

THE MODERN UNCANNY AND CHRISTINA STEAD'S 'THE MARIONETTIST'

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Little critical attention has been paid to Christina Stead's first published work, *The Salzburg Tales*, which appeared in 1934. Those critics who have addressed the book tend to do so fleetingly. It is usually considered a failed experiment or a false start to Stead's writing. Michael Ackland's 2003 article on *The Salzburg Tales* is only the second to address the book since M. Barnard Eldershaw's 1938 essay, 'Christina Stead.' Ackland offers a reappraisal of *The Salzburg Tales*, and suggests several new lines of interpretation. In doing this, he focuses on 'The Marionettist,' the first story in a collection of over thirty loosely connected short stories. In the following article I want to explore further one of the points Ackland makes about 'The Marionettist.' While tracing Stead's debt to the German Romantic writer, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and in particular his story, 'The Sandman,' Ackland notes how the figure of Coppelius, so uncanny in 'The Sandman,' becomes completely free of any uncanny aspect when it reappears in Stead's 'The Marionettist' as a marionette. The point is, if I read Ackland correctly, that what induced uncanny effects in Hoffmann's day ('The Sandman' was first published in 1817) is no longer felt as uncanny, since what a reader is prepared to credit has now changed: a reader of the 1930s, or a contemporary reader, would no longer be as likely to credit the supernatural, with which the Coppelius figure is associated. As Ackland writes, the Coppelius marionette in Stead's story 'not only serves as tacit recognition of Hoffmann's influential legacy, but also marks the distance travelled beyond it' (62). This is because, between Hoffmann and Stead's day, 'intellectually there had been a massive shift. Devilish forces, witches and fairies still people the popular imagination in the Romantic's [Hoffmann's] time. . . . By the 1930s, the former theatre of inherited deities was resonately hollow' (63). Uncanny effects can no longer be elicited, therefore, from a supernatural, changeling figure such as Coppelius. In general, 'The Marionettist' seems devoid of uncanny effects for Ackland.

This is the point I wish to explore, because I do feel uncanny effects while reading 'The Marionettist,' and some of them are linked to the figure of the Coppelius marionette that so briefly surfaces in Stead's story. Other uncanny effects in 'The Marionettist' are not linked with the Coppelius marionette, and this also forms part of my argument. This paper, then, explores uncanny effects in 'The Marionettist.' What is the source of these effects, how are they characterized, and how and why are they felt as uncanny? Ackland's evoking of the relationship between the historical and the uncanny also invites further investigation. This is a very large question, but in short I argue that the uncanny is not confined to modernity. My reading of 'The Marionettist' aims to provide an appropriate example for some suggestions regarding this much broader point.

I want to return briefly to Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay, 'The Uncanny.' Later writers often make assumptions based on this work, or about this work, and my argument questions some of these assumptions. One common assumption is that Freud's theory of the uncanny is

homogenous. However, Freud identifies at least three classes of uncanny in his essay, each with different characteristics. Freud also gives four different definitions of the uncanny. One is borrowed from the German philosopher, Schelling, who is cited by Freud as stating 'everything is *unheimlich* [unhomely, uncanny] that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' ('The Uncanny,' *Art* 345). Schelling's definition is often given as Freud's, or conflated with one of Freud's. Freud's most general original definition of the uncanny is this: 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (340). Important to my argument is that Freud divides this old but long familiar material into two classes—the repressed, and the surmounted. The repressed is constituted of drives which a subject cannot reconcile with the demands of the exterior world, and so buries from consciousness. When the repressed material is returned to consciousness, it can be felt as uncanny—something once familiar that has now grown strange to the subject. This is the class of the uncanny labelled by Freud as the repressed uncanny.

A second class of uncanny effects, the surmounted uncanny, is associated with a different psychic process. In 'The Uncanny,' the surmounted refers to ways of viewing the world which have become discredited and abandoned. The surmounted is outdated 'modes of thought,' to use Freud's phrase (370). For many contemporary people in the west, this includes the abandoning of crediting the existence of the supernatural. But when this mode of thought is shaken, and wavers, if only momentarily, and the subject has to consider re-embracing, or re-adopting, these outmoded ways of viewing the world, this return can be felt as uncanny too. Seeing what seems to be a ghost would have this effect on many people. So, according to Freud, both repressed psychic content and surmounted psychic content can be felt as uncanny when they return—but in the main the two psychic processes are distinct, and are elicited by different external content. Most of the third part of Freud's essay is concerned with this distinction between the repressed and the surmounted (the distinction only seems to come into focus for Freud in this last part of his essay). Freud identifies a potential third class of uncanny effects relating to the death drive, but he leaves this line of enquiry undeveloped in the essay. I explore the death drive further below.

Freud reads E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman' as an example of how uncanny effects are elicited in literature—but only from the repressed uncanny. For Freud, the character Coppélius, or the sandman, is a figuring of the return of the repressed, in this case the return of repressed fears of castration in the story's protagonist, Nathaniel. In Hoffmann's story, Coppélius, an associate of Nathaniel's father, terrifies the child Nathaniel by threatening to tear out his eyes. Later in the story, Coppélius returns to the adult Nathaniel in a different form, as an optician named Coppola. In this guise he becomes indirectly responsible for Nathaniel losing his sanity, falling in love with the automaton, Olympia, ruining his relationship with his fiancé, and eventually committing suicide. Coppélius's supernatural character, and the automaton Olympia, are not important for Freud as sources of uncanny effects in 'The Sandman.' He does not consider the former, and downplays the latter. He stresses only the repressed uncanny in the form of the castration complex. The surmounted uncanny—which would account for any uncanny quality being attached to the supernatural character of Coppélius and the automaton Olympia—is absent from his reading of 'The Sandman.'

In Stead's 'The Marionettist,' the figure of Coppélius appears only fleetingly, as a half-made marionette glimpsed on a table in an attic. It plays no active part in the action of the story. At first it seems only a gesture to Hoffmann, a kind of literary Masonic handshake. There seems no obvious need for the Coppélius marionette, other than to alert the reader to some debt Stead owes to Hoffmann. I suggest this debt is, in part, the knowledge of how to craft a narrative so that it elicits uncanny effects. I will discuss the sources of the uncanny in 'The Marionettist' in terms of the three classes of the uncanny Freud identifies in his essay: the repressed, the surmounted, and the death drive. (However I am not suggesting the uncanny is limited to these three classes.)

But what characterizes an uncanny effect? I hope to make this clearer through my reading of Stead's story, and only note here that an uncanny effect is analogous to a feeling in the reader of disquiet and unease at having come across something strange that is also somehow familiar. The effect involves both puzzlement and recognition, and also some uncertainty and apprehension, even fear. The reading effect can strike or startle the reader (through imagery, or a turn of phrase, for example), or it can emerge slowly over the reading process as a kind of bruise emanating from the narrative as a whole. This bruising may not be felt until after the reading is complete, or even only after a second reading (I have borrowed my conception of these effects from Roland Barthes's notion of the *punctum* in *Camera Lucida*). 'The Marionettist' contains both reading effects, although the latter is perhaps the strongest. The narrative's surface is mostly serene, even banal, and some critics have commented, or complained, that it is an ordinary seeming story. It becomes less ordinary with each reading, slowly releasing a strangeness that grows long after other narratives in *The Salzburg Tales* fade from mind.

'The Marionettist' begins and ends with descriptions of dreams by the mother of the protagonist, James. In between the mother's dreams is the story of James's life from the time he leaves his childhood home, until the time he returns to it, and his elderly mother, as an aging man. As a young man, James assures his mother he will never leave home as his two elder brothers, Peter and Cornelius (in whose name is a first, sidelong reference to Coppélius), have done as ten- and thirteen-year-olds. James does eventually leave home to go to art school, where he meets the fellow student, Anna. They marry and soon have a young family to support. James finds he cannot earn a living as a sculptor, his chosen field. However, he does discover a knack for making marionettes. He begins a marionette theatre with his wife. As their daughters grow older, they too help run the marionette theatre. Then, abruptly, and seemingly without motive, James leaves his family in his thirty-eighth year. He is absent for fifteen years, during which time he sends his wife and daughters one postcard. The family struggle on with the marionette theatre, until James returns to them just as abruptly as he had left. He assumes they will happily take him back after his long absence, and takes offence when they do not welcome him back unreservedly. He soon leaves them again to live with his aged mother. 'The Marionettist' is thus circular in plot, theme, and form.

This brief synopsis is enough to locate the points of departure of my argument about uncanny effects emerging from different sources in the narrative. As mentioned, I arrange these effects to correspond with the three classes of the uncanny identified by Freud. In brief, James's return to his elderly mother at the end of the story figures a movement toward quiescence and

erasure, a longing for rest and oblivion, which I read in terms of the death drive. This manifestation of the death drive is felt as uncanny, a revealing of death in life. James's sudden departure from his family in his thirty-eighth year I read as a return of repressed sexual and emotional impulses: uncanny effects to do with the return of the repressed emerge from this. And James's mechanistically repeating the patterns of his elder brothers' behaviour of leaving home without warning (which he does three times in the narrative) I view in terms of the surmounted uncanny: James lacks a fully articulated character in any conventional sense, and there is something of the automaton about him. This is indicated by his repetitive behaviour, an apparent lack of will, and a generic similarity to his brothers. Ackland describes this when he writes 'James himself appears a hapless puppet, lacking . . . self-control' (60). Ackland also notes that in Stead's story, as in Hoffmann's writing, there is a 'sense of individuals as puppets in the hands of an incomprehensible fate' (59).

This puppet-like, or automaton-like, aspect of James is indicated in this key passage from early in 'The Marionettist,' which I cite at some length to give a feeling for the style of the narrative, and because it raises many of the issues I pursue further. As a young father, James tells bedtime stories to his small daughters, using as props the marionettes he makes:

[James] came in from his attic workshop at night, when the children were in bed, bringing in some new puppet, to tell them a new chapter in an endless story that he made up as he went along, one which sprang naturally out of the events of their daily life, with incidents he read in the newspapers, and memories of his childhood pieced in. He could imitate marvelously the rain on the roofs of villages, and the rain on the railway station at Vienna, with the chatter of the travellers underneath: if they closed their eyes, he could make them hear the wind rising in a valley, a motor-horn approaching around a winding road and scattering a barn-yard; a shepherd yodelling on the mountains with the echoes catching this song. Then he would act for them, with his wooden dolls, 'Faust,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Cyrano de Bergerac,' fantastic pieces, a 'Hexentanz,' 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice,' and many other ancient themes. He lost himself in his performances, keeping his little daughters up late at night, till their flushed cheeks were turned to the pillow and their eyes suddenly closed. He often interrupted himself in a scene to find himself alone awake. (58-59)

This passage suggests that James is possessed by narrative ('he lost himself'). Something other is present in James's narration that is bigger than James. It erases him, or rather, transforms him into a character larger than his everyday self. The reader thinks: James could act that way, storytellers do get carried away like that. In thinking this, the reader is close to admitting that people can become the channel of something outside of themselves when they narrate. But assuming the reader no longer, under everyday circumstances, believes in such things, they are then being invited to reanimate or re-embrace discarded beliefs. This implicit invitation is extended by the other instances of James's mechanistic behaviour, such as his individual experience of everyday Vienna being repackaged into generic, ancient story forms, as if his imagination must operate within a series of moulds already shaped by ancient storytellers. Again, a conventional sense of individual integrity is undermined. If the reader does entertain again discarded 'modes of thought,' and begins to perceive James more as a

reproducible type without singularity or will, then an old and abandoned worldview has returned in them, and James becomes uncanny.

James's state of mind when narrating is depicted as something akin to rapture or trance. This is reminiscent of the ancient portrayal of the storyteller as being filled with divine inspiration as expressed in Homer, Hesiod, and in the passage in Plato's *Ion* about the power of poetry emanating from the Muses like a chain of magnets down to the humble rhapsode. The reader is invited to reanimate these old ideas. Or if it is not divine inspiration that is transforming James and the everyday material he narrates, perhaps it is magic: James's mnemonics—his use of imitative sounds and the marionettes as props—suggest the tools of magic.

James, then, shades into an automaton. He is not the only character in 'The Marionettist' who is described in mechanistic terms. A doll-like quality is given to his eldest daughter, who cannot walk until she is seven. This daughter is named, babushka-like, Anna, the same name as her mother. Then there is the imagery in the dreams of James's mother, dreams which bookend the narrative. Her opening dream introduces the marionette motif:

'I dreamed last night that Peter and Cornelius [James's older, runaway brothers] knocked at the door on a day like this. They were wrapped up in so many rags that I did not at first recognize them. They looked at me a moment, asked me for something to eat and then fell down flat on their faces like empty clothes. Even in my dreams, you see, I know they are not here.' (57)

She dreams of her sons as straw men, as big marionettes. 'Your dreams are always the same, mother,' says her husband, after hearing her similar, second dream near the narrative's end (69). This repetitive quality often suggests something mechanistic or doll-like about the characters in 'The Marionettist.' James in particular is defined by repetition. He repeats the actions of his brothers. He repeats his urge to leave women without warning. He makes imitations as work (he fashions marionettes, and, later, sculpts reproductions of 'Dantes and Tuscan girls in alabaster' [65]). And, as Ackland notes, James seems willed to repeat some overarching and impersonal process, or drive, that dictates his actions as it has dictated his brothers' actions.

It is in the context of this point about repetition that the appearance of the Coppelius marionette gains significance above being merely a token from Stead to Hoffmann. This is how Coppelius is mentioned in the narrative, not long after James's sudden return to his family after fifteen years, and after some talk of the marionette troupe performing a version of *The Tales of Hoffmann*:

[James] climbed to the second floor where his work-room had been. All was cleaned up and put in one corner, while William's [James's son-in-law's] work-table, with the half-made 'Coppelius' lying on it, stood in the centre of the room under a skylight. Then James went down to the theatre and they heard him pottering about. (68)

No more is heard of the marionette. It is not long after this that James leaves his wife and family for a second time and returns to his mother. The marionette, then, is spotlighted briefly, and passed over. But the marionette suggests, metonymically, and as the key detail in the widespread marionette motif embroidered into the narrative, that James and his brothers are reproducible as marionettes are reproducible. Stead makes no attempt to animate the marionette in her story. Instead the marionette is used to gesture to the de-animation of the brothers, who merge into the mechanical. The brothers are the marionettes. The automaton figure, externalized by Hoffmann in *Olympia*, is internalized by Stead in the character of James and his brothers. In this way the Coppélius marionette is not a mere trapping of the genre of the uncanny, planted in 'The Marionettist' in an attempt by Stead to recreate uncanny effects *à la* Hoffmann's automata. Neither is the Coppélius marionette the vestigial residue of Stead's creative synthesis of Hoffmann's influence. Rather, Stead's marionette tells us something essential about James, who in some important sense is dead in life. One of Stead's achievements in this story is to make the reader feel the strangeness of a man as ordinary as James.

The Coppélius marionette, then, produces no uncanny effects in itself. What it does do is suggest to the reader that James and his brothers are not characters in a conventional, realistic sense, and that if they have any character, they have only one character shared between the three of them. The marionette is one of the factors that induce a return of surmounted beliefs in the reader, beliefs to do with possession, singularity of character, and the confusion of the living with the dead.

This brings me to a second source of uncanny effects in 'The Marionettist.' I have already mentioned the death drive being enacted in 'The Marionettist' through James's final return to his elderly mother. For Freud, writing in 1920 in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the death drive is a principle governing all instincts. With the death drive, 'we may have come upon the track of a universal attribute of instincts and perhaps of organic life in general. . . . *that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*' (*Metapsychology* 308); 'all instincts tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things' (310); then, most sweepingly, '*The aim of all life is death . . . inanimate things existed before living ones*' (311). Freud's so-called life instincts, collectively labelled by him Eros, are subject to, and have contained within them, the death drive. Freudians came to gloss the death drive as Thanatos. Thanatos is normally hidden: when it surfaces into consciousness, this normally hidden drive can be felt as uncanny.

In 'The Marionettist,' even before James's return to his aged mother, something closely resembling this drive 'to restore an earlier state of things' is revealed in the following passage, where James, sitting at the dinner table on the night of his unheralded return, begins telling his family about what he has been up to for the preceding fifteen years:

Yes, I had a decent job doing [sculptures of] Dantes and Tuscan girls in alabaster, but the pay is not high. . . . So I became a real ne'er-do-weel, drank with the other men, went to the cheap theatre, ran after a girl or two—there was one in the street just now,

who is she? with the face of a medallion, a large bosom and small heels sticking out of thonged sandals: she wagged her tail at me in a red striped calico, pretty girl—hm. . . . At last I got tired and thought I'd come home and let you keep me! (65)

Feeling his age, and being broke, James admits he has returned home to be kept, to cease acting upon his philandering ('At last I got tired and thought I'd come home and let you keep me!'). The play between Eros and Thanatos emerges most clearly in this passage, a play that constitutes Stead's narrative through the following broad movements: as a young man, James is stimulated to leave home and find a wife, set up his own home, and have children; he becomes bored with married life and abruptly leaves to satisfy his unfulfilled erotic and (perhaps) emotional impulses; when acting on these impulses is no longer manageable, he returns to his wife and family; and when this return proves unworkable, he returns to his first home—his mother. This would seem to show the triumph of Thanatos over Eros. James has returned to where he came from. Yet it could also be read as an Oedipal return by James to his mother. Eros and Thanatos, having been in tension throughout 'The Marionettist,' marry and overlap in the story's ending. This contributes to the strange feeling of inevitable circularity and finality in the narrative.

While this play between Eros and Thanatos is depicted as antagonistic, at least until the narrative's end, also underscored is how closely entwined are the two processes. The last two sentences in the passage above provide an example of this, each sentence expressing a quite contrary desire. Even on the evening of returning to his family so that he can rest and be looked after, James cannot hide the erotic instincts which drove him away fifteen years before. In this reunion scene, the return of the repressed is figured in James's comment: 'there was [a pretty girl] in the street just now, who is she? . . . she wagged her tail at me in a red striped calico, pretty girl—hm.' James brings into the open what would normally be hidden in the context of the family and the home, namely, his lust for a strange woman passing in the street. Here is a third source of uncanny effects in 'The Marionettist.' James's expression of lust is the *unheimlich* (the unhomey, the strange) presenting itself in the *heimlich* (the homely, the familiar). It is the striking detail of the red calico, in particular, that alerts the reader to this irruption of the uncanny. The detail of the red calico sets in motion a train of association in the reader's mind. James's description tells us a great deal about him and why he is now broke. The 'red striped calico' creates a little line in from an untold, 'out of frame' part of the narrative.

Up to this point I have tried to show how uncanny effects in 'The Marionettist' are derived from different sources, from the different psychic processes of repression and surmounting, and from the overarching process of the death drive. These processes are either archaic, or timeless. Only the content that reveals the processes is historically determined. This is perhaps especially so in the case of the surmounted, which is an ongoing process of adjusting a subject's worldview to negotiate external realities. For example, the modern western subject has typically jettisoned a belief in the supernatural. The supernatural is the content, but the jettisoning, or surmounting, is the process, and this is archaic. Only what gets surmounted is what changes. Only the *content* of what is surmounted, or repressed, or triggers the surfacing of the death drive, is historically determined—not the *processes*, which are ahistorical.

This complicates the widespread notion among writers on the uncanny that the uncanny is a product of modernity. The uncanny has become so closely associated with modernity that many writers regard the uncanny as exclusive to, and defined by, modernity. This tendency has grown in recent decades. The narrow definition of the uncanny as exclusively modern is perhaps due to the influence of Terry Castle's 1995 book, *The Female Thermometer*. Castle's thesis, that the eighteenth century 'invented the uncanny' (8), underpins the 2008 edited collection of essays, *Uncanny Modernity*. The editors of this collection state in their Introduction, 'we have reason to believe that the very way [uncanny] experiences emerge *and* are articulated imply an intimacy between these dimensions that is both very modern and central to the possibility of the uncanny itself' (3). And for Nicholas Royle, writing in his 2003 book-length study of the uncanny, 'the uncanny is inextricably bound up with the history of the Enlightenment and with European and North American Romanticism' (8). The corollary is that the uncanny was never felt before modernity. Castle, and the majority of contributors to *Uncanny Modernity*, tend to focus very much on what in Freud's theory of the uncanny would constitute the surmounted uncanny, and either elide or ignore the repressed uncanny and uncanny effects deriving from the death drive.

Only one contributor to *Uncanny Modernity* questions the thesis (or assumption) that modernity and the uncanny are inextricably linked. This same author is the sole one to point out a distinction between the surmounted and the repressed uncanny, a distinction Freud grows very keen to stress in his essay (*Art* 370-372, 374-75). This author is Tom Gunning, who begins his essay by asking,

Is there a specifically *modern* uncanny? Freud's famous essay relates the uncanny to the timeless processes of the unconscious, and even refers back to archaic modes of thought—animism, magical powers of consciousness, the return of the dead, the existence of doubles. But while I would never claim that the uncanny is exclusively a modern phenomenon, I would certainly claim there is a modern uncanny. Much of what we think of as uncanny entails the emergence of a modern world: the struggle that an enlightened scientific worldview undertook with what it understood as superstition and illusion. The uncanny can arise when certain beliefs, taken for granted in traditional cultures, become unsettling and strange (yet, as Freud indicates, also hauntingly familiar) to modern experience. Likewise radical new technologies on first appearance can seem somehow magical and uncanny, recalling the wish fulfillments that magical thought projected into fairy tales and rituals of magic. (68)

I think Gunning is right to issue the disclaimer that 'I would never claim that the uncanny is exclusively a modern phenomenon,' and there is little in his qualified linking of the uncanny to modernity to suggest any exclusive relationship between the uncanny and our times. The theme of the clash between the rational and the irrational ('an enlightened scientific worldview' versus 'superstition and illusion') is, after all, central to Socratic philosophy, for example, and 'radical new technologies' might just as well apply to the lighting of fire from flint as to the invention of optical instruments, the cinema, or the photograph. Perhaps it is the case that the uncanny—at least those uncanny effects which derive from the surmounted—becomes an especially common and pronounced experience in any historical epoch where a rapid shift in worldview has occurred. Gunning seems to be thinking along these lines when

he writes 'The uncanny can arise when certain beliefs, taken for granted in traditional cultures, become unsettling and strange (yet, as Freud indicates, also hauntingly familiar) to modern experience.' Here, 'traditional' could be replaced with 'preceding,' and 'modern' with 'current,' and refer to any epoch where a subject can remember, or has recourse to material which suggests, that one might think differently on some matter. Our epoch is clearly not the first to attempt to divest itself of certain religious beliefs, superstitions, and other ways of perceiving and making sense of the world.

Given this, one would expect to find examples of uncanny effects arising from the surmounted uncanny in literature from those epochs where there has been a sudden and comprehensive shift in a culture's worldview. And I think this can be indicated, although a thorough demonstration would require a great deal more space than is available here. I will only briefly mention two examples: Marcus Apuleius's novel, *The Golden Ass*, most probably dating from the second century AD, and *Njal's Saga*, written 'around 1280' (Cook ix). In both epochs, there had been a movement away from long held beliefs in pagan and magical practices, to an embrace of Christian beliefs. This is a passage from the saga that I feel as uncanny:

It happened once that Hoskuld held a feast for his friends, and his [half-] brother Hrut was there and sat next to him. Hoskuld had a daughter named Hallgerd; she was playing on the floor with some other girls. She was tall and beautiful, with hair as fine as silk and so abundant that it came down to her waist.

Hoskuld called to her, 'Come here to me.'

She went to him at once, and he took her by the chin and kissed her. Then she went back.

Hoskuld said to Hrut: 'How do you like this girl? Don't you find her beautiful?'

Hrut was silent. Hoskuld asked again.

Hrut then answered, 'The girl is quite beautiful, and many will pay for that, but what I want to know is how the eyes of a thief have come into our family.'

(3-4)

I expect most readers would suffer a slight psychic shudder at the end of this passage. A sense of disquiet, of some emerging disturbance, feelings that are associated with the uncanny, begins at about the line 'She went to him at once.' These uneasy feelings increase with the father's inspection and wordless kissing of his daughter (which he has obviously done many times before), and the daughter's tacit understanding of when her public, male inspection is over. The sense of the uncanny then builds through the remainder of the passage, climaxing with Hrut's final pronouncement. If the uncanny did not exist until some time in the eighteenth century, how do we explain the feeling of the uncanny at reading this? Surely it is too facile to assert that the modern reader is constructed to read these effects into the text. While we obviously cannot know if a thirteenth century reader or listener felt this exchange between father, daughter, and half-brother as uncanny, we can assume that the author was aware of something particularly arresting about the incident, as it is placed first in the saga, and its effect is carefully controlled, amplified, and elaborated through the second half of the passage. Similar uncanny effects are evoked throughout the saga at key moments. This means that *Njal's Saga* is structured to elicit uncanny effects, as a narrative by

Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, or Stead is. One example of a technique for eliciting uncanny effects is to show a glimpse of something normally hidden, then bury it again, then bring it to the surface and reveal a bit more, then hide it again—and so on.

The uncanny effects in the passage above can be read as deriving not only from the surmounted uncanny, but all the classes of the uncanny I used to read the Stead story. In this opening passage from *Njal's Saga*, uncanny effects derive from the surmounted (the return of the pagan belief in second sight), the repressed (incestuous desires coming to light), and the death drive (Hrut sees this story's inevitable end, a bad end). Another example of the uncanny in a pre-modern narrative is the first part of Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*. Within the first few pages of this Roman novel the reader is chilled by descriptions of demonic yet life-like female beings, the living dead, unsettling transformations, strange displacements and coincidences, confusions over the animate and inanimate, and the disorientating blurring of consciousness and sleep—a host of themes still associated with the uncanny. Ovid's descriptions of beings in the process of slipping between categories in *Metamorphoses* are also highly uncanny.

In summary, I suggest some pre-modern authors sought to elicit uncanny effects in narratives, uncanny effects that emerge from different sources, including the three processes identified by Freud in 'The Uncanny.' (A further source of uncanny effects, and one especially pertinent to a reading of *Metamorphoses*, would be the confusion of categories, identified by the German psychologist, Ernst Jentsch, in his 1906 article. Jentsch was Freud's predecessor in writing on the psychology of the uncanny and the uncanny being evoked in literature.) I have argued that the death drive, repression, and surmounting are either timeless or archaic: but *what* is surmounted, or is repressed, or elicits the surfacing of the death drive, changes over time. By distinguishing the process from the content, articulating a distinctly modern uncanny becomes possible, without needing to exclude the uncanny from other epochs.

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