

Reading the Surface:
The Danish Gothic of B.S. Ingemann, H.C. Andersen, Karen Blixen and Beyond

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2013

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Scandinavian Studies

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Abstract

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Despite growing ubiquitous in both the popular and academic mind in recent years, the Gothic has, perhaps not surprisingly, yet to be examined within the notoriously realism-prone literary canon of Denmark. This dissertation fills that void by demonstrating an ongoing negotiation of Gothic conventions in select works by canonical Danish writers such as B.S. Ingemann, Hans Christian Andersen, and Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), as well as contemporary writers such as Peter Høeg and Leonora Christina Skov. This examination does not only broaden our understanding of these culturally significant writers and the discourses they write within and against, it also adds to our understanding of the Gothic – an infamously malleable and indefinable literary mode – by redirecting attention to a central feature of the Gothic that has not

received much critical attention: the emphasis on excess, spectacle, clichéd conventions, histrionic performances, its hyperbolic rhetorical style, and hyper-visual theatricality. As genre markers of trivial entertainment, these characteristics are often dismissed, but to understand how the Gothic works one must take into account its foregrounding of surface mechanisms and its peculiar surface-depth perspective, which informs all levels of narration, setting and characterization. When meaning is not buried in the depths but is played out on the surface, an extremely unstable sense of personal identity is the result. This is the most important contribution of the Gothic counter-narrative to the representation of the human predicament and it clashes dramatically with the Danish discourse of self-formation, *Dannelse (Bildung)*, which governs the national consciousness to the present day. By dressing up reality – and realism – in excess in disorienting narratives of fragmented subjects, Danish Gothic provides an important correlate to the construction of a harmonious Golden Age Romanticism and of Danish literature as wholesome, moderate and realistic in nature. Danish Gothic challenges the ways in which Danish literary histories have been written since the early 1800s, and the reception history of these writers reads like a Gothic tale of repression and persecution in itself. The aesthetics of the depthless image, which governs the Danish Gothic, seems, however, supremely relevant to the simulated, post-heteronormative hyper-reality of today.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Gothic is everywhere, from music, movies and television to fashion magazines, computer games, advertising, and art exhibitions, to university classrooms and academic journals. The quintessential aesthetic of darkness has very much been brought out into the light, from the obscure shadowy margins to the center stage of Western culture. Despite a relentless critical and popular interest in all things Gothic in recent years and the resulting awareness of Gothic traditions outside the established Anglo-American literary canon, Danish Gothic remains unexplored and undefined.¹ That is perhaps of little surprise, given the Scandinavian predilection for realism; and Denmark has arguably not had a very strong tradition of what are usually seen as fantasy modes, Gothic often being identified somewhere in this non-realistic spectrum. A clearer sense of how this infamously malleable literary mode works reveals, however, the deft employment of Gothic conventions by canonical writers such as B.S. Ingemann, H.C. Andersen, and Karen Blixen, and in extension, Peter Høeg and Leonora Christina Skov, often to comment on the crucial interface between ‘the real’ and the artificially constructed. From its inception, Gothic has been envisioned as the ultimate transgression of boundaries – between reality and illusion, depth and surface, originality and imitation, setting off adjoining conflicts between life and death, eros and thanatos, sanity and pathology, the natural and the supernatural, material and transcendent, individual and community, monstrosity and humanness, mind and body, male and female, self and other; its resistance to definition often being caused by its ambivalent responses

¹ Ib Johansen, most notably in *Sfinksens Forvandlinger* (The Transformations of the Sphinx, 1986), has explored the Gothic in multiple publications, but focusing primarily on the fantastic when it comes to Danish writers – a very reasonable strategy that Blixen also famously adhered to for the title of her debut. In addition, the first issue of the journal *Ny Poetik* (1993) was dedicated to the Gothic as a distinctive literary form, but without exploring Danish undertakings in the genre. In 1939 Marie Louise Eibe published a 10-page article on the influence of the Gothic novel on Danish Romantic works, “Skrækromanens Indflydelse paa danske romantiske Værker,” but the account is largely anecdotal and biographical, and suffers from a clear definition of the Gothic novel. Ultimately, Eibe concludes that there is no Gothic tradition in Denmark.

to such dichotomies. The focus of this study is the vehement testing of concepts of identity and self-formation framed by such transgressions, often in the most shockingly graphic ways but ultimately not removed from 'reality.'

Identification is of course bound up with definition, a notoriously difficult enterprise when it comes to the hyper-malleable and seemingly ubiquitous Gothic mode, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 provides a condensed overview of the Gothic with a focus on its key themes and conventions as they have transformed from the already clichéd inception of Gothic in 1764 to its heyday until 1820, from its Victorian and American interiorizing and domesticating reconfigurations to its post-modern logic of imitation, parody and simulation as it begins to emerge in mainstream culture, self-referentially drawing on itself as well as other genres for continued survival. Because the broad outlines of the Gothic and most of its principal transformations emerged between the late-eighteenth and the late-nineteenth centuries, I have chosen to focus primarily on materials from this time and works that define themselves in relation to this period. The chapter will clarify central terms and conventions, as they are relevant to Danish Gothic, and as they have been developed by the most influential critical approaches to the Gothic. It is imperative for a project of this nature to focus on a model of the Gothic which is flexible enough to demonstration of participation by works outside the traditional Anglo-American canon but not so flexible that it becomes all-encompassing and thus meaningless. In order to do that, I focus on the particular manner in which surfaces are foregrounded in the Gothic conventions, an aesthetic and ontology it shares with our postmodern culture. This has great implications for the identity politics that are constantly renegotiated within the haunted Gothic spaces; and so psychological concepts of the uncanny and the abject are addressed in conjunction with constructivist models of subjectivity. The continued relevance

of Gothic lies in its consistent interrogation, if not inversion of predominant cultural scripts in which the subject is encouraged to recognize if not reconstruct him- or herself.

The purpose of this study is both to gain a clearer sense of the identity construction that happens within Gothic narratives of prohibition and transgression, and to establish a distinct Danish Gothic tradition. Rather than violently forcing a primarily Anglo-American framework onto Danish works, I am inspired by New Historicist Gothic critics and develop a model of how Danish Gothic in its own particular way is conceptualized in continual dialogue with both national and international discourses and historical contingencies, a number of which seem to have precluded Gothic from wholly infusing the Danish canon in the sense that it did in England, France and Germany, and to some extent Sweden in the 1800s. In the Danish texts under consideration, the many direct and indirect references to works in the Western canon show that they position themselves in relation to an international tradition. This also seems to only underline the fact that their highlighting of the darker aspects of the otherwise wholesome and harmonious construction of Danish Romanticism and its bourgeois *Biedermeier* identity cannot be adequately understood with reference only to Danish concepts of Dark Romanticism, such as *Romantisme* and *Sort (Black) Romantik*, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. This chapter provides an outline of what happened in the Danish literary landscape when the Gothic mode was flourishing in Denmark, starting in the late 1790s. Gothic and Romanticism are traditionally linked as twin reactions against the oppressive Enlightenment dictate of reason and restraint but Danish Romanticism is inherently realistic, reasonable and moderate, not least due to specific historical events and socio-economic circumstances in the early 1800s, which shaped the literary public sphere. This examination should provide a tentative answer to the question of why the Gothic has never been acknowledged in Denmark by literary critics and literary historians, given its

undeniable existence in authorships that were otherwise officially canonized by the Danish Ministry of Culture in 2004. Although presumably steeped in a similar social realist literary tradition, the neighbouring Sweden has had a stronger, or at least more frequently acknowledged Gothic tradition², but Danish Gothic has never been the subject of academic scrutiny. Which assumptions and relations between self and world are offered in these texts that seem to be in such violent conflict with the established canon and the Golden Age construction of Danish nineteenth-century literature, and why are Gothic tropes necessarily invoked to convey such conflict? Answering these questions should broaden the understanding of writers that to some extent are known to readers and scholars outside of Denmark and present a methodological framework which provides more nuances to our construction of Danish Romanticism.

In Chapter 4, I examine a number of Ingemann's countless tales published 1820-1860. Despite the sheer volume of tales and Ingemann's status as national icon, only his Gothic rewriting of Hoffmann's fantasy "Der goldne Topf" ("The Golden Pot," 1814), the labyrinthine and disorienting "Sphinxen" (The Sphinx, 1820) is anthologized today and none have been translated into English. It will be analyzed in detail for its particular take on the Gothic-Fantastic, infused with a strong textual consciousness. The lesser known "Moster Maria" (Auntie Maria, 1820), "Altertavlen i Sorø" (The Altar Piece in Sorø, 1820), "Det Forbandede Hus" (The Cursed

² In Sweden, scholars Yvonne Leffler, Mathias Fyhr, and Ingrid Elam have assembled a Swedish Gothic tradition, although there is some confusion as to what constitutes Gothic vs. 'skrækromantik' (apparently a precarious mix of terror romanticism and sensationalism). Fyhr's *De mörka labyrinterna: Gotiken i litteratur, film, music och rollspel* (2003) is the most ambitious study and attempts to develop a viable definition, while also including live action role playing, computer games, and music.

In Norway, Thorgeir Haugen, much like the Danish scholar Ib Johansen, mentions the Gothic only in passing in his work on Norwegian fantastic writers in *Litterære skygger. Norsk fantastisk litteratur* (1998), to which Johansen also contributes. Due this year (2013) is the Finnish anthology, written in English, *Gothic Topographies*, edited by Päivi Mehtonen and Matti Savolainen. As a Nordic enterprise, it is the first of its kind, perhaps signalling a growing awareness of the Gothic in this region. The editors focus on the transgression of borders in Gothic and logically, then, consider Gothic a pan-European phenomenon. It contains articles on Nordic versions of Gothic, including an essay on Danish Gothic that I have contributed.

House, 1827) the twin tales “Varulven” and “Den Levende Døde” (The Werewolf and The Living Dead, 1835), “Niels Dragon” (1847), “Glasskabet” (The Glass Cabinet, 1847), ”Det Tilmurede Værelse” (The Bricked-Up Room, 1847) ”De Fortryllede Fingre” (The Bewitched Fingers, 1847), “Skole-Kammeraterne” (The School Mates, 1850) and ”Pulcinellen” (1860) deal with themes such as death, monstrosity, madness, the split psyche, the haunted home and self, and scepticism regarding creativity, autonomy and originality. Ingemann’s texts draw heavily on fairy tales, the fantastic, Gothic romances and horror effects, developed partly from Ingemann’s pre-romantic Gothic ballads. His tales maintain a dialectic between suspenseful terror and graphic horror, a rather surprising mode for this national icon of benevolent Christianity who has fathered some of the most beautiful hymns ever written in Danish; the insistence on this image of Ingemann as well as the reception history of Ingemann’s tales, early poems and drama speak volumes of the repressive Golden Age construction that has shaped literary histories to the present.

A similar conflict between expectations and horrific realization, the established canon and the actual oeuvre, is seen in the authorship of Ingemann’s good friend, H.C. Andersen, as will be examined in chapter 5. There is a physical gruesomeness and disproportionate sense of retribution often overseen in several of Andersen’s famous narratives, such as “De Røde Sko” (“The Red Shoes,” 1845), “Den Lille Havfrue” (“The Little Mermaid,” 1837) and “Pigen, som trådte på brødet” (“The Girl who Trod on the Loaf,” 1859) and “Skyggen” (“The Shadow,” 1847). While Andersen covers a range of genres, ultimately it is what he wanted us to think was his last tale, “Tante Tandpine” (“Auntie Toothache,” 1872) that really taps into the Gothic mode and thus will be the focus of my analysis. In its vision of partly real and partly fictive nightmares, prerational compulsions towards death, and dysfunctional family relations, it is heavily inspired

by E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" (1816). It bridges Danish Romanticism and the Modern Breakthrough and is a rather unexpected account of societal and psychological forces encroaching upon the freedom of the artist, also a dominant theme in Karen Blixen's tales, which appropriately are set in Andersen's time.

Given its more appropriate English title, Blixen's *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* (1935) – *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) published under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen – has been examined, albeit sparsely, in the light of this Anglo-American tradition, which the market-savvy Blixen avoided in the title of the Danish publication in order to capitalize on what she rightly assumed was a more familiar tradition to the German-influenced Danes. The focus of my analysis in Chapter 6 is first the often neglected ghost story "Et Familieselskab i Helsingør" ("The Supper at Elsinore"), which explores themes of incest; doubles; confinement in gender, body and home; the haunted house; failed creativity; and constructions of (monstrous and female) identities, fictions and lies. The story relies on a sophisticated matrix of Gothic conventions and references, reworked more playfully in "Drømmerne" ("The Dreamers"), "Syndfloden over Norderney" ("The Deluge at Norderney"), "Aben" ("The Monkey"), "Vejene omkring Pisa" ("The Roads around Pisa"), "Den Gamle Vandrende Ridder" ("The Old Chevalier") and "Digteren" ("The Poet"). "Karyatiderne" ("The Caryatids") and "Ekko" ("Echo") from *Sidste Fortællinger* (1958; *Last Tales*, 1957) detail the tyranny of the both personal and familial past, which continues to haunt the present. Secondly I will examine Blixen's paranoia extravaganza *Gengældelsens Veje* (1944; *The Angelic Avengers*, 1946), published under the pseudonym Pierre Andrézel. Its hybridity as simultaneously sincere *Bildungsroman*, playful pastiche of the Female Gothic and the most conventionally Gothic piece ever written by a Danish writer might explain its critical neglect to some extent, which I intend to make up for.

While this study will focus primarily on Ingemann, Andersen and Blixen as the originators of a Danish Gothic, it is important to note that the tradition is continued into the present, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter, in which I will summarize the key contributions to the Gothic made by Ingemann, Andersen and Blixen, while commenting on the current status of Danish Gothic as a continual ghostly presence haunting the way we think of identity, literature, society and culture. Blixen's homage to Gothic conventions has been cleverly renegotiated by Peter Høeg in his postmodern bricolage pastiche *Fortællinger om Natten* (1990; *Tales of the Night*, 1998), which are set in Blixen's time and resemble the architecturally incongruent haunted house in his "Forholdsregler mod alderdommen" (Precautions against Old Age, not translated) constructed from choice scraps and pieces from past traditions. This tale as well as "Medlidenhed med børnene i Vaden By" ("Pity for the Children of Vaden Town") and "Fortælling om et ægteskab" ("Story of a Marriage") all play elegant tricks with Gothic conventions in a complex web of references to previous literature, especially Blixen's texts: "Norderney" delivers the model for "Vaden By," while "Aben" provides the inspiration for "Fortælling om et ægteskab." Høeg's nightmarish schoolhouse Gothic *De Måske Egnede* (1993; *Borderliners*, 1994) brings tropes of horror into the post-modern Gothic, while rearticulating the generically mandatory questioning of the rationality and progress of enlightened modernity. Blixen's use of pseudonyms is famous and perhaps as a type of homage, Høeg, familiar with the playful masks of Gothic, let the public think that the horrifying *De Måske Egnede*, with its protagonist named Peter, was the story of his own childhood and adoption, which created quite the scandal but ignited the post-millennial literary trend of conflating fiction with autobiography – often as a marketing device. Likewise, when in 2010 the openly gay Leonora Christina Skov published a Gothic thriller, *Silhuet af en synder* (Silhouette of a Sinner, not translated), she

referenced her own sexuality and childhood experiences of having a potentially lost twin-double as her main sources of inspiration, along with Blixen's *Gengældelsens Veje* and classics such as Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). In other words, Blixen's heritage looms large, and there is a distinct awareness of the Gothic's potential for constructing an augmented reality, perhaps even alternative identities outside the fiction: its endemic imitation and unreliable signification processes create deceptive interpretations of text, reality and self.

Tellingly the interviews and advertising materials for Skov's 2010 novel were primarily focused on introducing and explaining the genre to the presumably unaware Danes, or in some particularly dreadful cases ignoring it entirely in order to focus on Skov's idea of motherhood.³ Skov's allegorical reference to the on-going financial crisis to explain the relevance of the Gothic perhaps underestimates the familiarity with the genre in a post-millennial audience that has grown up with re-runs of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on TV, as Danish media, too, are flooded with Gothic or semi-Gothic narratives from Hollywood, often with a particular proclivity towards vampires. Skov's explanation also underscores the current problem of the 'Gothic' epithet being so flexible that it has come to mean anything and thus inevitably nothing. Nevertheless, her comment that "nutiden er gotisk"⁴ (the present time is gothic) – in an unaccredited translation of Angela Carter's famous gambit "We live in Gothic times" – is as pertinent as when Carter first said it in 1974. In its inherent provoking of unease and exaggeration of clichés to the limit of grotesqueness, the Gothic compels a self-scrutiny that ensures its continued relevance and centrality in the Western culture – and in the Danish canon, too.

³ See the interview with Skov in *Information* March 26 2010: "Jeg tror, at der er mange, der ikke elsker deres børn."

⁴ Quoted from Marie Tetzlaff's interview: "Leonora Christina Skov: Nutiden er gotisk," *Politiken* March 28 2010. Carter's statement is from the afterword to her collection of darkly erotic short stories, *Fireworks* (1974).

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework: Gothic Criticism

2.1 What is Gothic?

What do we mean by 'Gothic'? Undoubtedly, most people know it when they see it: a group of conventions that represent the darker side of life; evil, death, decay, perversion and obsessive desire, terrifying experiences of sensory disorientation, psychological instability and supernatural spectacles; ancient castles, imperilled heroines, gloomy villains and frightening monsters; a revolt against reason and a defence of untethered imagination. The question is where the perimeters of Gothic lie as it has grown into a highly over-determined, constantly mutating concept that is currently being identified in any cultural product, it seems, which contains but a hint of darkness, gloom, fear or transgression, reducing the Gothic to a vague feeling or a mood. Gothic has since the middle of the eighteenth century shadowed normative ideals of self, society and literature, while continually destabilizing the demarcations between legitimate literary forms and trivial entertainment for mass-consumption. Appropriately for a literary mode informed by a consistent interrogation of boundaries, and partly due to its own formal and ideological tensions, Gothic has spilled over into other genres and media rather ubiquitously, easily lending itself to meet any given cultural or critical need. A flexible counter-narrative, it resists definition and categorization, so much so that critics cannot even pinpoint whether it is "a plot, a trope, a topos, a discourse, a mode of representation, conventions of characterization, or a composite of all these aspects" (Mulvey-Roberts, xvi). The critical tendency to view it as a set of discourses rather than simply as a genre has no doubt promoted its ubiquitous status, furthered by the International Gothic Association's 1999 launch of the academic journal *Gothic Studies*. In the introduction to its first issue, influential Gothicismist Jerrold Hogle calls for a firmer establishing of what the Gothic label means, in order to acquire "a more definite significance than that of an

amorphous blob of continually transferred settings, atmospheres, literary styles, character patterns, and fragmentations of history” (Hogle 1999: 2). On the other hand, critics such as David Punter and Glenis Byron seem to embrace its mobility, referring to the Gothic as “a collection of subgenres... that have obvious connections with the ‘original’ Gothic, but their differences might seem to be at least as important as their similarities” (Punter & Byron 2004: xviii). In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), Anne Williams gets to the heart of the matter when she notes that the “omnipresence and imprecision” of the term prevent it from being reduced to a textbook definition, adding that:

a thoughtful analysis of 'Gothic' should challenge the kind of literary history that organizes, delineates, and defines: a literary history that also confines us within some inherited literary concepts, particularly ideas about genre, that can be as confusing as Udolpho's amazing structures (Williams 13-14).

This offers some explanation as to why Gothic is usually associated with writers that are notoriously difficult to place in the rigid taxonomies of literary histories, in themselves representations of the very Enlightenment project which the Gothic traditionally reacts against. In Danish literary histories, for example, Karen Blixen is often categorized as “en fremmed fugl i den danske andedam,” ‘a foreign / strange bird in the Danish duck pond’⁵, and large parts of B.S. Ingemann’s oeuvre have been ignored in order to maintain a coherent perception of a national icon. Their resistance to stable categories also frames the complicated nature of my mission in this study; not only in creating a type of systematic Danish Gothic literary history out of the very non-systematic Gothic tradition but in the apparently contradictory purpose of working towards a clearer and more stable definition of the Gothic *and* conceiving it with enough elasticity to include a new national school within that framework.

⁵ Johannes Fibiger in *Litteraturens Linjer* (2005: 95) and *Hovedsporet* (2005) by Jens Anker Jørgensen et al. p. 546

In order to answer the intertwined questions of why these examples of Danish Gothic are temporally as far apart as they are, and why literary histories and critics have either ignored or deprecated them, it is important to include the discourses which make up the reception history of this tradition. Particularly Ingemann and Andersen struggled with a most vitriolic criticism, so much so that Ingemann changed some of his more extreme works to conform to expectations of restraint and balance. Establishing a Danish Gothic tradition also means investigating which assumptions and values, which models for relations between self and world are offered through the disreputable Gothic aesthetic which seem to be in such violent conflict with those expressed in the established canon. Particularly when looking beyond the conventional Anglo-American canon, the intertwined questions of inclusion and definition are and should be hotly contested. Establishing a viable Danish Gothic tradition requires a rethinking and clarification of what Gothic is, or rather, very importantly, how it works, in order to go beyond mechanically descriptive conclusions of exemplarity leading to identification, or a too-inclusive model, which neglects the very characteristics of the genre for the purpose of discovering, or forcing, an underlying psychological, political or religious meaning in its supposed depths, as has been the result of much Gothic criticism in the past. The key characteristic of the Gothic is its extensive repetition of recognizable conventions, an interesting paradox for such a mobile genre. Many critics impatiently dismiss these conventions as surface machinery with no substance for fear of taking what Eugenia DeLamotte has called “a shopping-list approach to a definition of Gothic romance” (DeLamotte 5). Those conventions, and by extension the approach they trigger, was famously mocked in the chilling fragment of a manuscript the novel-consuming Catherine Morland finds in Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1799/1818), which turns out to be a very banal laundry list that defies Catherine’s expectations of sublime and bone-chilling but pleasurable

terror. It is, however, exactly in the conventions of the surface that we find the most radical energies in Gothic, as Eve Sedgwick has pointed out, paradoxically since it is also these conventions that to some extent have rendered the Gothic a disreputable mode. In the following, I will discuss the most typical conventions as they pertain to a Danish tradition, keeping in mind that many of the established examples of Gothic appear to be characterised by their departure from this genre-that-is-not-a-genre, while also including with a thematic focus the most relevant developments in the rapidly expanding body of Gothic criticism.

2.2 The Gothic as Hybrid Form

Part of the problem in terms of definition is that the Gothic from its inception was not a 'pure' genre but a heterogeneous, unstable hybrid. In the preface for the second edition of what is generally regarded the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto. A Gothic Story* (1764), Horace Walpole also provides the first Gothic criticism:

It was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life (9).

Gothic is pulled between conflicting ideologies, as well as between genres and discourses, i.e. the supernatural and the realistic. In Walpole's preface to the first edition, the rational eighteenth-century reader is asked, in case he finds the tale's supernatural happenings too wild, to please excuse its "air of the miraculous," which at the same time is countered by the supposed verisimilitude which its status as translated script lends the tale (Walpole 6). The complex experience of terror, awe and wonderment produced by the discourse of the supernatural had been explained in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the*

Sublime and Beautiful (1757) with reference to vastness, magnificence and obscurity: “sublimity presented an excess that could not be presented by a rational mind” (Botting 1996: 39). In contrast to the beautiful, which is an important aesthetic category in Danish Romantic Idealism, and which is associated with pleasure, containment and comprehension, the vast expanses of the sublime are connected to terror and the pleasurable thrill of experiencing it from a safe distance. The sublime is toned down rather strikingly in the Danish Gothic texts, which primarily unfold in the quiet and subdued *Biedermeier* homescape, but the sublime does seem to inform the imagery of the abyss which appears repeatedly in Ingemann’s stories, in which the all-consuming chasm threatens not just fragmentation but complete dissolution of the subject: the life-threatening and limitless becomes part of the aesthetic representation of the complexity of human life, a complexity seemingly better represented in non-mimetic, supernatural terms. The late eighteenth-century debate on the sublime foregrounded a burgeoning interest in complex emotion and human psychology, connected to the discourse of aesthetics, which previously had functioned as the conveyer of eternal truths. In Denmark on the other hand, the discourse of aesthetics maintained a monopolized notion of ‘good taste’ based on the near-holy trinity of the good, the true and the beautiful, a function it largely maintained in Denmark until the Modern Breakthrough of the 1870s.

As Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis perfected the form in the 1780s-90s, exploring a new and potent intersection of sex, violence, and law, the foundations were laid for the Female and Male Gothic, often tied to the discourse of (sublime) terror versus (lurid) horror. In Radcliffe’s essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry”, published posthumously in the *New Monthly Magazine* in January 1826, she explains with explicit reference to Burke that “terror and horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of

life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.”⁶ The distinction hinges upon whether the supernatural is explained as illusions, creating a rational, manageable universe with a divine and ultimately benevolent order, as often happens in the Female Gothic, or whether it is accepted as supernatural, creating a sense of God-less alienation, as in the Male Gothic. The Danish texts span this range of options, not least because many of the examples participate as much in the Fantastic as in the Gothic, as the dual titles of Karen Blixen’s debut suggest. Consequently, Tzvetan Todorov’s influential account of the shift from supernatural to human explanation for disturbances to the social and natural order is also highly relevant. He traces a movement within categories of fantastic occurrence from the ‘marvellous’ (events explained only through reference to magic or supernatural forces) to the ‘uncanny’ (external manifestation of unconscious desires), with the ‘pure Fantastic’ (which eludes explanation altogether) somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Ultimately Todorov’s definition of the pure fantastic is so narrow that it applies to perhaps only two works - Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and Mérimée’s *La Vénus d’Ille* (1837) - and his contention that Freud rendered the fantastic mode obsolete has been proven wrong by the continual production of fantastic texts. In that respect, Rosemary Jackson’s Lacanian-based elaboration of Todorov’s ideas in *Fantasy: A Literature of Subversion* (1981) helps shed light on where the Gothic and fantastic merge: in regressive fantasies of dissolution and entropy, which counter the freedom of the expansive and thus equally life-threatening sublime, and subvert the symbolic order.⁷

The Danish texts mirror the overall development from an Enlightenment Gothic, which still maintains the option of relegating the text to the safe realm of the marvellous, to a more internalized psychological narrative of the uncanny, tracing “a slow diminution of faith in

⁶ Quoted from Clery & Miles: *Gothic Documents* (164).

⁷ Jackson helpfully uses the aesthetic term ‘mimetic’ to replace the psychological category of ‘the uncanny’.

supernaturalism” (Jackson 97). Ingemann’s early Romantic texts are, like the early Gothic romances of for example Clara Reeve, closer to the marvellous than to other modes, contributing to the hesitation in modern readers. “Their introduction of supernatural agents – ghosts, magic, animation – to aid human affairs by restoring justice and moral order, reveals a longing for an idealised social order to replace the one which was in the process of being destroyed by emergent capitalism,” Jackson notes, and to capitalism we might add rationalism and scepticism (Jackson 97). In *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762-1800* (1995), Emma Clery traces the transformation of the supernatural from ‘truth’ to ‘entertainment’, from relying on credibility and rationalist caveats which demystify the Gothic, as in Radcliffe’s explained supernatural, to being detached from questions of faith. This transition is concomitant with the Gothic’s establishing itself as an unabashedly spectacular fiction, in an increasingly capitalist culture and publishing industry which commodifies the supernatural in the lucrative business generated by “the fashion for artificial fear” (Clery 134). This inevitable drift towards entertainment, pleasure and consumption is skewered by Andersen with his ironic meta-commentary in “Tante Tandpine” (1872). When the supernatural occurrences are usually not explained in the Danish texts, even in Blixen’s 1930s texts, they become infused with a sense of nostalgia for a time pre-dating this commercialization of the supernatural, viz. Max Webber’s *Entzauberung* or disenchantment, as they embrace a non-mimetic aesthetic which is in increasing conflict with the predominantly realistic modes of Danish literature.

2.3 Gothic Conventions

The extent to which the explained and unexplained supernatural are employed by different authors has been a fixture in Gothic criticism since its earliest commentators, Radcliffe, Walter Scott and Coleridge among them, often working from an assumption that the realistic is the

preference of a more mature society and that the nonrealistic is for children and those with low and unsophisticated tastes. That idea lingers to this day, in which especially the modern Gothic still seems to carry less academic weight, largely due to the combination of visual spectacle created by the supernatural with melodramatic extravagances of plot, histrionic gestures, and a hyperbolic rhetorical style. Despite Walpole's rather baffling claim in the first preface to *Otranto* that "there is no bombast, no similies [sic], flowers, digressions, or unnecessary descriptions," this style made Gothic novels an easy target for ridicule and satire, already in its first phase (Walpole 6). Prominent examples are Thomas Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1799/1818), the latter demonstrating how Gothic can work as both parody and actual Gothic narrative at the same time, not least because Gothic already in its inception was based on clichés imitated from other genres. Catherine Morland's insatiable demand for 'truly horrid' novels becomes a comment on a supposedly indiscriminate audience of middle-class women, which further reduces the status of Gothic romances as 'low' literature upsetting domestic sensibilities as well as sexual propriety. That stigmatization continues to the present day, in which the Gothic plot translated into a Scandinavian market typically means imported paperback romances in the supermarket. This indicates both the scarcity of Scandinavian Gothic writers as well as the inherent tension in Gothic between high and low culture, originality and repetition, the canonical and the campy formulaic.

These mid-twentieth-century Gothic romances employ themes similar to the original eighteenth-century novels by Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and Clara Reeve. They include a swooning heroine replete with sensibility, and a tyrannical villain, entirely or ambiguously evil, but always dark and brooding, and often bequeathed with a lock, a key and a spine-chilling castle or variant thereof; the Bluebeard folktale thus becomes a point of reference

particularly for the Female Gothic. This convention remains rather stable insofar as it demonstrates an acute and painful obsession with power: the key human relation in Gothic texts is a pattern of flight and pursuit. A *Literature of Terror* as David Punter calls it, the central fear in Gothic revolves around transgressions of the individual's physical and psychological integrity; in variations on the persecuted maiden and the tyrannical villain who threatens to violate all established boundaries. As the Gothic has evolved, the list of sources of villainous peril has expanded - from predatory monks, lascivious aristocrats, ghosts, demons, corpses, and bandits, which populate eighteenth-century Gothic, to also include in the nineteenth century fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double, to represent a range of threats to the self, some of which come from within. Sometimes forgotten is the ambiguity in the relation of pursued and pursuer, often informed by a sexually tinged paranoia, and its implication of the reversibility in the dynamics and role-play found in sadomasochism. The identity played out in these relations is not structured by a stable Manichean binary of inherent good vs. evil but is rendered fluid by monstrous properties spreading through contagion and proximity, for instance in Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) or Blixen's *Gengældelsens Veje (The Angelic Avengers, 1944)*, in which the persecuted maiden suddenly becomes the pursuer simply by prolonged exposure to evil. This instability and reversibility dramatize identity as non-essential, as role play and ultimately: spectacle.

The scene where this pursuit between victim and victimizer takes place is the iconic haunted castle, "a structure imbued with the history of its inhabitants as well as a sense of its own passing" (Spooner 2006: 17). The haunted castle remains the defining and single most influential of Gothic conventions since *The Castle of Otranto* and its archetypal image of the trembling heroine trapped in terrifying isolation in the labyrinthine corridor between the impenetrable walls

of the patriarchal castle and the patriarchal abbey. While it is the ornamented, repetitive architectural style of the Gothic cathedral which gives the genre its name, the physical space takes many different architectural shapes, usually antiquated and decaying spaces that work as places of repression, isolation and confinement. In the nineteenth century, the most significant locus of entrapment and transgression become old ancestral mansions riddled with secret passages and obscure attics. They replace the underground vaults and torture chambers of the eighteenth-century feudal castles, but the same sense of confinement can be achieved with prisons, schools, and madhouses, not coincidentally institutions that define progress and enlightenment, as Høeg's *De Måske Egnede* (*Borderliners*, 1993) demonstrates. In these spaces emerge spectres of a dark past, ideological conflicts, family secrets, incestuous tensions, and psychological struggles; all suggestive figures of real or imagined threats to the self, including that of complete social disintegration. In that respect Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) reads like an inventory of the Gothic; the threats to the self are so vivid that the building at times is invested with a personality or becomes a force of evil, as it does in Blixen's "Et Familieselskab i Helsingør" (1934) and *Gengældelsens Veje* (1944) or later, Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) or Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977). The four Danish writers cover quite a range between them, focusing their attentions on the constricting mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois living room, the centre of civilised, domestic values and the cradle of the post-1800 subject. Contributing to these perceived threats is the ominous Gothic atmosphere: one of the strongest structural conventions is a "fearful sense of inheritance in time", the impossible escape from the past, combined with "a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space," as distributed by the haunted castle or its architectural replacement, "these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into

disintegration,” in Chris Baldick’s widely disseminated definition (Baldick 2001: xix). The production of identity when the self is faced with this inevitable and omnipresent threat of disintegration will necessarily have to be precarious, not least because the domestic space becomes strangely unsafe and defamiliarized: the strange and eerie are commonplace, while the home and the everyday world are rendered uncanny.

2.4 Gothic: Escapism or Social Commentary?

To make sense of the unstable Gothic self articulated through such visceral imagery, critics have often resorted to psychoanalysis, itself arguably a Gothic narrative. Psychoanalytic criticism reads the house with its many dark recesses and primeval depths as a Freudian topography of the mind, in an allegorical relationship that tends to ignore the actual setting. One of the points I wish to make is the importance of not necessarily dismissing the Freudian surface-depth model, but of finding a model that is more congruent with Gothic, a genre that notoriously foregrounds and interrogates surfaces. In the castle, for example, the architectural structure with its enclosed and confining spaces is not just an incidental background that conveys a latent psychological ‘reality’. It is rather a case of the castle in its different shapes realizing, “mak[ing] concrete the structure of power that engenders the action” within a historical, social world. The actual castle represents a certain cultural, gendered “arrangement of spaces” that determines the “distribution of power that generates the plot,” Anne Williams argues (Williams 41-4). So while the settings in classic Gothic appear very exotic and are often set in the past, usually on what Robert Miles calls ‘the Gothic cusp’ between medieval and modern times, sometimes in other transitional periods, this should not necessarily be taken as purely escapist tendencies. The prevalence of nightmarish dark landscapes, extreme psychological states and apparitions from the past has caused many critics to insist that Gothic portrays an utterly subjective “free-floating fantasy

world,” as early critics such as Edith Birkhead and Montague Summers argued, a point that has been echoed in much Danish criticism of Ingemann and Blixen (Mighall xxv). Instead, today’s critics such as Robert Mighall and Chris Baldick argue that the remote temporal or geographical settings in classic Gothic typically indicate a concern with probability and historical realism, from a perception that repressive feudal politics and mechanisms of past power configurations were still evidently governing such remote places as Southern Europe (Baldick & Mighall 219-220). Gothic family constellations, notoriously difficult, also grow out of a historical time of unrest: “Orphans, or children dispossessed of inheritance and due identity... become emblematic figures of the revolutionary decade, cast adrift in a world bereft of social and familial security. The threats to paternal order disclose an underlying instability, an absence, at the heart of any social or symbolic structure” (Botting 2002: 284) As the genre has evolved, the setting has grown increasingly recognizable and the archaic past has become more and more recent; and so by the 1930s Blixen, as Chris Baldick notes, sets her stories in the early nineteenth century, once the modern backdrop for dark medieval pasts but now a Gothic period itself; while Høeg, similarly, Gothicizes the 1920s and 1970s from the viewpoint of the 1990s, the customs of those periods now appearing cruelly repressive – but perhaps not so far or so different from the writer’s present. Gothic signifies a general fear of encroachment upon one’s personal, physical and ideological freedom, a sense of the impossibility of ever truly escaping the tyrannies of the past, particularly from the point of view of its middle-class audience. A safe distance enables literature to become an indirect critique of *Things as They Are* as the full title of William Godwin’s political *Caleb Williams* (1797) goes. In David Punter’s words, the gothic is “not an escape from the real but a deconstruction and dismemberment of it” (Punter 1981: 97). The Gothic counter-narrative unveils the shadows lurking within established constructions of the real,

through various exaggeration and defamiliarization techniques, which dramatize the threats the modern subject must face.

Each periodical transformation has expressed new anxieties and new threats to the subject arising in its time, and Danish Gothic covers the range of mutations. In its already heterogeneous classic age, the highly popular Gothic romances and drama shadowed eighteenth-century rationality, morality and Enlightenment, fracturing the autonomous and reasoning Cartesian subject, the construction of which, in Foucauldian terms, happens through an expulsion of madness, excessive emotion, transgressive desire and un-reason. In the Romantic age it continued to shadow ideas of individualism as well as the “despairing ecstasies of Romantic idealism”, creative freedom and the possibility of transcendence, creeping into the Romantic poetry and drama of Coleridge, Byron and Shelley (Botting 1996: 99). While several critics consider Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) emblematic of the Gothic in its composite and transgressive nature, this period also marks the end of classic Gothic with the publication of Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth The Wanderer* (1820) and James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Nonetheless, after 1820 the Gothic narrative of the floundering self has found increasing relevance in disparate geographical and cultural environments, and the Gothic has been diffused into a literary form capable of more radical interrogation of social contradiction and psychological conflict. The new American republic found in Gothic a useful discourse to articulate fears of past tyrannies, often conceived as Oedipal power struggles, in works by Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Due to the conspicuous lack of medieval castles, the threats to the self were interiorized and domesticated, offering a wider range of uncanny spaces while indicating that the Gothic can be located anywhere. A similar move towards confinement in the power

structures of everyday life, in the home, and in gender roles is seen in the Victorian Gothic of Wilkie Collins, Sheridan Le Fanu, and the Brontës, as illustrated by the iconic double-like figure of the raging madwoman in the attic and her excessive passion. The Victorian fear of carnal desires illustrates the nineteenth-century passage “from a symbolics of blood to an analysis of sexuality,” which Foucault explains corresponds to the bourgeoisie’s replacement of the aristocracy’s power and conduct (Foucault 1976: 148). If sanguinity guaranteed the aristocracy’s power, the control and the regulation of sexuality gave rise to middle-class hegemony. Ingemann and Blixen in particular deal with this transition, as Denmark grows increasingly democratic. At the end of the century, Bram Stoker, R.L. Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Henry James and Charlotte Perkins Gilman explore the dual, even polyvalent versions of the self, as the process of abjecting undesirable Others becomes increasingly disturbing with the Gothic moving towards a greater sense of realism. The Gothic has continued to morph into different shapes, as unstable as the identities produced in it, while continually shadowing discourses of emancipation and progress. The common thread, as I will focus on in my analyses, is the precarious state of human identity. Finally, in the present day, Gothic follows a post-modern logic of pastiche and simulation as it spreads into mainstream culture – the current post-millennial vampire craze being a case in point - self-referentially drawing on itself as well as other genres for its continued survival. In other words, Gothic is as hard to kill of as any of the revenants and living dead populating its fictions.

2.5 Gothic Criticism

One of the reasons the Gothic now seems so ubiquitous is that there has been a shift from identifying texts that have Gothic qualities in themselves, to critics subjectively superimposing Gothic frameworks on texts. This has meant a type of circularity between texts and critical terminology, since critics in the wake of Deconstruction and Derrida's work rather liberally have

employed Gothic metaphors of hauntings, spectres, traces, ghost-like signifiers, uncanny moments and echoes, to describe non-Gothic texts for inclusion in the Gothic canon. Gothic more than other genres is always a necromantic revival of the dead, blatantly imitative of its literary ancestors, and in that respect is really emblematic of textuality in general, a point to which I will return in my analyses. While Gothic in that sense is extremely helpful by visualizing fundamental conditions of all texts, it does not mean that all texts should be considered Gothic. This is something to be acutely aware of when teasing out Gothic works in new national canons; and a firmer grip of its recurring conventions should preclude such assumptions. In terms of content, the wish to identify texts as Gothic has much to do with the academy's Foucault-inspired concern with marginalization processes and transgressive strategies that subvert the dominant logic of discourses of power, all of which the Gothic counter-narrative of sexuality, knowledge and power affords generously, not least in its articulation of body politics, and feminist and queer issues. This has helped move the Gothic out of the dark margins of academic criticism, from where early twentieth-century critics such as Edith Birkhead, Eino Railo and J. M. S. Tompkins once felt the need to apologize for their interest in so lurid and unrespectable a form of popular literature.

The popular appeal of the Gothic has always shadowed its reputation. Designated 'the terrorist school', 'the German school', and 'the trash of the Minerva Press,' the Gothic from its beginnings has been perceived as marginal in terms of literary hierarchies, a horribly disfigured mutation of realism. However, although Gothic has been perceived as a "debased and degenerate cousin who calls too much attention to himself by an outrageous and almost campy performance of all the tricks of the literary trade," it was already in its early years crossing the genres of narrative, dramatic and lyrical writing (Halberstam 1995: 62). Significantly Walpole did not

admit to having authored *Otranto* until it was a verifiable popular success, nor did Matthew Lewis immediately acknowledge the scandalous and salacious *The Monk* as his progeny. We may add Karen Blixen's extensive use of pseudonyms to veil her identity. In contrast, the wildly popular Ann Radcliffe was also critically revered in the 1790s: by incorporating the popular discourse of the sublime into her romances she was able to pitch her work toward the high end of the literary market (Miles 2002: 43). While Radcliffe's romances advocated the subordination of imagination to reason and thus could still be seen as to some extent supporting the function of literature conveyed by periodicals such as *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review* of buttressing social improvement and national education, such was not the case with many of her mass market imitators. The Gothic soon acquired a reputation of being in "very bad taste" in the words of Walter Scott⁸, immoral and subversive of the social fabric, not least after the controversy surrounding *The Monk*, which was largely condemned along with the 'German' fashion it inspired, particularly by conservatives for its subversive social tendencies (Gamer 87). Coleridge, who like other Romantics such as Scott, Wordsworth and Byron both appropriated the Gothic in his own production while vilifying it in his critical writings, argues in his review of *The Monk* that "figures that chock the imagination, and narratives that mangle the feelings, rarely discover genius and always betray a low and vulgar taste" and "we trust that satiety will banish what good sense should have prevented."⁹ The condemnation is thus based on both moral and aesthetic grounds and is closely tied to the popularity of the Gothic: its sensationalism and visceral qualities, its female readership, its association with circulating libraries and the countless imitations of the Minerva Press meant that it was very early relegated to the bottom of the

⁸ In Scott's review of Maturin's *The Fatal Revenge* (1807) in *Quarterly Review* 1810. Scott notes Maturin's associations with Lewis and ties the Gothic to the "lowest denizens of Grub Street narrating...all that malevolence can invent and stupidity propagate" (Gamer 90).

⁹ Coleridge's review appeared in *Critical Review* Vol. 19 February 1797 pp. 194 -200. I quote from Clery & Miles: *Gothic Documents* (187, 185).

literary ladder, as 'low' literature. Similarly in Denmark, the pre-Romantic Gothic ballad lived on in various imitative forms in the monthly *Det Almindelige Danske Bibliotek* (The General Danish Library), while to a large extent it was the *Kolportageroman* which carried on the legacy of Gothic and *Schauer*; sold from door to door it was the most common dissemination of popular (trivial) literature. One of the most popular writers in the 1820s-30s was Johannes Wildt, who used his experience from the theater to create impossible scenarios of horrors and bombastic effects piled on top of the other and sentimental plots from German *Schauer*-novels revolving around the evil persecution of innocence in the shape of lustful friars and fathers. Unknown today, he was so popular that his books were still reprinted in the early 1900s. As Robert Miles argues, the "literary snobbery" surrounding the Gothic as a popular form "has for many years blinded critics to the obvious fact that many of the decade's canonical texts were first and foremost tales of terror" (Miles 2002: 60). As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, a similar blindness has precluded Danish literary histories from including Gothic texts in otherwise canonical authorships.

The labelling of Gothic, and sometimes rightly so, as pulp fiction, became particularly detrimental to its acknowledgement as a legitimate literary mode with the dominance in the academy of New Criticism in the 1930s to 1960s, before coherence became a dirty word in the wake of Derrida. The New Critical high/low distinction and rigid criteria for 'literariness' has meant a disregard of Romanticism and anything non-mimetic – not to say popular - in the Danish academy until the 1970s, while in the Anglo-American academy it meant that Gothic has been disregarded as inferior based on an ideal of organicism, unity, density and aesthetic coherence (Hogle 2006: 29). Such ideals are in conflict with the Gothic's heterogeneity of discourses, generic and stylistic mix and sometimes self-contradictory social responses. As late as 1987

Elizabeth Napier rejected the Gothic as an artistic and moral failure based on similar principles in *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (1987). But the Gothic is not necessarily always an inherently incoherent mode, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick was the first to demonstrate in the works of Radcliffe, the Brontës and Thomas de Quincey, in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980), which builds on some assumptions from New Criticism. Importantly, Sedgwick explores the relationship between the Gothic's major conventions, e.g 'live burial' and 'the unspeakable' and identity formation, while codifying these conventions into a phenomenological, psychological and structuralist model, which focuses on the characteristic orientation and movement of the self in the Gothic world. Sedgwick shows that Gothic conventions are "coherent in terms that do not depend on the psychological model; although they can sometimes be deepened by it" (Sedgwick 1980: 12). While Sedgwick forms the theoretical foundation of my approach, I will also refer to Eugenia Delamotte's work on boundaries and barriers shaping the model of individual identity, as she includes the aspect of gender to the outside-inside model, which Sedgwick ignores. The advantage of looking at Gothic literature as a semiotic system based on certain categories is that while motifs and themes can be transformed on a surface level, a certain stability in the super-categories ensures that the Gothic label cannot be applied to just any disturbingly gloomy cultural artifact.

2.6 The Ghost of Freud

While Sedgwick's work on Gothic conventions was for a time neglected, perhaps because it is quite abstract and demanding, critics such as Catherine Spooner and Judith Halberstam have continued to develop her surface-depth model into a precise articulation of a central characteristic of Gothic: its "strongest energies inhere in the surface" (Sedgwick 1980: 12).

These surfaces have been ignored because before Sedgwick, what rescued the Gothic and elevated it to prominence within the academy was psychoanalytical criticism and its probing of human and textual 'depth' for meaning: "With its theory of an underlying reality, psychoanalysis helped give the gothic a new 'profundity', by seeing it as the revelation of the private life of either the individual or his culture that had been buried as habit, the conscious will, and forces of individual and social repression" (Kilgour 220). Many critics, e.g. Maggie Kilgour, Robert Mighall, Markman Ellis, and Catherine Spooner take issue with the extensive use of psychoanalysis in Gothic criticism for different reasons, but a commonality is the tautology of applying to the Gothic a discourse which is arguably Gothic in itself, as Freud partly developed his theories from seeing the sublimation and symbolizing of unconscious drives as more readily apparent in popular fiction than in most published writing: his famous – and insightful – essay on the uncanny, "Das Unheimliche" (1919) is based on Hoffmann's semi-Gothic "Der Sandmann" (1816). That being said, the discourse of the uncanny provides an important counterpart to the aesthetic category of the expansive sublime and is particularly relevant to the claustrophobically contracting domestic spaces of Danish Gothic and their accompanying dysfunctional family dynamics, which play a pivotal role for the identity formation staged in the texts. Gothic remains a "narrative of prohibitions, transgressions, and the processes of identity construction that occur within such tensions"; it revolves around the classic Oedipal family, figured as both nation state and personal family, replete with primal scenes, castration anxiety, incest, paranoia, and sadomasochistic fantasies (Bruhm 261). Even Eve Sedgwick comments on the centrality of the Freudian vision:

Gothic seems to offer a privileged view of individual and family psychology. Certain features of the Oedipal family are insistently foregrounded there: absolutes of license and prohibition, for instance; a preoccupation with the possibilities of incest; a fascinated

proscription of sexual activity; an atmosphere dominated by the threat of violence between generations. Even the reader who does not accept the Oedipal family as a transhistorical given can learn a lot from the Gothic about the terms and conditions under which it came to be enforced as a norm for bourgeois society (Sedgwick 1985: 91).

A full understanding of the forces at work in the Danish Gothic, or in Gothic at large for that matter, cannot ignore the obvious Freudian configurations at play; but it must also include the striking mechanisms of the surface, which drives the Gothic and which exclusively psychoanalytical critics tend to disregard. An important point is that Gothic conventions do not cancel out depth as much as they foreground the surface-depth relationship for interrogation.

Das Unheimliche, or *Det Uhyggelige*, in Danish, which has similar connotations of the unhomely and the unsafe as the German word, is described in terms of “making things uncertain: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic” (Bennet & Royle 1999: 37). Through eruptions of the uncanny, what – or who - is familiar becomes estranged from the self, disrupting epistemological and ontological categories and defamiliarizing reality. Questions of representation, interpretation, knowledge, processes of perception and the way perception creates our sense of reality are at the forefront from the Gothic beginnings, as the narratives are frequently focused through the perspective of a terrified, paranoid, sometimes even mad protagonist, who is trying to make sense of contradictory signs and pattern (not unlike the Gothic reader). DeLamotte argues that “one of the problems of knowledge that Gothicists investigate is the dilemma of the self unable to perceive anything but its own reflection”; increasingly in the evolution of Gothic fiction, “the subject is no longer confident about appropriating or perceiving a material world” (DeLamotte 24; Jackson 97). Through the discourse of the uncanny and the dissolution of fiction’s classical unities of time, space, and unified character, the Gothic explores

a very fundamental epistemological and ontological confusion which arises in Romantic Idealism but which grows into a sense of alienation peculiar to modern bourgeois society. “If reality is dependent on an authentic state of mind, and not on a cognitive grasp of an external verifiable state of things, then Romanticism’s enthusiastic endorsement of the imagination is simultaneously a license for the legitimacy of Gothic delusion as a source of extended vision or emotional experience” (Martin 197). As the Romantic writers Ingemann and Andersen show in their nightmarish texts of things being constantly same and different, including the self, this sense of alienation has grave consequences on personal as well as cultural and national levels, as the ghosts, monsters, haunting doubles and undesirable others that have been repressed – or abjected in Julia Kristeva’s useful extension – return in distorted, disguised and displaced forms to confront the subject. The double in particular continues to take center stage in all the Danish texts, from Ingemann to Skov. Embodying the uncanny experience of sameness and difference, regression and evolution, its persistency seems to call for the highly theatrical psychoanalysis developed by Jacques Lacan, which helps bring attention to “the stagy performance of self cast into a struggle for coherence in the face of many haunting ‘others’” (Hogle 2009: 33). Gothic surfaces are duplicitous and specular: they refract a self struggling to maintain its boundaries, while defining itself against what is repressed and othered.

On a national and cultural level the Freudian and Kristevan mechanisms of repression and abjection help us understand the neglect of the discourses of the Gothic and the fantastic in Denmark, out of a larger need for individual and national coherence as brought forth in a grand narrative of unity and progress, which is an impulse that is consistently negated in the Gothic – and in psychoanalysis – by the stifling, yet alluring power of the past. David Punter, in particular, has since *The Literature of Terror* (1980) and its combination of psychoanalysis with a Marxist

social consciousness, shed light on the collective ideological repression which Gothic both reveals and participates in, although one should be careful to assume that this should happen in a straightforward manner. The symbolic realm constituted by Gothic in its various forms allows for the production of unity in Western middle-class culture by abjecting – throwing off – conflicting multiplicities, beliefs, unresolved quandaries, and cultural anxieties: whatever is ideologically identified as ‘other’ can be abjected into archaic settings, half-attractive and half-repulsive monsters and spectres, uncanny in their simultaneous foreignness and recognizability. This category can of course only be as stable as the self which engages in the phantasmatic identification of otherness, so the shape of the ‘Other’ continually shifts: “what is Gothicized constantly changes according to the stories a culture needs to tell itself” (Mighall 1999: 286). The Gothic allows both the confrontation of and seeming disappearance of what is othered and thus performs a complex cultural function.

2.7 The Gothic Surface: ‘A Writing of Excess’

Because Gothic is clearly expressive of fears, fantasies, anxieties and complex psychological issues, it only makes sense to investigate the identity construction it stages with some reference to psychoanalysis, or in Ingemann’s case to the pre-Freudian science of the self that was emerging at the time. However, reading the Gothic as only a Freudian allegory, as about something else located in its convoluted depths, tends to not only reduce every text to the same template but to dismiss its most striking characteristic – that it is ‘a writing of excess’, in Fred Botting’s now famous opening gambit in *Gothic* (Botting 1996:1). In Gothic fiction, the primary mechanisms take place on the surface, as the props, stagy settings, supernatural machinery and thrilling effects threaten to appropriate the narrative. Not only is this important in the context of identifying a distinct Danish Gothic tradition and what exactly makes these texts seem so

flamboyantly alien against the drab background of Scandinavian realism; it is also an obvious but neglected aspect of Gothic fiction in general, although fully present in the inaugural *Castle of Otranto* (1764) in addition to all the other central Gothic elements: the haunted castle, the persecution of innocents through labyrinthine passages, the dysfunctional – even incestuous and murderous - family relations and the related themes of rightful inheritance and confused identities, as well as a general atmosphere of depravity and violence. In order to get to the ‘meaning’ of this campy narrative, its melodramatic extravagances of plot, histrionic gestures, hyperbolic rhetoric and stagy effects such as the *memento mori* skeleton; supernatural portents; the magic helmet that drops from the sky and waves its sable plumes back and forth; the



animated portrait, from which Manfred’s grandfather steps out of the frame; the bleeding statue; and the ghostly ancestral giant have often been dismissed, even though its highly visual theatricality set the tone for the genre, in a manner that also resonates in a Danish context. The marionette-like quality of the characters conveyed

by the illustration also characterizes Blixen and Høeg’s stagy tales. Catherine Spooner, in her development of Sedgwick’s work on Gothic conventions, has brought attention to precisely these effects, which have given the Gothic a reputation of being superficial literature, and which have previously been dismissed as “the superficialities of ‘claptrap’, ‘decor’, and ‘stage-set’”

(Sedgwick 1980: 12). It was this visual aesthetic of Gothic which made Wordsworth put down the stupefying effects of “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies” staged in the Gothic theatre with its use of emerging spectral technologies, in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical*

Ballads, and which made Coleridge complain of the dangers of Gothic romance's visual aesthetic as a mode of vacant phantasmagoric reverie, "a mental camera obscura" in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), both despite their own earlier inspiration from the Gothic.

To all the stage effects and the stylistic appeals to the visual imagination we might add to these Gothic effects veils, cloaks, cowls, sartorial disguises, curtains and other means of concealment and dramatic revelation, in one spectacular tableau after another. These are often employed to heighten the suspense of the customary revelation when the veil is lifted to reveal true familial identity, a dominant theme in Gothic romances, which revolve around identities that are both confused and confusing because artificial and hidden from their supposed origins. In "The Character in the Veil," the supplementary text to *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Sedgwick examines Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *The Italian* (1797) and Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) with particular attention to the sexual function of veils and the manner in which "the attributes of veil and of flesh are transferable and interchangeable" offering themselves up for inscription and the imprint of characters (often as writing in blood); "the attributes of the veil, and of the surface generally, are contagious metonymically, by touch," or by contiguity, so that the veil stands in metonymically for the flesh it conceals (Sedgwick 1981: 255-6). Noting that the self expressed by Gothic conventions is "all surface," Sedgwick continues that "this self is at least potentially social, since its 'character' seems to be impressed on it from outside and to be displayed facing outward. And the contagion of characters does more than shape the self that already exists; it presides over the establishment of the self, "thus anticipating postmodern constructivist notions of subjectivity (Sedgwick 1981: 260). Sedgwick was the first critic to explore rather than dismiss the convention of the surface, but Catherine Spooner and Judith Halberstam have developed her ideas extensively, including also historical discourses of fashion,

and Gothic art and cinema. As the genre was shaped in the 1790s and beyond, the effect afforded by veils and veil-like constructions grew into a more existential questioning of what defines human identity: how art fashions nature, how surfaces shape self and text (Sedgwick 1981: 255–8; Kilgour 130; Spooner 2004: 6-7). This obviously has wide ramifications for the configuration of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’. It might not be surprising that Blixen with her personal and aesthetic ontology based on masks participates in this dramatic staging of world and self but Ingemann, Andersen, Høeg and Skov, too, negotiate this theme. It is my argument that Danish Gothic texts in particular, in addition to more traditionally Gothic conventions, draw attention to this veiling or sartorial construction of a fragmented and continually disappearing body and self.

At the same time, the texts in Danish Gothic, perhaps in Gothic at large, betray a tension between the recognition of exteriority and the urge for plenitude, authentic meaning and genuine self-expression, which Spooner identifies with Gothic’s twin impulse in Romanticism (Spooner 2006:28). It also governs today’s most prominent form of the Gothic *Weltanschauung* in postmodern Goth subculture. Contemporary Gothic, whether in the street or its high fashion



couture formulation, is articulated visually, in images of angsty and morbidly morose skull-toting teenagers with heavy eye makeup; scarred and pierced bodies, and variations of often shredded black clothing, based on the absence and presence of materials that simultaneously reveal, conceal and shape the surfaces of the body. The modern Goth strand of the Gothic ideology is usually dismissed by critics as unreflective cookie-cutter non-conformism and self-

indulgent suburban affectation, which has little to do with the literary Gothic, and which does not truly subvert any established political paradigms because it is fake, insincere and inauthentic.¹⁰

Such argumentation shows a misunderstanding of how the Gothic sensibility works: the meaning is not behind the clichés but in their coded forms, as one recognizable prop or conventional gesture conjure up an entire framework of identity and one costume articulates the subject in its role as victimiser or victim, master or servant. In addition, “the fetishization of ‘authenticity’ does not take account of the fact that clothing can never ‘mirror’ an essential, inner self, since that self does not exist,” Valerie Steele argues in her survey of

Gothic fashion and Goth culture from the 1700s to the present day (Steele 102). The subject is not only articulated through dress, but dress, masks and disguises articulate the body in terms of “a range of characteristic Gothic themes: sensibility, imprisonment, spectrality, haunting, madness, monstrosity, the grotesque,” thus fashioning the body as Gothic subject through an extensive



manipulation of surfaces (Spooner 2004: 4). Literary Gothic and the subculture that has emerged from it share a hyper-visual, theatrical nature, an obsession with stylized selves that are deliberately clichéd and one-dimensional, created from an existential awareness of a fundamental nothingness at the core by means of elaborate artifice, convoluted ornamentation and patchwork referencing of literary and cinematic texts. For both text and body as scripted and inscripted

¹⁰ This dismissal based on perceived inauthenticity has been particularly predominant in Europe, where Goths stand in the shadow of the ‘authentic’ working class rebellion of the punks, and where consequently Goth subculture has never been considered serious or transgressive enough to foster the religious-based media ire that it has sometimes attracted in the United States, particularly after the Columbine shootings in 1999 (Steele 46).

surfaces, this means a continual deferring of the gaze which is so prominent in the Gothic's staging of desire, often via elaborate ornamentation, from penetrating the surface in the quest for depth and wholeness at the centre of the Gothic drive. The metaphors of masking and disguise



seem to indicate an 'authentic' self hidden beneath, but as Gothic consistently interrogates the surface-depth relationship and foregrounds the process of concealment rather than what is hidden, a strategy often transferred to the discourse of both fashion and text, it becomes clear that when the sensational veil is dramatically rent, it reveals only another illusion: there is no authentic presence behind the contagious continuum of effects, as illustrated by the final revelation,

after some 400 pages, of what is behind the veil in *Udolpho*, not a dead relative but a *memento mori* wax figure, a ghostly signifier of absence.

2.8 The Monster and the Abject

The lack of depth apparent in Gothic bodies and selves seems only to provoke a continual violent testing of the validity of the surface (Spooner 2004: 10). There is an obvious connection, beyond the obsession with transience and decaying materiality, from early Gothic's interrogation of bodily boundaries, in the form of rape, incest, violence, torture and sadomasochistic relations, even shape-shifting, metamorphoses and monstrous transformations, to the more visual self-inflicted violation and submission of the pierced, perforated and penetrated body in the aesthetic of Goth chic. In highly visual terms often borrowed from the language of the theatre, the Gothic achieves its strongest and most typical effects through spectacle, specifically a spectacle of suffering, as particularly the highly theatrical "Tante Tandpine," *Gengældelsens Veje* and *De Måske Egnede* demonstrate. Consequently my discussion of the construction of the Gothic body

will also draw on Julia Kristeva's abject articulated in *Powers of Horror* (1982). The abject, in its often violent dissolution of boundaries between subject and object confronts us with our own mortality and challenges Enlightenment notions of wholeness and consistency of being. The externalized monstrosities, duplicitous Doppelgängers, and archaically uncanny Others in the Gothic are all, in Kristeva's sense of the term, abject, as their protean bodies disturb "identity, system, order... borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). The most iconic, visually striking examples have been regurgitated and continually transformed in popular culture, some even, in an ironically circular manner, more recognizable in their current form as Halloween costume than in their original shape. The precariously assembled state of Frankenstein's monster has, since Chris Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (1990), become emblematic of the Gothic's artificial patchwork identity which defies categories and challenges the Enlightenment notion of the well-balanced, organic whole (whether of body or text), cueing later monsters in modern Gothic horror to fashion themselves out of repurposed body-garments. There are countless examples of such instability in the Gothic's abjected bodies. There is for example the unsettling Matilda / Rosario in Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), both androgynous human and demonic spirit, who in her assumption of both masculine and feminine identities exposes the arbitrary and contingent nature of (gender) identity. Similar confounding metamorphoses take place in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) with its indecorous female monster-villain, and in Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1816); both of which are inspired directly by *The Monk*. They anticipate the instability of the subject in Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), in which the diabolical Gil-Martin is able to assume other identities merely through his gaze, rendering the physical body an illusionary construct. The unstable self in Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) is represented so powerfully that it has become an idiomatic part of not only the English language

but Danish, too, but although the novel in the popular consciousness is the most iconic representation of the split self, this dualism is far from simple and is in fact rather a case of fragmentation that problematizes the issue of identity at large: “man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my knowledge does not pass beyond that point. ... and I hazard a guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens,” Jekyll declares (Stevenson 79). In fin-de-siècle Gothic, Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) shares the absence of a fixed form with Gil-Martin, metamorphosing as bat, rat, rodent and man, but ultimately outside human categorization. Moreover, the weirdly androgynous count is able to feed from his breast and is aroused at the sight of Jonathan Harker’s throat but he still penetrates both men and women. In addition, Harker’s description of the count’s ‘child-brain’ suggests a regressive, in-between state. Such a state is also promised by H.C. Andersen’s Satania Infernalis in “Tante Tandpine” (1872), a demonic figure with torture instruments for fingers, a murderous and female Edward Scissorhands of sorts.¹¹ In her demonized femininity she is reminiscent of Ingemann’s all-consuming aristocrat Goldini, repeatedly referred to as ‘et uhyre’ (a monster) in “Sphinxen” (1820); in her menacing hybridity she points forward to Blixen’s Fanny in “Et Familieselskab,” who is described as part bird: it is not just a question of animalized masculinity, as Cyndy Hendershot has argued in *The Animal Within* (1998) but a general blurring of categories, gender included.

The monster’s lack of stable identity threatens the human subject, threatening to spill over in a contagious fluidity; ultimately there is but a fine line between monster and protagonist. Kristeva’s abject, derived from the Lacanian pre-Oedipal stage of radical instability, of being in-

¹¹ One could argue that Andersen’s over-the-top creation of Satania Infernalis participates in the same logic of excess and parody perfected by Tim Burton’s neo-Gothic films, showing a sense of its own ludicrousness and of its place within a particular tradition that encourages such parodic knowingness.

between - half-inside and half-outside the mother and thus in a horror-inducing state of being between death and life - is useful in highlighting the incompleteness of identity, its state of movement and *process*. In *The Gothic Body* (1996), Kelly Hurley extends Kristeva's abject to include the "abhuman subject [which] is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (Hurley 3).¹² While the Danish texts are less radical in their interrogation of the human form, most of them do illustrate that push-and-pull relationship between the coherent humanist subject and its fragmentation, between the abject's promise of both constitution and decomposition of identity. In Gothic, the interrogation of bodily boundaries, in the penetration of the skin as the outermost surface, and in the attempted rearranging of the body's design, suggests that the body is "remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable," particularly in its monstrous form: the formlessness and the malleability imply that bodies, and by extension, sex, identity and other structures are arbitrary and provisional, the idea of full humanity no more than an illusion (Halberstam 1995: 21; Hurley 25-6). Making strange the fundamental categories of *Det Gode*, *Det Sande*, *Det Skønne* (the beautiful, true and good), Gothic bodies and Gothic narratives transform such concepts into the abhorrent, the uncanny and the weird. Gothic bodies, always Foucauldian surfaces branded by historical discourses of knowledge and resistance, signal a reorientation of the surface / depth, outside / inside, body / mind, female / male balancing act that characterizes modern subjectivity. The Gothic thus often renders even more visual Foucault's body as the locus of a dissociated self adopting the illusion of a substantial unity as well as Judith Butler's notion of identity as an ongoing, constitutive process that reveals the seams and stitches of what was supposed to be whole and seamless.

¹² Hurley perhaps overstates the *jouissance* associated with Kristeva's abject, emphasizing the exuberant pleasures of new (monstrous) becomings of the ab-human and the post-human rather than the loss and expulsion which the term also encompasses, and which are also integral to subjectivity.

2.9 Queer Gothic and Performative Selves

Because the self is often radically deconstructed and exposed as an unnatural and unstable construct in the Gothic, Judith Butler's extensions of Freud, Lacan and Foucault in her queer theory and concept of performativity are very helpful, most obviously when we get to Blixen's colorful gallery of flamboyantly non-heteronormative protagonists, echoed in Leonora Christina Skov's transgender, cross-dressing narrator in *Silhuet af en Synder*. Ingemann and Andersen, however, also continually redefine notions of masculinity and femininity, and the Male and Female Gothic, as the role of the persecuted maiden in "Sphinxen" and "Tante Tandpine" seems to be played by male protagonists. Where queer theory is helpful is in its constructivist approach to concepts of essence, naturalness, and originality, viewing gender as a representation of cultural classifications and codes, rather than something that is superimposed on already complete individuals, as early feminist theories would typically argue. The issue of gender is central in the Gothic but in an extremely unstable form, as the continually overlapping critical categories of Female and Male Gothic also imply. Identity and gender in the Gothic are dynamic and relational matters, as Eve Sedgwick has also pointed out, coming into being in continual negotiation with culture and the Other, and dissolving ideas of 'originary' selves.

The post-structuralist concept of performativity is particularly useful to explain Gothic identity, as it is foregrounded as non-voluntarist play invoking the language of act and theatrics within the constraints of the discursively given. The hyper-theatrical mode illustrates Butler's understanding of gender and identity as a repeated performance, through which it is defined and naturalized by means of an elaborate and repetitive citation, a permanent copying or mimicking of an idea posing as 'original', which stabilizes gender by producing a fiction of a fixed, inner, essential selfhood or subjectivity. "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of

repeated acts... that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 1990: 33). Butler explains that this continued copying ultimately turns out to be nothing but a parody of the idea of the natural and original; this is the Gothic strategy in a nutshell, in its continuum of effects which are perceived to create an “appearance of substance,” in Butler’s words, or the semblance of a natural self but which reveals only illusions, a vacuum. In the Gothic, external appearances are often shown to be more important to the formation of personal identity than internal qualities are; identity is created through metonymic contagion, through which properties of selfhood are distributed.

The focus on performance, effect, show, costume, disguise and stylization is integral in the Gothic’s foregrounding of the surfaces that constitute identities; exaggerated and defamiliarized Gothic identities visualize gender as ‘a corporeal style,’ an act, the performer merely participating in the rehearsal of a script that survives the actor, the individual actors nonetheless required to reproduce that script as reality again and again. The one-dimensional formulaic characterization of Gothic protagonists, defined by a range of coded clichés which the trained reader immediately deciphers to mean identity, as well as their intertextual recycling and referencing of other Gothic narratives demonstrate identity as a rehearsal of a continual series of actions, a chain of performative citations which constitute the subject. The revelation of the pseudo-nature of gender and gendered identity, and its absence of an essence, a core, originality or naturalness happens according to Butler through the processes of repetition, exaggeration, parody, inversion, defamiliarization, deliberate confusion and hyperbole; in other words, the exact processes that drive the Gothic: ”gender is an ‘act’... that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration,

reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status,” and along with that, the structural features of the societal form that shapes the context for its figurations of sexuality (Butler 1990: 146-7)

2.10 Subversion or Conservatism?

Gothic and Queer share a focus on marginal, disruptive subjects who commit acts of sexual or social transgression, an emphasis which the commonly marginalized and stylistically eccentric nature of the Gothic is ideally suited for. Queer theory “has offered a richly historical and political language for valorizing those disreputable sexualities that the Gothic has traditionally rendered monstrous, not so much to purge them as to invest them with a sublime narrative energy” (Hanson 167). That being said, the type of queer reading that is informed by a hermeneutics of suspicion and is devoted primarily to tracing the deviant sexual pleasure which then is celebrated as a resistance to normative scripts, is ultimately guilty of the same ahistorical reductivism that traditional Freudian readings of Gothic have yielded. It is by now a commonplace to say that criticism itself is a product of the cultural and historical moment in which it is written, so while the insights of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault and the theories inspired by them can be used to demonstrate tensions, limitations and contradictions in bourgeois ideology and its hegemonic social systems and gender constructions, one must exercise caution before automatically designating everything under the Gothic umbrella uniquely subversive, transgressive or revolutionary. In their provocative essay “Gothic Criticism” (2000), Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall draw attention to this default position of much Gothic criticism – perhaps an extension of repeated misreadings of the Marquis de Sade’s comments on the connection between the Gothic and the French Revolution - and call for more nuanced historical accounts. Baldick and Mighall’s essay is (too) polemical and seems to dismiss all but a few critical interpretations of Gothic texts. Nevertheless, they offer a useful challenge to standard

critical practice especially when it comes to examinations of gender and sexuality in the Gothic, which can easily turn into unqualified declarations of empowerment, almost as if revelation equals reformation and revolution. As Kilgour says in terms befitting the Gothic's obsession with sartorial freight, it is "as if by exposing errors, ripping away idolatrous black veils, the truth will be seen," when at this day and age "we no longer believe that truth is under the veil, as, like Radcliffe, we know that all we find is more art, constructs that we have made" (Kilgour 222). But how do we avoid imposing the critical agenda of the present on the past (in a critical move that reverses the Gothic privileging of the past), gazing only at the reflection of our own image in its duplicitously specular surfaces?

An answer to that question lies in the distinction between elements and closure; and whether elements of subversion and transgression on the level of plot render the text itself subversive, or whether the often conservative closure of the narrative and its reestablishment and reaffirmation of a system of moral and social order in its gesture of containment cancel out the depravities and anti-social impulses represented en route? It is similar to the equally important question of whether elements of Gothic render a text Gothic in itself; when does the text merely make use of Gothic elements, as in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860), and when has it accrued enough Gothic conventions for it to qualify as wholeheartedly Gothic? Gothic conventions obviously can be put to different use. Robert Miles and Fred Botting acknowledge a progressively bourgeois thrust to Gothic engagements with economic and gender issues, but both also insist upon its subversive power. David Punter calls its "daring" commitment "to speak the socially unspeakable... an ambiguous gesture" (Punter 417). Likewise in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson somewhat qualifies the title of her study by arguing that most Gothic fiction tends to be of a conservative orientation and not necessarily always

automatically “politically subversive” (97). “It is a complex form situated on the edges of bourgeois culture, functioning in a dialogical relation to that culture. But it also conducts a dialogue within itself, as it acts out and defeats subversive desires” (Jackson 96). Expressing such desires both brings them into being and expels them, and threats to bourgeois subjectivity can be contained; the foundation of the cultural order is highlighted by opening up into what lies outside the dominant value system (Jackson 4). Gothic as a broad-based cultural phenomenon seems generally to support and sustain the economic, social, and sexual hierarchies of the time because it is “a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known,” but at the same time there is also often an element of ideological ambiguity, which contains an undeniable potential for subversion (Halberstam 1995: 2).

The critical categories of the Female and Male Gothic, although they should like all literary classifications be treated carefully, do in their generalized mapping out of the vast majority of Gothic texts illustrate a similar point. While there have been numerous departures from the formula since Ellen Moers coined the term in the 1970s, the Female Gothic with its explained supernatural tends to uphold the dominant ideology, ultimately dispelling the threat of terror and presenting a comprehensible universe.¹³ In terms of the subjectivities represented here, typically in the Radcliffean romance and the mass market romances that followed, the conventional marriage at the end signifies the “heroine’s wedding to culture” as well as the hero’s release from evil purposes; the masculine threat has been cancelled and made socially

¹³ While Walpole can be seen as engenderer of both female and male forms, Lewis created the Male Gothic as a response to Radcliffe’s Female Gothic. The division into female and male traditions customarily follows the gender of the author, with the female Gothic resorting to the terror of the explained supernatural in usually happy endings, while the Male tradition operates with the horror of an incomprehensible and supernatural universe. Such divisions are not always consistent as Charlotte Dacre and Mary Shelley write in the male tradition and *Le Fanu* in the female, while it can be argued that Walpole and Maturin unite the two forms, as do Coleridge and Keats, as Ann Williams has demonstrated, challenging accepted notions about gender and authorship among the Romantics.

acceptable (Williams 103; Milbank 54). In the Male Gothic, and particularly the Horror mode that has since evolved out of it, which is perhaps best treated as a now separate genre, the lengthy descriptions of suffering and sadomasochistic victimization, violent perversion and desires that push at the limits of the normative, terminate usually with the punishment of the transgressor, be that a teenager compromising her (is it ever his?) virginity in modern Horror, or isolated Faustian overreacher and monster-villain like Manfred in *Otranto* or Ambrosio in *The Monk*. Although this reaffirmation of order according to Stephen King “appeals to the conservative Republican in a three-piece suit who resides within all of us,” such retribution and containment is often accompanied by a loss of narrative energy and seeming ambiguity (King 50). Glenis Byron (in apparent disagreement with Baldick & Mighall’s edict in the same anthology) argues about the monsters that “even when the threatening spectacle of multiplicity is ultimately destroyed or repressed, there still remains a sense of excess” (Byron 195). Andersen’s diabolical red shoes illustrate this excess: not only do they represent, like other monstrous beings, an amalgam of perceived threats, in this case spread in metonymic contagion to the person wearing them, but their continual and uncontrollable run-away movement after they have been amputated from Karen’s body suggests that they have not been properly contained; they continue to defy the meaning we try to impose on them. Both Chris Baldick and Judith Halberstam envision the monster as the embodiment of the Gothic text, relying on “a vertiginous excess of meaning” for its purpose, which is the creation of fear; the architectural meaning of Gothic of an ornamental – non-classical - excess consisting of repetitive patterns of intricate traceries, gargoyles, loops, spirals, flying buttresses, and soaring arches and spires, visualizing the fiction’s “rhetorical extravagance that produces, quite simply, too much... [P]art of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot”; text and monster make available a multiplicity

of meanings (Halberstam 1995: 2). The Gothic is a highly versatile technology for producing monsters – and villains, heroes and heroines - that is constantly being rewritten by historically and culturally conditioned fears generated by a shared sense of otherness and difference that is a product of its time. ‘Transgression’ must necessarily depend on the particular system transgressed, and so transgression (like ‘sexuality,’ ‘gender,’ ‘discipline,’ and all those other categories by which the middle class subject understands and defines him- or herself) must necessarily be contingent. Gothic is a literature of excess partly but not exclusively because of its use of over-determined monstrous signifiers that organize its interplay of several discourses. In order to examine the potential transgression or subversion in the Danish texts at hand, it is necessary to identify the discourses and cultural systems that shape them.

2.11 A Multiplicity of Discourses

An investigation of the discourses, particularly with reference to identity and self formation, which the Gothic works with or against is a crucial way to deal with the fluidity of Gothic – and equally important for my purposes - its neglect in Danish criticism and literary histories. This should preclude simply superimposing an Anglo-American critical framework on Danish texts while also establishing the particular characteristics of a Danish Gothic as it is formed by its surrounding discourses, particularly its problematic reception history. Genres should not be considered static, homogeneous entities; they develop diachronically, building on earlier texts, interacting with other genres and modes, engaging in dialogic relations with literary and non-literary discourses surrounding them, which influence the historical conditions for their production. The changing over the course of time of localised concerns and discourses helps, perhaps, to explain why some sets of texts participate quite extensively in the Gothic genre, beyond simply employing a Gothic convention or two, without necessarily having been critically

recognized as Gothic (Spooner 2004: 14). Thus, while establishing a coherent Danish Gothic tradition based on commonalities between the Danish writers, as well as shared concerns with the Anglo-American tradition, it is important to include the historical context and how, for instance, it shapes the identity politics and Romantic science of the self negotiated by Ingemann, or the discourse of sexuality and family that emerges around the Modern Breakthrough, which provides the background for Andersen and Blixen's formulations of subjectivity. Taking historical context into account means avoiding the reduction of every single text to the same Freudian template of repression, or Foucauldian celebration of transgression, or Butler-esque resistance to heteronormative scripts, and it will deepen Eve Sedgwick's highly abstract phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and structuralist methodology, which does not, for example, incorporate gender or class into her account of what are ultimately also contingent power structures in the Gothic. This will afford a more nuanced perspective on the evolution of the genre in Danish context, and suggest why different writers at different times employ it in their own particular, historically inflected manner, for example how the idea of fragmented subjectivity is articulated differently in Romantic and twentieth-century texts. One discourse that will be variously rearticulated, negated and deconstructed over and over again in relation to the fragmentation of the self on multiple levels is the concept of *Dannelse* (*Bildung*), emerging in the early nineteenth century but to this day remaining an extremely important structure in Danish culture and mentality, as I will detail in the following chapter. *Dannelse* is the linear progress of a unique, innate self which through education and restraint grows into a sense of organic unity between self and world. By extension, the Danish Gothic texts are all darker versions of the normative bourgeois *Dannelsesroman* (*Bildungsroman*), particularly the novel-length *Gengældelsens Veje* and *De Måske Egnede*. Gothic inverts the idea of unity and organic growth

into fragmentation: the text is a convoluted story-within-a-story; 'normal' human relationships are pushed to destructive extremes, growth is replaced by disintegration, linear identity by a bricolage of disguises and quotes. While critiques of the heavily institutionalized *Dannelses*-project have been undertaken before, what is unique to Danish Gothic fiction is the persistent foregrounding of surfaces and their investment with qualities of the uncanny in the constructions of reality and self presented. This also happens on a textual level.

The New Historicist concern with intertextuality is particularly important in the Gothic, from its outset a precarious blend of romance and realism, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, and along the way incorporating, in what some critics consider a cannibalistic consumption, a multiplicity of literary and non-literary discourses. This feeding off of other works ranges from translations, imitations, and plagiarizations between English, German and French Gothic, to direct references, creative responses and overt rewritings. The seminal *The Castle of Otranto* spawned a deluge of mass-market shilling-shockers, penny-dreadfuls and bodice-rippers but also reads like an inventory of the classic Gothic texts that followed. Lewis' *The Monk* (1797) was written as a response to the sentimental female Gothic of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), adding inspiration from German sensationalist horror tales, while Radcliffe's final novel, *The Italian* (1797), was a counter-response to *The Monk*, which also triggered Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806). The list is endless. Such heavy intertextuality results in Ingemann's Arnold in "Sphinxen" not knowing whether he is Hoffmann's fictional Anselmus or his own self in a supreme case of Romantic irony, and in Blixen's characters that construct themselves from narratives and quotes in a radical Chinese-box structure of texts which ultimately voids the subject. The texts become another mask-like surface, under which there is nothing of substance, only more fictions in a continual imitative circuit.

In addition to the multiple references to other texts within the same tradition, Gothic fiction relies on a variety of non-mimetic discourses for that subversive function, including fantasy, folklore, myth, legend, ballads, superstition, fairy tales, romance and aesthetic theories of the sublime. As Jacqueline Howard argues “its potential for subversion is largely dependent on the use made of the fantastic,” meaning its departures from established constructions of ‘the real’ in varying degrees (Howard 30). Because such discourses cannot be easily assimilated into a recognizable ‘reality,’ they highlight the intertextual nature of all texts, as well as the heterogeneity of reality – and by extension, the self. By circumventing what Fredric Jameson calls ‘the bourgeois reality principle’ Gothic writers can point to the existence of multiple ‘Truths’ through its blurred and mediated perspective, disrupted narrative forms, and eruptions of the uncanny and consequent epistemological uncertainty. This denial of essential presence to be excavated from beneath and behind surfaces is in conflict with dominant models of the self, as put forth in the Danish realist *Bildungsroman*, and with the Holy Trinity of *Det Sande, Det Gode og Det Skønne* (the true, the good, and the beautiful), which dominates not just Danish Romantic Idealism but Danish nineteenth-century literature at large. Gothic locates phantasmatic structures at the origins of conceptions of both self and reality, while questioning representational and interpretative structures, including history and subjectivity. Including the Fantastic mode of the texts will help shed light on their use of textual mechanisms that reveal ‘reality’ - and the self that is produced by that reality - to be a contingent, linguistic construct. As Howard says, the language of the Fantastic used in Gothic can be used to relativize normative ways of perceiving and feeling, and question mainstream versions of ‘reality’ and associated values (Howard 36). When the Danish texts in question have been examined at all, it has been primarily through the theoretical, highly textual framework of the Fantastic, because it is perceived to be more German

and thus more familiar to Danes than the English Gothic. While the Fantastic helps us understand the defamiliarization of reality, ignoring the Gothic conventions of the texts obscures both their idiosyncrasy and their formulations of power mechanisms, and of issues of identity, class and gender. It is these conventions that will be the focus of the analyses that follow, while the eclecticism of my approach is intended to mirror the composite and complex nature of the object for scrutiny.

Chapter 3. Danish Romanticism and the Gothic

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to make a tentative investigation of potential reasons why the Gothic, and we might add the Fantastic as a separate but related literary mode, has not become a more widespread tradition in Denmark, given its enormous popularity in the surrounding countries – F. Frank estimates that no fewer than 4,500-5,000 novels in the Gothic style were published in Britain between 1764-1820 (Frank ix). Part of the investigation is also to examine why the Danish Gothic that has emerged has assumed particular characteristics. Inevitably such an undertaking will have to rely on broad generalizations, and one must of course be very careful when making correlations between historical events and literary genres. However, through the investigation should emerge a fuller picture of both the Gothic and its critical neglect on Danish grounds, as well as the particular nature of a Danish Gothic and the tropes, themes and issues it will have to confront. Because the period of High Gothic is very nearly synchronic with the Romantic period, with most of the best-known works appearing in the period 1790s to the 1820s, those tropes are largely Romantic but continue to appear in literature today: for example the literary character and cultural archetype *Aladdin*; *Fantasten*, the fantast-dreamer who is always in conflict with the established reality principle; the concept of *Dannelse* (*Bildung*), and the construction of family, ‘hygge’ (coziness), home and by extension, nation. These are issues that shape the Danish Gothic and its particular take on identity politics. In order to understand why the Danish Gothic is largely a neglected genre, one must examine not only Danish literary history, but its construction and rhetoric: Romanticism, particularly the more subjective version, was dismantled and pathologized even as it was being shaped in the early 1800s, a tendency which has been exacerbated greatly after the Modern Breakthrough of 1870.

3.2 European Gothic and Romanticism

Although today Gothic is considered largely an Anglo-American phenomenon, not least because the majority of Gothic criticism is written in English, the Gothic was in fact “a widely European phenomenon from its very beginnings, and became even more so as its early features were transformed in several continental variations well into the nineteenth century” (Hale 64). While Denmark did not see a major literary influence from England until the 1820s, countries like France and Germany, both of which historically have wielded an enormous cultural and political influence on the small Danish nation, both had strong traditions and examples of a popular aesthetics of horror in the 18th century, some Gothic, some bordering on other genres.¹⁴

In France the development of a Gothic tradition was less a domestic undertaking and more a case of influences by translations of the German *Schauerroman* and English Gothic novels, for example Walpole’s *Otranto* as early as 1767. Radcliffe in particular was popular and *Udolpho*, *The Italian*, and Lewis’ *The Monk* were all translated in 1797. While the Marquis de Sade perhaps made a too simple correlation between the French Revolution in 1789, its

¹⁴ In Sweden, Yvonne Leffler has documented in *I skräckens lustgård. Skräckromantik i svenska 1800-talsromaner* (1991) that a number of works in the school of terror romanticism emerged in and after the middle of the nineteenth century: Emilie Flygare-Carlen’s *Rosen på Tistelön* (1842), C.J.L. Almqvist’s *Gabriele Mimanso* (1842), Carl Fredrik Ridderstad’s *Svarta Handen* (1848), *Hin Ondes Hus* (1853) by Aurora Ljungstedt, who is known as the Swedish Edgar Allan Poe, and Selma Lagerlöf’s famous medieval ghost story *Herr Arnes Penningar* (1904). Later examples, as documented by Mathias Fyhr in his 2003 study are Inger Edelfeldt’s *Juliane och jag* (1982), Mare Kandres *Aliide, Aliide* (1991), Per Hagman’s *Volt* (1994) and Alexander Ahndoril’s *Jaromir* (1995). After Fyhr’s study, John Ajvide Lindqvist’s social realist vampire novel *Låt den rätta komma in* (2004) achieved considerable success outside Sweden and was translated and adapted for the screen as *Let the Right One In* (2008).

In Norway, Maurits Hansen’s “Novellen” (1827) is sometimes mentioned as a Gothic story, perhaps because Hansen is seen as a Norwegian Edgar Allan Poe viz. his detective stories. Although a prominent Romantic writer, Hansen has enjoyed a similar fate as the Danish Ingemann by being dismissed based on realist principles after the Romantic-Fantastic mode felt outdated at the end of the nineteenth century. Norway was part of Denmark until 1814, in the years of High Gothic, which may explain why there is not a particularly coherent Gothic tradition; it should be noted, though, that Norway today has a very strong Gothic metal music scene and a growing Goth culture in Oslo. In Thorgeir Haugen’s 1998 anthology on Norwegian fantastic writers, Henning Howlid Wærp identifies Gothic characteristics in Ragnhild Jølsen’s works, e.g. *Rikke Gan* (1904). Post-millennial examples are Nikolaj Frobenius *Jeg skal vise dere frykten* (2008), in which the life of Edgar Allan Poe is rewritten, while Lajla Rolstad’s Gothic crime story *Nekronauten* (2009) references Frankenstein, Sherlock Holmes and Hannibal Lecter.

consequent reign of Terror and the transformation of early Gothic into the 'high' Gothic in the period 1790-1820 in his often quoted statement that Gothic fiction, notably *The Monk*, was "the inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all of Europe has suffered," there is no doubt that the revolution did have a tremendous cultural impact in Europe. In France, the censorship and the cultural and political support mechanisms which furthered it disappeared, which gave rise to the *Roman Noir*. The role of censorship no doubt plays a central role in the shaping of the genre in Denmark, where the tightened grip on the public by King Frederik VI since ascending the throne in 1784 would impede a literature such as the Gothic, which questions hegemonic structures, the validity of the aristocracy, religion, good morals, sexual mores and the family as the buttress of the nation state, even if it does ultimately affirm the status quo. The French *Roman Noir* thus flourished in the period 1795-1820 and developed into critiques of the country's political transformations but also hitherto unseen erotic explorations as the liberalization of the censorship regime meant that French writers had more freedom than writers elsewhere (Hale 76). The *Roman Noir* shows clear genre markers of translated English and German novels, while its sensibility and aesthetic became prevalent and trickled into other types of novels, drama, and poetry. A number of writers began their careers in this vein or its more Romantic form, the *Roman Frénétique*, e.g. Nodier, Arlincourt, and the young Balzac and Hugo, which testifies to its widespread appeal, while from the end of the nineteenth century and until 1962, the Grand Guignol theatre in Paris would continue to visualize the graphic and amoral horror entertainment developed from Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre and the Gothic novel.

German Gothic seems to have developed independently of the English Gothic novel, but similarly developed a repertoire of props, events, characters and action, which made it possible to articulate a changing sensibility. Already in the 1760s-1770s there are elements of terror in

German ballads and drama and soon the *Schauerroman* (terror novel) followed, driven by an aesthetic of effect in a partly mysterious, partly excessive object world conveying all sorts of emotional thrills (Mohr 67; Forsmann 11). The early German *Schauerroman* was influenced by the *Ritter-* and *Räuberroman* of the *Sturm und Drang* period: demonic forces dominate the action accompanied by blood-curdling descriptions of death and murder. Toward the end of the century, mysterious and supernatural elements were added, e.g. in the novels by C. H. Spiess, along with a preoccupation with powerful secret societies. As in England, the Gothic would be an object of both appropriation and vilification: official literary criticism considered it an illegitimate offspring, and even though the German Gothic seems to have existed mainly as mass-produced texts, High Romantic writers such as Schiller and Goethe would use elements of *Schauer*, while late Romantics would develop the genre further – sometimes referred to as *Schwarze Romantik* - for example by adding themes such as the dualism in man, as in Tieck's *Abdallah* (1795) and Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815), modeled on and referencing Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). Hoffmann's *Phantasiestücke* were translated into Danish in 1821 but *Die Elixiere des Teufels* had already caused a stir in Copenhagen in 1815-16, followed by *Nachtstücke* the next year (Jansen 131). Widely discussed and anthologized, Hoffmann had an immense impact on Ingemann and Andersen and their development of psychological-Fantastic motifs, while Ingemann in particular was also influenced by the German fate dramas in the 1810s before J.L. Heiberg singlehandedly enforced the vaudeville as the aesthetically and academically superior dramatic genre of the bourgeoisie. German literature, much more so than the English, had a profound influence in Denmark from the late 1700s. The *Schauerroman* was popular; the Royal Library archive shows that numerous German examples were translated into Danish in the period 1790-1830, e.g. Spiess, Heinrich Zschokke, and Schiller's *Geisterseher* in 1814, but the educated

reading public would also read the German originals. An important point is that the German Gothic quite early branches out into several distinct modes, so that there is not one clearly defined model to emulate, which may explain why the Danish Gothic is not more prevalent.

The historical coincidence of Gothicism and English Romanticism is significant and complicates the relation between the two. Traditionally, by twentieth-century critics, Gothic and Romanticism have been schematized into a binary model of competing versions of Romanticism, the one 'light' and 'positive', offering synthesis, affirmations of transcendence and completion, the other 'dark' and 'negative', offering disintegration, ambiguity and annihilation: through images of "guilt, anxiety, despair" Gothic seems to shadow "Romantic ideals of individuality, imaginative consciousness and creation," and the unitive self, while providing a space where socially undesirable urges could be indulged and repressions divulged and resurfaced (Botting 1996: 10). Early twentieth-century critics, such as Eino Railo and J. M. S. Tompkins sought to excuse the inclusion of the popular, even vulgar Gothic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by insisting on the importance of the Gothic to Romanticism, as if the Gothic could be elevated by the association. When Robert Hume initiated the debate in 1969, he concluded that the Gothic's ambiguity reflects tensions it cannot solve. For Hume, this makes it secondary to Romanticism, which asserts the power of the synthetic imagination to reconcile and resolve all contradictions and "claims the existence of higher answers"; the Gothic imagination, in contrast, cannot transform or transcend the everyday world but "can only leave the 'opposites' contradictory and paradoxical" ending in "only unresolvable moral and emotional ambiguity" (Hume 290). This contrast between reconciliation and fragmentation will be central in the near-effacement of Danish Gothic. It has meant that for decades the Gothic has been considered an inferior (but perhaps necessary) stage toward the seemingly more mature and full Romanticism,

which involves “a setting aside of mere outward effects and the transference of psychological phenomena into the foreground,” as Eino Railo stated in 1927, maintaining the surface-depth model that has relegated the Gothic to the bottom of the literary hierarchy (Railo 1927:177).

Within English Romanticism, the well-documented fact that Romantic writers both consumed and subsumed Gothic materials means that the two are very much intertwined, which has been explained with reference to terms such as ‘Negative’ Romanticism or ‘Dark’ Romanticism, which G.R. Thompson popularized in the 1970s. Canonical Romantic texts participate extensively within the Gothic, for instance Coleridge’s “Christabel” (1818), Shelley’s incest-driven *The Cenci* (1819), and Byron’s *Oriental Tales* 1813-14, notably “The Giaour,” which like the later semi-autobiographical *Manfred* (1817) helped establish Byron himself as a transgressive Gothic hero-villain imprisoned by a dark past. These examples demonstrate both a commitment to the Romantic cause and the ultimate threat to Romantic metaphysical idealism, as envisioned in the Gothic or ‘negative’ sublime, which shows that the representation of transcendence itself is a transgressive desire for non-identity, a thanatos whose hidden goal is the annihilation, not the completion or perfection or overcoming, of the self; a drive Rosemary Jackson has documented extensively in both Romantic and Gothic texts. DeLamotte comments on “the paradoxical conjunction of transcendent aspiration and Gothic despair” and identifies “the issue of the boundaries of the self” as “the point at which optimistic Romanticism is most often on the edge of despair and negative Romanticism is on the verge of transcendence” (DeLamotte 122-3). She follows Robert Platzner who, replying to what he calls Robert Hume’s “rather limited notion of ‘transcendence’”, objects to “any rigid system of classification” that would obscure the “degree of continuity that actually exists between Gothic quests and Romantic epiphanies,” both of which “often involve some form or other of epistemological idealism”

(Platzner 267-8). The harnessing of the Gothic aesthetic by the Romantics to express the sustained interest in the borders of human experience and imaginative activity has presently been documented to the point where critics such as Michael Gamer and Anne Williams argue that they are “not two but one” (Williams 1). In Danish literary history, however, Gothicism remains “a poor and probably illegitimate relation” to Romanticism, as Hume framed it: they are very much not one, but two (Hume 282).

3.3 Universalromantik: Oehlenschläger and Steffens

A simple relation between Romanticism and Gothic on Danish grounds is complicated by the division of Danish Romanticism into four distinct models or character types:

Man kan groft sagt tale om fire modeller, hvor kun den anden og den fjerde vandt rigtig genhør i Danmark: universalromantikkens geni, nationalromantikkens Holger Danske, romantismens dæmoniske Kains-ætling og endelig den harmonisøgende hr. Biedermeier.

Roughly one might talk of four models, of which only the second and fourth really resonated in Denmark: the genius of Universal Romanticism; Holger the Dane of National Romanticism; the demonic descendant of Cain in *Romantismen*; and finally the harmony-seeking Mr. Biedermeier (*Dansk litteraturhistorie Vol 5* 1984: 19).¹⁵

One might argue that the later, darker *Romantisme* absorbed whatever Gothic proclivities there might have been but several literary histories argue that *Romantismen* as we know it from other European countries was virtually non-existent in Denmark, conflating the entire period of Danish *Romantik* 1800-1870 with the non-confrontational, myopic *Biedermier*¹⁶: although Danish literature had received strong impulses from the German Romanticism of Novalis, Tieck, Herder, Schelling and Goethe, from the outset it was anchored in a comprehensible, empirical world, far

¹⁵ Translations throughout this chapter are my own.

¹⁶ See for example Erik Lunding: ”Biedermeier og romantismen” (1968), Søren Kaspersen et.al.: *Dansk litteraturhistorie Vol. 5* (1984).

from the thrilling expanses of the sublime, which otherwise informs both German *Universalromantik* and the Gothic.

It is rather fortunate for literary historians that the advent of Romanticism in Denmark can be pinpointed to two specific events: the crowded lectures of Henrik Steffens in Copenhagen in the winter of 1802-1803 and the publication of Adam Oehlenschläger's "Guldhornene" ("The Golden Horns") in 1802, conceived overnight in a creative frenzy after a 16-hour conversation with Steffens and conveying in poetic form "the new German philosophy, which saw in nature and the events of history the revelation of a universal spirit and not merely the teleological world pattern which had been the assumption of rationalists in the eighteenth century" (Mitchell 108). When Steffens introduced the ideas of German Romanticism in Denmark, he created a particularly Danish version, partly determined by his position as natural philosopher, partly by his attachment through Schelling to Goethe, also an eager investigator of nature. This meant that Danish romanticism was characterized by an acute sense of concrete, empirical reality. It was also important that Steffens along with his 1803 philosophical lectures was lecturing on aesthetics with particular reference to Goethe. Thus, the reception of German romanticism in Denmark was inevitably connected to the reception of Weimar humanism and the reaction of the older Goethe and Schiller, which denotes a partial return to eighteenth-century classicism (Jørgensen et.al. 303). These two primary figures as well as early German Romanticism originate in the *Sturm und Drang* movement, which finds its very moderate and non-extreme Danish equivalent in the heightened focus on the emotions of individual self in Jens Baggesen's and Johannes Ewald's pre-Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century in Denmark. One might even argue that Baggesen and Ewald are the first writers in Danish literature to articulate the notion of a self but their position outside the institutional anchoring of literature diminished their

influence. The humanism centered in the idea of *Bildung*, adopted early on by Danish writers from Goethe and Schiller, attempts to overcome the subjectivism and individualism of *Sturm und Drang* in order to arrive at a more holistic approach, which emphasizes the comprehensive development and harmonious union of the individual's abilities in a continual interplay with the world. In contrast, early German Romanticism continues under the influence of Fichte down an individualistic path, toned down by the communal focus of Danish *Bildungs*-humanism. Even Steffens' 1802-3 lectures questioned such individualism, infusing into the very beginnings of Danish romanticism the all-important ideas of moderation, harmonization and optimism concerning the individual's potential for *Bildung* or *Dannelse* to fulfil a communal function within the emerging bourgeois monoculture (in Jørgensen et.al. 35; Mortensen et.al. 2005: 303).

Oehlenschläger would become the first national bard, and his importance cannot be overstated. In his work and thought there is not only a strong anti-individualistic element but also a harmonizing element, in which art works as the self-affirmation of and means to improve a stable bourgeois existence, particularly as he continued to adapt Schiller's aesthetic principles to his own program. Oehlenschläger was thus crucial in the democratization of art, which in the long run led to the prose breakthrough around 1824, as his poetics advocated the sacrificing of idiosyncratic strangeness in art, toning down its metaphysical superstructure as well as its psychological and philosophical experiments, to advertise its universal applicability and importance for everyman (Mortensen et al. 2005: 42). In other words, although the artist assumes an increasingly central position gradually liberated from a subservient position to the king, the aristocracy, and the church, there is not much art for art's sake in Danish Romanticism, but rather a continued moral and instructional purpose underlying the general Enlightenment view of man as improvable, a project for continual and organic growth.

3.4 Oehlenschläger & Staffeldt's Gothic Ballads

Undermining that very Enlightenment idea of the certainty of human progress at the same time are the pre-Romantic Gothic ballads, often based on folklore and legend, while sharing many concerns with the British graveyard poetry of the 1740s – in fact, recalling the feverish upheaval of the war and the bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, Ingemann writes in his journal that he felt compelled to block his pistol after reading Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* as a precaution against the “farlige fantasier, jeg havde leget med” (“the dangerous fantasies I had been toying with”) which might tempt him to take “et pludseligt Spring ind i Aandeverdenen” (“a sudden leap into the spiritual world,” in *Tilbageblik*: 17). Life and death were inseparable, and death was often preferred: graveyard poetry was “a harbinger of the thrill of entering forbidden, thanatic realms which would later become the province of the Gothic novel” (Punter & Byron 11). Such morphed into the stuff of macabre entertainment in the Gothic ballads that followed in the wake of the immensely popular “Lenore” (1774) by G.A. Bürger, which was of great importance not only to the rise of the Gothic novel but to the European Romantic movement as such, paralleled perhaps only by Goethe's *Werther*, which appeared a few months later. In Denmark the enormous appeal of “Lenore” is evident from countless translations, plagiarizations and imitations, which found a hungry audience with the new broadside readers (Rossel 259).¹⁷ As these poems reveled in the eerie motifs of churchyards at midnight, revenants, ghost, demon bridegrooms, skulls, skeletons and rattling bones, and the return of past crimes to haunt the present, it was an effective if trivial form of entertainment rarely mentioned in Danish literary histories. It is thus perhaps surprising that the foremost representatives of the two different

¹⁷ Sven Rossel has documented Bürger's immense popularity in Denmark. “Lenore” was translated in 1790 by Christian Olufsen and again in 1808 by Jens Baggesen, who in many ways bridges the two centuries. Knud Rahbek and Adam Oehlenschläger, both highly influential in the Romantic age, translated several other poems by Bürger: in total 58 were translated, some more than once. In addition Rossel has found countless imitations in the monthly *Det Almindelige Danske Bibliothek* (The General Danish Library, Rossel 242).

Danish Romantic movements, Adam Oehlenschläger and Shack Staffeldt, both included a number of Gothic ballads in their 1803 and 1804 debut collections but it is certainly a testimony to a closer nature of Romanticism and Gothic than has been assumed.

The German-born Shack Staffeldt represents more than any other Danish poet a Neoplatonic *Sturm-und-Drang*-inspired Romanticism infused with a melancholy longing for the lost harmony that once was, which Ingemann would soon adapt for his own religious world view. In Staffeldt's tormented vision infused with the idealist's sense of agonizing homelessness and exile, the poet is the long-suffering intermediary between matter and spirit, plagued by a lacerated consciousness: the dissatisfaction with the hell that is this world becomes a *Weltanschauung*, and discontent becomes the qualitative mark of the poet's hyper-sensitivity to the discrepancy between real and desired states of being. The Gothic ballads in his 1804 debut show but a more radical version of the extreme states of mind, madness, and suffering explored in the rest of the collection in poems such as "Den Vanvittige" (The Madmad, 1804) and "Melancholie. Af en ufuldendt Selvmordercharacteristik" (Melancholy. From an Incomplete Characteristic of Suicide, 1804). The poems express an agonizing awareness of an irreparable sundering of real and ideal. "Længsel" (longing) famously rhymes with "fængsel" (prison) in the now classic "Indvielsen" (The Initiation), which opens the collection: his futile longing to bridge the insurmountable dichotomy between matter and spirit becomes a psychological and physical prison of estrangement and *Weltschmerz*, while the experience of nature becomes not one of pantheistic rapture but rather a reminder of the transitory nature of all earthly things in his melancholic contemplation. Staffeldt's Gothic ballads, too, show a version of man victimized and at the mercy of uncontrollable forces, albeit in a decidedly different, more sensationalist tone. Ballads such as "Emmelina," "Jagten" (The Hunt), "Jægeren" (The Hunter) from *Digte*

1804, and “Brylluppet” (The Wedding, 1809) are all influenced by Bürger’s tone and effects. In the “Lenore”-imitation “Brylluppet,” the unfaithful bride is carried away on her wedding day by the ghost of her former betrothed, his skull behind the armor visor laughing horribly at her terror. In “Emmelina,” the description of the terror the protagonist feels as the family castle is besieged by the evil Sir Ulf is the focus of the ballad. In scenes of extreme violence, Ulf not only sets the castle on fire and threatens rape and pillaging but he spikes the oldest daughter on his phallic spear when she desperately jumps the castle walls, before the family is consumed in flames: “Nu blæser Vinden over Steen / Og over Askedynger / Og klapper med de hvide Been / Mens Dødningsfuglen synger” (“Now the wind blows over rocks / and over heaps of ashes / and rattles with the white bones /while the ghost bird sings,” transl. Rossel 246). As with Ingemann, the effect sought borders on the parodic and there is no doubt that these early ballads had a negative impact on Staffeldt’s reputation, both in his own time and posthumously, an impact which has perhaps clouded an understanding of his otherwise stylistically sophisticated poems until the modernism of the mid-twentieth-century paved the way for an appreciation of his oeuvre.

Considering the established notion of Oehlenschläger as the inaugurator of a very wholesome, balanced and monistic *Universalromantik* in Denmark, it is perhaps much more surprising to find poems that are equally satiated with horrific effects in his 1803 debut collection, which preceded that of Staffeldt by a year and thus forever relegated Staffeldt to a position as imitative latecomer. In Oehlenschläger’s churchyard fantasy “Sivald og Thora” (1803), Thora is seduced by the cruel Sivald, who abandons her, thus forcing her to kill their child and face the inevitable consequences in this conservative universe: when he returns 10 years later, at midnight, of course, he finds the gravedigger at the churchyard emptying the grave of mother and child to make way for the corpse of a recently hanged murderer, as the hollow

bones rattle dramatically against the tombstones when tossed aside. “Huult Thoras Hierneskal mod Muren klang, /og nu et Been, nu eet igien! nu atter! / Fra Sivalds Pande Dödens Perle sprang, / bag Kirkemuren hörtes rædsom Latter!” (“Hollow Thora’s skull sounded against the wall / And now a bone, now one more, now again / The pearl of death stood on Sivald’s forehead / Behind the churchyard wall one heard a terrible laughter”). As the now dying madman laughs demonically at the stroke of midnight, “Hans Hoved tumlede mod Murens Steen / og skyldigt Blod de blege Vægge malte” (“His head tumbled against the stones of the wall / and guilty blood painted the pale walls”). The blood stain remains on the church wall as it grows forth every time it is painted over. This imagery suggests the theme of the return of the past, which concludes the poem: “Blodblomsten voxer stedse fra sin Kime. / Ved Midnatstid det stygge Dödninguhr / fælt minder Morderen om Hevnens Time” (“The blood flower still grows from its seed / At midnight the terrible clock of death / horribly reminds the murderer of the hour of vengeance”). While it may be difficult to detect the literary qualities of this poetry, the Gothic ballads of Oehlenschläger and Staffeldt, infused with themes of vengeance, death and decay, provide images of the inevitability of human frailty, of man rendered powerless and corrupt. They differ from the modern Gothic in their lack of narrative sophistication and their medieval Nordic settings, both of which make them appear decidedly un-exotic and highly accessible to their intended audience, but they should still be considered as the early stages of what would be the Danish Gothic in prose. And so we must note with Sven Rossel that “Sivald og Thora” along with “Friedleif og Helga,” “Violsamlere” (The Violet Gatherer), “Spillere” (The Gambler) and “Skattegraveren” (The Treasure Hunter), all in *Digte 1803*, “constitute an important correlate to the generally accepted view of Oehlenschläger’s breakthrough collection as a unique expression of *Universalromantik*” (Rossel 248). Whatever does not fit into that Golden Age construction has

generally been repressed, left out or forgotten from the literary histories. A poet such as the late Romantic Emil Aarestrup illustrates this tendency well, as he continued the tradition of writing Gothic ballads in the style of Bürger, e.g. "Ridder Bruno" (Sir Bruno), "Skjøn Ellens Elsker" (The Lovely Ellen's Lover), and "Gravrøsten" (The Voice from the Grave, all 1838). They mark a development into a more aesthetic Gothic poetry, which heighten and visualize the themes of madness, broken families, infidelity, guilt, ghosts, death from sheer terror and murder most foul. Thanks to the semi-explicit eroticism of his poetry, he was excluded from the social and literary scene of Copenhagen and only managed to publish one volume. Instead it has become his rather harmlessly platonic, if beautiful, hymn to immortal love in a potentially meaningless existence, "Angst" that has been anthologized endlessly, and not his explorations of the sadomasochistic and voyeuristic dynamic inherent in intimate relations, nor his Gothic ballads.

3.5 Oehlenschläger & Staffeldt: Aladdin & Nouredin

Danish Romanticism – the so-called Golden Age – was constructed as balanced, harmonious, and wholesome very early on, with Oehlenschläger as the embodiment of that ideal, and Staffeldt cast in the role as morbid and inferior imitator. This idea was established in the few contemporary reviews of Staffeldt, for instance in *Dagen* January 31 1803, in which the anonymous reviewer urges readers to look for "en Digter, der staaer paa solid Grund" ("a poet who stands on solid ground") and leave Staffeldt to his dizzying flight from the world.

Oehlenschläger, on the other hand, commented in his preface to *Poetiske Skrifter* (1805) that "Fundamentet for den sande Kunst er ... Harmonien og Ligevægten af Sielekræfterne" ("The foundation for true art is the harmony and balance of the powers of the mind"). In his 1805 characterization of early Danish Romanticism, published in 1810, P.O. Brøndsted describes the phenomenon in terms of sickness vs. health, focusing on the contrast between the two poets:

“Die dänische Litteratur hat nichts Phantasiereicheres, nichts Innigeres und Herzlicheres, mit einem Worte, nichts Göthischeres, als die Romanzen dieses jungen genialischen Dichters,“ i.e. Oehlenschläger, who is immediately contrasted to Staffeldt’s “kranke, aber selbst in ihrer Krankheit gewaltige und zügellose Phantasie,” which will not endure testing by “ruhigeres Nachdenken und Gefühl, “ a contemplation which will only make apparent that the reader has let himself be carried away by something reprehensible (Brøndsted 160-1). Oehlenschläger’s development even further away from the high-flown nervousness of early German Romanticism in order to embrace the restraint and moderation of Goethean classicism is summed up in the words of the older Goethe: ”Das Classische nenne ich das Gesunde, und das Romantische das Kranke” (in Eckerman ch. 121). While it is somewhat understandable that critics would describe these Romantic explorations of extreme states of mind in terms of illness and pathology, there is no doubt that this reductive rhetoric has had an enormous impact on both the creation and reception of not only Romanticism but the Gothic and Fantastic in Denmark. Such rhetoric would be applied in a considerable number of reviews of especially the younger Ingemann, perpetuated in Georg Brandes’ dismemberment of Romanticism in the 1870s, and continued in the description of the “overspændte, undertiden sygelige og usunde Digtning” (“the hysterical, sometimes sick and unhealthy poetry”) of the Romantic age, unwholesome and thus inconsequential, as late as 1902 in Karl Mortensen’s literary history, *Lærebog i den danske Litteraturs Historie* (205). The idea has been so persistent that it was still echoed in the 1930s Danish reviews of Karen Blixen’s Romantic *Seven Gothic Tales* as perverse and abnormal.

Part of this discussion also concerns the opposition between originality and imitation, spontaneity and reflection, which would eventually play a part in the larger National-Romantic project. Oehlenschläger somehow became conflated with his own character, Aladdin, “naturens

muntre søn” (“nature’s light-hearted son”) as the famous line goes, who stumbles upon the lamp and like Oehlenschläger during his famous 16-hour conversation with Steffens discovers his inner poetic source; both are seemingly in possession of a spontaneous genius brought forth almost by coincidence or epiphany and realized rather effortlessly. This became the romantic idea of inspiration per se, strengthened by Oehlenschläger’s own anecdotal account, which soon became the stuff of legend. At a time when originality began to emerge as a value with art gaining a new role in an increasingly bourgeois society, this “Kubla Khan”-like vision of spontaneous and unrestricted genius put at the service of Oehlenschläger’s communally-oriented anti-individualism resonated with the reading public much more so than Staffeldt’s vision of the struggling lonely poet unhealthily dependent on German sources, who became synonymous with himself in an equally Romantic myth of isolation and futile artistic aspiration. As their debut collections, both titled – with the same typography and layout – *Digte* (Poems), were separated by just one year and Staffeldt’s was largely ignored, Staffeldt attempted to predate some poems in his collection to precede Oehlenschläger’s in the battle for the position as the nation’s first and pre-eminent Romantic poet, and so literary histories will forever portray him as Oehlenschläger’s darker shadow, who came a year too late. However, as literary historian Billeskov-Jansen pointed out in 1958, Oehlenschläger’s collection was as far as the title, typography and composition go, an imitation of Schlegel’s *Gedichte* (1800) an imitative gesture repeated, then, by Staffeldt. While Oehlenschläger did indeed renew the Danish poetic language, one must question the idea of the spontaneous artistic genius. The Gothic provides a language for that, as Ingemann and Andersen explore in “Sphinxen” and “Tante Tandpine.”

The key word “spontaneous” is a somewhat imprecise translation of the Danish word “umiddelbar,” which becomes the defining characteristic of the period – perhaps of the Danish

cultural mindset as such. Immense positive value is attached to this quality of being spontaneous, unreflected, unsophisticated, naïve, unmediated, immediate, which continues to this day. Where the Oehlenschläger-Aladdin archetype came to represent spontaneity, feeling and intuition, the Staffeldt-Noureddin type would represent a somewhat sterile intellect and reflection, not least because Staffeldt modelled himself on Schiller's sentimental, i.e. reflecting and sceptical poet, while Oehlenschläger conversely praised the naive poet in his 1810 lectures on Ewald, associating the naive poet with 'umiddelbarhed', objectivity and truth. To Schiller, however, the sentimental and the naive poet, like Noureddin and Aladdin, cannot be separated. Mitchell's description of their double-like nature is striking, not least because this formulation in Gothic terms would never appear in a Danish literary history:

Staffeldt lived a life of gloomy meditation. If Oehlenschläger was Aladdin, Staffeldt never advanced beyond Faust's *Studierzimmer*. Oehlenschläger never entered the pain of introspective reflection, but Staffeldt shared Faust's eternal dissatisfaction; he found peace neither in worldly attainments nor in his own soul. Nevertheless, in the realm of poetry, Staffeldt and Oehlenschläger are two sides of the same coin (Mitchell 115-116).

This reflective, introspective style conceived in Faust's study becomes associated with an overwrought, elaborate artifice, which is obscure, inaccessible and complicated. It should be obvious that a cultural environment which values what is perceived to be genuine, unmediated, naïve and simple could only react dismissively to a genre such as the Gothic, which is driven by the counterfeit, by hoaxes, by formulaic repetitions, and by the deliberately disingenuous. Part of the problem has to do with style. Where Oehlenschläger marked a sharp transition from the abstract language of the eighteenth century to more sensuous verses filled with striking images, dynamic verbs and colorful adjectives, Staffeldt would formulate the thoughts, abstractions and principles of the new German philosophy in his non-native tongue of Danish. This made his

poetry appear somewhat inaccessible, syntactically odd, and what is worse: ‘un-Danish,’ a charge that was also leveled against Ingemann, and to some extent Andersen.¹⁸

3.6 National Romanticism

The urge to redefine ‘Danishness’ informed the Romantic project from the beginning: through the effort of Oehlenschläger and N.F.S. Grundtvig, elements of Norse mythology, Saxo’s medieval chronicles, folksongs, legends, and paintings of the Danish landscape as a reflection of the character of the Danish people and their history formed a foundational part of Danish Romanticism. The inaugural document of Danish *Universalromantik* remains Oehlenschläger’s “Guldhornene” (“The Golden Horns,” 1802), the overnight result of Oehlenschläger’s famous 16-hour conversation with Steffens. Like Aladdin and his creator both stumble upon inspiration, so the Danish peasant girl, the quintessential representative of the Danish people, stumbles upon those symbols of the Danish golden age, which had been stolen in 1802. Where Staffeldt perpetuated the perception of himself as un-Danish by dismissing Oehlenschläger’s use of the Danish past and Norse mythology, Oehlenschläger used this material to further the ideal of the plain and simple as special Danish values. Flemming Conrad notes that this idea of the naïve and psychologically uncomplicated as typical characteristics of post-1800 Danish literature had already been established by R. Nyerup and K. L. Rahbek’s *Bidrag til den danske Digtekunsts Historie* (1800-1828) - the first attempt at writing a comprehensive presentation of Danish literature - and their emphasis on “den bonhommistiske Jovialitet” (“cheerful friendliness and joviality,” Vol. 3 1805: 138) and “det Naive der synes vor ægte Nationalpoesies Hovedcharacter” (“the naivety which seems to be the true main characteristic of our national poetry,” Vol. 4 1808:

¹⁸ The omnipresent Christian Molbech would meticulously demonstrate Staffeldt’s foreignness in *Analekter* (1846) in the highly nationalistic 1840s. Molbech was part of the Heiberg circle, which was predominantly anti-Ingemann, and eventually also anti-Oehlenschläger.

89). In Valdemar Vedel's influential *Studier over Guldalderen i dansk Digtning* (1890), which first introduces the lasting epithet of 'The Golden Age', the idea is continued in his comments on "det Retskafne, det Djærve og det Paalidelige, Afsky mod Underfundighed og Falskhed og Troløshed" ("what is upright, frank and reliable, detestation at strangeness and falseness and faithlessness") as the quintessence of the Danish Golden Age, as opposed to the psychological and philosophical artfulness perceived in German literature, e.g. Hoffmann (Vedel 12-18). It is also the very antithesis of the playful and hyperbolic, sometimes parodic nature of Gothic, which can be downright nihilistic in its subversive and elaborate narrative artifice.

The notion of the simple and naïve as key Danish poetic characteristics would be perpetuated by Vilhelm Andersen, another influential literary historian, in his portrait of Oehlenschläger in *Illustreret dansk Litteraturhistorie*, Vol. III (1924). Oehlenschläger, of course, had quite early on toned down the importance of Steffens, who might have been Norwegian-born but who was deeply influenced by his German education and encounters with the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Tieck, Fichte, Goethe and Schelling. This downplaying of Steffens along with a movement away from the Jena-inspired *Universalromantik* after 1805 towards a National Romanticism inspired by that of Herder and Heidelberg, even in the first generation of Danish Romantics, was continued by the literary histories of the nineteenth century "sådan at periodens karakter af en hjemlig, nordisk renæssance kunne komme til at fremstå klarest muligt" ("so that the period's characteristic of a homely, Nordic renaissance would stand out in the clearest way possible," Conrad: ADL). In other words, although the idea of such a cultural isolation is an illusion, the insistence on keeping Danish literature Danish at the time would necessarily have to exclude genres such as the Gothic which is doubly foreign: not just

playing out a violent action in exotic settings in Catholic Southern Europe but also emerging as a complex network of borrowings and translations between English, German and French writers.

Denmark was but a small rural province of Europe in the early 1800s, a small pawn with little control of its destiny, when a series of dramatic events shook the little German-oriented absolute monarchy as a consequence of the larger post-revolutionary re-mapping of Europe. National reform of social and economic areas which had begun before the French Revolution caused enormous change; growing industrialization, secularization, and social deprivation followed the Napoleonic wars, which first resulted in the military bombardment of the defenseless population of Copenhagen in 1807 and then the loss of Norway in 1814, which reduced the kingdom to a tenth of its previous size and which made Frederik IV, who had already enforced tight censorship since his crowning in 1784, tighten his grip on the public even further. The state bankruptcy followed in 1813; then an economic recession and agricultural crisis, which lasted until 1828. It is a commonplace in Gothic criticism that transitional, anxiety-ridden times often see a flourishing of Gothic literature in response to socio-political upheaval; England, German and France produced the Gothic novel, the *Schauerroman* and the *Roman Noir* in those tumultuous years. Because of the 1801-14 wars with England, there was a distinct anti-English sentiment, and English literature (with the exception of Shakespeare, Young and Ossian) wielded little influence on Danish culture in the early 1800s, but after 1820 Walter Scott's novels were all translated and widely read, and Byron fever raged (Nielsen 1976: 17-18). At the same time, French and especially German had long been the language of the bourgeois intelligentsia, and the Danish Romantic poets read the German philosophers and later Hoffmann in the original form. So why was there not a similar development toward the Gothic novel in Denmark? Perhaps an explanation can be found in the larger ideological project of building an authentic nation –

with new borders if not new leadership - in the wake of such disasters. Such an endeavor would necessarily have to be at odds with the foreignness, the fakery, the imitation, the grand theatrical gestures and the apparent insincerity at the heart of Gothic, or its German and French equivalents. Instead one turned to what was simple, close, and recognizable for affirmation of the immediate reality: the nation's past, and the *Biedermeier* culture.

3.7 Bourgeois Mono-Culture: Poetic Realism, *Biedermeier*, and *Fantasten*

Thanks to the new Herder-inspired notion of the close connection between the Danish people – much more homogeneous since losing Norway – and their shared history, their shared language, and their shared landscape, these multiple national crises 1800-1820 did not result in revolutionary sentiment but rather a National Romanticism, which did not truly become nationalistic until the 1840s and which strengthened the position of the king. The absolute monarchy remained largely unquestioned until the middle of the century, even by the most radical Romantics such as Ingemann and Grundtvig, not least because the early 1800s saw the emergence of a bourgeoisie tied to the growing administration and thus loyal to the system. This increasingly dominant group of public servants precluded a liberalist emphasis on the opposition between individual and state – and gradually nation - and promoted instead an emphasis on the common good. This is commonly referred to as “den borgerlige enhedskultur” (the bourgeois mono-culture), in which there was little room for dissent, not least as a particular set of moral values and aesthetic principles emanated from this bourgeoisie and vice versa and into all the governing institutions of Danish public life: families, schools, churches, sciences and culture. The majority of Romantic writers and critics came from Copenhagen's ‘embedsborgerskab’, the upper middle class which occupied all positions in the state, church, university, and administration. As an example of this concentration of cultural power, Oehlenschläger was

appointed chair of aesthetics in 1809 at Denmark's only university in Copenhagen; in 1819 he wrote "Det er et yndigt Land," which is still Denmark's national anthem; and in 1829 he was publicly crowned with laurels as 'Nordens Digterkonge' (The Nordic Poet-King) in the cathedral of Lund, Sweden. Likewise, the prolific J.L. Heiberg, who would cause Andersen and Ingemann so much aggravation, assumed a position of immense power as director of the Royal Theater; he singlehandedly made the vaudeville the dominant dramatic form, based on a strict adherence to a generic convention as the primary quality criteria, which gave an objective quality to what is essentially an entirely subjective matter. Literature and literary criticism became matters of increasing importance, and the feuds between the different camps grew increasingly hostile.

Although gradually liberated from the patronage system of the 1700s, writers still had to create art within the confines of the considerations of their profession, and their very small audience of a couple of thousand people – the literary circle would count no more than some 30 people, all friends, relatives, and neighbours - within the restrictive space inside the ramparts circumscribing the capital and its long-established, carefully described institutions. There are thus some systemic limitations placed on artistic expression. In terms of national politics, the growing desire for control of the unmanageable and chaotic is reflected in increasingly conservative, if not reactionary policies and a restrictive censorship, effectively reinstated in 1799 with the exile of J.L. Heiberg's father, political writer P.A. Heiberg, which put an end to the more politically orientated literature which had emerged in the 1790s. The restrictions enforced in the public sphere meant a greater focus on aesthetic matters over political agendas, as we see generally in Europe and particularly in J. L. Heiberg's and Kierkegaard's sophisticated analyses in the 1830s and 40s, and of course in the general glossing over the considerable social and political problems at the time, a tendency Georg Brandes revolted against in the 1870s.

While the lack of an openly political debate did give literature a prominent role in the shaping of moral and spiritual values in the new nation, it also meant very limited possibilities for any art that criticized or depicted detrimental societal practices or pointed to mechanisms of ideological repression. In their study of the Danish public sphere 1660-1901, Schmidt and Glerup have shown the dominance of the *Biedermeier* value system and the difficulty of expressing opposition to those norms, even for the bourgeois intelligentsia. While Gothic fiction in other countries at the time worked as a locus of fiction where “the middle class displaces the hidden violence of present social structures, conjures them up again as past, and falls promptly under their spell,” the Danish reading public after 1820 instead found vicarious catharsis and affirmation in the *Biedermeier* culture and its corresponding aesthetic category of Poetic Realism, which offered idyllic, often moralizing narratives of safe matters such as the home, family, and everyday life (Punter 218-19).

The year 1824 has been established as the starting-point of a new age in Danish literature, a prose revolution, although essentially it continues the infusion of Romanticism with realism, which in Denmark started very early on. It also continued the project of establishing literary models for its readers, but the novelty was that the prose form was better suited for the mirroring of everyday life, and for the re-establishment of a connection to reality, as writer and philosopher Poul Martin Møller emphasized. It presented a harmonizing outlook colored by local specifics and recognizable details. From the sweeping cosmic move and universal concerns in early Romanticism, the focus shifted to the individual and particular. The attention to concrete detail was not, however, used to reveal social or ideological tension, as we see in the realism closer to the Modern Breakthrough of the 1870s. It is instead a so-called Poetic Realism: a realistic representation laced with the strand of idealism that continues to run through the period, growing

from attempted reconciliation to increasing tension in the 1850s. This idealism is often not represented as a higher and spiritual presence behind the world of phenomena but rather a more flattering, harmonizing rendering of everyday life in clearer and more pleasing form than the actual reality that inspires it, devoid of extreme viewpoints.

The concepts of *Biedermeier* and *Poetic Realism* are key to an understanding of Gothic as a necessarily ephemeral genre in Denmark. “For Afgrundens Rædsel / Jeg vender sky mit Blik” (“from the horror of the abyss / I timidly turn my gaze”) Christian Winther writes in his poem “Sjælland” (1835): this is a world without extremes, an attempted reconciliation of the expansive *Zerissenheit* of early European Romanticism. The development from Romanticism to *Biedermeier* culture and Poetic Realism marks a transfer of emphasis from fantasy to everyday reality, a resignation from the Romantic dream of changing the very nature of human existence, an aspiration which was always more German than Danish anyway. Danish *Biedermeier* writers compromise instead and settle for whatever happiness is afforded in their immediate world. Friedrich Sengle has argued in his *Biedermeierzeit* (1971), that this was not necessarily an easy process, but rather a desperate effort to uphold a self threatened by conflict and fragmentation, which we also see in Heine and Büchner. Inspiring both Andersen and Ingemann, and with frequent use of the macabre and the supernatural, E.T.A. Hoffmann articulated the best known organisation of the discrepancy between fantasy and reality in his Serapiontic principle, an unstable relation at best as we see in the different outcomes in the parallel tales “Der Goldne Topf” (1814) and “Der Sandmann” (1817). That difference is located in the conflict between the marvellous fairy tale and the uncanny Gothic, which caused an ambivalent fascination in the deeply religious Ingemann, as expressed in his poem on Hoffmann: ”Igenem Phantasiens Land sig svinger / Hiin Genius med Flagermusevinger;/ Halv Engel, halv Dæmon, han for mig staaer/

Med Blomster og med Slinger i sit Haar/..." ("Through the Land of Fantasy flies / This spirit with the wings of a bat / Half angel, half demon, he stands before me / With flowers and serpents in his hair..."). He further compares Hoffmann to the enigmatic sphinx, which had become the motif of Ingemann's "Goldne Topf"-hommage, "Sphinxen" (1820), in which the ambivalence and indeterminacy of the confusing structure expresses such an irreconcilable conflict.¹⁹

The experience of conflict and discontinuity between the imaginative individual and a consensus-seeking society was partly articulated in *Romantismen* and *Det Interessante* after the 1820s, but its main representative is the literary character *Fantasten*, who emerges in the *Werther*-inspired Romantic writings of the first decade of the 1800s, most prominently shaped by Staffeldt and Ingemann. *Fantasten* is important because as an archetype he is closely tied to the repression in Danish literature of non-realistic modes. This figure often stands in stark contrast to the true model for Danish identity, the spontaneous and unreflective and perhaps therefore socially integrated genius Aladdin; *Fantasten* is the quintessential dreamer, very often of an artistic sensibility, who fails to conform to the given reality principle and thus to become a productive citizen. Many of Ingemann's characters in this mode are killed or kill themselves, unable to adapt to the world, while Andersen's scholar in "Skyggen" ("The Shadow," 1842) and the student in "Tante Tandpine" both disintegrate, and rather violently, too. P.M. Møller's *En Dansk Students Eventyr* (Adventures of a Danish Student, 1824) is another example, while female versions of *Fantasten* also meet violent endings, e.g. the mistress of the castle in Goldschmidt's "Bjergtagen" (Spellbound, 1868), and Miss Malin and Pellegrina in Blixen's "Syndfloden over Norderney" and "Drømmerne" (1834). The figure meets its ultimate indictment in Hans Egede Schack's *Phantasterne* (The Fantasts, 1857), a psychological study of

¹⁹ The poem is placed in the beginning of the copy of Hoffmann's collected works which Ingemann gave to his wife Lucie in 1849.

the ability to fantasize as manifest in the three contrasting main characters, the narrator Conrad and his foils, the hopeless dreamer Christian, and the sceptic and thus successful Thomas. The novel portrays mismanaged fantasies as the cause of social isolation, professional failures, and even mental illness, as Christian is eventually committed to a mental hospital dreaming that he is Jesus Christ. Conrad on the other hand, in the *Bildungs*-plot overcomes the childhood fantasies they indulged in together and manages eventually to mature into a productive bourgeois citizen. In their study of the Aladdin figure, Emerik & Andersen note that this is the first time a Nouredin character – the structural contrast to the anti-work ethic presented by Aladdin - attains happiness, thus signalling a contemporary social transformation based on the economic legitimization of work, not fantasy or spontaneous imagination (202). Ironically, though, Conrad is rewarded by marrying a princess after all, perhaps as an indication of the bourgeoisie taking over the role of the aristocracy after the introduction of democracy in 1848. At the same time, the novel is an indictment of the Romantic period, as shown in the childhood fantasies and dreams of heroic adventure, even of horrific scenarios of violence and death, based on the Romantic literature of the previous generations, which eventually provides a parodic contrast between the self-image of *Fantasten* and his trivial reality, rendering that literature ridiculously pompous and banal (Mortensen & Schack 2008: 568-9). Where Ingemann and Andersen in that thematic clash between imagination and reality both argue that the imagination provides an expanded reality and its representation a truer perception of man, *Phantasterne* argues that '*fantasien*', and by extension Romantic Idealism, unless reined in by reason and restrained into balance, is dangerously narcissistic and socially disruptive. The theme continues nevertheless into J.P. Jacobsen's naturalistic *Niels Lyhne* (1880) as well as in many other tragic characters, which become even more acutely tragic after the Modern Breakthrough's condemnation of such

apparently frivolous dreams. Later in the century, critical realist Henrik Pontoppidan references central *Biedermeier* works in his epic *Bildungsroman* about the ambivalent *Fantast* who brands himself as a Cain-figure, *Lykke-Peer* (Lucky Peer, 1898-1904): the ironic combination of quotes from Christian Winther and Ingemann work as a painful reminder of the *Biedermeier* repression of problems and the often consequent confinement of *Fantasten* within ineffective, doomed dreams, unable to pretend or sustain the effort of maintaining the idyll (Fibiger 2002: 155).

The danger of the *Fantast* figure lies in his questioning of reality as an arbitrary construction; in that sense the figure is closely tied to the Fantastic mode. The bourgeois realistic *Dannelsesroman* reconciles differences, and the fairy tale, which shares its three-part structure, underlines the parallel status of the alternative 'marvellous' universe and thus relegates Otherness into the safe confines of a pure non-mimetic form. Both are *Biedermeier* favourites. The Fantastic, on the other hand, as a mixed mode and through defamiliarization and metatextual structures reveals our own 'reality' - and our constructions of identity in extension - as contingent, as discursively created and in flux, while providing no unambiguous solutions to the epistemological problems it presents. In its employment of a Fantastic hesitation and an often ambiguous reconciliation of the supernatural with the worldly, the Gothic is driven by a similar epistemological and ontological uncertainty, furthered by disorienting settings and convoluted narrative structures. The Fantastic and Gothic share the non-Cartesian non-rational hesitation or doubt as to reason's monopoly on truth and reality. Marshall Brown has indicated the connection between this "Gothic mood of wonderment and dissatisfaction" and the romantic questioning of "validity and stability of the world we see around us," "the continuity of the self," emanating from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Brown: 49). When the number of both Gothic and Fantastic writer-protagonists is so striking, it is because they are engaged in writing their way to

a firmer grasp of both world and self through the aesthetic simulation of both. Ingemann, Andersen, Hoffmann and Blixen all articulate the limitations for exploring alternative selves, or rather the inadequacy of the simple model of the self advocated in Danish romanticism, as the artist – *Fantasten* per se - faces the vehement effort at harmonization in *Biedermeier* culture. As this often leads to Philistinism and simple materialism, the hungry audience that the artist must feed with sensation and cheap thrills is figured as a devouring monster in “Auntie Toothache” and “Skyggen,” further contributing to an irreconcilable fragmentation of the artistic self.

3.8 *Biedermeier* Culture and ‘Everyday Stories’

Rather than Fantastic stories, the dominant genres of the *Biedermeier* culture are vaudevilles, romances, everyday stories and fairy tales. While a writer such as Andersen articulates the tensions beneath the harmonizing effort of such genres,

Vilhelm Pedersen’s illustrations of his tales seem to maintain Andersen as a key *Biedermeier* figure, like the 1848 illustration for “Sneedronningen” (“The Snow Queen”), in images of a simple middle class idyll,



Romantic simplicity and purity, while Andersen’s elements of the Fantastic and demonic do not make it into these visual expressions of the Danish Golden Age. *Biedermeier* is in fact a term for the period 1825-50, while the corresponding aesthetic category would be *Poetic Realism* but the – rather derogatory - concept of *Biedermeier* has become synonymous with Danish Romanticism, partly because it consolidates tendencies already present in early Romanticism, such as elevating Woman to a representative of Feeling, not least in her maternal role, and to see the Child as a representative of innocence and spontaneity. Concepts such as childhood, the nuclear family and the love-based marriage were beginning to form with the new middle class

and the *Biedermeier Weltanschauung* inevitably became part of that process with a perspective limited to what is close, familiar, local, conventional and homely in sentimental and idyllic – hence the term *Poetic Realism* - accounts of activities in the home, of finding true and



appropriate love as well as one's place in the emerging construction of the nuclear family. The Heiberg family seems the embodiment of this increasingly matriarchal sphere in Wilhelm Marstrand's famous painting, *Fru Gyllembourg læser op af sine Hverdags-Historier for J.L. Heiberg og frue* (*Fru [Thomasine]Gyllembourg reads from her 'Everyday Stories' to [her son Johan Ludvig] Heiberg and his Wife [actress*

Johanne Louise Heiberg). In the painting the family is gathered around the circle-shaped table, each engaged in their own meaningful activity in the bourgeois living room under the watchful eye of the matriarch in her youthful portrait on the wall. The bourgeois nuclear family is the center of this paradigm which encompasses both an individual and a collective sense of self, as the family becomes a microcosm of the nation. While we see a shift from a male-dominated organization, in which the patriarch “robs the family members of their identities forcing them to conform to his will,” to the apparently idyllic “affective family which submerges individual identity into the group,” both models continue to be problematized in the Gothic vision of identity because Gothic has a tendency to parody bourgeois conceptions, including gender definitions (Day 77).

Although the concept of *Biedermeier* takes shape in the first decades of the nineteenth century and culminates 1825-1850, in many ways it is still an integral part of Danish culture and mentality today, evident in the obsession with the untranslatable ‘hygge’ (a coziness associated

with the home, with small spaces, and close relations) as a national characteristic, perhaps not unrelated to the aforementioned values of the plain, down to earth and simple – all decidedly un-Gothic and unspectacular. ”Biedermeierstemningen får i Danmark et skandinavisk islæt, idet den præges af en afdæmpet, flegmatisk livsfølelse, hvis nøgleord er hygge. Hyggens rum er hjemmet” (“The *Biedermeier* atmosphere in Denmark acquires a Scandinavian touch as it is marked by a subdued, phlegmatic feeling toward life, the key word of which is ‘hygge’. The space for ‘hygge’ is the home,” Fibiger 2002: 152). The home is the privileged site of Danish culture and mentality, a safe haven protecting its inhabitants from outside forces, and the heart of the home is *Stuen*, the living room. In Thomasine Gyllembourg’s highly influential “En Hverdags-Historie” (An Everyday Story, 1828), *Stuen* as core domestic space is characterized by a “paafaldende Mangel paa Ziirlighed og Orden” (“a conspicuous lack of neatness and order,” 151) and used as an emblem of the vain and superficial Jette’s faults, her lack of prudence illustrated in the uncanny taxidermic pet dog on display in the chaotic living room. In contrast to this is the tidiness of her half-sister Maja, who is *Dannet* – a fully-formed ideal of an individual, who raises the everyday routines of the household to a higher, more ideal level, which is essentially the movement of Poetic Realism.

Stuen is at once the scene of private pursuits and hobbies and window to the world, as depicted in Emil Bærentzen’s *Et Familiestykke* (1828). It is a public space insofar as it is the only room that visitors, or potential suitors, see in the continual pursuit of marital happiness. This is what Kierkegaard deliberately perverts and negates in his negotiation of conventional bourgeois spaces in mid-nineteenth-century Copenhagen in



Forførerens Dagbog (*The Seducer's Diary*, 1843) emptying both the spaces and the individuals that move within them of meaning as his demonic and hyper-reflective aesthete undertakes a reverse *Bildungs*-process of his persecuted maiden, Cordelia. Although Kierkegaard is by no means a Gothic writer, there is an obvious parallel to the centrality of the living room in Danish Gothic. In Peter Høeg's scathing semi-Gothic portrait of what appears to be a version of the Heiberg family in "Fortælling om et Ægteskab" ("Story of a Marriage" from *Fortællinger om Natten*, 1990) the living room becomes a place of disruptive, antisocial acts, as the barrier between public and private, outside and inside is broken down quite literally; 'hygge' becomes 'uhygge', uncanny, *Unheimlich*: every night the nuclear family is staged in front of the window to the audience outside but implodes behind the drawn curtains as tales of family curses, colonial exploitations in the past, and infidelity tear the unit apart. The main female character's profession as a revered actress makes her a double of Johanne Louise Heiberg, Johan Ludvig Heiberg's wife and Thomasine Gyllembourg's daughter-in-law; her repeated performance of not just marital bliss but domestic identity every night thanks to the curse from the family past becomes an apt comment on the roles played in the modern family, which is really governed by extremely hostile, even predatory relations. "Min hustru, der har sin teaterkarriers 35-årige træning i systematisk løgnagtighed, ville kunne bortforklare syndefaldet" (261; "My wife, with her thirty-five years in the theatre, her thirty-five years' training in systematic duplicity, could explain away the Fall itself," 253), the husband claims, connecting theatrical performance, lies and deceit with the feminine implication in the original sin. This study in emotional cruelty perhaps reflects both Thomasine Gyllembourg's and Johanne Louise Heiberg's later biographical accounts of something less than ideal under the surface of domestic perfection. The Danish concept of 'hygge' is negated and perverted and becomes 'det uhyggelige', *das Unheimliche*, and so in

addition to Høeg's tale, in Ingemann's "Moster Maria," Andersen's "Tante Tandpine," Blixen's "Et Familieselskab i Helsingør" and *Gengældelsens Veje*, and Skov's *Silhuet af en Synder*, the living room as the heart of the home is where the individual is formed but also ultimately negated: in Danish Gothic, it is *Stuen* which necessarily becomes the locus of the individual's dismantling.

3.9 Dannelsesromanen: The Construction of Bourgeois Identity

Because Gyllembourg comes to embody the norm to write within or against in the period, she is in many ways a key literary figure although not much read today. Her stories of everyday life and the imitations they spawned after the first publication of "En Hverdagshistorie" in 1828 answered an increasing demand from a new reading public, the growing – and largely traditionless – middle classes that needed an accessible literature in which to find a mirror for their own behavior, morals and ideals. Critics such as Punter, Hogle and Kilgour have argued the centrality of Gothic fiction to the new middle-class identity: through a process of symbolic abjection, both social, cultural and personal, Gothic fiction because of its "highly mixed form allows both the pursuit of sanctioned 'identities' and a simultaneously fearful and attractive confrontation with the 'thrown off' anomalies that are actually basic to the construction of a western middle-class self" (Hogle 2002: 8). In that respect, the Gothic is but a more extreme version of the strategy in the 'Hverdagshistorier'; while the Gothic abjects what is undesirable by throwing it off onto ghostly or monstrous counterparts, Gyllembourg shows if not a complex psychology, then darker and socially undesirably sides of the human mind within the confines of realism. Although the plots revolve around darker forces and the threats they pose to the establishment or maintenance of the home and privatesphere, ultimately tensions are reconciled, the idyll restored, dangerous ties to the past overcome, deviations punished and transgressions

carefully circumscribed. In “Den Lille Karen” (The Little Karen, 1830), the most widely taught of her stories, Hr von S, who at first is introduced as ”det rædsomme Uhyre!.. en afskyelig Vanskabning!” (“that terrible monster!.. a hideous monstrosity”) because of his physical deformity, turns out to be not ”ond og grusom” (“evil and cruel”) as the innocent Karen assumes but a model of education and wit, manly “Fasthed og Selvbeherskelse” (“restraint and self-control”), and inevitably: her guardian angel. By portraying the deviations from the ideal and socially considerate norms and their destructive effects, Gyllembourg outlines model behaviour in a contrasting scheme for the reader within the harmonizing perspective of Poetic Realism. Such narratives thus had an important instructional value for the new middle-class readers: where the enormously influential J. L. Heiberg’s idea of *Dannelse* was abstract, complex and rather elitist in its Hegelian methodology, his mother’s reformulations were more accessible as they were built around abstractions embodied, often almost allegorically, in people and recognizable conflicts in schematic form. In Gyllembourg’s works and those of her imitators, the individual is part of an extensive network of relations, governed by social responsibility, a strong work ethic and consciousness of the difference between right and wrong. The norms established to regulate truly educated and refined behaviour serve to ensure appropriate familial constellations, as extensions of a much more socially situated and relational self than we see in the individualistic late 1700s or even in early Danish Romanticism. Kierkegaard’s ethicist in *Enten-Eller* (1843) speaks of not ”et abstract Selv, der passer allevegne, og derfor intetsteds, men et concret Selv, der staaer i levende Vexelvirkning med disse bestemte Omgivelser, disse Livsforhold, denne Tingenes Orden.“ (“not an abstract self, which fits in everywhere and thus nowhere, but a concrete self which stands in a lively dialectic with these specific surroundings, these circumstances of life, this order of things,” quoted from Mortensen & Schack 74). Gone is

the introspective, isolated poet-visionary, gone is the sweeping panorama of the cosmos; the main concern for Danish writers of the nineteenth century becomes *Dannelse*, *Bildung*, less centred on individuation than on a complex social interplay of events and relations that is anchored in a detailed, if sometimes improbable because idealized realism. This is a concept writers of Danish Gothic inevitably must come to terms with, primarily through its negation.

Dannelsesromanen, the *Bildungsroman*, becomes the dominating literary format in the nineteenth century, acquiring its form in H.C. Andersen's novels in the 1830s and flourishing in the 1850s and 1860s before evolving – or perhaps devolving – into the more naturalistic *Udviklingsromanen* (novel of development) and *Undergangsromanen* (novel of defeat and destruction) around and after the Modern Breakthrough. While also present in many of the tales of Poetic Realism, the general structure and themes of this type of novel appear also in fairy tales and more importantly in Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* (1805), in which matter and spirit, present and past, finite and infinite, subject and object, individual and community are happily united, guided perhaps by good fortune rather than complex philosophical principle. The point of *Aladdin* is the reconciliation of all conflict, tensions or differences between the individual and society, the Ur-plot of the *Dannelsesroman*, which also relies heavily on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1796, transl. 1802). Because Aladdin also becomes the embodiment of the Romantic artist, he is a key literary figure, which Andersen negotiates in all six of his *Dannelsesromaner* and more indirectly in "Tante Tandpine." Ingemann also indirectly confronts the figure as early as in "Sphinxen" (1820), while Blixen dismantles him in "Et Familieselskab" (1834) in the shape of the always lucky but ultimately selfish Morten. In Gothic, there is always a discrepancy between individual and community, and precisely because "neither Oehlenschläger nor his

Aladdin delve into aberrations of the psyche or concern themselves with social and political problems,” Danish Gothic writers can use the Aladdin figure to do exactly that (Mitchell 111).

Dannelse means both formal education, *Uddannelse* (*Ausbildung*), and the possession of the good manners one needs to navigate social relations; in its ideal form, *Dannelse* means the formation of an already existing self, or rather a latent core of potential in the individual, waiting to be extracted and shaped. In the Hegelian critic J. L. Heiberg’s words, the goal is ”at gøre sig til Det som man er, eller at bringe den Idee, som man oprindeligt bærer i sig, til Existens” (”to make oneself into that which one is, or to bring the idea which one originally carries within into existence”). The process is thus characterized by a metaphysical dimension, a higher cosmic order, the ideal of which the individual manifests, as he takes his place in the order of things. The ideal is a compass, a guiding and controlling authority, founded in familial inheritance, upbringing, and social, moral and cultural norms in a chaotic world: The individual and the universal are thus in continual relation, as the divine powers in early cases play a starring role along with the protagonist, through coincidences, destiny or divine intervention, demonstrating the benevolence of the world to the individual that conforms to the universal, the common good, thus elevating himself above the particular. Heiberg again offers an apt description: ”Individualiteten består nemlig deri, at det i sig selv Partikulære og LigeGYldige bliver Idee ... og den Exemplarets Apoteose til Individ skeer derved, at det gennemtrænges af det Skjønne, det Gode og det Sande” (”Individuality therefore consists in the inherently particular and inconsequential becomes Idea... and this apotheosis of the example into individual happens in its permeation of the Beautiful, the Good, and the True,” quoted from Mortensen 2004: 132). The unity of the tripartite ideal of *Det Skjønne*, *Det Gode* og *Det Sande* ever present in nineteenth-century Danish culture is reflected in the trinity of art, Christianity, and philosophy, the unified

interconnection of the ideal as it applies to the main areas of life. This is paralleled by another trinity: *Gud, Konge, Fædreland* (God, King, and Country) and in the responses of faith, respect and sense of duty (Fibiger 2002: 175). "Vi ere ikke til for Lykkes, Velbehags Skyld. Mennesket er til for at erkjende Ordenen og bringe sig i Orden" ("We do not exist for the sake of our own happiness or pleasure. Man exists in order to realize order and to bring himself to order," from Goldschmidt's *Dannelsesroman Nemesis* 1877, p. 9). This is the order of the status quo, of a monolithic culture with a strong consensus and a uniform set of values. In the digressions and dangerous turns an individual can potentially take on his progress from internal division to completion and the inevitable crises this process necessitates mapped out in the ultimately harmonizing *Dannelsesroman*, we do see the enormous cultural effort it took to implement this program and to the forces that revolted against it, although necessarily ambivalently so.

The revolt of Danish Gothic is part re-writing, part negation. The teleological trajectory of organic maturation in the linear *Dannelses*-plot is often characterized by a metaphysical dimension, a general sense of optimism and a clearly defined ideal for the development of self in a process propelled by transparent causality. There is a strong parallel to the rise of the British novel and its ties to the emergence of a Protestant bourgeois culture, as Ian Watt has examined. Maggie Kilgour identifies the novel's focus on character development and narrative causality as an "extension of middle-class faith in individualism, self-determination, 'getting ahead', reason, autonomy, and progress" (Kilgour 10). In contrast, Gothic novels, in both form and content, resist trajectories of progress and development, of growth and individuation, both historically and individually. "It suggests that the present can never detach itself from the past: the gothic from its precursors, the adult from his childhood self" (Kilgour 37). While Ingemann's "Sphinxen" (1820) in many ways is a condensed *Dannelses*-story, its chaotic narrative structure

and confusingly intersecting layers of reality undermine any linearity and divine order, rendering the identity retrieved and the final resolve to maintain the status quo highly ambiguous. At the center of this tale is the Oedipal trajectory towards maturation; Gothic shares with Romanticism the preoccupation with childhood, which Andersen brought to the fore in his tales and his three 1830s novels. In Gothic this happens in a distorted form, as the personal and cultural past is also often the source of terror, as it keeps erupting into the present, thus retarding progress: “In its structure, settings, and characters it presents a view of an identity which has not evolved triumphantly into a Lockean unified person, but remains trapped in the past, fragmented, incoherent, and divided” (Kilgour 37). Blixen’s “Et Familieselskab” traces a reverse journey, arguably a regression back in time, back to the haunted house where the detrimental childhood patterns were established that stifle the sisters’ progress towards becoming complete beings. Gothic deals with painful losses and interruptions in this maturation process: instead of entering into organic unity with the environment, the individual is crushed by it. In Andersen’s “Tante Tandpine,” the ties to the past are not just personal and Oedipal but cultural and religious, as the references to the original Fall and the childhood of Man make clear. Andersen’s tale ends not with the birth or formation of the true and complete self, but with images of backwards falling into a watery grave, a negative rebirth as the artist can only articulate negative transcendence. The common, universal background invoked by the biblical images of Adam and Eve is not the solid foundation for the self to build on, nor the mythical Golden Age to which the Romantic fallen subject can be restored, but a nightmarish past that continues to haunt the present on individual and cultural levels. In its short concentrated form, it distorts the three-part model of ‘Hjemme, Hjemløs, Hjem’ (at home, homeless, return to home) which in *Dannelsesromanen* – and the fairy tale - corresponds to the origin sin, fall from and retrieval of the Christian Paradise.

The title of the most significant contribution to *Dannelsesromanen* as genre is significantly *Hjemløs* (Homeless, 1853-57) by A.M. Goldschmidt, which follows the same tripartite structure. Although Goldschmidt's protagonist dies at 32, like Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* it ends in an optimistic faith in the order of life and self: in the end, through practical work for others, he retrieves a sense of order in himself and the universe. Conversely the sense of homelessness and spiritual exile felt in much Romantic Gothic is often ascribed to a universe which may have been divinely created but ultimately abandoned by its God, as Shelley's reference to Erasmus Darwin in the preface to *Frankenstein* (1818) implies.

Because it is written towards the end of the first Gothic period, which coincides with the end of Romanticism, *Frankenstein* embodies a plethora of relevant formal and thematic concerns pertaining to the creation and formation of the *Bildungsroman*. The inner story traces Victor's isolation and ultimately complete alienation, beginning in a familiar domestic world to which Victor cannot return, because his quest destroys that very home. This is the trajectory of the revolutionary Male Gothic, a negation of the *Dannelses*-plot, which we however see confirmed in the outer story of Walton's "exile and return, of a circular defamiliarisation and refamiliarisation that is typical of the conservative Radcliffean Female Gothic" (Kilgour 215). At the same time, the nameless creature attempts to educate himself by reading Goethe's *Werther* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which only underline its anti-social non-identity. According to Lee Heller, "*Frankenstein* is Gothic because its stories of education become stories of crime" (Heller 337). The power of formal education is also questioned in Peter Høeg's schoolhouse Gothic *De Måske Egnede* (*Borderliners*, or literally: 'Those that Are Suitable', presumably for entrance into 'civilized' society). The boarding school becomes a prison set on the moral and educational improvement of its subjects, over which hovers the ever-watchful eye of the paternal principal

Biehl, who assumes a God-like role assisted by the Norse God Odin's ominous ravens, Hugin and Munin. The ideological creation and re-shaping of his little child-monsters, damaged and dehumanized juvenile criminals, take place through intense monitoring, hidden surveillance and teacher spies, while lists, discipline, isolation, corporeal punishment, and a tight schedule regulated by the ever-dominating bell are supposed to bring the select few out of their own darkness and "op i lyset" ("up into the light"), not least as they internalize the Foucauldian power structure of Bentham's panopticon. Ironically Biehl has written a tome on Grundtvig, father of Danish National Romanticism and founder of the folk high school and the freedom-based creativity-driven Danish education system in general. Even more ironically, in Peter's extortion scheme, Biehl's lists end up hidden in the Grundtvigian *Højskolesangbogen* (The Songbook of the Folk High School), a cornerstone in the spreading of the Romantic philosophy and still today the most central element in the Danish concept of *Dannelse*: in Høeg's novel, *uddannelse* (education) and *Dannelse* ultimately become social Darwinism; the only light that emerges is that of Peter's double's final suicidal explosion. In Blixen's *Gengældelsens Veje*, a marriage of *Dannelsesromanen* and Radcliffe's Female Gothic with a queer subtext, education also becomes repression and indoctrination: in his extensive lectures the apparently benevolent and widely read pastor/foster father teaches the girls to loathe their female bodies, a lesson also learned by Fanny in "Et Familieselskab" through her extensive readings of the male canon. At the same time the female bodies are attempted violated, raped and murdered, as if to test the strength of their identities-in-the-making. That testing of the perimeters of the self becomes even more shockingly violent in *De Måske Egnede*, as the nineteenth-century idea of the complete person, the productive individual who can contribute to society, becomes defeated by the recurring images of little bodies hunched over through discipline and very literally falling apart, some

through self-mutilation, others through rape and other sadistically inflicted punishments. In addition, the “William Wilson”-style phantasmatic doubles and ghosts that haunt the protagonist contribute to this sense of physical and psychological fragmentation, while the confusingly both linear and cyclical concept of Time adds to the general sense of disorientation while defying the teleological progress inherent in *Dannelse* and its novelistic expression. In the Gothic the world and the self are indeterminate, oscillating between extremes, a constant process of transformation with no reliable teleology, neither the Christian promise of a transcendent soul, the High Romantic dynamic of reaching a spiritual self through the work of the imagination, nor the bourgeois ethic of the realist novel of the forging of a stable ‘self’ through hard work and sheer will-power, whether of the individual or society. The Gothic is “a fable about the collapse of identity... the impossibility of identity” (Day 7).

3.10 Romantisme: The Dualistic Self

Although Danish Romanticism shares with the Gothic the new focus on interiority that is integral to nearly all the developments of the period, as well as a blurring of the subject / object divide, it is done so from a communal, holistic perspective, for an extroverted, expansive identity completion, whereas Gothic – Romantic or modern – is a nightmare about the possibility of selfhood. The modern subject emerges within the discourses of Enlightenment and Romanticism. While Oehlenschläger and Steffens certainly inaugurated a new era in 1802, late eighteenth-century writers such as Johannes Ewald and Jens Baggesen had in fact prepared the ground for a world and consciousness revolving around a highly reflective self sometimes at odds with reality; and particularly Ewald has a tremendous impact on Blixen. It is a commonplace that the emergence of Romanticism and Gothic happened as a reaction to Enlightenment and Augustan rationalism, through a confluence of social, cultural, and literary circumstances. In terms of the

formations of selfhood, Baker and Miles have shown that the unitary, rational subject that is the Enlightenment ideal is founded on an expulsion, a necessarily incomplete abjection, of passion, madness, and otherness, in a move that privileges reason, rationality and sameness over potentially destabilizing elements, which must be disciplined to achieve a sense of coherence and consistency of being. This lays the ground for the split subject of Gothic fiction and in many ways for the rent romantic consciousness. “Gothic texts trace the fragmentation of the unified subject, making visible the fracture lines that are always present within the formation of post-Enlightenment subjectivity” (Baker: 166).

While the British Romantics found in the Gothic a symbolic language through which they could explore a shared sustained interest in representations of subjectivity, in the Danish *Romantisme* of 1825-50 a number of writers channelled such psychological inquiry into *Det Interessante* (‘the interesting’), the darker aesthetic counterpart of Poetic Realism. *Det Interessante* acquires its interesting qualities from titillating transgressions of bourgeois *Biedermeier* norms: beginning in *Romantismen*, there is always something hidden beneath the surface, because it is in this period that the surface as a concept is formed. The surface can be transgressed; it can be shot through with fissures and cracks to reveal a moral darkness underneath; and it can be a mirror-like site of reflection and distortion. An example of all three is Kierkegaard’s self-doubling seducer in *Enten-Eller*, who demonstrates the demonic potential of the imagination when severed from its proper religious context and directed toward the self. *Romantismen* is teeming with hyper-reflective split characters torn between bourgeois expectations and uncontrollable desires. These split characters are arguably a continuation of the otherwise rather short-lived German-inspired *Universalromantik*, which resurfaces as growing doubts about the spiritual outlook and idealistic philosophy of Romanticism, and the possibility

of reconciliation of the ideal with the real. Where Christian doctrine restrained the dualism of early Romanticism, the increasing questioning of the metaphysical realm meant a more agonizing *Zerissenheit* and sense of disintegration, which particularly Ingemann's characters express, for example in the existential anxiety of the Novalis-inspired "Den Levende Døde" (The Living Dead, 1835). *Romantismen* is at odds with, yet dependent on the *Biedermeier* culture. The *Biedermeier* view of human nature is deeply rooted in Enlightenment views of man as improvable. Extremes in individual psychology and behaviour are rejected, but for the same reason also carefully registered and channelled into rigid patterns that facilitate disciplining and monitoring. There seems to be an increasing articulation of sexuality in this age, not least through the Foucauldian mechanisms of prohibition and proscription. Danish *Biedermeier* does not entirely exclude the erotic, exotic and dangerous as long as it does not upset the equilibrium and general harmony of things as they are, but only serve to underline the dominance of stronger forces (Mortensen 2005: 118). Thus, these demonic-Byronic characters – 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know', who revel in self-reflective *Weltschmerz*, spleen, scepticism and secret guilt from the past, usually end up getting what they deserve so normalcy can be restored, although chords of dissonance are not always entirely quieted. Heine and Byron were introduced in Denmark in the 1820s, replacing Scott as the most popular foreign writer (hence the popularity of Ingemann's historical novels). Bagger's *Min Broders Levnet* (The Life of my Brother, 1835) is the most famous example of a Byronic character in Danish *Romantisme*, and explores many Gothic themes such as the double - split out in the two polarized brothers - the haunting past that runs like a curse through the veins of this doomed family and a general moral and sexual debauchery, which undercuts the *Biedermeier* idyll that the narrator lives in, not knowing that his wife has born his brother a child. Closer to the Gothic is Christian Winther's "Skriftestolen" (The

Confessional, 1843). It takes place in exotic Catholic Italy and details the cold-blooded retaliation of a cuckolded husband on his wife and her lover, sadistic and sublime at the same time. The Marchese appears at the same time a loving husband, heroically strong-willed and undeniably monstrous when he strangles the young architect, who is in his employ, under the bedspread in his wife's room. As the bedspread takes on the properties of death but at the same time veils the uncomfortable fact, the theme of the hidden, the surface, and the unseen plays a pivotal role. In a rather Gothic manner, the cathedral - the Gothic structure per se - plays a central role in the intriguing plot of pursuit, but no possible flight, as the acoustics of the architecture in a certain spot reveals the wife's secret in the confessional. This forms a sharp contrast between the apparent metaphysics of the space and plain geometrical fact: things may be repressed and unseen, but not unheard.

Ingemann's werewolf character in "Varulven" (1835) is also a Byronic hero-villain, the title indicating his impossible conflict between civilized humanity and subhuman drives, as the studied and philosophical bourgeois young man cannot reconcile his ideals with his sexual urges, nor the vision of his ethereal fiancée with the prostitute he impregnates and ultimately murders. His suicide re-establishes a sense of normalcy but the psychological dissonance lingers, as it does in many of St. St. Blicher's tales of ugly sordidness of urges, drives and desires boiling underneath the repressive confines of the *Biedermeier* homescape, and the lethal consequences when such drives erupt, most notably in "Sildig Opvaagnen" (Late Awakening, 1828). Blicher is interesting because many of his first-person narrators reveal their own self as unknown and unknowable, self-deceptive and unreliable as they are, their skewed perspective becoming an epistemological point about *Det Interessante* as the unseen, what lies beneath. In their explorations of this fractured two-part self, often in a simple dualism of public exterior and dark,

socially unacceptable, even monstrous interior, writers such as Staffeldt, Blicher, Winther, and Aarestrup still suggest an originary, 'whole' self that pre-exists the moment of splitting and which can be restored to completeness. The dangerous drives, while definitely there and at times erupting gratuitously, can still potentially be repressed and disciplined in a perhaps rather unstable two-part self. In contrast, Gothic fiction further fragments and fractures that self into multiple selves. This faking of the self - a non-referential, imitative, and in Blixen often sartorially constructed self, which reveals nothing under its quotes, masks and disguises – complicates the simple two-part model of desirable surface and undesirable depth in the split characters in *Romantismen*, as Gothic generally interrogates the simplicity of a surface-depth model. The fakery, imitation, inauthenticity and insincerity at the heart of Gothic, are not only ideologically unsound within the general restoration project Denmark faced in the first half of the nineteenth century, but also contradict the emerging Romantic value attached to artistic originality as well as the idea of the true core self to be extracted in the process of *Dannelse*.

3.11 Brandes and the Modern Breakthrough: The End of Romanticism

When the *Romantisme* and the related Gothic mode were not stronger, it has to do with both the reception then and in and after the Modern Breakthrough. Ingemann was assailed by critics, who reduced his explorations of the psyche to diagnoses of pathology within the writer himself, and Aarestrup was ostracized from the cultural establishment in Copenhagen due to the themes of eroticism, voyeurism and sadomasochism in his poetry. Likewise, Blicher's now classic "Sildig Opvaagnen" according to philologist J.N. Madvig was "den indtil det smudsigste Detail udførte, aldeles uæstetiske Skildring af et... Horeliv" ("an in the filthiest detail executed and entirely unaesthetic account of a life of fornication [alt. a whore's life]" and should quite simply never have been printed, he argues in a review, which takes Gyllembourg's decorous stories as the

model for all literature, and which is based on a confusion of aesthetic and moral principles as was common in the criticism at the time (quoted from Mortensen & Shack 339). Because the texts of *Romantismen* are the works that are taught in the academy today, we tend to forget that the dominant cultural mode was in fact *Biedermeier*; several critics even argue that there really was no Danish *Romantisme* as we know it from other countries, and so a Gothic tradition would necessarily struggle even more to emerge. Even Georg Brandes, the great inaugurator of a more socially and politically rebellious literature, all but annihilated Ingemann and instead held out what has been considered the epitome of *Biedermeier* as exemplary, namely Christian Winther's verse romance *Hjortens Flugt* (The Flight of the Deer, 1855), which is largely ignored today but thanks to its innocuousness was an extremely popular present for the Danish Protestant Confirmation ritual – a central stage on the road towards *Dannelse* - until the mid-twentieth century, when critical attention shifted to his much darker short stories, such as the aforementioned "Skriftestolen."

The impact of Georg Brandes (1848-1927) on Danish – even Nordic - arts and letters is formidable; his influence reaches backward in a redefinition of Romanticism and forward into the literary environment of the better part of the twentieth century. Although the principles of realism had been anticipated by many of the Romantics, Brandes formulates the principles of a new realism and naturalism, condemning hyper-aesthetic writing and fantasy, and thus the Romantic movement in one fell swoop: literature should be an organ for the advance of liberty and the progress of humanity, and famously set up problems for debate. When this inauguration of a new literary era is still today considered a small revolution in the history of Danish culture, it is not only because Brandes ushers in a contemporary Naturalistic literature in dialogue with progressive movements in the rest of Europe, compared to which the provincial Danes according

to him were 40 years behind, but also because he simultaneously and very effectively disqualifies large parts of the Romantic literature as low-brow, in a very definitive and hostile eulogy. This means that the widespread opposition between Romanticism and Realism increasingly acquires a division into 'high' and 'low' literature, with Romanticism deemed not just aesthetically antiquated but poor literature with little textual consciousness, a sentiment that would last well into the 1970s. Nowhere is this expressed more aggressively than in his 1887 portrait of Ingemann. Not only does Brandes resume the aforementioned rhetoric of disease, madness and pathology to characterize Ingemann's Fantastic-Gothic prose tales, but the enormously popular historical novels, which had become a cornerstone in the Grundtvigian popular movement via the folk high schools and village lectures, were dismissed as "en Række Billeder af skrigende Falskhed. Personlighederne er umulige... skabte af en Drengfantasi... alle Situationer er teatraliske" ("a series of images of shrieking falseness. The characters are impossible... created by a boy's imagination... all situations are theatrical," 1887: 444). Furthermore, Brandes draws attention to the relation between Ingemann's works and "Lejebiblioteksromaner", the rental novels of contemporary libraries and thus a term for the popular – low – culture of the time with a less than sophisticated audience that Brandes branded "en Hærskare af barnlige og uudviklede Gemytter" ("an army of childish and undeveloped temperaments," 1887: 444). The dismissal is thus both aesthetic and based on *Dannelse* as a social and literary paradigm but the high / low dichotomy, a commonplace also in Gothic criticism, ignores the fact that a multiplicity of functional relations between texts across those two levels has taken place. In Denmark it has meant that realism has continually been placed at the top of the literary, and by implication social hierarchy, with Romanticism – both *Romantik* and *Romantisme* and its Gothic versions - at the bottom.

While it is understandable that Brandes takes issue with repetitive narratives, mechanistic production, and “den gammeldags Romantiks altfor grove Effekter” (“the much too crude effects of old-fashioned Romanticism”), described as theatrical and pathetic in his 1868 review of Carit Etlar, it is unfortunate that the Romantics’ explorations of subjectivity are ignored by this great catalyst for a Naturalistic literature, which would also include psychological matters. Introducing Nietzsche to Danish readers in 1888, Brandes writes from a Greek-inspired ideal of man as an undivided, organic unity, driven by an idolization of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, which results in his incomprehension at the dualistic view of human nature he finds in e.g. Tolstoj, Zola, and Maupassant in his essay “Dyret i Mennesket” (The Animal in Man, 1890), with the unconscious and its animal instincts and drives raging under the surface. The same ideal – and dismissal – can be seen in Sven Møller Kristensen’s influential study from 1967, *Den Dobbelte Eros* (The Dual Eros), which in essence criticizes Romantics such as Ingemann for not being familiar with the Brandesian *Kulturradikalisme* of the 1930s (!). Likewise, after 1900 Brandes would go on to dismiss Freud, who of course was enormously indebted to the very Romantics Brandes rejected, looking instead to Homer for an ideal of equilibrium found in ‘healthy’ men with no death fixations. This has meant that the rhetoric of pathology and disease used already in the early 1800s to describe Romantic and Gothic writers’ explorations of their shared preoccupation with the borders of human experience seemed justified and was continued in the many literary histories that followed in the wake of Brandes’ watershed moment. This is not least because Danish literary histories have taken the Goethean *Dannelsesroman* as their model, organizing and editing literary history according to the idea of the organism in a linear narrative of progress and growth for both individual and society (Rosiek 1996: 4-5; Aarseth 107).

Ultimately, because "Romantikken var forgiftet i sine Kilder" ("Romanticism was poisoned in its well") according to Brandes, for decades after 1870 it has been dismissed as 'too German' and thus theatrical and irrational because it explores states of madness and the unconscious; escapist because it expresses a longing for a medieval, sometimes personal past; and nihilistic thanks to an irony seen as subversive to the social fabric (Rosiek 1996:1). Thus the older Romantics such as Coleridge and Novalis, and by extension all of the Danish Romantics, were seen by Brandes as having failed the 1789 ideals of reason, progress and liberty, while he conveniently placed the politically rebellious and thus acceptable Byron and Shelley under the somewhat confusing heading "Naturalismen i England." The death sentence Brandes pronounced over the Romantic movement has meant that it has seemed embarrassingly antiquated and irrelevant to the Danish academy, at least until the 1980s when deconstructive critics rescued it through an interest in fragment, irony, and allegory rather than *Dannelse*, *Weltanschauung* and quasi-theological symbols. After World War I, Brandes' ideas were channeled into *Kulturradikalismen*, which forms the cultural, aesthetic, social and political background for the publication of Blixen's strange Romantic-Gothic-Fantastic debut in 1934, a backdrop which made *Seven Gothic Tales* seem even more odd and anachronistic, its ornamented style and hyperbolic theatrics clashing with the social realism of the 1930s and the elevation of message over artistic articulation in that period. This is no doubt part of the reason why it was directed at an Anglo-American market, which had given up on Romanticism much later than the Danes.

It should now be apparent why the Gothic has been a neglected genre in Denmark both in terms of production and reception. The writers who have dabbled with the genre have had to face a damning rhetoric of pathology and disease and were criticized for being 'too German' and too divorced from the wholesome, monistic construction of reality prevalent in the early 1800s. The

figures of Aladdin and *Fantasten* embody this paradigm and the continual struggle between reconciliation and rebellion within the dominant *Biedermeier* culture, a discourse of normality and social acceptance which Danish Gothic constantly has to interrogate. This particular perception of reality supported the national restoration project of the first half of the nineteenth century and helped build a solid self-understanding for the growing middle classes while they were building and relying on a growing cultural capital. The dialectic between the bourgeois mono-culture and an absolute monarchy relying on strong censorship clearly limited the extremeness of the social and cultural abjections necessary to uphold such a world view. While the later and darker Romanticism of *Romantismen* allows for ideological deviations in the form of dualistic, Byronic characters that permit standard, adult, middle-class identities to stand out more clearly against them, the Gothic goes further by presenting in structure, setting, plots and characters a view of identity as entirely discontinuous and fragmented, and not governed by the higher order which gives a metaphysical presence in the bourgeois *Dannelsesroman*. It has taken the Danish academy a century to correct Brandes' dismissal of Romanticism, but today there is a greater interest in the reaction against *Biedermeier*, so that *Biedermeier* literature is not canonized, anthologized or generally in print, while the works of *Romantismen* have become defining of the era. With critical attention thus mostly focused on the provocations, or perhaps rather the scrutiny of the carefully established boundaries in the dominant culture, it is all the more curious that the idea of a Danish Gothic tradition has not yet been established.

Chapter 4. B.S. Ingemann's Romantic Gothic Tales: Demons, Darkness and Dobbelgængers

4.1 Bernhard Severin Ingemann: Introduction

The critical reception of the works of Bernhard Severin Ingemann (1789-1862) is in many ways key to understanding the exclusion of Gothic and Fantastic literature from the established Danish literary canon. He remains the most prolific Gothic writer in Denmark, yet few Danes know him as such. Despite this paradox, he must be credited with making a number of important contributions to the development of a specifically Danish Gothic tradition, influenced by German Romanticism and by the early nineteenth-century emerging science of the self, while exhibiting a textual consciousness which was unseen at the time in Danish literature. At the same time, Ingemann's positioning of the fragile Gothic body, male as well as female, seems to be informed not just by Romantic, pre-Freudian notions of a fragmented and divided self, but by the concern with surfaces, violence and transgressions in Anglo-American Gothic which would evolve into the horror story, and which clearly threatens established notions of Danish Romanticism as a balanced and coherent vision of unity.

Born in the year of the French Revolution and making his literary debut in the decade that followed Oehlenschläger's 1802 Romantic breakthrough, a decade which also saw the near-collapse of the Danish state, Ingemann represents a stubborn insistence on the spiritual value of Romanticism, as a harmonizing outlook with a national orientation replaced the exploration of the dangerous subjective forces of the dualistic and fragmented *Universalromantik* in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Publishing poems, verse romances, historical and contemporary novels, psalms, hymns, autobiographies, theological writings and dramas for six decades,

Ingemann was extremely productive. Inspired by Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels, his historical novels, *Valdemar Seir* (Valdemar the Victorious, 1826), *Erik Menved's Bamdom* (Erik Menved's Childhood, 1828); *Kong Erik og de Fredløse* (King Erik and the Outlaws, 1833); and *Prins Otto af Danmark og Hans Samtid* (Prince Otto of Denmark and his Time, 1835) would become the best-selling novels of all time in Denmark and made him as prominent and beloved a children's writer as Andersen was in nineteenth-century Denmark, despite little critical interest. These novels are, however, largely forgotten now, and Ingemann's legacy has become his beautifully poetic, richly suggestive and in a Danish context universally known psalms, of which *Morgensange for Børn* (Morning Songs for Children, 1837) and *Syv Aftensange* (Seven Evening Songs, 1838) were arguably as much a part of the emerging market for children's literature as Andersen's famous tales. Considering the simple naivete and benevolent Christianity of the songs and the conservative themes in the novels of chivalry and optimistic nationalism – at the expense of both historical accuracy and emerging ideas of democracy before the absolute monarchy was abolished in 1848, to Ingemann's chagrin - it is rather hard to believe that Ingemann is also the father of both the Danish horror story and the Danish fantastic tale, exploring extreme mental states, destructive passions, psychological experiments, hidden crimes, family curses, pacts with the devil, and generally redefining what is considered normal or real, as corpses, werewolves, the living dead, ghosts, demons and monstrous Others emerge from the cracks in the otherwise polished *Biedermeier* surface.

Inspired heavily by E.T.A. Hoffmann and pointing to Edgar Allan Poe, Ingemann is unique on Danish ground, as no other Danish writer has explored the histrionic gestures and excessive effects associated with the Gothic mode to the same extent, at least not until Karen Blixen made her debut in 1934. For decades his early productions were forgotten, even

repressed, as they have been in conflict with the prevailing notion of the Danish Golden Age as ‘healthy’ and balanced, far from the dangerous extremes of German Romanticism. J.P. Trap’s famous 1868 image of the both paternal and childlike

countenance of Ingemann the elder has perhaps also contributed to that cognitive dissonance; when an influential literary critic such as F. Billeskov Jansen writes ”Det forstaar sig, den hyggelige Dansker har ikke Tyskerens Magi” (“It is understood that the



“hyggelige”[agreeable, homely, cozy] Dane does not have the magic of the German”), the point is not so much Hoffmann’s perceived superiority as it is the compulsion to maintain the image of Ingemann as harmless and ‘hyggelig’, devoid of ‘magic’ and other potentially threatening sorcerous impulses (Jansen 131). Since the 1980s, though, there has been a growing critical interest in not only Ingemann’s fantastic tales, almost exclusively focused on “Sphinxen” (The Sphinx, 1820) and to a much lesser degree on the poems and plays of his youth. Ingemann’s use of Gothic tropes, however, remains largely ignored. In the following, I will briefly examine important motifs in Ingemann’s early works (1811-1819), in so far as they help shed light on the development of an early Danish Gothic as it is shaped by a wild and sublime Romanticism. Then I will examine three of his prose tales from *Eventyr og Fortællinger* (1820) with the main focus on “Sphinxen,” while including the critical reception of his work as well as other select tales to elucidate his particular reworking of Gothic conventions.

4.2 Ingemann’s Early Works 1811-1822

Contrary to common perception, Ingemann was one of the most radical and extreme Romantics, as his 1827 manifesto indicates:

Litteraturens Rige er en aandelig Fristat, hvori Alder, Stand, Rang og alle andre borgerlige forhold bortfalde: her gælder intet andet Forhold, end det, hvori Aand staar til Aand; enhver anden Myndighed eller Overlegenhed, man heri vil indføre, er en Anmasselse, der bør bortvises som Uforstand eller Uforskammenhed (from Ingemann's journal 1827, quoted from Michelsen, 170).²⁰

The kingdom of literature is a spiritual Free State, in which age, rank and class and all other bourgeois matters are void: here the only circumstance which matters is the relation between spirits; any authority or superiority which is attempted introduced here is an aggression, which should be expelled as folly or rudeness.

The desire to rebel against petty rules and bourgeois conformity would ultimately be the source of the damning criticism launched against him, as he conveyed such rebellious impulses through experiments in form and genre, while content-wise, his 1811-1822 production is characterized by themes of death, eternity, obsessed introspection, and a feverish longing for transcendence as an escape from the painful realities of this world.

Ingemann made his debut with a collection of elegiac poems, some sentimental, some Gothic, in *Digte 1-2* (1811-12), followed by the epistolary novel in verse *Varners poetiske Vandringer* (Varner's Poetic Wanderings, 1813), the *Werther* of Danish Universalromantik.²¹ The spiritual love between Varner and the aptly named Maria, who is the mirror image of his soul, is presented as the means to retrieve the lost harmony between the individual and the universe. Such is, however, only possible beyond death, when the individual is liberated from the chains of the material state. This is what Varner pursues by literally drinking death from Maria's lips, thus deliberately contracting her deadly disease: "Kun hvor ei Hjerter slaaer, er Aanden fri" ("Only where the heart does not beat, the spirit is free"). Their love was never meant to be consummated; before their untimely deaths, Maria hesitated before the altar, asking: "Er vi ikke

²⁰ All quotes in this chapter are in my translation.

²¹ Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774) was attempted published in Danish translation in 1776 when the theological faculty in Copenhagen banned it on the grounds of blasphemy and encouragement of immoral behavior. Although it was not published in Danish until 1820, 'Werther Fever' raged in Copenhagen, as Danish youth embraced the book and its fashions, which included a wave of suicides.

Børn endnu?" ("Are we not still children?"), suggesting the theme of the sexually initiated fall, which Ingemann develops extensively in both form and content in his entire oeuvre. The same motif of the deliberately deadly kiss which leads to the sweet release of the afterlife is also used in the last tragedy of Ingemann's youth, the epic poem *Tassos Befrielse* (The Liberation of Tasso, 1819). This blissful reunion may be sensed in dream-like states, as well as by the Romantic artist, the outsider, who is isolated and elevated above mundane matters like an alienated ghost: poets "vandre jo som Gjenfærd over Jorden / Og smile ad de Dødeliges Møie / Al deres Viisdom tykkes os kun Tant; / Vi kan ei tage Borgerskab iblandt dem." ("Poets "Wander like ghosts over the earth / And smile at the toil of the mortals / All their wisdom seems to us mere folly / We cannot assume citizenship among them"). Ingemann's Tasso is one of several studies of insanity as manifest in the fragile, neurotically sensitive mind of the artist, who, unlike in Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* (1790), is the undisputed hero.²² There is thus very early on a coupling between artistic production and madness. At the same time, Ingemann's male protagonists grow increasingly ambiguous and it is clear that the demonic forces cannot be separated from them (Michelsen 181). This along with the romantic notion that the world is a prison and insanity an escape was perhaps reinforced by the first staging of *Hamlet* in Denmark in May 1813 and the general Shakespeare renaissance in Europe in the 1810s, which influenced the Gothic revival considerably (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1996: 81).

Ingemann thus represents the apex of Danish Neoplatonism in this decade, as the supranatural idealism in his early poems and dramas forms a stark contrast to the series of

²² Ingemann's Tasso is a counterpart to Goethe's, as Ingemann admitted to resenting the German poet's world view and thus carefully avoided Weimar – but sought out Hoffmann - on the *Dannelsesrejse* (to Italy, 1818-1819), which most Danish Golden Age poets embarked upon. It was also this journey which established a strong skepticism towards Catholicism in Ingemann, as his strong religious feeling turned more devoutly Christian, although always undogmatic, he never came to endorse the tenet of the resurrection of the flesh (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1996: 81).

existential crises, murders, patricides, pain and torture, as well as extreme and feverous, even demonic, states bordering on or crossing into the realm of insanity. The death wish thus runs through many of these texts, as it did generally in the Romantic literature at the time, as the dark side of the dualistic characters is explored and their sense of reality and identity is dissolved, while the unconscious threatens to take over. In the tragedy *Løveridden* (The Lion Knight, 1816), inspired by the German *Schreckromantik* and fate dramas that were in vogue in Copenhagen at the time, Ingemann comes closer than ever to a type of psychoanalysis, which he would develop further in his later prose tales. Dealing with the themes of fate and incest, as his earlier fate drama *Mithridat* (1812) also did, Ubald, engaged to his sister without realizing the ties of blood, ends up murdering both her, his father and his witch-like mother in an Oedipal drama. He ultimately identifies the true enemy within: "... som en anden Ubald - / Der raser jeg imod mit eget Væsen -- / Forunderlige Sjælekamp! Hør op! / Du sønderbryde vil mit Inderste" ("like another Ubald / I rage against my own being / Strange battle of the soul! Seize! / You will tear apart my innermost self"). As Ubald is torn between erotic and spiritual love, a conflict reiterated in the later historical romances and prose tales, he represents all of Ingemann's characters: torn between the demonic and the divine, man is faced with an existential choice between good and evil, tempted by carnal desires or the pursuit of intellectual knowledge beyond what is proper; either way the demonic is represented as the triumph of the individual, coldly rational self as opposed to the redemption afforded by the unreflected, almost child-like belief in God. This denunciation of intellectual knowledge is emphasized by the breaking of the stones of wisdom in *Reinald Underbarnet* (Reinald the Wonder Child, 1817) and will play a prominent role in particularly "Sphinxen" (1820). Despite the reconciliation of the endings, the dark and ominous

tone of despair in the works lingers, creating a level of ambiguity which remains in the prose tales and which in the Gothic is tied to a general reluctance towards established truths.

As the eeriness and violence of the fatal events and the erotic motifs in these early works are often accompanied by overwrought exclamations, “hereditary maledictions, omens and horror effects”, the influence of Gothic is obvious despite the fact that the Gothic mode already felt outdated in the 1810s (Rossel 239). In *Løveridderen*, “howling dogs at midnight, galloping ghosts on horseback, rattling skeletons and gloomy sepulchral chapels” set the atmosphere (Rossel 240). In the mythological, allegorical epos *De Sorte Riddere* (The Black Knights, 1814) the Gothic mode erupts in the dream-like action in the descriptions of Satanic evil and contracts with the devil signed in blood as well as in the dualistic conflict between the good Ridder Rød and the evil dwarf, Pystrich, who at times seem to merge, as the knight chooses “Vellyst i Forbandelsen” (“lust in damnation”). The theme of the demonization of human nature is more consistently Gothic in the poem “Nattevandrerinden” (The Lady who Walks at Night, in *Procne*, 1813) in which the Gothic machinery with all its sensational effects is on full display. The poem relies on the figures of the demon bridegroom and the spectral bride, which also appear in Danish folklore, but the main source of inspiration is clearly G.A. Bürger’s Gothic ballad “Lenore” (1774). In Ingemann’s “Nattevandrerinden,” the young Elina roams her father’s dark castle at night, dressed in “sorte, flagrende Klæder” (“black, flowing garments,” l.2), pale and withering from the loss of her lover, whom she seeks out in the churchyard every night at midnight. As the skeletal hand breaks through the black soil and “Dødningen” emerges from the grave, Elina’s mother watches the reunion of the two in a passionate embrace. Interestingly the explicit eroticism of the scene is driven by the girl, and certainly there is in Ingemann’s works a strong presence of demonic and erotically alluring women, of femmes fragiles who become

femmes fatales, as love and lust cannot be reconciled in the present: “Hun læner sit Hoved op til hans Bryst;/ Hans Læber alt hendes møde,/ Og Pigen hensmelter i rædsomme Lyst -/ Hun klynger sig fast til den Døde; /Paa Graven de sidde, som Brudgom og Brud...” (“She leans her head towards his chest, / tightly lips meet lips, / and the girl melts in gruesome lust / and clings so closely to the dead / On the grave they sit as like bridegroom and bride” (l. 41-44 in Rossel’s transl.: 257). The mother cries out in horror that they are really sister and brother and orders Elina to pray for her ”syndige Sjæl” (“her sinful soul”), but the dead brother protests that “Ei Blod kan Sjæle adskille” (“Blood cannot keep souls apart,” l. 64). The image of blood is common in Gothic and Romantic usages of incest as trope; in its non-Platonic form, incest – in Danish ‘blodskam’ or ‘blood shame’ - simultaneously consummates and violates a blood relationship: incest forces both significations of blood into the same act. Thus incest is often accompanied by death: as Elina and her brother thus can only merge into one in “Aandernes Rige,” the realm of the spirits, he announces Elina’s death at dawn. This is not presented as a punishment by an otherwise rather conservative writer, but as a mutual wish coming true for the lovers, again underlining the death wish that runs through much of Ingemann’s early works. Despite thus attempting to raise such scandalous and titillating material to a Platonic level, the eroticism is still violently present by the adjacent Gothic themes of incest, necrophilia and fearful, yet welcome vampirism, which implies a psychic conspiracy that blurs the lines between victim and villain: “I Morgen, Favre! du vorder min Viv,/ Saa skal jeg dig evig omarme;/ Thi nu har jeg drukket dit sidste Liv,/ Udsuget din sidste Varme“ (“Tomorrow, my girl, you’ll become my wife, / then I shall embrace you forever / because now I have drunk the last of your life, / sucked out your last warmth,” l. 49-52 in Rossel’s transl. 1990: 257)

While the influence of the pre-romantic Gothic ballad on Oehlenschläger and Staffeldt was ultimately limited, the impression made on Ingemann seems much deeper. Sven Rossel has carefully documented the many imitations of this style Ingemann produced in his early poems, replete with dark stormy nights and howling wolves, churchyards, skulls, skeletons and rattling bones, as well as ghosts and all kinds of supernatural retribution. Ingemann embraced the horror effects to the point where the genre unintentionally approaches parody, as in the ghastly image of the murderous count's brains floating on the sea after his mad suicide in "Næssegreven" (The Count of the Cape, 1812) and the hyperbolic carnage which the male protagonist inflicts on his family in the folk ballad imitation "Den manede Brudgom" (The Conjured Bridegroom, 1816), a bloodshed which "does not fall short of the last act of Hamlet" (Rossel 1990: 253). Ingemann was the last Gothic Romanticist in Denmark, as Rossel points out in what is presently the only study of Ingemann's employment of the Gothic. Rossel's focus is, however, on the pre-romantic Gothic ballad in the style of Bürger, which, as I will demonstrate, developed into an if not stylistically then thematically far more sophisticated prose.

Almost inevitably, Ingemann's high-flown explorations of the macabre, of misguided sexuality, cruelty and horror, of the extreme polarization of man torn between heaven and hell became an easy target for the criticism, not least because of the uneasy combination of the German *Schrechromantik* with ascetic piety and moralizing devotion to God. His early works, however, enjoyed great success; *Digte* (1811) and *Digte, anden Deel* (1812) sold out quickly and were reprinted in 1817, while the dramas *Masaniello* (1815) and *Blanca* (1816) were staged numerous times at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen. His initial success was no doubt due to the popularity of Goethe's *Werther* and the wave of sentimental death-obsessed literature it spawned, as well as the non-academic accessibility and simple beauty of his language. Another

important factor in the success was his firm grasp of theatrical effects for applause, for which his good friend Grundtvig criticized him in a poem published on March 16 1816 in the widely read journal *Nyeste Skilderie af Kjøbenhavn*: “Men ak! End i Blod du kvæder, / Skaren klapper, Barnet græder “ (“But alas! However much in blood you compose / the crowd applauds, the child cries” (st. 29; Lundgreen-Nielsen 1996: 84). An integral part of Gothic, the aesthetics of hyperbole - or ‘the writing in blood’ as Grundtvig calls it – so easy to mock, is what made Ingemann an object of ridicule in the satirical criticism promoted by the Heiberg circle, a dismissal which has continued at least until the 1970s, without any attempts to examine these effects. No doubt, Ingemann’s early success also provoked a certain vitriol in the critics.

Initially the most vociferous of his critics was Peder Hjort, who claimed that Ingemann’s writings lacked both the ideal and the real from the perspective of the Oehlenschläger school of Romanticism; he was too reflexive, too allegorical, and too Platonic in his division of bodily and spiritual love. When Hjort’s somewhat onesided review of *De Sorte Riddere* was first published in the monthly journal *Athene* in 1814, Ingemann wrote a letter to the editor, poet Christian Molbech, who responded by letting Hjort meticulously work his way through Ingemann’s entire oeuvre in the journal, most notably in July and October 1815, and February 1816 (“Om Digteren Ingemann og hans Værker”).²³ Hjort was followed by Nicolai Søtoft and Carsten Hauch and then by the omnipresent Johan Ludvig Heiberg, while Grundtvig, Knud Rahbek and Jens Baggesen on the other side defended the silent Ingemann in the long-standing literary feud. It was perhaps

²³ Molbech would later write the longest – 48 pages! - and most scathing review of Ingemann’s first two historical novels in the journal *NordiskTidsskrift for Historie, Literatur og Kunst* in 1828, in a tone so sour and dismissive that it was considered harsh even then. Nevertheless, this review has come to represent the contemporary critical opinion on Ingemann’s novels. Molbech’s main point of objection is Ingemann’s blend of myth, fairy tale and legend with the historical material for the novel. The popular success of the novels is, however, unparalleled, in Denmark and abroad, and in all layers of society, testifying also to the growing literacy among the rural population in the 1840s and 1850s. A parallel can be made to Ingemann’s songs, initially poorly reviewed but from the time they were published in the 1830s enjoying a heartfelt response with Danish readers and poets alike, which seems unabated in 2013 – even Georg Brandes, in his otherwise obliterating reviews of Ingemann admitted to embracing the hymns.

the criticism in the shape of fiction which felt most hurtful. Søtoft published the satirical play *Aandernes Maskerade* (The Masquerade of the Spirits) in 1816, which is an obvious parody of Ingemann's fate dramas. Later that year Heiberg mocked the etherealness of "Korsridderen" (The Crusader, 1811), *Blanca* and *Varner* in the satirical *Julespøg og Nytaarsløier* (Christmas Jests and New Year's Fun, 1816), so viciously that Ingemann would later rewrite *Varner* drastically and with a happy ending, changing it to the much lighter and less spiritualistic *Varners Sommer-Vandring* (Varner's Summer Wanderings), which seemed to imply that he agreed with the criticism. Ingemann might thus unwittingly have contributed to the repression of his works in the Danish cultural consciousness (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1996: 83, Nørballe 78). Significantly, Heiberg let the characters of *Blanca* visit Ludvig Holberg's Jeronimus and Magdelone to teach them proper Platonic love, signaling that Ingemann was not only an overwrought dreamer divorced from reality, but un-Danish, a point of criticism which would recur throughout his career - and rightly so, given his German sources - but of course further marginalizing his works in the Danish literary histories for a very long time (Michelsen 178).

In terms of genres, Heiberg had placed the vaudeville at the top of the aesthetic hierarchy and succeeded in excluding both Ingemann and Andersen from The Royal Theater. As the Danish literary Parnassus moved towards the sophisticated syntheses and classicist principles of a Hegelian aesthetics, as interpreted by Heiberg, Molbech and Hertz, Ingemann's works were considered devoid of any sense of form or aesthetics (and thus Romantic to a default), partly because he had not published a poetics of his own. It is clear, however, that Ingemann had an acute formal awareness as his texts often have precise generic definitions in their titles, and as his literary reflections in his autobiographical accounts and memoirs later would demonstrate, e.g. in "Efterskrifter" and "Forerindringer" (1843-5) (Kofoed 1992: 34; Rosiek 1990: 51). The

polarization between Heiberg and Ingemann illustrates the fact that Danish Romanticism is split into two equally valid and mutually dependent sides: the mystical, sometimes sentimental turning away from the material world and into the past or the self of Ingemann, and on the other hand, the playful satire and polemical criticism of Heiberg (Kofoed 1992: 35). Eventually, after 1819, Ingemann would not only be aesthetically and spiritually but also geographically removed from the cultural establishment in Copenhagen, as he settled down in idyllic small-town Sorø, which would provide a stark contrast to the nightmarish settings he continued to envision.

Ingemann's Romanticism is not anchored in philosophy or intellectual speculation but in the poetics of the dream, in the merging of religious spirituality with poetry, and in the complexities of the European Enlightenment and its burgeoning exploration of the dark side of human nature, which would evolve into the Gothic. Ingemann drew inspiration from his readings of James MacPherson (Ossian), Thomas Percy, Edward Young's graveyard poetry, the Gothic ballads of August Bürger, and the *Sturm-und-Drang* Romanticism of the young Goethe (Kofoed 1996: 29). His Neoplatonic otherworldliness is quite different from the Romanticism formulated by other Danish Romantic heavyweights such as Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig, who both despite their differences remain anchored in the material world. In *De Sorte Riddere* a poetological battle is fought over True Poetry: to Ingemann, the Romanticism spawned by the natural philosophy of Schelling, by way of Steffens and thus Oehlenschläger in Denmark, is pagan, heathen, un-Christian and thus figures as part of the seductive tools of the demonic powers in the text (Michelsen 177). In the memoir *Tilbageblik* from 1837, Ingemann writes about his idealism and supranaturalism, which necessarily had to:

...sætte min Digtningens Aand i skarp Opposition mod vore videnskabelige Realister, Rationalister og naturalistiske Empirikere, der med hin velbehagelige æsthetiske

Dannelse, der fordrer alle Livsdissonanser opløste i en skønt udsmykket Endelighed, havde faaet al den Poesie, de vilde modtage, i Goethe og Øhlenschläger [sic], og derfor ingen anden poetisk Livsanskuelse kunde taale (Ingemann 1998: 320)

...set the spirit of my writing in sharp opposition to our scientific realists, rationalists and naturalist empiricists, who with their pleasurable aesthetic *Dannelse* [*Bildung*] which demands all the dissonances of life dissolved into a beautifully ornamented finitude, had received all the poetry they wanted in Goethe and Oehlenschläger and therefore could tolerate no other poetic view of life.

Although Goethe and Oehlenschläger may seem slightly out of place in this category, the point is that Ingemann considers himself in sharp opposition to the narrowminded critics as well as this particular school of Romantics, as he eagerly, sometimes morbidly, promotes his own rather extreme *Weltanschauung*. To the chagrin of many critics, he deliberately distanced himself from the mature Goethe and the sensuousness of Oehlenschläger and his “Stræben efter plastisk Modellering eller yppig Udmaling af det ydre Liv” (“Pursuit of plastic modeling or sensuous and elaborate descriptions of the outer life”), emphasizing instead “en desto inderligere Tilsluttelse til Ideelivet selv, til den ahnende Følelses og den aandelige Phantasies dunkle hemmelighedsfulde Regioner” (“an all the more intense support of the life of Ideas, of the sensitive feeling and the dark secretive regions of the spiritual imagination,” *Tilbageblik* 1998: 279). As many recent critics have pointed out, Ingemann’s true literary kinship is with the dualistic German Romanticism represented in Denmark by German-born Shack Staffeldt. While Staffeldt (unfairly so, as his poems exhibit a strong formal awareness) became the Nouredin-Salieri to Oehlenschläger’s Aladdin-Mozart, both he and Ingemann were dismissed as overwrought German imitators of a sickly repressive dualism, not least because Ingemann deliberately fashioned himself as an antipode to Goethe and Oehlenschläger and remained strongly inspired by German Romanticists such as Novalis, Tieck and Hoffmann.

4.3 **Eventyr og Fortællinger (1820): The Prose Breakthrough**

Perhaps because Ingemann seems so foreign, little or no credit has been given to him for pioneering the prose breakthrough in Denmark in and after the mid-1820s, as shaped by St.St. Blicher, Poul Møller and Thomasine Gyllembourg. This of course further contributes to the critical neglect of his Gothic tales. In fact, *Eventyr og Fortællinger* (1820) was not even reviewed in Denmark, while in 1835 it was obvious to draw comparisons between Ingemann's *Tre Fortællinger* (Three Tales, 1835) and Thomasine Gyllembourg's *Hverdagshistorier* (Stories of Everyday Life) which were much preferred over Ingemann's shaky grasp of reality in stories such as "Varulven" (The Werewolf) and "Den Levende Døde" (The Living Dead), as expressed in a review in *Kjøbenhavnspostens Søndagsblad*, April 12 1835. The neglect is partly due to the fact that Ingemann so vehemently continued to defend his otherworldly idealism as opposed to the material present that had taken over in the works of the mature Oehlenschläger and Goethe, and partly because he designated his first publication of prose texts as *Eventyr og Fortællinger* (Fairy Tales and Stories), rather than *noveller*, despite the fact that the term *novelle* was in use at the time and that only one of the four texts is an actual fairy tale. The generic designation of *noveller* is only used about Ingemann's collection published in 1827, despite the fact that it would be followed by more stories in the collections of 1835, 1847 and 1850. Likely, the generic term of *noveller* suggested to Ingemann a realism which he termed *nederlandsk* – Dutch – to suggest a literature of the mundane and the banal, which he viz. his idealistic literary program held in low esteem; in "Familie-Synet" (The Family Vision, 1847) he equates "en realistisk, næsten fantasiløs og hjerteløs Antiromantik" ("a realistic, almost unimaginative and heartless Anti-Romanticism") with "en vis nederlandsk ideløs Naturefterligning" ("a certain Dutch imitation of Nature, devoid of ideas"), which in its extreme becomes "det Platte, Trivielle og

Prosaiske” (“vulgar, trivial and prosaic”) far removed from the Romantic trinity of *Det Gode*, *Det Sande*, og *Det Skønne* (309). As Danish literature grew increasingly realistic, particularly as the *Dannelsesroman* was shaped in the 1830s, this helps to explain why Ingemann’s tales would appear incongruent, sometimes even outdated.

While the metered verse of Ingemann’s youth are meant to indicate a deeper poetic meaning, the prose pieces to a large extent were intended as mere entertainment, “Kakkelovns-krogshistorier” (Stories for the Nook by the Fireplace) as he named his 1847 collection. They were often originated as oral tales and ghost stories for visiting friends and relatives, as described vividly by his friend H.C. Andersen in *Mit Livs Eventyr* (Rossel 1990: 262, Nielsen 1989: 241). This also partly accounts for the less than stringent composition and unnecessary repetitiveness of some of them. Nevertheless, with the 1820 publication of his first venture into prose, Ingemann, in his own words, conveys “Characteertræk og Begivenheder af den nyere Tids daglige Liv” (“characteristics and events from the daily life of modern times”), as he would phrase it in hindsight in the autobiographical *Levnetsbog* (1862). It is in the merging of everyday life with inexplicable, sometimes supernatural events to create an expanded reality that Ingemann’s use of Gothic tropes is sharpened: providing shock and suspense for a live audience, they are often trite and theatrical, but sometimes deeply poignant when they become part of a larger interrogation of the spectacle of subjectivity. Despite thus representing a new genre for Ingemann, not least through the mediating consciousness of a narrator, which provides a modicum of distance to the material, the four prose narratives of *Eventyr og Fortællinger* are still thematically very much a part of his first phase as a writer (1811-1822). The central theme remains the *Zerissenheit* of the individual who is split between the sensuous and the spiritual world, often upon the entrance into adulthood, as intellectual knowledge, sexual urges and social

ambition preclude the harmony once experienced in childhood. While the paradise lost can be restored, and on a deeper, more experienced level, through religious devotion, spiritual love and the artistic imagination - and the texts all claim such a retrieved harmony at the end in some form, on the background of shock and horror - they still circle obsessively around themes of dissonance and internal division, often as a consequence of the restricting norms of *Dannelse* within the bourgeois organization of life. Consequently, the collection has acquired the reputation of being “den mest udprægede demonstration af 1810ernes sjælesyge” in Danish literature (“the most pronounced demonstration of the soul’s disease in the 1810s,” Lundgreen-Nielsen 1989: 92). In the only actual fairy tale in the collection, “Det Høie Spil,” however, the protagonist, aptly named Holger, despite entering a Faustian pact with the devil and fighting eternal damnation, seems much more robust than the Werthers and Varners of the early years, and the influence of the Brothers Grimm is apparent, as *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* had been published in Denmark 1812-15. The other three stories, however, “Altertavlen i Sorø” (The Alterpiece in Sorø) “Moster Maria” (Auntie Maria) and “Sphinxen” (The Sphinx) did little to change the perception of Ingemann as morbidly obsessed with liminal, demonic states and mental trauma, as they test the identity of the modern individual emerging in the 1820s, negotiating the simultaneous loss of and release from the ties of family, tradition and religion. In the following, I will briefly examine the Gothic tropes in “Altertavlen i Sorø” and “Moster Maria,” two texts which heretofore have been completely neglected by critics, and then provide a detailed analysis of the more well-known “Sphinxen.”

4.4 “Altertavlen i Sorø”: The Return of the Past

“Altertavlen i Sorø” begins on a dark and stormy night in the year 1647 and thus immediately suggests the problem for the protagonist Franz, who prefers roaming the moonlit forests alone on

such nights: his dark and stormy temper and unbridled passions, which possibly have been caused, or at least amplified by the years he has spent in Italy, so much so that the color of his skin and hair has been permanently altered by his exposure to the South: “Hans lange Ophold i Italien havde givet ham en sydlig gulbrun Ansigtifarve, og hans nordiske blonde Haar og Kindsæg var blevet dunkelt” (“His lengthy sojourn to Italy had given him a Southern yellow-brown facial color, and his Nordic blond hair and beard had grown dark,” 2). Here the metonymic contagion of qualities which characterizes the Gothic begins to take shape, as inside and outside become confused. This becomes much more apparent in “Sphinxen,” as does the relation between portraits, clothes and veils and personal identity hinted at in “Altertavlen.” “Altertavlen” also emphasizes the contrast between the wild and Catholic South to the Protestant North, a classic Gothic concern, as suggested by the evidently un-Danish unruly temper Franz has imported from the South, while his daughter, Gjulina, born in Italy but raised in Ingemann’s idyllic Sorø is torn between the two countries and religions, a conflict manifest in her clothing: the narrator much prefers her in “dansk Bondepigedragt” (“Danish peasant girl costume”), as she apparently overshadows “de fornemme Kjøbstedsjomfruer med deres unationale og hensigtsløse Modepynt” (“the fancy maidens of the city with their unnational and careless fashionable ornaments,” 3), thus suggesting strong themes of nationalism. Her inherent ties to Italy are, however, illustrated by her secret masquerade behind closed doors, where she puts on the “fremmede Stoffe og Smykker” (“foreign fabrics and jewellery”) which the countess has sent her and of which she has fashioned the traditional costume of her native Italy, copied from her father’s pictures. It is also behind closed doors that she worships the image of “den skønne Himmeldronning” (“the lovely heavenly queen,” 5). Although this is not the altar referenced in the title, the doubling is significant, as the Madonna figure, too, is immediately doubled by the

absent mother in the very same paragraph: "Over hendes Moders Skæbne og hendes tidligste Barndomshistorie laa ligeledes et dunkelt Hemmelighedsslør udbredt, som hun aldrig vovede at ville opløfte" ("Over her mother's fate and her earliest childhood a dark veil of secrets had been laid, which she never dared to lift," 6), a veil which of course will be dramatically rent. This, again, is doubled by the recently deceased mother of Count Otto, who seeks out Franz in order to solve the riddle posed by his mother on her deathbed, which somehow is connected to Franz's dark and mysterious past, his temperamental instabilities, and his disappearance into the little chapel every year on All Hallows' Eve, from which he emerges looking like "En, der var død i Fortvivlelse og staaet op af Graven" ("someone who had died from despair and risen from the grave"), suggesting a Poe-esque crime of the past haunting the present (17). As Otto and Gjuliana, who grew up together, grow closer, the double-edged vocabulary grows ominously suggestive: "Han er jo min gamle Legebroder, og det er mig næsten som vi havde kjendt hinanden altid" ("He is after all my old brother in play, and it almost seems to me that we have always known each other," 13); "hun meget mere i ham syntes at have fundet et nyt Liv, hvori hendes eget Liv og væsen ligesom Fordobledes" ("in him she seemed to have found a new life, in which her own life and being seemed to become doubled," 19). Anyone who has read a Gothic novel or two knows what is coming, although their kinship is not revealed until the very end. The absence of parental figures, as is usually the case in Gothic tales, worsens the identity confusion of the two and their Romantic "state of dual and undecided identity": "One can be, through incest, other than oneself, yet strangely, by virtue of this sense of the family as a 'larger self', more completely oneself" (Miyoshi 11). Yet this is bound to have fatal consequences.

At the same time, in an equally uncanny doubling of images, Franz happens upon the altarpiece in the Protestant church in Sorø, on which the Dutch painter Karel van Mander for

realistic effect has painted him, a local, as Judas Iscariot in the act of betraying his master. Franz storms out of the church screaming like a madman, accompanied by the organ's sound of "Dommedagsbasuner" ("the trumpets of Judgment Day," 22), only to hang himself in the forest. This is all standard Gothic fare, and the device of recognition by a painted portrait for true identity is prominent in Gothic novels, as I will return to. Otto then happens upon Franz' written confession, the content of which is, however, withheld from the reader for maximum suspense. Only later is what we suspected all along confirmed: on a trip to Italy Otto shows the letter to his aunt, in which Franz confesses to his betrayal of his master 15 years earlier, not only by sleeping with his wife, the countess, which resulted in the secret birth of Gjuliana, but also by dispensing not 15 but 100 drops of morphine to the ailing count – in wild Italy, of course, not in Denmark - excused by a type of possession by the devil: "det var som Satan førte min Hånd" ("it was as if Satan guided my hand," 30). As Otto cannot control his passion for Gjuliana, who is evidently his half-sister, he flees to America, where he dies in an accident, leaving her with the following words, which echo the blood-driven speech of the skeletal brother in "Nattevandrerinden":

Evigt elskede Søster! For denne Verden ere vi adskilte – men der, hvor Brudgom og Brud ere som Søster og Broder – hvor Blodet ikke adskiller og heller ikke forener – der skal du gjenfinde den troe, elskende Aand, som evig og uadskillelig er forbunden med dig for Aandernes Herre (31).

Eternally beloved sister! To this world we are separated – but where groom and bride are like sister and brother – where blood does not separate and does not unite either – there you shall find again the faithful, loving spirit, which is forever and inseparately connected to you before the Lord of the Spirits.

Thus only the hope of a reunion in the hereafter – Ingemann's favorite motif – saves them from complete psychological destruction. The love between siblings in this story is romantically developed as a Platonic ideal of completion with the other half, an ideal self which is self and other at the same time, thus putting up the least amount of resistance. Rather than an exploration

of the potential for radical epistemological destabilization in the uncanny too-close near-doubles, incest in this paradigm becomes rather an ultimate manifestation of courtly love. The story remains, however, trite when compared to contemporary explorations of the same theme by British Romantics such as Byron and Shelley, and its use of (semi-)Gothic conventions remains rather conventional, which is of course often the point in these tales.

4.5 **“Moster Maria”: A Romantic Bluebeard**

“Moster Maria” is a richer tale than “Altertavlen” as it marks a negotiation of the Female Gothic from a male author’s perspective and thus positions itself in what was already then a long literary tradition inaugurated by Ann Radcliffe. For all its Gothic machinery and its reliance on folk tale material, “Moster Maria” still marks Ingemann’s approach to the *noveller* of the Poetic Realism of the 1820s in the detailed and idyllic description of everyday life in the *Biedermeier* household in Copenhagen. This setting is, however, soon transported to Jutland, which is (supposedly still today) at the dark margins of Danish culture and civilization, as the heroine Maria finds herself in “den dunkle gothiske Sal paa [Hr. Hinds] Herregaard i Jylland” (“the dark gothic hall of Mr. Hind’s manor in Jutland,” 58). It is this patriarchal house with its secret rooms which transmutes the story of the vulnerable and curious heroine and enigmatic hero-villain into the Gothic, accompanied by themes of man’s duality, *Doppelgänger*s and the potential for myths and stories to become reality.

The key reference is to the story of Bluebeard, the telling of which frames the plot in the beginning and end: “Men det er jo dog kun et Eventyr?...nu har Ingen dog meer saadant et fælt blaåt Skjæg?... Og nu tør heller Ingen saadan slaae sine Koner ihjel, det har Ingen Lov til meer, ikke sandt?” (“But it is after all a mere fairy tale? ... Now surely nobody has such a horrible blue

beard?... And nobody dares to kill their wives like that; no one is allowed to do that anymore, right?" 33), Auntie Maria's niece and nephew ask in the warm family-centered *Biedermeier* living room. Soon, however, the idyll is broken and their beloved storyteller Maria is persuaded to marry the mysterious Hr. Hind with the strangely blueish-black 5 o'clock shadow (33). The sign of his gender, his beard, defines him while suggesting that his enigmatic past has something to do with male sexuality, its unnatural color implying perversity. Indeed, as both object of desire and fear, he turns out to be "to Væsner, der kun havde Skikkelse tilfælles" ("two beings who only shared physical form," 62), as he embodies Eugenia Delamotte's observation that in the Female Gothic, the villain's threat is no different than the hero's promise. The Bluebeardesque figure is a staple in classic Gothic; he appears as Radcliffe's Mazzini and Montoni, Austen's spoof villain General Tilney, Brontë's Rochester, and du Maurier's Maxim, and as many of Victoria Holt's Byronic villains following her *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960), which would further the eventual dilution of Female Gothic into supermarket Gothic. The basic structural elements of the Bluebeard story coincide with the 'somebody's trying to kill me and I think it's my husband' plot of Female Gothic, thus providing the tension in that genre between the home as the safe space from Gothic villains, ghosts and rapists, and that very same home and its inseparable domestic fate as the actual source of danger.

The wedding between Maria and Hr. Hind takes place on the anniversary of the death of his unnamed last wife, who appears as "det blege Dødningsansigt paa Ruden" ("the pale skeletal face on the window pane," 64), a frightful image Ingemann had also used in the Gothic ballad "Pokalen" (The Cup, 1816). One night, after Hr. Hind turns out to be a completely different and much more coldly rational person than he pretended during their romantic courtship, thus ensuring the conventional sudden defamiliarization of the heroine's home, the

desperate Maria discovers the token secret door in her room, in which her own key, rather oddly but with obvious reference to the folk tale, fits. In the secret chamber she sees what is presumably a vision of her husband wiping the furniture, almost as if the room itself emanates the memory of his once fatal presence there. The close connection between manor and owner invites a reading of the Gothic castle as more than incidental background, which allegorizes psychological depth. Instead, the architecture, which in its arrangement of spaces creates such walls, boundaries and secrets only to invite their transgression, renders the gendered distribution of power in the plot very concrete. As Ann Williams points out, as a monster the Bluebeard figure in his unnaturalness is the exception that proves the rule as he reveals the premise of patriarchal culture: control of the female, subversive in her failure to respect his secrets, yet at the same time paradoxically set up to do exactly that (Williams 43-4).²⁴

In the secret chamber, the disobedient Maria realizes that she is witnessing the scene of the last wife's murder, still (inexplicably) covered with blood, as in the original tale: "med Forfærdelse opdagede hun, at Kanten af Hjørneskabet var rød, som af Blod, paa Gulvet og Væggen saae hun ligeledes Blodstænk, og lange afrevne Haar klæbede fast derved" ("With horror she realized that the edge of the corner cabinet was red, as if with blood; on the floor and on the wall she also saw splatters of blood and long torn-off strands of hair stuck to the surfaces," 62). The horrific gore of the scene becomes a recurring motif for Ingemann and suggests the fear associated with Kristeva's abject: a primal fear related to the realization of one's own mortality, caused by the breakdown of any distinction between subject and object, between ourselves and the world of dead material objects, as torn-off parts of the previous wife, Maria's ghostly predecessor and thus apparent double, almost become embedded in the walls of

²⁴ Such are also the implications of the reworkings of the Bluebeard story in Elizabeth Gaskell's ghost story "The Grey Woman" (1861) and Angela Carter's "The Bloody Chamber" (1979).

the great house. The contents of the room represent what Ann Williams calls “patriarchy’s secret, founding ‘truth’ about the female: woman as mortal, expendable matter / *mater*,” a lesson originally learned by the curious and thus transgressive Eve and Pandora (Williams 43).

Maria of course faints upon realizing the crime, a repetition of her passing out the first time her husband confesses to ‘murdering’ his first wife before their marriage, which, however, he explains as resulting from her metaphorical heartbreak. Although Maria thus in her general state of swooning helplessness, conventional femininity and romantic reverie seems like the standard Gothic heroine, not least as she dramatically flees the physical punishment of the violent Hr. Hind after she has discovered the secret chamber, she does wield some power. What is remarkable is that unlike in Perrault’s folk tale, this Bluebeard is not immensely wealthy but financially at the mercy of his wives, whom he is forced to marry for their inheritance, thus in a manner prostituting himself in a reversal of marital patterns at the time. He may be a man of property but the power that comes with money belongs to the women; Maria’s fortune is even a maternal inheritance. Secondly, the heroine burns down the manor (accidentally while swooning), thus in a manner appropriate for Gothic fiction annihilating the house as both structure and patriarchal family line, as Hr. Hind dies soon thereafter. Replicating the journey of many a folk tale and fairy tale, Maria returns to the safe space of the *Biedermeier* home she left behind, which in stark contrast to the patriarchal Gothic manor seems exceptionally feminized, due to the matter-of-fact sensibility of her strong sister and the absence of her sailor brother-in-law; this is also an apt comment on the organization of the modern nuclear family as it was emerging at the time and an apparent defense of that ideology of separate gendered spheres which Kate Ferguson Ellis otherwise sees the Gothic novel as an insistent critique of (Ellis xv).

As both Maria's dead mother, absent father and the apparitions of Hr. Hind's dead wife continue to haunt the doomed couple in the course of the story, we are given somewhat realistic psychological explanations for the main characters' actions in keeping with the tradition of the explained supernatural of the Female Gothic: the alleged accidental death of the first wife, described as a virtual Bertha Rochester from his male point of view, seems to have been caused by guilt, jealousy and her unbridled passion. Hr. Hind thus appears more a victim of circumstance than a psychotic serial killer, a psychological complexity which lends nuance to the otherwise rather conventional storyline. His coldly rational dismissal of the Romantic belief in the powers of the imagination as "forskruede og overspændte Ideer" ("deranged and hysterical Ideas," 40) thus seems like the defense mechanism of someone who has had to face the harsh economic realities of the world, and he does explain this rational view as hard-won but necessary to avoid ending up a "fortvivlet Tragediehelt, hvis jeg ikke af al Magt bekæmpede dem" ("a desperate tragic hero if I did not fight it with all my might," 62). Still more villain than hero, however, his ordering Maria to read less and let "Kogebogen afløse Werther og Sigvarth" ("let the cook book replace Werther and Sigvarth"²⁵," 60) expresses not only his patriarchal power, but the kind of anti-Romantic criticism Ingemann himself had faced, and which he would continue to portray as demonic throughout his oeuvre. The narrative cleverly provides only Hr. Hind's perhaps unreliable version of the death of his first wife in a barely legible letter, and Maria's romantic sensibilities and imagination do turn out to match the reality (similar to Austen's *Northanger Abbey* but deadly serious), so it is unclear whether we should trust his defense of his actions, or what is the reality of the horrific events.

²⁵ "Sigvarth" refers to the sentimental German novel *Siegwart, eine Klostersgeschichte* (1776) by J.M. Miller or the Swedish Romantic poem "Sigvarth, eller kärlekens svärmeri" (1810) by Per Elgström, a Swedish Werther of sorts.

Maria is thus in a manner vindicated as she was proven right but her encounter with the demonic aspects of life still leaves her with severe psychological scars: the rest of her seemingly endless life is described as a ghostly non-existence. Retreating from the world and struggling through long bouts of depression, Maria does not, unlike the folk tale, re-marry but ends up a spinsterly maternal figure to her niece and nephew. This ending seems to support Bruno Bettelheim's reading of the original source by Perrault as a cautionary tale about the dangers of adult sexuality from the point of view of children, but it is also, one might add, a comment on the cultural 'ghosting' and physical effacement of women by male power. Maria is 'killed' three times: first when Hr. Hind confesses to his deceptive double nature and it grows "mørkt i hendes Sjæl, som i en Grav" ("dark in her soul, as in a tomb," 59); secondly when upon the violent revelation of the death of the first wife Maria enters an unconscious state and Hr. Hind "som en afsindig" ("like a madman," 62) raises his hand against her; and finally, in the last scene, where Maria is braiding her "isgraa Lokker" ("icy grey locks," 64) to imitate the style of her wedding day, suggesting an uncanny repetition of the ghosting of the first wife, not least as Maria is staring at the mirror-like window pane where she saw that frightful apparition on her wedding day. Maria, once ominously referred to as "Scheherazade" by Hr. Hind, is ultimately silenced and thus figuratively dead as she loses the ability to re-tell "Rolf Blaaskjægs Historie," the favorite tale of Bluebeard, to her niece and nephew: the unacceptably curious female has learned her lesson and fiction has come too close to reality (63). With its commentary on the power struggles inherent in patriarchal culture intertwined with the gendered struggle between reality and fiction, realism and romance for cultural dominance, the story thus becomes an important, if stylistically inelegant contribution to the Danish Female Gothic, neglected but unrivalled until the publication of Blixen's *Gengældelsens Veje* in 1944.

4.6 **"Sphinxen": Overview of the Plot**

The blurring of fiction and reality that structures "Moster Maria" is also a pivotal point in "Sphinxen," the most ambitious, literary and Gothic of Ingemann's tales. It is also the most well-known, so an examination of Ingemann's contributions to the Gothic will necessarily have to deal with it at length. The text is rather long and exceptionally convoluted so a quick plot overview is in order. *Eventyr og Fortællinger* (1820) inaugurates a new phase of semi-realism for Ingemann, closer to his own world than the mythical, allegorical material he had produced thus far. Consequently, "Sphinxen" begins in a recognizable setting, at a busy market place in contemporary Hamburg, Germany, in which we find our protagonist, at first introduced as a nameless young gentleman defined by his clothes, which is an important, if overlooked theme in the story. It is the clothes that give this nameless person an identity: "Han saae ud som en Student" ("he looked like a student," 42), thus introducing the "som" ("like") of the simile, which will cause such grave epistemological and ontological confusion in the course of the story, not least in terms of Arnold's identity. Wearing "en gammeldysk Kofte, med lange Lokker om Ørene, og en lille Kallot" ("an Old-German kaftan with long locks around the ears and a little skullcap," 42) sounds old-fashioned but this attire would have been the latest fashion in 1820 (Gjesing 14). The kaftan indicates the medieval revival, which after the Napoleonic wars had excited German students, often connected to a politically inclined enthusiasm for the German *Volkstum* and dreams of a unification of all Germans in a single nation state, thus rendering Arnold a young, politically radical intellectual. No longer at the university of Kiel in Schleswig-Holstein, which he makes reference to, and which at the time was a disputed area in the post-Napoleonic redefinitions of Denmark and Germany, Arnold finds himself in Hamburg, part of the German confederacy since 1815. Arnold does connect the wonders he eventually sees with

medieval times: "Er den herlige Middelalder opstaaet af Graven?" (44), and Ingemann, in both his early poetic works and historical novels, is the foremost representative of medieval Romanticism in Denmark, not unconnected to his use of Gothic. The German setting is thus both a reference to Hoffmann's source text and in extension of that an exotic location to further the strange sequence of events, which soon transport Arnold into what seems like another realm, far removed from such politically fraught questions.

As Arnold is walking around apparently without a care in the world, idly watching and observing "ligesom i et tragikomisk Skuespil, hvorved han selv kun var den rolige Tilskuer" ("like in a tragicomic drama, at which he was only a quiet spectator," 42), some critics have seen him as a *Taugenichts*, a good-for-nothing, in the manner of Eichendorff and even as a precursor of Kierkegaard's bohemian flâneur or an aesthete, not least because he wants to be a writer. It seems more profitable, though, to read him as a version or perhaps negation of *Aladdin*, the intuitive poetic genius ubiquitous in Danish romanticism. What he really embodies, in contrast to the Aladdin figure, is the theme of isolation, of being on the outside looking in, as later repeated in the text. The reason Arnold can freely "spadsere gjennem den vide Verden" ("stroll through the whole wide world," 42) is because he is an orphan and as such detached from the social ties that keep the individual in place. Consequently he is easy prey for the demonic forces of the marketplace, as "en munter fantastisk klædt Yngling" ("a cheerful, fantastically dressed youth," 42), who later turns out to be identical with the enigmatic page boy Florian, whispers in his ear to purchase a walking stick from the old saleswoman, thus initiating a chaotic and convoluted series of events, as from this point one scene morphs into the next on different levels of reality (42). At first it seems rather uncomplicated, as the old hag of a saleswoman, despite her witch-like qualities, appears to take on the function of the helper in the folk tale by endowing him with the

magical object, the stick with the face of a beautiful girl carved in ivory on its handle. This initiates the quest and sends the happy dreamer into the deep, dark forest, where he walks around for half a day, until he bumps his head onto a log and questions his own sanity. This, however, does not return Arnold to an unambiguous level of reality, as he immediately begins to hear echoes and crashes headfirst into what is described as an abyss. When he comes to, he wakes up in the fairy tale castle of countess Cordula, and seems to have fallen into his own dream, as Cordula is the woman whose features are carved into the stick. As she is amused at his “hovedkulds” (“headlong”) entrance, the multiplications of reality are intricately connected to the literalization of idioms and metaphors which create the Fantastic: words become reality. Yet another level of reality is added, as the two wander into a landscape, which is described as a painting from long ago, which becomes reality: ”Der forekom det ham som i et velbekjendt vidunderligt Landskab, han som Barn engang havde set....og Billedet var ikke længer et malet Kunstværk; men en underfuld levende Natur” (“It seemed to him that it was a familiar, wonderful landscape he once had seen as a child... and the painting was no longer a painted work of art; but marvelous living nature,” 46). From this landscape, which is like a painting, the two wander into a gallery of paintings, which adds yet another level in the confusion:

Hvad de længst dvælede ved, vare visse sælsomme Billeder, hvori en overnaturlig, underfuld Fantasier verden blandede sig, vild og barrok, i det virkeligste spidsborgerligste Hverdagsliv, og i den besynderligste Contrast, syntes at ville udtale de høieste Ideer i en forvirret Blanding af Skjønhed og Carrikatur (46).

What they dwelled on for the longest time were these strange paintings, in which a supernatural, wonderful world of the imagination, wild and baroque, interfered with the most real and bourgeois everyday life, and in the most curious contrast, seemed to want to express the highest ideas in a confused blend of beauty and caricature

This Hoffmann-inspired formula succinctly describes Ingemann’s prose tales and is at the same time an apt characteristic of the mix of realistic and fantastic, even bizarre elements in Jacques

Callot's seventeenth-century prints, as credited parenthetically in the full title "Sphinxen: Et Eventyr (i den *Callot-Hoffmannske* Maneer)". In a bizarre logic, they then walk from the gallery to the library, in which Cordula emphasizes her "Vidunderlige Eventyr fra forrige Tider" ("marvelous fairy tales from times past"), and where of course Arnold's attention is drawn to one of Hoffmann's "Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier" (1814), namely "Der Goldne Topf" ("The Golden Bowl"). The further he reads in this strange tale of the student Anselmus and his conflict between the philistine Veronica and the fairy-like Serpentina, the more it seems to be his own life he is reading about, adding yet another reality level to the text.

He spends three days in this paradise with Cordula until she falls ill. Morphing into the image of the sphinx, she poses the riddle: "Hvo er du, og Hvo er jeg?" ("who are you and who am I?" 48). Arnold tumbles back into Hamburg, thinking it all but a dream. In order to solve the riddle, he starts writing, but begins what appears to be a descent into madness, as he feels himself splitting into another person and finds himself transitioning back and forth between the prosaic reality of Hamburg and the enchanted world of Cordula's castle. Returning to his desk, he finds his adventures written down in fresh ink despite having no recollection of writing them. The different realities then merge, when the page boy Floristan, now employed by a Princess Goldini, turns up in his chamber in Hamburg to paint his portrait, upon which Arnold is introduced to the rumor that he is the son of the prince. Arnold receives a written warning to flee, but ignores it and sits down to write, upon which he is arrested by an officer, who refuses to believe he is not identical with the adventurer of his unpublished (!) writings.

At the dark castle at the remote outpost to which he is taken, Arnold is confused with what appears to be his murdered twin, as he continues to mix dream, text and reality while

persistently writing. Fleeing both the ghost of his dead twin, or double, and the old warden, who killed his double on Princess Goldini's orders and who now must kill Arnold, he stumbles upon a gallery of royal portraits, which indicate that he and his twin brother, presumably illegitimate children of the king, must have drawn the ire of the queen, a both veiled and masked figure, which becomes indistinguishable from the lovely Cordula. In the gallery, Arnold finds himself holding a scepter and wearing a crown and becomes lost in his own royal reflection and therefore misses the chance to flee the demonic Goldini, who appears in the shape of Cordula, but who unlike Cordula awakens a decidedly un-spiritual desire in him. As they embrace, she suddenly grows old and wrinkled and turns into the old saleswoman from the marketplace. As everything seems to spin around in circles for Arnold yet again, we expect a return to the recognizable reality of Hamburg, but this time Arnold remains in the other dimension, no longer caring whether it is dream or reality. Having reconciled himself with the question of his identity and the unsolved mystery of the sphinx, he finds the sphinx in the shape of the stick by his side once again, as is Cordula at their wedding, which immediately follows and concludes the story. Arnold is thus one of the few Ingemann heroes who seems to successfully reach the postulated Neoplatonic other-worldly apotheosis at the end in the union with an angelic female figure. Accepting such a semi-religious reading would, however, not do justice to the complexities of the story and its negotiation of gender, genre and texts.

4.7 "Sphinxen" and its Genres

As opposed to the source text, "Der Goldne Topf" by E.T.A. Hoffmann, we do not return to reality in Ingemann's story but stay within the dream or text – or psychosis - which adds to the confusion for the reader, not least in terms of the genre of the text. Because the text ends in an apparently supernatural realm, or Todorov's marvelous, it has been read as a *Kunstmärchen* in

the style of Goethe or Novalis, a utopian fairy tale which often relies on a type of alchemical, synthesizing symbolism, and later to the fairy tales of H.C. Andersen. While Georg Brandes in 1873 dismisses both Novalis and Ingemann as too divorced from reality in their absolute elevation of poetry, Billeskov Jansen claims that the main function of “Sphinxen” is to prepare the ground for Andersen’s more successful tales (Brandes 1873: 383, Jansen 131). The heavy-handed message of the tale, as phrased by Cordula in the wedding scene, is to give up analytical reflection and surrender to the synthesizing powers of the imagination in order to reach and remain in an imaginary realm, in which subject and object become one. Such is the inherent goal of fairy tales, as the form connects the horizontal development of the individual with his or her vertical ascent and thus coincides with the three-part trajectory of both the folk tale and the *Bildungsroman*: ontogenetically and phylogenetically the original wholeness is broken through a Fall instigated by reflection or awareness of sexuality, which leads to alienation and homelessness. Finally harmony is regained on a higher level, as individual ideals through partial renunciation are connected to the demands of reality. In Ingemann’s words, the tales which feature the eruption of the supernatural in our lives demonstrate ”det uendelige Livs Sammenhæng med Endeligheden” (“the connection between the infinite life and finitude,” in Möller-Christensen 1986: 123-25). The form thus takes on the properties of the Romantic symbol, as it synthesizes the finite and the infinite, nature and spirit, subject and object, imagination and reality, idea and object, as Heinrich Steffens also claimed. In “Sphinxen,” however, Arnold continually disrupts such a synthesis: whenever he engages in critical reflection and begins to doubt his own perceptions and sanity, he is thrown back into the world of Hamburg (until the relation between the two levels is completely diffused toward the end), but when he believes, he finds himself with Cordula, who encourages him to forfeit the kind of rational

reflection which fragments world and self. Intuitively fighting such fragmentation, Arnold connects allegories with death in his remark that “Allegorier kan jeg ikke lide for min Død, jeg forlanger heller ingen Forklaring derover” (“allegories I do not like for the death of me; nor do I demand any explanation of them,” 68). In Ingemann’s works there is an aspiration toward completion and synthesis through the forms of the symbol, the myth and the fairy tale but despite the postulated harmony at the end, what lingers in the reader is the impression of fragmentation, chaos and insanity. This also has to do with Ingemann’s writing across genres. In the prologue to *Nye Eventyr og Fortællinger* (1847) Ingemann describes his tales in the following manner:

De ere som oftest udsprungne af den Stemning, der gjerne tillader Fantasien at dvæle ved den dunkle hemmelighedsfulde Side af Menneskenaturen - uden at lade den prosaisk bortforklarende Forstand gribe forstyrrende ind i Fremstillingen - men dog derfor ikke bortfjerner den psykologiske Mulighed, der giver Ideens høiere Sandhed Skikkelse i de aandelige Phænomeners Verden (in ”Forerindring,” 1847).

They are most often originated from the sentiment which allows the imagination to dwell on the dark, secretive side of human nature – without letting the prosaically explaining mind intrude invasively in the representation – but which still, however, does not remove the psychological possibility, which gives the higher truth of the idea shape in the realm of spiritual phenomena.

It is Ingemann’s Christian conviction that man is not able to and should not attempt to solve his own riddle through rational analysis or to peek into the secrets of the divine creation. As man is split between this world and the next, the genre has to represent that hesitation, and so the quote also accurately characterizes the Fantastic and its reluctance to offer both reader and protagonist an unambiguous explanation to apparently supernatural occurrences, reflected in the unsolved mystery of the sphinx in the text. Critics have consequently focused on the 1820 tales, and those that followed, within the framework of the Fantastic, as they are suspended uneasily between the marvelous and the uncanny. This was, in fact, a recurring point of criticism in contemporary reviews of his later tales; reviewers express irritation at the hesitation in the texts to offer an

unambiguous, either natural or supernatural explanation of the events (*Kjøbenhavnsposten* Dec. 7 1847 and Sept. 12 1850, *Flyve-Posten* Dec. 14 1847).

As a consequence perhaps of the critical focus on Ingemann's use of the Fantastic both then and now, no attention has been paid to Ingemann's employment of Gothic tropes, although the Gothic and Fantastic modes are by no means mutually exclusive and often deepen the effect of one another, Poe being a case in point. The Gothic works across the explained and the unexplained supernatural, and like the Fantastic, the Gothic thus consistently questions established truths, perceptions and realities through disorienting visions and problematizations of vision and language. These characteristics, along with a general skepticism towards its own content, are all attributed by Rosemary Jackson to the subversive fantasy mode in a revision of Todorov's spectrum, which equally applies to Gothic texts (Jackson 27-32). Structured around the representation of multiple layerings of 'self' and 'reality', "Sphinxen" relativizes such constructions, setting them in relation to constantly shifting external circumstances, which may not be external at all, not least as Arnold keeps questioning his own sanity. As the story progresses, the lines between dream, fiction, imagination, insanity and the apparent reality of nineteenth-century Hamburg become increasingly blurred, as Arnold's tripping, tumbling, falling and crashing through the plot convey the dizzying and abrupt transitions between the multiple levels of 'reality', until the lines separating them are eventually completely dissolved.

4.8 Echoes and Madness

The rapidly changing semantic chains in the apostrophes of the saleswoman selling her sticks, which noisily open the text, indicate that we find ourselves in a universe in conflict between bourgeois reason and demonic fantasy, between "den gammelkendte borgerlige fornuftsverden

og den nye, uregerlige og dæmoniske fantast-verden” (“The familiar, bourgeois world of reason and the new, uncontrollable and demonic world of the fantast,” Barlby 1994: 191). This opposition is embodied in the literary character of the *Fantast*, who is increasingly in conflict with any given reality principle of his world in much nineteenth-century Danish literature. The theme dominates Ingemann’s entire oeuvre, from *Varner* (1813) to “Varulven” (The Werewolf, 1835) to ”Familiesynet” (The Family Vision, 1847) as well as the German source text, Hoffmann’s *Der goldne Topf* (1814), in which Anselmus is torn between the philistine Veronica and the fantastic Serpentina, who in “Sphinxen” are represented by the materialistic - as indicated by the name - Goldini and the spiritual Cordula. From the very beginning, Arnold makes his choice, when he ignores the “Gamle Stokke! Fornuftige Stokke! Spitsborgerstokke!” (“Old sticks! Sensible sticks! Bourgeois sticks!”) in order to focus on what in the saleswoman’s words become ”nye Stokke! Studenterstokke!... Romantisk-poetiske Stokke! Ravsplitterpinendegale, djævleblændte Stokke!... Daarekistestokke” (“New sticks! Student sticks!... Romantic-poetical sticks! Stark-raving mad, devilish sticks! Madhouse sticks!” 42). Not heeding the saleswoman’s warning that the selected stick will turn him mad, Arnold’s choice of ”en af de galeste eller er de maaske alle lige kloge” (“one of the maddest or are they perhaps equally wise,” 42) shows the for Ingemann close connection between intellectual reflection and mad perdition. No sooner is this mad stick chosen by Arnold than a voice whispers in his ear and the colorful, carnivalesque trickster, Floristan, appears in the middle of the otherwise realistic setting at the marketplace in Hamburg. This figure is seen nodding familiarly to him as if they know each other, suggesting a schizoid internal division already in the opening scene, which grows more emphatic as Arnold wonders who is putting “gale ord” (“mad words,” 43) into his mouth. The now diabolically laughing saleswoman’s semantic chains thus morph into ”Bloksbjergsstokke,”²⁶

²⁶ The Brocken, or the Blocksberg peak in the Harz mountain range, has been the center of revelry and fornication

Helvedfartsstokke, Fandens-Oldemodersstokke!” (“Brocken sticks, journey to Hell-sticks, Devil’s Greatgrandma sticks!” 43), intimating that Arnold like many an ambitious protagonist in the Male Gothic has entered into a type of Faustian bargain with the devil, closely tied to the image of the sphinx on the purchased stick, which embodies the riddle of the self.

As Arnold wanders into the dark, demonic forest of the folk tale, suggesting the dark depths of the mind, he hears ”en Stemme, som han vilde tage for Gjenlyden af sin egen, hvis den ikke just ved sin vrængende Liighed med hans syntes at haane den vildfarne Vandrer” (“a voice which he would take for the echo of his own if it did not through its mocking similarity with his own seemed to ridicule the lost wanderer,” 43). His loss of sanity is consistently paired with and thus displaced onto the devil, reminiscent of eighteenth-century explanations of otherwise incomprehensible madness as a vice attributed to the individual’s possession by the devil: “Plager Fanden dig Arnold! - sagde han ved sig selv - er du gaaet fra Forstanden”; “er her nogen saa kom, om saa det er den lede Satan selv” (“Is the devil bothering you, Arnold! - he said to himself - have you lost your mind?”; “if there is anyone here, then come on out, even if it is the evil devil himself,” 43). While the unnaturally delayed echo, which offers confirmative answers to his questions, maintains Todorov’s Fantastic hesitation between the uncanny and the marvelous, Arnold’s comment that ”Det forbandede Ekko gjør mig gal” (“the damned echo is driving me mad,” 43) offers a rational-psychological explanation to the supernatural phenomenon. The emphasis on the eerily laughing voice as his own suggests that the demon he is facing is located inside, as the dark side of the sought-after self, which most of Ingemann’s

with the devil for witches in Danish legend since the early 1700s, long before Goethe described such scenes at the Brocken in *Faust* (1808). The German *Walpurgisnacht* in April corresponds to the Danish *Sankthansaften* (St. John’s Eve) in June, a pagan celebration of the solstice and a night in which magical forces – benign and malevolent – are particularly strong. It is no coincidence that Arnold’s second journey into the other realm happens on “St. Hans Dag” (50). It also figures as a magical date of transition in “De Fortryllede Fingre” (The Bewitched Fingers, 2847).

characters confront. The confrontation often has fatal consequences, particularly if the protagonist denies or surrenders to the demonic side, as in “Varulven,” Ingemann’s most archetypal exploration of the divided self. But Arnold’s trajectory is more ambiguous.

4.9 The Fall into the Abyss: Adolescence and Sexuality

As in many Gothic texts, the psychological process is conveyed in material terms. After crying out that the demonic forces can have their way with him, Arnold rushes through the forest “som en Besat” (“as if possessed”) and trips: “Aandedrættet gik fra ham idet han styrtede hovedkulds ned som i en Afgrund” (“he lost his breath as he crashed head first into what appeared to be an abyss,” 44). He crashes into the abyss, which, as indicated by the “som” (“like”) apparently has the status of a simile, but which is taken literally as every other metaphor, image or figure in the text. The abyss – ‘afgrunden’ – is thus, as in Hoffmann, both external and internalized as a romantic topos, f.x. also in “Skole-Kammeraterne” and in “Moster Maria,” in which the demonic Jekyll/Hyde character Hr. Hind explains his charade to Maria with reference to the same image: he could have revealed his dark side if she had been strong enough to face the depths: “Havde du havt Kraft nok til at see dybt i en Afgrund uden at svimle” (“If only you had had enough strength to look deeply into the abyss without growing dizzy,” 60). In “Det høie Spil” the otherwise wholesome Holger ultimately exclaims: “Jeg har været vanvittig - jeg staaer alt med Foden i Afgrunden!” (“I have been insane – I am standing entirely with my foot in the abyss,” 38), while in “Varulven” is expressed a fear of “det Forfærdelige, der ligger dybest i vor Natur og ligesom paa Bunden af Sjælens løndomsfulde Afgrund” (“what is most terrible, what lies deep in our nature and seemingly at the bottom of the mysterious abyss of our soul,” 119). The protagonist, not an actual werewolf as much as a bourgeois gentleman unable to control his most base instincts, describes the “Uhyre, der boede i hans Sjæl... en løndomsfuld Afgrund” (“the monster,

which lived in his soul...a mysterious abyss” (117), in an echo of the description of Goldini as ”et frygteligt Uhyre” threatening Arnold: ”du faaer ikke Ro for mig, før du farer med mig i Afgrunden” (“terrible monster who said: ‘I am Princess Goldini – I will never let you rest, until you dive into the Abyss with me’,” 63). From his debut and throughout his career, Ingemann continues to use “Afgrunden” - the abyss - as an image of perdition, usually coming from within.

What instigates the fall into the abyss, and thus the crashing through so many levels of reality - or madness - seems to be the connection between the semi-Faustian bargain with demonic forces and the actual stick – a painfully obvious phallic shape - on which the carved-out female figure triggers Arnold’s male, fetishizing gaze, presumably for the first time: “det deiligste Pigeansigt, hans Øine nogensinde havde seet.. jo mere han betragtede den lille smilende Sphinx jo hedere blev han om Hjertet, jo stærkere blussede hans Kinder,” suggesting a sexual arousal (“the loveliest face of a girl that his eye had ever seen... the more he contemplated the little smiling sphinx, the hotter grew his heart, the more his cheeks blushed,” 43).²⁷ The feminine appears as an enigma to the sexually inexperienced protagonist: part woman, part animal, joined in the ”ubegribelige” (“unfathomable”) Sphinx, which confusingly ”snart syntes at vinke, snart at true eller advare” (“now seemed to beckon, now to warn or threaten,” 43). The dichotomy becomes more pronounced, when Cordula morphs into Goldini, which “... tændte en Attraa i Arnolds Hjerte, som han aldrig før havde virkelig følt, men kun leget med i sine Drømme”; ”Det var som hun lovede ham en langt virkeligere og haandgribeligere Lyksalighed” (“ignited a desire in Arnold’s heart, which he never before really had felt but only entertained in his dreams”; “It

²⁷ The purchasing of the stick, which Arnold sees as a series of women, suggests a mechanism of fetishization, which involves the displacement of anxiety onto something controllable, usually a material object. This theme is underlined by Arnold’s own references to Ovid’s Pygmalion and the ivory image of his dream woman. In this Fantastic-supernatural narrative economy, the attempt at establishing emotional control must fail, as the fetishized object provokes uncanniness, because it asserts its independence through a continual metamorphosis, refusing to be controlled or truly comprehended. This is also why Olimpia drives Nathanael mad in “Der Sandmann.”

was as if she promised him a far more real and tangible bliss,” 70). While Cordula becomes a Romantic symbol, unifying disparate qualities and bridging the earthly and the spiritual, Goldini with her promise of tangible pleasure seems to be an allegorical figure, with a simple one-to-one correspondence. Read as a formula of *Dannelse* or *Bildung*, the protagonist in the course of events becomes socialized into controlling his passions and directing his libido toward the pale and ethereal Cordula, the Madonna-figure, while the dangers to the self represented by the demonically sexualized and masked Whore are exposed (Johansen 1986: 19): ”han gjenkjendte ikke den skjønnne Cordulas Aand i dette fortærende Blik, som syntes at hæve ham til en svimmel Høide, der tillige bragde ham til at grue for sig selv” (“He did not recognize the lovely Cordula’s spirit in this consuming gaze, which seemed to lift him to dizzying heights, which furthermore made him dread himself,” 70), and “denne Prindsesse Goldini var en forførerisk Djævel, som med den skjønnne Cordulas Maske vilde lokke mig i Afgrunden” (“Wearing the lovely Cordula’s mask, this Princess Goldini was a seductive devil who would lure me into the abyss,” 71). The fall into the abyss of “den elskovssvimle Arnold” (dizzy from love or literally from lovemaking), a literalization of the act of falling in love, is thus connected to the women as objects of his burgeoning sexuality, as he is standing on the threshold to adulthood.

It is no coincidence that it is at this pivotal point of transition that Arnold is confronted with the riddle of the sphinx, first posed to Oedipus: “Hvo er jeg?” (“Who am I”): the quest for identity may revolve around his sexuality but it hinges upon his (connected) feelings towards the lost mother in the proto-typical Oedipal drama. The Gothic castle which his quest eventually takes him to is, as tradition prescribes, the site of a family secret, which allows it to be “the core for fantasies based on a childish desire that adulthood be an exactly defined secret one can discover and possess” (Holland & Sherman: 279). In this castle, his hesitation in front of the

painting of the Queen Mother proves to be near fatal; while Arnold is hoping that the inexplicable painted image of his mother with her sons is “en Madonna” and stating that only “den skjønnne Cordulas Blik kan drage mig bort fra dette fromme moderlige Aasyn” (“Only the lovely Cordula’s gaze can tear me away from this pious motherly countenance”), Floristan warns him: “du kan reddes endnu; seer du ikke hvor Dæmonen truer dig selv i Moders Skjød?” (“You can still be saved; do you not see how the demon threatens you even in your mother’s womb?” 67), as Goldini approaches; she is the obvious “demon” responsible for the death of Arnold’s family, but there are certainly also demons inside (67).

Because Arnold is alone in the world, the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood is particularly dangerous, fraught with danger, witch-craft and demonry, as is typical in Danish medieval ballads, folk tales and fairy tales. Orphaned at birth, “forladt af Fader og Moder, før jeg vidste mit Navn” (“abandoned by Father and Mother before I knew my name,” 48), Arnold represents the Romantic predicament: a draft of modern man, he is severed from any physical, social or metaphysical reality and is facing the daunting task of defining his own reality and his own self, as manifest in his writing. This vertiginous freedom is so boundless that it appears equally tempting and diabolically frightening – hence the transition of the opening scene of the Babel-like market place to hints of pacts with the Devil (42-4). Arnold is on the outside looking in, envisioning himself as the similarly free-falling “Adam efter Faldet... udenfor sit Paradiis som Tilskuer” (“Adam after the Fall... outside his Paradise as a spectator”) looking in at “den forsvundne Herlighed” (“the lost splendor,” 46). This splendor and wonderful landscape seem oddly “velbekjendt” (“familiar”) to him, like something he had seen “som Barn” (“as a child,” 46). The end of innocence is a general theme in Gothic, which deepens an overriding concern in Danish Romanticism: the loss of a mythological childhood or golden age, of personal

and cultural completeness and prelapsarian purity, a remnant from early German-influenced Romanticism. The modern fairy tale seeks to restore what was lost, but it seems that for both Ingemann and Andersen, who continually renegotiate Romantic discourses, it is necessary to employ Gothic conventions and eruptions of the uncanny to portray the demolition - and then reconstruction - of the modern subject: Arnold – and later Andersen’s student - is divided, doubled, fragmented, and possibly insane.

4.10 The Fragmented Self in Ingemann’s Works

It is in his vision of a deeply fragmented individual that Ingemann contributes to an early European Gothic tradition that is informed by a burgeoning awareness of fundamental psychological processes. The demons and monsters that are referred to in Ingemann’s texts as emerging from the inner abyss correspond to contemporary pre-Freudian notions of man’s dual nature, since, of course, Freud’s theories and models of the self were inspired by the literature of the Romantic era as well as the Modern Breakthrough. Where Freud saw biological processes, the Romantics saw the emerging idea of the unconscious as being of a spiritual nature: Ingemann was familiar with G.H. Schubert’s *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (1808), one of the chief works in the new science of the self, which ends in religious idealism by underlining a pursuit of “das höhere göttliche Ideal” (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1989: 77).²⁸ A connection between biology and spirit was provided by Franz Mesmer’s *magnétisme animal* at the end of the 18th century, the cultural impact of which was profound in Europe, including in Denmark by way of Germany, and Ingemann makes reference to it multiple times throughout his

²⁸ According to the archives from 1821, Ingemann checked out Schubert’s book from Det Kongelige Bibliotek (The Royal Library) on March 29 1821 (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1989: 99, n. 6)

career.²⁹ With the discovery of hypnosis, healing, magnetism, artificial somnambulism and other dream-like states, one sought to bridge the gap between the ‘daylight’ rational side of the individual with the ‘nightside’- *der Nachtseite* - of the soul and its inner hidden truths: a two-part self. In Ingemann’s “Varulven” (1835) this dualism is primarily sexual, torn as the Byronic protagonist is between his ethereal fiancé and the lower class woman he has likely impregnated and eventually kills before shooting himself. In the sequel to “Varulven,” “Den Levende Døde” (The Living Dead, 1835), the metaphorical daytime/nighttime dualism, however, becomes very literal but at the same time defamiliarized, as the poet-protagonist in his youth chooses to be dead during the day and alive during the night, to the point where he actually embraces the live burial staged at the insane asylum to wake him from his delusion. Eventually he recovers and becomes a highly distinguished member of multiple scientific societies; a widower, he finds solace in the study of animal magnetism and the understanding it affords him of the secrets of human nature, but: ”Jeg er i grunden død endnu, men ingen ved det... Jeg er nu kun død om Natten... og dagen har jeg valgt til min spøgelsestid” (“I’m actually still dead but no one knows it... Now I’m only dead at night... and I have chosen the day for my ghost time,” 1967: 126). The point he makes is that in so far as he is dead, he is exactly like everybody else, thus rendering life and death - and normality - relative concepts which threaten to merge. One might here detect an inspiration from Novalis’ *Hymnen an die Nacht* (1800) or even Ingemann’s own *Tasso* (1819). Although Ingemann is not typically one to philosophize, the irreconcilable conflict between the ‘living’ self and the ‘ghost’ self takes on existential aspects.

²⁹ Mesmer’s *Mémoire sur la Découverte du Magnétisme Animal* was published in 1779, while C.A.F. Kluge’s *Versuch einer Darstellung des animalischen Magnetismus, als Heilmittel* (Berlin, 1811) had been translated into Danish in 1817 by G.T. Bang as *Fremstilling af den dyriske Magnetisme som Lægemiddel*. It was published in several editions in Copenhagen that year and referred to in 15 articles in the journal *Adrastea* (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1989: 79)

While the 1835 twin tales of the two torn brothers describe conventional two-part selves, the clearest articulation of Ingemann's model of the self is in "Selv-Citationen" (The Self-Citation, 1847). Echoing the tripartite universe of earth, heaven and hell in his early poems, the self is composed of three parts: earthly, divine and demonic. Although it was written decades later, the story is set in "Aaret 1817, da de Hofmanske [sic] Fantasier vare nye i Læseverdenen" ("the year 1817, when Hoffmann's fantasies were new in the literary world," 128) and demonstrates Ingemann's intimate knowledge of Mesmer's ideas and "den animalske Magnetismes Hemmeligheder" ("the secret of animal magnetism," 128) as it says in the beginning of the story. The 'self-citation', all the rage among students in Copenhagen, consists of calling one's own name three times alone at midnight by a church, a desolate ruin or some other lonely and solemn place, giving pause to ask: "Hvo kalder mig?" ("Who is calling me?" 128). After this "vilde Billedet af den Citerendes eget Væsen ligesom træde ud af hans Sjæl og pludselig stille sig for hans Øine" ("The image of the cited person's own being would step out from his soul and suddenly place itself before his eyes," 128). Again one must note the "ligesom" ('like') of the simile, which indicates the Fantastic uncertainty in much of Ingemann's oeuvre; in "Varulven" and "Den Levende Døde" this uncertainty is guaranteed by the Chinese box structure of the first-person accounts being reflected through the perhaps unreliable first-person perspective of the village pastor, who as the foremost representative of Danish *Biedermeier* culture tries to explain it all rationally but still must hesitate. As a consequence of the uncertainty, the narrator in "Selv-Citationen" notes that it is unclear whether this image would appear to the outer or the inner eye, but the sight thereof would be so profoundly terrible that only few people would have the strength to bear it. The madness and death which would likely be its consequence are, however, not questioned as subjective fantasy but scientific fact:

Det Menneske, der saaledes vovede at fremkalde sit eget hemmelighedsfulde Væsen, hvis Dobbeltthed allerede synes at antydes i enhver Tale, et Menneske holder til sig selv, vilde derved, paastodes der, ved et Slags Selvmagnetisme have adskilt, hvad der i vor nærværende sunde Tilværelse altid var inderlig forbundet, og denne Selvopløsning var igrunden et hemmelighedsfuldt Selvmord, da enhver saadan Selv-Visionair enten maatte blive afsindig og ligesom tabe Sammenhængen i sit eget Liv og Væsen, eller saaledes overvældes af Rædsel, at han døde paa Stedet (128).

The person who in such a manner dared to conjure his own secretive being, the double nature of which already seems to be suggested in any speech a person gives to himself, would hereby, it was claimed, through a type of self-magnetism have separated what in our present healthy existence was always deeply connected, and this self-dissolution was actually a secretive suicide, since any such self-visionary was bound to either go mad and sort of lose the coherence in his life and being, or thus be so overwhelmed with terror that he would die on the spot.

As we are thus reminded of Arnold's constant addressing himself, often in lengthy soliloquies, it seems like, according to this description, it takes very little effort to provoke the emergence of this uncanny other self, suggesting a highly unstable self that is porous at the edges.

The source of the uncanny associated with the double is, in Freud's words, the experience that "primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed," a notion developed from Otto Rank's anthropological-psychological work on the figure, which connected the idea of the double with the belief of early cultures in the existence of an immortal soul, distinct of the human body (Freud 2003: 155). From his non-dogmatic Christian perspective, Ingemann uses the figure of the double to confront this atavistic terror of death and the consequences a society must face which in giving up its belief in ghosts has also forfeited its belief in the immortality of the soul, thus implicitly coupling the Romantic cultural nostalgia for a lost Golden Age with what has been repressed in the life of the individual. Certainly the recurring instances of characters confronting multiple alternative selves in Ingemann's texts suggest a regression to a pre-conscious stage of completeness and omnipotence: be that a Lacanian imaginary before the sundering split of the mirror stage, a

Freudian primitive narcissism, or the pre-lingual states of childhood, in which the distinction between signifier and signified collapses. This fantastic signification process is coupled with psychoses and drug-induced states of mind (Todorov 104-130). Any such regression necessarily means disintegration: although Arnold laughingly dismisses it as superstitious folklore, his vague recollection that "et saadant Selvsyn altid var et vist Forbud paa Døden" ("such a self-vision was always a portent of death," 49) implies an awareness that the double is a harbinger of death, as Freud also noted: the "usigelige Rædsel" ("unspeakable horror") Arnold feels when he looks at the bloodied and "sælsomme Dødningeansigt" ("weird death's head"), which is really the ghost of his dead twin, and recognizes "sit eget Aasyn, saa livagtig, som saae han sig i et Speil" ("his own countenance, as lifelike as in a mirror," 63) is certainly connected to this atavistic terror of death. He is experiencing that nightmarish repetition that most Gothic protagonists feel; an uncanny sense of having been through all this before: "In Gothic romance . . . devices and images of repetition suggest a double horror of boundedness and boundlessness in both spatial and temporal terms. The same events seem to recur again and again, trapping the protagonist in a single instant of time yet simultaneously evoking the nightmare of eternity," (DeLamotte 95).

In "Skole-Kammeraterne" (The School Friends, 1850), animal magnetism is reduced to prosaic, lucrative magic tricks, which are nevertheless profoundly powerful: the protagonist, Valman, who is both a medical student and a magnetist, is ultimately faced with his dead self in the shape of a naked body he has exhumed at the cemetery in order to rob his grave in a scene straight from a Gothic ballad. In reality the double is the son of the fiancé of his youth, who shares both his name and an uncanny resemblance to him - but not DNA. It is as if fundamental characteristics such as physical appearance have been transmitted by proximity, which suggests a malleable self. Upon the sight of the dead double Valman loses his mind and dies the following

day; the moral of the story is to refrain from such hubristic experiments. In “Selv-Citationen,” however, Frederik Holm is one of the few Ingemann characters who succeeds in facing his other self unscathed but the point is that he does not actually explore it: after calling his own name twice, he hears a voice, not that of a stranger but also not his own, warning him against going further. Frederik interprets this as his divine self preventing him from a fatal encounter with his third, demonic self by speaking “saa høit i vor Bevidsthed, at det kunde gjenklinge i vor ydre Sands og skræmme os tilbage fra Fordærvelsen” (“so loudly in our consciousness that it would resonate in our outer senses and scare us back from corruption”, 131). For Ingemann, Mesmer’s ideas provided access to the spiritual world, while the self-analysis and self-reflection, even the natural sciences of his age were dangerous, even blasphemous experiments, “formastelige eksperimenter med det Dybe og Ubegribelige i vor Natur” (“presumptuous experiments with what is deep and incomprehensible in our nature” in “Selv-Citationen” p. 132) as the ultimate punishment of his many Faustian characters testifies to and as his feud with famous Danish scientist H.C. Ørsted would demonstrate in 1831: man is not meant to solve his own riddle.

Paul Coates explains the contradictory attitude of the Romantics to the Double: the figure represents the “fear of the feasibility of the self’s total reification by science,” and so the Romantics “oppose it as they do science, because the reflection echoes the self mechanically and presents the body as soulless mechanism; yet they have to embrace it, too, for it is the unconscious” (Coates 3-4). Despite such ambiguity, the imagery Ingemann uses still seems colored by the science of the self at the time and a growing awareness of mechanisms of repression, for example “det mørke Princip i ham selv” (“the dark principle in himself,” 119) in “Varulven”; Hr. Hind’s murderous other as “denne ulyksalige Skygge i mit Liv” (“this disastrous shadow in my life,” 83) in “Moster Maria”; in Arnold’s twin as “et usselt Skyggeværk uden Kjød

og Blod” (“a wretched shadowy creation without flesh and blood,” 66); and in the confusion of Arnold with not only his murdered twin but the murderous assassin of that twin: ”I er mig, og jeg er Jer, det er en reen Sag, det kan En jo see med et halvt Øie, det er heller ikke mig, der har stukket eders Høihed ihjel, men det er Jer, gale Karl!” (“You are me and I am you, that is a simple case, one can see it with half an eye, it was not me who stabbed your highness to death either, it is you, madman!” 65), the guard exclaims, dissolving any notion of a unified, clearly defined self. Such formulations are reminiscent of Schubert’s writings on the somnambulist self as “the murderer inside” in his dissertation on the language of dreams, *Die Symbolik des Traumes* (1814), which had also inspired Hoffmann and which would later influence both Freud and Jung (Johansen 1986: 20).

As the unconscious self is tabooed and sublimated within the bourgeois culture of *Dannelse*, what begins as an echo becomes a mad and divided self split into shadows, Doppelgängers and confusing reflections. The theme of doubles appears often in Ingemann’s stories, providing a textbook illustration of the Freudian uncanny as repetition with a difference: ”Moster Maria”, ”Altertavlen”, ”Varulven”, ”Corsicaneren”, ”Den Levende Døde”, ”Gravmælet”, ”Selv-Citationen”, ”Skole-Kammeraterne”, and ”Det Hemmelige Vidne.” Sometimes the motif appears as mere theatrical effect, but often Ingemann uses the double to express a conflict between the mundane and the spiritual self or as in Arnold’s case to suggest an external projection of deeply repressed material: sexual urges, murderous impulses and material desire as evident in Arnold being lost in the reflection of himself as king and the suggestion that he may have murdered his identical twin to attain that position, and finally his hubristic attempts to overcome the limits of mortality initiated by his intellectual speculation. While this is not an unfamiliar process to post-Freudian readers and while it was largely congruent with scientific

writings at the time, it is this vision of an irrevocably split self which seems to have caused contemporary reviewers to label Ingemann's poems and tales as inferior, unhealthy, pathological even, a trend which only increased after Georg Brandes' 1873 and 1887 scathing portraits of the writer. "Selvbevidsthedens Væsen er Selvfordobling. Men det Selv er sygt, som ikke formaaer at overvinde og beherske denne Fordobling," Brandes writes in 1873 ("The nature of self-consciousness is the doubling of the self. But that self is sick which is not able to conquer and control this doubling," 1873: 335). It is rather paradoxical that Brandes, the inaugurator of Modern Scandinavian literature, who would influence Danish arts and letters so immensely and thus also Ingemann's posthumous reception, could be so divorced from reality in his insistent cultivation of a coherent Greek-inspired superman balanced, undivided and unconquered by internal forces (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1996: 89). The Romantics certainly knew better...

4.11 The Female Doubles

Before examining the figure of the Doppelgänger further we must look at the female doubles in "Sphinxen" to understand Ingemann's particular vision of the unstable self. The multiple character doublings make obvious a variety of psychoanalytic interpretations but the extent and complexity of the echoes, shadows, reflections and doubles mean that a Freudian surface-depth reading of a simple Jekyll/Hyde dualism does not do full justice to the text, and the female doubles underline this idea. At first glance, Cordula-Goldini seem to express such a simple dualism: the time-honoured male fantasy of the Other, easily divided into Madonna and Whore, the non-sexual and the over-sexed, for a firmer grasp of their meaning; they are manifestations of Arnold's (dis)orientation in the world rather than an expression of a divided female subjectivity. While "the Doppelgänger host and visitant are axiomatically gendered as male" in Gothic novels, the female doubles - or "doublettes," as Webber calls them - typically serve "as the

objectification of a polarized male subject” (Webber 4-5). Earlier, especially Jungian criticism has focused, quite logically, on “the phantom lady” as an anima, or the repressed feminine aspects of the male self, which the Romantics began to explore (Andriano 2). In that sense, the female double, or the “fiend in women’s garments,” as Praz calls her, although the figure is the “more or less exclusive property of the male gender...also subverts gender as the most essential specification of an essentialized idea of identity” (Praz 206, Webber 4).

“The identity crises staged in the plot are also associated with a spectacular mise en scène of femininity itself,” Johansen notes in a reading focused on the Fantastic elements of the text (Johansen 1999: 542). In my perspective, the key word is mise-en-scene, as femininity is staged as a spectacle, which voids the simple female dichotomy, dispersing instead the properties of the feminine through proximity and contiguity into a seemingly endless chain of signifiers. First the saleswoman in the marketplace sells Arnold the walking stick, on which he seems to see her wrinkled face carved on the handle. This turns into the female ivory sphinx, but then morphs into the slimy white toad in the forest, which sends Arnold stumbling into the arms of the ivory-pale, sphinx-like femme fragile Cordula, who again at times coincides both with the image of the lost mother and with the evil and seductive femme fatale Goldini, reminiscent to Arnold of the “rædsomme Søstre” (“the horrid sisters”) in *Macbeth* but also monstrous in her own right (confusingly Floristan is the page boy of both Cordula and Goldini, which also underlines their inseparability). The most spectacular transformation is that of Goldini, who on the brink of consummating the union with Arnold as rightful heir to the throne, morphs into not just the wrinkled ”forrykte Sælgerkjærling” (“mad saleswoman”), who initiated Arnold’s reflections in the first scene, but “Fandens Oldemoder” (“the devil’s great-grandmother,” 70) herself, dancing out of the text in the arms of the old prison guard while thus completing the dizzying drift of the

female semantic into images of witch-craft, demonry, death and decay: the way of all flesh.³⁰

The feminine thus cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy or even distinct opposing groups as the one figure consistently morphs into the other as if through metonymic contagion. Arnold's identity crisis is thus very much a crisis of categories, an epistemological crisis, particularly as these phantasmatic doubles increasingly insist on their place in the real.

4.12 Doubles and Doppelgängers

When the term 'Doppelgänger' first appeared in Jean-Paul's *Sibenkäs* in 1796, it was a response to the assertion of subjective autonomy, individuality, and human agency in Romantic Idealism, ideals which had been under negotiation and inversion since the inception of Gothic literature in the decades before. Alice Schmid remarks that the double is prevalent in periods of "subjective realism" marked by an intensified awareness of the self, while Catherine Spooner points out the close connection between the rise of the literary double and the birth of the individual as a modern concept: "It is only when value is invested in a unique, coherent subjecthood that fear can be generated through its duplication or disintegration" (Schmid 36, Spooner 2004: 129). Ingemann, arguably Denmark's most radical Romantic, then goes for maximum theatrical effect through a spectacular series of doubles, some more disconcertingly familiar than others: from the many manifestations of the female figure, to the double role of the enigmatic Floristan to Arnold's confusion of himself with not just Hoffmann's Anselmus and the protagonist of his own fictional account, to his dead twin and the guard, who seemingly murdered that twin, which is further complicated by the guard's perception of Arnold as a ghost: in Danish *dobbeltgænger*,

³⁰ "Fandens Oldemor", or the great grandmother of the devil, is a common colloquial expression in Danish. The figure is the keeper of the damned souls in Hell, watching over them while the devil is retrieving more sinners. The figure appears in folklore as well as in tales by the Brothers Grim (as the devil's grandmother), and H.C. Andersen, e.g. "Pigen som traadte paa Brødet" ("The Girl who trod on the loaf," 1859), in which the sinful girl of the title is punished for her vanity by being submerged into a hell-like pit underground.

a 'double-goer' is etymologically close to a ghost, *en genganger* ('a revenant') which *går igen*, or 'goes again'. The shape that Arnold follows around in the long, dark hallways of the Gothic castle, which is wearing his own brown coat is doubled several times over: identified as both a ghost moving "ikke paa sædvanlig Menneskeviis, men svævende som en Skygge" ("not in normal human fashion but gliding like a shadow,"66); as "et lumpent Fantasiebillede, som jeg selv har skabt" ("an insidious image of my imagination, which I myself have created,"66); as his dead twin brother; and finally as Arnold himself as it turns around: "han saae nu atter sit eget Aasyn, som i et Speil" ("he now saw his own countenance, as if in a mirror"), which makes him ask: "De skulde dog aldrig være en vis *Candidatus Philosophiae* Hr. Arnold, som jeg hidindtil i min Uskyldighed har holdt for mig selv?" ("You wouldn't happen to be a certain *Candidatus Philosophiae* Mr. Arnold, whom I heretofore in my innocence have taken for myself?" 66). Paul Coates interprets the materialization of the double as "a pathological attempt to replace the image of the other with that of the self": as the subject "denies that the other who resembles oneself could be one's identical twin, and hence a real person existing outside the bounds of selfhood and its projections, the figure of the double paradoxically enhances the ideology of individualism" (Coates 2-3). As the subject is doubled, identity is not shared, but twinned, halved and challenged: the *doppelgänger* implies the experience of, in Derrida's words, 'duplicity without an original'. "Jeg kan ikke længer blive klog paa mig selv - er jeg En eller To? og er jeg To, hvilken af de To er da mit virkelige Selv? - eller er jeg maaskee endog gal, og har kun enkelte *lucida intervalla*," Arnold desperately exclaims ("I can no longer make sense of myself – am I one or two? And I am two, which of the two is then my real self? Or am I perhaps even mad, having only a few *lucida intervalla*?" 55). His consequent running in and out of the study to clear his mind literalizes the oscillation of the 'lucid intervals' in which he is less mad and

more – or is it less? - himself. He embodies and literalizes the Danish idiom ‘at være ude af sig selv’: literally to be outside oneself, metaphorically a frenzied panic.

The terror inspired by the division is enforced by the fear of the autonomy of the self-image: ”er det dig selv, dit andet, ubegribelige Jeg, som nu sidder paa din Plads, og fortsætter dit Livs vidunderlige Eventyr?” (“Is it yourself, your other unfathomable self, which is now sitting in your seat and continuing the marvelous tale of your life?” 63), Arnold wonders, as the other self seems to be writing his story, a perception which from this point in the story is corroborated by witnesses, which makes it all the more alarming. Contending that the Gothic is concerned with boundaries of the self, DeLamotte argues that the heroine’s peril derives from two linked fears: “the fear of terrible separateness and the fear of unity with some terrible Other” (DeLamotte 22). For Arnold both mean an ontological destabilization of the self that he is on a quest for, which becomes profoundly relativized; paradoxically reduced and halved rather than guaranteed by its multiple specular replications: since it *is* and does not *have* a double, the subject is both observing and observed, always constructed as an object for and by an Other:

Men Hvo er jeg da? det var altid Spørgsmaalet, hvorved han standsede, og idet hans eget Væsen saaledes blev Gjenstanden for hans drømmende Forskning, blev han ofte forfærdet for sig selv, og det var ham. ligesom hans Væsen var dobbelt og kunde udtræde af ham selv og aabenbare sig for ham i et synligt Billede (49).

But who am I then? That was always the question at which he stopped, and as his own being thus became the object of his dreamy examination, he was often terrified by himself and it seemed to him that his being was double and could step out of himself and appear to him in a visible image.

Arnold is the victim of what Webber calls “a visual double-bind” which causes the “general divisive objectification of the subject in the case of the Doppelgänger” (Webber 3). The motifs of doubling and mirroring are repeated on so many levels in the text that it gives Arnold’s visual

and likely mental disorders the appearance of a near-monomaniacal narcissism, as Johansen phrases it (Johansen 1986: 20). Certainly the risk of a perhaps happy, perhaps fatal solipsism is hinted at when Arnold, already dizzy from the many specular replications of himself, is advised by Cordula to live as if "der saa slet ingen Verden var til uden om os" ("as if there were no world around us," 52). More importantly, the figure of the double suggests numerous "rehearsals of a double role on various reconstructions of the Lacanian mirror stage" (Webber 3). Struggling for control over the gaze, Arnold's quest for the 'real self' as a metaphysical given becomes instead a process of enactment of identity mediated by his perceived other self. Nowhere is this performative aspect more obvious than in the pivotal scene in the hall of mirrors.

4.13 Mirrors and Reflections

In the hall of mirrors, Arnold attempts to conjure and maintain a self by provoking its thousandfold multiplication. The previous scene in the gallery of family portraits indicates his detachment from the world: orphaned before his Christening, he is not anchored in the identity afforded by religion, family, social ties or even a legitimate name. In addition, as "Dæmonen truer [ham] selv i Moders skød" ("the demon threatens him even in his mother's womb," 67), as the page boy Floristan warns him, he is the result of a broken home as many a Gothic protagonist, and thus traumatized by "dysfunction in the family romance of structured well-being", which as Webber explains often results in the fluid sense of self embodied by the Doppelgänger and in eruptions of *das Unheimliche* (Webber 5). The family portraits of Arnold with his identical twin and their mother in the gallery are transformed under Arnold's gaze:

hvor hen han vendte sit Blik, saae han kun et eeneste Billede, men tusindfold fordoblet [...]: det var ham selv, i en prægtig Kongedragt med Septer og Krone. Han mærkede nu, at alle Vægene vare af det klareste Speilkrystal, som viste ham hans egen herlige Skikkelse, i en uendelig Række af kronede Hoveder, der alle vare Gjentagelser af hverandre (69).

Wherever he turned his gaze, he only saw one single image, but multiplied a thousand times... it was himself, in a splendid royal robe with a scepter and a crown. He felt now that all the walls were made of the clearest crystal mirror, which showed him his own magnificent shape, in an infinite series of crowned heads, which were all a repetition of each other.

The self is rendered infinite, omnipresent and omnipotent as king: it is so unstable that it must be mirrored *en abîme*, repeated and affirmed infinitely. The narrative *mise-en-abîme* afforded by the multiple levels of reality and non-reality, which mirrors Arnold's specular reflection, has the same result, though; meaning is continually deferred, displaced and postponed, often in dream-like sequences. The fairy tale "Det høie Spil" sums up the figure in "et konstigt Speil, hvori man kan see det Fraværende" ("a strange / artificial mirror in which one can see what is absent," 26): the reflection *en abîme* multiplies and enlarges, "yet casts the sign of identity into abysmal or groundless nonentity" (Webber 6). 'Afgrunden', the abyss, which figures so prominently in Ingemann is both a psychological, aesthetic and narrative bottomless pit. Webber describes the prevalence of the principle of aesthetic and intellectual reflection in German Romanticism:

Ideas of subjectivity and of aesthetic production are mediated by specular reproduction, by processes of reflection of and on the self and the world which are always liable to be propelled into the vertiginous wonderland of a gallery of mirrors. This is a space which at once provides a scene for Romantic fantasies of self-fulfilment and yet which falls prey to distortions, where the images of self tend to become fractured and fugitive or viciously circular (Webber 23).

In "Sphinxen" this Romantic cult of reflection becomes a nightmare, not least because the text operates in a Gothic space. The scene is a key to an understanding of Danish Gothic, if not Gothic in general: identity, like everything else in Gothic texts, is a surface mechanism constructed of clothes, props and mirrors, which reflect and propel the contagious properties of selfhood. Subjectivity becomes a surface effect, as Arnold's robe and scepter become equivalent to his royal and perceived authentic self: rather than him articulating himself through dress, it is

his clothing and props which articulate him. What Ingemann describes is not a dual identity as the traditional Jekyll/Hyde alternation without confrontation, which he develops at length in the torn werewolf-character in “Varulven” and in Hr. Hind in “Altertavlen i Sorø” and which affords a model of deep structured subjectivity under the socially and aesthetically acceptable surface; nor is it the tripartite self he explores in “Selv-Citationen”, divided into earthly, divine and demonic. What he proposes in “Sphinxen” is identity as multiple, multivalent selves, “performative and dispersed across a continuum of appearances,” and as I will return to, additionally intertextually collaged together from quotations from other texts (Halberstam 64).

As a variation on the mirror image – and a variation of the Gothic theatrical trope of suddenly moving portraits to create terror and suspense - Ingemann employs painted portraits to reflect the unstable self and the problems of perception associated with Todorov’s ”themes of vision,” e.g. “Altertavlen i Sorø,” ”Frø-Benet,”(The Frog Leg, 1847), “De Fortryllede Fingre” (The Bewitched Fingers, 1847), ”Skole-Kammeraterne” (The School Friends, 1850), ”Den Fremmede,” (The Stranger, 1859). When Goldini does not want to meet Arnold himself but instead commissions a painted portrait of him, drafted by Floristan in Arnold’s room in Hamburg, it causes a very particular sense of horror and resistance in Arnold:

Mit livagtige Billede, mit andet Jeg vil hun see; ja saa - det treffer De maaskee bedst, naar jeg er ude...Jeg mener kun, at jeg ligner mig selv meest, og naar De har mig, saa har De ogsaa mit livagtige Billede. Jeg ønsker ikke heller at see det skilt fra min Person, eller med andre Ord, min Herre, jeg ønsker ikke at see mig selv, det skee paa hvad Maade det vil, jeg mener naturligviis ved Penslen... Jeg mener, man kan have Ulykke nok med sig selv, baade som Subject og Object, naar man vaager og naar man drømmer, see det er allerede to Væsner og to Tilværelser; blev man nu ovenikjøbet malet, saa blev man jo tre (56-7).

My lifelike image, my other self she wants to see; indeed - you might more easily encounter that when I am out... I am only saying that I resemble myself the most and when you have me, you also have my lifelike image. Nor do I wish to see it divorced from my person, or in other words, dear Sir, I do not wish to see myself in any manner whatsoever, I

mean of course, by the paint brush... I believe that one can have enough misfortune with oneself both as subject and object, when you are awake and when you are dreaming, you see that is already two beings and two existences; if one was painted in addition to that, then one would be three.

In his confused ramblings, Arnold pinpoints the issue of the self and its apparently endless fission, which blurs the distinction between internal and external selves: “the self expressed or explored by these conventions is all surface, but its perimeter is neither fixed nor obvious” (Sedgwick 1981: 260). Arnold seems intuitively to sense that runaway process of identity: the attributes of both self and image of self are transferable and interchangeable, often through sheer proximity, and the contagious process “flattens or empties out that which inside or within, transforming it to one more link in the signifying chain” (Spooner 2004: 7). Thus, like in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait on the canvas can be more ‘authentic’ than the actual self.

The other portraits that play an important role in “Sphinxen” are the painted family pictures in the gallery that eventually turn into the mirror-en-abîme. These portraits are important because of the way Gothic texts envision personal identity as not inherent but “applicable”: it is applied from the outside and “by a process of visual assimilation or ‘seeing as’” (Sedgwick 1981: 261). According to Sedgwick, “always for women, and very often for men, life begins with a blank”: the parents are dead or strangely absent; “the women's names suggest the blank, the white, the innocent” and the initial letter A works as “a cipher that signifies a blank origin where the name does not do so denotatively” (Sedgwick 1981: 260). Examples are Antonia and Ambrosio, who turn out to be siblings in *The Monk*; Arnold in “Sphinxen” shares the initial letter A and the experience of starting life anew with the Biblical Adam, to whom he compares himself, while his actual twin brother remains nameless (although his other ‘twin’ is given the name Anselmus by Hoffmann). The self is a blank surface or an empty canvass on which identity

can be imprinted or inscribed through the establishment of similarity, “by a retracing of recognized traits from other faces, signally from portraits,” a plot which gives the miniature portraits in *The Italian* and *Udolpho* a prominent role (Sedgwick 1981: 260). In the texts examined by Sedgwick, “the belated establishment of identity... occurs only with the retracing or recognition of pairs of marked countenances that are ocularly (never just metaphorically or imaginatively) confronted and compared with each other” (Sedgwick 1981: 261).

Complicating the Aristotelian master plot of *anagnorisis* or recognition is the multiple ways in which these representations in “Sphinxen” are veiled and masked, thus extending the chains of visual likeness: the mother, which Arnold tellingly assumes must be “en Madonna” tries to “tilhulle” (“to veil”) the identical boys, protecting them from the gaze of the queen, while in the background appears “en dunkel Skikkelse” (“a shadowy shape,” 67) with a dagger in the one hand and a mask in the other, which makes Arnold take the figure for the tragic muse Melpomene. In the mask, however, he recognizes the features of Cordula, which again are mirrored in a painting on the opposite wall. This painting appears veiled and is placed next to “et andet endnu mere tilsløret Billede” in which he seems to recognize himself, or at least “Grundtrækkene,” suggesting that this might be the draft (“Grundridset,” the fundamental outline, 67) originally made by Floristan in his room in Hamburg, again blurring the lines between the different levels of ‘reality’. As Floristan warns him that the aforementioned demon, which threatens him in his mother’s womb, is approaching “og vil blænde dig med den fortryllende Maske” (“and will blind you with her bewitching mask,” 67), almost as if she steps out of the painting, Floristan at Arnold’s beckoning is able to draw aside the seemingly painted veil that hides Cordula’s face: the painted veil “lod sig ligesaa let drage tilside som et virkeligt” (“was drawn aside as easily as a real veil,” 67), again dismantling the distinction between surface

and content, image and apparent reality. In Eve Sedgwick's examination of the veil in classic Gothic texts such as *The Italian*, *Udolpho* and *The Monk* as "the locus of the substitution of one person for another" in its function of "spreading, of extending by contiguity, a particular chain of attributes" in a type of "indiscriminate metonymic contagion," she states that the veil "very often hides Nothing, or death, or, in particular, some cheat that means absence and substitution," the example being the wax figure Emily discovers in *Udolpho*: not an actual corpse but an imitation of death, a *memento mori* (Sedgwick 1981: 257-8). For Arnold this means that meaning is continually postponed; significantly he identifies the paintings as allegories: "det er formodentlig et Slags Allegorie, men Allegorier kan jeg ikke lide for min Død, jeg forlanger heller ingen Forklaring derover" ("It is presumably some sort of allegory but allegories I do not like for the death of me; nor do I demand any explanation of them," 67). Like a true Romantic, Arnold is on a quest for the unmediated presence promised by the symbol – and the mythical fairy tale he is in the process of writing - which ideally bridges this and the other side, imagination and spirituality, literal and figurative, signifier and signified. Instead, the "Forklaring," the explanation or meaning he tries to grasp, keeps eluding him; like allegories reveal a fundamental absence, as intimated by Arnold's connection between death and allegories, so masks, mirrors and veils reveal more illusions and copies of representations with no substantive presence beneath. This means that Ingemann's contribution to the Gothic canon, at least in "Sphinxen," is profoundly modern, if not anticipating the discursive construction of postmodern identity. Moreover, it is a theme which is so fundamental to Ingemann that it spills over into his non-Gothic tales.

4.14 "De Fortryllede Fingre": The Manipulable Skin

The theorization of Gothic identity as constructed out of surface mechanisms with an emphasis on clothes, veil and mirrors obviously has great implications for the construction of gender, as the mechanics of appearance have always been central to the formation of femininity (Spooner 2004: 130). In "Sphinxen," Arnold's construction of his self before the mirror and through multiple multi-gendered doubles thus becomes a deconstruction of his unambiguously male self. In "De Fortryllede Fingre" (The Bewitched Fingers, 1847), the female protagonist Thora experiences a similar instability in both body and mind: as an adolescent she is on the path to an adult identity but her growth is stunted by her perceived ugliness: not only is her forehead too prominent, her nose too wide and her lips too full, but her skin is consistently described as "nødbrun" ("hazel brown") and she has "et Udseende, der ikke var uligt Mulatindernes" ("an appearance not unlike the female mulattoes," 136): she is thus in terms of both gender and apparent race twice othered. She consistently identifies herself as a "Negerpige" (a "negro girl," 137) from Africa although she is most definitely white: her appearance becomes her identity. In the logic of the story her unusual appearance is equated with animal-like properties, as she herself and her family repeatedly compare her to an owl; it even means monstrosity and loss of familial identity: "ja, de har Ret! jeg er en Skifting, ret et lille Uhyre af Grimhed" ("Yes, they are right! I am a changeling, truly a little monster of ugliness," 136). Identity and humanity become skin deep. Likewise in "Varulven" (The Werewolf), the psychological Zerissenheit and existential alienation felt privately by the protagonist become manifest physically and very publically in his bushy black brows merging on the very forehead that he will eventually shoot a bullet through in a reverse branding of the skin, to "brænd[e] Varulvemærket ud af sin Pande med Kirkebly" ("burn the mark of the werewolf out of his forehead with church lead," 123).

Estranged from her family, her community and herself, Thora receives help from her godmother, whose magical powers are explained somewhat rationally with reference to her knowledge of herbs and an intuitive understanding of the divine: although the story is designated “et eventyr,” a fairy tale, it has the realistic setting of 1830s Copenhagen and has famous Golden Age sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen in a prominent role as Thora’s helper, while continually entertaining the possibility of the explained supernatural insofar as the perceived magic can be caused by Thora’s potential insanity and/or optical illusions. Thora’s wish comes true: following a ritual, which is inexplicably set in a Gothic ruin at sunset and involves the favorite motif of both a physical and psychological fall, she becomes able to mould and reshape her face with her apparently magical fingers. The result is that she grows more grotesque and disfigured by the day to the extent that she must veil her face from the public gaze, not dissimilar to the monstrously gnome-like Guillelmo in Ingemann’s “Den Fremmede” (The Stranger, 1859), who thanks to the family curse caused by a pact entered with the prince of darkness generations ago is one of many sons born as “halve Dyr” (“half animal”) and must spend his short life behind curtains, masks and costumes. While for Guillelmo, the sartorial freight of these surfaces result in the effacement of his grotesque body, leaving the reader with only the image of his piercing luminous gaze, for Thora the veil becomes a striking foreshadowing of the way in which her face will become a blank canvas. When Thorvaldsen is assigned to redesign her face by physically moving her features around, he makes a poignant comparison between “at modellere i levende Menneskekjød” (“to model in live human flesh”) and the powers of clothing:

En saadan Menneske-Restauration var vel ogsaa en Konst... For en Deel slog det ind i Skrædderkonsten, meente han, siden dog Klæder skaber Folk, og for en Deel hørte det til... Haarskjærernes, Kammertjenernes og Pyntekonernes Professioner (145-6).

Such a human restoration was surely also an art form. For many it turned into the art of tailoring, he thought, since clothes after all do make the man, and for many it belonged to... the professions of barbers, valets and dressers.

The lack of depth accorded to the body and the self results in both an increased manipulation of, even violence towards skin, our ultimate boundary, and by extension, clothing, our second skin: both become metonyms for the human (Spooner 2004: 10, Halberstam 1995: 7). As skin and clothing no longer contain or conceal, the outside becomes the inside: if nineteenth-century monsters according to Halberstam “metaphorized modern subjectivity as a balancing act between inside / outside, female / male, body/ mind, native/ foreign,” then Thora destabilizes such easy dichotomies and we might add the surface-content model with them (Halberstam 1995: 1).

The story was published two years after Andersen’s “De Røde Sko” (“The Red Shoes, 1845) and presents similar images of the mutable, manipulable, even amputable body as Thora is punished brutally for her transgressive desire to change God’s order: not only does she accidentally render herself hideously disfigured, but her magical fingers eventually become infected and almost amputated, like Karen’s feet. However, her real sin, like Andersen’s Karen, is her vanity: her eventually aesthetically pleasing surface makes her interior much less pleasing.³¹ Visually she is narcissistically reflected, affirmed and reconstructed in every surface she sees, from the mirror that breaks into a thousand pieces during her magic ritual at the Gothic ruin, to her dressing table, to the shiny hymnal book in church on the day of her confirmation

³¹ The loss of her unreflected “Naivitet” (“naivety”) after her fall into adulthood is exacerbated by this vanity, which only worsens as she grows prettier, and which is accompanied by a scathing critique of the Heiberg circle’s *modus operandi*. Thora’s predilection for “Modesmagens tilsyneladende Foragt for al Følelse og Fantasi” (“the apparent contempt for all feelings and imagination that was in fashion”) is coupled with her favorite literature, “de Skuespil og satiriske Blade, hvori den hjerteløse Spot og det al Begeistring udslykkende Vid udelukkende førte Ordet” (“those plays and satirical magazines, in which the word is given to heartless ridicule and the kind of wit which extinguishes all enthusiasm”), while she herself mimics such discourse by wittily mocking her surroundings for applause, thus excluding “al Hjertelighed og Alvor” (“all cordiality and seriousness”) from her life (149). This is a belated defense of Ingeman’s early works, which Heiberg and his circle mocked mercilessly for applause; neither in his most grotesque fantastic tales nor in the Gothic, which with its campy aesthetic easily approaches parody, does Ingemann ever venture into satire or jest.

(also an important rite of passage in “De Røde Sko”), to the final triangulation of her gaze between the mirror in her room, the cast replica of the original angel that her face is modelled in an oddly reverse process, and the drawn childhood portrait. Again, identity must be elicited from pictures, suggesting that we remain at the surface and that subjectivity is only skin deep. While this story is not part of Ingemann’s Gothic oeuvre, it does illustrate a growing, somewhat existential concern with the mechanisms of the surface, which is fundamentally but not exclusively Gothic.

4.15 The Body as Barrier

In “Sphinxen,” too, there is a special kind of attention accorded to the ultimate surface of the subject; the skin, which is supposed to contain body and self, is constantly attempted manipulated and tested. This has to do with the particular spatial orientation of Gothic, and to examine that we must return to the setting: the haunted castle, which provides the labyrinthine stage for scenes of flight and pursuit, as Arnold struggles for control of the pen-dagger, which continually threatens his boundaries. The fairy tale setting of Cordula’s enchanted “gamle gothiske Ridderslot” (“old gothic knights’ castle,” 46), the “afsides Paradiis” (“the remote Paradise,” 45) seemingly morphs into its opposite: it becomes Goldini’s equally remote haunted Gothic castle, complete with dark winding hallways, doors that suddenly disappear, secret buttons that reveal concealed closets, violent struggles, confusing noises, supernatural disturbances and things that go bump in the night: this is a crime scene, as the shrouded mother failed to protect Arnold’s twin-double from being murdered five years earlier. While all noticing that the castle provides “en ægte gotisk eller skrækromantisk kulisse” (“a genuine gothic or *Schreckromantic* stage set”) critics such as Jan Rosiek, Knud-Bjarne Gjesing and Ib Johansen

dismiss the setting as just that: a set piece (Johansen 1986: 20).³² The result is a neglect of the foundational feature of the Gothic genre, the haunted castle, which has meaning in its own right.

The castle appears when Arnold is arrested and

henført til en øde vild Egn, rundt omgivet af Taager og nøgne Klipper. Inderst mellem Klipperne ragede et gothisk Fangetaarn i Veiret, som paa alle Sider var omgivet af en steil Klippemuur og dybe uoverstigelige Grave. 'Skal jeg her indmures paa Livstid?' - tænkte Arnold og en Gysen gjennemisnede ham; men han taug og adlød Nødvendigheden (60).

transported to a desolate, wild area, entirely surrounded by fog and naked rocks. Deep in between the rocks, a Gothic donjon emerged, which was on all sides surrounded by a steep cliff wall and deep insurmountable moats [note that the Danish text says "Grave," which also means tombs or graves]. 'Will I be confined here for life?' – Arnold wondered and a chill froze his bones, but he remained quiet and obeyed necessity.

As he is consequently walked over a drawbridge and through three large iron gates, which are loudly locked after him, every single thing in this description conveys isolation and confinement. That is of course the chief attributes of the Gothic castle. In addition, the social marginalization signaled by the architectural space is intensified by the descriptions of the tower "som havde mere Lighed med en Hule for vilde Dyr, end med en menneskelig Bolig" ("which resembled a den for wild animals more than a human dwelling") and the guard's comments: "Gud give, her var en Daarekiste, Herre!...her er det, der er værre: her er jo en blodig Morderhule, som I nok veed selv" ("God grant that it were a madhouse, Sir! It is much worse; it is a bloody den of murder, as you well know," 61). The final Gothic castle to be navigated by the heroine in the Female Gothic is of course often the insane asylum. The castle is thus described as stripping away human attributes and reason, and in addition, Arnold's voice and power to move:

Forgjæves vilde han spørge: Hvo er du? Det var ligesom en usynlig Haand holdt ham for Munden, og som det Spørgsmaal maatte koste hans Liv. Forgjæves søgte han at reise sig;

³² The dismissal of the castle is completely congruent with the focus of these critics, which is not the Gothic conventions of the text, but for Jan Rosiek its allegorical condition, for Knud-Bjarne Gjesing its exploration of sexual politics, and for Ib Johansen the text as a prime example of the Danish fantastic mode.

han kunde hverken røre Haand eller Fod ...Meer saae ikke den bestyrtede Arnold; han sank udmattet tilbage... (63).

In vain he was trying to ask: 'Who are you?' It was as if an invisible hand covered his mouth and as if that very question would cost him his life. In vain he attempted to rise; he could neither move his hand nor his feet... This was all that the startled Arnold saw; exhausted he collapsed.

As he is thus silenced and paralyzed and after that fallen into an unconscious state, the architectural structure ensures what Eve Sedgwick sees as the defining convention of Gothic texts: a spatial reorganization which identifies the strongest energies in the Gothic in the surface and which does not depend on psychological models of depth, although, as Sedgwick explains, it can be "deepened" by such models:

It is the position of the self to be massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access. This something can be its own past, the details of its family history; it can be the free air, when the self has been literally buried alive; it can be a lover; it can be just all the circumambient life, when the self is pinned in a death-like sleep (Sedgwick 1986: 12).

Arnold experiences all of the above as a result of his entrapment in the castle, the most massive of the barriers he faces, as it results in his constant disorientation and bewilderment at the arbitrariness of his surroundings. The erection of this insurmountable barrier, which is arbitrary because there seems to be no reason for it and which separates things or areas that should be in a relationship of communication and interaction, takes place both at the level of plot and that of narration, manifest structurally in the difficulty Arnold's story has of being told. The consequence is a radical reorganization of normal spatial experience, according to which one finds oneself in a world that is accessible to one's understanding and action. The relationship between the two sides of the barrier seems to be one of communication, becoming instead one of parallelism and doubling:

The inside life and the outside life have to continue separately, becoming counterparts rather than partners, the relationship between them one of parallels and correspondences rather than communication. This, though it may happen in an instant, is a fundamental reorganization, creating a doubleness where singleness should be (Sedgwick 1986:13).

The energies that drive the action and the interest of the Gothic text therefore center on the barrier that separates the two elements, keeping it in place or working to overcome it, often through excessive violence directed at that barrier. In the works of Spooner and Halberstam, Sedgwick's theorization of surfaces and of outside and inside as separated by an arbitrary but absolute boundary, the disruption of which is inevitably accompanied by violence, is taken to its logical extreme by including skin as that barrier, as the ultimate boundary and primary surface in the Gothic, dividing outside from inside, self from other, and the individual from society. Because there is, as demonstrated, an overt lack of depth accorded to models of the body and the self, the violence surrounding the skin as a barrier is all the more intensified, and skin is rendered manipulable, malleable and permeable (Spooner 10).

One might look to "Skole-Kammeraterne" for further illustration of the fragility of skin: in a scene reminiscent of Arnold dancing with Cordula-Goldini-the demonic saleswoman at the end of "Sphinxen," Cadaver-Marthe, the wrinkled hag who boils corpses for anatomical studies, morphs into both the angelic Amalie and the devil's grandma while dancing in the arms of the deranged protagonist Valman. She proceeds to laugh and sing shrilly, "medens hun trak et Menneskehoved ved Haarene op af Kjedelen og begyndte at skrabe det" ("as she pulled up a human head by its hair from the kettle and started scraping it"): the flesh peels right off and the rattling skeletons abound everywhere in the story as a grotesque *memento mori* (185). Likewise, in "Niels Dragon" (Niels Dragoon, 1847) the eponymous protagonist, who like Marthe skeletonises corpses for the purpose of anatomic experiments – a blasphemous transgression, as

Ingemann carefully states in both stories - meets his unavoidable fate, as the body of his former amorous rival, who has sworn revenge, bursts out of the kettle at midnight after it has been violently bent and shoved into it. The horror of the boiled and expanded flesh and skin could not be more emphatic; and Niels of course drops dead on the spot as he faces the “kogte græsselige Dødningsansigt... med de aabne udvidede Øine” (“the horrid, cooked skull...with open, gaping eyes” (134).³³ In the more Poe-esque horror story “Glas-Skabet” (The Glass Cabinet, 1847), the miserly protagonist not only embalms the corpse of his dead wife but positions it in a glass cabinet right by his bed, visible to the passers-by in the street outside. Ultimately, he, too, must face a violent end as the corpse in its richly ornamented costume one night falls upon him and seems to strangle him, but it is the image of the precious sapphires that the miser has violently shoved into the dead wife’s eye sockets as a human hiding place which causes the real horror of the story. In the Gothic and the horror genre, the effects of which Ingemann was clearly familiar with, the perimeter of the human body is consistently a locus of violent transgression.

Like a Gothic heroine, Arnold spends the better part of the story being chased around the Gothic castle with a rusty dagger, which already fatally penetrated the skin of his murdered twin-double five years earlier. The continual reappearance of the knife suggests the fragility of the skin and the fear of both bodily and mental integrity, which dominates the Gothic universe: the problem of the self and its boundaries is at the center of Gothic fiction, particularly the Female Gothic. Arnold’s fluid sense of self and the permeability of skin in this universe only exacerbate that problem. If skin is the ultimate personal boundary, then “Gothic posits skin primarily as a

³³ These scenes suggest a general disgust with the body; a non-dogmatic Christian, Ingemann was uncomfortable with the tenet of the resurrection of the flesh, or „Ligenes Opstandelse“ (“the resurrection of the corpses”), as he called it, a notion which he expanded on at length in his theological musings, e.g. “Tankebreve fra en Afdød” (Thoughts and Letters from a Deceased, 1855). The apparent disgust signals perhaps rather impatience: although the post-mortem body rots away and ultimately turns into nothing, in life it does limit the soul, congruent with Ingemann’s neo-Platonic Romanticism (Michelsen 197).

boundary to be disrupted,” “a surface which can be modified or transformed” (Spooner 9-10).

The doubling between pen and dagger in the story suggests the close connection between skin, paper and (bloody) sheet: everything, including the body, is a surface to be marked and inscribed with characters, as underlined by Arnold’s gaze which moves from the mirror image of his bloodied self in the cell, to the blood-stained sheet on his bed³⁴ and to the walls that are riddled with inscriptions (62-3). The scenes of bloody persecution suggest violence of a sexual nature: in the mirror (one of many in the story) which reflects the bed in Arnold’s cell, he sees that “han virkelig baade var bleg og blodig, og havde nok stødt sin Pande i Mørket mod Sengestolpen” (“that he really was both pale and bloody and had probably bumped his forehead against the bed post in the dark,” 64). Likewise the white sheet stained by the blood of Arnold’s double is referred to multiple times: “der kan I endnu see Blodet paa Lagenet”; “Arnold... saae paa det rødplettede Lagen”; “[den] blodige Døds seng” (“there you can still see the blood on the sheet”; “Arnold looked at the crimsoned sheet”; “the bloody death bed,” 62-3). It is certainly difficult not to associate this with a sheet bloodied from the first sexual intercourse, not least as the guard violently bursts through the locked door in the middle of the night to pierce and penetrate Arnold, who is sleeping on that very sheet – perhaps again – with his rusty knife. The violence of the assault on the room suggests a metaphorical if not physical rape. While sleeping on the stained sheet, Arnold has a nightmare, or so it seems: “nu faldt det blodige Lagen ham ind, og det var ligesom Blodet blev vaadt og varmt under ham, og fyldte hele Sengen med en brændende Strøm” (“now the bloody sheet occurred to him and it was as if the blood became wet and warm under him and filled up the bed with a burning stream,” 63). This maelstrom of burning hot blood seems to be swallowing and drowning him in a violent image of the abject while at the

³⁴ Blixen’s meta-story “Det Ubeskrevne Blad” (“The Blank Page,” 1957) is of course one of the most prominent – albeit non-Gothic – examples of the correlation between paper sheet and linen sheet, although that is the narrative of a sexual encounter which likely never happened.

same time suggesting an adolescent and all-consuming fear of both hymenal bleeding and menstrual blood. Arnold reacts the way he always does: he passes out. In both “Sphinxen” and Andersen’s “Tante Tandpine,” the Gothic romance pattern of the persecuted maiden and the monster-villain is reversed by oddly feminized male protagonists, swooning and gasping and falling into nightmarish states of vulnerability as they try to escape a monstrously unstable and murderous, sometimes sexually aggressive female. This sexually tinged abandon and fragile femininity are conventionally illustrated by Henry Fuseli’s famous painting, *The Nightmare* (1781), which might equally visualize Andersen’s “Tante Tandpine.” Like that and “Sphinxen,”



the painting takes the spectator both inside and outside, as it conjoins sexuality and death with a grand gesture. It has consequently, like many literary Gothic classics, been parodied endlessly.³⁵ “Sphinxen” becomes almost a Bluebeard-tale in reverse when on the brink of marriage

Goldini threatens Arnold that “Blod vil det koste” (“it will cost blood,” 70) if he does not blindly obey her will. The original mythical sphinx is, of course, a female monstrous hybrid, who threatens the dismemberment of those who fail her test. Ingemann and Andersen’s protagonists are both males, yet represent a masochistic, mutilated and victimized femininity derived from the male Gothic imaginary of de Sade, Lewis, Poe, Hoffmann, Stoker, etc. This is one of multiple ways in which “Sphinxen” both negotiates and maintains what is considered traditionally feminine and masculine in Gothic narratives as the unstable construction of gender is but one element in the fragmentation of the self.

³⁵ Not coincidentally, Fuseli’s painting opens the exhibit *Schwarze Romantik Von Goya bis Max Ernst* at Frankfurt’s Städel Museum (2012-13), now located at Musée d’Orsay in Paris. It is a testimony to the continued European interest in the Gothic imagination, as it catalogues all thinkable visual horrors from the 1700s to Max Ernst.

4.16 The Persecuted Maiden of the Female Gothic

“Sphinxen” seems to be a hybrid between Male and Female Gothic, as the phallic-masculine stick with its enigmatic female figurine implies. First and foremost, the plot is underpinned by the Oedipal myth, which Williams and Fleenor identify with the Male Gothic. Such is made clear by the constant reference to the mythical sphinx, the struggle to gain hidden knowledge of the forbidden mother and Arnold’s conflation of Cordula-Madonna-Mother in the gallery. In addition, doubles and Doppelgängers are prevalent in Male Gothic, usually employed to illustrate its themes of paranoia and schizophrenia in the male subject. However, despite its nightmarish scenes of bloody persecution and the cluster of obviously phallic images in the uncanny stick-steed-pen-dagger-key-scepter metamorphoses, which bring Arnold physically and intellectually forward in the story, “Sphinxen” is not primarily about male homo-erotic desire, male agency or male transgressions of social taboos like *The Monk*, *Caleb Williams*, *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, or *Frankenstein*. Instead, like “Moster Maria,” it seems to be about the kind of imprisonment and virtuous passivity normally found in Female Gothic – or rather ‘Feminine Gothic’ since we are focusing on the constructed gender of the speaking subject in the text rather than the gender of the author.

Like a traditional heroine in the style of Radcliffe, Arnold is the orphaned and persecuted maiden in search of an absent mother while entrapped in a labyrinthine castle by a masculinized tyrant and transgressor, who threatens death and rape, and ultimately like that maiden and all her sisters in drugstore Gothic, he supposedly finds true love, a true self and a stable home through marriage. The Female plot traces the passage from childhood to maturity and appropriate socialisation, an individuation achieved through disciplined subjectivity, as Arnold learns to resist the beast within and sublimate his sexual urges. Although “Sphinxen” does not share with

Female Gothic the explained supernatural (unless one takes Arnold's repeated questioning of his own sanity literally), it does claim a happy ending ensured by the ur-plot of restraint and virtue rewarded with property. In her pioneering essay on the Female Gothic, Ellen Moers was the first critic to remark upon the property interests in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and by extension property ownership as the ground for rights and personhood. Property rights are an element that is severely downplayed in "Sphinxen," as the dominant focus is on the romance between Cordula and Arnold, although they are ultimately inseparable issues. Although it is barely hinted at, we must assume that the haunted castle is Arnold's ancestral home given the abundance of family portraits there. After Goldini is punished for her violent usurpation of it, Arnold should be able to claim the ancestral estate as his own. Instead, there is no mention of it, while Cordula's castle is repeatedly mentioned during the final scene of nuptial bliss: the property Arnold will have access to will not be his inherited estate, but his wife's, as in the classic romance plot that Blixen also employs in *Gengældens Veje*, but reversely gendered.

Ingemann seems to marry the structure of the fairy tale and the *Dannelsesroman* with the similarly socializing, educational purpose of the Female Gothic. Ann Williams argues that the Female Gothic demands a happy ending in the form of the conventional marriage, which symbolizes the heroine's "wedding to culture" (103). At the same time, Gary Kelly has demonstrated how Female Gothic was used to promote middle-class values of democracy and meritocracy as a viable alternative to the hegemonic order represented for instance in the aristocratic and elitist ideology of Walpole's *Otranto* (1764), thus participating in the evolution of the modern state. In contrast to this, and despite employing conventions from the Female Gothic and renegotiating the gendered positions in that plot, Ingemann, fervent royalist and staunch supporter of the absolute monarchy, seems both socially and politically conservative,

consistent with the agenda of his 1830s historical romances, but uneasily so. The villain, Princess Goldini, may be an evil, lascivious and ambitious aristocrat, who is duly punished, and Arnold is at first introduced as a poor, orphaned student who has to survive by his own merit in an increasingly commercialized and bourgeois world, as indicated by the marketplace setting in the opening scene. However, Arnold is also, as it turns out, the rightful and inherent heir to the throne and the estate, and he has to do very little to reclaim both – except to marry the right (equally aristocratic) girl, stay quiet and give up his quest for answers; or in other words refrain from questioning the status quo.

The transfiguration at the end – and the transfer of property – cannot take place until Arnold has given up his apparently subversive hermeneutic project. In contrast, the Female Gothic asserts the power of the mind to comprehend a world which, though mysterious, is ultimately sensible; the ghosts and supernatural events are explained. DeLamotte argues that “not knowing for sure is the primary source of Gothic terror. An essential activity of the Gothic protagonist is therefore interpretation” (DeLamotte 48). Thus the Gothic heroine on a quest for her own identity becomes the detective’s prototype in the long evolution of ‘mystery’ fiction out of Gothic romance. One might even argue that “Sphinxen” with its quest for clues and its murder mystery is a Danish prototype of the detective novel, which Steen Steensen Blicher would perfect in the 1820s in a more realistic setting.³⁶ However, renouncing both the Radcliffean sensibility and Poe-esque ratiocination normally employed to solve the mysteries of the romance and the detective story, respectively, Arnold must relinquish his analytical reflection and forfeit the certainty of knowing in order to achieve the postulated happy ending, as usual in Ingemann’s texts. His tracing of his self becomes in the course of the story an epistemological quest for

³⁶ An argument can certainly be made for the profound influence of Gothic tropes on modern Scandinavian crime fiction, not least in Stieg Larsson’s ubiquitous Millennium trilogy.

certainty. When asked at the end if he no longer dreads the mysterious sphinx, and implicitly its lack of finite meaning, Arnold responds: “Nei, nu er jeg forsonet med dens hellige Mysterium...og spørger Sphinxen mig atter: Hvo er du? og Hvo er jeg? - see, da vil jeg pege op paa Himmelens Stjerner og sige: der kan du læse det, jeg veed det ikke, jeg vil og skal vel ikke vide det nu” (“No, I am now reconciled with its holy mystery... and if the sphinx will ask me again: Who are you? And who am I? – look, then I will point to the starry sky above and say: you may read it there; I do not know, and I would and should not know it now,” 72). In the reactionary Protestant paradigm that Ingemann maintains throughout his literary career, the quest for knowledge remains a demonic epistemological project echoing the transgressive curiosity of the original Fall, punished in many of his tales. Arnold, at the end a deliberately blind Oedipus, cannot achieve happiness until he gives up finding a final answer to the Oedipal riddle, leaving such unanswered questions safely in the hands of an invisible God: it is not for us to know the essence of His creation, at least not in this life. At the same time, maintaining the ambiguity of the text, Arnold’s Kantian reference to the reading of the stars implies that he will continue his Faustian hermeneutic project, as Johansen suggests (Johansen 1997: 44).³⁷ And why would he not? He is after all surrounded by texts from beginning to end.

4.17 Textual Labyrinths

From the very first scene, in which the demonic saleswoman is hawking her inexplicably transforming sticks, Arnold is surrounded by enigmatic and duplicitous signs: the semantic shifts of the sticks signal the lability of the semiotic universe (Johansen 1999: 545). As in other

³⁷ The implicit reference in the phenomenal stars to Kant’s internal moral law can be seen as part of “the Romantic appropriation of the inwardness of the divine but Kant himself was appalled at the Romantic attempt to make idiosyncratic poetic imagination, rather than what he called the ‘common moral consciousness’, the center of the self” (Rorty 29).

fantastic texts, words become reality: Arnold becomes what the stick variously means, from a romantic-poetic student to a damned being who has entered a demonic pact. From that point on, the overdetermined sign of the stick with its multiple significations becomes a highly underdetermined sign: the uninterpretable and uninterpreted sphinx, which to support its resistance to human comprehension is placed among not just “Pyramider og Obelisker” but “gaadefulde Hieroglypher” (“enigmatic hieroglyphics”), signs that were not deciphered by Champollion until 1822 and which were so puzzling that Schubert called the language of dreams a ‘hieroglyphic’ code in *Die Symbolik des Traumes* (1814). This, along with the uncontrollable sequence of events suggests that we are in a dream-like universe, or what Todorov describes as a psychotic or regressive child-like state, in which signifier and signified are not distinguishable.

Arnold’s quest for meaning is further complicated by the dominant spaces in the story: the galleries, the library, the prison cell and his study. The galleries blur the line between representation, reference and reality, not least due to the veiled paintings, which perhaps come to life. The library with its endless circulation of texts has a similar function: signs, images and texts signify other signs, images and texts in an infinite play of relations, which never finds a definite resting place but continually postpones meaning. It is in the library that the already well-read student stumbles upon Hoffmann’s “Der Goldne Topf”:

[han] syntes tilsidst, at det var noget af hans eget Liv og Levnet, han læste. Hvordan hænger det sammen - tænkte han - du skulde dog vel aldrig selv være Studenten Anselmus? Du skulde dog vel aldrig være 'ein Phantasiestück in Callott's Manier' ... Længer kom han ikke i disse gale Tanker, som nær havde bragt ham til at drage sin Originalitet, som et levende Menneske, i Tvivl (47).

Eventually he thought that it was his own life story he was reading. How does this make any sense - he thought – you wouldn’t happen to be the student Anselmus yourself by any chance? You wouldn’t happen to be 'ein Phantasiestück in Callott's Manier' ... He did not

go any further into these mad thoughts... which had almost made him doubt his own originality as a living human being.

The reference to Jacques Callot both honors Hoffmann's main inspiration and visualizes Arnold's predicament. Examples such as Callot's *Les deux Pantalons se regardent* (1617) and



Bello Sguarda et Couiello (1622) succinctly illustrate Arnold's problem of finding originality among doubles, copies, and references. Moreover, as Callot's famous prints have been reduplicated and multiplied infinitely, making it difficult historically to identify the originals,

Arnold's problem is finding originality among doubles, copies, and references, as the doubling of texts, objects and names creates a simulacrum which subverts the relationship between model

and copy as well as between word and object, in the same way that the omnipresent Doppelgänger paradoxically both doubles and negates the original subject – “er jeg en eller to?” (“am I one or two?” 49),



Arnold asks. Traditional ideas of reality or referential

logic are thus suspended, deferring any final, absolute or external meaning. In “Pulcinellen” (1864) the actor-protagonist is dressed like Callot's characters in a grotesque masquerade; part street performer, part monster as his mask with its long beak-like nose seems inextricable from his face. As he dies in the Florence square during a tour de force performance of Romantic masterpieces, he becomes variously Goethe's Faust and Byron's Manfred and Don Juan, to the point where the fantastic hesitation between explanation models becomes both the protagonist's, the spectators' and the reader's. In his *Faust* soliloquy, he exclaims: “Jeg er et mislykket Kunstværk... jeg er et Fuskerværk baade af min Skjæbne og mig selv og min berømte poetiske

Skaber” (210; “I’m a failed work of art... I’m a work of fraud as created by my fate, myself and my famous poetic maker”). Not only his persona but his self is performed, assembled as a collage of quotes, and that discursively constructed self appears to be a fraud.

Arnold, too, constantly quotes other texts, be it Hoffmann, Shakespeare, the Bible, fairy tales, or other texts and images from his childhood. Overcome with what Harold Bloom calls the anxiety of influence, the horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica, his natural response is to create another text, another self, and hopefully an original one. The quantity of writer-protagonists in the Romantic Fantastic is not coincidental, engaged as they are in writing their way to a more useful sense of reality through its aesthetic simulation. Perhaps resembling Hoffmann’s mad Nathanael more than Anselmus, Arnold makes a resolution: ”Jeg vil dog optegne, hvad jeg kan udfinde, der er Mening i, af alt dette Virvar, at jeg ikke imorgen igjen skal blande mine Drømme dermed, og være ligesaa gal, som igaar, og iforgaars, og alle de andre Dage” (“I will, then, note down what I can find meaning in, in this entire chaos, so that tomorrow I will not again confuse my dreams with it and be as mad as yesterday and the day before yesterday and all the other days,” 63). But this is not so easy, as the Danish etymology of the contractual and omnipresent bargain ‘*Forskrivelsen*’ also indicates: writing becomes a diabolical process. Eventually his study morphs into his prison cell, and for the poet those two spaces may in fact be one and the same:

Paa Væggene saae han hist og her indridset Skrift; han holdt Lyset til og studsede; thi det var ligesom han her saae sin egen Haandskrift, og hvad han læste, var Steder af Machbeth, som han selv kunde udenad, og som ofte faldt ham ind naar han var eene. Der stod ogsaa enkelte Bibelsprog, og Navnet Goldini stødte han ofte paa; men efter det fulgte gjerne en frygtelig Forbandelse af det gamle Testamente (62).

Here and there on the walls he saw engraved writing; puzzled he held up the candle for it was as if he saw here his own handwriting, and what he read were passages from Macbeth

which he knew by heart and which often came to him when he was alone. There were also some biblical verse and the name Goldini he often came across but after it followed usually a terrible curse from the Old Testament.

Literally seeing the writing on the wall, he is imprisoned and held back by quotes from other works written in his own hand, mirroring his artistic and personal process. The monster which threatens destruction in the abyss is not extricable from the writing: before Arnold meets her, Goldini is a sign, a text on the wall. This dizzying *mise-en-abîme* of fiction becomes the Romantic topos of the abyss, “Afgrunden,” which Arnold is damned by Goldini’s “Uhyre” (“monster”) to stumble into while writing as he struggles to set himself free from previous works - echoing the literal Fall of the Adam he wishes to be and marking another literal and textual obstacle to communication: this is live burial but in textual echoes of the past, from which Arnold does not manage to free himself. As he is thus struggling to have his story told on both levels of plot and structure, the ability of the post-Kantian subject to take over the divine powers of creation is of great importance, not just here but generally in Romantic texts, as are the possibility of transcendence and the ontological status of the productive imagination. The subject is alternately omnipotent and powerless, creator of and created by words and world, writing and rewriting the hand of God as the implicit reference to “The Book of Daniel” in the prison cell suggests.

Arnold’s casting himself as a postlapsarian Adam who has managed to find his way back to the Paradise lost indicates a longing for a time preceding the division of signs into signifiers and signifieds as created by Adam himself, a time when it was still possible to put words to something for the first time, before meaning became contingent. A draft of modern man and facing a new age, Arnold attempts to define his own reality and self, and to name his own events in an act which like all fiction reduplicates the first task given to Adam by his Maker.

This project seems dizzyingly thrilling and diabolically dangerous at the same time. Ultimately it is negated by the post-Romantic and Faustian “Pulcinellen” in 1864: like the Romantic heroes he idolizes, the actor transgresses “Menneskenaturens Grænser” (“the limits of human nature”) and identifies himself defiantly as ”hverken Tidens eller Rummet Træl” (“not the slave of neither time nor space,” 215) but ultimately chokes to death on his über-Romantic quotes from Goethe and Byron: the text has already been written. Commenting on the impossible quest of the post-Enlightenment poet to rebel against death’s necessity and his anxiety of influence in his antagonistic reworking of previous works, Harold Bloom states:

his quest necessarily encompasses... the death of poetry. When it dies... it will be self-slain, murdered by its own past strength... Romanticism, for all its glories, may have been a vast visionary tragedy, the self-battled enterprise not of Prometheus but of blinded Oedipus, who did not know that the Sphinx was his muse (Bloom 10).

If the meaning of a poem can only be another poem, a ‘misprision’ of former poems as Bloom has it, then literature is not an allegorical representation of an external Reality or Truth, but is like reality and truth a human and relational construct which can only mean other constructs. Supporting this is the authorial doubling between Ingemann and Hoffmann, reduplicated in the relations between Arnold as a writer of his own story and as a reader of Hoffmann, along with all the other doublings on all levels of ‘reality’ in the story. The metafictional, intertextual elements are obviously part of Ingemann’s Romantic irony, echoing Hoffmann’s fiction, which reveals the mimetic representation of reality and the possibility of transcendence to be an illusion.

The daunting anxiety of poetic influence is not the only source of fear. While the Gothic and the uncanny thrive on the horror of things not being what they seem, the object of fear is normally expelled and ‘normality’ restored. But the unresolved labyrinthine confusion and the fear of the discursively constructed self in “Sphinxen,” and by extension Andersen’s “Tante

Tandpine” are tied to fundamental and disturbing duplicities, which point to the postmodern Gothic and its peculiarly reflexive form of narrative anxiety which stems from the sense that:

...things are not only not what they seem: what they seem is what they are, not a unity of word or image and thing, but words and images without things or as things themselves, effects of narrative form and nothing else. Unstable, unfixed and ungrounded in any reality, truth or identity other than those that narratives provide, there emerges a threat of sublime excess, of a new darkness of multiple and labyrinthine narratives, in which human myths again dissolve, confronted by an uncanny force beyond its control (Botting 1996: 170).

While Ingemann’s works generally display an intense and modern, often uncanny, play with the boundaries between fiction and reality, words and silence, absence and presence, figurative and literal, symbolic and allegorical, in “Sphinxen” such binaries create a peculiarly textual horror and further the disorientation of the unstable self created by the Gothic tropes: a self that is not only doubled, fragmented, stabbed and violated, but ultimately also reduced to a floating signifier - or mere fiction.

4.18 Ingemann Then and Now: Critical Views

While *Eventyr og Fortællinger* tellingly was not reviewed in Denmark despite the fact that Ingemann was already an established writer, later literary historians have taken offense to precisely this modern text-conscious quality of Ingemann’s writing. In 1890 Valdemar Vedel writes that in this phase – not unlike Arnold, it would seem - ”tumledes han om mellem alle Slags litterære Paavirkninger, tilegnede sig Tidens fantastiske Gjæring... men denne Produktion var overfladisk” (“He stumbled about all kinds of literary influences, adopted the fantastic unrest [lit. fermentation] of the times... but this production was superficial,” 153). What was perceived to be superficial then of course may be the very point today. Similarly, F. Rønning writes in 1927 that although Ingemann’s pre-1819 production contains ”ikke saa lidt usundt” (“quite a few

unhealthy elements”), he at least has a message, which, however, vanishes in literary experiments soon thereafter: “i 1819-20 har han intet på Hjerte... Han staar eksperimenterende over for sine Emner, anstiller Forsøg saa med ét, saa med et andet. Men den Digter, der gør det, er færdig...” (“In 1819-20 he has nothing on his mind... He faces his topics in an experimenting fashion, sets up experiments with now one thing, now the other. But the poet who does so is finished,” 179). Likewise Billeskov Jansen reduces the complex “Sphinxen” to a mere experiment: “Særlig i Fremstillingen af Hoffmanns Yndlingstema, Personlighedsspaltningen, føler man, at Ingemanns Eventyr er en Stiløvelse” (“Particularly in the representation of Hoffmann’s favorite theme, the split personality, one feels that Ingemann’s fairy tale is a mere stylistic exercise,” 131). There is thus a tendency to look for a constructive message and consequently dismiss the texts based on their embrace of Gothic surface and superficiality, which continues in Blixen’s reviews 100 years later.

Ingemann himself must eventually have grown uncomfortable with the self-reflexive irony and the dangerous, perhaps near-blasphemous explorations of the subject’s power of creation; his prologue to the 1845 edition of *Eventyr og Fortællinger* says that the purpose was:

at fremstille hvorledes en Romantik, der bevæger sig mellem Vanviddets og Ideens Dybder, enten maa forvilde sig i huul Nihilisme og dæmonisk Mørke – hvilket er tilfældet med nogle af Hoffmanns ‘Fantasistykker’ navnlig med ”Sandmanden” – eller paa Ideens Vinger udsvinge sig i Frihedens Region.

to represent how a Romanticism which moves between the depths of madness and the depths of the Idea must either stray into hollow nihilism or demonic darkness – which is the case with some of Hoffmann’s ‘Fantasy pieces’, particularly “The Sandman” – or on the wings of the Idea to soar into the region of freedom.

”Sphinxen,” like its eponymous figurine, is a fantastic riddle and can of course with its multiple ironies and playful twists easily come down on either side of this spectrum ranging from

nihilistic, demonic darkness to complete freedom in the realm of Ideas, despite Ingemann's post-rationalization after the fact. The Ingemann of 1845 thus seems heavily influenced by the anxiety of extremes established early in the Danish Golden Age construction and fortified only by the Modern Breakthrough of the early 1870s. In 1886 at the event of Ingemann's approaching centennial, literary historian H. Schwanenflügel, still subscribing to Georg Brandes' ideas at the time, described Ingemann's early writings as "mere Drømme, der udklækkes i en Febersygs Hjerne end i en sund Fantasis Værksted" ("More like dreams hatched in the brain of someone sick with fever than in the workshop of a healthy imagination," 92). Brandes had of course completely obliterated Ingemann in his 1873 chapter on Danish Romanticism in *Hovedstrømninger* and in his 1887 portrait of Ingemann, as part of his – successful - ideological program to disqualify Romantic literature as low-brow, un-aesthetic, and uncultured, as discussed in the previous chapter. Apparently missing the radical potential of the deceptive surfaces and theatrical gestures in "Sphinxen," he dismisses the story as follows: "Det hele er Gøgl og Tomhed, interesseløst og virkningsløst som enhver ydre Manér, der efterabes... meningsløse end en Sindssygs vildeste Fagter" ("It is all tomfoolery and emptiness, uninteresting and ineffective, as any outer mannerism, which is imitated... more meaningless than the wild gestures of a madman," Brandes 1887: 443). Having felt the vitriol of the Danish academic criticism before the 1820 publication of *Eventyr og Fortællinger*, Ingemann formulates a pre-emptive defense in "Sphinxen," which anticipates the critical rhetoric of disease and madness associated with the German-influenced *Schwarze Romantik*: "De betragtede ham som en Phantast, der ikke var rigtig i Hovedet, og som den nyere tydske Poesie udentvivl havde gjort forskruet og gal" ("They considered him a phantast, who was not right in the head, and whom the recent German poetry no doubt had turned deluded and mad," 48). His own anxiety of

influence becomes Arnold's. The Danish literary figure of *Fantasten* finds its first true embodiment in Arnold and will be articulated over and over again in the course of the nineteenth century; not quite killed off by the writers of the Modern Breakthrough, he remains in continual struggle with any given reality principle of the established culture.

Ingemann himself, always a favorite with the popular audience, even in Germany and Sweden,³⁸ but spurned by critics and the Danish academy, has eventually found increasing academic relevance since the advent of the 1980s New Romantic poetry. The 1990s even saw the establishment of the B.S. Ingemann Society. Traditionally dismissed by critics as an unhealthy if necessary phase on his path toward becoming 'the real' Ingemann of the hymns and historical novels, the prose tales in particular have recently been reevaluated by critics as their violent conflicts between everyday realities and demonic underworlds, torn and tormented personalities alienated from bourgeois norms and the fundamental doubt about the construction of 'truth' and 'reality' seem to appeal to modern readers. Now we may also add to this list that peculiar foregrounding of the surface and the discursively constructed self which we find in the Gothic, which is no doubt supremely relevant to a post-millennial audience and which really should place Ingemann firmly within a larger European Gothic tradition concerned with the post-Romantic consistent if ambivalent demolition of the modern subject.

³⁸ *Eventyr og Fortællinger* was translated into German at least three times despite mixed reviews there, in which particularly Ingemann's dependence on Hoffmann caused offense. Some of his later collections were also translated in their entirety into Swedish and German.

Chapter 5. H. C. Andersen and the End of Romanticism.

5.1 H.C. Andersen's Romantic Contradictions: Introduction

Contemporary writers and close friends, B.S. Ingemann (1789-1862) and Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) both appeal to audiences of all ages, both are rather unorthodox in matters literary, religious and philosophical, and both are – perhaps consequently – placed at the margins of the Danish culture of *Dannelse* and have as such for the better part of a century enjoyed a popularity with the readers which has far exceeded the interest of the academy. Despite such similarities, they still define Danish Romanticism and the Danish Gothic in very different ways. The Romantic irony and playful metafictional awareness of “Sphinxen” becomes a prominent feature in Andersen growing into an almost nihilistic irony towards the end of his career. In his texts, the boundaries of the Romantic subject is constantly redefined and renegotiated in a series of metamorphoses and violent threats to the body. Touching upon the grotesque and the horrific along the way, he embraces the Gothic in his final text, “Tante Tandpine” (“Auntie Toothache”), which becomes the ultimate negation of the Romantic program.

Andersen is in many ways split between, on the one hand, Poetic Realism and the idealizing, often idyllic orientation of the *Biedermeier* culture, and on the other, the painful experiences of early dualistic Romanticism, which grows into the *Romantisme* influenced by Hoffmann, Heine, Hugo, and Byron. That clash is also evident in the reception of the tales that primarily define his reputation today, although he considered himself a novelist first and foremost. The tales were primarily written for financial reasons, and they were – like Ingemann’s tales - often poorly reviewed if noticed at all by reviewers and literary critics (de Mylius: ADL). The translations of the tales are part of the reception history; notably the burgeoning realism of

that age and its still cautious confrontations of issues such as poverty, death, gender and class, which gradually define the 1830s and 40s, are often omitted, even though the originals are already shaped by the parameters of the Danish censorship that lasted until 1848. Jackie Wullschlager points out that many of the English translations in the second half of the nineteenth century had very little to do with the Andersen known by Danish readers, as rather drastic changes were made in order to accommodate a fast-growing literary market and the moral code of Victorian England (Wullschlager 2002: 300, 2004: xliii). That means that Andersen's idiosyncratic, witty and ironic style, odd as it sounds to a Danish ear, is often not captured, sometimes deliberately as the tone itself was considered unsuitable for children, sometimes by chance because the source was yet another translation. More importantly, many of the translations have alternative endings or other changes made to modify whatever content was considered unconventional, norm-breaking or immoral, an element which contemporary Danish reviewers also sometimes lamented: Carsten Hauch was concerned about the moral quality of "Fyrtøiet" ("The Tinderbox," 1835) and even Ingemann advised his good friend to refrain from writing more of these tales after the publication of *Eventyr, fortalte for Børn* in 1835. Grievous examples of changes are the traditional English versions of "Fyrtøiet" ("The Tinderbox," 1835) and "Den lille pige med svovlstikkerne" ("The Little Match Girl," 1848), in which the protagonists in the former do not kiss, nor is the witch decapitated, whereas in the latter, the little girl does not die, even though clearly her death is the very point of the story. Generally, hints of sex and violence have been omitted from the translations, from both language and content. As Andersen's tales continue to be translated, adopted, transformed and occasionally misused, it seems therefore a legitimate question to ask whether readers outside of Denmark know the real Andersen, not least because his tales – perhaps as a result of this editing process which favors

happy endings - make up an inevitable part of the Western collective consciousness, the Disneyfied “The Little Mermaid” being the best example. Recently Tiina Ninnally has provided excellent translations of Andersen’s most widely known tales, which capture some of the oddity of his prose. I use her translation throughout the chapter unless otherwise noted.

Spanning six decades and counting numerous fairy tales, stories, poems, dramas and novels, Andersen’s body of work comes across as rather incoherent, in terms of genres and themes as well as style. While incoherence can be a response in itself, it was the lack of a coherent and objective *Livsanskuelse*, or world view, which Søren Kierkegaard famously considered missing in *Kun en Spillemand (Only a Fiddler, 1837)*, expressed in the 90-page Hegelian critique, *Af en Endnu Levendes Papirer (From the Papers of One Still Living, 1838)*. Instead Andersen's tales seem to express an epistemological and ontological struggle to establish a sense of meaning in life, closely tied to the recovery of a true and stable identity, whether the protagonists are insects, inanimate objects or human beings (Ingwersen 452). Certainly he can be considered the first Danish writer to describe psychologically the traumatic ties to childhood and the difficulty of passing the threshold to adulthood. The contradictions and sometimes failures in that struggle are often the very point, as will be demonstrated by “Tante Tandpine.” In that sense, it is understandable that Andersen, like Ingemann, felt misunderstood by the Danish literary parnassus, notably the prominent Johan Ludvig Heiberg and the other Hegelian formalists, as early as after Hertz’s attacks in the fall of 1830 but more pronounced after the Heiberg feud of 1840, which resulted in Heiberg’s mocking “En Sjæl efter Døden” (A Soul after Death, 1841) and Andersen’s counter-response in *En Digters Bazar (A Poet’s Bazaar, 1842)*. Heiberg and Christian Molbech had initially lauded Andersen’s early productions but Molbech’s 1833 review is characteristic: what is considered missing is ”den ordnende Fornuft, Forstandens Kraft til at

modne og udfolde Tanken... endelig Besindighedens og Smagens Evne til at lade Phantasien concentrere sin Virkning” (“the ordering principle of reason, the force of the intellect to mature and develop the thought... finally the ability of common sense and good taste to let the imagination focus its effect,” in *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur* Vol. 10). In other words: the restraint, reason and maturation favoured by the *Dannelses*-ideal. The criticism after the early 1840s would generally be positive but the 1835-1845 criticism labelled his imaginative form childish and naive, with no sense of the progress of history or ideas that would lend order to his stories, as Carl Elberling’s lamented in his review of “Lykkens Kalosker” (“The Galoshes of Fortune”) in 1839, often from the viewpoint of the Goethean *Dannelses*-tradition that Andersen was both upholding and dismantling. Andersen, like Hoffmann, represents a Romanticism torn between the traditional fairy tales or *Kunstmärchen* of Universal Romanticism on the one hand, and on the other, a gradual undermining of the mythical, unity-seeking premise of those narratives, as Romanticism also points forward to the dissolving – even nihilistic - tendency of modernism, as seen in the fantastic and absurd meta-ales such as *Fodreise (A Journey on Foot*, 1829) and “Skyggen” (“The Shadow,” 1847).

On the one hand, Andersen looked to Adam Oehlenschläger, who with his national epos “Guldhornene” had inaugurated the monistic *Universalromantik* in 1802. Andersen’s idea of Romanticism as a vision of unity is most clearly stated in “Klokken” (“The Bell”) from 1850. The belatedness of this vision – published some 45 years after the height of the philosophical and literary Romanticism that it is both a response to and an expression of – is a testimony to the inherent dichotomy in Andersen’s authorship. It was probably rather Oehlenschläger’s status as national poet, revered in all of Scandinavia and friends with Goethe, which Andersen felt inspired by, not least in the meta-narrative of Aladdin as artist, which influenced many of

Andersen's tales and novels, because Andersen's true literary kinship seems to be located in the dualistic vein in Danish Romanticism, as represented by Schack Staffeldt and sometimes Ingemann: the Romanticism of a painful disunity and sundering *Zerissenheit* which both define and mark the end of the Romantic era. From this *Romantisme* comes a greater psychological complexity and scope to a bourgeois culture and literature marked by a gradually increasing, yet still somewhat idealizing realism. There is a focus on what is taboo, on sexual drives and on what lies hidden beneath the surface, as the surface as a mental and cultural premise arises at that very time – in other words, *Det Interessante*. In Andersen's tales, this is often joined by a strong sense of melancholy pessimism regarding the possibility of reconciling the ideal with the real, apparent in the awkward conclusion to "Den Lille Havfrue" ("The Little Mermaid," 1836).

Such pessimism is further explored in his novels, which mark the general transition from *Dannelsesromanen*, the *Bildungsroman*, to the pre-naturalistic novel of defeat, *Undergangsromanen*, shaped by Andersen as early as 1837 with his third novel, *Kun en Spillemand*, which marks the nadir of his 1830s pessimism. In this novel, society is blamed for the demise of the artistic protagonist, to the chagrin of Søren Kierkegaard, who did not only miss a *Livsanskuelse* or world view, but decried the new tendencies towards nihilism, political rebelliousness and societal dissolution coming from the new French and German literature (de Mylius: ADL). Significantly, Andersen's tales, published between 1835 and 1872 and from the outset a wild combination of poetry, fantasy tale and everyday reality, grow increasingly realistic and lose their status as *Eventyr*, meaning both actual fairy tales (*Märchen*) and more fantastic, wondrous tales (*Abenteuer*): they are instead designated "historier," stories, as they mirror the development towards a more pessimistic realism, for example in "Ib og lille Christine" (1855) or "Portnerens Søn" ("The Janitor's Son," 1866). This vein of both cultural and existential pessimism and

irreconcilable dualism is highly prevalent in his works from the beginning of his literary career, combined with a keen psychological insight and a consistent exploration of the twin impulses of the death drive and the fear of death, which clearly make Andersen a pre-modernist. This pre-modernist orientation is especially obvious in his meta-tales of finding – or failing to find – poetic inspiration in some of his later tales such as “Lygtemændene ere i Byen” (“The Will-o’-the-wisps are in Town” 1865), “Hvad man kan hitte paa” (“What One Can Invent,” 1870), the witty and wicked “Loppen og Professoren” (“The Flea and the Professor,” 1872) and “Tante Tandpine.” The Romantic view of poetry as a divine and unifying force happily stumbled upon by the unwitting and unintentional genius in his encounter with unmitigated nature, first expressed by Oehlenschläger in “Aladdin” (1805) and later so clearly by Andersen in “Klokken,” is negated as these tales, in addition to “Skyggen” and *Kun en Spillemand* demonstrate an acute awareness of the conditions of the marketplace and the fact that art in more than one sense is a mere illusion – painstakingly man-made and utterly un-transcendent.

Many of the contradictions apparent in Andersen’s work are central to the Gothic: the generic hybridity; the conflict between a supernatural, nostalgic Romanticism and a socially conscious Realism; the constant clash between feeling and reason; an ironic self-awareness accompanied by unapologetic sentimentality; and the battle between high and popular culture that was inevitable in an increasingly democratic age. Certainly, the exploration of the role of the unconscious and of family ties in the construction of an often fragmented identity is something Andersen shares with Gothic writers, as is the identification of sex with death suggested in “Den Lille Havfrue” (1836), “Snedronningen” (“The Snow Queen,” 1845), and “Isjomfruen” (“The Ice Maiden,” 1862). The text that participates most fully in the Gothic is the tale Andersen wanted us

to think of as his last, “Tante Tandpine” (1872).³⁹ He also explores similar grotesque scenarios of violence, death and dissolution in other tales such as “Den Lille Havfrue,” “De Røde Sko” (“The Red Shoes,” 1845), “Skyggen” (“The Shadow,” 1847) and “Pigen, som traadte paa Brødet” (“The Girl who Trod on the Loaf,” 1859), while *Fodrejse (Journey on Foot, 1829)* highlights the slippery textual surfaces of the story. Hyperbole is, after all, Andersen’s favorite trope, and in “Tante Tandpine,” Gothic hyperbole and excess find a specifically Nordic shape, as opposed to the more German Gothic of Ingemann. Exploring the Gothic mode of the text with a particular focus on Andersen’s negotiation of the surface shaped by Gothic conventions affords some provocative answers. The Gothic is inherently preoccupied with the very themes of consumption, production and resistance that drive “Tante Tandpine,” as well as its tension between good and evil, purity and corruption, and life and death. Andersen, like Ingemann, was intimately familiar with the Gothic conventions of the pre-romantic ballad or legend, as his virtually unknown story “Det Sjunke Kloster” (The Sunken Convent, 1831) demonstrates. It is a verbatim translation of the German legend as told in the pre-Romantic Gothic style by Freidrick Gottschalk in his 1814 collection of German folktales. By 1831 such conventions were outdated. Set in a dark and melancholy forest, a medieval convent is absorbed into a roaring lake in a manner which foreshadows the fall of the house of Usher, as “Røg og Ild bølgede op af det frygtelige Svælg” (“smoke and fire surged from the terrible gulf”) as a punishment for the nuns’ lack of Christian mercy. A doomed love story ensues, as each night in the hour before midnight a knight calls on his beloved to emerge from the sunken convent, until “Nid og Ondskab” (“envy and evil”) sever

³⁹ Based on Andersen’s journals, Topsøe-Jensen shows that Andersen begun writing “Tante Tandpine” in 1870 only to abandon it in order to write the novel *Lykke-Peer*, with which is thematically related. He resumed writing the tale in 1871 and finished it in 1872 as the first of the five tales he completed that summer, of which “Loppen og Professoren” (“The Flea and the Professor”) was withheld for later publication. The abandonment of a traditional narrator and the consequent introduction of the student as the sensitive first-person narrator was part of the third and final phase of writing “Tante Tandpine” (Topsøe-Jensen 194-6, 205).

the literal thread which connects them, and the young knight hurls himself into the blood-red water. The story shows that Andersen was very much acquainted with the standard tropes of the early Gothic tradition, and at the same time it serves as an illustration of how Gothic clichés easily remain just that. In “Tante Tandpine,” written 40 years later, Andersen deftly negotiates Gothic conventions into a Danish everyday reality in order to confront difficult themes and questions that were arising around the time of the Modern Breakthrough and the demise of Romanticism signalled by Georg Brandes and the new heightened realism after 1870.⁴⁰

5.2 “Tante Tandpine”: Plot and Genre

With its message of the vanity of all things, “Tante Tandpine” might be one of the darkest and most despairing texts in the history of Danish literature. The frame narrative begins with the narrator’s purchase of the piece of paper on which the center story is printed. It has been found by the morally shady “Urtekræmmerdrengen,” the grocery boy, in the bin, where everything ends up anyway, as the narrator explains when we return to the frame at the end. Inside this frame there are four short chapters handwritten on this fragment of scrap paper: these four chapters form the first person narrative of a student, who is also an aspiring writer, and all the pains he goes through to create literature, with ‘help’ from his sugary sweet Auntie Mille with the fake teeth, always promising him candy in return for stories. She stays in his apartment one night and haunts him – possibly in his dreams - as the diabolical muse Satania Infernalis, who forces him into a reverse diabolical pact never to write again or the most excruciating pain will be inflicted

⁴⁰ Brandes, in fact, was the first critic to take Andersen’s tales seriously, as literature for adult readers and as the deliberate product of an artist who deviated from generic and stylistic orthodoxy and stringent compositions in order to explore the fundamental and primal layers of the individual, “det Ubevidstes Domæne” (“the domain of the unconscious,” Brandes 1869: 357). In contrast, Brandes identifies Ingemann’s popular historical novels as the real children’s literature, written for adults but too childish and inaccurate (“Uskyldig Løgn,” innocent lies) to be read by anyone over the age of exactly 12 and a half, while Andersen’s tales are written for children but rightly consumed by adult readers thanks to their imaginative and psychological depth (Brandes 1869: 325).

upon him by her sharp dental instruments. He sinks into a death-like sleep and cannot tell Satania and Mille apart in the morning. At the end - or really at the beginning of the frame narrative - everyone in the story is dead and the story has found its final destination in the bin. Or has it?

The level of violence, Oedipal-masochistic sexual tension, and despair at the inescapable death, corruption and destruction of all things offer a stark contrast to the *Biedermeier* harmonies painted in many of Andersen's earlier tales. The themes of personal and textual disintegration have often been explained with reference to Andersen's deteriorating health, toothaches and writer's block when he created the tale in the period 1870-72. Biographical fallacies aside, the tale bridges the dualistic version of Danish Romanticism and the Naturalism, which was inaugurated by Georg Brandes at the time it was written. Andersen's tales always display a strange oscillation between everyday reality and fairy tale. Many of them thus easily lend themselves to readings in the Fantastic mode, as Ib Johansen most prominently has demonstrated, as the reader hesitates between locating the inexplicable events in the realm of uncanny and mimetic, or in the marvelous. In "Tante Tandpine" the supernatural apparition of Satania Infernalis and her apparent connection to an ancient metaphysical force suggest a marvellous explanation, while the solid anchoring of the plot in a recognizable everyday reality seems to suggest otherwise. Placing the story in the uncanny mode, the vision of Satania has its source in the protagonist's repressed sexuality, the many nights spent alone in his room fretting over his lack of inspiration, the storm outside and the neighbours bustling around, which make it sound like the house is alive to the hyper-sensitive student, "som var det en Jordrystelse. Ligger jeg i Sengen, gaae Stødene gennem alle mine Lemmer" (219; "like an earthquake. If I'm lying in my bed, the jolts shudder through all my limbs," 415), and as he later announces: "Drøm og Virkelighed gik over i hinanden" (222; "Dream and reality merged into one," 420). The Gothic

and the Fantastic are not necessarily mutually exclusive and the hesitation between explanation models in the Fantastic support the Gothic focus on a fundamental epistemological confusion, as the protagonists cannot see clearly and are cut off from the “real” world.

A focus on the uncanny elements should not mean dismissing the mechanisms of the surface in the quest for psychological depth, as this is where some of the most interesting Gothic effects as well as coherence are found, as Eve Sedgwick has demonstrated. For example, the Gothic convention of live burial is used on the levels of plot and setting, as well as thematically, metaphorically and structurally: in the suffocating womb-like living room; in the student’s reverse rebirth as he falls backwards into a watery grave after the confrontation with Satania; in the obsession with teeth as a *memento mori*, dentures as death-in-life; and in the constant awareness of death as conventual punishment for transgression, whether original or subsequent. Structurally, the story is buried not just within the framed story but also on the level of plot literally in the bin, thus pairing the convention of live burial with the related trope of unspeakability. In Gothic texts, it is, as mentioned, “the position of the self to be blocked off and isolated from something to which it ought normally to have access,” live burial being the prime trope for this massive inaccessibility, while the inability to see clearly, or to distinguish between nightmarish fantasy and reality being is another related trope (Sedgwick 1980: 12). The student-artist is apparently blocked off from expressing himself, swearing that the framed story will never be printed. It is thus doubly buried: it will never be printed and it is buried inside a heavy frame, where in addition it is described as physically ending up in the bin. Let us, then, examine the story that seems to be buried within.

5.3 The Student and Auntie: The Family Romance

As if it were a love story, the center story is rather disturbingly referred to as “min og Tantes Historie” (“The Story of Auntie and Me”). It lies buried within the deceptively simple frame narrative and it begins: “Tante gav mig Slik-Sødt, da jeg var Lille. Mine Tænder holdt det ud, bleve ikke fordærvede; nu er jeg bleven ældre, bleven Student; hun forkjæler mig endnu med Sødt, siger at jeg er Digter” (“Auntie gave me sweets when I was little. My teeth survived; they didn’t get damaged [note that the Danish word ‘fordærvede’ also means ‘corrupt’ or ‘rotten’]. Now I’ve grown up and become a student. She still spoils me with sweets and tells me I’m a poet,” 412). This is followed by a kiss as she praises the student’s childish attempts at narrating. So, we immediately have established a physically and emotionally unhealthy relationship between the student and his maternal aunt stemming from his childhood and linked to the theme of the suffering artist. In varying forms, each short section of the story combines the intertwined components of strange family relations, death and art, all united by the dominant image of teeth as emblems of rotting decay and corruption, a reinvented *vanitas* motif. In other words, there is plenty of juicy, Gothic material for us to sink our teeth into.

The relationship between the student and Auntie is defined by temptation and resistance, bargaining and exchange, as she coaxes him into writing his little stories and he, painfully aware of his artistic limitations, tries to resist. This back-and-forth dynamic, so predominant in the Gothic mindset, is repeated in the key passage which describes their walk from the theatre one stormy, snowy night: “Vi stavrede frem i den dybe Snee... Jeg løftede hende, jeg holdt hende, jeg stødte hende frem. Kun to gange faldt vi, men vi faldt blødt” (218; “We staggered forward through the deep snow...I lifted her, I held her, I shoved [literally: thrust] her along. Only twice did we fall, but we fell softly,” 417). The theme of the Fall is thus thematized heavily – although

they fall softly, they do fall twice - and the obvious sexual connotations of the Danish formulation only grow stranger when they reach his lodgings: “Vi fik af os Overtøi og Nedertøi, og alt hvad Tøi der kunde kastes” (218; “We took off our overcoats and boots and what other clothes might be removed... she would make up the sofa in front of the connecting door to my room that was always kept locked. And that’s what happened [*literally*: And it happened],” 417). As Auntie agrees to stay on the couch, the fact that the door between his bedroom and the living room is always locked is carefully established. It is of course set up only to be transgressed: “Og det skete” – and it happened – in an odd choice of words and furthermore placed on a separate line of its own as if to draw attention to it. What exactly it is that happens, we have to wonder, to merit such a defamiliarizing formulation?

If Gothic fiction is a narrative of the processes of identity construction that occur within the tensions between prohibitions and transgressions, then there is no getting around the rehearsal of the Oedipal psychodrama, as Andersen’s young man seems brimful of repressed desire for his maternal aunt as he fails to liberate himself from – or symbolically kill off - the literary forefathers he wants to emulate as a writer. Dickens and Jean Paul, which are held out by the aunt as models, are certainly daunting paternal figures. More obviously, though, the only other male figure in the story, Brygger Rasmussen, Auntie’s close friend who once proposed to her, presides as a father figure in the little family constellation of three. When he dies, his sudden absence, echoed in the absence of teeth and thus life in his mouth full of “sorte Stumper” (“black stumps,” 215), clears the way for the student to connect with Auntie. In other words, while the psychoanalytic model may be problematic in some respects, it does remain extremely useful in its interrogation of the family romance, a central theme in Gothic. As noted, Gothic fiction is riddled with confusing familial relations and traumatically broken homes. We see it in the

majority of Blixen's tales with their complete absence of conventional nuclear families; Ingemann's hero Arnold is an orphan casting himself in the role of Oedipus facing the familial riddle of the sphinx; Peter Høeg describes the emotionally stunted lives of children abandoned by parents and guardians; and Skov's women are orphaned, switched at birth, raped by their fathers and attempted murdered by their mothers. In Andersen's case, Auntie Mille becomes a mother figure in the complete absence of the student's mother even from childhood memories. In fact, in a firm establishment of the uneasy relationship between life and death in this story, the baby brother who is mentioned in connection with Rasmussen's funeral, which eventually directly triggers the student's writing, has been delivered not by a mother but a stork – a fantasy which of course helps the protagonist deal with the trauma of (deferred) parental sexuality. Generally, the protagonists in Danish Gothic deal with painful losses and interruptions in the maturation process towards becoming a complete being, often in relation to a burgeoning sexuality. Relations in Gothic are either too distanced or too close, which again renders them even more disturbingly distanced, pointing through theatrical exaggeration to the unnatural roles we all play. This happens often through an incestuous tension, which is somewhat unusual in Danish literature but a favourite trope in Romantic and Gothic literature, as the great unspeakable sin that becomes part of a general representational crisis, as well as an interrogation of established roles and boundaries.

The new bourgeois sphere of intimacy in the Romantic age required strong emotional ties between family members, as children bonded with adults, particularly their mothers. Such was explored in Danish literature most famously and influentially in Thomasine Gyllembourg's widely imitated *Hverdagshistorier* (Stories of Everyday Life, 1827-1845), which had important instructional and normative value for the middle class. When Gyllembourg wrote her 'stories of

everyday life', the nuclear family was just emerging as a concept. Her stories, along with the more sentimental earlier tales by Andersen, helped shape the modern family constellation in the Danish consciousness. In these stories, we see the individual repeatedly asking the same question as Ingemann's Arnold in 1820: "Who am I?" That question of identity demands both a social and a psychological answer. Hindering the retrieval of an answer is the trope of incest, often between siblings unaware of their ties by blood, used by both Ingemann and Gyllembourg in order to interpret the changed, more individual-centered family structure. When the close bonds between family members threaten to revert into their tabooed corporeal equivalent, it is the ultimate violation of 'natural' ties. For Gothic writers incestuous tensions thus enable "a parody of the modern introverted nuclear family" in the exaggeration of the relations required by modern society, as Gothic critiques 'normal' human relationships by pushing them to destructive and strange extremes (Kilgour 12). *Satania Infernalis* perhaps hints at the universal inevitability of this in the allusions to the original Fall: Adam and Eve shared a Father and as such were siblings. The illegitimate relationship between Auntie and her nephew thus represents the incestuous love between siblings in a displaced form, as Bøggild notes (Bøggild 195)

The year in which "Tante Tandpine" was published was perhaps not coincidentally the year of Brandes' seminal lectures on nineteenth-century literature, sparking the Modern Breakthrough and ultimately the evaluation and complete dissolution of the bourgeois patriarchal family structure and along with it the repressed and unhealthy sexuality, which was its often fatal consequence. When the locked door bursts open in the middle of the night and Andersen's student is visited by the maternal and controlling Auntie, or rather her demonic version, who threatens to pick him apart and castrate him with the dentist tools she has for a hand, they are virtually indistinguishable. *Satania's* first comment is a sarcastic repetition of Auntie's chorus:

“Du er Digter!” (“You’re a poet!”), with the added threat of medieval-style torture: ”Ja, jeg skal digte Dig op i alle Pinens Versemaal! jeg skal give Dig Jern og Staal i kroppen, faae Traad i alle dine Nervetraade!” (220; ”Well, I’m going to write you into all the verses of pain. I’m going to give you iron and steel in your body, put fiber into all the fibers of your nerves,” 419). Auntie’s consistent luring him into writing becomes a reverse Faustian bargain and thus defamiliarized, expressing his own acute sense of inadequacy – not least as her promise of physicality is associated with pain, not pleasure. After Satania makes him swear to never write again, in what we cannot be entirely certain is a mere projection of his own hyper-sensitive mind, she promises:

‘See mig skal Du, men i en fyldigere, en Dig kjærere Skikkelse, end jeg er det nu! Du skal see mig som Tante Mille; og jeg vil sige: Digt, min søde Dreng! Du er en stor Digter, den største maaskee vi har! men troer Du mig, og begynder at digte, saa sætter jeg dine Vers i Musik, spiller dem paa din Mundharpe! Du søde Barn! - Husk paa mig, naar Du seer Tante Mille!’ Saa forsvandt hun (220).

’But you *will* see me, although in a more substantial [literally: fuller] form, one that is dearer to you than I am now. You will see me as Auntie Millie, and I’ll say: Write, my sweet boy! You’re a great poet, perhaps the greatest we have! But believe me, if you start writing, then I’ll set your verses to music and play them on your mouth organ. You sweet child. Think of me when you see Auntie Millie.’ Then she vanished (420).

His inability to distinguish between the two the next morning when he wakes up to Mille sitting next to him by the bed, despite the door being locked, attests to the simultaneous nurturing and destructive function of family ties: “Jeg syntes at hun smilede saa lumskelig. Jeg vidste ikke om det var den skikkelige Tante Mille, som elskede mig, eller den Forfærdelige, jeg i Nat havde givet Løfte” (222; “I thought she smiled so slyly. I couldn’t tell if it was the real Auntie Mille, who loved me, or the horrible one, to whom I had given my promise in the night,” 421). The two are likely one and the same as Mille’s nighttime visit allegedly to check on him in his sleep is envisioned by the half-sleeping student as the nightmarish Satania Infernalis. In the texts that deal with incestuous relations, often expressed through the Gothic trope of doubles, e.g.

Ingemann's "Sphinxen," Blixen's "Et Familieselskab," "Karyatiderne" and *Gengældelsens Veje* and Skov's *Silhuet af en Synder*, unstable familial relations dissolve the identifying masks that distinguish one person from another. When one person wears several masks, the established roles that uphold individual, family and society become meaningless as both moral and epistemological compasses.

5.4 The Uncanny: The Living Room as Torture Chamber

The defamiliarization of what is intimately familiar and well-known and the consequent instability of signs in general figure largely in what seems to be an inspiration for "Auntie Toothache", E.T.A. Hoffmann's semi-Gothic "Der Sandmann" (1817) and more famously in Freud's essay on the uncanny, which that story prompted. While Ingemann claimed Hoffmann's happy Golden Age fantasy "Der Goldne Topf" (1814) as the model for "Sphinxen," the themes of the disintegrated home, absent parents, troubled sexuality, the dualism of femininity, and nightmarish, perhaps hallucinatory, visions of demonic fiends of "Der Sandmann" seem to more accurately provide the foundation for both "Sphinxen" and "Tante Tandpine." While Ingemann explores the uncanny in his later more realistic tales, the apparently marvellous fairy tale setting in parts of "Sphinxen" seems to defuse some of the terror otherwise connected with the uncanny, viz. Freud's discussion in part III of his essay. Hoffmann's Nathanael and Andersen's student on the other hand are situated firmly in a recognizable reality from which their uncanny experiences emerge as something strangely familiar, belonging to the home, to what is private, something old-established in the mind, which has been rendered unfamiliar and secret through repression, but then returns, simultaneously same and different, in disguises outside them to haunt them from both their personal and cultural pasts. The threatening return of repressed psychological material is also evidenced by the figure of the double in these texts, which dissolves otherwise

clear boundaries between life and death, self and other, fantasy and reality, wholeness and fragmentation and ultimately defamiliarizes the self as the figure gives rise to pathological fantasies of being censored or persecuted. The experience of the uncanny thus disrupts the protagonists' sense of their own self, their home – the 'Heim' - and their place in the world.

For Ingemann, Andersen, Blixen, and Høeg, harmonious bourgeois relations are defamiliarized by referring to the identity established by such relations as mere masquerading and role play, often revealed to conceal deadly struggles. The source of the uncanny is in everyday life, the home, *hjemmet*, the 'Heim' - in

which the self supposedly has been anchored since the early nineteenth century. The transgressive space in many of the Danish stories is the living room, *Stuen*, the privileged site of Danish culture and mentality since the age of *Biedermeier*, as illustrated in Danish



Golden Age painter Wilhelm Marstrand's *Det Waagen-Petersenske familie-billede* (1836). In "Tante Tandpine," it is infused in true *Biedermeier* style with an awareness that something must be kept out in order to maintain that sense of quiet harmony. The room is familiar but strange:

Ilden brændte i min Kakkellovn, Themaskinen kom paa Bordet, der blev hyggeligt i den lille Stue, om ikke saa hyggeligt som hos Tante, hvor der ved Vintertid er tykke Gardiner for Døren, tykke Gardiner for Vinduerne, dobbelte Gulvtæpper med tre Lag tykt Papir under; man sidder der som i en veltilproppet Flaske med varm Luft...(219)

The fire burned in my stove, the tea urn was set on the table and the little room grew quite pleasant ['cozy' seems closer to the Danish 'hyggelige'] although not as pleasant as Auntie's parlor in the wintertime, with its thick curtains over the doors, thick curtains at the windows, and double carpets with three layers of thick paper underneath. Sitting there is like being in a tightly corked bottle filled with warm air... (417).

The *hyggelige* living space contracts into its opposite and becomes *uhyggeligt, unheimlich*: not a refuge but a suffocating, isolating prison pointing to the introverted mechanisms of the bourgeoisie. Like the candy-distributing Auntie, this space is only apparently nurturing and maternal: it is more like a tomb than a womb, as the clutter of commodities replaces the family that should populate it. Relations here are consumption-driven rather than procreation-driven, as Auntie remains unmarried despite offers, while devouring candy, literature and apparently little boys, too: her stubborn disregard for the health of the children while buying their affection is coupled with her uncanny “weakness for sweet children,” suggesting a Grimm-like cannibalistic witch, in the following paragraph:

Hun gav os Syltetøi og Sukker, uagtet det var en stor Fortræd for vore Tænder, men hun var svag ligeoverfor de søde Børn, sagde hun. Det var jo grusomt at negte dem den Smule Sødt, som de holde saa meget af. Og derfor holdt vi saa meget af Tante (215).

She gave us jam and sugar, even though they could cause great harm to our teeth, but she had a weakness for sweet children, she said. It was cruel to deny them the tiny amount of sweets that they loved so much. And that’s why we loved Auntie so dearly (413).

She defies societal conventions and seems to have made a choice to be deliberately ‘unnatural’, as represented by her fake teeth, which are furthermore connected not only to the childbirth she has opted out of but to Eve’s original transgression, as she reminisces during the conversation she and the student have in the living room before bedtime: ”den første Tand og Familieglæden herover....Uskylds Tand, skinnende som en lille hvid Melkedraabe, Melketanden. ...og Viisdoms Tænderne med, Fløimænd i Rækken, fødte under Pine og stor Besvær” (219; [The] first tooth and the family rejoiced... The tooth of innocence, gleaming like a little white drop of milk, my baby tooth...[The] wisdom teeth, the flank guards in the row, born with pain and great trouble,” 417). The odd choice of words recalls *Genesis* 3:16, in which Eve is cursed to suffer the severe pains of childbearing as a punishment for the sin, which ultimately resulted not only in a

religiously sanctioned gender hierarchy, which Auntie resists by holding out on Brygger Rasmussen, but in decay, transience and death. The 'Curse of Eve' is the curse of mankind. The living room thus sets the stage for the Gothic convention of a family curse in a slightly different form. It still, however, ensures in Chris Baldick's words that "fearful sense of inheritance in time", the impossible escape from the past, combined with "a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space," which "reinforce[e] one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration," which is the nucleus of Gothic fiction (Baldick 2001: xix). Thanks to Auntie – a perhaps not-so-distant cousin of Miss Havisham and Blixen's sisters in "Et Familieselskab" - we thus have an uncanny movement in which interior tendencies and external environment mirror each other, as Danish Gothic seems to engage with the transition from *Biedermeier* representations of domestic spaces as inherently family-centered, to a questioning, even an emptying of that space and thus of the social economy and identity it supports.

As the living room, the middle-class refuge from threatening forces of the world outside, is transformed into the obscure torture chamber located in the classic Gothic castles, relations become grounded in domination, voracious consumption, even annihilation. Blixen's descriptions of the often lethal outcome of heterosexual, bourgeois relationships also exemplify this tendency. Gothic, then, helps Andersen & Co articulate a nightmare vision of a modern world made up of detached and alienated individuals, a non-community that has dissolved into predatory and hostile relations which cannot be reconciled into a healthy social order. This conflict between individualism and duty is "antithetical to and subversive of social requirements" and thus signals both freedom and imminent doom (Kilgour 12).

5.5 Female Transgressions and the Interrogation of the Body

The transgressive acts at the heart of Gothic fiction generally focus on corruption in the structures that shape the country's political life and its family life (Heiland 5). Ultimately, the incestuous undercurrent, although apparently monstrous in itself, seems to be but one of many transgressions, emanating from resistance to the proper bourgeois familial and social bonds. Such defiant disregard for convention renders the perpetrator not a Romantic-Gothic villain-hero but a monster, physically abject, and often inevitably punished in the conservative versions of Gothic. Many of Ingemann's tales demonstrate such punishment, while Andersen and Blixen are more ambivalent, as their works arguably are shaped by their more or less consciously registered experience of a position outside the heterosexual social economy. Nevertheless, in a number of Andersen's tales the female is rendered monstrous, a physical anomaly subjected to a continual testing of the perimeters of her body.

Andersen's rather grotesque folk tale "De Røde Sko" ("The Red Shoes," 1845) illustrates the strange tension between celebratory defiance and horrific punishment, as the poor orphaned peasant girl Karen fails to play the role of a caring and grateful daughter to her adopted middle class mother and instead gives in to her vanity, wearing at her communion the sinfully red shoes



that will eventually and horrifically have to be cut off her body with her dancing feet still in them, leaving her a disfigured amputee. The transgression goes beyond a missing class consciousness, as Karen's vanity, the suggestive color of her unruly and apparently sinful dancing shoes, and the sheer physicality of the dancing suggest an unbridled burgeoning

sexuality. The punishment is equally physical, a literal mutilation and symbolic castration – a necessary step towards adulthood - administered in that most Gothic of sceneries, a churchyard at night, by a sword-wielding angel, apparently fresh out of Christian mercy, as illustrated by Vilhelm Pedersen: "Dandse skal Du!... Dandse paa dine røde Skoe, til Du bliver bleg og kold! til din Hud skrumper sammen som en Beenrads! dandse skal Du fra Dør til Dør" (88; "Dance you shall!...Dance in your red shoes until you turn pale and cold! Until your skin shrivels up like that of a skeleton! Dance from door to door," *my transl.*) until her feet are amputated from her body. Her repetition compulsion to keep sinning thus becomes the equivalent of the alienating curse cast on The Wandering Jew and The Flying Dutchman, and it is rather odd that the demonic force of the shoes seems to be in the service of the Christian moral lesson of sin, guilt and atonement that she must learn.

Dismemberment, consistent pain, the cutting out of her tongue, repeated humiliation and ultimately complete dissolution is also the price which Andersen's titular mermaid of "Den Lille Havfrue" (1837) must pay for her attempted social advancement and abandonment of her family and her underwater *Biedermeier*-idyllic home as she, too, pursues the object of her desire. The fact that the demonic here, too, is connected to a burgeoning sexuality is evident from the fact that she attains a proper female lower body and the similarities between this process and a deflowering: "da skilles din Hale ad og snerper ind til hvad Menneskene kalde nydelige Been, men det gjør ondt, det er som det skarpe Sværd gik igjennem dig... hvert Skridt du gjør, er som om du traadte paa en skarp Kniv, saa dit Blod maatte flyde" (99; "then your tale will split in two and shrink to what the humans call charming legs, but it will be painful. It will feel like a sharp sword is passing through you... every step you take will feel like you're treading on a sharp knife and make you blood flow," 79), which again is underlined by the irrevocability of the act:

her tail, and thus her original body, can never grow back, once she has completed this devilish transaction with the sea witch, surrounded by the white bones of the mermaid's ghostly predecessors. She may attain an immortal soul but the core of the story is the detailed descriptions of her drawn-out sufferings, which remain unarticulated and unable to enter the language of which she has been robbed: an isolated and powerless existence, she dies, like Karen, from the apparently literal bursting of her heart: the center of the body cannot hold and the women quite literally fall apart.

Likewise, the elaborate folk tale "Pigen, som traadte paa Brødet" ("The Girl who Trod on the Loaf," 1859), suggests that "the sexual drive knows only two possible answers in [Andersen's] universe: damnation or non-being" (Van Hees 1999: 79). In the story, the adolescent Inger is punished rather hyperbolically for her vanity by being condemned to



spending a century in hell. The loaf she steps on to avoid soiling her shoes grows inseparable from her foot and drags her through the dirty mud and into the hellish pit opening up underneath her, leaving only a black pool of water where she once stood to mark her impending dissolution. The further dehumanization of her underground happens in multiple ways, as she experiences the live burial and isolated state of parallel non-communication, which characterizes so many Gothic texts. Not only does the physical merging

of the foot with the loaf find its final metamorphosis in Inger growing stiff and paralyzed like a

marble statue, but she also seems to physically merge with “alt det ækle, levende Filteri” (114), all the slimy morass of the stinky environment, as the spiders, snakes and toads, which are initially writhing and seething and turning the pit into sheer undifferentiated matter, eventually emerge from her hair and clothes, now soiled beyond recognition: “Klæderne var som overskyllt med en eneste stor slimklat” (“It was as if her clothes had been drenched with one large mass of slime,” *all my transl.* 115). The liquidity of the images, which is also captured in Dugald Stewart Walker’s 1914 illustration of the bloodied and soiled girl, suggests a complete dissolution which cancels out a traditional exterior / interior relationship, as matter, the object, consumes the subject and the self seems to be lost, as the dissolution is also coming from within: “til sidst syntes hun, at hendes indvolde åd sig selv op” (“eventually it seemed to her that her internal organs ate themselves up from within,” 118). This leaves a horrid emptiness in “den hule, tomme Skal, der omsluttede den fængslede, piinte Sjæl” (“the hollow, empty shell, which enclosed the imprisoned, tortured soul,” 118), as the flies she once mutilated and tortured start buzzing around the face of this living-dead. The return of the flies underlines the dominant theme of vengeful punishment, as does the repeated chorus of “uh, hvor jeg pines!” (“oh, how I am tortured,” 117) to the point where Inger herself quite masochistically expresses the wish to have been “avet” – chastised and controlled – more before finding herself in this hell-hole, from which she is able to hear what goes on above to emphasize her complete isolation from the human world (117). The level of bodily horror and mutilation these female characters must face is remarkable and is in no way mitigated by the sentimental bleeding-heart Christian mercy meted out to them in the respective endings, in which the purportedly blessed dissolution is conveyed in religious terms as their bodies evaporate and turn into sea foam, timid birds or angelic beings. This may account for the cognitive dissonance and discomfort that have characterized the

reception history of particularly “The Red Shoes” and “The Little Mermaid.” Blixen is more celebratory of such societal defiance in her depiction of strong, witch-like female characters, but for Andersen it seems that female resistance to conventions can only go so far, and the punishment is strikingly graphic and physical, signalling at times even a remodelling of the body.

A recent strand of Gothic criticism uses Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection to explain the assertion of both individual and national identity by conferring less-than-subject status upon – or literally ‘throwing off or under’ - whatever psychological or historical conditions are deemed undesirable so that consistency of being can be claimed on both personal and cultural levels. As Fred Botting points out, the one consistency that can be easily identified in the hyper-malleable, hybrid genre of Gothic, is its capacity to “adapt formally and thematically” to the specific and changing fears and anxieties it simultaneously shapes and provides an outlet for: “through narrative patterns of appropriation and expulsion, Gothic figures provide historically and culturally determined social fantasies of the other with some stability, thereby constituting as much as dissolving the boundaries of system and identity” as the instability of the projected Other reflects the instability of the self “but the phantasmatic identification of otherness, nevertheless, establishes a powerful sense of consistency” (Botting 1998: 2). This helps explain the importance of repetitions in ever varying forms in Gothic fiction. While what is abjected, expelled and externalized as monstrous, unclean and improper is continually morphing to serve ever-changing needs, the changing status of the female body and the subjection of women have been a concern of consistent interest in Gothic fiction and its negotiation of what is considered acceptable forms of subjectivity and sociality, as early as *The Castle of Otranto*. The primary threat to the bourgeois familial organization and social structure around the Modern Breakthrough is perceived to be the rebellious and sexualized female, as evidenced for example

in the acrimonious *Sædelighedsfejde* of the 1880s, or the ‘Great Nordic War over Sexual Morals’. This ‘war’ was initially instigated in Denmark in the early 1880s by Elisabeth Grundtvig and Georg Brandes but ultimately, producing life-long enmities along the way, it involved Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Arne Garborg in Norway and August Strindberg in Sweden, and by extension, prominent women writers such as Amalie Skram, Adda Ravnkilde, og Erna Juel-Hansen, who explored the sexual and intellectual self-realization of the woman outside the bourgeois family in their novels. The consequent demonization of this ‘New Woman’, sometimes defiantly appropriating the male gaze, sometimes devouring the submissive man like a vampire, is most clearly visualized by Edvard Munch, who is as much an artist of his time as Andersen is. As Glenis Byron argues in her examination of fluidity, hybridity and shape-shifting in 1890s Gothic, the conventional dichotomy of good woman / evil woman marks an “attempt to stabilize the notion of proper



femininity by identifying the sexually aggressive female who usurps male strength as something alien and monstrous” (Byron 193). This opposition is, however, repeatedly undermined by monstrous metamorphic female figures who merge with the acceptably feminine figure or otherwise disrupt the “comfortable categories which allow for the defining and fixing of the human subject” (Byron 195). The apparently maternal Mille is but another side of the demonic Satania; they are personifications of dangerous seductiveness: one sweet, one torturous, both ultimately painful. Kristeva’s abject is precisely that which “disturbs identity, system, order.

What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1984: 4). What the female Gothic monsters of the late 19th century thus threaten is the “stability and integrity of the human subject” as they “confront the reader with the spectacle of dissolution,” as Byron argues (195). This is conveyed quite literally in *Satania Infernalis*.

5.6 Abjecting The Mother Monster

In Andersen’s visualization, the monstrous female is defined metonymically by her hand and its piercing extensions, which emphasize the horror of the abject and the ‘spectacle of dissolution’:

Jo hun spillede op og forfærdelig saae hun ud, selv om man ikke saae mere af hende end Haanden, den skyggegraa, iiskolde Haand, med de lange syletynde Fingre; hver af dem var et Piinsels-Redskab: Tommeltot og Slikkepot havde Knivtang og Skrue, Langemand endte i en spids Syl, Guldbrand var Vridbor og Lillefinger Sprøite med Myggegift (220).

Oh yes, she started playing, and how horrible she looked even though I could see no more of her than her hand, that shadowy gray, ice-cold hand with the long fingers as thin as awls. Each of them was a torture instrument: her thumb and index finger ended in a sharp awl, her ring finger was a gimlet, and her little finger a syringe full of mosquito poison (419).

The overwhelming examples of penetrating imagery which threatens the consequently effeminized student, represent a grotesque manifestation of masculine power, the very potency that he himself lacks in his writing and in his life in general, and which Auntie with her aggressive beckoning and general unnaturalness clearly possesses. At the same time, in this passage the terrifying awls, pincers, screws, gimlet and syringe are embedded in the Danish nursery rhyme which assigns silly names to each of the fingers on the hand, with “Slikkepot” for the index finger as an echo of Auntie Mille’s sugary means of bargaining.⁴¹ These names are something a mother would traditionally teach her child in the phase of acquiring a language and

⁴¹ The names of the fingers from the nursery rhyme are untranslatable but provide an important subtext of child-like weirdness. Nunnally simply writes “her index finger” for “Slikkepot” (419).

learning to distinguish the body and the self from the (m)other in the psychosexual development towards subjectivity: “The abject confronts us....with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling” (Kristeva 13). Andersen’s student’s confrontation with the abjected female re-enacts that push-and-pull process, which Barbara Creed also describes in her examination of the use of the monstrous feminine in horror films: “A crucial aspect of the abject is... that it can never be fully removed or set apart from the subject or society; the abject both threatens and beckons. The abject constitutes the other side of seemingly stable subjectivity” (Creed 1993: 121). The destabilization of subjectivity becomes apparent when the half-attractive, half-repulsive Mille-Satania is conjured up in what is presumably the student’s dreams to indicate the psychological process behind the child’s abjection of the (m)other to assert an autonomous and stable identity, the externalized monstrosity embodying the abjected contradictions and irreconcilables that he is both drawn to and repulsed by.

What the abject thus confronts the student with is the return of a condition preceding the identity he so desperately tries to establish, and accordingly, his own death made palpably real: Mille is death-in-life, unnatural and frozen, cheating time with her teeth and her resistance to a heteronormative lifestyle, which would organize her life in child-bearing cycles, but: ”Hun stod stille i Alderen” (215; “Her age never changed” (413), or literally: ‘She stood still / was frozen in age’). Satania, conversely, is life-in-death as she represents the threat of being literally torn apart.⁴² The insistent materiality of death triggers horror and fear in the student, as illustrated by

⁴² The student thus faces the traumatic experience of being confronted with the sort of materiality that shows him his own death, which according to Kristeva is different from the knowledge or meaning of death, which both can exist within the symbolic order (Kristeva 3)

Hans Tegner (circa 1900): he feels the repulsion of the abject, as the threat of falling back into the pre-linguistic stage means giving up all the linguistic structures by which we order our social world of meaning and gain subjectivity. The dream-like state that the student enters after passing out, sent off by a final piercing pain in the jaw, shows this regressive stage of dissolution with images of water in different symbolic forms:

Jeg fik til Afsked ligesom et gloende Sylestik op i
Kjæbebenet; men det dulmede snart, jeg ligesom gled
paa det bløde Vand, saae de hvide Aakander ...sænke
sig ned under mig, visne, løse sig op, og jeg sank med
dem, løsnedes i Fred og Hvile - - 'Døde, smelte hen som
Sneen!' sang og klang det i Vandet, 'dunste, hen i
Skyen, fare hen som Skyen!' – (221)

In farewell I got what felt like a glowing awl jabbed
into my jaw, but it soon faded. I felt as if I were
floating on gentle water. I saw the white water lilies
with the broad green leaves droop, sink below me,
wither, dissolve, and I sank with them, dissolving into
peace and rest. 'Die, melt away like the snow!' is what
I heard singing and ringing in the water. 'Evaporate
into the clouds, pass on like the clouds!' (420).



As the rich symbolism of the water imagery suggests, the twin themes of longing for and fearing death thus find their grand finale in this tale. Where the little mermaid in 1837 travels upwards through the water to attain an immortal soul, the student in 1872 sinks downwards into a complete entropic dissolution, “To bottomless perdition / There to dwell,” in John Milton’s words. The ultimate individualistic freedom found in the Romantic concept of the sublime is counteracted in the Gothic and Fantastic, which seek to dissolve boundaries and differences between self and other, life and death, man and nature, organic and inorganic objects, to reach “an imaginary zero condition, without time or space,” an entropic state of undifferentiated matter in which all tensions are reduced, which Rosemary Jackson compares to the death drive as

described in Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* and finds in de Sade and Poe (Jackson 72,79).

Echoing Burke's descriptions of the Sublime but expressing a problematization of the isolation of the individual in that encounter, this drive equals "a mystical quest for union with an absolute Other" (Jackson 78). While the religious subject would have faith that the dissolution of the self into a state of unbeing would lead to ultimate unity with a divine being, such faith is not expressed in Andersen's tale. As Bøggild writes, the student's claim to believe everything - "Jeg troer Alt!...Far hen! far hen!" ("I believe everything!... Go away! Go away!" 221) - in response to Satania's threats, equals not believing anything at all (Bøggild 193). The transcendent ideals of Romanticism have definitively been replaced by "a space of nonbeing, an absence" (Jackson 78).

Instead of looking to God or religion, while sinking downwards the student sees "store, lysende Navne, Indskrifter paa vaiende Seiers-Faner, Udødeligheds Patentet - skrevet paa Døgnfluens Vinge" (221; "Shining down through the water toward me were big, bright names. Inscriptions on fluttering victory banners, the proclamation of immortality – written on the wings of a mayfly," 420),⁴³ connecting his fear of failing as a writer with his fear of death, while the names, signs and inscriptions show his departure from the Symbolic order.⁴⁴ Despite the lack of religious belief – or perhaps rather because of it - death is experienced as a relief, a non-religious union of subject and object. The object in the shape of Satania offers both horror and identification: both a reminder of a previous state of being prior to signification and an engulfing threat to the self. The blurring of the boundaries between Satania and Mille and between the student and his own apparent phantasmatic projection, shows that the abjected, aberrant figures of our own disguised projections in Gothic texts often appear to be more alien than they really

⁴³ Note that the Danish "døgnflue" ('mayfly') is an idiomatic expression of a cultural product with limited shelf life and thus brings together the themes of transience and poetic inadequacy.

⁴⁴ As Bøggild points out, this passage brings to mind the motto which Keats, the prototype of the dead Romantic artist, had placed on his tombstone: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water" (Bøggild 201).

are, thus also marking violent eruptions of the uncanny. However, where Freud in his theories of the uncanny posits an identifiable 'core' in the unitary subject, in Kristeva's analysis there is no such thing but rather a fractured subject that experiences the abject when faced with the blurring of the distinction of I and Other. The abject is never truly expelled and the boundary between self and (monstrous) other, of subject and abject, human and non-human, remains blurred, giving way to a radically disrupted masculine subject, where the 'originary' self does not in fact exist under the surface. Where Kelly Hurley identifies liberating aspects in the plurality of Gothic selves freed from Gothic bodies and identity systems in fin-de-siècle British literature, the consequences of the blurring of the subject's boundaries in Andersen's perspective seem on the contrary distinctively frightening.

5.7 The Construction of Identity

What Gothic seems to always highlight is the fact that we are all creatures of conflicted desires, locked in an uncanny push-me-pull-you that propels us toward the objects we fear and to fear the very objects toward which we are propelled. Each of our abjections is an uncanny mixture of irreconcilables that we both long for and fear to recognize, but abjected so that consistency of being can be claimed. As the student seems to conjure up in his dreams the majestic and infernal "Hendes Forfærdelighed" ("Her Horrible Highness") who "asede og qvasede" ("mashed and gnashed") him, reducing him to "en krybende orm" ("a cringing worm") the ritualistic tug-of-war seems not only an exorcism, a confrontation with inadequacies and fears, but also, and related to it, a dramatized role play of power in the (often reversible) sadomasochistic dynamic that is inherent in intimate relations, which we also saw corporealized in the student and Auntie's back-and-forth movement in the snow (220). In Gothic "individual identity, including sexual identity, is social and relational rather than original or private" (Sedgwick 1981: 2). In stark

contrast to the script of the *Dannelsesroman*, most of the texts under scrutiny portray identity formation as a rehearsal of this play between victim and victimizer, dangerously reversible in Blixen's *Gengældelsens Veje* and Høeg's *De Måske Egnede*. Although Gothic is often divided into its Male and Female forms, the sadomasochistic relationship of dominance and restriction stays the same. As we saw in "Sphinxen," the paranoid fear of violation of one's body and mind dissolves gender categories, pushing characters to inhabit different roles in the unstable gender continuum. Male protagonists such as Ingemann's Arnold and Andersen's student swoon, faint, gasp and fall into the nightmarish states of vulnerability normally reserved for the persecuted maiden, as they try to escape the monstrously unstable and gender-defying female, who usurps the power of the Gothic villain. Privileging the ingress of the transgressive masculinized villain rather than the potential egress of the victimized protagonist, the texts revolve around entrances into private spaces, such as the bedroom and the body, as signified by the doors being flung violently open at night in both texts. Expressing such fears of violation, Andersen's student is begs for effacement and annihilation: "O lad mig være lille!...Lad mig slet ikke være!" ("Oh, let me be little... Let me not be at all," 221, *my transl.*).

In "Tante Tandpine" that fear of bodily disintegration is poignantly mixed with existential fears regarding the inability to escape the body, with the story's welter of references to the consequences of the original sin, and rotting, absent or fake teeth as *vanitas* symbols of lost innocence, lost youth and unavoidable decay and death.⁴⁵ Those themes are closely connected in a highly condensed manner in the tightly composed paragraphs and sections which make up the story. For example, in the short paragraph in which the student fondly remembers

⁴⁵ Poe's "Berenice" (1835) comes to mind in its similar correlation between teeth, death and absence but one might include Poe's fetishistic fixation on synecdochal bodily details in general and the corresponding violation of the human body in his texts.

the paternal Brygger Rasmussen, he is exclusively and metonymically characterized by his absence of teeth, as there are just a few black stumps, “kun nogle sorte Stumper” (215), left thanks to his consumption of sugar. Cut to Rasmussen’s funeral procession in which that deadly absence becomes literalized: Rasmussen is dead and gone. In addition, the student contemplates in childlike wondering:”Jeg tænkte meget over den Forvandling og om jeg vilde være istand til at kjende ham i den nye Skikkelse” (216; “I gave a good deal of thought to this transformation and to whether I would be able to recognize him in his new form,” 414), the new shape being the decorporealized angelic form he supposedly would morph into according to Auntie’s anecdote, a shape which further heightens the Manichean drama that the devilish Satania instigates, as Auntie seemingly morphs into her. The student does not easily distinguish between signifier and signified: words are reality and the figurative is taken literally, as is often the case in Fantastic texts. “Tante Tandpine” illustrates, in Rosemary Jackson’s words, a “metonymical rather than metaphorical process: one object does not stand for another, but literally becomes that other, slides into it, metamorphosing from one shape to another in a permanent flux and instability” (Jackson 41-2). Even Georg Brandes noted in Andersen’s tales this metonymical thought process connected to that of a child: ”en mere end barnlig Evne til ikke blot at lade det Ene gælde for det Andet, altsaa ombytte Alt, eller lade det Ene leve i det Andet, altsaa levendegøre Alt, men til ved det Ene hurtigt og flygtigt minde om det Andet, genfindende det Ene i det Andet” (“A more than child-like ability to not just let the one thing stand in for the other, that is to substitute everything; or let the one thing live in the other, that is to animate everything; but to let something quickly and fleetingly remind us of another thing, recovering the one in the other,” 1870: 307-8). While it creates marvelous myths in the realm of the fairy tale, the metonymical blurring and shape-shifting prove ominous and deadly in the economy of the Gothic, in which

the metonymical action of replacement means a blurring of the limit between subject and object, between 'I' and 'not-I', rendering a firm grasp of identity nearly impossible when the self is faced with the dissolution of separating categories. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" (1816) and *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815) as well as James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) display similar but much more extreme continual metamorphoses, which problematize the relation of the self to the phenomenal world, resulting in a highly unstable subjectivity and finally complete disintegration.

The fear of disintegration is apparent in the similarly metonymical correlation between Satania's hand of torture instruments and Auntie's teeth as tools of dismemberment. The same imagery of knives and swords cutting easily through fragile limbs runs through "The Little Mermaid" and "The Red Shoes" and result ultimately in complete physical and spiritual dissolution. Ingemann's Arnold, of course, spends the better part of "Sphinxen" being chased with a bloody knife (or is it rather his own pencil?), his skin marking an ultimate paper-thin boundary which is continually tested."Tante Tandpine," however, reflects much more clearly the sense in the Gothic of the body disappearing, not just in decorporealized ghosts – or in the transcendent economy of the fairy tale: angels and sea foam, to which we might compare



Auntie's designation of the student as "en Guds Engel," "one of God's angels" (222) as a veiled version of Satania's threat - but in the body being diffused into the surfaces that construct it in metonymical relations. Auntie is defined by her dentures, pure deceptive surfaces, which mask the black darkness where teeth were supposed to be. She morphs into Satania, who is defined by the dental instruments on her hand, which also signify absence, the cutting away of material. The monstrous Satania is a perfect representative of

Gothic identity, a disembodied matchstick figure. What confers identity upon her is the piece of cloth that designates her as female: "Snart blev Skikkelsen tydeligere, den fik et Slags Kjoletøi, meget tyndt, meget fiint, men det viste, at den hørte til Hunkjønnen" (220; "Soon the figure grew more distinct. It was wearing a sort of gown, very thin, but this showed that the figure was female," 418). Before that, she is a one-dimensional sign, not unlike Andersen's famous paper cuttings, a mere outline based on empty spaces and absence of material: "en Skikkelse, tynd og lang, som naar et Barn tegner med Griffel paa Tavlen Noget, der skal ligne et Menneske; en eneste tynd Streg er Legemet; en Streg og een til ere Armene; Benene ere ogsaa hver kun en Streg, Hovedet en Mangelkant" (220; "a figure, tall and thin, the kind a child draws with a pencil on a slate, something that is supposed to look like a person. A single thin line forms the body, one line and then another form the arms; the legs are each one line, the head a polygon," 418).

Thus apparently "devitalized or two-dimensional," Satania illustrates the presentation of character, which is characteristic of Gothic texts, in which "incompletely linguistic markings of 'character'" further not only an endless confusion of identities but also "maintain a draining but irreducible tension with a fiction of physical, personal presence"



(Sedgwick 1981: 255, 262). This dialectic of absence and presence is inherent in all fictional writing – in fact, all three of the student's literary productions are oral, as he expresses an acute awareness that the written account is always haunted by absence, or a lack of life, as he says - but Gothic consistently confronts it head on, echoed very visually in the contemporary Goth

aesthetic.⁴⁶ Decades before writing “Tante Tandpine,” Andersen had already explored this theme in “Skyggen” (1847), which sheds further light – or perhaps rather darkness - on the text.

5.8 **“Skyggen”: Shadow and Light**

Satania Infernalis seems to be sartorially constructed like the equally demonic shadow in “Skyggen,” Andersen’s nihilistic inversion of a fairy tale from 1847, which, too, details the consequences of a Faustian bargain. The learned man from the North is deeply engaged with the at that point marginalized study of the holy trinity in Danish Romanticism: *Det Gode, Det Sande og Det Skønne* (the Good, the True, and the Beautiful). On a voyage to Southern Europe, he loses



his shadow in a set-up which ultimately demolishes Plato’s allegory of the cave, which Vilhelm Pedersen’s illustration also intimates, underlining the increasing tension between the real and the ideal, which was only partially masked by the *Biedermeier*-

culture in the 1830s but which had become even more acute in mid-nineteenth-century

literature.⁴⁷ Ib Johansen notes the *camera obscura* effect which Andersen employs, in which

impressions are projected but in a distorted form, rendering Todorov’s marvelous all effect and

⁴⁶ Keeping his awareness of writing as absence in mind, it is ironic that it is the very materiality of the student’s fragmented narrative discarded in the bin which catches the attention of the narrator: “Der laae et par Blade af en større Skriversbog; den særdeles smukke og tydelige Haandskrift tildrog sig strax min Opmærksomhed” (215); “The handwriting was particularly beautiful and clear; it attracted my attention at once” (411).

⁴⁷ The 1840s and 1850s were a time of significant political and social change, as Oehlenschläger died in 1850 and the absolute monarchy ended with the death of King Christian VIII in 1848. Rather than a dramatic break between two literary eras, the more realistic Romantic writers of those decades, such as Meir Goldschmidt and Hans Egede Schack, anticipated the 1870s naturalistic rebellion against political conservatism, metaphysics and idealistic philosophy in general. Andersen, so attuned to his age, should be considered in relation to that growing sense of realism, although ambivalently so. The political upheaval and the heightened need for a strengthened national identity in this period of transition may also have impacted the dichotomy between the cool, reasonable Protestant North and the hot, barbaric Catholic South in “Skyggen,” a dichotomy apparent in classic Gothic novels.

optical illusion, not unlike the Gothic stage set: Weber's post-Enlightenment *Entzauberung* leaves behind a de-mystified, "secularized and disenchanted world" (Johansen 1993: 1).

The optical illusions of "Skyggen", and likewise in "Tante Tandpine," partly account for the generic confusion, rendering it closer to a Fantastic or uncanny tale than a fairy tale. The appearance of Satania is prefaced by a similar description of light and shadow, a chiaroscuro effect which creates a sense of the volume and three-dimensional form of a human body: "Der var en Uro i Skygge og Lys, men tilsidst saae Skyggen paa Gulvet ud som Noget; jeg saae paa



dette Bevægelige...." (220; "There was a restless shifting of shadows and light, but at last the shadow on the floor took shape [literally: looked like something]. I looked at this moving form and felt an icy disgust," 418). In "Skyggen" the shadow, too, ostensibly grows into a real person, returning years

later to haunt and pester the scholar, and as a true *Doppelgänger*, it is a harbinger of death and disintegration to the coherent self. The story resists, however, a simple psychoanalytical reading of Jungian projections, abjections of base impulses and Freudian cases of the return of the repressed, although those motifs contribute to its enduring power of fascination.⁴⁸ The shadow, however, cannot represent the sexual drives, which the scholar shies away from in his quest for the ephemeral "Poesien" because the shadow does not have a sexuality of its own due to its apparent lack of a body proper: it cannot grow a beard and the princess notices what an exceptionally light dancer it is. It does, however, grow fatter and richer, underlining its paradoxical materiality. In a similar dialectic between intangibility and materiality in "Tante

⁴⁸ Like Ingemann's "Sphinxen," "Skyggen" has become a high school classic, reflecting a growing interest in the darker side of Danish Romanticism since the 1980s. Georg Brandes of course also considered it a masterpiece.

Tandpine”, Satania threatens:”See mig skal Du, men i en fyldigere.... Skikkelse, end jeg er det nu!” (220; “You *will* see me, though in a more substantial form ... than I am now. You will see me as Auntie Mille,” 420): he will see her in what is literally a ‘fuller’ form, as appropriate for the candy-consuming Mille.

What make both the shadow and Satania Infernalis human - and remarkably so, one might note – are their clothes. In “Skyggen,” the narrator observes:

Det var ellers virkelig ganske mærkværdigt hvormeget Menneske den var; ganske sortklædt var den og i det allerfineste sorte Klæde, lakerede Støvler, og Hat der kunde smække sammen, saa at den blev bar Pul og Skygge, ikke at tale om hvad vi allerede veed her var, Signeter, Guldhalskjæde og Diamantringe; jo, Skyggen var overordentlig godt klædt paa, og det var just det, som gjorde at den var ganske et Menneske (133)

Yes it was quite remarkable how much of a human being it had become. The shadow was dressed all in black, made from the finest of black cloth, with patent-leather boots, and a top hat that could be snapped closely so only the crown and the brim [ironically in Danish ‘brim’ and ‘shadow’ are the same word] remained. To say nothing of what we already know he was wearing: seals, a gold chain, and diamond rings. Oh yes, the shadow was exceptionally well-dressed, and that was exactly what made him a human being (237).

The formulation is striking in both “Skyggen” and “Tante Tandpine”: rather than making them *appear* human, clothes *make* them human.⁴⁹ After declaring that “jeg blev Menneske!” (“I became a human being!”), the shadow speaks poignantly of needing “Støvler... Klæder... hele denne Menneske-Fernis, som gjør et Menneske kjendeligt” (135; “As a human being I was ashamed to walk around like that. I needed boots, clothing, the whole human façade [varnish] that makes a person recognizable [visible / discernible],” 229).⁵⁰ At the same time, the bodily

⁴⁹ The essence / appearance dichotomy is explored in an altogether different light in “Kejserens Nye Klæder” (“The Emperor’s New Clothes,” 1837), in which clothes, furthered by flattery, vanity and corruption, create a false reality, but nonetheless a reality which remains unquestioned by everyone until the very end.

⁵⁰ One might also note the transition here from the early Gothic villains, which are often feudal overlords, banditti or monks, to increasingly sophisticated and stylish – even Dandy-like - men of the world in nineteenth-century Gothic, often with the Byronic Lord Ruthven in Polidori’s *The Vampire* (1819) as a model (Spooner 2004: 96)

materiality of the scholar diminishes, as people inform him that he really looks like a shadow of himself (136; 230). Because appearance is reality he submits to the status as shadow to his former shadow, now “den egentlige Herre” (136): “the real master” (231). The reversal of roles in the struggle for power is a staple in Gothic fiction. The now subservient and physically shrinking scholar is further demeaned and diminished by the shadow insisting on calling him “du” rather than the formal “De” but not allowing reciprocity, while the narrator insists on calling it ‘den’, ‘it’, implying its actual subhuman status.⁵¹ Ironically, just before the shadow has the scholar killed off, the shadow boasts: ”Man giver tidt sin Tjener finere Klæde i Liberiet end man selv bruger, og saaledes har jeg ladet min Skygge pudse op til Menneske” (137; ”People often give their servants finer livery than they wear themselves, and in the same fashion I’ve dressed up my shadow as a human being!” 231). The confusion of appearance and reality is now complete; *Schein* becomes *Sein*. External surfaces are represented as more constitutive of personal identity – of humanness and by extension status as human - than apparently interior aspects, suggesting a kind of possession by appearances, which is also used with great effect in *Kun en Spillemand (Only a Fiddler)* as Naomi, a rather interesting and rare Danish femme fatale, who explores male disguises, sadomasochistic relationships, and general gender-bending, professes that “Verden er en stor Maskeradesal... man maa imponere! kun det, man ret forstaaer at representere, det er man!” (162; “The world is one great masquerade ballroom... one has to make an impression! One is only what one understands to represent!” *my transl.*). In Klaus P. Mortensen’s analysis of “Skyggen” and the demonic undercurrent in the Danish Golden Age, which has a different focus than the present study, he poignantly suggests that “ Menneskelighed er noget man får ved at iklæde sig den som var den et sæt tøj, klæder skaber folk. Med andre ord:

⁵¹ The ‘du/De’ distinction corresponds to the German ‘du/Sie’ pronouns. Nunnally translates it as “... shouldn’t we drink a toast and call each other by our first names?” (231).

menneskelighed er det samme som menneske-lighed, ægte menneskelighed findes ikke” (“Humanness [or humanity] is something one acquires by donning it like a suit of clothing; clothes make the man. In other words: humanness [‘menneskelighed’] is the same as resembling a human [‘menneske-lighed’]; authentic humanness does not exist,” Mortensen 2). The emphasis on spectacle strikingly privileges surface over depth, thus undermining a deep-structured subjectivity of a monstrous interior waiting to erupt from underneath a polished exterior, and suggesting perhaps instead a multifarious and fragmented rather than a simply doubled subject.

Danish Gothic texts demonstrate a remarkable preoccupation with clothing and attempts to design, fortify or hide selves in the sense of constructing new sartorial identities, and while it has traditionally been the formation of femininity that has been tied to the mechanics of appearance, in Gothic gender seems to be unimportant in this respect, or rather dissolved as a separating category, perhaps because the body itself loses significance or is even effaced under its sartorial mask. As Gothic texts and by extension texts with eruptions of the Gothic mode consistently foreground surfaces in order to interrogate the surface-depth relationship, it becomes clear that there is no substantive presence hidden beneath the unstable and contagious continuum of effects. There is, however, often a strong pull towards interiority in a doomed quest for completeness and authenticity, and that quest is defeated by the foregrounding in the Gothic Fantastic of “the impossibility of definitive interpretation of vision: everything becomes equivocal, blurred, ‘double’, out of focus” (Jackson 49). In “Skyggen” - as in “Sphinxen” with its semi-blind Oedipal hero - the ability to see clearly, to distinguish between reality and illusion, self and other, is a theme with consequences for both plot and genre: “uncertainty and impossibility are inscribed on a structural level through hesitation and equivocation, and on a thematic level through the images of formlessness, emptiness and invisibility” (Jackson 49). The

problem of apprehension is expressed in the scholar's doomed quest to discover the True (along with the Good and the Beautiful) as an essence concealed behind the curtains, inside the innermost chamber in the house across the street, which however remains out of sight and is ultimately revealed to be nothing. Likewise, the princess' piercing gaze is staged as extraordinarily perceptive but ultimately it becomes yet another fairy tale element that is negated as there is no essence for her to perceive: "...da de saa dandsede igjen, saa blev hun forliebt, og det kunde *Skyggen* godt mærke, for hun var færdig at see lige igjennem ham" (138; "when they started dancing again, she fell in love. The shadow was well aware of this, because she was practically looking straight through him," 232). She ends up taking the shadow for a man. The scholar threatens to tell all, "at jeg er Mennesket, og at du er Skyggen, du er bare klædt paa!" ("That I'm a human being, and you're the shadow. That you're just masquerading [dressed up]" 233), but the veil is never ripped away which hides the shadow's absence of a man: the scholar is executed during the wedding of the shadow and the princess, a murder most foul only mentioned in passing; he is "killed offstage and in a subordinate clause, too frail and blank to be worth a sentence of his own" (139; Wullschlager 2004: xxxv). With him disappears any possibility of retrieving the Good, the Beautiful, and of course, the True, as there seems to be no Truth or substance disguised underneath the slippery surfaces.

5.9 **"Skyggen", "Tante Tandpine" and the Conditions for Art**

The student in "Tante Tandpine" apparently experiences a similar disillusion and disintegration in his quest for "Poesien" as the scholar. Certainly they face similar difficulties of perception, as ideal and real, reality and nightmare, seem to be a continuous spectrum, rather than an absolute

dichotomy. Villy Sørensen⁵², arguably the most famous of Andersen's critics, takes over the language of veils and disguises in his reading of "Tante Tandpine": "den usande poesi [fremtræder] både som den søde tante, der tilslører virkeligheden med sine skønne ord, og som det pinagtige syn, der afslører altings Forfængelighed" ("The untrue poetry appears as both the sweet aunt, who veils reality with her sweet words, and as the painful vision, who reveals the vanity of all things," Sørensen 23). This is echoed by Gerda Thastum Leffers in her analysis: "et dækkende tæppe (af illusioner) flænses, og hvad man ønskede skjult kommer til syne" ("A covering blanket (of illusions) is ripped and what one wanted to hide becomes visible," Leffers 88, *my transl.*) Such language implies an idea of a 'True Poetry' disguised allegorically in the depths underneath, as opposed to an untrue poetry, but as Mille and Satania become one and the same, we must ask if that is the case: does the demonic figure pose an absolute dichotomy between True and Untrue Poetry? Is there anything veiled underneath? Significantly, Satania herself connects her demonic powers with the function of clothes as covering something up, in an account which has puzzled many a literary critic:

'Erkjender Du da, at jeg er mægtigere end Poesien, Philosophien, Mathematiken og hele Musiken!' sagde hun. 'Mægtigere end alle disse afmalede og i Marmor hugne Fornemmelser! Jeg er ældre end dem Allesammen. Jeg blev født tæt ved Paradisets Have, udenfor, hvor Vinden blæste og de vaade Paddehatte groede. Jeg fik Eva til at klæde sig paa i det kolde Veir, og Adam med. Du kan troe, der var Kraft i den første Tandpine!' (221)

'Then do you acknowledge that I'm mightier than poetry, philosophy, mathematics, and all music?' she said. 'Mightier than all those painted and marble-carved sensations? I'm older than all of them. I was born close to the Garden of Eden, outside where the wind blew and the damp toadstools grew. I made Eve put on clothes in the cold wind, and Adam too. Believe me, the first toothache was a powerful one!' (419)

⁵² Where Andersen uses the marvelous-fantastic modes to ambivalently explore the possibilities of establishing a true and stable sense of identity, not least anchored in a social hierarchy, Sørensen is much more adamant about the existential impossibility of such in post-WW2 Europe. This is expressed in his *Strange Tales* (1953), which so cleverly paraphrase Andersen's, particularly "Duo" (inspired by "Skyggen") and "En Glashistorie" (1964, inspired by "The Snow Queen").

In Paul Rubow's still relevant 1927 tome on Andersen's tales, he connects this ancient female shape not only with the icy Nordic cold that she emanates from, which she perhaps shares with those other demonic femmes fatales of the Ice Maiden and the Snow Queen, but with a mythology which predates the very Judeo-Christian system she implicates herself in:

Skikkelse[n] vokser ud af den søvnløse Vinternat og trækken, som isnende kold gaar gennem Stuen. Den er en typisk Frembringelse af en nordisk Digters makabre Fantasi. – Man kommer let ved Tante Tandpine til at tænke paa de oldnordiske Myther om selve den blege og blodløse Hel (Rubow 112).

The shape grows out of the sleepless winter night and the icy cold draft, which haunts the living room. It is a typical creation of a Nordic poet's macabre imagination. – By Auntie Toothache one is easily reminded of the Old Norse myths of the pale and bloodless Hel herself (*my transl.*).

Hel refers to both the pre-Christian underworld realm of the dead and the terrifying mistress of that space, death personified, hence the Danish word 'ihjel', 'to death', which is essentially the threat embodied by Satania. Rubow does not pursue this idea further but one might note that the name Hel means 'det skjulte, det indhyllede': 'the hidden, the shrouded'. What Satania comments on and negates is the dualistic tradition in Western thought of ideal / real, true / false, content / surface, which subordinates clothing as "artifice as opposed to the natural body, a false covering for the authentic self beneath," as clothing is "associated with earthly vanity and constructed as a medium of deception and a marker of humanity's 'fallen' state," a binary logic heavily implicated in a "Judeo-Christian system of morality and its frequently misogynistic nature," as clothing and adornment are inextricable from the feminine sensuality, vanity and duplicity associated with the Eve of Satania's account (Spooner 2004: 2). Almighty and ancient, Satania seems to represent Pain and Shame as the forces behind everything, not some transcendent Truth or Poetry.

Satania is also, like the other texts the student fabricates, an allegory – and given the story of her origins and her insight into the transience of all things, one might even call her an allegory of an allegory, the personification of the seductive power in the myth of the Fall, originally in the shape of a serpent (Bøggild 193). What Satania threatens, in addition to the student’s fragile self, is the greater Romantic notion of Art in the form of the symbol as granting privileged access to the realm of the Ideal, as she in her monologue makes a mockery of the liberal arts that are feigning a connection with an ultimate Truth supposedly more primal than her. According to Paul de Man, the symbol attempts to transcend, avoid, or deny the inescapable fact of temporality in embodied human existence, whereas the allegory does not only attempt to avoid temporality but highlights human finitude, and in addition difference, deferral, and absence as a fundamental condition. For de Man, allegory is authentic, whereas the symbol with its denial of temporality, its attempted connection between subject and object, self and non-self, is “a defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-knowledge” and as such is inauthentic in its being-towards-death (de Man 191). The allegorical Satania and Skyggen foreground the non-identification and non-presence which the Romantic symbol tries to hide; “renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, [the allegory] establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference” (de Man 207). Satania and Skyggen share their status-by-proximity. Satania is “født tæt ved Paradisets Have, udenfor” (221) – “born close to the Garden of Eden, outside” (419) - while Skyggen only reaches the antechamber of ‘Poesien’ and not the innermost halls, which are described in pantheistic clichés of a Romantic Golden Age imported straight from Andersen’s own “Klokken” and Oehlenschläger’s “Guldhornene” by the scholar. Yet it is in the antechamber that the shadow becomes ‘human’ and learns of “mit Medfødte, det Familieskab, jeg havde med Poesien” (134, “my innermost nature, what I was born with, the kinship that I

have with Poetry,” 229): Skyggen and Satania do not represent the thing in itself but a metonymical contagion: proximity rather than identity. Appearances and proximities rule the Gothic-Fantastic universe: their power is very real, so real in fact that it appears banal, prosaic and mundane: Satania’s power manifests itself as toothaches, Mille’s as candy (seduction and torture are both means of persuasion and control) and likewise, the shadow’s power comes from the simplest and basest of extortion schemes. As the shadow reflects on its nocturnal powers, it explains to its former master, the Scholar:

’...i Maaneskin var jeg næsten ved at være tydeligere end De selv....Jeg tog Vei, ja, Dem siger jeg det, De sætter det jo ikke i nogen Bog, jeg tog Vei til Kagekonens Skjørt, under det skjulte jeg mig... jeg kiggede hvor Ingen kunde kigge og jeg saae hvad ingen Andre saae, hvad Ingen skulde see! Det er i Grunden en nedrig Verden! Jeg vilde ikke være Menneske, dersom det nu ikke engang var antaget at det var noget at være det! Jeg saae det Allerutænkeligste hos Konerne, hos Mændene, hos Forældrene og hos de søde mageløse Børn; - jeg saae... hvad ingen Mennesker maatte vide, men hvad de Allesammen saa gjerne vilde vide, Ondt hos Naboen. - Havde jeg skrevet en Avis, den var bleven læst!’ (135).

‘In the moonlight I was almost more distinct than you were... I made my way... well, I’ll tell you, since you’re not going to put it in any book, after all. I made my way under the skirts of the cake-wife; that’s where I hid... I looked where no one else can look, and I saw what no one else can see, what no one ought to see. What an ignoble world it really is! I wouldn’t even want to be a man except that being human is considered worth-while. I saw the most unthinkable things among women, among men, among parents, and among the sweet, marvelous children. I saw... what no person should know, but what everyone would like to know: bad things about their neighbors. If I had written something for a newspaper, people would have read it!’ (229)

“An ignoble world,” indeed: this is a Gothic world made up of alienated individuals, who can relate to each other only as enemies; even “the sweet, marvellous children” are guilty of “the most unthinkable things”: innocence is corrupted, literature is perverted, and everyone seems driven by the rule of pure appetite (229).

The extortion scheme in “Skyggen,” which according to the shadow represents the true kinship it has with poetry, finds an equally utilitarian parallel in “Tante Tandpine.” In the beginning of the frame, the narrator introduces “Urtekræmmerdrengen,” the grocer’s boy, as the person who sold him the story found in the bin, which we are apparently reading: “Søn af en Spækhøker; han er gaaet tilveirs fra Kjeldereren til Stueboutiken; et Menneske med stor Læsning, Kræmmerhuus-Læsning” (213; “a grocery boy, the son of a delicatessen owner. He rose up from working in the cellar to the main shop; a boy who has read widely, paper-twist reading,” 411). His upwards mobility from the cellar to the main shop is thus closely tied to the texts he finds in the wrapping paper bin. The narrator notes in the same paragraph that the grocer’s boy has an interesting collection of important documents from ”Een og Anden altfor beskæftiget tankespredt Embedsmands Papirskurv; eet og andet fortroligt Brev fra Veninden til Veninde: Scandale-Meddelelser som ikke maatte gaae videre, ikke omtales af noget Menneske” (213; “the wastepaper baskets of various busy and absentminded civil servants; several confidential letters from one girlfriend to another: scandalous reports that were not meant to go any further, were not to be discussed with anyone else,” 411). The boy thus draws advantage from this collection of confidential texts, and not only that, but his remarks that they are quite amusing to read indicate that they serve as mere entertainment, a rather unethical stance. The narrator describes the circuit of these private and shocking letters as “en ikke ringe Deel af Literaturen,” (213; “a not insignificant segment of literature,” 411). While the writings of the True, the Beautiful and the Good by the scholar-poet in “Skyggen” and the innocent stories of wonderment by the student-poet in “Tante Tandpine” go unpublished, there is clearly a demand for the intimate and ”scandalous reports” retrieved by the shadow and the grocer’s boy. After all, “Skrevne Sager er ogsaa brugelige” (213; ”written materials can also be useful,” 411) as the narrator ironically

notes, as he observes the texts as wrapping paper enter into a very literal circuit of consumption: while the same motif appears in “Nissen hos Spekhøkeren”⁵³ in 1852, the literature found in the bin in the earlier story is envisioned, after much skepticism and comments on the uselessness of poetry, as a marvelous tree of light, the most precious item in the household. By 1872, it is quite a different story: literature must meet the needs of the capitalist ideology to be of any use.

5.10 Consumption and Inspiration

In this circuit of supply and demand, the student’s primary audience, Auntie, has her own needs-based, utilitarian agenda: she, too, is looking for ‘useful’ texts and sensational entertainment. The student produces three in-set ‘texts’ within the frame narrative that he also supposedly has written, all quite literal and non-visionary. The second of the texts is the detailed account of his lodgings, a house “uden Handling” – without any plot or action - which might be seen as the social reality of urban poverty (218). This piece of uneventful realism is doubled by the account of what happens the night of Satania’s appearance, as the very same objects in the building suddenly turn it into a haunted house. The gate slamming, the window howling, and the lamp banging against the wall create ‘the explained supernatural’, as these sounds torment him and make his fragile mind susceptible to superstitious beliefs. The in-set text thus becomes the realistic foil for Andersen’s use of the Gothic mode, as things, objects and props take over the narrative, which is often the trajectory of Gothic texts. Auntie, however, is not entirely impressed: in her critique of the student’s story, she sees the setting as a mere prop for a dramatic plot in which one might retrieve an object for psychoanalysis, rather than a point in itself, thus echoing many interpretations of Gothic texts. As she bribes him with candy, she yells at him to

⁵³ The text has, rather unfortunately, been translated as “The Goblin and the Grocer” when in fact the ‘nisse’ is a small humanoid house elf in Scandinavian folklore, a ‘tomte’ or hob.

rewrite his story by adding unhappy people to the stage: "Du er Digter!...Skriv bare din Tale op, saa er Du ligesaa god som Dickens!⁵⁴ ja mig interesserer Du nu meget meer! ... Det gyser i En! - Digt videre! Læg noget Levende ind i det, Mennesker, yndige Mennesker, helst ulykkelige!" (218; "You're a poet!... Just write down what you told me and you're as good as Dickens. Yes, now you're much more interesting to me... It makes me shiver. Keep writing! Put something alive into it: people, charming people, preferably unhappy ones," (416). Reflecting an audience hungry for entertainment and vicarious catharsis through human tragedy, Auntie mirrors the beginnings of the Gothic market as it emerged from an eighteenth-century cult of sentiment, which grew into an insatiable craving for sensationalism, or in Satania and the shadow's versions: the ugly, naked facts of human life that no one wants to admit wanting to hear, and which the student shies away from exploring. Andersen's story thus becomes a meta-commentary on the Gothic dialectic between realism and supernatural effects, between high-brow and low-brow, and finally between canonical works in Western culture à la Dickens and the trivial entertainment of cheap thrills.

A "hideous offspring of capitalism itself," nineteenth-century Gothic, according to Judith Halberstam is "obsessed with multiple modes of consumption and production": the satanical Auntie embodies a ravenous and indiscriminate reading public consisting primarily of middle-class women, who as monstrous consumers are devouring art – and the artist (Halberstam 4). The ominous and more or less constant presence of fear, prevalent in Female Gothic and in most of the Danish texts, suggests haunted and self-loathing selves. While the troubled relationship between artists and audiences is central in many of Andersen's tales and novels, for example in

⁵⁴ The comparison of the failed protagonist-writer with Dickens likely reflects the ending of their friendship after Andersen had overstayed his welcome in the Dickens household in 1857.

“Grantræet”⁵⁵ (“The Fir Tree,” 1944), creativity in “Tante Tandpine” is strikingly imbued with metaphors of death and loss, associated via the teeth with the physical pains of childbirth. Art means pain and ultimately absence. The self-loathing of the student-writer comes from an aversion against a non-Ideal art, but also the sense of inadequacy which stems from a constant comparison to the great writers of world literature, such as Dickens and Jean Paul. Lacking the insight that Hoffmann’s Klara expresses in her comments on Nathanaels’ literary productions, Auntie exclaims: ”Skriv bare alle dine Tanker ned... og put dem i Bordskuffen; det gjorde Jean Paul; han blev en stor Digter, som jeg rigtignok ikke holder af, han spænder ikke! Du maa spænde! og Du vil spænde!” (415; “Just write down all your thoughts... and put them away in your desk drawer. That’s what Jean Paul did. He became a great poet, though I’m not especially fond of him; he doesn’t excite me. You have to be exciting! And you will be exciting!” 415). The untranslatable Danish verb “spænde” is translated as the adjective “exciting” which misses the meaning of painfully tensing and tightening muscles – the physical reaction one would have for example when afflicted with toothaches. Her advice both flatters and chastises the student, but ultimately it is a form of control which leaves him in unbearable pain: her remarks are immediately followed by him lying in bed “i Længsel og Vaande” (216; “with longing and agony,” 415), in his desire to be the great poet she wants him to be. As his “Digter-Pine,” or poetic pain, manifests itself as the more mundane “Tandpine,” or toothache, the disproportionate power of the latter may suggest the rather unpoetic mind of the one afflicted with the former.

⁵⁵ In ”Grantræet” (1844) the hungry audience is embodied by the soon jaded mice and the critics by the brutally philistine rats, who insensitively dismiss the tree’s poetic ecstasy, demanding instead art for literal consumption: “Det er en overmaade daarlig Historie! kan De ingen med Flesk og Tællelys? Ingen Spisekammer-Historier?” (47): “It’s an exceptionally tedious story. Don’t you know any about bacon and tallow candles? Any pantry stories?” (169). As the tree experiences the chopping up which the student has nightmares about, and is devoured by flames, the moral expressed in the final words is very similar to that of “Tante Tandpine”: ”Træet var forbi og Historien med; forbi, forbi, og det blive alle Historier! (48): ”The Tree was gone, along with the story. It was over, over, and that’s what happens to every story!” (171). In “Det Utroligste” (“The Most incredible Thing,” 1870) the confrontation becomes a violent clash between the ax-wielding brute of a philistine and the struggling artist.

The student is so preoccupied with the mysteries of “Poesien” that he at times sees the city as “et stort Bibliotek; Husene ere Bogreoler” (214; “a great library. The buildings are bookshelves,” 412). The world refracted in his mind becomes one large intertextual space consisting of chains of texts referring to yet more texts, endlessly deferring meaning in a manner not dissimilar to Arnold’s textual self in “Sphinxen”, an allegorical condition which is underlined by the circulation of texts entering the world as wrapping-paper in the main frame. Andersen’s student and Ingemann’s Arnold share the inability to see clearly, to distinguish between text and reality, symbol and allegory, and to articulate their own texts as well as identities. In “Skyggen” there is, as in “Sphinxen,” an explicit reference to the German source text, Chamisso’s Faustian tale “Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte”⁵⁶ (“Peter Schlemihl’s Remarkable Story,” 1814), which in turn is based on the folktale with the same motif of a man who sells his shadow to the devil. Initially it is not so much the loss of his shadow which aggravates the scholar in “Skyggen” but the fact that his story already exists:

Og det ærgrede ham, men ikke saa meget fordi at Skyggen var borte, men fordi han vidste, at der var en Historie til om en Mand uden Skygge, den kjendte jo alle Folk hjemme i de kolde Lande, og kom nu den lærde Mand der og fortalte sin, saa vilde de sige, at han gik og lignede efter (131).

He was annoyed, not so much because the shadow was gone but because he knew there was another story about a man without a shadow. Everyone back home in the cold countries knew about it, and if the learned man now came and told them his own story, they would be sure to say that he was just copying the other one and he shouldn’t bother (225)

In a text structured around doubles and copies being taken for originals, the apparently original self thus ironically and poignantly expresses a deep-seated fear of being a mere imitator, ‘copying the other one’. The student in “Tante Tandpine” has similar fears of not being original.

⁵⁶ Blixen also makes reference to “Peter Schlemihl” in her female Faustian story, “Drømmerne” (“The Dreamers”).

His vision of the urban textual space is framed on both sides by the twin statements: “Jeg har i mig Noget af Poeten, men ikke nok” and ”Der er noget i mig af poeten, men ikke nok” (214; “I have something of the poet in me, but not enough... There is something of the poet in me, but not enough,” 412). In this vision lies not only his realization that he does not have what it takes to be a great poet, as his ultimate denunciation of pain indicates, but also, and connected to it, Bloom’s idea of the violent (Oedipal) relations to past literary works, which inform all fiction, and which seems to be the foundational idea behind Andersen’s 1829 debut.⁵⁷

5.11 **Fodreise: Romantic Irony and Gothic Scepticism**

Andersen’s first publication, *Fodreise fra Holmens Canal til Østpynten af Amager i Aarene 1828 og 1829* (*A Journey on Foot from Holmen’s Canal to the East Point of Amager, 1829*), an ironic-fantastic arabesque, offers interesting parallels as well as contrasts to the last tale in his final collection. In this text, the relation between the student and Auntie is prefigured in the ironic self-portrait of the poetic cat, doubtful of its own originality but encouraged by the fat female cat oddly wrapped around him; this is his aunt exclaiming: “Ja min Søn, Du er Digter!” (“Yes, son, you’re a poet!” 18). A literary cousin of Hoffman’s Anselmus, Ingemann’s Arnold and later Auntie Mille’s nephew, the student-writer protagonist in *Fodreise*, also alone at night in his “Studerekammer,” enters into a type of Faustian bargain: ”da foer den onde Aand, som man kalder Satan, ind i mig, og indblæste mig den syndige Tanke at blive Forfatter” (1, “Then the evil spirit which is commonly known as Satan rushed into me and inspired me with the sinful thought of becoming a writer,” *my transl.*). The writing process is envisioned as demonic; not only is it the devil’s plan to create a deluge of inferior literature flooding the world, but the narrator

⁵⁷ Ironically, the importance of the Father is replicated in the outside frame as the grocer’s boy who retrieved the story in the first place finds “the richest” literary material in the bin of Spekhøkeren – his father, the delicatessen owner - who thus provides the boy with both identity and socio-economic status....

encounters a diabolical temptress in the shape of ‘Amager-konen’, a sister of the hideous old applemonger in Hoffmann’s “Der Goldne Topf,” and the diabolical saleswoman in “Sphinxen”. At first, like Auntie, bargaining by means of apples, nuts and other sweet treats, she eventually flies into a violent rage, pulling up his own book from her pocket with ”et Satanisk smil” (“a Satanic smile”) and, not unlike Satania, with her sharp index finger branding the delicate leather on the back of the book with the word “Vaas”, nonsense, with flaming letters:

Snart vil Høkeren, som *Prometheus'* Grib, sønderrive dens Indre, og om Sukker og Sæbe sende den ud i den store By. - *Ha miser!* følg kun Din deilige Brud; maaskee fletter hun Dig Sivkrandsen i de vaade Haar, det bliver Din Digterkrone; farvel med Dine brogede Drømme!’ (11)

’Soon the grocer, like the vulture of Prometheus, will tear apart its insides and send it out into the great city, wrapped around sugar and soap. Ha, wretch! Only follow your lovely bride; perhaps she will fashion you a wreath of reeds for your wet hair, this will be your Poet’s laurel crown; goodbye to your confused dreams! (*my transl.*).

Poetic production seems intimately tied to consumption, humiliation, drowning, and violent fragmentation, to the point where the poet seems cast in the part of the Ophelia of Female Gothic. Some 40 years apart, it is striking how similar that vision is in *Fodreise* and “Tandpine.”

The student in *Fodreise* has, however, armed himself with Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815) fittingly in his pocket in case his imagination runs dry, as he embarks on a one-night journey to Amager for inspiration, in a structure which parodies both Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1307-21), Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (Danish translation 1794) and the *Bildungsroman*. He does not want to be just any writer, though, as even Goethe, the almighty father of Danish Romantic *Dannelseshumanisme* is mocked in the text, thanks to the tear-stained sentimentality of *Werther* (1774), which had been all the rage in Copenhagen in the beginning of the Romantic era but seemed hopelessly outdated by 1829. This part rebellion against, part endless referencing of a

myriad writers of world literature, particularly the German masters Tieck, Jean Paul, Heine, Chamisso, and repeatedly Hoffmann, result in a larger reflection upon the related problem of identity in general. Not only is the highly unstable narrative self faced with his past self in the shape of a speaking potsherd, literally a fragment crushed into even smaller pieces under the very foot that facilitates his journey, but he is irrevocably split into multiple narrators of stories-within-stories, somnambulists, shadows, doubles and other dark and uncanny creatures emerging from the realm of “Fantasien” and from reading too many German novels, as the narrator ironically warns against. The self that emerges from such activities is a vampiric-cannibalistic one, as if to suggest the parasitic nature of literary consumption:

Da saae jeg midt i den brogede Række mit eget *Jeg*. Mit Blod isnede... jeg saa dog det frygtelige *Jeg* trænge sig gjennem Sværmen og slynge sine Arme om mig; jeg følte det knuge sig fast ind til mig, men skrige kunde jeg ikke. O det var en unævnelig Følelse for mig, da dette mit dobbelt Væsen udsugede mit Liv og Blod. Jeg svandt hen i et Intet, i et frygteligt Intet (29).

Then I saw in the middle of the motley throng [of faces] my own self. My blood froze... I then saw the terrible *I* force its way through the crowd and wrap its arms around me; I felt it hold on tightly to me but I could not scream. Oh, it was an unspeakable feeling for me when this my double being sucked out my life and blood. I withered into nothingness, a terrible nothingness (*my transl.*).

Eventually the journey on foot ends in pure text, as Chapter 14 is shaped as a meta-textual impasse, an end-point of unconstrained and weightless movement in a sublime, imaginary space, as the laws of reason and physics – and disbelief – are suspended and the text is dissolved into empty, meaningless ciphers, a literary vacuum. The grand literary apparatus which is at play involves countless intertextual references, Romantic irony, meta-fictive reflections, interactive options for the reader, narrative interruptions and abrupt changes of genre. These all merge to create a sort of literary metaphysics, which serves as a compensation for the post-Enlightenment

Entzauberung and thus replaces a collapsed religious world order, or Todorov's marvelous, as Ib Johansen points out in his examination of Andersen's use of the Fantastic mode (Johansen 1993: 1). This is the same tendency which gave rise to the Gothic, as Emma Clery has argued in her study of the close connection between Gothic and the ascent of modern consumer culture, which caused a drift of apparition narratives from truth to spectacle: Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment capitalism enabled the production of Gothic, in that only a society that has ceased to entertain superstitious belief is able to turn superstition into the stuff of entertainment, conceived purely in terms of excess and ripe for mass consumption. Ultimately, "where once Gothic provided a space in which the dark dreams of Enlightenment could be realized, now it simply exposes the void at the heart of an advanced consumer culture" (Spooner 2006: 155).

In "Tante Tandpine", some 40 years after *Fodreise*, the writer-protagonist's vision of very dissimilar texts and genres, such as "Hverdagshistorie[r]", "Komodie[r]", "videnskabelige Værker i alle Fag... Smuds-Literatur og god Læsning" (214; "book[s] about everyday life, comed[ies], and scholarly works in every field.... risqué literature and entertaining stories," 412), circling around each other in a vast intertextual space is closely tied to the utilitarian, partly extortion-based circulation of private letters and to the explained supernatural which further demystifies the Gothic imaginary space: this an all-too-human reality which in its unabashedly spectacular entertainment precisely therefore seems all the more terrifying. "Tante Tandpine" thus seems to bid a final farewell to the idea of the sublimely inspired Romantic poet who has privileged access to the mysteries of this world, as was still possible in *Fodreise*. Instead, the student-writer is weighed down by the past and never manages to free himself from the burdensome weight of other, and greater, writers, while Andersen himself seems heavily inspired by nineteenth-century Gothic and Fantastic works. The text thus stands as a meta-commentary on

the hybrid Gothic genre itself, which in Kilgour's words "feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself" (Kilgour 4). Few texts address their cannibalistic nature as self-consciously as Gothic: its obsession with the past, conveyed through both historical settings and narrative interruptions of the past into the present, also manifests itself in its referencing of its own past, as Gothic revives its own ghosts and corpses for continued consumption. By adapting Gothic conventions, Ingemann, Andersen, Blixen, Høeg and Skov are able to more clearly point to the consumptive nature of literature, art and by extension identity. "Tante Tandpine" in particular is structured by consumption on many levels, most literally in the texts that serve as wrapping paper for food, again underlining Sedgwick's observation of thematic and structural coherence in Gothic texts. Critics such as Chris Baldick, Maggie Kilgour, Judith Halberstam, and Catherine Spooner have all pointed to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as a central metaphor for the grave-robbing gothic genre in its thematization and ultimate demonization of its own creation, a predominant theme in "Tante Tandpine," along with the concomitant thematic matrix of childbirth, creation and death (Kilgour 190). While Ingemann's "Sphinxen" perhaps more clearly demonstrates the Frankensteinian corporate identity of the Gothic in its self-referential piecing together of genres, quotes, images, and references from older literary traditions upon which the text, like *Frankenstein* – both novel and monster - cannibalistically feeds, becoming in Halberstam's words "a hybrid form, a stitched body of distorted textuality," "Tante Tandpine" is perhaps closer to that other iconic monster of the Gothic, Dracula, in its model of consumption and production characterized by violent and devouring penetration and unnatural, even demonic appetites (Halberstam 1995: 33). Ann Williams observes that the gothic is ultimately a lot like the capitalistic culture it inhabits: both are marked by what one might call a vampiric shifting

between consuming and being consumed, a notion deepened by Marx's descriptions of capital as a blood-sucking vampire. For Fred Botting, the Gothic is so bound up with consumerism that he - appropriately for this particular text - has coined the term 'Candygothic' to signal the unavoidable exhaustion of the genre, which has become "a sweetshop of horrid thrills that ultimately fail to satisfy the jaded consumer, satiated by ubiquitous horror and repetitive shock" (Botting 2001: 134; Spooner 2006: 155). What begins in "Sphinxen" as the dizzying mechanisms of the marketplace becomes in Andersen an absolute condition, contributing to the agonies of the artist and ridding romantic literature of all its ideals, as the fragments of the text fulfill their determined place in the circuit of mass consumption as wrapping paper for culinary items while pointing to the position of art in the same materialistic, utilitarian money-based circuit.^{58 59} It offers no metaphysical truth; only negative transcendence through images of physical and figurative, personal and cultural falling in downwards spiralling movements into a state of apparent entropy: "Bryggeren er død, Tante er død, Studenten er død, ham fra hvem Tankegnisterne gik i Bøtten. Alt gaer i Bøtten. Det er Enden paa Historien..." (222; "The brewer is dead, Auntie is dead, and the student is dead, the one whose sparks of genius ended up in the bin. Everything ends up in the bind. And that's the end of the story..." 421).

⁵⁸ The same principle of commodity circulation is expressed in "Flipperne" ("The Shirt-Collar," 1848) and "Laserne" ("The Rags," 1868). In the former, the very paper on which the story is printed is a former shirt collar recycled from "Kludekassen," the rag bin. As the collar brags about his personal love stories that have never been, it points to the predicament of all fiction. Ultimately, the moral of the story is that everything and everyone who do not behave modestly can end up in that same rag bin, and as an additional punishment being forced to have their "innermost secrets" printed on themselves as sheets of paper for everyone to see in a metatextual branding of the skin and reversal of the surface-content binary (203).

⁵⁹ Such concerns were not alien to Andersen, who might be Denmark's first truly market savvy writer. The publication of his debut, *Fodreise*, has been prepared by the strategic placement of bits and pieces of it in *Københavns Flyvende Post* in the fall of 1828, while subsequent editions were garnered with favorable reviews. In addition, Möller-Christensen (1992) has documented his active participation in Germany's rapidly expanding world of media, translators, publishers, editors and reviewers, and he was highly successful in catering to their economic needs. Kofoed shows that Ingemann, Andersen's mentor and life coach in the 1830s, disapproved of Andersen's hectic productivity and rather unapologetic pandering to his audience, which included royalty, nobility, authors and other celebrities: "De [har] altfor tillidsfuld og med en næsten barnlig Hengivenhed kastet Dem i Armene paa det store, tusindtungede og vægelsindede Publikum" ("You have with too much trust and an almost childish devotion thrown yourself into the arms of the great thousand-tongued, capricious audience" (Kofoed 1992: 45).

5.12 The Frame Deframed: Textual (In)authenticity

Such are the final words in Andersen's last collection of tales and thus his life work. However, in a work which turns truth upside down, nothing is left unchallenged. Topsøe-Jensen has shown that "Tante Tandpine" despite its placement as the last tale in the collection and Andersen's own rather puzzling claims to the contrary was likely not the last tale he wrote, while he and Paul Rubow note that the penultimate sentence "Alt gaar i Bøtten" was deleted in the proofreading of the text for the illustrated edition, and so we are left with a somewhat contradictory and unstable text (Topsøe-Jensen 194, 207; Rubow 112). After all, what ends up in the bin, as declared in the final sentences, clearly does not remain there or the implied reader would not be reading the supposed fragment of a text, so one should perhaps not take the ultimate nihilistic statement for granted. The fragment or found manuscript is a favorite narrative device in Gothic, as part of its discontinuous and convoluted form, incorporating tales within tales and changes of narrators, to create on the textual level the same labyrinthine, epistemologically confounding madness of interpretation that the protagonists are faced with in the plot. The aforementioned erection of arbitrary, insurmountable barriers, which Eve Sedgwick identifies as the most characteristic feature of the Gothic text, and which plot-wise the student faces in his personal life in the shape of Auntie/Satania and in his artistic endeavours in terms of his dependence on other texts, also exists on a structural level:

Of all the Gothic conventions dealing with the sudden, mysterious, seemingly arbitrary, but massive inaccessibility of those things that should normally be most accessible, the difficulty the story has in getting itself told is of the most obvious structural significance. This difficulty occurs at every level of the novels. A fully legible manuscript or an uninterrupted narrative is rare; rarer still is the novel whose story is comprised by a single narrator, without the extensive irruption into the middle of the book of a new history with a new historian... (Sedgwick 1980: 13-14).

The story-within-the-story, which we also see in Ingemann's "Sphinxen," and in Blixen's meandering Chinese box tales, represents structurally the otherwise thematic Gothic convention of live burial: the texts are buried within each other, creating relationships of parallelism and non-communication, thus also staging the Gothic trope of the unspeakable. In this case, the framing device, not unlike that of Shelley's *Frankenstein* skews perspective and complicates what should be fairly simple relations between author, narrator, readers, and characters.

This skewed perspective is also due to the fact that the fragment plays tricks with our notion of authenticity, in a genre which has been self-consciously and notoriously fake from its clichéd inception in 1764, when *The Castle of Otranto* was published as a retrieved medieval manuscript, newly translated by the author, and the book itself supposedly inspired by Walpole's Strawberry Hill, a fake Gothic castle constructed partly in papier mache. Gothic acutely points out the lack of original sources as a general premise for production within the capitalist ideology. "Tante Tandpine" cleverly dismantles its own status as an "original" fragment. As Jacob Bøggild has pointed out, the student makes a series of self-contradictions, the most grievous being the fact that he claims that he has stopped writing as required by the satanic pact and that nothing has been written down, yet we are reading that very story. It also seems very strange that the inner story, allegedly not written for publication, is written with an implicit reader in mind, as indicated by the meta-narrative comments: "Hvem var Tante *Mille* og hvem var Brygger *Rasmussen*?" (215; "Who was Auntie Millie and who was Brewer Rasmussen?" 413) and "Men jeg maa begynde med et nyt Afsnit i min og tantes Historie" (217; "But I have to start a new section in the story of my aunt and myself," 415). It would be more natural if such had been formulated by the actual narrator in the outside frame. It is also rather puzzling that the (granted, unethical and perhaps untrustworthy) grocer's boy claims that the fragments are found in random

order, when there is very much a cohesive, organized plot in progress in the four parts. Then again, it seems rather odd that the frame and the framed share the same title: "Tante Tandpine." The most startling contradiction is, however, the narrator's slip of the tongue at the end of the frame narrative: "Bryggeren er død, Tante er død, Studenten er død". Why "Tante" ('Auntie') and not the definite unfamiliar form "Tanten" ('the aunt')? The two narrators must be one and the same and we have all along been immersed in a fictional *mise-en-abîme*, as the relation between fabula and subject is destabilized. What was supposedly a lost and found fragment is a hoax, an illusion masking another illusion, not unlike the empty inauthenticity masked behind Auntie's dentures. As the frames collapse into one another, it thus becomes apparent that the story cannot be read as a dualistic case of the inner narrative expressing a truth hidden by the outer layer. Furthermore, one might argue that it renders the author a type of ghostly presence insofar as the traditional authorial function of guaranteeing a truth in a confusing world of ghosts and demons is deconstructed; the physical horror of the inside tale is shadowed by the textual horror of meaning running riot in the outside frame when there is no authorial center preventing things from falling apart. Such abnegation of authorial responsibility seems only fitting in a tale which demonstrates such ambivalence about authorship and authority.

5.13 Aladdin Revisited: Contemporary Reviews and Concluding Remarks

Contemporary reviewers entertained a seemingly contrary perception of the story. Remarkably, "Tante Tandpine" is hardly mentioned in the 1872 reviews of *Nye Eventyr og Historier. Tredie Række. Anden Samling* (*New fairy-tales and stories*), which also contains "Krøblingen" ("The Cripple"), "Portnøglen" ("The Gate Key"), and "Hvad gamle Johanne fortalte" ("What Old Johanne Told"), a somewhat depressing tale of social realism, poverty, broken relations, death and decay. The collection is generally highly praised; Andersen had since the 1840s been

celebrated as an international literary star and was rather far from the misunderstood and persecuted genius which the famously thin-skinned poet often fashioned himself as in his journals and narratives. The critical favorite is the overly sentimental "Krøblingen"; when it is briefly mentioned, "Tante Tandpine" is rather oddly praised for its "sprudlende humor, overgivne Indfald, en Friskhed og Ungdommelighed som i hans allertidligste og mest populære Eventyr" ("sparkling humor, unrestrained whims, and the freshness and youthfulness of his very earliest and most popular fairy tales," Robert Watt in *Dagens Nyheder* Nov. 24 1872) and for "det elskværdige Skjelmeri, der satirisk titter frem af saa mange af hans bedste Eventyr" ("the lovable shenanigans, which satirically peep out from so many of his best fairy tales," *Fyens Stiftstidende* Dec. 21 1872), while Carl Ploug in *Fædrelandet* Dec. 4 1872 claims that the story is told "med et saa spillende elskværdigt Lune" ("with such a playful, lovable mood") that reading it yields much pleasure. In his journals Andersen writes of the similar reactions he received when reading the text in his social circle. The "Lystighed", or merriness, with which "Tante Tandpine" is received by the brothers Brandes is reiterated in their review of the story when it was reissued in December 1874 as part of *Eventyr og Historier. Femte Bind*: they deem it a delightful surprise by virtue of "det friskeste og lyseste Lune" ("the freshest and lightest mood," in E. Nielsen 1990: 221). The reviews express a stubborn insistence on seeing it as a fairy tale, which clearly it is not: the unreliable first-person narrator(s) in both the frame and the framed and the fragmented text clearly defy its categorization as a fairy tale. Nevertheless *Dagbladet* on Dec. 9 1872 emphasizes "Digterens vindunderlig rige Fantasi i fuld virksomhed med Skildringen af Tandpinens Eventyrfigur" ("the wonderfully rich imagination of the poet in full activity with the depiction of the fairy tale figure of the toothache"). Similarly Peter Hansen in *Nær og Fjern* Dec. 1 1872 writes that "den usvækkede Fantasi er især fremtrædende i den højst maleriske gjengivne

Personifikation af Tandpinen med dens Marterkammer af Torturretskaber” (“the undiminished imagination is particularly prominent in the highly picturesque personification of the toothache with its torture chamber of excruciating tools”), without commenting further on those torturous tools. Finally the review in *Dags-Telegraphen* Dec. 16 1872 claims that ”Portnøglen” and ”Tante Tandpine” are ”fulde af det prægtigste Humor, og i den sidstnævnte Historie sammensmeltes det komiske Syn på Livet med et Fantastisk Element, der i sin barokke Dristighed gjør en fortræffelig Virkning” (“are full of the most splendid humor, and in the latter the cosmic views on life is melted together with a fantastic element, which in its baroque audacity creates an excellent effect”).

It is rather surprising to see this tale of pain, torture and entropic dissolution characterized consistently with adjectives such as humorous, merry, jolly, comical, and delightful. Granted, the Gothic mode does in all its hyperbolic and histrionic excess allow for baroque and burlesque eruptions of the parodic, grotesque and satirical, but unlike the grotesque it seems to be predominantly a non-comical space. However, Horner & Zlosnik have detected, particularly in the ironic and self-aware post-modern Gothic, shifts of tone enabled precisely by its lack of authenticity or depth: “Indeed, it is the Gothic’s preoccupation with ‘surface’ that enables it so easily to embrace a comic as well as a tragic perspective” (Horner & Zlosnik 4). Andersen’s knowingness of the tradition the text participates in thus partly offers an explanation to the critical verdict of it as ‘humorous’. However, given contemporary Danish literary discourse, it seems more likely to be an expression of a unanimous insistence on the maintained construction of Andersen as a fairy tale writer, harmless, humorous, entertaining, and somewhat naïve, a view that generally characterizes his reception. Robert Watt’s review of the collection in *Dagens Nyheder* Nov. 24 1872 is symptomatic: ”Faa kan som han fortælle os om det Gode, det Smukke

og det Sande her på Jorden, kan i jevne, simple, barnlige Ord skildre Livets lyse og straalende Sider” (“Few people can like Andersen tell us about the Good, the Beautiful and the True here on earth, few can in such plain, simple, childish words portray the light and bright sides of life”). We might then ascribe the contemporaneous ignoring of non-fairy tale elements to that general refusal to acknowledge ideas in conflict with the predominant harmonious, optimistic Golden Age construction, which had characterized much of the reception since that infamous Kierkegaard review on *Kun en Spillemand* in 1838. When Kierkegaard finds that a *Livsanskuelse* is missing, he means an Idea which systematically structures the text, for example expressed through the ordering principle of an omniscient narrator, who organizes a coherent story of morally instructional value. This indicates a belief in the possibility of order and coherence in text and world, often with a metaphysical dimension which guarantees a sense of meaning or a general Idea to be retrieved from a particular human existence. In the *Dannelsesroman* it is up to the individual to find his place in this world while bridging the individual and communal, the particular and the general, the arbitrary and the meaningful. Kierkegaard, then, is arguing from the point of view of the very *Bildungs*-plot, which Andersen had explored in his first novel, *Improvisatoren* (1835), but which he had begun to dismantle soon thereafter; gradually with *O.T.* (1836) and its themes of the dark past haunting the physically branded and socially stigmatized outsider; and completely with *Kun en Spillemand*, his third novel from 1837. If *Improvisatoren* is the first Danish *Dannelsesroman*, *Kun en Spillemand* is the first *Undergangsroman*, a novel of defeat akin to the naturalistic novels of the Modern Breakthrough. The themes of artistic failure tie *Kun en Spillemand* to Andersen’s final novel, *Lykke-Peer* (1870) and the contemporaneous “Tante Tandpine”; through all of Andersen’s novels but most clearly in *Improvisatoren*, *Kun en Spillemand* and *Lykke-Peer* runs the perennial Aladdin-motif, the foundational myth of

Andersen's life and literature, which in a manner finds its final negation in "Tante Tandpine," when both inner and outer narrative thoroughly debunk the romantic myth of the spontaneous genius, or any notion of art as immortal or achieved through divine inspiration. In Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* (1805), art is spontaneous, brought forth by the inherent genius by virtue of his innate and unmediated powers of creation, suggesting an outdated deterministic legitimization of nobility denounced by Georg Brandes in *Emigrantlitteraturen* in the year "Tante Tandpine" was published with his famous sentence: "Geniet er ikke den geniale Lediggjænger, men den geniale Arbejder" ("The genius is not the ingenious idler, but the ingenious worker," Brandes 1872: 9). While Brandes does not take issue with the idolization of the genius as such, he critiques the Romantic idea of artistic spontaneity, promoting instead intellect and willpower, assiduity and diligence.⁶⁰ Andersen's artists succeed at neither, failing to wed art with life. This is dramatically envisioned in Lykke-Peer's final moment of illusory euphoria, as he collapses on stage while singing the lead in the opera "Aladdin", which he has written and composed, dead of a burst coronary artery. As in "De Røde Sko" and "Den Lille Havfrue," the self seems to implode from within.

In "Tante Tandpine," too, the artist works so hard to be truly artistic only to face the Gothic idea of art not as creation or origination but combination. As the past inevitably encroaches on the present, he is seemingly annihilated, and along with him the elusive trickster-narrator and thus any overarching Idea, which would indicate an ordered text and universe – again, the *Livsanskuelse* Kierkegaard was missing – leaving instead the impression of the

⁶⁰ In his essay "Adam Oehlenschläger: Aladdin" from 1886, Brandes argues that the figure of Aladdin was not an embodiment of vitality, but a sophomoric, lazy, irresponsible citizen, who had shaped the Danish nation in the most unfortunate way by producing a Romantic generation of stunted and emasculated adolescents. Brandes offers Oehlenschläger, Thorvaldsen, H.C. Ørsted, H.C. Andersen, Grundtvig and Kierkegaard as examples of Golden Age cultural figures who never fully matured (Brandes 1886: 220-1).

individual alone and at the mercy of uncontrollable forces, be that demonic or capitalistic, arbitrarily selecting their victims. For the student, as for many of Andersen's failed artists, the ultimate resignation is partly caused by the failed severing of childhood ties, both ontogenetic and phylogenetic, and so a meaningful place in the world cannot be attained; the Romantic ur-plot of fall and return, of alienation from and retrieval of an original state of harmony and innocence, which M. H. Abrams has showed is central to Romanticism, is defeated. The home in the sense of cultural origin, maternal womb, familial space and abode for the self thus becomes *Unheimlich* – uncanny and unhomely - and the self is rendered alien to itself in the dialectic between homeliness and otherness central in the Gothic. In a genre in which homelessness is central, there is, according to Robert Miles, “broad agreement that the Gothic represents the subject in a state of deracination, of the subject finding itself dispossessed in its own home, in a condition of rupture, disjunction, fragmentation” (Miles 3). The Christian optimism of the *Dannelsesroman* is replaced by pessimism, scepticism, failure, and resignation, and while some critics consequently point to Andersen's pre-modernism, we must also consider his sophisticated use of the Gothic mode to convey this mental and physical fragmentation and alienation of the exiled self: the identity formed and shaped in the *Dannelsesroman* is picked apart by Satania's torturous tools, inch by inch, bit by bit, tooth by tooth, verse by uninspired verse, only to end up in the bin - like everything else. And that's the end of the story...

Chapter 6. Karen Blixen's Gothic Ontology of the Surface

6.1 Blixen or Dinesen: Gothic, Fantastic, or Romantic? Introduction

Karen Blixen – or Isak Dinesen - is famously a special case in Danish literature, as she partakes in both the Scandinavian and Anglo-American literary canons. When *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* (1935) - or *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) - stands today as an indisputable masterpiece in Danish literary history, it is not because any particular literary development between Andersen and Blixen prepared for the arrival of this gender-bending generic hybrid. Instead, Blixen's status today is likely a result of the international recognition she achieved for the English original, which received only mixed reviews in Denmark and which was allegedly never intended for a Danish audience in the first place.⁶¹ Since Blixen's debut in its original form is titled *Seven Gothic Tales*, one would think that her use of the Gothic had already been examined extensively but that is not the case. While the critical discussions have at times come close in the commentary on Blixen's pervasive use of masks, theatrics, mirror-like surfaces, and her extravagant, archaic style, the question of how the Gothic conventions in her texts work has not been answered. While her texts offer a veritable treasure trove of discursively and sartorially constructed identities, often with inspiration from classic Gothic, I will limit my discussion to "Et Familieselskab i Helsingør" ("The Supper at Elsinore") from *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* and the 1944 novel *Gengældelsens Veje* (*The Angelic Avengers*) because these texts are the most conventionally Gothic in Blixen's oeuvre and – presumably therefore - some of the most understudied. The dialogue between the two texts creates a space in which the issue of identity, the common thread in all of Blixen's texts, is simultaneously negated and reconstructed, with particular reference to the formulation of gender. For an elucidation of the development of a

⁶¹ Blixen claimed as much in Johs. Jacobsen's interview with her in *Politiken* May 1 1934.

Danish Gothic, I will include the development of Gothic tropes in *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, as well as the contemporary reception of Blixen, as it reads like a tale of Gothic persecution in itself.

Seven Gothic Tales was conceived in English and published in America in April 1934 and in England in October. It was translated, or rather re-written by Blixen herself into her native Danish and published as *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* (Seven Fantastic Tales) in Denmark the following year, and going through yet another generic mutation as *Sju Romantiska Berättelser* (Seven Romantic Tales) in Sweden. The Gothic, Fantastic, and Romantic discourses employed, combined with the archaic style, and relocation of the action into the past of the 1820s-60s, have rendered her work notoriously resistant to definition and categorization, not least in terms of literary periods; triggering also the epithets of baroque, impressionism, symbolism, modernism and postmodernism, and supporting her own carefully staged self-representation as the exotic Baroness removed from the literary world of the inter-war period (Heede 244). The generic multiplicity signalled by the various titles of her debut is manifest on all levels of her oeuvre, connecting the larger question of fragmented identity in her texts with her public persona.

The bilingualism of her literary project reflects a systemic preoccupation with multiplicity and the questioning of identity, which is in turn reflected in her use of pseudonyms, her appropriation of the gothic mode, her experiments with autobiography, her fascination with masks and disguises, and the manipulation and interplay of gender in her texts (Rees 17).

That multiplicity also comes across in the tension between seriousness and play in her work, and in her own marketing of her work – one of several areas in which she could justly claim the

equally market-savvy Lord Byron as a model.⁶² Blixen knew her audiences well; she understood that the Danes would not appreciate her literary style like an Anglo-American audience would.

I den hele danske Litteratur findes der ikke nogen Bog af denne Art, paa Engelsk er der mange, og de læses gerne. Englænderne ynder saadan en Vrøvlebog.... Jeg ved ikke andet Ord for Bøger, hvori der hænder alt muligt fantastisk. De kender vel Hoffmanns Eventyr? Det er noget af samme Art og dog ikke det samme. Det er heller ikke Edgar Poe, men alligevel... hvis vi skriver saadan paa Dansk, maa det blive en Skuffelse for Folk, som venter en Bog med Mening i. Og det venter danske Læsere altid.⁶³

In the entire history of Danish literature there is no book of this nature; in English there are many and they are read happily. The English favor such a nonsense book... I don't know another word for books in which all sorts of fantastic things happen. You probably know Hoffmann's Tales? It is something like that, but not really the same... It is not Edgar Poe either, but still... If one writes in this manner in Danish, it must be a disappointment to people who expect a book with meaning in it. And Danish readers always do (*my transl.*).

Blixen's deliberate 'Vrøvlebog', nonsense book, provides a stark contrast to the democratic social realism dominant in Denmark at the time, in tales of the little man's fight against the system, which weigh an ideologizing, moralizing message over artistic form – an inevitable result of the Modern Breakthrough's focus on debating social problems. Such is strikingly at odds with Blixen's aristocratic world view and hyper-aesthetic, ornamented narrative form. Considering the particular nature of Danish literary history, Blixen diagnoses the particular reason why *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* would be perceived as nonsense by her realism-prone, message-focused Danish readers:

Vi har få eller ingen fantastiske bøger herhjemme. Vi har Ingemanns "Sfinxen" og vi har Heibergs "Julespøg og Nytaarsløjer." Men hvem erindrer dem? Jeg var bange for, at folk

⁶² Byron, like Blixen, straddles Gothic and Romantic, parody and seriousness, frivolous amorality and political subversion. Blixen used his name as a pseudonym in her youth and has numerous references to his persona, as carefully masked as her own, throughout her work.

⁶³ Interview in *Politiken* May 11 1934

efter læsningen af min bog ville spørge: Hvad er meningen med det, De skriver? Der er ingen mening, og der skal heller ingen mening være. Det er drøm, fantasi!⁶⁴

We have few or no fantastic books here at home. We have Ingemann's "The Sphinx" and Heiberg's *Christmas Jests and New Year's Fun*, but who remembers them? I was afraid that people, after reading my book, would ask: 'What is the meaning of what you write?' There is no meaning, and there should not be a meaning. It is dream. Fantasy! (transl. Brantly 13)



There was thus a careful analysis behind the different generic designations in the titles of the book, an assumption that Danes would be more familiar with the Fantastic genre due to the German inflection of Danish Romanticism (Brantly:15). In addition, the designation of Fantastic underlines a possibility that the alien elements can be resolved by integration into a realistic explanation, or by relegation into a parallel

marvellous universe, whereas Gothic fiction often remains ambiguous and unresolved – as

indeed does Blixen's (one of the many points of objection with the Danish critics). The respective covers illustrate the tendency

towards minimizing the Gothic and Fantastic, even the

Romantic for the Danes: Mogens Ziegler's cover is very much

in the spirit of 1930s Danish 'Funkis'-style, sharp, modernistic,

and functional, with clearly defined objects, much like the

architecture and social programs promoted by the contemporary

post-Brandesian *Kulturradikalisme*. In contrast, the American

and Swedish covers are heavily ornate and reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich's Romantic

paintings but perhaps more in tune with the spirit of the content, including the use of Gothic

letters at the beginning of each tale. Although we are dealing with an English original as far as



⁶⁴ Interview in *Berlingske Tidende* September 10 1935

the collection of *Seven Gothic Tales* and *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* goes, I will, for the purpose of establishing a Danish Gothic, refer to the Danish version, which Lise Kure-Jensen calls an “amplification” of the English version (317).⁶⁵ In many respects it is a work in its own right; rather than a mere translation it becomes a type of double displaced from its supposed origins. While I am not arguing that the collection is Gothic through and through, the Gothic mode and tropes seem to dominate, as there are really only two events which could create the hesitation of the Fantastic: the prioress turning into a monkey in “Aben” (“The Monkey”) and the apparition of Morten’s ghost in “Et Familieselskab” (“The Supper”). Blixen herself expressed a preference and greater familiarity with the Gothic than the Romantic-Fantastic: “I know more about the English ‘Gothic’ than German romanticism, but there are also works in that [tradition] which have meant a lot to me” (quoted from Brantly 15).

In “Drømmerne” (“The Dreamers”), a meta-commentary on the Gothic is offered by the storyteller Mira Jama, himself a frightful apparition with his nose and ear cut off to make visible his “mørke Kranium” (“dark skull”), a Gothic prop that reappears in several of the texts: “Mit Fag var alt saadan, som faar Blodet til at stivne i Aarerne paa Folk. Djævlø, Gift, Tortur, Forræderi, Mørke og Vanvid, det var Miras Varelager... Alle folk vil gerne forfærdes” (332-3; “I specialised in such tales as make the blood run cold. Devils, poison, treachery, torture, darkness, and lunacy: these were Mira’s stock in trade... People love to be frightened,” 274). Boasting that his “Historier om Frygt og Forfølgelser” (“tales of flight and pursuit”) make the listeners’ blood curdle, the point is that the mutilated storyteller has realized, as have the sisters in “Et Familieselskab,” that no narrative can be as frightening as the mundane matters of real life: “Naar man har haft Omgang med Genfærd og staaet i Forhold til Djævlø, saa er man tilslut mere

⁶⁵ I use inserted brackets in the quotes to indicate discrepancies between the Danish and English versions of both *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* and *Gengældelsens Veje* throughout the chapter.

bange for sine Kreditorer end dem” (333; “When you have had talk with ghosts and connections with the devil you are, in the end, more afraid of your creditors than of them,” 274). There is an odd tension between the mourning of loss of income that generates these comments and the commercial emphasis on his “Varelager” (stock in trade) in this acknowledgment of not just story-telling but specifically Gothic narratives as a hot commodity, and then on the other hand the frightful commercial realities of the bourgeois world of creditors, in which the real terror lies in Blixen’s aristocratic worldview. While critics often, correctly, draw attention to her uncompromising endorsement of untethered imagination – the element of “dream” and “fantasy” she identifies as the ‘non-meaning’ of *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* - she also demonstrates a very acute and very prosaic awareness of the commodification at the heart of Gothic. Both *Seven Gothic Tales* and *Gengældelsens Veje* were written for financial reasons, parts of the former were serialized, as were later tales, in *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, and the latter deliberately employs the seemingly trite conventions of mass-market Gothic romances. The commercial emphasis is underlined by the aggressive marketing campaign leveraged by her American publishers, hawking *Seven Gothic Tales*, the *Book of the Month*, like “Forbidden Fruit” and “white magic” in a meta-campaign which in itself reads like a commentary on the Gothic, immersed as ‘Dinesen’ is with the names of its living-dead canonical writers on a graphic background of Gothic arches – or is it tombstones? – layered *en abîme* within each other.⁶⁶ In Denmark, on the other hand, paperbacks and book clubs are a much later phenomenon, and this form of publication as well as its generic adherence has likely contributed to the general dismissal of what one snarkily reviewer called her “moderne Bestseller.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See Kjældgaard’s epilogue in the 2012 critical edition p. 684-5 for illustrations.

⁶⁷ Frederik Schyberg’s review in *Berlingske Tidende* Sept. 25 1935

The highlighting of Fantastic components in her product for her Danish audience as opposed to the Gothic elements for her Anglo-American audience was a clever marketing strategy, as astute as Walpole's adding of the subtitle 'A Gothic Story' in the 1765 edition of *Otranto* to capitalize on the success of the 1764 edition. Blixen did in fact acknowledge Walpole as the originator of her inaugural genre, and with the recognition comes an acute awareness of Gothic as inherently fake and imitative: "When I used the word 'Gothic' I didn't mean the real Gothic, but the imitation of the Gothic, the Romantic age of Byron, the age of that man – what was his name? - who built Strawberry Hill, the age of the Gothic revival."⁶⁸ This awareness of the "doubly mimetic, the imitation of an imitation," as Susan Hardy Aiken phrases it, comes across in both Blixen's handling of the literary material as well as the identities produced in her Gothic fiction (Aiken 69). Both David Punter and Aiken note the ambivalent simultaneous embrace and rejection through a supposed memory slip of literary forefathers such as Walpole, Hoffmann and Poe, appropriate given her work in a genre that revolves around troubled pasts (Aiken 69-9, Punter 1996: 378-80). Where Punter reads her work as archaic, nostalgic and unconnected to both history and the Gothic canon, Aiken, with the deconstructionist's love for marginal forces imperilling the center, argues that Blixen employs Gothic conventions that are always automatically subversive, particularly from the perspective of (French) feminism, figuring the Danish Blixen as a "latter-day Northern 'barbarian'" who deliberately forgets Walpole, the father of the Gothic, in order to rewrite the "androcentric literary canon and master myths that her tales simultaneously display and displace" (Aiken 68, 74).

Dinesen's book announces the nature of its particular Gothic through its author's tongue-in-cheek deployment of conventions patent to the genre: the wild landscapes and seascapes, the haunting and haunted mansions, the decaying battlements and cryptic

⁶⁸ From Curtis Cate's interview with Blixen in *Atlantic Monthly*. December 1959

chambers, the skeletons and the specters, the doublings and metamorphoses, the stock characters – abbesses, apparitions, witches, madwomen, charlatan priests, bedevilled wanderers, sinister fathers, victimized daughters (Aiken 68).

The conventions are all very much present, but Aiken carefully bypasses them as “stock types” along with the “synthetic terror” they were once intended to produce (Aiken 69). While Aiken, despite her heavy reliance on post-structuralist metaphors, provides a brilliant analysis of Blixen’s use of the Gothic as a subversion of cultural codes and established truths, she does then, like the criticism in general, dismiss the Gothic conventions and their surface mechanisms in order to tease out the deeper meaning that Blixen herself denied. The doubleness in Blixen’s response to a genre that is inherently ambiguous is underlined by her choice of Gothic “fordi det i England tidsfæster Historierne og antyder noget, der bade er ophøjet og kan slaa ud i Spøg og Spot, i Djævlerier og Mystik” (“Because in England it places the stories in time and implies something that both has an elevated tone and can erupt into jests and mockery, into devilry and mystery”).⁶⁹ It is this playfulness and the uncertainty about the level of irony with which these quotations of quotations are employed which make Blixen’s texts challenging. What is rather unique to Blixen is her simultaneous humorous detachment and nostalgic embrace of the campy exaggerations afforded by Gothic conventions, which at the same time through their hyperbolic form enable a critique of the historical time and reality they are grounded in.

6.2 The Gothic Criticism of Blixen’s Tales

Before examining the texts, it is relevant to briefly look at previous treatments of Blixen’s use of the Gothic. The body of Blixen/Dinesen criticism is vast and will only be dealt with here when it concerns the Gothic. With the main division of the criticism into biographical, feminist and

⁶⁹ Interview in *Politiken* May 1 1934 with Johs. Jacobsen, from *Blixeniana* 1980: 163. Transl. by Brantly: 15.

existentialist-philosophical enquiries, the Gothic has been excluded, in a strange way even in the critical texts – with the prominent exception of Aiken - that take Blixen’s use of Gothic as their object. It has been primarily American critics that have made reference to the Gothic mode in her work, understandably since the English title identifies the Gothic as its main referent, but the 2012 Danish critical edition of *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* includes a brilliant epilogue, in which Lasse Kjældgaard does address the Gothic, albeit briefly given the limits of a general introduction to the work. The attention drawn to the Gothic as both period and aesthetic principle is helpful, as Kjældgaard does draw attention to Blixen’s imitation of an imitation, and her resurrection of the living dead. Otherwise, the discussion of Blixen’s Gothic is often obfuscated by a lack of clear sense of the term. Eric Johannesson (1961) for example does not distinguish between ‘Gothic’ and ‘decadent,’ in extension of Mario Praz’ influential *The Romantic Agony*. The study is still rather helpful in listing a number of important Gothic motifs used by Blixen, such as incest, doubles, artificiality, mysterious convents and castles, ghosts, innocence pursued, and atmospheres of perversity and sadism. Johannesson correctly concludes that “the significant fact concerning this dependence is the manner in which she makes this tradition serve her own vision” (55), which goes beyond the mere “spine-chilling sensations” of the Gothic Romance insofar as her tales “deal with individuals who are trapped... by sex, by class, by history” (59). Ellen Rees (2006) reads Stevenson’s “Ollala” (1885) and Barbey D’Aurevilly’s “À un dîner d’athées” (1874) as Gothic precursors that Blixen ultimately subverts in “Drømmerne,” adding to Juul & Jørgensen’s detection of inspiration from Georges du Maurier’s *Trilby* (1894), but only to bypass the point of the Gothic in order to place Blixen within a female modernist tradition. Similarly, although Helen Stoddart’s article “Isak Dinesen and the Fiction of Gothic Gravity” (1996) appears in an English reader on *Modern Gothic*, she also does not really engage with the

important Gothic themes that she mentions, such as “mutability, fakery, transience, superficiality, role-playing, and the deliberate and imaginative denial of the categories of the real and realism in favour of the dreamed and the fantastic” (Stoddart 84). Instead she privileges the themes of weightlessness and gravity in relation to the female act of storytelling. In that project, she is close to Sarah Stambaugh’s – and later Aiken’s - feminist reading of Blixen, a purpose which seems not at all incongruent with an inclusion of the Gothic, as Susan Brantly briefly mentions in her comment that Blixen reverses the Gothic to rewrite traditionally restrictive representations of women, insofar as her women with sexual experience as well as her madwoman usually go unpunished (Brantly 59). Stambaugh, however, mentions the Gothic only in passing in her conclusion: “Dinesen’s symbolic technique is what I see as most gothic in her work... All of Dinesen’s works are characterized by the symbolism which romantic writers like Coleridge assimilated from the gothic novel without necessarily imitating the content” (Stambaugh 111). As I will argue Blixen, in fact, relies on both form and content in her use of Gothic conventions, although the notion that they are divorced is also entertained by Marianne Juhl & Bo Hakon Jørgensen, the only Danish critics to consider the Gothic, in *Diana’s Revenge* (1985).⁷⁰ In the brief chapter entitled “Why Gothic Tales?” they deliver a list of Gothic conventions without contextualization, dismissed as “of a symbolic nature” (89). The lack of distinction between Gothic and Fantastic makes the discussion somewhat muddled. Cued by Blixen’s own references in the aforementioned interview, they provide analyses of select texts by Poe and Hoffmann with a focus on dichotomized characters, only to argue that Blixen is nothing like her self-confessed sources of inspiration, a move that seems predetermined by their insistence on a semi-biographical tracing of authorial consciousness. The formulations are

⁷⁰ The original Danish study *Dianas Hævn* (1981) has a short chapter called “Om fantastiske eller gotiske fortællinger,” which, however, ignores those literary traditions in order to deal with Blixen as story-teller.

interesting and typical, though, in their almost-insight into the surface-depth relation in Gothic, e.g. “the fantasy clothes something that has already been realized by the storyteller” and “the author clothes the narratives in a certain stylistic form” (94) but this stylistic ‘clothing’ and “gothic decor” are quickly dismissed as “not in fact epically functional but... an intentionally distracting masking of the actual epic” (97).

A more textually founded observation about Blixen’s unconventional use of the Gothic is made by Sibyl James in “Gothic Transformations: Isak Dinesen and the Gothic” (1982). She argues that Blixen’s narrators, unlike those of the traditional English Gothic, do not resort to preachiness, nor is conventional societal morality affirmed at the end; Blixen seems to rather reject both “moral sentiment” (always a point of contention with the Danish critics, one might add), avoiding the questions of right and wrong, as well as the explanation of supernatural events, focusing instead on wit, freedom of imagination, and narrative play (James 140). James, in that respect is on the same page as David Punter & Glenis Byron when they argue that Blixen’s “use of the term ‘Gothic’ ... is unusual, and has little or nothing to do with horror or terror” but a lot to do with “a fascination with social and cultural forms which have passed away” (Punter & Byron 111). A similar point is made by Punter, rather vaguely, in the second edition of *The Literature of Terror* (379), while Fred Botting simply notes in passing that “perhaps the strangest use of Gothic in the twentieth century is Isak Dinesen’s very conventional renderings of themes in her short stories” with no explication or further comment (Botting 1996: 156). That observation does, despite its vagueness, redirect our attention back to the ‘conventional’. In the following, Blixen’s use of Gothic conventions – conventional yet strange, as Botting remarks, and inherently preoccupied with the past, as Punter notes, although not as

“deeply and committedly reactionary” as he insists (379) - will be examined as they are shaped in her Gothic ghost story, “Et Familieselskab i Helsingør” (“The Supper at Elsinore”).

6.3 “Et Familieselskab i Helsingør”: Introduction

When “Et Familieselskab” appears to be the most Gothic of her tales, it is because it reworks and complicates such staples as the family curse, potential madness, confinement in physical and mental spaces, a questioning of the integrity of body and selfhood, and the inescapability of the past in the present, while its deeper logic is imbued with patterns of entrapment and despair, flight and pursuit. The haunted castle as the defining convention of Gothic fiction becomes a matrix of these themes, in this case with reference to the great Gothic Ur-text of *Hamlet*, also set in Elsinore. Unlike the other tales in *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, with the exception of “Digteren” (“The Poet”), the tale unfolds in a distinctly Danish setting, in wintery Elsinore in a frozen Northern Zealand; Blixen’s own childhood landscape thus provides the appropriate melancholy setting. The tale is thus anchored in a specific historical and geographical reality, and comments on social patterns of the nineteenth century which had not been abandoned in Blixen’s present. The momentum of the plot is interrupted by three flashbacks and two lengthy conversations, which overshadow the principal action of the journey of the dying housekeeper Madam Bæk to Copenhagen to inform the spinster sisters Fanny and Eliza de Coninck of the repeated apparition of their deceased long-lost brother at their family home in Elsinore. The sisters return to confront his ghost, forming the ‘family gathering’ of the Danish title and the final of the two conversations. The flashbacks to the privileged childhood and adolescent years of the aging sisters as the beau monde of Elsinore, in Denmark’s most Romantic period, as Langbaum calls it, of chivalrous adventure, male heroism and national excitement during the English wars, before the state bankruptcy of 1813, prepare us, in unison with the symposium

they have with their aging male friends in Copenhagen 30 years later, for the final confrontation. When the Aladdin-like Morten left his sisters, and a devastated fiancé, mistress and mother behind on the eve of his wedding, it was to pursue a life of freedom as a buccaneer, unrestrained by the social and moral conventions that are implied in both the flashbacks to the affluent *Biedermeier* home and the symposium in the narrative present.

The symposium, which takes place in early 1840s Copenhagen, provides both a digression from the plot as well as the social and philosophical framework through which to understand the lives of Fanny and Eliza, who never had Morten's option of flight or amorous adventures. Instead, the virginal sisters imagine themselves as "et par fremragende, aandelige Kurtisaner," (289; "a pair of prominent, spiritual courtesans leading their admirers into excesses"), echoing Miss Malin in "Norderney" in a reversal of the traditional gendered script. The discussion in the all-male party revolves around angels' wings, which Fanny desires, even if it means hopping on a broomstick to fly. The Bishop, representing conventional theological misogyny, informs Fanny that she may only have wings if she does not consider flight or abandoning the traditional pedestal of femininity. He invokes the example of Lilith as a cautionary tale, created like Adam and thus unmastered by "Engle eller Ægtemænd" (293; "neither husbands nor angels can master her," 240). The ideal woman must have been brought up completely unaware of "Muligheden af Flugt" (293; "the possibility of flight," 240).⁷¹ The theater director is described as an excellent dramatist and philosophical writer and must be modeled on J.L. Heiberg, although the director was Christian Molbech in 1842, when the story takes place; either way they are both historical figures that are critical of unrestrained imagination, as mentioned in Chapter 3. He thus compares women to poetry, as both of which have "saa megen Besvær med at staa og gaa og optræde

⁷¹ Note that 'flight' translates into both fearful escape and the act of flying in the Danish 'Flugt'.

ifølge de allervanskelligste og snævrreste Love” (294; “infinite trouble to stand, walk and behave according to difficult and painful laws,” 241), in order to fulfill their sole purpose of beauty. Finally, the Commodore, the very epitome of masculine action and adventures, compares “selvforsørgende Kvinder” (“self-supporting women”), uncontrolled by external forces, to “nederdrægtige Dampskibe... en art Havhekse” (294; “the beastly steamships... a species of witches of the sea,” 241), independent of the male hand that steers them. As Brantly notes, Fanny and Eliza have internalized this message of feminine passivity and the male evaluating gaze to the point where they only surround themselves with men:

Naar disse to Søstre ikke kunde leve uden Mænd, saa var det, fordi de holdt fast ved den gamle Trossætning, som sidder alle søfarende Familier i Blodet... at gælder det om at faa at vide, hvad man egentlig selv er værd i Verden, og i Handel og Vandel, da er det det modsatte Køn, hvis Ord gør Udslaget (289).

If these sisters could not live without men, it was because they had the firm conviction, which, as an instinct, runs in the blood of seafaring families, that the final word as to what you are really worth lies with the other sex (237).

This commodification of women underlined by the Danish expression “Handel og Vandel” will grow even more literal in *Gengældelsens Veje*. Contrasted to the roles of the conventional heteronormative script offered in this symposium - angel of the house and poetic beauty *or* demonized Lilith and witch - are the roles created by the sisters and their voracious imaginations, which feed upon both the dead and the living. Their vehement resistance to “en begrænset Virkelighed” (296; “a limited reality,” 242) is the core of the story, framed within patriarchal restriction but by no means limited to their refusal to marry. Divorced from reality, the subversive *Fantast*-character is, however, typically doomed in Danish literature.

6.4 The Fall of the House of de Coninck

That restriction is given architectural form in the shape of the de Coninck family home. Its importance is given by its appearance in the introductory sentence: “Paa et Gadehjørne i Helsingør... staar et værdigt, gammelt, graat Hus. Som er bygget i Begyndelsen af det attende Aarhundrede, og som nu med Forbehold ser paa de nye Tider, som er vokset op omkring det” (267; ;”Upon a corner of a street of Elsinore there stands a dignified old gray house, built early in the eighteenth century, and looking down reticently at the new times grown up around it,” 219). The first couple of lines, then, introduce the themes of the encroaching past, the family space and the anthropomorphized haunted and haunting building which defines the lives of its inhabitants. The abandoned house has become a monument to history, to glorified memories of the naval past of the city, which revolve around heroic deeds accomplished by idealized masculine ideals such as privateers, marines and Napoleon; the background is the historical events which would give rise to Danish National Romanticism in the early nineteenth-century.⁷² A highly gendered *ubi sunt*-motif thus seems intricately connected to the architectural *memento mori*. But the prominence of the past goes even further back from the living room with its view “ud imod det graa Kronborg...som en knyttet Pansernæve ud i Sundet“ (307; “of the old gray castle of Kronborg... like a clenched fist into the sound,” (252). The gray color connects the two buildings: the de Coninck house appears to be the gentry’s smaller replica of the ominous Kronborg, conceived as a threatening ‘fist’. This doubling is paralleled by Morten’s reflection in the image of “en anden ædelbaaren helsingørsk Yngling” (213), the “other highborn young dandy before him” (221), i.e. Kronborg’s Prince Hamlet. The stage is thus set for another drama

⁷² Kjældgaard has documented Blixen’s use of historical documents, which is particularly obvious in “Et Familieselskab” in the long passages borrowing from Kay Larsen’s *Danmarks Kapervæsen 1807-14*, to which Blixen herself gives credit in the foreword to *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* (Kjældgaard 698, 562-8). The Gothic plot is, in other words, anchored solidly in a recognizable, historical reality.

of ghosts, dynastic aggression and incestuous tragedy. The parents are oddly absent, even before their deaths. The position of dominant male is thus filled by Morten, the son, who is universally admired, even to the point of explicit obsession in the maternal substitute, Madam Bæk (272). Metaphorically crowned with “en Kejsers Krone” (273; “the diamond tiara of a young emperor,” 221), he is effectual king of the castle. The statement that “han lignede i Virkeligheden deres Far” (325; “He was indeed much like their father,” 268) and Morten’s position as de facto head of the household, but an irresponsible, perhaps incestuous one, testifies to the past’s parasitic relation to the future, to fathers, authorities, institutions, and traditions having outlived their usefulness, as also implied by the reactionary views offered at the Copenhagen symposium 30 years after Morten’s flight.

The inescapability of the past marks the decaying bodies of the sisters, which is the first thing they think of upon the sight of their old home. They feel that “det graa Hus kunde have god Grund til ved dette Gensyn at begræde deres egen Alder og Svækkelse” (306; “the old [gray] house might well have deplored the signs of age and decay at this meeting again of theirs”, 251). Like the house is a monument to an outdated mode of life, their aging bodies have become monuments to an impossible and ghostly idealism, suggested by Eliza’s seemingly intentional transformation, ‘forstenet’, or fossilized, as the Danish version says, into “rent Marmor” (297), the pure marble that also forms Morten’s once noble forehead upon his spectral return (309). The sisters have deliberately fashioned themselves as spiritual mummies as a manner of escape from the identity afforded by their unavoidably decomposing, gendered bodies:

At de vilde komme til at forsvinde fra Jordens Overflade uden at efterlade sig noget Spor, de tog de sig let, for de havde altid vidst, at det maatte komme til at gaa dem saadan. Det var dem en Tilfredsstillelse, at de vilde komme til at forsvinde saa overmaade yndefuldt. De kunde ikke gaa i Fordærvelse, som det hændte nogle af deres Venner, for de var

allerede, som om de havde været elegante aandelige Mumier, nedlagt med Myrrha og balsamiske Urter (271).

That they were to disappear from the earth without leaving any trace whatsoever did not trouble them. For they had always known that it would be so. It gave them a certain satisfaction to feel that they were disappearing gracefully. They could not possibly putrefy, as would most of their friends, having already been, like elegant spiritual mummies, laid down with myrrh and aromatic herbs (220).

Their assumption of this Miss Havisham-like ghostly identity is an evasion of the roles otherwise offered that they have consistently said no to, as to everything else in life, one of the great existential themes of the tale. The paradoxical reversal of life and death, norm and deviation appears in their internal monologue when they confront the house: “[havde] deres Barndoms- og Ungdomshjem... syntes dem lidt tomt og koldt, lidt for meget som en Grav, lige til der var et Genfærd i det?” (306; “Was it that the house of their childhood and young days had seemed to them a little empty and cold, a little grave-like, until it had a ghost in it?”251). The idea that the ghost would make the deserted home less grave-like, less empty suggests both their resistance to conventional thinking and the presence of death in that home from the beginning.

6.5 A Room of Their Own: Confinement and Unspeakability

It is tempting to read the house as merely an image conveying the psychological reality of its inhabitant. However, the house in itself carries importance. Enclosing spaces, a house makes secrets in merely being itself. The de Coninck family secret is the foundation upon which patriarchal culture rests: control of the subversively unreasonable ‘female’ who questions the order of things, demonstrating through what appears to be fits of madness paradoxically the unreasonableness of her contingent reality. The house as a man-made materialization of the name of a particular family in patriarchy represents a cultural and social arrangement of spaces, synonymous with the distribution of power that generates the plot (Williams 41-44). This

structure has a private and a public aspect, which manifests itself in the schizophrenic duality of the sisters' public gayety and private gloom in the rooms, which seem to contain them:

Og naar de saa igen var i deres egne Værelser... saa gik de op og ned ad Gulvet og græd og klagede sig, eller sad i vinduet og saa ud over Havnen, som om de vilde kaste sig ud i den, og vred Hænderne i Skødet, eller de laa og græd bitre Taarer i deres senge om Natten, uden at de havde nogen Verdens Grund dertil (269).

...within their own rooms, they would walk up and down the floor and weep, or sit down in the window and look out over the harbor [as if they were going to fling themselves into it] and wring their hands in their laps, or lie in bed at night and cry bitterly, for no reason in the world (219)

When Morten "traadte ind i en Stue, ejede og beherskede han den" (272; "when he came into a room... he owned and commanded it" (221). But the sisters do not command or own rooms of their own, but are rather placed behind imprisoning walls erected by the patriarchal family structure, which conceal their unreason. Therefore, this house is not merely surface, behind which is a latent psychological 'reality'. Instead, the physical shape makes concrete the structure of power that engenders the action within the real world, as Gothic castles usually do, despite their supernatural hauntings. When they are said to have no reason in the world to feel such melancholy, even suicidal bitterness, it is because this passage is filtered through Madam Bæk's consciousness, and she, like their mother, does not have "Forbandelsen i Blodet" (269; "the curse in her blood," 219) and thus does not understand such a Byronic *Zerissenheit*.

The theme of confinement is reduplicated on a smaller level by the madwomen in the attic themselves, in the many birds kept in cages in their rooms, gifts from their countless seafaring admirers. Golden age painter C.W. Eckersberg's 1820 painting of wealthy merchant M.L. Nathanson's eldest daughters illustrates the entrapment of the double-like sisters, the gilded cage being only a small-scale version of the rich, golden-colored *Biedermeier* interior framing

them, the parrot suggesting the mimicry associated with good breeding, or feminine *Dannelse*. Birds and wings are in Blixen's texts images of the possibility of flight, of resisting the limited reality tied to their gendered bodies, Pellegrina in "Drømmerne" being the most obvious example. If the caged birds offered by suitors are smaller replicas of the sisters' lives in their rooms, then confinement is tied to love, marriage and gender expectations and becomes in the course of their restricted lives "vort Nonnekloster" (310; "our



nunnery of Elsinore," 255), immediately contrasted in their conversation with Morten to his freedom and "Mængde yndige Steder, som vi aldrig har set, Du dog har besøgt" (310; "multitude of lovely places you have visited, that we have never seen," 255). For Blixen's imperiled maidens, it is never the actual loss of virginity that is frightening but the (marital) enslavement it entails. Convents in Gothic novels appear as structures of self-control and reason, but behind the facade they function like the madhouse, the whorehouse and the prison as an enclosed space where unreason and socially destructive passions are repressed and hidden.

In the history of Gothic fiction, such restraint becomes incarceration, morphing into images of burial, which stem from the obsession with transience. During the confrontation with Morten in the living room, Fanny's body feels like a coffin, restraining her ability to speak:

Hun talte til ham med en hæs og sprukken Stemme, som hentede hun den op af en dyb Brønd i sit Bryst... Hendes Stemme slog Klik for hende... Fanny havde tænkt sig at blive ved at tale, og at prøve endelig en Gang at løfte sit Livs tunge, knugende Vægt af sig, men hendes Strube var snøret sammen, hun kunde ikke overdøve Uhret. Hun aabnede og lukkede Munden to Gange, uden at der kom en Lyd frem (325-6).

She spoke to him in a hoarse and cracked voice, as if she were heaving it up from the innermost part of her chest [as if from a well]... Her voice failed her... Fanny meant to go on speaking, and to lift at last all the deadly weight of her whole life off her, but she felt her chest pressed together. She could not out-talk the clock, and her mouth opened and shut twice without a sound (268-9).

Fanny thus unites the two principal figures, being buried alive – in both house and body - and unspeakability, which Eve Sedgwick identifies as fundamental to the Gothic at the levels of plot as well as narration, reconciling surface with ‘deep’ meaning. All the conditions listed by Sedgwick are present: the self is cut off from both its own past, a lover and “the details of its family history” - the sisters probably never really learn what happened to their brother who incidentally also figures as their lover – and the free air: the environment is conceived of as a deadly cold grave, and the house has ”en Atmosfære af Gravrust (269; “an atmosphere of corroding rust [of the grave],” 211; Sedgwick 14). These are all things with which the subject should have “a proper, natural, necessary connection” and interaction but that is far from the case; instead the barrier creates counterparts, relationships of parallelism and “doubleness where singleness should be” (14). This explains the sisters’ melancholy schizophrenic separation of public gayety and private introversion, of the mirror image they are said to hold out to their admirers while the ‘real woman’ looks on, as well as their vicarious living through their male double. The defining attempt to restore the self and what should belong to it “to their original oneness” can only take place through “violence or magic, and both of a singularly threatening kind” (Sedgwick 14). Might we then see the appearance of Morten as a deliberate but transgressive attempt to recreate that lost oneness through a type of supernatural conjuring?

The ghost of Morten poses a difficult interpretive question. The naturalness with which the sisters receive both Madam Bæk’s news of his return and his eventual apparition before their very eyes is strange in itself. This is a very different ghost than the traditional dramatic Gothic

supernatural spectacle, which is intended to inspire terrifying thrills. Instead the encounter with the ghost is envisioned as a quiet tableau. Most critics do not attempt to answer the question, which is essentially the Fantastic hesitation between marvelous and uncanny-mimetic explanations. Langbaum, Hannah, Stambaugh and Aiken, however, all seem to subscribe to the latter by suggesting that he is a product of the sisters' warped imaginations and thwarted desires. Stambaugh notes that it is through the consciousness of Fanny that the story is primarily focused and that as she grows increasingly discontented and realistic during the encounter, she is unable to sustain the fantasy; it is Fanny, who has wound the clock, which strikes twelve, and which dissolves the spectre (Stambaugh 10). In that case Madam Bæk, who sees him seven times, is a psychical accomplice, which defies a rational explanation. The unexplained supernatural, then, deliberately contrasts the 'limited reality' the sisters resist. The materialization of his ghost, whether animated by the women's collective psychic energies and obsession with the past or just a plain old ghost, violates fundamental notions of science and reason in the most Faustian, transgressive way. The *Biedermeier* living room with its faded red walls, delicate china, warm candles and fragrant potpourri, all of which reinforce it as a site of domestic ideology and bourgeois rationalism, is thus transformed into the dark chamber of mystery, magic and devilish experiments which is so central to the power of the villain lord of the Gothic castle, the role of which Fanny attempts to assume in order to restore the lost oneness and tear down the barriers that demand her unspeakability. She seems to model herself after a tradition of Gothic villainy represented best by Poe's Usher and Byron's Manfred, as male examples in the Romantic-Gothic tradition who bring back their ethereal siblings from the dead for the purpose of gratifying their own incestuous, erotic drives and desire for completion of the frail Romantic ego.

6.6 Impossible Creation: Ghostly Narratives

The conjuring is inextricably tied to the sisters' persistent story-telling, detailed in the flashbacks to the flights of fancy in their youth and suppressed during the symposium. Bringing back Morten, then, is one of several attempted violent superimpositions of their own constructed internal reality onto an external reality, as both Stambaugh's and Aiken's feminist readings of the theme of female story-telling suggest. Fanny's behavior when conveying her story is manifestly physical: reaching desperately for him, throwing herself across the table, in intense pain, she brings him back from across the uncannily frozen Sound of Øresund: "Hun troede selv, at hun havde skreget højt i et Forløsningsraab som en Kvinde i Barnefødsleens sidste Øjeblik" (311; "She felt it herself as if she had screamed out, in a shout of deliverance, like a woman in the final moment of childbirth," 255). Neither proper narrative nor baby, the ghostly presence she gives birth to testifies to the limitation of her power, carefully circumscribed as it is by patriarchal conventions of femininity. It is a 'hideous progeny', as Mary Shelley called her own creature in her 1831 preface to *Frankenstein*, which like Andersen's "Tante Tandpine," too, employs metaphors of painful childbirth and demonic creation. Disappointed and betrayed, Fanny ultimately sends her creature back to the Hell it came from: "'Aah, saa til Helvede' raabte hun, 'ad Helvede til!' (326; "'Oh, hell', she cried out, 'to hell!'" 269).

The violence involved in breaching Sedgwick's "imprisoning wall" manifests itself as Fanny's repeated trouble speaking. With implications on the levels of both plot and structure, it is, however, not just her story that has trouble being told. The reader is almost deprived of what appears to be the central story, as Madam Bæk, herself a living dead buried in the past, buries the main story in long digressions to memories of male achievement, details of ships, the naval feats of the privateers and of the poet Johannes Ewald, of whom she is reminded during her journey to

Copenhagen. In doing so, she appropriates the narrative which is not really hers to tell, adding a level of narrative unreliability by focalizing it through her mind, which is marked by her impending death and her strong emotional investment in Morten. At long last, she, the marginalized servant, is privileged to an experience her gentry mistresses are not, an experience of living with a ghost, which Fanny rightly assumes must be the happiest time in Bæk's life. The roles change, however, once she reaches the sisters in Copenhagen to tell her story. She feels

som en lykkelig forløst Barselkone. Hun var blevet befriet for en Vægt og en Fylde, men samtidig var hendes Position som den mest betydningsfulde Person i Forsamlingen blevet taget fra hende. Saadan bar Herskaber sig altid ad. De bemægtigede sig alt, hvad man havde, om det saa var et Spøgelse (302-3)

like a happily delivered lady-in-the-straw. A weight and fullness had been taken from her, and her importance had gone with it. That was ever the way of the gentry. They would lay their hands on everything you had, even to the ghosts (248).

She, too, is faced with the violence of getting her narrative across the barrier, repeated in the birth metaphor. As their voracious imaginations feed on her dying delusion - or is it? - the sisters appear to be not just mummies but intellectual lamiae, 'unnatural' women as they are, bleeding her dry and appropriating her 'fullness' when taking over her child-narrative of the spectral brother which all three women envision as a type of irresistible demon lover. The lamia in Greek lore and the Judeo-Christian Lilith, who is discussed during the symposium, are sometimes used as identical⁷³ figures of a sexual appetite for men, matched by a cannibalistic appetite for children, and sometimes depicted as birthing millions of demons. While Gurli Woods makes an interesting point that such depictions evince a fear of the independence of Lilith, she claims that Blixen is only interested in the question of gender equality embodied in Adam's first,

⁷³ Although the lamia devours children, and Lilith traditionally is a child-killing witch, 'Lilith' is translated as 'lamia' in the Latin Vulgate Book of Isaiah 34:14, and as 'vampire' in the 1922 English Moffatt Translation. 'Lilith' is also variously translated as 'night-owl', 'screech-owl', 'night-monster' and 'night creature' suggesting the composite nature of the lamia as part human, part snake.

disobedient wife, who was created of the same material as he and thus meant to be on an equal footing (Woods 60). While that is an obvious aspect, it downplays the prominence of cannibalistic consumption and demonized creation, and the closeness of the Lilith-lamia figure to vampires and the medieval succubi. Her destructive powers noted in the bishop's contribution to the symposium is much like the sisters', for whom Madam Bæk saw "Helsingørs unge Herrer blive blege og tæres hen" (270; "the swains of Elsinore grow pale and worn," 220) in a significant choice of words normally reserved to the vampire's victims. The destructive woman was made specifically vampiric in the nineteenth century, becoming literally a femme fatale, as developed by the Pre-Raphaelites. The Romantics complicated and convoluted the meaning of the Incubus-Succubus figure: it became a metaphor for man's troubled sense of his creative powers or for his ambition to transcend his limited earthly condition, as Mario Praz has detailed in *The Romantic Agony*; in this story creativity is linked to that impossibility of transcendence.

In the resurrection of Morten, Blixen thus combines two narrative metaphors central to the Gothic tradition which come down to the same vision: the vampiric feeding off identities and texts and the act of bringing back them back from the dead to resuture them into a repurposed narrative. Morten is resurrected as a ghostly narrative constructed by the sisters, who are said to have been avid readers of ghost stories for most of their lives (310; 254). That consumption of "their wandering brother as pure story" is evident in their gluttonous reception of "de sparsomme Efterretninger, som fra Tid til anden blæste ind vestfra" (281; "strange rumors that drifted in from the West," 228), the West being "at once geographical locale and place of death, each tale undoing and undone by all the others" (Aiken 178). These displaced fictions are described

specifically in terms of consumption⁷⁴; they are “denne fattige Kost... den Manna, hvorpaa de holdt deres Hjerter i live i en Ørken. De bød den ikke om til deres Forældre eller Venner men paa Retorter i deres Værelser lavede den den til efter mange forskellige Opskrifter” (281; “spare food.... manna on which they kept their hearts alive in a desert. They did not serve it to their friends, nor to their parents; but within the distillery of their own rooms they concocted it according to many recipes,” 229).⁷⁵ Unshared, these concoctions are without purpose, demonstrating the sisters’ anti-social, introverted impulses; their little circle can encompass none but themselves. They could have easily made Madam Bæk, the maternal substitute, happy by sharing, and it is striking that they do not even share it with their parents, particularly when the mother eventually dies from grief, a tragic fact mentioned only in passing as if of little importance to their lives. Their melancholy introversion, masked by extroverted participation in the social scene, is part of what makes them indifferent to leaving traces – be that children, heroic acts or narratives – behind; as spiritual mummies they are neither creators nor procreators. The demon lover that is their creation lacks originality, but the sisters listen intently “for dette var virkelig som Eventyr og en Roman” (315; “This was really like a book of romance and adventure,” 259). “Morten’s description of his life as a pirate and of his five wives reflects the sisters’ exaggerated and melodramatic idea of what constitutes the life of freedom and adventure denied to them” (Stambaugh 10). He is “en Eventyrskikkelse” (280; “a figure out of a fairy tale,” 229) assembled from bits and pieces from literary male antecedents, such as Odysseus,

⁷⁴ The close connection between the Gothic and consumption is also implied by Blixen’s original title for the collection, *Nozdref’s Cook*, referring to Gogol’s *Dead Souls* (1842), in which Nozdref (Nozdrjov) cooks from whatever is available, as Blixen cooks a literary soup of quotes and allusions (Selboe 36; Brantly 12).

⁷⁵ The re-staging of the last supper implied by the English title informs Aiken’s reading of the text as “a revelation of deified word made spectral flesh through a kind of communal female script(ure) whose climactic incarnation transpires at a last supper, the secularized ‘Holy Communion’ toward which the text builds” (Aiken 179). She compares it to “Babettes Gæstebud” and its carnivalesque feminine ritual, the witch’s mass, in which Babettes concoctions, unlike those of Fanny and Eliza, “transcend and transform the confinements of culture and the misdirections of history” (Aiken 185) . Because the Danish text puts less emphasis on that religious aspect viz. its title I focus on the aspects of the family stressed instead.

Sinbad, the Flying Dutchman, Bluebeard, and of course Hamlet, all of which the text makes explicit reference to. Always oriented more towards male than female communities, the sisters vampirically latch on to the male canon to create and recreate not just Morten but themselves as male adventurers, merging their precarious identities into one.

The assumption of male roles is evident from an interesting change of verbs made in the Danish revision. About Morten it says that “Han var [was] Helsingørs Helt” (272) but the English version says “He played the hero” (221). Fanny says about their readings of the *Odyssey* “Ah hvor vi da var [were] Helten og hans tapre Mandskab” (298) but the English says: “How we played the hero and his gallant crew” (245). For Blixen there seems to be no difference between being and playing, *Schein* and *Sein*, which for the sisters has the added implication that they do not distinguish between fiction and reality, convinced that the world is made up by “saa megen Løgn og saa megen grulig Falskhed” (270; “so much lying, so much [horrific] falsehood,” 219), as they cry in their rooms at night, “med saa megen sort Bitterhed, som om de havde været to unge Søstre til [two young sisters of] Timon af Athen” (“with the black bitterness of two Timons of Athens,” 219). Again, the discrepancy between the Danish and English versions suggests that there is no difference in being related to and being in itself, proximity and semblance being close enough to the real thing. There is in fact much ‘lying and falsehood’ in their lives but in the shape of the marionette plays, dilettante comedies and masquerades they stage in the living room, and similar parrot-like imitative activities that fill up their childhood (218):

De kunne synge Duetter som et Par Nattergale i et Træ, og de kunde... i Stemmer og Manerer efterligne hele Helsingørs Beaumonde... De kunde paa staaende Fod opfinde en vittig Ordsprogsleg eller Panteleg, og... kom... tilbage saa fulde af Oplevelser, de havde haft, eller af Eventyr, der selv havde opfundet... (269).

They could sing duets like a pair of nightingales in a tree, and imitate without effort... the voices of all the beau monde of Elsinore... They could make up a charade or game of forfeits in not time... They came back brimful of tales of what had happened or of tales out of their own imaginations... (218).

While these are typical *Biedermeier* bourgeois pastimes, there is no distinction between their actual experiences and their made-up stories. It is no wonder that appearances and role-playing take on the properties of reality as they have always subscribed to “en særegen Overtro, som de havde fra en Marionetkomedie. Den gik ud paa, at de Løgne, man fortæller, bliver til Sandhed” (312) ”a special superstition, which they had from a marionette comedy. It came to this: that the lies which you tell are likely to become truth,” 257). The revised Danish version omits the ‘are likely to’: appearance simply becomes reality; with the added metafictional layer that the marionette comedy referred to is Blixen’s own “Sandhedens Hævn” (*The Revenge of Truth*, 1926), which also appears in “Vejen omkring Pisa” (“The Roads Around Pisa”). Importantly, “de havde endnu den gamle vane i Blodet” (313; “the habit was still in their blood” (257), much like the related curse that defines them. They remain stuck in this stage of adolescent idealism, as Langbaum calls it, or infantile fixation, as van Hees diagnoses it, likely because their maturation process, as for most characters in the Gothic, is interrupted by painful losses. In their fantastic obsession with not coming down to a limited reality, the sisters assume the role of the Romantic Gothic villain-hero, the epitome of alienated masculinity: introverted, bitter, guilt-ridden, corroding from within from disappointment with the limitations of the human world and the ghastly gap between ideal and real.

6.7 **Incestuous Doubles: The Self in the Family**

The lack of conformity to the given reality principle this attests to is emphasized by the sense of fatality, of being under a curse, which lends power to the Romantic conception of a noble nature

doomed by fate, perverted from Promethean potentialities to abysmal despair often as a living dead or hollow shell. Emphasizing such a dramatic identity is the Byronic innuendo of the unspeakable sin, which is an aspect of the general representational crisis which informs the story. Madam Bæk, too, struggles with the words to convey it:

Selv om hun ikke havde kunnet sætte det i Ord, saa følte hun tydeligt nok, baade med Legeme og Sjæl, den Skæbne, som hang over Slægten og som bandt disse Søskende sammen, og gjorde det umuligt for dem at komme i noget virkeligt Forhold til andre Mennesker (268).

Even if she was unable to put it into words, she felt keenly enough, as with her own body and soul, the doom which hung over the breed, and which tied these sisters and this brother together and made impossible for them any true relation to other human beings (218).

Having observed this introverted self-sustained family for years, Madam Bæk holds toward the world “den Teori, at de ikke havdet været i Stand til at finde nogen Mand, som var dem fuldt ud værdig, undtagen deres egen Broder (268; “the theory that they had not been able to find any man worthy of them, except their brother,” 218), a theory she dismisses in her heart. But this superficial explanation offered to the world as a mask for the real reason is in fact the reason; so that “hidden meaning denies the superficial meaning” (Van Hees 1979: 29; Brantly 53). All existing interpretations of the story naturally comment on the incestuous relationship between the siblings but the theme of incest has not been explored in context with the Romantic and Gothic discourses Blixen uses as foundation for her formulation of identity.

The Romantic sphere of intimacy required strong emotional ties between family members, as the friendship-based family became the ideal. This platonic incest threatened continually to revert into its tabooed corporeal equivalent, not least because the mundane sexuality of the Enlightenment was rejected for the idea of transcendental love, demanding

separation of body and mind. Sexuality in early Romanticism was understood as an idealized mental act, more than a bodily impulse: the ghostly sisters' ideal is the oddly body-less brother: "Jeg havde slet ingen Vægt mere...Tyngde har jeg ikke mere" (318; "I had become too light for anything. From that time on I was somehow without body," 262) he claims, thus relinquishing with the limits of the body the blood that simultaneously binds them and keeps them apart as an insurmountable barrier between self and what should belong to the self (262). Clearly, this strategy is related to the lamia-like sisters' destruction of the other men in their lives who have dared to love them. Vampirism is the foremost trope for breaking down boundaries between Self and Other, own blood and some body – literally – else's. Thus the apparently asexual love becomes transferable to the sibling in an 'unheimlich' transformation of the familiar into the strange and taboo, when the sisters long to physically touch their dead ghostly brother, adding necrophilia to Blixen's long list of non-heteronormative impulses:

De lyttede nu, som de altid havde gjort, men de længtes efter at gøre mere. De havde drejet deres slanke, smalle Torsoer helt rundt i Stolen imod ham. Kunde de ikke røre ham? Nej, derom, vidste de, kunde der ikke være Tale (310).

They listened then as they had done before. But they were longing to do more. As they had set eyes on him they had turned their slim torsos all around in their chairs. Could they not touch him? No, they knew that to be out of the question" (254).

Wondering if he has been faithful to them, they hear him ask: "I er da vel ikke gifte, Pigebørn?" sagde Morten, som om han med eet blev forskrækket ved Tanken om den Mulighed, at en Fremmed skulde kunne tilhøre hans Søstre" (312; "You are not married, my dears, are you?" said Morten, suddenly frightened at the absurd possibility of a stranger belonging to his sisters," 257). The formulation is strange because he seems frightened that a man should belong to them and not the other way around; is it a sense of what these lamia-like sisters do to men that reduce the man to the passive object of the enquiry?

As with any taboo, indulgence in it often results from a confused mixture of social defiance and self-degradation, making it truly poetic in a Romantic framework and adding to the moral relativism which characterizes the Gothic, as embodied in the genre's isolated villain-hero:

'Jeg kunde ikke faa hende uden at gaa imod Loven og Profeterne... Og derefter maatte vi jo... holde os lidt paa Afstand af honette Folk... Jeg ved ikke, om jeg bar mig rigtigt ad eller ej. Skal det ikke være den, som elsker en Kvinde højest, der faar hende?' (316) .

'I could not have her without cheating law and order a little. After that we had, she and I, to keep off the respectable people of the country... I do not know for certain whether I did right or wrong. Shall he not have the fair woman who loves her most?' (259-60)

At Morten's declaration of heroic disregard for convention and unbridled passion for her nautical substitute called *La Belle Eliza*, Eliza herself is described as looking like a bride, her cheeks blushing, as Blixen typically conveys erotic excitement. If Morten is considered their spectral creation, then the dangerous desire has its source in these sisters' vicarious fantasies of absolute and transgressive freedom. Hans Brix compares Morten's request to postpone his hanging so that he could think for a minute on *La Belle Eliza* with the rope around his neck, with Emil Aarestrup's Gothic Ballad from the *Biedermeier* age, "Skjøn Ellens Elsker" (1838, Lovely Ellen's Lover), mentioned in Chapter 3. Aarestrup's male protagonists' obsession with the lovely Ellen makes him abandon his wife and child to become a thief and a murderer, outside society. Each of the seven stanzas ends with the repetition "Og kunne tænke paa dig" ("to think once more of you"), even as he lies facedown under the executioner's axe (Brix 98; Brantly 54). The poem displays a similar defiant disregard for the nuclear family he leaves behind to pursue anti-social drives. In addition, the royal epithets that are consistently used to describe Morten raise him out of the sphere of the ordinary and render the imaginary incest acceptable, since only persons of royal blood are customarily allowed to commit incest (Van Hees 1979: 29).

The incest ban upholds individual, family and society by maintaining separating categories, based on the exchange and circulation of women, in which the sisters refuse to participate, with or without the brother, a contradiction of or perhaps the necessary consequence of the idea that they subscribe to of desirability having to do with the price asked, as Morten says (316; 260). The resistance to convention implied in the Romantic theme of incest is sustained by the sisters' eerie closeness, depicted in Madame Majeska's illustration of the two ominous figures, merging in the blackness of their dress, as if they are one self split into two halves:



Men hvem bedaarede vel dem? Det Glas aandeligt og romantisk spiritus, der satte Liv og Varme i deres gamle Gæsters forkalkede Aarer, hvorfra skulde de selv faa det? 'Fra hinanden,' var Svaret (299).

But who could make them feel in love? That glass of mental and sentimental alcohol which made for warmth and movement within the old phlebotomic veins of their guests – from where were they themselves to get it? From each other, they knew (245).

Again love is tied to consumption, here with a lesbian subtext not unusual in Blixen. The Danish word 'Blodskam' locates the corruption as a shameful infection in the blood, the core of the individual alienated from within. The three siblings love each other as they by blood are bound to do, but the repeated emphasis on consanguinity, e.g. the curse in the blood, and "den hængte unge Mand af deres eget Kød og Blod" (304; "the hanged boy of their own blood," 249) also stresses their sameness. Incest thus becomes a metaphor for breaking down boundaries not just between individual and society, but between male and female, body and mind, self and role.

The incestuous relation, in dissolving the usual familial as well as extrafamilial bonds ... finally dissolves the identifying masks distinguishing one individual from another. Given the time-honored sense of the family as an extension of self, a larger self in a sense, the

incestuous act becomes the moment for the self meeting with itself. At the same time, it provides a temporary escape from roles assigned by fate or society and now unwanted... One can be, through incest, other than oneself, yet strangely, by virtue of this sense of the family as a 'larger self', more completely oneself. The new role provides a freedom denied in everyday family experience (Miyoshi 11).

Blixen consistently parodies the bourgeois nuclear family, in this case both its introverted organization and the impossible standards it holds out to its commodified daughters.

Significantly Eliza does not express a wish to have been *with* Morten, but to *have been* him, in an escapist merger with their ideal of masculinity. That thought is echoed immediately by Fanny as the two seem to share a common mind to some extent. Blixen thus complicates Romantic-Platonic discourses of love, the idea that love means oneness: "We shall become the same, we shall be one / Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?/ One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew," as it says in Shelley's "Epipsychidion," which, too describes a "captive bird" trapped in a convent by her family (573-5). Blixen repeatedly holds out her own inverted version of Aldous Huxley's tragically inflected 'the love of the parallels' as an ideal for relationships (Heede 116).⁷⁶ As the story "Karneval," which was intended for *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, shows, when the two parallels are too alike, too much like shadows or doubles that do not put up resistance, the result is barren domination, as Julius says: "som to masochister... forenet af et bånd af gold forståelse, en sympati" ("like two masochists... joined by the band of a barren understanding, a sympathy" (66). In Elsinore, the desire for merger becomes deadly; in an unusual reversal, Morten becomes the persecuted maiden, his sisters the pursuers driven to consume him. The quest for wholeness at the center of the Gothic drive, the act of tearing down barriers between self and other, necessarily takes place through repeated reflections and images

⁷⁶ Heede points out that Blixen in the course of her life reverts to the original tragic meaning of Huxley's parallels, as expressed in the seemingly conservative views on the gender hierarchy expressed in the controversial "En Båltale" ("Oration at a Bonfire") in 1953 (Heede 122).

of mirrors, which point to a visually inflected fascination with an other self, both same and different, central to the desire to be ‘other than oneself’, yet ‘more completely oneself. Brother-sister incest thus conveys both the Romantic hero’s narcissistic sensibility and his intellectual solipsism (Thorslev 54). It is not unusual for the Romantic hero, who is so often characterized by his focus on his creative drive directed at self and world, to turn to the fundamental ego formation in the mirror stage, in which the narcissistic self is formed by being placed in relation to the world. The re-enactments of this reflexive and reflecting stage ties into the unnameable incestuous sin and the general representational crisis in the story, as this Lacanianthetic break constitutes the boundary between the imaginary and symbolic orders. Regression through attempted unity is a way of divesting oneself of the alienation introduced through self, consciousness and language, as mirrorings are:

sites of self-making, though they are also, at the same time, sources of self-division. With them the self of the child comes to constitute itself as itself and also Other. To identify with another that is, at once, both Other and oneself, makes for the symmetry of opposing forces one gets in an oxymoron, the kind whose energy comes from a dialectic of likeness and unlikeness (Garber: 32).

This dialectic of opposing forces, likeness and unlikeness, sympathy and antipathy, eros and anteros is central to the desired union with a differently gendered self, as they complement and contrast each other through an investigation of sameness and difference. The purpose is the dissolution of boundaries, and in “Et Familieselskab” that impulse is so all-consuming that it extends beyond the siblings and into their environment as if metonymically contagious.

6.8 Vicious Circles: Sympathy and Dissolution

In the series of echoes that structure the story, the unity of the siblings is repeated in the unity of their childhood home, in a series of simultaneously unifying and dividing reflections, as the

struggle between the forces of present and past, life and death is paralleled by the struggle between reason and madness in a complex pattern of doubling.

I Aarenes Løb er det blevet arbejdet sammen til en Enhed; naar Forstuedøren bliver lukket op... aabner en af Dørene til Korridoren ovenpaa sig af sig selv, i Sympati, og naar man træder paa et af Trinene af den brede Trappe... er der et Gulvbræt i Dagligstuen, der svarer, som et fjernt Ekko... (267)



Through the long years it has been worked into a unity, and when the front door is opened ...the door of the corridor upstairs will open out of sympathy...when you tread upon a certain step of the stair, a board of the floor in the parlor will answer with a faint echo (217)

This introduces the structuring themes of unity through sympathetic response to doubles or objects of likeness, as echoes. But the echo also relates to the intertextual doubling taking place between the text and its sympathetic relation to its precursors. Sympathy and continuity with the Other become voracious in the Gothic setting. The response between objects of sameness, on the phenomenological level the two doors, is mirrored within the family of the house, eventually emptying both but providing the coherence Sedgwick traces. The text bridges *Biedermeier*



representations of domestic spaces as family-centered, supporting a social economy and identity, with Vilhelm Hammershøi's eerie fin-de-siècle paintings of silent rooms, strangely emptied of the presence of people or narratives. The Romantic sibling relationship is eroticized in a doomed attempt to find a perfect sympathetic unity. The sisters' closeness as alternately structural and identical doubles makes it natural to turn to that which is closest to themselves, of the same blood, flesh, and spirit: a brother.

Sympathy is an instance of the Same so strong and so insistent that it will not rest content to be merely one of the forms of likeness; it has the dangerous power of assimilating, of rendering things identical to one another, of mingling them, of causing their individuality to disappear – and thus of rendering them foreign to what they were before. Sympathy transforms. It alters, but in the direction of identity, so that if its power were not counter-balanced it would reduce the world to a point, to a homogeneous mass, to the featureless form of the Same (Foucault 1966: 50).

This pre-Romantic definition describes a force that renders everything in its path virtually the same while alienating things from themselves. The double represents the extreme effect of this force, which makes two people feel, act and think so alike that they become one. But likeness, when taken to its regressive, boundary-dissolving extreme, becomes deadly, and in folklore the *Doppelgänger* has traditionally been regarded a harbinger of death. The fact that the name Morten, although still common in Denmark, contains ‘le mort’ has been noted by several critics. Moreover, in a reconfiguration of the conventional delayed and relational recognition of identity through family portraits in the Gothic, in the final scene that recognition is of absence and death, as Time is said to have revealed the true characteristic of Morten’s noble forehead: that metonymic characteristic of his is now deprived of the imperial tiara that once crowned it and appears “som et Kranium” (“like a skull”):

... idet man af Broderens Ansigt fik Nøglen til denne særegne Familieskønhed, fandt man den igen i Søstrenes Ansigter, selv i de ungdommelige Portrætter på Væggen. Det fælles Træk i disse tre Hoveder var den tydelige Familielighed med Dødningshovedet (309).

...this particular type of family beauty, you would recognize it at once in the appearance of the sisters, even in the two youthful portraits on the wall. The most striking characteristic in the three heads was the generic resemblance to the skull (253).

The deadly likeness is enforced by the subtle imagery, repeated and transformed, same but different, in Morten’s unusually high collar which conceals the marks on his skin from his hanging and which somehow spreads to the attire of the girls, as the properties of flesh and fabric

are interchangeable in the Gothic; in Fanny's "sorte Fløjelsbaand omkring hendes Hals" (291; "black velvet ribbon around her throat," 238) mentioned in the description of her fading beauty; and in the streamers of Eliza's cape, which she tugs at "som om hun trak i et Reb" (327; "as if she were pulling a rope," 270) while she repeats Morten's declaration to think once more, "med Rebet om Halsen" ("with the halter around my neck," 270) of La Belle Eliza, as if assuming his ghostly identity. Eros and thanatos thus merge; they are of course both impulses towards "the denial of our individual lives," as Georges Bataille remarks (24): sexuality and death break down distinctions between individual, autonomous bodies, with sexuality threatening "a rent in the seamless garment of separate individuality" (Bataille 102).

Sympathy, in the Gothic discourse of consummation, assimilation, physical mergers and breaking down boundaries, is akin to the death drive, or rather the radicalization of the pleasure principle which regressively moves towards a tensionless state of undifferentiated, unalienated wholeness, but with an Other similar to self for less resistance and friction, similar to the point of entropy almost reached in Andersen's "Tante Tandpine." Through solipsistic projections, world may eventually equal self as before the mirror stage, but it is as a distorted reflection. The physical house and the barren wasteland surrounding them are as emptily sepulchral as the sisters, reflecting their ultimate stagnation and lack of vitality.

Vinteren 1841 var usædvanlig haard... i Januar gik den over til et død stille, vedvarende Frostvejr... der var ingen Vind, ingen Sol og ingen Bevægelse i Luft eller Vand. Isen laa saa tyk paa Sundet, at Folk kunde gaa fra Helsingør til Sverrig... Om Natten... virkede Havets store urørlige Flade uhyggeligt, som Dødens Aandedræt over Verden... intet levende kunde trives her (285-6)

The winter of 1841 was unusually severe... in January it turned into a deadly still, continuous frost... there was no wind, no sun, no movement in air or water. The ice was thick upon the Sound, so that people could walk from Elsinore to Sweden... At night...

this flatness and whiteness of the sea was very strange [‘uhyggeligt’ or uncanny], like the breath of death over the world... nothing at all could keep alive here (232-4)

As the ice bridges the world of the dead and the living (or rather, the living dead), Morten can return. Outside and inside uncannily become one, as in the horror genre’s tendency to conceive of the physical body and its environment as a continuous organic fact: “Hele Verden er bitterlig kold omkring mig. Jeg fryser saadan i min Seng om Natten” (326; “The world is bitterly cold around me. I am so cold at night, in my bed,” 269), Fanny exclaims, withering from within. The perfect circle which by Shelley and Byron in their Romantic treatments of love between consanguineous doubles is referred to as a Paradise, a description ironically repeated in the story, becomes not a complete circle, as Eliza says, but the “*circulus vitiosus*” (325; “the vicious circle”) pointed out by Fanny, excluded from and divided by the exchange of gazes between her siblings. The attempted Platonic-Paradisaical wholeness becomes in Poe’s words: “a circle that ever returneth in / To the self-same spot, / And much of Madness and more of Sin / And Horror the soul of the plot” (“*Ligeia*,” 1838): the zero point described by Foucault when division and categories are not maintained, a concentric and concentrated instance of “the featureless form of the Same.” Blixen’s story and many of her texts thus share with the American Gothic tradition the vision of the family circle constricting until it consumes what is left of the family.

6.9 Antipathy and Monstrous Desire

Fanny may share that desire, but antipathy governs her psyche to a larger degree than the more conventionally feminine Eliza, who loses herself in Morten to the extent of repeating his dying words as a mantra to herself after he has left them once again at the end. Commingled with the desire to be his and him is a hateful resentment at the opportunities he has had precisely because he is not her (or hers). Fanny is excluded from the circle although she screams for Morten to take

her with him as he fades: within her, sympathy is rightly compensated for by its twin figure, antipathy, which keeps things separate and prevents assimilation, a hatred which in nature makes murderers of some and victims of others (Foucault 1966: 52). They both feel “den hemmelige Foragt for Mænd,” (320; “that secret contempt for all men” (264), both refuse to “mind” the hanging of their brother, and both re-create Morten as a much lonelier figure than themselves, but it is Fanny whose heart leaps when she hears that he comes from Hell and it is Fanny, who winds up the clock, which sends him back to that place at the end.

Characteristic of the Gothic Villain is how sympathy as desire for sameness, and antipathy as upholding difference, degenerates into a sadomasochistic power struggle. Characterized by an appetite which he cannot satiate in an orthodox way, his very identity, as mortal human being, prevents fulfilment of his transgressive ambitions and he needs another identity in order to escape himself, social responsibility, and a sense of existential guilt, which Fanny, and not Eliza, suffers from. When this other self emerges, however, it reveals the monstrosity of the intentions. The atmosphere of sexual depravity stems from a fundamental uncertainty that there can be a relation which does not result in a total domination, or even annihilation, of either the self or the Other. Poe was able to produce only ethereal, dead or dying women in response to the same problem; Blixen responds with consistently violent outcomes of attempted heteronormative relations throughout her oeuvre. In “Pisa” relationships end with death from childbirth, rape, and jealous battles; the Councilor in “Digteren” drives his first wife mad to the point where she tries to murder him with a pair of scissors, and then has his head smashed in by his second wife. Baron von Brackel in “Den Gamle Vandrende Ridder” is attempted poisoned by his wife, potentially a she-werewolf (84), and for Marcus in “Drømmerne” the doctrine of love equals toxicology: love is “en Udveksling af Gifte” (408; “a mutual distribution of poisons and

counterpoisons,” 337). In “Aben” the act of love-making, first staged as a violent rape, becomes a parody of sexual intercourse with its simultaneous ideal of oneness and sadomasochistic top-bottom aspect: they were “ i et Favntag på Liv og Død” (159; “in an embrace of life and death,” 152), and “den enes Ligevægt så afhængig af og sammensmeltet med den andens, at ingen af dem ret vidste, hvor hans eget Legeme hørte op og Modstanderens begyndte” (160; “the balance of the one so dependent upon and amalgamated with that of the other that neither knew clearly where his own body ended and that of his adversary began,” 153). Boris’ violent loss of teeth is experienced with orgasmic delight, as he compares Athena to the carnivora, who will eat the hunter if he fails, as he is filled with the kind of “rasende,” raging, love which is not rooted in “Sympati eller Slægtskab, men i Modsætning og Modstand” (159; “sympathy or consanguinity but in contrast and resistance,” *my transl.*). Morten de Coninck’s thoughts before the wedding also express a classic Gothic pattern of fear and revenge in all human relationships.

Jeg tænkte paa alt det store, rene og herlige i Verden, der siger Nej til os. Og hvorfor skulde det sige Ja og finde sig i vore flove Kærtegn? De, der siger Ja, - vi faar dem under os og forlader dem, og finder saa siden, naar vi har forladt dem, at de har gjort os Fortræd (323)

I thought of those great, pure, and beautiful things which say no to us. For why should they say yes to us, and tolerate our insipid caresses? Those who say yes, we get them under us, and we ruin them and leave them, and find when we have left them that they have made us sick.... (267)

This statement mirrors Eliza’s concocting a perfect recipe of “denne fuldkomne Ruin, Elendighed og Nedværdigelse” (“plain ruin, misery and degradation”) for Katrine, the mistress Morten left behind, who ends up a mad and scandalous prostitute, a tragic fate which “gav triumferende Genklang” (“resonated triumphantly,” *my transl.*) with Eliza because that is the only “harmoniske og sømmelige” (“harmonious and appropriate,” *my transl.*) option for someone who (also) loved her brother. Comforting Katrine on her deathbed, Eliza is described as

“en Heks, der opmærksomt iagttager hver virkning af sit dødbringende Bryg” (284; “a witch attentively observing the working of the [her] deadly potion,” 232), as she holds her own breath to hear Katrine’s last one. Similarly, the sisters evince such a deep contempt for Morten’s fiancé Adrienne, both because she is able to do what they are not but also because she is too ordinary, too bourgeois and conventional to exist in their extraordinary sphere of possibility. She, too, is destroyed by Morten, and again her long illness and eventual loss of hearing seem appropriate; eventually marrying she spends the rest of her sad life “mellem vildt udskregne Trivialiteter” (282; “in an atmosphere of high-shrieked platitudes”), as indeed the sisters perceive all their married friends to do to the point where they look at them with “Medlidenhed og let Foragt” (295; “pity and slight contempt,” 242). Rendering normalcy the strange option in a defamiliarization of gender scripts, they talk to their married friends in “et helt andet Sprog... som om disse tilhørte et Fremmed Folkeslag, med hvem Samkvem maatte foregaa ved Tolk (296; “in a different language, as if they had been of a slightly lower caste, with whom intercourse had to be carried on with the assistance of interpreters,” 243). The options for a realized female identity represented are on the one hand the conventional petit bourgeois wives, such as Adrienne, who is deaf, pitied and isolated, and on the other, the exotic and scandalous sensuality of Katrine: these foils represent the angel-demoness spectrum offered in the Copenhagen symposium. Although Katrine with her madness and gypsy-like descent is truly Othered, the sisters are perhaps not so different from her; as Stambaugh notes, they are whores in their hearts, declaring that they would gladly sell themselves 300 times over to keep their servants, something Morten failed to do.

When resisting conventional femininity, in Blixen's world the female characters can assume several archetypal roles, e.g. the witch and the Diana figures.⁷⁷ However, while Eliza is described as a witch, always a positive epithet of female power with Blixen, Fanny seems to bear the mark of the monstrous. Although they are similar in many ways, the difference between them is that the lighter, blonde Eliza is still conventionally pretty, feminine and less intelligent, whereas the darker, older Fanny, who is angry, bitter and reproachful of Morten, is devoid of the codes of femininity, characterized metonymically by her strong masculinized gaze. The consistent bird imagery of heroic falcons and eagles, and lovely swans and doves, takes a different form in Fanny, which becomes more obvious with the passing of time, eating away at her once pleasing features: "Tiden havde taget haardt paa Frøken Fanny. En lille Skævhed i Trækkene... tog sig nu ud som en uhyggelig lille Vanførhed, hendes fordums fugleagtige Lethed var karikeret i pludselige og umotiverede smaa Sæt og Ryk" (291; "Time had played a little cruelly with her. A slight wryness of feature... was now turned into an uncanny little disfigurement. Her birdlike lightness was caricatured into abrupt little movements in fits and starts" (238). She is "en stor, fortvivlet, vingestækket Fugl, der flagrede i solnedgangen" (304; "a great, mad, wing-clipped bird, fluttering in the winter sunset," her large nose "et frygteligt, grumt Næb" (304; "a terrible, cruel beak" (250); all this adding to her self-identification as a scarecrow (242; 265). She shares with the aging Malin in "Norderney," who is even more bird-like, her

⁷⁷ While they do not cover all Blixen's female characters, the Diana, the witch, the caryatid, and the blossom are the main female types in her texts. As with identity in general, they are unstable categories; Childerique in "Karyatiderne" embodies all four variously as stages in her development. Because of their fluidity, there is some critical disagreement with regard to their extent (Brantly 9). The existence of predetermined categories also tends to limit the readings of Blixen, I think. Where the Diana – the tomboy – and the witch – the aggressor, sometimes sexually so – openly resist the expectations of patriarchy, the blossom subverts the system subtly from within, and finally, the caryatids uphold the family name and its honor. Brantly compares Fanny and Eliza to Martine and Philippa in "Babettes Gæstebud" as examples of caryatids who pay an enormous price to serve their family, noting that the original architectural caryatids after all are made of stone (Brantly 10). In Eliza's case that would be marble and alabaster. While particularly Fanny's resistance has perhaps been understated, the visualization of them as caryatids certainly adds a new dimension to their upholding the very Gothic house that has shaped their wasted lives.

position outside the human register. It is as if, Heede notes, postmenopausal women in Blixen become degendered and thus ab-human to the point of being monstrous. “The mark of gender appears to ‘qualify’ bodies as human bodies... Those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted” (Butler 1990: 111). Catinka transforms into a monkey in “Aben” and Carlotta in “Pisa” and Mrs Pennhallow in *Gengældelsens Veje* hover between masculine and feminine bodies. Pellegrina’s animal qualities in “Drømmerne” become more apparent in “Ekko,” which describes a later stage in her life, in which she assumes the properties of a witch and a bloodsucking vampire, a lioness and an angry goose. There seems to be a latent animality waiting to erupt when these women are freed from their gendered bodies (Heede 149-151). Their corporeal abnormality is a tangible emblem of a reality that cannot or will not be engaged into ideological frameworks.

Both sisters are said to stand in a distorted relation to the world, “som om det var deres eget Spejlbillede, de viste den, (271;”as if it had been only their reflection in a mirror which they had been showing it,” 220), both addicted to the male gaze and the worship their carefully staged self-representations yield. But there is a level of congruence in Eliza within these confines of patriarchy, which is missing in Fanny, whose sympathies are with the demonic Lilith. Because the formation of feminine identity is tied inextricably to the mechanics of appearance, it is easier for Eliza to play the part of a proper lady; not only is she conventionally pretty, but she is “en Modedukke af Rang” (literally ‘a fashion doll of the first degree,’ 297), relating to other women through fashion, e.g. the hats she buys from Katrine and the way she and Fanny are said to have created Adrienne for her wedding by dressing her up. Eliza is so lovely through-and-through that

she is not only likened to a swan but expected to fold out her angels' wings at any time (297), thus despite her obvious resistance conforming to the Bishop's ideal at the symposium:

Kvindens særlige og englelige Egenskaber, som vi i saa høj Grad ser op til og tilbeder, er netop de samme, som tynger hende ned og holder hende ved Jorden. De lange Lokker, de kyske Slør og Folder i den sandt kvindelige Klædedragt, endogsaa de tilbedelsesværdige kvindelige Former, Barmens og Hoftens runding, strider i selve deres Væsen direkte mod Tanken om Flugt (293).

In woman, the particularly heavenly and angelic attributes, and those which we must look upon and worship, all go to weigh her down and keep her on the ground. The long tresses, the veils of pudicity, the trailing garments, even the adorable womanly forms in themselves, the swelling bosom and hip, are as little as possible in conformity with the idea of flying [flight or escape in Danish] (240).

In the prominence of clothing in this passage, it is as if the clothes shape the body, which is already a prison, and inform its specific weight, which constricts its movement within the straitjacket of quintessential femininity. When Eliza hears of La Belle Eliza and Morten's desire to sleep in it – or 'her', as he says - her white cape is no longer "en gammel Dames Stads, men Brudepynt for en kysk blussende Brud (317; "the finery of an old lady, but the attire of a chaste, flaming bride," 261), again assuming what would be properly feminine dress if it were not her own brother she donned it for. Fanny on the other hand leads a much more schizoid, conflicted existence. Never a conventional beauty, she dresses up very differently: "Som [de gamle Grenaderer] iførte hendes Sjæl sig den gamle Uniform. Fra dette øjeblik af var det kun for et Syns Skyld, og for Spøg, at hun tog sig ud som en gammel Dame. (242; "Her soul [like the French troops] donned the old uniform. It was for the benefit of the onlookers only... that she was dressed up in the body of an old woman," 265). The fact that her body is described elsewhere as a coffin and here as a garment, incongruent with her self, would indicate a true self hiding beneath, but her innermost core is yet another surface, dressed up in another body and gender. Her character thus resists a simple dualism between public self and deviant interior,

when the interior, too, is but another costume: “the model of a monster hiding behind a respectable or aesthetically pleasing front seems to produce a deep, structured subjectivity” but “disguise becomes equivalent to self”, making “subjectivity a surface effect” (Halberstam 64). As Fanny harnesses such masculine energies, that surface effect is, however, bound to appear monstrous, shaped as it is by the confines of patriarchy.

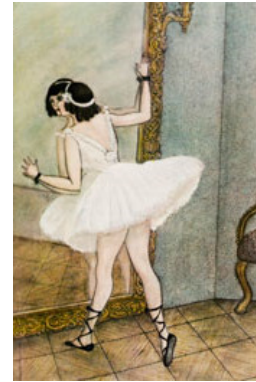
“Et Familieselskab” is thus both conventional and unconventional in its use of the Gothic. It reworks classic staples such as the haunted house of patriarchy, sadomasochistic power relations, incestuous tensions, the family curse and the blood line coming to an end with the last two survivors perishing, while the return of the past conveys a sense of inescapable doom. Blixen also uses classic Gothic stage props such as skulls, family portraits, elaborate costume and spectral apparitions, not for chock effect but rather to convey a haunted identity incongruous with itself and thus inevitably ghostly. The Gothic master plot of live burial and broken communication, which structures both plot and narration, becomes particularly gendered in this context. Traditional Gothic villainy, imperilled heroines and supernatural spectacles are thus renegotiated, as the male becomes the object of the maidens’ desires and pursuit, and the supernatural event seems brought about deliberately by these not-so-fragile ladies, who assume the active role of the Gothic villain-monster. As in Blixen’s other texts, the gender instability may not seriously undermine the prevailing social hierarchies, but it does expose the arbitrary and contingent nature of gender identity.

6.10 Blixen’s Twentieth-Century Gothic: The Staging of Identity

Although “Et Familieselskab” is unusual in *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* in its melancholy, grayish Nordic Gothicness, its staging of identity as role-playing, performance, citation and

costuming is quite typical for Blixen, as I will demonstrate in the following by examining some of its Gothic motifs and props in relation to Blixen's other tales. Because the *Biedermeier* living room is a central locus of transgression in Danish Gothic, the de Coninck familial space is also the site of a pivotal constellation; on one of its faded, once-red walls hang the portraits of Fanny and Eliza, specifically defined as "Helsingørs Skønheder. Det tredie Portræt, imellem dem, af deres Broder, var blevet taget ned for saa længe siden, at kun en svag Skjold paa Væggen viste, hvor det engang havde hængt" (307; "the beauties of Elsinore. The third portrait, of their brother, had been taken down so long ago that only a faint shadow on the wall showed where it once had been," 252). This small tableau demonstrates two important points about Gothic identity. First of all, the girls are as fixed in the portraits of their youthful beauty as they are in their domestic confinement. Morten, on the other hand, is un-fixed, not just to roam freely but to become an empty cipher, a faded trace of an elusive and shadowy identity. If surfaces are contagious in the Gothic, then the emptiness signaled by the mark on the wall spreads to the characters in its proximity, rendering them ghostly, more like monuments and artifacts than human beings. Conversely, in "Kardinalens tredie Historie" (1957; "The Cardinal's Third Tale") it is the aging Lady Flora, like Fanny defiantly virginal and precluded from 'normality' by her gigantic stature, who gains life (paradoxically in the form of the deadly syphilis she contracts) from the bronze statue she kisses and not the other way around: it is not from the site of the human that life emanates in Blixen. In "Et Familieselskab," the void of the human is filled with the narratives of an identity imposed externally, e.g. by Madam Bæk's Oedipal fantasies of Morten and his sisters' semi-erotic narratives based on their readings of fairy tales and romances, emulating the discursive construction of most of Blixen's characters.

The second point implied by the portraits in “Et Familieselskab” is that the sisters’ identity is formed in a space between the portraits of youthful beauty and the mirror to which they continually refer, extended by the self-reflections created by the internalized male gaze. Miss Malin’s tale of Calypso’s formation in “Norderney” forms a striking parallel, which has caused considerable critical disagreement. Composed as a



Gothic tale-within-the-tale, it is set in a dark, medieval castle and stages Calypso explicitly as the persecuted maiden, who finds her true identity by coming out as heterosexual woman and not the gay boy her misogynist villain-uncle has forced her to be. Stripped down to the waist and with a hatchet in hand to cut off what defines her body as womanly, she is positioned between her own reflection in the mirror and its reflection of the scandalous painting behind her of naked nymphs, centaurs and other animal-human hybrids. This is the space in which she comes into being, constantly looking “fra Spejlet til Maleriet” (228; “from the glass to the painting,” 48), itself a man-made construct, which does not even depict actual human beings: one fictional identity is no less arbitrary than the other. Consequently she dresses up in the feminine regalia left in the boudoir: identity in Gothic comes from without, not within, as if embossed in the surface of the self, conflating skin with text and textile. If Miss Malin’s formulation of Calypso’s formation is a “dressed-up image” (46) of the events (which may or may not have taken place), constituted as a chain of quotes and allusions to carry the idea of Calypso, the narrative provides yet another discursive mirror, as Calypso listens intently to her own narrative as told by Miss Malin. It is also in front of the mirror that Fransine in “Digteren” (“The Poet”) articulates her self, subverting the gaze of her voyeur-suitor, always hidden in the shadows, by kissing her own reflection, as captured in Majeska’s illustration. Tom Kristensen, perhaps because he was the foremost

expressionist poet in Denmark in addition to being a critic, is the only Danish reviewer to treat in a serious manner Blixen's specific ontological and aesthetic vision as it is shaped by the mirrors that he correctly perceives everywhere in the collection. He argues that in Blixen, "forklædning bliver en form for Livsfilosofi" ("disguise becomes a philosophy of life"), arisen before the mirror, a philosophy "man gaar i Døden paa" ("one dies for"). "Spejlbilledet bliver en stærkere Virkelighed end Virkeligheden selv" ("The reflection in the mirror becomes a more powerful reality than reality itself"), reaching its most extreme consequence in "Mangfoldiggørelsen af Jeget" ("in the multiplication of the I").⁷⁸ In "Vejene omkring Pisa" ("The Roads Around Pisa"), mirrors double and reflect more mirrors, as "det store Spejlkabinet" (10; "the mirror-room of the Panoptikon in Copenhagen," 166), which Augustus von Schimmelmann shudders at as a child, is reduplicated in his rooms as a student, which are covered by the mirrors in which he searches for the truth about himself. "Derinde ser man sig selv afspejlet til alle Sider, ja i Loftet og Gulvet, i mange hundred Spejle, hvoraf hvert eneste forvrænger og fordrejer Beskuerens Ansigt og Skikkelse" (10; "you see yourself reflected, to the right and the left, in the ceiling and even on the floor, in a hundred glasses, each of which distorts and perverts your face and figure in a different way," 166). The point is that "denne uhyggelige Sal lignede selve Livet," this uncanny space "was like real life" in its continual play of transformations and dizzying effects of a self that is described as purely relational, derived from a series of mutually mirroring circles and surfaces and through the gaze of others, as this reflected "Karikatur," this caricature of the self, lives on as a double which both pretends to be and *is* the truth about oneself, thus relativizing the notion of an intrinsic, originary self (10; 166). Looking for depth, one finds only surfaces. The vision resembles that of Ingemann's Arnold reflected by the mirrors, which create an infinite regress of mutually reduplicating images, postponing and relativizing 'truth' and 'self'. Surely it

⁷⁸ Tom Kristensen's review of *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* in *Politiken* September 25 1935.

is no coincidence that Blixen refers to "Sphinxen" in her promotional interviews; Arnold's questions, 'who am I and who are you?' drive her oeuvre.

If earlier critics focused on the problematic establishment of a single identity, recent criticism suggests that Blixen's texts revolve around maintaining "a constantly shifting multiplicity of identities" (Rees 2005: 17). Pellegrina, the ever-metamorphosing protagonist of "Drømmmerne" ("The Dreamers"), which is structured around the repetition of Arnold's question, formulates a manifesto that informs most of Blixen's texts: "Jeg vil ikke igen være én Person... jeg vil være mange... Opgiv altid at være en og den samme" (417; "I will not be one person again... I will be always many persons from now... Give up the game of being one," 345). Rising from the dead after the fire which claims her voice, she erects a tombstone to the fixed God-given name and identity to which she has been "Slave og Fange," a "slave and prisoner" (417; 345). Being oneself does not equal being one self (Aiken 59). Pellegrina is 'herself' the most when on stage, lost in the operatic roles and theatrical costumes that define her, much like Boris in "Aben" ("The Monkey"): "for ham var Teatret det virkelige Liv. Hvor han ikke kunde spille Komædie, stod han usikker over for Tilværelsen... Men i en Rolle fandt han sit sande Jeg" (145; "To him the theater was real life. As long as he could not act, he was puzzled by the world and uncertain what to do with it... but as an actor [in a role] he was his true self" 140), again reflecting Kasparson's speech on the world as his stage in "Norderney". Pellegrina becomes variously Lucifer, Cain, and Faust, having sold her soul to the Devil, blending the role of dark Romantic hero and solitary wanderer with iconic versions of 'woman': whore, revolutionary and saint, all the while continually in flight, like the peregrine falcon her name recalls, in a defiant resistance to fixity and stasis. While Blixen often uses bird imagery to convey the act of flight from one's limited reality, often tied to the materiality of one's body, the

multiplicity of identity is conveyed through figures of masking, costumes, puppets, marionettes, theatrics, role-playing, mirrors, mimes, cross-dressing and transvestitism, liminal identities such as bastards, orphans and incestuous siblings, conjoined with numerous forms of reflection and inversion, and a frequent use of doubles, twins, siblings, and shadows – many of these drawn from the Gothic. Blixen seizes the program of individual liberation of the Modern Breakthrough, using “moments of transformative spectacle... to explore ruptures in the fabric of European identity” but her reliance on Gothic figures and props to convey the tearing of the fabric is, if critically acknowledged at all, dismissed as mere effect (Rees 2006: 19). It is, however, precisely the effect that is the point.

The number of metamorphoses, masks and disguises in Blixen’s texts is daunting, their effect often summarized by the actor-murderer Kasparson’s repeated comment in “Norderney”: “Ikke paa Dit Ansigt men paa Din Maske vil jeg kende Dig” (259; “Not by the face shall the man be known, but by the mask,” 75). The surface is consistently privileged over its content; effects and semblance become the reality of the self. The specular panoptikon thus shapes both genders: in the economy of Gothic identity, both the formation of femininity and masculinity rely on the mechanics of appearance. Blixen consistently uses masks and costumes to convey the notion that “identity can be travestied or exchanged; there is no proper referent, male or female, only the masquerade of masculinity and femininity” (Butler 1990: 168). Agnese in “Pisa” fashions herself as a young Lord Byron, Lincoln in “Drømmerne” dresses up like his twin sister in order to seduce her friend, Boris in “Aben” often plays the leading lady on stage, while the girl he is forced to seduce, Athena, in her undergarments looks like a sailor boy ready to swap the deck, as she resists both Boris’s advances and the script that is forced upon her body and self, in this case by the simian Prioress as Gothic villain. The otherwise majestic Carlotta in “Pisa” is referred to

repeatedly as an old, bald man, demasked at the derailing of her carriage. But just as it only takes a slight stir to be divested of one's self, Carlotta immediately resumes her gendered identity by reclaiming the hat with its sowed-in hair that she lost. "I en Haandevending var den gamle Mand forvandlet til en fin og højst imponerende gammel Dame. Med hatten havde hun genfundet sig selv" (15; "In a moment the old man was transformed into a fine old lady of imposing appearance. [With the hat she had found herself again]," 169). The scene, as Heede notes, is truly Gothic in its uncanny substitute of the familiar for the strange and its reversal into a pre-social, pre-gendered state, in which the unmade person looks variously like a baby and a corpse (Heede 144). All it takes to become human, or produce the effects of a human, which amounts to the same thing, is a prop. But that also suggests, in its extreme constructivism, that there is no essence, no human being behind the masquerade, that it is quite literally the clothes that make the man – and the woman. At the end of "Digteren," Fransine, when throwing off her outlandish cloak, "en slags Domino" (493; "a sort of black domino," 439), is said to simultaneously discard her beauty and her self; she has decided that "hun var færdig med sit Legeme" (505; "she had done with her body," 419). As if by her own volition, her body disintegrates, effaced by the white shroud / nightgown / wedding dress she is wearing under the cloak: "Hendes Barms og Hofters Runding var Skrumpet ind, det saa ud, som var der intet andet end en Stok inden i hendes hvide Linned" (505; "Her rounded bosom and hips had shrunk; there seemed to be nothing inside her white garment but a stick," 418). There is, quite literally, nothing underneath the surfaces that construct the human.

Particularly in Blixen's early texts, gender is staged as a masquerade, a fluid construction, which the characters can play with and against but are sometimes also played by, as Dag Heede has examined extensively. The posthumous "Karneval," which like "Karyatiderne" was written

for *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* suggests a carnivalesque delight at the liberal assumption of re-gendered costumes and re-purposed fictions. While the insistence on transvestism confers a sense of agency upon the refashioned self, there are also multiple cases in which the body is shaped involuntarily from the outside or articulated through its forced-on costume, more in line with Judith Butler's 1993 corrections to the misconstrued popular notion of performativity as painless, voluntary and without cost (Heede 210). Instead, Blixen uses Fantastic distortion, grotesque ostentation, Gothic hyperbole and a foregrounding of the surfaces that articulate the characters as a means of exaggeration to expose arbitrary constructs. "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency... In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which disavows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity" (Butler 1990: 137-8). In the preoccupation with costume, reversal, unraveling and remaking, Blixen's characters expose the stitches and the artifice of what Western culture wants to perceive as whole, organic, and seamless, exemplifying Butler's notion of gender as an ongoing, constitutive process that reveals the seams of its own making. This anti-humanist discourse is furthered by endless dialogical intertextual references and allusions, to the point where Blixen's own characters reappear in several texts, deflating their own 'realness'. Such techniques naturally have profound implications for the concepts of truth and authenticity.

The metaphorical and literal motifs of masking and disguise seem to indicate an 'authentic' self that is hidden beneath in a deep-structured surface-depth model, but in Blixen's texts, the mask and the effect are the very point: there is no authentic self to be retrieved from the 'depths' of the disguise. Kasparson's mask reveals only an actor who has played many different roles across the categories of class and gender, in addition claiming with Miss Malin that the

world is a product of the imagination (260). If in “Norderney” the villain becomes a saint, and the aging virgin is “den store Skøge fra Aabenbaringen” (196; “the great whore of the Revelation,” 21), the point of such Gothic reversals is not that they are playing but that they *are* their roles. The Prioress-monkey in “Aben,” notoriously resistant to critical interpretation, may offer a clue to this particular configuration of identity. Reading woman as analogous to historical representations of the monkey as uncannily human-like, a defective man which claims subject status through imitation and pretension, or ‘aping’, Aiken links the principle of similitude etymologically with the adjective simian and argues that “the monkey – and its analogue, woman – appears not merely as a mime, a principle of deviation, mockery and caprice, but as a figure of figuration, a re-presentation of representation...that invades and undermines the dominant symbolic order” (Aiken 139-141). Although there are clues that the metamorphosis has already taken place before the dinner, we never reach a point of certainty about whether it is the monkey or the prioress we see, blurring the categories of human vs. animal, which may extend to all the post-menopausal women and their pets in the convent (Heede 217). In the conversation on the goddess of love of “de nordiske Barbarfolk” (134) from which Athena descends, the Wendish idol is described as having on one side the face and facade of a beautiful woman, the other the image of a leering monkey. While Pastor Rosenstand through his profession represents *Biedermeier* bourgeois morality and rationalism viz. his profession and suggests studying it thoroughly to connect it with “Arvesynden” (134; 131), the original sin, Athena simply asks how one can tell which is the front and which is the back. In its simplicity the question formulates rather precisely the Gothic surface-depth relationship, undermining the very dualisms introduced by the Reverend’s original sin.⁷⁹ Like there is no front or back, the monkey is not concealed

⁷⁹ As Hans Brix first pointed out, Blixen was likely inspired by one her favorite authors, Ingemann, in the creation of this Wendish idol, which he describes in *Grundtræk til en Nord-Slavisk og Vendisk Gudelære* (Fundamentals of a

underneath the exterior of the Prioress or hidden in her very flesh; instead they continually change places. Such hybrid forms of monstrosity work in the Gothic to disrupt the systems of classification through which Western culture organizes experience, and problematize binary thinking (Punter & Byron 264). Moreover, in the Prioress' name Catinka, Aiken finds a correlation with the Russian *matrioshka* dolls, "infinitely reproductive of further self-representations," which Blixen remarks in *Den Afrikanske Farm (Out of Africa)* are sold under the name of 'Katinka' (Aiken 150). In the *mise-en-abîme* construction of identity, one layer reveals but another, and 'truth' is continually postponed.

The gaze is thus continually deferred, by both the rich Gothic ornamentation of the text and the bodies formulated within it. Even in the attempts to peel off the many layers, e.g. in actual stagings of strip-tease and the grotesque parodies thereof, only more surfaces and texts are unveiled: even the most basic form of the self is constructed, unnatural, fictionalized. There are no naked or unmediated bodies in Blixen, but rather a myriad of literary, aesthetic and mythological references shaping the body. Nudity itself becomes a costume: Heloise's striptease is staged as the tableau of 'Diana's Revenge', the spectators desiring to see her in the costume of Venus; Ehrengard carefully frames her nude bathing scene as a painting; and the surface of the female bodies in "Den Gamle Vandrende Ridder" ("The Old Chevalier") and "Sorg-Agre" (1942; "Sorrow-Acre") have been carefully moulded by cultural scripts, changing the materiality of the body into a crucial site for the inscription of cultural paradigms, or in Foucault's words, an always inscribed surface (Heede 192-8; Foucault 1977: 140). In "Den Gamle Vandrende Ridder," Baron von Brackel ponders the female dress and its purpose, which is "at omskabe det Legeme,

North-Slavic and Wendish Mythology, 1924) and in *Valdemar den Store og hans Mænd* (Waldemar the great and his men, 1824). In many respects a traditional, dualistic Romantic, Ingemann contrasts the innocence of woman to the lust and unchaste indecency of the monkey, as a disgusting distortion, whereas Blixen throughout her oeuvre negates and reverses such dualisms (Brantly 35)

som den skjulte, i en Form, saa forskelligt som muligt fra dets virkelige Væsen” (89; ”to recreate the body it concealed into a form as different as possible from its true being,” *my transl.*), turning women into symbols, “et Kunstværk,” a work of art, echoing the Bishop’s speech on the remodeled female body and its dead weight in “Et Familieselskab.” The corsets that recur in many of Blixen’s texts, and in Goth fashion, become both the metonyms for and causes of disfigured and misshapen bodies that bear the imprint of the social structures in which they are inserted: the skin is branded and marked by culture. Undressing the young prostitute Nathalie like “en Dukke” (88), like the doll she resembles, the baron finds her waist ”prentet af Snørelivet” (89; ”marked by the stays”), which restrict her breathing: the Danish verb “prente”, to print or imprint, collapses body, fabric and text. Rather than concealing a body of inner truths, skin becomes the fabric that produces bodies exclusively as surface effects in a variety of shifting shapes. But because Blixen’s identities are not essentialist, the tightlaced corset-straitjacket can be undone. In “Aben” Athena, the gigantic tomboy – or Diana-type – is consistently described in masculine terms of hypervirility and phallic penetration (snakes, bears, logs, swords, tools, etc). But during the supper of seduction, which stages her as the rape victim and as the Gothic maiden without a friend in the house (158; 152), it is the maiden Athena who knocks over a glass of redwine, breaking its stem, and after dinner it is she who gets in the fatal punch which knocks out Boris’ teeth in a symbolic act of both castration and deflowering (Heede 200). As the wine spreads over the white tablecloth, and the blood fills up Boris’ mouth, the homology of text-veil-textile-body, which points forward to the later “Det Ubeskrevne Blad” (1957; “The Blank Page”) and its writing in the blood on the sheets, reminds us of the instability of identity and signification in thus universe, inscribed and imprinted from without.

There is another manner in which the perimeters of the body are tested, and in extension the ontology of the surface, in the continual reappearance of skulls, death's heads, bones and skeletons in most of the tales in *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, which extends and renders grotesque the unveiling implied by the striptease. Looming over her sleeping uncle, ready to decapitate him as a substitution for the self-mutilation she has abandoned, Calypso has held her uncle to be "et Sandhedsvidne... og hvad fandt hun? En stakkels lille Dukke, udstoppet med Savsmuld, en Karikatur af et Kranium" (229; "a minister of truth... and what did she find? A poor little doll stuffed with sawdust, a caricature of a skull," 49). Grand narratives and the human born within such constructions of 'truth' are collapsed, consistently shown to be mere puppets and bones. More vengeful, Fransine in "Digteren," her own doll-face already dissolved into the mask of a death's head with its "sorte Huller i den Hvide Flade" (506; "black holes in a white plane," 418), smashes the skull of her husband, the Councillor, who is already bleeding profusely from his gunshot wound. Yelling "Du Digter! Poet!" (508; "You poet!" 420), she seems to finally dismantle the poetic world he has constructed, with Goethe as model and maker, in which she is a mere puppet, echoing the death of another meddler, Prince Potenziani of "Pisa." The smashing of the skull is like deflating a balloon: "Det legeme,, faldt nu sammen og laa fladt paa Jorden som en Byldt gamle Klæder" (508; "The body... fell together, and lay on the ground like a bundle of old clothes," 420), collapsed into nothing like his wife under her nightgown.⁸⁰ Although "Blodet sprøjtede til alle sider" (508; "The blood spouted to all sides," 420) on the page that ends both the English and Danish versions of the book, Blixen's effects are markedly different from Ingemann's use of skulls, skeletons and corpses as shocking horror tropes,

⁸⁰ The collapse is an inversion of the quality of the 'ballon' lightness she has as a ballet dancer, a defiance of gravity and physical limitation, which paradoxically increases with the volume of matter in the dancing body (445; 368). The collapse is foreshadowed by Fransine's ending the dance "som om begge hendes Ben var blevet klippet af med en Saks" (454; "exactly as if her legs had been cut off with a pair of scissors," 375).

approximating instead the parodic in its heavy aestheticization. Such is conveyed best by Boris, the presumably gay young man cast in the uncomfortable role as straight seducer. Parodying the male gaze with the voracious intensity of X-rays, he thinks upon looking at Athena that she would have been "et yndigt, et udsøgt skønt Skelet. Hun vilde ligge i Jorden som en uforlignelig Knipling, et Kunstværk af Elfenben" (152; "A lovely, an exquisitely beautiful, skeleton. She would lie in the ground like a piece of matchless lace, a work of art in ivory," 146). The fantasy of her delicate filigree skeleton and her "blankt polerede Hovedskal" (152; "her polished skull," 146) decorated with a tiara is not so much an expression of a morbid passion, a pathological necrophiliac relish for corpse-like bodies found in Gothic and horror texts, but a grotesque striptease which merely continues the acts of obsessive if elusive unveiling in Blixen's texts. "Mindre frivolt end den traditionelle gamle Libertiner, der i Tankerne klæder de Damer af, som han souperer med, befriede Boris Pigen for hendes friske og kraftige Hud og Huld sammen med Klæderne" (152; "Less frivolous than the traditional old libertine who in his thoughts undresses the women with whom he sups Boris liberated the maiden of her strong and fresh flesh together with her clothes," 146), all the while imagining that he could fall in love "hvis han kunde faa lov



at faa hende i det skønne Skelet alene" (152; "could he have her in her beautiful bones alone," 146). The flesh is no different than the clothes; both easily peel off, again conflating skin with textile and text, which recalls Gautier D'Agoty's controversial *L'Ange Anatomique* (1746), with her flaps of skin pulled away from the back in a manner that suggests the angel wings of the symposium in "Et Familieselskab" or the puffy sleeves of her dress. The contrast between the elegantly coiffed hair, rosy cheek and lively expression and the visceral horror of her flayed body is stark but

suggests a similar aestheticization: this is not the abject mess of a female corpse in a state of decomposition but an attempt to strip truth to the bone, clean-cut, polished and clear. Similarly, Baron von Brackel, in a parody of Hamlet's existential pose, holds up the skull of the girl he once undressed, admiring the rare beauty of a body now turned inside out: "Det blanke hvide ben lyste under Lampen saa klart og ærligt, saa rent. Og i Sikkerhed" (105; "The white polished bone shone in the light of the lamp, so pure [and honest]. And safe," 107). Undressing her years prior, he philosophizes on the Goethean "das ewig Weibliche" concealed under "alle de Stofmasser, hvori min Tids Kvinder var begravede" (89; "the mass of material under which the women of my day were buried," 94), suggesting the Gothic image of live burial but here burial in the body that is formed by excessive conformity to convention, which he, as a presumably gay or bisexual man, like Boris, also must suffer under. But his analogy to the girl sitting on the empty powder barrel with a lighted torch, well knowing that "Tønden er tom... at der intet Mysterium var" (92; "it is empty... there is no mystery" (96) demonstrates an awareness of the fundamental emptiness behind the layers upon layers of deceptive surface; in Blixen's Gothic collection, there is no essential femininity or masculinity.

For both text and body as scripted and inscribed surfaces, the principle of burial - in skin, clothing, gender or heavily ornamented layers of narrative, quotes and allusions - means a continual deferring of the gaze from penetrating the surface in the quest for depth, interiority and wholeness at the centre of the Gothic drive. Literary style thus becomes ontology. In "Drømmerne" the 'central' narrative of the voiceless Pellegrina becomes a continually sliding referent buried under the heavy weight of the various male narrators' fictionalization of her. In "Digteren" especially, the narrative universe is constructed as a collage of quotes from Danish Romantic and German poetry, with the characters moving around like poetic tableaux that

emphasize their status as marionettes rather than warm-blooded human beings that invite identification. The puppetmaster is Councilor Mathiesen, presiding over the distinctly Danish setting of historical Hørsholm, like the Goethe he holds up to be “Guddommen,” the divinity, and “Overmennesket,” the superman (437): “Hans Paradis skulde da være et Weimar, et Elysium, fyldt til Randen af klart Lys, Værdighed, Harmoni og Glans” (438; “His paradise was to be a Weimar – an elysium of [light], dignity, [harmony] and brilliancy,” 361). Hushing up everything uncomfortable and upholding law and order, while showing a talent only for making life pleasant, the Councilor’s ideal is “not the *Sturm und Drang* Goethe of the *Werther* phase but the Olympian poet and elder statesman of classical German literature” (Ted Billy in Brantly: 65). In contrast to the Goethean ideal of restraint, order and taste, which has impacted Danish literature and *Dannelse* so profoundly, stands the poet Anders Kube, a Luciferian type engaged by the Councilor in order to produce great poetry, which however must be regulated to meet the standards of tastefulness, as Kube tends to populate his stories with non-human creatures “der ikke altid opførte sig anstændigt” (444; “who did not always behave properly,” 366):

I hans Sind forstørredes alt, hvad han mødte, paa en mærkelig Maade [og] blev gigantisk, ligesom hine uhyre Skygger af dem selv, som Rejsende i Bjerge ser mod Taagen og forfærdes for, som Genstande, hvis Eksistens er udenfor, og udover, menneskelig Forstaaelse (443).

He had a mind which strangely enlarged everything he met... things became gigantic, like those huge shadows of themselves upon the mist which travelers in mountains meet and are terrified of, gigantic and somehow grotesque, like objects playing about a little outside of human reason (366)

In Anders’ poetic mind, “der var mere spøgefuldt og skamløst end en Bajads” (444; “[with] more playfulness and shamelessness...than a [masked] clown,” 366), the continuity between Romanticism and Gothic thus comes to the fore, in the ludicrous exaggeration to the limit of grotesqueness, the provoking of unease and the grand ornateness and playfully unnatural style,

which defies the desire to believe the word as fact. Making the Councilor a caricature of everything she disliked about Goethe,⁸¹ Blixen lets Fransine, Italian, exotic and displaced, begin the dismantling of the literary and philosophical system he represents by dislodging a stone from the fence of the estate, thus symbolically tearing down the structure, order and boundaries the system relies on and upholds. Smashing that stone into the skull of its miniature representative, she unravels the organic and seamless unity of the Danish Goethean *Dannelses*-ideal, before hurling it and him into “en umaadelig Afgrund” (508; “an immeasurable abyss”). The final paragraph of the collection thus describes the burial of that ideal in “det opslugende Mørke,” (508; “the engulfing darkness,” 420). Taking its place is the Romantic-Gothic spirit introduced not just by Anders Kube but by the very first paragraph of the first story in the English edition, “Norderney”⁸²: “The romantic spirit of the age, which delighted in ruins, ghosts and lunatics” (1), albeit characteristically toned down in the Danish translation of mere “Ruiner og Vanvid” (173; “ruins and madness”), replaces “et klart filosofisk Systems Sikkerhed” (173; “the harmony of a philosophic system,” 1). In one fell swoop, traditional Western metaphysics and the limits of reason are abandoned, underlined by the striking fusion of the monkey with the bust of Immanuel Kant in “Aben.” As Gothic readers we are aligned with Miss Malin, a Catherine Morland unrestrained by reason, liberated in her own mad laughter and imaginary excess:

Skinsyge, Troløshed, Forførelse, Voldtægt, Barnemord og senil Grusomhed med alle de skrækkelige Udslag som menneskelige Lidenskaber kan give sig... lige til de galante Sygdomme... var for hende en sød Konfekt, som hun fornøjet nippede ud af sin Sjæls Bonbonnière og knasede med sand Lækkermundethed (197).

Jealousy, deceit, seduction, rape, infanticide, and senile cruelty... all the perversities of the human world of passion... even the *maladies galantes*... were to her little sweetmeats

⁸¹ Blixen’s close friend Aage Henriksen has written of her dismissal of Goethe as a *petit maître*, a fop or a pedant, “a great and troublesome neighbor, with whom she was always involved in frontier disputes” (Brantly 65).

⁸² As the first story of *Seven Gothic Tales* and the middle story of *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, the centrality of “Norderney” and its poetics is undeniable.

which she would pick, one by one, out of the *bonbonnière* of her mind, and crunch with true *gourmandise* (22).

The delighted abandon in the unrestrained consumption of deliberately non-philosophical excess, debauchery and superficiality associated with the popular form of the Gothic was, however, not shared by Blixen's contemporary critics. The critical commentary to *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger / Seven Gothic Tales* is worth examining at length before returning to the analysis of her great Gothic novel, *Gengældelsens Veje*, as the reception sheds light on the conditions for the development of a Danish Gothic tradition.

6.11 The Critical Reception of *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger / Seven Gothic Tales*.

The difference in the reception of Isak Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales* vs. Karen Blixen's *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* speaks volumes of the different literary climates. American and English reviewers generally appreciate the book on the terms of the genre which its title claims adherence to. Jenny Ballou praises it as a "marvellous spectacle," comparing it to "the lyrical gargoyles and exquisitely grotesque sculptures of the Gothic structures."⁸³ This is a stylistic appreciation which Tom Kristensen is the only Danish reviewer to display in his comment on "de gotiske Domkirkers indviklede og sammensnoede Zirater, for ikke at sige Kniplinger" ("the convoluted and intertwined ornaments, not to say lace, of the gothic cathedrals."⁸⁴ Similarly, *The Times* rightly applauds its atmosphere as "Gothic of the most flamboyant and ghostly architecture."⁸⁵ William Soskin writes that "the word Gothic implies a barbaric, non-classical quality. The novelettes in *SGT* have something of that fierceness about them" combined with "distinctly modern cynicisms... This is a book about living ghosts, ageless and ancient and

⁸³ Jenny Ballou in *New York Herald Tribune Books*, April 8 1934

⁸⁴ Tom Kristensen in *Politiken* April 30 1934, review of *Seven Gothic Tales*.

⁸⁵ *The Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 6 1934

frighteningly contemporary.” Soskin also comments that despite the Gothic mode, “these are not horror novels. Isak Dinesen... makes the supernatural quite reasonable. The stories drip with blood, but it is an incandescent red fluid that suggests a wild poetry rather than any specific horror.”⁸⁶ Likewise, English reviewer Gerald Gould argues that here “Gothic means what it meant to Horace Walpole: something agreeably horrid.”⁸⁷ As such, it is taken seriously; Peter Monro Jack preemptively counters Blixen’s own argument by arguing that “it does not appear to be nonsense,” and that the “response to the style” is necessary for its meaning: “the mood of the tales, outmoded though it is, seems to be contagious,” he poignantly notes.⁸⁸ In contrast, the Danish criticism largely ignores the Gothic framework: ”Er bogen lutter gotik, ikke spor af ligetil Dansk?” (“Is the book all gothic, without a trace of simple Danishness?”), Valdemar Rørdam asks with a hint of despair in order only to praise its descriptions of nature, which Frederik Schyberg also applauds.⁸⁹ Those descriptions in fact play a very minor role, but the desire to anchor the strangeness in the empirical world harks back to the particular non-imaginative shaping of Danish Romanticism. Another strategy for dealing with its strangeness is the insistence by many critics to categorize it as ‘Eventyr,’ fairy tales, thus relegating it to a parallel universe, an endeavor continued for decades thereafter , e.g. with the first book-length study, Hans Brix’s *Karen Blixens Eventyr* (1949). Only Otto Rung acknowledges the Fantastic implied by the Danish title and connects it to the Danish resistance with reference to Shack’s *Fantasterne*:⁹⁰ “I Danmark, hvor Fantasi i stort Format altid af litterære Pædagoger er bandlyst under Navnet Fantasteri er en saadan Bog en sjælden Gæst.” (“In Denmark, where fantasy on a

⁸⁶ William Soskin in *New York American*, April 9 1934

⁸⁷ Gerald Gould in *New Chronicle*, Sept. 19 1934

⁸⁸ Peter Monro Jack in *The New York Times Book Review*, April 8 1934

⁸⁹ Valdemar Rørdam in *Berlingske Tidende* May 16 1934, review of *Seven Gothic Tales*.

⁹⁰ Otto Rung: ”Isak Dinesen og den Fantastiske Fortælling” in *Berlingske Aftenavis*, Oct. 3 1935

large scale has always been banned by literary pedagogues under the name ‘Fantasteri’, such a book is a rare guest”) – so rare that he compares it to the mirage of the Flying Dutchman!

Generally, the Danish criticism is pervaded by scepticism, first due to an underlying resentment that a Danish writer dared to seek out a non-Danish audience first – and succeeded! – and then because of the distinct but related issues of class, style and sexual morals, with an underlying contempt for its foreignness. Hans Brix, for example, equals the books to display cases at museums and claims that what stands out “i dette gotiske Fantasikompleks, er en intensiv Smag og Sans for gammeldags herskabelig Luksus... en Verden som nu hades og forkættes af saa mange” (“in this gothic fantasy-complex is an intense taste for and sense of old-fashioned, upper-class luxuries... a world which is now hated and reviled by so many people”), and which “udfordrer Proletariatet” (“challenges the proletariat”). He assures us that they were all decapitated in 1793 but “de har Genfærd, der holder Traditionen levende” (“they have ghosts which keep the tradition alive”).⁹¹ While this reminder of past tyrannies happily – but perhaps not definitively – overcome is a Gothic obsession in itself, it is particularly apt for Brix’s medium, *Social-Demokraten*, and for the socialist climate of the 1930s, in which such a preoccupation with nobility would be perceived as unacceptable snobbery. Frederik Schyberg, in his now legendary review, claims that that “Snobberi,” both personal and aesthetic, is what has ensured the American success of the book.⁹² Valdemar Rørdam asks (again with a note of despair): “Men er der slet ingen Moral i den Bog...? Jo, men ingen ortodoks og inden demokratisk Moral... kun den gamle aristokratiske” (“But is there no moral at all in this book? Yes, but no orthodox and no democratic moral... only the old aristocratic one”).⁹³ Hartvig Frisch

⁹¹ Hans Brix in *Dagens Nyheder* July 3 1934

⁹² Frederik Schyberg, *Berlingske Tidende*, Sept. 25 1935

⁹³ Valdemar Rørdam in *Berlingske Tidende* May 16 1934 (review of *Seven Gothic Tales*)

issues a similar denouncement: ”alle de Grever og Højheder, det vimler med, er man saa uvant [med] paa Dansk... at det tager sig lidt ud som en Maskerade” (“all the counts and highnesses that it is teeming with, one is so unaccustomed to in Danish... that it appears as a masquerade”). Such class structures are completely inconspicuous in English, he claims, although hardly as obsolete in Denmark as he would like the readers to think, Baroness Blixen being a case in point.⁹⁴ Class and style thus become part of the same issue of threatening ‘foreignness,’ except in the 1930s the threat is not German, as in the previous century, but American.

The coupling of stylistic excess and class-based luxuries, now obsolete, becomes, in Schyberg’s perspective, snobbery; he argues that the environment of the tales relies on historical snobbery ”og deres Efterligning af de store romantiske Fortællere er et litterært Snobberi” (“their imitation of the great Romantic tales is a literary snobbery”), continuing that Blixen is a snob for the wines, diamonds, swans, etc., ”som er hendes faste Rekvisitter” (“which are her usual props”), thus actually commenting on two very important characteristics of Blixen’s Gothic: the heavy reliance on intertextuality for effect and the props that play such a prominent role. However, where the Anglo-American criticism holds out her literary predecessors with reverence for the method, Danish critics dismiss it as unoriginal pastiche, or as Schyberg calls it in the title of his review: “Et Stykke blændende kunsterisk Simili af en begavet, men forskruet Forfatterinde” (“A piece of dazzling [or blinding] artistic ‘simile’ by a gifted but deluded lady author“).⁹⁵ ‘Simile’ cleverly refers both to the imaginative make-believe of the style and to fake gems, underlining both a class consciousness and the value of originality and authenticity, so important in Danish context. Richardt Gandrup continues that the tales

⁹⁴ Hartvig Frisch in *Social-Demokraten*, Sept. 25 1935

⁹⁵ Frederik Schyberg in *Berlingske Tidende* Sept. 25 1935

... virker kunstlede indtil det unaturlige og i deres stil forekommer raffinerede indtil det anstødelige ... det artistiske betyder mere for hende en det menneskeligt dybe og sande... Hendes bog er Litteratur paa Litteratur og ikke digtning om liv og sind. Det er... gennemført og stilsikker pastiche... og ikke digterisk oprindelighed.⁹⁶

... seem artful bordering on the unnatural and in their style appear refined bordering on the offensive... artistry matters more to her than human depth and truth... Her book is literature on literature and not writing about life and minds. It is... a consistent and sophisticated pastiche... and not poetic originality.

On these grounds, which sum up the Gothic aesthetic, Gandrup and Schyberg are able to dismiss it as hardly admirable, a work which will surely soon be forgotten, despite its international success. Gandrup even argues that it would never have been published in Denmark if it were not for the support it enjoyed from abroad, which seems to be further cause for its dismissal:

[Der] må være Egenskaber ved den Stil, der virker frapperende på Udlændinge og opfattes som 'gotiske' men ikke sætter danske Læseres Sind i større Bevægelse, enten fordi vi i forvejen kender det hele saa godt, eller fordi vi gennemskuer det. Vistnok mest det sidste.

There must be certain qualities in that style, which seem astonishing to foreigners and are perceived as 'gothic' but which do not move the minds of Danish readers, either because we already know it all so well, or because we see through it. Surely mostly the latter.

The quote expresses a sense of pride in Danish progress and Enlightenment, not granted to these barbaric (American) foreigners who easily fall prey to such cheap Gothic effects; it is the kind of literature, Schyberg claims as the voice of bourgeois reason and *Dannelse*, "som fornuftige mennesker ellers ikke giver sig af med at læse mere" ("which sensible people do not read anymore"). The term 'illusion' is repeated by Gandrup and Schyberg, and seeing through it to unveil Blixen's 'true' offenses becomes an obsession:

Bogens Indhold kræves at ses gennem Slør, og med Fjernelsen af dens kunstfulde, patinerede Dansk-Engelsk falder det første skæbnesvangre Slør i den ejendommelige 'De Syv Slørs Dans', som Baronessen i sine syv Fortællinger opfører for os.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Richardt Gandrup in *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, September 28 1935

⁹⁷ Frederik Schyberg in *Berlingske Tidende* September 25 1935

The content of the book requires seeing through veils, and with the removal of its artful, patinated Danish-English the first ill-fated veil falls in the peculiar ‘Dance of the Seven Veils,’ which the Baroness enacts for us in her seven tales.

Again, Schyberg in his malicious formulations is perplexingly accurate in his description of the drive at the heart of not only Blixen, but the Gothic; it does derive its ontology from the veil and its contagious effects, much more so than from a notion of intrinsic humanity to be retrieved from under its veil-like surfaces.⁹⁸ Schyberg accurately notes that Blixen offers no solutions to the conflicts but “præsterer en Effekt, men ingen Pointe” (“achieves an effect but no point”), a common point of criticism in Gothic’s relativization of ‘truth’. While praising its artistry and wit (so unusual for women writers, he informs us), Paul la Cour ultimately thus denounces the book as ”litterær Pastiche af højeste Kvalitet, men Bogen er gold, fordi den er uden Hensigt.” (“literary pastiche of the highest quality but the book is barren because it is without intention or purpose).”⁹⁹ In other words, what is lacking is the *Livsanskuelse*, the world view or inner vision that Kierkegaard sought after in Andersen and which critics could not detect behind Ingemann’s Romantic histrionics. In the case of Blixen that perceived lack of feeling has been construed as a void of authorial, human presence and purpose, which guarantees a fundamental meaning rather than just a spectrum of effects, and it is that which critics since have worked so hard to tease out of Blixen’s tales, not just in the deluge of biographies but in the critical work as well.

When the tales are considered ‘perverse’ it has to do not just with the ‘deviant’ sexualities explored in them – deviance being of course a historically contingent category - but with that perceived lack of a human being pulling the strings of the myriad of marionettes

⁹⁸ Dag Heede uses Schyberg’s review as the starting point for his own queer readings of Blixen’s texts to which I am much indebted. He reads this passage as a strip-tease perceived to be intended to seduce the male reader, an act in which Schyberg himself assumes the role of the little boy in Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes” in his pointing out the vacuum of truth and originality under the veils.

⁹⁹ Paul la Cour in *Tilskueren* November 1934

populating the fictional universe. Twenty years after the publication of *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, Harald Nielsen continues Paul La Cour's criticism of Blixen as 'barren' (because a woman writer) in her denial of real life, and asking if the conception of these stories is even humanly possible (62). When he refers to the style as seductive magic, "Tryllekunster," or a witch's brew in its elaborate and aristocratic artifice, he does not only underline the perceived non-human origin but he demonstrates a class-based distancing from 'normal' people, ordinary lives and recognizable feelings (Nielsen 15). He takes particular issue with the marionettes, the skeletons, the metamorphoses (which he calls "Hamskifte" – sloughing - to dehumanize them further), and the exaggerated sexual interest, which ostensibly is even more 'perverse' because it is a female writer who is compelled to "løfte Skørterne på sine Medsøstre" (53 "lift the skirts of her fellow sisters") - like Andersen's diabolical shadow, we might add. Such are all emblematic of the "Mangel på levende Menneskelighed" (62), the lack of living humanity, perceived normalcy and healthiness in the text, the 'barrennes', thus continuing the pathologization of the non-mimetic since the early 1800s (Nielsen 52). The epithets of 'normal' and 'healthy' vs. 'perverted' continue to be used well into the 1950s, like the question of its lack of 'moral'; examples are critics such as Ingeborg Buhl and Svend Borberg, even author and friend of Blixen Ole Wivel in the 1980s denounces its "obskønitet og blasfemi" ("obscenity and blasphemy"). The real offense in Schyberg's review is "Perversiteten" ("the perversion"), the fact that "der...ingen normale Mennesker findes" ("there are no normal human beings"), that all the men are 'effeminized', wearing their sister's clothes, play the theatrical roles of ladies, while all the women are 'mannish', dressed up like men and described as hunters, sailor boys, grenadiers. Schyberg thus concludes, correctly, that the eroticism between such characters necessarily has to be "højst sælsom" ("very strange"), derailed and erupting into "'gotiske' udslag," ("gothic

effects”). This erotic exploration is ”forargelig af den ene Grund, at den intet Formaal tjener” (”reprehensible simply because it serves no purpose”). The dismantling of the nuclear family and its teleological reproductive sexualities, and Blixen’s use of the homosexual marriage of parallels as a positive anti-bourgeois metaphor and a rejection of dull settled life, clearly transgress 1930s mores. Contemporary norms of course should not be sneered at from our post-Foucauldian present but when this obvious transgressive aspect of Blixen’s texts has not been dealt with until Heede’s 2001 tome and partly Aiken’s 1998 study, it is because it has continued to challenge Danish notions of good taste, morals, and what constitutes literary value. It has partly been dealt with through an insistence on the moral nature and humanity of *Den afrikanske Farm* (1937; *Out of Africa*) and *Vintereventyr* (1942; *Winter’s Tales*):

It reassured the Danes, who had not liked the decadent, fantastic, cynical and perverse quality of *Seven Gothic Tales*, that Isak Dinesen had after all a regard and a knowledge of reality and humanity. The Danish reviewers liked the realism of *Out of Africa* and its humanitarian sensibility, the love she shows in it for animals and simple people (Langbaum 155).

First of all, however, the attempted reconciliation has been attempted through an obsession with Blixen herself, in what Tone Selboe likens to a cult following, fascinating but also somewhat disturbing; and what Dag Heede terms a narcissistic anthropologization, a fearful fascination with and disavowal of the post-human, monstrous narrative of a human presence missing in the texts. What American reviewer Jenny Ballou praised as “a weird understanding of the spectacle...the ego of the author is strangely absent,” the Danish reception in particular has considered a void to be filled with a human construction of Blixen, the demasked woman.¹⁰⁰

While we probably have that interest to thank for the prominence Blixen enjoys in the academy and the Danish popular consciousness today, it does paradoxically tend to render her

¹⁰⁰ Jenny Ballou in *New York Herald Tribune Books*, April 8 1934

literature secondary. There is no doubt that Blixen herself has contributed to that myth, staging herself in the role of the rebellious Gothic hero, as carefully as Lord Byron did more than 100 years prior, to the point where her construction has become the stuff of mass entertainment.

Judith Thurman, main contributor to the Hollywoodization of Blixen,¹⁰¹ writes on the back of her

1982 biography: “Myth-spinner and story-teller famous far beyond her native Denmark, Karen



Blixen lived much of the Gothic strangeness of her tales” (1986 edition).

Blixen’s repeated references to pacts with ‘Lucifer’ as the foundation of her writing; the numerous pseudonyms,¹⁰² the initial unveiling of which

Danish reporters described as more exciting than chasing a criminal; the deliberate exoticization of the African past; the elaborate masquerades as

in Rie Nissen’s 1954 photo of an emaciated skeletal 69-year-old Blixen effaced by the weight of the overwhelming Pierrot costume, diabolical in its jesting clownishness – such all contributes to the carefully orchestrated impression of a constructed identity as deliberate as her fictional creations; a fakery or monstrosity, writing, as Heede notes, under a false (or lost) title, assuming false names and a false gender in a false language and under a false nationality (Heede 28).

Nowhere is the awareness of the Gothic masquerade as commodity more evident than in her 1944 potboiler *Gengældelsens Veje* (*The Angelic Avengers*).

6.12 *Gengældelsens Veje*: Introduction

Blixen’s doubleness between parodic distance and seriousness, high and low literature, participation and subversion comes to a climax with the publication of her only novel

¹⁰¹ Thurman co-wrote the script for Sydney Pollack’s big-budget movie *Out of Africa* (1985), which played a prominent part in the 1980s Blixen revival, which also featured TV adaptations of “Sorg-Agre” and “Ringene” and Gabriel Axel’s Oscar-winning *Babettes Gæstebud* (1987; *Babettes Feast*).

¹⁰² Frans Lasson notes her Pellegrina Leoni-like nature and counts her numerous aliases: “Karen Blixen, Karen Blixen-Finecke, Karen von Blixen, Tania von Blixen, Baronesse Blixen, KBF og KvB, Isak Dinesen, Pierre Andézél, Osceola, Tanne, Tania, Memsahib og Khamar” (Lasson 19).

Gengældelsens Veje in 1944, under yet another male pseudonym, Pierre Andrézel. With a detailed fabricated identity and a literary family which included Poe, Stevenson and Stein Riverton, all carefully outlined on the dust cover, *Gengældelsens Veje* adds another layer to Blixen's narrative artifice, appropriate for a novel which revolves around masquerades and deceptive appearances. Taking the Gothic dismantling of not only femininity but modern subjectivity in *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* to a more violent level, it repeats the question posed by Morten de Coninck in "Et Familieselskab": "Hvad er en Kvindes Pris?" ("The question to ask about woman is this: What is her price...?" 260).

Published as *The Angelic Avengers* in England in 1946 and in America in 1947, commercially it was Blixen's most successful work, in Denmark and abroad, although today the novel lives in relative obscurity.¹⁰³ Like *Seven Gothic Tales*, *Out of Africa* and *Winter's Tales*, it was chosen as *Book of the Month*, despite Blixen's reluctance to have it ranked alongside her previous 'serious' publications. She refused to admit to her authorship until her *Paris Review* interview in 1956, wryly referring to the novel as her "illegitimate child," in an echo of her semi-ironic distancing herself from *Seven Gothic Tales* as a 'Vrøvlebog' (a nonsense book). The Danish press immediately assumed Blixen was responsible, causing the so-called 'Andrézel affair' of 1944, an intense public debate about the artistic prerogative to use pseudonyms.¹⁰⁴ Blixen denied having written the novel vehemently and wrote an article in which she defended the right to use pseudonyms, not as a type of deceit as the press implied – voicing again that fear of the non-human behind all her fictions, which Dag Heede has examined at length - but as a

¹⁰³ Her first four books were printed in editions of 50.000 copies in America but *The Angelic Avengers* was printed in an edition of 90.000 copies before 1950. In Denmark it was reprinted three times in 1944 since debuting in September, totaling 20.000 at the end of the year. It continued its popularity well into the 1950s and 1960s as the first of the *Gyldendals Tranebøger* paperbacks, being printed in an edition of 25.000 copies in 1959 and 12.000 in 1960.

¹⁰⁴ Strongly – and polemically - opposed to the use of pseudonyms were Knud Nielsen (in *Sorø Amtstidende*), Carl J. Elmquist (in *Politiken*), Kai Friis Møller (in *Ekstrabladet*) and Axel Manicus-Hansen (in *Aalborg Stiftstidende*).

mask, claiming that even if she were the author, she would never admit it.¹⁰⁵ With her maternal metaphors and rhetoric of illegitimacy she again echoes Mary Shelley's 'hideous progeny' viz. the view of Gothic that was dominant until the 1970s, as a bastardization of classic realism, a product of low rather than high culture. But she had already published one Gothic collection to great success, so her demonstrable dismissal of *Gengældelsens Veje* is puzzling. It is of course a much more traditional Gothic novel of persecuted maidens and uncompromising evil set in post-revolutionary France, in a style close to Ann Radcliffe's and Charlotte Brontë's Female Gothic, and without the convoluted structures, existential contemplations and intricate narrative ornamentation of *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*. Still, although also referred to as a pastiche of 'a governess novel' by contemporary Danish critics, it was generally well received and praised for its suspenseful composition, skilful technique and international orientation¹⁰⁶ – all of which was still eclipsed by the debate on the pseudonym. Blixen later vented her disappointment at the positive reception in the story "Dykkeren" ("The Diver," 1958), which fictionalizes, she explained in a letter, her frustration at not being able to please the audience until she had "søgt nedefter" ("sought the depths") with *Gengældelsens Veje*, which was written for financial reasons (Brundbjerg 160, Brantly 182).

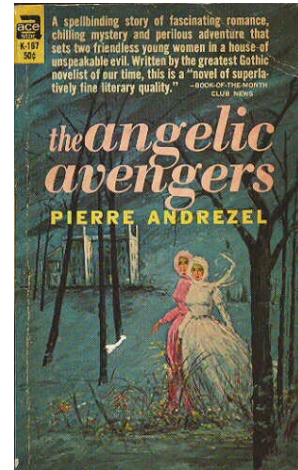
Later critics have predominantly been in agreement with Blixen's own disparaging assessment. When *Gengældelsens Veje* is not ignored in the criticism or mentioned only

¹⁰⁵ In Blixen's article in *Berlingske Aftenavis* Nov. 23 1944 titled "Om Pseudonymer og *Gengældelsens Veje*." Her reluctance to claim the pseudonym of Andrézel had a most Gothic aftermath, as the 1953 novel *En Aften i Kolera-Aaret*, published under the name of Alexis Hareng, was marketed as being another one of her 'illegitimate children'. This caused Blixen to orchestrate an (unpublished) interview with the actual writer, Kevin Lindemann, to force him to reveal himself as her double, while Blixen's letters condemn the public's failure to distinguish between pseudonyms and plagiarism, masks and imitation. In "Norderney," Kasparson, the actor, tells the story of how it amused Walter Scott that Wilibald Alexis' novel *Walladmor* was published in his name, using the example to underline his own masterful assumption of a new name and identity. It seems to be a case of life imitating art imitating more art: Gothic identities are artificial and precarious, even in 'real' life!

¹⁰⁶ Harald Engberg: "Kriminalhistorie i Krinoline" in *Nyborg Socialdemokrat*, Dec. 5 1944, and Svend Erichsen: "En dansk Roman af internationalt Snit" in *Social-Demokraten* Nov. 1 1944. See also Rostbøll's epilogue.

sporadically in footnotes, it is typically dismissed as “mere pastiche,” “mere entertainment,” even by critics otherwise dedicated to establishing Blixen’s literary reputation (Johannesson 55, 66). “*Gengældelsens Veje* has no literary value and need not detain us”; “The book has little or no value as literature” are typical responses (Langbaum 198;

Hannah 49). Its impressive sales numbers and subsequent republication with a cover in the style of mass-produced mid-twentieth-century romances, has likely helped diminish its critical status. There are thus only a few serious examinations of length which go beyond the details of its inception in wartime Denmark and the ‘Andrézel affair’. In Judith Thurman’s 1982 400-page tome,



Gengældelsens Veje takes up a mere two pages. Hans Brix (1949) devotes a chapter to it but declares it a waste of the author’s rare talent (Brix 249). Dag Heede (2001), with the Queer theorist’s predilection for the marginal, is one of the few critics to include it on an equal footing with the rest of the authorship, mostly due to its spectacular stagings of gender trouble. Bernhard Glienke (1977) and Gunhild Agger (1988) both examine its pastiche qualities, Glienke with reference to *The Castle of Otranto*, calling *Gengældelsens Veje* a *Schauerroman*; and Agger with reference to the mass-market romances in the style of Barbara Cartland, so popular in the 1980s. The central elements of pastiche, gender trouble and Gothic terror will also inform my reading.

Because this dramatic novel of persecuted innocents, revenge and forgiveness was released in 1944, Danish readers have seen it as a clever satire of Nazi-occupied Denmark.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ In the very helpful epilogue to the critical edition of *GV*, which will be published later this year, Benedicte Rostbøll points out that WW2 triggered several fictional accounts of the nature of evil in the 1940s, a prominent theme in the novel, e.g. by H.C. Branner, Martin A. Hansen and Kaj Munk. Its connection to this literary trend perhaps makes *Gengældelsens Veje* seem less ‘foreign’ and frivolous than *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*.

This view has been supported by a central quote in the novel, which has served as its epigraph, and which Blixen herself, in her 1944 article which denied that it was hers, held out as its point:

I alvorlige Folk skal ikke gaa saa strengt i rette med et Menneske for, hvad det finder paa at more sig med, naar det er lukket inde som en Fange og ikke en Gang har lov til at sige, at det er i Fængsel! Hvis jeg ikke snart faar lidt Kommers, saa dør jeg! (95).

You serious people must not be too hard on human beings for what they choose to amuse themselves with when they are shut up as in a prison, and are not even allowed to say that they are prisoners. If I do not soon get a little bit of fun, I shall die! (110).

Casting herself in the role of the persecuted maiden, who is denied self-expression in her arbitrarily enforced domestic confinement, Blixen stated, when admitting her authorship in 1956: “During the German occupation of Denmark I thought I should go mad with boredom and dullness. I wanted so to be amused, to amuse myself...” In a letter she complains of the Danes’ lack of humor and their insistence on taking her seriously, even when she only wants to play; what she misses is a Danish equivalent of the word ‘fun’ (Selboe 76). By publishing a novel such as *GV*, Blixen plays an elaborate joke on particularly the Danish readers, recalling the blend of “an elevated tone... and jests and mockery” with which she explained her choice of the Gothic in the first place, 10 years prior.¹⁰⁸ The allegorical interpretation has not surprisingly stuck with the Danes, both contemporary and later critics,¹⁰⁹ intent on discovering a serious purpose behind the melodramatic extravagances of the plot, hyperbolic gestures and eruptions of the unexplained supernatural, alternately seeing it as an introspective crime novel,¹¹⁰ which is where the suspense of the Gothic is usually redirected in Scandinavia – and it is of course marketed as “en forrygende spændingsroman” (“a terrific thriller”) on its paperback cover. Perhaps the most conventionally Gothic text in the history of Danish literature, *Gengældelsens Veje* uses the

¹⁰⁸ In the interview with Johs. Jacobsen in *Politiken* May 1 1934.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Ole Wivel (1987) and Per Stig Møller’s religious reading in *Nat uden daggry* (1985) p. 155.

¹¹⁰ See for example Harald Mogensen: *Mord og mysterier. Den danske krimis historie* (1983) p. 89.

Gothic mode not exclusively to say something allegorically about depth and deep meaning – although its contemplation of the nature of evil certainly pertains to the historical time and place in which it was written - but first and foremost to play around with the Gothic conventions that continually dissolve and disrupt the subject. Often compared to Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818), with which it shares the exposure of the limits on self-determination and self-expression for young women within a patriarchal culture, its irony is slightly different. While both novels rely on the Gothic conventions they also parody, *Gengældelsens Veje* does not feature the wry deflation of dramatic expectations in neither protagonist nor reader, both like Catherine Morland presumably well-versed in the Gothic plot, which provide the comic distance of Austen’s Gothic. There are no melodramatic scripts turning into laundry lists. In fact, everything turns out to be exactly as terrifying, if not more, as the girls – and the reader – expect, creating an excess that contributes to its tone of in-on-the-joke sincerity. A stylized pastiche bordering on parody, it eludes heavily to the Female Gothic and mass-market romance genre it also participates in, playing into the reader’s awareness of the scripts with the same insatiable appetite for pleasurable terror with which Miss Malin Nat-og-Dag faces her endless (fictional) debaucheries. Its multiple allusions to classics of world literature as well as English and Danish Romanticism, which also create intricate metatextual *Verfremdungs*-effects in *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, clash with the cover’s explicit references to Poe, Stevenson and crime novelist Stein Riverton, who all, like the Gothic itself, precariously straddle the gap between high and low culture. When the fake introduction on the cover claims that *Gengældelsens Veje* had already been serialized in weekly magazines, like those three writers, it introduces a profound sense of playful inauthenticity, furthered by its claim to be based on a true story found in French police annals. At the same time, though, its ‘fun’ and glossy romanticized surface is radically juxtaposed to an

alignment of female sexual slavery with marriage, and sentimental bourgeois fiction with the discourse of masochism and pornography.¹¹¹

6.13 **Bluebeard – Once More... : Doubles and Repetitions**

GV was conceived originally in Danish, dictated to Blixen's stenographer, which may account for the relative lack of digression and involution. The plot revolves around unresolved conflicts on several levels, carefully structured around pairs and doubles. Thus we have two girls following the schematic plot of the Female *Bildungsroman*, drawing on eighteenth-century sentimental fiction in the vein of *Pamela* and Radcliffean romances. It is focalized through the young and beautiful Lucan, who has lost her home and family as the novel begins but then immediately finds a home as a governess for the wealthy widower Mr. Armworthy and his blind son. Lucan exerts her maternal powers in the household and seems to be promised a future as the wife of Mr Armworthy, when she receives a letter from him intimating as much – the first in a repetition of deceptive texts circulating in the story, propelling, distorting or holding back the action. As the letter instead is a set-up for the indecent proposal that Lucan be his mistress, secretly stored away in a house near-by, she is forced to flee to save her dignity. Just a few pages into the novel, then, we have the plot of *Jane Eyre* condensed and then abandoned; and while there is no ironic tone per se, the dialogical relation set up between the texts create a sense of the pastiche playfully commenting on its own status as (unoriginal) fiction, thus taking the seriousness out of the dramatic response of the imperilled heroine (Brix 253; Agger 87).

¹¹¹ Connecting the novel with Lynda Zwinger's observation that "the daughter of sentiment" leads to pornographic representations of female masochism, Aiken in a brief footnote argues that *The Angelics Avengers* reads "female sexual slavery as both logical consequence and hyperbolized synecdoche of a phallogocentric order" (Aiken 310 n.1).

Lucan embarks on a perilous journey to find her childhood friend, the wealthy Zosine. It seems that the retrieval of a lost but happier childhood is indeed possible as she arrives at the Tortuga mansion, described as Coleridge's Xanadu and thus headed for a fall. This should be the end of the *Dannelsesroman*, but in a double twist of fate, this second home also falls apart after an elaborately staged masquerade to deceive Zosine's father's creditors. After the collapse, Lucan, then, embarks on yet another perilous journey, this time with Zosine, a journey which takes them first to London, where they feel the precariousness of their situation as young women with no means or connections, and then to France under the protection of the austere, puritanical Reverend Pennhallow and his wife, who have made it their mission to 'rescue' young women. This is the second time Lucan meets the strange Mrs. Pennhallow, as she also coincidentally met her during her first journey away from Mr. Armworthy. Now begins the final and longest of the three *Dannelses*-plots that are condensed into the novel. As the young women receive a rigorous education under the auspices of the Reverend Pennhallow and his wife in their farm house, a series of dramatic events show that things are not what they seem and no one is who they claim to be, that age-old instigator of Gothic terror. The apparently benevolent Pennhallows are engaged in white slavery, selling the girls they have adopted into a life of prostitution overseas. Lucan and Zosine seem destined to double Rosa, their predecessor, who resisted and was brutally murdered but haunts the girls in the old house. After many reversals in fortune, attempts to escape and decisions to stay to find evidence to convict the Pennhallows and avenge Rosa, the persecuted girls assume the roles of the persecuting Pennhallows and defeat them in a dramatic ending that draws on both Caribbean voodoo magic, reincarnation and a Manichean principle embodied in the Reverend Pennhallow as pure devilish evil transgressing the limits of time and place. Defeated not by Zosine's lust for vengeance but by the mercy Lucan displays, Mr.

Pennhallow hangs himself. Mrs. Pennhallow hangs herself next to him by the same rope, underlining their identification with each other, as well as with his diabolical ancestor-double, Papa le Roi, who was also hanged according to the black maid Olympia's tale of her dark past in the Caribbean. The girls escape; Zosine's relation to the owner of the castle, which the farm house once belonged to, is discovered, and they are married off to eligible suitors on the same day, underlining the double nature of the two protagonists.

Gengældelsens Veje is structured around doublings, repetitions, and coincidences on the level of plot as well as character, setting and structure. Structurally, the repetition is emphasized by the many chapter headlines ending with "... endnu en gang" ("... once more"), while plot-wise the theme of the return of the repressed past looms large, combined with an added supernatural eeriness in Reverend Pennhallow, who has gone through a cycle of past existences. The many doubles create an effect of nightmarish repetition belonging to the Freudian uncanny, creating a sense of doom and inescapability of the past, and more importantly a fundamental epistemological confusion, as things coincide with their opposites. That sense of disorientation is maintained by the frequent repetition of the simile of "som om" (as if or like), which underlines the deceptive appearances of everyone and the perhaps supernatural status of the Pennhallows. The homes echo each other repeatedly, which disrupts the domestic space as the primary site for identity formation in the novel. After Lucan's initial home with Mr. Armworthy turns out to rely on a degrading objectification of her, an arrangement covering moral ruin, and the second home with Zosine's family turns out to be a decadent facade covering financial ruin, the third domestic space with the Pennhallows is described as a potentially stable 'home.' It masks, however, an underlying agenda of trafficking, which combines the sexual objectification in the first home with the financial greed of the second. The refuge from worldly dangers soon turns out to be the

very source of terror. While the Pennhallows and their adopted 'daughters' seem at first an idyllic family, with the father figure engaged in the academic instruction of his daughters, and the mother figure in the development of their moral rigor, the household is consistently rendered strange through coincidences and inexplicable events. The description of everyday life, chores, dinners, studying and playing chess in the library make up a reassuring *Biedermeier* existence, enforced by the calm benevolent presence of the Reverend, who turns the farm house into *Præstegården*, the parsonage that is the primary locus of bourgeois rationalism in Danish *Romantisme*. But he espouses a very particular kind of Enlightenment: "Jeg skal oplyse eder og vise eder det sorte Hul, paa hvis Rand I staar" (219; "I will enlighten you, and show you the black hole, at the edge of which you stand," 261), he exclaims when facing the noose in the living room. In the curse he extends from the stool turned pulpit, he compares, with reference to his Puritan Scottish ancestors, the mechanism of the girls' conscience with the most dreadful torture instruments in the dungeons of eighteenth-century feudal castles.

Jeg kender til fromme mennesker og deres samvittighed... Den havde stærkere og finere Instrumenter at pine dem med end dem, som jeg har set paa i de gamle Slottes Kældre, og de var i dens Hænder lige så nøgne og bagbundne som de Fanger, der blev forhørt dernede (220)

I know pious people and their conscience... It had got stronger and more delicate instruments to torture them with than those that I have handled in the vaults of old prisons [castle cellars], and in the hands of their conscience they were as naked, pinioned and gagged as the people [prisoners] who were brought [interrogated] down there (262)

The vision of naked, tortured bodies recurs throughout the novel, as does the gradual shift from external to internal Gothic. The once *hyggelige* living room is rendered *uhyggelig*, uncanny, turned into a violent spectacle as Pennhallow jumps, while Lucan and Zosine's minds, also once safe refuges from the world outside, are transformed into the torture chamber of classic Gothic. The once-safe parsonage becomes a structure of confinement, with its niches, irregular recesses,

long corridors and its dark, ominous basement, not to mention the two large ominous hooks in the kitchen and the graves that are dug for the girls in its garden. As in much Female Gothic – whether in the vein of Radcliffe, Austen or Charlotte Brontë, or the paperback romances they inspired – the governing structure is the Bluebeard plot, as the man-made architecture both precludes and sets up the curious female to solve the riddle, in this case modelled on the actual Bluebeard mystery of finding the bloody chamber concealing the dead ‘wives’ of the past. At Sainte-Barbe, the beard implied by the French ‘barbe’ is diabolical, not saintly. The architecture itself is threatening, as if the house is responsible for the constant surveillance and blocking of communication: “Det er ikke nok, at de ikke er her i Stuen. De kan høre os gennem Dørene. De er her inde, selv om vi endnu ikke ser dem... Vi kan slet ikke mere tale sammen” (160; “It is not enough that they are not in the [living] room. They can hear us through the walls. They will be here even if we cannot see them. We cannot talk together at all anymore” (188). Eventually the structure seems to contract to annihilate them, becoming “det Morderhus, der lukkede sig om dem til alle Sider” (161; “The house of murder, which closed round them on all sides,” 188). Inside and outside collapse, producing a sense of claustrophobic doom.

Pennhallow’s curse, like everything else in the novel, has a predecessor. Despite the older generation’s presence as reminders of the past (Baptistine, Mme de Valfonds), it is not the feudal castle with its twice-told tale of revolutionary chaos, domestic and national betrayal, and finally murder, that turns out to be the actual site of repression and dark secrets; it is the apparently idyllic farm house of Sainte-Barbe. The drama of the castle has, however, spilled over into its annex, so that in the narrative’s present of 1840, in classic Gothic style, it is “et af Gud selv forbandet sted” (76; “there was... a curse on the house,” 89), after the murder of the castle’s owner was committed on its grounds in the aftermath of the revolution. Still, it is not from the

remnants of an aristocratic lifestyle that terror emanates, but from bourgeois institutions not being what they seem. The police in the form of Monsieur Tinchebrai and the clergy in the form of the Protestant pastor Pennhallow are criminals; even Zosine's father's self-built mercantile upper middle class wealth fails to provide shelter, as the palace built as a testimony to his meritocracy is described repeatedly as a ruin after his escape to the West Indies. In a reversal of classic Gothic, but quite typical for Blixen's orientation, it is actually the aristocracy in the form of Mme. de Valfonds, atoning for her husband's murder, and the Catholic clergy in the form of Father Vadier, who offer rescue. Blixen's position on the aristocracy is notoriously benevolent, when managed responsibly, giving rise to Danish reviewers' accusations of decadent snobbery.¹¹² Feudal or semi-feudal relations are not the immediate problem. Middle-class mercantile relations, however, are described as either failing, deceitful or voracious, recalling Marx's description of capitalism in Gothic terms of vampirism. Reverend Pennhallow's business is conceived as a bloodsucking, cannibalistic vocation inherited from his devil-uncle, significantly named Papa le Roi and thus representing a patriarchal order that consumes its own daughters. The black maid, Olympia's tale of this white minister demanding human sacrifice is intermingled with her account of her own past as a slave and (oddly content) sexual commodity for her masters, in an analogy to the white slave-trade the Pennhallows are engaged in, all within a larger positioning of the past as a deterministic force. A criticism of the slave trade is not, however, on Blixen's agenda, but rather a critique of middle-class gender construction.

¹¹² Cp. Zosine's thoughts on aristocratic vs. bourgeois courage, the first tied to a Romantic defiance and love of danger for its own sake, the latter dependent on the familial relations at stake and thus rather mundane (171/203).

6.14 Wanton Women and White Lilies

Once again, within the bourgeois domestic space, a scramble for power is played out. In this atmosphere of sexual depravity and greedy consumption, the existence of the self depends on the domination, even eradication of the other. The Gothic tropes describe a nightmare vision of a modern world, the plot device of the buried secrets rendering its inhabitants unknowable to each other – or themselves – creating not the imagined affective communities based on sympathetic identification of the sentimental novel, but a non-community based on contagion, paranoia and predatory relations. Ultimately, these tensions are seemingly reconciled into a healthy social order, but not until after the girls have repeatedly questioned their own sanity after the sadomasochistic dynamic has been reversed and the hunted become the hunters: “The tables have turned and now we are chasing them. The canary birds are out of their cage, and on their track. And they will never leave the blood-trail till they have hunted them down, till they are dead,” the Byronic avenger Zosine cries out, “half laughing, half in horror” (200).¹¹³ The reversibility in this dynamic suggests identity as role play, played out between the positions of victimizer and victim, and evil as not necessarily an inherent principle, as the demonic Pennhallow would otherwise suggest, but rather as something unstable to be transmitted to others by prolonged exposure. Sensing the power of sympathetic identification, Lucan is said to understand ”den Ondskabs Art,” the nature of the evil surrounding them but ”denne Forstaaelse drog hende... nærmere til de gamle Folk” (183; “this understanding did in itself draw her... nearer to the old people,” 219). But the threat of appropriation and merger is distinctly physical, too, conveyed in terms of abject dissolution and consumption in another animal simile:

¹¹³ The Danish passage conveys the same message of the hunted becoming the hunters but omits the imagery of the canary birds in their cages, presumably because it could be (mis)understood by the German occupational forces as a veiled allegory (169).

Den gamle Mand har selv fortalt os, hvordan Kvælerslangen, for at svælge sit Bytte, først maa spy det over med sit Slim. Just saadan har jeg følt, at deres Væsen satte sig fast paa mig, ja, at jeg var ved at blive en Del af dem selv! (183)

The old man himself has told us, how the python, to swallow its prey, must first pour it over with slime. Just in that way I have felt that their whole being did stick to me, yes, that I was myself going to become part of them! (219)

”The Gothic has always been concerned with the integrity of the body, and by extension, the mind; with the primitive fear of either finding ourselves cut off from others... or having others transgress our personal space, mental or physical” (Miles 2002: 110). The serpent-like Mr Pennhallow increasingly and quite literally gets under their skin as their relationship in typical Gothic fashion acquires sexual and sadomasochistic overtones.

The boundaries of selfhood form a consistent theme in the Gothic. It is tied to the theme of ‘knowledge,’ or the life-preserving ability to interpret dangers surrounding the self but interpretation becomes increasingly difficult when the familiar is rendered uncanny: “not knowing for sure is the primary source of Gothic terror” (Delamotte 48). It is thus understandable why *GV* is sometimes referred to as a crime novel, and it does revolve around a number of lost and circulating texts and purloined letters that resurface in unexpected places: the misplaced letter from Noël to Lucan; the memorized letter from auntie Arabella, which saves their lives; the letter from the Pennhallow’s business associate that reveals the fate of Rosa disguised as a skein; Wordsworth’s poem; and Mr Pennhallow’s lost sketch, presumably of the girls in monstrous or graphically victimized forms. Finally the library, in which Lucan and Zosine spend many hours studying, offers not just biblical images but a world of texts that end up conveying a very particular model of self to the girls, moulded and shaped in the manipulative hands of the eloquent Reverend, referred to as a prophet, a Socrates. The girls, mostly Zosine, are eager to learn, sucking in Pennhallow’s vast erudition, which Zosine associates with “stor

Magt,” a great power, which she intends to partake in, seemingly striving to be more like this Faustian overreacher (79; 92). At the same time Zosine’s statements that “Han kender os begge, og alt, hvad der angaar os. Baedre end vi selv gør det!” (83; “[He knows us both and everything that concerns us]. He knows more about us than we do ourselves,” 97) and Lucan’s perception that he “ad Veje, hun ikke kendte, ledte Bøgernes Indhold ind i hendes Sind” (120; “by roads unknown to her, conducted the wisdom of his books into her mind,” 140) implies an invasion of their minds and a dissolution of boundaries between inside and outside.

The loss of selfhood is also caused by the girls’ extensive theological readings and the references to classics of male ambition, e.g. Richard III, Tamerlane, Dr. Faustus, Odysseus – similar to the models the sisters de Coninck find in the male canon (81; 96). The emphasis is, however, on their unspoken horror at the punishment of the unfaithful servant-maidens in the *Odyssey*, hanged from a rope “som Drosler” (82; “like thrushes,” 96), wriggling their feet - but not for long... Likewise, Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) is used to convey a sense of righteously punished female sexuality in a horribly dark patriarchal world. In the hierarchy established by Mr. Pennhallow, ‘wanton women’ are at the very bottom, below thieves, murderers, perjurers, rats and vermin, who all rightfully recoil in horror from this abomination: “Det er i sig selv syndigt at tænke paa hende med andet end Foragt og at ønske hende andet end Undergang” (121; “It is a sin even to think of her with anything but aversion, or to wish her anything but ruin,” 141). Making the Cartesian dualism of body and mind into that of Gothic flesh and spirit, in which the dominant male relegates the Other to fleshly immurement, clearly serves as a critique of the Protestant church. It reverses the traditional anti-Catholic sentiment in Gothic but picks up the implicit critique of Scottish Calvinism of Hogg’s *Confessions, another startinling portrait of the power of evil*, as Pennhallow descends from a severe ascetic religious sect in Northern

Britain, “Adventister” in the Danish version (69). To Blixen the pious Protestantism of the Danish state church represented a guilt-ridden denial of the Nietzschean sensuousness she held forth in many of her texts, such as “Babettes Gæstebud”.¹¹⁴ Paradoxically, the ascetic pastor, who refrains from eating meat, turns out to be a diabolical consumer of black babies and white bourgeois daughters alike. The hypocrisy is underlined by his argument that if there is no God, one must invent it, just as one must hurl half of womanhood into abysmal darkness to make “den hvide Lilie”, the white lily, appear whiter: “Hvis den rene Kvindelighed ikke er til, maa vi skabe den” (121; “If pure and guiltless womanhood does not exist, we must create it,” 141). The constructedness of the binaries of Devil / God, darkness / light, whore / Madonna is thus made clear; and as his words make Lucan think of Mr. Armworthy’s proposal, we understand that the social hypocrisy extends into conventional middle-class erotic arrangements.

Furthering the girls’ alienation from their gender, their bodies, and themselves, is the same message coming from the maternal figure of the household, when Mrs Pennhallow in one of her rare monologues denounces the Catholic church and its worship of woman:

Kvinden er den hæsligste af alle Skabninger. Den nøgne Kvinde er saa afskyelig, at Tanken viger tilbage for hende.... Hvis det var hændt mig, at jeg havde set mig selv nøgen i et Spejl, da maatte jeg have lukket mig inde i et mørkt Værelse for resten af mit Liv. Kvindernes særlige Funktioner er saa vederstyggelige, at de selv, imellem sig, kun hviskende kan omtale dem. Det er en rædsom Lod for et menneskeligt Væsen saaledes at maatte foragte og gyse for sig selv og at vide, at der ikke findes nogen Udvej fra denne Foragt og Gru (98-9)

Woman is the most hideous of all creatures. The naked woman is so loathsome that thought shrinks from her... If it had happened to me to view myself naked in a looking-glass, I should have had to stay in a dark room for the rest of my life. The particular functions of

¹¹⁴ Although Blixen became a pivotal figure in the *Heretica* circle of Danish poets in the 1940s, she had little patience for their moralizing, ethical qualms, taking particular issue with the combination of Christian existentialism and democratic revisionism of Ole Wivel and Martin A. Hansen (Selboe 80-5; Brantly 5)

women are so abominable that even among themselves women will only mention them in a low voice. It is a terrible lot for a human being thus to despise and shrink from itself, and to know that there is no escape from the horror and debasement (114).

Mrs. Pennhallow has internalized the message to the point where she conceives of female existence as a Gothic hell. The usually silent woman here expresses the self-loathing of Female Gothic; immured within a filthy, menstruating body, this is woman as pure abject. Her abhuman vileness is so profound that it spills over, rendering self and other, person and environment one continuous fact: ”den frygtelige Fortabelses Smittekim springer fra Kvinde til Kvinde” (122; ”the contagion of perdition would leap from woman to woman,” 142), he argues, while she claims that “vi, mens vi lader ham drage os op af Dyndet, selv drager ham ned deri” (98; “While we are making him lift us from the mire, we are ourselves dragging him down into it,” 115). In this vision of femininity as contaminated and contagious, subsuming others into its vileness, there is paradoxically also an undercutting of the essentialism put forth, as if bodies are porous, unstable and not self-contained. Woman is thus condemned to eternal bondage and slavish submission:

Vi maa underkaste os ham og trælde for ham, hans Vilje maa være os alt... Maa vi da ikke gøre alt hvad han forlanger af os, og kan da noget deraf nedværdige os? Ja, hvis han nu vil træde paa os, er det jo ikke dyrt betalt (98-9)

We must submit to him, and toil for him; his wish must be law to us... Must we not, then, do all that he demands of us? [And could any of it, then, be degrading? Well, if he wants to step on us, it is not an expensive price to pay] (115).

In Mrs. Pennhallow’s vision, woman’s hypostatization depends on the male gaze, “ved hans Blik” (99), and in her hope for his unlikely forbearance, he becomes both master, savior and creator – ironically, as man is committed not as much to creating, as unmaking female bodies in

the story.¹¹⁵ While heterosexual relations are often represented as sadomasochistic and deadly in Blixen's texts, Mrs Pennhallow's admonition is the most extreme interrogation of the 'natural' structures that make up the 'reality' of family relations and heteronormative gender roles, and the "expensive price" paid. Further defamiliarizing such 'natural' structures is the revelation that the Pennhallows are really brother and sister, with the added twist that she harbours a semi-erotic attraction to her brother, joining him in the spectacular *Liebestod* at the end of the same rope. Their religious teachings blur the idea of separate identities, as woman becomes submissive appendix to man, illustrated in Mrs. Pennhallow's paralyzing dependence on her brother-husband – she is no Lilith. The incestuous confusion further intensifies the identity crises that govern the plot, as the masks and the roles that distinguish one person from another within the structures of individual, family and society are abandoned, while seemingly harmonious bourgeois relations are revealed to conceal deadly struggles.

6.15 Masquerades and Gender Trouble

The conjoining of identity and alterity, the possibility that something or someone can coincide with its opposite, produces the uncanny atmosphere at Sainte-Barbe. As the thematic terror of not knowing is usually associated with guessing who lurks behind the veil, curtain or locked door, it also ties into a fundamental theme of confusing identities – confused and confusing because orphaned, artificial, veiled and hidden from their supposed origins. Blixen deploys the convention of the family portrait rather traditionally, when Zosine's identity is belatedly established in the revelation of her as heir to the castle, due to her uncanny similarity with her late aristocratic grandmother of the same name in the portrait. But there is a more fundamental

¹¹⁵ A similar thought is expressed in "The Cloak" (1957): "What is woman? She does not exist until we create her, and she has no life except through us. She is nothing but body, but she is not body, even, if we do not look her" (39).

sense in which identity is extraneous, spilling over from without rather than from within. The chapter devoted to “Masks” in particular clothes as Gothic what in Blixen’s texts is a fundamental condition. “Vi... har Maskerade paa Sainte-Barbe nu for Tiden... Jo, det er en lystig Maskerade!” (169; “We are holding a bal masque at Sainte-Barbe these days... yes, it is a merry masquerade,” 200-1), Zosine declares. The prolonged playing of roles in the ‘they know that we know that they know’- mode is deepened by the connection to the power play in the repeated chess game with Mr. Pennhallow: role play, identity and power are interwoven. In this novel in particular, Blixen, highly conscious of the conventions of the Gothic romance, lets the plot revolve around myriads of disguises and consequent identity confusions: the elaborate masquerade in the beginning that stages and disguises Mr. Tabbernor’s escape, in which Zosine’s father is played by her cousin and Lucan dresses up in Zosine’s dresses; the continual fascination with said dresses as emblems of the desired self for Lucan, not least as the dresses give access to a joint identity with their owner; the case of mistaken identities when the girls wear each other’s shawls and the implication for Lucan’s quest for a self anchored in marriage; and their feeling of being “et par grove og mandhaftige Fruentimmere” (67; “a pair of coarse, mannish women,” 79) when tending to practical matters on their own in London, without the aid of a man, having to carefully “Slaa deres slør for Ansigtet” (67; “put down the veils of their bonnets,” 79) to feel like proper ladies, as if the veil transmits feminine identity. At the end, Lucan thinks of the treasure she has guarded her whole life, “vogtet den bag sænkede Øjenlåg og lukkede Læber, som bag et Forhæng og et Segl” (253; “she had guarded his treasure for him behind cast down eyes and closed lips, as behind a veil and a seal,” 302): the principle of the masquerade extends to the body itself which is but an extension of the garments covering it.

Adding to the gender confusion are the retarded helper Clon's appearance as a woman when they first meet him; the matronly housekeeper Baptistine's brutal and sullen manliness; and the prince in the in-set story from the revolution, who must flee in the clothes of his mistress, Madame de Valfonds, underlining his identity as a coward (234). Blixen's multiple cross-dressers, transvestites, actors and masked beings generally, through parody and stylized exaggeration, demonstrate the performative, non-essentialist aspect of identity as a set of manipulated codes, props and costumes, but the Pennhallows are the stars in this spectacular rendition of gender trouble: he is mild-mannered, smiling and soft-spoken – paradoxically for the last in a long line of eloquent orators - while she is repeatedly described as more masculine than her brother-husband: awkward, flat-chested, unkind, large-toothed and with grey hairs on her chin (98; 115). Zosine ponders their uncanny similarity:

Jeg har hørt eller læst... at et Ægtepar, der lever meget lykkeligt sammen, med Tiden kommer til at ligne hinanden... Fordi hun er en Kvinde, tager hun sig større og kraftigere ud end han, men naar de staar ved siden af hinanden, er de nøjagtigt lige høje... Kan du huske at vi, da vi første Gang saa dem , tænkte, at Pastor Pennhallow lignede en gammel Dame i Herreklæder og hans kone en gammel Mand i Dametøj? Undertiden synes jeg endnu, at han er meget mere end en Mand... Men hun vilde dog altid kun være en tør og træt gammel Herre (84).¹¹⁶

I have heard or read... that a married couple who live happily together with time grow to resemble each other... Because she is a woman, she appears larger and heavier than him but when they stand next to each other, they are exactly the same height...¹¹⁷ Do you remember that we, when we first saw them, thought that Reverend Pennhallow looked like an old lady in men's attire and his wife an old man in women's clothes? Sometimes I even still think that he is much more than a man... But she will nevertheless always be a dried-up and tired old gentleman (*my transl.*)

¹¹⁶ This key passage is oddly omitted from the English translation p. 98 in the 1946 Random House publication.

¹¹⁷ There is a similar confusion of proportions in "Karyatiderne" (1957), another drama of brother-sister incest through mistaken identities. The confusion is underlined by giving the protagonists almost identical names and physical characteristics – Childerique outgrows her half-brother-husband physically and psychologically, treating him like a sister without knowing of the biological bond, while increasingly directing her erotic attentions to the brother figure she grew up with, Childeric. The Gothic themes of gypsy magic, vampirism, omens and the curse upon their house deepen the sense of inevitable disintegration inaugurated by the incestuous liaison.

While this description of unattractive oneness is but one of many parodies of the bourgeois marriage in *Blixen*, it is striking how it visualizes the contagious properties of identity, spreading through prolonged proximity, and transcending the biological gender of the body. This consistent cross-dressing is taken to its logical extreme in the scene in which the girls return from their excursion and wish to dress up in the precious regalia of fashionable femininity in the absence of their mentors, who have taught them to be ashamed of their physical form: “Vi bliver os selv igen” (184; “We will be ourselves once more,” 219), Zosine promises, although ironically the dresses are all hers. After the mutual admiration of each other’s semi-naked bodies, which enforces the lesbian subtext of the story, and which both draws on Calypso’s formation scene in “Norderney” – she, too, has been taught to loathe her own form - and reverses Mrs. Pennhallow’s essentialist revulsion at her own naked body in the mirror, they realize that their clothes are gone. The Pennhallows have absconded, dressed up as them. Because Gothic identity depends on props and because the Pennhallows are exactly the same height, coincidentally also the height of the girls, the simple pulling down of a veil, as Zosine remarks, means no one will recognize them (186; 221). The ruse enables the Pennhallows either to escape or to be able to kill off the girls without a trace, but it ends up providing the girls with an alibi, as witnesses have seen ‘them’ leave Sainte-Barbe before Pennhallow’s hanging. In a universe in which masks and disguises articulate the subject, it is indeed easy to wear another identity.¹¹⁸

6.16 **Gothic bodies**

Gothic bodies take on the properties of costume, suggesting a metonymic possession by appearances, as both Sedgwick and Spooner have explored: external surfaces are represented as

¹¹⁸ Mrs. Pennhallow is reminiscent of the equally uncanny Carlotta in “Pisa,” another manly or hermaphroditic creature, who stages a female identity by the simple props of a hat and a wig.

more constitutive of identity than apparently interior aspects. Still, there is a pronounced tension in Gothic literature – and Goth subculture - between self-fashioning, performative identities and the drive towards desired interiority in a doomed quest for lost completeness. The oddly masculinized gaze of Mrs. Pennhallow, reminiscent of Fanny de Coninck’s, is constantly thematized as her intense stare seems to attempt to penetrate the beautiful surface of Lucan, adding scopophilia to her husband’s epistemophilia on the list of transgressions. While the Gothic trope of ocular vampirism and piercing gazes is often associated with demonic villains such as Godwin’s Falkland, Hogg’s Gil-Martin, Stoker’s Dracula and du Maurier’s Svengali, *Gengældelsens Veje* specifically recalls John Polidori’s account in *The Vampyre* (1819) of a dead, leaden gaze, gray like Mrs. Pennhallow’s, which weighs heavily upon the skin that only fangs can penetrate. Zosine’s remarks emphasize the contagious properties of the surface: ”Du bliver smukkere med hver dag... Naar Fru Pennhallow sluger dig saadan med sine runde, graa øjne, prøver hun at suge noget af din Skønhed over fra dit Ansigt til sit eget” (84; “You are getting prettier with every day, and perhaps, when our old foster-mother cannot take her eyes off you [is swallowing you with her round, gray eyes], she is trying to draw [to suck] the beauty from your face into her own.” (98).¹¹⁹ The wording of the Danish original is specifically vampyric, emphasizing the invasion of both their bodies and minds initiated under Mr. Pennhallow’s tutelage, which comes to an arrestingly visual climax when the pair dress up in drag as the girls. In its extreme form, such a voracious take-over becomes the twentieth-century psychotic monster and his skin-suit, as Judith Halberstam has examined, which reorganizes the simple surface-depth model of the self. Zosine’s outburst, “Vi lever ikke mere” (201; “We are no longer alive,” 240), at the realization of the grotesque masquerade indicates that it is an instant

¹¹⁹ Heede links *GV* with “Alkmene” (1942) which also develops a queer subtext of vampyric, incestuous relations linked to monetary greed and dogmatic Christianity, albeit in non-Gothic form (Heede: 132, n. 141)

and complete obliteration of their identities, in the same way that the Cardinal in “Norderney” has been done away with by Kasparson, the murderous actor, in a voracious and violent, imitative take-over.

The testing of the surface, and the drive towards its perforation is also formulated in terms derived from vampiric folklore in the curse which Mr. Pennhallow extends to the conscientious girls, promising that their lives will be worse than death:

Samvittigheden trak dem lange Furer i Ansigtet som Ar efter Brandsaar, den stak Øjnene ud paa dem og fik dem til at ryste og bæve i Mørke...[Den] sad op igennem dem, ligesom den Pæl, hvorpaa de gamle Ofre var spiddede, deres Sjæle raadnede omkring den! (221)

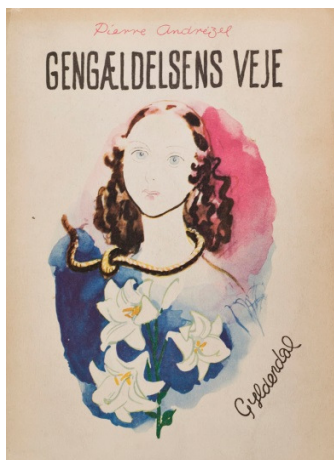
Their conscience drew deep furrows in their faces, like the scars after hot irons. It put out their eyes and made them tremble in the dark... [It] stuck in them, like the poles on which the victims of the old days were impaled, and made their souls grow gangrenous around it (262).

The act of penetration in the novel, of which he is the mastermind, is both overtly sexual in the prostitution scheme but also demonized in its association with an ocular vampirism that is tied inextricably to a not dissimilar consumption. Mrs. Pennhallow’s persistent gaze is at first materially conditioned, a calculation of the wealth Lucan’s beauty can bring. It parallels the oral cannibalism suggested in Mr Pennhallow’s demonic figure, who in a previous incarnation ate the babies of black slaves in the Caribbean and now consumes the daughters of white bourgeois citizens. Female bodies in *GV* are consistently figured as having a price inscribed on them. The Pennhallows and their large accounting books only exaggerate the consistent phrasing of heterosexual relations in terms of price, value, exchange, and commodity, even up to the very last scene, in which Lucan takes off with her new husband and thinks of the “Skat,” the treasure she has been guarding: “Hun havde holdt sin fine Midje saa stramt indesluttet i Snørlivet, for at

den netop skulde passe i Maal til hans Arm...Hun havde overgivet Noël hans ejendom, den kom til at gøre ham rig for hele Livet (254; “She had kept her slim, delicate waist so firmly laced in whalebones, in order that it might fit his arm... She had handed over his rightful property, his buried treasure to Noël. It was to make him rich for all his life,” 303). The physical reshaping and cultural conditioning of the body as feminine text is thus inexorably connected to its possession by the male and its monetary value. While Gothic generally interrogates corporeal boundaries, female bodies in particular are inscribed with visible and invisible markings that reinforce social hierarchies. Both referred to as lambs, Agnese’s rape in “Pisa” and Calypso’s attempted self-mutilation in “Norderney” – and Rosa’s in *GV* – are the extreme manifestations of this sacrificial inscription. The thoughts of her ‘treasure’ upon entering matrimony are instigated by Lucan’s recollection of the proposition advanced by Mr. Armworthy, which, although she attempts to rewrite history by deciding that it never took place, implies that his proposal, the conventional marriage she is entering and the life in prostitution they (may) have escaped are but continuities on a spectrum of commodification and consumption (252; 302).

Enforcing the ambivalence of the ending are the echoes in the description of Lucan as blushing “under sin Rosenhat” (252; “her rose bonnet,” 302), and Noël repeating the simile that she is “som en Rose” (251, “like a rose,” 300) in her expensive dresses at the end. This necessarily recalls Rosa, their prostitute predecessor, who throughout the novel haunts the girls as their ghostly double, leaving red rings around Zosine’s wrist, which again suggests the transmitting of identity onto surfaces. She is the darkness against which the white lily stands out, as the Reverend preaches in the beginning. At the end, ”den blegrøde, duftende Rose fra en Have i England var blevet sort, og den stank. Det onde havde groet og spredt sig godt der” (222; ”The pink, sweet-scented rose from the English garden had become black and charred, and its smell

gave offense. There evil had taken root, and had spread nicely,” 264) he narrates with pleasure at her decay before calling Lucan Rosa. Again, evil is a transmittable quality; and woman is a vile, rotting, stinking mess of putrefaction. Significantly, Rose, within the limited range of resistance and self-expression in the novel, has instigated her own process of decomposition by perforating that outermost surface which determines her price. By burning holes in her skin she reorganizes her body as text in a defiant act of self-mutilation, which annuls her commodity value.¹²⁰ Her



own act of penetration impedes theirs. She is therefore strangled with one of the ropes that constantly appear in the novel, including on its original cover alongside the white lilies. The murdered prostitute is then buried in a cellar; woman is “interchangeable abhuman flesh to be bought, consumed, and discarded,” replaced by yet other girls (Massé 2000: 160). Divested of identity, the nameless prostitutes that precede Lucan and Zosine are reduced to fleshy

objects, hyperbolic versions of patriarchal society’s dehumanized and consumable female bodies. Commenting on the dismemberment of the body into appetizing parts destined for consumption, Michelle Masse has demonstrated the generic alignment of pornography and the Gothic:

[t]he Gothic uses woman’s whole body as a pawn: she is moved, threatened, discarded, and lost. And as the whole person is abducted, attacked, and so forth, the subtext metaphorically conveys anxiety about her genital risk... The depiction of explicitly genital sexual practice which is pornography’s metier can be simply a difference in degree, not in kind, from the Gothic’s more genteel abuse (Massé 1992: 108)

If the Gothic’s central concern, as Massé argues, is the enactment of subordination and domination through the attempted fusion of power and eroticism, we might extend the purview

¹²⁰ This recalls the attempted self-mutilation of Calypso in “Norderney,” who faces the mirror with a knife in hand, in order to cut off what marks her body as feminine and thus at the bottom of the social ladder.

to include the contractual obligation of conventional heterosexual marriage, as the constant reminders of Bluebeard and Lucan's thoughts of the treasured virginity she has guarded with her life upon entering matrimony would indicate. Mr. Pennhallow's appetite may offend against common decency but it only raises the question of less visible forms of perversion, like the torturer-victim relationship he produces is only a synecdoche of a fundamental disparity between the sexes, concealed under the romanticized covers of marriage and romance novels.

6.17 Female Gothic – Queer Gothic?

The female body as pawn is underlined by the repeated references to the chess game played between Mr. Pennhallow and the girls. Not only is it moved around between different brothels and continents in an exchange between men, which parodies that of institutionalized marriage; it also very literally faces the threat of rape, burial, violence and entrapment. The narrative is focalized through Lucan, who is constantly at a loss for words, choking, feeling like she's drowning, sinking into a dark and bottomless sea, or crushed under an immense weight: "Det tilintetgjorde hende som et Møllehjul, der malede hende ned og knuste hende" (157; "It annihilated her, like a mill-wheel, that would grind her down and crush her," 184); on the last page she is not even used to hearing her own voice: "Endnu var hun uvant... med at høre sin egen Stemme" (254). The Gothic master plots of unspeakability and live burial thus loom large in the novel, psychologically in the girls' self-alienation, phenomenologically in the images of cellars and burial, and structurally in the texts that are constantly hidden. At the same time, the otherwise eloquent Reverend has physically lost his voice but is still close to omnipotent, while that most deprived of women, the black slave who has been sexually exploited by her white master and lost her baby to Papa le Roi, is not only able to tell her story several times, but to revenge her loss in the most violent manner. Possibly, this is due to their position outside the

human register, he as a monstrous devil-serpent-pastor, she as a black madwoman howling and screaming, both aided by supernatural forces. The theme of self-expression has been central to the Female Gothic as it has been developed from Moers' sex-based definition in *Literary Women* (1976), crystallizing the connections between the body, ownership, and texts. Not coincidentally, Moers was also the first critic to connect Blixen with that critical category. While Blixen's texts on very obvious levels reveal cultural traditions of misogyny and the conflicts of female identity within patriarchal repressive structures, and while the consistent preoccupation with the body and bodily limits of the Female Gothic remain relevant, Blixen's texts work towards a destabilization of the essentialist gender categories that Male and Female Gothic are based on. When her heroines are deprived of voices, e.g. in "Et Familieselskab," "Norderney," and very literally in "Drømmerne," they resort to a counterstrategy of expression and self-construction through a reassembling of fictions, references, masks and disguises to somehow replace the lost object. In *GV*, the possibility for completeness lies in the possibility of a community of women.

Gengældelsens Veje, unlike most of texts that make up the Danish Gothic, with the possible exception of "Sphinxen," seems to offer the possibility of transcendence, access to completeness and spiritual oneness, paradoxically through the increasingly physical friendship between Lucan and Zosine. While the Pennhallows are the biological siblings in the story, they are reversely mirrored in the true familial relations enacted by the two girls, who consider each other sisters, but in fact act more like a couple than the 'married' Pennhallows. Unlike the cannibalistic heterosexual relations critiqued throughout the novel, the monosexual love that unfolds between the girls happens spontaneously, with no hidden agenda or purpose. The multiple scenes of the girls holding hands, touching, embracing, kissing, caressing, holding hands, "tæt sammenslyngede med lykkelige Ansigter" (144; "embracing tightly with happy

faces”) and semi-erotically charged undressing in front of each other: ”Det Blik, hvormed Pastor Pennhallow og hans Hustru havde betragtet deres Skønhed, var endt med næsten at indgyde dem selv Skræk for den. Nu spejlede de sig for første Gang i lang tid i hinandens Øjne” (184; ”The glance wherewith Mr. Pennhallow and his wife had eyed their beauty in the end had made them afraid of it themselves. Now each of them saw it again, reflected in the eyes of the other,” 219). The mirrors and gazes that abound in the novel can be appropriated in a positive way as tools for self-formation, when devoid of the heteronormative agenda of cannibalistic exploitation. Their marriage to their respective husbands on the same day, replacing their shared birthdays as link, seems to only strengthen the unspeakable bond between them – in a rather innocent version of the Gothic convention of the unspeakable, a love beyond words:

Hun tænkte på Zosine, men hun vilde ikke engang have kunnet give sine Tanker Ord, ikke engang for sig selv. Af alle de Oplevelser, der havde forenet de to unger Piger, havde ingen bundet dem saa sælsomt og skæbnsvangert sammen som denne sidste; at de var blevet gift paa samme Dag. Ingen gamle Nordiske Helte, der havde blandet Blod, kunne have følt en mere gaadefuld og evig Samhørighed end de to Veninder paa deres Bryllupsdag... de havde begge lige dybt følt, at Ord fra nu af var overflødige imellem dem. De korte, blide, lykkelige Blikke, som de af og til vekslede, udtrykte mere, end de nogen sinde havde sagt, eller nogensinde ville kunne sige til hinanden (251)

She thought of Zosine, but she could not have given words to her thoughts, not even to herself. Among all the adventures which had united the two girls, none had bound them together as strangely and fatally as this last: that they had been married on the same day. No old Nordic heroes, who, according to the Viking custom, had mingled blood, could ever have felt a more eternal and mysterious oneness than the two friends after their wedding day... They both felt, with equal strength, that from now words were superfluous between them. The short, deep, gentle, happy glances, which from time to time they exchanged, expressed more than they had ever said, or would ever say to each other (300).

The marriage at the end seems to be the culmination of the ’engagement’ the girls have entered with one another, bound to each other by the home-made ring signifying oneness (166; 194). The rings double the rings of Zosine’s three aunts, which literally spell out ’one’, and extend into the

realm of the dead by including in the circular female community the ghost of Rosa, who has left red rings around Zosine's wrists throughout the story, marking Zosine as an extension of Rosa's branded body. Only symbolically tied by the blood they metaphorically have mixed,¹²¹ but spiritually tied together by their ring, they are able to re-create the lost protective unity, the romantic mythical level of completion from which man has fallen which structures the majority of Danish Gothic texts – the theme of Paradise Lost and Regained is underscored by the consistent serpent imagery describing the Reverend. In contrast, the actual relations by blood, the Pennhallow siblings, illustrate the Gothic motif of the constricting and concentric family circle contracting into nothing, like the 'circulus vitiosus' of the de Coninck siblings. Although seemingly socialized and disciplined into order, the transgressive homo-erotic impulse does destabilize the double marriages at the end, particularly in light of Blixen's general depiction of true love as monosexual and not procreation-driven, recalling the pact made between Agnese and Rosina in "Pisa" – perhaps inspired by the fears of the female body in connection with maternity and childbirth that have been seen as defining the Female Gothic and which drives many of Blixen's spinsters. Halberstam even links the queer impulse "to the death drive in order to propose a relentless form of negativity in place of the forward-looking, reproductive and heteronormative politics of hope" (Halberstam 2006: 823). In Blixen's texts, heterosexual desire rarely occurs in a pure form but usually works as a replacement mechanism directed at a displaced object, in effect merely mimicking the true constellation of homosocial and monosexual desire, in this case between the two girls (Heede 121).

¹²¹ In a similar manner in "Pisa", Rosina and the wild Agnese, who like Zosine models herself on Byron, have mixed blood and vowed sisterhood, a pact which has dire consequences for Agnese, who, like the sacrificial lamb her name recalls, takes Rosina's place in the marital bed and is raped by her impotent husband's stand-in, losing thus both her virginity and poetic voice of expression: "the relation carries a lesbian subtext that can only emerge indirectly, written in the 'blood' of symbolic exchanges and substitutions" (Aiken 167). In "Ekko," Pellegrina's understanding of the mixing of blood implies continuity: "it is difficult to tell, in a mingling of blood like our, who gives and receives" (189), ultimately causing accusations of vampirism which she does not wholeheartedly deny (186).

Gengældelsens Veje, then, both upholds and dismantles the tradition of the Female Gothic novel. Transgressive evil is seemingly punished, and anti-social desires are allayed, subsumed under the reaffirmation of the old social and moral order, as the home-away-home trajectory of the *Bildungsroman* (and fairy tale) ends with the discovery of a feminine self that is relational and anchored in the domestic space of the heteronormative economy. The female plot is typically “one of repetition and continuity,” in which individual interest is reconciled with the demands of society, and individuation is reached through attachment (Kilgour 37). But a number of slips deliberately undercut this compulsive happy ending: the lesbian subtext; Lucan’s comparisons to the damaged prostitute as she enters marriage; the echoes of Mr. Armworthy’s indecent proposal at the same time; and the replacement of Zosine’s self-fashioned childish ring with “en skøn, kostbar gammel Ring” (246; “an old beautiful diamond ring,” 301) from her husband, signalling again the commodification of women as objects of exchange that is the basis of this particular society – so irrefutably that it marks their bodies. Additionally, Zosine’s future at the castle of Joliet comes with a stipulation that she remain there, as an extension of the atonement for the revolutionary crime committed by its mistress, but in effect extending the incarceration Zosine has fled. Likewise, one must note that Lucan’s Noël himself believes that his recently gained fortune is a result of a pact entered with the devil, the very reason why he returns to Mr. Pennhallow, who is his former mentor! Most damning of all is the Reverend’s prophecy, delivered from the stool of his hanging, which he turns into a pulpit, like he turns the robe around his neck into a clerical collar (219; 261). He predicts that their guilt from pursuing the *Gengældelse* – the vengeance – of the title will drive them mad: tying the motifs of blood, circular repetition and bodily inscription together, he predicts that they will faint twelve times a year at the sight of their own blood, that Lucan’s wedding ring will “klæbe til din Finger med

Blod” (stick to your finger with blood”) and that her child will be born ”med en rød Ring om Halsen” (“with another red ring round its throat”). The lessons she will teach her child will turn into the “hæslige Ord” (“hideous words”) of the books he has taught them from at Sainte-Barbe, suggesting again his complete invasion of their bodies and minds.

Jeg vil staa bag ved dig paa Skamlen, naar du ser dig i Spejlene i dit smukke Hus, indtil du hvinende slaar dem alle i Stykker, og den Ægtefælle maa lukke dig inde med Forhæng for Vinduerne og med en Vogterske, der kan give dig Spændetrøjen paa (221)

I will be standing behind you, on this stool, with the rope round my neck, when you gaze into the looking-glasses of your pretty rooms, until, squealing, you break them all with your fists, and your husband will have to shut you up, with shutters to the window, and a strong woman [guardian] to put the strait-jacket on you (263)

Because the womanly existence he paints between the menstrual function, child-rearing and the mirrored vanity is not so distant, if at all, from Blixen’s present, and because heteronormative marriage is consistently problematized in her texts, referred to as spiritual cannibalism in her essay on modern marriage, “Moderne Ægteskab” (written 1923-24), there seems to be a ring of truth to it. In the Female Gothic, paradoxically “the protagonist’s marriage and reintegration into society appear to reinforce precisely the domestic ideology which, throughout the narrative, is suggested to be the cause of all her problems and suffering” (Punter & Byron 281). The old Mrs. Pinkney’s reference to Lucan and Zosine as “Fanny og Elisabeth” suggests lives wasted in unrealized potential, rendering them intertextual doubles of the de Coninck sisters, Fanny and Eliza (181). Will they turn into the mad and confined Bertha Rochesters described in the curse, or the Ophelias, who in the English version, “like my other girls... will be taught to yearn for the river, for the deep well, for the rope itself” (263)? Will the angelic avengers pine away as the angel-of-the-house stereotype that is but another version of the Gothic victim?

Mr. Pennhallow is an eerily powerful figure, a study of evil unmatched in Danish literature, as he consistently appropriates the discourse, symbols and attire of Christianity to further his own cause. Because his apparently supernatural qualities are not rationalized in the course of the novel, unlike the traditional Female Gothic, his curse seems very real. Uncle and nephew are doubled; Papa le Roi and Pennhallow are both gray in color and associated with snakes, to suggest their in-between nature; both are hoarse; both know the rope very well; and both are in the service of the devil after entering a diabolical pact, a supernatural element that is sustained throughout the novel, as Pennhallow seems but another incarnation of Papa le Roi (222, 262). Olimpia even suggests that this "Djævel i Menneskeskikkelse" (154; "devil in human form," *my transl.*) has risen from the grave. Olimpia herself seems to have telepathic powers and is aided by a ghostly community of dead black slaves to find the girls. Pennhallow consistently enjoys himself, smiling and chuckling at the crimes he refers to as "jokes" intended to make his master smile, assured of his own happiness and safety: "Min Tilfredshed vil vare" ("My pleasure is to last forever and ever," 264), knowing that "det onde i Verden er mægtigt, et Afgrundsdyb, et Hav, der ikke kan tømmes ud ... ved menneskelige Foranstaltninger" (135; "the evil of this world is mighty, an abyss, a deep sea that cannot be emptied...by any human acts or measures," 159). Evil is not conquered at the end, but is implied to live on and transcend time and space; it is after all contagious. Stealing the show, Pennhallow's story of vaunting ambition and Luciferian rebellion against bourgeois conventions and human limitation is what lingers at the end, as the novel comes to a screeching halt in the final chapters, which outline the pre-marital bliss of the girls. The novel form allows Blixen to marry the male and female Gothic traditions, thus foregrounding the interests of late twentieth-century critical theory: "early female writers of the Gothic are primarily interested in rights, for their class, their sex, and often both together;

whereas the early writers of the male Gothic are more absorbed by the politics of identity... The trajectories of the two strands take us, critically, to feminism and queer theory” (Miles 2000: 45). The identity developed in the crossfires between feminism and queer theory is, as shown, of a distinctly modern nature: staged, masked, precarious and perhaps not inherently straight.

6.18 Concluding Remarks

If the quietly melancholy “Et Familieselskab” draws on *Hamlet* and its hyperbolic staging of masculinity, then the loudly excessive *Gengældelsens Veje* is a pastiche of that other great precursor of the Gothic novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, and its imperiled femininity. Both texts, however, rewrite their sources of origin, in the same way that quotes in general and the biblical myth of origin and fall in particular are rewritten throughout Blixen’s oeuvre. One of the effects of this is a type of reconstructed history of genderbiased sexuality, from the Eden myth to commodified, even violent relations to conventional marriage. Through their shared motifs of ropes and caged birds, cannibalistic and vampyric consumption, transgressive desires, and encaged and inscribed female bodies, both texts challenge the then prevailing models of not only gender, but bourgeois relations and domesticity cloaked in gothic form not to disguise but to reveal what is already strange. Both texts draw attention to “the logic of an androcentric symbolic order [that] all contracts between men and woman become variants of prostitution” but they both also subvert that order through the queer subtexts (Aiken 112).

Although Blixen’s texts resemble a literature conceived before the Modern Breakthrough, in many ways she continues Georg Brandes’ program, not in terms of the heavy-handed social realism conveying a democratic and prosaically recognizable normality, which it had evolved into, but its aspect of liberation from a self grounded in Christian moral dogma and bourgeois

convention, which Brandes would explore in his trailblazing essays on Nietzsche in 1888. 'Lucifer', Romantic rebel and modern outsider, becomes Blixen's archetype for that liberation, in her exploration of that question, 'Hvem er jeg?' ('Who am I?'), which has haunted Danish writers of a particular sensibility since Johannes Ewald, the pre-romantic poet whom she references so extensively. Bending the familiar and popular Gothic formulas to her own purposes, Blixen does not conform wholly either to 'male' or 'female' Gothic conventions but uses Gothic to destabilize all kinds of boundaries, allowing her to critique constructions of masculinity and femininity. Referencing the past heavily – paintings, music, modern literature, myths and biblical narratives, fashion, historical events, etc. – she is not an innovator in terms of style or structure nor a modernist but the dialogic reality set up destabilizes conventional concepts of truth, reality and self, as expressed in the Danish *Dannelsesroman*. Using the recognizable popular form of the Gothic, she is able to explore the anxieties of modernity, anticipating the hyper-staged self-representations that characterize our post-millennial concepts of identity.

Chapter 7. Conclusion: The Danish Gothic, Past and Present

When Leonora Christina Skov published her *über-Gothic* novel *Silhuet af en Synder* (Silhouette of a Sinner) in 2010, she claimed in an interview on Danish public radio that "traditionen i Danmark er ikke kommet videre end Blixen..." ("the tradition in Denmark begins and ends with Blixen," in P1 *Kulturnyt* April 2010). It has been my intention to prove that statement wrong by demonstrating the consistent but varied employment of Gothic conventions not just by Karen Blixen, but by her predecessors, B.S. Ingemann and H.C. Andersen. In the following I will offer an outline of my central arguments, tying the disparate texts together, while also connecting them with the modern Danish Gothic of today as shaped by Peter Høeg and Leonora Christina Skov. The scope of this study does not permit me to go into depth with their texts but they should be included for a full understanding of the Danish Gothic, not only because they represent its current status but because especially Høeg's extreme awareness of his Danish textual precursors testifies to the existence of such a rich tradition.

When Danish works that participate in the Gothic genre are, as demonstrated, more common and central to the canon than has been assumed, the reasons for its critical neglect lie first and foremost in the Scandinavian region's proclivity for realism. While that realism since the 1990s has been disciplined into a terse, minimalistic prose detailing rather mundane matters of everyday life, e.g. by Helle Helle and other writers from *Forfatterskolen* - a style Skov explicitly denounces in the promotional interviews for *Silhuet* - in the 1800s it resulted in a construction of Romanticism which is realistic and empirically based in the everyday world, and not as intimately bound up with Gothic as in the surrounding countries. On the contrary, the Danish writers that have explored darker versions of Romanticism, be that Gothic ballads,

Fantastic tales or stories of illicit desires raging under the surface in the later *Romantismen*, have faced an obliterating criticism, which tells a story of a repressive diagnostication, pathologization, and abjection of quandaries, monstrosities and deviant subjectivities that have not fit in with the dominant cultural script, or which have only been permitted in the safe confines of the non-mimetic marvelous mode as in the fairy tales by H.C. Andersen. That construction of Romanticism as realistic - not escapist, nor nihilistic or irrational, and thus not 'German' - has been closely tied to formulation of what constitutes literary value, which became even stronger under the banners of the Modern Breakthrough and the then complete annihilation of Romantic sentiment and aesthetics, and even more so its Gothic subtext. This has precluded an acknowledgment of the Gothic and other non-mimetic modes, which have - to an extent in Britain, and much more so in Denmark - been considered "as aberrations, as necessary lapses into a false taste that had to be purged" before the national literature found its true form in the well-written, well-mannered realistic novel of the mid-century (Gamer 89). The Gothic, then, becomes an embarrassing footnote, if mentioned at all in the official literary histories, "a juvenile fancy – an immature and sensationalist aesthetic" to be rejected by more mature writers, e.g. the older Ingemann (Gamer 89). At the same time, though, that sensationalist and suspenseful aesthetic accompanied by drawn-out spectacles of suffering is very much present elsewhere, in another supposedly 'immature' and 'low-brow' mode. It is telling that Peter Høeg found his greatest success not with *Fortællinger om Natten* (*Tales of the Night*) or *De Måske Egnede* (*Borderliners*) but with the (rather high-brow) crime novel *Frøken Smillas Fornemmelse for Sne* (1992; *Smilla's Sense of Snow*) in the 1990s; although there are elements of non-realism in *Smilla*, it seems that the desire for sensationalism and suspense in Scandinavia seems largely to have been channelled into the realistic mode of crime fiction, perhaps due to the predominantly

secular nature of the region. When Skov in the promotional interviews for *Silhuet af en Synder* expresses her disappointment that ”kriminalromanen... det er der, de gode historier bliver fortalt i dansk litteratur” (“the crime novel... that is where the good stories are told in Danish literature,” in P1 *Kulturnyt* April 2010), she makes an astute point. Significantly, when Lene Kaaberbøl published *Kadaverdoktoeren* (The Corpse Doctor) at the end of 2010, it was promoted not as the Gothic semi-Frankensteinian novel it is, which seems to be the basis for several reviewers wondering about the age and maturity of the targeted demographic¹²²; instead it was marketed as a *kriminalroman* and *Dannelsesroman* (a crime novel and *Bildungsroman*) – the two major pillars of realism in Danish literature. While we may detect commonalities between the Gothic and the new Scandinavian wave of crime fiction in terms of a Nordic Noir of sorts, the key difference is that the Scandinavian *krimi*-genre is unambiguously conservative and realistic in nature, satisfying our need for justice, punishment of deviance and restoration of social and political order, where the Gothic offers ambivalence and disorder, not least when it comes to the metaphysical realm.

That sense of disorder and deviation conflicts with the larger ideological project of building the nation in the wake of the revolutionary sentiment, Romantic idealism and the unrest in early nineteenth-century Denmark. For the process of abjection on a national level, we may look to Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’. Anderson emphasizes the constructed nature of culture and the role of print capitalism and national print languages in the development of the modern European nation states; nation and nationalism are conceived as

¹²² Similarly, the newly established *Dansk Horror Selskab* (Danish Horror Society) has the explicit purpose of demonstrating that horror is for adult readers, too: “Dansk Horror Selskab er et tiltag for at sætte fokus på horror for voksne” (from the DHS website). Although the horror genre has evolved in a different direction than the Gothic from which it has emerged, they both suffer from the popular conception that they are written for adolescent audiences and juvenile intellects.

textual productions. In the early 1800s that print culture was increasingly turning Danish, as opposed to German and French, although some 40 percent of the population spoke German and not Danish as late as 1814, after the Napoleonic wars. The need for a national language was driven by commercial and political interests driven by a growing capitalist-based middle-class. The early 1800s is also when Denmark saw both a national literature and its first national literary histories – some still written in German but the majority in Danish. The concept of Danishness does not emerge until the mid-1800s, in large part thanks to Grundtvig and Ingemann but the nationalist discourse has not grown less important in our present time. Anderson stresses that “the nation is imagined as limited” with “finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations”; the perceived boundaries based on a shared idea of what constitutes nation-ness establish a distinct sense of inside and outside (Anderson 16). Gothic fiction dissolves such boundaries – inside/outside, surface/depth - articulating not just what lies outside the imagined community but what is infecting it from within. The humanist imperative towards the construction of a coherent bourgeois subject is consistently undermined by Gothic narratives; even when they offer reconciliation and justice at the end, their “monstrous corporate identity” and boundary negotiations still expose “the limits of modern rational ideals of both human and textual autonomy, coherence, self-control and Lockean notions of personhood” (Kilgour 222). Through hyperbolic verbalization the Gothic offers a countercontext to established norms: the canon, gender roles, the bourgeois nuclear family, heteronormative sexuality, and the traditional ideals of post-Enlightenment western individualism.

So, why is Danish Gothic of interest, one might ask? While each text under consideration holds a different facet of the Gothic to the light, their shared obsession with surfaces, and with spectacles of fragmentation and dissolution of subjectivity suggests that the old bourgeois subject

is no more and that identities are not authentic but can be made and re-made, most often through various practices of consumption. This places them within a larger postmodern or posthuman crisis of the subject, which spills over into multiple forms, as they span the generic range from Gothic ballads and drama, to Gothic-Fantastic-tales with one foot in the door to the realm of the marvelous, to Poe-esque horror tales, to playful pastiche and full-fledged Gothic novels.

Ingemann's contribution is not only the correlate he provides to the time-honored construction of the Danish Romantic Golden Age; to the Gothic at large he offers in "Sphinxen" an exceptionally meta-literary, textually conscious take on standard Gothic tropes, fusing its Fantastic hesitations and supernatural spectacles with Romantic irony and repeatedly calling attention to the text's status as fiction, which ultimately undercuts the transcendent happy ending and shows the tears in the seams of the discursively constructed self. Ingemann and Andersen share with Blixen and Høeg (in their tales more than the novels) a disarming tone of strangeness and subversion, which make their Gothic, like other ironic and parodic art forms, highly relevant to a postmodern sensibility, something that Leonora Christina Skov's very earnest tribute lacks. Andersen's idiosyncratic tone, which is strange even in his native Danish, becomes even stranger when it appears in the Gothic tale of "Tante Tandpine" rather than the expected fairy tales, although many of his fairy tales, too, are much more violently transgressive than their reputation. In Andersen's Gothic, the dizzying mechanisms of the marketplace become a vortex, a maelstrom that drowns the artist and rids not just Romantic writing but literature at large of all its ideals. Instead writing offers only negative transcendence in downwards spiralling movements, haunted by inescapable tyranny of past narratives. Or does it? The joke may be on us in this hoax of a narrative. That subversive laughter seems to be what drives Blixen's oeuvre, too, in her sometimes very humorous and indecorous version of Gothic, which wryly deflates established

truths. The influence of Blixen seems to be echoed in Peter Høeg's "Fortælling om et Ægteskab" ("Story of a Marriage"): the family curse is a repeated, carefully organized script that in its enactment of justice stages "en kosmisk latter, der intet skjuler, men er så klar, at man igennem den kan se såvel kraniet som det pulserende liv" (270; "a cosmic laugh, a laugh that hides nothing but is instead so clear that through it one can see not only the skull but the pulsating life within," 263). Again, skin is peeled away to find some semblance of truth. To Blixen's eclectic discourses, masked selves, non-heteronormative sexualities and ontology of story-telling, Høeg adds a view of history, progress, sexuality and philosophy informed by Foucault. In *De Måske Egnede*, the construction of and philosophy of Time informs the Gothic obsession with eruptions of the past in the present and becomes part of a postmodern epistemological relativization, which has always been present in the Gothic. Similarly, in the nine tales of *Fortællinger om Natten* he examines nine different disciplines that make up what we today perceive as our social reality but undercuts that construction by fusing it with non-mimetic discourses, which in addition to the Gothic include the fairy tale, the fantastic, magic realism, the ghost tale, all with a keen meta-literary awareness supported by a welter of encyclopaedic references. In this post-modern bricolage, Høeg employs the Gothic to examine representations of consciousness, as well as a foregrounding of fundamental problems of representation, inspiration, knowledge, and interpretation, issues that are fundamental to Romanticism as well. Before the 1988 debut of Høeg, Blixen had had her revival in the 1980s; Romanticism had begun its process of rediscovery; a wave of New Romantic poetry had been published; magic realism had come into vogue thanks to Ib Michael and a more international literary orientation; and Danish scholars such as Ib Johansen and Finn Barlby had begun publishing research on the Fantastic. This seems

in some way to have paved the way for Høeg's idiosyncratic blend of non-mimetic discourses, the Gothic included.

Now, with the 2010 publication of Skov's *Silhuet af en Synder*, it seems Danish reviewers and literati have grown more open to the genre. Perhaps due to Skov's notoriety, perhaps because its promotional material presented the Gothic novel as something new in a Danish context, its publication received widespread media attention, which was generally positive. Marianne Kongerslev calls the Gothic features "et forfriskende pust inden for dansk litteratur" ("a breath of fresh air in Danish literature," at *Kultunaut.dk*), which to some extent it is, but then Klaus Rifbjerg, omnipresent in the Danish literary debate since the 1960s, fortuitously refers to Ingemann and Andersen and frames the novel in its proper literary historical context (in *Weekendavisen*). The general verdict is that *Silhuet* is kitschy, starting with the title alone; Christina Dahl praises the novel as "vidunderligt lavlitterær" ("wonderfully low-brow") as opposed to "det litterære parnas' finkulturelle udgivelser" ("the high culture publications of the literary Parnassus," in *Frederiksborg Amts Avis*), while Romantic scholar Lilian Munk Røsing repeatedly praises it as "kulørt" ("colorful," in *Information*). It is perhaps telling that a term of color in Danish is synonymous with low-brow literature, as opposed to the grey social realism of the default mode. Queer scholar Dag Heede applauds *Silhuet* while there is consensus that its queer perspective raises it above "temmelig trivielt" ("rather trivial," Lars Handesten in *Kristeligt Dagblad*). The queer element is presumably the reason why Skov felt the need to call attention to the genre as critically repressed and denigrated in the mock-prologue, in a manner contradicting her own reviews, but fitting for her portrayal of marginalized sexualities and the clandestine gay scene in 1930s Copenhagen. In the prologue, supposedly the 1973 foreword to the re-edition for its 30th anniversary, which is added to the foreword from its 1947

second edition in a skewed present-past perspective, the narrator opens with an imitation of Schyberg's scathing review of Blixen's *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger*, which as noted continues a long tradition of dismissing the Gothic and Dark Romanticism in Danish literary history:

Jeg burde have opbygget alting mindre snørklet, skrevet om noget andet, benyttet mig af færre effekter og portrætteret flere mænd frem for alle de frustrerede fruentimmere. Hvad lavede al den galskab der overhovedet, for ikke at tale om alle perversionerne, som vi ikke har bedt om at få lige i synet. Tænk, det skrev en anmelder på et tidspunkt, som foretrak han helt alvorligt, at de lå og boblede lige under overfladen i stedet (Skov 16)

I should have constructed it all less intricately, written about something else, used fewer effects and portrayed more men rather than all the frustrated shrews. What was all that madness doing there in the first place, not to mention all the perversions that we have not asked to have thrown right into our faces. Can you imagine that this is what a reviewer wrote, as if he in all seriousness preferred to have it all bubbling right under the surface instead (*my transl.*)

It is safe to say that neither Skov nor her heavy-handed narrator alter ego leave anything 'bubbling under the surface'; on the contrary, the novel gorges on 'deviant' sexualities, corpses, madness and dusty decadence and consistently draws attention to its status as copy; there is after all but a fine line between imitation and homage, parody and pastiche. Thus in *Silhuet* Blixen's own Rungstedlund becomes a mausoleum to the Blixen-esque writer of Gothic serials withering like a mummified Miss Havisham in the central locus of the living room, while her mad twin sister from whom she has usurped her name, persona, and authorship, is locked up in the tower, like a virtual Bertha Rochester, to whom Skov makes direct reference. Likewise the voyeur housekeeper, Lauritz, is modelled on Mrs Danvers of *Rebecca*, another key reference made, not least as she seems to harbour a sexual attraction to the incestuous, lesbian twins that she spies on; she is the self-admitted 'sinner' of the title and thus the main character although always hidden by doors, missing journals and her so-called 'skjulekjoler' (hiding dresses) that further distort her figure. The novel – almost to a fault – reads like a catalogue of every convention that has ever

appeared in the classic Gothic novels. It has been my mission to demonstrate not only that all the texts in question adhere to these fundamental conventions of the Gothic, but to examine how they work, as I will recapitulate in the following.

The iconic haunted castle which has come to represent the Gothic more than any other convention contributes in its multiple architectural forms dramatically to the key Gothic fear of encroachment upon one's personal and political autonomy. From darkly convoluted eighteenth-century feudal castles and convents, to antiquated farm houses, schools, parsonages, crumbling ancestral mansions and constricting mid-nineteenth-century living rooms, Ingemann, Andersen, Blixen, Høeg and Skov cover a range of suddenly hostile, confining spaces, as spectres of a repressed past resurface along with family secrets, and ideological and psychological conflicts. These real or imagined threats to the self are often acted out in a way that makes the house itself seem alive – blurring the boundaries between imagination and pathology in “Sphinxen” and ‘Tandpine’, playing on notions of sympathy and sentience in “Et Familieselskab” in an echoing of Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and exploiting the shock effects the genre so easily affords in the claustrophobic ‘house of murder’ in Blixen’s *Gengældelsens Veje*, and in the eerie Linjenholm castle in *Silhuet af en Synder*, in which the castle with its secrets of suicide, incest and rape takes on an identity of its own to the point where its resident ghosts are blamed for the murder that takes place within its dilapidating walls, but which is committed by the mannish housekeeper, as much a part of the place and its uncanny familial relations as Madam Bæk is in Blixen’s “Et Familieselskab.” Finally, the paranoia-inducing Bentham-esque panopticon in Høeg’s *De Måske Egnede* achieves the same effect of control and claustrophobia through modern surveillance technology, which seems to bestow human-like qualities to the physical space; it certainly has eyes and ears: “Dog vågede den over os, det mærkede man. Det var første

gang, jeg forstod, at selve bygningen hørte sammen med Biehl. Væggene så på os” (“Still it watched over us, we felt it. It was the first time I understood that the building itself was part of [Principal] Biehl. The walls looked at us,” 132 *my transl.*). Through de-familiarization and inversion, subject and object coincide; the everyday world in the home is rendered disturbing and strange, while the uncanny becomes commonplace. Gothic personal identity is about the consequent difficult reorientation of the self in the world and is often acted out in a pattern of paranoid persecution: the self is relative, defined in relation to something or someone else, as Judith Butler has also argued in her theories on queer and performance that in some ways have been anticipated by the conception of Gothic identity. In this relation, the roles of pursuer and pursued are often unstable and reversible. In *Gengældelsens Veje*, the angelic victims become relentless avenging pursuers after prolonged exposure to evil, gradually alienated from themselves through a transmission of qualities. Høeg’s *De Måske Egnede* repeats the pattern violently as Peter orchestrates his revenge, while Ingemann’s Arnold, continually on the run in “Sphinxen,” must ask whether he or his double is the knife-wielding murderer. These narratives explore doublings between the victims on the one hand, paired up as close friends or siblings, and their shadowing victimizer on the other, as also seen in Poe’s tales, Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794), Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Hogg’s *Private Memoirs* (1824) with a resulting collapse of distinctions between self and other, subject and object.

Contributing to the dissolution of such distinctions is the continual breaking down of bodily boundaries in spectacles of suffering, which both illustrates the horror associated with Kristeva’s abject and reminds us of the key characteristic of the Gothic: that its primary mechanisms take place on the surface. Gothic is not subtle or bound to the codes of realism, as the props, stagy settings and thrilling effects take over the narrative, which indulges in

melodramatic extravagances of plot, histrionic gestures, hyperbolic rhetoric, and supernatural spectacles. The severed limbs in Andersen's "De Røde Sko" and "Tante Tandpine" show an affinity for the graphic shock shared by Ingemann, who relies on prop-heavy effects such as closet doors and bricked-up walls bursting open, skeletons rushing out of their concealment, the dead returning from the grave, bloody knives appearing in haunted castles, mysterious visions and the unveiling of shrouded portraits, echoed in Høeg's predilection for mirrors. Blixen, too, has her fair share of ghosts appearing and skulls emerging, albeit framed more existentially as an often futile peeling away of layers in search of a human core, which is never really there after all. Psychoanalytical approaches can help us understand the drama of fear and desire played out in the Gothic; the Freudian uncanny explains the acts of defamiliarization associated with the experiences of fear and desire in the self and the home; Lacanian approaches shed light on the repeated images of regression backwards through the mirror stage to a state of undifferentiation or merging with Others; while Kristeva's neo-Freudian concept of the abject articulates the repression of specific quandaries on individual and cultural levels to establish the boundaries of the human, but which can return as the most primally and archaically uncanny of externalised monstrosities. While these approaches seem indispensable, attention must be paid to the manner in which such processes are represented in very visual spectacles relying on theatrical effects and take into account the particular surface-depth model, which characterizes the Gothic. The foregrounding of surfaces is especially important in the representation of identity.

Another group of effects, which also date back to the Gothic beginnings of Radcliffe and Lewis, has to do with textiles and clothing: veils, cloaks, cowls, curtains are often devised as confusing means of concealment, sartorial transformation and dramatic revelation, often of true familial identity, which is never a given in the Gothic romance. Such is the case in Blixen's

Gengældelsens Veje and “Et Familieselskab,” as well as Ingemann’s “Sphinxen” and Skov’s *Silhuet*, in which no one in the Linjenholm family is who they seem. Many of Høeg’s *Fortællinger* revolve around disguises and shocking revelations of true identity or the collapse of the distinction between public and private stages at curtain call. Ultimately the prominence of this group of veil-like constructions informs a more existential questioning of what defines human identity: how art fashions nature, how surfaces shape self and text (Sedgwick 1981: 255–8; Kilgour 130). What I hope to have demonstrated in the course of this study is not only that there is a Danish Gothic, alive and well (or as ‘alive’ as a literary mode obsessed with death and decay will ever be), but that the writers of Danish Gothic in particular draw attention to these surface effects. In their proclivity towards excess, it is as if they are propelled by a *horror vacui*



which fills a fundamental emptiness with decadent artifice and convoluted ornamentation on the levels of both plot and narration. This is of course the very foundation of Blixen’s oeuvre, as captured in Madam Majeska’s illustration to “Aben,” in which the elaborate embellishment of the furniture and the dress of the monkey-Prioress, already in metamorphosis, are so excessive that they almost seem to merge. While “Aben” explicitly discusses the construct of *horror vacui*, Ingemann, Andersen and Høeg, too,

contribute to this shaking of the foundations of ‘reality’, which is described as a devouring and “føleligt vacuum” (“a palpable vacuum”) in Høeg’s “Spejlbillede af en ung mand i balance” (“Reflection of a Young Man in Balance”). The empty repetition *en abîme* of Ingemann’s Arnold’s imagined reflection of himself in “Sphinxen” – literally a nobody as indicated by his

repeated question “hvo er jeg?” (“who am I?”) – is connected across the centuries via Johannes Ewald and Blixen to Høeg’s tale.

Det øjeblik vi betragter verden, begynder den at forandre sig. Og vi selv med den. At se på virkeligheden er ikke at begribe en struktur. Det er at underkaste sig og at indlede en uoverskuelig forvandling. ... Jeg så et spejl. Derefter uendelig mange spejle der spejlede hinandens tomhed ... En verden der er en illusion ... en verden der ikke eksisterer, men drømmes af et væsen, der heller ikke eksisterer. (*Fortællinger* 281–2)

As soon as we lay eyes on the world it starts to change. And we with it. Viewing reality does not mean making sense of a structure. It means surrendering oneself and triggering an unfathomable transformation ... I saw a mirror. Then an infinite number of mirrors reflecting each other’s emptiness ... A world which does not exist, but is dreamt up by a creature which in turn does not exist. (*Tales* 276)

While this narrative is not exactly Gothic, its ontology does inform many of the selected Danish tales by adding a literal level of circularity in the reciprocal process of creation between the mirror and its creator – in which does agency lie? And what sort of orientation in the world is the result of this illusory self under “uoverskuelig forvandling” (“unfathomable transformation”) governed by this fragmenting aesthetics of surface in the depthless image?

Many critics, notably Robert Miles, argue that Gothic narratives, often set on the cusp between an older age and a new world, delineate and condense the anxieties of transitional times. The great theme of Romanticism is the loss of the Golden Age, the mythological childhood, from which man has fallen but also the loss of a metaphysical presence. This is perhaps why Gothic comes to Denmark some fifty years after its inception in England: the Gothic theme of the end of innocence, and of personal and cultural unity, articulates perfectly the quandaries of the new human being emerging in the Romantic age. Thus, Ingemann and Andersen, and Blixen taking their age for her own, confront the daunting task of defining a new self severed from previous frameworks – a project which continues to govern the post-Romantic consciousness.

The three, and later Høeg and Skov adopting Blixen's age for their tales, convey the lost unity and still haunting presence of the past in recurring images of falling, of fragmentation, isolation, disorientation, drowning, being buried alive or devoured by monstrous beings. The conventional Gothic family curse is widened to encompass the family of man, doomed to fall and fail, as illustrated in *Satania Infernalis*'s biblical imagery of the original fall in Andersen's "Tandpine," and the constant disoriented falling of Ingemann's Arnold, who is cast as a post-lapsarian Adam looking at Paradise from the outside, like a spectator, separated from a previously known, clearly defined reality, and expected to create his own. In the "broader Gothic notion of personal identity ... life begins with a blank," Sedgwick explains (1981: 261). Identity is not discovered within or from an identifiable point of origin but must be found or constructed.

Rather than a blank slate signalling freedom of invention, childhood is far from a golden age of pre-lapsarian bliss in Gothic narratives, which for their effect rely on the construction of the personal and cultural past as sites of terror. Andersen and Ingemann are both heavily inspired by E.T.A. Hoffmann's uncanny tales of maturation processes, which provided the basis for Freud's seminal "Das Unheimliche" (1919). While we want to go beyond the psychoanalytical model, which dismisses the Gothic imagery of the surface to analyse a supposedly individual, originary self buried beneath, what is useful in this context is the dissolution of classical notions of a stable, unified subject, albeit divided only into a three-part model rather than the fragmented, polyvalent Gothic subject. Equally important is the location of the source of terror in the home, as whatever has been repressed returns to haunt the subject in unfamiliar, yet familiar shapes and disguises: homely yet othered, propelling the subject into an epistemological crisis when this defamiliarization renders everything uncertain and un-interpretable, including the self and the family as extension of self, while this ambivalence is exacerbated by the confusion of who lurks

behind the veil, curtain or locked door, hidden from their supposed origins. The uncanny is associated specifically with the dynamics in the family in Freud's analysis, and Gothic fiction is riddled with confusing familial relations: Blixen's tales are characterized by a complete absence of conventional nuclear families, while Ingemann, Andersen and Høeg describe orphans, painful losses and broken homes; in *De Måske Egnede*, August has killed his parents with a shotgun, avenging years of abuse. Skov, going all in for full Gothic effect, writes of generations of depravity in the Linjenholm family; the father, Horace, mismanages the home and lets the castle sink into ruins, terrifies the mother to the point where it makes her a morphine addict and sexually abuses (what he believes to be) his twin teenage daughters, Antonia and Lily together. Not only do the twins continue the sexual activity together past his death at the hands of the housekeeper, a stand-in parental figure, who spends most nights observing them through the keyhole, but the incestuous liaison is passed on to the next generation, when the narrator Agnes, the daughter of Lily and her 'father' Horace, and her cousin Nella, Antonia's daughter, become lovers because their true identity as cousins is kept from them. In the Gothic, the maturation process towards becoming a complete being is consistently interrupted, so that a 'true' identity must be continually renegotiated. Relations are either too close or too distant, pointing through theatrical exaggeration to the unnatural roles everyone plays: in Gothic fiction, "individual identity... is social and relational rather than original or private" (Sedgwick 1980: 255). Gothic highlights the process of self-formation that takes place through the relation to the other as a site of self-making and at the same time, uncannily, a source of self-division.

The family constellation's sundering dialectic of attraction and repulsion, desire and prohibition, informs a Byronically torn *Zerissenheit* in "Et Familieselskab," proving to be fatal in the once paradisaical *circulus vitiosus* of the three siblings, while it is entirely demonized in

“Tante Tandpine” in the odd relationship between the artist and his aunt, indistinguishable from her monstrous form of Satania Infernalis. The Auntie/Satania character testifies to the simultaneous nurturing and destructive aspect of the claustrophobic family unit, as the maternal aunt ruins his health materially by dissolving his teeth into a dark absence, and her nightly form threatens to further chip away at the already impotent, fragmented student with her dentist tool hand. The bourgeois living room, the privileged site of Danish culture and mentality since the *Biedermeier* age and the family space per se, is transformed into the obscure torture chamber of classic Gothic, no longer a refuge but synonymous with the threatening forces it was constructed to keep at bay. In *Gengældelsens Veje*, the living room in the farmhouse, cursed by a crime committed during the French Revolution, is the scene of the spectacular *Liebestod* of the Pennhallows, God-fearing parental figures turned Gothic villains. Høeg’s “Fortælling om et Ægteskab” and Blixen’s “Et Familieselskab” also have the past return to haunt the living room in the form of a curse, combining “a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space” for the special Gothic impression of “a sickening descent into disintegration” (Baldick xix). Reliving a complex love-hate relationship with incestuous undercurrents, Blixen’s two spinsters conjure up their long-dead brother in a dark living room facing Hamlet’s Kronborg, another dramatic stage for the proto-typical Gothic ghost story of fatally dysfunctional familial relations. Thanks to a curse inflicted on the family by the Indian Scheherazade who was raped and tortured by their ancestor, Høeg’s couple is doomed to enact, over and over again, a happy version of their sadistic marriage in their living room, side by side with the Royal Theater at Kongens Nytorv in Copenhagen, where ironically the dissections of the institution of marriage by Modern Breakthrough dramatists such as Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg are staged at the same time. The living room is thus both a private space and a stage

for an audience looking in when the curtain is drawn. A Gothic convention is thus used to break down the boundaries between inside and outside, surface and content. What the audience perceives as a waltz, a loving embrace, is really Georg van Austen strangling his actress-wife, the inveterate performer. Cloaking familiar images of domesticity in Gothic forms does not disguise as much as disclose what is already strange, in these cases the assumed stability of the Freudian bourgeois self, which relies for its formation on the introverted constellation of the nuclear family as it emerged in the early nineteenth century and on the reconciliation of the predatory relations within this unit for a healthy social order.

While Radcliffean terror and Lewisian horror are associated with more physical threats to the self, the epistemologically confounding uncanny erupts when things are inexplicably the same and different. Unstable familial relations dissolve the identifying masks that distinguish one person from another in the established roles that uphold individual, family and society. When one person wears several masks, particularly in the texts that deal with doubles, incestuous relations or malicious parental figures, it results in a profound identity crisis for the protagonist. "Sphinxen," "Moster Maria," "Altertavlen i Sorø," "Tante Tandpine," "Karyatiderne," "Et Familieselskab," "Aben," *Gengældelsens Veje*, *De Måske Egnede* and *Silhouet af en Synder* all represent this complete collapse of identity referents. While in some texts this uncanny conjoining of identity and alterity only propels further trauma, others are informed by a more Romantic consciousness and it is sought out as an attempted merger with doubles, siblings, ghosts or other projected or mirrored selves, both identical and different, to bypass the problematic relation between self and other and become, with the least amount of resistance, "other than oneself," yet "more completely oneself" (Miyoshi 11). Still charting this easy transition from liberating autonomy of the mind to alienating solipsism, yet other Gothic

narratives describe this merger as attempted with an actual Other. This generates many sensational effects when characters dress to assume other identities. A simple disguise transforms Kasparsen, the actor, into the murdered Cardinal in Blixen's "Norderney," as well as the foul-mouthed assistant cum pied piper into the eloquent but deceased Monsieur Andress in Høeg's take on "Norderney," "Medlidenhed med Børnene i Vaden By." Both of these metamorphoses frame the identity crises of the adolescent protagonists, as the world around them comes to an apocalyptic end. Likewise, in Blixen's gender-confused *Gengældelsens Veje*, the Pennhallows even before they dress up in the clothes of their two captive girls appear to have swapped genders but their masquerade is so instantaneous and complete that it seems to efface the two girls to the point of non-existence. In a similar manner the Cardinal and Monsieur Andress have been done away with by their impersonators in voracious, violent appropriations in "Vaden By" and "Norderney" with the added twist that Høeg's take is also an if not violent then complete take-over: his text is dressed up in the costume of Blixen's tale. Generally the threatening atmosphere of violence, sexual depravity and sadomasochistic dynamics in Gothic stems from a fundamental doubt that there can be a relation which is not based on the complete domination, even destruction, of the self or the Other, thus de-familiarizing by exaggeration the closeness of 'normal' human relationships required by modern society.

The violence at the center of Gothic, often accompanied by a penetrating, devouring gaze which can be assumed by both genders, shows a frequent drive towards interiority, Romantic in nature, as if to transcend the limits of the body to test this ontology of the surface - to quite literally get under someone else's skin. For Ingemann and Andersen, such testing of the perimeters of the body is shaped as a series of physical transformations, from the magical animalistic style of their fantastic narratives and fairy tales, to complete disintegration in their

Gothic mode, as they populate their stories with werewolves, the living dead, ghosts, corpses, trolls, monstrous and fragmented bodies that morph into other unstable shapes, echoed in Blixen's playful "Aben" ("The Monkey"). Less romantic in spirit are the blank white skulls that are the supposed core of the self in "Den gamle vandrende Ridder" ("The Old Chevalier") and "Et Familieselskab," akin to Ingemann's defleshed, boiled corpses in "Skole-Kammeraterne" (The School Mates) and the drowned, bloated and dissolving body in "Det Forbandede Hus" (The Cursed House). The same graphic chock is achieved with the naked, tortured, degraded bodies in *De Måske Egnede*, from Axel's cutting out of his own tongue, to August's suicidal explosion. Skov, like Blixen, employs the visual spectacle of the grotesque body for feminist purposes. The huge body of the mannish housekeeper in *Silhuet af en Synder* is covered with festering abscesses and tumors deforming and discolouring her body and puncturing her skin, as what is supposed to be on the inside passes as secretions to the outside through the perforated skin of the no longer self-contained body:

Hendes store deforme mund. Læberne var gledet tilbage over gummerne, og tænderne manglede... hendes hals og underarme var dækket af fede, væskende bylder og åbne sår. De lyste op i enhver tænkelig nuance af rødt og blå... det store hul i hendes ansigt blev endnu større... hendes ånde lugtede så rådden, at Nella måtte vende ansigtet bort (134).

Her large, deform mouth. Her lips had retreated behind the gums, and the teeth were missing... Her neck and lower arms were covered by fat oozing boils and open gashes. They lit up in every thinkable nuance of red and blue... the large hole in her face grew even bigger... her breath smelled so rotten that Nella had to turn away her face (*my transl.*).

When the emphasis is on the mouth in this passage, it is possibly because this state of dissolution is the extreme conclusion to a process that she started herself as a teenager, when she began devouring excessive amounts of food to change the appearance of her body and avoid being bartered into a heterosexual marriage. While she attempted to render her body gender-neutral

through consumption, something is now eating her up from within, and her body ends up being so gender-neutral that it is barely human; in fact it appears abject and ab-human. Going by the male name Lauritz rather than her maiden name Lauritzen, she defies the gender identity determined by her body; when each of the boils carry the name of a male family member, she brands her already ruined skin in an ironic reversal of patriarchal power. Lauritz employs a strategy similar to Rosa's self-mutilation in *Gengældelsens Veje* as Rosa brands her own skin, penetrating and devaluing that precious surface before anyone else can. "Part of the capacity of Gothic texts to disturb derives from their presentation of the body as lacking wholeness and integrity, as a surface which can be modified or transformed," unstable, manipulable and negotiable like its extension, clothing, our second skin, and acquiring the suppleness of a text (Spooner 2004: 9–10). This general instability means that skin, clothes and other surfaces, rendered sites of transgression, seize to divide inside from outside, self from other, in an unnatural and uncanny collapse of distinctions; Gothic narratives "turn bodies and minds inside out in their search for monstrosities" (Halberstam 72). If skin, as the ultimate boundary and surface of the self, is supposed to house the body, it becomes another haunted castle, no longer protecting or shielding the self: 'One need not be a chamber to be haunted' in Emily Dickinson's famous words.

The simple dualisms of the Freudian surface-depth model implies something predictable to be interpreted under the surface in the depths that are supposed to be the locus of the original, individual self, but the 'authentic' selves supposedly concealed underneath the multiplicity of masks, disguises and garments, both literal and metaphorical, are simply not there, as Fanny de Coninck demonstrates in "Et Familieselskab.". The continual oscillation between Auntie Toothache and Satania Infernalis, not to mention Blixen's Aunt Cathinka and her monkey in

“Aben,” attest to this friction of surfaces: can we really determine who is disguised or contained under the skin of whom? Is it clear which is inner and which is outer being? The multiform ego in continual flux is perhaps demonstrated best in Blixen’s elusive and continually morphing Pellegrina, in whom “disguise becomes equivalent to self” rendering “subjectivity a surface effect,” patterns identified by Halberstam in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Halberstam 1995: 64). When the sensational Gothic veil is dramatically rent, it often discloses only another illusion: there is no human core or essence revealed after Pellegrina’s fall, nothing anchoring the continual chain of metamorphoses by this ghostly cipher told by others, voiding the question of self-realization. The narratives in which the most important characters turn out to be actually absent, their bodies dissolved into de-corporealized ghosts, such as “Et Familieselskab” and Høeg’s “Forholdsregler mod Alderdommen” and *De Måske Egnede*, underline the lack of authentic presence behind the continuum of effects. Surface attributes are transferable, “contagious metonymically” (Sedgwick 1981: 255). “Simultaneously, contagion flattens or empties out that which is inside or within, transforming it to one more link in the signifying chain,” which renders the question of agency complex (Spooner 2004: 7). The uncannily manly Carlotta in “Pisa” and The Pennhallows in *Gengældelsens Veje* instantly re-gender and seemingly humanize themselves by donning women’s sartorial props, demonstrating this transmission of qualities from clothing to body, while a mere white shawl – a stand-in for the iconic Gothic veil – in *Gengældelsens Veje* bestow upon the wearer the identity of her double/friend. Andersen demonizes this process in both the shadow in “Skyggen” and in Satania Infernalis, as the disembodied figures are rendered human - and omnipotent - simply by the donning of human dress. Likewise, Ingemann’s orphan Arnold is suddenly rendered regal, made into a somebody that transcends a class structure already crumbling at the time, by the

metonymical crown and sceptre, reflected in mirrors *en abîme*. The scene foreshadows the instant transformation run amok in Andersen's "De Røde Sko," in which the body is seemingly disciplined and diffused into the accessory that articulates the captive subject. This darker vision is informed by the nostalgic loss of mythical completeness that governs the Romantic consciousness, whereas in contrast, literary critic Leonora Christina Skov clearly knows her Butler – and her Blixen – and dedicates large parts of *Silhuet af en Synder* to celebratory descriptions of masquerades, from Antonia and her 'daughter' Nella playing dress-up in the outdated couture stored in the tower to the narrator's masculine cross-dressing, which defiantly shapes her gendered and de-gendered body, to herself as well as in the gaze of others.

The tension between agency and determinism in the dissolution of the interior / exterior binary points to Judith Butler's discussion of the production of effects of self. Where identity according to Butler is produced by non-voluntarist reiteration, Gothic identity is formed instantly and precariously, through contagion, by proximity or touch. The hyper-theatrical exterior focus in Gothic – and Goth – on performance, show, costume, disguise, drag and stylization identifies through exaggeration and de-familiarization the staged and highly unnatural nature of gender and self as a chain of performative citations and quotes, 'a persistent impersonation that passes as the real' (Butler viii). This strategy of drag is furthered by the alienating mechanisms of the Fantastic mode, a staple in the Gothic confrontation with strange and supernatural spectacles. Torn between progressive explorations of transgression and conservative punishments of deviation from a norm that is reinstated at the end of the narrative, the Gothic identifies the structural features of the societal forms masked as 'reality' which shape the context for its figurations of identity within the constraints of the discursively given. Through repetition of conventions, inversion, supernatural distortion and deliberate confusion, Gothic reveals gender

and gendered identity to be “a free-floating artifice,” an act “that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status” (Butler 6, 146–7). What is so radical about the Gothic’s defamiliarization of the gendered self is that external aspects and appearances govern not only the formation of female identity but rule regardless of the biological sex.

One issue I have wrestled with in the course of my study is whether the demonstration and revelation of such mechanisms and their accompanying power structures constitute acts of subversion in themselves, or whether the containment of deviant subjectivities, aberrant sexualities and uncanny monstrosities which sometimes, although not always, concludes the narrative restores the status quo and confirms the social and aesthetic limits transgressed. As acts of subversion and transgressions necessarily must be relative to the established scripts that are negotiated, I have examined some of the myths and discourses which the Danish Gothic expresses a reaction against. The persistent fragmentation of self on multiple levels, including that of gender, is a response to bourgeois models of identity, calling into question the nineteenth-century Goethean concept of *Dannelse*, which remains of central importance to Danish literature and mentality. *Dannelse* is the linear progress of a unique, innate self, which grows into a sense of organic unity between self and world, through exercise of restraint and education – education in the sense of developing and extracting innate qualities in a transition from inside to outside. While some Gothic texts can be seen as darker versions of the normative *Dannelsesroman*, most obviously in the education-themed *Gengældelsens Veje* and *De Måske Egnede*, Gothic usually inverts the idea of the desirable unity into fragmentation: both novels figure ghosts as attempts to escape the structural and artificial confines of selfhood superimposed by a rigidly authoritarian educational system. Likewise, in “Vaden By” Monsieur Andréss’ European *Dannelse* is

repeatedly stressed but as his assistant takes over the deceased artist's identity and physical form, his *Dannelse* becomes but another empty mask to assume, even to the point where it elevates this diabolical figure to a Messiah-like stature. In these Gothic narratives, 'normal' human relationships are critiqued by being pushed to destructive extremes, growth is replaced by disintegration, linear identity by a *bricolage* of disguises and quotes.

Further underlining identity as fiction and the consequent profound scepticism regarding the originality, agency and unity of the self is the constant referencing and rehearsal of already written scripts by Gothic writers and characters. The themes of storytelling and writing are crucial to all four Danish writers in question, and the vast quantity of writer-protagonists in these and in Romantic Fantastic and Gothic texts in general is, of course, not coincidental, engaged as they are in writing their way to a more solid grasp of self and reality. What begins as potential artistic and personal freedom in the post-Kantian age of Romanticism turns into a questioning of creativity, spontaneity and originality, as we also see in the artistic *Bildungs*-narrative of Aladdin vs. Nouredin, which has been omnipresent in Danish literature from 1805 and well into the twentieth century. Instead, protagonists resort to artifice, imitation, role-play and unlimited quotation in the attempt to construct a complete, conformist self, but they are then unable to distinguish between self and other: Blixen's characters often model themselves on fictional characters, and Ingemann's Arnold thinks he is Hoffmann's Anselmus in "Der goldne Topf," not knowing where the fiction ends and he begins, or whether he is writing his story or it is writing him. Texts of the past, sometimes even the present, become another force encroaching upon, even annihilating the self, as it happens for the student in "Tante Tandpine," the sisters in "Et Familieselskab," and seemingly everyone, including the author, in *Silhuet af en Synder*.

These anti-teleological, convoluted narratives of supernatural spectacles and artificially assembled subjects, who come into being when a narrative is superimposed on them, clash with the self and the world view presented in the dominant discourse of realism since the Modern Breakthrough, but present already in the first generation of Danish Romantics. In “Fortælling om et Ægteskab” (“Story of a Marriage”), Høeg debunks said script ironically through the very young and naive Jason Toft, another writer-protagonist, who, because he is precisely not a *Fantast* like Ingemann and Andersen’s writer-protagonists, has enjoyed great success despite his lack of life experiences. He is driven by an almost fanatical pursuit of ”den korrekte gengivelse af verden,” (236; ”the correct reproduction of the world,” 228):

På en journalists spørgsmål om, hvorvidt hans bog altså spejlede virkeligheden, havde Jason svaret, at ’ethvert spejl har brydningsfejl. Det håber jeg ikke gælder for mine værker. Ethvert spejl spejlvender, bytter om på højre og venstre. Det ville jeg betragte som en litterær unøjagtighed’ (236).

To one reporter’s question as to the extent to which his book did in fact reflect real life, Jason had replied that ‘every mirror has its errors of refraction. I hope that is not the case with my works. Every mirror reverses the image, transposing right and left. That, to me, would be tantamount to literary inaccuracy’ (228).

Missing the inherent impossibility of his mission, he finds no use in ”romantikens tågede symbolik eller den formørkede religiøse litteraturs stereotypier” (248; “the hazy symbolism of Romanticism or the obscure stereotypes of religious literature,” 240) and even dismisses his boyhood heroes, the great realists such as Zola, Proust and Henrik Pontoppidan and their emulation of the photography on the grounds of it not being real enough.

...med dyb skuffelse havde han vendt dem ryggen, da han opdagede, at de i sidste ende altid var virkeligheden utro. Det var på det tidspunkt han selv begyndt at skrive, og det, der havde drevet ham, havde været hans trang til at fortælle verden, at den litterære handling er en illusion... i en alder af 20 år opdagede [han] forfatterens fatale svaghed. Den at de lod sig forføre til at bringe deres virkelighed til en afslutning, at de indførte en handling (247).

...deeply disappointed, he had turned his back on them on discovering that in the end they always betrayed reality. It was then that he himself began to write, driven by his urge to tell the world that literary narrative is an illusion.... At the age of twenty, he hit upon the fatal weakness of these writers: that they let themselves be seduced into bringing their reality to a conclusion, that they introduced a narrative (240).

In the Van Austen living room, however, he experiences not only fantastic hallucinations that transport him to the Indian jungle but he witnesses the compulsive repetition of the Van Austen family curse first hand, which is devised as a meticulous and sadistic ritualistic staging in their own living room once a week of what sounds like the essential Gothic plot:

Forbandelsen er levende... Måske skal hun myrde en af sine nyfødte og pines af dette mord retsen af livet. Måske smitter han hende med en uhelbredelig sygdom. Måske skal de se deres børnebørn bortførte og skamferede. For historiefortælleren er kærlighedens rædsler uendelige (269).

... the curse lives on [lit. is alive]... Perhaps she will murder one of her newborn infants and be tortured by that killing for the rest of her days. Or perhaps she will catch some incurable disease from him. Perhaps they will have to watch their grandchildren being abducted and mutilated. To the storyteller there is no end to the horrors of love (262).

As Jason's realism is defeated as naive, the story, with its references to Golden Age classics such as Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* and *Et Sct. Hansaftenspil* and Heiberg's *Elverhøj*, becomes a meta-commentary on the problem of Gothic in a Scandinavian setting: Gothic does everything 'great' literature is not supposed to do by exaggerating the inherent artificiality of all literature through excessive contrivances, convoluted narratives, hokey plot devices, implausible coincidences, and repetitious conventions. Its excessive spectacles point to the artificiality of any representation by providing the distorted mirror-site Jason loathes for the construction of ourselves and a reality, which may not even be out there, but which we construct by superimposing narratives onto it.

Unlike Jason Toff's essentially unrealistic hyper-realism, the multiple quotes and references, even in early Gothic, demonstrate with a strong metafictional charge that texts as well as selves are imitative, relational constructs which can only refer to yet other constructs, and not to any essential meaning outside the narrative. The Chinese box structure of illusions within illusions is also manifest at the narrative level, which Blixen uses in her convoluted stories-within-stories to create a textual labyrinth reminiscent of the haunted castle she rarely creates in physical form, and which Andersen interestingly uses in "Tante Tandpine" to collapse the distinction between inner and outer narrative frames by a slip of the tongue, the hoax again deferring the penetrating gaze that is on its quest for the real essence buried in the depths of the story. Ingemann's "Sphinxen" and "Pulcinellen," Andersen's "Tante Tandpine," Blixen's "Norderney," "Drømmerne," "Et Familieselskab," "Digteren," Høeg's "Vaden By," "Fortælling om et Ægteskab" and Skov's *Silhuet* all disclose only more fictions in a continual circuit. This is of course the nature of all texts, but by adapting Gothic conventions of non-originality, impossible creativity and negative transcendence, Danish writers are able to point more clearly to the consumptive nature of all literature and all identities, particularly as they, then, steal from a non-Danish genre. Gothic texts are buried within and feed off each other, so as to create a self-referential semiotic system of familiar images, conventions, recycled structures and inter-textual allusions well-known to the reader. Such short-hand codes are another component in the formation of one-dimensional characters created by references and ghostly signifiers, and not by any type of originary essence. Frankenstein's creature, dressed up in the bodies of multiple others, embodies such consumptive texts and identities, its precarious patchwork nature demonizing its own parasitical creation and haunted absence of identity (Kilgour 190). Gothic, then, is "not fantasy in need of psychoanalysis," but rather "a series of contemporaneously

understood forms, devices, codes, figurations, for the expression of the fragmented subject,” and of the alterity of subjectivity, as Robert Miles claims, paraphrasing Eve Sedgwick (Miles 4). This is not least because the heterogeneous Gothic form itself has a parasitical, cannibalistic relation to other narratives, split between realism and romance, absorbing a welter of disparate discourses, and without its own proper identity and defined perimeters.

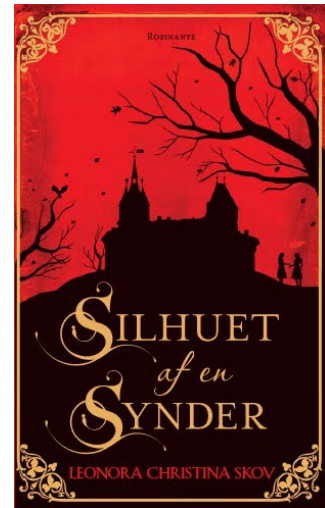
In Høeg’s “Forholdsregler mod Alderdommen” (Precautions against Old Age), the final (untranslated) story in *Fortællinger om Natten*, the imposing architectural structure of Leonora Blassermand, a Blixen-esque “stor, mørk rovfugl” (“large, dark bird of prey,” 302), stands as a lingering comment on the generically, stylistically and ideologically incongruent tradition that Høeg reinvents in the course of the collection:

... det henviste til en eller anden form for uorden... Det var påbegyndt af Hvideslægten i 1100-tallet... Da slægten Blassermand overtog bygningsværket i 1700-tallet, havde det gotisk fundament og ydermure af tuffsten, svungne renæssancegavle, et tegltag som i italiensk paladsbyggeri... og stregrelieffer i polsk barok. Familien afsluttede nu byggeriet med en hvid og lysegrå klassicistisk façade (300)..

... it referred to some kind of disorder.... It had been initiated by the Hvide family in the 1100s... When the Blassermand family took over the construction in the 1700s, it had a gothic foundation and outer walls of tuff bricks, sweeping Renaissance gables, a tile roof as in Italian palatial buildings... and a carved relief of the Polish baroque. The family now finished the construction with a white and pale grey classicist façade (*my transl.*)

On top of this mad, disordered, almost Piranesi-like structure, on the ridge of the roof, Leonora Blassermand – who of course eventually turns out to be a ghost - has added a pavilion, “som havde form som et kæmpestort menneskeligt øre der lyttede mod himlen” (“in the shape of a giant human ear listening toward the sky [alt. the heavens],” 300): the grotesque, the disproportionate and the incongruent are combined with an upwards aspiration, which usually is defeated, precisely because of the Gothic’s ambiguous ideological responses. Its generic

vacates the Gothic tropes and conventions so forcefully crammed into Skov’s homage? The principle of cannibalistic consumption, embodied in the equally sweet-toothed Auntie Mille in “Tante Tandpine” and Miss Malin in “Norderney,” is conveyed in the multilayered collage “Inspirationskilder” (sources of inspiration) from Skov’s own media-savvy website. It pulls together a motley assortment of the Gothic in different media, as the Female Gothic of *Jane Eyre* (1947), *Rebecca* (1938), and *Syv Fantastiske Fortællinger* (1935) is mixed with black and white photos from the past that share their dusty mystique with the film noir of Hitchcock, and the dark glamour of a time long gone of Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and Robert Aldrich’s *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (1962), all merging with recent texts in the ever-growing canon, such as Diane Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale* (2006) – which Skov’s novel borrows heavily from – and the soundtrack to David Lynch’s neo-Gothic *Twin Peaks* (1990-91). The blatant confession of imitation and of the impossibility of originality and creation anew connects it with Ingemann’s and Andersen’s tales of the demonization of creation and narrative authority across the centuries within the postmodern aesthetic of the surface, a preoccupation which the kitschy black and red cover illustration of the titular silhouette in its very depthlessness iconicizes.



A year from now, the Gothic novel – and its criticism – will be 250 years old. Plundering the past for recognizable symbols, Gothic has been self-consciously fake from its clichéd inception in 1764 in the shape of a novel posing as the authentic translated manuscript of a sixteenth-century Italian monk, acquiring the label ‘A Gothic Story’ for its second edition as a marketing ploy, with a plot that revolves around the falsification of a will and which is played

out in a fictional castle modelled on Walpole's own Strawberry Hill, a replica constructed from second-hand pictures rather than ruins of actual buildings and devised partly of paper mache. As Jerrold E. Hogle has pointed out in his writings on the Gothic counterfeit, the characters are "hollow stick-figures" and the principal hauntings in the novel are modelled on portraits, effigies and prior fictions: they are "ghosts of representations, spectres of counterfeit, rather than the shades of bodies" (Hogle 2000: 293). As these signifiers of signifiers drift further from their foundations, selves and 'realities' are hollowed out in their reconstitution by ghostly representations of representations; and faith in the authenticity of signs is replaced by a secular emphasis on the circulation of commodities (Hogle 2000: 294; 1994: 31). As *Otranto* spawned an immensely popular literature of the counterfeit, which builds on false Renaissance ideas about the Middle Ages, again based on erroneous perceptions of the historical Goths, the Gothic is now logically taking its place in a system of commodities, its images reproduced for mass-consumerism as spooky-kitsch Halloween decorations and supermarket paperback romances, its complex identities copied and renegotiated by suburban Goths and the Hollywood machinery for a Disneyfied *Twilight*-esque version. Consequently, the Gothic is often dismissed as having been emptied of meaning, or in the case of Danish criticism entirely ignored, although clearly Ingemann, Andersen, Blixen, Høeg and Skov's articulation of identity with the Gothic emphasis on surface, spectacle and performativity is immensely relevant for today's simulated, post-heteronormative hyper-reality. It certainly provides an important correlate to the dominant myths of Danish literary history. The fact that there is no original Gothic, but a counterfeit concept centred on an aesthetics of surface and depthless images, is of course reflected in the construction of the human, or rather post-human, in that fiction, as well as in its figuration of truth, which cannot lie within, but – like the writing that is supposed to express it – is dressed up

in excess. Unlike realism, Gothic “calls attention to itself as costume” (Halberstam 61). Gothic is literature as cross-dressing, and it is precisely through its uncanny extravagances, supernatural events and persistent foregrounding of surfaces that we are able to acknowledge the very real impossibility of a true reconciliation of ‘the real’ and the artificially constructed, of originality and imitation, self and other, into the well-balanced, organic whole of identity or text that is central to the established Danish literary history, neglectful of its Gothic authors.

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