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### **The Uncanny in E.T.A. Hoffmann's Novella *Der Sandmann***

*Der Sandmann* by Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822) belongs to his collection of "night pieces", published in the year 1817. As the name itself suggests, the night pieces portray the dark and hidden sides of human psyche. The atmosphere in the night pieces stands against the bright intellectual light of the enlightenment, e.g. most of the alchemy experiments in the novella are performed at night. *The Sandman* belongs to the late romantic period (19<sup>th</sup> century). Brockhaus defines the term the Sandman as:

The Sandman is a fantastic figure who throws sand in the eyes of disobedient children. Since his childhood the protagonist and poet Nathanael is obsessed with the Sandman and he firmly believes that he exists. Nathanael thinks that the ugly looking advocate Coppelius is the Sandman. He also takes him to be the reason of his father's death. He forgets his rational fiancée Clara when he meets a strange but perfect girl Olympia. Later he finds out that Olympia is an automaton. This phase drives him insane. At the end he throws himself off a tower.

Sigmund Freud attempts to understand the term *Das Unheimliche* (1919) with regard to the text *Der Sandmann* itself.

Freud saw dreams reflecting underlying conflicts and as products of suppressed emotions and desires. Like a subconscious wish corresponding to death of one's father. In his essay on the *Uncanny* also, Freud talks about suppressed emotions. The Webster Dictionary defines Uncanny as eerie, strange, dreadful and frightening.

In the very first part of the essay Freud tries to lay down the meaning of the term *Uncanny*. The uncanny has to do with a certain kind of feeling or sensation, with some emotional impulses. Freud puts forward the opposition between the German words *unheimlich* (uncanny) and *Heimlich* (canny) to understand the nature of uncanny. Initially it was often understood as something mystical, supernatural, occult and a knowledge withdrawn from the unconscious. Freud derives the meaning of *Unheimlich* from *Heimlich* itself. It may mean not to feel at home or something unfamiliar, strange, basically evoking discomfort.

Freud says that *Unheimlich* is not just something hidden, concealed or unknown. It is rather a confrontation with all those fears and anxieties which are supposedly repressed and stay well locked up in the sub- unconscious.

He relates the uncanny effect of the story with its theme of the eyes, with 'the Sandman' and his terror. Freud talks about the experiences of his patients. According to Freud, the fear of losing one's eyes is rather associated with the fear of being castrated.

As per Freud's theory, in the fantasies of male child there always exists a father-duo, i.e. an evil father and a good father. Freud calls it the *Vater-Imago*. The sub-conscious recognizes the evil father as the villain of the child's life. He is a punishment striker who wants to disturb or rather take away his love life by castrating him. Therefore, for Freud the *Sandmann* could actually be replaced by this father.

Freud explains further that the uncanny is nothing new, but something known, yet hidden. Further, he says, one of the most uncanny and widespread forms of superstition is the dread of the evil eye. We often tend to believe that somebody can cast his spell upon our possessions. A belief (thought) that our certain conceptions, ideas, or blurred coincidences will or do come true.

Then, Freud discusses the human belief in the return of the dead. Man always has believed in life after death and thereby return of the dead in the form of spirits and ghosts. He marks out that there still lays a repression in this fact, because some educated people don't actually believe in spirits. Therefore, the fear of the return of the dead is repressed. Then it might return in form of an uncanny feeling.

Freud concludes that the Uncanny is a return, a coming back of something which has stayed inside. This return brings with itself an undefined fear.

Some motifs in the text draw us closer to the uncanny:

**The vision-** Vision in the text is always present and is to be experienced through eyes (motif). The whole text revolves around eyes. The inner and outer vision in the text is the most crucial aspect. Occult practices, fables, alchemical experiments all lay a lot of importance to eyes. Eyes are symbolically a representation of magic, mystery and danger. The symbol of eye swings between the rational and irrational perspective in the novella.

Freud understands the eye motif with relation to Oedipus complex, detailing the father-son conflict.

**2 The automatan-** the automaton character represents the other world, which is not human. This world could be that of machines and dolls. This world remains a desire for humans. Doll and playing with the doll are deeply associated with child and childhood. When such a perfect and desirable world of a child gets distorted, the child may face insanity.

The constellation of Clara and Olympia presents the conflict between the humans and the machine. Wolfgang Preisendanz in the book *Zu E.T.A. Hoffmann Interpretationen* comments that Clara, the fiancée of Nathanael was mechanical. He perceives her rather as *lebloses verdamptes Automat* which means a dull lifeless machine. Preisendanz sees her as too rational.

Ricarda Schmidt writes in *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Der Sandmann: An early example of ecriture Feminine? A critique of trends in feminist literary criticism* that Olympia is as beautiful as a statue. And she is indeed a statue. She represents eternal beauty. This eternal perfect beauty is the desire of Nathanael. Therefore this beauty becomes an ideal. Although this perfect beauty is lifeless. It still remains a desire. A desire which if not achieved may lead to destruction.

3 **The double**- Coppelius and Coppola can be seen as doubles. These figures seem to exist till the end and follow Nathanael everywhere. The obsession faced by Nathanael may be due to this double figure itself. The text does not reveal the identity of this double figure clearly. (Raimund Belgardt)

4 Other motifs- the text is full of motifs such as fire, alchemy, night.