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Exploring Freud's Theory Of The Uncanny Through A Gothic Lens: E.T.A Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs(2024)

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Abstract

This study investigates how E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815) enacts Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny to reposition Gothic fiction as a medium for exploring psychological disintegration. Grounded in Freud's concept of the "return of the repressed," the analysis offers a close reading of Hoffmann's novel by examining six interrelated motifs: the doppelgänger[2], spatial unsettlement, dream logic, madness, narrative instability, and aesthetic synaesthesia[3]. Through an exploration of fractured chronology, intrusive editorial voices, and synaesthetic imagery, the study demonstrates how Hoffmann intertwines form and content to evoke the uncanny and dramatize inner conflict. These conflicts include identity fragmentation, repressed desire, and traumatic memory, all of which anticipate techniques later found in psychological and modernist fiction. The reading positions *The Devil's Elixirs* at the intersection of Romanticism and modernism, highlighting its central role in the evolution of Gothic and psychological narratives. Ultimately, the study argues that Hoffmann's treatment of the uncanny offers a compelling model for how literature can represent unconscious processes and contribute to broader understandings of horror, narrative form, and psychoanalytic criticism.

Keywords: E. T. A. Hoffmann; *The Devil's Elixirs*; Freud's uncanny; Gothic fiction; doppelgänger; narrative form; psychoanalytic criticism.

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تجسيد رواية "اكسير الشيطان" (1815) لـ.ت.ا.هوفمان لنظرية سيقموند فرويد

حول "الغرابة" من اجل اعادة تصنيف الأدب القوطي كوسيلة لاستكشاف التفكك النفسي . استنادا الى مفهوم فرويد

حول "عودة المكبوت" , تقدم الدراسة قراءة تحليلية دقيقة لرواية هوفمان من خلال فحص ستة محاور مترابطة :

القرين , الاضطراب المكاني , منطق الحلم , الجنون , عدم استقرار السرد , و التشابك الحسي الجمالي .

من خلال تحليل التقطيع الزمني , و الاصوات السردية المتداخلة , و الصور الحسية المتشابكة , توضح الدراسة

كيف يدمج هوفمان بين الشكل و المحتوى لاثارة الشعور بالغرابة و تجسيد الصراع الداخلي و تشمل هذه

الصراعات : تفتت الهوية , الرغبات المكبوتة , و الذاكرة الصادمة و هي عناصر تستبق تقنيات الأدب النفسي

و الحداثي .

تضع هذه الدراسة رواية "اكسير الشيطان" عند تقاطع الرومانسية مع الحداثة , مما يبرز دورها المحوري في

تطور السرد القوطي و النفسي . و تبرز الدراسة في النهاية أن معالجة هوفمان لمفهوم الغرابة تمثل نموذجا ثريا

لكيفية تمثيل الأدب للعمليات النفسية اللاواعية و مساهمته في فهم أوسع لأدب الرعب و شكل السرد و النقد

التحليلي النفسي .

الكلمات المفتاحية : ا.ت.ا.هوفمان ; اكسير الشيطان ; غرابة فرويد ; الأدب القوطي ; القرين ; شكل السرد ; النقد

التحليلي النفسي .

Dedications

To my mother and brother,

whose unwavering love, endless support, and constant encouragement have been my

foundation throughout this journey.

Thank you for believing in me even when I doubted myself, for inspiring me to keep going,

and for being my greatest source of strength.

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laughter during the tough times, and for standing by me through every step of this journey.

Your belief in me and the moments of joy we shared kept me grounded and motivated.

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General Introduction

Since its first appearance in 1815, E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* has drawn readers into a world of Gothic dread and psychological turmoil. The novel chronicles the Capuchin monk Medardus's descent into madness as he grapples with a mysterious potion, a disturbing double, and forbidden passions. Hoffmann locates his tale within the solemn cloisters of a Bamberg monastery and the dark forest that surrounds it, employing motifs such as echoing corridors, vivid sensory distortions, and divided identities to create an atmosphere of constant unease. While these features align with Romantic Gothic conventions, Hoffmann's true innovation lies in the way he merges narrative form and thematic content to enact what Sigmund Freud later called the uncanny which is the resurfacing of repressed impulses in forms that are at once familiar and alien (Freud 147).

Hoffmann realizes this uncanny effect by blurring the line between what is real and what is imagined, using techniques that mirror the psyche's inner workings. He disrupts chronological order so that readers experience time as Medardus does, disjointed and confusing. Unexpected editorial comments break the illusion of a single, reliable narrator, and dreamlike passages collapse interior thoughts and external events into one disorienting flow.

Hoffmann also employs synaesthetic imagery, blending sound, color, and touch in ways that transform everyday scenes into grotesque spectacles, as when Aurelie's visage contorts into a "grimace of madmen" while a violin seems to wail in the darkness (Hoffmann 231). In these formal innovations, Hoffmann does more than decorate his

narrative with Gothic tropes. He brings Freud's ideas about repression, repetition, and the double to life, immersing readers in the very psychological fracture his characters endure.

This dissertation argues that *The Devil's Elixirs* not only embodies Romantic Gothic fascination with the supernatural but also anticipates twentieth-century psychological and metafictional storytelling. By examining how Hoffmann shapes themes of repression, identity fragmentation, and traumatic return into cohesive literary strategies, the study recasts *The Devil's Elixirs* as a critical link between eighteenth-century Gothic romance and modern explorations of consciousness.

It demonstrates that profound literature does not simply mirror psychological theory; it enacts that theory, inviting readers to confront the hidden terrors within themselves and to recognize the uncanny as both a narrative technique and a deeper pattern of human perception.

Rationale of the study

Although Freud's theory of the uncanny has shaped numerous interpretations of Gothic literature, particularly in relation to Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, his novel *The Devil's Elixirs* has yet to receive a comprehensive psychoanalytic and formal analysis. This absence has left underexplored the ways in which Hoffmann's narrative techniques such as fragmented chronology, editorial interruptions, dreamlike sequences, and synaesthetic imagery contribute to the representation of repressed material and the destabilization of identity within the text itself. By reading *The Devil's Elixirs* through the lens of Freud's uncanny, this study addresses that critical gap and reveals how Hoffmann's use of form anticipates key features of psychological and metafictional narratives. In doing so, the

project situates the novel as a vital link between Romantic Gothic fiction and twentieth-century explorations of consciousness, while also offering broader insight into literature's ability to render unconscious experience through narrative form.

Statement of the Problem

Although scholars have widely applied Freud's theory of the uncanny to Gothic literature, most notably in studies of Hoffmann's *The Sandman* and other classic works, *The Devil's Elixirs* has not yet been the subject of a thorough psychoanalytic and formal investigation. Prior research often focuses on individual Gothic tropes such as doubles, haunted settings, or madness, but it overlooks how Hoffmann weaves together fragmented chronology, editorial interventions, and synaesthetic imagery to produce a unified uncanny effect.

By examining *The Devil's Elixirs* as a holistic enactment of Freud's psychoanalytic ideas, this project addresses that critical omission. It demonstrates how Hoffmann not only embodies Freud's concepts but also extends them through innovative narrative techniques, thereby expanding our conception of the Gothic uncanny.

Research Questions

The current study is based on a main question :

- How does E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* embody Freud's concept of the uncanny?

And sub questions :

- What narrative strategies does Hoffmann use to evoke the uncanny in *The Devil's Elixirs*?

●   How does Hoffmann's use of doubling, repressed desires, and supernatural elements align with Freud's framework?

●   In what ways does *The Devil's Elixirs* differ from *The Sandman* in its depiction of the uncanny?

Literature Review

This literature review examines how Freud's idea of the uncanny is applied in Gothic literature, specifically focusing on *The Devil's Elixirs* by E.T.A. Hoffmann. The idea of the uncanny, as proposed by Freud, has been widely debated in connection with a number of literary works, especially Gothic works, although Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* has not received as much attention in this regard. After outlining the main ideas of Freud's theory of the uncanny, this section looks at how it applies to Gothic literature and then summarizes the body of research on *The Devil's Elixirs.*

In psychoanalytic and literary criticism, Freud's 1919 article *The Uncanny (Das Unheimliche)* served as a basis because it provides a framework for comprehending the psychological discomfort that results when something familiar turns weird or scary. Often brought on by the resurgence of suppressed urges or experiences, Freud describes the uncanny as something that inspires both familiarity and strangeness (Freud, 1919). To elaborate on this description, scholars like Schlipphacke (2015) and Kimball (1987) propose that the uncanny functions as a psychological mechanism that blurs the lines between the known and the unknown. Uncanny, according to Freud, is a sign of suppressed trauma and unresolved fears rather than just an aesthetic effect.

Freud's concept of the uncanny is especially focused on issues like fear of the unknown, the return of the repressed, and doubles. Freud's investigation of the uncanny, according to Lydenberg (1997), displays a deep ambivalence regarding identity and its disintegration, with the uncanny frequently revealing the hidden aspects of the self. In literary analysis, the uncanny is often associated with figures of the double, as depicted in narratives in which people experience frightening or perplexing reflections of themselves. In Gothic literature, where themes of duality and identity breakdown are common, this psychoanalytic approach has influenced numerous interpretations.

Gothic literature has long been linked to the uncanny because of its examination of terror, the paranormal, and the instability of reality. The uncanny has been linked by academics like Todorov (1970) to the Gothic genre's fascination with the strange, where the line between the imagined and the real is blurred. The uncanny often appears in literary literature when characters experience doubles, supernatural forces, or the resurfacing of suppressed memories. According to Barnaby (2015), Hoffmann uses these elements in ways that mirror Freud's idea of the uncanny in his writings, especially *The Sandman* and *The Devil's Elixirs*. Hoffmann's characters frequently struggle with existential dread and psychological fragmentation, two major issues in the uncanny.

According to Fletcher (2002), Hoffmann's stories offer a distinctive framing of compulsive repeatition and inner persecutory voices that are consistent with Freud's theories of the unconscious and the death drive. According to Fletcher, Hoffmann uses the uncanny in his writings to explore the psychological conflicts between the self and the outside world rather than only as a literary device. The uncanny effect is produced by the supernatural components of Hoffmann's writings, such as the ghostly apparitions and the

recurrent motif of the double, which create an atmosphere where the familiar becomes uncannily alien.

Hoffmann's *The Sandman* has utilized Freud's uncanny, although *The Devil's Elixirs* has gotten less attention in this regard. But a number of academics have started to notice how this book deals with uncanny themes. The way the double is embodied by Medardus, a Capuchin monk caught between his temptations and his spiritual vows, is examined by Tambling (2015). His internal struggle between the rational and the irrational, the sacred and the profane, is a reflection of Freud's theory that suppressed desires can resurface in odd and unsettling ways. The otherworldly encounters Medardus has, including his contact with his doppelgänger, highlight the novel's examination of the unexplainable.

To further, Falkenberg (2005) argues that Hoffmann's use of Gothic motifs, mysterious elixirs, haunted monasteries, and fractured identities, produces an atmosphere that exposes the reader to uncanny happenings. Falkenberg contends that Hoffmann's narrative structure, which alternates between reality and hallucination, undermines the reader's capacity to discriminate between the imagined and the real, which is a fundamental aspect of the uncanny. She suggests this literary method mirrors the protagonist's inner psychological struggle by engrossing the reader in a state of doubt.

Despite these insightful observations, there is still a lack of academic research that clearly links *The Devil's Elixirs* to Freud's psychoanalytic notion of the uncanny. The Gothic and supernatural aspects of the book are the main emphasis of most studies, which ignore how these themes relate to Freud's theories on repression, the repressed returning, and the fear of the familiar becoming strange.

Although Hoffmann's *The Sandman* has been extensively explored in connection with Freud's uncanny, there is still a gap in the application of this framework to *The Devil's Elixirs*. Although the Gothic and supernatural aspects of Hoffmann's writing are frequently highlighted in the literature that is currently available, the psychoanalytic aspects of his portrayals of identity, fear, and the paranormal are largely ignored. In order to fill this gap, the following article applies Freud's notion of the uncanny to *The Devil's Elixirs,*which analyses how Hoffmann employs themes of duality, supressed desires, and the return of the repressed to craft a story that blurs the line between the familiar and the unfamiliar.By doing so, this research adds to the current discussion regarding the relationship between identity formation, Gothic literature, and psychoanalysis.

Research Methodology

This study's theoretical approach is psychoanalytic, with a focus on Freud's theory of the uncanny to interpret E.T.A. Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixir. The driving framework for this analysis will be Freud's concept of the uncanny, which focuses on repressed anxieties, the reappearance of the repressed, and the destabilization of reality.

While Freud's uncanny has been frequently applied to Hoffmann's The Sandman, this study aims to broaden the application to The Devil's Elixirs by examining how Hoffmann's use of Gothic themes such as dualism, shattered identity, and the supernatural intersects with Freud's concepts.

My research strategy includes a detailed reading of the primary text, Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixir, with a focus on important passages dealing with uncanny motifs. This reading will be reinforced with an exploratory analysis of Freud's The Uncanny (1919),

which will highlight key psychoanalytic themes that are compatible with Hoffmann's narrative tactics. Through this, I will show how Hoffmann's portrayal of double, the supernatural, and the reappearance of the repressed reflects Freud's psychoanalytic beliefs.

In addition to the primary text and Freud's essay, I plan to support my views with secondary sources such as scholarly papers, books, and literary criticisms. These sources will include analyses of Freud's uncanny, Gothic literature, and past research into Hoffmann's works. By looking at the larger scholarly background, it is my goal to place my work within the continuing debates concerning the relationship between literature, psychology, and the uncanny.

In addition, I will take a historical materialist approach to understanding the cultural and intellectual context in which Hoffmann composed The Devil's Elixirs. This means looking at the sociopolitical realities of early nineteenth-century Germany, as well as Hoffmann's personal background, to contextualize the novel's investigation of Gothic themes and their relationship to Freud's thoughts on anxiety and repression. The findings from these readings will be combined to create a thorough understanding of how the uncanny functions in Hoffmann's work, as well as its relation to psychoanalysis and Gothic literature.

Scope of the Study

This dissertation analyzes the uncanny along three interconnected dimensions. The first dimension traces Freud's original definitions and explores how they inform readings of Gothic and modernist literature. The second dimension offers a close psychoanalytic reading of Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs*, examining its structural innovations, key

thematic clusters such as doubling, haunted spaces, and fragmented identity and the psychological roles of principal characters. The third dimension evaluates Hoffmann's lasting impact on later writers and investigates how uncanny aesthetics evolved into twentieth-century psychological and metafictional narratives. The study draws on a diverse body of sources, from primary Gothic and modernist texts to critical works in psychoanalysis, narratology, and cultural theory, which provides a comprehensive account of the uncanny as both a literary device and a cultural phenomenon.

Limitations of the Study

While this dissertation offers a detailed analysis of the uncanny in *The Devil's Elixirs* through a Freudian lens, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is centered primarily on Freud's original 1919 essay "The Uncanny," which, although foundational, represents only one strand of psychoanalytic thought. Alternative theories of the uncanny such as those by Lacan, Kristeva, or contemporary cognitive theorists were not fully explored, which may narrow the interpretive scope.

Second, the analysis focuses extensively on a single literary text. While this allows for in-depth textual scrutiny, it limits comparative insight. Other works by Hoffmann, such as *The Sandman* or *The Golden Pot*, could have provided a broader understanding of his engagement with uncanny themes. Similarly, placing *The Devil's Elixirs* in dialogue with additional Gothic or modernist texts might have yielded richer intertextual connections and strengthened the study's generalizability.

Third, while the dissertation gestures toward the cultural and historical context of early nineteenth-century Germany, it does not fully examine how specific sociopolitical factors

such as post-Enlightenment anxieties or Romantic spiritualism influence Hoffmann's portrayal of psychological disintegration. A more historically grounded approach could have enhanced the analysis of repression, trauma, and institutional critique within the novel.

Finally, this study does not include empirical methods or reader-response analysis. As a result, it cannot measure the actual psychological or emotional effects of uncanny motifs on readers, which limits the conclusions to theoretical and interpretive claims. Future research might benefit from interdisciplinary methods that integrate literary analysis with findings from neuroscience or psychology.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes meaningfully to Gothic and psychoanalytic criticism by offering a sustained engagement with Hoffmann's narrative techniques and their resonance with Freudian theory.

Research Aims

This study aims to:

- Analyze how *The Devil's Elixirs* embodies Freud's concept of the uncanny in Gothic literature
- Identify and evaluate the narrative strategies Hoffmann employs to evoke uncanny effects
- Examine how Hoffmann's use of doubling, repressed desire, and supernatural elements aligns with Freud's theoretical framework
- Contrast *The Devil's Elixirs* with *The Sandman* to highlight their differing treatments of the uncanny

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Analyze *The Devil's Elixirs* using Freud's theory of the uncanny, focusing on key motifs such as the double, the supernatural, and repressed desires.

- Investigate how Hoffmann's narrative techniques create an uncanny reading experience, particularly through structural framing, doubling, and disruptions of reality.

- Compare *The Devil's Elixirs* to other Gothic texts that employ the uncanny to highlight its unique contributions to the genre.

- Fill a scholarly gap by expanding Freud's uncanny beyond *The Sandman* to include a more detailed analysis of *The Devil's Elixirs*.

 Research Significance

- Demonstrate that *The Devil's Elixirs* is a key text in understanding Freud's uncanny in Gothic literature.

- Provide a deeper psychoanalytic reading of Hoffmann's novel, moving beyond previous studies that focus solely on *The Sandman*

- Contribute to broader discussions on the relationship between literature, psychology, and identity formation.

Chapter one: The Uncanny in Literature: Freud's Theory and Its Applications

Introduction

The concept of the uncanny,as articulated by Sigmund Freud in his seminal essay The Uncanny, offers a compelling psychoanalytic framework through which examines the unsettling nature of repressed fears and desires in literature. Freud defines The Uncanny (unheimliche) as that which is familiar yet unfamiliar, evoking a sense of disquiet when repressed memories, desires, or fears resurface in distorted forms.

This phenomenon, which disturbs the boundary between the known and the unknown, is particularly prominent in Gothic and modernist texts. Freud's exploration of the uncanny in works such as E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* provides a psychoanalytic approach to understanding the uncanny's role in destabilizing identity and perception. Although Freud's theory remains foundational, its applicability to various literary contexts has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate.

From the Gothic novel *The Monk* by Matthew Gregory Lewis to the modernist works of Samuel Beckett and Paul Auster, The Uncanny continues to serve as a critical tool for exploring the fluidity of reality, identity, and psychological disturbance. This paper seeks to analyze Freud's theory of The Uncanny, its historical and literary applications, and the critical responses that have expanded or challenged its significance in contemporary literary analysis.

1.1 The Definition of The Uncanny: Freud's Concept and Framework

Sigmund Freud's essay "The Uncanny" explores the origin and meaning of the term, linking it to the German "Unheimliche" or "unhomely"(Alagoz.) Freud defines The Uncanny as "something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" (154). He further describes it as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (154). This experience arises when repressed or surmounted opinions and desires from the unconscious mind resurface in consciousness(Alagoz.) Freud asserts that the uncanny element in the recurrence of the same thing is rooted in infantile psychology and a compulsion to repeat, which is intrinsic to the nature of drives (155). The sensation of the uncanny thus emerges when repressed material resurfaces which later creates an unsettling effect that disrupts the familiar(Alagoz). Freud's "The Uncanny" suggests that the resurfaced ideas, thoughts, opinions, and feelings after being suppressed for long will disturb and appear as strange and unfamiliar which builds a disturbing feeling to the individual.

Freud illustrates the concept of The Uncanny through literary examples, particularly E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman*. The narrative follows Nathaniel, who, as a child, is warned about the Sandman, a figure he later associates with Coppelius, a sinister figure involved in experiments with his father. After witnessing a traumatic event involving Coppelius, Nathaniel experiences a series of uncanny encounters, including his infatuation with the automaton Olympia, whose artificial nature is revealed when her eyes are violently removed. Nathaniel descends into madness, ultimately taking his own life (Alagoz.) Freud refutes the idea that the uncanny stems from the ambiguity between

animate and inanimate objects, as represented by Olympia. Instead, he argues that the fear of losing one's eyes symbolizes the castration complex, a fundamental psychoanalytic fear (160). The Uncanny, in this sense, is not merely a shift between reality and fantasy but a return of deep-seated, repressed anxieties. Several scholars like Hélène Cixous (*Fiction and its phantoms1996*), Mladen Dolar (I *shall be with you in your wedding night 1991*), and Nicholas Royle*(The Uncanny 2003)* debate wether Olympia is really alive, or merely a lifeless automaton. Nathaniel's perception of Olympia is distorted by his spy glasses that lead him to believing she's a living woman when in reality, shes an automaton.This confusion between animate and inanimate objects aligns with Ernst Jentsch's theory of The Uncanny. However, Freud dismisses this view by arguing that the source of the uncanny in T*he Sandman* is not within the ambiguity of Olympia's being, but rather the deep-rooted psychological fear of castration that is symbolized in the motif of eye loss(Alagoz.)

A crucial aspect of Freud's theory is the notion of the double. He suggests that in early childhood, individuals create projections of multiple selves as a way to ensure their perceived immortality. However, once childhood narcissism is overcome, the double becomes an unsettling reminder of a primitive state. Freud describes the double as "an insurance against the destruction of the ego" but also links it to the formation of the super-ego (162). As the ego develops, the super-ego represses aspects of the self and projects them onto the double. Over time, encountering the double reactivates repressed feelings, producing the uncanny sensation. This reinforces Freud's overarching argument that the uncanny arises from the return of repressed psychological material.

Another source of uncanniness, according to Freud, is the compulsive recurrence of similar situations, events, or objects, which instills a sense of insecurity and fear. He attributes this phenomenon to the unconscious mind's "compulsion to repeat," a force

powerful enough to override the pleasure principle and contribute to the daemonic nature of certain aspects of the psyche (164). This repetition not only manifests in neuroses but also in superstitious beliefs, as people project meaning onto coincidental recurrences. Freud does not provide a definitive explanation for how these recurrences connect to infantile psychology but emphasizes their potential to evoke the uncanny atmosphere.

Freud's theory of The Uncanny has been the subject of extensive analysis and critique. Windsor (2020) argues that Freud presents two competing explanations: the return of the repressed and the confirmation of previously surmounted beliefs. Barnaby (2015) suggests that Jentsch, whom Freud critiques, offers a more precise interpretation of the uncanny in Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. The uncanny is central to psychoanalysis, though Freud's framework remains incomplete (Dolar 1991.) Schlipphacke (2015) contextualizes Freud's theory within post-World War I anxieties and the fall of the Habsburg Empire, connecting it to broader theories of anxiety and trauma. She contends that the uncanny extends beyond the return of the repressed, signifying a deeper cultural and psychological disquiet. These diverse perspectives underscore the complexity and continued relevance of Freud's theory of The Uncanny within psychoanalysis, literature, and cultural studies.

1.2 Historical and Theoretical Overview on The Uncanny and Literature:

The concept of The Uncanny in literature is deeply rooted in its ability to evoke discomfort by blending the familiar with the unfamiliar. As Sigmund Freud theorized, The Uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*) emerges when something once repressed resurfaces in a distorted form, challenging the stability of identity and perception. This phenomenon has been widely explored in Gothic fiction, modernist narratives, and contemporary literary studies, evolving into a broader theoretical framework encompassing cognitive and

aesthetic dimensions (Falkenberg 192). The uncanny is capable to destabilize reality and blur the line between perception and illusion as it is particularly evident in the works of Matthew Gregory Lewis, Samuel Beckett, Paul Auster, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, and Franz Kafka.

In the Gothic novel *The Monk*, Matthew Gregory Lewis repeatedly evokes feelings of the uncanny as the return of past repressions by blurring the demarcation between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The characters in *The Monk* are unable to see beneath the surface, and fear arises from the unsettling notion that the object one perceives may not be its true identity. Ambrosio, the seemingly virtuous monk, falls victim to his own repressed desires, which violently resurface, leading to his moral and psychological downfall. Matilda, who first appears as a devoted young novice before revealing her demonic nature, embodies the deceptive duality central to the uncanny. Similarly, the spectral Bleeding Nun disturbs the boundary between the living and the dead, reinforcing Freud's notion of repressed fears returning in monstrous forms. The monastery, a traditionally sacred and secure space, transforms into a site of corruption and horror, further exemplifying the uncanny through spatial destabilization.(Byeon)

A similar engagement with the uncanny is found in Beckett's and Auster's literary works, which explore themes of identity disintegration and epistemological uncertainty. Beckett's trilogy centers on the collapse of the self in isolation and the struggle to maintain coherence. Conventionally, the self is perceived as distinct, internally consistent, and continuous, but Beckett subverts these assumptions by presenting fragmentation, contingency, and the external determination of identity. His works critique rational epistemology and depict a self that is simultaneously constituted and distorted through language, reinforcing the uncanny effect by exposing the self's vulnerability to dissolution.

The perpetual failure of narrative attempts to impose order leaves Beckett's characters

suspended in a dialectical tension between coherence and incoherence.(Martin)

　　Auster's detective fiction heightens the impact of the uncanny by employing the

conventions of the genre while simultaneously subverting them. Unlike Beckett, who

operates outside traditional narrative structures, Auster critiques the rationalist

epistemology inherent in detective fiction. Characters such as Quinn and Blue in *City of*

Glass and Ghosts experience a gradual unraveling of their detective selves. Quinn, for

instance, initially believes that Stillman's actions can be deciphered through logical

analysis, but as he fails to stabilize Stillman's identity, his own self begins to disintegrate.

This trajectory parallels Beckett's depiction of Moran in *Molloy*, underscoring a

fundamental connection between the two authors' treatment of the uncanny.(Martin)

　　The uncanny also plays a crucial role in classic Gothic literature, particularly in the

works of Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, and Franz Kafka. Falkenberg identifies Poe's *The*

Fall of the House of Usher, James's *The Turn of the Screw*, and Kafka's *The*

Metamorphosis as key texts for exploring the uncanny (192). In *The Fall of the House of*

Usher, Poe constructs an atmosphere of uncertainty through the narrator's psychological

instability(Anderson). The narrator's arrival at the Usher mansion is marked by an

immediate sense of oppression: "an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no

earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium" (Poe

60). The mansion itself is a site of uncanny tension, appearing both structurally stable and

physically decayed. The character of Roderick Usher mirrors this duality; his cadaverous

complexion, fluctuating voice, and incoherent behavior all contribute to the pervasive

unease(Anderson).

Scholars have debated the origins of this uncanny atmosphere, with some arguing that Roderick's life force is inextricably linked to the decaying mansion (Walker 587), while others interpret Madeline's resurrection as a shared hallucination between Roderick and the narrator (Hill 396). Another perspective considers the incestuous undertones between Roderick and Madeline as a moral "fall" contributing to the house's decline (Spitzer 352). Stahlberg contends that Roderick's greatest fear is the dissolution of his individual identity (16). While much critical attention has focused on Roderick and Madeline, the narrator's role in constructing and destabilizing the uncanny atmosphere remains significant.

Recent scholarship has expanded the study of the uncanny beyond its psychoanalytic origins, incorporating cognitive and aesthetic perspectives. The influence of The Uncanny extends into art, politics, and cultural studies (Mrówczyńska 2021). French novelists, for example, have employed uncanny themes to examine home, family, and identity (Connon 2010). Additionally, the uncanny has been applied to bodily transformations and social anxieties, demonstrating its continued relevance in contemporary criticism. By reinterpreting traditional uncanny motifs in new contexts, scholars affirm the concept's adaptability and enduring significance in literary analysis.

1.3 Freud's Sources and Influences

E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* has been a focal point for psychoanalytic interpretation, particularly in Freud's work on the uncanny. Freud argues that the uncanny emerges when something familiar is rendered strange through repression, leading to unsettling experiences that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination. *The Sandman* exemplifies this through its exploration of castration anxiety, the doppelgänger motif, and

the loss of identity, all of which contribute to the protagonist Nathanael's psychological instability.

Freud himself analyzed *The Sandman* through the lens of psychoanalysis, particularly in relation to castration anxiety. He suggests that the loss of eyes in the story symbolizes the fear of castration, an idea reinforced by the role of the Sandman as a figure who takes children's eyes. Freud states that "anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated" (Freud 2008). The act of self-blinding, such as that of Oedipus, serves as a mitigated form of castration, a punishment dictated by the lex talionis which is the law of retaliation, meaning that the punishment should fit the crime in equal measure. It is most often summed up as "an eye for an eye." This principle comes from ancient legal systems, such as the Biblical law, and was meant to ensure justice by preventing excessive punishment or revenge. Hoffmann's narrative continuously plays with this fear, particularly through Nathanael's repeated encounters with the Sandman figure, which reinforce his trauma.

Nathanael's experiences are also deeply linked to the doppelgänger motif, a recurring theme in literature associated with the uncanny. The doubling of his identity with Olimpia and the father figures contributes to the castration theme. According to Kremer, "the human eye itself functions as a double mirror," reinforcing the significance of sight in the castration complex (Kremer 84). Nathanael's father's death, which occurs in connection with Coppelius, and the subsequent reappearance of Coppola intensify his trauma, creating a cycle of repetition that continually reactivates his deepest fears.(Borgmann)

This repetition of traumatic events plays a crucial role in Hoffmann's text. As a child, Nathanael associates the Sandman with the loss of his father, and as an adult, he encounters similar figures that evoke the same anxieties. Sarah Kofman argues that

Nathanael is unable to distinguish between reality and imagination, describing him as "a madman who confuses the imaginary and the real, who sees double" (Kofman 133). This epistemological uncertainty aligns with Freud's assertion that the uncanny often arises when boundaries between the real and the imaginary dissolve.

Beyond Freud, contemporary scholars have expanded the psychoanalytic interpretation of *The Sandman*. Borgmann compares Hoffmann's *The Sandman* with "Der goldne Topf," applying Freudian concepts such as narcissism and the Oedipus complex (Borgmann 2009). Fletcher suggests that Hoffmann's narratives anticipate Freud's theories on the death drive and the superego function (Fletcher 2002). Barnaby, however, challenges Freud's interpretation by arguing that Ernst Jentsch's original theorization of the uncanny—based on intellectual uncertainty—offers a more fitting analysis of Hoffmann's work (Barnaby 2015). Forget explores identification mechanisms in the story, considering both Freud's and Kofman's perspectives (Forget 2022). These studies collectively demonstrate the enduring influence of Hoffmann's work on psychoanalytic thought and literary interpretation.

The themes present in *The Sandman* resonate with those in other Gothic works, particularly Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk.* In this notorious Gothic novel, Lewis repeatedly evokes the uncanny as the return of past repressions by blurring the demarcation between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The characters in *The Monk* are unable to see beneath the surface, and fear arises from the realization that an object's true identity may be obscured. This uncertainty mirrors the epistemological anxieties in *The Sandman*, where Nathanael's inability to perceive reality leads to his ultimate demise. Both texts illustrate the uncanny's power to destabilize identity and reveal the fragility of human perception.

The uncanny in literature extends beyond individual texts, shaping broader theoretical frameworks in cognitive and aesthetic studies. Freud's analysis remains foundational, yet modern interpretations continue to evolve, demonstrating The Uncanny's lasting significance in literary and psychological discourse. By examining works such as *The Sandman* and *The Monk* through psychoanalytic lenses, scholars uncover the deep-seated fears that drive Gothic narratives, reinforcing the genre's preoccupation with the return of the repressed and the instability of perception.

1.4 Core Features of the Uncanny in Literary Texts

Mathew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* repeatedly evokes feelings of the uncanny as the return of past repressions by blurring the demarcation between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The characters are unable to see beneath the surface, and fear arises from realization that what they perceive may not be its true identity. This theme of perceptual instability aligns with Freud's conceptualization of the uncanny, which also finds expression in other Gothic and modernist works, including E.T.A Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, Edgar Allan Poe's fiction and Samuel Beckett's narratives of identity dissolution.

E.T.A Hoffmann's The Sandman has been a focal point for psychoanalytic interpretation, particularly in Freud's work on the uncanny. The doppleganger motif in the novellais closely linked to repetition and castration anxiety, both central to Freud's theory. Nathanael's trauma, which is triggered by the castration complex and the death of his father, is intensified through repeated encounters with father figures such as Coppelius and Coppola, who symbolize the return of repressed fears. Freud's argument that Coppelius and Coppola are the same person further underscores the instability of identity and reality within the text (Freud 242). Sarah Kofman builds on this analysis, asserting that Nathanael

cannot distinguish between imagination and reality, labeling him a "madman who confuses the imaginary and the real, who sees double" (Kofman 133). This doubling, both literal and psychological, reinforces the uncanny effect by destabilizing the boundaries between self and other, real and unreal.

Similar themes of perceptual instability and psychological disintegration are evident in Edgar Allan Poe's works, which are ideal for exploring the uncanny due to their preoccupation with horror and mystery. In *The Raven*, Poe transforms the bird into an uncanny presence, an object that disrupts reality by seemingly communicating with the speaker. Traditionally a symbol of bad omens or witchcraft, the raven in Poe's poem functions as a medium for the dead, amplifying the protagonist's existential dread. Freud argues that the uncanny makes the reader uncomfortable by resurrecting repressed anxieties, and the raven achieves this effect by continuously affirming the speaker's worst fears. As the poem progresses, the reader, much like the speaker, is left in a state of unease, culminating in the unsettling finality of the raven's "nevermore."

Samuel Beckett's narratives further develop the theme of identity dissolution, a key aspect of the uncanny. His trilogy presents protagonists who struggle with self-coherence, confronting the breakdown of identity in isolation. The self, typically understood as continuous and autonomous, is instead depicted as fragmented, contingent, and externally determined. This disruption of stable identity parallels the uncanny's effect of rendering the familiar unfamiliar. Beckett's work critiques rational epistemology and exposes the fragility of selfhood, reinforcing the idea that identity is not a fixed entity but a construct susceptible to dissolution.

Paul Auster's detective fiction similarly engages with the uncanny through the erosion of self-identity. His New York Trilogy subverts the conventions of detective narratives by

replacing resolution with epistemological uncertainty. Characters such as Quinn in *City of Glass* experience a gradual unraveling of their investigative selves, mirroring the doppelgänger motif found in Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. Quinn initially attempts to stabilize Stillman's identity through logical analysis, but as he fails to do so, his own sense of self begins to disintegrate. This trajectory recalls Beckett's depiction of Moran in *Molloy,* reinforcing the uncanny effect by blurring the lines between observer and observed, detective and suspect, self and other.

In classic Gothic literature, the uncanny is often explored through themes of spectrality, psychological instability, and doubling. Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* exemplifies this through its atmospheric uncertainty and the narrator's gradual descent into paranoia. Roderick Usher's psychological deterioration mirrors the mansion's physical decay, and critics have interpreted his fear of dissolution as emblematic of a deeper existential crisis (Stahlberg 16). The narrator, who attempts to impose rational explanations on his experiences, ultimately becomes entangled in the uncanny, his perception destabilized by the blurring of reality and hallucination.

Recent scholarship has expanded the study of the uncanny beyond its psychoanalytic origins, incorporating cognitive and aesthetic perspectives. Falkenberg situates the uncanny within a broader literary framework, identifying its presence in Gothic fiction, modernist narratives, and contemporary explorations of identity (192). In addition, the uncanny has been applied to digital literacy, where familiar text-based practices become disorienting in digital contexts, creating anxiety among educators (Carrington 2005). This adaptability underscores the uncanny's enduring relevance in literary analysis, allowing it to be reinterpreted across various disciplines.

The Monk exemplifies the uncanny through its destabilization of perception and the return of repressed fears, themes that resonate across Gothic, modernist, and contemporary literature. Hoffmann's The Sandman, Poe's fiction, Beckett's narratives, and Auster's detective novels all explore the dissolution of selfhood and the unsettling collapse of familiar structures. The uncanny, by continually unsettling identity and perception, remains a powerful analytical tool for understanding literary representations of fear, instability, and the fragility of human subjectivity.

1.5 Critical Responses and Limitations of Freud's Theory of the Uncanny

Freud's theory of the uncanny has faced significant criticism for its heavy reliance on psychoanalytic constructs such as repression and castration anxiety. Many scholars argue that this emphasis narrows the scope of literary and cultural analysis by reducing complex phenomena to basic psychological mechanisms, while neglecting broader socio-historical contexts. This reductionist tendency is particularly evident in Freud's interpretations, which frequently link uncanny experiences to repressed childhood fears or latent sexual anxieties. Such an approach, although foundational, risks oversimplifying the multifaceted nature of uncanny affect.

Furthermore, cultural critics highlight the limitations of Freud's model in addressing cross-cultural variations. What one culture may find uncanny might not evoke the same response in another, indicating that Freud's theory lacks universal applicability. In contrast to Freud's psychoanalytic framing, Ernst Jentsch proposed that the uncanny originates from intellectual uncertainty, particularly when individuals cannot determine whether an object is animate or inanimate. This cognitive model reorients the uncanny as a response to perceptual ambiguity rather than to repressed content(Jentsch On the psychology of the

uncanny (1906)).Additionally, deconstructive scholars such as Hélène Cixous and Samuel Weber have exposed contradictions within Freud's own text, suggesting that his theoretical discourse is itself imbued with uncanny qualities and thus undermines its internal coherence. The lack of empirical rigor in Freud's methodology, marked by reliance on anecdotal and literary illustrations, has further raised concerns about the theory's scientific validity. Consequently, while Freud's contribution remains influential, it is increasingly supplemented or contested by alternative frameworks that expand the concept of the uncanny beyond the limits of psychoanalysis.

Freud's theory of The Uncanny remains an essential psychoanalytic framework for understanding the destabilizing forces of repressed emotions and fears in literature. Texts such as *The Sandman*, *The Monk*, and the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Samuel Beckett, and Paul Auster illustrate how the uncanny functions to blur the boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar, thus unsettling perceptions of self and reality. While Freud's approach provides valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms behind the uncanny, its limitations—particularly its reliance on psychoanalytic theory and its Eurocentric bias— have led to critiques from scholars such as Ernst Jentsch and Hélène Cixous, who argue for broader, more inclusive interpretations.

Conclusion

These alternative perspectives suggest that the uncanny may arise not only from repressed childhood fears but also from intellectual uncertainty and the ambivalence inherent in human perception. Despite these critiques, the concept of the uncanny remains a vital tool for literary analysis, offering a means to explore the complexities of identity,

fear, and psychological instability across diverse literary traditions. As such,Freud's theory continues to shape and inspire scholarly inquiry into the nature of the self and its discontents in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Chapter 02 :Gothic Literature and the Uncanny: A Psychological Perspective

Introduction

Building on Freud's insight that fear often arises from the strangely familiar and repressed, this chapter applies his concept of the uncanny to the evolving structures of Gothic fiction. While his work provides a psychological framework, literature offers concrete examples where these ideas take form. Gothic fiction, in particular, creates spaces where the uncanny becomes visible. It does this through familiar settings made strange, characters who reflect inner conflict, and narratives that blur the line between reality and illusion. The Gothic does not just reflect uncanny experiences; it actively constructs them through narrative strategies and recurring motifs. This chapter explores how Gothic literature expresses the uncanny through major themes, its historical development, and the work of foundational writers. Reading these texts through a Freudian lens illuminates how the genre gives emotional and symbolic shape to unconscious fears

2.1 Defining Gothic Literature: Themes and Aesthetics

Gothic literature explores psychological depth, moral ambiguity, and the tension between fear and fascination. The genre emerged in the late eighteenth century with dark settings, supernatural elements, and a persistent atmosphere of dread (Helyer). Unlike Romanticism, which emphasizes beauty and transcendence, Gothic writing confronts human limitations and unresolved contradictions (Hume).

These features appear in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, where he uses Gothic tropes to examine inherited guilt and societal decline (Gayathri). Readers remain drawn to the genre because it provokes discomfort while demanding engagement, which sustains its popularity and academic relevance (Helyer). Contemporary authors rework Gothic conventions in postmodern texts like Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho(1991)*, where they parody traditional motifs and explore new anxieties (Helyer). Scholars also analyze how academic approaches influence the way educators teach the Gothic, showing its evolving role in literary studies (Powell and Smith).

Several key authors shaped the Gothic tradition by infusing their works with psychological complexity, suspense, and the uncanny. Horace Walpole established the foundation of the genre with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which combined medieval settings, family secrets, and supernatural events to create the first "Gothic story" (Walpole). Mary Shelley expanded the genre's scope with *Frankenstein* (1818), where she explored scientific ambition, alienation, and moral responsibility through a deeply humanized monster (Shelley).

Edgar Allan Poe refined the Gothic in the American context by focusing on madness, guilt, and the disintegration of the self in short stories like "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Edgar Allan Poe). Meanwhile, E.T.A. Hoffmann blended Gothic horror with philosophical depth in tales such as "The Sandman," which Freud later used to define the concept of the uncanny (Hoffmann; Freud 219–52). These writers not only shaped the formal elements of Gothic literature but also challenged readers to confront what lies beneath the surface of rationality and civilization.

2.2 The Uncanny as a Defining Feature of the Gothic

The connection between Freud's concept of the uncanny and Gothic literature remains central in literary analysis. Gothic texts create uncanny effects by blending the familiar with the unfamiliar and by expressing repressed fears and past traumas (Byeon). The uncanny, which emerged in Enlightenment thought, functions as both a literary tool and a psychoanalytic concept that challenges our understanding of knowledge and reality (Cabrera Sánchez). This connection also extends into aesthetic, political, and social concerns, revealing how Gothic fiction mirrors broader cultural anxieties (Wijkmark).

In the early nineteenth century, industrialization reshaped cities and transformed human experience. In response, Gothic writers transformed the optimism of progress into sources of dread and horror.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* captures fears of scientific and industrial advancement by portraying Victor Frankenstein as a figure haunted by his own creation. His divided nature, as argued by Jungian critics such as Clemens, reflects a psychic split between rational ambition and neglected spiritual needs. Jung's concept of the "compensatory function" helps explain this dynamic, where the unconscious produces opposite traits to balance the conscious personality. The burning of the cottage in the novel parallels the destruction of rural life and the rise of industrial society.

Psychoanalytic readings remain common in Gothic criticism, including in analyses of children's literature such as Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. However, some scholars contend that this approach may limit other interpretations and reinforce narrow conceptions of childhood (Buckley). Even so, the relationship between the uncanny and the Gothic

continues to offer valuable insights into how literature explores fear, identity, and cultural change.

2.3 Gothic Figures and the Uncanny

The Uncanny's significance in Gothic literature extends across disciplines, intersecting with psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and cultural critique. Scholars like Kyrpyta argue that the uncanny manifests in Gothic fiction through anthropomorphic objects and scenes of cognitive dissonance, drawing connections to Kant's notion of the sublime and Nietzsche's aesthetic relativism (Kyrpyta). These elements unsettle the boundary between beauty and ugliness, mirroring the psychological disorientation Freud described.

Cabrera Sánchez situates the uncanny within a historical and ideological context, suggesting that both Gothic fiction and psychoanalysis respond critically to Enlightenment rationalism. Hoedt expands the scope of uncanny inquiry into Gothic drama, revealing how theatrical spaces and performances can evoke a sense of estrangement and haunting. Rizzo further emphasizes the connection between horror and psychoanalysis, identifying the uncanny as a key force underlying horrific themes (Rizzo). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that the uncanny operates not only as a psychological response but also as a cultural strategy that challenges normative aesthetic and philosophical assumptions.

Through recurring Gothic tropes such as haunted spaces, mirrored selves, and the collapse of life into objects, literature externalizes internal fears and destabilizes fixed categories of meaning. These narrative and symbolic structures do more than produce suspense or horror; they articulate a crisis in identity, knowledge, and control. In *Frankenstein,* for instance, Victor Frankenstein's creation, a figure both human and monstrous, embodies the uncanny by blurring the line between the familiar (human) and

the unfamiliar (unnatural creation). Frankenstein's disintegration as a result of his own creation or the very thing he sought to control reflects Freud's notion of the uncanny: something that was once familiar: his ambition, his scientific pursuit but turned disturbingly alien as it spirals out of his control.

Similarly, in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the Gothic trope of the haunted house externalizes the psychological disintegration of its inhabitants. The decaying mansion, mirroring the inner turmoil of the Usher family, becomes a symbol of repressed fears and buried trauma. The house's collapse at the end of the story, as Roderick and Madeline's fates are sealed, parallels the eruption of long-suppressed anxieties, revealing how physical spaces can become containers for the unconscious.(Kayani et al.)

In *The Castle of Otranto*, Horace Walpole uses the uncanny to destabilize time and history. The castle itself which is a space full of supernatural occurrences, becomes a metaphor for the repressed fears of a lineage haunted by its violent past. As the protagonist grapples with the mysterious forces in the castle, the boundaries between the rational and the irrational blur, emphasizing Freud's idea that the uncanny is the return of repressed content that disturbs what should be known or familiar.(Merkofer 18)

These recurring Gothic motifs: haunted spaces, mirrored selves, the blurring of life and death highlight how the uncanny manifests in literature as both a narrative device and a psychological mechanism. By externalizing internal fears through these motifs, Gothic texts dramatize deeper anxieties about identity, control, and reality. In doing so, Gothic literature enacts Freud's theory of the uncanny, revealing the unconscious tensions that persist beneath the surface of rational life. The convergence of psychoanalytic theory and Gothic aesthetics invites readers to confront what feels both familiar and threatening,

making the uncanny a vital and enduring aspect of the Gothic tradition.(Freud; Nadal;

Csiky)

2.4 Freud's Uncanny in Key Gothic Works

Freud's concept of the uncanny, defined as the frightening made familiar, finds powerful

expression in Gothic literature. This psychological phenomenon appears vividly in texts

that explore fractured identities, moral ambiguity, and internal fears. In *The Monk* by

Matthew Gregory Lewis, the uncanny surfaces through blurred identities and repressed

desires that return to torment the protagonist (Byeon 2020). The Enlightenment era shaped

the development of both Gothic fiction and psychoanalysis, providing critical frameworks

for examining how literature challenges established systems of knowledge and internal

conflict (Cabrera Sánchez 2020).

Edgar Allan Poe's fiction demonstrates this intersection between psychological depth

and Gothic narrative. In stories such as *The Imp of the Perverse* and *William Wilson*, Poe

employs the doppelgänger motif to represent the internal division of the self, closely

reflecting Freud's notion of the uncanny (Leonardi de Oliveira and Indrusiak 2019). His

poetry, including *The Haunted Palace* and *The Raven*, evokes feelings of dread and

estrangement by blending themes of grief, madness, and the supernatural (Saeed 2021).

Through these techniques, Poe reveals how unconscious fears emerge through literary

forms, affirming the Gothic's connection to psychological inquiry.

E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815) stands as a significant example of how

Gothic literature externalizes psychological tension through uncanny motifs. The novel

follows the monk Medardus, whose descent into madness involves identity confusion,

hallucinations, and the haunting presence of a double. Hoffmann wrote the narrative after

visiting a Capuchin monastery in Bamberg, and published it in two parts in 1815 and 1816 (E.T. 2022). The novel intertwines themes of religious guilt, suppressed passion, and inherited curses with narrative instability, reflecting the fractured inner life of its protagonist (Meier 2020; Korolyova 2019). Though initially dismissed as trivial, the work has gained recognition for its complexity and depth.

The doppelgänger in Hoffmann's novel plays a central role in creating the uncanny. Medardus's double, who commits crimes in his name, generates a persistent sense of disorientation. This double does not function merely as a separate character, but as a mirror of Medardus's fragmented psyche. It illustrates Freud's claim that the double represents repressed elements of the self that return in distorted form (Freud 235). As Medardus loses clarity over his own actions and motivations, the narrative exposes the instability of personal identity.

Medardus's repressed desires further intensify his psychological conflict. His forbidden longing for Aurelie and his struggle with religious duty demonstrate the tension between internal impulse and external morality.(*Marquette University*) When these feelings resurface as hallucinations, dreams, and acts of violence, they reveal how the uncanny forces the self to confront what it has tried to suppress. The Gothic, in this sense, becomes a stage where private fears and desires are made visible and inescapable.

Hoffmann enhances this psychological unease through disjointed narration, abrupt shifts in time and space, and dreamlike sequences. These devices produce a persistent atmosphere of uncertainty. Readers, like Medardus, must question whether events are real or imagined. Freud suggests that the uncanny thrives in such ambiguity, and Hoffmann uses this narrative instability to mimic internal psychological disorientation.

The Devil's Elixirs offers a vivid literary enactment of Freud's theory of the uncanny. Through its use of doubling, identity confusion, and moral ambiguity, the novel transforms repressed psychological conflict into a compelling Gothic narrative(Masschelein 25). Hoffmann's work demonstrates the genre's enduring ability to probe the unconscious and dramatize the tensions that disturb the stability of the self.

2.5 The Uncanny in the Evolution of Gothic Fiction

The concept of the uncanny, foundational to Gothic fiction, has undergone significant evolution from its Enlightenment origins to its current role in literary criticism and psychoanalysis. Freud's influential definition of the uncanny as the return of the repressed is vividly illustrated in works like Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, where characters confront disturbing yet strangely familiar perceptions of self and reality (Byeon 2020). This reading positions the uncanny as a psychological disturbance rooted in repressed desires and unresolved trauma. However, critics such as Falkenberg challenge the limits of Freud's psychoanalytic model. Falkenberg (2005) proposes an expanded definition that includes cognitive and aesthetic dimensions, particularly as seen in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Ludwig Tieck. These authors evoke the uncanny not only through psychological tension but also through narrative form, artistic ambiguity, and the collapse of conventional aesthetic boundaries.

The uncanny's relation to other philosophical and aesthetic categories further illustrates its evolution. In J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, horror and revulsion are entangled with fascination and desire, reflecting the paradoxical appeal of the uncanny (Kyrpyta 2020). This convergence echoes Immanuel Kant's theory of the sublime and later resonates with Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetic relativism, which questions rigid dichotomies between the

beautiful and the ugly. Kyrpyta argues that in postmodern contexts, the uncanny no longer fits neatly into traditional aesthetic categories. Instead, it becomes a space where contradictions are sustained and exploited, revealing shifting cultural and artistic sensibilities.

A significant shift in Gothic and horror fiction occurred in the early nineteenth century, when the genre began to move from supernatural terror toward psychological horror. This transition is apparent in texts like Hoffmann's *The Sandman* and Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, where fear arises less from external forces and more from characters' inner worlds and mental instability (Saeed 2022). Rather than relying on ghosts or monsters, these stories explore madness, paranoia, and the fragility of perception. The trend continued into the twentieth century and beyond, influencing horror cinema.

Films evolved from classic depictions of external threats to psychological narratives that probe the human mind. For instance, *The Conjuring* franchise merges religious themes with psychological unease to explore vulnerability and belief (Nakamura 2024). Literature also followed this path. Early twentieth-century writers such as Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair incorporated psychical research and Freudian psychology to experiment with narrative form and access the unconscious (Seed 2001). These developments reflect broader scientific and cultural interests in psychology and mental health, transforming how fiction portrays fear and subjectivity.

Contemporary Gothic and neo-Gothic fiction continue to engage with the uncanny, adapting it to modern concerns. One notable extension of Freud's theory is the "technological uncanny," which examines how science and digital media affect perceptions of the body, identity, and consciousness (Alexander 2018). This modern iteration reflects how technological progress generates new anxieties, blurring the line

between human and machine. In the British Gothic tradition, recent works address contemporary socio-political tensions, including the legacy of empire, terrorism, and environmental catastrophe (Horton 2024). These narratives channel familiar Gothic themes: monstrosity, haunted spaces,and spectral returns through the lens of twenty-first-century crises.

According to Reyes (2018), the contemporary Gothic not only revives old tropes but also filters them through transgressive literature and postcolonial critique. It recycles mythical figures and archetypes, reshaping them to confront present fears about migration, national trauma, and digital surveillance. Short stories, in particular, serve as powerful vehicles for conveying The Uncanny affect. Their compact form heightens narrative disorientation and intensifies emotional response, making them ideal for exploring the fragmented, uncanny nature of modern life (Alexander 2018).

The exploration of the uncanny within Gothic literature demonstrates its enduring relevance as a psychological and aesthetic tool. Through the lens of Freud's theory, Gothic fiction reveals the internal struggles of characters confronting repressed fears and fractured identities. The uncanny, in this context, is not merely a narrative device, but a profound reflection of the unconscious mind and its discontents. As we have seen through works by authors such as Hoffmann, Shelley, Poe, and Lewis, the uncanny emerges as a space where the familiar becomes disturbingly unfamiliar, disrupting traditional boundaries of reality, identity, and morality. These authors, along with others in the Gothic tradition, have used the genre to externalize psychological tensions, thereby making the intangible fears of the unconscious both visible and visceral.

Moreover, the evolution of the Gothic from its early supernatural foundations to its modern psychological interpretations highlights the genre's adaptability. From the

industrial anxieties reflected in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to the technological uncanny of the contemporary Gothic. The genre continues to reflect societal concerns, offering a platform for the anxieties of each era. The shift from external monsters to internal struggles within the mind mirrors broader cultural and psychological transformations, as evidenced by the works of both classic and modern authors. In the twenty-first century, Gothic and neo-Gothic literature has expanded to address new fears related to technology, neoliberalism, and global crises, reshaping the uncanny to fit a rapidly changing world.

Thus, the Gothic's enduring engagement with the uncanny serves not only to entertain but to provoke critical reflection on the unconscious forces that shape human experience. By examining the uncanny through the lens of literature, psychoanalysis, and cultural critique, we gain a deeper understanding of the anxieties that permeate the human psyche and the ways in which literature continues to give form to these fears.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of the uncanny in Gothic literature reveals an ongoing and complex engagement with the tension between the familiar and the strange, as well as the conscious and the repressed. Through recurring motifs such as doubling, haunted spaces, and fractured identities, Gothic texts express psychological disturbances and cultural anxieties that challenge conventional ideas of stability and self-hood. Foundational authors demonstrate that the uncanny functions not only as a narrative device but also as a profound articulation of unconscious fears, moral ambiguity, and the limits of rational understanding. This dynamic relationship between psychoanalytic theory and literary form

underscores the Gothic's enduring ability to probe the depths of human experience and the shadowed recesses of the mind.

Building on this groundwork, the following chapter will examine E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs*, a key work that exemplifies the uncanny's complexity through its layered narrative structure and psychologically charged themes. By applying a Freudian analysis, this study will explore how motifs such as the doppelgänger, uncanny spaces, and the dissolution of reality into madness and dreams enrich our understanding of the uncanny's literary and psychological dimensions. Additionally, it will consider Hoffmann's influence on the Gothic tradition and the lasting significance of his uncanny vision, shedding light on the intricate connections between literature, the psyche, and cultural history.

Chapter03 :The Uncanny in E.T.A. Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs: A Freudian Reading

Introduction

In earlier discussions of the uncanny within Gothic literature, this study has traced the historical and thematic evolution of the genre, from its eighteenth-century origins to its psychological turn in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Central to this evolution is Freud's theorization of the uncanny as the unsettling return of the repressed, a concept that resonates strongly with Gothic tropes such as haunted spaces, doppelgängers, and the collapse of identity. Chapter Two examined how these motifs manifest in foundational Gothic texts by authors like Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, and E.T.A. Hoffmann, emphasizing the genre's persistent interest in fractured subjectivity and psychological terror. Building on that foundation, this chapter turns to Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* as a rich and complex case study. The novel not only exemplifies the Gothic's preoccupation with identity and the supernatural but also foregrounds the uncanny as a narrative and psychological structure. Through its treatment of doubling, madness, and narrative disorientation, *The Devil's Elixirs* engages deeply with the tensions Freud outlines and offers insight into how the uncanny operates both thematically and formally within the Gothic mode.

3.1 Hoffmann and the Uncanny: A Literary and Psychological Context

E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) was a multifaceted artist whose contributions to literature, music, and law mark him as a central figure in early German Romanticism. A

composer, conductor, and critic, Hoffmann embodied the Romantic ideal of the universal

genius (Schafer). His literary works, particularly his fantastic tales and romantic fairy

stories, have left an indelible mark on world literature (Kremer). Among his most

innovative novels, *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr* (1819/21) stands out for its use of

romantic irony, interweaving the autobiographical reflections of a cat with the fragmented

biography of a musician. This experimental form highlights Hoffmann's narrative

ingenuity (Meier). While his creativity has garnered much admiration, scholarly attention

has also turned to the role of alcohol in his life and work, sparking debates about whether

his creative brilliance was shaped or hindered by alcoholism (Dutchman-Smith). Such

discussions have contributed to the persistent image of Hoffmann as a tortured, alcoholic

genius. Nevertheless, his legacy continues to be a cornerstone of German literary and

artistic history.

Hoffmann's fiction exemplifies the intersection of German Romanticism and the Gothic

tradition, blending supernatural motifs with psychological intensity. His tales, rich in

suspense and bizarre imagery, often explore the porous boundaries between the real and

the fantastic (Hoffmann and Laboccetta). In *The Devil's Elixirs*, Hoffmann combines

elements of the Gothic and the *Bildungsroman*[1], while incorporating metafictional

commentary. This demonstrates the complex aesthetic dialogue between British Gothic

literature and German Dark Romanticism (Kovachev). A recurring theme in his work is the

disruption of reality through imaginative spaces, often set in Oriental or exotic locales.

These function as transitional zones, amplifying the uncanny and addressing the fractured

nature of modern existence (Dickson). Hoffmann's stories are not merely exercises in

fantasy. They are deeply reflexive texts that challenge the authority of Enlightenment

rationality and critique emerging scientific disciplines, especially psychiatry (Markx). His

influence can be traced in later literary movements such as surrealism and modern horror, affirming his importance in the development of speculative fiction (Hoffmann and Laboccetta).

One of Hoffmann's most analyzed stories, *The Sandman*, plays a pivotal role in Sigmund Freud's theorization of the uncanny in his 1919 essay. Freud uses Hoffmann's tale as a central case study to illustrate how the uncanny arises from repressed fears, particularly castration anxiety, a reading that has since been both influential and contested (Schlipphacke). Freud famously identifies characters such as Coppola and Coppelius as doubles, ambiguous figures whose unstable identities generate psychological unease. In his interpretation, "Coppola the optician really is the lawyer Coppelius and thus also the Sand-Man," collapsing distinctions between multiple identities into a singular, uncanny figure. Freud also notes the confusion between Clara and the automaton Olympia, especially in the moment when Nathaniel mistakes the living woman for the inanimate doll, reinforcing the theme of uncertain perception and unstable reality.

However, Freud's reading of *The Sandman* has not gone unchallenged. Scholars such as Barnaby argue that Freud misinterprets both Jentsch's notion of "intellectual uncertainty" and Hoffmann's narrative intent. Freud's psychoanalytic framework, which links the uncanny primarily to repression, has been criticized for oversimplifying the story's psychological complexity (Barnaby 127) (Süner 88). Alternative interpretations have shifted the focus toward other dynamics, such as secrecy versus openness or the concept of "total narcissism" (Pearson75). These diverse perspectives reflect a broader scholarly effort to re-evaluate Hoffmann's work outside the boundaries of Freudian theory, highlighting the multiplicity of meanings embedded in his fiction.

Despite Freud's limited engagement with the theme, madness plays a central role in *The Sandman*, as well as in Hoffmann's wider body of work. While Freud acknowledges that madness and epilepsy may appear uncanny because they evoke unfamiliar forces that also exist within the self, he largely avoids a thorough analysis of Nathaniel's mental breakdown. In contrast, Hoffmann foregrounds madness as a way to explore the limits of reason, identity, and perception. (Rosenbaum)

Freud notes that "the ordinary person sees in [epilepsy and madness] the workings of forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellow-man but which at the same time he is dimly aware of in a remote corner of his own being." This ambivalence between estrangement and recognition is precisely what gives Hoffmann's fiction its haunting power and ensures its continued relevance in the study of the Gothic and the uncanny(Rosenbaum)

3.2 The Uncanny in The Devil's Elixirs: Key Themes and Motifs

E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* stands as a hallmark of German Dark Romanticism, richly layered with Gothic elements, psychological depth, and narrative innovation. The novel exemplifies the Romantic tradition's fascination with the uncanny, particularly through the recurring motif of the double. This device, central to the novel's structure, not only intensifies its psychological complexity but also allows for a deeper exploration of the human psyche and the supernatural. The interplay between verbal, visual, and fantastic codes, often expressed through synaesthetic interlocking, creates a rich tapestry of meaning that challenges the boundaries of reality and fiction (Kovachev 2024). These characteristics have significantly influenced later authors such as Edgar Allan Poe and Fyodor Dostoevsky, who adopted similar narrative techniques to probe the darker recesses of the mind (Labriola 2002).

The novel's uncanny atmosphere is not merely thematic but structural. Hoffmann employs metafictional strategies and romantic irony to create a disorienting narrative experience that resists positivistic interpretations and invites ambiguity (Coates 1983) (Jaglewicz 2023). For example, the text calls into question whether Medardus ever truly left his monastery, blurring the lines between reality, hallucination, and narrative fiction. This ambiguity reflects Hoffmann's broader philosophical critique of Enlightenment ideals such as the coherence of selfhood and the autonomy of reason. As Jaglewicz (2023) suggests, *The Devil's Elixirs* destabilizes notions of human unity and rationality, foregrounding the tensions between Christianity and paganism, authentic and inauthentic art, and the search for spiritual synthesis.

Furthermore, *The Devil's Elixirs* draws on various genres, including the Bildungsroman and Trivialroman, incorporating themes of crime, redemption, and mechanized existence to reflect the existential and cultural anxieties of its time (Kovachev 2024) (Koroleva 2022). The uncanny in Hoffmann's text is not a static aesthetic but a dynamic principle that reveals the fragmentation of modern identity. His use of the doppelgänger motif, for instance, prefigures later literary explorations of divided selves, such as Poe's "William Wilson" (Labriola 2002). Similarly, Hoffmann's thematic focus on evil and transgression resonates with Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter," revealing a broader Romantic concern with the limits of human morality and the instability of perception (Barboza Núñez 2006).

The uncanny, as it appears in Hoffmann's work and Romantic literature more broadly, is deeply entwined with trauma and intergenerational memory. Nadal (2016) emphasizes how Gothic fiction channels unresolved past experiences, transforming them into haunting

literary motifs. Building on this, Laheg (2024) uses Freud's theory of the uncanny to examine how magical realist narratives surface repressed collective memories and identity crises. Cabrera Sánchez (2020) further contextualizes the uncanny as a historically situated concept that offers a critical response to Enlightenment rationality through Gothic and psychoanalytic lenses. In a similar vein, Kimbles (2021) introduces the notion of intergenerational complexes, arguing that inherited psychological patterns and phantom narratives shape the internal lives of individuals and collectives. These insights show how the uncanny functions not only as a literary effect but also as a psycho-cultural phenomenon with implications for healing and psychological understanding.

Ultimately, Hoffmann's contributions to the Gothic tradition, particularly his use of the uncanny and the double, resonate far beyond his own era. His innovative narrative strategies, philosophical depth, and psychological insight helped to redefine the boundaries of fiction. They laid the groundwork for future explorations of identity, trauma, and the supernatural in both Romantic and modern literature.

3.2.1 Key Thematic Clusters in *The Devil's Elixirs*

3.2.1.1 Dissolved Boundaries between Self and Other

E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* dramatizes Freud's concept of the double as "a harbinger of death" through Medardus's encounters with his doppelgänger, Viktorin. These moments reveal how repressed violence and guilt resurface in uncanny form. Medardus's vision of "the phantom of myself, drenched in my own blood and guilt" (Hoffmann 124) highlights the fracturing and instability of his identity (Freud 162).

3.2.1.2 Religious Guilt and Forbidden Desire

Medardus embodies the conflict between his monastic vows and illicit desires, illustrating the tension between repression and moral duty. His hallucinations, including grotesquely disfigured dancers' wives, externalize the guilt and forbidden passions he struggles to suppress (Hoffmann 231)(Marquette University).

3.2.1.3 Narrative Unreliability and Metafiction

Hoffmann unsettles the reader's trust by employing fragmented chronology and intrusive editorial comments. Questions such as whether Medardus ever truly left his monastery mirror his psychological disorientation, making the narrative structure itself a site of uncanniness (Coates 22)(Jaglewicz 150).

3.2.1.4 Haunted and Labyrinthine Spaces

The Capuchin monastery's "whispering corridors" transform a place of sanctuary into an "unhomely" space that reflects Medardus's guilt and inner turmoil (Hoffmann 78; Freud 141). The winding passages and hidden catacombs serve as physical manifestations of his psychological dread.

3.2.1.5 Madness, Dreams, and Synæsthesia

Fevered visions, such as Aurelie's face twisting into "grimaces of madmen," alongside dreamlike confessions, blur the lines between waking and hallucination. These moments enact Freud's idea that repressed content returns in distorted and unsettling forms (Hoffmann 231)(Freud 147).

3.2.1.6 Trauma, Memory, and Cultural Resonance

Themes of inherited curses and the doppelgänger as "living archives of unassimilated

trauma" link personal guilt to broader cultural anxieties. This connection demonstrates how Gothic motifs channel both individual psychological disturbance and intergenerational fears(Kimbles 14).

Together, these thematic clusters create a complex literary embodiment of the uncanny in *The Devil's Elixirs*. Hoffmann's novel resonates across Romantic, Gothic, and modernist explorations of identity, trauma, and the supernatural, offering a profound investigation of the fractured self.

3.3 Implicated Characters of the Devil's Elixirs: Agents of the Uncanny

While narrative techniques and thematic motifs shape the uncanny atmosphere of *The Devil's Elixirs*, its central characters themselves embody repressed impulses and fractured identity. Hoffmann uses these figures not merely as agents within a Gothic story but as living representations of Freud's concept of the return of the repressed. Each character reveals different aspects of Medardus's troubled psyche. By closely examining Medardus, his double Viktorin, and the elusive Aurelie, we observe how personal guilt, divided subjectivity, and idealized desire intersect to create the novel's profoundly unsettling effects.

3.3.1 Medardus, the Haunted Protagonist

From the moment Medardus appears, he is caught between spiritual obligation and forbidden desire, making him the central figure of psychological tension. His repeated visions whether of blood-soaked dancers or the monastery's whispered corridors externalize the guilt he cannot suppress: "I heard within me a voice that murmured of unspeakable crimes" (Hoffmann 102). In Freudian terms, Medardus represents a subject

whose ego is infiltrated by the disavowed impulses of the id (Freud 154). His fractured sense of self parallels the novel's fragmented narrative, positioning him both as the agent and the victim of the uncanny experience.

3.3.2 Viktorin, the Doppelgänger Made Flesh

Viktorin's sudden and violent intrusions into Medardus's life stealing and committing crimes under the monk's identity make him a tangible double and a persistent embodiment of repressed transgression. When Medardus perceives "the phantom of myself, drenched in my own blood and guilt," he confronts a distorted reflection of his darkest desires and sins (Hoffmann 124). Viktorin's role dramatizes Freud's idea that the double returns as a "harbinger of death" following the loss of narcissistic innocence (Freud 162). Each appearance of Viktorin heightens the uncanny by collapsing the distinction between self and other, past guilt and present reality.

3.3.3 Aurelie, the Uncanny Ideal

Aurelie occupies a threshold between living woman and ghostly image. Medardus's obsession with her evokes the Romantic ideal that blurs the line between reality and illusion. In a delirious episode, he confuses a painted saint for the living Aurelie, noting that "her painted eyes glowed more truly than any mortal glance" (Hoffmann 312). This moment captures the intellectual uncertainty described by Jentsch, as both Medardus and the reader are left to question whether Aurelie is an object, a subject, living, or an uncanny automaton (Jentsch 10).

These three characters animate Hoffmann's uncanny world. Medardus embodies the fractured self, Viktorin serves as the restless double, and Aurelie represents the ghostly

ideal of desire. Their interconnected destinies illustrate how personal guilt, divided identity, and illusory idealization converge to make *The Devil's Elixirs* a compelling enactment of Freud's theory of the uncanny.

3.4 The Doppelgänger as a Manifestation of the Uncanny in the Devil's Elixirs

In *The Uncanny*, Freud describes the double as "an insurance against the destruction of the ego," which, once childhood narcissism is overcome, becomes "a harbinger of death" by reactivating repressed content (Freud 162). Hoffmann stages this dynamic in *The Devil's Elixirs* when Medardus repeatedly confronts a sinister figure who mirrors his every gesture and thought. At one climactic moment, he confesses, "I beheld the phantom of myself, drenched in my own blood and guilt" (Hoffmann 124). This doppelgänger is not a mere coincidence of appearance but rather a materialization of Medardus's buried violence and forbidden desires. Kovachev explains that Hoffmann uses synaesthetic interlocking which is a literary technique that deliberately blends sensory impressions through sound, color, and movement to fuse the protagonist and his double into a single grotesque spectacle of self-annihilation (Kovachev 45). Koroleva adds that this fracturing of identity anticipates later Gothic representations of split selves, transforming the double into "a living archive of unassimilated trauma" (Koroleva 112). Labriola also traces Hoffmann's influence on Edgar Allan Poe and Fyodor Dostoevsky, arguing that Medardus's mirror image killer foreshadows the moral and psychological dualities seen in *William Wilson* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Labriola 58). By evoking the uncanny through the figure of the double, *The Devil's Elixirs* externalizes Medardus's inner conflict and demonstrates how the return of the repressed can fracture both the psyche and narrative reality.

3.5 Uncanny Spaces: Monasteries, Labyrinths, and Haunted Landscapes

Freud's theory of the uncanny hinges on the transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar. In *The Uncanny*, he observes that once-safe domestic spaces can become deeply unsettling when they begin to harbor repressed content, turning into "unhomely" places (Freud 141). E.T.A. Hoffmann dramatizes this transformation in *The Devil's Elixirs* through Medardus's return to the Capuchin monastery. Originally a site of spiritual refuge, the monastery becomes charged with dread as it echoes Medardus's unresolved guilt. "I could swear the corridors themselves whispered my darkest deeds," he notes, marking the space as haunted by internal conflict rather than divine peace (Hoffmann 78). This inversion of the sacred into the sinister echoes Freud's claim that childhood spaces, once comforting, can later become filled with dread when they conceal what has been repressed (Freud 142).

The spatial uncanniness of Hoffmann's narrative extends beyond the monastery and into a broader Gothic geography. The novel's winding passages, forests, and fragmented architecture mirror the psychical labyrinth of Medardus's consciousness. Gaston Bachelard argues that such "lived spaces" in Gothic fiction often externalize psychological tension, rendering architectural forms as poetic expressions of inner turmoil (Bachelard 53). This theme recurs across Gothic literature. For instance, Poe's decaying Usher mansion in "The Fall of the House of Usher" collapses under the symbolic weight of ancestral sin, visually enacting Roderick Usher's mental disintegration (Anderson 112).

Similarly, Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* presents a physical structure marked by generational guilt, its secret staircases and shaded corners preserving the

family's buried traumas (Walker 200). These environments function not merely as backdrops but as participants in the narrative, disorienting both character and reader by destabilizing the boundary between the familiar and the frightening.

The monastery, a central Gothic setting in *The Devil's Elixirs*, carries a complex historical resonance. While often portrayed as peaceful retreats in literature and film, monasteries have long served as institutions of repression and psychological discipline. In Imperial Russia, monastic prisons formed part of a broader system of criminal repression, housing diverse categories of inmates (Levanov). Likewise, early modern Russian monastic settings operated as hybrid institutions of atonement and punishment, where religious and state interests converged (Makhotina). Contemporary examples, such as the Crna Reka monastery in Serbia, reveal the continuation of this punitive legacy.

There, brutal physical punishment was framed as a form of drug rehabilitation, revealing the fine line between spiritual correction and abuse (Savelli). However, cinematic portrayals still often idealize monasteries as tranquil sanctuaries of reflection, showing how these spaces remain symbolically contested (Sabbadini and Di Ceglie). The multiplicity of meanings attached to monasteries complicates their role in Gothic narratives, making them ripe for uncanny transformation.

The broader concept of spatial uncanniness also appears across architectural theory and literature. Sacred architecture frequently deploys thresholds and hidden compartments to signal transitions between ordinary and sacred realms. According to Johnson, such design strategies create complex synergies between people, materials, and environments, contributing to affective instability (Johnson). This threshold dynamic is crucial to what

Atmodiwirjo and Yatmo call "interiority discourse," which explores how architectural boundaries provoke ambiguous spatial experiences (Atmodiwirjo)(Yatmo).

Literary examples further explore these themes. In Kafka's "Der Bau," uncanny architecture is a structural metaphor for paranoid introspection, revealing the psychological dimension of physical space (Touloumi). Post-dictatorship Argentine literature similarly reflects the transformation of domestic spaces into unhomely, politically charged zones marked by absence and repression (Mandolessi). Taken together, these studies illuminate how secret passageways, ambiguous thresholds, and altered environments evoke uncanniness by transforming spaces of safety into sites of haunting and destabilization.

3.6 Madness, Dreams, and the Blurring of Reality

Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* immerses the reader in a world where reality and hallucination become indistinguishable. In Medardus's fevered mind, the boundary between inner phantasm and outer world dissolves, echoing Freud's notion of the uncanny. Freud defines the uncanny (*Das Unheimliche*) as something familiar that has been repressed and returned in a distorted form (*The Uncanny* 147). In other words, the uncanny arises when what is deeply known becomes estranged through repression. Hoffmann literalizes this concept by allowing repressed guilt and desire to erupt into grotesque visions. After a murder attempt, Medardus experiences a hallucination of macabre dancers, where Aurelie's face is "grotesquely disfigured like the grimaces of madmen" while her brother plays a frenzy on a "chest which had been transformed into a violin" (Hoffmann 231). This surreal image, which combines visual, auditory, and emotional sensations, unsettles perception and renders the familiar eerily strange.

As Sarah Kofman explains, Hoffmann's use of doubles reflects a fragmented self, with each doppelgänger serving as both a projection of the ego and an idealized version of it (Kofman 87). Medardus himself becomes unable to distinguish his identity from Viktorin's. When Viktorin appears covered in blood, Medardus exclaims "But, oh horrible sight!" at the figure, then questions whether he or Viktorin had spoken an incriminating word (Hoffmann 257). Whether the vision is real or imagined, Medardus reacts with visceral fear, revealing the breakdown of his ability to test reality. Through such moments, Hoffmann dramatizes the uncanny not as a momentary shock but as an ongoing psychological condition.

Dreams in *The Devil's Elixirs* further complicate the boundary between reality and imagination. According to Freud, dreams are a form of the return of the repressed, and contemporary cognitive studies suggest that dreams replay unresolved emotional material (Freud 153)(Casarotti 102). Hoffmann captures this in Medardus's visions, such as the moment he dreams of Euphemie's corpse transforming into a demonic figure (Hoffmann 310), signaling the eruption of repressed desire. In another example, Medardus and Aurelie share a dream of confession, described as "not pure" by the narrator (Hoffmann 222).

The shared dream space suggests a psychic intimacy between the two characters that echoes incestuous desire and blurs the lines between individual consciousness. The recurrence of dreams and hallucinations within the narrative aligns with scientific observations about the nature of hallucination. Research by Rankin and O'Carroll demonstrates that individuals prone to hallucinations struggle with distinguishing between imagined and external stimuli, a process known as reality monitoring (Rankin and O'Carroll 520). Medardus displays this same difficulty throughout the novel, frequently

confusing representations with reality, such as mistaking a painting of a saint for the real woman Aurelie (Hoffmann 312). These dreamscapes and perceptual failures emphasize Freud's point that when the psyche's defenses weaken, repressed material resurfaces in distorted, uncanny forms (Freud 154)(Mandolessi 63).

The structure of the narrative itself reinforces this instability through the use of an unreliable narrator. Medardus's confession is framed as a personal account, yet it is continually undermined by frame narratives, discovered documents, and contradictions within his own testimony. This technique aligns with modern literary explorations of narrative unreliability. Nabokov's novels, such as *Pale Fire*, feature narrators whose delusional worldviews blur the distinction between reality and fantasy (Kudryashov et al. 56). Similarly, Nella Larsen's *Passing* explores how a narrator's psychology and repressed fears can reshape narrative events, distorting what the reader perceives as truth (Comstock 77). In *The Devil's Elixirs*, Medardus's mental deterioration is mirrored in the form of the text itself. Apparent interruptions from editors, the insertion of family chronicles, and even changes in narrative tone reflect the fracturing of Medardus's identity.

His confession resembles a fragmented dream narrative, shifting between guilt and denial, fantasy and memory. At one point, he even addresses a version of himself, remarking, "I am properly thou" (Hoffmann 257), as if acknowledging the loss of a unified self. Through this layered and unstable narrative form, Hoffmann not only illustrates Medardus's psychological disintegration but also invites the reader into a similarly uncertain experience. The novel, like its protagonist, no longer offers firm distinctions between reality and illusion.

3.7 The Influence and Legacy of Hoffmann's Devil's Elixirs' Uncanny Gothic

Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* exerted profound influence on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Gothic and psychological fiction. Adriana Labriola traces a direct line from Medardus's murderous double to Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson," observing that both narratives employ the doppelgänger to dramatize the collapse of moral order and identity (Labriola 65). Robert Czech argues that Hoffmann's unstable narrative frame and synaesthetic imagery prefigure Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which Hyde embodies Jekyll's repressed id given flesh (Czech 219). In Russian literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846) echoes Hoffmann's split-self motif to explore bureaucratic alienation, while more recent critics link *The Devil's Elixirs* to Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, another metafictional experiment that uses narrative instability and identity confusion to evoke the uncanny (Koroleva 120)(Quinn 92).

Beyond these specific texts, Hoffmann's aesthetic innovations such as fragmented chronology, intrusive editorial voices, and synaesthetic interlocking have become hallmarks of uncanny storytelling. Nicholas Royle identifies these techniques as central to the modern uncanny tradition, asserting that Hoffmann "established a narrative grammar for the unheimlich that remains vital in contemporary horror and speculative fiction" (Royle 102). Feminist and postcolonial critics have revisited his legacy to examine how uncanny spaces and doubles can expose hidden power structures ranging from domestic patriarchy to colonial trauma (Mandolessi 78). This legacy extends into film and digital media, with echoes of *The Devil's Elixirs* visible in Luis Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) and in video-game narratives that blur the line between player and protagonist.

E.T.A. Hoffmann's wider contribution to literature and culture rests on his exploration of reality, fantasy, and the uncanny. His tales, most notably "Der Sandmann," challenge readers' perceptions and laid the groundwork for modern fantasy, detective, and science-fiction genres (Geistfeld). Scholars such as Falkenberg have expanded the concept of the uncanny in Hoffmann's work beyond psychoanalytic readings to include cognitive and aesthetic dimensions (Falkenberg 54). Contemporary discussions continue to acknowledge his impact on art and theory, as seen in *The Fantastic and the Uncanny* edited by Steinecke and colleagues, which highlights Hoffmann's enduring relevance (Steinecke et al. 2019). His dual career as lawyer and creative artist informed the bizarre, unsettling worlds he crafted, ensuring that his stories remain a wellspring of scholarly and popular fascination (Hoffmann and Laboccetta 15–16).

Conclusion

By reading *The Devil's Elixirs* alongside Freud's concept of the uncanny, it becomes clear that Hoffmann's novel does more than simply illustrate Gothic conventions. It interrogates the very nature of identity, memory, and perception. Medardus's disintegration, haunted by his double and trapped in a cycle of repetition and repression, reflects Freud's idea that the uncanny arises from what is both known and repressed, familiar yet estranged. However, Hoffmann's narrative does not merely mimic psychoanalytic insight. Rather, it anticipates it through literary means. The instability of the narrative voice, the blurring of fantasy and reality, and the recursive structure of the novel all contribute to a reading experience that mirrors the very disorientation it portrays.

In this way, *The Devil's Elixirs* occupies a pivotal place in the Gothic tradition, not just as a tale of supernatural horror but as an exploration of psychological complexity that bridges Romanticism and modernism. Hoffmann's contribution lies in his ability to dramatize the uncanny not only through content but through form, making the reader feel the same destabilization that his characters endure. As Gothic fiction continues to evolve, Hoffmann's work remains a compelling reminder that the most enduring horrors are those that reside within the self.

General Conclusion

This dissertation has traced the development and application of Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny from its theoretical foundations to its complex manifestation within Gothic literature, culminating in an in-depth psychoanalytic reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs. By exploring the intersection of psychoanalysis and literature, the study has highlighted the intricate ways in which literary texts can both reflect and enact psychological theories. Rather than treating the uncanny as a fixed or purely thematic device, this dissertation has demonstrated that it operates across narrative structures, character development, symbolic motifs, and readerly perception, forming a multifaceted lens through which Gothic literature can be analyzed and understood.

Chapter One introduced the concept of the uncanny by detailing Freud's foundational principles: repression, the double, and the compulsion to repeat while also considering the theoretical contributions of thinkers such as Ernst Jentsch, Hélène Cixous, and Nicholas Royle. These concepts were contextualized within the broader field of literary and psychoanalytic criticism, showcasing how the uncanny emerges not only from specific

narrative content but from disruptions to cognitive certainty and emotional equilibrium. The chapter also examined critical perspectives that challenge or expand upon Freud's model, offering a nuanced framework for analyzing literary representations of the uncanny beyond purely Freudian parameters.

Chapter Two examined the historical development and thematic range of the Gothic genre, emphasizing its evolving strategies for invoking fear, anxiety, and the uncanny. The analysis of texts by Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, and Matthew Lewis revealed that Gothic fiction consistently externalizes internal psychic conflicts, thereby dramatizing the tensions between the conscious and unconscious, the rational and the irrational, and the familiar and the strange. This chapter also mapped the shift from external horror to internal psychological terror, situating Gothic literature as a precursor to modern explorations of fragmented identity, trauma, and memory. By engaging with both canonical and contemporary texts, the chapter highlighted the enduring relevance and adaptability of the Gothic mode.

Chapter Three focused exclusively on Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs, providing a close reading of its narrative structure, characters, and motifs through the lens of Freud's theory of the uncanny. The novel's recursive structure, hallucinations, dream sequences, and the use of the doppelgänger motif were analyzed as manifestations of repressed desires and psychic fragmentation. The analysis demonstrated that Hoffmann's formal experimentation :disrupted chronology, synaesthetic imagery, intrusive editorial commentary mirrors the internal disorientation of the protagonist Medardus, thereby reinforcing the uncanny effect for the reader. By aligning narrative form with

psychological content, Hoffmann's novel not only enacts Freudian principles but also anticipates modernist and postmodernist techniques in literature.

This study has positioned Hoffmann's work as a key bridge between Romantic Gothic fiction and the later development of psychological and metafictional narrative forms. It contributes to Gothic scholarship by shifting critical attention from Hoffmann's frequently analyzed short story The Sandman to the more complex and expansive novel The Devil's Elixirs. Moreover, the study reinforces the value of Freud's theory of the uncanny as a literary analytic tool, while also acknowledging its theoretical limitations and the potential for cross-disciplinary enrichment. The Devil's Elixirs proves especially fertile for this kind of analysis because it resists simple interpretation, instead inviting a multi-layered engagement with identity, memory, and desire.

Beyond its literary implications, the study underscores the uncanny's utility as a cultural and psychological concept. In today's media landscape, where the boundaries between reality and simulation are increasingly blurred, the uncanny continues to serve as a useful framework for exploring phenomena such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and digital haunting. Hoffmann's techniques: his use of mirrored identities, narrative disruption, and spatial dislocation anticipate many of the anxieties that continue to shape twenty-first-century cultural production.

Future research could expand on this analysis by exploring the uncanny in transnational Gothic traditions or by examining the adaptation of Hoffmann's narrative techniques in visual and interactive media. Comparative studies might consider how non-Western literatures express parallel anxieties through different narrative mechanisms. Similarly,

interdisciplinary approaches involving neuroscience or trauma studies could deepen our understanding of how readers cognitively and affectively respond to uncanny texts.

In conclusion, this dissertation demonstrates that the uncanny is not merely a theme or a literary device, but a dynamic process that operates at the intersection of narrative, psychology, and reader experience. Hoffmann's The Devil's Elixirs provides a rich site for examining this interplay, offering insights into the fractured nature of the self and the narrative mechanisms that reflect it. By aligning literary analysis with psychoanalytic theory, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about identity, perception, and the role of fiction in revealing the unconscious dimensions of human experience.

Future Prospects

This dissertation points to several clear paths for future research. Scholars could compare how the uncanny shows up in Gothic tales from non-Western cultures or in interactive digital stories. Interdisciplinary teams might investigate how our brains react to uncanny art or examine its political impact in postcolonial contexts. Close readings of contemporary novels and films could uncover new ways creators blend sensory experiences or mix genres, continuing Hoffmann's legacy of formal innovation.

By demonstrating how *The Devil's Elixirs* puts Freud's ideas into practice through both theme and structure, this study shows that the uncanny is more than a decorative effect. It becomes a tool for exploring human perception, divided identity, and shared anxieties. These findings offer valuable insights not only for Gothic and modernist scholarship but also for fields such as psychology, neuroscience, and cultural studies.

Glossary:

Bildungsroman[1]: A literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of a protagonist from youth to adulthood, often emphasizing a journey toward self-discovery and personal development.

Doppelgänger[2]: A German term meaning "double-goer." In literature, it refers to a character's double or mirror image, often representing a divided self or repressed aspect of the personality.

Synaesthesia[3]: A literary device in which one sense is described using terms from another, such as describing a sound as "bright" or a color as "loud."

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