent activity. We already know that this species of the uncanny stems from its proximity to the castration complex. Some would award the crown of the uncanny to the idea of being buried alive, only apparently dead. However, psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying fantasy is merely a variant of another, which was originally not at all frightening, but relied on a certain lasciviousness; this was the fantasy of living in the womb.

Let us add something of a general nature, which is, strictly speaking, already contained in what we have previously said about animism and the superannuated workings of our mental apparatus, but seems to call for special emphasis. This is the fact that an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so

forth. This is at the root of much that is uncanny about magical practices. The infantile element about this, which also dominates the mental life of neurotics, is the excessive stress that is laid on psychical reality, as opposed to material reality – a feature that is close to the omnipotence of thoughts. During the isolation of the Great War, I came across a number of the English *Strand Magazine*. In it, among a number of fairly pointless contributions, I read a story about a young couple who move into a furnished flat in which there is a curiously shaped table with crocodiles carved in the wood. Towards evening the flat is regularly pervaded by an unbearable and highly characteristic smell, and in the dark the tenants stumble over things and fancy they see something undefinable gliding over the stairs. In short, one is led to surmise that, owing to the presence of this table, the house is haunted by ghostly crocodiles or that the wooden monsters come to life in the dark, or something of the sort. It was a quite naïve story, but its effect was extraordinarily uncanny.

To conclude this collection of examples, which is certainly not exhaustive, I will mention an experience culled from psychoanalytic work, which, unless it rests on pure coincidence, supplies the most pleasing confirmation of our conception of the uncanny. It often happens that neurotic men state that to them there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they find uncanny ['unhomely'] is actually the entrance to man's old 'home', the place where everyone once lived. A jocular saying has it that 'love is a longing for home', and if someone dreams of a certain place or a certain landscape and, while dreaming, thinks to himself, 'I know this place, I've been here before', this place can be interpreted as representing his mother's genitals or her womb. Here too, then, the uncanny [the 'unhomely'] is what was once familiar ['homely', 'homey']. The negative prefix *un-* is the indicator of repression.

III

During the foregoing discussions, certain doubts will have arisen in the reader's mind; it is now time these were brought together and given a proper hearing.

It may be that the uncanny ['the unhomely'] is something familiar ['homely', 'homey'] that has been repressed and then reappears, and that everything uncanny satisfies this condition. However, such a choice of material does not seem to solve the puzzle of the uncanny. Our proposition clearly does not admit of its logical converse. Not everything that reminds us of repressed desires, or of superannuated modes of thought belonging to the prehistory of the individual and the race, is for that reason uncanny.

Nor do we wish to discount the fact that for nearly every example we have adduced in support of our thesis an analogous one can be found to counter it. For instance, the severed hand in Hauff's fairy tale certainly has an uncanny effect; this we have traced back to the castration complex. But others will probably agree with me that the same motif produces no uncanny effect in Herodotus' story of the treasure of Rhampsenitus, in which the princess wants to hold on to the master-thief's hand, but is left holding the severed hand of his brother. The prompt fulfilment of the host's wishes in 'The Ring of Polycrates' certainly seems just as uncanny to us as it does to the king of Egypt. But our fairy tales teem with instantaneous wish-fulfilments, and there is nothing uncanny about these. In the tale of 'The Three Wishes', the wife is tempted by the delicious smell of a fried sausage to say that she would like one too. Immediately it is on the plate in front of her. In his annoyance, her husband wishes that it may hang from his meddling wife's nose, and in no time it

is dangling there. This is very striking, but not in the least uncanny. Indeed, the fairy tale is quite openly committed to the animistic view that thoughts and wishes are all-powerful, but I cannot cite one genuine fairy tale in which anything uncanny occurs. We are told that it is highly uncanny when inanimate objects – pictures or dolls – come to life, but in Hans Andersen's stories the household utensils, the furniture and the tin soldier are alive, and perhaps nothing is farther removed from the uncanny. Even when Pygmalion's beautiful statue comes to life, this is hardly felt to be uncanny.

The false semblance of death and the raising of the dead have been represented to us as very uncanny themes. But again, such things are commonplace in fairy tales. Who would go so far as to call it uncanny when, for instance, Snow White opens her eyes again? And the raising of the dead in miracle stories – those of the New Testament, for example – arouses feelings that have nothing to do with the uncanny. The unintended recurrence of the same thing has produced effects that are undoubtedly uncanny, yet in a number of cases it serves other, quite different ends. We have already mentioned one in which it is employed to produce a sense of the comic, and such instances could be multiplied. At other times it is used for emphasis, and so on. Moreover, where does the uncanny effect of silence, solitude and darkness come from? Do not these factors point to the part played by danger in the genesis of the uncanny, even though these are the conditions under which children are most often seen to express fear? And can we completely discount the element of intellectual uncertainty, given that we have admitted its importance in relation to the link between the uncanny and death.

So we should probably be prepared to assume that other conditions, apart from those we have so far laid down, play an important part in the emergence of a sense of the uncanny. One might of course say that these initial findings have satisfied any psychoanalytic interest in the problem of the uncanny, and that what is left probably calls for an aesthetic study. This, however, would open the door to doubts about the value we can actually claim for our finding that the uncanny derives from what was once familiar and then repressed.

One observation may point towards a resolution of these

uncertainties. Nearly all the examples that are at variance from our expectations are taken from the realm of fiction and imaginative writing. This suggests that we should distinguish between the uncanny one knows from experience and the uncanny one only fancies or reads about.

The uncanny of real experience has far simpler determinants, but comprises fewer instances. I believe that it invariably accords with our attempted solution and can be traced back every time to something that was once familiar and then repressed. But here too we must make an important and psychologically significant distinction within the material, and we shall recognize this most clearly with the help of suitable examples.

Let us take first the uncanny effects associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfilment, secret harmful forces and the return of the dead. There is no mistaking the conditions under which the sense of the uncanny arises here. We – or our primitive forebears – once regarded such things as real possibilities; we were convinced that they really happened. Today we no longer believe in them, having *surmounted* such modes of thought. Yet we do not feel entirely secure in these new convictions; the old ones live on in us, on the look-out for confirmation. Now, as soon as something *happens* in our lives that seems to confirm these old, discarded beliefs, we experience a sense of the uncanny, and this may be reinforced by judgements like the following: 'So it's true, then, that you can kill another man just by wishing him dead, that the dead really do go on living and manifest themselves at the scene of their former activities', and so on. Conversely, for anyone who has wholly and definitively rejected these animistic convictions, this species of the uncanny no longer exists. The most extraordinary coincidence of wish and fulfilment, the most baffling repetition of similar experiences, in the same place or on the same date, the most deceptive sights and the most suspicious noises will fail to disconcert him or arouse in him any fear that might be called a fear of the 'uncanny'. It is thus solely a matter of testing reality, a question of material reality.¹

It is rather different when the uncanny derives from repressed

childhood complexes, the castration complex, the womb fantasy, etc. – though there cannot be many real-life experiences that give rise to this variety of the uncanny. The uncanny we know from experience belongs mainly to the earlier group, but the distinction between the two is very important from a theoretical point of view. Where the uncanny stems from childhood complexes, the question of material reality does not arise, its place being taken by psychical reality. Here we are dealing with the actual repression of a particular content and the return of what has been repressed, not with the suspension of *belief in its reality*. One could say that in the one case a certain ideational content was repressed, in the other the belief in its (material) reality. But such a formulation probably stretches the concept of 'repression' beyond its legitimate bounds. It is more correct to take account of a perceptible psychological difference and to describe the animistic convictions of civilized man as having been – more or less completely – *surmounted*. Our conclusion could then be stated as follows: the uncanny element we know from experience arises either when repressed childhood complexes are revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs that have been *surmounted* appear to be once again confirmed. Finally, we must not let our preference for tidy solutions and lucid presentation prevent us from acknowledging that in real life it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the two species of the uncanny that we have posited. As primitive convictions are closely linked with childhood complexes, indeed rooted in them, this blurring of the boundaries will come as no great surprise.

The uncanny that we find in fiction – in creative writing, imaginative literature – actually deserves to be considered separately. It is above all much richer than what we know from experience; it embraces the whole of this and something else besides, something that is wanting in real life. The distinction between what is repressed and what is surmounted cannot be transferred to the uncanny in literature without substantial modification, because the realm of the imagination depends for its validity on its contents being exempt from the reality test. The apparently paradoxical upshot of this is *that many things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life*

are not uncanny in literature, and that in literature there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life.

Among the many liberties that the creative writer can allow himself is that of choosing whether to present a world that conforms with the reader's familiar reality or one that in some way deviates from it. We accept his choice in every case. The world of the fairy tale, for example, abandons the basis of reality right from the start and openly commits itself to the acceptance of animistic beliefs. Here it is impossible for wish-fulfillments, the existence of secret powers, the omnipotence of thoughts, the animation of the inanimate – all of which are commonplace in the fairy tale – to produce an uncanny effect, for, as we have seen, a sense of the uncanny can arise only if there is a conflict of judgement as to whether what has been surmounted and merits no further credence may not, after all, be possible in real life. This is a question that is wholly ruled out by the presuppositions underlying the world of the fairy tale. Hence, the fairy tale, which has furnished most of the cases that are at odds with our solution of the problem of the uncanny, confirms the first part of our thesis, viz., that many things that would be bound to seem uncanny if they happened in real life are not so in the realm of fiction. In the case of the fairy tale there are additional factors, which we shall briefly touch on later.

The imaginative writer may have invented a world that, while less fantastic than that of the fairy tale, differs from the real world in that it involves supernatural entities such as demons or spirits of the dead. Within the limits set by the presuppositions of this literary reality, such figures forfeit any uncanny quality that might otherwise attach to them. The souls in Dante's *Inferno* or the ghostly apparitions in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar* may be dark and terrifying, but at bottom they are no more uncanny than, say, the serene world of Homer's gods. We adapt our judgement to the conditions of the writer's fictional reality and treat souls, spirits and ghosts as if they were fully entitled to exist, just as we are in our material reality. Here too there is no place for the uncanny.

Not so, however, if the writer has to all appearances taken up his stance on the ground of common reality. By doing so he adopts all

the conditions that apply to the emergence of a sense of the uncanny in normal experience; whatever has an uncanny effect in real life has the same in literature. But the writer can intensify and multiply this effect far beyond what is feasible in normal experience; in his stories he can make things happen that one would never, or only rarely, experience in real life. In a sense, then, he betrays us to a superstition we thought we had 'surmounted'; he tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it. We react to his fictions as if they had been our own experiences. By the time we become aware of the trickery, it is too late: the writer has already done what he set out to do. Yet I am bound to say that the effect he achieves is not an unmixed success. We are left with a sense of dissatisfaction, of resentment at the attempt to deceive us. I felt this particularly keenly on reading Schnitzler's story *Die Weissagung* ['The Prophecy'] and similar works that flirt with the miraculous. The author may then resort to another device in order to overcome our resistance, while at the same time improving his prospects of success. For a long time he may prevent us from guessing the presuppositions that underlie his chosen world, or he may cunningly withhold such crucial enlightenment right to the end. On the whole, however, this illustrates the thesis we have just advanced – that fiction affords possibilities for a sense of the uncanny that would not be available in real life.

Strictly speaking, all these variations relate only to that species of the uncanny which arises from superannuated modes of thought. The variety that derives from repressed complexes is more resistant; with one exception, it remains as uncanny in literature as it is in real life. The other species of the uncanny, deriving from superannuated modes of thought, retains its character in real-life experience and in writings that are grounded in material reality, but it may be lost where the setting is a fictive reality invented by the writer.

The foregoing remarks clearly do not exhaust the possibilities of authorial licence and the privileges that fiction enjoys in arousing and inhibiting a sense of the uncanny. Towards real experience we generally adopt a uniformly passive attitude and succumb to the influence of our material environment. To the writer, however, we

are infinitely tractable; by the moods he induces and the expectations he arouses in us he can direct our feelings away from one consequence and towards another, and he can often produce very different effects from the same material. All this has been known for a long time and has no doubt been studied in depth by experts in aesthetics. We were led into this field of inquiry without any real intention because we yielded to the temptation to explain why certain instances of the uncanny conflicted with our thesis regarding its origin. Let us therefore return to one or two of these.

A while back we asked why the motif of the severed hand did not have the same uncanny effect in Herodotus' story of the treasure of Rhampsenitus as it did in Hauff's 'Story of the Severed Hand'. The question seems more significant to us now, since we have recognized the greater resistance of that form of the uncanny which derives from repressed complexes. The answer is simple: in the former tale our attention is concentrated not on the princess's feelings, but on the superior cunning of the master-thief. She may not have been spared a sense of the uncanny; we are even prepared to believe that she may have fallen into a swoon, but *we* have no sense of the uncanny, because we put ourselves in the place of the thief, not in hers. In Nestroy's farce *Der Zerrissene* ('The Torn Man') a different device is used to spare us the impression of the uncanny. A fugitive, convinced that he is a murderer, sees what he takes to be his victim's ghost rising from every trap-door he lifts, and cries out in despair, 'But I've only killed one man. Why this ghastly multiplication?' The audience, knowing what has led up to this scene, does not make the same mistake as the character; hence, what is bound to seem uncanny to him strikes us as irresistibly comic. Even a 'real' *ghost*, such as the one in Oscar Wilde's 'The Canterville Ghost', inevitably loses any claim to arouse even feelings of fright when the author amuses himself by ironizing it and exposing it to ridicule. We see how independent, in the fictional world, emotional effects can be of the choice of subject-matter. In the world of the fairy tale, feelings of fear, and therefore of the uncanny, are totally ruled out. We understand this and therefore ignore whatever occasions they afford for such a possibility.

As for solitude, silence and darkness, all we can say is that these are factors connected with infantile anxiety, something that most of us never wholly overcome. Psychoanalytic research has dealt elsewhere with the problem of such anxiety.

(1919)

Notes

I

1. 'Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen', *Psychiatrisch-neurologische Wochenschrift* 1908, No. 22 and No. 23.
2. [Translator's note: On the meaning of *heimlich* see pp. 126ff; *heimisch* may provisionally be glossed as 'local, native, domestic; (feeling) at home', and *vertraut* as 'familiar'.]
3. I am grateful to Dr T. Reik for the following material.
4. [In the following excerpts bold type is used (a) for headwords as is customary in dictionary entries, and (b) for passages that Freud chooses to emphasize.]
5. [The phrase *an heimlichen Orten* occurs also in vv. 9 and 12. It is clearly equivalent to the AV's phrase 'with emerods' (i.e., haemorrhoids). In the modern Luther Bible, the phrase is replaced by *mit bösen Beulen* ('with grievous swellings'). The affliction is thus less specific. Similarly, in the New English Bible the 'emerods' of the AV are replaced by 'tumours'.]
6. [See Note 5 in this section.]
7. Here the text of the *Gesammelte Werke* has *mir* ('me'), not *uns* ('us').

II

1. On the derivation of the name, pointed out by Frau Dr Rank: *coppella* = 'assay-crucible' (the chemical operations during which the father meets his death); *coppo* = 'eye-socket'. [In the first edition of 1919 this note occurs where it does now, but in subsequent German editions (except the students' edition) it appears, no doubt erroneously, after the second mention of the name Coppelius in the previous paragraph.]
2. In fact, the writer's imaginative handling of his material has not thrown the constituent elements into such wild confusion that their original arrangement cannot be reconstructed. In the story of Nathaniel's childhood, his

father and Coppelius represent the father-imago, which, owing to its ambivalence, is split into two opposing parts; the one threatens him with blinding (castration), while the other, the good father, successfully intercedes for his sight. The piece of the complex that is most subject to repression, the death-wish directed against the bad father, finds expression in the death of the good father, for which Coppelius bears the blame. In Nathaniel's later life as a student, this pair of fathers is represented by Professor Spalanzani and the optician Coppola. The professor himself belongs to the father-series, while Coppola is seen as identical with the lawyer Coppelius. They once worked together at the mysterious brazier; now they have collaborated in constructing the doll Olimpia; the professor is also called her father. This twofold collaboration reveals them as two parts of the father-imago, which means that both the mechanic and the optician are the fathers not only of Olimpia, but of Nathaniel too. In the frightening childhood scene Coppelius, after refraining from blinding the boy, had proceeded, by way of experiment, to unscrew his arms and legs – to work on him, in other words, as a mechanic would work on a doll. This strange feature, which falls quite outside anything we know about the Sand-Man, brings a new equivalent of castration into play; it also points to the inner identity of Coppelius and his later counterpart, the mechanic Spalanzani, and prepares us for the interpretation of Olimpia. This automaton cannot be anything other than a materialization of Nathaniel's feminine attitude to his father in his early childhood. Her fathers, Spalanzani and Coppola, are merely new versions – reincarnations – of Nathaniel's two fathers. Spalanzani's otherwise incomprehensible statement that the optician had stolen Nathaniel's eyes (see above) in order to set them in the doll becomes significant as evidence of the identity of Olimpia and Nathaniel. Olimpia is, so to speak, a complex that has been detached from Nathaniel and now confronts him as a person; the control that this complex exercises over him finds expression in his senseless, compulsive love for Olimpia. We are justified in describing such love as narcissistic, and we understand that whoever succumbs to it alienates himself from his real love-object. Yet the psychological truth that a young man who is fixated on his father by the castration-complex becomes incapable of loving a woman is demonstrated by many analyses of patients, the content of which, while less fantastic than the story of the student Nathaniel, is scarcely less sad.

E. T. A. Hoffmann was the child of an unhappy marriage. When he was three, his father left his small family and never lived with them again. The evidence that Grisebach assembles in his biographical introduction to

the works shows that the writer's relation to his father was always one of the sorest points in his emotional life.

3. O. Rank, 'Der Doppelgänger', *Imago* III, 1914.
4. I believe that when poets complain that two souls dwell in the human breast, and when popular psychologists talk of the splitting of the human ego, what they have in mind is the division under discussion, belonging to ego-psychology, between the critical authority and the rest of the ego, rather than the opposition, discovered by psychoanalysis, between the ego and whatever is unconscious and repressed. True, the difference is blurred because the derivatives of what has been repressed are foremost among the things that are condemned by self-criticism.
5. In H. H. Ewers' story *Der Student von Prag* ['The Student of Prague'], which supplies Rank with the starting point for his study of the double, the hero promises his beloved that he will not kill his opponent in a duel, but on his way to the duelling-ground he meets his double, who has already dispatched his rival.
6. [In the *Gesammelte Werke* this writer is wrongly given the initial 'H'.]
7. P. Kammerer, *Das Gesetz der Serie* (Vienna 1919).
8. 'Bemerkungen über einen Fall von Zwangsneurose' ['Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis'] [II.B.] (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. VII).
9. *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes* (2 vols, Berlin 1910/1911).
10. [In German 'the evil eye' is *der böse Blick*, literally 'the evil look'.]
11. On this topic see Freud's study *Totem und Tabu* ['Totem and Taboo'] (1913) section III of which deals with animism, magic and the omnipotence of thoughts. Here the author remarks, 'It seems that we ascribe the character of the uncanny to those impressions that tend to confirm the omnipotence of thoughts and animistic thinking in general, though our judgement has already turned away from such thinking.'
12. Cf. op. cit. on 'taboo and ambivalence'.
13. [Literally the 'thrower' (of bad luck), or 'the one who casts' (the evil eye).]

III

1. Since the uncanny effect of the 'double' also belongs to this species, it is interesting to learn how our own image affects us when it confronts us, unbidden and unexpected. E. Mach reports two such experiences in his *Analyse der Empfindungen* ['Analysis of Feelings'] (1900), p. 3. On the first occasion he was not a little alarmed when he realized that the face he saw was his own. On the second occasion he passed a very unfavourable

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judgement on the apparent stranger who boarded his omnibus, and thought to himself, 'What a shabby-looking schoolmaster that is, the man who's just getting on!' I can tell of a similar adventure. I was sitting alone in my sleeping compartment when the train lurched violently. The door of the adjacent toilet swung open and an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and travelling cap entered my compartment. I assumed that on leaving the toilet, which was located between the two compartments, he had turned the wrong way and entered mine by mistake. I jumped up to put him right, but soon realized to my astonishment that the intruder was my own image, reflected in the mirror on the connecting door. I can still recall that I found his appearance thoroughly unpleasant. Hence, instead of being frightened by our 'doubles', both Mach and I simply failed to recognize them. Or was the displeasure we felt at seeing these unexpected images of ourselves perhaps a vestige of the archaic reaction to the 'double' as something uncanny?