

The "Uncanny"<sup>1</sup> (1919)

IT IS ONLY rarely that a psychoanalyst 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 planes of mental life and has little to do with those subdued emotional activities which, inhibited in their aims and dependent upon a multitude 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 then it usually proves to be a rather remote region of it and one that has been neglected in standard works.

The subject of the "uncanny" is a province of this kind. It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread. Yet we may expect that it implies some intrinsic quality which justifies the use of a special name. One is curious to know what this peculiar quality is which allows us to distinguish as "uncanny" certain things within the boundaries of what is "fearful."

As good as nothing is to be found upon this subject in elaborate 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, with the circumstances and the objects that call them forth, rather than with the opposite feelings of unpleasantness

<sup>1</sup>First published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge. [Translated by Alix Strachey.]

and repulsion. I know of only one attempt in medico-psychological literature, a fertile but not exhaustive paper by E. Jentsch.<sup>2</sup> But I must confess that I have not made a very thorough examination of the bibliography, especially the foreign literature, relating to this present modest contribution of mine, for reasons which must be obvious at this time;<sup>3</sup> so that my paper is presented to the reader without any claim of 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 will be obliged to translate himself into that state of feeling, and to awaken in himself the possibility of it before he begins. Still, difficulties of this kind make themselves felt powerfully in many other branches of aesthetics; we need not on this account despair of finding instances in which the quality in question will be recognized without hesitation by most people.

Two courses are open to us at the start. 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, sensations, experiences and situations which arouse in us the feeling of uncanniness, and then infer the unknown nature of the uncanny from what they all have in common. I will say at once that both courses lead to the same result: the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar. How this is possible, in what circumstances the familiar can become uncanny and frightening, I shall show in what

<sup>2</sup> "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen."

<sup>3</sup> [An allusion to the European War only just concluded.—Trans.]

follows. Let me also add that my investigation was actually begun by collecting a number of individual cases, and only later received confirmation after I had examined what language could tell us. In this discussion, however, I shall follow the opposite course.

The German word *unheimlich*<sup>4</sup> is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning "familiar," "native," "belonging to the home"; and we are tempted to conclude that what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation cannot be inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny.

On the whole, Jentsch did not get beyond this relation of the uncanny to the novel and unfamiliar. He ascribes the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always be that in which one does not know where one is, as it were. The better orientated in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it. It is not difficult to see that this definition is incomplete, and we will therefore try to proceed beyond the equation of *unheimlich* with unfamiliar. We will first turn to other languages. But foreign dictionaries tell us nothing new, perhaps only because we speak a different language. Indeed, we get the impression that many languages are without a word for this particular variety of what is fearful. I wish to express my indebtedness to Dr. Th. Reik for the following excerpts:

LATIN: (K. E. Georges, *Deutschlateinisches Wörterbuch*, 1898). *Ein unheimlicher Ort* [an uncanny place]

<sup>4</sup> [Throughout this paper "uncanny" is used as the English translation of "unheimlich," literally "unhomely."—Trans.]

—locus suspectus; in *unheimlicher* Nachtzeit [in the dismal night hours]—intempesta nocte.

GREEK: (Rost's and Schenkli's Lexikons). *Xenos* strange, foreign.

ENGLISH: (from dictionaries by Lucas, Bellow, Flügel, Muret-Sanders). Uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal, uncanny, ghastly; (of a house) haunted; (of a man) a repulsive fellow.

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

SPANISH: (Tollhausen, 1889). Sospechoso, de mal agüero, lugubre, siniestro.

The Italian and the Portuguese seem to content themselves with words which we should describe as circumlocutions. In Arabic and Hebrew "uncanny" means the same as "daemonic," "gruesome."

Let us therefore return to the German language. In Daniel Sanders' *Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (1860), the following remarks<sup>5</sup> [abstracted in translation]

<sup>5</sup> Vol. i. p. 729. Heimlich, a. (-keit, f. -en): 1. auch Heimlich, 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 heimliche Rat. 1. Mos. 41, 45; 2. Sam. 23, 23. 1 Chr. 12, 25. Weish. 8, 4, wofür jetzt: Geheimer (s. d 1.) Rat üblich ist, s. Heimlicher—(b) von Tieren zahm, sich den Menschen traulich anschliessend. Ggzt. wild, z. B. Tier, die weder wild noch heimlich sind, etc. Eppendorf. 88; Wilde Thier . . . so man sie h. und gewohnsam um die Leute aufzueht. 92. So diese Thierle 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. Höly; Ein schöner, heimelicher (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 Schutzes, wie das umschlossene wohnliche Haus erregend (vgl. Geheuer): Ist dir's h. noch im Lande, wo die Fremden deine Wälder roden? Alexis H. 1, 1, 289; Es war ihr nicht allzu h. bei ihm. Bren-

are found upon the word *heimlich*; I have laid stress on certain passages by italicizing them.

*Heimlich*, adj.: I. Also *heimelich*, *heimelig*, belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, comfortable, homely, etc.

(a) (Obsolete) belonging to the house or the family, or regarded as so belonging (cf. Latin *familiaris*): *Die Heimlichen*, the members of the household; *Der heimliche Rat* [him to whom secrets are revealed] Gen. xli. 45; 2 Sam. xxiii. 23; now more usually *Geheimer Rat* [Privy Councillor], cf. *Heimlicher*.

(b) Of animals: tame, companionable to man. As opposed to wild, e.g. "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.

(c) Friendly, intimate, homelike; the enjoyment of quiet content, etc., arousing a sense of peaceful pleasure

tano Wehm. 92; Auf einem hohen h—en Schattentpfade . . . längs dem rieselnden rauschenden und plätschernden Waldbach. Forster B. 1, 417. Die H—keit der Heimath zerstören. Gervinus Lit. 5, 375. So vertraulich und heimlich habe ich nicht leicht ein Plätzchen gefunden. G. 14, 14; Wir dachten es uns so bequem, so artig, so gemüthlich 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, 188; 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. I, 172; Wenns h. wird und leise/die Abendstille nur an deiner Zelle lauscht. Tiedge 2, 39; Still und lieb und h., als sie sich/zum Ruh'n einen Platz nur wünschen möchten. W. II, 144; Es war ihm garnicht h. dabei 27. 170, etc.—Auch: Der Platz war so still, so einsam, so schatten-h. Scherr Pilg. I, 170; Die ab- und zuströmenden Fluthwellen, träumend und wiegenlied-h. Körner, Sch. 3, 320, etc.—Vgl. namentl. Un-h.—Namentl. bei schwäb., schwyz. Schriftst. oft dreisilbig: Wie "heimelich" war es dann Ivo Abends wieder, als er zu Hause

and security as in one within the four walls of his house. "Is it still *heimlich* to you in your country where strangers are felling your woods?" "She did not feel all too *heimlich* with him." "To destroy the *Heimlichkeit* of the home." "I could not readily find another spot so intimate and *heimlich* as this." "In quiet *Heimlichkeit*, surrounded by close walls." "A careful housewife, who knows how to make a pleasing *Heimlichkeit* (*Häuslichkeit*)<sup>6</sup> out of the smallest means." "The protestant rulers do not feel . . . *heimlich* among their catholic subjects." "When it grows *heimlich* and still, and the evening quiet alone watches over your cell." "Quiet, lovely and *heimlich*, no place more fitted for her rest." "The in and out-flowing waves of the current, dreamy and *heimlich* as a cradle-song." Cf. in especial *Unheimlich*. Among Swabian and Swiss authors in especial, often as trisyllable: "How *heimlich* it seemed again of an evening, back at home." "The warm room and the *heimelig* afternoon." "Little by little they grew at ease and *heimelig* among

lag. Auerbach, D. 1, 249; In dem Haus ist mir's so heimelig gewesen. 4, 307; Die warme Stube, der heimelige Nachmittag. Gothelf, Sch. 127, 148; Das ist das wahre Heimelig, wenn der Mensch so von Herzen fühlt, wie wenig er ist, wie gross der Herr ist. 147; Würde man nach und nach recht gemüthlich und heimelig mit einander. U. 1, 297; Die trauliche Heimeligkeit. 380, 2, 86; Heimelicher wird es mir wohl nirgends werden als hier. 327; Pestalozzi 4, 240; Was von ferne herkommt . . . lebt gw. nicht ganz heimelig (heimatlich, freundschaftlich) mit den Leuten. 325; Die Hütte, wo/er sonst so heimelig, so froh/ . . . im Kreis der Seinen oft gesessen. Reithard 20; Da klingt das Horn des Wächters so heimelig vom Thurm/da ladet seine Stimme so gastlich. 49; Es schläft sich da so lind und warm/so wunderheimlig ein. 23, etc.—Diese Weise verdiente allgemein zu werden, um das gute Wort vor dem Veralten wegen nahe liegender Verwechslung mit 2 zu bewahren. vgl.: "Die Zecks sind alle h. (2)" H . . . ? Was verstehen sie unter h . . . ?—"Nun . . . es kommt mir mit ihnen vor, wie mit einem zugegra-

<sup>6</sup> [From *Haus* = house; *Häuslichkeit* = domestic life.—Trans.]

themselves." "That which comes from afar . . . assuredly does not live quite *heimelig* (*heimatlich* [at home], *freundschaftlich* [in a neighbourly way]) among the people." "The sentinel's horn sounds so *heimelig* from the tower, and his voice invites so hospitably." This form of the word ought to become general in order to protect the word from becoming obsolete in its good sense through an easy confusion with II. [see below]. "The Zecks [a family name] are all "*heimlich*." "*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.

II. Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it, withheld from others, cf. *geheim* [secret]; so also *Heimlichkeit* for *Geheimnis* [secret].

benen Brunnen oder einem ausgetrockneten Teich. Man kann nicht darüber gehen, ohne dass es Einem immer ist, als könnte da wieder einmal Wasser zum Vorschein kommen. Wir nennen das un—h.; Sie nennen's h. Worin finden Sie denn, dass diese Familie etwas Verstecktes und Unzuverlässiges hat? etc. Gutzkow R. 2, 61\*.)—(d) (s. c) namentl. schles.: fröhlich, heiter, auch vom Wetter, s. Adelong und Weinhold.—2. versteckt, verborgen gehalten, so dass man Andre nicht davon oder darum wissen lassen, es ihnen verbergen will, vgl. Geheim (2), von welchem erst nhd. Ew. es doch zumal in der älteren Sprache, z. B. in der Bibel, wie Hiob 11, 6; 15, 8, Weish. 2, 22; 1. Kor. 2, 7 etc., und so auch H—keit statt Geheimnis. Math. 13, 35 etc., nicht immer genau geschieden wird: H. (hinter Jemandes Rücken) etwas thun, treiben; Sich h. davon schleichen; H—e Zusammenkünfte, Verabredungen; Mit h—er Schadenfreude zusehen; H. seufzen, weinen; H. thun, als ob man etwas zu verbergen hätte; H—e Liebe, Liebschaft, Sünde; H—e Orte (die der Wohlstand zu verhüllen gebietet), 1. Sam. 5, 6; Das h—e Gemach (Abtritt) 2. Kön. 10, 27; W. 5, 256 etc., auch: Der h—e Stuhl. Zink-

\* Sperrdruck (auch im folgenden) vom Referenten.

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, love-affair, sin; *heimlich* places (which good managers oblige us to conceal). 1 Sam. v. 6; "The *heimlich* chamber" [privy]. 2 Kings x. 27 etc.; "To throw into pits or *Heimlichkeit*." Led 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." "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." (Cf. *Heimtücke* [mischief]). To dis-

gräf 1, 249; In Graben, in H—keiten werfen. 3, 75; Rollenhagen Fr. 83 etc.—Führte h. vor Laomedon/die Stuten vor. B. 161 b etc.—Ebenso versteckt, h., hinterlistig und boshaft gegen grausame Herren . . . wie offen, frei, theilnehmend und dienstwillig gegen den leidenden Freund. Burmeister g B 2, 157; Du sollst mein h. Heiligstes noch wissen. Chamisso 4, 56; Die h—e Kunst (der Zauberei). 3, 224; Wo die öffentliche Ventilation aufhören muss, fängt die h—e Machination an. Forster, Br. 2, 135; Freiheit ist die leise Parole h. Verschworener, das laute Feldgeschrei der öffentlich Umwälzenden. G. 4, 222; Ein heilig, h. Wirken. 15; Ich habe Wurzeln/die sind gar h., im tiefen Boden/bin ich gegründet. 2, 109; Meine h—e Tücke (vgl. *Heimtücke*). 30, 344; Empfängt er es nicht offenbar und gewissenhaft, so mag er es h. und gewissenlos ergreifen. 39, 22; Liess h. und geheimnisvoll archromatische Ferriröhre zusammensetzen. 375; Von nun an, will ich, sei nichts H—es mehr unter uns. Sch. 369 b.—Jemandes H—keiten entdecken, offenbaren, verrathen; H—keiten hinter meinem Rücken zu brauen. Alexis. H. 2, 3, 168; Zu meiner Zeit / befliss man sich der H—keit. Hagedorn 3, 92; Die H—keit und das Gepuschele unter de Hand. Immermann

cover, disclose, betray someone's *Heimlichkeiten*; "to concoct *Heimlichkeiten* behind my back." Cf. *Geheimnis*.

Compounds and especially also the opposite follow meaning I. (above): *Unheimlich*, uneasy, eerie, blood-curdling; "Seeming almost *unheimlich* and ghostly to him." "I had already long since felt an *unheimlich*, even gruesome feeling." "Feels an *unheimlich* horror." "The *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 . . . hidden and secret and has become visible," 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 *heim-*

M. 3, 289; Der H—keit (des verborgnen Golds) unmächtigen Bann/kann nur die Hand der Einsicht lösen. Novalis. 1, 69; /Sag an, wo du sie verbirgst . . . in welches Ortes verschwiegener H. Schr. 495 b; Ihr Bienen, die ihr knetet/der H—keiten Schloss (Wachs zum Siegel). Tieck, Cymb. 3, 2; Erfahren in seltenen H—keiten (Zauberkünsten). Schlegel Sh. 6, 102 etc. vgl. *Geheimnis* L. 10: 291 ff.

Zsitzg. s. 1 c, so auch nam. der Ggzt.: Un-: unbehagliches, banges Grauen erregend: Der schier ihm un-h., gespenstisch erschienen. Chamisso 3, 238; Der Nacht un-h. bange Stunden. 4, 148; Mir war schon lang' un-h., ja graulich zu Mute. 242; Nun fängts mir an, un-h. zu werden. Gutzkow R. 2, 82; Empfindet ein u—es Grauen. Vern. 1, 51: Un-h. und starr wie ein Steinbild. Reis, 1, 10; Den u—en Nebel, Haarrauch heissen. Immermann M., 3, 299; Diese blassen Jungen sind un-h. und brauen Gott weiss was Schlimmes. Laube, Band 1, 119; Un-h. nennt man Alles, was im Geheimnis, im Verborgnen . . . bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist. Schelling, 2, 2, 649 etc.—Das Göttliche zu verhüllen, mit einer gewissen U—keit zu umgeben 658, etc.—Unüblich als Ggzt. von (2), wie es Camppe ohne Beleg anführt.

lich 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 very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight. The word *unheimlich* is only used customarily, we are told, as the contrary of the first signification, and not of the second. Sanders tells us nothing concerning a possible genetic connection between these two sets of meanings. On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the "uncanny," one which we had certainly not awaited. According to him everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.

Some of the doubts that have thus arisen are removed if we consult Grimm's dictionary.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Grimm, Jakob und Wilhelm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig, 1877, IV./2, p. 874 *et seq.*

"Heimlich; adj. und adv. vernaculus, occultus; mhd. heimelich, heimlich.

S. 874: In etwas anderem sinne: es ist mir heimlich, wohl, frei von furcht. . . .

(b) heimlich ist auch der von gespensterhaften freie ort . . . S. 875: (ss) vertraut; freundlich, zutraulich.

4. aus dem heimatlischen, häuslichen entwickelt sich weiter der begriff des fremden augen entzogenen, verborgenen, geheimen, eben auch in mehrfacher beziehung ausgebildet . . . S. 876:

"links am see  
liegt eine matte heimlich im gehölz."

Schiller, Tell I., 4.

. . . frei und für den modernen Sprachgebrauch ungewöhnlich . . . heimlich ist zu einem verbum des verbergens gestellt: er verbirgt mich heimlich in seinem gezelt. ps. 27, 5. ( . . . heimliche orte am menschlichen Körper, pudenda . . . welche leute nicht stürben, die wurden geschlagen an heimlichen orten Samuel 5, 12 . . .

We read.

*Heimlich*; adj. and adv. vernaculus, occultus; MHG. heimelich, heimlich.

P. 874. In a slightly different sense: "I feel *heimlich*, well, free from fear. . . ."

(b) *Heimlich*, also in the sense of a place free from ghostly influences . . . familiar, friendly, intimate.

4. From the idea of "homelike," "belonging to the house," the further idea is developed of something concealed, drawn from the eyes of others, 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, Tell. . . . Poetic licence, rarely so used in modern speech . . . 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* places in the human

(c) Beamtete, die wichtige und geheim zu haltende rat-schläge in staatsachen ertheilen, heissen heimliche rätthe, das adjektiv nach heutigem sprachgebrauch durch geheim (s.d.) ersetzt: . . . (Pharao) nennet ihn (Joseph) den heimlichen rath. 1. Mos. 41, 45;

S. 878. 6. Heimlich für die erkenntnis, mystisch, allegorisch: heimliche bedeutung, mysticus, divinus, occultus, figuratus.

S. 878. Anders ist heimlich im folgenden, der erkenntnis entzogen, unbewusst: . . .

Dann aber ist heimlich auch verschlossen, undurchdringlich in bezug auf erforschung: . . .

"Merkst du wohl? sie trauen mir nicht,  
fürchten des Friedländers heimlich gesicht."

Wallensteins lager, 2. aufz.

9. die bedeutung des versteckten, gefährlichen, die in der vorgen nummer hervortritt, entwickelt sich noch weiter, so dass heimlich den sinn empfängt, den sonst unheimlich hat nach heimlich, 3b sp. 874) hat: "mir ist zu zeiten . . . an menschen der in nacht wandelt und an gespenster jeder winkel ist ihm heimlich und schauerhaft."

theater, 3, 298.

body, pudenda . . . "the men that died not were smitten" (on their *heimlich* parts). I 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, having been replaced by *geheim* [secret]. . . . "Pharaoh called Joseph's name 'him to whom secrets are revealed'" (*heimlich* councillor). Gen. xli. 45.

P. 878. 6. *Heimlich*, as used of knowledge, mystic, allegorical: a *heimlich* meaning, *mysticus, divinus, occultus, figuratus*.

P. 878. *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 me; they fear the *heimlich* face of the Duke of Friedland." *Wallensteins Lager*, Act. 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." Klingler.

Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*. Let us retain this discovery, which we do not yet properly understand, alongside of Schelling's definition of the "uncanny." Then if we examine individual instances of uncanniness, these indications will become comprehensible to us.

## 2

In proceeding to review those things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny in a very forcible and definite form, the first requirement is obviously to select a suitable

example to start upon. 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 wax-work figures, artificial dolls and automatons. He adds to this class the uncanny effect of epileptic seizures and the manifestations of insanity, because these excite in the spectator the feeling that automatic, mechanical processes are at work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of animation. Without entirely accepting the author's view, we will take it as a starting-point for our investigation because it leads us on to consider a writer who has succeeded better than anyone else in producing uncanny effects.

Jentsch says: "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 directly focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go into the matter and clear it up immediately, since that, as we have said, would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing. 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 *Nachtstücken*,<sup>8</sup> which contains the original of Olympia, the doll in the first act of Offenbach's opera, *Tales of Hoffmann*. But I cannot think—and I hope that 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 element to be held responsible for the quite unparalleled atmosphere of uncanniness which the story evokes; or, indeed, that it is the most important among them. Nor is this effect of the story heightened by the fact that the author himself treats

<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann's *Sämtliche Werke*, Grisebach Edition, vol. iii.

the episode of Olympia with a faint touch of satire and uses it to make fun of the young man's idealization of his mistress. The main theme of the story is, on the contrary, something different, something which gives its name to the story, and which is always re-introduced at the critical moment: it is the theme of the "Sand-Man" who tears out children's eyes.

This fantastic tale begins 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 the father he loved. 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 that evening. When questioned about the Sand-Man, his mother, it is true, denied that such a person existed except as a form of speech; but his nurse could give him more definite information: "He is 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 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 believe in such gruesome attributes to the figure of the Sand-Man, yet the dread of him became fixed in his breast. He determined to find out what the Sand-Man looked like; and one evening, when the Sand-Man was again expected, he hid himself in his father's study. He recognized the visitor as the lawyer Coppelius, a repulsive person of whom the children were frightened when he occasionally came to a meal; and he now identified this Coppelius with the dreaded Sand-Man. Concerning the rest of the scene, Hoffmann already leaves us in doubt whether we are witnessing 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 begin to busy themselves at a hearth with glowing flames. The little eavesdropper hears Coppelius call out, "Here with your eyes!" and betrays himself by screaming aloud; Coppelius seizes him and is about to drop grains of red-hot coal out of the fire into his eyes, so as to cast them out on the hearth. His father begs him off and saves his eyes. After this the boy falls into a deep swoon; and a long illness followed upon his experience. Those who lean towards a rationalistic interpretation of the Sand-Man will not fail to recognize in the child's phantasy the continued influence of his nurse's story. The grains of sand that are to be thrown into the child's eyes turn into red-hot grains of coal out of the flames; and in both cases they are meant to make his eyes jump out. In the course of another visit of the Sand-Man's, a year later, his father was killed in his study by an explosion. The lawyer Coppelius vanished from the place without leaving a trace behind.

Nathaniel, now a student, believes that he has recognized this childhood's phantom of horror in an itinerant optician, an Italian called Giuseppe Coppola. This man had offered him barometers for sale in his university town, and when Nathaniel refused had added: "Eh, not barometers, not barometers—also got fine eyes, beautiful eyes." The student's terror was allayed on finding that the prof-fered eyes were only harmless spectacles, and he bought a pocket-telescope 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 he quite forgets his clever and sensible betrothed on her account. But Olympia was an automaton whose works Spalanzani had made, and whose eyes Coppola, the Sand-Man, had put in. The student surprises the two men quarrelling over their handiwork. The optician carries off the wooden eyeless doll; and the mechanician, Spalanzani, takes up Olympia's bleeding eye-balls from the ground and throws them at Nathaniel's breast, saying



that Coppola had stolen them from him (Nathaniel). 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. He cries, "Faster—faster—faster—rings of fire—rings of fire! Whirl about, rings of fire—round and round! Wooden doll, ho! lovely wooden doll, whirl about——," then falls upon the professor, Olympia's so-called father, and tries to strangle him.

Rallying from a long and serious illness, Nathaniel seemed at last to have recovered. He was going to marry his betrothed with whom he was reconciled. One day he was walking through the town and market-place, where the high tower of the Town-Hall threw its huge shadow. On the girl's suggestion they mounted the tower, leaving her brother, who was walking with them, down below. Up there, Clara's attention is drawn to a curious object coming along the street. Nathaniel looks at this thing through Coppola's spy-glass, which he finds in his pocket, and falls into a new fit of madness. Shouting out, "Whirl about, my wooden doll!" he tries to fling the girl into the depths below. Her brother, brought to her side by her cries, rescues her and hastens down to safety with her. Up above, the raving man rushes round, shrieking "Rings of fire, whirl about!"—words whose origin we know. Among the people who begin to gather below there comes forward the figure of the lawyer Coppelius, suddenly returned. We may suppose it was his approach, seen through the telescope, that threw Nathaniel into his madness. People want to go up and overpower the madman, but Coppelius<sup>9</sup> 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—beautiful eyes,'" flings himself down over the parapet. No sooner does he

<sup>9</sup> Frau Dr. Rank has pointed out the association of the name with "Coppella" = crucible, connecting it with the chemical operations that caused the father's death; and also with "coppo" = eye-socket.

lie on the paving-stones with a shattered skull than the Sand-Man vanishes in the throng.

This short summary leaves, I think, no doubt 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 this effect. Uncertainty whether an object is living or inanimate, which we must admit in regard 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 admitted the 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 means to make us, too, look through the fell Coppola's glasses—perhaps, indeed, that he himself once gazed through such an instrument. For the conclusion of the story makes it quite clear that Coppola the optician really is the lawyer Coppelius and thus also the Sand-Man.

There is no question, therefore, of any "intellectual uncertainty"; 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 "intellectual uncertainty" is thus incapable of explaining that impression.

We know from psychoanalytic experience, however, that this fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible fear of childhood. Many adults still retain their appre-

hensiveness in this respect, and no bodily 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 a morbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration. In blinding himself, Oedipus, that mythical law-breaker, was simply carrying out a mitigated form of the punishment of castration—the only punishment that according to the *lex talionis* was fitted for him. We may try to reject the derivation of fears about the eye from the fear of castration on rationalistic grounds, and say 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 kind. But this view does not account adequately for the substitutive relation between the eye and the male member which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies; nor can it dispel the impression one gains that it is the threat of being castrated in especial which 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 get the details of their “castration-complex” from the analyses of neurotic patients, and realize its immense importance in their mental life.

Moreover, I would not recommend any opponent of the psychoanalytic view to select precisely the story of the Sand-Man upon which to build his case that morbid 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 appear each time in order to interfere with love? He divides the unfortunate Nathaniel from his betrothed and from her brother, his best friend; he destroys his second object of 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. Things like these and many more seem arbitrary and meaningless in the story 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 awaited.<sup>10</sup>

We shall venture, therefore, to refer the uncanny effect of the Sand-Man to the child's dread in relation to its castration-complex. But having gained the idea that we can take this infantile factor to account for feelings of uncanniness, we are drawn to examine whether we can apply it to other instances of uncanny things. We find in the story of the Sand-Man the other theme upon which Jentsch lays stress, of a doll that appears to be alive. Jentsch believes that a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny sensations 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 happen to be rather closely connected with infantile life. We remember that in their early games children do not distinguish at all sharply

<sup>10</sup> In fact, Hoffmann's imaginative treatment of his material has not played such havoc with its elements that we cannot reconstruct their original arrangement. In the story from Nathaniel's childhood, the figures of his father and Coppélius represent the two opposites into which the father-*imago* is split by the ambivalence of the child's feeling; whereas the one threatens to blind him, that is, to castrate him, the other, the loving father, intercedes for his sight. That part of the complex which is most strongly repressed, the death-wish against the father, finds expression in the death of the good father, and Coppélius is made answerable for it. Later, in his student days, Professor Spalanzani and Coppola the optician reproduce this double representation of the father-*imago*, the Professor as a member of the father-series, Coppola openly identified with the lawyer Coppélius. Just as before they used to work together over the fire, so now they have jointly created the doll Olympia; the Professor is even called the father of Olympia. This second occurrence of work in common shows

between living and lifeless 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 way, with as concentrated a gaze as possible. 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 excitation of an early childhood fear, the idea of a "living doll" excites no fear at all; the child had no fear of its doll coming to life, it may even have desired it. The source of the feeling of an uncanny thing would not, therefore, be an infantile fear in this case, but rather an infantile wish or even only 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 in literature the unrivalled master of conjuring up the uncanny. His *Elixire des Teufels* [The Devil's Elixir] contains a mass of themes to which one is tempted to ascribe the uncanny effect of the narrative; but it is too obscure and intricate a story to venture to summarize. Towards the end of the book the reader is told the facts,

that the optician and the mechanic are also components of the father-*imago*, that is, both are Nathaniel's father as well as Olympia's. I ought to have added that in the terrifying scene in childhood, Coppelius, after sparing Nathaniel's eyes, had screwed off his arms and legs as an experiment; that is, he had experimented on him as a mechanic would on a doll. This singular feature, which seems quite out of perspective in the picture of the Sand-Man, introduces a new castration-equivalent; but it also emphasizes the identity of Coppelius and his later counterpart, Spalanzani the mechanic, and helps us to understand who Olympia is. She, the automatic doll, can be nothing else than a personification of Nathaniel's feminine attitude towards his father in his infancy. The father of both, Spalanzani and Coppola, are, as we know, new editions, reincarnations of Nathaniel's "two" fathers. Now Spalanzani's otherwise incomprehensible statement that the optician has

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 of a kind; one's comprehension of the whole suffers as a result, though not the impression it makes. We must content ourselves with selecting those themes of uncanniness which are most prominent, and seeing whether we can fairly trace them also back to infantile sources. These themes are all concerned with the idea of a "double" in every shape and degree, with persons, therefore, who are to be considered identical by reason of looking alike; Hoffmann accentuates this relation by transferring mental processes from the one person to the other—what we should call telepathy—so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own—in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same

stolen Nathaniel's eyes so as to set them in the doll becomes significant and supplies fresh evidence for 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 such love narcissistic, and can understand why he who has fallen victim to it should relinquish his real, external object of love. The psychological truth of the situation in which the young man, fixated upon his father by his castration-complex, is 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 three years old, his father left his small family, never to be 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.

crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations.

The theme of the "double" has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank.<sup>11</sup> He has gone into the connections the "double" has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the astonishing evolution of this idea. For the "double" was originally an insurance against destruction to 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 the genital symbol; the same desire spurred on the ancient Egyptians to the art of making images of the dead in some lasting material. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind the double takes on a different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death.

The idea of the "double" does not necessarily disappear with the passing of the primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of development of the ego. A special faculty is slowly formed there, able to oppose the rest of the ego, with the function of observing and criticizing the self and exercising a censorship within the mind, and this we become aware of as our "conscience." In the pathological case of delusions of being watched this mental institution becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego, and discernible to a physician's eye. The fact that a faculty 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

<sup>11</sup> "Der Doppelgänger."

and to ascribe many things to it, above all, those things which seem to the new faculty of self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of the earliest period of all.<sup>12</sup>

But it is not only this narcissism, offensive to the ego-criticizing faculty, which may be incorporated in the idea of a double. There are also all those unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all those 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.<sup>13</sup>

But, after having thus considered the manifest motivation of the figure of a "double," we have to admit that none of it 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 the content arrived at could account for that impulse towards self-protection which has caused the ego to project such a content outward as something foreign to itself. The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the "double" being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect. The "double" has become a vision

<sup>12</sup> I cannot help thinking that when poets complain that two souls dwell within the human breast, and when popular psychologists talk of the splitting of the ego in an individual, they have some notion of this division (which relates to the sphere of ego-psychology) between the critical faculty and the rest of the ego, and not of the antithesis discovered by psycho-analysis between the ego and what is unconscious and repressed. It is true that the distinction is to some extent effaced by the circumstance that derivatives of what is repressed are foremost among the things reprehended by the ego-criticizing faculty.

<sup>13</sup> In Ewers' *Der Student von Prag*, which furnishes 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.

of terror, just as after the fall of their religion the gods took on daemonic shapes.<sup>14</sup>

It is not difficult to judge, on the same lines as his theme of the "double," the other forms of disturbance in the ego made use of by Hoffmann. They are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world and from other persons. I believe that these factors are partly responsible for the impression of the uncanny, although it is not easy to isolate and determine exactly their share of it.

That factor which consists in a recurrence of the same situations, things and events, will perhaps not appeal to everyone as a source of uncanny feeling. From what I have observed, this phenomenon does undoubtedly, subject to certain conditions and combined with certain circumstances, awaken an uncanny feeling, which recalls that sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams. Once, as I was walking through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was strange to me, on a hot summer afternoon, I found myself in a quarter the character of which 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 while without being directed, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, but only to arrive yet a third time by devious paths in the same place. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to abandon my exploratory walk and get straight back to the piazza I had left a short while before. Other situations having in common with my adventure an involuntary return to the same situation, but which differ radically from it in other respects, also result in the same feeling

<sup>14</sup> Heine, *Die Götter im Exil*.

of helplessness and of something uncanny. As, for instance, when one is lost in a forest in high altitudes, caught, we will suppose, by the mountain mist, and when every endeavor to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot, recognizable by some particular landmark. Or when one wanders about in a dark, strange room, looking for the door or the electric switch, and collides for the hundredth time with the same piece of furniture—a situation which, indeed, has been made irresistibly comic by Mark Twain, through the wild extravagance of his narration.

Taking another class of things, it is easy to see that here, too, it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds with an uncanny atmosphere what would otherwise be innocent enough, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and unescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of "chance" only. For instance, we of course attach no importance to the event when we give up a coat and get a cloakroom ticket with the number, say, 62; or when we find that our cabin on board ship is numbered 62. But the impression is altered if two such events, each in itself indifferent, happen close together, if we come across the number 62 several times in a single day, or if we begin to notice that everything which has a number—addresses, hotel-rooms, compartments in railway-trains—always has the same one, or one which at least 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, taking it, perhaps, as an indication of the span of life allotted to him. Or take the case that one is engaged at the time in reading the works of Hering, the famous physiologist, and then receives within the space of a few days two letters from two different countries, each from a person called Hering; whereas one has never before had any dealings with anyone of that name. Not long ago an ingenious scientist attempted to reduce coincidences of this kind to certain laws, and so deprive them of their uncanny

effect.<sup>15</sup> I will not venture to decide whether he has succeeded or not.

How exactly we can trace back the uncanny effect of such recurrent similarities to infantile psychology is a question I can only lightly touch upon in these pages; and I must refer the reader instead to another pamphlet,<sup>16</sup> now ready for publication, in which this has been gone into in detail, but in a different connection. It must be explained that we are able to postulate the principle of a *repetition-compulsion* in the unconscious mind, based upon instinctual activity and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—a principle powerful enough to overrule the pleasure-principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the tendencies of small children; a principle, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients. Taken in all, the foregoing prepares us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner *repetition-compulsion* is perceived as uncanny.

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

In the story of "The Ring of Polycrates," the guest turns away from his friend with horror because he sees that his every wish is at once fulfilled, his every care immediately 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 still rather 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 obsessional neurotic,<sup>17</sup> I have described how the patient once stayed in a hydro-pathic 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 amiable 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 "Well, I hope he'll have a stroke and die." A fortnight later the old gentleman really did have a stroke. My patient thought this an "uncanny" experience. And that impression of uncanniness would have been stronger still if less time had elapsed between his exclamation and the untoward event, or if he had been able to produce innumerable similar coincidences. As a matter of fact, he had no difficulty in producing coincidences of this sort, but then not only he but all obsessional neurotics I have observed are able to relate analogous experiences. They are never surprised when they invariably run up against the person they have just been thinking of, perhaps for the first time for many months. If they say one day "I haven't had 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 cast its shadow before on their minds. They are in the habit of mentioning this state of affairs in the most 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.<sup>18</sup> There never seems to have been any doubt about the source of this dread. Whoever possesses something at once valuable and fragile is afraid of the envy of others, in that he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. A feeling like this betrays itself in a look even though it is not put into words; and when a man attracts the attention of others by noticeable, and particularly by unattractive,

<sup>15</sup> P. Kammerer, *Das Gesetz der Serie* (Vienna, 1919).

<sup>16</sup> [Beyond the Pleasure-Principle.—Trans.]

<sup>17</sup> Freud, "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," *Three Case Histories*, Collier Books edition BS 191V.

<sup>18</sup> Seligmann, the Hamburg ophthalmologist, has made a thorough study of this superstition in his *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes* (Berlin, 1910).

attributes, they are ready to believe that his envy is rising to more than usual heights and that this intensity in it will convert it into effective action. What is feared is thus a secret intention of harming someone, and certain signs are taken to mean that such an intention is capable of becoming an act.

These last examples of the uncanny are to be referred to that principle in the mind which I have called "omnipotence of thoughts," taking the name from an expression used by one of my patients. And now we find ourselves on well-known ground. Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe, which was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings, and by the narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes (such as the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, the magical practices based upon this belief, the carefully proportioned distribution of magical powers or "mana" among various outside persons and things), as well as by all those other figments of the imagination with which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to withstand the inexorable laws of reality. It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us as "uncanny" fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression.<sup>19</sup>

This is the place now to put forward two considerations which, I think, contain the gist of this short study. In

<sup>19</sup> Cf. my book *Totem und Tabu*, part iii., "Animismus, Magie und Allmacht der Gedanken"; also the footnote on p. 7 of the same book: "It would appear that we invest with a feeling of uncanniness those impressions which lend support to a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, and to the animistic attitude of mind, at a time when our judgment has already rejected these same beliefs."

the first place, if psychoanalytic theory is correct in maintaining that every emotional affect, whatever its quality, is transformed by repression into morbid anxiety, then among such cases of anxiety there must be a class in which the anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which *recurs*. This class of morbid anxiety would then be no other than what is uncanny, irrespective of whether it originally aroused dread or some other affect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why the usage of speech has extended *das Heimliche* into its opposite *das Unheimliche*; <sup>20</sup> for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light.

It only remains for us to test our new hypothesis on one or two more examples of the uncanny.

Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts. As we have seen, many languages in use to-day can only render the German expression "an *unheimliches* house" by "a *haunted* house." We might indeed have begun our investigation with this example, perhaps the most striking of all, of something uncanny, but we refrained from doing so because the uncanny in it is too much mingled with and in part covered by what is purely gruesome. There is scarcely any other matter, however, upon which our thoughts and feelings have changed so little since the very earliest times, and in which discarded forms have been so completely preserved under a thin disguise, as that of our relation to death. Two things account for our conservatism: the strength of our original emotional reaction to it, and the insufficiency of our scientific knowledge about it. Biology has not yet been

<sup>20</sup> Cf. abstract on p. 23.

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. It is true that the proposition "All men are mortal" is paraded in text-books of logic as an example of a generalization, but no human being really grasps it, and our unconscious has as little use now as ever for the idea of its own mortality. Religions continue to dispute the undeniable fact of the death of each one of us 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 this prospect of a better life after death as a recompense for earthly existence. In our great cities, placards announce lectures which will tell us how to get into touch with the souls of the departed; and it cannot be denied that many of the most able and penetrating minds among our scientific men have come to the conclusion, especially towards the close of their lives, that a contact of this kind is not utterly impossible. Since practically 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 at any opportunity. Most likely our fear still contains the old belief that the deceased becomes the enemy of his survivor and wants to carry him off to share his new life with him. Considering our unchanged attitude towards death, we might rather inquire what has become of the repression, that necessary condition for enabling a primitive feeling to recur in the shape of an uncanny effect. But repression is there, too. All so-called educated people have ceased to believe, officially at any rate, that the dead can become visible as spirits, and have hedged round any such appearances with improbable and remote circumstances; their emotional attitude towards their dead, moreover, once a highly dubious and ambivalent one, has been toned down in the higher strata of the mind into a simple feeling of reverence.<sup>21</sup>

We have now only a few more remarks to add, for

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Totem und Tabu*: "Das Tabu und die Ambivalenz."

animism, magic and witchcraft, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration-complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something fearful into an uncanny thing.

We also call a living person uncanny, usually when we ascribe evil motives to him. But that is not all; we must not only credit him with bad intentions but must attribute to these intentions capacity to achieve their aim in virtue of certain special powers. A good instance of this is the "Gettatore," that uncanny figure of Roman superstition which Schaeffer, with intuitive poetic feeling and profound psychoanalytic knowledge, has transformed into a sympathetic figure in his *Josef Montfort*. But the question of these secret powers brings us back again to the realm of animism. It is her intuition that he possesses secret power of this kind that makes Mephistopheles so uncanny to the pious Gretchen. "She divines that I am certainly a spirit, even the devil himself perchance."<sup>22</sup>

The uncanny effect of epilepsy and of madness has the same origin. The ordinary person sees in them the workings of forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellow-man but which at the same time he is dimly aware of in a remote corner of his own being. The Middle Ages quite consistently ascribed all such maladies to daemonic influences, and in this their psychology was not so far out. Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, 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 which had lasted many years in a girl who had been an invalid, the patient's own mother confessed to this attitude long after the girl's recovery.

Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist,<sup>23</sup> feet which dance by themselves<sup>24</sup>—all these

<sup>22</sup> "Sie ahnt, dass ich ganz sicher ein Genie,

Vielleicht sogar der Teufel bin."

<sup>23</sup> Cf. a fairy-tale of Hauff's.

<sup>24</sup> As in Schaeffer's book mentioned above.



have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove able to move of themselves in addition. As we already know, this kind of uncanniness springs from its association with the castration-complex. To many people the idea of being buried alive while appearing to be dead is the most uncanny thing of all. And yet psychoanalysis 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 filled with a certain lustful pleasure—the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence.

There is one more point of general application I should like to add, though, strictly speaking, it has been included in our statements about animism and mechanisms in the mind that have been surmounted; for I think it deserves special mention. This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes, and so on. It is this element which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices. The infantile element in this, which also holds sway in the minds of neurotics, is the over-accentuation of psychological reality in comparison with physical reality—a feature closely allied to the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts. In the midst of the isolation of war-time a number of the *English Strand Magazine* fell into my hands; and, amongst other not very interesting matter, I read a story about a young married couple, who move into a furnished flat in which there is a curiously shaped table with carvings of crocodiles on it. Towards evening they begin to smell an intolerable and very typical odour that pervades the whole flat; things begin to get in their way and trip them up in the darkness; they seem to see a vague form gliding up 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 that sort. It was a thoroughly silly 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 psychoanalytical experience; if it does not rest upon mere coincidence, it furnishes a beautiful confirmation of our theory of the uncanny. It often happens that male patients 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 everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a humorous saying: "Love is home-sickness"; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, still in the dream, "this place is familiar to me, I have been there before," we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body. In this case, too, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, home-like, familiar; the prefix "un" is the token of repression.

## 3

Having followed the discussion as far as this the reader will have felt certain doubts arising in his mind about much that has been said; and he must now have an opportunity of collecting them and bringing them forward.

It may be true that the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition. But these factors do not solve the problem of the uncanny. For our proposition is clearly not convertible. Not everything that fulfils this condition—not everything that is connected with repressed desires and archaic forms of thought belonging to the past of the individual and of the race—is therefore uncanny.

Nor would we, moreover, conceal the fact that for almost every example adduced in support of our hypothesis

some other analogous one may be found which rebuts it. The story of the severed hand in Hauff's fairy-tale certainly has an uncanny effect, and we have derived that effect from the castration-complex. But in the story in Herodotus of the treasure of Rhampsenitus, where the master-thief leaves his brother's severed hand behind him in that of the princess who wants to hold him fast, most readers will agree with me that the episode has no trace of uncanniness. Again, the instant fulfillment of the king's wishes in "The Ring of Polycrates" undoubtedly does affect us in the same uncanny way as it did the king of Egypt. Yet our own fairy-tales are crammed with instantaneous wish-fulfillments 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 immediately it lies on a plate before her. In his annoyance at her forwardness her husband wishes it may hang on her nose. And there it is, dangling from her nose. All this is very vivid but not in the least uncanny. Fairy-tales quite frankly adopt the anti-mistic 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 inanimate objects—a picture or a doll—come to life; nevertheless in Hans Andersen's stories the household utensils, furniture and tin soldiers are alive and nothing could perhaps be more remote from the uncanny. And we should hardly call it uncanny when Pymalion's beautiful statue comes to life. Catalepsy and the re-animation of the dead have been represented as most uncanny themes. But things of this sort again are very common in fairy-stories. Who would be so bold as to call it an uncanny moment, for instance, when Snow-White opens her eyes once more? And the resuscitation of the dead in miracles, as in the New Testament, elicits feelings quite unrelated to the uncanny. Then the theme that achieves such an indubitably uncanny effect, the involuntary recurrence of the like, serves, too, other

and quite different purposes in another class of cases. One case we have already heard about in which it is employed to call forth 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. Another consideration is this: whence come the uncanny influences of silence, darkness and solitude? Do not these factors point to the part played by danger in the aetiology of what is uncanny, notwithstanding that they are also the most frequent accompaniment of the expression of fear in infancy? And are we in truth justified in entirely ignoring intellectual uncertainty as a factor, seeing that we have admitted its importance in relation to death?

It is evident that we must be prepared to admit that there are other elements besides those set down here determining the production of uncanny feelings. We might say that these preliminary results have satisfied psycho-analytic interest in the problem of the uncanny, and that what remains probably calls for an aesthetic valuation. But that would be to open the door to doubts about the exact value of our general contention that the uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed. One thing we may observe which may help us to resolve these uncertainties: nearly all the instances which contradict our hypothesis are taken from the realm of fiction and literary productions. This may suggest a possible differentiation between the uncanny that is actually experienced, and the uncanny as we merely picture it or read about it.

Something uncanny in *real experience* is conditioned much more simply, but is limited to much fewer occasions. We shall find, I think, that it fits in perfectly with our attempt at solution, and can be traced back without exception to something familiar that has been repressed. But here, too, we must make a certain important and psychologically significant differentiation in our material, best illustrated by turning to suitable examples.

Let us take the uncanny in connection with the omnip-

otence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfillments, secret power to do harm and the return of the dead. The condition under which the feeling of uncanniness arises here is unmistakable. We—or our primitive forefathers—once believed in the possibility of these things and were convinced that they really happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have *surmounted* such ways of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new set of beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something actually happens in our lives which seems to support the old, discarded beliefs, we get a feeling of the uncanny; and 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 merely desiring his death!" or, "Then the dead do continue to live and appear before our eyes on the scene of their former activities!", and so on. And conversely, he who has completely and finally dispelled animistic beliefs in himself, will be insensible to this type of the uncanny. The most remarkable coincidences of desire and fulfillment, the most mysterious recurrences of similar experiences in a particular place or on a particular date, the most deceptive sights and suspicious noises—none of these things will take him in or raise that kind of fear which can be described as "a fear of something uncanny." For the whole matter is one of "testing reality," pure and simple, a question of the material reality of the phenomena.<sup>25</sup>

The state of affairs is somewhat different when the uncanny proceeds from repressed infantile complexes, from the castration-complex, womb-phantasies, etc.; but experi-

<sup>25</sup> Since the uncanny effect of a "double" also belongs to this class, it is interesting to observe what the effect is of suddenly and unexpectedly meeting one's own image. E. Mach has related two such observations in his *Analyse der Empfindungen* (1900, p. 3). On the first occasion he started violently as soon as he realized that the face before him was his own. The second time he formed a very unfavourable opinion about the supposed stranger who got into the omnibus, and thought

ences which arouse this kind of uncanny feeling are not of very frequent occurrence in real life. Actual occurrences of the uncanny belong for the most part to the first group; nevertheless the distinction between the two is theoretically very important. Where the uncanny comes from infantile complexes the question of external reality is quite irrelevant; its place is taken by psychological reality. What is concerned is an actual repression of some definite material and a return of this repressed material, not a removal of the *belief* in its objective reality. We might say that in the one case what had been repressed was a particular ideational content and in the other the belief in its physical existence. But this last way of putting it no doubt strains the term "repression" beyond its legitimate meaning. It would be more correct to respect a perceptible psychological difference here, and to say that the animistic beliefs of civilized people have been *surmounted*—more or less. Our conclusion could then be stated thus: An uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed. Finally, we must not let our predilection for smooth solution 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 upon them, we shall not be greatly astonished to find the distinction often rather a hazy one.

"What a shabby-looking school-master that is getting in now."—I can supply a similar experience. I was sitting alone in my *wagon-lit* compartment when a more than usually violent jerk 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 he had been about to leave the washing-cabinet which divides the two compartments, and had taken the wrong direction and come into my

The uncanny as it is depicted in *literature*, in stories and imaginative productions, merits in truth a separate discussion. To begin with, 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 distinction between what has been repressed and what has been surmounted cannot be transposed on to the uncanny in fiction without profound modification; for the realm of phantasy depends for its very existence on the fact that its content is not submitted to the reality-testing faculty. The somewhat paradoxical result is that *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 story-teller 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 every case. In fairy-tales, for instance, the world of reality is left behind from the very start, and the animistic system of beliefs is frankly adopted. Wishes, fulfillments, secret powers, omnipotence of thoughts, animation of lifeless objects, all the elements so common in fairy-stories, can exert no uncanny influence here; for, as we have learnt, that feeling cannot arise unless there is a conflict of judgement whether things which have been

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 of the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being terrified 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 that older reaction which feels the double to be something uncanny?

"surmounted" and are regarded as incredible are not, after all, possible; and this problem is excluded from the beginning by the setting of the story. And thus we see that such stories as have furnished us with most of the contradictions to our hypothesis of the uncanny confirm the first part of our proposition—that in the realm of fiction many things are not uncanny which would be so if they happened in real life. In the case of the fairy-story there are other contributory factors, which we shall briefly touch upon later.

The story-teller can also choose a setting which, though less imaginary than the world of fairy tales, does yet differ from the real world by admitting superior spiritual entities such as daemonic influences or departed spirits. So long as they remain within their setting of poetic reality their usual attribute of uncanniness fails to attach to such beings. The souls in Dante's *Inferno*, or the ghostly apparitions in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar*, may be gloomy and terrible enough, but they are no more really uncanny than is Homer's jovial world of gods. We order our judgement to the imaginary reality imposed on us by the writer, and regard souls, spirits and spectres as though their existence had the same validity in their world as our own has in the external world. And then in this case too we are spared all trace of the uncanny.

The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story. But in this case, too, he can increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality, by bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact. He takes advantage, as it were, of our supposedly surmounted superstitiousness; he deceives us into thinking that he is giving us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility. We react to his inventions as we should 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* and similar stories which flirt with the supernatural. The writer has then one more means he can use to escape our rising vexation and at the same time to improve his chances of success. It is this, that he should keep us in the dark for a long time about the precise nature of the conditions he has selected for the world he writes about, or that he should cunningly and ingeniously avoid any definite information on the point at all throughout the book. Speaking generally, however, we find a confirmation of the second part of our proposition—that fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny sensations 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 irrefragable and remains as powerful in fiction as in real experience, except in one point. The uncanny belonging to the first class—that proceeding from forms of thought that have been surmounted—retains this quality in fiction as in experience so long as the setting is one of physical reality; but as soon as it is given an arbitrary and unrealistic setting in fiction, it is apt to lose its quality of the uncanny.

It is clear that we have 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 experience and are acted upon by our physical environment. But the story-teller has a peculiarly directive influence over us; by means of the states of mind into which he can put us and the expectations he can rouse in us, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, 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 professors 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. And accordingly we will now return to the examination of a few instances.

We have already asked why it is that the severed hand in the story of the treasure of Rhampsenitus has no uncanny effect in the way that Hauff's story of the severed hand has. The question seems to us to have gained in importance now that we have recognized that class of the uncanny which proceeds from repressed complexes to be the more durable 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 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*, 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 horrid multiplication?" We know the truth and do not share the error of the *Zerrissener*, 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 arousing at any rate an uncanny horror in us as soon as the author begins to amuse himself at its expense 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 uncanny sensations—are ruled out altogether. We understand this, and that is why we ignore the

opportunities we find for any development of a feeling of this kind.

Concerning the factors of silence, solitude and darkness, we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of that infantile morbid anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free. This problem has been discussed from a psycho-analytical point of view in another place.

### **Dreams and Telepathy (1922)**

# Studies in Parapsychology

SIGMUND FREUD

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

PHILIP RIEFF

Volumes in the Collier Books Edition of  
*The Collected Papers of Sigmund Freud*

The History of the Psychoanalytic Movement  
Early Psychoanalytic Writings  
Therapy and Technique  
Dora—An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria  
The Sexual Enlightenment of Children  
General Psychological Theory  
Three Case Histories  
Sexuality and the Psychology of Love  
Character and Culture  
Studies in Parapsychology

Each volume has an Introduction by the Editor,  
Philip Rieff.



COLLIER BOOKS  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK