Historical and Philosophical Relations between The Uncanny and Illustration

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Abstract: Many illustrators have adopted "The Uncanny" and embraced it as the characteristic psychological effect of their illustrative style. While we might argue that other discursive forms are capable of conveying the effect of uncanniness, what I am interested in here is why it manifests historically via illustration in particular. I will divide my investigation into three propositions: first, that the Uncanny's essential ambivalence is achieved as a literary event; second, following Ernst Jentsch and Masahiro Mori, that a key site of the Uncanny effect is actually within the material physical object and its potential for movement; and finally, following E.T.A. Hoffman, that complex textual scenarios and frameworks of storytelling comprise the locus for the philosophical theorisation of The Uncanny. The word "uncanny" is used in many contexts of the everyday. But this chapter will argue that a critical perspective on storytelling is the best mode for showing how the Uncanny effect is a phenomenon of language—and its theoretical consideration is really a consideration of larger philosophical questions about our relation to language as subjects, and as objects.

Key words: Uncanny; automaton; The Sandman; Coraline; Jentsch: Freud; ETA Hoffmann

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This essay takes as its starting point the association of certain beloved illustrators with the "The Uncanny." In my years of teaching Illustration students, I have had the good fortune to be presented with conversations, essays and dissertations on illustrators such as Edward Gorey, Tim Burton, Dr Seuss, Maurice Sendak, J.H Williams III, P. Craig Russell, Dave McKean, Jon

Klassen, and many stop-motion animators, including the Brothers Quay, Henry Sellick, Clyde Henry Productions, and Paul Berry, among others, all of whom, arguably, convey feelings of "uncanniness" in their viewers. These illustrators have adopted "The Uncanny" and embraced it as the characteristic psychological effect of their illustrative style. While we might argue that many discursive forms are capable of conveying the effect of uncanniness, what I am interested in here is why it manifests historically via illustration in particular. What constitutive aspects of illustration make it a vehicle for uncanniness? I will divide my investigation into three propositions: first, that the Uncanny's essential ambivalence is achieved as a literary event; second, following Ernst Jentsch and Masahiro Mori, that a key site of the Uncanny effect is actually within the material physical object and its potential for movement; and finally, following E.T.A. Hoffman, that complex textual scenarios and frameworks of storytelling comprise the locus for the philosophical theorisation of The Uncanny. My focus on storytelling is not to say that The Uncanny existed, or exists, solely within the realm of fiction. A phenomenon constituted in the 18th century, alongside the invention of wondrous mechanical automata and projection mechanisms such as the magic lantern, Uncanniness also pervaded the popular imaginations of entertainment, science, and spiritualism— particularly when these three entities merged.[1] Today, the word "uncanny" is used in many contexts of the everyday. But this chapter will argue that a critical perspective on storytelling is the best mode for illustrating that the Uncanny effect is a phenomenon of language—and its theoretical consideration is really a consideration of larger philosophical questions about our relation to language as subjects, and as objects.

It would be very remiss not to prioritise the question of why eyes-- strange eyes, button eyes, moving eyes, blank eyes, hollow eyes, non-moving eyes-- are the singlemost applied signifier of uncanniness. This signifier seems much more complex in its depth than the age-old adage that "the eyes are the windows to the soul." Something much larger is at work here. Illustrators of The

[1] For an extended analysis on the general "uncanniness" which pervaded not only the literature of The Uncanny during the 18th century but also the debates in philosophy and science, as well as in new forms of popular "magic" entertainment, see Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: 18th-Century* Culture *and the Invention of the Uncanny*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press (1995).

Uncanny, both writers and visual artists, partake in the larger philosophical encounter with the precariousness of believability and the inherent instability in the illustrative relation itself. Taking away one's eyes unseats us from knowing through seeing, and exposes the unsteadiness of knowing something by way of hearing or reading language without the benefit of visual illustration. On the other hand, as we shall see in so many Uncanny writers and illustrators, the supplement of the image is also not always reliable.

Recent examples of uncanny illustration join the genealogy of theory which links illustration with uncanniness. Neil Gaiman is a contemporary writer who, in many ways, "illustrates" Sigmund Freud's well-known essay, "The Uncanny," written in 1919. While Freud's essay lays the groundwork in this chapter for recognizing that The Uncanny is primarily a literary event, we have Neil Gaiman to thank for bringing to light the particular literary act of *telling a story* as paramount to understanding the effect of uncanniness. Gaiman, following Freud and Ernst Jentsch, will have read what amounts to the treatise on storytelling and the uncanny— the real motherlode of The Uncanny: German Romantic artist and writer E.T.A. Hoffman's short story, "The Sandman," published (in German) in 1817.[2] Hoffmann introduces The Uncanny into the lexicon of literary criticism, and into the philosophical consideration of illustration. This single short story, in accentuating the act of storytelling as the starting point of the uncanny effect, indexes a larger Romantic crisis about the referentiality of language itself. Much poetry and philosophy, and literary criticism of the Romantic period (early 19th century) identifies language's propensity to move with its own momentum, regardless of a knowing, intentional subjective voice behind it. The figure of the automaton, circulating literally as a mode of popular entertainment and as a subject of literature and philosophy, runs directly parallel to the philosophical considerations of the autonomy of language at this time. As Hoffmann deftly conveys through narrative structure and content, this anxiety-producing predicament whereby words become untethered from an anchoring source, has everything to do with a crisis in *knowing-- in knowing for certain* whether words

2 E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann/The Sandman," German-English Edition, trans. John Oxenford, Berlin: Michael Holzinger (2015) [1817].

carry authority on their own and can therefore be believed as being real or true.

What I want to explore is the possibility that illustration works with this anxiety-producing predicament in order to earth the language with reassuringly grounding meaning, or, in the case of illustrators working through the Uncanny, in order to theorise the instability of certainty through language. A close reading in the second half of this chapter of E.T.A. Hoffman's narrative content and style of writing will foreground what Hoffmann presented as the human psyche's desperate need for an accompanying image to a story. Hoffmann's narrator's compulsive drive to ground stories with images indicates his descent into madness, a madness seemingly brought on by a gradual deterioration of any recognizable outside referents to "reality."

Many of us have a sense of what uncanniness is from Sigmund Freud's ideas whether we have actually read his essay on the subject or not: we think of houses that feel eerily unfamiliar, and of objects which appear human and are not, but are still, perhaps, animated. We think of dopplegangers and darkness, of dolls with frightening eyes, and we think of eerily repeated patterns that happen by chance. And we think of the strange feeling that comes from which is completely familiar and yet completely unfamiliar at the same time. Freud's seminal essay, "The Uncanny," published in 1919, comprises a nexus of the Uncanny, because it both acknowledges its predecessors in the subject (Hoffmann and Jentsch), but also forms the psychic substrate of subsequent thinkers of the Uncanny, such as Neil Gaiman, Tim Burton, and many literary theorists. Freud's extensive gloss on the word *unheimlich* (translated into English as "uncanny") in the first half of his essay heightens his reader's awareness of the antithetical meanings within the German word *heimlich*, or "homely", a word which eventually reverses itself in its etymological progression into its opposite meaning: *unheimlich:* "Thus Heimlich is the word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich. Unheimlich is in some way or other a sub-species of Heimlich."[3] Thus, the figure of the nurturing home is put forward by Freud as bearing an inherent instability, which gives us a feeling of extreme discomfort.

[3] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," trans. James Strachey, in *Standard Edition*, v. XVII, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis 1955, 226.

Citing Grimm's Dictionary entry from 1877, Freud offers the following: "*from the idea of 'homelike', 'belonging to the house', the further idea is developed of something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret…'*"[4] This theme of the house which conceals something from vision is a recurrent trope throughout many genres of literature, lending itself to storytelling and illustration as exemplified in *The Dark* by Lemony Snicket and illustrated by Jon Klassen, and Neil Gaiman's "Coraline," which will be discussed later in this chapter. We also see this recurring figure of the uncomforting home of Tim Burton's protagonists, who never feel quite "at home" in his or her suburban American house.

Freud's prolific writing career covered case studies of his patients as well as essays on ideas within psychoanalysis, with a relative few essays venturing into theories of aesthetics. "The Uncanny" was one such essay on aesthetics. Freud introduces this essay by explaining that not only would a psycho-analyst rarely address a topic of aesthetics but that discussions of aesthetics outside of psychoanalysis focus on theories of beauty, not theories of what is horrible. Because of the role of repression that he identifies as the psychic mechanism that creates an uncanny feeling, Freud feels justified in working on relatively uncharted territory. He takes on the position of literary theorist in order to do so, discussing E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "The Sandman," written in 1812, and Ernst Jentsch's 1906 essay, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" as his material for critical analysis. These two texts, he explains, are his predecessors for theorising the Uncanny as aesthetic effect. An effect of feeling uncanny is possible in life or in literature, however, literature, says Freud, is "a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life," because "…the storyteller has a *peculiarly* directive power over us; by means of the moods he can put us into, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, to dam it up in one direction and make it flow in another, and he often obtains a great variety of effects from the same material."[5] Freud recognises, then, a materiality and malleability of a story, and the role that the applied mechanics of the storyteller (their "directive power") plays in what Freud will read as the psychic effects of repression and

[4] Freud, citing Grimm's dictionary, 225.

[5] Freud, 249, 251.

castration upon the reader.

In terms of the directive power of the storyteller, Freud was taking his cue from Ernst Jentsch, who also noted the role of the storyteller as someone who deploys mechanical operation, for the purpose of deflecting the reader from being aware of her own uncertainty about whether a character is real or not. At some unexpected point in being told the story, the reader stumbles upon the storytelling frame itself, asking the question: is the storyteller a "real" person, telling us a story from the outside of the story, or is the storyteller a fictional character within the story, constructing a storyteller persona? The multiple frames work by relating to each other, but these relations are not relations which refer back to a stabile point of origin, so they are not helping to inform us. Our uncertainty is enacted through our becoming aware of the storyteller's strategy, of the artfulness of the textual construction, and, of our own feeling of being made an object of the storyteller's operation. Jentsch's observations about the reader's uncertainty about what we might understand as the character's "reality" constitute an operative "psychological artifice" which furthers the uncanny effect:

> In storytelling, one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character. This is done in such a way that the uncertainty does not appear directly at the focal point of his attention, so that he is not given the occasion to investigate and clarify the matter straight away; for the particular emotional effect, as we said, would hereby be quickly dissipated. In his works of fantasy, E.T.A. Hoffmann has repeatedly made use of this psychological artifice with success. The dark feeling of uncertainty, excited by such representation [as an automaton character], as to the psychical nature of the corresponding literary figure is equivalent as a whole to the doubtful tension created by any uncanny situation, but it is made serviceable by the virtuosic manipulation of the author for the

purposes of artistic investigation.[6]

Jentsch is proposing here that Hoffmann's artistic strategy entailed putting the reader into the position of the character within the story who encounters an automaton figure, *and*, into the position of an automaton, i.e., being manipulated by the agile direction of the storyteller. In this sense, both Hoffmann and Jentsch recognise storytelling to be a textual operation, a relay between subject and object on the figurative level of language and textuality.

Freud's reading of "The Sandman" takes a more thematic direction than that of Jentsch, however, Freud, like Jentsch, also approaches the story at the textual level as well. Hoffmann's plot and characters will be elaborated below, but for the moment, I would just like to diagram the figures in "The Sandman" that Freud identifies as being interchangeable on a psychic level:

> The Sand-Man←→Coppelius (the lawyer)
> Nathaniel←Clara→Olympia (the automaton doll)
> Professor Spalanzani <→Coppola the Optician←-→Coppelius←→ father
> Coppola the Optician←→Coppelius the lawyer
> Fear of gouging out of the eyes←→fear of castration

This diagramming of the textual figures helps us to understand two points that Freud makes about how the Uncanny works. First, following one of the many dictionary definitions of *unheimlich* cited at the outset of his essay, that the Uncanny, or *unheimlich*, brings to light that which would, or should, have remained hidden. In psychoanalytic terms, this aspect is known as repression. When something has been expressed after being previously hidden from our consciousness, we experience the odd feeling of feeling familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. But the repressed object or event is only repressed in that it recurs. The recurring figures by way of substitutable characters, for Freud, signify repetitions or recurrences of something repressed. We only know that something is repressed through the repetition of its original happening. As such, "repression" and "the compulsion to repeat", two hallmarks of the general

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6 Ernst Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," trans. Roy Sellars, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2, no. 1 (1997), [1906], 13.

Freudian approach, are interrelated. A feeling of automated repetition is illustrated by Freud's example of a recurrence of the number 62. We may not think twice about having a ship cabin of that number, he explains, but as soon as we notice other figurations of the number 62 happening on the same day, we start to feel that something uncanny is going on, that perhaps a secret message is being communicated to us, and that we may be part of a larger pattern at work, a pattern which is beyond our conscious control.[7] In this sense of it happening through recurrence, uncanniness happens through recurrence, returns, and repetitions. Both Freud and his predecessor Jentsch recognize that in this sense, uncanniness is more possible to achieve as a literary technique, because those repetitions and recurrences constitute what we also think of as literary figures or tropes. This literary assignation is not to say that uncanny events are purely an effect of textual mechanics. Uncanny events also have a correspondence to what is being represented within the content of a story, as we shall see below in readings of *Coraline* and *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*.

Freud disparages his predecessor, Jentsch, for failing to recognize the psychoanalytical dynamic that propels the character Nathaniel's actions in "The Sandman." Freud's analytical reading of Nathaniel's identifications, repressions, and anxieties is convincing. The task has been up to subsequent theorists to carry on from Freud's initial theorisation, opening up the notion of castration to encompass the anxious relation whereby we are cut off from the certainty that language promises to secure.

The sleep-realm of dreams, in which the meaning of words and imagery is more obviously uncertain, is analogously "insecure." When we are sleeping we are both unconscious (and therefore unintentional in terms of the language that we use), *and*, our eyes are closed, so that we cannot know by seeing. For this reason, the folk figure of the Sandman, who visits children at night and helps them sleep by sprinkling dust into their eyes, has gathered around itself uncomfortable feelings associated with uncertainty, insecurity, and vulnerability. The writer Neil Gaiman took this figure as the starting point of his comic book series *The Sandman*, part of the Vertigo imprint of DC Comics, which ran from 1989 to 1996 and featured the main character of Morpheus, or Dream, the god

[7] Freud, 237-238.

of sleep. Dreaming, for Gaiman, following Freud, realizes, in image-form, otherwise unrealized stories. Gaiman's *Sandman* series, like Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, is a story about story telling, describing itself as "a vast hallucinatory landscape housing all the dreams of any and everyone who's ever existed. Regardless of cultures or historical eras…"[8] In his version of *The Sandman*, Gaiman uses dreams as an allegory for the act of storytelling, framing the breakaway narratives across the series as stories being told from one character to another.[9]

Although *Coraline*, Gaiman's novella of 2002, does not thematise storytelling, his characters in this story clearly correspond to Hoffmann's depiction of uncanny characters, particularly that of the "Other Mother", who, along with Coraline's Other Father and assorted creatures, lives in the other, scarier side of the house into which her family has just moved. As in Hoffmann's narrative structure and similar to Gaiman's *Sandman* series, the division line within the narrative frames between "reality" and dream or imagination is blurry, confusing for both the protagonists and for the reader. When we read *Coraline*, we identify with Coraline herself in her lonely explorations in and around her new house. Her parents don't pay much attention to her, so that when she finds herself having crossed through a secret doorway into the attached and supposedly uninhabited house next to her own, which Coraline accesses through a bricked-up passage way that sometimes opens up, we wonder whether she is dreaming or whether the other house, with its Other Mother and Father, could be "real." The antithetical figure of the home, or *Heimlich*, resonates in *Coraline*, configuring the unfamiliarity and uncertainty as to whether the story is real or a dream. Gaiman personifies the ambivalence of the familiarity of the home through the familial figures of Coraline's mother and father, who, like the house into which she has moved, are doubled figures. As she explores the other house which is not her own but which seems like her own, Coraline feels this uncanniness:

She looked around the room. It was so familiar—that was what made it

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[8] http://www.vertigocomics.com/characters/the-sandman, accessed 02/27/2017.

[9] Many thanks to Dino Carobene, who made this observation in his essay "Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*: On Dreams, Characters and Stories," BA Illustration, Falmouth University, 8 May 2015.

so truly strange. Everything was exactly as she remembered: there was all her grandmother's strange-smelling furniture, there was the painting of the bowl of fruit (a bunch of grapes, two plums, a peach and an apple) hanging on the wall, there was the low wooden table with the lion's feet, and the empty fireplace which seemed to suck heat from the room.[10]

Like the unfamiliar familiarity of the *heimlich*, the Other Mother looks and sounds like her mother, but is the strangely perfect mother that Coraline never had, cooking lovely roast dinners, cheerily welcoming her, telling her constantly how much she loves her. The Other Mother's difference from her real mother (besides being such a "perfect" mother) is signified by her large, frightening black-button eyes. The Other Mother, as the story unfolds, steals childrens' eyes and souls, just as she has stolen the Other Father's eyes and replaced them with buttons. Coraline's own eyes are also in danger of being extracted by the evil Other Mother. Gaiman's re-configuration of Hoffmann's Sandman (who also steals childrens' eyes, particularly when they are sleeping) as The Other Mother certainly warrants a more elaborate feminist critique, but for the moment, I would like to point out that Gaiman's choice to signify the violent extraction of the eyes through the figure of the mother does reinforce Freud's model of castration anxiety, because Freud's theory also identifies the mother as an activator of this anxiety.

Feminist readings aside, *Coraline*, in its amalgamation of Freud's and Hoffmann's use of "The Sandman," is a generative text that points to the very performative nature of storytelling itself. Gaiman himself often discusses the act of storytelling as lending itself to further storytelling. In one interview, Gaiman considers,

> Can stories reproduce? Well, yes. Not spontaneously… they tend to need people as vectors. We are the media in which they reproduce; we are their petri dishes… Stories grow, sometimes they shrink. And they reproduce—they inspire other stories. And of course, if they do not

[10] Neil Gaiman, *Coraline* (2002), New York: Harper Collins, 71.

change, stories die.[11]

Further "vectors," to use Gaiman's word, to the story of *Coraline* comprise a succession of illustrators, beginning with Dave McKean, then P. Craig Russell, and then Henry Sellick. Dave McKean was the first illustrator to work with Gaiman on *Coraline*. McKean's carefully chosen moments for pen and ink drawings interspersed throughout the text lend the story a macabre, Gothic tone. In figure 1, McKean's drawing of Coraline's Other Mother, as reproduced in the book, looks as if he's drawn it on a torn envelope. His lines seem to scratch the surface of his paper, mimicking the talon-like fingers of the Other Mother and leading our eye to releases of solid black areas of ink that pull us in to the creepy depth of the story. The envelope on which the image is superimposed is torn at the edge, a reminder of the fear that our eyes, as if buttons, could be torn away. McKean's placement of the Other Mother's arched and taloned forefinger just along the eye socket signifies the terrifying potential of his line to move even just a fraction. This potentiality of sudden movement suspends the reader or viewer within a state of discomforting suspension of what might happen next, creating a feeling of uncertainty. I would like to put forward here the proposition that this suspended movement before possible movement becomes central to the illustrative character of The Uncanny, and, to the characteristics of uncanny illustration. Gaiman narrates this state of suspension of certainty in his depiction of Coraline's hesitation between the two distinctive sides of the house:

> Coraline backed away. She turned and hurried into the drawing room and pulled open the door in the corner. There was no brick wall there now—just darkness, a night-black underground darkness that seemed as if things in it might be moving.
>
> Coraline hesitated. She turned back. Her other mother and her other father were walking toward her, holding hands. They were looking at her with their black button eyes. Or at least she *thought* they were looking at

11 Interview with Neil Gaiman, https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/06/16/neil-gaiman-how-stories-last/, accessed 02/26/2017

her. She couldn't be sure.[12]

Gaiman's writing alternates between describing Coraline as an object moving in space and as someone whose state of mind is unsure and uncertain of whether the Other Mother and Other Father were moving towards her.

In P. Craig Russell's 2008 graphic novel version of *Coraline*, the graphic novel medium is exploited for conveying the subjective interiority of Coraline in its ability to stretch out these hesitant moments of suspended time through close-up drawings of Coraline's facial expressions. The panels allow for the reader to differentiate semiotically between Coraline's facial lines and body language when she is in her real house, and those aspects when she is depicted in the Other world, where the lines of her face and body language as drawn by Russell indicate her anxious and angry feelings, thus conveying a sense of doubt and uncertainty to the reader.[13]

Henry Selick's stop-motion animation of *Coraline* (Laika, 2009) introduces yet another illustrative vector, realizing the story's uncanniness to the fullest. Neil Gaiman was keen on the medium of stop-motion animation because of what Freud would have characterized as its ambivalence between real and artificial, between what is immediately familiar and what is strange and unfamiliar. Gaiman explains, "[T]here is a different nature to reality in stop motion, because it is real, because you could reach out and touch it; but because these are not human, because they're dolls, there is something intrinsically distancing."[14]

Stop-motion animation has often been deployed in conveying the discomforting feelings of uncanniness, as seen in the work of the Brothers Quay and Tim Burton, among others. Taking its cue in this regard from older traditions of object performance such as puppetry and automata, stop-motion animation

[12] Neil Gaiman, *Coraline*, New York: Harper Collins, 2002, 46.

[13] See Frances Barton, "The Uncanny and Storytelling," BA Illustration dissertation, Falmouth University, 2017, 10.

[14] Neil Gaiman on Empire Magazine video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gviEbYj8sZU.

reinforces the importance of movement as being integral to our investigation of Illustration and The Uncanny. Stop-motion's three- dimensional, tactile objects, shot frame-by-frame to convey that object's movement in space, look as if they are moving by themselves, autonomously, but without conscious intention. Stop-motion animation often conveys what Bryony Carter has noted as an indicative hesitation before movement, a suspended moment that leaves the viewer in a state of discomfort and uncertainty.[15] As a genre, stop-motion animation is aligned with automatons, robots, dolls, mannequins, and puppets, because all of these are objects, not subjects, of possible movement, signifying a manipulatability, a potential to move and to be moved. Non-human objects moving outside the metaphysical frameworks of intentionality leave the viewer feeling uncertain and unfamiliar.

The spooky opening sequence of the film *Coraline* presents the figure of the Coraline-doll introducing the film's character Coraline (who is actually a puppet anyway). (see figure 2) In the sequence, the doll is manipulated by a metallic skeletal hand (prefiguring the Other Mother character in the film). This metallic skeletal hand introduces the plot, and the larger uncanny predicament of Coraline's brave fight against being an object controlled and manipulated by an outside, unseen force. This thematic predicament is framed by the technical aspect by which the hands of the animators move Coraline and all the figures about the sets, but are never visible to the audience.[16] The stop-motion medium of animation makes visible the possibility of our own objecthood, that is, the possibility that we might not be able to consciously direct our own movement. We seem to be experiencing a strange meeting of our own subjectivity with our own objectivity, imparting a feeling of psychic disturbance: of "uncanniness."

The illustration of this uncanny existential objecthood is not limited to the medium of stop-motion animation. For example, Edward Gorey's well-known book *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*, published in 1963 and still in publication today, exemplifies his particular unsettling mode of authorial practice, often gets

[15] Many thanks to Bryony Carter, BA Illustration 2017, for her thoughtful work on hesitation and The Uncanny in stop-motion animation.

[16] Many thanks to Isabel Ward, BA Illustration, 2015, for these cogent observations on the multiple frameworks of manipulation put forward in Selick's film of *Coraline*.

characterised as uncanny. This book is structured as a childrens' alphabet book from A to Z, but each letter of the alphabet refers to the first letter of the name of a child who has met a terrible demise. Gorey gives us a disturbing variety of terrifying ways in which each lettered child has died. His illustration, consisting of black ink drawings on white background, is reminiscent of a Victorian Gothic style and tone of voice, lending a morbid feeling to what would might have been presented as a cheerful childrens' learning tool. Key to the reading of *Gashlycrumb Tinies* is the relation between the cover of the book to the inside pages. The cover of the book depicts a macabre skeleton clothed in Victorian mourning garb, holding a black umbrella over 26 children. The children stand within the black shadow cast by this figure of death and his ominous-looking umbrella. Gorey does not show us the skeletal figure again inside the book. But that figure's presence within the book is implied because of its placement on the cover, which introduces the reader to the rhyming explanation of how each successive child met his terrible death. On a very basic level, the antithetical familiar/unfamiliar situation at play in the book would make it uncanny, but there is another, more deeply unsettling aspect to the story which, places *Gashlycrumb* squarely within the Uncanny, and that is the unsettling presentation of a larger, unseen power at work that manipulates the children as if they were mere objects, without an animating free will, to meet their inevitable destiny. The back cover of the book depicts 26 headstones, which visually enforces the childrens' objechood.

The psychologist Ernst Jentsch, whose 1909 essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" introduced for the first time an analysis of the uncanny aesthetic, recognised that a spectator or reader would experience a disturbance of their own "psychical harmony" upon viewing an object about which's inherent animation they were uncertain. For Jentsch, the uncertainty or doubt as to that object's inherent animation acts as an immediately performative signifier of a potentially disunified psyche, in which one's own bodily motion could be autonomous from our intention and consciousness. Thus the experience of watching someone having an epileptic fit, explains Jentsch, creates a similar "affective excitement of the uncanny" within the viewer as does watching objects that appear to move on their own:

It is not unjustly that epilepsy is therefore spoken of as the *morbus sacer*

['sacred disease'], as an illness deriving not from the human world but from foreign and enigmatic spheres, for the epileptic attack of spasms reveals the human body to the viewer – the body that under normal conditions is so meaningful, expedient and unitary, *functioning according to the directions of his consciousnes*s—as an immensely complicated and delicate mechanism." (my emphasis)[17]

What is extraordinarily compelling about Jentsch's explanation, and what explains why he, even more than Freud, is the theorist important within the field of object theatre, as noted by puppetry historian John Bell in his essay on puppetry the Uncanny,[18] is that Jentsch is identifying neither a pedestrian mind-body split, nor a thesis on *life, breath* or *anima* within an object but a thesis about the manipulated body-as-object, in particular, about the uncanny effect of witnessing the body as an object that moves without its own intention or will. To clarify his ideas, Jentsch explains that witnessing an epileptic attack would elicit an uncanny feeing, whereas seeing an attack of hysteria would not, because hysterics "usually retain consciousness," so that "their type of movement again frequently reminds one of hidden psychical processes, in that here the muscular disturbances follow a certain higher ordering principle…"[19] What I want to highlight for the purposes of thinking about uncanniness and illustration is that Jentsch repeatedly identifies *movement*—and not simply *animation*, as the key element in creating an effect of uncanniness. Jentsch does discuss the factor of doubt as to whether a lifeless object is animate or not, but importantly, he characterises this doubt as being related to movement, not life. Jentsch's account of a traveller who sat down next to a tree trunk which, "to the horror of the traveller, … suddenly began to move and showed itself to be a giant snake," exemplifies the uncanny experience because:

The mass that at first seemed completely lifeless suddenly reveals an inherent energy because of its movement. This energy can have a

[17] Jentsch, 14.

[18] John Bell, "Playing with the Eternal Uncanny: The Persistent Life of Lifeless Objects," paper given on 20 October, 2013, Falmouth University, Falmouth, at the *Performing Objects* conference, 17-20 October 2013.

[19] Jentsch, 14.

psychical or a mechanical origin. As long as the doubt as to the nature of the perceived movement lasts, and with it the obscurity of its cause, a feeling of terror persists in the person concerned.[20]

When Jentsch mentions "obscurity of cause," he is opening up a discussion of autonomous movement, which may present itself as "enigmatic." (*ibid*, 8) The figure of the *automaton as a character* in a given story is, as previously noted, a successful "psychological artifice" deployed by E.T.A. Hoffmann in many of his stories.[21] One example of many would be the figure of The Nutcracker, from Hoffmann's 1816 rather scary story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King," concerning a nutcracker, who comes alive at night and introduces the protagonist, Clara, to the mice and dolls which also come to life at night. Not coincidentally, Hoffmann's story of the "Nutcracker" became a ballet, with music composed by Tchaikovsky, staging and materialising the aspect of autonomous movement that I am underlining as being so constitutive to evoking uncanny feelings.

In his discussion of the psychological literary convention of the automaton figure, Jentsch did not mention "The Sandman" specifically, despite that story's prominent "character", Olympia, being a life-sized automaton. We can see, however, how "The Sandman" illustrates Jentsch's proposition that the automaton figure operates on various levels simultaneously. Despite Nathaniel's instability as a narrator, we readers do sympathise, and identify with him, having been privy to his own accounts of the doubts and uncertainties that plagued him from childhood into his short-lived adulthood. We as readers know that Nathaniel has fallen in love with an automaton, and yet we still find ourselves in a position of not knowing what is "real" within the story: we do not know whether the evil advocate Coppelius is really evil, is really an eye-stealing Sandman, or whether Coppelius and the optician Coppola are one and the same person. Are we ourselves like automata, moved by the unseen force of the storyteller? And if that is the case, is the automaton Olympia any more of an automaton that Nathaniel is, or as we the readers are? Hoffmann's storytelling artistry lies within the ways in which he confounds the reader by mirroring the

[20] Jentsch*,* 11.
[21] Jentsch, 11.

internal story content with complex textual manipulation, that is, manipulation on the level of the language itself.

Freud turns his own critical reading on the peremptory presumption that Jentsch's observation about doubt and uncertainty in Hoffmann's work "refers primarily to the story of 'The Sandman.'[22] But Jentsch mentions only Hoffmann's name, not any particular story's title, and nor does Jentsch mention the character Olympia. The specious assumption on Freud's part allows him to then attempt to diminish Jentsch's proposition that the automaton is the primary site of the Uncanny: "…I cannot think—and I hope most readers of the story will agree with me—that the theme of the doll Olympia, who is to all appearances a living being, is by any means the only, or indeed the most important, element that must be held responsible for the quite unparalled atmosphere of uncanniness evoked by the story," writes Freud decisively.[23] Thus Ernst Jentsch's thesis on the psychological experience of the Uncanny was dismissed by Freud.

Freud claimed that Jentsch's emphasis on the figure of Olympia, with its attendant psychical effects of uncertainty and doubt, overtook the more important psychic dynamics of repression, repetition, and castration anxiety. In Freud's opinion, repression and castration anxiety clearly informed Hoffmann's theorization of the Uncanny. [24] Freud's neglect of any consideration whatsoever of an object's *movement* – the closest he gets to this element is his characterization of Olympia as Spalanzani's "strangely silent and motionless daughter"[25] -- reveals a metaphysical blind spot that needs to be identified and unpacked in order to open up new avenues for understanding the relation between illustration and the Uncanny. The most credit Freud will give to Olympia as an agent of the Uncanny is that "Uncertainty whether an object is *living or inanimate* [my emphasis]… [is] admittedly applied to the doll Olympia…"[26] "Jentsch," Freud notes criticizingly, "believes that a particularly

[22] See Freud, "The Uncanny," *Standard Edition*, vol. XVII, 226.

[23] Freud, 227.

[24] Freud, 226.

[25] Freud, 229.

[26] Freud, 230.

favorable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one."[27] Similarly, Freud mentions later in the essay the example of wooden monsters coming to life in the dark would be examples of something in a story that would cause an uncanny feeling.[28]

As I have mentioned above, Freud never considers movement itself. He cites Jentsch's noting of "doubts [as to] whether an apparently animate being is really alive"[29], but never picks up on Jentsch's isolation of movement in his consideration of animation. The difference between animation and movement is subtle. Being animate or animated is based etymologically on the Latin word *anima*, meaning "breath" or "soul"; if something is *animated* it means that it is alive, that it is "endowed with life or the qualities of life."[30] Movement is a quality often attributed to being animated, but it is not rooted within "animation" itself. To approach an object's movement is to look at its mechanics of motion, and it is an approach which is *outside the metaphysical frameworks of breath, life, and spirit.* This approach the Uncanny from the point of view of signification, not from representation. Thus to consider whether an automaton is "animated" or not, as Freud has done, is to impose a metaphysical essentialist philosophical framework that only serves to block what I would like to argue here is the more deconstructive critical framework put forth by Hoffmann and Jentsch. The central role of movement in conveying an uncanny feeling needs to be recovered from the masking effect of Freud's oversight.

One of very few commentators on The Uncanny to identify movement as the key element to the creation of an uncanny reaction is the Japanese mathematician Masahiro Mori. In his article of 1970, "The Uncanny Valley,"[31]

[27] Freud, 233.

[28] Freud, 245.

[29] Freud, 226.

[30] *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield, MA: G & C Merriam and Co.

[31] Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," trans. Karl MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Robotics and Automation,* 19 (2), 2012, [1970], 98-100.

Mori explains that we can mathematically chart our psychological relation to an object using the variable x-axis of human likeness as it relates to the function y-axis, which represents our "affinity" towards that object. According to Mori, our affinity towards an object rises the more the object appears to be like a human (for example, we are drawn to mechanical robots, human-looking robots, and stuffed animals), but our affinity only lasts up to a point, and then, our affinity falls drastically. This dramatic drop occurs when we have a sudden realization that what we are seeing or touching is actually artificial. As indicated on the chart as being below the x-axis, within negative value, we feel below our comfort zone. The intensity of the "Uncanny Valley" is made more apparent in Mori's second chart, to which he adds the function of movement, as indicated by a dotted line overlaying the solid line already in the first chart. (see figure 2)[32] "The presence of movement steepens the slopes of the uncanny valley," Mori explains.[33] Movement amplifies the dip into the uncanny valley, which Mori illustrates with the example of the prosthetic hand, already located in the Valley, which plunges even deeper into the Valley if that prosthetic hand is fitted with electrodes which make it move.[34]

The prosthetic hand's implication, as a figure, is that some anteceding force is "behind" or attached to it, as the cause of its movement. That this moving object also appears to be a hand, or a manipulator of something else, introduces the uncanny effect in its confounding double function as both manipulating subject, and, as a stand-alone object which seems to move on its own. Mori's choice of the prosthetic hand as his illustrative figure of the Uncanny effect coincides with other hand figures in the theorization of the Uncanny as an effect related to movement and automata. Here we can't help but think of Neil McKean's illustration of Coraline's Other Mother's cut-off bony hand, darting quickly, spider-like and articulated, towards Coraline, at several climactic moments of the story.
Henry Selick's stop-motion interpretation of that same hand depicts it as a silver

[32] Interestingly, many articles which have reproduced Mori's graph only reproduce the second graph, but in order to appreciate how important movement is to Mori's thesis, we must look at both the first and the second graph, as Mori intended us to do in his original article.
[33] Mori, 99.
[34] Mori, 99.

metallic instrument endowed with the capacity for moving other instruments. (see figure 3) The invisibility of that moving force renders the metallic hand another object within a chain of moving objects, being moved outside of their "own" intentional control. What I am suggesting here is that "uncanniness" comprises the effect of the scary recognition othat we might be objects being moved by unseen forces.

The emphasis upon *movement* as opposed to *animation* in the theorisation of The Uncanny, exemplified by Jentsch, Mori and many illustrators, puts forward what is the deconstructive, anti-metaphysical literary techniques already deployed by E.T.A. Hoffmann in much of his work, including "The Sandman." As promised in my introduction to this chapter, a close-reading of "The Sandman" here will aim to illustrate first how the complex multiple narrative frameworks enact a feeling of uncertainty in the reader, and second, the role that the eyes and image-ination play in attempting to secure cognitive certainty within an uncertain linguistic scenario. Hoffmann's writing is exemplary of much other Romantic literature which contends with the larger philosophical predicament of the reader's suspension of knowledge as she moves between language as tropic machine, and language as a mode of referentiality and meaning.

E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" published in the collection *Nachstucke* (Night Stories) in 1817, presents us with the first, and foundational, philosophical enquiry into the literary phenomenon of *Unheimlich*. Hoffmann mentions the word *unheimlich* a few times in the story, but it is more than the mention of the word: the story enacts the affect, or conscious subjective aspect, of "uncanniness" within the reader. Hoffmann adeptly directs us from narrator to narrator within the story. The different narrative perspectives chronicle the mental breakdown of the protagonist Nathaniel. Nathaniel has been plagued all his life by the spectre of "The Sandman," a fictional character operating on many levels within the story we are reading. Throughout the story, whether the narrative voice is that of Nathaniel writing to Lothaire, of Clara writing to Nathaniel, or of the unnamed narrator to whom the letters between the three characters have been given (a narrator who, as interpreted in the opera *Tales of Hoffmann*, is Hoffmann himself as a character within the interior story world), a consistent call for the image is invoked by the act of recounting a story. Mid-way through the story, the narrator directly addresses his reader, explaining

how he came to tell Nathaniel's story:

> Now I must confess to you, kind reader, that no one has really asked me for the history of the young Nathaniel, but you know well enough that I belong to the queer race of authors who, if they have anything in their minds such as I have just described, feel as if everyone who goes near them, and the whole world besides, is insistently demanding: 'What is it then—tell it, my dear friend?" Thus I was forcibly compelled to tell you of the momentous life of Nathaniel…. I had to make you equally inclined to accept the uncanny, which is no small matter… So take, gentle reader, the three letters, which friend Lothaire was good enough to give me, as the sketch of the picture which I shall endeavor to color more and more brightly as I proceed with my narrative. Perhaps, like a good portrait-painter, I may succeed in catching the outline in this way, so that you will realize it is a likeness even without knowing the original, and feel as if you had often seen the person with your own corporeal eyes.[35]

Here, the narrator appeals to the reader's "own corporeal eyes" as the saving grace which would allow for the possibility of "knowing" the "original" person (Nathaniel). Thus, it is the visual image that might anchor the story, suggesting that the story is precarious in what it delivers otherwise.

Storytelling, for Hoffmann, provides the fertile ground for his philosophical investigation into language in general. For Hoffmann, storytelling is the category of linguistic communication that is most connected to visualization. The connection is so immediate that the words are almost *causal*. Storytelling is language that conjures the image. Sometimes, this conjuring provokes an overwhelming feeling of anxiety, despite its desire to do the opposite. The narration of "The Sandman" relays Nathaniel's destitute need, from his early childhood up until the tragic end of his life, for an image or picture to give him certainty about the given story's truth. Reading "The Sandman," we share Nathaniel's paranoia and need to know [what is real] for certain, and we can identify with his frequent anxious calling for an image to moderate his doubt.

[35] E.T.A. Hoffman, "Der Sandmann/The Sandman," bilingual edition, trans. John Oxenford, Berlin: Michael Holzinger, 2015 [1817], 16.

Hoffmann positions Nathaniel's anxious letter to his friend Lothaire as the introduction to the entire story, immediately setting the tone of uneasiness that pervades the story to come: "Certainly you must all be uneasy that I have not written for so long."[36] Nathaniel then proceeds to defend the absence of his communication as a delayed symptom of a childhood trauma: the trauma of hearing the bedtime story of "The Sandman" when he was a child. He entreats his friend, Lothaire, and by extension, us, his other readers:

> I must use every endeavor to collect myself, and patiently and quietly must tell you so much of my early youth *as will bring the picture plainly and clearly before your eyes.* As I am about to begin, I fancy that I hear you laughing, and Clara exclaiming, 'Childish stories indeed!'"[37]

Here, Nathaniel attributes to Clara, his beloved and also Lothaire's siter, her typical bourgeois sensibility when he projectively cites her censuring words, "'Childish stories indeed!'" The word "indeed" merits closer reading. In the original German[38], "indeed" is *rechte*, meaning "right". It is a term of emphasis, and the phrase functions here, and throughout the story, as a sort of judgmental, super-egoic counterpoint to Nathaniel's ever-increasing doubt and uncertainty.

Nathaniel's attempt to "collect himself" for the purpose of presenting a clear picture for his reader's eyes sets the agenda, and philosophical predicament, of the story. Images offer, within Hoffmann's complex scenario, a corresponding and sometimes comforting anchor for stories, childish or otherwise. Nathaniel recalls, in his opening letter to Lothaire, the comfort he felt as a child from looking at picture-books while his father told stories on cozy evenings, relayed to the children over his beer and calming pipe smoke. But these warm evenings would invariably be interrupted by the melancholy directive of his mother, who successively ushered the children up to bed with the announcement, "Now,

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[36] Hoffmann, 3.

[37] Hoffmann*,* my emphasis.

[38] »Das sind ja rechte Kindereien!«, which translates, literally as "These are really right childishnesses!"
(Thank you to Marei Schweitzer for her helpful translation.)

children, to bed, to bed; the Sandman's coming, I can see."[39] And so Nathaniel dutifully went to bed, hearing the slow step up the stairs of the Sandman.

Nathaniel tells his reader (Lothaire, and us) that he became obsessed with knowing what the Sandman looked like, ignoring his mother's assurance that The Sandman was just an expression, a way to make children close their eyes and go to sleep for fear of getting sand sprinkled into their eyes. Unsatisfied by his mother's explanation, Nathaniel asked his sister's nurse what sort of man the Sandman really was. The nurse's story stayed with Nathaniel throughout his life, and formed the core of much Uncanny literature to come:

> Eh, Natty,… don't you know that yet? He is a wicked man, who comes to children when they won't go to bed, and throws a handful of sand into their eyes, so that they start out bleeding from their heads. He puts their eyes in a bag, and carries them to the crescent moon to feed his own children, who sit in the next up there. They have crooked beaks like owls so that they can pick up the eyes of naughty human children.[40]

The old woman's story conjured up a "frightful picture" which "impressed on [Nathaniel's] mind." The Sandman was a "spectre" (a word which comes from the Latin *specere*, to look or look at), an "image… [which] did not become any more faint."[41] The boy's obsession took the form of compulsive image-making: "I was always drawing [The Sandman] with chalk or charcoal on the tables, cupboards and walls."[42] Soon, Nathaniel's wild turns of the imagination became realized: Coppelius, the repulsive advocate whose evening visits caused his parents to feel so solemn, became one and the same "spectral monster" as the fictional Sandman. Nathaniel's lengthy detailed description of every aspect of Coppelius provided his reader with a vivid illustration, which was able to be conveyed upon the boy's having peeped through a curtain.

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[39] Hoffmann, 4.

[40] Hoffmann, 4-5.

[41] Hoffmann, 7.

[42] Hoffmann, 5.

It was Nathaniel's act of "peeping" that instigated the central trauma of "The Sandman": he describes his father and Coppelius, huddled over a fireplace, with various sorts of utensils all around. He then saw Coppelius use hot tongs to extract glowing objects out of the smoke which he then hammered. Nathaniel anxiously recalls: "It seemed to me, as if I saw human faces around without any eyes—but with deep holes instead." 'Eyes here, eyes!' said Coppelius in a dark roaring voice. Overcome by the wildest terror, I shrieked out, and fell from my hiding place…" Coppelius' response to discovering Nathaniel's peeping elicited the following response: "'Now we have eyes enough—a pretty pair of child's eyes' And then, taking some red-hot grains out of the flames with his bare hands, he was about to sprinkle them in my eyes." (*ibid*, 8) This central trauma of the story forms the narrative core, but it also gives us the primary clue as to the ambivalence that informs and structures "uncanniness" in Hoffmann's critical thinking. While we tend to use our eyes to secure knowledge through the reassurance of the image, these eyes are also the sites of trauma, literally, in their potential extraction. Furthermore, even when eyes remain intact, an image before us is also anxiety-producing in that it may very well not produce the security of certainty.

The act of telling a story thus carries with it a *highly ambivalent* desire for seeing an accompanying image: we want to supplement the story with what we see with "our own corporeal eyes", but we are at risk of them being viciously extracted, particularly if we fall asleep or if we "peep". From that traumatic point onwards, Nathaniel writes, "tormented by restlessness and an inward anguish perfectly indescribable, I could not close my eyes. The hateful, abominable Coppelius stood before me with fiery eyes, and laughed at me maliciously. It was in vain that I endeavored to get rid of his image."[43] Once beheld in "reality," the Sandman's image that Nathaniel had longed to see in such a desperate way, became an unbearable spectre, haunting his imagination, indelibly ingrained. Reading "The Sandman," we share Nathaniel's paranoia. The Sandman, by being interchangeable semiotically with Coppelius and later with the figure of the optician Coppola, makes the literary figment of the evil Sandman equally as "real" as those characters, who, because they exist outside the frame of the nurse's fictional story of The Sandman, signify to the reader

[43] Hoffmann, 10.

that they might be "real."

So, Nathaniel cannot close his eyes for fear of falling asleep, because doing so would make his eyes vulnerable to being extracted. In the stop-motion animation *Coraline*, the opening sequence, discussed above, illustrates the vulnerability of the protagonist, Coraline, by depicting a ragdoll which is progressively taken apart, stitch by stitch, by a pair of disembodied metallic bony hands. The doll's button eyes are unstitched too. The doll is then placed on its back, surrounded by dissection tools. We watch the spider-like hands choosing a new pair of buttons from a drawer of hundreds of pairs of buttons, then sewing them (the needle poking through the button holes creating quite a creepy effect) onto the doll. Henry Selick's animation builds upon the figure of the button eyes from Gaiman's novella. Gaiman deploys the button eyes as an indicator of how central eyes and acts of seeing are to a literature of The Uncanny.[44] Gaiman's, and then Sellick's, strangely unnerving use of button eyes on the characters who reside within the other half of Coraline's new house are direct descendants of the eyes stolen by Hoffmann's original figure of The Sandman/Coppelius/Coppola.

As an introduction to Coppola the travelling optician,the important character who is introduced later in the original Sandman story, I would like to return very briefly to Freud's essay on The Uncanny, which includes the following footnote: "Frau Dr. Rank has pointed out the association of the name with '*coppella'*=crucible, connecting it with the chemical operations that cause [Nathaniel's] father's death; and also with '*coppo'*+ eye-socket."[45] In the second half of Hoffmann's story, which shifts from epistolary format to first-person narration, we learn of what happens once Nathaniel is a young adult,

[44] The examples of uncanny illustration which depict strange eyes, or blocked eyes, or empty eyes, abound: the post-production addition of real human eyes into the puppets of the stop motion film *Madame Tutli- Putli* (National Film Board of Canada, 2007); the vacant white eyes of the puppets in the Brothers' Quay's *Street of Crocodiles* (1986); the deep dark eye sockets of Morpheus in Gaiman's serial graphic novel *The Sandman*; the figure of Mr. Barron, the evil Shapeshifter or "Wight" (named for his milky white eyes), played by Samuel L. Jackson in Tim Burton's film *Miss Peregrin's Home for Peculiar Children* (2016), whose white eyes signify his character's desperate need to steal childrens' eyes… the list could go on.

[45] Freud, "The Uncanny," *SE*, footnote 1, 230.

away studying at university. From his apartment, Nathaniel can see the home of his professor, Spalanzani, across the way, whose strange, stiff, but beautiful daughter always sits at the window. The story of the Sandman and the horrible figure of Coppelius, who may or may not have been responsible for Nathaniel's father's death, happened long ago in Nathaniel's life, but it now returns in the figure of a man who reminds him of Coppelius/the Sandman: the optician Coppola. As he is writing to his beloved Clara, Nathaniel hears a knock on his door. A man pushes his way into his room, despite Nathaniel saying he did not want to buy a barometer. The man replied: "I have besides pretty eyes too-pretty eyes!" to which Nathaniel cried in horror: "Madman! How can you have eyes? Eyes?"[46] The salesman then produced many pairs of spectacles from his coat pocket, which eventually covered an entire table, reawakening Nathaniel's traumatic childhood encounter with The Sandman/Coppelius:

> A thousand eyes glanced, and quivered convulsively and stared at Nathaniel; yet he could not look away from the table, where Coppola kept still laying down still more and more spectacles, while flaming glances were intermingled more and more wildly, and shot their blood- red rays into Nathaniel's breast.[47]

After coming around from this momentary relapse, Nathaniel decides to purchase a tiny pocket telescope. As the narrator tells us, "Never in his life had [Nathaniel] met a glass which brought objects so sharply, plainly and clearly before his eyes. *Involuntarily* [my emphasis; *Unwillkürlich* in the original German] he looked into Spalanzani's room; Olympia was sitting as usual before the little table…"[48] As soon as he tries out Coppola's telescope, Nathaniel forgets his fiancée Clara and becomes mesmerized and obsessed with Olympia. When Professor Spalanzani holds a grand party introducing his invention/"daughter" Olympia, Nathaniel pledges his unequivocal love for her and is unable to see that she is, in fact, an automaton, despite his friends observing that she is rather strangely mechanical and stiff. His friend Sigismund tries to explain his reservations to Nathaniel about Olympia:

[46] Hoffmann, 23.

[47] Hoffmann, 23.

[48] Hoffmann, 24.

To us—pray do not take ill, brother, she appears singularly stiff and soulless… She might pass for beautiful if her glance were not so utterly without a ray of life—without the power of seeing. Her pace is strangely measured, every movement seems to depend on some wound-up clockwork… We find your Olympia quite uncanny, and prefer to have nothing to do with her."[49]

Nathaniel's obsession with Olympia is, of course, ironically, a blind obsession; he cannot see clearly what his friends can see about Olympia, namely, that she is an automaton. As the narration tells us, Nathaniel takes out his telescope at the party in order to have a clearer vision of his beloved Olympia. In many stagings of the opera version of "The Sandman," Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*, Nathaniel is shown wearing dark round glasses at Spalanzani's party. From the French libretto of the opera we can follow Nathaniel's words about his love for Olympia; he "knows" that he loves her: "*Je connais, Je connais"*[50] Here the irony of *connaissance* becomes clear, and resonates with the English etymology of *uncanny,* best accessed as Freud did in the German version, through the positive, yet ambivalent term, *canny*: "being cautious and shrewd; fortunate, lucky; free from unnatural powers."[51] Nathaniel's knowing what he knows comes from his acquired "eyes," which, despite being a tool for clarification, have actually rendered his vision completely unreliable. Not only is Nathaniel's knowledge not helped by the lens he has bought from Coppola, but he has been duped into the belief that better vision would cure uncanniness of the automaton itself.

We are given a clue to Nathaniel's misgivings about his own naïve credulity: "Ah, thought Nathaniel, [Coppola] is laughing at me because, no doubt, I have paid him too much for this little glass."[52] One of Hoffmann's and Freud's most astute readers, the theorist Samuel Weber, notes the significance of this

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[49] Hoffmann, 29. Here, I have taken the liberty to diverge slightly from the translation at hand to include the English word "uncanny" which had been mistranslated here from the original German word "*unheimlich*" to mean "unpleasant", which of course erases my central point!

[50] Offenbach, *Tales of Hoffmann*, Act 1, 1881.

[51] Merriam-Webster New Collegiate Dictionary.

[52] Hoffmann, 24.

moment of self-doubt in Nathaniel.53 Thinking that he heard Coppola laughing at him, Nathaniel's paranoia set in, emanating from the anxiety that something, something which was to help him see more, was actually, on some level, deleterious, taking away "too much." Nathaniel has invested in seeing, and in seeing better, only to find out that Olympia is an automaton: in the dramatic scene of the horrific return of the initial traumatic event of the Sandman's visit, Nathaniel sees his beloved Olympia's eyes fall out of their sockets as Professor Spalanzani and Coppola fight over her body, breaking it to pieces. Nathaniel's fantasy similarly shatters to pieces, and the irony of his vision actually being impaired by the special lens which he purchased is not lost on the reader, nor on any of the characters within the scene. Hoffmann is presenting the risk of investing too much in vision itself as a framework for knowing, and at this climactic point of the story, the reader is also implicated in the result of investing too heavily in the need for the supplement by the image.

The need for the supplement of the image seems to persist throughout Hoffmann's narrative as an invocation for a base-line of reality which would act as a reference point of certainty within doubt. The psychiatrist Adam Bresnick reads the intellectual uncertainty of the reader of "The Sandman" as a function of Hoffmann's narrative techniques, which "inveigle the reader" into identifying with Nathaniel: "… at stake is not merely uncertainty about a given plot, but a radical doubt about who is reading and what—or whom--- is being read, as the reader fantasmatically projects himself into the tale, dissolving the frame that would insure his ontological separation from the art-work."54 In this radical reading scenario, it is no wonder that we are all scrambling for certainty, hoping that an image might do something that language does not.

Hoffmann's focus on the eyes, and on the eye sockets (*coppo*), what Samuel Weber remarked upon as *ocular anxiety*,55 presages Freud's castration anxiety. Weber's term does come from having read Freud's essay on The Uncanny:

53 Samuel Weber, "The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment," *MLN*, Vol. 88, No. 6, Comparative Literature (December 1973). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1117.

54 Adam Bresnick, "Prosopoetic Compulsion: Reading the Uncanny in Freud and Hoffmann," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 71:2, 1996, 1114, 118.

55 Weber, 1113.

ocular anxiety comes from the jarring revelation of "non-perception," that is, when the child sees his mother naked for the first time and is shocked into feeling castrated because he sees that she does not have a phallus. Weber elaborates:

> … the eyes… play a decisive role in the peculiar non-discovery of castration. Not merely do the eyes present the subject with the shocking "evidence " of a negative perception--the absence of the maternal phallus--but they also have to bear the brunt of the new state of affairs, which confronts the subject with the fact that it will never again be able to believe its eyes, since what they have seen is neither simply visible nor wholly invisible… what is involved here is restructuring of experience, including the relation of perception, desire and consciousness, in which the narcissistic categories identity and presence are riven by a difference they can no long subdue or command.[56]

Weber's psychoanalytic explication of "The Sandman" elucidates how Hoffmann recognized, before Freud spelled it out as castration anxiety, the suspensive effect of the evidence of negative perception upon the psychic unity of the Subject. On some unconscious level, Nathaniel seems to be aware that his own investment in the security of vision is always going to be improvident.

Nathaniel's compulsive need for images as narrated throughout "The Sandman" can be read as the symptom of a larger crisis which comes through in much German Romantic literature, and investigated further by a cluster of literary theorists reading Romantic literature,[57] which is a crisis about our relation to language itself, namely, that cognition, so central to Enlightenment thinking about the way in which we use literature to transmit our true, inner thoughts, actually relies upon a fictional, artificial aspect of language, namely, figurality. Therefore, a pure transmission of Enlightenment ideals of knowledge, certainty, and cognition within the self are always going to be riven by the mechanical aspects of language, bringing forward an acknowledgement of language as a

[56] Weber, 1113.

[57] This cluster would include, primarily, Paul De Man, but also Cynthia Chase, Neil Herz, Samuel Weber, and many others, including the psychiatrist Adam Bresnick.

kind of exterior, objective material to be manipulated. Uncannily, this manipulation of language into a tropic system of literary figures intervenes with the subjective realm of intention, in which the function of language is to be a transmitter of thought and content.

To bring this abstract point back to "The Sandman": storytelling, for Hoffmann, is the linguistic modality which best distills the double functioning of language. First, language describes or conveys the content of a story which may or may not have happened. This function of language/storytelling presumes a referent and/or a subjective voice behind the words from which the language comes forth. In this metaphysical understanding of language, language is secondary to the referent, which is the anchoring "real" event or voice behind language. On the other hand, the multiple narrative frames Hoffmann deploys unsteady the reader's grounding in any single point of reference. We find ourselves not knowing what is real, what is madness, what is a dream, what is storytelling, just like the characters of Nathaniel, and Coraline after him. We are, like these characters, manipulated into uncertainty by the storyteller "outside" the story. Adam Bresnick clarifies the way in which the reader "acquiesces" to Hoffmann's manipulations through the "porousness" of the narrative frames:

> Hoffmann's tale will performatively demonstrate the porousness of the frame that ostensibly separates the reader from the tale being read, just as it reveals the essential continuity of the affect driving the responses of poor, crazed Nathanael, and his romantic surrogate, the reader. In [Neil] Hertz's excellent formulation, '[A]s a result of Hoffmann's manipulations a reader is made to feel, confusedly, that Nathanael's life, his writings, the narrator's story-telling, Hoffmann's writing and the reader's own fascinated acquiescence in it, are all impelled by the same energy, and impelled precisely to represent that energy...'[58]

Hoffmann's maneuvering of narrative frames enunciates his perspective that language itself is not an emanation of subjective consciousness the purpose of

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[58] Adam Bresnick, "Prosopoetic Compulsion: Reading the Uncanny in Freud and Hoffmann," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 71:2, 1996, 122, citing Neil Hertz, "Freud and the Sandman,"*The End of the Line*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 21.

which is to transmit meaning, but rather, a complex material object that moves and can be moved in a way autonomous of life or intention within or behind it. This view of language as automaton, moving by its own mechanics, characterizes the predicament or crisis of language that Hoffmann recognizes. Hoffmann is theorising the psychological conflict which arises in the uncanny encounter between storytelling as textual performance, and storytelling as conveyer of content and by extension, of cognition.

Cynthia Chase's reading of another German Romantic writer, Heinrich von Kleist, shows that Hoffmann's philosophical negotiation of language came as part of a larger context of early deconstructors of Enlightenment values exploring questions of language and referentiality. Chase notes that Kleist writes stories about the telling of stories, in which "…stories or facts are recounted, and the listeners' responses form part of a larger narrative… [They are] narratives about the effects of narration, and … concern the status of texts."[59] This emphasis on the effects and status of the narration point to a concern with the performative and also figurative aspects of the text in addition to the story's content. In her essay "Mechanical Doll, Exploding Machine: Kleist's Models of Narrative," expanding upon the theories of Paul De Man, Chase analyses the encounter between figurality and referentiality in Kleist's essay "On the Marionette Theater" (1810):

> [In Kleist's story about the marionette theater] Every figure is ultimately bound by resemblance to what it represents: essentially a metaphor, each rests upon a substantial connection with a referential basis. On the other hand, it is assumed that the distinctiveness and the power of the referents derive from its very nonconnection from a ground of referents separate from it. The essential dimension of the tropological model of the text is its figurality. The essential charm of the system is its effective denial of the pertinency of facts. Thus Kleist's allegorical model representing language as at once totally unhinged from the reality of reference, and tied in with a referential dimension as ineluctable as the law of gravity.[60]

[59] Cynthia Chase, *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, 145.

[60] Chase, Cynthia, 145.

Like the marionettes observed by Kleist, our use of language moves between the "ineluctable" force of gravity—that is, the human need for referentiality, certainty and knowing, and the perhaps inevitable untethering of language as its own moving object, with its own mechanical direction and irrepressible tendency towards figuration. Chase's readings of Kleist's "allegories of the force of language" contextualize what I have been proposing as the uncanniness that comes from the encounter between language offering the security of meaning because of a certain relation to its referent, and language as moving, and moveable, object. In the former case, language is descriptive; in the latter, language is performative and non-referential. The theorist Paul De Man's extensive reading of Romantic allegories of reading which Chase is expanding upon is characterized further by another De Manian theorist, Neil Hertz, as identifying a "pathos of uncertain agency" which comes out of Romantic literature's dwelling on the difference between language as meaning and language as performance.[61] What I want to suggest is that The Uncanny is the name or mark for the impact of that "pathos of uncertain agency." This impact is a psychological impact based upon the workings of language. Adam Bresnick describes the workings of language in "The Sandman," citing the philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe:

> …it is this disturbance-- or perhaps more accurately, this revelation—of the everyday function of language, more than any single thematic element we might locate at the level of the plot, that provides the most salient occasion of the uncanny in Hoffmann's 'Sandman.' As Philipppe Lacoue-Labarthe has suggested, 'It follows that the *Unheimliche* is essentially a matter of language, or that language is the site of the *Unheimliche*… it is language alone which harbors the *Unheimliche* as a possibility.' Indeed, it is precisely by virtue of entrusting himself to the sly workings of Hoffmann's language that the reader of 'The Sandman' will be seduced into the workings of the uncanny.[62]

[61] Chase, Cynthia, 145.

[61] Hertz, Neil, "Lurid Figures," in *Reading De Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters & Wlad Godzich, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1989), 100.

[62] Bresnick,120, citing Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Catastrophe: A Reading of Paul Celan's 'The

"The Uncanny" names the predicament in which we, the reader, find ourselves when language is recognized as not only a continuity of our own or others' animated subjectivity but as an object in and of itself, which operates and performs outside of our conscious intention. Like the automaton, which, at the time during which Hoffmann wrote his uncanny stories, was circulating as a figure of fascination and discomfort, language moves between representing something else ("real" or otherwise), and operating as if it were a manipulatable machine that can move on its own. This ambivalence that comprises language confronts the reader with the suspension of certainty, and of knowledge.

That language can move and be moved as if it were an object disconnected from intention and understanding throws us into a crisis, and this crisis extends into the concept of illustration. In "The Sandman," we are deprived of a stable narrative keel that ensures our knowledge and certainty about what and who are "real" in the story. Storytelling is put forth as the allegorical form for the proposition that language itself is not steadying. However, as Hoffmann shows us in the complex characterisation of Nathaniel, neither is the supplement of the visual image any more steadying. Both good storytelling and good illustration rely upon tropes and figuration as their fundamental mode of representing something, but seemingly, it is figuration, in the sense that it is mechanical, which introduces the ambivalence and the strange relation to language. Freud understood this drive towards figuration as a compulsion to repeat, to recognize similar figures recurring within a given text. The strange, "uncanny" repetition was such because figures happened outside of our conscious control, as if we were objects of a larger, unseen power. Jentsch had already, before Freud, recognized that movement, not simply animation, of objects might be the source of uncertainty and doubt because movement does not carry the metaphysical intention of animating spirit. Historically and philosophically, illustration and The Uncanny are interwoven in complex ways: illustration traditionally gives image to an anchoring text, clarifying and informing it; but it can just as easily not do so, frustrating what we think we can know about a given story. Many illustrators of stories have chosen to grapple with uncanniness, I believe, because the objects of illustration (houses, moving

Meridian," *Oxford Literary Review*, 15 (1993), 12.

objects, faces, eyes, etc) make for good story content. But these illustrators are also intrigued by the precariousness of what an image can tell us for certain, enjoying the liabilities of the illustrative relation itself much in the same way that E.T.A. Hoffmann seemed to relish the inveigling of his attentive, but uncertain, reader.

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Table of Illustrations

Figure 1: "The Other Mother," Dave McKean for *Coraline*, 2002. (source: Dave McKean).

Figure 2: still shot from the opening sequence of Henry Selick's film *Coraline*, 2009. (source: LAIKA)

Figure 3: graphs of The Uncanny Valley, from Mori, Masahiro . "The Uncanny Valley," translated by Karl MacDorman and Norri Kageki. *IEEE Robotics and Automation,* 19 (2), 2012, [1970], 98-100.