UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

FACULDADE DE LETRAS

Writing the Unknown:

Fiction, Reality, and the Supernatural in the Late-Nineteenth Century Short Story

(Machado, James, Maupassant)

Amândio Pereira Reis

Orientadores: Professora Doutora Helena Etelvina de Lemos Carvalhão Buescu

Professor Doutor Régis Augustin François Salado

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor no ramo de Estudos de Literatura e Cultura, na especialidade de Estudos Comparatistas

2020

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
FACULDADE DE LETRAS

Writing the Unknown:
Fiction, Reality, and the Supernatural in the Late-Nineteenth Century Short Story
(Machado, James, Maupassant)

Amândio Pereira Reis

Orientadores: Professora Doutora Helena Etelvina de Lemos Carvalhão Buescu
Professor Doutor Régis Augustin François Salado

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor no ramo de Estudos de
Literatura e Cultura, na especialidade de Estudos Comparatistas

Júri:
Presidente: Doutora Maria Cristina de Castro Maia de Sousa Pimentel, Professora
Catedrática e Membro do Conselho Científico da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de
Lisboa.
Vogais:
- Doutora Maria Marta Dias Teixeira da Costa Anacleto, Professora Catedrática da
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra;
- Doutora Maria Isabel da Silva Pires de Lima, Professora Catedrática Aposentada da
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto;
- Doutora Eunice Maria da Silva Ribeiro, Professora Catedrática do Instituto de Letras e
Ciências Humanas da Universidade do Minho;
- Doutora Helena Etelvina de Lemos Carvalhão Buescu, Professora Catedrática da
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, orientadora;
- Doutora Ângela Maria Valadas Fernandes, Professora Auxiliar da Faculdade de Letras da
Universidade de Lisboa.

2020

Table of Contents

Abstract

This dissertation offers a comparative perspective on the supernatural short stories of Machado de Assis, Henry James, and Guy de Maupassant written in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Contextualizing my close interpretation of the texts in this historical period, which corresponds to the birth of the modern short story and, at the same time, of the modern fantastic, I argue that notwithstanding their differences, which are also taken into consideration, these three authors similarly explore the supernatural as a subgenre that given its intrinsic association with the unnatural and, by extension, with the unknown, allows them to approach, through fiction, the various dimensions of an epistemological problem. But this epistemological problem is intimately connected with the nature and experience of literary language, which these authors consistently represent, thematize, and even allegorize in their supernatural short stories. Thus, the main goal of this dissertation is not to arrive at a strict definition of the late-nineteenth century supernatural story, but to investigate the ways in which, in different linguistic, cultural, and literary contexts, the genre resists stabilization and problematizes itself in a constant correlation with various notions of "fiction" and "reality", as exemplified in the literary as well as critical works of Machado, James, and Maupassant. In this sense, this study distances itself from more habitual approaches that tend to analyze these authors as more or less non-conforming cases of the "fantastic" proper. Instead, I focus on how they explore and renovate the genre through the employment of diverse formal and/or narrative elements — namely, the use of multiple diegetic levels, the figuration of ghostly manuscripts, and the metaliterary representation of writing — which together contribute to form a common notion of "supernatural textuality" that has largely escaped critical attention. My final objective is to demonstrate that a close analysis of these typically neglected texts shows that they are "modern", also, and above all, because they rhetorically, structurally, and thematically formulate an implicit reflection on literature that focuses on its imaginative ability to represent the unreal by giving shape to the unknown.

Keywords: Guy de Maupassant; Henry James; Knowledge; Machado de Assis; Nineteenth-Century Literature; Short Story; Supernatural.

Resumo

Esta dissertação oferece uma perspectiva comparativa dos contos sobrenaturais de Machado de Assis, Henry James e Guy de Maupassant escritos nas últimas décadas do Século XIX. Contextualizando uma interpretação aproximada dos textos neste período histórico, que corresponde ao do nascimento do conto moderno e, ao mesmo tempo, do fantástico moderno, sugiro que, não obstante as diferenças entre eles, que são também tomadas em consideração, estes três autores exploram o sobrenatural como um subgénero que, graças à sua associação intrínseca com o não-natural e, por extensão, com o desconhecido, lhes permite abordar, através da ficção, várias dimensões de um problema epistemológico. Contudo, este problema epistemológico está intimamente ligado à natureza e à experiência da linguagem literária, que estes autores consistentemente representam, tematizam e até alegorizam nos seus contos sobrenaturais. Assim, o objectivo principal desta dissertação não é chegar a uma definição restrita do conto sobrenatural do fim do século XIX, mas investigar os meios através dos quais, em diferentes contextos linguísticos, culturais e literários, este género resiste à estabilização e se problematiza a si mesmo numa contante correlação com diversas noções de "ficção" e "realidade"; correlação que parece paradigmática nos textos literários e críticos de Machado, James e Maupassant. Neste sentido, este estudo distancia-se de abordagens mais habituais, que tendem a analisar estes autores enquanto casos mais ou menos conformes com o estrito "fantástico". Em vez disso, esta análise observa de que maneira eles exploram e renovam o género através da utilização de diversos elementos formais ou narrativos — nomeadamente, a multiplicação de níveis diegéticos, a figuração de manuscritos fantasma e a representação meta-literária da escrita — que, contribuem para formar uma noção comum de "textualidade sobrenatural", a qual tem escapado à atenção da crítica. O meu objectivo final é demonstrar que uma leitura atenta destes textos tipicamente negligenciados mostra que eles são também, e sobretudo, "modernos", porque formulam retoricamente, estruturalmente e tematicamente uma reflexão implícita sobre a literatura que incide sobre a sua capacidade de representar o irreal e, assim, dar forma ao desconhecido.

Palavras-Chave: Conhecimento; Conto; Guy de Maupassant; Henry James; Literatura do Século XIX; Machado de Assis; Sobrenatural.

Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking my generous supervisor, Prof. Helena Buescu, for her unfailing support and dedication, the sharpness of her comments, and the honesty of her criticisms. I am also thankful for the good humor that Prof. Buescu brought to the seriousness of this work when I needed it the most. I extend my gratitude to Prof. Régis Salado, who read and commented these chapters but who also welcomed me warmly in Paris. His support while I was a visiting student at Université Paris Diderot allowed me to profit enormously from the activities of the Centre d'Études et de recherches interdisciplinaires en Lettres, Arts, Cinéma, as well as from research conducted above all at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and at the library of the Centre Jacques-Seebacher, specialized in the nineteenth century.

A scholarship from FCT — Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia allowed me to dedicate four years of my life to the study of literature. This is a privilege and an opportunity for which I will be forever grateful.

I am also indebted to the University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities, the Centre for Comparative Studies, and the International FCT PhD Programme in Comparative Studies for their institutional, financial, and personal support. In particular, I would like to thank the director of PHDCOMP, Prof. Ângela Fernandes, for the infallible attention that she paid to the program and the students, as well as Prof. Brian Richardson, for kindly reviewing and commenting my dissertation prospectus, and for all his constructive suggestions. I also extend my gratitude to all the professors, members of the directive board, external advisors,

Tout aussi bien la pièce fausse serait peut-être, pour un pauvre petit spéculateur, le germe d'une richesse de quelques jours.

— Charles Baudelaire
"La Fausse Monnaie"

Introduction

The Modern Short Story Across the Atlantic

This thesis aims to reconsider a corpus of supernatural short stories published in the final decades of the nineteenth century in Brazil, by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (Rio de Janeiro, 1839 — 1908), in the United States of America and in England, by Henry James (New York, 1843 — London, 1916), and in France, by Henri René Albert Guy de Maupassant (Tourville-sur-Arques, 1850 — Paris, 1893). From a comparative perspective that accounts for surprising similarities while also stressing irreducible differences, I argue that these works surpass the generic conventions they are associated with and provide a fundamental insight into the understanding of fictionality and of the aesthetic revolutions taking place at the time of their writing. This time is the birth of modern short fiction — of which Machado, James, and Maupassant came to be known as three of the most important representatives —, taking place simultaneously in both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, across different but communicating cultures, literary traditions, and languages.

But what is the "modern short story"? It is certainly difficult to answer this question satisfactorily. However, the task is only just as challenging as that of saying, in the first place, what the "short story" is. The abundance of studies trying to define the genre — the majority of companions and theoretical volumes on short fiction typically begin with another attempt at definition —, as well as the variety and sometimes the incompatibility of what these studies propose, is in itself an indication of the lack of consensus surrounding the formal requisites of a literary genre primarily identified, looking at various traditions, according to mode and

length (thus, in English, a short story is evidently a narrative that is *short*), or according to its expressive outline, as the terms *conto* and *conte*, in Portuguese and in French, respectively, derive from the verbs *contar* and *compter*, the equivalents of *to tell* in English. In Romance languages, then, *conto* refers literally to "that which is told", or the tale. And this verbal focus on narration, or on the action of telling, is only reinstated in the alternative French term *récit*. In either case, since there are as many ways of telling — as well as other literary forms, such as narrative poetry and the novel, which are also *told* — as there are measures for shortness, none of the linguistic worlds navigated in this thesis offers a particularly clear understanding of the form, although they seem unanimous in figuring it as an independent piece of narrative prose that is not very long, but also not as short as a sketch. Such indeterminacy may tempt us into looking for a more precise delimitation. However, as Allan H. Pasco reminds us, that quest is unlikely to be fruitful, and in fact it may be beside the point:

> Some have wanted to reserve the term "short story" for a rather specific subject matter. Murray Sachs feels, for example, that for the "educated" *conte* or tale "has a strong flavor of the unreal or the supernatural… [T]he French word *nouvelle* [short story] is sometimes confined because of etymology to narratives which have the character of real events (or 'news'), and is felt to be inapplicable to stories of the fantastic or the improbable."[1] Alfred G. Engstrom is similarly exclusive. For him, "supernatural narrations (fairy tales, legends of demons, saints, gods and the like) and the tales of outright wizardry"[2] are generally to be excluded from the *conte*, thus from the short story. This distinction is, of course, similar to the old separation between the novel and the romance. While I might interject that francophone *nouvelle* seems to be used primarily in English as a generic term to cover such subcategories as conte, tale, anecdote, and so on, and that *conte* maintains a strong association with its oral roots, I think all such discussions miss the point. Ian Reid is right to be disturbed by the distinction, however much he accepts it. As Reid recognizes:
>
> > *Exempla* about tediously saintly figures, snippets of legend about marvels and eerie occurrences: such things differ quite patently from those tales that are imaginatively cohesive even when fantastic and elliptical, or from tales that explore a mental and moral dimension by evoking the preternatural, as in Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" with its symbols of devilry and witchcraft.[3]

[1] See Sachs 1969: 13.
[2] See Engstrom 1945: 631.
[3] See Reid 1977: 8-9.

Still, the key is not whether or not a myth, legend, or mythological story is recounted, it is whether it is done artistically in a brief compass. (2019: 27)

Considering all the factors of inherent instability pointed out by Pasco in his study, to which we must add the frequent contradictions in critical discourse (starkly exemplified in Sachs's and Engstrom's diverging views as to what is and is not a *conte*), it is not my intention to advance another definition of "short story", or to problematize the terminology at use by contrast with the *novel* and the *romance*, or with the more trans-linguistic *novella*, which not always obliges to the realistic criterion of "real events" or "news", and which also calls for a discussion on length for being understood as an intermediate form of longer and possibly multilinear story located between the short story and the novel.[4] In reality, we often find the same work referred to in different contexts as a short story and a novella. James's "The Turn of the Screw" and Maupassant's "Le Horla" are "stories of the fantastic or the improbable" that exemplify this fluctuation, which is probably due to the fact that they are relatively long and complicated in terms of plot. The truth is that this fluctuation itself indicates that subject matter, length, and complexity of plot and characterization may or may not be considered distinctive factors. It all seems to depend on what we mean to emphasize. To signal that these texts are longer than an average short story, or longer than their authors' average story, they are identified as "novellas"; but to specify, instead, that they belong to a subgenre such as the fantastic or the ghostly, placing them now in a particular tradition of short fiction, they are preferably called "fantastic short stories" or "ghost stories".

In the following chapters of this thesis, I allow myself the same kind of conceptual and contextual flexibility, believing, as Pasco puts it, that impossible genre definitions do not

---

[4] For a discussion on the novella as "a fictional prose narrative of 'medium' length", see Good 1994: 148.

preclude pragmatic ones, which, in fact, readers constantly use "as guides" (Pasco 2019: 24). The prerequisites of such a pragmatic definition of "short story" are, then, that it be a literary narrative, that is, a narrative written with aesthetic purposes ("done artistically"), as opposed, for instance, to historiographic purposes, and that it stays within a generally accepted length, which tends to be short, although we do not always know *in comparison to what* ("in a brief compass"), bringing us back to the question of shortness as a defining characteristic of short fiction, even across different languages, literary traditions, and formal patterns.5

I return now to the initial question on the "modern short story" in order to clarify that, although it may also refer to different realities, it is commonly accepted that the modern short story emerged during the first half of the nineteenth century as an autonomous form of narrative literature, written in prose, that nonetheless was different from the novel, circulated differently, and was published and shaped according to new conventions also dictated by the technology and the materiality of the platforms — not exactly the feuilleton, nor the book (at least, not as the original publication) — in which it was typically put into print.6

I shall come back to the problem of the short story's highly-contextualized existence in periodicals of a literary or a more varied nature (see p. 130), and of how "short story" was actually a "magazine term" (Good 1994: 148) only fixated in the late nineteenth century. For now, however, I want to emphasize the fact that, regardless of the exact delimitation that we may choose to attribute to it, the understanding of "modern short story" that I make in this

---

5 Mary Louise Pratt addresses the apparent inescapability of this question in a chapter aptly titled "The Long and the Short of It". She posits that "[s]hort story critics typically rely on comparisons with the novel as ways of fleshing out the 'mere' fact of shortness, ways of talking about the short story as 'something more than a story which is short.' The problem with shortness, of course, arises from a sense that literary genres ought to be characterized by aesthetic properties, and shortness seems altogether too quantitative, too material a feature to be given top billing. *At the same time, (...) it does seem inescapably the crucial fact*" (1994: 95, my italics).
6 In fact, there is a historical hypothesis that the modern short story emerged as a "countergenre", "somewhere between 1835 and 1855", in response to the consolidation of the nineteenth-century novel (see Pratt 1994: 99).

reflection is located amid a historical enclave: between the innovations developed in the mid-nineteenth century, when the short story clearly diverged from the tale of tradition and the folktale so as to become an innately *written* form,[7] and the consolidation and wide circulation of the genre, toward the late nineteenth century, through its translation and dissemination in the journals of international and intercontinental publishers, which in turn paved the way for many of the formal and thematic distinctions of Modernist literature. The internationalization of the genre was a process stimulated, for example, by Garnier, a publishing house that, having arrived at Brazil from France in the early 1840s, not only promoted and was promoted by Machado de Assis as well as other Brazilian writers, but "dominated the book trade in Rio de Janeiro in the second half of the nineteenth century" (Abreu & Silva 2016: 96).[8]

As short story writers of the same epoch, working inside a cosmopolitan literary and cultural context which the genre itself facilitated, and participating in a network of influences not always easy to determine with certainty, Machado, James, and Maupassant were, on one hand, the heirs and developers of literary innovations reaching back to Edgar Allan Poe (the first writer to conceptualize the short story in critical terms), and other authors of the first half of the nineteenth century, and, on the other hand, the precursors of twentieth-century writers who looked back to them as paragons of literary modernity. We shall see throughout this study that their modernity and the role they have played — more or less separately, but

---

[7] In spite of this divergence, some short story critics remind us that it is not an absolute separation, and that the short story is nonetheless closely attached to its typically oral relative. This is the case of Warren S. Walker, who argues that: "Throughout the past two centuries, short fiction, even more than other forms of literature, has demonstrated its kinship with the oral narrative, and despite its various experimental masquerades — anti-story, metafiction, surfiction — it gives no evidence of losing the ancestral likeness. In a great many of its thousand faces, lineaments of the folktale are readily available" (1982: 18).

[8] For a discussion on how Baptiste-Louis Garnier, the sixth Garnier brother — and apart from the question of his commercial success —, not only helped disseminate a vast catalogue of foreign authors in Brazil (not rarely through indirect translation from French), but also promoted national literature and "affirmed himself as a kind of patron of Brazilian letters", see also Abreu & Silva 2016: 96 *et seq*.

contemporarily — in changes that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth in literatures written in Portuguese, English, and French is to the present day one of the most insistent assertions of criticism, and a notion that continues to motivate constant reevaluation.

Nevertheless, these three authors are insistently referred to as major examples of the nineteenth-century realist current in their respective language; and the fact that they stood at the crossroads of literary practices and conventions, following a tradition of the short story largely based (on the modern aestheticization of) the supernatural at the same time that they championed advanced forms of literary realism, which had become the hegemonic tendency, was also the source of problematic overlaps and dualistic echoes.9 This margin of confluence will be one of the major points of discussion throughout this dissertation, since it is the central stage on which the mutual relationship between a meta-literary conscience of fictionality and a well-established realistic paradigm is brought to the fore in the stories of the supernatural written by Machado, James, and Maupassant.

Thus, I propose to investigate these stories as more than just a contextual expression of historical overlaps of the late nineteenth century, and of literary trends and fashions fueled by the willingness of newspapers and magazines to provide for their reading public. I would like to argue that, apart from that, these supernatural stories are a privileged and perhaps the primordial, corpus in which we can investigate these writers' shared modernity, as well as their individual and combined achievements as short fiction writers and authors of literature.

---

9 Drawing an analogy with British heraldry, Willian Penden conceptualizes this issue as a union between "the lion, symbolic of earthly power, courage, the non-exceptional and the ordinary" and "the unicorn suggestive of the unseen, the unusual, and the magical" (1982: 47). He understands that "England's contribution to the modern short story is characterized by a similar dualism", adding that "[i]t is hardly accidental or coincidental that the 'new' English short story was born during the 1890s, largely under the influence of Maupassant and the Continental realists at approximately the same time that Poe was being 'rediscovered'" (1982: 47-62).

As such, one of my guiding questions has to do not so much with what the supernatural did for these authors as an occasionally lucrative and playful form at their disposal, but with what these authors did with the supernatural, in short fiction, as a literary model that spoke to them and their artistic ambitions in a particular way, and which they thought was in need of being transformed while, at the same time, preserved.[10]

However, Machado, James, and Maupassant were certainly not the first nor the only writers to understand that, more easily than the bulky novel, the short story — even when it was not supernatural in theme — could swiftly navigate the meeting currents of sophisticated fictionality (or what is often called "aestheticism") and realist protocols. In fact, looking at those who preceded them, and sided with them, can help us understand what is at stake here. In this respect, Maupassant's comments on E.T.A. Hoffmann and Poe, discussed in Chapter 3 (see p. 260), are illustrative of his search for a specific kind of "roundabout" fantastic that denaturalizes (or *defamiliarizes*) literary language while still abiding by realistic principles. But it is in Anton Chekhov, one of the most prominent writers of short fiction of all time, a contemporary of the authors contemplated here, and a recognizable and admitted influence for all three of them, that we find the same — and, perhaps, the original — modernity shared by this transatlantic triad, and which is fundamentally different from Poe's rationalization of the supernatural (understood as a way to "defolklorize" it). This aspect of Chekhov's poetics of the short story is summarized by Charles E. May in very comprehensive terms:

---

[10] In each of the following chapters I address the question of how Machado, James, and Maupassant individually sought to conceptualize, or, at least, to envision, the(ir) supernatural short story as a reaction against the threat of emerging trends in fantastic fiction and, simultaneously, a return to previous models or to more "original", as Machado puts it, means of disrupting the common and the ordinary. But the point is made clear by Suzanne Ferguson in her observation about the way James resuscitates, for example, the memory of stories told "round the hearth" so as to reenact the ancestral scene of storytelling. She argues that, "[i]n thus framing the governess' tale of horror in *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James is less modern than firmly traditional" (1989: 186).

Chekhov's ability to dispense with a striking incident, his impressionism, and his freedom from the literary conventions of the highly plotted and formalized story marked the beginnings of a new or "modern" kind of short fiction that combined the specific details of realism with the poetic lyricism of romanticism.

The primary characteristics of this new hybrid form are: character as mood rather than as either symbolic projection or realistic depiction; story as minimal lyricized sketch rather than as elaborately plotted tale; atmosphere as an ambiguous mixture of both external details and psychic projections; and a basic impressionistic apprehension of reality itself as a function of perspectival point of view. The ultimate result of these characteristics is the modernist and postmodernist focus on reality itself as a fictional construct and the contemporary trend to make fictional assumptions and techniques both the subject matter and theme of the novel and the short story. (1994: 199)

But I am not suggesting, of course, that Machado, James, and Maupassant coincide with Chekhov, or with each other, in each one of these points. It seems obvious, for example, that Machado's characters are very well-rounded human types, just like those of Maupassant, even if the latter is more concise in the portrayal that he makes of them, and that James's stories are typically very intricate and "elaborately plotted". Nevertheless, they all share Chekhov's fundamental treatment of realism as a field in which "fictional assumptions" can also be sown and picked, as well as his notion that the immaterial ("psychic projections", "impressionistic apprehension") is not so much a disruption of realism, but an axis on which fiction and reality spin together. It is as if these late-century authors had understood that realism, just like our experience of reality, could in fact be anti-realist without annihilating itself, and that the short story, with its aesthetic vocation and its inherent focus on narrativity — as pointed out earlier about the various designations of the genre —, and as such on the exploration of "perspectival point of view", as opposed to the novel's focus on eventfulness and on character development, was the ideal form in which to explore this paradox.

This is also the point where the supernatural, into which Chekhov never fully delved, but which Machado, James, and Maupassant consistently explored, is brought back into the equation. If the supernatural story was in need of assistance after the disappearance of its founding fathers from the first half of the century (Poe, but also Hawthorne, Hoffmann, and

Mérimée), the consecration of the realist novel as the narrative archetype, and the growing scientification and medicalization of the fantastic story — a topic that I shall discuss along this thesis —, these authors took their different contributions to its *fin de siècle* revival as an opportunity to advance and experiment with some of the most distinctive traces of their own views on modern fiction. We could say that, in several ways, they regarded the supernatural as an intrinsic quality of literature, or, in other words, that they were sensitive to its potential to express the unnatural quality of literature. As such, the supernatural subgenre and its many variations could be seen as more than a niche lacking in seriousness and abounding in *frisson*, and as an expression of modernity in the guise of — or aside from — a literary product aimed at generating an emotional and fleeting, and not intellectual and long-lasting, response.

Thinking specifically of English literature, Suzanne Ferguson tackles this subject in terms that I believe may be, and should be, extended to the authors that I analyze in this study. Additionally, she conceives the inherent aesthetic conscience, the realist/anti-realist overlap, and the modern impressionism of the late-nineteenth century ghost story by also pointing out its departure from proper fantasy, thus making a distinction that is equally crucial here:

> Ghost stories exploit the signifying power of words to evoke scenes and events that "make your flesh creep" (in the words of Dickens' Fat Boy), playing upon conscious and unconscious fears, guilt, and doubt in contexts resembling the settings of realistic fiction, rather than fantastic worlds (as in H. G. Wells). Inverting the comic formula of ridiculing the threatening, they take it seriously and thus — perhaps — purge it.
> I would argue that the sensational element developed in the best of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century English ghost story writers (…) contributed in a significant way to the rise of the highbrow, "mainstream" short story in the twentieth century. The techniques of description used to create the realistic setting in which the outré events take place, the symbolic character of the setting, and the psychological involvement of the protagonist were important in the development of significant settings and psychological plots in the twentieth-century short story. The effort, in Conrad, "to make you hear, to make you feel, above all to make you *see*" a situation, to experience vicariously and sensationally — phenomenologically — is more fully practiced in the ghost story than in any other short genre. (Ferguson 1989: 186-7)

The lines connecting Machado, James, and Maupassant are as manifold as they are indirect, and the historical and aesthetic relations that I have traced so far owe certainly more to the idea of convergence than to that of dialogue. In point of fact, if we can speak assuredly of common influences from the literary past (Hoffmann, Mérimée) as well as from their own time (Chekhov, Turgenev), the question of how these authors relate to one another in concrete terms is more complex and less obvious. However, the fact that French was at their time the language of culture and of international communication surely helped break some barriers. It also seems certain that all of them were sensible to the emanations coming from the "capital of the nineteenth century", which, according to Patricia Garcia, played a very important role in the very configuration of the modern and fundamentally urban fantastic:

> On the one hand, Paris presented itself as the "Ville Lumière," a display case of modernity to be looked upon by the rest of the world. The city was progressively doing away with superstitious explanations of physical events and celebrating instead a scientific evolution and logical positivism. However, in parallel with the positivistic model of thought, the city was becoming a melting pot for the occult sciences, which captured the interest of the time in the dark, unknown dimension of the human mind. Occultism, spiritism, magnetism, and hypnosis were to pervade the Parisian scene, responding to a need to express a metaphysical anxiety that science failed to grasp. (2017: 4)

It is only natural that Machado and James were well-acquainted with the works of Maupassant, which circulated easily from "the Parisian scene" to the rest of Europe and to the Americas, and which they could read in the original. Moreover, in 1875, James moved to "melting pot" Paris to become a novelist; and even if he was only thirty-two, and an aspiring writer, his skills with spoken French and his ability to navigate the artistic *milieu* allowed him to infiltrate the Sunday afternoons at the Paris apartment of Gustave Flaubert, where the author of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* gathered the likes of Émile Zola, Ivan Turgenev, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Alphonse Daudet, Edmond de Goncourt, and, of course, his *protégé* Guy de

Maupassant. A decade later, Maupassant visited him in London, where James was residing at the time, and where he obliged him as his "principal English sponsor" (Brooks 2007: 165). Although their relationship was at times comically inharmonious, as Peter Brooks points out, socially as well as artistically, these mutual visits meant that "James probably saw more of Maupassant, personally, than most of his other French connections" (165). And the enduring — and sometimes spectral, as we shall see in Chapter 2 — presence of the author of *Une Vie* is even felt, as Philip Horne notes and exemplifies in his reflection on "Paste" (1899), James's rewriting of Maupassant's "La Parure" (1884), in all the occasions in which James "makes characters in his fiction readers of Maupassant" (2019: 138).

Unlike Poe, however, James took a long time to be translated, to earn popularity and to travel beyond the limits of the anglophone world as an author, so Maupassant could never reciprocate the kind of knowledge that James had of him. It is also improbable that Machado had any direct contact with the works of James, even if his library and his translations of Poe suggest some proficiency in the English language; and it is certain that Maupassant and James never came across the works of Machado, kept behind the insurmountable barrier, at the time, of their peripheral location and native tongue.

The work of a comparatist, however, is more than surveying the materially attested relationships between authors and works, as it involves creating new, as much as discerning existing, relationships that often lie outside the scope of immediate observation. This is what other critics and scholars whose work I shall turn to throughout this thesis have occasionally done in journal articles, book chapters, books, and dissertations, probing also into other areas of contact different from the genre-oriented perspective I have delineated above.

Restricting myself, in this instance, to those which are wider in breadth and scope, I would like to refer in particular to Richard Fusco's radical study of influence in *Maupassant*

12

and the American Short Story (1994), of which James is one of the case studies; as well as to

Maria Teresa Defazio's interdisciplinary perspective on literature and psychiatric sciences in

Il Mito dell'io Impossibile: Allucinazioni e Identitá Mancate in Guy de Maupassant, Henry

James, Luigi Pirandello (2004), in which Defazio compares the fictional works of James and

Maupassant with the scientific writings of F.W.H. Myers and Jean-Martin Charcot.

Studies welcoming Machado as a piece in this triad are less common, but important

contributions have been made by Andrea Perrot, in *Do Real ao Ficcional: A Loucura e Suas*

Representações em Machado de Assis (2001), a thesis on madness in Machado that regards

Maupassant as an important term of comparison, and Marcelo Pen Parreira, who in *Realidade*

Possível: Dilemas da Ficção em Henry James e Machado de Assis (2012) revises the subject

of ambiguity in the late novels *The Ambassadors* and *Memorial de Aires*. [11]

However, and apart from bringing Machado, James, and Maupassant together for

the first time — also in an attempt to redeem Machado from the undeserved relative obscurity

to which his geographical and linguistic origin reduced him in the international scene —, the

reflection carried out in this thesis diverges from the aforementioned works, and is a relevant

addition to them, in the fact that it restores the critical focus to the literary texts, instead of

attending primarily to matters of context. This change of perspective means that biographical

data — considering, for instance, that Maupassant had a history of mental illness that may

inform some of his stories dealing with the subject — will not be a primordial angle of inquiry

in my study, which, likewise, will not attempt to psychoanalyze or diagnose characters, nor

their authors, by taking these narratives as (clinical) evidence.

---

[11] In his study, Parreira also provides a detailed historical survey of other, more occasional comparisons between Machado and James (see 2012: 16-24).

In this respect, I will also avoid understanding literary texts as telling symptoms or symmetric reflections of any given cultural or sociopolitical framework. My focus will be on how the short stories under analysis refract — more than they reflect — certain aspects of a heterogeneous literary and sociocultural environment in the nineteenth century. Instead of regarding these texts simply as complicated products of that background, I consider how they complicate that background by recreating its essential facets and sometimes by creating new pathways that may even run against, or independently from, the major trends of their cultural atmosphere. And, in fact, the supernatural short story seems to be one of the main instances through which these writers have showcased the power of literature to *differ*.

In addition — and this is probably the cause to which my dissertation can contribute the most in relation to the work that has been done —, my goal is to reexamine some of these writers' well-known and widely discussed creations, but also, and above all, to illuminate a representative selection of short stories that remain in the shadow of more celebrated texts, and particularly of their authors' novels, which, with the exception of Maupassant's atypical case, gather by far a greater and an almost exclusive amount of critical attention. As we will see, some of the stories to which I give center stage along this dissertation have occasionally been shunned as minor works or curiosities, and others have never been properly studied or had their fair place reevaluated in the context of their author's oeuvre. Considering this, I aim to read them as well and as closely as possible, without disregarding the need to substantiate my interpretation and the fact that no work of literature is born or read in isolation.

In what comes to common points of contact, we cannot ignore that Machado, James, and Maupassant were conceiving their art in a "nameless era", or rather a many-named one,[12] that "swings up onto the back of the Victorian carriage and clambers onto the running boards of the modernist automobile" (Schaffer 2007: 1). Moreover, this coincides with what J. W. Burrow calls a "crisis of reason" that reverberated throughout the Western world, and which resulted in part from the double-edged notion that "[t]he ultimate metaphysical question of the nature and cause of existence, which [Herbert] Spencer called 'the Unknowable', was beyond the reach of human understanding, but the phenomenal world was an unbreakable chain of transformations of matter and energy" (2000: 44). However, the origin of *being* was not the only enigma to be incorporated into the end-of-century epistemological framework, because the "unbreakable chain" of nature *also* included a few invisible links — namely, the human mind, whose problematic constituency is often explored in the stories I analyze here — that complicated the reliability of material observation. As Burrow adds a few pages later:

> "Science" had manifestly not, moreover, resolved the mysteries of consciousness and volition, nor had it unambiguously established its empire over the fundamental principles governing human life and society, though the ability to draw on the authority of science for any moral and political view was much coveted and claimed. But the bid for a comprehensive, unified scientific understanding of the universe, including the human mind, had, temporarily at least, failed, and the intellectual climate of the turn of the century was crucially shaped by that perceived failure, whether experienced with disillusionment or relief. Science was a powerful and much solicited voice rather than an unchallenged hegemony. (59)

The awareness of a critical state of things, or of a crisis that is innate to their present time, seems indeed to be shared by Machado, James, and Maupassant. And the fact is they all lived among the echoes of an Age of Enlightenment that had shaken the foundations of

---

12 As Talia Schaffer notes: "the period from the 1870s to the 1910s also has a unique problem: It has no widely accepted name. What can we call this era? 'The turn of the century'? 'The 1890s'? 'Late Victorianism'? 'Early Modernism'? 'The *fin de siècle*'…?" (Schaffer 2007: 1).

European culture in the preceding century. Their political and social reality was also shaped by a revolution that changed the face of France and Europe in 1789 and the following years. And, in their own time, they experienced many technological and material transformations that had been set in motion during the mid-century Industrial Revolution and exponentiated at the peak of the colonial enterprise. In fact, this "age of empire", in the words of Hobsbawm, witnessed an "intellectual crisis" that was simultaneous with fast-accelerating economic and scientific progress, greatly fueled, of course, by the revenues of colonial exploitation. It is in this context that "[t]he unknown and incomprehensible became more popular than they had been since the early romantic era", without such popularity ever compromising, however, the "major intellectual development of the years from 1875 to 1914", with a "massive advance of popular education and self-education and of a popular reading public" (1989: 262).

Industrialized printing and the proliferation of newspapers and periodicals, both of which began much earlier but gained a new impetus at this stage, were certainly a part of this development from which writers benefited creatively and economically. Thus, periodicals in France and all over Europe and the Americas not only promoted the short story as a modern genre and a strong counterpart to the novel installment — under the pioneering influence of the British press and, in fact, looking back to German Romantic fiction as the foundation of what was understood as the new *conte fantastique* (Bryant 1991: 10-2) —, but also harbored a great number of *crônicas*, or *chroniques*, that correspond to a significant part of Machados's and Maupassant's works.[13]

---

[13] Typically treated as marginal, these texts have recently been the object of renewed attention from critics, and they were collected with high editing standards in *Chroniques: Anthologie* (Ed. Henri Mitterand, Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2008) and *Crônicas Escolhidas* (Ed. John Gledson, São Paulo: Penguin/Companhia das Letras, 2012).

In spite of this shared cultural environment, the common ground between Machado, James, and Maupassant can also be found in what differentiates them. Their mostly divergent and unrelated histories were in truth marked by constant causes of social and political unrest, forcing these writers to assume a detached position toward their own countries and literatures, which they critically analyzed and interpreted, not rarely setting themselves apart from them.

James's unsettled love affair with the Old Continent and his voluntary expatriation from the U.S.A., which culminated in his becoming a British citizen only one year before his death, is perhaps the most visible manifestation of that difficult relationship. James left the United States not long after the Civil War (which had touched upon his closest family[14]), at the height of immigration, economic growth, and industrialism, all of which had an ample and not always positive influence on his writing. Moving to England and strolling around Europe, however, meant no pacification. In this respect, Julia Briggs interprets his work as a ghost story writer as an exploration of this fact, arguing that for American-born writers who, like James, were trying to fit into European society, the "ambiguity of the ghost, skeleton in the cupboard or welcome messenger of a bygone world, provided an exact counterpart to the complexity of their feelings towards their new surroundings" (1977: 112).

Machado's multi-racial identity and his ascension from humble origins to an affluent standing as a successful writer and public servant also represented, according to G. Reginald Daniel, a "struggle with duality and ambiguity" (2016: 72). It seems apparent that in various instances of his work and his life Machado stood "between and betwixt" (75) racial and social categories. Stressing once again the supernatural, or "quasi-macabre", element in the author's

---

14 For an account of how James and his family experienced the participation of the younger brothers, Wilkinson and Robertson James, in the American Civil War, with long-lasting effects, see Edel 1996: 61-3.

tales, Elizabeth Ginway claims that their fantastic dimension contains a covert critique of the Empire and is meant to "contest the official version of history" (2016: 212).

And Machado was indeed a witness to profound changes in Brazilian society, from the *Lei do Ventre Livre*, in 1871, which automatically freed any new-born slave children, to the belated abolishment of slavery in 1888 and the end of the Empire and rise of the Republic in the following year. Ginway's reading emphasizes the impact that the country's tumultuous political arena in the last quarter of the nineteenth century had in Machado, as it appears, in her view, allegorized in some of the author's short stories of the supernatural. Once more, we are persuaded to fixate our interpretive perspective at the meeting point between the short story's direct relationship with reality and its fictional reconfiguration of it.

In France, with the fall of Napoleon III and his Second Empire, making way for the Third Republic in 1870, Maupassant also experienced a tempestuous transition to democracy. In addition, the Franco-Prussian War left considerably deep scars in his spirit and work, with short stories such as "Tombouctou" (1883) attesting to his uneasiness in dealing with it and his effort to reinterpret and in fact reinvent it through a fictional approach to history. But the economic crisis and climate of depression that ensued may perhaps have been assuaged by the purported grandeur of France's imperial domains in North Africa.

In 1881, Maupassant himself was an envoy from *Le Gaulois* in Algeria, where he experienced in the first person the conflicting situation of an independent *colon*, an epithet that he used for signing his articles anonymously: on the one hand, fascinated with the ideal of a fair and principled colonization, and, on the other hand, a fierce critic of the misconduct and unqualified administration of French officials. However, in addition to painting for his cosmopolitan yet naïve public back in Paris, in suggestive passages, the great shock between

European civilization and exotic territories and customs, Maupassant's *récits* and *nouvelles* from Africa are a testimony to his decisive encounter with otherness.[15]

The author tries to make it quite clear that, aside from adventurous and exploratory, his journey is epistemological. Leaving the capital city of Paris is for him a necessary step in overcoming a state of utter ignorance: "Il semble qu'on va mourir demain sans rien connaître encore, bien que dégoûté de tout ce qu'on connaît" (2015: 111) [It seems that we will die tomorrow still knowing nothing, even if sick of all that we know].[16] Algeria, on the contrary, is an opportunity for the conquest of a new knowledge, needed to placate the paradoxical and bourgeois "nostalgie du Désert ignoré" (113) [nostalgia for the unknown Desert].

Several years before Joseph Conrad's literary exploit of a related kind, Maupassant presented his own words on newly colonized Algeria as the cloudless report of an admittedly shadowy matter, aiming to astonish as much as to educate his fellow countrymen. Although I do not focus on the "African cycle" in this study, it provides a preliminary example of how the short story became for Maupassant, as it had become for Machado and James, a privileged form in which to lay siege on the dark and the inscrutable, so as to shape it and question it.

My main goal in this dissertation, then, is to identify, describe, and understand some of the most relevant formulations that these three authors gave to the problem of knowledge in their supernatural short stories. This interpretive and dissertative perspective is grounded on two leading assumptions. The first one is that, as we have seen from the majority of critical discussions that I referred to before, the topic of knowledge arises in almost every conception of the modern short story, be it to underline its questioning of reductive notions of realism,

---

[15] These texts have been collected by Noëlle Benhamou as two cohesive groups in *Nouvelles d'Afrique* (Lyon: Palimpseste, 2008) and *Récits d'Afrique* (Lyon: Palimpseste, 2005).

[16] Unless a specific reference is provided after the quote, all translations of literary and critical texts are mine.

its radical employ of perspectivism and frame narration, its antagonism toward the novel's teleological outline and vocation for totality, or even, more simply, its predilection for the epistemological theme (which does not necessarily entail a depiction of scientific motifs and characters). With this in mind, this thesis proposes a reading of the late-nineteenth century short story that reconsiders and looks to materialize some of these theoretical claims, which naturally tend to be abstracted and generalized, keeping the literary texts, however, and their own specificities and a-theoretical nature, always at the forefront of analysis.

The second assumption presiding this reflection is that the supernatural — a concept whose indeterminacy, as we shall see, allows it to cover a vast array of (seemingly) *unnatural* elements —, related to the fantastic, but not to be confused with fantasy, is intimately tied to an epistemological problem, and, for that reason, to the very nature of the modern short story. As Ferguson points out on the subject of the ghost story, the ability of the supernatural to address the occult, the invisible, the psychological, or the perception of the unknown, means that it is co-extensive with the essential traits of the short story, allowing us to regard it as an epitomized expression of the genre and, as such, a particularly adequate angle from which to reexamine it, and not a subsidiary variant considered only for its enduring attractiveness and for its supporting role in the history of literature.

Considering, in particular, the way that the supernatural enabled the short story to explore the matters of the mind — thus opening pathways that would be decisive to modernist literature —, we can also see it as a literary exploration, sometimes sympathetic and at other times defiant, of "a new scientific context" in which "all matter has its mental side, just as all manifestations of mind display a material face"; which means that there is no need "to resort to marvelous properties of the universe anymore", since "the enigma lies in the heart of every living being, and even of the simplest cell" (Chevalier 2016: 19).

To conclude this point: focusing on the supernatural story, I am not only narrowing down a corpus that would otherwise be simply too vast for analysis, considering that together these authors have written several hundred short stories, nor am I picking the examples that seem better suited to my own argument and theoretical premise, excluding those that are less yielding. My goal is to approach those texts — many of which have been typically neglected — which bring me to, and which constitute, the heart of the question. The question is that of understanding how the supernatural represents an unprecedented opportunity for Machado, James, and Maupassant to articulate, in the late-realist period, the complexities of formulating the invisible through literature, or, in other words, of writing the unknown.

As I have stated before, I will not be looking to apply or disavow any pre-determined theoretical framework using my object as a test case. Instead, I integrate ideas from literary history and theory, comparative literature, short fiction studies, and close reading in my study of the stories and of the ways they may interact with each other, from a critical point of view, so as to arrive at a cohesive argument. Nevertheless, given that this reflection occupies itself with the subject of knowledge, not as a broad philosophical problem *per se*, but in correlation with fictionality and literary representation, I hope that it can also contribute to the discussion revived in the 1990s, with Michel Pierssens' *Savoirs à l'Oeuvre* and with Pierre Macherey's *À quoi pense la littérature?* — and which recently congregated around the more consolidated field, particularly dynamic in French academia, of *épistémocritique* in the context of literary studies —, around "une littérature que l'on pourrait dire *épistémologique*" [a literature that could be called *epistemological*], seen as an *object*, but not as an *instrument*, of cognition — to appropriate Ronald Shusterman's distinction —, and, as such, "une littérature qui exerce, évoque et met en scène nos 'facultés' de perception" (Shusterman 1998:146) [a literature that exercises, evokes, and depicts our "abilities" of perception].

One of the ways in which literature becomes epistemological in that sense, and one that will be particularly relevant for my readings of Machado, James, and Maupassant, is the employment of what Pierssens calls "epistemic figures", or elements, through which the idea of knowledge is "transplanted" onto the level of discourse or fiction. Pierssens explains that:

> Introduire dans un texte un élément épistémique, c'est donc greffer sur la série narrative (le jeu des structures du récit, décrit par les narratologues) ou sur la structure prosodique, toute l'arborescence potentielle des figures d'un savoir, avec l'effet en retour que cela ne peut manquer d'avoir sur les possibles narratifs comme sur le jeu du sens dans le récit ou le poème lui-même. (1990: 11-2)
>
> [To introduce an epistemic element in a text is thus to inscribe on the narrative chain (the interplay of narrative structures described by narratologists), or on the prosodic chain, all the potential arborescence of figures of knowledge, with the effect that this cannot fail to have, in return, on the narrative possibilities as well as on the operation of meaning in the story or the poem itself.]

Before briefly summarizing the contents of the following chapters of this thesis, this principle of exchange between the (re)presentation of the knowledge-problem and a (formal, narrative, stylistic, thematic) (con)formation of that problem brings me back to Chekhov as a paradigm of the modern short story in its tendency to explore "epistemic elements". As we have seen, May mentions the "apprehension of reality itself as a function of perspectival point of view" as one of the main traits of Chekhov's understanding and practice of the short story (see p. 9). What this means, of course, is that if reality is understood as a multifaceted prism, and if narrators are no longer gifted with a God's eye view, some sides of reality eschew the possibilities of investigation, while still playing a role as lacunae, however, in the structure and global understanding of the story. Thus, this is a particular exploration of the "epistemic figure", in which the *figure (in the carpet)*, or a part of it, is, so to speak, missing.

James M. Flora elaborates on this intentional flaw, conceptualizing it as a "device of conspicuous silence" explored by nineteenth-century writers, and particularly by those that

were, like Chekhov — as a dramatist apart from a short story writer —, well-acquainted with the conventions of the stage and the notion of the obscene. Flora suggests that:

> Yet if [Frank R.] Stockton's story ["The Lady or the Tiger?"] is mainly a tease, greater writers were experimenting with the technique of having the narrator refrain from telling the reader or refrain from portraying for him important matters, matters the reader would normally expect to be settled or portrayed. Writers of fiction could find ample precedent for such omissions in the drama. Dramatists had long known that certain things could not be conveniently presented on the stage — usually deeds of great violence (…). Dramatists discovered other ways to use "silence." Silence by a character on stage can convey anger, indignation, disbelief, or horror.
> (…)
> There are, of course, abundant precedents for the use of conspicuous silence in other genres. The device is as old as the oral narrative; it is certainly a common characteristic of the ballad. (…) In the nineteenth century when writers began to formulate a theory of the short story, they inevitably concerned themselves with exclusion. Exclusion is not necessarily conspicuous, but early formulators of the short story clearly sensed the potential for conspicuous silences. (Flora 1982: 28-9)

I would like to argue that the representation of silence — not to be mistaken for the silencing of representation — is also a fundamental characteristic of the fantastic short stories of Machado, James, and Maupassant, but in a way that is crucially different from the narrative "refrain" described by Flora. I am also not addressing "exclusion" here as the assumption of Machado's allegorical cover-up of sensitive political issues, James's avoidance of the sexual subject, or Maupassant's scandalous *double entendres*. Such forms of censorial omission can occasionally play a role in my reflection, but they are in no way its main object.

I will focus instead on how these three authors, through different means which will require adequately diverse critical responses, but also with a consistency and a similarity of approach that substantiates a comparative perspective, explored the supernatural and the way it allowed them to play with notions of fiction and reality through the enactment of writing, authorship, reading, and storytelling. Thus, the supernatural element, often inextricable from the "epistemic element" which it embodies by representing the "unknown", will be examined

in constant association with the meta-literary figures of writing and/or reading that pervade these stories. Ultimately, this perspective allows me to reevaluate the supernatural sub-genre, whose relevance as an object of artistic exploration and critical reflection, both in the context of these authors' oeuvres and of the modern short story at large, is still underestimated.

In Chapter 1, I reconsider Machado's geo-cultural distance in relation to hegemonic Europe and, particularly, how it has been tackled by critics as a guiding or a misleading factor in our appreciation of his supernatural stories. I discuss the methods and ideas underlying the anthologizing and generic categorization of these tales, arguing that a revision of Todorov's "fantastic", sometimes simply applied and other times categorically rejected, may in fact help us in understanding them as a particular challenge to that theoretical framework. I then isolate the motif of "three-knocks-on-the-door", fundamental in Machado's inaugural stories of the fantastic ("O País das Quimeras", "O Anjo Rafael", "Capitão Mendonça", "A Vida Eterna"), associating it with frame narrative and the "implied author" (Baptista), and with the way the world of fiction and the world of life are represented in these stories as connected *realities*. The figuration of the door as a gateway into fictionality anticipates my reflection on dreams ("O Anjo das Donzelas", "Decadência de Dois Grandes Homens") and on madness ("Um Esqueleto", "Sem Olhos") as essential landscapes in Machado's depiction of the world of the mind, which leads me to his praise of "original" madness against diagnosed folly, that is, of the fantastic story against the medicalized "case". I suggest that "matrimonial horror" is an expression of Machado's "triangular desire" (Girard), one of the most important symbols of terror ("Eternal Life", "A Chinela Turca", "Um Sonho e Outro Sonho"), in the light of which we may rethink his work, and a theme in which he actively preserves the "original" madness. I finally reflect on the way Machado's endings and closures ("Os Óculos de Pedro Antão"), frequently deemed "rationalizing", in fact restore the fantastic as a meta-fictional device.

Chapter 2 begins with a reflection on how, as in the case of Machado, the history of how James's supernatural stories were collected offers us precious clues into a pragmatic and a theoretical understanding of the genre. I focus on two anthologies of ghost stories organized according to the "apparitional" criterion (Edel). This allows me to interrogate the protocols of the short story collection (Luscher), and the widespread notion of "psychological ghost story", complexified in the comparative (con)text of the collection. I argue that the Jamesian ghostly resorts to structures of repetition enacted in the stories, mainly, in the idea of heredity and family curses, and in the transmission of texts across time, equating *texts* and *testaments* ("De Grey: A Romance", "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes", "Owen Wingrave"). But one difference between the two collections considered helps me underline the evolution, from James's early "romantic" stories to his late modern ones, of the intertwining of "writing" and "haunting", as the author increasingly portrays the ghost as a writer or the writer as a ghost. In addition, I argue that in James's ghost stories, in which there is no actual "ghost", the true ghost is a meta-literary "ghost text", represented recurrently as a lost original, an illegible or unwritten manuscript, or a burned letter ("The Real Right Thing", "The Turn of the Screw", "The Private Life", "The Third Person"). Taking this argument further, the narrative frames that James created in some of his ghost stories open up a passage, harking back to my reading of Machado's doors, between representations of fiction and representations of reality that is also an exploration of authorship ("The Friends of the Friends", "Sir Edmund Orme"). Lastly, I associate James's critical concept of "house of fiction" with the haunted houses in his own stories ("The Ghostly Rental", "The Jolly Corner"), which I conceptualize as the center stage on which ghost texts act out their "emptiness and incompletion" (Lustig).

I return in Chapter 3 to the subject of the fantastic short story as an "interrogative" subgenre. Examining the rhetorical outlines (focusing on their interlocutory form), and the

"epistemic figures" (in relation to subject matter), of Maupassant's Horla cycle ("Lettre d'un fou", "Le Horla" [1886], "Le Horla" [1887]), I argue that the author explores an *interrogative mood* in these narratives told by madmen of a "remarkable lucidity" (Ponnau). As a concept, this "interrogative mood" refers both to the inquisitive disposition of the narrators, or their psycho-emotional *mood*, and to the interrogative form of their discourse and/or their writing, meaning the stories' grammatical *mood*. Combining these two senses of the term with the "imitation of written form" (Pratt), in the letter and the diary — compared to the epistolary and diaristic in Machado and James —, I elaborate on how they make us reconsider certain ideas about realism as an aesthetic convention, taking this discussion, from formal issues, to Maupassant's epistemic formulation of agnosticism, condensed in the adverb "perhaps". The notion of "perception" is then explored as a key-word linking these stories with the remaining corpus, which I group under the recurrent narrative device of a "reanimation plot" ("Auprès d'un mort"). I connect the reanimated body parts that traverse these stories, such as dentures, mummified hands, and locks of hair ("La Main d'Écorchée", "La Main", "La Chevelure"), with the textual figures in the Horla cycle, arguing that, together, they materialize a common "writerly anxiety" (Bryant). Thinking of murderous hands, I analyze the role of constriction and strangulation in these stories, relating them to the tales of Machado and James in which the same motif is used to represent textual resistance. The ultimate form of textual resistance is literalized in Maupassant's final story of the fantastic, in the enactment of deathly writing ("La Morte"). The liminal spaces of writing — taking place between the living and the dead, "beside a corpse" and "beside a grave" — suggest that *besidedness* is the fundamental idea in all of these authors' understanding of the (super)nature of literature.

My analysis of the stories demonstrates that the uncertain concept of "supernatural" often represented for these authors the possibility to explore elements that do not necessarily

26

belong to fantasy lore, but which are simply not a part of the reader's ordinary reality either. One of these elements is the experience of literature itself, inextricably bound with the *occult* world of the imagination. As such, my final goal is not to redefine the supernatural short story as a fixed genre, but to investigate the intermittences and the complexities of its historical context and aesthetic development as exemplified in the works of Machado, James, and Maupassant. However, not only regarding these authors as examples, but looking, above all, into the ways they have renovated and modernized the landscape of short fiction at the end of the nineteenth century, I aim to offer a clearer reflection on what is specific in them, and, perhaps, on how these specificities participated in, and contributed to, significant changes in literary history. After all, what Machado, James, and Maupassant have in particular as well as in common is what justifies their long-lasting impact in the art of literature and the critical attention that, in unending reformulations, they continue to deserve today.

Chapter 1

The Doors of Fiction:

Dreams, Madness, and Matrimonial Horror

> Le travail de connaissance vise une vérité
> approximative, non une vérité absolue.
>
> — Tzvetan Todorov
> *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique*

1.1 Fantastic *ma non troppo*

Like James's supernatural stories, the small number of Machado's tales associated

with the preternatural have been compiled — which means, set apart from the author's corpus

of more than two-hundred texts — and divided into two categories. This anthological history,

to which Maupassant is also not a stranger,[17] is the evidence of a *collecting tendency* that

surrounds the short story, and, in particular, the supernatural story, which seems especially

susceptible to being labeled and contained within the borders of genre-oriented collections.

Such collections, abundant in the shelves of bookstores and publicizing themselves according

to a unifying principle that more often than not is unclear, seem to clearly attest to what is

perceived as the symbiotic materiality and habitat of the short story.[18]

---

[17] In the case of Maupassant, however, his supernatural stories are very diversified and much larger in number in comparison to Machado's and James's. This not only represents a challenge for the critic, confronted with a vast and varied corpus, but also for the editor, occupied with collecting these texts amidst over three-hundred short stories. Nonetheless, it was done for the first time in 1973 by the Belgian publisher Marabou-Gérard, in a volume containing a *cosmological* subtitle that disappeared in future editions: *Contes Fantastiques Complets: L'Univers de l'Inquiétude* (Verviers: Bibliothèque Marabou Fantastique, No. 464).

[18] Mary Louise Pratt's fourth proposition for a definition of the short story revolves around the genre's material "incompleteness" and co-dependence: *The novel is a whole text, the short story is not*. Here I refer to the very concrete fact that a novel constitutes a complete book (or books), while a short story never does. A short story

Exemplifying this necessity to categorize the supernatural story in restraining terms, Marcelo J. Fernandes traces Machado's "oneiric fantastic" back to the French writer Téophile Gautier. He does so by considering the Brazilian author's exploration of dream-visions as well as the Romantic influences pervading some of his stories. The connection made between the two authors — located in opposing sides of the Atlantic and different periods in time — leads Fernandes to propose a further generic split in Machado's work, between "Gautierian" and "non-Gautierian" stories (2011: 10).[19]

Among the fifteen supernatural stories written by the author of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* [The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas],[20] Fernandes identifies eight tales whose fantastic nature is entirely dependent on dreams, and seven in which it is not. But he contemplates other subdivisions inside these two main categories, arranging the "Gautierian" stories in: 1) six cases of dreams and delirium ("Decadência de dois grandes homens", "A chinela turca", "Capitão Mendonça", "A vida eterna", "O anjo das donzelas", and "O país das quimeras"); 2) one daydream, or *rêve éveillé* ("Mariana"); and 3) one cautionary tale, or *conte d'avertissement* ("Um sonho e outro sonho").

The "non-Gautierian" stories are equally subdivided into three categories: 1) five narratives of the bizarre [*insólito*] ("Um esqueleto", "O imortal", "O anjo Rafael", "A mulher pálida", and "A segunda vida"); 2) one "detective-fantastic" story *in the manner of Poe* ("Os óculos de Pedro Antão"); and 3) one strictly fantastic tale ("Sem olhos").

---

is always printed as part of a larger whole, either a collection of short stories or a magazine, which is a collection of various kinds of texts. Except in schools, perhaps, individual short stories are read as part of a larger reading experience. Though this is not a determining factor, it is likely that the fact of not being an autonomous text reinforces the view of the short story as a part or a fragment" (1994: 103-4).

[19] The article referred to here summarizes the topic of Fernandes's unpublished dissertation, "Quase-macabro — o fantástico nos contos de Machado de Assis" (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1999).

[20] As Fernandes explains in his introduction, the current canon of Machado's fifteen supernatural tales — so far uncontested — resulted from a cross-linking between the findings of his own research and the corpus Raimundo Magalhães Júnior gathered in his 1973 collection, *Contos Fantásticos de Machado de Assis*, reissued in 1998.

Before suggesting this two-fold partition, however, Fernandes proposes a new term to address the majority of Machado's supernatural stories — except for "Sem olhos", whose special place I reflect on below—, arriving at the compound designation of "quase-macabro" [quasi-macabre]. The term derives from the understanding that what we find in most of these texts is a form of "horror diluído, desmanchado no final da narrativa" (2011: 10) [diluted horror, dismantled by the end of the narrative], since the unbelievable element is ultimately "justificado pelo viés do sonho ou do acontecimento insólito" (12) [justified through dreams and unusual events]. Thus, the prefix *quasi* points to the impurity of stories that seem to come close to the model of fantastic narrative in structure and atmosphere, but stray away from it with regards to content, closure, and overall intent. In addition, although the adopted criteria are significantly different in each case, Fernandes's "quasi-macabre" reading of Machado's stories echoes Leon Edel's employ of "quasi-supernatural" as a general term to designate the eighteen ghostly tales written by Henry James (see p. 136).

The difference of degree that the adjunct *quasi* bestows on the qualifying terms in these two cases — the otherwise simply put "supernatural" or "macabre" — seems to address a common problem in the classification of stories which, appearing at around the same time in the second half of the nineteenth century, escape the boundaries of supernatural fiction at the same time as they are inevitably pulled back within its blurry limits.

The hesitation, albeit its specificities in the cases in question, reflects and contributes to a general discussion on the difficulties of definition and allocation of short fiction at large. This discussion has occupied the field of short story studies in a long-standing debate around genre that has known many forms and continues today. At one point, Suzanne C. Ferguson even found it fruitful to contemplate the radical hypothesis that the short story "does not exist as a discrete and independent genre", considering that "there is no single characteristic or

cluster of characteristics that the critics agree absolutely distinguishes the short story from other fictions" (1994: 218).

The complication seems to lie, as I have referred in the introduction, on the natural indeterminacy of short fiction, particularly in what comes to "the long and the short of it", a criterion too variable to work as a general defining principle. Such pliability allows the short story to assume an indeterminate number of sizes and shapes (as opposed to the monolithic image of the nineteenth-century novel, at least, in our collective imagination), and to shatter and reinvent the same narrative, stylistic, and formal patterns that it itself formulates, which consequently makes it a rich field for literary experimentation and indeterminacy.

1.2. Short Beginnings

In fact, all three authors considered in this study began experimenting (alongside incipient poetry) with short narrative long before they published their first novels. Although Machado's earliest collection of tales appeared in 1870 (*Contos Fluminenses*) [Tales from Rio], followed by his inaugural novel two years later (*Ressurreição* [Ressurrection], 1872), the Brazilian writer was publishing short fiction since the late 1850s. James also managed to produce over fifteen short stories in the seven years between his first, anonymous publication ("A Tragedy of Error", 1864) and his earliest attempt at the novel (*Watch and Ward*, 1871). Maupassant, the youngest of the three, not only also made his first incursions in narrative as a short story writer, but, unlike Machado and James, started his publishing career already as a writer of supernatural stories, in 1875, with "La Main d'Écorché", in *L'Almanach Lorrain de Pont-à-Mousson*, eight years before his first novel, *Une vie* (1883).

In spite of Maupassant's "supernatural" debut, it is important to notice that Machado and James also sailed into fantastic waters early on in their departures into literary life. Before his birth as a novelist with *Ressurrection*, Machado had published as much as six of his fifteen supernatural tales, and he would write the remaining nine until 1892. James, in turn, wrote in 1968, with an interval of five months, two "romances" later included in his "apparitional stories": "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "De Grey: A Romance", in the February and July issues of *The Atlantic Monthly*, respectively).

From a comparative perspective, these biobibliographies of the very early years of Machado, James, and Maupassant as published authors show the seminal place of short-story writing in the evolution of writers known primarily as novelists, with the partial exception of Maupassant (although his 1885 novel *Bel-Ami* remains, with all probability, his most widely-available, translated, and circulated work today). Moreover, they attest to the essential role that the supernatural sub-genre — in its inherent pliancy, ambiguity, and penchant to diffuse the borders of naturalist representation — played from early on, and continued to play even in more mature years, in these writers' diverse but related path into the mastery of fiction and into the consolidation of their oeuvres.

In the case of Machado, my position on this topic aligns with João Cezar de Castro Rocha's belief that the author's short stories are fundamental insofar as they anticipate some of the more striking features of his mature writing, frequently treated by criticism as complete novelties. Contradicting this assumption, Rocha argues that "[i]n the stories published before 1880 we may observe a laboratory of ideas, narrative experiments, and textual procedures resuscitated by the deceased author"[21] (2015: xxx).

---

[21] That is, Brás Cubas (*the deceased author*), the fictional writer of Machado's *The Posthumous Memoirs*.

It is important to note, however, that Rocha regards Machado's short fiction as more than the mere incubation ground of greater works. In fact, the corpus of the Brazilian author's short stories is so consistently radical and inventive that it challenges and does not fit into the generally accepted — and seldom questioned — split between romantic "Machadinho" and modern Machado, that is, before and after *The Posthumous Memoirs*. The changes that turned Machado into an author of landmark novels, Rocha suggests, came about in his short fiction before the 1880 milestone: "In the short stories and the crônicas as well, the wheel seems to have spun before the Brás Cubas revolution" (2015: 25).

That said, before treading a path that will also lead me to the works of Maupassant and James, and to what takes the shape of a transatlantic literary issue tackled in this thesis as a whole, it is necessary to explore Machado's peculiar treatment of the supernatural genre, focusing especially on the challenges that he presented to it and that it represented for him.

1.3. The French, the Brazilian, and the Tropics

Several hypotheses have been raised to justify Machado's unyielding to some of the crucial rules of fantastic fiction, ranging from matters of cultural influence to the specificities of the context in which his stories were published. Since they lead me into my own argument, I will offer a more detailed look into the more consistent ways in which several critics have attempted to circumscribe Machado's individual take on the fantastic subgenre.

Marcelo J. Fernandes believes Machado's resistance to crystallized models to be a question of cultural affinity with many of the French writers of his century (from Villiers de L'Isle-Adam to Guy de Maupassant), who were responsible — if we follow Fernandes' line of reasoning — for creating a particular kind of Continental fantastic (which, however, the

critic never describes or defines), said to be inherently different from the "horror opressivo e inefável dos ingleses" (2011: 6) [oppressive and ineffable horror of the English].

Fernandes takes this association further, arguing that Machado is not only more indebted to the French than he is to the English, but also that he represents a creative and philosophical resurgence, owing more to past ideologies — that is, in Alfredo Bosi's words, to the "tradição moralista analítica dos seiscentos" [analytic moralist tradition of the 1600s] and to the "ceticismo galhofeiro dos setecentos" [hilarious skepticism of the 1700s] (qtd. in Fernandes 2011: 6) — than to the ideological framework of his own time. Fernandes suggests that it is as a "grande leitor dos contos filosóficos franceses do século XVIII" (6) [great reader of the French philosophical tales from the eighteenth century], that Machado introduced in his *decorous* fantastic stories the didacticism and the morality plots that, at the same time, he subtly sought to overcome.

While also contemplating a frequent "rational exit" to Machado's supernatural tales, Diogo Nonato Reis Pereira illuminates a different side to this problem: the context in which the majority of Machado's tales were published, and, specifically, the literary paper *Jornal das Famílias*, "uma publicação preocupada com a instrução moral, destinada a atender às expectativas de um público majoritariamente feminino" (Crestani 2007: 19, qtd. in Pereira 2014: 22) [a publication concerned with moral instruction, meant to meet the expectations of a predominantly female public].

Commenting on the author's collaboration with the *Jornal das Famílias*, Pereira suggests that "[s]e por um lado [Machado] atendia aos critérios editoriais morais do periódico de Garnier, mantendo o decoro e o bom tom e as exigências do público; por outro, aproveitava da forma inusitada do fantástico para discutir e criticar práticas correntes na época" (2014: 6) [if, on one hand, [Machado] met the moral, editorial criteria of the periodical from Garnier,

keeping within decorum and propriety and the requirements of the public; on the other hand, he took advantage of the unusual form of the fantastic to discuss and criticize prevailing practices of the epoch].22

Like Pereira, but focusing instead on the short stories themselves, Elizabeth Ginway also defends that Machado made use of an altered version of the fantastic which enabled him to safely express a veiled social and political commentary on his own time and country, bending the conventions of the genre with the "goal of allegorically depicting a political state of affairs" (2016: 221).

In their article about the "transatlantic reception" of "*Gespenster*-Hoffmann" by the Bruxo do Cosme Velho [Wizard of Cosme Velho]23, Túlio Fernandes and Wiebke Röben de Alencar Xavier combine and revise the two previous perspectives on Machado's supposedly *anomalous* fantastic, adding to the discussion a third element related to translation and to its historicity. Fernandes and Xavier argue that contacting with the tales of E.T.A. Hoffmann in translated versions, and not in the original, played a crucial role in Machado's interpretation of the genre and in what they call his process of "tropicalização do fantástico Hoffmanniano" (Fernandes and Xavier 2016: 152) [tropicalization of the Hoffmannian fantastic].24

---

22 However, and differently from what is suggested in Pereira's quotation, a fundamental part of Jaison Luís Crestani's study focuses precisely on how, regardless of their sub-genre, the stories published by Machado in the *Jornal das Famílias* subverted Romantic values either through the inversion or the omission of traditional plotlines, in favor of a "moralidade às avessas" [reverse morality] (see Crestani 2009: 140-56). This becomes particularly clear in the pages Crestani dedicates to the subject of marriage, "um dos grandes mitos do idealismo Romântico" (140) [one of the great myths of Romantic idealism] debunked by Machado. In section 1.9 ("Matrimonial Horror") I present a new approach to this matter, looking at how marriage joins forces with horror and the supernatural in its transgressive potential.
23 The humorous epithet was firmly established in the poem "A um bruxo, com amor" (*A Vida Passada a Limpo*, 1959), Carlos Drummond de Andrade's tribute to Machado.
24 Offering a radically different view, José Guilherme Merquior called Machado an "antitropical" with "horror a toda a ênfase — menos, porém, à ênfase do estilo" (1972: 20) [horror to all emphasis — except, however, to the emphasis of style].

Considering the unparalleled place that France held along the nineteenth century in the publication of periodicals and feuilletons both in Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean, Fernandes and Xavier justly point out that Hoffmann firstly arrived at Brazilian shores "por traduções francesas, que alteraram o sentido de fantástico, pois o objetivo dos tradutores era harmonizar os contos de Hoffmann ao gosto francês" (2016: 136) [in French translations that changed the meaning of the fantastic, for the goal of translators was to harmonize Hoffmann's tales with the French taste].

It follows in Fernandes and Xavier's argument that, meeting this Gallicized version of Hoffmann, translated by François-Adolphe Loève-Veimars in the pages of the *Revue de Paris* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*25 — which were at the time disseminated in the French bookstores and typographies of Rio de Janeiro (Machado himself collaborated with Garnier in the *Jornal das Famílias* for a very long period of his career) —, the author managed to "adaptar o fantástico de Hoffmann às condições de acolhida dos leitores brasileiros, principalmente das leitoras do Jornal das Famílias, onde ficam mais evidentes as publicações de seus contos de nítida inspiração hoffmanniana" (2016: 141) [adapt Hoffmann's fantastic to fit the requirements of Brazilian readers, and especially the female readers of the *Jornal das Famílias*, where the publication of his stories of a clearer Hoffmannian inspiration is more evident]. They summarize the situation as follows:

> O *Jornal das Famílias* publicava contos fantásticos de Machado de Assis inspirados no modelo hoffmanniano que atravessava o Atlântico nas *revues* francesas. Entretanto, os contos machadianos atingiam objetivos diferentes do fantástico do escritor alemão em razão de adaptações do modelo ao ambiente local, evitando com isso descontentamento dos leitores e promovendo a manutenção dos jornais e periódicos, àquela época, sustentados quase que exclusivamente por assinaturas. (Fernandes and Xavier 2016: 145)

---

25 Marcelo Pen Parreira offers a detailed account of James's and Machado's contact with the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which both include among some of their characters' readings, reflecting also on the intermittences of the magazine's, and of its contributors', anti-realist agenda (see Parreira 2012: 161 et seq.).

[The *Jornal das Famílias* published the fantastic stories of Machado de Assis inspired by the Hoffmannian model coming across the Atlantic in the French *revues*. However, the Machadian tales achieved different goals from those of the German writer's fantastic, due to adaptations of that model to the local environment, thus avoiding the displeasure of readers and promoting the maintenance of newspapers and periodicals which, at that time, relied almost exclusively on subscriptions.]

More than simply strange or "uncanny", yet not quite "marvelous" enough, playing provocatively with the reader's hesitation, but not taking it as far as to make them "fantastic", Machado's bizarre (that is, *unrealistic*) tales are nothing short of a critical conundrum that the scholars and critics I mentioned so far try to address and, one way or another, explain. In spite of their best efforts, however, and of the precious contributions they have made to the study of these texts, several fundamental questions are still open to debate.

Marcelo J. Fernandes's pivotal work succeeded in compiling for the first time what is now accepted as the full corpus of Machado's fantastic tales known to us, complementing and adding a critical perspective to Raimundo Magalhães Júnior.'s editorial endeavor in *Os Contos Fantásticos de Machado de Assis* (firstly published in 1973). Nevertheless, his idea or intuition that the specificities of the Machadian fantastic, as well as the author's tendency to what he calls rationalization, were dictated by a proximity with French culture (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon culture), and with ideologies of the previous century, seems pertinent at least to some extent, but remains largely unsubstantiated by textual evidence.

In addition, judging by the way Machado resorts to seraphic visitations ("O Anjo das Donzelas") and scenes featuring murder and cannibalism ("A Vida Eterna"), and even movable human remains ("Um Esqueleto") — to name three telling examples —, Fernandes' option to categorize these stories as "quasi-macabre" is a critical misstep if we recognize that

they are either *not macabre at all* or *macabre in the full sense of the term*.26 In fact, it is their unequivocally "macabre" dimension that confers them, in general, their unrealistic quality and supernatural atmosphere. Perhaps an alternative designation such as "quasi-fantastic" or "quasi-supernatural" would be more appropriate.

The studies conducted by Diogo Nonato Pereira, and Túlio Fernandes and Wiebke Röben Xavier, remind us of the important influence that the publication and the socio-cultural context have exerted on the writings that Machado submitted to periodicals and consequently on his own constituency and formation as a short story writer and novelist. However, the very partial glimpses that both studies offer into the texts themselves, once again, leave them far behind in their shared goal of defining the "vertente fantástica da obra machadiana" (Pereira 2014: 2) [fantastic strand of Machado's oeuvre], and Machado's "tropicalized" version of the fantastic (Fernandes and Xavier 2016: 152).

In fact, very little is said in all of these essays as to what constitutes the particularity of Machado's supernatural writing apart from a (certainly not unique) tendency to create a naturalizing closure and a (not revolutionary *per se*) cultural transposition to the settings and subjects of Brazil. As much as Fernandes and Xavier argue that Machado's fantastic tales are different from Hoffmann's in their French translations, which are different from Hoffmann's original tales in German language, they never clarify their readers as to *what differences* are

---

26 The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "macabre" as something: "having death as a subject", "dwelling on the gruesome", and "tending to produce horror in the beholder". Likewise, the Dicionário Houaiss states that in Portuguese the adjective qualifies that which is "relativo à morte ou aos mortos" [related to death or to the dead], "que tem a morte como tema; que versa sobre a morte e assuntos afins" [which has death as a subject; which addresses death and akin subjects], "que desperta o horror; hediondo, horrendo" [which raises horror; hideous, horrendous]. The largely coinciding definitions show that this is not a matter of translation or semantic specificity attributed to the term *macabro* in the Portuguese language, in which it keeps the association with the French origin that Joan Corominas, in the *Diccionario Crítico Etimológico Castellano e Hispánico*, traces back to the *dance Macabré* (modernized *danse macabre*) to designate the medieval poetic and pictorial genres of the "Dance of Death". As we will see, this semantic echo is absolutely consentaneous with Machado's stories, and almost illustrative of Dr. Belém's final "dance" with the skeleton of his deceased wife in "A Skeleton".

being taken into account and what exactly do these differences amount to in what they present as a successive re-conceptualization of the fantastic according to the nations and languages whose borders the genre was able to cross.

In the end, the insistence on equating Machado's supposedly unique fantastic with that of his French peers or Hoffmann's, to the point of qualifying his stories as "Gautierian" and "Hoffmannian" (with due adaptations and adjustments) feels like a setback in the task of offering a comprehensive and fair reading of this portion of Machado's works. Classifications such as these run the risk of falling prey to unverified readings. To provide a clear example of this: Fernandes and Xavier base their study on four stories — although only one of them is cited and briefly analyzed throughout the article — in which "a recepção de Hoffmann em Machado de Assis torna-se mais perceptível" (2016: 141, note 8) [the reception of Hoffmann in Machado de Assis becomes more perceptible]. But Hoffmann's influence is thought to be "more perceptible" in this minimal selection of stories only because they include "narradores que fazem alusão ao escritor alemão e definem a narrativa como fantástica" (141) [narrators that allude to the German writer and define the narrative as fantastic].

For one, Fernandes and Xavier do not contemplate the fact that alluding to the author of *Der Sandmann* may not authenticate his influence on the stories and/or preclude the central presence of other writers; and, secondly, they also overlook the counter-hypothesis that not mentioning Hoffmann explicitly does not exclude any of Machado's texts from his ghostly shadow. Thus, the exact corpus and the constituency of Machado's "Hoffmannian" tales is after all only a conjecture based solely on explicit references. Nevertheless, the relevance of the Brazilian author's contact with the *Gespenster* and the translated pathways that have led to that contact are thoroughly made clear in Fernandes and Xavier's detailed reflection.

Returning to the question of Machado's cunning use of fantastic parameters in his short fiction, it also seems insufficient to think that his main intention in doing so — as Diogo Reis Pereira and Elizabeth Ginway propose — was to satirize and allegorize the customs of the middle-upper class of Brazil's Second Empire, or to advance a concealed political stance in a coded form. This is the assumption, also shared by Darlan Lula, that Machado de Assis "utilizava esse recurso [o sobrenatural] para descrever coisas que não teria ousado mencionar em termos realistas" (2005: 30) [utilized that expedient (the supernatural) to describe things he would not have dared to mention in realist terms].

However, when we look at the stories and find that the majority of them revolve around the same cluster of topics that is ubiquitous in Machado's narratives — "jealousy, adultery, vanity, and dissembling" (Rocha 2015: 24-25) —, regardless of genre and phase, a distinction between realist and fantastic tales based on theme or sociological subject, such as the one Lula suggests, is more difficult to accept. And criticizing this "paradigma crítico que tende a cobrar um engajamento sócio-político objectivo" (1999: 44) [critical paradigm that tends to demand an objective socio-political involvement from the part of Machado], Rubens Pereira suggests, on the contrary, that we see Machado's works in the light of an "iconoclasta máquina textual machadiana, milimetricamente ajustada para relativizar valores, quando não triturá-los" (45) [iconoclastic Machadian textual machine minutely adjusted to relativize values, if not to crush them], taking us on a constant "travessia estética" [aesthetical drift] of facts and history that permeates the author's writings, and which, I allow myself to add, is in no way exclusive to his supernatural stories.

It is equally difficult to come up with "things" — assuming Lula is referring to taboo sociological subjects, and not to specific symbols and tokens of the fantastic and the ghostly — that Machado kept exclusively to his supernatural writing and did not address in any shape

or form in his realist texts. In fact, and particularly after the enlightening reading of Roberto Schwarz in *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*,[27] it is clear that Machado has been too daring in political terms and too critical of society in his work as a novelist as well as a realist short story writer to allow us to think reductively of his fantastic creations as the camouflaged political portion of an oeuvre otherwise founded on a supposed neutrality.[28]

My suggestion, then, is to look at the special place that Machado's fantastic stories occupy in his oeuvre and his poetics from a different angle. Instead of investigating the whys and wherefores of Machado's disruptive use of the fantastic, I propose to look at these texts so as to understand in what ways they conform to and deviate from patterns that are, above all, created within themselves, exhibiting at the same time and throughout time consistencies and incoherencies that, together, provide a clearer image of how Machado dealt with the supernatural, adapting it but also adapting to it.

---

[27] In the chapter on "Questions of Form", for example, Schwarz eloquently demonstrates how Machado drew a fine line between literary craft, social commentary, and historical conscience, while inhabiting a society torn between economic prosperity and deep inequality, social development and slavery: "The systematization of the Brazilian elite's moral impasse, condemned to something like an enforced structural infraction of the rules, allowed Machado to take up the emerging aestheticism in a nonaesthetic manner. This same aestheticism was, precisely, rehearsing and stylizing its new assault on bourgeois civic guarantees – the same assault of which, on another level, the incipient new imperialism was the most spectacular manifestation.

The enumeration of these historical paradoxes and combinations illustrates the complexities of the literary operation carried out in the *Memoirs*. Machado de Assis explores in detailed fashion, and to perfection, the nonbourgeois dimension of bourgeois existence in Brazil and extended it into the area of artistic convention, under the generalizing guise of transgression" (Schwarz 2001: 123).

[28] Holding an opposite view, Fernandes and Xavier defend that the "narrador machadiano torna claro que seu fantástico acatará as normas morais de sua época em que dignidade, decência, honradez e pudor acompanharão a compostura de seus personagens durante a narrative" (2016: 144) [Machadian narrator makes it clear that his fantastic will follow the moral norms of his epoch, in which dignity, decency, honor, and shame will accompany the countenance of their characters throughout the narrative]. Although they concede that the reader herself is allowed to relativize the words of the narrator, finding instances of a "ruptura com o decoro do período" (144) [rupture with the decorum of the period], Fernandes and Xavier's reflection suffers, again, from not being grounded on any actual contact with the stories. It is thus that they conceptualize a genteel and over-zealous form of fantastic that is greatly at odds with the grisly plots (involving suggestions of murder, torture, suicide, adultery, drug use, etc.), the formal anomalies, and the provocative and acerbic irony of the narrators — an objective irony that does not rely on an especially penetrating interpretation — in the majority of Machado's supernatural tales.

My goal is also to contribute as much as possible in this study to narrow the "abyss" dividing the criticism of Machado's short stories into two unproportioned sides described by Luís Augusto Fischer as the "overcrowded" side of interpretation (focusing on philosophical, ideological, and sociological aspects that are aprioristic) and the "rarefied" side of analysis (1998: 149). It is on the second side, then, that I place my reflection, expecting that through a close textual interpretation, as well as through the conceptualization and contextualization that frame my reading, it will help strengthen a neglected field of Machadian criticism, too often reduced to commonplace assertions. The innovative ideas that I derive from the stories themselves and, particularly, from their comparative reading allows me to question, discard, and complement such assertions whenever necessary.

The main question guiding me in the following pages is, shortly: *to what effect* and *with what results* did Machado — even before his deeply unrealistic invention of a deceased author in *The Posthumous Memoirs* — resort to the supernatural in his short fiction?

1.4. Todorov is Dead, Long Live Todorov!

A first step in tackling this issue is to debunk the myth of Machado's originality. This, however, in no way amounts to denying the author's inventiveness and ingenuity or his mastery of the genre, all of which are sufficiently evident in his earliest endeavors as a writer. Instead, my position is justified by the fact that, when the critics I have cited above speak of Machado as an author who disrupted the laws of fantastic tradition, they rarely consider that, in doing so, he was not a first nor an isolated case. In fact, judging by the variety of references often mentioned in those same studies, including and adding to the tutelage of Gautier and Hoffmann, we could suggest that Machado seemingly internalized and practiced disruption

42

as a *traditional* feature of short fiction at large, which Charles E. May deems anti-realist in nature, regardless of its many forms and expressions:

> In the short story, a fictional character may seem to act according to the conventions of verisimilitude and plausibility; however, since the shortness of the form prohibits the realistic presentation of the character by extensive metonymic detail, and since the history of the short tale is one in which a character confronts a crucial event or crisis rather than develops over time, the very form and tradition of short fiction militate strongly against the central conventions of realism. (May 1989: 66)

Adding to the fact that it is never clear to what fantastic tradition — if such a notion may even be upheld — critics are referring to, a new, comparative perspective on Machado's fantastic tales makes it even more apparent that the author of "O País das Quimeras" was not alone in refurbishing the genre. The examples of Maupassant and James, contemplated in the two following chapters, show that Machado is not an unparalleled case of re-appropriation and that to remodel the fantastic short story (or, for that matter, any other genre perceived as traditional), one does not have to inhabit the strictures of a provincial society on the periphery of capitalism (appropriating Schwarz's geo-economic formulation), where such model would disembark already in a translated and/or twisted form and then need to be further refashioned by "tropicalization". Guy de Maupassant and Henry James (as certainly others) were making innovations in their own *acclimated* versions of the supernatural tale at around the same time as Machado, at the very hearts of cultural and imperial hegemonies[29].

---

[29] In *Ao Vencedor as Batatas*, Roberto Schwarz mentions precisely Henry James as the example of a writer who experienced a peripheral "ambivalence" — between the USA and Europe, in his case — that may have inspired in a few authors (like him and Machado) a "deslocamento em nível formal" (2000: 35) [displacement at the formal level] of original ideologies. However, Schwarz's analogy between Machado and James may alert us, albeit inadvertently, to the dangers of simplifying Machado's relationship with the European tradition as a question of importation and adaptation to the local color. What does "local color" mean with regards to James, who lived most of his life as an expat in Europe? Is it the local color of his European settings, from the point of view of Americans, or is it the local color brought by his American travelers to Europe, from the point of view of Europeans? If James is as "Europeanized" as he is inevitably American, Machado is as "Europeanized" (although, unlike James, he never left his peripheral home) as he is inevitably Brazilian. Comparing James and

However, the thorny question of reframing Machado among his contemporaries and his precursors in a transatlantic panorama, as well as in view of the literary traditions that his writing took nurture from, does not stop at that, as we must contemplate two other aspects. On one hand, if we accept, as I believe we should, that the notions of *fantastic short story in English* and *fantastic short story in French*, and, to a certain extent, that of *Hoffmannian tale* (all of which are referred to in criticism to substantiate Machado's allegiance to or deviance from foreign models) point to national and linguistic borders that do not stand for monolithic and homogeneous entities, the idea of model itself, if meaning a fixed and coherent paradigm, and Machado's supposed nonconformity to such a model, needs to be greatly problematized. On the other hand, if when they say "traditional" critics are referring to Todorov's definition of the genre (as is often the case), it would also be important to consider that the theoretician is not exactly trying to fixate a literary tradition in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), but to identify common structures, or, in a more contemporary wording of his ideas, the *underlying network*, in a multifarious genre that seems to be, for the lack of a more just and elegant term, *trans-traditional*.

In addition to the difficulty of categorizing the fluctuating objects of his own study (and dealing with that difficulty in the cleverest way), it was Todorov himself who conceived

---

Machado's distinct yet relatable experiences suggests that it was their shared condition to always be slightly misplaced on *either* side of the Atlantic. But Machado's instinctive — and not programmatic, as some have understood it — Brazilianness and his sedentary lifestyle seem to somehow cohere with the cosmopolitanism of the literary universe that he inhabited and where he placed himself as an author. This irresolvable reciprocity seems to have guided Abel Barros Baptista in his demystifying re-reading of Machado's famous essay on the "Instinto de Nacionalidade" [Instinct of Nationality] (published in the 1873 March 24 issue of *O Novo Mundo*). Baptista proposes to regard this text as more of a metaphorical argument and a treatise on Machado's perspective of a freer Brazilian literature — even freer from itself — than a political pamphlet for a nationalistic project, which, simply put, is not what Machado offers us in his works (see Baptista 1991: 43-63). Baptista's interpretation of the essay tells us that, on one hand, Machado did not think that explicit and direct references to Brazil — that is, the use of "local color" — would forcibly institute a national literature, and, on the other hand, that the national literature of Brazil could in fact dispense with such (romantic) topicality, as "apenas uma tendência literária entre outras possíveis" (62) [only one literary tendency among other possible tendencies], if that were more consentaneous with the author's *instinct*, without becoming any less Brazilian.

the fantastic as a borderline genre, as a kind of fold between the marvelous and the uncanny, further stating that it is precisely due to its constant oscillation that the fantastic "leads a life full of dangers, and may evaporate at any moment" (1975: 41). One page later, the author continues with this language of dematerialization, speaking instead of genre of an *effect of the fantastic* which lasts for "only a portion of our reading" (42). Moreover, considering a phenomenon of genre-change by reason of the awakening of the protagonist from a dream — a situation that we encounter often in Machado's tales — Todorov adds to his argument a line of admonition that seems to wander off from his categorization and focus instead on the voluble nature of the fantastic in itself: "there is no reason not to think of the fantastic as an *evanescent genre*" (42, my italics).

Many of those who have written about the short stories of Machado persistently go back to Todorov to either reapply his theories[30] or question them and claim their insufficiency in defining what the author offers in his tales.[31] Regardless of whether Todorov is endorsed or criticized, the fact that he is in all cases an inexorable presence seems to provide enough proof of the enduring pertinence of his approach and of the literary elements that he proposed to circumscribe. The insistence on the hesitation vs. no-hesitation criterion to confirm or to disavow the Todorovian status of Machado's fantastic, as well as the variety of alternative designations such as "oneiric fantastic", "mitigated fantastic", or "tropicalized fantastic", are, in one way or other, simply reinstatements of the philosopher's proposition.

The most abundant hint we can find of this sometimes unwanted affinity is perhaps the many times the word *fantastic* is used as a synonym of *supernatural* in the majority of

---

[30] See Barros 2011: 7-8; Fernandes 2011: 4; and Pereira 2014: 4 et seq.
[31] See Fernandes and Xavier 2016: 152.

these studies. It not only indicates that, even if they resist fitting into Todorov's design, we have so far no better name to give to Machado's non-realist tales, but it also points to the fact that we are always speaking of "evanescent" literary constructs that easily slip away from tight definitions to broader and indeterminate concepts, and back again. Ivan Teixeira argued in this respect that Machado's "comical-fantastic realism" is directly associated with the "free compositional form" of the author's narratives, which often "fingem que têm existência real e independente do formato impresso do livro" (1987: 60) [pretend to have a real existence, independent from the book's printed format], in an exploration of the interface between the interior and the exterior of the narrative that generates *fantastic* textual forms. We can assume that a rigorous critical discourse is bound to be contaminated by a similar slippage.

Thus, I also use the terms "fantastic" and "supernatural" with an equivalent sense throughout this thesis. And, as Eugenio Bolongaro underlines, even Todorov does it as his argumentation on the fantastic evolves and partly dissolves into its conclusion,[32] arriving at "a much more flexible and fluid system than it might have appeared at first", that is, arriving at "a porous configuration" (2014: 75). This is also the reason why, regarding the convoluted relationship of Machado's critics with the theory of the fantastic, independently of which side they are in, we must remember that Todorov "developed a toolbox, which should be evaluated for what it can accomplish in the analysis of a wide range of literary texts, rather than on the basis of the 'purity' of its conceptual apparatus" (75).

With this in mind, and considering the debates that have already been sustained on that subject and which it would be fruitless for me to reiterate, I do not question the defining

---

[32] "Beyond this intense but 'normal' love for a woman, the literature of the fantastic illustrates several transformations of desire. Most of them do not truly belong to the supernatural, but rather to a social form of the uncanny. Incest constitutes one of the most frequent varieties" (Todorov 1975: 131).

essence of Machado's supernatural tales in the following sections with the aim of verifying whether they corroborate or deny Todorov's fantastic. This introduction has allowed me to offer a sense of what constitutes the corpus analyzed in this chapter, the challenges it poses, and the critical trends that it motivated so far. At the same time, these prefatory remarks also establish several coordinates that will guide me in the subsequent readings of texts whose most vital qualities as instances of fantastic literature may well be their fluidity, porosity, and ungraspability. Having briefly problematized our knowledge *of* these texts, my goal is now to better understand the problematization of knowledge taking place *in* them.

1.5. Three Knocks on the Door

Commenting on Machado's debut as a writer at the early age of eighteen, with "Três Tesouros Perdidos" [Three Lost Treasures] (in *A Marmota* of 5 January 1858), and referring to jealousy and to what, taking this idea a bit further, we may conceive as a recurrent *ménage à trois* structure, João Cezar de Castro Rocha notes that "from the very beginning, the triangle has been the quintessential Machadian geometric figure, an element developed in a number of texts and resulting in the sphinxlike novel *Dom Casmurro*" (2015: xxviii).

Between Machado's first tale and his "quintessential" novel of jealousy, the figure identified but not analyzed in depth in Rocha's *Poetics of Emulation* emerges repeatedly in the author's short stories of the supernatural. The triangle occurs both as a geometric shape and — as the stories will demonstrate — a dramatized distribution of characters, composing a motif that crosses different levels of the narrative and which seems, in some of its crucial aspects, akin to James's third-person complex (see p. 186), with all that the word "complex" entails in a psychological reading of the two writers and of the emotional-cognitive tensions

at the base of the love triangles and narrative triangles that they both construe. In fact, Rocha speaks of jealousy in Machado in terms that are strikingly similar to the ones Todorov uses in describing the fantastic as something which fits in the space-time of a *cognitive impasse*:[33] "This is the topic that really matters, casting an inescapable shadow over one's knowledge: *to know or not to know, that is the dilemma of the jealous*" (Rocha 2015: 25, my italics).

Taking this relation one step further, it is needless to say that any reader of Machado, like Todorov predicted in his much-quoted hesitation principle, is forced to take her/his place in a narrative that projects unto us its own interpretation, and step into the shoes of the hero to experience with him, like two semiologists — before a female body that becomes gradually monstrous, as we shall see in the stories —, "un étonnement où l'épouvante succède au désir, l'*horror* à la *libido sciendi*" (Marquer 2014: 77) [an astonishment along which terror follows desire, *horror* follows the *libido sciendi*]. However, in addition to this interpretive function shared among character and reader, Machado offers his reader a true place at the level of plot or figuration, making the ambiguity between the different enunciative levels in the narrative more important than the hesitation in what comes to the contents of narration in themselves. Ivan Teixeira addresses this narrative technique by mobilizing the concept of "leitor incluso":

---

[33] As we can verify in the following passage, a similar movement of cognitive oscillation is at the very heart of Todorov's definition, relating the experience of jealousy and the experience of the fantastic, to a certain extent, in their constituency and their effects: "Thus Alvaro [in Cazotte's tale *Le diable amoureux*] hesitates, wonders (and the reader with him) whether what is happening to him is real, if what surrounds him is indeed reality (...) or whether it is no more than an illusion. (...)

Which brings us to the very heart of the fantastic. In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination — and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality — but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (...)

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (1975: 24-5).

Um dos dispositivos técnicos mais modernos da narrativa machadiana é a invenção do *leitor incluso*, o qual existe de fato como categoria ficcional, habitando, por assim dizer, a margem do texto. É uma forma de personagem, com existência independente da presença do leitor empírico. Trata-se de algo mais do que um simples vocativo. Possui vida própria na ficção do texto: com gestos, fisionomia e postura mental. Acha-se como protagonista em inúmeras sequências e, às vezes, em capítulos inteiros, casos em que ocupa toda a atenção do narrador. (1987: 81)

[One of the most modern technical devices of the Machadian narrative is the invention of the *included reader*, who exists in fact as a fictional category, inhabiting, in a matter of speaking, the margins of the text. He is a type of character, with an existence that is independent from the presence of the empirical reader. This is about something more than a simple vocative. He has a life of his own in the fiction of the text: with gestures, physiognomy and mental posture. He finds himself the protagonist of countless sequences and, sometimes, whole chapters, in which cases he occupies the narrator's sole attention.]

In sum, to assume our proper role as readers, we must *act as* Machado's confounded madmen and maniac jealous. At the basis of this identification mechanism lies the idea that "[Machado's] narrators tell stories in the form of unanswered questions posed for the reader's consideration" (Jackson 2015: 124). In Chapter 3, I discuss the way Maupassant literalizes a similar principle of interlocution built into the narrative itself by way of an "interrogative mood". But if K. David Jackson is right in his assumption – using "Missa do Galo" (1899) as a central example of "saying what cannot be told" (123) –, we must also recognize that Machado's early short stories anticipate his novels and later stories in the deployment of that same mechanism, and they initiate and bring forward a problematization of knowledge that, being pervasive in his writing, seems to be *the* intrinsic feature of the supernatural.

Focusing on Machado's supernatural short stories not only allows us to access the laboratory of some of his most important ideas and his legacy as an artist, but also illuminates a neglected field in which, given the nature of the medium and its formal possibilities, these ideas came to an apex of expression. Looking now closely at these stories brings me back to the notion of triangularity as a catalyst of the Machadian fantastic, allowing me to suggest in

this respect that also frequently in Machado, as René Girard puts it, "[t]he basic idea from which one can rediscover everything is triangular desire" (1965: 52).

In these stories, we find many apparently incidental occurrences of the number three as a unit of time (three-year flashbacks, three-day prolepses, three-month deadlines, thirty or thirty-three years of age) which together form a clear pattern and a compositional tendency with symbolic overtones without which each individual case could pass as a merely adequate, if not expected or parodic, detail proper to the idiom of the eerie, the fantastic, and the fairy-tale. But when number three takes the shape of a triangular image it may invite us to consider its deeper meaning and purpose inside the text, as it happens, for instance, with the three candles in "O Capitão Mendonça" [Captain Mendonça] and three stones in "O Imortal" [The Immortal], which emerge as tokens of demiurgic creation and folkloristic magic, and which are felt by the characters to hold some kind of precious secret or prophetic charm.[34]

---

[34] In "Captain Mendonça": "Fomos ao laboratório; Augusta ia pelo meu braço; o capitão caminhava adiante com uma lanterna na mão. O laboratório estava iluminado com três velas em forma de triângulo. Noutra ocasião perguntaria eu a razão daquela disposição especial das velas; mas naquele momento todo o meu desejo era estar longe de semelhante casa." (*CR* [*Contos Recolhidos*]: 180) [We went to the laboratory; Augusta took my arm; the captain walked ahead of us holding a lantern in his hand. The laboratory was lit up by the three candles in the shape of a triangle. In another occasion I would question the reason behind the particular disposition of the candles, but in that moment all I wished was to be away from such a house]. In "The Immortal": "Estavam diante de três pedras, dispostas em triângulo. Pirajuá sentou-se numa, meu pai noutra. Depois de alguns minutos de descanso:

— Arreda aquela pedra, disse o guerreiro, apontando para a terceira, que era a maior. Meu pai levantou-se e foi à pedra. Era pesada, resistiu ao primeiro impulso; mas meu pai teimou, aplicou todas as forças, a pedra cedeu um pouco, depois mais, enfim foi removida do lugar.

— Cava o chão, disse o guerreiro.

Meu pai foi buscar uma lasca de pau, uma taquara ou não sei quê, e começou a cavar o chão. Já então estava curioso de ver o que era. Tinha-lhe nascido uma idéia — algum tesouro enterrado, que o guerreiro, receoso de morrer, quisesse entregar-lhe." (*RCV* [*Relíquias de Casa Velha*] II: 223) ["They were standing before three stones arranged in a triangle. Pirajuá sat on one, my father on another. After a few minutes of rest: 'Move that stone aside,' the warrior said, pointing to the third stone, which was the largest.

My father got up and went to the stone. It was heavy and resisted his first push. But he redoubled his efforts, apllied all his strength, and the stone moved slightly, then a bit more, then more, until it was finally moved aside. 'Dig into the earth,' said the warrior.

My father got the branch of a tree, a bamboo or something, and began to dig into the earth. By now he was curious to see what might be buried there. He suddenly concluded that there was some treasure buried there, which the warrior, fearful of dying, wanted to give him."] (Assis 2009: 669-670).

A third instance of magic number three, and perhaps the most inconspicuous of them all, appears in the shape of three knocks on the door of the protagonist, as a form of reverse invasion that comes to take her/him *into* the supernatural world by the hand of an unexpected guest. We find this narrative trope for the first time in Machado's inaugural fantastic tale, "O País das Quimeras" [The Country of Chimeras], and see it reappear in all stories of the same kind published until 1870 — except "O Anjo das Donzelas" [The Angel of Maidens], which, nonetheless, includes an unannounced "visitation" irrupting through the door of the maiden's bedroom —, namely: "O Anjo Rafael" [The Angel Raphael], "Captain Mendonça" and "A Vida Eterna" [Eternal Life]. I transcribe all four cases below:

> Mas qual o meio de mudar de sítio? Tomaria por terra? tomaria por mar? Qualquer destes dois meios tinha seus inconvenientes. Estava o poeta nestas averiguações, quando ouviu que batiam à porta três pancadinhas. Quem seria? Quem poderia ir procurar o poeta àquela hora? Lembrou-se que tinha umas encomendas do homem das odes e foi abrir a porta disposto a ouvir resignado a muito plausível sarabanda que ele lhe vinha naturalmente pregar. Mas, ó pasmo! mal o poeta abriu a porta, eis que uma sílfide, uma criatura celestial, vaporosa, fantástica, trajando vestes alvas, nem bem de pano, nem bem de névoas, uma coisa entre as duas espécies, pés alígeros, rosto sereno e insinuante, olhos negros e cintilantes, cachos louros do mais leve e delicado cabelo, a caírem-lhe graciosos pelas espáduas nuas, divinas, como as tuas, ó Afrodite! eis que uma criatura assim invade o aposento do poeta e, estendendo a mão, ordena-lhe que feche a porta e tome assento à mesa. (*RCV* II: 424-425)

> [But through what means to change places? Would he take to land? would he take to sea? Either one had its drawbacks. The poet was making these inquiries when he heard three soft knocks coming from the door. Who would it be? Who could be looking for the poet at such an hour? He remembered that he had some orders from the odes man and went to open the door, ready to listen resigned to the very plausible reprimand that he naturally came to preach him. But, wonder! as soon as the poet opened the door, behold a sylph, a heavenly creature, vaporous, fantastic, wearing white robes, not quite made of cloth, not quite made of mist, but of something between the two species, feet alight, serene and insinuating face, eyes black and sparkling, blond curls of the lightest and most delicate hair, gracefully falling on her bare, divine shoulders, like yours, O Aphrodite! behold, a creature so encroaches upon the poet's chamber, and stretching out her hand, she orders him to close the door and take a seat at the table.]

> Já ia disparar o tiro, quando ouviu três pancadinhas à porta. Involuntariamente levantou a cabeça. Depois de um curto silêncio repetiram-se as pancadinhas. O rapaz não esperava ninguém, e era-lhe indiferente falar a quem quer que fosse. Contudo, por maior que seja a tranqüilidade de um homem quando resolve abandonar a vida, é-lhe sempre agradável achar um pretexto para prolongá-la um pouco mais.
>   O Dr. Antero pôs a pistola sobre a mesa e foi abrir a porta. (*CE* [*Contos Esparsos*]: 17)

[He was about to shoot when he heard three soft knocks on the door. Unwillingly, he lift his head. After a short silence, the faint knocks were repeated. The boy was not expecting anyone, and it was indifferent to him to speak to whoever it might be. Nevertheless, no matter how great the tranquility of a man when he resolves to abandon his life, it is always pleasant for him to find a pretext to extend it a little longer.

Dr. Antero placed the pistol on the table and went to open the door.]

Acompanhei, portanto, o meu capitão, que continuou a falar durante o caminho todo, arrancando-me apenas de longe em longe um monossílabo.

No fim de algum tempo paramos defronte de uma casa velha e escura.

— Vamos entrar, disse Mendonça.

— Que rua é esta? perguntei eu.

— Pois não sabe? Oh! como anda com a cabeça a juros! Esta é a Rua da Guarda Velha.

— Ah!

O velho bateu três pancadas; daí a alguns segundos rangia a porta nos gonzos e nós entrávamos num corredor escuro e úmido. (*CR*: 160)

[So, I joined my captain, who went on talking over the entire walk, taking only a monosyllable from me every once in a while.

After some time, we stopped in front of an old and dark house.

— Let's go in, said Mendonça.

— What street is this? I asked.

— You don't know? Oh, how you do have your head in the clouds! This is Rua da Guarda Velha.

The old man knocked three times; a few seconds later the door was creaking on its hinges and we were stepping into a dark and damp hallway.]

Era natural passarmos dali ao sono completo, e eu lá chegaria, se não ouvisse bater à porta três fortíssimas pancadas. Levantei-me sobressaltado; Vaz continuava na mesma posição, o que me fez supor que estivesse dormindo, porque as pancadas deviam ter-lhe produzido a mesma impressão se ele se achasse meio acordado como eu.

Fui ver quem me batia à porta. Era um sujeito alto e magro embuçado em um capote. Apenas lhe abri a porta, o homem entrou sem me pedir licença, e nem dizer coisa nenhuma. (*CA* [*Contos Avulsos*]: 83-4)

[It would be natural to go from there to deep sleep, and that is where I would have arrived at if I had not heard three resounding knocks on the door. I startled and stood up. Vaz remained in the same position, which lead me to suppose he must have been asleep, since the knocking would have given him the same impression had he been half-awake like myself.

I went to see who it was knocking at my door. It was a tall, thin individual wrapped in a cloak. As soon as I opened the door, the man stepped in without my permission and without uttering word.]

As suggested above, these passages indicate that throughout the first decade of his experimentation with the supernatural short story Machado returned to the same core elements of narrative, inserting them in a mechanism of repetition and variation that extends to different

sides of storytelling. Only a cross-referenced reading allows us to understand the coherence and sophistication, as well as the limitations and later developments of such mechanism.

Bringing the "three-knocks-on-the-door" stories together, I intend to offer a starting point in the exploration of four fundamental topics in Machado's poetics of the supernatural. These topics are introduced and expanded in these inaugural stories, but, more importantly, they cut across the whole corpus studied in this chapter in complex and thought-provoking ways. We can synthesize them as follows: 1) a problematization of the border between known and unknown; 2) an exploration of dreams and dreamlike states that disables *and* enables the fantastic; 3) the topic of madness in constant oscillation between humor, or irony, and fright; 4) the recurrence of a fatal danger associated with love and marriage, in a markedly Machadian *topos* (which brings him close to James and Maupassant) that I call "matrimonial horror".

1.6. The Secret Beyond the Door

The various episodes of door-knocking correspond to the nuclei of these initial stories insofar as they coincide with the turning-point that originates them as narratives. In a way, it is as if the stories were built from and around that particular moment in a process of accretion that seeks to describe it and, as far as possible, *make sense of it*. The centrality of doors is, of course, a clear fictional investment in the idea of threshold. In these cases, the threshold seems to divide a realist setting from its fantastic interruption. The interruption matches indeed a (forceful) decontextualization from what corresponds to the level of reality in the fictional world; a figurative and literal decontextualization or decenterment that only lasts for a specific amount of time in the narrative, for Machado never embarks in full fantasy. But it would be a simplification to think of Machado's supernatural stories as perfectly delimitated parodies of

the fantastic, even if the limits between the different registers seem to be clear enough in the diegetic structure.

We must also account for the fact that border-crossing is in itself a questioning, if not an effacement, of borders. More than a simple and momentary ambiguity, it implies seepage, overlapping, and contamination. This is also why to think of the ending in these stories as a mechanism of "rationalization" that simply neutralizes the fantastic segment that preceded it is to regard Machado as something he was not: a realist writer. As Luís Augusto Fischer put it so explicitly, and triangularly, Machado was not a fantasy writer nor a realist, but an author related to the late-century and turn-of-the century aesthetic tendencies of *Parnasianismo* and Symbolism, insofar as he shares with them "o ânimo de buscar, pesquisar formas, para além dos *standards* românticos e para além das facilidades realistas" (1998: 160) [the will to look for, to search forms, beyond romantic standards and beyond easy realist tools].

However, to go beyond Romanticism and Realism is also to contemplate and to be located on the liminal space between them, which puts Machado at the heart of a "crise da representação" (162) [crisis of representation].35 This crisis may have caused the occasional friction, but it was a fertile ground for literary creativity. Moreover, it corresponds to an aspect of Machado's dilemmatic writing that has so far escaped the attention of critics and which is

---

35 Fischer elaborates on this subject in terms that recapture Machado's "instinct of nationality" as a work-in-progress and a literary problem: "Quanto à crise de representação, portanto, está claro que Machado percebia o impasse dos métodos ou das perspectivas (românticos e realistas) e, por isso, obrigou-se à especulação, à ousadia. Mas tal crise vai mais além: também o Brasil parecia, aos olhos de Machado, uma outra impossibilidade, um outro enigma, um outro desafio. (…) Assim, Podemos dizer que para Machado não há método narrativo suficiente, nem há Brasil suficiente. Acresce que ao lado dessas ilustres ausências há um conjunto de presenças acachapantes. Por exemplo: a ciência" (1998: 162-3) [In what concerns the crisis of representation, then, it is clear that Machado was aware of the impasse of methods or perspectives (romantic and realist) and, so, he compelled himself into speculation, into audacity. But that crisis goes beyond that: Brazil also seemed, in the eyes of Machado, another impossibility, another enigma, another challenge. (…) Therefore, we can say that for Machado there is no sufficient narrative method, nor is there sufficient Brazil. In addition, alongside these illustrious absences there is a group of overwhelming presences. For example: science].

connected to the specificities of the genre, and not only of the epoch, the geo-cultural setting, and the literary tendencies in which Machado's fiction found a way to emerge solidly.

If we look at the way the short story theorist Charles E. May describes the appearance of the short story in what is considered its "modern" incarnation in the nineteenth century, we see that the origins of the form are intimately tied to the same key paradoxes and aesthetic solutions explored by Machado:

> Even though the short story derives directly from this mythic-story and aesthetic romance tradition [of folktale and myth], its appearance in the early nineteenth century was necessarily conditioned by two assumptions about art's relation to reality – the realistic and the Romantic – which combined in the short story in a particular way to create a new mode of discourse. […]
> The early short story writers followed the impulse of the Romantic poets to demythologize the old ballads and folktales and remythologize them by presenting them as basic psychic processes. The ballad story, the legend, and the romance, which had previously existed as received story, became infused with the subjectivity of the poet or the teller and were given a metaphoric structure. (1989: 65)

Regarding this subject matter from a genre-oriented perspective that has so far been residual, we realize that when Machado devised the bewildering narratives which readers and critics feel the need to distinguish from the rest of his oeuvre and call fantastic, supernatural, "quasi-macabre", or unrealistic, he seemed to be interested in exploring a problematic interval often conceived in his fiction, in metaphorical terms, as a geographical or a spatial "interzone". This was the case right from the beginning, from "The Country of Chimeras".

The story, which appeared originally in *O Futuro*, in 1862, was partly altered by the author four years later, and republished in the *Jornal das Famílias*, with which Machado had begun a longstanding collaboration, between April and May of 1866, with a new title: "Uma Excursão Milagrosa" [A Miraculous Excursion]. Machado did not substantially change the text in his revision, but he made one important modification which consisted in turning a third-

person narrative into a frame story in which we also find the protagonist's first-person account of his miraculous adventure. The moment in which one narrative voice gives way to the other is particularly relevant for announcing, with relative discretion, what will eventually become one of the major traits of Machado's mature fiction: his sophisticated use of meta-narrativity, into which I look in more detail in the final section of this chapter.

What we see in the 1866 version is that, at the very frontier between narrative frame and core story (drawn in the text as a blank space), Machado not only presents the narrator as an author, making both functions indistinct and conceiving the narrator as a fictional writer, but also suggests that the author may depart from his creation, as a dispensable figure in the absence of which the story can proceed *making itself*: "Aqui deixa de falar o autor para falar o protagonista" (*CR*: 125) [Here the author ceases talking for the protagonist to speak].

In a dubious yet befitting statement, the narrator of "A Miraculous Excursion" vows to be completely silent from that moment on, instead of proposing to *reproduce*, in accordance with the practical laws of framing and reported speech, the testimony of his protagonist in the form of a transcribed or a duplicated first-person narrative.36 However, his last words are "Diz ele" [He says], implicating that Tito's supposedly first-person account is after all a *copy* under the narrative device of direct speech. The narrator's diversion may seem either too playful or too timid to be worthy of special attention, but if we take it literally in its deeper implications — not forgetting that the protagonist is also a *poet* — we may be able to see how it is a strong suggestion of what we find in the prefatory pages of *Dom Casmurro*, *Esaú e Jacó* [Esau and Jacob] and *Counselor Ayres' Memorial*. In these novels, Machado revolutionized his readers'

---

36 The narrator goes so far in his attribution of the middle section to the unmediated voice of the hero that he adds, to that purpose, a clause on adequateness and tellability: "Não quero tirar o encanto natural que há de ter a narrativa do poeta reproduzindo as suas próprias impressões" (*CR*: 125) [I do not wish to take away the natural charm of having the narrative of the poet reproducing his own impressions].

expectations with regard to narration and authorship by trapping the text in various schemes

of co-creation that project its author as a permutable, unstable figure.37

For the purposes of this study, however, I focus on the first version of "The Country

of Chimeras", not only because it contains an intrinsic historical value as Machado's earliest

intrusion into supernatural territory, but also because, as a third-person narrative, it presents a

slightly more challenging and less obvious version of a problem we can see in a dilated, or,

perhaps, a more "resolved", form in "A Miraculous Excursion". This problem consists in the

narratorial process of accessing the consciousness of one other, protruding the unknown, and

giving that voyage an intersubjective (that is, a tellable and intelligible) form.

The hero of "The Country of Chimeras" personifies duplicity. In the story's opening

lines, we find him unsure as to how to escape from his degraded life. He has chosen to go on

a trip, instead of committing suicide, over a tragic story of unrequited love. However, both sea

and dry land seem to him less than ideal routes. He is also physically dubious. While his face

is handsome and pictorial, he is ugly and deformed from the waist down. The narrator, and

Tito's friend, concludes about him that, "[c]omo as medalhas, e como todas as coisas deste

---

37 Bento Santiago, the autobiographical narrator of *Dom Casmurro*, begins his book-project by ascribing an authorial status to a certain "poet of the train" who scornfully called him "Dom Casmurro", thus giving the novel its title: "Não consultes dicionários. *Casmurro* não está aqui no sentido que eles lhe dão, mas no que lhe pôs o vulgo de homem calado e metido consigo. *Dom* veio por ironia, para atribuir-me fumos de fidalgo. Tudo por estar cochilando! Também não achei melhor título para a minha narração; se não tiver outro daqui até ao fim do livro, vai este mesmo. *O meu poeta do trem ficará sabendo que não lhe guardo rancor. E com pequeno esforço, sendo o título seu, poderá cuidar que a obra é sua. Há livros que apenas terão isso dos seus autores; alguns nem tanto*" (Assis 1962: 23-24, my italics). ["Don't consult your dictionaries. *Casmurro* is not used here in the meaning they give for it, but in the sense in which the man in the streets uses it, of a morose, tight-lipped man withdrawn within himself. The *Dom* was for irony: to impute to me aristocratic airs. All for dozing off! Well, I have found no better title for my narrative; if no better occurs, let it stand! *My poet of the train will know that I do not bear him a grudge. And, with a little effort, since the title is his, he will be able to decide that the bool is his. There are books which owe no more to their authors; some, not so much*"] (Assis 1966: 4, my italics). On the other hand, in the "Foreword" to *Counselor Ayres' Memorial*, which is to a certain extent a spin-off of *Esau and Jacob*, "M. de A." announces himself simultaneously as the actual writer and the mere legatee and editor of Aires's manuscript (see Assis 1961: 19; and Assis 1982: 5 for the English translation).

mundo de compensações, Tito tem um reverso" (*RCV* II: 418) [like medals, and like all things in this world of compensations, Tito is double-sided].

In addition, the poet is morally ambiguous. Although free of vice and full of positive virtues, he lost his honor by working as a ghost writer and selling the "productions of his muse", over which he lost all "parental rights" (419), to a rich man, obsessed with poetic fame, who took advantage of his poor situation. The implication of all these conflations, of course, is that the poet and protagonist is in a way, himself, a *chimera*, or a harbor of chimeras, thus an imaginary and imaginative land waiting to be explored.38

Following this idea, we also find a parallel between the movement of Tito's delirium in the story and the reverse movement of our own reading of the story, that is to say, between Tito's going *out* to the country of chimeras and our going *into* his mind (and in both cases as witnesses to chimeric visions, or, in other words, as hallucinated travelers).

It is at the paroxysm of his undecidedness that the poet hears someone knocking three times on his door, which he proceeds to open to the faerie visitor. The "sylphid" takes him on an intergalactic journey through air — that is, a *third* option he had not considered before — into the Country of Chimeras. This foreign land is ruled by the sovereign Génio das Bagatelas [Genie of Trifles] and queen Moda [Fashion], and peopled by all sorts of deities, such as the

---

38 The historical resonance of Tito's name is also relevant. In fact, the Roman historian Titus Livius (Tito Lívio in Portuguese) is mentioned in another story, "Decadência de Dois Grandes Homens", as a fundamental literary source for Jaime, the reincarnation of Marcus Brutus. In addition, Tito's name, as well as his physical structure, point to the fact that he represents opposing sides that co-exist without mixing, or, in other words, he is a conflation without synthesis, like Jaime/Marcus Brutus and like many of Machado's "carnivalesque" characters in which "os contrários se encontram um ao outro, se olham um ao outro, se refletem um no outro, se reconhecem e se compreendem um ao outro" (Riedel 1979: 16) [opposites find one another, look at one another, reflect another, recognize and understand one another], and, instead of fusing, take turns when coming to the fore in the narrative. This irresolvable duplicity, which Machado clearly thought to be important to maintain, spreads into other areas of the writer's universe, particularly in what comes to the borders of truth and fiction, or reality and literature, not simply equivalent, but *interchangeable* or chimeric realms.

Utopias and the Chimeras, personifying all the more or less vapid notions and fantasies that occupy the minds of aspiring poets and romantic lovers fallen into disgrace.

More importantly, the "child of Earth" comes into contact in the Country of Chimeras with the makers of "chimeric mass", a substance extracted from the very atmosphere of the planet and subsequently poured into the brains of Earthlings who happen to have a chimeric "disposition". These are, not surprisingly, "statesmen, poets, lovers", and women, too (435). Tito manipulates the vaporous mass, which quickly dissolves in his hands into nothing. The lesson contained in the allegorical image of chimeric dissolution is not lost on Tito, and upon his return to Earth he becomes incredibly discerning. In fact, with "the eyes of a lynx" he can distinguish his fellowmen between those gifted with "brains" and those whose heads are filled with "chimeric mass" (441). Thus, as innocuous and unreal as the episode may seem, it has brought one real and irreversible change: Tito has become *wise*.

However, it would be unfair to reduce Machado's chimeric world to a simple parable on poetic naiveté and disillusionment, which it also is. If we pay a special attention to the way the illusory segment itself — Tito's travel — is embedded into the narrative, we see that its limits are anything but clear. Although the account of the hero's journey resembles in many aspects an experience of sleepwalking, which is what it probably is on a level of strict realism, there is no suggestion that the poet was falling asleep, or slumbering, between his pessimistic brooding and the entrance of the fairy. The transition is intentionally abrupt and unmarked, as if the entry into the world of illusions had taken place at any given moment and the knocking on the door were its natural *consequence*. As suggested before, the instant we begin intruding Tito's mind in the first lines of the story, guided by the unnamed narrator — our cicerone in a land of chimeras —, may after all coincide with an unannounced plunge into an otherworldly country that we, as readers, readily and perhaps naively accept as such.

In point of fact, Machado asks of his readers to do more than assume the perspective of a character. His narrative *fingimento*39 [pretense] leads us into a romanticized vision of the world that is, consequently, a world of its own right; and since the Machadian character is not a "voz das idéias do autor, mas tem a sua própria voz e o mundo é visto pela significação que ele, personagem, lhe dá" (Riedel 1979: 21) [voice of the author's ideas, but has a voice of his own, and the world is seen according to the meaning that he, the character, gives it], it is often the character who, in the function of protagonist and narrator, and *imaginative* consciousness, adopts the role of *fictor*, or, in Erich Auerbach's translation of Varro, of the "image-maker", who "when he says *fingo* (I shape), puts a *figura* on the thing" (1984: 12).40

Therefore, Tito's worldview — that is, the way his world is *seen*, signified and given shape (by him and us, through the narrator) — becomes predominant again when his exodus from the ethereal land is carefully and seamlessly sewn into the fabric of narrative. He does not wake up, or at least not in any literal way, but descends the heavens in a "diabolical" fall until he sets foot on the surface of the Earth again: "sobre uma praia, de pé, firme como se não

39 Ivan Teixeira places the notion of "fingimento" [pretense, enactment, make-belief] at the heart of Machado's narrative creations. He refers to the ways Machado invents "uma condição específica para cada texto" (1987: 60) [a specific condition for each text], relying on "diversos veículos para as narrativas" [various narrative vehicles] through which he establishes "uma nova ordem literária na língua portuguesa" (60) [a new literary order in the Portuguese language]. Teixeira focuses on how Machado insistently invested on the dramatization of narration and storytelling, fabricating strong narrative and meta-narrative frames for each of his major novels and many of his short stories that largely surpass anything that had ever been written in the Lusophone world. I would like to add to this idea that the term *fingimento* is derived from the same Latin root as the term *fiction*: "fingo" (to shape, to fashion, to form; but also, to deceive, to feign, to pretend). The *double entendre* of the concept is especially important for the purposes of this study because it points out the fact that, to create literature, for Machado, regardless of the debate opposing realist and fantastic registers, is to make truth of a simulation, to consciously — and not deceitfully — *put on an act*. The final section of this chapter elaborates further on this subject by focusing on the structural limits of Machado's narrative frames, looking at how they break apart and at the same time reinforce the margins of fictionality.

40 In this respect, Merquior also underlines that "Machado é um escritor em quem o aspecto fortemente retórico do estilo, longe de lesar, *reforça* a energia *mimética* da linguagem, o seu poder de imitar, de *fingir* (ficção), efectivamente a variedade concreta da vida" (1972: 20) [Machado is a writer in whom the strongly rhetorical aspect of style, far from harming it, *reinforces* the *mimetic* energy of language, its power to imitate, to *feign* (fiction) indeed the actual variety of life].

houvesse dado aquele infernal salto (…); a dois passos de casa" (*RCV* II: 440) [on a beach, standing, as firm as if he had not taken the hellish leap (…); two steps from home].

The apparent integrity of Tito's physical structure is opposed to the profound effect that the journey has on his conscience, altering his perception as well as the course of his life. Thus, Machado seems to imply in "The Country of Chimeras" that the workings of the mind have a bearing, albeit intangible, in the world of the flesh, or, in other words, that we cannot step into the realm of dreams and poetry with impunity, regardless of if we are headed to fancy or elucidation. In fact, the very possibility of distinguishing fancy from lucidity is questioned at the end of the story, which ironically contradicts the development of Tito's character:

> Desde então Tito possui um olhar de lince, e diz, à primeira vista, se um homem traz na cabeça miolos ou massa quimérica. Devo declarar que poucos encontra que não façam provisão desta última espécie. Diz ele, e tenho razões para crer, que eu entro no número das pouquíssimas exceções. Em que pese aos meus desafeiçoados, não posso retirar a minha confiança de um homem que acaba de fazer tão pasmosa viagem, e que pôde olhar de face o trono cintilante do rei das Bagatelas. (441)

> [Since then Tito has the eyes of a lynx, and he can tell at first sight if a man is carrying brains or chimeric mass in his head. I must declare he finds few of them who do not make a provision of the latter kind. He says, and I have reason to believe him, that I add to the number of very few exceptions. Even if it displeases those who have no affection for me, I cannot take my trust away from a man who has just made such a wondrous journey and was able to look at the scintillating throne of the King of Trifles with his own eyes.]

The narrator seems to be attributing Tito the quality of good judgement, as far as such judgement pictures himself as a sage. However, at the same time, he does so by expressing a blind faith in a man who experienced *as reality* a fantastic journey that cannot be conceived of as something other than an illusion. The narrator's choice of words denounces him, in the end, for trusting a lunatic, and his addendum completely dismantles what we may have had integrated as the moral lesson of the story. This addendum was removed from "A Miraculous Excursion", and the ending of the story simplified as a warning about the cons of becoming

wise and, consequently, "poorer and unhappier" than before due to a new ability to detect the previously hidden faults of vanity and delusion in other people (*CR*: 135).

The breach between the two voices, even if it is only apparent, in the narrative frame and the narrative core of the 1866 version also compartmentalizes the mirroring effect we can find in "The Country of Chimeras" between hero and narrator. In the earlier version, the two figures are often indistinct and inter-possessive — the narrator refers to Tito as "meu amigo" [my friend] and "meu poeta" [my poet] (*RCV* II: 417-9; 432; 436-7) while reconstituting his journey into words — and their different experiences of telling the story and experiencing the story overlap to confirm and invalidate each other, thus pointing to the uncertainty at the heart of Machado's first encounter with the supernatural. In closing, it is precisely when hero and narrator recognize one another — and, in so doing, recognize themselves — *as wise* that we discover that they are in fact fools. As is generally known, however, in dreams, as well as in the dreams that stories are made of, contradictory hypotheses may coexist without opposition. Thus, literature is expanded for Machado as a region of harmonious duplicity.

In Machado's second incursion into dreamland, "The Angel of Maidens" (*Jornal das Famílias*, 1864), the visitor does not announce himself by knocking. In fact, the angel in the title invades Cecília's room abruptly and unexpectedly. Things become even more interesting in this respect when, looking back, we realize that the angel's sudden entrance is prefigured in the opening lines and in the entrance of the *reader*, masterfully dramatized by the narrator as an inoffensive invasion of privacy:

> Cuidado, caro leitor, vamos entrar na alcova de uma donzela.
>   A esta notícia o leitor estremece e hesita. É naturalmente um homem de bons costumes, acata as famílias e preza as leis do decoro público e privado. É também provável que já tenha deparado com alguns escritos, destes que levam aos papéis públicos certas teorias e tendências que melhor fora nunca tivessem saído da cabeça de quem as

concebeu e proclamou. Hesita e interroga a consciência se deve ou não continuar a ler as minhas páginas, e talvez resolva não prosseguir. Volta a folha e passa a coisa melhor.

Descanse, leitor, não verá neste episódio fantástico nada do que se não pode ver à luz pública. Eu também acato a família e respeito o decoro. Sou incapaz de cometer uma ação má, que tanto importa delinear uma cena ou aplicar uma teoria contra a qual proteste a moralidade.

Tranqüilize-se, dê-me o seu braço, e atravessemos, pé ante pé, a soleira da alcova da donzela Cecília. (*CA*: 9)

[Caution, dear reader, we are entering a maiden's chamber.

The reader shudders and hesitates before this announcement. He is, of course, a man of good manners, he respects the families and cherishes the laws of private and public decorum. It is also probable that he has already encountered some writings of that sort which brings to the public papers certain theories and tendencies that would better never have left the head of those who conceived and proclaimed them. He hesitates and asks his conscience whether or not he should continue reading my pages, and he will, perhaps, decide not to proceed. He turns the page and moves on to a better occupation.

You may rest yourself, reader, for you will not see in this fantastic episode anything that could not be seen under the public light. I also respect the family and abide the rules of decorum. I am incapable of committing an evil deed, whether it be delineating a scene or applying a theory against which morality could protest.

Reassure yourself, give me your arm, and let us cross, tiptoeing, the threshold of Cecília's chamber.]

In itself, the *incipit* may pass for little more than a playful and enticing apostrophe to the reader. It is uncommonly long and flourished, for certain, but not rare, as a figure of speech, among Machado and his contemporaries. Furthermore, it can be taken as a manifestation, on the part of Machado, of an ironic complicity toward the rules of conduct of late-nineteenth century periodicals targeting bourgeois ladies and their families,[41] and — as we are frequently reminded in criticism — to which Machado had to concede, willingly or unwillingly, with an evident humor. As a simple apostrophe designed to seduce the reader, however, it is too long and convoluted. But if we see it as a confirmation of tacit or dictated norms, on the other hand, it is quite unnecessary, for the whole episode is in fact as innocent as the narrator promises it to be, apart from the fact that entering the rooms of both innocent and corrupted maidens is a

---

[41] However, it is important to notice that, in this case, the vocative ("Caro leitor") is explicitly directed to a *male reader*. This may be ironic, placing the implicit female reader in the shoes of a male entity to whom bolder and more adventurous steps are exclusively allowed, or it may not be ironic and contradict the notion that Machado conceived his stories having in mind the expectations of a fundamentally female audience.

common infraction in literature, and one which would hardly deserve a word of caution. The rhetorical effectiveness of the apostrophe lies in the fact that it means the contrary of what it says; for without the narrator's reassurance that our reading *is not* an illicit practice, we would never consider how illicit it can be, or seem to be in order to raise excitement.

It seems, then, that the bizarre opening scene must have another function disguised under its most obvious ones. And, in fact, if we look retrospectively at the reader's "tiptoeing" into Cecília's abode in view of the following intrusion of the same space by the angel, which clearly mirrors it, we begin to understand that the central aim of the apostrophe is to launch a reflection not so much on the etiquette of narration, but on the politics of reading. It forces us to reconceptualize reading as a tautological active action that is framed in the text itself as co-operative with storytelling, thus *fictional*. Referring to Machado's triad of implicit authors — Brás Cubas, Dom Casmurro, and Counselor Ayres — and deriving his argument from Wayne Booth's intentional fallacy, Abel Barros Baptista describes this mechanism as

> *uma retórica da harmonia entre autor e leitor no campo específico do texto*: o 'autor implícito' é, para Booth, tanto uma origem da estratégia que conduz a leitura, como uma construção do leitor, e o que se procura (...) é a coincidência entre ambos, pelo que a noção acaba por valer como metáfora de um princípio de apreensão da obra como totalidade unificada, fonte de legitimidade da leitura. (1991: 120)

> [*a rhetoric of harmony between author and reader in the specific field of the text*: the 'implicit author' is, for Booth, as much an origin of the strategy that directs reading, as he is a construction of the reader, and what is pursued (…) is the coincidence between them both, wherefore the notion turns out to be the metaphor for a principle of apprehension of the work as a unified totality, a source for the legitimization of reading.]

Briefly, in the presence of typical narratorial protocols of the time, reconfigured to perform a *modern* function,[42] the reader is not only addressed and taken into consideration in

---

[42] I qualify Machado's approach to the short story as "modern" having in mind the same principles of formal innovation that Ivan Teixeira identified — in a somewhat inflated tone that is perhaps unjust to later modernist writers in Brazil — in relation to the author's novels, but which, I believe, cannot be seen as exclusive to the

the Machadian text, but she/he is *made up* as a participating agent who can shoulder and move with the implicit or fictional author, who she/he *makes up* in return — as Marta de Senna puts it in her comparative study of short stories by Machado and Anton Checkhov — as a "narrative voice" and "a set of textual strategies" (1998: 35). Harking back to Umberto Eco's concept of Model Author and Model Reader, Senna clarifies that this "[n]ão é apenas uma questão de *prever* um leitor, de *esperar* que exista, mas de mover o texto de modo a construí-lo" (35) [not only is a question of *predicting* a reader, of *expecting* that he exists, but of mobilizing the text in order to construct him]. In the realm of fiction, then — and this is what is unique in Machado —, narrators and readers are actualized *and* fictionalized in a process that rhetorically explores the ontological border between world and text.

Once again on the subject of borders, the opening frame of "The Angel of Maidens" gains an intensified meaning in the context of the other stories I discuss here. In a comparative view, it becomes clear that the moment of intrusion is analogous to the three-knocks-on-the-door episode that we do not find here, but whose rhetorical and symbolic effects in our reading and in the narrative are nevertheless reinstated.

---

longer narratives or to the time period they fit into: "Os romances maduros de Machado de Assis foram escritos de 1880 a 1908, mas todos possuem estrutura própria do século XX. A narrativa de vanguarda brasileira (Mário e Oswald de Andrade, Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, Osman Lins, etc.) não acrescentou quase nada à novidade estrutural de Machado de Assis. As *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* continuam sendo, entre outras coisas, o nosso romance mais vanguardista, pois apresenta um sem-número de soluções formais ainda não superadas pela invenção de nossos escritores" (1987: 61) [The mature novels of Machado de Assis were written between 1880 and 1908, but they all display a structure that is characteristic of the twentieth century. Brazilian vanguard narrative (Mário and Oswald de Andrade, Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, Osman Lins, etc.) added very little to the structural novelty of Machado de Assis. *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* is still, among other things, our most avant-garde novel, for it presents endless formal solutions that still have not been surpassed by our writers' invention]. Merquior argues about the same subject that Machado's strongly rhetorical style is "mais do que um traço pós-romântico" [more than a post-romantic trait], and in fact "genuinamente *moderno*; algo menos próximo dos impressionistas do que de um Joyce, um J. L. Borges ou um Guimarães Rosa" (1972: 20) [genuinely *modern*; something less close to the impressionists than to a Joyce, a J. L. Borges or a Guimarães Rosa].

The parallel incursions of the reader and the Angel of Maidens into the textual space makes it all the more clear that Machado makes use of the supernatural to question the limits of fictionality, as he simultaneously seeks "uma definição de leitor que ultrapasse a empiria e aponte para uma figuração complexa construída a partir de mediações entre seres, digamos, históricos e ficcionais" (Guimarães 2012: 28) [a definition of reader that would surpass empiricism and point to a complex figuration built on mediations between beings, so to speak, historical and fictional].

In a way, the imposing apparition of the angel, the narrator, and the reader echoes the undetermined margins of Cecília's "dream", which is not exactly (only) a dream. As in Tito's case, the protagonist's reverie in this third-person narrative is not easy to delimit. Cecília's dream is not a story within a story, but a fictional reading scene inside a projected and a real reading scene, that is, in other words, a story of reading framed within the prospective reality of our own reading. As we have seen, the reader is compelled to spatially *step into* the story; but the location or even the existence of the line dividing the two worlds is unclear although it is determined by narration itself and by the effect that, through interlocution, narration is intended to create in an actual reading situation. It is no surprise, then, that also like Tito and many of Machado's characters, Cecília is in various respects a *literary creature*.

It is not sunken in poetic wanderings that the Angel of Maidens finds the protagonist, but in a related state of "immersive" reading:

> Cecília lê um romance. É o centésimo que lê depois que saiu do colégio, e não saiu há muito tempo. [...]
> Que lê ela? Daqui depende o presente e o futuro. Pode ser uma página da lição, pode ser uma gota de veneno. Quem sabe? Não há ali à porta um índex onde se indiquem os livros defesos e os lícitos. Tudo entra, bom ou mau, edificante ou corruptor, *Paulo e Virgínia* ou *Fanny*. Que lê ela neste momento? Não sei. Todavia deve ser interessante o enredo, vivas as paixões, porque a fisionomia traduz de minuto a minuto as impressões aflitivas ou alegres que a leitura lhe vai produzindo.

Cecília corre as páginas com verdadeira ânsia, os olhos voam de uma ponta da linha à outra; não lê; devora; faltam só duas folhas, falta uma, falta uma lauda, faltam dez linhas, cinco, uma... acabou.

Chegando ao fim do livro, fechou-o e pô-lo em cima da pequena mesa que está ao pé da cama. Depois, mudando de posição, fitou os olhos no teto e refletiu.

Passou em revista na memória todos os sucessos contidos no livro, reproduziu episódio por episódio, cena por cena, lance por lance. Deu forma, vida, alma, aos heróis do romance, viveu com eles, conversou com eles, sentiu com eles. E enquanto ela pensava assim, o gênio que nos fecha as pálpebras à noite hesitou, à porta do quarto, se devia entrar ou esperar.

[...]

Procurou dormir para fugir às idéias sombrias que se lhe atropelavam no espírito e dar descanso ao peso e ao ardor que sentia no cérebro; mas não pôde; caiu em uma dessas insônias que fazem padecer mais em uma noite do que a febre de um dia inteiro.

De repente sentiu que se abria a porta. Olhou e viu entrar uma figura desconhecida, fantástica. Era mulher? era homem? não se distinguia. (*CA*: 10-3)

[Cecília is reading a novel. It is the hundredth novel she reads since leaving school, and she has not left it too long ago. (…)

What is she reading? From this the past and the future depend. It may be an instructive page, it may be a drop of poison. Who knows? There is no index at the door listing the forbidden and the permissible books. Everything comes in, good or bad, the edifying and the corrupting, *Paul and Virginia* or *Fanny*. What is she reading at this moment? I do not know. However, the plot must be interesting, the passions lively, because her expression translates by the minute the unnerving or joyful impressions the reading produces in her.

Cecília rushes through the pages in real eagerness, her eyes fly from one end of the line to the other; she does not read, she devours; only two leaves missing, only one leaf, only one page, only ten lines, five, one… it is over.

Finishing the book, she closed it and placed it on top of the small table by the bed. Then, she changed position, stared into the ceiling and stood thinking.

She browsed through her memory all the events contained in the book, she reproduced it episode by episode, scene by scene, move by move. She gave shape, life, soul, to the heroes in the novel, she lived with them, talked to them, felt with them. And while she was thus meditating the genie that shuts our eyebrows at night hesitated, standing at the door, about whether to get in or wait.

(...)

She tried to sleep in order to escape the somber ideas that ran through her mind and give rest to the weight and the burning she felt on the brain; but she could not; she fell into an insomnia such as those that make us suffer more in one night than a whole day's fever.

Suddenly, she noticed the door was opening. She looked and saw a strange, fantastical figure stepping in. Was it a woman? was it a man? you could not tell.]

Marked by the hesitation felt by the "Genie of Sleep" — a precursor to the Angel of Maidens at the threshold of Cecília's inner world —, the exact degree of the girl's awareness is apparently impossible to determine. The suggestion of sleep is soon contradicted in the text and replaced with a quite possibly ironic situation of *sleepless* wonder.

The oscillating progress of the narrative's initial steps is suggestive of an unresolved correlation between reading and sleeping, and, by association, between reading and dreaming. The angel's apparition seems to derive from the contents of Cecília's readings, since he comes up on the scene to answer concerns raised by the romantic nature of the girl's favorite books, invariably centered on doomed love. Reading, dreaming and imagining, however, bleed into each other, and it is not possible to tell them apart, just as it is not possible to discern the exact nature of the androgynous angel, sexually and ontologically indeterminate.

The young girl is an innocent reader who takes fiction *to the letter* as exemplary of real life. Therefore, she fears she might fall in love and be condemned to some form of eternal unhappiness, as it happens to all heroines in the novels that she simultaneously "devours" and dreads. Consoling her of this fear, the Angel of Maidens comes to her aid, and promises her undisturbed peace as long as she vows to remain a virgin all her life. Cecília readily accepts his proposal, and the pact is sealed as the angel places an emerald ring on her finger in a mock marriage to chastity.

The ironic turn of "The Angel of Maidens" happens when, by the end of the tale, we discover, at the same time as Cecília, that she was the victim of a scam by her cousin Tibúrcio. Leaving Rio de Janeiro for Goiás and wanting to preserve her for himself, Tibúrcio devised a plan to ensure Cecília remained out of anyone else's reach for the necessary amount of time. His return was greatly postponed, however, and the *coup de thêàtre* ended up having a life-long effect. Cecília's Angel of Maidens was only a *mucama* (housekeeper).

Yet there is a double irony inscribed in the text in the fact that what is offered in the beginning as a derangement of reading must be reinterpreted, in the end, as something entirely dependent on the fact that Cecília was *awake* and in possession of her physical senses. Instead of producing the "dream", Tibúrcio's prank — only because he underestimates the power of

imagination — corroborates and complements it, as if its essence had already taken shape in Cecília's mind. It follows from this sequence of events that, for Machado, the fantastic is not necessarily dependent on actual dreams or daydreams and on a cessation of awareness, since reason is not an impermeable realm. In fact, fancy may take refuge on reason and awareness, which are not inflexible states always shielded against the truculence of belief and perception. In this case, there is no dream, and yet the text employs the vocabulary and the narrative tropes of dreaming, as much as there is no mystic vision although all the markers of a mystic vision are there. Instead, the "hallucination" is enabled by a state of vigil and subdued reasoning, for if Cecília were sleeping she could not have been tricked by the *mucama*'s enactment.

Like "The Country of Chimeras", "The Angel of Maidens" dwells in ironic duplicity; and like Tito, who foolishly trades his poetic talent for worldly wisdom — as he had done for money before that — Cecília trades the possible restlessness or the possible joys of a carnal relationship for the dismal security and unhappiness of a chaste and void life suggested to her in a sophisticated yet quite implausible joke. Both heroes are thus trapped in the hyperbole of their own desires and fears, unable to tell reality from fancy because they are indistinguishable in the context of their emotional and psychological worlds. In a Girardian reading, we could say that Cecília's desire for chastity is *mediated* by the novels that she reads, paving the way for the success of Tibúrcio's prank. Like Emma Bovary, she "desires through the romantic heroines who fill her imagination", and so the "second-rate books which she devoured in her youth have destroyed all her spontaneity" (Girard 1965: 5).

As these stories demonstrate, Machado did not use dreams as a mere expedient of the fantastic, that is, as an easy way to step in and out of it. On the contrary, his formal treatment of the oneiric motif, intertwined and not rarely analogous with the experience of literature, of

storytelling and story-reading, promotes a blurring of the borders between sleep and vigil that associates with the narrative content to represent an intermingling of reality and fiction.

Delving into the unknown realm of their own consciousness as seers of the unseen, Tito and Cecília obtain a new knowledge of chimeric truths that, paradoxically, implies their unknowing of important parcels of their real worlds. However, this dynamic of learning and unlearning is not due to their becoming less sharp after their supernatural experiences, but to the fact that the unknowability of the world beyond contaminates — and, in a way, reveals — unknowable portions of their respective *realities*. Precisely because the realness of individual experience surpasses and encloses the reality of immanence, every form of knowledge stands in these stories for the parallel loss of another form, insofar as, as we see it happening to these characters, to be fanciful is to be knowledgeable of something, and to be wise is to be ignorant of something else.

Having explored the uncertain boundaries of reality and fancy and of ignorance and knowledge in Machado's first two stories of the supernatural, in the three following sections I continue making a comparative analysis of "three-knocks-on-the-door" stories and other fantastic stories in which we do not find this motif. Looking at these contrasting but related pairs, I intend to observe the evolution and the various forms of "door-crossing" as one of the most distinctive traits of Machado's fantastic fiction. Simultaneously, I develop the remaining topics of this chapter (dreams, madness, and matrimonial horror), as they expand along with, and apart from, that seminal image.

1.7. Actual Dreams

The two stories I analyze next give a double meaning to the notion of "actual dream". In "The Angel Raphael" (*Jornal das Famílias*, 1869), we find an actualized dream, which is to say that oneiric markers similar to the ones Machado had previously employed are used to describe a naturalist story turned *dreamlike* given the oddity of the real-life events that unfold from the moment of Dr. Antero da Silva's planned, but not executed, suicide. In other words, Antero explicitly experiences the story of which he finds himself the protagonist *as if* it were a dream. The association that he makes between real life and the oneiric is so strong that upon waking up from a *real dream* — a concept whose seeming contradictory nature would not be lost on Machado —, in which he consummates his suicide and consequently goes to hell to be thrown into the fire, the narrator declares: "Saía de um sonho para entrar em outro" (*CE*: 22) [He was leaving a dream to enter another].

"Decadência de Dois Grandes Homens" [The Decadence of Two Great Men] (*Jornal das Famílias*, 1873), on the other hand, deals with an actual dream, made explicit in the text *as a dream*. However, the cessation of the narrator's opioid-induced sleep in this short story of metempsychosis does not offer a completely satisfactory return to the world of reason and vigil, giving instead further ground to the questioning of fixed concepts that seem inexorably destabilized as they participate in the making of fiction.

In fact, *fiction* is in many ways an integral part of Antero's life, which makes him an obvious "brother-in-arms" of Tito and Cecília. And even when fiction would not be the exact term, we still find him wrapped up in literary references and activities. This is exemplified in the scene of Antero's unconsummated suicide, which deserves to be analyzed closely:

O Dr. Antero foi para a sala, estendeu-se no divã, abriu um volume do *Dicionário filosófico* e começou a ler.

Já então declinava a tarde e aproximava-se a noite. A leitura do dr. Antero não podia ser longa. Efetivamente daí a algum tempo levantou-se o nosso herói e fechou o livro.

(...)

O Dr. Antero acendeu uma vela e sentou-se à mesa para escrever. Não tinha parentes, nem amigos a quem deixar carta; entretanto, não queria sair deste mundo sem dizer a respeito dele a sua última palavra. Travou da pena e escreveu as seguintes linhas:

Quando um homem, perdido no mato, vê-se cercado de animais ferozes e traiçoeiros, procura fugir se pode. De ordinário a fuga é impossível. Mas estes animais meus semelhantes tão traiçoeiros e ferozes como os outros, tiveram a inépcia de inventar uma arma, mediante a qual um transviado facilmente lhes escapa das unhas.

É justamente o que vou fazer.

Tenho ao pé de mim uma pistola, pólvora e bala; com estes três elementos reduzirei a minha vida ao nada. Não levo nem deixo saudades. Morro por estar enjoado da vida e por ter certa curiosidade da morte.

Provavelmente, quando a polícia descobrir o meu cadáver, os jornais escreverão a notícia do acontecimento, e um ou outro fará a esse respeito considerações filosóficas. Importam-me bem pouco as tais considerações.

Se me é lícito ter uma última vontade, quero que estas linhas sejam publicadas no Jornal do Commercio. *Os rimadores de ocasião encontrarão assunto para algumas estrofes.*

O Dr. Antero releu o que tinha escrito, corrigiu em alguns lugares a pontuação, fechou o papel em forma de carta, e pôs-lhe este sobrescrito: *Ao mundo*.

Depois carregou a arma; e, para rematar a vida com um traço de impiedade, a bucha que meteu no cano da pistola foi uma folha do Evangelho de S. João. (*CE*: 16-7)

[Dr. Antero went into the living room, stretched out on the couch, opened a volume of the *Philosophical Dictionary*, and began to read.

The evening was declining, and the night was approaching. The reading of dr. Antero could not be long. In fact, after some time our hero got up and closed the book.

(...)

Dr. Antero lit a candle and sat at the table to write. He had no relatives, nor friends, to whom to leave a letter; however, he did not want to leave this world without saying his last word about it. He took the pen and wrote the following lines:

When a man, lost in the jungle, finds himself surrounded by ferocious and treacherous animals, he tries to escape if he can. Generally, it is impossible to escape. But these animals, my fellows, as treacherous and ferocious as any other animals, had the ineptitude of inventing a weapon, by which a misfit easily escapes their clutches.

That is just what I am going to do.

I have a pistol, gunpowder and a bullet beside me; with these three elements I will reduce my life to nothingness. I will not miss it or be missed. I die from being sick of life and from having a certain curiosity about death.

Probably, when the police find my corpse, the papers will write the news of the event, and one or the other will make philosophical considerations in that regard. I do not care much about such considerations.

If it is lawful for me to have one last wish, I want these lines to be published in the Jornal do Commercio. *Occasional rhymers will find the subject matter for a few stanzas.*

Dr. Antero reread what he had written, corrected the punctuation in some places, closed the paper in the form of a letter, and addressed it: *To the world*.

Then he loaded the gun; and to finish off his life with a trace of impiety, the sleeve which he put into the barrel of the pistol was a page from the Gospel of St. John.]

Between a quick glance into philosophical lines and a provocative and unholy new use of the biblical text, Antero manages to envelop his farewell letter in an aura of literariness. What is more striking about that letter, however, is precisely the way its author thinks of it not so much as the honest and painful last testimony of a man who feels defeated by life, but as a piece of text written by a proud and even arrogant plaintiff begging to be published and sent *to the world*. Moreover, Antero expects his last words to have a life of their own and produce three derivative literary objects: 1) articles in the newspapers; 2) philosophical considerations which he vows to dismiss with the same tediousness with which he put away the (Voltairean) *Philosophical Dictionary*; and 3) more importantly, a page in the *Jornal do Commercio* that might perhaps inspire poets to write about him. All things considered, the goal of Antero's suicide letter (and therefore of this life) seems to be two-fold: to be perceived as literature and to originate literature, enclosing its writer in the *shroud* of a literary subject, which, in fact, he already is as the hero of Machado's story.

The explicit formulation, from Antero's own pen, of his inherent literary nature, as well as the pre-conceived posthumous life of his letter, with all the written replies it calls for, deserves further consideration. But before tackling that subject we must analyze Antero's own voyage into an alternate reality in order to understand how he finds himself, and how, through him, we find Machado's fantastic fiction, stepping on borders that are one degree subtler than the ones we have encountered so far.

Instead of announcing a seraphic creature, the three knocks on the door that interrupt and prevent Antero's annihilation bring forth a person made of flesh and blood. The "roughly dressed man" introduces himself as a servant of Major Tomás, a complete stranger to Antero, and delivers the protagonist his master's cursory letter requesting him to join him immediately at his home, alluding to a mysterious "business", and promising him a fortune. Reluctantly,

Antero puts aside his planned suicide and accompanies the servant to the Tijuca. Once there, he finds himself more and more steeped in mystery, until he eventually learns that Major Tomás is an old comrade, from "the time of independence", of his dead father. Additionally, the Major reveals that the business he referred to is no less than a marriage to his daughter, Celestina, which would make Antero his heir and a rich man. After hesitating to concede at once to Major Tomás' unfounded whims, Antero finds himself unable to resist for long to the appeal of fortune, as well as to Celestina's unquestionable charms and innocence.

All would be well, had not Antero also gradually understood that he was the guest of a madman. Major Tomás nurtures the belief that he is a manifestation of Archangel Raphael in human form. Living in seclusion, he also managed to persuade his young daughter of this, and to make her entertain the consequent notion that she herself, although not an angel, is the progeny of one, and thus an angelic creature. But all is clarified by the end of the story thanks to the intervention of another old comrade, Colonel Bernardo. He reveals the cause of Major Tomás' folly to be the belief that his wife, Celestina's mother, had been adulterous. The Major dies, and Antero marries Celestina, saving her from insanity and saving himself from ruin as they happily leave the Tijuca and head back into the "real" world.

Once again, the adventure represents an intermission in the protagonist's life. But, more than that, a special importance is placed on the frontiers of that intermission, and on how they react and intermingle with "real life". I have referred at the beginning of this section to the fact that Antero and the narrator insistently describe this non-supernatural adventure as an experience of the unreal. However, the "posthumous" life of Antero's suicide letter — duly found by his faithful servant, who was not only ignorant of his whereabouts but also convinced that he had actually killed himself — turns Antero's time at Major Tomás' house in the Tijuca into something more than a dream come true, and something closer to a work of fiction.

While perusing the morning papers, still in the Tijuca, Dr. Antero comes face to face, in the *Jornal do Commercio*, exactly as he had wished, with the news of his death. The author of the piece clarifies that, contrarily to what had been said in the letter (attached to the article), Dr. Antero had not shot himself, but instead disappeared and drowned, his dead body having been found on the beach of Santa Luzia. The corpse mentioned in the article must of course have been misidentified and wrongly attributed to Antero as a materialization of his suicidal plot. Nevertheless, the *inadvertently fictional* and even farcical contents of Antero's obituary in the *Jornal* produce in him an "odd feeling": "estaria ele morto deveras? Teria já saído do mundo da realidade para o mundo dos eternos sonhos?" (*CE*: 34) [was he really dead? Had he already left the world of reality for the world of eternal dreams?].

Having entertained the idea, factually and materially *corroborated* in the news and in the finding of a corpse, that he could in fact have been dead, Antero continues to play with it in a brief letter sent to his friends upon his return, safe and sound, to the city: "O Dr. Antero da Silva, recentemente suicidado, tem a honra de participar a V. que voltou do outro mundo, e se acha ao seu dispor no hotel de ***" (55) [Dr. Antero, who recently committed suicide, has the honor of announcing he has returned from the other world, and is at your disposal at the hotel ***]. Slightly crossed by the morbid quality of what they see as Antero's prank, his friends reservedly celebrate his "return". But the *Jornal do Commercio* publishes a different piece of news in order to enlighten its readers. However, this does not withdraw the initial announcement of Antero's death, putting instead the fact of his return into question: "Dizem que reapareceu o autor de uma carta com que me ocupei ultimamente. Será verdade? Se voltou não é autor da carta; se é autor da carta não voltou" (56) [It has been said that the author of a letter with which I occupied myself recently has reappeared. Is it true? If he came back, he is not the author of the letter; if he is the author of the letter, he has not come back].

Antero finds himself obliged to respond to the ambiguous declaration, stating firstly in his reply: "Voltei do outro mundo, e apesar disso sou o autor da carta" (57) [I have returned from the world beyond, and I am nevertheless the author of the letter].

The *folhetinista* — that is, a chronicler of trifles and gossip, but also, in another sense, an *author of fiction* — working for the newspaper seems unable to suspend the referentiality of the letter, insistently taking its contents *to the letter* regardless of them not having come into fruition, to finally arrive at that impossible chiasmus. Antero, on the other hand, also takes an unbridled view of the meaning of his own letter, but he sees it rather as an enabling factor, as something that makes the impossible possible. Both characters read too much into the letter and they both take it too much at face value, but the interpretations they arrive at are radically distinct, and perhaps equally appropriate.

On one hand, the *folhetinista* pictures Antero as a material impossibility, confirming his literary nature — that is, his suicide letter is paradoxically taken as an instance of self-creation, originating a character with which the journalist feels he *must* coincide — as well as the fictionality of a real world where what is uttered in a piece of text is truer than living proof. On the other hand, by inscribing himself in that impossibility, Antero gives a symbolic meaning to his experience and his new life, *as if he had been born again*, at the same time as he fantasizes about his own status as a "dead author", *as if he had remained dead* — a technical impossibility manifest twelve years later in *The Posthumous Memoirs*.43 In any case, the words

---

43 I am picturing Dr. Antero da Silva as a character who foreshadows, in Machado's short fiction, the figure of the "defunto autor" discussed by Abel Barros Baptista with regard to *The Posthumous Memoirs*. Baptista's idea is inherently difficult to translate. Although *defunto autor* ("defunto" as noun and "autor" as adjective) seems to easily stand for "dead author", it is important to distinguish it from *autor defunto* ("autor" as noun and "defunto" as adjective), which also translates into English as "dead author". Baptista clarifies that the difference between these two designations is the same that separates Brás Cubas from Counselor Ayres. The former is "um morto autor de um livro" [a dead man author of a book] (Baptista 1991: 169), while the latter is an author who dies before completing his literary project. As a consequence, the meaning of "defunto autor" must be given in a periphrasis, as "a dead person who is also an author", and not as "an author who is dead/has died"

Abel Barros Baptista uses in his reading of that novel aptly describe this premonitory story: "O que aqui se anuncia, na ficção e pela ficção, é a presença inelutável da morte na própria destinação do texto literário" (1991: 171) [What is announced here, in fiction and through fiction, is the irrevocable presence of death in the destination of the literary text itself].

In "The Decadence of Two Great Men", unlike Antero's, but similarly to Tito's and Cecília's, the protagonist's trip into the world of the unknown is mostly stationary. The first-person narrator's reverie is induced, in this case, by an opiated cigar offered to him by Jaime, an old man he meets by chance in the café Carceller, in Rio de Janeiro. Published the following year to Machado's debut novel, this story is a mixture of diverse literary tendencies from the second half of the nineteenth century, assembled by the author in a cohesive and lean narrative. It combines a hint of historical fiction with a decadent taste for hallucinogenic wonder and the use of drugs, not forgetting the pseudo-medical themes of metempsychosis and madness.

Miranda, the narrator, can hardly believe his ears when Jaime, his host, professes to be the reincarnation of Marcus Brutus, while the body of his pet cat — he is certain — hides the soul of Julius Caesar, bent on exacting revenge upon his murderer and current owner. As the action takes place during the "ides of March", Jaime-Brutus is naturally fearful for his own life, although penitent for his past deeds, and he seeks the narrator's company for solace. Of course, Jaime is a deeply literary character. He glorifies "os tempos antigos, a virtude romana, as páginas de Plutarco, Tito Lívio e Suetônio. Sabia o Tácito de cor e dormia com Virgílio"

(*autor defunto*). However, as Baptista reminds us, there is a reciprocal tension between Brás Cubas and Counselor Ayres, *defunto autor* and *autor defunto*, that I think is also an important part of Antero's pre-posthumous letter: "como se a morte se inscrevesse enquanto acontecimento inevitável no processo que faz de alguém um autor; como se, em contrapartida, todo o autor estivesse impossibilitado de morrer" (1991: 171) [as if death inscribed itself as an inevitable event in the process that makes someone an author; as if, in contrast, any author were unable to die]. Baptista's paradoxical conclusion about Machado's intertwining of death and authorship is thus perfectly illustrated in Antero's reply to the *folhetinista* in "The Angel Raphael". His suicide letter is both his death sentence ("I have returned from the world beyond"…) and what keeps him in the world of the living (…"and I am the author of the letter").

(*CEsq* [*Contos Esquecidos*]: 19) [the ancient times, Roman virtue, the pages of Plutarch, Titus Livius, and Suetonius. He knew Tacitus by heart and slept with Virgil]. He is also aware that he has been taken as a subject by Shakespeare, who aptly "took him to the stage", and whom he is in a place to both corroborate and correct in different passages.[44]

However, it should be noted that Brutus' reincarnation is not just a passive receptacle for literary influences. He has also read the scientific or pseudo-scientific treatises of modern times and is certain to have found the "truth" that Miranda is tempted to ridicule. The truth is *metempsychosis*, the title of one of the books the narrator's eye catches standing on his shelves. Furthermore, Jaime endorses a philosophical doctrine of which he tries to persuade Miranda: "Toda a filosofia pode ser verdadeira; a ignorância dos homens é que faz de uma ou de outra crença da moda" (20) [Any philosophy may be true; it is the ignorance of men that reduces one or the other to a fashionable belief].

Apparently unaware that he himself is a believer in creeds dictated by fashion, Jaime does not really convince Miranda of his all-including philosophical principle; but he manages to at least plant a seed of doubt in his mind. Combined with the opiated cigar, this seed is enough to plunge the narrator into a psychotropic dream in which he witnesses Jaime/Brutus turning into a rat which Julius Caesar, commonly called Júlio, Jaime's cat, pleasurably tortures and finally swallows, thus retributing his executioner's unpunished crime.

Miranda's dream does not stop when the revenge is satisfied. It continues as a solitary journey through space, the skies, and seas, where he sails a "truly mythological seashell" and

---

[44] "Há de ter lido que a sombra de César me apareceu depois duas vezes, sendo que, da segunda, veio silenciosa e silenciosa foi. É um erro. Da segunda vez foi que eu ouvi tremendo segredo que lhe vou revelar" (24) [You have surely read that the shadow of Caesar appeared to me twice afterwards, having, on the second time, silently come and silently gone. That is a mistake. It was on the second time that I heard the terrible secret I will reveal to you].

where he bears witness to metamorphoses taking place on himself, namely on his nose, which grew disproportionately and "assumiu sucessivamente a figura de um chapéu, de um revólver e de uma jaboticaba" (28) [took in succession the shape of a hat, a revolver, and a jaboticaba]. Subsequently, Miranda finds himself back in the city, where houses are now standing upside down, with foundations facing the sky. Eventually, he returns to Jaime's living room, where no one else is to be found after the massacre of moments before, and from where he quickly escapes back to his place and out of the opioid dream.

As in all the previous stories, "The Decadence of Two Great Men" features a return to order which generally corresponds, in the narrative, to a return to the place of departure. However, like before, the completion of the circle does not exactly take us to the original point, for something has irrevocably changed along the journey that leads us into an altered landscape (or mindscape) which has become unfamiliar. The protagonist's mind, or, in other words, his *mindset*, like Miranda's nose and Dr. Antero da Silva's standing in "life", has been dilated, contracted, and transformed, forcing him to readjust his cognitive structures and his expectations according to a new experience that challenged them radically. Having to deal with the madness of another, Antero and Miranda ultimately must come to terms with the fact that they are not immune or alien to it. This realization is all the more significant if we bear in mind that said madness is always related to identity and/or ontological destabilization: Major Tomás is the Archangel Raphael, Jaime is Marcus Brutus and also a rat, Júlio is Julius Cesar and also a cat, Miranda's nose is a hat, a revolver, and a *jaboticaba*.

The danger of switching bodies, and even corpses, seems to be frequently at lurk in Machado's supernatural stories. Yet there is also a playful dimension to this disturbing change, taking the shape, if we want, of a morbid desire to identify with the dead body on the beach, or with the battered rat lying at the paws of Julius Caesar. This is perhaps why, back at Café

Carceller the following day, Miranda feels both relieved and anguished at the sight of Jaime in perfect health. The "fatal hour" went by and Caesar did not return to eat him whole. He was only a madman, and, worst of all, it has come to the narrator's knowledge that "aquele mesmo homem de Plutarco, freguês do Carceller, curado por um hábil médico, está agora tão comum como os outros" (29) [that same man from Plutarch, customer of Carceller, cured by a skillful doctor, is now as common as all others]. Confronted with the news of Jaime's full recovery, Miranda concludes, in disappointment: "Acabou a originalidade com a maluquice. *Tu quoque, Brute?*" (29) [Originality has ended with madness. *Tu quoque, Brute?*].

Originality was, for Miranda, the only possible opposition to commonness; and, in a way, his lament for the end of originality, replaced with simple folly, is a cry of alert against the prevalence of commonness which now stands facing no adversaries. This conclusion may contain an implicit commentary on the part of Machado, especially if we consider that "The Decadence of Two Great Men" is itself a story which, having madness as its subject matter, resists banalizing it by focusing instead on a related experience of drug-induced hallucination that takes over and *affects* the realm of sanity. Without realizing it, sane Miranda, his visionary journey, and his first-person narrative, are all instruments against the use of clinical madness as an easy fictional tool for producing the weird and confronting reason. Like Henry James in his attempt to rehabilitate the fantastic genre in light of a crescent pathologizing of characters that ultimately makes them *common* and the resulting fiction unoriginal (see p. 167), Machado seems to imply that it is when the questioning of reason comes from the same side of the coin (that is, from reason itself), that it is uncommon, thus truly relevant.

1.8. Mad Copies vs. Mad Originals

The way dreams are gradually reconceptualized in Machado's short stories, either by negating their essence while keeping their rhetorical structure, or by enhancing them through the use of book-induced or drug-induced hallucination, seems to pair with a growing interest in madness. However, this "madness" is not exactly seen as a documented social issue and an area of medicine, as clarified at the end of the previous section, but as a fictional subject and, at the same time, an enabler of fiction. Like Miranda, seeking originality in an ocean of copied and recopied customariness, these stories suggest that Machado felt increasingly tempted to tackle the distortion of reason — and not its abandonment, which is an important distinction — and turn it into the very crux of his supernatural narrative.

In the following pages I propose to observe this evolution as it unfolds in three stories published in the *Jornal das Famílias* in the 1870s, Machado's most prolific decade in terms of supernatural writing, as well as the apogee of short fiction in his entire career. This period is located right before *The Posthumous Memoirs* and his other novels of maturity, or, in other words, it falls between Machado's early endeavors as a poet, short story writer, and relatively successful novelist, and his consecration in the 1880s as a prominent author in Brazil and in the Portuguese-speaking world. These stories of madmen also predate what many consider to be Machado's masterpiece of short fiction and his most notable novella on psychopathology: "O Alienista" [The Alienist] (1882).[45] They are "Captain Mendonça" (1870), "Um Esqueleto" [A Skeleton] (1875), and "Sem Olhos" [No Eyes] (1876).

---

[45] William L. Grossman translated this story and others into English in a collection titled *The Psychiatrist and Other Stories* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963). Helen Caldwell, who was the first Machadian scholar in the U.S.A., was also responsible for several original translations in the same volume.

In all these stories the male protagonist comes face to face with a mad genius whose presence forces him to reevaluate what he had, until then, believed to be the facts of life, and to change his relationship with reality according to that epistemological shift. But, as we will see, this readjustment also takes place at the level of the character's self-knowledge; for the (contaminating) contact with the madman, which produces the "uncanny effect of epilepsy or madness", is reflected back to the subject's perception *of himself*, because, according to Freud, he "sees a manifestation of forces that he did not suspect in a fellow human being, but whose stirrings he can dimly perceive in remote corners of his own personality" (2003: 150). In this context, no story exemplifies Machado's taste for replication like "Captain Mendonça". The repetitions that occur in this story and in others, however, are never gratuitous or mechanical. They also imply sometimes subtle and other times diametrical change, and, if anything, they are an evidence of Machado's authorial coherence and of a continued development of what we may understand as his poetics of supernatural short fiction.

The structures of repetition and continuity that permeate the stories of Machado from when he started publishing as an aspiring writer until his maturity as a consecrated author and a man of letters also challenge the idea, rebuffed by João Cezar de Castro Rocha, but endorsed, in turn, by Alfredo Bosi, that as a young short story writer Machado "exercia-se na convenção estilística das leitoras de folhetins, em que os chavões idealizantes mascaravam uma conduta de classe perfeitamente utilitária" (Bosi 2007: 75) [exercised himself in stylistic conventions of the female readers of feuilletons, in which idealizing clichés masked a perfectly utilitarian class conduct]. Moreover, they contradict the assumption that only after the publication of *The Posthumous Memoirs* and of *Loose Papers* did Machado manage to overcome "um grau baixo de consciência dessa ambiguidade [social]" [a feeble awareness of that (social) ambiguity], and a limiting "ênfase nos bons sentimentos" (77) [emphasis on good sentiments].

As I hope to demonstrate throughout this study, the sophistication of Machado's early tales, even when camouflaged under mere "convention", contradicts the notion that only after turning forty and ascending the social ladder was Machado able to grow out of his supposed naiveté and his female-oriented ways as a short story writer.[46] I would argue instead, without attempting to erase indisputable differences between Machado's short stories and novels and between his earlier and later works, in favor of what Crestani sees as a *productive continuity* (2012: 123-8) that, suffice it to say, does not stand for sameness or redundancy.

Likewise, looking at the texts I am analyzing here, and particularly at their narrative structures, more than at their social themes and typified characters, it is hard to accept — at least as a general truth — Bosi's idea that young Machado "mantém-se fiel, sobriamente fiel, às instituições literárias do romance brasileiro romântico, que sempre se quis 'realista': as descrições de paisagens e de interiores, a sequência dos eventos, o sentido do tempo e, mesmo, as entradas metalinguísticas desses contos, já estavam em Macedo, em Manuel Antônio, em Alencar" (2007: 80) [keeps himself faithful, soberly faithful, to the literary institutions of the romantic Brazilian novel, which always wanted to be 'realistic': the descriptions of landscapes and interiors, the sequences of events, the flow of time and even the metalinguistic passages

---

[46] Patrícia Lessa Flores da Cunha also questions the notion of a "complete rupture" in Machado's oeuvre, which she views instead as "um processo de amadurecimento de idéias e de posicionamentos" (1998: 124) [a process of maturation of ideas and positions]. Addressing the repetition of motifs and ideas in their correlation with Machado's continued development as a writer, Cunha adds: "A partir da publicação de *Papéis Avulsos* (1882), entretanto, em que se formaliza a virada machadiana em relação ao conto, há uma mudança de enfoque e um outro olhar se volta à paisagem humana que se manifesta na superfície do conto de Machado de Assis. Isso não significa, contudo, que situações deflagradas anteriormente não se repitam; ao contrário, uma leitura atenta percebe que muitas das primeiras narrativas são reescritas, e posições são reavaliadas em outras cronologicamente posteriores, enquanto várias antecipam e/ou exploram conflitos e construções de personagens bastante análogos, por exemplo, aos encontrados em seus romances" (124-5) [From the publication of *Lose Papers* (1882), meanwhile, in which the Machadian change concerning the short story is formalized, there is a change of focus, and a different look turns to the human landscape manifested on the surface of the short story by Machado de Assis. That does not mean, however, that situations instituted before do not repeat; on the contrary, an attentive reading will perceive that many of the early narratives are rewritten, and positions are reevaluated in others which succeed them chronologically, while several [stories] anticipate and/or explore conflicts and character developments quite similar, for example, to those we find in his novels].

of these stories were already in Macedo, in Manuel Antônio, in Alencar], and, as follows, that "[a] deferência pela face institucional das Letras e da Sociedade é norma em Machado" (81) [a deference toward the institutional side of Letters and Society is a norm in Machado].

Fischer directly questions this position, shared by several commentators (1998: 154-5), and argues that it is precisely "no quadro da narração" (164) [in the narrative frame] that Machado is an innovator from a very early stage of his writing. Looking at the supernatural stories, then, offers a special perspective on this subject because they represent some of the most daring examples of narrative experimentation. In Machado's stories of the supernatural, the guiding principles that Bosi enumerates are systematically violated, and there is nothing unoriginal or arbitrary about the "metalinguistic passages" that we find along the way.

As a matter of fact, the metalinguistic dimension of Machado's early fantastic stories is one of their strongest, most challenging and interesting attributes from a critical standpoint. It not only complexifies the realist vs. supernatural conundrum in ways that I tackle further ahead, but it is also one of the most cohesive proofs of the interrelationships and prevailing preoccupations of Machado's work, not only across time but also across different genres and contexts of publication. The fact that they are often metalinguistic, and significantly so — a subject I discuss in more detail in the last section of this chapter —, shows that there is no extreme break, but the development and the consolidation of certain traits, in *The Posthumous Memoirs*, a novel whose narration focuses largely on the subject of its own writing.

In this respect, "Captain Mendonça" is successful in encapsulating two of Machado's overarching motifs in one single narrative construct: dreams and madness. In an effort to take his mind away from quarrels with the "lady of his thoughts", Sr. Amaral, the story's hero and its first-person narrator, decides to spend the evening watching an "ultra-romantic drama" at the Teatro de S. Pedro. There, he meets Captain Mendonça, his father's old comrade in arms,

just returned from Rio Grande do Sul. Amaral is so similar to his deceased father that Captain Mendonça is able to identify him by his looks, subsequently persuading Amaral to accompany him to his home during the intermission. Amaral accepts the proposal because, like Miranda in "The Decadence of Two Great Men" (published three years later), his wearisome and dull life is driven by a thirst for "originality". Amaral cannot resist the "eccentric and original" captain, and his words on this subject are a foreshadowing of Miranda's quest as we saw it in the previous section: "Encontrar um original ao meio de tantas cópias de que anda farta a vida humana, não é uma fortuna?" (*CR*: 160) [To find an original in the midst of the many copies that fill human life, is this not good fortune?].

Of course, like it would happen three years later with Miranda in relation to Jaime/ Brutus, deception seems to hover over Amaral's cursory appreciation of Captain Mendonça's originality. No less remarkable, however, is how the protagonist's motto and the formulation opposing originals and copies would recur insistently in the other two stories. In "A Skeleton", Alberto confronts Dr. Belém's odd behavior by asking him "Confesse ao menos que é um uso original" (*CEsq*: 83) [At least admit that it is an original custom]. Dr. Belém's reply, in the form of a question, is final and sharp: "Queria que eu copiasse os outros?" (83) [Would you want me to copy others?]. In "No Eyes", we find the protagonist once again disappointed with the one who previously deserved his admiration: "Eu cuidava ter diante de mim um espírito original; saía-me um louco; o interesse diminuía ou mudava de natureza" (*RCV* II: 102-3) [I believed I stood before an original spirit, but I found a madman; my interest was diminishing or changing in nature].

The characters' obsession and ultimate disappointment with this topic signals both a rhetorical repetition and a change of pace in Machado's treatment of the supernatural, which becomes increasingly parodic, or gradually more explicit in its replication and dismantling of

commonplace aspects of the fantastic sphere. In my view, nevertheless, the evolution does not run towards a deconstruction or a destruction of the fantastic, but into its reconceptualization into a facilitating element of the fictional text, by which I mean both the narrative as well as the textual *web* from which the narrative arises and on which it takes hold.

Repetitive elements are a strong evidence of Machado's pursuit of the supernatural as a mechanism created exclusively *by and for* storytelling and literary language, and, at the same time, an often parodic — though no less effective and daunting — device which in turn originates fictions. My perspective on the Machadian supernatural is thus admittedly attuned to Todorov's idea that the supernatural, in general and in itself,

> is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent: the supernatural. The supernatural thereby becomes a symbol of language, just as the figures of rhetoric do, and the figure is, as we have seen, the purest form of literality (Todorov 1975: 82).

However, an important distinction must be made between, on one hand, Todorov's theorization of the linguistic nature of the supernatural, and, on the other hand, Machado's exploration of the supernatural — that is, the unnatural, *fictive* — nature of (literary) language. The contrast between these two views and uses of language becomes more obvious when we realize that in Machado's supernatural fiction there are absolutely no "devils" or "vampires", or even angels (at least not as Todorov conceives them), who nevertheless appear with relative frequency, but are really only *made of words*. There are, however, many examples of vampiric and devilish *words* or uses of language from the part of characters and narrators and ultimately from that of the author himself. This turns the table on the elements of Todorov's argument while preserving its central idea of a language-specific world. In sum, if Machado also takes

part in a concept of narrative in which Barthes places Henry James, and which sees characters and narrators as "êtres de papier" [paper beings] whose constituency is "immanent au récit" [immanent to the narrative] and whose voice is independent from that of their material author (1966: 19-20), the absence of truly supernatural *paper beings* in his stories means that literary language — used by narrators and characters in its figurative function — is what comes to the fore as a *product of language* and of its more-than-natural inventiveness.

The metalanguage of Machado's fiction, and more particularly the way it is explored in frame narratives, descriptions of dreams and mystical visions, or even cruel pranks that take advantage of the audience's alternatively superstitious or skeptical tendencies, is what makes it supernatural without relying on fantasy, werewolves and ghosts, while avoiding, at the same time, to become a complete allegory or a metaphor, identified by Todorov as forms of literary discourse that the fantastic genre inherently precludes (1975: 62-4).

Coming back to "Captain Mendonça", we see that the magic power of words which have no magic apart from their literary *effects*, as well as Machado's reciprocal mechanism of fiction-making through spellbinding repetition are, again, important traits in this story. As the third "three-knocks-on-the-door" story, this *dramatic* narrative also includes the first and only inversion of that same trope. Instead of signaling an invasion of the protagonist's mind or of his private space, the knocking, performed by the Captain on the door of his own home after taking Amaral with him and away from the theatre, marks an evasion *from* Amaral's agonizing thoughts regarding his lover, as well as from the theatrical scene, and into the Captain's house and extraordinary world.

Once there, Amaral discovers that Captain Mendonça is also a scientist, or, in fact, a demiurge, and meets his beautiful daughter Augusta, another heavenly-named, angelic young woman, after Cecília and Celestina from "The Angel of Maidens" and "The Angel Raphael".

Unlike her seraphic predecessors, however, Augusta is not a real woman, but the product of Captain Mendonça's Hoffmann-inspired creative genius. In fact, she is the fourth and the most perfect of his creations: "três vezes saiu a pequena dos meus alambiques, sempre imperfeita. A quarta foi esforço de ciência. Quando aquela perfeição apareceu caí-lhe aos pés. O criador admirava a criatura!" (*CR*: 167) [three times did the girl spring out of my alembics, always flawed. The fourth was a feat of science. When that perfection appeared, I fell to its feet. The creator looked up to the creature!].

Following the narrative model of "The Angel Raphael", published the year before, the hero of "Captain Mendonça" is invited, or, in other words, tactfully compelled, to marry the young girl as his strength and his reason vacillate before the power of the two other links (Captain Mendonça and Augusta) in the chain that grips him. Unlike Celestina, Augusta is not human and she cannot be redeemed or dissociated from her father's dominant madness, thus the engagement becomes a source of desperation for Amaral — also because it must include a surgical procedure in order to pour "genius", in the form of ether, into his brain — and the girl incarnates the very figure of horror when her father removes her eyes, her most attractive feature, to give them to the infatuated and terrified protagonist:

> Olhei para Augusta. Era horrível. Tinha no lugar dos olhos dois grandes buracos como uma caveira. Desisto de descrever o que senti; não pude dar um grito; fiquei gelado. A cabeça da moça era o que mais hediondo pode criar imaginação humana; imaginem uma caveira viva, falando, sorrindo, fitando em mim os dois buracos vazios, onde pouco antes nadavam os mais belos olhos do mundo. Os buracos pareciam ver-me; a moça contemplava o meu espanto com um sorriso angélico. (*CR*: 165)
>
> [I looked at Augusta. It was horrible. In place of the eyes she had two large holes, like a skull. I give up describing what I felt; I could not utter a cry; I was frozen. The girl's head was the most hideous thing the human imagination can conceive; picture a living skull, talking, smiling, staring at me with the two empty holes where shortly before swam the most beautiful eyes in the world. The holes seemed to see me; the girl contemplated my amazement with an angelic smile.]

Amaral does find a note from the real Captain Mendonça after waking up on his seat in the theatre, but it is clear by then that the whole experience had only been a dream induced by the tumults of his love life and from the sentimental extremes of the Romantic drama being staged in front of him. The note is an invitation for Amaral to pay the Captain a visit. However, he vows not to accept the invitation, because even if he knows that "o Mendonça da realidade não era o do sonho" (*CR*: 183) [the Mendonça of reality is not the one from the dream], he cannot free himself from the *real* constraint of the recent experience in the dream.

Despite the return to reason, and putting aside Amaral's superstitious fear, there is at least one odd detail in the whole story. Captain Mendonça had not met Amaral before he had fallen asleep in order to be assimilated in his dream. In fact, he arrived late to the play and his note clearly states that he found Amaral already asleep, just as he left him: "Meu caro doutor. — Entrei há pouco e vi-o dormir com tão boa vontade que achei mais prudente ir-me embora pedindo-lhe que me visite quando quiser, no que me dará muita honra" (*CR*: 183) [My dear doctor. — I entered a while ago and saw you sleeping so soundly that I thought it best to leave while asking you to visit me whenever you like, which would be a great honor for me].

It is worth recalling that at this point the two of them had never met in person before, and they never do during the timespan of the story. Amaral is asleep throughout their chance encounter in the theater, and, as in his dream, the Captain must have guessed his identity based only on his looks. Though it would be perhaps hasty to take the anachronism of Mendonça's entrance in the theatre and his (previous) entrance in the dream as a proof of supernatural or of telepathic activity, one must admit that it still points to an astonishing and *unexplainable* contiguity between the real world and the world of dreams. In a way, the ambiguous form of the tale's conclusion retains a link of hermeneutic undecidability between the "Captain" of reality and the mad scientist of the dream, whose dubious physicality reminds Amaral of "a

meditação de um filósofo ou a taciturnidade de um néscio" (*CR*: 164) [the contemplation of a philosopher or the sullenness of a fool].

"A Skeleton" and "No Eyes" explore a similar range of topics, though with important differences, to the ones I have analyzed in the previous stories. They both feature a triangle of characters composed of the hero that is caught in the web of a mad genius and of his attraction to a woman (or woman figure) who inspires fear. They also continue to dwell on the uncertain limits between complete madness and extraordinary (that is, *original*) perception, making it clear that Dr. Simão Bacamarte in "The Alienist", to which I have alluded before, is the apex of an archetypal figure that took Machado several years of laborious development.

In the first case, Dr. Belém, who "[c]ompusera um romance, e um livro de teologia e descobrira um planeta" (*CEsq*: 73) [composed a novel, and a theology book, and discovered a planet], is also a pathological jealous and a necrophile who keeps the unburied skeleton of his first wife, whom he murdered in an act of undue revenge. He speaks to the skeleton, kisses its hands, and makes it sit at dinner table, horrifying Alberto, the narrator, and D. Marcelina, his second wife, with his morbid behavior and his arrogant contempt for the rules of civil life. Nevertheless, his sharpness of mind is regularly underlined: "Líamos então e comentávamos à nossa maneira o *Fausto*. Nesse dia pareceu-me o Dr. Belém mais perspicaz e engenhoso que nunca" (81) [We were reading and commenting *Faust* at our will. That day, Dr. Belém seemed to me more perceptive and ingenious than ever].

In "No Eyes", the figure is typified in Damasceno Rodrigues, a philologist who tells *desembargador* Cruz the tragic story of his younger years, when he met and became friends with Lucinda, the young wife of a "wise, sullen, and jealous" doctor (*RCV* II: 111). Although innocent, the friendship that sparked between the two was misinterpreted by the husband,

who in act of punishment gouged Lucinda's eyes out with a red-hot iron, producing another eyeless-woman figure like Augusta in "Captain Mendonça".

On his deathbed, Damasceno shows signs of being haunted by the horrid figure of his mutilated friend Lucinda. Although seemingly delirious, his account is calm and moving, which makes Cruz doubt of his folly and judge him, after all, an *halluciné raisonnant*[47]: "A gravidade com que ele proferiu estas palavras excluía toda a idéia de loucura" (108) [The solemnity with which he uttered those words precluded any idea of madness]; "Ao mesmo tempo admirava a perfeita lucidez com que ele me referia aquelas coisas, a comoção da palavra, que nada tinha do vago e desalinhado da palavra dos loucos" (114) [At the same time I admired the perfect lucidity with which he mentioned those things, the emotion in his words, which had none of the vagueness and disarray of the words of madmen].

After witnessing the same apparition as Damasceno, and after fainting of horror in front of the ghost of Lucinda, the narrator is forced to question his own reason, or to accept that her ghost is real. Finding out, a few months after Damasceno's death, that he had been the victim of a joke, and that Damasceno had never met a woman named Lucinda, and that the portrait he had shown to Cruz belonged in fact to his niece who had never married, does not make things any clearer.

Cruz still had *seen* Lucinda and been haunted by her image, displaying once again the irrevocability of experience even before the facts of reality as a trait of Machado's fiction. Inspired thus by Damasceno's theatrical number, instead of being offended by it, the narrator can reclaim his reason without abdicating from the pleasure of having lost it forever. Since, independently from the factual truth, he cannot *unsee* the ghost of Lucinda and renounce the

---

[47] The oxymoronic notion of "halluciné raisonnant" (sensible lunatic; rational madman) is borrowed in advance from Guy de Maupassant's "Le Horla", a novella analyzed and commented in Chapter 3.

truth of experience. This coalescence of epistemic incompatibilities relates him, among other

rationally mad characters in Machado, to Quincas Borba, who is responsible for founding

the "Humanitist" philosophy in *The Posthumous Memoirs*. In his Bakhtinian reading of this

novel, Dierce Côrtes Riedel explains that:

> O mundo da demência do filósofo é um mundo carnavalizado, um mundo às avessas. A consciência da loucura lhe traz eufórica e dinâmica alegria (...).
> (...)
> A carnavalização leva a realidade cotidiana até as fronteiras do fantástico, ultrapassando as leis da razão. A consciência da razão é que faz chorar, enquanto a consciência da loucura se regozija. A tristeza da razão e a alegria da demência tornam homólogos — no mundo carnavalizado do personagem, construído pelo sistema segundo, o da linguagem literária — termos não correspondentes no sistema primeiro, o da língua:
> alegria: sandice: : tristeza: razão
> sandice – alegria x razão – tristeza (Riedel 1979: 13)

> [The world of the philosopher's dementia is a carnivalized world, a world upside down. The conscience of madness brings him euphoric and dynamic joy (…).
> (…)
> Carnivalization pushes everyday reality to the frontiers of the fantastic, overtaking the laws of reason. The consciousness of reason is what causes tears, while the consciousness of madness is rejoicing. The sadness of reason and the joy of dementia make counterparts — in the carnivalized world of the character, constructed by the second system, that of literary language — of terms that have no correspondence in the first system, that of speech [*língua*]:   happiness: madness: : sadness: reason
> madness – happiness x reason – sadness]

The apparition of Lucinda is, like the deceased author of *The Posthumous Memoirs*

in the words of Charles H. Geyer, a "fantastic literary event — outside the bounds of rational

explanation and beyond logical comprehension — to be understood as a profoundly ironic

one" (Geyer 2018: 177). I believe the same principle applies to all practical impossibilities

that we find in Machado's stories. Furthermore, on the subject of the conflation between the

fantastic and irony, and borrowing from Paul de Man's conceptualization of the trope, Geyer

states that the function of the language of irony "is to reveal as inauthentic any linguistic

pretensions of totalizing readability in texts or ultimate stability in meaning, and to expose

the true nature of language as one of mutability and aporia" (177). The fact that Machado's

irony is regularly also metalinguistic makes it all the more evident that a rebuttal of literary language as a fixed representation of the world is a main concern in these texts.

"No Eyes" is a perfect example of how madness and fantastic irony are brought together by Machado, not against reason and reality, but in spite of them. In addition, these two stories, featuring a skeletal woman and a female Oedipus, continue to explore a reversal in Machado's early picturization of angelic women. Nevertheless, it would not be correct to assume that one figure simply replaces the other; that is, that the horrific woman supplants the angelic. In fact, what we see is that the two of them accrete — either in the same women, in the case of humanoid Augusta and of mutilated Lucinda, or in distinct women paired as a unit, like the skeleton wife and D. Marcelina — as Machado plays with the repetition of figures and narrative structures, and with different degrees of sophistication, in his treatment and appropriation of the fantastic genre.

Apart from all the more or less naïve male heroes, women play an absolutely crucial role in the fabric of the Machadian supernatural, whether as its victims or agents. In a closer look, we see that in either case they are inevitably bound up with what is probably the most important horror catalyst in all of these stories, which is love. If "Captain Mendonça", "A Skeleton", and "No Eyes" all feature monster women, and women sacrificed at the hands of monstrous husbands, some of the stories I analyzed before are no less rich in their portrayal of marriage and love (either licit or illicit) as a topic of horror.

In this respect, we may recall the nightmarish context and the anguish surrounding Antero's courtship of Cecília in "The Angel Raphael". In that same story, Major Tomás had reduced his wife to misery due to an unfounded suspicion of betrayal. Even "The Angel of Maidens", with its heroine's obvious fear of matrimony, is in a way a first incursion into, or a variation on, "matrimonial horror". I think this is one of the most important, pervasive, and

unexplored topics of Machado's supernatural stories, which I tackle next having as my main case studies "Eternal Life" and "A Chinela Turca" [The Turkish Slipper].

1.9. Matrimonial Horror

From Tito's "illness of love", which "started as a fever" and took him "to the edge of his grave" (*RCV* II: 422), in "The Country of Chimeras", to the horrible — even if entirely fictional — crime of passion at the center of "No Eyes", Machado's amorous plots seem to be always tinged with morbidity and to represent a place of malaise, if not of pure terror.

Thirteen of Machado's fifteen supernatural tales — with the only exceptions of "The Decadence of Two Great Men" and "The Immortal" — revolve around or include prominent cases of fatal jealousy, doomed love, disappointed lovers, and deathly marriages, among other ailments of love. This is a clear indication of how Machado, a writer frequently divorced from the cheaply sentimental, deemed as tranquil and ironic as Counselor Ayres, but also as honest as Ayres when it came to his affections, both in his social life and in his writing — and a writer who repeatedly made use of his fiction to ridicule Late-Romanticism for its magnified portrayal of eroticism and tragic love[48] —, was perhaps unwittingly obsessed with melodrama and with the excesses of desire. In fact, "matrimonial horror", as a narrative trope, enacts what Peter Brooks calls the "'discovery' of the grotesque" in nineteenth-century melodrama (with Victor Hugo) as a "discovery of dynamic contrast" (1995: 92) that unites "polarized concepts and forces" (93). Illustrating this idea, Brooks adds (in terms especially adequate to describe

[48] Machado provides scathing caricatures of the artistic movement, particularly in what concerns its formulaic expression in literature and drama, in "The Angel of Maidens" (*CA*: 10-12), "Captain Mendonça" (*CR*: 157), "The Pale Woman" (*CSD* [*Contos sem Data*]: 57), and "The Turkish Slipper" (*PA* [*Papéis Avulsos*]: 123).

the *horrific brides* in these stories): "As Didier will say of the heroine in *Marion Delorme*, in a characteristic and revealing line: 'Oh God, the angel was a demon!' These are the terms, and the stakes, of the drama" (93).

Machado found an opportunity in his fantastic stories and in their dubious freedom of subject and dispersion of meaning to explore this inclination from its more innocent to its more "grotesque" dimensions. In the light of these stories, we may even rethink the collective image of Machado as a serene and composed writer, happily conceding to the rules of decorum and propriety of literary journals, and perhaps reevaluate the place of his renowned novel on destructive love and jealousy, *Dom Casmurro*, having in mind the role that the novel plays in a continuum that predates it, paves the way for it, and complexifies it.

Like the husband-and-wife vampirism of James and the necrophilia of Maupassant, which I discuss in the two following chapters (see p. 126 and 282), the matrimonial horror of Machado conceives the wedlock and the bond of love as the optimal frame for portraying fear and the fantastic.[49] Thus, it is both a consequence and a catalyst of the supernatural tale, or, in other words, it is alternatively — and sometimes simultaneously — a result and a cause of a certain manner of storytelling which escapes the boundaries of normalcy and "commonness". In this context, women are clearly at the top of the preternatural construct, and their depiction offers us precious clues into its purpose and nature.

---

[49] One the factors contributing for Machado's interest in this theme, apart from it being an ever-present — albeit successively refashioned — literary commonplace, may have been the particular sense of urgency and anxiety surrounding it in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. Emphasizing the economic complexities of matrimony, Zephyr Frank describes Machado's epoch as one in which "the coordinates mapping sex, love, family, and money were in flux", adding that: "Certainly, the marriage market in Rio de Janeiro strayed far from the level playing field of a frictionless and open system. The dramatic (or melodramatic, as the case may be) heft of the marriage plot in nineteenth-century Brazilian fiction derives in no small part from the historical difficulties known to readers from experience and the strands of gossip concerning this evergreen theme" (2016: 124-5).

Whether women participate in the fantastic to witness it ("The Angel of Maidens"), to intercede for it ("The Country of Chimeras" and "Captain Mendonça"), or to embody it ("A Skeleton" and "No Eyes"), female characters obtain in Machado a special status that results from their metonymic relation with the fantastic. Moreover, they are frequently equated with poetry and literature, which indicates an unsuspected triangulation between women, fiction, and the supernatural. In "Captain Mendonça", Augusta is compared to the *Odyssey* and the poet-scientist to Homer (*CR*: 168), while in "Eternal Life" Eusébia is said to be "the creation of an oriental poet" (*CA*: 92). In sum, if women are demonic and/or angelical embodiments of poetry, then the supernatural element that they incorporate in themselves and *into* the story is, above all else, the place of fictionality and literary creation.

Before looking more closely at this issue (in the final section of this chapter), I return to "Eternal Life" (*Jornal das Famílias*, 1870) as a key example of matrimonial horror. It also happens to be Machado's fourth and last three-knocks-on-the-door story. As such, it recycles narrative structures and figures that we have become fairly familiar with in my analysis of the previous stories. But the more interesting and important aspect of this connection, pointing to a vivid development of Machado's plots in the way of marital horror, is the way "Eternal Life" deviates from other texts with a similar pattern.

Once again, the first-person narrator of this story tries to present his dream as reality by overemphasizing his vigilant state: "Era natural passarmos dali ao sono completo, e eu lá chegaria, se não ouvisse bater à porta três fortíssimas pancadas" (83) [It would be natural to go from there to deep sleep, and that is where I would have arrived at if I had not heard three resounding knocks on the door]. To put it briefly, in its final occurrence, the door-knocking that signals an entry into the world of fancy is ironically presented as its exact opposite: that which pulls the narrator *out* of his slumber and away from the pre-conditions of dreaming.

This time, the unexpected visitor is not an angel or a servant, but the master himself, an old man named Tobias, *with a degree in mathematics* (85). The hero, too, whose repose is interrupted by Tobias, is no longer a young Byron, but a mature and sensible man. And in his conversations with Dr. Vaz, a friend who sleeps undisturbed by the arrival of Tobias, they are both like "dois velhos para quem já não tem futuro a gramática da vida" (83) [two old men for whom the grammar of life has no future tense].

The old age of Camilo da Anunciação (he is seventy) — a fact copiously remarked by himself — is an added element of oddity in yet another story of forced marriage. However, unlike Antero, in "The Angel Raphael", Camilo is not seduced by a mysterious trade and by the promise of great fortune. The man who aspires to become his father-in-law has nothing to offer him except his beautiful daughter and a "marry-or-die" agreement: "Não quero saber de sua idade, disse Tobias pondo o chapéu na cabeça e segurando no revólver; o que eu quero é que se case com Eusébia, e hoje mesmo. Se recusa, mato-o" (86) ["I do not care about your age", said Tobias putting his hat on his head and holding his pistol; "what I want is for you to marry Eusébia, and to do it today. If you decline, I will kill you"].

Confronted with such an absurd choice, the narrator leaves his house and his sleeping friend, and takes the journey that all three-knocks stories presuppose, guided by Tobias to his mansion in the middle of nowhere, in an unidentifiable corner of Rio de Janeiro. Once there, Camilo is captivated by the niceties of Tobias' entourage of old characters of Brazilian society, and by the prospect of having a young and attractive bride at an age in which such joy seemed like an absolute impossibility.

After his marriage to Eusébia is performed, however, the girl reveals to Camilo that he is the victim of an "immortality" sect led by her own father, for whom she has unwillingly acted as a mere pawn. This was her fifth wedding, in fact, and all her previous husbands had

been sacrificed and ritualistically consumed. Camilo is subsequently captured, tied down, and dismembered; and he remains aware and conscious during his body's fragmentation and his own death, witnessing a segmentation between the mind, the body, and its different parts that is reminiscent of Miranda's metamorphic nose in "The Decadence of Two Great Men", and announces Maupassant's exploration of autonomous body parts in Chapter 3.

Originally published in *A Época*, three years after "Eternal Life", and then included in the short story collection *Papéis Avulsos* [Loose Papers], in 1882, "The Turkish Slipper" is yet another important iteration of the marry-or-die plotline. It also combines so many of the motifs I have identified throughout this study that, like "Captain Mendonça", it could stand as a synthesis of the Machadian supernatural story. It includes: an unexpected and inopportune guest, Major Lopo Alves; a lovesick hero, *bacharel* Duarte; an angelic object of love — again named Cecília — gifted with "os mais finos cabelos loiros e os mais pensativos olhos azuis" (*PA*: 119) [the finest blonde hairs and the most pensive blue eyes]; a tedious Romantic drama penned by Lopo Alves; a reading and dreaming scene, in which Lopo Alves recites the one-hundred and eighty pages of his drama; and the abduction of the hero, who is forced to embark on a journey with two men disguised as policemen that accuse him of having stolen a valuable "Turkish slipper".

This story exemplifies the crucial role that the principles of repetition and variation play in Machado's fiction. However, this is not only a process of standardization that allowed Machado to quickly produce a great number of stories that he then submitted to the papers to obtain his due revenue. In fact, the iterative mechanism of Machado's fantastic tales is spread across time, carefully construed, and developed with precision and nuance, suggesting that the author searched for a long time and in various grounds, in a cyclical movement, for the core of the supernatural element in his writing, trying perhaps to get deeper and closer to it,

or perhaps trying to avoid it and keep it as elusive as possible. In any case, when we understand the consistency and the insistence of Machado's quest, it seems inevitable to realize that his supernatural writing is also, and perhaps above all else, about the search for itself.

Even Duarte, the alleged thief of the Turkish slipper, sees the central element in the story of which he is the protagonist — the slipper — as a "pura metáfora" [pure metaphor], that is, as part of an allegorical image of the story itself: "tratava-se do coração de Cecília, que ele roubara, delito de que o queria punir o já imaginado rival" (129) [it was Cecília's heart, which he had stolen — a crime for which the already foreseen rival wanted to punish him].

The hero is advancing a hypothetical interpretation of his own dream. Nevertheless, regardless of his being right or wrong about his assumptions, by simply making them it is as if he were decoding, at the same time as experiencing, the strange auto-allegorical dimension of the story, uncovering its *storyness* and denouncing it as a fictional construct. In other words, the hero is reading the story where he is written, performing it, as Paul Dixon suggests is *Os Contos de Machado de Assis*, as a "teoria da percepção" [theory of perception] and a "discurso sobre o ato de leitura" [discourse on the act of reading] (Dixon 1992: 100).

The drama written by Lopo Alves, a fictional text within this fictional text, is nothing but the reproduction of "os lances, os caracteres, as *ficelles*, e até o estilo dos mais acabados tipos do romantismo desgrenhado" (*PA*: 123) [the moves, the characters, the *ficelles*, and even the style of the most perfect types of disheveled romanticism]. Kept by duty and interest, since as a relative of Cecília, Lopo Alves may intercede on his behalf, Duarte is bound to miss his opportunity of arriving that same evening at Rio Comprido still in time to be in the company of the young girl. However, his sacrifice to Alves' insufferable drama is compensated by the matrimonial nightmare that, steeped in anxiety, he fabricates himself. In it, Duarte is finally brought to the presence of the owner of the Turkish slipper and coerced into marrying her.

This nameless entity is described as nothing less than an angel of poetry, but also as Cecília's double, that is, as a living phantom:

> Não era mulher, era uma sílfide, uma visão de poeta, uma criatura divina.
>   Era loura; tinha os olhos azuis, como os de Cecília, extáticos, uns olhos que buscavam o céu ou pareciam viver dele. Os cabelos, desleixadamente penteados, faziam-lhe em volta da cabeça um como resplendor de santa; santa somente, não mártir, porque o sorriso que lhe desabrochava os lábios, era um sorriso de bem-aventurança, como raras vezes há de ter tido a terra.
>   Um vestido branco, de finíssima cambraia, envolvia-lhe castamente o corpo, cujas formas aliás desenhava, pouco para os olhos, mas muito para a imaginação. (131-2)

> [She was not a woman, but a sylphid, a poet's vision, a divine creature.
>   She was blonde; she had blue eyes, like Cecília's, and ecstatic, eyes that searched the heaven or seemed to live in it. Her hair, loosely combed, formed the radiance of a saint around her head; but only a saint, not a martyr, because the smile that bloomed on her lips was a smile of bliss, such as the Earth has seldom had.
>   A white dress, of very fine soft cotton, was chastely wrapped around her body, whose forms it drew, little for the eyes, but much for the imagination.]

The dream, however, is in no way a happy alternative to the encounter with Cecília, for Duarte not only has no intention of marrying the sylphid as he is also promised a certain death in doing so. I have stated that "The Turkish Slipper" reenacts the marry-or-die plotline, but, in fact, it takes it one step further, turning it into a marry-and-die inescapable *telos*. Duarte may either marry the seraphic creature, write his will and testament, and swallow a fatal drug from the Levant, or refuse to marry her and be immediately shot to death (132-3).

The compensation that the nightmare represents comes then from the fact that it is a counter-narrative to Lopo Alves' drama, opposing the *fantastic* to the *romantic* in terms that revive the distinction between "originality" and "commonness" that I have pointed out before in different stories. After seeing out the Major, Duarte thinks to himself: "Ninfa, doce amiga, fantasia inquieta e fértil, tu me salvaste de uma ruim peça com um sonho original, substituíste-me o tédio por um pesadelo: foi um bom negócio" (135-6) [Nymph, sweet friend, restless and

fertile fantasy, you have saved me from a lousy play with an original dream, you have traded tediousness for a nightmare: it was a good deal].

In the end, "The Turkish Slipper" may well be a metaphor of an interpretable dream, but also a metaphor of the conceptualization and ethics of literature guiding Machado. It stands for a stylistic opposition that, as much as it seems reducible in the discourse of the stories to an easy win of uncommon originality over redundant Romanticism, still comes up at the heart of Machado's work, showing by its very recurrence that it is not so easily resolved. As all the "matrimonial horror" stories suggest, Machado may pretend to shake off and dispense with the excessive romantic facet of his precursors, his contemporaries, and himself. However, he actually manages, by "supernaturalizing" it, to transform the romantic and to preserve it at the same time, keeping it latent under its own caricature.

A comparative reading of "Eternal Life" and "The Turkish Slipper" makes it all the more evident that Machado developed his compelled-marriage plot by keeping the constant, abnormally attractive quality in the female character (regardless of her changing nature), while working on a growing sense of peril and destruction associated with the hero's union to her.

In other words, there is an ascending gradation of horror from the conciliatory plot of "The Angel Raphael", in which the couple finds happiness, to the paradoxical desire that Amaral feels for Augusta in "Captain Mendonça", whose expectations the hero can no longer fulfill, since they threaten his life, and the murderous plot in Camilo and Eusébia's marriage in "Eternal Life" as well as in the marriage between Duarte and the owner of the slipper in "The Turkish Slipper" (both of which implicate the complete destruction of the male partner). It seems significant in these narratives that, as the male character is ever more vulnerable, the female character is increasingly dehumanized: from a deluded girl to an artificial humanoid

endowed with a soul, and an actress or a phantom, or even an animated painting in "Mariana" (*Jornal das Famílias*, 1871).

In "A Skeleton" (*Jornal das Famílias*, 1875), five years after "Eternal Life", we see that Machado would still go one step further in his dehumanization of the female, whom, we must not forget, is not exactly a mimetic representative of real, living women, but a figure of the fantastic who, as such, must tread a path of growing unknowability and *denaturalization*. In this story, Dr. Belém is "married" to two women: D. Marcelina, a modest and kind woman whom he recently espoused, and the skeleton of Luísa, his deceased wife, whom he wrongfully murdered with his own hands for suspecting her of adultery. Thus, the "triangular desire" of jealousy that punctuated the backdrop of other stories becomes central in "A Skeleton".

Remorseful for having killed his first wife unjustly, Dr. Belém keeps her skeleton by his side, to converse and socialize with and make love to, even at dinner table in the presence of his new wife, horrified by the scene. What is more remarkable in the psychological profile of yet another of Machado's mad geniuses or demented scientists is the fact that Dr. Belém is an inveterate and unrepentant jealous. He does not hesitate to tell Alberto an additional reason for his keeping the skeleton in the light of day: "para que minha segunda mulher esteja sempre ao pé da minha vítima, a fim de que se não esqueça nunca dos seus deveres, porque, então como sempre, é mui provável que eu não procure apurar a verdade; farei justiça por minhas mãos" (*CEsq*: 86) [for my second wife to be at all times close by my victim, so that she never forgets her duties, because, then as ever, it is quite probable that will not look to ascertain the truth; I will do justice by my own hands].

These menacing words are, of course, ominously and intimately tied to a principle of repetition imbued in the story. Dr. Belém's and the reader's guess is that Alberto could be the new lover in a second story of betrayal, regardless of the fact that the first story was made up.

In fact, the game of rivalry that, as a Girardian "*vaniteux*", Dr. Belém plays (to himself) with Alberto, suggests that *he wants* Alberto to be his wife's lover, according to the principle that "if the mediator himself [or Alberto] desires the object [or D. Marcelina]", "it is even this very desire, real or presumed, which makes this object infinitely desirable in the eyes of the subject" [or Dr. Belém] (Girard 1965: 7). The repetition of inexistent or *fictional* antecedents, however, is not so strange in Machado's tales. In fact, it is an inherent trait of his writing, working even at an intertextual level, as we have seen in the three-knocks-on-the-door cycle.

It is not clear if Dr. Belém had reasons, or not, to suspect of Alberto and Marcelina, but it is obvious that the two of them grow increasingly closer in their timid resistance to the scientist's mania, to the point of being falsely accused in an anonymous letter which would later be traced back to one of Marcelina's former suitors. Alberto's suggestion is that Bento Soares, the suitor, wrote the incriminating letter merely out of spite and humiliation.

In any case, Dr. Belém finds himself unable to fulfill his promise, and ends up sparing the lives of the possibly innocent pair, while running away and disappearing into the jungle where he had been conducting his research on botany. The ghastly image of Dr. Belém, as a true and hopeless necrophile, holding tight to the skeleton of his first wife as he abandons the civilized world is like a grotesque version of Máximo's search for the palest woman on earth in "A Mulher Pálida" [The Pale Woman], published in *A Estação* six years later, in 1881. It seems that Dr. Belém and Máximo face their disappointments in love with such a degree of morbidity that only Death herself, the skeletal, *palest woman*, can meet their demands.

Regarding this topic, Machado's last supernatural story, "Um Sonho e Outro Sonho" [A Dream and Another Dream] (*A Estação*, 1892), corresponds to a radical inversion of some of its most prominent features. To begin with, the *dead* object of love is, for the first time, a man: Genoveva's late husband, dead for three years. Her precocious widowhood — Genoveva

is "twenty-four years old, beautiful and rich" (*RCV* I: 301) — makes of her the only female in these stories that is also a potential necrophile. However, her relationship with the deceased *bacharel* Marcondes, also known as "Nhônhô", develops in ways that distance Genoveva from the necrophilic lovers and jealous maniacs that we have encountered, despite the fact that she, too, is in the middle of a typically Machadian love triangle.

Like Cecília, in "The Angel of Maidens", Genoveva has solemnly sworn not to marry (or, in her specific case, not to remarry), and she easily dismisses all suitors whose names are hopelessly "inscribed in the book of passengers" (302). Unlike Cecília, however, Genoveva is not a virgin. She has been married once and she is knowledgeable of matrimonial life. What keeps her from remarrying is not the fear of what might be expecting her, but the memory of her past love and her prevailing sense of duty as a wife. In fact, Marcondes haunts Genoveva continuously in his portrait, which — the verb is ironic — "vivia no quarto dela, pendente da parede, moldura de ouro, coberta de crepe" [lived in her bedroom, hanging from the wall, framed in gold, covered in crepe]. It is said, furthermore, that Genoveva "não se deitava sem lançar o último olhar ao retrato, que parecia olhar para ela" (302) [would not go to bed without looking one last time at the portrait, which seemed to look back at her].

However, Genoveva's resilience begins to give way to the efforts of her most cunning suitor, *bacharel* Oliveira, who, unlike his competitors, seems to understand her disposition, and, instead of trying to persuade or seduce her, shows an impeccable neutrality and a lack of immediate interest in his friendship with her. As soon as Genoveva starts feeling the danger of her growing fondness for Oliveira, she has her first dream. This is when, as a hybrid of the Angel of Maidens and an unfairly jealous husband, the spirit of Marcondes appears to her, to make her a solemn request: "não conspurques o teu amor com as carícias de outro homem" (313) [do not defile your love with the caresses of another man].

Genoveva is deeply impressed by her nightly visitation, and naturally recedes, at first, from her relations with Oliveira. However, it is important to observe that her dream is not just an expression of her own anxiety. Genoveva's marriage, as her mother confides to one of the unfortunate suitors, had been literally *romanesco*. She and Marcondes were impressed by "a mesma linha da mesma página" [the same line in the same page] of a certain novel (303). In addition, the dead husband had himself written a few poems and even one novel, *A Bela do Sepúlcro* [The Beauty of the Tomb],

> cuja heroína era uma moça que, havendo perdido o esposo, ia passar os dias no cemitério, ao pé da sepultura dele. Um moço, que ia passar as tardes no mesmo cemitério, ao pé da sepultura da noiva, viu-a e admirou aquela constância póstuma, tão irmã da sua; ela o viu também, e a identidade da situação os fez amados um do outro. A viúva, porém, quando ele a pediu em casamento, negou-se e morreu oito dias depois.
>   Genoveva tinha presente este romance do marido. Havia-o lido mais de vinte vezes, e nada achava tão patético nem mais natural. (304-5)
>
> [whose heroine was a young woman who, having lost her husband, spent her days at the cemetery, by his grave. A young man, who spent his afternoons in the same cemetery, by the grave of his bride, saw her and admired her posthumous constancy, so akin to his own; she saw him, too, and the similarity of their situation made them fall in love. When he asked her to marry him, however, the widow declined and died eight days later.
>   Genoveva had her husband's novel in mind. She had read more than twenty times, and there was nothing she found as pathetic and more natural.]

In *The Beauty of the Tomb*, the association between death and marriage seems to be intimate yet uncertain. We cannot tell if the widow dies of natural causes, if she is sacrificed for the betrayal that her new love represents (even if she does not act on it), or if she succumbs, precisely, to the regret of not having acted on it. We also do not know how Genoveva interprets her late husband's novel exactly, but her dreams seem to be clearly based on it.

Genoveva's second dream — as her union to Oliveira is increasingly unavoidable and the danger of her breaking her oneiric promise all the more real — makes it evident that, like in many of James's fantastic stories, the concept of ghost-text discussed in Chapter 2 aptly

defines the relationship between *The Beauty of the Tomb* (by Marcondes) and "A Dream and Another Dream" (by Machado). To a great extent, Machado's story is haunted by Marcondes's story (a *fictional fiction*) which is both its double and its diametral opposite. Both texts reflect, substantiate, and ultimately annihilate each other.

As the Beauty in her husband's funereal novel, Genoveva anticipates her own death. After treading the path into hell in her sleep, her mouth covered by the hand of her executioner (Oliveira), she receives her husband's final sentence: "Morrerás se casares!" (322) [You will die if you marry!]. The crucial difference between the two *characters*, however, is that the Beauty of the Tomb has died even without remarrying. The only conclusion Genoveva might draw from the conflict between her husband's novel and the verdict that he applies to her life is that death seems to be, for her, the only certain outcome in any case. As I suggested above, the two fictions feed on and neutralize each other, allowing for an alternative third conclusion to arise. By the end of the story, Genoveva pushes superstition abruptly aside, discerns dreams from reality, and reduces her experience to just fancy: "São sonhos!" [They're just dreams!]. The narrator concludes: "Casou e não morreu" (322) [She got married and did not die].

It seems particularly striking that, as the protagonist manages to overcome her fears, reintegrate the fantastic segment of the story into reality, and reclaim her life, she is, to a great extent, also dismantling the foundations of Machado's "matrimonial horror". Genoveva is no longer a Beauty of the Tomb. She is an anti-Cecília who, instead of becoming captive of her fears and of the stories given to her, can intervene in fiction and *see through* it, thus plotting her own way out of the dilemma. In a way, Machado's final supernatural story, "A Dream and Another Dream", is a rewriting of one of his earliest ones, "The Angel of Maidens", mirrored in the protagonist's "rewriting" of her late husband's melodramatic novel.

As the inverted reflection of that story, written thirty years before it, "A Dream and Another Dream" shows that, as an accomplished writer, having published two of his so-called realist novels, *The Posthumous Memoirs* and *Quincas Borba*, Machado returned one last time to the topic of "matrimonial horror", not to revive it, but to dismantle it. What has changed?

Here, reality and fiction are no longer mutually suppressing, but, instead, mutually *enabling*. If it were not for Genoveva's horrifying dreams, she would not have the impetus to go against the delirium of her husband's ghostly presence. However, it would be a mistake to understand this radically different and apparently nullifying take on the supernatural as a triumph of realism. The author of a supposedly realist novel that claims to have been written by a dead man seems to be suggesting, now, that reality (Genoveva's and Brás Cubas' lives) and fancy (Genoveva's dreams and Brás Cubas's posthumous activity) are more reconcilable in the realm of fiction (in her rewriting of Marcondes' novel and in his writing of his memoirs, *and* in Machado's writing of both) — and, in fact, more inextricable —, than even he himself had previously considered. As demonstrated in the final section, this idea is developed with a special significance in the endings of many of the stories.

1.10. New Endings Are New Beginnings

Arriving at the last stage of my reflection on Machado, I return to "A Skeleton". This story does not stop at the disappearance of the mad scientist, Dr. Belém, as he escapes into the forest. In fact, the first-person narrator, Alberto, makes a final addendum that disconcerts his audience and reverts the story by bringing its fictionality into the heart of the storytelling scene. Alberto's final remark shatters the expectations that the members of his audience had set on him, dissolves the gratification they looked for in his narrative, and betrays their hope

of enlightenment as to the nature of Dr. Belém, introduced in the opening lines as the most

"eccentric" of characters in the most enticing story that Alberto had ever come across:

> Alberto acabara a história.
> — Mas é um doudo esse teu Dr. Belém! exclamou um dos convivas rompendo o silêncio de terror em que ficara o auditório.
> — Ele doudo? disse Alberto. Um doudo seria efetivamente se porventura esse homem tivesse existido. Mas o Dr. Belém não existiu nunca, eu quis apenas fazer apetite para tomar chá. Mandem vir o chá.
> É inútil dizer o efeito desta declaração. (*CEsq*: 90)

> [Alberto had finished his story.
> — But he is a madman, your Dr. Belém! exclaimed one of the audience members, breaking the horrified silence into which had fallen the auditorium.
> — Him, mad? Alberto replied. He would be mad, in fact, if he had ever existed. But Dr. Belém never existed, and I only meant to open our appetites for tea.
> It is needless to describe the effect that this declaration had.]

Alberto destroys in one swift blow the entire narrative edifice whose building up his

audience, and us, readers, had been eagerly witnessing. The effect of his final declaration on

his narratee is, of course, that of utter disappointment, including perhaps a dose of humiliation,

or, at least, of self-awareness, for so easily and willingly falling for a hoax. However, Alberto

is certainly not alone in exercising his cruel pleasure. Like Maupassant in the final paragraphs

of "La main" (see p. 270), Machado is making use of his narrator to address and provoke his

bourgeois readership, and particularly, as we may assume, those among it with a penchant for

ghostly tales. He offers his readers something radically different from what they expected and,

instead of satisfying their hunger and curiosity for the supernatural, tells them what they know

but do not expect to be reminded of by the work itself: what they just read is *only* a story.

We must not take this, however, as a mere *caçoada*, or a meaningless joke between

the writer and, alternatively, his more cunning or his more naïve readers. In fact, to say that

the story is *only a story* complicates matters significantly. For, by intentionally breaking the

"suspension of disbelief", Alberto's closure brings into the context of narration a problem of

storyness and hermeneutics, of what constitutes or does not constitute a story, of how we can discern a fake story from a real one, and both from reality. It also emphasizes the implications of an experience of aesthetic imagination that overflows the text to inundate the world of the reader, be influenced by this transit and influence the text in return.

To make things clearer, I return to the idea, defended or reproduced by many of the critics and scholars I have referred to in the beginning of this chapter, that very often Machado explores the short story's typically abrupt conclusion to rationalize his supernatural tales and dissolve any properly fantastic reading of them. On a first level, as in "A Skeleton", this does seem to be true, insofar as the weird narrative is dismantled and reframed in an orderly setting. However, on a deeper level, "rationalization", in the sense of "naturalization" — a term taking us inexorably close to naturalism and, ultimately, to realism —, is hardly the appropriate word to describe what we find in these stories.

The epistemic problem that Alberto leaves in our hands by the end of "A Skeleton" is not one of knowing whether Dr. Belém was a madman or a genius, or if the story was real or not. We are explicitly told that it was *not real*, it was made up, and it is the narrator himself that denounces his story as *falsa fictio*, as an exercise in eloquence and persuasion, shining as such before our eyes. But what can we do with it? And how should we read a story that, instead of purporting to be a reflection of real life or of *a life said to be real* (and whose value as truth we could, of course, deem higher or lower according to our knowledge of the world and our interpretive criteria), confesses to be a magnificent lie, a construct of language that only exists in language? How to approach stories that are not "naturalized" but "fictionalized", that is, that present themselves emphatically *as fiction*?

Trying to address these questions, we inevitably realize that Machado found a way to make us reconsider our relation with literature according to a principle of fictional *actuality*

that I have addressed before in what concerns the dreams of "The Angel Raphael" and "The Decadence of Two Great Men". But a confrontation with further examples of meta-narrative fabrication — a pretense [*fingimento*] that Ivan Teixeira thinks is the "essência da revolução machadiana" (1987: 60) [essence of the Machadian revolution], and Abel Barros Baptista calls, alternatively, the author's "ficção da ficção" (Baptista 1991: 122) [fiction of fiction] — may help in the formulation of a tentative answer.

One of the most important examples of this process is found in "No Eyes". As I have summarized above, this story becomes problematic from the moment the narrator finds out he has fallen for the joke of Damasceno, like Cecília had fallen for Tibúrcio's joke in "The Angel of Chimeras", like Alberto's listeners had fallen for his joke in "A Skeleton", and like we have fallen, during a portion of our reading, for Machado's joke in all these stories.

As has been pointed out, the problem with "No Eyes" is that, although he finds out that Lucinda never existed and was never brutally tortured, and that Damasceno never met her, Cruz still had seen her ghost. He cannot doubt that *fact*: "De pé, junto à parede, vi uma mulher lívida, a mesma do retrato, com os cabelos soltos, e os olhos... Os olhos, esses eram duas cavidades vazias e ensangüentadas" (*RCV* II: 116) [I saw a livid woman standing by the wall, the same woman who was in the portrait, with her loose hair, and her eyes… The eyes, those were two empty and bloody cavities].

This is the unsolvable mystery that Cruz presents his listeners with, and it is also what leads Marcelo Fernandes to call "No Eyes" the only "strictly fantastic" story born out of Machado's pen (2011: 10). Fernandes's inference is logical. "No Eyes" is rigorously fantastic because a supernatural apparition has indeed taken place, and while we know it is impossible according to the realistic parameters of the story, an alternative, rational explanation for the vision is not offered. The reader is thus placed before the classic dilemma enveloping James's

governess in "The Turn of the Screw", and which Todorov analyzes as a crucial example in his essay on the fantastic: has the apparition really taken place, or is the narrator a madman or a temporary lunatic? We cannot decide solely based on textual clues.

However, the problem with this reasoning, for me, is that it overlooks one absolutely crucial aspect of the Machadian text. Differently from Henry James, Machado does not locate the undecidedness of his supernatural story in an element of plot whose lines are blurred. What Machado aims at in "A Skeleton" and "No Eyes" is to transgress the breach between the telling and the told, making those two dimensions jump out of the page instead of merging. Thus, the conclusion of the story is contradicted by the end of narration, which disavows the *fabula* that came before it and forces us to restart our reading in view of new knowledge, as well as taking different analytical principles into account. In the end, otherworldly settings and figures may be destroyed *without* destroying the effect of the fantastic, because Machado posits metaleptic ambiguity, and not narrative undecidedness, as the source of the supernatural in his stories.

Gérard Genette's original definition of metalepsis in *Figures III* (1973) conceives it from the start as the materialization of impossibilities, as a "transition from one narrative level to another" that is "always transgressive" (1980: 234-5). It should be noted, with regards to Machado's exploration of thresholds between extradiegetic and intradiegetic — and not rarely metadiegetic — worlds, that Genette's analysis of metalepsis develops through the association of that figure with the *unnatural* in various senses:

> any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) (…) produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical (…) or fantastic.
> (…)
> All these games, by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude — a boundary

that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells. (235-6)[50]

With the risk of generalizing, we could say that in most of Machado's supernatural stories it is precisely the ruination of the fantastic plot that reinforces or provides the raw basis for the edification of the fantastic text as an act of "defiance" that is both comical *and* fantastic. According to this perspective, the ambiguity of "No Eyes" cannot be illustrated in the question "Is Cruz insane, or has he actually seen a ghost?", like the one inevitably put to the governess of "The Turn of the Screw". In fact, unlike James's novella, Machado's text is perfectly clear as to its epistemic structure: Cruz *is not insane*, nevertheless *he has seen a ghost*, and *the ghost he undoubtedly saw is a fabrication* of Damasceno. Then our question should be: "How can Cruz see a ghost that does not exist, of a person who never existed? What are the conditions of possibility for such a radically fictive apparition?". The answer, I believe, takes us back to the concept of metaleptic fiction, explored by Machado as an integral part of his stories and of the narrative levels (and ontological worlds) that they transgress.

This transgression is illustrated to perfection in "No Eyes" in the parallelism between the vision of Lucinda and the vision of the moon, adding to the fact that *lua*, in Portuguese,

---

[50] The transgressive and unnatural character of metalepsis has been reinstated in more recent explorations of the figure in contemporary narratology, in ways that help substantiate an argument regarding Machado's use of it in his systematic challenging of borders between reality and imagination. Furthermore, the very terminology surrounding the concept is an indication of how fruitful it might be, and how neglected it has been, as a possible aspect of supernatural fiction. This is particularly evident in the studies of Marie-Laure Ryan, and Alice Bell and Jan Alber on "ontological metalepsis" (as opposed to "rhetorical metalepsis") taking place between distinct worlds as, for instance, that of diegesis and that of the empirical reader. In *Avatars of Story*, Ryan states that "Communication presupposes indeed that all participants belong to the same world; this is why speaking to the spirit world is generally considered a paranormal activity. […] [O]ntological metalepsis opens a passage between levels that results in their interpenetration, or mutual contamination. These levels, needless to say, must be separated by the type of boundary that I call ontological: *a switch between two radically distinct worlds, such as 'the real' versus 'the imaginary,' or the world of 'normal' (or lucid) mental activity versus the world of dream or hallucination*" (2006: 207, my italics). Bell & Alber, in turn, insist that ontological metalepses consist of "disorienting transgressions of boundaries that are physically of logically impossible, and hence *properly unnatural*" (2012: 167, my italics).

may be read as an abbreviation of the ghost's name. One of Damasceno's theories is that the moon does not exist at all and is merely "an illusion of the senses":

> A lua, meu rico vizinho, não existe, a lua é uma hipótese, uma ilusão dos sentidos, um simples produto da retina dos nossos olhos. É isto que a ciência ainda não disse; é isto o que convém proclamar ao mundo. Em certos dias do mês, o olho humano padece uma contração nervosa que produz o fenômeno lunar. Nessas ocasiões, ele supõe que vê no espaço um círculo redondo, branco e luminoso; o círculo está nos próprios olhos do homem. (*RCV* II: 101)

> [The moon, my dear neighbor, does not exist; the moon is a hypothesis, an illusion of the senses, a simple product of the retina in our eyes. This is what science has not yet stated; this is ought to be proclaimed to the world. In certain days of the month, the human eye suffers a nervous contraction that produces the lunar phenomenon. On those occasions, it supposes to behold in space a rounded, white and luminous circle; the circle is in the very eyes of man.]

Later, while Cruz illuminates his audience about the inexistence of Lucinda — about the fact that she can only have been "a product of the retina" —, he recapitulates Damasceno's astronomical theory in terms that undermine the supposed rationalization of the story: "Não havia dúvida: o episódio que ele [Damasceno] me referira era uma ilusão como a da lua, uma pura ilusão dos sentidos, uma simples invenção de alienado" (119) [It was clear: the episode he (Damasceno) described me had been an illusion like that of the moon, a pure illusion of the senses, the simple fabrication of a lunatic].

Before seeing Lucinda's ghost, Cruz takes Damasceno's theory about the inexistence of the moon as nothing but harmless, foolish talk. After having the vision, he displays it before his audience as a basic axiom. As an "illusion of the senses", the vision of Lucinda is *analogon* with the vision of the moon. The problem with this equivalence is that it reconceives the moon itself as the fabrication of a lunatic (pun intended), collapsing any distinction between sensory experience and imaginative experience.

The change in Cruz's worldview keeps him locked in an irresolvable double-bind: if the moon is true, then Lucinda is true; if Lucinda is an illusion of the senses, then the moon is an illusion of the senses as well. In fact, both Lucinda (an emblem of fiction), and the moon (an emblem of reality), are real and false at the same time, insofar as — from the moment Damasceno's hoax is unveiled and Machado's text becomes metaliterary — they participate as correlative self-referential images in a world made of metonymic language. As Charles E. May argues to be the case in "many contemporary, self-reflexive short stories", "No Eyes" is a tale whose "[c]haracters become inextricably enmeshed in their own dual fiction-reality status; the two realms entangle to suggest that all existential dilemmas are fictional, just as all fictional dilemmas are existential" (1989: 66).

Fiction is what makes non-referential ghosts (or self-referential words) a possibility, and, more than that, a central element of its constituency. In other words, literary language is inherently ghostly. It follows from this that all fiction — even in naturalistic representations, like that of Earth's satellite — is supernatural, and not a matter of coincidence with the natural world, which may also not coincide with itself as a representation. The moon may be a lie.

This threatening unreality that haunts the characters of "No Eyes" and lies at the heart of many of Machado's stories — with a particular incidence on those that include a metalepsis of the reader — is construed by Genette as a troublesome thought-process that the metaleptic structure in narrative fiction is bound to produce inside and outside of it: "The most troubling thing about metalepsis indeed lies in this unacceptable and insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees — you and I — perhaps belong to some narrative" (1980: 236).

Just like *desembargador* Cruz, unable to erase the apparition of Lucinda even after finding out that the girl never existed, much less her ghost, we cannot turn our eyes away from

the fact that these stories are fictitious — they state it loudly — and yet we have developed a relationship with them based on cognition and illusion. If instead of negotiating a "suspension of disbelief" with his reader Machado presents his fiction *as fiction*, we, as interpreters, have to renegotiate our relationship with literature and no longer predicate it on a safe similarity or a clear difference toward reality. After all, we also have seen or imagined Lucinda.

To put it simply, Machado confronts us directly with the fact that, like his characters, we create relationships with, have feelings for, and draw experiences and conclusions from fictional constructs, judged with the same principles by which we judge our own world, using words and analogies for that purpose. As a result, our world is inevitably judged back, as the fiction that tricks us also forces us to question our own abilities of good judgment.

This ironic, creative and interpretive principle is materialized, almost allegorized, in "Os Óculos de Pedro Antão" [The Glasses of Pedro Antão] (*Jornal das Famílias*, 1874). In this story, Pedro convinces his friend Mendonça of all the more relevant facts concerning the life and death of the latter's uncle, Pedro Antão, whose house Mendonça has inherited. Neither Pedro — sharing his first name with the deceased — nor Mendonça had ever met Pedro Antão. Nevertheless, Pedro manages to gather all the necessary information and to bridge all the gaps in Antão's story through a careful analysis of his surroundings and of all the objects scattered in the house, and particularly in the attic. He seems to have absolute faith in his own capacities as a detective and an interpreter, as well as in the truthfulness of his report: "Tudo o que até aqui tenho dito é a verdade; do estudo destes objetos que vemos a conclusão que tiro, é que só a minha narração pode explicar a vida de Pedro Antão" (*CA*: 157) [All I have said so far is the truth; the conclusion I arrive at, from the study of these objects we have before our eyes, is that only my narration can explain the life of Pedro Antão].

Eventually, Pedro and Mendonça discover a note written by Antão himself, and in it they find that they have fallen into a trap that the old man had laid out for "idiots" like them:

Meu sobrinho. Deixo o mundo sem saudades. Vivo recluso tanto tempo para me acostumar à morte. Ultimamente li algumas obras de filosofia da história, e tais coisas vi, tais explicações encontrei de fatos até aqui reconhecidos, que tive uma idéia excêntrica. Deixei aí uma escada de seda, uns óculos verdes, que eu nunca usei, e outros objetos, a fim de que tu ou algum pascácio igual inventassem a meu respeito um romance, que toda a gente acreditaria até o achado deste papel. Livra-te da filosofia da história.

Calcule agora o leitor o efeito deste escrito, espécie de dedo invisível que me deitava por terra o edifício da minha interpretação!

Daí para cá não interpretei à primeira vista todas as aparências. (164)

[*My nephew. I shall not miss the world I am leaving. I have been secluded for so long so as to get used to death. I have recently read a few works on the philosophy of history, and I have seen such things, I have found such explanations to facts hitherto accepted, that I had an eccentric idea. I have left there a silk ladder, some green glasses which I have never worn, as well as other objects, so that you, or another idiot like you, would make up a story about me, one in which everyone would believe until the finding of this paper. Rid yourself from the philosophy of history.*

Let the reader imagine the effect of this message, a kind of invisible finger wrecking down the edifice of my interpretation!

From then on, I have not interpreted any evidence at first sight.]

Focusing on the destruction of Pedro's whimsical narrative, denounced as fake by the words of a "ghost", Marcelo Fernandes also defends a principle of "naturalization" in what comes to this story, stating that it is constructed "in the manner of Poe" (2011: 10). He means that the detective-like investigation carried out in the narrative manages to rationalize, or to explain, an apparently unexplainable story, as it is also a well-known process in the American writer's making and unmaking of suspense. The problem with this view, however, is that once again it neglects the essential constituency of Machado's tale and of the author's fabrication of the supernatural in a manner that is very different from Poe's.51

---

51 Notwithstanding my position concerning specifically "The Glasses of Pedro Antão", I do agree with Patrícia Lessa Flores da Cunha in her general view that a correlation may be established between Machado and Edgar Allan Poe on the basis of their aesthetic modernity, one they both arrived at "ao priorizar o processo criador como um feixe de técnicas, como um fazer refletido e ponderado" (1998: 91) [by prioritizing the creative process as a set of techniques, as a reflected and thought craft] (1998: 91). Elaborating on this subject, Cunha underlines precisely Machado's critical, *reflective* conscience and activity: "Crítico, e praticante da crítica *per*

In "The Glasses of Pedro Antão", the fantastic story is not rationalized and explained according to the analysis of tangible evidence. On the contrary, it can never be reintegrated into the real world because Pedro Antão's note has shown us that it is totally and utterly *false*, and predictably false. Unlike Poe's detectives, the more meticulous Pedro is in his gathering of clues and in his task of interpreting them, the more of a fantasist he becomes right before our eyes. The more he substantiates his story with visible evidence, the more fictional it gets. In fact, Pedro's story is already the flawed explanation of the scattered bones of a story which, in turn — and in the aporia of story-making — can never be *explained* back.

But this is no surprise. Both Mendonça and the reader know that Pedro had never had any direct contact with Pedro Antão or gained any real knowledge of the *facts* that he uncovers as his imaginative eyes peruse the house. Pedro is also aware of his fabrication and of his own interpretive hubris, and describes himself as a novelist and a fiction writer. He even commits a narratological and/or meta-narrative slip of the tongue in his dialogue with Mendonça: "O leitor facilmente calculará... / —Que leitor? / —Foi engano. Quero dizer que tu facilmente calcularás as emoções do namorado [Pedro Antão] antes de cometer o rapto" (*CA*: 160) [The reader will easily guess... / —What reader? / —It was a mistake. I mean you will easily guess the lover's [Pedro Antão's] emotions before committing the abduction].

Pedro's accidental metalepsis may be seen as a symbolic moment that concentrates what is for Machado an essential possibility of the supernatural genre: an ironic transgression that destabilizes the world of fiction so as to destabilize the world of the "reader". At the same

---

se, da crítica enquanto julgamento estético, enquanto análise e consideração das obras literárias do Brasil passado, [Machado] teve, assim como Poe, a intuição da crítica moderna — a instância decisiva da interpretação não é a vida dos escritores, é a linguagem da obra, em que o foco do olhar crítico deve sempre incidir no universe das formas" (91) [A critic, and a practitioner of criticism *per se*, of criticism as an aesthetic judgement, as the analysis and consideration of literary works from the Brazil of the past, [Machado] had, just like Poe, the intuition of modern criticism — the decisive instance of interpretation is not the life of writers, it is the language of the work, in which the focus of the critical eye should always be on the universe of forms].

time, and more broadly, it constitutes a visible extension of what Schwarz calls Machado's historically contextual yet intrinsically transgressive "nonaesthetic aestheticism" (see p. 41, note 27). That narratorial outburst not only confers the story a subtle self-reflexive dimension — without which it would indeed be a Poe-like narrative based on the accumulation of tension followed by its naturalization —, but it also reopens the sutures between story and discourse, verisimilitude and fictionality, the world of storytelling and the world of the reader, included and *made up* in the former. Making these typically dissociate realms bleed into each other, Machado suggests that "the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic".

The seepage between different dimensions associated with the *literary* tells us that they are not totally separate, but it does so without erasing the differences between them. In fact, according to Genette's reflection, underlining — and not erasing — a "shifting boundary" is the crucial step of metalepsis, without which the figure would dissipate. The approximation of different dimensions shows the short-circuits produced when they are brought so intimately together, and moments of overlap between the world of reality and the world of fiction (and between metadiegetic worlds) trigger sudden flashes of consciousness in a process of *reader-awareness* that William O'Rourke believes to be a central characteristic of the modern short story, equipped with a visible "exoskeletal structure" which, "like the sermon, asks readers to contemplate what they experience while experiencing it; in other words, they are asked to be reflective, self-examining, conscious of their apprehension of the story they read: the hallmark of the written form" (1989: 201). In this respect, it is significant that "Eternal Life", the last of Machado's three-knocks stories, contains a "meta-editorial" ending:

> No dia seguinte, acordamos tarde e almoçamos alegremente. Ao sair, disse-me o Vaz:
> — Por que não escreves o teu sonho para o *Jornal das Famílias*?
> — Homem, talvez.
> — Pois escreve, que eu o mando ao Garnier. (*CA*: 99)

[The next day, we woke up late and had a joyous lunch. Vaz asked as he left:
— Why don't you write your dream for the *Jornal das Famílias*?
— Well man, perhaps.
— So, do it, and I will send it to Garnier.]

In Camilo's final words, what looks like the dismantling of the fantastic is dismantled in return when we are confronted with a new destabilization of the criteria of plausibility. Or, in other words, the story's "rationalization" (that is, its fall back into reality) is re-fictionalized in ways that corroborate Geyer's defense of Machado's ironic fantastic as a literary means of exposing "the true nature of language as one of mutability and aporia" (see p. 92).

Camilo's dream was in fact published in the *Jornal das Famílias* of January of 1870, which was in fact edited by Baptiste Louis Garnier, and which was in fact where contemporary readers found it originally. However, all these factual elements collaborate in making up the fiction of a fiction (to use Baptista's formulation [p. 110]). In the last analysis, what is fantastic in this story is not Camilo's dream, but the metaleptic *text* in which the story is told, contained in the narration contained in it, as a materialized impossibility or a "fantastic literary event" (Geyer). Therefore, by suggesting to his readers that they are actually reading the work of a character, Machado is telling them they are the witnesses to a fiction-come-true, a "thing" on which Camilo — and not him — put a "*figura*" (Auerbach, see p. 60).

The transference of authorship of the text published in the *Jornal das Famílias*, and not of the narration or of the story *per se*, to Camilo, the narrator, indicates that there is more to this coda. Apart from the cooperative action between the narrator and Vaz in the birth of the work — one writes it while the other ensures that it is published —, which would in the future become a crucial point in the narrative frame of Machado's novels — namely, in *Dom Casmurro* and *Counselor Ayres's Memorial* (see p. 57, note 37) — we see in "Eternal Life"

what is possibly the very first case, incipient, for certain, but meaningful for its originality, of the figure that Baptista identifies as the "autor suposto" [alleged author] in Machado's "ficção de autores" [fiction of authors] (1991: 117, et seq.), an absolutely central element for the writer since *The Posthumous Memoirs*.

That said, and as the final dialogue between Camilo and Vaz demonstrates, an alleged author calls for an alleged reader. It is so that, faced with the event of the text, *we* are called to assume the responsibility and to be self-conscious in our task as readers; a task which, as it seems suggested in the stories I have analyzed throughout this chapter, may take us into the shores of different worlds where our hermeneutical tools need to be readjusted, just as much as our outlook of the point of departure is bound to change after the voyage. After all, reading, dreaming, and hallucinating are all conceived in these stories as experiences of *displacement*. This will be a connecting point between Machado, James, and Maupassant in the following chapters, and it is also, perhaps, the "grave lesson" *bacharel* Duarte speaks of in "The Turkish Slipper" when he ultimately realizes that "o melhor drama está no espectador e não no palco" (*PA*: 136) [the best play takes place in the spectator, and not on the stage].

Duarte's conclusion may be a distant echo of Machado's final dictum in his critique of Eça de Queirós's *O Primo Bazílio*: "Voltemos os olhos para a realidade, mas excluamos o realismo, assim não sacrificaremos a verdade estética" (1955a: 178) [Let us turn our eyes to reality, but let us exclude realism, that way we will not sacrifice aesthetic truth]. Inner dramas, or inner truths, aesthetic truths, approximative truths, are explored in the supernatural stories of Machado de Assis as an integral part of reality, even — and all the more so — if they have no part in the mimetic protocol of literary realism.

To read a literary text entails listening to and performing the three knocks on the door between the world of reality and that of fiction, becoming *mad* and cognitively contaminated

by challenging forms of "truth" and by inhabiting an ambiguity not exclusive to any of those worlds but which emerges from their contact and co-existence, from their inter-relatedness as it is "dramatized" in us, actors and spectators. In sum, taking part in the language of literature, by writing and reading fiction of any genre, is, for Machado, inherently fantastic.

Chapter 2

An Invisible Thread:

From Ghost Stories to Ghost Texts

> Forms are configurations and systems of configurations
> in which the incorporeal things of the mind can manifest
> themselves and become apprehensible.
>
> — Ernst Robert Curtius
> *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*

2.1. Series, Collections, and Stories

As in the previous chapter, revolving around Machado's corpus of fantastic short stories, I inquire in the following pages into the existing category of Jamesian "ghost story", referred by readers, editors, and scholars — at least in terms of a pragmatic identification — as a discrete section of James's work. To offer a sense of the history and the challenges posed by this sub-generic definition, I look into the collections of ghost stories edited by Leon Edel, James's biographer, along the 20th century (in 1948, 1963, and 1970), and into one collection published in 2008 by Wordsworth Editions.

My aim is not to use these volumes as case studies *per se*, but to take them as starting points in my reflection on the stories and as a platform on which the status of genre in short fiction is inherently problematized in concentrated detail. Ultimately, analyzing connections and divergences between the stories and weighing their possible relations with the collection in its entirety (that is, with a notion of *corpus*), I argue that the presence of a ghost text — by which I refer to a textual object that is irretrievably lost, destroyed, or simply unintelligible

at the level of plot or figuration — is a common denominator in many of James's supernatural narratives, as well as a crucial manifestation of the Jamesian ghostly as a narrative model and a particular approach to short-story writing in the late nineteenth century.

I suggest that, as a recurrent meta-literary figure inherently connected to textuality and to interpretation, the ghost text challenges, complexifies and complements the common association of these stories with questions of genre, be it the properly "fantastic" or the more flexible "supernatural" — the framework through which they are more frequently read — and redirects our attention, as James repeatedly invites us to do in his fiction and in his critical writings, to a reflection on literature, and, more specifically, on its thematic and formal ties with the unknown.

In 2001, Wordsworth Editions published an anthology of ten stories by Henry James in their Classics series of "inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students", as stated in the common introduction to every volume. Seven years later, the exact same collection of chilling narratives, with an introduction and notes by Martin Scofield, was reissued in a more specific series devoted to "Tales of Mystery & the Supernatural". In spite of this change in cataloguing, the anthology maintained the genre-oriented title *Ghost Stories of Henry James*52 and the attempt to earn popular appeal in the literary marketplace, with a cover-header that shows, in obvious disregard of James's preference for subtleties, a human skull on the left and dripping blood stains on the upper-right corner.

Regardless of what some will surely consider a case of crass editorial mistargeting, the collection itself begs us to recognize that to include James's stories in a series devoted to mystery and the supernatural is also to frame them in a larger literary canon, and to create

---

52 Hereafter cited as *GSHJ*.

implicit links between the volume at hand and other authors and works who have found their way into the same series. However, a broadening of perspective as crude and inclusive goes largely against the grain of studies devoted to James's celebrated creations in the short form, traditionally more occupied with identifying their specificities than with tracing their possible relations with the works of other writers and literary currents. In fact, save frequent references to Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe — regarded almost unanimously as James's precursors in supernatural short fiction[53] — James's inventiveness and his refurbishment of the ghostly narrative are emphatically mentioned as the basis for a new and unique type of "psychological ghost story".

It is important to note, however, that the "psychological" quality of James's fiction is in no way specific to his ghost stories, but it permeates all of his works to a greater or lesser degree, regardless of format and representational register. It is a central feature of the author's novels as well as his short stories, either realist or supernatural, and it is moreover a historical and contextual preoccupation that anticipated James as much as it survived him in following generations of writers. Still, James's stories take us since their beginnings to a question that criticism has traditionally confined to the novelistic form, and which — referring once again to *The Golden Bowl* (1904) and other of James's "great novels" — Melissa Valiska Gregory traces as "the very problem late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novelists struggled to resolve: how to give voice to the inner self within the novel" (2004: 147).

However, Gregory's observations on the influence Robert Browning — the British writer who eventually became a character in James's "The Private Life" (see p. 171) — may have exerted on James's development of character subjectivity gives us subtle hints as to the

---

[53] Examples of this recurrent association with the other two American authors are found in Edel, in James 1970: 3 and 103; Briggs 1977: 113 and 118; Despotopoulou and Reed 2011: 2-3; Hutchinson 2011: 64.

specific contributions of the short story to this narratological transformation. And through it we are allowed to speculate that even before the turn-of-the-century struggle for subjectivity, and before he tried to address this in the novel, James may have asked himself a different but correlated question — how to give voice to the inner self within the story?:

> Browning's dramatic monologues, which construct the interior, lyric self as dramatically — and hence socially and historically — situated, were central to the early psychological novel's construction of the inner self. They were a particularly crucial source of inspiration for James, who persistently attempted to render the lyric's focus on the inner self within the melodramatic, inherently social world of the novel. (147-8)

Gregory's association of the evolution of subjective interiority in the novel with the poetic mode of lyricism not only establishes a connection with short forms that are radically different from the novel, but it also echoes James's own definition — in an analogy I come back to in p. 132 — of "the very short story" as a mineralized "shining sonnet" (James 1984a: 1244-5). In both cases, the lyric is used as a metaphorical marker for, alternatively, narrative mode and narrative form: interior monologue and concentrated brevity.

It is only in the short story, of course, that these two attributes meet in a solid fusion. Still, we must also regard the "lyric" short story as emanating from a larger context that, to a great extent, dictated its configuration. Was James consciously putting forward a new genre of supernatural tale with his "psychological ghost story", or was he simply adapting an old genre to his own principles and aspirations as a writer, as he did with every other model that he picked up from literary tradition and made his own? And, in either case, what role did the ghost story play, if any, in the larger context of an emerging psychological narrative? What was its exact relevance? I leave these questions unanswered for now, as open interrogations, to address them later on in the final section of this chapter. But in conclusion of the ideas that

125

these questions announce I return to Gregory's study, where we find another possible clue as to the particular relevance of the ghost story in James's literary-cultural background:

> James's alarming transformation of the comfortable bourgeois family into a psychological sublimation of Gothic melodrama taps into the pervasive social fear that the bourgeois home might not be such a safe place after all — a fear shared by both James's contemporaries and by more recent literary scholars concerned with the enduring afterlife of nineteenth-century domestic ideology. (Gregory 2004: 148)

Gregory is still referring to the novel in this passage. However, if the short story is able to conjoin interiority and brevity, the ghost story is a combination of inner voices, formal condensation — a better term than *brevity* given James's tendency to spill over the expected page-length in his not-so-short short stories — and psycho-social horror. It is this perfect equation that we must regard as decidedly Jamesian. For if James explored in his novels an emerging sense of what we may call a *domestic horror*, predicated on "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 2003: 124), it is in his ghost stories that this sense achieved a more concrete form even before the vampiric liaisons of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Like Machado, who paved in the short story the path that would eventually take him to *Dom Casmurro*, James invokes from early on in his short fiction the specters of jealousy and the image of the family home as the stage of violence and aggression, both of which were necessarily naturalized and diluted, although remaining absolutely central, in his future novels.

A chronological reading of Machado's and James's works dealing with the question of "domestic horror" — a great majority of them in both cases — could perhaps invites us to think of *Dom Casmurro* and *The Portrait of a Lady* as the cemented results of obsessions and preoccupations that the two writers had been tackling in an underdeveloped version in their

short stories. I propose, however, a retrospective reading, from the novels of maturity to the short stories that anticipate them or side with them, so as to understand that, instead of tipping the toe in waters that would later flood the ample territory of the novel, Machado and James took the short form, and particularly the supernatural story and what it allowed them in terms of suggestion, condensed meaning, and dramatic symbolism, as the opportunity for a direct plunge into the uncanniness of the bourgeois home, the impregnability of the inner self such as we see it outlined in the voices of narrators and characters, and a veiled meditation on the nature and the conditions of fictionality at the end of the century.

The reverse perspective I propose here may recast Machado's and James's stories as conclusions which they put forth in the first place, working subsequently on an extensive elaboration that might retrospectively take us, as it took their authors, back to them. Even so, such a perspective does not deny a principle of progression that is also fundamental in two authors whose works — unlike the case of Maupassant, who passed away at the young age of forty-two — are commonly distributed by critics between a first and a second phase, or an early style and a style of maturity (understood in the artistic and biological sense). Looking back to the short stories to rediscover the origins of many concepts, themes and plot patterns, in fact complexifies, without erasing it, the notion of a clear division in the development of these authors' artistry, as I discussed it before with regard to Machado and his "competing" Romantic and modern facets (see p. 33).

However, as we shall see, even if the overlapping of character subjectivity, formal concentration, and societal terror is at the basis of James's unique "ghost story", it is still not enough to understand its full constituency and its deeper implications, which I aim to identify and describe in the following sections of this chapter.

1.2. The Long and the Short of It

The circumtext created by the "Mystery & the Supernatural" series corroborates the claim at James's uniqueness as much as it questions it by including the collection of his ghost stories in a larger whole that emphasizes contrasts and dialogues between sometimes very distinct literary forms. In his introduction to May Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* (another volume in the series), Paul March-Russel refers to James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) as "the most influential psychological ghost story" ever (in Sinclair 2006: 11), substantiating his claim with Virginia Woolf's firm assertion of the American author's originality and uncanniness:

> Henry James's ghosts have nothing in common with the violent old ghosts — the blood-stained sea captains, the white horses, the headless ladies of dark lanes and windy commons. They have their origin within us. They are present whenever the significant overflows our powers of expressing it; whenever the ordinary appears ringed by the strange. (Woolf, qtd. in Sinclair 2006: 12)

Woolf's undoubtedly pertinent statement is also a generalization, for it bypasses the literal and physical harmfulness of a few of James's otherworldly agents, as well as her own comments on "Owen Wingrave" (1892). She feels that this story's supernatural dimension is simply "violent" and "sensational" (Woolf 1988: 323). But it should be noted that Woolf is not exactly referring to all of James's ghostly narratives when she speaks of "Henry James's ghosts". Woolf is arguing, specifically, for her understanding of a *perfect* ghost story, thus dismissing "Owen Wingrave" as one that "misses its mark" (323), and opposing it to different stories "in which Henry James uses the supernatural effectively" (324).

Woolf's notion of an effective use of the supernatural is central to our understanding of the Jamesian ghostly, and yet all collections considered here include "Owen Wingrave" in

their "arranged sequence" — using Robert M. Luscher's concept which harks back to Forrest Ingram's typology of short story cycles (1989: 161) — of James's ghost stories; "a sequence" not conceived by the author himself, but by an editor (in this case, firstly by Leon Edel, in 1948, with a scholarly background and focus). More recently, the same "arranged sequence" was partially rearranged by a publishing house (Wordsworth) thinking less of a segment of the public that is well-acquainted with the genre, its history and its many expressions in forms of, perhaps surprisingly, high culture, than of the global mass-market in English language, aiming to provide its consumers with fright and entertainment in the literary marketplace of the twenty-first century.

In fact, the hierarchical status of short fiction is not crystallized, nor is the general assumption of its subalternate place in comparison to what we often perceive as nobler forms unchallenged by material evidence. Conjoining the problem of defining short fiction with the genre's intimate correlation with literary impressionism, for example, Suzanne C. Ferguson offers a telling reflection on the evolution of the ghost story from sensationalist literature to highbrow literature, as well as on the short story — particularly the "decadent" or "aesthetic" story of the final decades of the nineteenth century — as a "prestige genre" associated, in opposition to what is commonly presupposed, with modernity and erudition, and considered in truth "superior to the novel" for being "more controlled, intense, and, finally, reflective of life itself" (Ferguson 1989: 186-9).

Ferguson's conclusions are all the more relevant when we consider James's difficult relationship with the balancing of the scales between market sales and literary status at a time that coincided with the explosion of literary magazines. The multitude of weekly and monthly papers that emerged between the end and the turn-of-the-century in Europe and the Americas, with a constant demand for and supply of short fiction, both limited and popularized the short

story, confining it to an industrial format and shaping it as a modern genre, giving the form

a new audience and providing that audience with a new form fitted to tastes and *word-count*.

Moreover, as Clare Hanson notes regarding the rise of literary periodicals, "[t]he 1880s saw

a proliferation of magazines chiefly at the cheaper end of the market", which was at the time

viewed by some as a threat against "the higher development of literature":

> In the long run, however, it could be argued that the expansion of the 1880s had a beneficial effect on the "literary" periodical, for it forced it to become more specialised, and to take greater risks in terms of content. Editors began to cultivate specific reading publics and in this we can see the beginnings of the association between literary innovation and specialised coterie magazines which has persisted to this day. (1985: 11)

Apart from the problematic yet stimulating coexistence of literature and sub-literary

content, with magazines and journals the standardization of the story's length, even if flexible

and varied, became another pressing concern, and all the more so for circumlocutional James.

"The 'short' of 'short story' is a word charged with difficulties for him", Philip Horne argues,

observing that James's systematic inability to keep within the word-limit imposed by editors

is paradoxically the reason why he wrote so many stories in only a few years:

> When a tale was rejected as too long, then, or as too difficult or even improper, or came out too long even to be offered up for rejection, James had to go on and try again; had to write another. When his flow of inventiveness became too unending it only doomed his high expression to flow again. Many editors seem to have been ambivalent about carrying his work, soliciting contributions from him for the tone he would lend, but easily scared off by the air of the uncommercial which surrounded him. (Horne 1996: 4-5)

Horne's investigation of James's notebooks and his correspondence with magazine

editors portrays the author as a "non-seller" (3) in the bourgeoning market of short fiction, a

context in which he was "even treated sometimes as a jinx on the publication that bore him

by his too evidently artful intricacies and indirections" (3). The original reaction to James's

stories underlines the fact that, in the opinion of editors and readers of the late-nineteenth century, they contradicted two of the genre's crucial qualities: brevity and directness. James's *short* stories were simply too long and too obscure, thus failing to succeed commercially both in British and North-American periodicals and earning their author almost always less than was expected for the amount of work he put forward. It is clear that many of James's stories were only published owing to their author's own stubbornness and perseverance.

But James's commercial failure in the mass-market was successful in cementing his aura as a respected writer and a *real* artist. And stories that would greatly disappoint the avid readers of "sensationalist literature" — to appropriate Ferguson's phrase — could find their rightful place, even if James's relationship with their editors continued to be troublesome[54], in "highbrow" periodicals such as *The Yellow Book* (a disseminator of Decadent *fin-de-siècle* art and literature where he published three stories between 1894 and 1895: "The Death of the Lion", "The Coxon Fund", and "The Next Time")[55] and *Cosmopolis*, where "The Figure in the Carpet" was originally published in 1896. This more welcoming atmosphere was due to the simple fact that both *The Yellow Book* and *Cosmopolis* were "more bohemian magazines whose appeal specifically targeted an élite of sophisticated readers" (Horne 1996: 13).

If James's reputation as an unsellable elitist had any effect in the reception and in the understanding of his ghost stories — a sub-genre vastly associated with "sensationalism" —, that effect, originating what is perceived as a new kind of psychological ghostliness, must

[54] See Horne 1996: 13-5.
[55] For a detailed account of James's brief association with *The Yellow Book* and of the impact this association bore on his writing and his perception of the literary market, see Diebel 2011. The reflection that Anne Diebel carries out in this study is particularly important for re-contextualizing the stories James published in *The Yellow Book* as "a meta-commentary on the very act of contributing to *The Yellow Book*" (46).

have been directly proportional to his early mythification as a respectable writer, albeit easy to caricaturize, who was frequently unable to appeal to the masses.

It seems certain, then, that if Ferguson is right in her claim that from the end of the nineteenth century the ghost story was gradually rehabilitated as a "prestige genre", James was one of the main champions of that process, not because he sought it directly or because it brought him success, but because — even while addressing them as "anecdotes" and "pot-boilers", and looking to downgrade them as minor works so as to preserve the public image that he wanted for himself, as he does with regards to "The Turn of the Screw"[56] —, he could not help putting into these stories the same amount of dedication and high artistic principles that he applied to the rest of his writing.

What I mean is that James did not invent the "psychological" ghost story exclusively according to what he thought a ghost story should be, but also according to what he thought modern literature should be, and according to his somewhat alchemical treatment of the short form, compared by him to the diamond-like and erudite poetic form of the "shining sonnet".[57] And it is ironic — but indicative of how our perception of literary artifacts may change facing external factors and publicity strategies — that more than a century later the uncommercial and impenetrable stories that cost James and his editors a lot while giving them little in return are now sold as blood-curdling narratives in "inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader", packed and labeled in apparently clear genre categories.

---

[56] See James 1984b: 86, and p. 146 below.

[57] In James's own words, the shortness of the short story can only be achieved "by the innumerable repeated chemical reductions and condensations that tend to make of the very short story... one of the costliest, even if, like the hard, shining sonnet, one of the most indestructible, forms of composition in general use" (James 1984a: 1244-5).

The comments I have made so far on matters of context and editorial presentation intend to underline the fact that the circumstances surrounding the creation and publication of these collections of James's supernatural and ghost stories make it especially adequate to consider René Audet's advice to deflect from "the author's creative strategies" and focus on "the effects produced by the practice of the collection" (Audet 2014: 36). Sustaining the view, however, that the effects produced by the practice of the collection may in fact provide us precious clues into the author's creative strategies, it is not my intention to separate these two dimensions, but to focus on them in equal measure. According to this line of thought, one of the main questions I want to ask is: what may these collections and their organizing principles tell us about the stories grouped under them?

A methodological point may help me begin answering this question even before my final considerations. In her conceptualization of "comparison literature", Rebecca Walkowitz focuses on the essay book and the novel. However — taking her ideas into a different context — I would argue that, considering its natural tendency to migrate between different formats and the history of its publication (typically starting as an individual text in a magazine or a journal that is later compiled in volumes that may follow a great variety of criteria), the short story is, as much as the novel or the essay, or even more so, a form that inherently calls for the inquiries of contemporary practices in Comparative Literature into "the history of many books: excerpts, anthologies, editions, and translations" (Walkowitz 2009: 581).

Anthologies such as the 1948 *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James* and the 2001 *GSHJ* were not "born-translated" (569), but they were certainly *born-comparative*, inasmuch as they both generate and depend on interpretive and formal tensions that cannot be accounted for by tackling any individual text alone. One of the main purposes of this chapter is thus to grapple the most relevant relationships between the areas of literary creation and reception,

which Audet sees autonomously, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of James's short stories associated with the ghostly, and of his poetics as a short-story writer at large.

To make the basis of my argument clearer, it is important to note that when it came to collecting James's tales, the editors at Wordsworth were not nearly as strict as Woolf. They labelled James's fictions as plain "ghost stories" — instead of "stories of the supernatural", a more comprehensive designation that both Virginia Woolf and Leon Edel adopt in different contexts[58] — and they were unafraid to bring the author together with ghosts old and new, psychological and otherwise. As a result, the Mystery & Supernatural list comprises James's antecedents (Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*), authors who looked up to him (*Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton*),[59] and paragons of the genre in its more crystallized forms (M. R. James's *Collected Ghost Stories*, and *The Lurking Fear* and *The Whisperer in Darkness*, by H. P. Lovecraft), amidst whom James is to a large extent an intruder.[60]

Another relevant aspect in the planning of the series is the fact that relating James to this particular literary universe, in its lowest form associated with pure sensationalism and popular adherence to formats of inexpensive but lucrative serial literature,[61] bears a decisive influence on the reader's own perception of the ghostly: on one hand, as a wide phenomenon

---

[58] Namely, in the opening lines of Woolf's essay on James's ghost stories, in which she corrects herself stating: "It is plain that Henry James was a good deal attracted to the ghost story, or, to speak more accurately, by the story of the supernatural" (1988: 319); as well as in the 1970 edition of the *Ghostly Tales*, which Edel retitled *Stories of the Supernatural*.

[59] In his introduction to the volume by James's devoted friend and admirer, David Stuart Davies cites Wharton herself when she states: "[Henry James's] imaginative handling of the supernatural no one, to my mind, has touched" (Wharton, qtd. in Davies 2009: x).

[60] So much so, that Lovecraft provided in fact a partly derogatory comment on *The Turn of the Screw*, elsewhere insistently referred as *the* perfect ghost story, finding James "too diffuse, too unctuously urbane, and too much addicted to subtleties of speech to realize fully all the wild and devastating horror in his situations" (1973: 70).

[61] In their introduction to *Henry James and the Supernatural*, Anna Despotopoulou and Kimberly Reed discuss the importance of ghost stories — which the author himself often considered inferior, if not simply degrading — in James's personal finances, as a modest means of subsistence in less successful periods (2011: 2).

and a set of stylistic practices in western literature, and, on the other hand, as an attribute of *this* collection of James's works.

This light-handed but powerful reader-orientation mechanism seems to derive from the ability of the editor to frame our reading of her/his collection. Commenting on this matter, although he does not elaborate on the deeper consequences of editorial intervention as a process of framing, Luscher alerts us, while distinguishing a short story sequence composed by an author from one devised by an editor, to the fact that "[b]oth an editor's and an author's volumes may engage similar pattern-making faculties, but the editor adds another dimension to the work, interposing yet another layer of critical interpretation between the reader and the stories" (1989: 161).

In the case of Wordsworth's "Mystery & the Supernatural" series, the supra-generic *ghost story* — amalgamating short stories, novellas, and novels — is used as a self-evident category, with terms such as "Haunted", "Ghost" and "Ghost Stories" coming up frequently in the titles of the series to create what seems like a common ground between disparate texts. As a consequence, the notion of "ghost story" as an immediately recognizable genre adorned with commonplace characteristics is both reinforced and put at stake in the (also interpretive) act of including James's stories in that series. To illustrate this point, I transcribe the book blurb found on the back cover of *GSHJ*:

Henry James was arguably the greatest practitioner of what has been called the psychological ghost story. His stories explore the region which lies between the supernatural or straightforwardly marvellous and the darker areas of the human psyche.

This edition includes all ten of his "apparitional stories" or ghost stories in the strict sense of the term, and as such is the fullest collection currently available. The stories range widely in tone and type. They include "The Jolly Corner", a compelling story of psychological doubling; "Owen Wingrave", which is also a subtle parable of military tradition; "The Friends of the Friends", a strange story of uncanny love; and "The Private Life", which finds a shrewd, high comedy in its ghostly theme.

> The volume also includes James's great novella *The Turn of the Screw*, perhaps the most ambiguous and disturbing ghost story ever written. (James 2008)

To classify this as a collection of James's ten "apparitional stories" is an attempt to circumscribe a specific understanding of what a proper ghost story is, as much as it is a veiled reference to previous efforts to anthologize the author's works in the same vein. But it is also a re-appropriation of Leon Edel's distinction between "apparitional" and "non-apparitional" stories in his second collection of *Ghostly Tales of Henry James* (Universal Library, 1963)[62].

In an unpublished dissertation, Charles R. Greenhaw considers the history of Edel's collections and his methodology, clarifying that:

> Edel did not include "The Birthplace" in his volume [of 1948]. He did, however, collect those tales which James had not been willing to refer to directly as supernatural. To these he added in temporal order those *stories which James had to call ghost stories, for the want of a better term*. Edel divided these eighteen stories into two groups: *apparitional tales* (those stories in which ghosts are seen or thought to be seen by people) and *non-apparitional tales* (those of a quasi-supernatural nature in which ghosts are felt to be present, but are never actually seen by anyone). Ten of the eighteen tales were described by Edel as "apparitional" stories. (1965: 3-4, italics mine)

In total, Edel organized three collections of ghost stories by Henry James: a first one in 1948, comprising all eighteen of the author's "ghostly tales"; a shorter volume, in 1963, containing only the ten stories considered "apparitional"; and a second version of the original collection, in 1970, retitled *Stories of the Supernatural* (this time published by Taplinger). It is the second, intermediate collection — the selection of a selection — that coincides almost entirely with the one that Wordsworth Editions published in 2001.

The same chronological order of publication has been kept, ranging from the oldest of James's texts to deal with matters of the occult, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes"

---

[62] See "Introduction" in James 1963: v.

(1868), to the last one of that kind published in his lifetime, "The Jolly Corner" (1908), thus attempting to unify forty years of rich and markedly heterogeneous literary production.

However, to delve further into the dynamics of collecting that seems to surround James's short fiction from various sides, it is worth noting that Edel's selection also partly picks up on the author's own short story compilations in volumes XII and XVII (1907-1908) of the New York Edition of his complete works, in which supernatural tales are collected with naturalistic ones, destabilizing and complexifying the *ghostly* dimension of the whole.

As a matter of fact, the prefatory excerpts included in the opening pages of *GSHJ* are taken from the author's prefaces to those volumes in the New York Edition, abridged and fitted into the collection as self-standing pieces of critical material. However, the image these prefaces project of *GSHJ* is at best that of an unstable totality: a self-conscious reassembly of cut up parts into a provisional whole. We must look into the collections, then, to understand how their similarities and differences can help us formulate a more satisfactory view of what the ghostly represented for James in its tight correlation with the short story as a format whose treatment, according to Dorothea Krook in *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, is, contrarily to that of the novel, "tentative, exploratory, 'experimental'" (1967: 326).

2.3. Ghosts and Ghosts: Difference and Repetition

The collections devised by Edel and Wordsworth Editions differ in one single story. James's biographer included "De Grey: A Romance" (1868) in second place in the author's "apparitional stories", whereas the recent collection silently obliterates this piece, adding a much later one, "The Private Life" (1892) in its place; or not exactly in its place, but to keep

a total number of ten stories[63]. Considering this change, I would like to briefly reflect on its implications on the stories as a cohesive — or maybe not so cohesive — group, as well as on their critical interpretation. I am not so interested in the reasons behind this change, which are not mentioned or made explicit in the paratext of the collection, as I am in the effects that the change itself may have on our reading and understanding of the whole.

Through a close reading of certain passages in the stories as much as a distanced perspective on the macrostructure of the collections, what I hope to make clear by the end of this study is that these volumes, significantly different in what comes to their editorial rules, critical framing, and purposes in terms of audience and marketing, but only slightly different in content, both underline important nuances at the same time as they reiterate the remarkable coherence — if we consider the inherent variety and vast timespan that separate the different tales — of James's poetics of the ghostly. Given the fact, however, that two radically different stories are able to compete in two collections that claim to abide by similar and equally strict principles so as to offer their readers the *numerus clausus* of texts that form a specific corpus in James's oeuvre, it seems necessary to investigate their distinctive traits so as to understand the stories themselves and the continuities and changes in James's "apparitional" narratives. In sum, I intend to demonstrate how the assumed organizing principle behind the collections of James's ghost stories leads us into a theory of the ghostly that, like Miss Tina's hesitating attraction to the narrator-protagonist of *The Aspern Papers* — a work whose relevance for the case at hand is clarified ahead —, can only follow the "invisible thread" (III: 238) that in a mostly enigmatic way seems to tie the stories together.

---

[63] Oddly enough, in the chapter of his *Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story* devoted to Henry James, Martin Scofield recommends Edel's 1948 edition of all eighteen ghostly tales but refers solely to the Wordsworth collection in what concerns the ten specifically "apparitional" ones, making no mention to the previous collection of 1963 (see note 7 to p. 85 in Scofield 2006: 245).

Before elaborating further on this topic, however, I return to Wordsworth's back-of-book description and to its claim to include all ten of James's "ghost stories in the strict sense of the term."

On one hand, in another veiled appropriation of Edel's conceps, James is identified as a practitioner of the "psychological ghost story", a particular kind of ghost story, dwelling in a region difficult to circumscribe in precise terms and which lies "between the supernatural or straightforwardly marvelous and the darker areas of the human psyche". On the other hand, this edition claims to include all ten of his "ghost stories in the strict sense of the term". The unintended imprecision of such statement lies precisely in the fact that these "psychological" stories — as they are called in the same passage — cannot be, by definition, ghost stories *in the strict sense of the term*, whatever that sense may be. And we could even suggest that both James's work *and* the Mystery & Supernatural series demonstrate that there is no strict sense of the term we can hold on to without being confronted with a contrary notion. This indicates that the publishers are probably concentrating on the "apparitional" dimension of the stories as a common denominator to all of them, alluding to the everyday meaning of "ghost" as the materialized image or presence of a deceased person.64

Such an understanding brushes over the variety and the complexity of many of the ghostly manifestations pervading the different stories, and it is even contrary to the decision to include "The Private Life" in the collection, since this is a story in which the apparition is of a different type, and where strictly speaking we find no real or even imaginary ghosts. The editor's oversimplification is a clear sign of the difficulties that arise in wanting to sell these

---

64 It is worth mentioning, however, that in the latest reissue of *GSHJ* the initial reference to the "apparitional stories" has been eliminated, and a shortened sentence now states, less compromisingly: "This edition includes all ten of his ghost stories, and as such is the fullest collection currently available".

narratives as "ghost stories" at the same time as having to deal with James's duplicitous take on the supernatural. Scofield synthesizes this problem in his introduction:

> Henry James's ghosts are liable to arise as much from within as from without: whatever their vivid perceptibility, they are often as much emanations from the psyche as visitants from "another world". Indeed, it is precisely the equivocation between the two that gives them their imaginative power. (Scofield, in James 2001: xi)

The equivocation from the part of the reader goes hand in hand with the ambiguity of expression from the part of the writer. In fact, the resistance to full articulation is the basis for Woolf's view of James's ghosts as entities in stories "where some quality in a character or a situation can only be given its fullest meaning by being cut free from facts" (1988: 324). According to Woolf, meaning should not be conveyed by literal, deductive language, but it must arise from that which "remains unaccounted for" (325), in an understanding of literary language and of its tight link with the unknown that is crucial to the conclusions I draw from my own reflection.

Uncertainties and lacunae have always been the object of a great amount of scrutiny in critical studies of James's novels and stories, but his short stories of the supernatural seem to contribute in particular ways to an implicit theory of "epistemological uncertainty" that includes but greatly surpasses the principle of fantastic hesitation. Thus, I would like to argue that — in spite of their specificities in content and form, which also justify their special place in this reflection — James's supernatural stories cannot be extricated from the problem of literary representation that pervades his work and which derives in great part from a "realist vision" that must encompass a notion of alterity which, in the cases at hand, is (dis)embodied in the ghost. According to Peter Brooks' broader reflection on this matter, James

would learn, no doubt mainly from Flaubert [an author I return to in the conclusion of this thesis] and his followers, something about the radical uses of perspectivism in the presentation of narrative, and about the epistemological uncertainties that go with trying to know the lives of others. The lesson of Flaubert, and of "the modern" in literature and art in general, seems to reach James with a certain delay — but then it hits hard, and especially in the 1890s his fiction turns on questions of how we know, what we can know, in the gaps and blanks out of which we never can — though also we must — construct our actions. (2005: 181)

So, how are these "epistemological uncertainties" dramatized in James's treatment of the ghostly subject? Several hypotheses have been raised. Martin Scofield, for example, equates the Jamesian ghostly with "fantasy, phantasm and desire" (Scofield, in James 2001: xvi), connecting it in psychoanalytical terms with repression and primitive drives. Focusing more on the rhetoric of the ghostly, Anna Despotopoulou and Kimberly Reed proposed to see it, more recently, "not only in terms of the supernatural but also as a narrative strategy that nuances James's realistic-protomodernist technique, giving it the profound elusiveness it is celebrated for" (2011: 1). In addition, T. J. Lustig, the author of the most important book on the subject, argues convincingly that the ghostly is an uncategorizable element of narrative construction and experience which is pervasive in James's oeuvre and not at all exclusive to his works known as supernatural:

> The ghostly is necessarily an insubstantial entity, yet this very openness is of the essence. (…) The ghostly is fundamentally and vitally uncertain and Todorov's argument that this uncertainty is itself a generic hallmark seems to me to categorize the uncategorizable, to classify that which challenges or suspends classification and to ignore the supra-generic features of the ghostly, its ability to slip through conceptual meshes and cross categorical borders. The ghost, the vision, the hallucination, the dream, the fantasy, the metaphor: there is clearly a descending order of what Max Black calls "ontological commitment" here. (2010: 6-7)

Lustig comes back to this subject much later in the book in his attempt to redefine the Jamesian notion of "supernatural" in contradistinction to fantastic ambiguity:

Todorov does not force a univocal interpretation of "The Turn of the Screw" and shows no overt hostility to uncertainty. Yet even though he sees the fantastic in more complex terms than those of static opposition, his conceptual schema belongs to pre-Jamesian strategies of representing the supernatural and therefore seems less well suited to explore the work of a writer like James, who conceives of the relation between the real and the romantic or the familiar and the strange in terms of charged circuitries, double dynamics, tensions and fusions. One could even argue that the applicability of Todorov's linear and static generic model is contested by the rotary movement evoked in the very title "The Turn of the Screw"… (2010: 114-5)

Although I believe Lustig offers a fair description of James's "rotating" and slippery supernatural, to think of it as completely uncategorizable and as even more evanescent than Todorov's fantastic, which — as I have discussed with regard to Machado (see p. 45) — is not exactly as "linear and static" as Lustig accuses it of being, is perhaps to run the risk of hitting a wall of indefinability, or, in other words, of attempting to analyze an object that must be as unassessable as it is said to be inaccessible. After all, rejecting Todorov for being too narrow, Lustig may well end up providing a diametrically opposed but equally unusable critical tool that is simply too wide and general in its reach. Trying to overcome this impasse, the following sections of this chapter, in which I analyze the stories more closely, will attempt to identify the patterns and concrete expressions of the Jamesian ghostly without neglecting its inherent instability and the "charged circuitries" that energize it. In fact, the realization that in James's universe the *unnatural* is pervasive and "supra-generic" does not mean that we cannot observe it also in some of its more specific and formalized manifestations such as the ghost story, a particular landmark — and not a diluted path — in James's oeuvre.

That specification, and the different ways these late-nineteenth century authors give it shape, is precisely the focus of this thesis as a whole. However, in the context of my current reflection, Lustig's broadening view is relevant for representing an exact opposite to the other specification suggested by Wordsworth Editions. Instead of looking to circumscribe genre labels, Lustig's notion of the ghostly emphasizes the same *lato sensu* of ghost story that made

it possible to exchange "De Grey: A Romance", in Edel's collection — the tale of a cursed lineage echoing *Bluebeard's Wife* — for "The Private Life", in the Wordsworth collection, the burlesque story of Lord Mellifont (a man without an essence who exists in the presence of others but disappears in private), and Clare Vawdrey (a writer struggling with his work, along with his Doppelgänger, who is not only his private persona but also the *real* writer).

In the following pages, I offer an analysis of these two and of several other stories, looking into their specificities as much as to the various relationships they may establish with the remaining corpus of James's "apparitional" tales. My final aim is to arrive at a clearer understanding of how James's "uncategorizable" ghosts are after all related to questions of unknowability that arise from a common — yet variously constituted and differently treated — gap in the textual-epistemic edifice of these stories: a gap, or an emblem of what "remains unaccounted for" (Woolf), that I refer to as a *ghost text*.

2.4. Texts and Testaments

Relating James's ghost stories to his travel writings and personal experience as an expatriate, Julia Briggs persuasively conceives ghosts "as a link with the past from which we are afraid of being disinherited or disconnected" (1977: 112). Briggs's analogy suggests, and I believe quite rightly, that James did not regard literature as a *specular* reflection of history, where the latter could be mimetized and reconstituted, but as a *spectral* embodiment of it, through which a connection with the past may perhaps be rekindled through its supernatural configuration in an unstable and often uncanny form: its perceived yet necessarily reinvented "ghost". This pressing, or, more precisely, this haunting *sense of the past* — also the title of James's last, unfinished novel — is often manifested in the experience of history as a burden,

which is also what constitutes the narrative core of "De Grey", in some ways an inaugural

story for James, and one about which Edel writes in a short introduction:

> "De Grey: A Romance", published in the *Atlantic Monthly* of July 1868, contains Henry
> James's first use of his "vampire" theme. Written when he was twenty-five, it possesses
> the melodrama of his early style and shows the influence of his reading of French
> romances. There is a family curse, a passionate wife, and the characteristic Jamesian
> formula in which husband preys on wife – or wife on husband. Marriage in the early
> works of James seems to be a threat to life – and often one or the other partner is doomed.
> (Edel, in James 1970: 26)

Alongside the marital-vampire theme that would later emerge in full shape in Isabel

Archer and Gilbert Osmond's relationship in *The Portrait of a Lady*, to speak of what is

perhaps the most widely-read example, "De Grey" deployed the most literal treatment of —

and provided the model for — the topic of heredity, often alluded to but seldom explored

thoroughly by James's critics. And here I refer to heredity not only in a biological sense, tied

with the characters' genetics and family history, but also as a literary device able to assume

widely different forms in order to enact what Lustig calls the "perverse laws of repetition and

inversion" that dominate James's fiction (2010: 103).

Lustig also notes that repetition and inversion are apt names for the forces propelling

the *turning of the screw* of James's most celebrated novella, a movement which, I should like

to add, is intimately related to storytelling. In a famous passage of the prologue to "The Turn

of the Screw", told by an anonymous narrator, a character named Douglas seems to warn us

about the dangers of trusting small children who claim to have been witnesses to ghostly

apparitions, especially when there is more than one child involved: "If the child gives the

effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children—?", he asks his audience,

who quickly and avidly reply: "We say, of course […] that two children give two turns! Also that we want to hear about them" (IV: 635).65

The image evoked by Douglas directly relates to the complex narrative framing and passing-on of the core text of the story. Briefly, the narrative is told from an "exact transcript" (638), by the first narrator, of the manuscript that Douglas had committed to him or her before his death. Douglas, in turn, had received the original twenty years earlier, in "old, faded ink, and in the most beautiful hand" (636), from the author herself — that is, his sister's governess and the story's heroine — before her death, and he kept it safely hidden "in a locked drawer" from where it "had not been out for years" (636).

Looking closely at this prologue, where successive narrative levels emerge only to disappear as they are entrapped in the next and/or in the previous level, it is no surprise that this "story about reading" (Lustig 2010: 104) has recently originated a series of derivative fictions, in several media, including cinema, that take its cue as they revolve around questions of point-of-view and focalization, and acts of storytelling and writing, sometimes offering a different side — that of the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, for instance — to James's original story, and turning its screw once again, as it seems possible to do continuously. As Ann Heilmann points out, these contemporary recreations do not rise so much from the solid ground that James's text may have laid out for them, as they find their origin precisely in the elusiveness of the original's ghostly invention, and in its disquieting meta-narrativity, which continues to confound us more than a century later and even after all we have witnessed since then in terms of self-referential, modern and post-modern fiction:

---

65 All quotations are from James's *Complete Stories* (New York: Library of America), with the volume number identified in the first occurrence by roman numerals before the page number.

The appeal to the late twentieth and twenty-first century imagination resides precisely in the multiple instabilities of James's novella: a narrative about the nature of narrative, the text lends itself to illimitable metafictional experimentation and thus always returns us both to itself and to ourselves: a literary game with boundless opportunities for narcissistic authorial and critical pleasure. Spectrality, in *Turn of the Screw* and its complex adaptations and reworkings, serves as a prism through which we continue to view and review the triangulated relationship between narrator, reader, and text. (Heilmann 2009: 129)

In the last analysis, however, every attempt to grasp "The Turn of the Screw" from a different angle is also a demonstration that, in accordance with the whirling nature of its premises, James's story will always escape stabilization. This is why these recreations and reworkings are perhaps the ideal interpretive act, in the sense that they speculatively augment the landscape of the story, opening new avenues for us to tread, hypothesizing *it* instead of hypothesizing *about* it, taking its open-endedness as a productive factor rather than trying to explain it away. Nevertheless, there is yet an additional dimension to "The Turn of the Screw" that I would like to consider. I believe the story's frame narrative also provides a remarkable example of how, metaphorically performed in the transmission of documents as well as in the collusion of both concrete and abstract ideas of *text* and *testament*, writing is plotted, and forms of inheritance play a fundamental role in the reflexivity of James's short fiction.

Shoshana Felman gives a detailed account of the reading *dispositif* embedded in the same novella, articulating it with the nature of reading as action and as *actualization*, as well as with the notion of the reader as a participant (1977: 101). Felman's calling our attention to the "reading effects" implied in narrative framing may find its parallel — with important differences in context and subject matter — in René Audet's insistence on the reading effects produced by the architectural frame generated in a short story collection: "a specific *machine textuelle* producing interpretations through the relations that can be established between its composing elements" (Audet, qtd. in D'hoker and Van Den Bossche 2014: 12). Furthermore,

Audet proposes to regard the collection as "the sum total of the effects it produces" (Audet 2014: 36), concentrating on the *effects* in a way that, according to Elke D'hoker and Bart Van Den Bossche, forces us "to analyse the patterns of interaction which characterize the *recueil* from a reader-oriented perspective" (2014: 12).

Assuming such a perspective, we begin to realize the way James's preface to "The Turn of the Screw" — which appears in *GSHJ* right after Scofield's introduction — has been decontextualized and re-contextualized to spearhead the Wordsworth collection in theoretical terms and chronological terms (following the New York Edition, and not the original dates of publication). It not only confirms the place of "The Turn of the Screw" as James's most reputed ghost story — praised by critics as "one of the greatest moments in ghostly fiction" (Briggs 1977: 113); "James's most elaborate frame story" (Lustig 2010: 103); and "one of the most famous ghost stories ever written" (Cook 2014: 147), known to have "a ghostly haunting effect on any attempt to tackle the uncanny in James's oeuvre" (Despotopoulou & Reed 2011: 7) — but it also tentatively establishes it as the model for the stories to follow.

And yet, "The Turn of the Screw" can only be a partial model, for James himself, obsessed with circles, wholeness and "roundness" (James 1946: 171) — terms and ideas that seem rather adequate at the *incipit* of the collection — conceived his tale as a development of ancient forms of folkloristic literature. "The exhibition involved is", James claims in the preface to volume XII in the New York Edition, "a fairy-tale pure and simple" (171), later adding: "['The Turn of the Screw'] is an excursion into chaos while remaining, like Blue-Beard and Cinderella, but an anecdote – though an anecdote amplified and highly emphasized and returning upon itself" (172). In the second preface replicated in the collection, taken from volume XVII in the New York edition, James elaborates on this subject:

The ideal, obviously, on these lines, is the straight fairy-tale, the case that has purged in the crucible all its *bêtises* while keeping all its grace. It may seem odd, in a search for the amusing, to try to steer wide of the silly by hugging close the "supernatural"; but one man's amusement is at the best (we have surely long had to recognise) another's desolation; and I am prepared with the confession that the "ghost-story", as we for convenience call it, has ever been for me the most possible form of the fairy-tale. (254)

The sequential reading of prefatory remarks that were originally separate certainly gives the idea a new and amplified strength, while it consolidates the privileged position, already suggested in the paragraph dedicated to it on the cover blurb, that "The Turn of the Screw" holds as a publicity bait and an "anchor story" (Lundén 2014: 60) that, even in terms of length, overshadows all other elements in the collection. However, James's indebtedness to fairy-tales and the notion of a text that returns upon itself bring me back to "De Grey", the "apparitional" story included in Edel's but not in the Wordsworth collection.

The fairy-tale resonance of this narrative finds its tone in Father Herbert's account of a curse going "back to the night of time" (I: 345), sentencing to death every young maiden who is the object of love of a De Grey. The transference of the curse along the family line is significantly materialized in a written register, "inscribed in a great variety of hands" (I: 344), that combines the dates of marriages and marriage proposals with the dates of death of every woman victimized by the curse. This makes "De Grey" — like "The Turn of the Screw" but in a comparatively incipient version — a text *haunted* by cumulative and cooperative writing: a narrative of love and death successively written down and handed-down until it presents itself before the reader, its final legatee.

Family sins and ancient curses are equally important in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes", James's first supernatural tale and a gruesome parable of jealousy and revenge, and "Sir Edmund Orme", a frame story constructed around a strikingly Maupassantian found-

manuscript motif. In both cases, the specters of a relative and of a rejected lover, respectively, haunt and interfere on newly-formed love affairs.

Nevertheless, it is "Owen Wingrave", dismissed by Virginia Woolf, that seems the closest case to "De Grey" of a "story of ancestral repression" (Cook 2014: 85). Its hero is overpowered and ultimately brought to death under the influence of his family tradition and of his ancestors, offended by the youth's revolt against military life. The De Greys' written memorandum, as a parade of ghosts that cyclically return to haunt and *hunt on* the present by sacrificing the young wives, is replaced in "Owen Wingrave" with the family portraits that "glower at [Owen] on the walls" (IV: 275), eager to make a sacrifice of their own descendant.

Notwithstanding these cross-linking instances which appear mainly in the form of recurrent narrative *topoi*, "De Grey" proves to be an eccentric piece in the collection and a particularly interesting angle from which to look at it. The supernatural trait in the story is purely conveyed in the suggestive and ambiguous account of the family curse, which is said to have been the action of "a man versed in fantastic medical lore, and supposed to be gifted with magical skill" (I: 345).

Nevertheless, apart from Father Herbert's superstitious obsession with the matter at hand, fueled by the selfish motive of his own attraction to Margaret Aldis — Paul De Grey's intended wife — there is no mystical vision to deal with, no actual or *shared* apparition to account for, as it will almost be a rule in James's future stories. The more portentous "ghost" in this ghost story is fear in its pure form, emanating from an inherited, traumatic, and violent memory. And the fear of ghostly memory is an abstraction, but an abstraction objectified, put into written form in the family's morbid chronicle.

In a Wilsonian reading of "De Grey", [66] Gerard M. Sweeney goes as far as to contend

that this story is not supernatural at all, and that it is possible to provide a "non-supernatural,

medical explanation" for the events in it (Sweeney 1991: 38). What I should like to stress in

in reference to Sweeney's debatable idea, however, is that what Leon Edel claims to be the

first pre-requisite in the selection of the stories — their "apparitional" quality — could have

also supplied an argument to exclude "De Grey" from his collection (as ended up happening

in the Wordsworth).

We may infer from this apparent contradiction that what is requested from readers

and critics to accept the inclusion of that tale in Edel's collection, and consequently to accept

it as a congruous whole of "apparitional stories", is a widened perspective and an unrestricted

understanding of "ghost story", as well as of what the *ghost(ly)* in a ghost story may be. I will

address this conceptual development in the next two sections of this chapter.

2.5. Writing as Haunting

Like "De Grey: A Romance", "The Private Life" can only make for a unique case

as a ghost story, even if it is in many ways a tale of apparitions and disappearances. Written

at the beginning of the 1890s, the richest decade regarding James's supernatural creations,[67]

---

[66] I allude to the original debate between "apparitionists" and "non-apparitionists" regarding the ambiguity of "The Turn of the Screw"; notably, between Edmund Wilson's psychological reading and Robert N. Heilman's supernatural reading. For a detailed debate around this polemic, see "Edmund Wilson and Others on 'The Turn of the Screw'", in Krook 1967: 370-89. Dorothea Krook is critized by Brooks, however, for her "excessively theological view" and for ignoring the "epistemological complication" in the story (Brooks 1995: 167). Brooks prefers to see the governess's dilemma as a form of melodramatic Manicheism based on a ratio of "either/or" or "all-or-nothing" (168). T.J. Lustig offers yet a new perspective on this controversy in Lustig 2010: 5 *et seq*.
[67] In his introduction to the original collection, Leon Edel discusses the "decadent nineties" and the possible reasons behind the apogee of James's ghost-story writing in this period (see James 1948: xiv). For different considerations on the same topic, with an emphasis on cultural and historical context, see Lustig 2010: 86-104, and also Ponnau 1990: 306, who, in turn, relates James's major output of supernatural tales with the late-century consolidation of — and the author's close proximity with — studies on psychopathology: "C'est ainsi que chez

this story greatly differs from the romance substratum of those I have previously mentioned to constitute a more recognizably Jamesian account of the reunion and delicate relationships of a group of eccentrics assembled in the Swiss Alps.

Devoid of ghosts in the strict sense of the word, this story, "where the contours of absence and presence are laid out in every detail" (Todorov 1978: 107), is perhaps James's paradigmatic *alter ego* narrative. As such, it paves the way to "The Jolly Corner", a story of doubling that I analyze in the end of this chapter and which is, in chronological terms, the conclusive Jamesian ghost story, in which, along the lines of a Jekyll-and-Hyde drama, the hero is haunted by — and finally confronted with — his double, in the form of an American capitalist. But "The Private Life" also harks back to other stories which do not approach the double so explicitly. Tzvetan Todorov sees in it a "perfect symmetry" between Mellifont's lacking persona and Vawdrey's superabundant *alter ego*, a structure that seems to have been reflected also in the planning of the text, split in two halves. However, more importantly for my argument, Todorov considers such symmetry a general "characteristic of the way Henry James devises the intrigue of a story" (1978: 108).

To give an example, the mirroring effect in the "The Turn of the Screw" between the characters of Miles and Flora, on the side of the living, and Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, on the side of the dead, is a well-known instance of doubling in a story that is not immediately

---

lui [James] les apparitions des fantômes, les manifestations insolites des intersignes et des présages, les révélations du monde de l'au-delà sont toujours mises en relation avec le monde énigmatique de la psyche. Il est, à cet égard, significatif que la plupart des récits fantastiques de James paraissent dans les années 1890-1900, c'est-à-dire à l'époque même où les activités de la SPR [Society for Psychological Research] sont entrées dans leur phase la plus intense, tandis que, simultanément, les recherches sur l'hystérie, étudiée par Binet et Janet, mais aussi par Freud et Breuer se développent et présentent des cas extraordinaires de double personnalité" [It is so that in (James) the apparitions of ghosts, the outrageous manifestations of *intersignes* and omens, the otherworldly revelations of the beyond are always put in relationship with the enigmatic world of the psyche. It is significant, in what comes to this, that the majority of James's *fantastique* tales appear in the years 1890-1900, which is to say during the very same time the activities of SPR entered their most intense phase, whereas, simultaneously, researches on hysteria, studied by Binet and Janet, but also by Freud and Breuer, progress and present extraordinary cases of split personality].

associated with the Doppelgänger *topos*. But in order to provide a clearer and richer outline of the processes of doubling, especially in their articulation with Todorov's idea of symmetry as a fundamental feature of James's poetics, it is worth mentioning first the cases of "The Friends of the Friends" (1896, originally "The Way It Came") and "The Third Person".

"The Friends of the Friends" tells of the efforts to bring together two people whose similar supernatural experiences make them the inverted image of each other. An unnamed male character is known to have witnessed the apparition of his mother — whose illness he was unaware of — at the time of her death; while an unnamed female character suffered the same kind of inexplicable phenomenon with regards to her father. The author of the diaries where such happenings are inscribed, and of which we are given a fragment to read in the story, is the man's fiancée and the woman's friend. Considering their parallel experiences, the fictional diarist tries to make them meet several times, but with no success. However, out of jealousy, she ends up preventing the meeting from happening when this is more probable, until finally the two characters meet each other in secret, shortly before (or was it after?) the woman's death, thus forcing her accomplice ghost-seer to take their bond, an "inconceivable communion" (IV: 634), as suggested by the offended wife, beyond the grave.

As another iteration of the inheritance theme, "The Third Person" relies on mimicry and duplication as expressions of corporeal and/or spiritual doubling. According to Anna Despotopoulou, in her contention for women as the primary catalysts of the supernatural in the Jamesian text, this story takes its mystery "not so much out of the male ghost but out of the hovering presence of two women whose relationship supplies the story with suspense and uncertainty" (2011: 92). Indeed, in "The Third Person" it is the living who — like in many passages of James's ghost stories — are referred to *as ghosts*, as it becomes clear in the conversations between Miss Frush and Miss Amy, "two good ladies, previously not intimate"

who "found themselves", by the testamentary clause of an aunt, "domiciled together in the small but ancient town of Marr" (V: 255). In fact, the two spinsters are the ones who tirelessly haunt the specter; and the reversal of roles between the living and the dead is emphasized in the text when, for instance, after seeing "him", Miss Amy is said to have almost frozen "to death", being subsequently described as "half dead" by her cousin, Miss Frush, and looking, in her own words, "impossible" (that is to say, fantastical or unreal) in the mirror (V: 273).

To appease the ghost of Mr. Cuthbert Frush, their ancestor who had been hanged in the previous century for smuggling, Miss Amy herself smuggles one of the volumes edited by Tauchnitz, the German publisher of English works, from Paris into England, replicating her ancestor's ill-deeds and satisfying what she thinks is his wish, and what skeptical readers will more probably interpret as her own secret drive toward the illicit.

Making "The Friends of the Friends" and "The Third Person" co-exist with "The Private Life" reinforces the doubling element that provides the basis for the ghostly in all of these tales, emphasizing a layer of meaning and a recurrent compositional structure that could otherwise remain unnoticed. Moreover, taking "The Private Life" as a "fringe story", to use obce again Lundén's taxonomy of the short story cycle (2014: 60), that resists integration in the group of ghost stories for being more appropriately proto-Borgesian than ghostly, we see the great extent to which doubles and ghosts are connected in James's stories and in his vision of the supernatural, to the point of becoming interchangeable, if not fully equivalent. But there is another instance of doubling that I should like to tackle next, and which has no longer to do with the characters but instead with the text itself.

With different degrees of elaboration, both Priscilla Walton (1992: 13-4) and T. J. Lustig (2010: 81) suggest that, in one way or another, James is also a ghost hovering over these stories, asserting his authorial presence in frame devices, prefatory revelations, and

other instances of metaphorical self-placement. However, although I am convinced by their substantiated views on this matter, I will focus on another equally relevant form of ghostly doubling. As the plot summaries I have provided so far intended to suggest, James's ghost stories are also insistently haunted by *another text*. Furthermore, this second piece of writing is typically inaccessible or refracted, or utterly destroyed, at the very heart of the story.

2.6. From Ghost Stories to Ghost Texts

"De Grey" is a dramatization of the family chronicle and also its closing chapter. It offers a conclusion to that haunting document by reversing the family curse, shutting the current of writing as it puts an end to the family line with the death of its last representative. One could say that the narrative opposes the chronicle it stems from by navigating against the tide of that fatally incessant river of writing, seeking to erase it and, by consequence, to exhaust itself. Continuing to showcase this investment on twists and turns and erasures, "The Turn of the Screw" obliterates the document it refers to and from which it springs *as writing*: the governess's manuscript. Copied and transcribed, the original text is supposedly replicated in the first-person narrative that comes after the prologue, but it is in itself inaccessible, its ghostly presence and material absentness being ironically reasserted in Douglas' memory of the governess's handwriting. To point out the irony of this image, the governess's "beautiful hand" — emphasized in the narration — is certainly not traceable in the replica produced by the narrator, which is after all, according to the *history of the book* provided in the prologue, the only version of the manuscript that we, as readers, will ever be presented with.

Although Ponnau did not tackle the conundrum of textual replication presented in the narrative frame of "The Turn of the Screw", taking the story that follows it, instead, as a

direct product of the governess's authorship — he systematically calls her "narrator", as if her voice were unmediated — he did, relating James's heroine with the author of the diary in Maupassant's "Le Horla", another fictional writer, capture the problem of representation that these works put before us as endeavors to *write the unknown*:

> Dès lors pour la narratrice la présence des fantômes est une impérieuse nécessité, tout comme pour le narrateur du *Horla* il fallait que l'existence de l'être invisible fût impérativement démontrée: dans l'un et l'autre cas, il est essentiel pour le héros de faire la preuve du caractère non pas hallucinatoire de ses visions, mais de leur réalité qui, précisément, se trouve au-delà de toute demonstration proprement rationelle. D'où pour chacun de ses deux personnages l'importance capitale de l'écriture: dire l'invisible, c'est tenter de le représenter ou mieux: de le rendre lisible. Comme le journal rédigé par le narrateur du Horla, le manuscrit de la gouvernante du *Tour d'écrou* met donc bien face à face deux thèses contradictoires: ou bien les fantômes existent et la narratrice, *a posteriori* justifiée, quelques longues années plus tard, de sa clairvoyance médiumnique par les expériences de la SPR, a accompli une oeuvre de salut, ou bien les spectres étaient des hallucinations produites par la folie dont le manuscrit, anonyme et sans titre, porte, à l'insu de son auteur, un tragique témoignage.
> [...]
> Tout se passe comme si précisément il était impossible de dire une vérité qui resiste aux mots: comme si les visions de la gouvernante, au même titre que les manifestations du horla, étant, par nature, indescriptibles, ne pouvaient être qu'illisibles ou, — et c'est en l'occurrence tout un —, ne pouvaient que trahir leur caractère fantasmatique. Voilà pourquoi le manuscrit de la narratrice, rédigé longtemps après les faits, peut, par là même, apparaître comme une tentative de justification étayée, nous l'avons vu, rétrospectivement par les théories des spécialistes des recherches psychiques dont l'héroïne, d'une manière significative, fait état. (Ponnau 1990: 310-311)

[Therefore, for the narrator the presence of the ghosts is an urgent necessity, just as for the narrator of the Horla it was necessary that the existence of the invisible being was imperatively demonstrated: in both cases, it is essential for the hero to prove the non-hallucinatory nature of [her/his] visions, but of their reality which, precisely, is beyond any properly rational demonstration. Whence for each of these two characters the capital importance of writing: to say the invisible is to try to represent it, or better yet: to make it legible. Like the diary written by the narrator of the Horla, the manuscript of the governess of the *Turn of the Screw* puts two contradictory theses face to face: either the ghosts exist, and the narrator, *a posteriori* justified, a few long years later, of her psychic clairvoyance by the experiments of the SPR, accomplished a work of salvation, or the specters were hallucinations produced by the madness of which the manuscript, anonymous and without title, bears, without the knowledge of the author, a tragic testimony.
(…)
It all takes place as if it were impossible to speak a truth that resists words: as if the visions of the governess, just as the manifestations of the horla, being, by nature, indescribable, could only be illegible, or — which in this case amounts to the same thing — could only betray their phantasmatic character. This is why the narrator's manuscript, written a long time after the facts, may, by the same token, retrospectively appear to be an attempt at substantiated justification, as we have seen, by the theories of the psychic research specialists which the heroine, significantly, reports.]

In the next chapter, I will reflect on the ways that Maupassant explores the questions of writing the invisible and describing the imperceptible. For now, however, I focus on what Ponnau left out of his reflection: the way narrative framing projects the fictional manuscripts in James's stories as challenges to knowledge, not because they indulge in fantasy and the irrational, and betray reality, but because, as faithful — and for that reason more *imperfect* — (mediated) first-person accounts that are to the largest possible extent true to the fictional writer's lived experience, no matter how paranormal that experience may seem, they are also mechanisms for translating elusive reality into an apprehensible form.

Not by chance, it is in the theoretical work of William James that we find a clearer articulation of the fabricable dimension of reality. Discussing the onto-psychological status of hallucinations, the older James brother defends that "there is no break" between "normal perception and illusion" (2007: 116), or, in simpler terms, between *sensorial* observation and *fictive* observation, both of which are real insofar as they constitute the reality of the observer faced with the permanent "realness" of the observed. The psychologist further states that

> Hallucinations usually appear abruptly and have the character of being forced upon the subject. But they possess various degrees of apparent *objectivity*. One mistake *in limine* must be guarded against. They are often talked of as mental *images* projected outwards by mistake. But where an hallucination is complete, it is much more than a mental image. *An hallucination is a strictly sensational form of consciousness, as good and true a sensation as there were a real object there*. The object happens not to be there, that is all. (2007: 116)

The ultimate consequence of William James's assertion is that all consciousness is inherently *super*-natural inasmuch as it presupposes a disconnect from nature, or, at least, a mediated relationship with it, in the context of a human reality which is necessarily invented in the very process of being perceived (or, in truth, conceived). Only according to this thought can hallucinations possess an "apparent objectivity" — as he puts it — beyond metaphorical

terms (as projected *images*) and in actuality (as experienced *sensations*). The objectivity of "complete hallucinations" is *apparent*, then, not for being false, but for being perceptible, or, as etymology suggests, "apparitional". In sum, in the world of the observer, hallucinations are objectively visible while subjectively experienced.

In this sense, it may seem that Henry James shared his brother's pragmatic view of the complex epistemology of perception and turned it into his own stance on the multilayered epistemology of narrative. In the next section of this chapter, however, we see that several years before the publication of *Principles of Psychology* (in 1890) the younger brother had already equated experience with the unlimited "atmosphere of the mind" in his essay on "The Art of Fiction" (James 1987: 194). Even anticipating William's "sensational consciousness", Henry elaborates on the definition of that experience — which is "never complete" — as "an immense sensibility" that "converts the very pulses of the air into revelations" (194).

Adopting similar "principles of psychology", then, the two brothers seem to arrive at slightly different conclusions, or at least they seem to isolate distinct aspects or *movements* to the same problem. While the psychologist sees hallucinatory perception as a part of reality and life, the fiction writer sees reality and life as the superficial world of "hints" which can be converted into consciousness, and, ultimately, into hallucinatory perceptions, or, adhering to the more mystical terms that he himself employs, into "revelations".

Henry James's choice of vocabulary and imagistic language is in itself an evidence that the "revelations" he is thinking of, like those associated with visions and religious events, have little in common with a type of knowledge that is derived from clarification, being much more impalpable than the "revelations" of scientific discovery to which the work of William James contributed. So, if the latter emphasizes the psychological reality of hallucination, the former emphasizes the psychological hallucination of reality. The distinction may be subtle,

but it shows that James did not merely translate the psychopathological "cases" scrutinized and not rarely made famous at the end of the nineteenth century — and which he was literally *familiar* with[68] — into fictional *exempla*. In fact, the divisions in the criticism devoted to his work are an attestation of how much it resists an exclusively psychological theorization. Such resistance is perhaps even more vehement in his fantastic stories, insofar as they explore the irresolution between the psychological and the supernatural, not taking them as antagonistic but as fusional elements, often indiscernible but never simply paradoxical.

Furthermore, and contrarily to Machado and Maupassant, James completely evades the medical subject in his fiction; in such a way that no psychopathological reading (and there have been many) is suggested *a priori* in the narrative itself. His elision of the clinical aspect of psychology is in fact so absolute that we may see it as a conscious deviation or/and as the elephant in the room. In either case, it is an additional clue of how important the supernatural sensibility was for James in his implicitly theoretical treatment of matters of perception and psychological life. As a matter of fact, and as becomes clearer in my reading of his stories — particularly of "The Ghostly Rental" —, I argue that the supernatural register, if we may call it so in order to avoid the delimitations implied in the concept of genre, was crucial in James's meta-narrative approach to character psychology.

In this respect, the way James explores the conflation between fictional writer and narrator, that is, the link between enunciation and observation, seems to anticipate the change in his novels from "multiple perspectives" to a "single homodiegetic point of view" (Klepper

---

[68] In a deeply substantiated article, Oscar Cargill demonstrates the extent to which the heroine of the "The Turn of the Screw" may in fact have been inspired by James's own sister, Alice James. It is Cargill's belief that James combined his "experience and special knowledge of hysteria" with his sister's timidly discussed mental illness, while "elaborately disguising" this crucial element in the inception of the story (1963: 238). "The Case of Miss Lucy R." (a governess of two children), included in *Studien über Hysterie*, one of the earliest works of Sigmund Freud on psychoanalysis (with Josef Breuer), is also pointed out by Cargill as another possible source that had been generally overlooked even by his Freudian critics (244).

2011: 365-7). The imperfectness of the written register only reflects the imperfectness of the observation at its origin (from the first-person narrator and fictional writer), and which is also inextricable from that which succeeds it (from the frame-narrator and the reader, acting as second- and third-degree observers). So being, perception and verbalization are not *imperfect* because they are insufficient, but rather because they are overabundant, constantly enriched by experiential phenomena that make them irreducible to a clearly delineated truth, that make them — more than open-ended — *unfinished*. As Martin Klepper points out in *The Discovery of Point of View*:

> The turn from the multiple perspectives of *The Portrait of a Lady* to the single homodiegetic point of view [in *The Sacred Fount*] betrays a heightened skepticism about the possibility of knowledge through observation. Even in James's early work, the act of observing was haunted by projections, desires, fantasies, and the inescapable participation of the observer in the scenes he watches. (2011: 356-7)

Knowledge (derived from observation, as different from the one which comes from intuition) is not impossible due to a lack of information and stimuli, but because information and stimuli flood the bridge between reality and observation, between world and worldview, in quantities that disturb any god-like and complete overview. Hence the question of narrative (un)reliability does not become irrelevant here, but it partly collapses in the fictional world of Henry James, since what we commonly name reality (no matter at which level of narrative we contemplate it) is what gains a problematic meaning as something too excessive to be apprehensible and representable in its totality. In more concrete terms, the fissure and the link between the third-person narrative and the copied first-person manuscript in "The Turn of the Screw", or between external attestation and personal testimony, further underlines the paradoxical factuality of the text — in itself unchangeable and uncontestable —, as an *object*

of subjective expression and inter-subjective interpretation, that may represent the governess herself (its fictional author) as framed in the "sequence of transmutation" that shapes James's aesthetic philosophy — in connection here to Brooks view of his modern "realist vision" of the other as subject (see p. 140) — as described by Dorothy Hale:

> the artist's identificatory understanding has the power to turn the object of interest into an artistic subject — and then to recast that subject as a self-expressive art work. In the Jamesian version of the appreciation of alterity, the artistic subject is experienced by James as both a subjectivized object and an objectifiable subject. If the artist's appreciation discovers the object to the capable of humanlike self-expression, it is the objectiveness, derived from its objectness, of the artistic subject that allows James to believe that alterity can be instantiated through artistic form. (1998: 88)

In "The Turn of the Screw", this alterity — subjectively objectified and objectively subjectivized — is not only instantiated, but literally enacted in the "ghost" of the manuscript (that is, of the original *story*) as it "transmutates" along the different narrative voices in the text. Performing an impersonal judgement and a wisely distant look upon the core narrative, the frame-narrator tells us that the manuscript is a *real* document and that, even if it does not deal with ordinarily verifiable facts, it must nonetheless be taken as the truthful *description* of an experience. However, confirming the factual nature of the manuscript is an operation that backfires on the frame-narrator, and on his position as a self-legitimizing voice, by making him the accomplice to a written description — that is, a literary construct — in which he himself rhetorically intervenes, implying in the process that, to be conveyed through language, an experience must be translated into some kind of fictional or *constructed* account. In sum, the effect of contamination from the core narrative to the narrative frame tells us that the reality of literature is constantly invented, insofar as it must be constantly re-presented and re-interpreted. This realization is also what justifies the capital distinction made by the

frame-narrator of "Sir Edmond Orme" between *realness* and *veracity*, two terms that can no longer be regarded as synonyms:

> I can't, I allow, vouch for his [the manuscript's anonymous author] having intended it as *a report of real occurrence* – I can only vouch for his *general veracity*. In any case, it was written for himself, not for others. I offer it to others – having full option – precisely because of its oddity. Let them, in respect to the form of the thing, bear in mind that it was written quite for himself. I've altered nothing but the names. (III: 851, my italics)

As this passage shows, we may speak of "The Turn of the Screw" as the paradigm of narrative framing and textual doubling, both in the works of Henry James and in the whole of late-nineteenth century short fiction, but the two other frame stories I am considering here offer important clues for further reflection on this subject.

More than precise information as to how the first narrator came into possession of the source-text, the narrative frames of "Sir Edmund Orme" and "The Friends of the Friends" offer his musings on the ethics and politics of posthumous publication. They do not clarify the appended text, written in the first-person, in autobiographical form (as a written statement and a personal diary, respectively), as much as they obscure it even further, or, to put it more rigorously, as they distance it from a form of ultimate verification. In the first case, the frame-narrator's opening sentence is a direct reflection of the epistemic problem that pervades the whole frame in the form of uncertainty: "The statement *appears* to have been written, though *the fragment is undated*, long after the death of his wife, whom I *take to have been* one of the persons referred to" (III: 851, my italics).

In "The Friends of the Friends", it is instead the dead author's insufficient talent for storyness that renders her text — if it were not for the editorial operation of the frame-narrator — illegible, or plotless and thus ungraspable: "Her diaries are less systematic than I hoped;

she only had a blessed habit of noting and narrating. She summarised, she saved; she appears seldom indeed to have let a good story pass without catching it on the wing" (IV: 609). It is up to the narrator, then, to contain and organize the woman's disorderly — though intuitive enough — flood of writing: "Take as an instance the fragment I send you after dividing it for your convenience into several small chapters. It's the contents of a thin blank-book which I've had copied out and which has the merit of being nearly enough a rounded thing, an intelligible whole" (IV: 609). Likewise, the frame-narrator of "Sir Edmund Orme" concludes his story by pledging to have "altered nothing but the names" (III: 851) in the original record that he came about. The admission that he altered the names, however, is more of an evidence that the text we are subsequently given to read is at least partly corrupt than it is a proof of its full integrity. From that moment on, the doors to further and perhaps unreported alterations are subtly but inexorably opened.

In a similar way to what happens in "The Turn of the Screw", these two stories give us the illusion of an original text that is actually *not* original, and whose degree of fidelity to that virtual document is simply not ascertainable. In sum, the narrative frames of these stories have the complementary ability to corroborate and at the same time refract their source-texts, forcing the central narratives not to coincide with themselves and, instead, to partake in a game of doubling played against an overshadowing, imaginary, and irretrievable original written by a (frequently absent or dead) fictional author: that is, a ghost text.

"The Real Right Thing" is a variation on this scheme, dealing instead with the ghost of a text that is not impossible to read, but impossible to write. In this story, young journalist George Withermore wins over his initial hesitation and finally accepts the job of writing the biography of Ashton Doyne, a recently deceased author whom he knew and admired, only to become haunted, together with Doyne's widow, by the writer himself. Doyne comes back to

the world of the living to supervise the work, and finally to prevent it from being completed, or so Mrs. Doyne and the would-be biographer are led to believe.

Doubling is once more performed in this story as a game of gestural mimicry, when Withermore describes to the widow how he replicates and summons the presence of the dead author, projecting in himself some form of bodily possession. Withermore's choice of words, however, when he uses the phrase "as if" in the description of his ritual, as the principle that enables the writing-as-possessing ritual and from which said ritual derives, is what gives him away as someone who is operating in the realm of fiction. Although Withermore's conclusion is that he acts "as if" he were waiting for Doyne, it is clear that he acts "as if" he *were* Doyne, whom he cannot and does not want to *write off*: "I sit in his chair, I turn his books, I use his pens, I stir his fire — all exactly as if, learning he would presently be back from a walk, I had come up here contentedly to wait" (V: 125).

In the final analysis, what also haunts this text is the ghost of writerly failure and a mechanism of *unwriting*. To a certain extent, the story is itself an interrupted resurrection, prepared among the spoils of Doyne's archive of private writings and documents, against the backdrop of that larger life-story — the author's biography — that never came into existence.

In essence, these are all stories of indiscretion that rely on the figures of written and unwritten texts as ghost-analogues to convey what can be their moral: that no subject's life, interiority, and individual experience — projected either in personal writings or full-fledged biographies — is, or should ever be made, accessible to exterior invasion. Thus, refraining from the urge to invade is ultimately "the real right thing" to do. Opaque and blank spaces in the story seem to stipulate this condition at the same time as they signal the presence of the "ghost" that James wanted to place "[o]n the threshold — guarding it" (V: 133) — guarding

the high wall of the text against full intellection, against base *comprehension*; in sum, making fiction resist any attempt at solving it to the end.

Elaborating on this idea, we realize that even stories which do not rely on narrative framing or in subject matter as a means of textual doubling still make use of written artifacts as privileged tokens of the ghostly, pointing to the common figure of the *closed box* I analyze toward the end of this chapter as a materialization of the text that resists opening. The ghost of Cuthbert Frush in "The Third Person", for example, is only awakened after the finding of "a box of old odds and ends, mainly documentary; partly printed matter, newspapers and pamphlets yellow and grey with time, and, for the rest, epistolary — several packets of letters, faded, scarce decipherable" (V: 260). Cuthbert's box provides his descendants with indirect knowledge (via Mr. Patten, the vicar at Marr, who acts as investigator) into his past existence, his misdeeds, and the circumstances of his execution. The ghost is finally laid, as Miss Amy and Miss Susan suppose, only with the pseudo-ritualistic smuggling of what we may or may not assume to be a Tauchnitz novel, since the definite nature of the stolen book is unclear.

An epistolary element is also integral to "The Jolly Corner", in what is perhaps the subtlest yet the most powerful, in psychological terms, case of textual haunting, coinciding also with James's final ghost story. I say this because, apart from pursuing the projection of his un-European Doppelgänger until it finally appears before him, Spencer Brydon is haunted by the memory of an unopened letter. This letter is mentioned only once in the story, but its importance for the protagonist and his obsessive conjectures is remarkable: "the worry of it, the small rage of curiosity never to be satisfied, brings back what I remember to have felt, once or twice, after judging best, for reasons, to burn some important letter unopened. I've been sorry, I've hated it — I've never known what was in the letter" (V: 706).

At the first level of Brydon's characterization and psychology, the burned letter can be quite rightly understood as a parallel to his double, a figure of the unknown and of the irretrievable *what-could-have-been*, shrouding the character's mind in his obsession with an impossible form of past futurity. At the second level of reading and interpretation, the cloud of fire and smoke that surrounds the letter, its undisclosed emissary, its lost contents, and Brydon's undisclosed reasons to destroy it, make it the quintessential symbol of the epistemic gap that structures the story as a primary ingredient of its ghostliness.

The burning of Brydon's mysterious letter may also put us in the track of a fine intertextual link with the conflagration of Aspern's papers in James's earlier and longer story of letters which eternally escape from being read, which I mentioned above and from which the title of this chapter is a direct quote. In fact, the recurrent immolation of unopened papers and inviolable houses — such as we see it in "The Aspern Papers" but also much earlier, in "The Ghostly Rental", for example — could provide the basis to a whole different study on James's fine-drawn but incandescent meta-literariness.

For my own purposes, I take the cue of this recurrent motif to propose a connection between the textual double in the stories I analyze here and James's view of the supernatural and the unknown. For this, I return to the prefaces replicated in *GSHJ*. In the first preface, while elaborating on the inspiration behind "The Turn of the Screw", the author considers in mournful terms what seems to be the late nineteenth-century crisis of the supernatural tale in face of crescent rationalization and medicalization, explaining how

> one winter afternoon, round the hall-fire of a grave old country-house where (for all the world as if to resolve itself promptly and obligingly into convertible, into "literary" stuff) the talk turned, on I forget what homely pretext, to apparitions and night-fears, to the marked and sad drop in the general supply, and still more in the general quality, of such commodities. The good, the really effective and heart-shaking ghost-stories (roughly so

to term them) appeared all to have been told, and neither new crop nor new type in any quarter awaited us. (James 1946: 169)

If in his fiction Machado felt the need to voice his stance on the struggle between "originality" and "madness", between the unexplainability of the unfamiliar and the common explanation through diagnosis (see p. 85), James's prefatory statements are an evidence that, as other writers delving into the supernatural at the time, he came face to face with a historical impasse resulting from the weight that the scientific culture started to bare on fiction-writing. As a result, he decided to overcome the challenge of the inflexion toward the medical motif in his own, newly developed terms, since, as Susan Owens demonstrates:

> Attentive research into hitherto unexplained phenomena that should have resulted in the most compelling stories of all seemed only to have succeeded in extracting the romance, even the intrinsic interest, from the subject. […] In an era of ghostmania, when even the academic establishment was open-minded about their existence, the story-writer's task seemed, oddly, to have become more exacting than ever. (2017: 214)

However, apart from criticizing the overdoing of the modern *clinical narrative* and its "copious psychical record of cases of apparitions" (James 1946: 174), James hesitates in what regards the terminology at his disposal. He writes: "ghost-stories (roughly so to term them)". And repeats his recalcitrance in the second preface: "the 'ghost-story,' as we for convenience call it, has ever been for me the most possible form of the fairytale" (254).

He then vies to deflect from the scientific account of the ghostly phenomenon and return to the "annexed but independent world" of the rounded story "in which nothing is right save as we rightly imagine it" (171). The rehabilitation of imaginative faculties — that is, in James's view, the ability to discern the *rightness* of imagination from the *wrongfulness* of pseudo-science — goes together with a deficit of notation, or a sort of necessary subtraction,

166

from the part of the fiction writer. This negative calculus leads, paradoxically, to an increment of expressive potential, since, according to the author:

> some things are never done at all: this negative quantity is large (…). Recorded and attested "ghosts" are in other words as little expressive, as little dramatic, above all as little continuous and conscious and responsive, as is consistent with their taking the trouble — and an immense trouble they find it, we gather — to appear at all. (174)

In keeping with this vision, James takes on the mission to save his own "demon-spirits" from "the drop, the comparative vulgarity, inevitably attending, throughout the whole range of possible brief illustration, the offered example, the imputed vice, the cited act, the limited deplorable presentable instance" (175). In essence, he means to save his supernatural creatures from being *denotated* either as real or imaginary "ghosts", and those who see them as simply talented "psychics" or, alternatively, "mad women" and "mad men".

That being said, psychopathology is indeed a crucial element in the construction of the supernatural for all of the authors contemplated in this thesis, and we cannot push it aside as the mere antonym of a "marvelous" — to make use of Todorovian terms — understanding of the stories in question. To the contrary, more often than not the medical or pseudo-medical context is precisely what *enables* the fantastic element to emerge in the narrative. In sum, it is important to realize that all of these writers used the coordinates of psychopathology that abounded in the cultural environment of their time, not to adhere to them and contribute to the "research into hitherto unexplained phenomena", but instead to rescue their stories from becoming exemplary accounts of mental illness *as much as* from being reduced to an exercise in superstition and void mysticism.

As I discuss in the next chapter, Maupassant is perhaps the simplest and at the same time the most challenging example of this process, since he escapes from the confinements

of medical interpretation while referring frequently and directly to the *clinical scene*, placing doctors and patients as central characters in his supernatural stories. Machado also mentions the question of mental illness explicitly; but he does it, as we have seen, in the context of a dichotomy between the uninteresting "mad" and the interesting "bizarre". The trick, in his case, in order to save both concepts from simply nullifying each other and reduce the story to aporia, is to explore the tension between the two by placing each in different levels of the narrative, preserving them by making them feed on one another. Thus, if a central character is "mad", the experience that the sane narrator is forced to go through when dealing with that character is "bizarre"; if the narrator is in turn the one who is "delirious", his or her account is substantiated by empirical or experiential evidence, making it "strange" but irrefutable; if the subject matter of the story is "crazy", the text shaping the story is "original".

James, who may have been inspired by actual documented cases,[69] and who, of the three, in close acquaintance with the works of his brother William James, had the richest and the most academically-informed substratum to work from, is the one who completely evades the subject. As with matters of explicit sexuality, psychiatric infirmities may be read between the lines of some of his stories, to the point of becoming a commonplace in critical responses to them, but they are never openly articulated as such. It seems that, in the task of saving his "demon-spirits" from "vulgarity", James found it necessary to explore fundamental traces of psychopathology while also ejecting it as a pillar of truth from the deep structure of the story, maintaining fiction in the province of fiction, and maintaining what he intended to eternalize

---

[69] For a study on the hypothetical influence of documented psychic and paranormal research on James's fiction, and particularly on "The Turn of the Screw", see Banta 1973: 20 *et seq*. Still on this topic, Elizabeth A. Sheppard furtherly suggests that James's "decision to include these [preternatural] experiences in his governess's psychic history may have been more directly inspired by a lengthy 'Record of Telepathic and Other Experiences' included in Volume VI of the SPR *Proceedings*" (1974: 147).

on the fertile ground of inexplicability — of constantly renewed *wonder* — from diagnostical

autopsy. And by protecting his stories from this thematic association, James was protecting

his characters from exposure, which consequently brings this reflection back to the question

of character psychology in its tight association with the genre, and with the "modern" story

such as Robert F. Marler understands it, as a narrative form responsible for developing the

question of character interiority while simultaneously shielding it from fixed solutions:

> Endowed now with minds, the chief characters in short stories are therefore subject to the inner complexities that experience imposes. They undergo internal changes as they are affected by choices they make and by what happens to them. Such changes typically appear as the movement from a relative state of ignorance to a relative state of knowledge, and the movement occurs even when a character ironically rejects or ignores the knowledge. The ironic vision in the twentieth century is responsible for fairly radical modifications; but as a characteristic of the nineteenth-century short story this change has been regularly remarked in stories of James, Howells, and Edith Wharton. Furthermore, the change frequently instills a sense of mystery, a mystery in keeping with what remained vital in the romantic spirit. […] The fiction dramatizes the mystery; and, free of unnecessary explanations, that mystery is what the reader intuits or feels, though typically it remains unstated and unsolved. (1974: 161-2)

Therefore, rekindling the "love of a 'story as a story' which had from far back beset

and beguiled their author" (James 1946: 252), and appealing to the "seasoned spirit of the

cunning reader" (253) who is perhaps more willing to see through and be confounded by the

mystery in the verbal artifice of the characters' minds, James asserts the *literariness* of his

ghostly creations — the "literary stuff" they spring from, their certainly more conceptual than

stylistic fairytale resonance — at the same time as he rejects their *literality*. Furthermore, it

is by exploring the ghost-text trope that his stories do indeed "return upon themselves", but

they also turn against themselves, dramatizing (to quote Marler) in that movement their own

unknowability, and generating the ambiguity that the author came to be known for.

The relationship between story and ghost text, contrarily to those relations that take

place at the level of the intrigue as they were explored by Todorov, is one of co-dependence

and fundamental anti-symmetry. But this ambiguous double standard cannot be simplified as a trick played on the reader to make her/him think that the actual ghosts are after all nothing more than a fancy, or vice-versa. These ghosts are all the more *real*, that is to say, they are "effective" *as ghosts* — to use Woolf's terms once again — precisely because they arise from such an acute awareness of their own fictionality.

In the final analysis, what is ghostly is what they give back to and awaken in readers and interpreters: the hermeneutical fright, the uneasiness, the *sensory consciousness* of being haunted and trapped in "the house of fiction" of a million windows.[70] This is something that a literal ghost — that is, an irremediably false (in the sense of *fictively real*) figure — could not possibly do. The "master of daylight ghosts, who understood that the 'terror of the usual' runs deeper than rattling chains or trapdoors and dungeons" (Edel 1996: 466), seems to have also understood that only *fictively fictional* ghosts can escape the dead-end of literality and activate the interpretive process in which he wanted his readers to participate.

Sometimes following the ghost of a ghost (that is, the vague hint that points to a darker mystery), we could say that James's readers have to trail the same path that leads his characters into astonishment and hesitancy before such elusive objects and entities. In this sense, James's reader-oriented technique — predicated on the intellective effects that it aims to produce on the interpreter more than on her/his immediate emotional reaction — has much in common with Machado's inclusion of the reader as a figure of fiction (see p. 49). But where Machado placed the material thresholds of the text and of metaleptic narrative levels, making use of the "tropical" (not in the climatic, but in the rhetorical sense) powers of irony,

---

[70] As James conceived it in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, stating: "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will" (1946: 46).

James envisioned the thresholds of interpretive action and psychological experience of the text (a cognitive experience, but also a forcibly "sensational" one), making use of the highly productive limits of narrative focalization.

This is perhaps the reason why Lustig identifies the sense of "bewilderment" as a primary source of the ghostly, stating that "[t]he ghost stands for the ability of texts to sustain their own peculiar laws; it defeats or transforms the laws formulated by James's protagonists in their attempts to establish coherent and harmonious patterns of meaning, to control or elude their fate" (2010: 230). After all, Lustig is writing about a form of textual resistance both plotted in the narrative and projected out into its interpretation, and he does so in terms that allow him to think about characters as readers "establishing patterns of meaning". The overlap in their actions and functions suggests, even if implicitly, an intimate correlation and sometimes a full equivalence between the two figures in question.

To make my argument clearer, I return to "The Private Life", a story that deploys, with a particular relevance, the mechanism I have been attempting to describe: the thread of invisibility, or of invisible texts, that conjoins the greater part of James's ghost stories.

In terms of style, "The Private Life" pairs with "The Ghostly Rental" — in which, once more, "the haunter becomes the haunted" (Edel, in James 1970: 103) — constituting also the only other case of a linear, unframed narrative in the first person, deriving from the supposed lived experience and recollection of the narrator, and not from a written source or from a storytelling situation. It is a self-reflexive and obliquely autobiographical text inspired by the historical figures of Robert Browning, the poet (fictionalized as Clare Vawdrey), and Frederic Leighton, the painter (fictionalized as Lord Mellifont),[71] both of whom James knew

---

[71] For an account and a critical reading of the real-life inspiration behind the characters of "The Private Life", see Lind 1951.

in person, but it digs deeply into questions of textuality and authorship by revolving around a text "that creates the author [Vawdrey's double, *born* from and in the act of writing], rather than the author the text" (Walton 1992: 15). It is clear that this story of a character in search of missing authors and texts anticipates the inherited-manuscript and the co-authorial framing of "The Friends of the Friends" (through the diaries of the deceased woman) and "The Turn of the Screw" (through the governess's memoirs), but it equally echoes the dramatization of unachieved writing — in itself a gateway to the ghostly — in "The Real Right Thing".

The prominence of Vawdrey's authorial drama in "The Private Life", and of his and Mellifont's appearing and disappearing acts, may distract us from the fact that there is another writer in this story. The unnamed intradiegetic narrator also nurtures the aspiration to write a play in which Blanche Adney, the actress in the group, could star. Hence the narrator duplicates Vawdrey in his frustrated writerly endeavor, duplicating also Vincent Adney, the actress's husband, whose "one discomfort was that he couldn't write a play for his wife, […] asking impossible people if *they* couldn't" (IV: 62). The figure of the inept dramaturge in the story is thus multiplied by three.

The narrator's literary inclination is again sparingly mentioned, with no more than three occurrences of it in the whole text. These brief occurrences, however, always underline the impossibility of such inclination to come into fruition, simply because the eager would-be author is not given the avail to proceed. In a dialogue with the actress, she judges him "a searcher of hearts — that frivolous thing, an observer", in response to which he confides: "I wish you'd let an observer write you a play!" But Blanche's replica is firm: "People don't care for what you write; you'd break any run of luck" (69). As the conversation between the two progresses, Blanche exclaims, "imperiously": "Bring me the scene — bring me the scene!" (70). However, she is not referring in this moment to a segment of the unwritten play

172

— although her words have a *double entendre* that James certainly intended his "cunning reader" to catch — but to the narrator's plan of looking into Vawdrey's room unannounced (this is the "scene" that Blanche is looking for), so as to catch him/his double *in flagrante* at work. "I go for it," he answers, "but don't tell me I can't write a play" (70).

The last mention to the speculative "play" comes about at the very end of the story, in the narrator's final considerations on the subject:

> Mrs. Adney had vanished when we came down; but they [she and Clare Vawdrey] made up their quarrel in London, for he finished his play, which she produced. I must add that she is still, nevertheless, in want of the great part. *I have a beautiful one in my head*, but she doesn't come to see me to stir me up about it. Lady Mellifont always drops me a kind word when we meet, but that doesn't console me. (91, my italics)

Since Clare Vawdrey's play is eventually written and performed, though to no great success, the narrator of "The Private Life" comes finally forward as the ultimate failed author and ghost-seer in the story. The latter role is attributed to him, primarily, because he is the one who *sees* Vawdrey's double, while Blanche Adney *does not see* Lord Millefont, who goes invisible, or, rather, inexistent, whenever he is or thinks he is alone. Thus, if the narrator is endowed with augmented vision, Blanche is his counterpart in blindness, a fact reinforced when she fails to see the opportunity, put right before her eyes, of getting perhaps in the narrator's unwritten play the great role that she is desperately waiting for.

But the first-person narrator is also a ghost-seer because he pursues the vision of his play, a shadow hovering over both his experience and his recollection of the events, which is to say, his own *private life*. The seemingly supernatural phenomena that he and Mrs. Adney witness alone and in different occasions — namely, the disappearance of Lord Mellifont and the apparition of Vawdrey's double — are experienced by both of them with excitement and

amusement, but with no hint at all of what James held in his prefaces as "the dear old sacred terror" (1946: 169). If the supernatural experience is not a source of disquiet after all, having been normalized and relegated to a realm of *play*, what still haunts the first-person narrator after everything is past, what makes him inconsolable — that is, the ghost he has not been able to lay — is precisely the drama that seems doomed never to be written. Shaped by the "inner voice" of its first-person narrator — and of the play's ever-postponed writer —, "The Private Life" is like a fragmented and scattered reflection of that unknown text.

2.7. "One Thing Leads to Another, and All Things Are Mixed Up"

The evolution of James's supernatural stories is tightly bound with the development of the ghost text from the apparently unrelated figure of the locked chest in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" to the one of the unopened letter in "The Jolly Corner". In fact, while remaining attached to such spatial elements of occlusion, the materialization of what we may call the *ghost of the unknown* gradually turns in these stories toward inaccessible and closed texts which accompany or substitute locked rooms and dark closets, corroborating the idea that, in James's works, "[w]henever texts and writings crop up as objects within the narrative, they too are almost always characterized by emptiness and incompletion" (Lustig 2010: 122). However, what I am referring to as a *metamorphosis* of the object is also a figural *metaphor* complemented by a change from a centrifugal to a centripetal movement, or, more accurately, to a movement of siege on the closed object or text, or a wandering-around-it.

This idea is already visible in James's emulative American "romance" that provides what we may call the primordial scene of violation of proscribed contents in his supernatural fiction. Viola Willoughby, the accursed heroine of "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes",

is described towards the end of the story as a predatorial ghost waiting to pounce on her sister Perdita's forbidden chest, kept in the family's attic, containing the garments of the dead girl, who had been the first wife of Viola's current husband and former brother-in-law, Arthur Lloyd, and who had passed away in childbirth:

> Viola's thoughts hovered lovingly about her sister's relics. She went up and looked at the chest in which they lay imprisoned. There was a sullen defiance in its three great padlocks and its iron bands, which only quickened her desires. There was something exasperating in its incorruptible immobility. It was like a grim and grizzled old household servant, who locks his jaws over a family secret. And then there was a look of capacity in its vast extent, and a sound as of dense fulness, when Viola knocked its side with the toe of her little slipper, which caused her to flush with baffled longing. (I: 259-260)

Viola's desire to know — in other words, to *violate*, as her Italian name suggests — the insides of the chest is only "quickened" by their concealment, and by her intuition that a vast reward awaits her in breaking through the protected object. Anticipating by thirty years the protagonist of "The Turn of the Screw", Viola may well be, like the governess described in the words of Robert B. Pippin, possessed by a "rage to understand" that demands "to the point of insanity and death that questions be resolved no matter what" (2000: 89). Thus, when Viola finally opens the chest, after obtaining the key from her husband who is unable to resist any longer to the pressures of her obsession, the curse cast on the object by Perdita unleashes upon Viola, spatially, as an opposing movement of constriction:

> The lid of the chest stood open, exposing, amid their perfumed napkins, its treasure of stuffs and jewels. Viola had fallen backward from a kneeling posture, with one hand supporting her on the floor and the other pressed to her heart. On her limbs was the stiffness of death, and on her face, in the fading light of the sun, the terror of something more than death. Her lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her bloodless brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands. (262)

Revised in 1875 (seven years after it had appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*) — and the same year Maupassant published his "La Main d'Écorché" — "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" concludes with a strangulation performed by "ghostly hands" that is strikingly similar to what we find in the French writer (see p. 263). If Maupassant's seemingly undead hand is reanimated and materialized in the narrative, however, as a concrete and a tangible object (regardless of whether its supernatural powers are real or not), James opted to represent Viola's suffocation as a case of extreme fright, leaving behind nothing but the purely ghostly trace of Perdita's vengeful memory in the form of her spectral fingers that *empty out* the life from her sister in direct proportion to the chest's undue revelation.

The dynamic transition between *in* and *out* of proscribed spaces such as we see it in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" was explored once again, only one year later, in "The Ghostly Rental". The crucial difference between the two stories in what regards this subject, however, is that in the second case the transition is more explicitly conceptualized, depending on objectual spaces (such as houses) rather than spatialized objects (such as chests).

After arriving at Cambridge as a theology student, the first-person narrator of "The Ghostly Rental" tells us of how he came about an old, closed, and abandoned house in terms that make him a light-hearted and intrepid, although equally prone to suffer from the dangers of curiosity, version of Viola Willoughby. Like her, he senses the reverberation of the closed space as a cruel play on intuition, calling for his desire for deeper cognizance:

> In a short time I came to the house, and I immediately found myself interested in it. I stopped in front of it gazing hard, I hardly knew why, but with a vague mixture of curiosity and timidity. […] Behind the house stretched an orchard of apple-trees, more gnarled and fantastic than usual, and wearing, in the deepening dusk, a blighted and exhausted aspect. All the windows of the house had rusty shutters; without slats, and these were closely drawn. There was no sign of life about it; *it looked blank, bare and vacant, and yet, as I lingered near it, it seemed to have a familiar meaning — an audible eloquence*. I have always thought of the impression made upon me at first sight, by that

gray colonial dwelling, as a proof that induction may sometimes be near akin to divination; for after all, there was nothing on the face of the matter to warrant the very serious induction that I made.

(…)

The longer I looked at it, the intenser seemed the secret that it held. I walked all round it, I tried to peep here and there, through a crevice in the shutters, and I took a puerile satisfaction in laying my hand on the door-knob and gently turning it. *If the door had yielded, would I have gone in? — would I have penetrated the dusky stillness?* My audacity, fortunately, was not put to the test. The portal was admirably solid, and I was unable even to shake it. (II: 159-60, my italics)

The "good young man and prospective Doctor of Divinity" (175) does manage to break into the haunted house and eventually sort out its morbid — though, at first, not quite supernatural — secrets, before the house is finally destroyed in a fire and turned into nothing more than "a mass of charred beams and smouldering ashes" (189-90). The narrator's part in the plot, however, as a hovering presence, a violator of prohibited territory, and a "methodical pedestrian" (158), is counteracted in the story by the inverted model of Miss Deborah, a local whom he meets in the hopes of gaining further knowledge on Captain Diamond's abandoned house that fascinates him so. She is said to be "an old maid in all the force of the term" (169).

However, Miss Deborah is not only, in contrast with the narrator, the personification of immobility — "She was deformed; and she never went out of the house; she sat all day at the window, between a birdcage and a flowerpot, stitching small linen articles — mysterious bands and frills" (169) — but also represents a type of finer intellect than his. Her intelligence is drawn, firstly, from the observation of many invisible relationships that dictate the course of events, the order and chaos of a world, and the constitution of those who populate it, and, secondly, from a process of intuitive inference that would become increasingly important for James, until eventually occupying the heart of his fiction and critical thinking:

Her window commanded the whole town – or rather, the whole country. Knowledge came to her as she sat singing, with her little, cracked voice, in her low rocking-chair. She was the first to learn everything, and the last to forget it. She had the town gossip at her fingers'

ends, and she knew everything about people she had never seen. When I asked her how she had acquired her learning, she said simply – "Oh, I observe!" *"Observe closely enough," she once said, "and it doesn't matter where you are. You may be in a pitch-dark closet. All you want is something to start with; one thing leads to another, and all things are mixed up.* Shut me up in a dark closet and I will observe after a while, that some places in it are darker than others. After that (give me time), and I will tell you what the President of the United States is going to have for dinner." Once I paid her a compliment. "Your observation," I said, "is as fine as your needle, and your statements are as true as your stitches." (169, my italics)

Like a spider's, Miss Deborah's power to catch information from fine threads lying in the air and which she weaves together in an intelligible whole also distinguishes itself from the protagonist's strife for *penetration*, for it takes place, on the contrary, from the inside out. The old maid's centrifugal episteme has its center in the "pitch-dark closet" that is also the symbolical core of her thinking. Miss Deborah's example inspires the narrator to relocate his own quest for knowledge into a similar "dark closet", not to illuminate it — notice that "some places in it are darker than the others", and not *clearer* — but to inhabit it as a strategic blank space from which everything can be best observed in contrast.

At the heart of "The Ghostly Rental" is a process of revelation, and not explanation. A process in which confounding and even contradictory discoveries, which must be *made up* by acutely observing characters, have a more relevant place than simple decipherment in the acquisition of knowledge. But what is also remarkable in this respect about Miss Deborah's theory of observation, being perhaps its most striking quality from a critical point of view, is the extent to which it resonates with the author's own theory of fiction. We find such theory conveyed in an essay published eight years after this story, in September of 1884, in reply to Walter Besant, who in the spring of that year had delivered a lecture at the Royal Institution in London titled — like James's response to it — "The Art of Fiction".

James's story foreshadows a particular passage of his critical thinking in which fine, invisible threads are thematized as a metaphor for the countless connections that constitute,

for him, the core of artistic sensibility and creation. This is the reason why, in his rebuttal to

Besant's assumption that "one must write from experience", James argues instead that

> Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; *it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue*. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative — much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius — it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. (1987: 194, my italics)

Since James is not speaking only of experience in general but of the experience of

literary persons — his reflection being specifically addressed to a "supposititious aspirant"

writer (194) — we see how, bringing together these two excerpts from a fictional text and a

theoretical one, Miss Deborah and the writer coalesce in the semantically correlated figures

of the weaver and the arachnid.

"The Ghostly Rental" is thus a telling example of how, from his earliest short stories,

James uses fiction to think about *the art of fiction*. If the narrator's final comparison between

Miss Deborah's observations and her needles, her statements and her stitches, is a necessary

step in making her *authorial* in the context of the story, it is also an evidence that she is the

first full-fledged projection of James's "man of genius", sewing (that is, writing, giving shape

to) the *textus* of artistic experience.

In this respect, while comparing James and Émile Zola, Paolo Tortonese is in a way

hinting at a crucial distinction at the heart of literary realism between what we may simplify,

for the purposes of my argumentation, as the *experience of reality* (Besant) and the *reality of*

experience (James). Furthermore, he focuses on the common reflexive dimension of James's

and Zola's fictional creations in terms that may be extended to my reading of "The Ghostly

Rental" at the same time as they reevoke James's meditations on his own role and aesthetic and political standing as a ghost-story writer at the end of the nineteenth century :

> Ils ont en commun, sans aucun doute, le désir et la tentative d'accompagner leur production romanesque et leur carrière d'une réflexion sur le destin de la littérature à leur époque, et même, sous des formes différentes, d'une théorisation très large sur l'histoire du roman et son avenir. Cette réflexion peut assumer des formes plus militantes, celles d'un chef d'école chez Zola, ou des formes plus proprement critiques, celle d'un observateur inquiet chez James. Mais les deux s'adonnent à l'analyse des productions contemporaines pour dégager de cette contingence les grandes lignes d'une évolution à laquelle ils veulent contribuer. Pour l'un comme pour l'autre, il s'agit de se situer, de prendre position dans la dynamique en cours. (Tortonese 2015: 1)

> [Without a doubt, they both share the desire and the attempt of accompanying their novelistic production and their career of a reflection about the destiny of literature in their own time, and even, in different ways, of a very broad theorization on the history of the novel and its future. This reflection may take on more militant forms, like that of the head of school in Zola, or more properly critical forms, like that of a restless observer in James. But both of them engage in the analysis of contemporary productions to cut free from that same contingency the outlines of an evolution to which they want to contribute. For one as for the other, it is a matter of situating oneself, of taking a stand in the ongoing process.]

The conflation between observer and writer, and the exploration of the link between inside and out, thought and expression, observation and creation, somewhat scattered along these fictional and critical pages of earlier times, would be completed in the next century in the preface to the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*. Here, considering the infinite degrees of permeability of the "house of fiction", James uses the words "watcher" and "artist" as synonyms, since in his view the two entities that the terms refer to share a particular kind of consciousness or psychological mechanism which corresponds to the birthplace of art, and without which art is but a void and nullified construct. This is why he concludes his reflection stating that both "'choice of subject' and 'literary form'" are "as nothing without the *posted presence of the watcher* — without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has *been* conscious" (1946: 46, my italics).

From the cursed chest in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" to the haunted house and the dark closet in "The Ghostly Rental", to the locked drawer where the pages of the manuscript are found in "Sir Edmund Orme", James's short fiction revolves increasingly around covert symbols, around the inviolability and unknowability of spaces and documents. As such, problematic reading or even complete unintelligibility is the common mark between papers and spaces, as well as the essence of the analogy we can draw between them. This is why, apart from burning houses, burnt, unsent and unopened letters — such as those we find in "The Turn of the Screw" and in "The Jolly Corner" — become central figures in James's stories as archetypes of ghostly writing and suppressed reading, or *insight*.

Enacting the double darkness of Miss Deborah's closet in "The Ghostly Rental", the letter addressed from the governess to the uncle's children in "The Turn of the Screw" — a letter whose sending its author frequently postpones — presumably informing the Master of Miles's problematic standing after being expelled from school for undisclosed reasons, ends up being stolen precisely when it was ready to be mailed. The comments that the governess makes upon the realization of the theft, however, bring an additional layer of darkness to the opaqueness of the object, for she reveals that the letter did not contain any clarifying message at all, and would not have put her employer in the knowledge of the situation, just as it could not have revealed her intentions to the one who stole it: "The note, at any rate, that I put on the table yesterday, (…) will have given him [Miles] so scant an advantage — for it contained only the bare demand for an interview" (IV: 728).

However, the subtraction of the letter in itself — in the logic of the *intersigne* which according to Ponnau dominates the psychology of James's characters (see p. 150, note 67) — offers the governess and the reader the knowledge of what *may have been* the motives of Miles's expulsion from school. Furthermore, it does so via the otherwise simple-minded Mrs.

Grose, whose eyes are for a moment opened wider than those of the governess, who in turn shows (or pretends) to have, in this case, an unusual degree of skepticism and ponderation:

> "Yes, I see that if Miles took it instead he probably will have read it and destroyed it."
> "And don't you see anything else?"
> I faced her a moment with a sad smile. "It strikes me that by this time your eyes are open even wider than mine."
> They proved to be so indeed, but she could still blush, almost, to show it. "I make out now what he must have done at school." And she gave, in her simple sharpness, an almost droll disillusioned nod. "He stole!"
> I turned it over – I tried to be more judicial. "Well — perhaps."
> She looked as if she found me unexpectedly calm. "He stole LETTERS!" (728)

This episode reminds us, in addition, that the governess is also a *writer* who, as a storyteller and an author of fugitive texts, plays a decisive part in the narrative form of "The Turn of the Screw". This is why Maurice Blanchot emphasizes even more than Ponnau the governess's role as the dark source of narration, attributing her an authorial intervention in the story that brings her close to James himself as someone whose task is to give us the *récit* of the siege she/James has laid to the "secret" in the story:

> Les lecteurs modernes, si rusés, ont tous compris que l'ambiguïté ne s'expliquait pas seulement par la sensibilité anormale de la gouvernante, mais parce que cette gouvernante est aussi la *narratrice*. Celle-ci ne se contente pas de voir les fantômes, dont sont peut-être hantés les enfants, elle est celle qui en parle, les attirant dans l'espace indécis de la narration, dans cet au-delà irréel où tout devient fantôme, tout se fait glissant, fugitif, présent et absent, symbole du Mal sous l'ombre duquel Graham Greene voit James écrire et qui est peut-être seulement le coeur malin de tout récit.
> (...)
> Ce qui revient à dire que le sujet du *Tour d'écrou*, c'est — simplement — l'art de James, cette manière de toujours tourner autour d'un secret — quelque fait, quelque pensée ou vérité qui pourrait être révélée —, qui n'est même pas um détour de l'esprit, mais échappe à toute révélation, car il appartient à une région qui n'est pas celle de la lumière. (1959: 178-9)
>
> [Modern readers, so cunning, have all understood that the ambiguity could not be explained solely by the abnormal sensibility of the governess, but by the fact that this governess is also the *narrator*. Not satisfied with seeing the ghosts who perhaps haunt the children, she is the one who speaks about it, attracting them into the undecided space of narration, into the unreal beyond where everything becomes a ghost, everything is slippery, fugitive, present and absent, a symbol of Evil under the shadow of which

Graham Greene sees James writing and which is perhaps just the malignant heart of any story.

(...)

Which is to say that the subject of "The Turn of the Screw" is — simply — the art of James, this way of always turning around a secret — some fact, some thought or truth that could be revealed —, which is not even a detour of the mind, but escapes all revelation, for it belongs to a region which is not that of light.]

A similar case of inference from intuitively interpreted clues is found in "The Third Person", published at the very turn of the century, in 1900, as James's last ghost story before his final one, "The Jolly Corner" (in 1908). Miss Amy's imitation of her ancestor's crime, whose configuration I have described (see p. 164), is not substantiated by anything other than her own *guess* of what her crime should be. Her act, nonetheless, even if based on blind faith, seems to produce the expected result of appeasing the ghost of Cuthbert Frush, bringing peace, at the same time, or, bringing peace *in truth*, to the haunted minds of the two old ladies. Their final colloquy is a telling example of affirmative vagueness:

"Why, you dear goose," Miss Amy spoke a little strangely [to Miss Susan], — "I went to Paris."

"To Paris?"

"To see what I could bring back — that I mightn't, that I shouldn't. To do a stroke with!" Miss Amy brought out.

But it left her friend still vague. "A stroke —?"

"To get through the Customs — under their nose."

It was only with this that, for Miss Susan, a pale light dawned. "You wanted to smuggle? *That* was your idea?"

"It was *his*," said Miss Amy. He wanted no 'conscience-money' spent for him," she now more bravely laughed; "it was quite the other way about – he wanted some bold deed done, of the old wild kind; he wanted some big risk taken. And I took it." She sprang up, rebounding, in her triumph.

Her companion, gasping, gazed at her. "Might they have hanged you too?"

Miss Amy looked up at the dim stars. "If I had defended myself. But luckily it didn't come to that. What I brought in I brought" — she rang out, more and more lucid, now, as she talked — "triumphantly. To appease him — I braved them. I chanced it, at Dover, and they never knew."

"Then you hid it —?"

"About my person."

With the shiver of this Miss Susan got up, and they stood there duskily together. "It was so small?" the elder lady wonderingly murmured.

"It was big enough to have satisfied him," her mate replied with just a shade of sharpness. "I chose it, with much thought, from the forbidden list."

> The forbidden list hung a moment in Miss Susan's eyes, suggesting to her, however, but a pale conjecture. "A Tauchnitz?"
>
> Miss Amy communed again with the August stars. "It was the *spirit* of the deed that told."
>
> "A Tauchnitz?" her friend insisted.
>
> Then at last her eyes again dropped, and the Misses Frush moved together to the house. "Well, he's satisfied."
>
> "Yes, and" — Miss Susan mused a little ruefully as they went — "you got at last your week in Paris!" (V: 285-286)

Miss Amy's deed is inspired by little more than her communion with "the August stars", and not by any direct instruction from her ancestor, as much as Miss Susan's only apparently assertive conclusion that the smuggled object is a "forbidden" Tauchnitz volume remains ambiguously unconfirmed. Moreover, we know that Miss Susan's induction may be a fancy, simply a result of her individual experience and worldview, having in mind that she is significantly described in the opening paragraph as a "bland, shy, sketching person, (…) with her camp-stool, her sketchbook, *her Tauchnitz novel*" (255, my italics). Intoxicated in her own clairvoyant reverie, Miss Amy does not confirm, nor does she deny, that the object of her smuggling is a book at all. However, her fluency in silent communication had already been attested in her fanciful and markedly *literary* character, paradoxically dappled by areas of darkness and material gaps:

> Miss Amy, after all less conventional [than Miss Susan], at the end of long years of London, abounded in reminiscences of literary, artistic, and even — Miss Susan heard it with bated breath — theatrical society, under the influence of which she had written — there, it came out! — a novel that had been anonymously published and a play that had been strikingly type-copied. (…) She had in her head hundreds of plots — with which the future, accordingly, seemed to bristle for Miss Susan. (258)

As the writer of a novel published anonymously and a play whose only performance was to be copied on a typewriter, Miss Amy is an irretrievable ghostly author, compensating for this lack of concrete manifestation — or only augmenting it — with an overabundance of

virtual "plots". But Miss Amy's abilities as a reader are just as evasive as her writing, at least in what regards her uncle's "box of old odds and ends" which informs her and Miss Susan of Cuthbert's execution for smuggling. In addition, the circumstances in which this box is found are also quite relevant for this matter:

> Marr, below ground, is solidly founded — underlaid with great straddling cellars, sound and dry, that are like the groined crypts of churches and that present themselves to the meagre modern conception as the treasure-chambers of stout merchants and bankers in the old bustling days. A recess in the thickness of one of the walls had yielded up, on resolute investigation (…) a collection of rusty superfluities among which the small chest in question had been dragged to light. It produced of course an instant impression and figured as a discovery; though indeed as rather a deceptive one on its having, when forced open, nothing better to show, at the best, than a quantity of rather illegible correspondence. (260)

Reevoking the figure of the locked chest from James's earliest ghost story — "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" — "The Third Person" also portrays an encircling of the closed box, now replete with written material instead of cursed garments and jewelry. This change of contents is capital as a conclusive mark of James's gradual association between the supernatural and textuality, turning the ghostly from an overspent trait of romance into a modern pathway leading to literary reflection.

Developing the antithetical motif of occlusion and revelation, this chest is not only locked and "forced open", but also vaulted, enclosed in an architectural sarcophagus. Once opened, however, the "undecipherable" letters and the remaining documents kept in the chest continue to project, toward the outside, the same kind of maze-structure that constitutes and surrounds it. The papers it contained are judged certainly "wonderful" by the two heiresses, but "also rather a weary labyrinth" (260).

To a certain extent, the characters' reluctant contact with the dumbfounding papers simulates the labyrinthine dwelling of the reader along the regions of a story which is largely

plotted around undecipherable and unclear links and knots. The reader is also, after all, that "restless observer" (to appropriate Tortonese's term), a "third person" or a third voice — as much as Miss Deborah in "The Ghostly Rental", Mrs. Grose in "The Turn of the Screw", or Mr. Patten in the present case — from whom an external perspective on the matter at hand is solicited. The reader's distanced perspective, however, corresponds more to an added layer of meaning than to a chance at resolution. Yet, it is solely upon it that we are able to make an "intelligible whole" of the clues scattered along the dialectic outline of the text.

Nonetheless, the places of spectator, hero, and chorus are not exactly fixed in this *play*, as they seem to circulate interchangeably. Relegating the research of the box's contents to Mr. Patten, the vicar, allows the two principal characters in "The Third Person" to remain in a state of *illiteracy* in what concerns the cryptic writings inside their ancestor's archive, but it also places them in a decentered, and thus privileged, interpretive position: standing on a dark spot, receiving and processing information obliquely captured from the outside, in a position that emulates Miss Deborah's closet and Mrs. Grose's illuminating naiveté.

Even after retrieving the old papers from the vicar, Miss Amy insistently keeps them away from her eyes, sealing them through whatever means she can, all the while underlining their illegibility in a slightly theatrical but vague demonstration of her own incompetence, or simple indisposition, to read them:

> When their packet of documents came back from the vicarage Miss Amy, to whom her associate continued to leave them, took them once more in hand; but with an effect, afresh, of discouragement and languor — a headachy sense of faded ink, of strange spelling and crabbed characters, of allusions she couldn't follow and parts she couldn't match. She placed the tattered papers piously together, wrapping them tenderly in a piece of old figured silken stuff; then, as solemnly as if they had been archives or statutes or title-deeds, laid them away in one of the several small cupboards lodged in the thickness of the wainscoted walls. (271)

Before this episode, however, we had been given evidence of Miss Amy's and Miss Susan's intention of keeping the papers tightly bound at all times, as well as of their odd, perhaps capricious and only assumed, ineptitude to read them — they never actually *try* do to so —, which leads them instead into a state of unconsciousness that is the exact opposite of the alertness of reading, bringing the inflammable parcels dangerously close to fire:

> Baffling, at any rate, to Miss Susan's unpractised eyes, the little pale-ribboned packets were, for several evenings, round the fire, while she luxuriously dozed, taken in hand by Miss Amy; with the result that on a certain occasion when, toward nine o'clock, Miss Susan woke up, she found her fellow-labourer fast asleep. A slightly irritated confession of ignorance of the Gothic character was the further consequence, and the upshot of this, in turn, was the idea of appeal to Mr. Patten. (260)

As mentioned before, eight years later the menace of combustion would materialize in the burning letter — or in the burning letters, since we are told it happened "once or twice" (V: 706) — of "The Jolly Corner". Though tempting, it would be hastened to see this story as the *sumula* of James's ghostly fiction. In fact, dealing not with the ghost of a deceased (or assumed deceased) person, but with the specter of the protagonist's suppositious self — had he stayed in New York and not gone to Europe to live as a dilettante for thirty-three years — "The Jolly Corner", even if undoubtedly "apparitional", is so unique in plot and design that it hardly fits into this group of ghost stories "in the strict sense of the term". And yet the very placement of the story, for chronological reasons, at the end of all three collections (Edel's in 1948 and 1963, and Wordsworth's in 2001) invites us to regard it at least to some extent as James's closing statement on the ghostly.

As a matter of fact, if Spencer Brydon's "apartment-house" on "the jolly corner" of a New York avenue gives an architectural exponentiation and concreteness to the mazy walls and confounding chests of previous stories, Spencer's first statement, in the opening lines of

the story, gives him away as the anthropomorphized version of the inviolable interiority such as we have witnessed it before in what came to objects and houses:

> "Everyone asks me what I 'think' of everything," said Spencer Brydon; "and I make answer as I can — begging or dodging the question, putting them off with any nonsense. It wouldn't matter to any of them really," he went on, "for, even were it possible to meet in that stand-and-deliver way so silly a demand on so big a subject, my 'thoughts' would still be almost altogether about something that concerns only myself." (697)

The structural parallel between the dark recesses of the protagonist's "chamber of consciousness" — as James conceives the characters' minds in "The Art of Fiction" (1987: 194) — and the doors, windows, corridors and back-rooms of his house is, of course, one of the crucial elements in the narrative. Considering this, Millicent Bell argues that "[t]he image of the mind as a house — with closets, cabinets, rooms, which may be open or shut or long disused, predicts the literalization soon to come in Brydon's final pursuit of his other self to a shut upper-story room of the 'unconverted' building" (1991: 278). Bell's comment reminds us that this is also a full-fledged Doppelgänger story which treats the doubling plot in a way that is unrivalled, though quite significantly announced, in stories like "The Private Life" and "The Turn of the Screw".

Following a process of gradual unveiling that leads to a final and quite surprising interpretation, but not to an ultimate *understanding*, the action of "The Jolly Corner", like, in many ways, that of all the narratives I analyze here, revolves around a quest for knowledge of something hidden. But this is also the area where the story presents the biggest challenge, because what Spencer is in search of is — quite literally — his inexistent self: an irresistibly mysterious figure that soon after his return he speculates may be conjured up from the latent memories and projections brooding in the rooms and surfaces of the cherished house, now

significantly empty, of his childhood in the United States of America. After a game of hide

and seek, closing and opening doors, Spencer does eventually become acquainted with the

object of his tireless search, but what he finds is violently different from what he expected:

> The face, *that* face, Spencer Brydon's? — he searched it still, but looking away from it
> in dismay and denial, falling straight from his height of sublimity. It was unknown,
> inconceivable, awful, disconnected from any possibility! — He had been "sold," he
> inwardly moaned, stalking such game as this: the presence before him was a presence,
> the horror within him a horror, but the waste of his nights had been only grotesque and
> the success of his adventure an irony. Such an identity fitted his at *no* point, made its
> alternative monstrous. A thousand times yes, as it came upon him nearer now, the face
> was the face of a stranger. (725)

The way Spencer's double, contrarily to his hopes, escapes from elucidation — "It

was unknown, inconceivable, awful, disconnected from any possibility!" — is after all not

far removed from the hero's own initial statement, in which he confessed to be irremediably

shut upon himself. Therefore, the *inner* Spencer, the one who inhabits the dark chambers of

thought, desire, and infinite possibility, remains to the end disjointed — "Such an identity

fitted his at *no* point" — strange, and ungraspable, even to, and *in spite of*, himself.

The complete lack of identification between Spencer and his Doppelgänger may be

an evidence of the futility of his quest, as he initially believes, or it may be exactly the "point"

of it, as is finally suggested by Alice Staverton when she lucidly asks him: "'Isn't the whole

point that you'd have been different?'" (730). Alice is thus the third person in the story, who

aids Spencer Brydon in his grim fantasy — both as an instigator, acting on self-interest, and

an entrapped accomplice acting on love —, living it with him and *for him* in her own dreams.

In any case, Spencer's hope of clarification as to the shape of his un-lived life seems to have

been thoroughly erased, or, to put it more rigorously, dislocated back into the dark space

from whence it came, pointing to a state of things that had earlier been implicated in the text by Spencer himself in a moment of adumbration:

> He found all things come back to the question of what he personally might have been, how he might have led his life and "turned out," if he had not so, at the outset, given it up. (…) "What would it have made of me, what would it have made of me? I keep forever wondering, all idiotically; as if I could possibly know! I see what it has made of dozens of others, those I meet, and it positively aches within me, to the point of exasperation, that it would have made something of me as well. Only *I can't make out what, and the worry of it, the small rage of curiosity never to be satisfied, brings back what I remember to have felt, once or twice, after judging best, for reasons, to burn some important letter unopened*. I've been sorry, I've hated it — I've never known what was in the letter. (706, my italics)

At the surface, the burned letter is an adequate simile, conceived by Spencer himself, of his frustrated meditation. On a deeper level, it is a central figure, if not *the* central figure of the story, its dark kernel. In this sense, the erased letter in "The Jolly Corner" coincides with Spencer's place in the same story, to the extent that the unread missive emerges also as the perfect correlative of the protagonist, showing him to be a detective of unreadable texts and — as the opening lines determine and the confrontation with his double confirms — an unreadable text himself. But Brydon's double is also associated with opaque textuality as an "epistemic element" that, like Lucinda in Machado's "No Eyes", is not real like a creature of fantasy is real in a fantasy story, but is real as an apparition of the hero's consciousness, that, in turn, makes him (like Lucinda and the Moon) an allegorical image of the story itself, whose fictionality becomes visible. This materialization, at the level of figuration, of the effects of literary language in the story is what Millicent Bell refers to when she speaks of the apparition of Brydon's double as a "literalization soon to come":

> The literalization of metaphor — or the interplay, rather, between the metaphor as metaphor and its slippage into the main term, the tenor of narrative — is an important semantic technique in this story. The power of language to make what is absent present

is illustrated, in all discourse, by figurative imagery, which offers the momentary hallucination of a reality that is withdrawn as soon as it has sharpened our sense of the main term. So James's haunted house and its ghost are poetic expressions of psychic reality or, alternatively, literal truth. But as the story advances, vehicle (the figurative) becomes tenor (the literal). The figurative ghost becomes a figure actually seen. Nothing could be more apt than such a confusion of the imagination to make us understand how what can be conceived as a possibility is no less real than what happens. What seems only a technical eccentricity is, in fact, a representation of the story's own theme. (1991: 278)

Along this thesis, I will continue discussing the ways in which these stories explore the notion that "what can be conceived" is "no less real than what happens", since this is one of the main challenges in the representation of the supernatural and of the psychological, two aspects that are very often intertwined in these authors' writing. But to elaborate from Bell's idea, I would like to point out that, if Brydon's double corresponds to a literalization of the metaphorical dimension of literary language, Brydon himself is also inextricable from the implicit aesthetic theory put at work in "The Jolly Corner", and particularly from the relation between that consciousness of fictionality and the constitution of an epistemological problem which can only be formulated if we also look *beyond* the frame of the story's image literalized in his double. In this case, we must contemplate the hypothesis that Brydon is already, since he first sets foot on the scene and before the apparition, a figure of duplicity: an investigator and an object of the unknown (who describes himself in the terms of an unreadable text).

Brydon's primordial and inherently dubious constituency, partly materialized in his role as an interpreter, and partly expressed in his role as an object of interpretation, is certainly bound to remind the reader of her/his own peering over the ghostly threshold of the story so as to take an inquisitive look at the unfathomable depths of its protagonist, and, perhaps like Miss Alice Staverton — picking up the scarce yet cogent enough clues in the story — devise with Brydon, after all, not a clear image of him, but the shape of his own *disfiguration*.

2.8. Apparitions and Disappearances

The idea I should like to develop from my reading of all these stories, and not only from the competing pair in what comes to the "apparitional" criterion formed by "De Grey: A Romance" and "The Private Life", is that for James the ghostly seems integral to writing and to what — as underlined in his exploration of the supernatural genre — is the intrinsic phantasmagorical nature of literature, an artform haunted by the effects of the *re-presentation* (that is, the reconstitution of *presence*) produced in the acts of writing and reading.

However, one single difference in the sequence of ten "ghost stories" proposed by the two different collections that I identified in the beginning of this chapter may suggest a more essential divide. In including "De Grey", in which we do not find the visible apparition of a ghost, in his 1963 collection, Edel strengthens the ties between the Jamesian ghostly and medievalesque forms of romance and fairytale to which the author was still (and would partly remain) largely attached, even if giving them a much more abstract and theoretical shape in his later stories. By substituting this story for "The Private Life", whose "apparitional" nature is, however, likewise debatable, the collection published by Wordsworth Editions in 2001 strays away from the "fairy way of writing" (Abrams 1971: 274) to offer a narrative written in James's mature, self-reflexive years, after he had developed his own critical reflection on "the art of fiction" and on ghost-story writing at the end of the century.

Looking at the two collections allows us to discern two inextricably related and yet distinguishable ways of making the ghostly *effective* — as Virginia Woolf would put it —, emphasizing the evolution of James's approach to it: from the traditional and the horrific to the modern and the bizarre, from the sensational to the psychological. But it also sheds new light on the way the author was able to reconcile those distant spheres with the purpose of

advancing his ideas on supernatural fiction and on fiction at large as a territory in which to meditate on the nature of literature itself. James's meta-literary thinking is most visible in his recurrent but changing deployment of ghost texts as phantasmagorical entities that tie these stories to their doubles: hovering, imaginary, often testamentary, and irretrievable originals, written (or to-be-written) by fictional authors.

What I argue, in essence, from this comparative reading of James's stories enabled by their grouping in collections focused on an apex of horror — that is, the *apparition* of a ghost — is that from the family chronicle in "De Grey" to the inexistent play in "The Private Life", not forgetting the edited diary in "The Way it Came" and the "scarce decipherable" letters (V: 260) and unidentified stolen novel in "The Third Person", the author's exploration and renewal of the ghost story genre often materializes in his fiction in the narrative trope of the ghost text, a piece of writing always elusive and in most occasions hidden or deferred, construed as the veritable haunting presence. The ultimate ghost is, if we look closely enough into the author's treatment of this figure, a written text, and often a text — more tellingly, a *script* — emphatically written by hand: that is, a *manuscript*. In this respect, a "literary" story such as "The Private Life" gives prominence to a decisive element of James's exploration of the ghostly, and which emerges from a movement that contradicts the revelation promised to the reader of his "apparitional" stories: the disappearance of an overshadowing text.

In the ghost stories of Henry James, fictional texts which sometimes coincide or are said to coincide with the story itself (as in "The Turn of the Screw", "The Way It Came", or "Sir Edmund Orme") often threaten to disappear before our eyes, telling us that, because they have in fact been copied and edited they *are there* and *are not there* simultaneously. But on other occasions these doubly fictional texts never actually emerge at all (as it happens in "The Private Life", "The Third Person", or "The Real Right Thing"), remaining instead in a state

of permanent latency. Although quite different in structure, the two explorations of the same trope seem to underline the fact that it is precisely in delicate movements along the spectrum of apparent absence and evanescing presence, playing with the conditions and specificities of his own literary medium, that James conjures up his textual ghosts.

T. J. Lustig suggests on this subject, at the very start of his thoughtful reflection on James's ghostly settings and characters, be them supernatural or naturalistic, that "[i]n a very general way all writing evokes, revives or resurrects what is not present", which means that "the history of literature is bound up with the ghostly" (2010: 1). On a different but related note, J. Hillis Miller claims that "[a]ll James's stories and novels are ghost stories" (2005b: 299). Lustig's and Miller's generalizing assertions must be regarded, however, as preliminary statements and working hypotheses that, if taken out of context, may even contradict my own argument and the pertinence of trying to formulate a poetics of the supernatural linked to James's short fiction and, specifically, to his ghost stories. However, if we switch the terms in the relation that Lustig takes as his starting point and observe the deeper implications of Miller's point, it becomes clear, as I also hope to have shown throughout my analysis of the texts studied in this chapter, that there is something particular in the way that the ghostly insistently *invokes* writing in all of these stories, suggesting that in James's approach to the fantastic genre the ghostly is "bound up" with literary consciousness.

In fact, it is in his reflection on the ghost story and on himself as an author, in his preface to the 1908 edition of "The Turn of the Screw", which I have cited before, that James devises his own modernity as a ghost story writer. Interestingly, though, he conceives it as a return to the past and to a "beautiful lost form" that was abandoned for what he considers an unpromising "new type": "the mere modern 'psychical' case, washed clean of all queerness

as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap, and equipped with credentials vouching for this" (James 1999: 123).

Nevertheless, we would be far from the truth in thinking of James's return to the past as a mere restoration of ancient forms. He himself makes it clear that in going back to previous precepts of the ghostly genre he proposes to surpass his peers and offer something that is *more modern* than the "modern 'psychical' case", doomed to be inexorably reduced to its own historical postulation. Thus, it is in a dissociation from science and a reconnection with fictionality (or the love of a "story as a story" [James 1946: 252]) that James reinfuses his narratives with what he deems to be their fundamental "queerness".

However, if we understand queerness as the quality of something that challenges commonplace notions and widespread knowledge, defying familiar forms and ordinary *logic*, we see that the "Romantic" queerness of ancient ghost tales, still residual though significantly transformed in early stories such as "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "De Grey", decidedly turns into a different "queerness" through which James explores his modern ideas on the extinction and preservation of the author-figure. This is, then, how the unfathomability of superstition is turned in his stories into the unfathomability of fiction itself, not competing with science and deductive knowledge in a post-Enlightenment world, as mysticism would, but claiming back its own territory and its inherent ability to touch, in alternative, upon those things that cannot be exposed to a sanitizing "laboratory tap".

It was by turning fiction into itself, then, and by making it reflect (on) its own means and possibilities, so as to become, as many of the characters in these stories, its Doppelgänger and the home of its own ghost, that James made it fundamentally "queer". It is so that many of his ghost stories are about storytelling and writing; sometimes about their own telling and their own writing. But they are so without ever falling into a proper *mise en abyme*, as they

find their supernatural nature in a literary self-consciousness that never stands for exposure. We must not forget that between them and their readers is the "posted presence of a watcher", an onlooker but also a sentinel, a welcoming host and at the same time a gatekeeper.

In what concerns this question, it is true that acts of writing, and writing itself — unlike what happens in other stories and in spite of the deleted letter that remained unopened anyway —, are not strictly problematized in "The Jolly Corner". Nevertheless, James's final ghost story provides another clue that allows us to tie it to the writer's *fin-de-siècle* narratives, and even to his very first story of the supernatural, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes". I refer to the fact that the greatest element of fright in the bodily shape of Spencer Brydon's double is, even before and above his unrecognizable face, his hands:

> [H]e could but gape at his other self in this other anguish, gape as a proof that he, standing there for the achieved, the enjoyed, the triumphant life, couldn't be faced in his triumph. *Wasn't the proof in the splendid covering hands, strong and completely spread?* – so spread and so intentional that, in spite of a special verity that surpassed every other, the fact that one of these hands had lost two fingers, which were reduced to stumps, as if accidentally shot away, the face was effectually guarded and saved.
>   (…). *The hands, as he looked, began to move, to open; then, as if deciding in a flash, dropped from the face and left it uncovered and presented*. (725, my italics)

Although the double's "white masking hands" (724) are no longer mentioned in the final moments of the grisly *tête-à-tête*, we have been given their shape, and can picture them as a major physical feature of Spencer's *alter ego* when, "as one of those expanding fantastic images projected by the magic lantern of childhood", he advances toward the hero "as for aggression" (725), and maybe even as for strangling.

Looking back at "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" with this idea in mind, it would be difficult to believe, though not impossible, considering the information in the text and the fact that this inaugural ghostly "romance" seems to display an uncharacteristically

unambiguous treatment of the supernatural, that Viola actually choked *herself* in a paroxysm of horror and guilt, thus bringing upon her the curse formulated by the dead sister of whom she is in more than one way a "double". But the hypothesis that, as her sister's double, Viola may also embody Perdita's ghost, playing the role both of victim and executioner in the story, is suggested with a particular vividness in a brief episode in which Viola is caught trying on her sister's nuptial *accoutrements*, thus fashioning herself in Perdita's image:

> Perdita then hurried off to bid farewell to her mother, leaving Viola to follow. The parting was short; the horses were at the door and Arthur impatient to start. But Viola had not followed, and Perdita hastened back to her room, opening the door abruptly. Viola, as usual, was before the glass, but in a position which caused the other to stand still, amazed. She had dressed herself in Perdita's cast-off wedding veil and wreath, and on her neck she had hung the heavy string of pearls which the young girl had received from her husband as a wedding-gift. (I: 252).

As the passage indicates, character psychology is already at play since the beginning of James's approach to the ghost story, but differently from how it would gradually emerge in subsequent works more representative of his "realistic-protomodernist technique".[72] Here, instead of reported speech (or reported writing), focalization, free indirect speech, or similar narratorial means of entry into consciousness, we see the character's interiority suggestively *externalized* in spatial markers and symbolic objects, and even in psycho-somatic clues. This deployment of oblique points of access to consciousness may well exemplify those "overtly Gothic and melodramatic elements" that "characterized James's juvelinia" and that constitute "more obvious and external devices of melodramatic representation and rhetoric" (Brooks 1995: 153), but it was never completely abandoned by James, and its persistence is evident in the correlation between Brydon's house and his mind in "The Jolly Corner". In fact, Peter

---

[72] See Despotopoulou and Reed 2011: 1, quoted in p. 141 above.

Brooks posits that James's "underlying melodramatic ambition remains, and indeed reasserts itself with the 'major phase'", in which "the romantic" is defined as "the realm of knowledge" (153-4). Brooks quotes James himself from his critical writings on this subject, arguing that:

> Close to the time he was composing the late essays on Balzac, James undertook his celebrated discussion of "romance" in the preface to *The American*. (…) he worries about the definition of "the romantic" and its use, virtually from an epistemological perspective. "The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never *can* directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and desire". (154)

The way this "epistemological" perspective on the "romantic" is (so anticipatedly) dramatized in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" invites us to question what came first: a psychological approach that ultimately reformulated the supernatural as an epistemological element, or a supernatural approach that was an epistemological gate into the psychological? It is tempting to think, in fact, considering the relative conventionality of James's early realist prose and the precocious inventiveness of his stories of the supernatural, that these ghostly narratives, in their association with intuitive sensibility, with a primeval and never decorative symbolism, and with the enigmatic atmosphere of the psyche (or, "the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and desire"), were fundamental in James's self-appointed mission to lay siege to "what we never *can* directly know"; a mission which would eventually spread, taking different paths and shapes, to all of his work as a writer.

Comparing "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and "The Jolly Corner", James's earliest and his last ghost story, we see that the hands emanating from the *hearts of darkness* in both these texts — in one case, Perdita's locked chest, in the other case, Spencer Brydon's fathomless self — perform a circular movement of enclosing and unveiling, masking and unmasking, *containing* the unknown and guarding it against too prowling eyes, pushing back

those trespassers who, in their "rage to understand" (p. 175), do not understand the rules of James's play, or even executing on them their cruel revenge for undue intrusion.

Malevolent and vindictive hands such as the ones that we find in these stories have a long and rich history in nineteenth-century literature, shaping a tradition that pre-modernist authors like James and Maupassant — whose exploration of hands and other detached body parts I look into in the next chapter — followed up and reinvented in their short fiction. Retrieving this ancient motif allowed them, I believe, to explore specific concerns of literary representation and aesthetic problems posed by their own time.

It is in this new context in the history of literature, and in the history of short fiction, that they insisted on similar terms, but in very different ways, on the image of a *manipulative* text or text-analogue that, like a spidery hand, weaves the invisible threads of its web, at the same time as it clutches its dark center, keeping it safe from those who — like the governess at Bly — would like to surrender to the "temptation of resolution" (Pippin 2000: 116).

Chapter 3

"The Wise Man Says: Perhaps?"

Or, Doubt, Dogma, and the Dead

> Il n'est même jamais sûr que le mot *littérature* ou le *mot* art
> réponde à rien de réel, rien de possible ou rien d'important.
>
> — Maurice Blanchot
> *Le Livre à Venir*

3.1. Interrogative Moods

As seen in the two previous chapters, establishing a parallel between narrative and interpretive (im)possibilities — between what can and cannot be told, and between what can and cannot be read — inside the *textus* of the story itself is one of the most effective ways of problematizing notions of knowledge in fiction. A special attention given to the story's own literariness — a recurrent aspect of short fiction from the late nineteenth century — opens the way to a thematization of textual transmission. In this respect, like Machado and James, Maupassant frequently devised his supernatural short stories as exemplary considerations on how a tale is passed on and how it is received.

This metafictional conflation of more or less overt reflections on storytelling and story-reading (or story-listening) invites us to ask ourselves how the epistemological problem at the heart of a narrative may reshape or agitate our views on literary creation and reception. I continue tackling this question more extensively in this chapter, considering how important

it is in a specific number of short stories and novellas by Maupassant which are written in an *interrogative mood*, or mode.

By "interrogative mood" I mean the tendency of many of the stories I analyze here to be presented as questions, either in a broader sense, when they report a mystery or a case for which they simultaneously demand a solution (more often than not with no success),[73] or in a literal sense, when they are syntactically dramatized as questions posed by characters or narrators to themselves, a narratee, and/or the reader. In these cases, the interrogative "mood" is also the psychological trait or state of a character who systematically interrogates himself or others, and the story may even coincide in form with, and correspond to an elaboration on, the question posed. This becomes more obvious in the titles given to "Lui?" [Him?] (1883) and "Un fou?" [A Madman?] (1884), or in the epistolary format of "Lettre d'un fou" [Letter from a Madman] (1885). In fact, this distressed epistle concludes with the hopeless plea from the writer of the letter/story for a response from his doctor/reader.

While comparing some of these stories with Machado's "The Alienist", which also addresses and successively reconfigures the issue of mental illness, Andrea Perrot discusses the complexity of their one-sided communicative structure by focusing not on the emissary, but on the fictional addressee and on the question of interpretive responsibility. She remarks that by the end of "Letter from a Madman" the distraught patient leaves "aos médicos e sábios a responsabilidade da interpretação do que lhe estava acontecendo" (Perrot 2001: 40) [to the

---

[73] What I am describing here as a general *inquisitiveness* of the text is particularly visible in the second version of "The Horla", in which the diary entry dated "20 août", for example, is composed entirely of interrogatives: "Le tuer, comment? puisque je ne peux l'atteindre? Le poison? mais il me verrait le mêler à l'eau; et nos poisons, d'ailleurs, auraient-ils un effet sur son corps imperceptible? Non... non... sans aucun doute... Alors?... alors?..." (II: 936) [How can I kill him, if I cannot touch him? Poison? But he would see me mixing it in the water; and besides, will our poisons even have any effect on an imperceptible body? No... no... they cannot… What then?] (2005: 39). All quotations in French are from Maupassant's *Contes et nouvelles*, Vols. I-II, Ed. Louis Forestier, Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1974.

doctors and wise men the responsibility of interpreting what was happening to him]. Perrot's consideration is thus linked to a frequent motif which is another expression of what I call the "interrogative mood": the apostrophic request of a diagnosis for madness. The protagonist of "Letter from a Madman" seems to ask himself (or no one in particular): "Suis-je devenu fou?" (II: 464) [Have I gone mad?] (2005: 54). But in the end of the story he addresses his doctor, the unidentified recipient of the letter and the one to whom he describes his case, once again, to ask him directly: "Voilà ma confession, mon cher docteur. Dites-moi ce que je dois faire?" (II: 466) [That is my confession, my dear Doctor. Tell me, what should I do?] (2005: 57).

In addition to instating an imaginary or virtual dialogue that surpasses the limits of the text, the ability of the short story to convey doubtfulness or to shape itself in the form of a question is also inextricably linked with the motif of a reanimated body part in a significant group of Maupassant's supernatural tales. The connection between a subjective and entirely unverifiable point-of-view (or, the possibility of a *natural* delirium) and zombie hands and deadly locks of hair (or, the possibility of a *supernatural* phenomenon) takes us directly into the fantastic as systematized by Todorov and others, considering that the genre's main feat is that of ultimately putting reality and the *self* (that is, the hero and the reader) into question.[74] To illuminate this point, we could say that the key principle of the fantastic genre is that it produces an hesitation, experienced by characters and readers, between natural and unnatural

---

[74] In *Teorías de lo Fantástico*, David Roas offers an eloquent description of the genre, addressing precisely this point: "Basado, por tanto, en la confrontación de lo sobrenatural y lo real dentro de un mundo ordenado y estable como pretende ser el nuestro, el relato fantástico provoca — y, por tanto, refleja — la incertidumbre en la percepción de la realidad y del propio yo: la existencia de lo imposible, de una realidad diferente a la nuestra, conduce, por un lado, a dudar acerca de esta última y, por otro, y en directa relación con ello, a la duda acerca de nuestra propia existencia: lo irreal pasa a ser concebido como real, y lo real, como posible irrealidad" (2001: 9) [Based, therefore, in the confrontation of the supernatural and the real within a world as stable and orderly as ours intends to be, the fantastic story provokes — and therefore reflects — uncertainty in the perception of reality and of the self: the existence of the impossible, of a reality that is different from ours, leads, on one hand, to doubt about the latter, and, on the other hand, and in direct relation to this, to doubt about our own existence: the unreal happens to be conceived as real, and the real as a possible unreality].

causes for an abnormal event taking place in the real-world of the story.[75] And although it is true that Maupassant also forces his narrators and his readers to face such an hesitation, it is precisely from this critical perspective that I wish to distance my reflection.

I do not mean to overlook the individual merits as well as the critical and historical relevance of many past and present readings of Maupassant's tales which choose to mobilize the fantastic as an interpretive key. However, as we have seen in Chapter 2 with T. J. Lustig's critique of traditional views on the Jamesian ghostly (see p. 141), the tendency to focus on the fantastic as the main or the only analytical tool carries the danger of producing a limiting form of criticism that explores the general and obvious and neglects important specificities and many uncategorizable elements in the stories that these authors devised. Additionally, it is important to remember that, on one hand, as we have seen in the cases of Machado and James and shall also verify with regard to Maupassant, these writers explored the fantastic in a creative as well as a critical context long before Todorov's conceptualization of the term, which the three of them contemplated and redefined in ways that do not necessarily match the theorist's. On the other hand, although including reflections on Maupassant and James in his essay, Todorov focuses primarily in notions of fantastic fiction that pre-date these end-of-century authors and do not easily fall in line with their innovations.

The awareness of such anachronisms does not require us to discard all the valuable reflections that have been conducted on this subject since the late nineteenth century, but it invites us to recall that the fantastic, in its mutual (and not always obvious) relationship with the supernatural, has a history that is all but linear and which — from a critical standpoint — stretches back to the *fin de siècle*, when authors such as those I approach here took a manifold

---

[75] See Todorov 1973: 26.

self-reflexive perspective on the term. This becomes clear in the final section of this chapter, dedicated to Maupassant's comments on the *fantastique* apropos of Ivan Turgenev.

What I contend for in the following pages is that to read these complex stories solely as the fantastic and consequently dubious expression of either "psychic phenomena" (Ponnau 1990: 297) or paranormal phenomena may not only be insufficient but even misleading. My argument is substantiated by the fact that the fantastic ambiguity often attributed to the stories of Maupassant focuses on instances of the narrative that are thought to be *doubly* explainable — naturally or supernaturally —, whereas the texts themselves, even when they play (as they often do) with those mutually exclusive alternatives, are in fact so committed to the unknown and the unexplainable on a thematic and formal level that they seek to neutralize *all* solutions, rendering the very notion of fantastic ambiguity obsolete. My position on what concerns this point is grounded on the assumption that interpretive ambiguity and *realistic unexplainability* — not to be confused with Absurdism and the Surrealist use of the nonsensical[76] —, although related, are not the same thing, and they must be discerned if we aim to understand the three authors I contemplate in this dissertation.

Our first step in this task is to realize that these stories challenge the very opposition between natural and supernatural — thus weakening the two pillars of ambiguous readings —, not because these notions are *fantastically* confused or indiscernible, but because they

---

[76] Nevertheless, Maupassant may not be so distant from such aesthetic landmarks of the twentieth century either. In fact, commenting on one of the *croniques* that he dedicated to Ivan Turgenev, Henri Mitterand suggests that in exalting the Russian writer's "génie rêveur et précis, réel et poétique, un peu voilé, comme pour faire deviner des choses lointaines, indécises, ces choses qui flottent dans les brouillards de la vie, ces choses qui peuplent la terre de songes, qui nous montrent, derrière les faits cruels, le mystère doux, toujours fuyant et charmant, dont se bercent les poètes" [dreaming and precise, real and poetic genius, a little veiled, as if to make one guess distant things, those things that float in the fogs of life, those things that populate the land of dreams, which show us, behind the cruel facts, the sweet mystery, always fleeting and charming, in which poets cradle], Maupassant may already be enumerating the building blocks of an "antichambre du surréalisme" [antechamber of surrealism] (Mitterand, in Maupassant 2008: 1107-8).

are understood and treated in essence as one and the same thing. They are impregnable realms that become intertwined in the traveling form — traveling also in matters of space, context, genre, and register — of the short story, predicated on an *essential* insolubility instead of an *ambiguous* insolubility. This is why an implicit conclusion in many of these narratives, from Machado to Maupassant, is that nature and fancy, our world and the beyond, are not mutually exclusive, but blend and bleed into each other in ways that may become more evident in the universe of fiction. Because of such promiscuity, any attempt at differentiating those spheres must confront the fact that, perhaps, in (too) many aspects, they are not distinct. This idea becomes particularly clear in the way the author of *Bel-Ami* gradually develops his theory on human sensory organs — "les seuls intermédiaires entre le monde extérieur et nous" (II: 461) [the only intermediaries between the exterior world and ourselves] (2005: 50), that is, the only available instruments, not just for accessing, but also for communicating with reality — as doorways to *illusion*, and not to our real world, in the stories of the Horla cycle.

To be more precise, the nocturnal "illumination" on the whole subject is said to have stemmed from the reading of Montesquieu, explicitly quoted in "Letter from a Madman":

> C'est une phrase de Montesquieu qui a éclairé brusquement ma pensée. La voici:
> "Un organe de plus ou de moins dans notre machine nous aurait fait une autre intelligence. … Enfin toutes les lois établies sur ce que notre machine est d'une certaine façon seraient différentes si notre machine n'était pas de cette façon."
> J'ai réfléchi à cela pendant des mois, des mois et des mois, et, peu à peu, une étrange clarté est entrée en moi, et cette clarté y a fait la nuit. (II: 461)

> [It was a phrase from Montesquieu that suddenly illumined my thinking. Here it is:
> "One more organ or one less in our body would give us a different intelligence. In fact, all the established laws as to why our body is a certain way would be different if our body were not that way."
> I reflected on that for months on end, and, little by little, a strange clarity came to me, and this clarity let there be night]. (2005: 49-50)

But the original passage is slightly different. It emphasizes the gift of "eloquence" and "poetry" (or expression) which Maupassant misquoted for "intelligence" (or perception): "un organe de plus ou de moins dans notre machine nous auroit fait une autre éloquence, une autre poésie" (Montesquieu 1951: 1241). Considering what Maupassant changed and omitted in his quote, we should also keep in mind, when reading the stories of the Horla cycle, the fact that Montesquieu's *Essai sur le Goût dans les Choses de la Nature et de l'Art* (1757) — published posthumously — is only in part an essay on the psycho-physical aspects of sensory activity, and first and foremost a meditation on creativity and art-making.

3.2. The Horla Cycle

Although themes and problems associated with the "Horla" reverberate in many of Maupassant's short stories and novellas, critics often isolate the specific trilogy that I am also contemplating here, composed by "Letter from a Madman", the first "The Horla", and the second "The Horla".[77] In addition to their common subject matter, this group of narratives is exemplary of how Maupassant followed the short form to a level of experimentation that the novel, for matters of length and convention, could not take him. A brief look into the formal framework of the stories in question will clarify this point.

The first story coincides entirely with the letter that it also conveys. In fact, it *is* the letter, devoid of narrative frame and signed, "through copy" [*pour copie*], by Maufrigneuse.

---

[77] This is the case of Charlotte Mandell, who compiled and translated the three stories, calling them "the Horla cycle" (Mandell, in Maupassant 2005: 79). Mandell's cyclical perspective emphasizes the continuity and the relationships between works often seen and treated as mutually exclusive, with the final version of "The Horla" substituting the previous ones and being the only in the trilogy that is also frequently collected and anthologized outside of it.

Thus, "Letter from a Madman" (1885) is simultaneously the title of a story and an identifying label appended to the written document that it summarily, and literally, describes. The odd signature at the end, however, is often erased both in translated versions and in reproductions of the story in the original. This is probably due to the fact that Maupassant did use the name Maufrigneuse as a pseudonym, which makes editors and translators judge it an unnecessary information. In this case, however, the pseudonym is not disposable, for it refers both to the (disguised) author of the story and to the writer of the letter, or, supposedly, its copyist. Like a Jamesian ghost text, the original manuscript is unknown to us, and what we have is the "copy" of a lost letter. In spite of this, or precisely because of this, the two little words "pour copie" crystalize the name of Maufrigneuse on the page and are a clear indication that, apart from its contents, the signature, as well as the writing and the reproduction of the letter, is a fundamental aspect in the fictionality of the story, and as such it cannot be erased.[78]

The second story on the same subject matter is already entitled "The Horla" (1886), thus naming the Invisible Being for the first time as it also names itself. Unlike the previous "letter", "The Horla" includes a minimal narrative frame, opening and closing the story, told by a third-person narrator. The remaining text corresponds to the monologue of a psychiatric patient, and, more specifically, a testimony of his preternatural experience reported to a group of physicians assembled by Dr. Marrande, "le plus illustre et le plus éminent des aliénistes" (II: 822) [the most renowned and outstanding of alienists].[79] With substantial differences in form, this is in terms of subject a condensed version of what we find in the next story.

[78] The original publication in the *Gil Blas* of 17 February 1885, bearing the elements of the fictional signature, was made available in the online archive of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, consulted 21 August 2019 at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7521650f/f1.image>.
[79] Here, as in the remaining few cases in which the translated quote is not followed by a page reference, I provide my own translation of a passage which I interpret differently from Mandell.

Closing the trilogy, the final version of "The Horla" (1887) expands on the previous versions in what comes to length and depth, at the same time as it develops the mechanisms of subjective enunciation explored before. Once again, the story does not include a narrative frame, but now instead of a letter we find a personal diary written by the narrator-protagonist in the summer months (from early May to early September) of an undisclosed year. It is as if the mental patient of the 1886-version had to go back, from his oral testimony, to the written communication of "Letter from a Madman", but dispensing with interlocutors. So, doctors and alienists have disappeared, and the very form of the personal diary suggests that, at last, the conversation is held between the writer and himself. But why and to what effect?

It is true that doctors have stepped out of the 1887 "Horla" as narrative addressees, but the medical subject has not been altogether abandoned in this version of the story. In fact, in a dinner party taking place at his cousin's, Mme Sablé, in one of his alleged trips to Paris, the narrator meets with a certain Dr. Parent, a physician "qui s'occupe beaucoup des maladies nerveuses et des manifestations extraordinaires auxquelles donnent lieu en ce moment les experiences sur l'hypnotisme et la suggestion" (II: 922) [who spends much of his time studying nervous illnesses and the extraordinary symptoms that experiments with hypnotism and suggestion are producing these days] (2005: 17). And it does not take long for the narrator to witness Dr. Parent's irresistible powers as he exercises them on Mme Sablé, making her beg him, under hypnosis, for an inexplicably large sum of five thousand francs that he does not possess and she does not need.

This episode is of course meant to serve as a lesson of humility, a victory over the narrator's skepticism, and an evidence that he must penetrate further into a "voi inattendue" (II: 922) [unexpected track] (2005: 18) in his search for the Horla. In view of his cousin's subjugation to the mysterious powers of Dr. Parent, the narrator is encouraged to ask himself

disturbing questions, so as to arrive, in the aftermath of that experience, at the dictum that is central to the story and its *interrogative mood*, and encapsulates much of what is at stake in the Horla cycle and in the reanimation stories analyzed in the following sections of this study: "Le sage dit: Peut-être?" (II: 926) [The wise man says: Perhaps?].[80] Or, in other words, to recognize our inherent ignorance is an act of wisdom in and of itself. However, the narrator's standing in favor of agnosticism does not ask us to drown in a sea of suspicion or to accept all and any form of explanation as possible. In fact, according to the examples given in these stories, it means to reject all dogmatisms — a proposal that James praised most emphatically in his critical writings on Maupassant[81] — and to consider not only the unknown but also the incomprehensible, assuming an inclination to constant inquiry and an attraction to that which escapes explication. But all this without giving in to occultism and easy superstition, so as to "conclude", instead, "with these simple words": "'Je ne comprends pas parce que la cause m'échappe'" (II: 921) ["I do not understand because the cause escapes me"] (2005: 16). In any case, the acceptance of the ungraspability of certain things is a change in epistemological

---

[80] I prefer to preserve the original interrogative structure of the narrator's thinking, whereas Mandell gives it a slightly different tone by turning it into an exclamation: "The wise man says, 'Perhaps!'" (2005: 23).

[81] The first time that James broaches this subject, in an article of March 1888, he perfectly captures the problem of illusory perception of reality that Maupassant placed at the center of his supernatural tales, but he also takes the chance to add a measure of nuance to the cynicism and absolute relativism that we may too hastily associate with the French writer: "he goes on to say that any form of the novel is simply a vision of the world from the standpoint of a person constituted after a certain fashion, and that it is therefore absurd to say that there is, for the novelist's use, only one reality of things. This seems to me commendable, not as a flight of metaphysics, hovering over bottomless gulfs of controversy, but, on the contrary, as a just indication of the vanity of certain dogmatisms. The particular way we see the world is our particular illusion about it, says M. de Maupassant, and this illusion fits itself to our organs and senses; our receptive vessel becomes the furniture of *our* little plot of the universal consciousness" (James 1984: 523). In the following year, a much shorter piece on Maupassant reiterates his aptness at shattering expectations and commonplace beliefs, even when recurring more to subtler means and less to the "uncleanness" of the typically French *conte leste* (as James had put it in his first portrait of the writer): "His two last novels, *Pierre et Jean* and *Fort comme la Mort*, deal with shades of feeling and delicacies of experience to which he had shown himself rather a stranger. They are the work of an older man, and of a man who has achieved the feat of keeping his talent fresh when other elements have turned stale. In default of other convictions it may still, for the artist, be an adequate working faith to turn out something fine. Guy de Maupassant is a striking illustration of this curious truth and of the practical advantage of having a first-rate ability. Such a gift may produce surprises in the mere exercise of its natural health. The dogmatist is never safe with it" (James 1984: 554).

attitude that, as seen in these stories, brings literature and science face to face as interrelated yet competing ways of representing and attributing meaning to the world.

Commenting on the episode of hypnotism, Atia Sattar points out that "Maupassant's choice of name for Doctor Parent is also worthy of consideration" for being the last name of the protagonist of "A Madman?" (2011: 234-5), a story that is to some extent an embryonic version of "The Horla". I agree with this observation and regard it as an important intertextual echo; but there is a subtler and more consequential layer of meaning in the physician's name. In doubling "the image of the Horla" (236), as Sattar pertinently puts it, sharing with it the power to subjugate the human will in his work as a hypnotist, Dr. Parent is also attesting an ontological proximity with the Being, of whom he is a *relative*, or of whom, under the aegis of Mesmer, he is the *father*, according to the common meanings of the word *parent* in French. To support this view, we must see to what extent the author's play with notions of parentage and blood relations along the novella is masterfully codified in this passage.

After picturing the mesmerized lady in action under the influence of Parent, like the haunted protagonist under the influence of the doctor's supernatural counterpart, Maupassant makes the physician refer to Mme Sablé not as the narrator's *cousine* — as the diarist himself addresses her every time[82] —, but as his "parente" (II: 925). This odd choice of word clarifies the exact correspondences between the four characters in question, and it reinforces the para-psychological dimension that we may associate with the Invisible Being: the narrator stands for his *parente* (as a puppet) like the Horla stands for *Parent* (as a puppeteer). Here is one of the most important differences between the final "Horla" and the earlier stories; a difference

---

[82] See, e.g., pp. 922 and 930.

that responds to what I referred to as a turning point in epistemic attitude from the pretension of knowledge (scientific *or* superstitious) to the wisdom of inquisitiveness.

The dramatization of interlocution has disappeared from the narrative outline of the story, and the medical authority that used to occupy the place of reader and/or recipient of the narrative so as to possibly reply with a diagnosis or, at least, a clear answer to the doubts expressed by the fictional writer, now stands in the place of the unseeable and wordless being. The hope of cure or clarification is gradually transferred along the stories into the very place of fear, thus displacing clinical action, in metaphorical terms, from the realm of science and method into the regions of the Unknown. In a late-century cultural context in which doctors are as wizards with unprecedented power over the invisible workings of the mind, there is no difference between science and sorcery.83 Since to give himself to Dr. Parent, like his cousin, would mean surrendering to mechanisms of domination akin to the Horla, and who may even have *parented* it, the narrator is unaided and must act both as patient and analyst of his case.

---

83 With respect to this confluence, or even confusion, it should be noted how the diarist describes his cousin's going under and out of hypnosis more as a mysterious magic spell than as a rational medical procedure: "Elle s'assit dans un fauteuil et il commença à la regarder fixement en la fascinant. Moi, je me sentis soudain un peu troublé, le cœur battant, la gorge serrée. Je voyais les yeux de Mme Sablé s'alourdir, sa bouche se crisper, sa poitrine haleter. Au bout de dix minutes, elle dormait" (II: 923) [She sat down in an armchair and he began to look at her fixedly, hypnotizing her. I felt all of a sudden a little troubled; my heart was beating and my throat tightened. I saw Madame Sablé's eyes becoming heavier, her mouth clenching, her chest heaving. After ten minutes, she was asleep] (2005: 19); "Elle sommeillait déjà sur une chaise longue, accablée de fatigue. Le médecin lui prit le pouls, la regarda quelque temps, une main levée vers ses yeux qu'elle ferma peu à peu sous l'effort insoutenable de cette puissance magnétique" (II: 926) [She was already napping on a chaise longue, overwhelmed with fatigue. The doctor took her pulse, looked at her for some time, then raised his hand over her eyes. Gradually they closed, under the irresistible force of this magnetic power] (2005: 23). Adding to this troubling atmosphere and loss of free-will before Dr. Parent's influence, Mme Sablé's hypnotic episode is more reminiscent of the pain and desperation attributed to demonic possession than of the numbness of Mesmerism: "Elle s'assit fort troublée, les yeux baissés (…) Elle tremblait d'angoisse, tant cette démarche lui était douloureuse, et je compris qu'elle avait la gorge pleine de sanglots (…) Je devinai le travail torturant de sa pensée (…) Elle poussa une sorte de cri de souffrance (...) Elle s'exaltait, joignait les mains comme si ele m'eût prié! J'entendais sa voix changer de ton; elle pleurait et bégayait, harcelée, dominée par l'ordre irrésistible qu'elle avait reçu" (II: 924-5) [She sat down, very agitated, her eyes lowered (…) She was trembling with anxiety, so painful was this task to her, and I could tell that her throat was choking with sobs (…) I could see how hard it was for her to think (…) She let out a sort of cry of anguish (…) She became distraught, joining her hands together as if she were praying to me! I heard her voice change tone. She cried and stammered, tormented, dominated by the irresistible order she had received] (2005: 20-2).

As such, he also becomes addresser and addressee of his written appeal,[84] or, in other words, and as some of Machado's characters contemplated in Chapter 1 (see p. 91), an "halluciné raisonnant" (II: 928): an oxymoron used by himself and which may translate periphrastically as "a rational person suffering from hallucinations" (2005: 26).

Before delving more deeply into this matter, however, to see how the narrator is able to exercise his reason by marrying it with his delirium, I would like to point out that regardless of the way these stories enact their own transmission as real documents, taking us back to the paradoxical *factuality of the text* discussed in James's "The Turn of the Screw" (see p. 159), Maupassant knits together his Horla cycle by fictionalizing three relatively short genres of autobiographic writing: letters, confessions, and journal entries. This brings me back to the discussion about the possibilities of the short story as opposed to those of the novel. What I meant when I first mentioned this subject was that, more peacefully than James, as we have seen (see p. 130),[85] Maupassant benefits directly from the brevity and formal openness of the short story and knows how to make them instrumental to his poetics, and particularly to his poetics of the supernatural. I say this because, more than relying on an ambiguous plot, these

---

[84] The central question on the topic of madness, for example, is no longer put to the physician, but instead to himself: "Je me demande si se suis fou" (II: 927) [I wonder if I am crazy] (2005: 25).

[85] As a matter of fact, James's regular battles with the problem of story length and with his tendency to expatiate seem to have been fought, in the author's own mind, having Maupassant for a counter-example and a model. Richard Fusco discusses this issue in detail, stating in *Maupassant and the American Short Story*: "In his search for a new literary self (…), James tried to incorporate in his works an approach that he believed fundamental to Maupassant's genius. The stylistic criterion he came to associate with Maupassant more than any other was *brevity*. (…) As he entered and survived his own artistic experiments, during the 1890s, James often chastised himself and his work in progress with buzzwords such as 'brevity' and 'à la Maupassant.' Although he invoked in his notebooks the name of his friend more than any other writer during the decade, James's entries suggest that Maupassatian principles were not central to the formulation of any single plot but instead acted as corrections to his expansive inclinations. The first invoking of Maupassantian brevity in James's journal came while he mapped out a plot sequence for *The Tragic Muse*: 'Oh, spirit of Maupassant, come to my aid! This may be a triumph of robust and vivid concision; and certainly ought to be'" (1994: 185-6).

stories take on an unfinished form — or a "very full" brevity, as James put it in a (remarkably) brief essay on his French contemporary[86] — as an enabler of the supernatural experience.

However, these texts do not play with the ideas of incompleteness or fragmentarity as such. I use the expression *unfinished form* to refer to the power of the short story to project other textual dimensions outside of it. This is not to say that other narrative forms do not rely on suggestion, implicit information, and ideas which lie only between the lines. This is quite uncontestable. Nonetheless, what we find in these short stories surpasses those mechanisms to reach a further degree of linguistic economy and metaleptic design. It all comes down to the fact that, unlike the nineteenth-century novel — and as Maupassant understood it quite inventively in these cases —, a story may correspond *ipsis litteris* to a single unanswerable letter posing an unanswerable question, to a short testimony offered to a medical audience, taken as fact and presented without contestation, or to the honest, although certainly baffling, pages of a personal diary kept for a few months until the apparent death of its writer.

In the final analysis, these stories are not ambiguous because we cannot tell whether they are properly realistic or properly supernatural — since, as I have argued, they actually neutralize that kind of divide —, but because they overstep the border of narration to reach extra-narrative entities and realities more evidently anthropomorphized as a mute narratee, a speechless doctor, or a reader whose voice is desperately called-for but inaudible. This state of irresolution between text and solicited interpretation, between what falls inside and what remains outside the grammar of the short story (while being conceived *in* it), is what guided Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier in her discussion of "The Horla" as a tale that necessarily

---

[86] "The complete possession of his instrument has enabled [Maupassant] to attack a great variety of subjects — usually within rigid limits of space. He has accepted the necessity of being brief, and has made brevity very full, through making it an energetic selection" (James 1984: 553).

activates an "hors-texte" [outer-text] (1978: 358). This "hors-texte", in turn, reproduces the text that produces it, enabling the redemption of its writer by transferring the responsibility — that is, the task of *responding* — over to the story's recipient.

While exploring a similar transition between different narrative levels, even beyond the verbal limits of the text, to the one I have contemplated in the stories of Machado which are fictionally framed within the reality of our own reading (see p. 66), Ropars-Wuilleumier's concept of "outer-text" further emphasizes and plays with a type of outward spatiality that is inherent to Maupassant's creation and attested in the name of the Invisible Being: the *Horla*, who comes from the *hors-texte* that it originates. To clarify this point, I quote from Charlotte Mandell's comment on this matter in her brief note to the translation of the novella:

> The word "horla" (pronounced "orla"), although not a word in French, does have some interesting connotations to a French ear. "Hors" means outside, and "là" means simply "there"— so le (note the masculine gender) Horla sounds like the Outsider, the outer, the one Out There. (Mandell, in Maupassant 2005: 79)

Ropars-Wuilleumier's textual understanding of the deixis implicated in the Being's name takes me to the point in which the problem of spatiality meets the problem of reading, as the Outsider seems to invade and traverse space and text uncontrollably in the eyes of the narrator, disappearing in words as much as it does not appear in material images. The links in this connection must be analyzed more attentively.

Compared with "Letter from a Madman" and to the first "Horla", the story published in 1887 seems to be a more sophisticated tale of *pathogenic* reading. Its protagonist is subtly introduced, in fact, as having an obsessive disposition toward that activity. However, for the very first time that he touches the subject, the writer of the diary speaks instead of his inability to read, presenting that flaw — which James frequently imposes on his characters, as seen in

Chapter 2 — as a sign of the tribulations that he is going through due to an impairment firstly cognitive and then physical: "Je dîne vite, puis j'essaie de lire; mais je ne comprends pas les mots; je distingue à peine les lettres" (II: 915) [I dine quickly, then I try to read; but I do not understand the words. I can scarcely make out the letters] (2005: 6). Associated with the deterioration of his own thinking and ability to comprehend, the diarist's failing eyesight is also the confirmation of a more general preoccupation with the weakness of our senses, and particularly of vision, already outlined in "Letter from a Madman":

> Peu nombreux, parce que nos sens n'étant qu'au nombre de cinq, le champ de leurs investigations et la nature de leurs révélations se trouvent fort restreints.
> Je m'explique. — L'oeil nous indique les dimensions, les formes et les couleurs. Il nous trompe sur ces trois points.
> Il ne peut nous révéler que les objets et les êtres de dimension moyenne, en proportion avec la taille humaine, ce qui nous a amenés à appliquer le mot grand à certaines choses et le mot petit à certaines autres, uniquement parce que sa faiblesse ne lui permet pas de connaître ce qui est trop vaste ou trop menu pour lui. D'où il résulte qu'il ne sait et ne voit presque rien, que l'univers presque entier lui demeure caché, l'étoile qui habite l'espace et l'animalcule qui habite la goutte d'eau. (II: 462)

> [Paltry, because since our senses number only five, the field of their investigations and the nature of their revelations are both quite limited.
> I will explain. The eye transmits dimensions, shapes, and colors to us. It deceives us on these three points.
> It can reveal to us only objects and beings of an average dimension in relation to human size, which has led us to apply the word "large" to certain things and the word "small" to certain other things, only because the eye's weakness does not allow it to be aware of what is too immense or too tiny for it. Hence, it knows and sees almost nothing, and almost the entire universe remains hidden from it, the star that inhabits space as well as the microbe that inhabits a drop of water.] (2005: 50-1)

In "The Horla", however, even if he is also aware that his eye is deceitful, and even if he writes about the illegibility and the evanescent nature of the books at his disposal, the protagonist shows a remarkably naïve trust in the written word as a source of knowledge; and he conceives the act of reading as an opportunity for revelation and clarification. And when the possibility of enlightenment seems impossible in his own case, he attaches this precisely to the non-literary nature (according to his experience as a reader) of the situation at hand, as

the *unreadable* gives way in the story to the *not-read*: "Je n'ai jamais rien lu qui ressemble à ce qui s'est passé dans ma demeure. Oh! si je pouvais la quitter, si je pouvais m'en aller, fuir et ne pas revenir. Je serais sauvé, mais je ne peux pas" (II: 930) [I have never read anything that resembles what has been going on in my house. If only I could leave it, if only I could go out, flee and not come back, I would be saved. But I cannot] (2005: 30).

Although seemingly unrelated — apart from the fact that they emerge sequentially in the narrator's mind —, the two ideas presented in this passage are tightly connected. If we look carefully, the narrator's surprise before what he describes as a literary unprecedent and his wish to escape from it revolve around the same axis of the home. Even in terms of syntax, *ma demeure* [my house] plays the part of a bridging term: a noun in the adjunct of the first sentence, it resurfaces as a pronoun in the object of the following clause (*la*) [it], suggesting a direct correlation between the undecipherability of the situation and the subject's captivity, between the inexistent text in the first sentence and the inescapable house in the second.

If we follow this line of interpretation, it becomes clear that the writer is the spatial antagonist of the Horla and at the same time its symbolic twin, reinstating the Doppelgänger motif to formulate a paradoxical principle of *non-equivalence*, such as we saw it, for example, in James's "The Jolly Corner". The narrator knows that he is locked inside the house (that is, inside the *story*) while he constantly gazes outside its walls, into the *hors là*. By contrast, the Being is ontologically and definingly exterior, inhabiting an *hors-texte* while it insistently peers into the story (that is, it invades the protagonist's home), whereas, also as in James's story, the diarist's house is a reflection of his own mind, with various points of escape and intrusion. In his study on Maupassant as a literary precursor of Freud's theoretical work, Pierre Bayard connects this to the epistemological problem of "savoir *où* est l'Autre" (1994:

143) [knowing *where* is the Other]. The house of "The Horla" is a paradigmatic (although

not exclusive in the work of Maupassant) exploration of this issue:

> Le jeu le plus précis et le plus dense de métaphores est celui de l'*habitation*. Ce n'est pas sans raison que "Le Horla" se termine par l'image d'une pièce que l'on barricade et d'une maison que l'on brûle. L'habitation, et spécifiquement la maison, est clairement, chez Maupassant, une métaphore du sujet, toujours menacée comme lui d'être envahie, pénétrée, occupée. Les seuls moments de tranquillité que connaît le narrateur sont d'ailleurs ceux où il s'éloigne de chez lui. (1994: 144)

> [The most precise and densest play with metaphors is the one surrounding *habitation*. It is not without a reason that "The Horla" ends with the image of a barricaded room and a burned house. The habitation, and specifically the house, is clearly, in Maupassant, a metaphor for the subject, always threatened, like him, to be invaded, penetrated, occupied. The only moments of tranquility known by the narrator are actually those when he moves away from home.]

But in this metaphorical chain the architectural self is in turn materialized in the text

produced by himself in an attempt to accommodate (that is, to turn *homely* or *familiar*) the

convulsive and uncanny dimension of his experience. Additionally, the figures that occupy

this triangle between mind, house and text are also the personifications of writing and reading

acts at the heart of the novella: the writer, a subject made only of (his own) words in the diary

is in search of an *unread* monster who invisibly hovers above the surface of that text, forever

escaping from being *written down*. Nevertheless, it would be reductive to see the relationship

between the narrator and the Horla as one of simple anti-symmetry.

On some occasions — as when the creature *tells* him its name for it to be verbalized

for the first time in a sort of theophany without apparition[87] —, the diarist's writerly endeavor

brings him close to the Horla. At other times, it emphasizes oppositional differences between

---

[87] "Il est venu, le... le... comment se nomme-t-il… le… il me semble qu'il me crie son nom, et je ne l'entends pas… le… oui... il le crie... J'écoute… je ne peux pas… répète… le… Horla… J'ai entendu... le Horla... c'est lui... le Horla... il est venu!..." (II: 933) [He has come, the... the... what is his name... the... he seems to be shouting out his name to me, and I cannot hear it... the... yes... he is shouting it... I am trying to hear... I can't... again... the... Horla... I heard... the Horla... it is he... the Horla... he has come!] (2005: 34-5).

them, as I have remarked with regard to one's eloquence and the other's practical aphasia. In spite of this oscillating connection between characters that both repel and reflect each other — which becomes preeminent, as we shall see, in the mirror scene at the center of the story —, the writing of the diary distinguishes the narrator and makes him perhaps a more powerful and all-encompassing entity than the one that actually gives the novella its title.

As a matter of fact, the Horla acts as a challenging sphinx at the end of the fictional writer's heroic pursuit, which we must not forget — tracing the echoes of Montesquieu — is also an artistic one. Apart from his altered state of consciousness (which may be equally due to dementia or to a heightened perception), the narrator is afflicted with a particular madness of representation. I use this phrase to refer both to his obsession and his agonizing difficulties in translating the Being into a perceivable form; for if the Horla is invisible, it is impossible to describe in any positive terms. In fact, it has been noted that conceiving the Horla in *words* was no small task for Maupassant and for his fictional author. Considering this, Katherine D. Kiernan formulated two questions which, on one hand, point out the problem of perception and intelligibility that surrounds the creature, and, on the other hand, isolate the crux of the matter in the writing project that the story also corresponds to for its protagonist: "Comment enregistrer cet être étrange dans le journal intime? Comment le distinguer du moi s'il est invisible?" (Kiernan 2005: 44) [How to register that strange being in the personal diary? How to distinguish it from the self if it is invisible?].

Both questions may be asked, at different points and with different implications, to Maupassant, to the fictional writer, and to the story's reader. But at the basis of the two-fold problem that they stem from — related to representation as well as to reading or discernment — lies the interstitial nature of the protagonist, perfectly summarized in the title of Kiernan's article, "L'entre-moi": a pronominal "I" locked between illusory perception and attempted

218

expression, between the Horla and himself, speaking to us only as the voice of writing placed in the eternal present of diaristic register, and so inherently synchronous with enunciation (if we accept, at least, that any story conveyed in a diary is responding to the arch-narrative of the diary's own writing). In view of this issue, this "story about writing a story" (Fitz 1972: 956) reconstitutes a sequence of events *with* the time-frame of their writing and translation into a literary form, thus becoming an extemporal interval of time and a period of eloquence inside which the nameless narrator is also confined, or before and beyond which his existence is fully interrupted even as a virtual character.

In the vein of Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, a story reporting "extraordinary events" in the life of a narrator confronted with his climbing insanity,[88] published fifty years earlier, the latest version of "The Horla" follows a diary-entry format while dispensing with any kind of narrative framing. In their supposedly unmediated objectivity, both texts disrupt the "affirmation of reality" traditionally expected from supernatural fiction of the nineteenth century, reliant on the "*effet de cadre*" and in "stereoscopic presentation" (Neefs 1980: 232).

We only find examples of such rhetorical devices in the first "Horla", with a third-person narrator and with Dr. Marrande's distanced and legitimizing, although inconclusive, point-of-view: "Je ne sais si cet homme est fou ou si nous le sommes tous les deux... ou si... si notre successeur est réellement arrivé" (II: 830) [I do not know if this man is mad, or if we are both mad... or if... if our successor has actually arrived] (2005: 74). On the contrary, the atypical co-dependence, in the final "Horla", between the purely subjective enunciation and the story — between telling and being (in time) — is illustrated in the ending, as the narrative is forced to stop at exactly the same point where the diarist's life-line seems to break.

---

[88] See Gogol 2009: 158.

Before tackling the writer's final words, however, I should like to point out the fact that enough clues have been gathered, from the format of the personal diary itself to the *logo-genesis* and narrative suicide of the "I", to suspect that the narrator's search for the Horla is also a quest for himself. It is possible that "Letter from a Madman" and that the 1886 "Horla" give a more obvious emphasis to the exploration of the narrative self, since in the last version of the story the attention seems to be placed, instead, almost entirely in the creature. However, as it encapsulates "the narrator's scopic engagement with his own body" (Hadlock 2003: 49), the mirror scene that I have alluded to before is also an indication that the apex of horror may finally correspond, in the third story, to an experience of monstrous self(less)ness:

Je me dressai, les mains tendues, en me tournant si vite que je faillis tomber. Eh bien?... on y voyait comme en plein jour, et je ne me vis pas dans ma glace!... Elle était vide, claire, profonde, pleine de lumière! Mon image n'était pas dedans... et j'étais en face, moi! Je voyais le grand verre limpide du haut en bas. Et je regardais cela avec des yeux affolés; et je n'osais plus avancer, je n'osais plus faire un mouvement, sentant bien pourtant qu'il était là, mais qu'il m'échapperait encore, lui dont le corps imperceptible avait dévoré mon reflet.

Comme j'eus peur! Puis voilà que tout à coup je commençai à m'apercevoir dans une brume, au fond du miroir, dans une brume comme à travers une nappe d'eau; et il me semblait que cette eau glissait de gauche à droite, lentement, rendant plus précise mon image, de seconde en seconde. C'était comme la fin d'une éclipse. Ce qui me cachait ne paraissait point posséder de contours nettement arrêtés, mais une sorte de transparence opaque, s'éclaircissant peu à peu.

Je pus enfin me distinguer complètement, ainsi que je le fais chaque jour en me regardant. (II: 935-6)

[I stood up with my hands outstretched, turning around so quickly that I almost fell down. And? Everything there was clear as in full daylight, but I could not see myself in my mirror — it was empty, clear, profound, full of light! My image was not inside it… yet I myself was facing it! I could see the large clear glass from top to bottom. I looked at it with terrified eyes, but dared not move forward. I did not dare to make any movement, fully aware that he was there, but that he would escape me again, he whose imperceptible body had devoured my reflection.

I was terrified. Then suddenly I began to see myself in a mist, in the depths of the mirror, in a mist as if through a sheet of water. It seemed to me that this water shimmered from left to right, slowly, making my image more precise, from second to second. It was like the end of an eclipse. Whatever was obscuring me seemed not to possess any clearly defined outlines, but just a sort of opaque transparency, little by little becoming clearer.

Finally I could distinguish myself completely, just as I do every day when I look at myself.] (2005: 38-9)

The metaphorical "eclipse" is a perfect demonstration of the dualism at the heart of the story between effacement and identification. While the presence of the Horla in the house is confirmed by its paradoxical invisibility ("he was there"), the same phenomenon seems to put the presence of the narrator into question: "Everything there was clear as in full daylight, but I could not see myself in my mirror — it was empty, clear, profound, full of light". This apparent double standard is a sign of the intricacies in the correlation between *I* and the Being. Only moments before, the Horla imitates the diarist in his movements as a reader and writer, with a focus on the objects that represent him best: that is, books and papers. Now, the tables have turned, and the narrator sees himself replicating the Horla while disappearing, like it, in front of its very symbol: the empty mirror where invisibility is visualized. This game of hide-and-seek played around books and mirrors reconnects those two objects in the palimpsestic disappearance of the narrator, whose image is obliterated in contact with the nondescript (that is, the non-verbalizable) Horla, as well as in his gradual reappearance, taking place, as a turn of page in a book and a return to legibility, "from left to right".

Given these points, the mirror scene is clearly a moment of climax in the semantics of vision and non-vision pervading the Horla cycle. This ocular obsession permeates theme as much as plot development, but it is also important from a narratological perspective, as suggested in the visual metaphors and sight-related vocabulary that Jacques Neefs and Philip Hadlock themselves employ when thinking in critical terms of *cadre* and stereoscopy, and of the narrator's "scopic" mania with himself. However, as J. Hillis Miller reminds us in a study of perspectivism in Henry James, *visuality*, in literary discourse, is a metaphorical construct that contaminates our theoretical language with narratological terms that "elide the way the essential mode of existence of any literary fictional work is linguistic through and through"

(2005a: 125).89 But when vision itself, and, by extension, hypotyposis, seems or pretends to fail as a means of representation, as it happens in "The Horla", the understanding that it is *in fact* a "figure of speech" (see note 89) is very likely put into relief, even if implicitly.

As a matter of fact, we can see a strengthened metaphorical correlation between the diary and the mirror, generating a difficult tension between the "logique discursive (ce que le texte dit)" [discursive logic (what the text says)] and the "logique iconique (ce que le texte donne à voir)" [iconic logic (what the texts shows)] (Schincariol 2013: 100-1). Apparent imbalances produced by this mutual relationship may perhaps be resolved in the analogy that Brewster E. Fitz established between the two objects, stating that: "A journal is, figuratively speaking, a mirror which the author holds at an oblique angle in order for the reader to see him, and directly in front of himself, in order to see his own image" (1972: 956).

The realization that the mirror and the journal are both impressionable and opaque surfaces on which the narrator attempts to fixate a fading image (also of himself) brings me back to the exploration of writing and reading in the story. I return specifically to the moment in which the protagonist remarks that he "never read anything that resembles what has been going on in my house" (2005: 30), or, in other words, that this story, like the creature, has no reflection that can be analyzed by the observer as a *comparandum*.

We may conjecture that, on the surface, Maupassant is claiming his own originality through the pen of his writer, who is — biographical readings aside — his fictional cognate. More simply put, Maupassant may be implying, inside the narrative itself, that this story is

---

89 Miller elaborates on this idea, stating that: "Another way to put this is to say that though such terms as 'center of consciousness', 'point of view', or 'focalization' may be essential to present-day narrative theory, they are figures of speech. No consciousness as such exists in any novel, only the representation of consciousness in words. No looking or bringing into focus exists in any novel, only the virtual phantasm of these as expressed in words" (2005a: 125).

unparalleled and truly new in the literary landscape of the late-nineteenth century. In a deeper level, however, this affirmation is paradoxical and very significant as a rhetorical construct, since it is exactly in *this* story that the narrator's never-read story is to be found. *Here* is the missing account of that unique experience, which is being translated into literature at the same time as it is told and written by the fictional diarist, who, in spite of having a literary disposition all around, seems to fail to see the implications of his work.

The story itself, that is, the narrator's own tale, could then be the answer or the text that he seeks, at the same time that it is also the absolute negation of that possibility for being trapped in a perverse form of self-referentiality. Briefly, it is the text itself that tells us that something like it does not exist, and that what we are reading has never been read or put into written form. Not "never before" nor "until now", but *including now*, for the narrator never conceives his written account as the necessary supplement to that gap, which seems strange in a fictional construct that dramatizes its own writing, and which is inherently destined and rhetorically designed — judging by the teleological content of its pages, certainly unexpected in a private journal — *to be read*. The effect obtained with this suggestion is that, in the end, our own reading should become an integrated experience of a story that tells us it is unique and, in fact, unpublished. If the identification with the protagonist's point-of-view is effective and complete in the measure that Maupassant seems to have intended it, then we are invited to witness the narrator's experience and see it as something that has not yet been, and is only *now* in the process of being, fixed in a readable form. Thus, accessing it we are experiencing a mystery and a practical impossibility, also taking part in the supernatural event.

Again, such expectations concerning the reading experience must be considered in more depth, as they seem to derive from, or side with, the protagonist's attitude toward that activity. As his comment on the unread story suggests, the unidentified narrator seems prone

to believe that everything he might read is to a certain extent (if not completely) true or truth-like. The truth-value that he ascribes to literature is not only comparable or similar to real life but it is also *formative*, according to an ideal sequence of events in which reading is expected to precede lived experience, so as to provide the reader (in this case, the diarist) the tools that allow him to know or recognize whatever he may be forced to contend with in reality.

But in addition to his trust on the written word, reminding us of Machado's innocent readers of Romantic novels and poetry, the protagonist of "The Horla" seems to ignore the need to draw the line between mystic and scientific literature. For him, the very questionable "grand traité du docteur Hermann Herestauss sur les habitants inconnus du monde antique et moderne" (II: 930) [great treatise of Dr. Hermann Herestauss on the unknown inhabitants of the ancient and modern world], reporting "l'histoire et les manifestations de tous les êtres invisibles rôdant autour de l'homme ou rêvés par lui" (931) [the history and manifestations of all the invisible beings that prowl around mankind, or that we dream of], naturally pairs with the *Revue du Monde Scientifique* (932), an imaginary example of all the many scientific magazines published in the late-nineteenth century. In sum, the incongruency of his readings suggests that the diarist is not as mindful of the trustworthiness of his sources as he is simply fascinated with the possibility of reading as a pathway into knowledge, regardless of whether this knowledge comes from pure fancy or rigorous observation.

Further attesting the connection between reading and the Horla, it is also in a reading scene — or by visibly manipulating the tokens of reading — that the Invisible Being *appears* at the narrator's desk, imitating him in perusing his book and sitting on his chair:

> Or, ayant dormi environ quarante minutes, je rouvris les yeux sans faire un mouvement, réveillé par je ne sais quelle émotion confuse et bizarre. Je ne vis rien d'abord, puis, tout à coup, il me sembla qu'une page du livre resté ouvert sur ma table venait de tourner toute

seule. Aucun souffle d'air n'était entré par ma fenêtre. Je fus surpris et j'attendis. Au bout de quatre minutes environ, je vis, je vis, oui, je vis de mes yeux une autre page se soulever et se rabattre sur la précédente, comme si un doigt l'eût feuilletée. Mon fauteuil était vide, semblait vide; mais je compris qu'il était là, lui, assis à ma place, et qu'il lisait. (II: 931-2)

[After sleeping for about forty minutes, though, I reopened my eyes without making a movement, awakened by some confused, strange emotion. At first I saw nothing; then, all of a sudden, it seemed to me that a page of the book that I had left open on my table had just turned, all by itself. No breath of air had entered through my window. I was surprised, and I waited. After about four minutes, I saw, yes, I saw with my own eyes, another page rise up and fall back on the one before, as if a finger had turned it. My armchair was empty, seemed empty; but I understood that he was there, seated in my place, and that he was reading.] (2005: 32)

The narrator's conclusion is that the situation described is a clear sign of the Horla's presence and intervention in the physical world, corroborating his belief that this is a creature "qui peut toucher aux choses, les prendre et les changer de place, doué par conséquent d'une nature matérielle, bien qu'imperceptible pour nos sens, et qui habite comme moi, sous mon toit" (II: 927) [who can touch things, hold them, and make them change places. He is gifted, consequently, with a material nature, although it is imperceptible to our senses, and he is living, as I am, beneath my roof] (2005: 25). However, if we temporarily ignore this final assumption and focus only on the visual progression of the episode, what we are given to see is in fact a reading scene without a reader, or having for reader a *blank* figure. The theatrics involved seem quite simple, but the horror inherent to the situation — since it is horrific even before and aside from its suggested connection to the Being — arises not from the fact that the main actor is visually absent, but from the realization that his presence is dispensable.

The horror comes in when the narrator understands that *his* reading scene still takes place when he is not consulting his book and is not seated on his armchair. This is, of course, the mesmerist theory embodied in the Horla: not exactly that actions happen without subjects, but that we may be led into action unawares. Apart from this connotation, however, and still pursuing the proposal to concentrate on what happens before the diarist's own interpretation

225

of the events, the autonomous reading scene and the book whose pages apparently turn by themselves confer a horrific character to elements of literary activity, even independently from their contact with a human intervenient, as if written words had a life of their own and no book could ever remain safely closed.

Once again, the emergence of the Horla constitutes a rupture of natural enclosures and boundaries. The creature's invasive readerly activity overflows from within and out into the narrator's original position *on set* — "assis à ma place" —, displacing him to the outside of the personal nucleus represented by the reading table and turning him into an eyewitness or a relatively distant spectator of what happens in it: "je vis, je vis, oui, je vis de mes yeux".

This intrusion of the private sphere — previously emphasized in a more architectural vocabulary related to the house ("[il] habite comme moi, sous mon toit") — becomes more prominent in a writing scene that follows the reading scene I have just commented, and which precedes, or in truth develops immediately into, the mirror scene analyzed before. Adding to the intermediate place that *writing* occupies in the chain of actions reproduced in "The Horla" between *reading* and *mirroring*, this scene introduces a theatrical component to the gestures of the fictional writer that justifies some of the dramatic words and symbols that I have used in my own comments on the story. In fact, the scene itself is a *coup de thêàtre*:

> *19 août.* — Je le tuerai. Je l'ai vu! je me suis assis hier soir, à ma table; et je fis semblant d'écrire avec une grande attention. Je savais bien qu'il viendrait rôder autour de moi, tout près, si près que je pourrais peut-être le toucher, le saisir?...
> (...)
> Donc, je faisais semblant d'écrire, pour le tromper, car il m'épiait lui aussi; et soudain, je sentis, je fus certain qu'il lisait par-dessus mon épaule, qu'il était là, frôlant mon oreille. (II: 935)
>
> [August 19. I will kill him. I have seen him! I had sat down at my table last night, and I pretended to write with great concentration. I was well aware that he would come prowl around me, quite close, so close that I might perhaps be able to touch him, to seize him....
> (…)

I was just pretending to write in order to trick him, for he too was spying on me; and suddenly, I felt, I was sure, that he was reading over my shoulder, that he was there, grazing my ear.] (2005: 38-9)

Even if the narrator's mockery of writing is devoid of humor, there is still the ironic possibility that what he pretends to write, or to go back to write, is his own journal — that is, "The Horla" —, which makes the Invisible Being a reader of the story in which it is taking part, and also, like the narrator himself a few weeks before, the reader of a text *not yet written*, or which, as in this case, only pretends to be written. In any event, it is clear that the reading and writing scenes, taking place at exactly the same location (the writer's table), pave the way for a convergence, finalized in the mirror scene, between the figures of "I" and the Being. Moreover, the joint movements of their two essentially disparate but superficially concurring bodies indicates a physical overlap — "so close that I might perhaps be able to touch him", "over my shoulder", "grazing my ear" — which in turn points out a coincidence or confusion between the narrator and the ghostly creature haunting him precisely at the point where reading, writing, and mirror reflections all intercept in the story.

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, Ponnau argues that the "capital importance of writing" is what unites the nameless heroine of James's "The Turn of the Screw" and the nameless diarist of "The Horla" (see p. 155) in a common task of giving the invisible a stable representation in words, that is, to *capture* it legibly. However, if we compare the apparitional scenes in the two stories, it becomes clear that the two fictional writers are also making an effort to achieve self-representation through depersonalization. As authors and observers, both characters are inherently absent, and they cannot see themselves through the same point of view in which they see the world that they describe. In order to overcome this impossibility as well as their anxiety of self-perception, they must face the horror of identifying with the

ghostly Other and, consequently, of bestowing a parcel of authorial status to Miss Jessel and the Horla, so that these Doppelgänger can *represent* them.

Briefly put, to see themselves in their own eyes, these characters have to abdicate from themselves and *possess* the ghosts that haunt them, which means that both sides of their characters' ontological circuitry are occupied by mutual imitators and usurpers. Then it is no coincidence that, similarly to the Horla, the ghost of Miss Jessel is caught by the governess at her "own table", taking possession of her "pen, ink, and paper", and yet making *her* feel like an intruder and the present ghost of her previous self, revealed in the emphatic, un-gothic, and Maupassantian visibility of a "clear noonday light":

> Seated at my own table in clear noonday light I saw a person whom (…) I should have taken at the first blush for some housemaid who might have stayed at home to look after the place and who, availing herself of rare relief from observation and of the schoolroom table and my pens, ink, and paper, had applied herself to the considerable effort of a letter to her sweetheart. (…) Then it was — with the very act of its announcing itself — that her identity flared up in a change of posture. She rose, not as if she had heard me, but with an indescribable grand melancholy of indifference and detachment, and, within a dozen feet of me, stood there as my vile predecessor. Dishonored and tragic, she was all before me; but even as I fixed and, for memory, secured it, the awful image passed away. Dark as midnight in her black dress, her haggard beauty and her unutterable woe, she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers. While these instants lasted, indeed, I had the extraordinary chill of feeling that it was I who was the intruder. It was as a wild protest against it that, actually addressing her — "You terrible, miserable woman!" — I heard myself break into a sound that, by the open door, rang through the long passage and the empty house. She looked at me as if she heard me, but I had recovered myself and cleared the air. There was nothing in the room the next minute but the sunshine and a sense that I must stay. (James 1996, IV: 705)

However, even if these apparitions and disappearances suggest that we can speak of an *iconic* affinity between the Horla and Maupassant's fictional writer, we must also consider a *discursive* correlation between the Being and the story's actual reader. As a matter of fact, the creature's act of prying over the shoulder of the narrator to contemplate his scribblings clearly illustrates our own indiscretion while scrutinizing the pages of a personal recording.

It becomes clear, then, that the horror felt in that writing scene *à deux* serves to unveil or to exemplify the horror of our readerly intrusion, which Maupassant has weaved into the text of the story by shaping it in the form of a personal diary. If the Horla can sit at the narrator's place, we can also occupy the place of the Horla, since we, too, are the invisible being peering from the outside.

At this stage, it has become clear that although it dispenses with the "affirmation of reality" that could be provided by a legitimizing third-person narrator who would account for the voyage of the manuscript from its source and into the reader's lap, this story still explores, through others means, the mediation of discourse and writing. In fact, by presenting the diary *as is*, like he had done before with the letter from a madman, Maupassant begs us to consider the status of literary writing associated with the problem of narrative reliability. Differently from Machado, who frequently unveils the fictional nature of the story, or from James, whose frame-narrators contribute even more, while attesting for its factuality, to the unreliability of the text replicated in their narrative, Maupassant opted to present his story as a cold case that can only speak for itself, undisturbed by outside intervention, and even from its author, who, contrarily to the writer of the letter in the first story, does not sign his manuscript or give his identity away by any other means. It is a piece of textual evidence suspended in the air.

However, instead of disavowing the truth-value of the fictional manuscript, the fact that it is given without apparent considerations for authenticity only makes it more effective and unquestionable in its (undisclosed) intents. The text was originally *personal* and does not seem to have been used by anyone else in order to prove or disprove anything, and it is free of second-degree commentary, making it particularly believable. In sum, Maupassant played brilliantly with the "affirmation of reality" by dispensing with it altogether.

The use of such an *invisible* device is in itself an indication that the author of *Mont Oriol* saw the supernatural potential inherent to literary language as a form of historical and mnemonic preservation that also functions as a means for recreating and supplanting nature. In "The Horla", Dr. Parent sees the emergence of abstract language, and specially of literacy, as the birth of impenetrable mystery, the turning-point of history in which mankind tragically exceeded itself. What is more, according to him *omnipotent intelligence*, expressed as written thought, stands as the antithesis of our *impotent organs*: "Depuis que l'homme pense, depuis qu'il sait dire et écrire sa pensée, il se sent frôlé par un mystère impénétrable pour ses sens grossiers et imparfaits, et il tâche de suppléer, par l'effort de son intelligence, à l'impuissance de ses organes" (II: 922) [Ever since man has thought, ever since he has known how to speak and write his thoughts, he has felt touched by a mystery impenetrable to his coarse and imperfect senses, and he has tried, by the effort of his intelligence, to compensate for the powerlessness of his organs] (2005: 18).

In this respect, it is important to notice the extent to which the notion of unlimited *imagination-through-writing* also affects the fictional author of the diary, who quite smoothly surpasses nature in some of his boldest conjectures, showing us not only how familiar he is with the boundless powers of fiction, but also how much this story is the work of a perhaps dangerously imaginative mind. His speculation on extraterrestrial life-forms is suggestive in this matter, as naming gives way to metaphor, which in turn allows for dreaming and finally for *seeing* in the chain of imaginative creation:

> Mais direz-vous, le papillon! une fleur qui vole! J'en rêve un qui serait grand comme cent univers, avec des ailes dont je ne puis même exprimer la forme, la beauté, la couleur et le mouvement. Mais je le vois… il va d'étoile en étoile, les rafraîchissant et les embaumant au souffle harmonieux et léger de sa course!... Et les peuples de là-haut le regardent passer, extasiés et ravis!" (II: 935)

[But you'll say, what about the butterfly? A flower that flies! I dream of one that would be as large as a hundred universes, with wings whose shape, beauty, color, and movement I cannot even describe. But I can see it… it goes from star to star, refreshing them and soothing them with the harmonious and light breath of its journey!... And the peoples up there, ecstatic and ravished, watch it go by!] (2005: 37)

All writing implies in one way or other the possibility of *making up*. This seems to be the principle behind the origin of the diary, the staged writing scene, Dr. Parent's theories on intelligence, and the narrator's mixed-up reading history. Nonetheless, writing is also the most important means for the communication of knowledge. This double function points out an essential promiscuity between literary and scientific texts to which late-nineteenth century authors such as Maupassant were sensitive. Reflecting on the question of narrative reliability, Charlotte Sleigh pins down the structure of this mutual relationship, stating: "The judgements of science and literature were also connected for the simple reason that scientific knowledge is, at some stage or another, always conveyed in written form. Thus the scientific question of evidence always entailed that of textual credibility" (2011: 101).

Perceiving the intricacies of this connection allowed Maupassant to put the scientific (or pseudo-scientific) theme, which James expurgated from his own pages, at the service of fiction. His goal in doing this, however, was not to imbue literature with factuality, producing forms of supernatural narrative that might be clinically *explained away*. On the contrary, the common ground between the treatise of Dr. Herestauss and the *Revue du Monde Scientifique* is one in which fiction may grow free from the constraints of any form of dogma, not shackled by superstition neither subservient to medicine, and so unbounded by explanations.

Under this assumption, Maupassant explores the correlation of scientific "evidence" and "textual credibility", as seen, by fictionalizing a genre of autobiographic writing in which the two ends seem to meet: the text is proof, and it is not a *tale*, but a direct and a practically

simultaneous translation of the lived experience of its unknown writer. It stands as a piece of evidence that survived the one who produced it and is now the echo of an irrecoverable, thus irrefutable voice. This brings me back to the question of the diarist's unrestricted authorship, which does not correspond exactly to narrative unreliability.

Machado's narrators often acknowledge the lucidity and the precision in the words of the madmen with whom they cross paths (see p. 91). Here, however, the narrator himself is the reporter of incredible revelations and the witness to impossible visions that he proceeds to convey in a story of experimentation and discovery written, in Ponnau's formulation, with "remarquable lucidité" (1990: 299) [remarkable lucidity]; that is, this is a story that exhibits all the habitual signs of reliability, starting with the diarist's *interrogative mood* manifested in his hesitation, self-questioning, and sensible doubts about his own mental integrity.[90]

The narrative of the final "Horla" is itself based on the writing process (enacted in the diaristic format) of a document which, rather than claiming to be true, humbly states the facts in a series of events as it is experienced by its author. There is, however, a catch in this impeccable rhetoric device: the narration made exclusively in the first-person and the purely subjective position that grants us unmediated access to the story also emphasize its solipsistic

---

[90] In the entry dated "*7 août*", for example, he writes: "Je me demande si je suis fou. En me promenant, tantôt au grand soleil, le long de la rivière, des doutes me sont venus sur ma raison, non point des doutes vagues comme j'en avais jusqu'ici, mais des doutes précis, absolus. J'ai vu des fous; j'en ai connu qui restaient intelligents, lucides, clairvoyants même sur toutes les choses de la vie, sauf sur un point. Ils parlaient de tout avec clarté, avec souplesse, avec profondeur, et soudain leur pensée, touchant l'écueil de leur folie s'y déchirait en pièces, s'éparpillait et sombrait dans cet océan effrayant et furieux, plein de vagues bondissantes, de brouillards, de bourrasques, qu'on nomme 'la démence'. Certes, je me croirais fou, absolument fou, si je n'étais conscient, si je ne connaissais parfaitement mon état, si je ne le sondais en l'analysant avec une complète lucidité" (II: 927-8) [I wonder if I am crazy. As I was walking just now in the full sunshine, along the river, doubts about my reason came to me, not vague doubts as I have had till now, but precise, absolute doubts. I have seen madmen; I have known some who remained intelligent, lucid, even perceptive about all matters of life, except on one point. They speak of everything with clarity, agility, and profundity, and suddenly, as their thoughts turn to the stumbling-block of their madness, their thought processes shatter, scatter, and sink into that terrifying and furious ocean, full of leaping waves, fogs, and squalls, which we call "dementia". Surely, I would think myself crazy, absolutely crazy, if I weren't aware of my condition, if I weren't completely familiar with it, if I didn't probe it by means of the most complete and lucid analysis] (2005: 26).

and possibly obsessive nature, as well as its general unverifiability. Ponnau elaborates on the paradox in the reading effect produced by this contradiction as the sign of an insurmountable limit imposed on the representational powers of language:

> [L]e héros-narrateur veut démontrer le caractère supranormal [de son récit] afin d'écarter, du même coup, l'hypothèse non moins angoissante de son éventuelle folie. Entreprise condamnée à l'échec tant le langage se révèle incapable de circonscrire et de représenter une aventure dont l'authenticité, garantie par la seule parole d'un narrateur qui est aussi un personnage, est nécessairement sujette à caution. (1990: 94)

> [The hero-narrator wants to demonstrate the *supranormal* character (of his story) in order to dispel, at the same time, the no less agonizing hypothesis of his own madness. The enterprise is condemned to failure so much as language shows to be incapable of circumscribing and representing an adventure whose authenticity, assured only by the word of a narrator who is also a character, is necessarily put into question.]

In my reflection I am not so interested, however, in how "The Horla" fails to safely authenticate the narrator's story as I am in how it actually succeeds in communicating it in a way that prevents readers from hastily judging it as *inauthentic*. And an important part of this success is precisely due to the ability of the diarist to traverse — instead of circumscribing — the linguistic space between his subjective, and perhaps maniacal experience, and the clear and substantiated account of that experience in terms that are reasonable and sometimes even proto-scientific.

"The Horla" does not start as a scientific investigation in the first sense. However, as the diarist's account of his daily life progresses, it becomes increasingly evident that it is organized according to a basic structure of observation and conjecture, experimentation with the elements of the problem, and, lastly, assessment of results obtained. But there is more to this aspect of the novella than a simple parody of scientific rhetoric. Differently from the mad scientists of the stories of Machado, who act and speak more like charlatans or jokers, it is

important for Maupassant's diarist to face his quest for knowledge seriously and earnestly, since his intention is not to mock science, but to use it on behalf of his story.

The most rigorous representation of a scientific method, or of a practice that aspires to empirical verifiability, following a logical-deductive argumentation from the protagonist, is to be found in the nightly tests that he conducts in his room with the aim of demonstrating the presence of the Invisible Being through visible evidence. After realizing that the water in a jar left on his bedside table had disappeared in the morning (see II: 919), he gets a suspicion and comes up with an idea which he then puts to the test in a series of experiments annotated in what looks like an analeptic laboratorial chronogram of events:

10 juillet. — Je viens de faire des épreuves surprenantes.
    Décidément, je suis fou! Et pourtant!
    Le 6 juillet, avant de me coucher, j'ai placé sur ma table du vin, du lait, de l'eau, du pain et des fraises.
    On a bu — j'ai bu — toute l'eau, et un peu de lait. On n'a touché ni au vin, ni au pain, ni aux fraises.
    Le 7 juillet, j'ai renouvelé la même épreuve, qui a donné le même résultat.
    Le 8 juillet, j'ai supprimé l'eau et le lait. On n'a touché à rien.
    Le 9 juillet enfin, j'ai remis sur ma table l'eau et le lait seulement, en ayant soin d'envelopper les carafes en des linges de mousseline blanche et de ficeler les bouchons. Puis, j'ai frotté mes lèvres, ma barbe, mes mains avec de la mine de plomb, et je me suis couché.
    L'invincible sommeil m'a saisi, suivi bientôt de l'atroce réveil. Je n'avais point remué; mes draps eux-mêmes ne portaient pas de taches. Je m'élançai vers ma table. Les linges enfermant les bouteilles étaient demeurés immaculés. Je déliai les cordons, en palpitant de crainte. On avait bu toute l'eau! on avait bu tout le lait! Ah! mon Dieu!...
    Je vais partir tout à l'heure pour Paris. (II: 920)

[July 10. I have just carried out some surprising experiments.
    Without a doubt, I am mad! And yet ...
    On July 6, before I went to bed, I placed on my table some wine, some milk, some water, some bread, and some strawberries.
    Someone drank — I drank — all the water, and a little milk. They didn't touch the wine, or the bread, or the strawberries.
    On July 7, I repeated the same test, which gave the same result.
    On July 8, I didn't include the water and the milk. They touched nothing.
    Finally, on July 9, I put on my table just the water and the milk, taking care to wrap the carafes in pieces of white muslin, and to tie down the stoppers. Then I rubbed my lips, beard, and hands with graphite, and I went to bed.
    The invincible sleep seized me, followed soon after by the atrocious awakening. I had not moved at all; my covers themselves did not have any stains. I rushed over to my table.

The pieces of cloth enclosing the bottles had remained spotless. I undid the strings, quivering with fear. Someone had drunk all the water! And all the milk! Oh my God ...
I am going to leave soon for Paris.] (2005: 14-5)

The oscillation between the use of the subject pronoun *je* [I], implicating the narrator himself in the phenomenon, and the impersonal pronoun *on* [one], which does not necessarily refer to the Horla, but opens up the field of possibilities — putting all preconceptions aside — to any entity who might have been responsible for the unexplainable deed, is another act of careful consideration and "hallucinated reasoning" on the part of the diarist. We may be tempted to regard this duality as a suggestion of fantastic irresolution: 1) if *I* drank the water and milk, he is certainly mad and the Horla is his fabrication; 2) if *one* emptied the bottles, then the narrator is the witness to a supernatural event and the Horla truly exists.

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it fails to see a more complex relationship between fantasy and reason in the narrator's ambivalent formulation. Firstly, the *je*-hypothesis is an indication of his madness as much as it confirms that he is perfectly sane, since to contemplate the possibility of our own folly is an attestation of mental health and of the ability to take a distanced (and disinterested) look upon the matter at hand. Secondly, the *on*-hypothesis does not simply affirm the existence of the supernatural creature. In fact, its calculated indeterminacy is a proof of ponderation, as the narrator recurs to it to refrain from any compromising statement and, instead, leave the question in the open. Furthermore, "on" is so much *in the open* that it might mean himself, the narrator. Alternatively, it might include him, since *on* is commonly used in French in substitution of the first-person plural *nous* [we], allowing us to re-read his sentence, not as "*Someone* drank — *I* drank", but as "*We* drank — *I* drank". In this case, the protagonist and the Horla are acting in unity (as suggested before

in the reading and writing scenes), which means that the narrator is both mad for not realizing it and sane for considering it so carefully in this passage.

In sum, what initially looks like an ambiguous structure is in fact a circular structure according to which each pronoun points to the other's referent, a referent which, in turn, each pronoun confirms at the same time as it neutralizes itself. An apparent slip of the tongue (*je*) that seems to give away the narrator's insanity is after all a sign of skepticism that nonetheless leaves the event unexplained and does not match the available evidence. On the other hand, a bold statement for the existence of the Horla (*on*) is in fact a demonstration of prudence, apart from the mere expression of the empirical evidence at the narrator's and the reader's disposal: the results of the careful experiment.

Looking at this proto-scientific conundrum, it becomes clear that the undecidability problem at the heart "The Horla" is not so much due to the fact that the two options (natural and supernatural) are equally apt in explaining the events in the story, but to the fact that both seem to fail to do so from the moment when, counteracting each other, they also support each other, creating an irresolvable epistemological loop. The "spotless pieces of cloth" are then the *unambiguous* materialization of this unstoppable circularity.

Maupassant might have conceived the novella as a frameless picture that is given in monoscopic presentation, but by carefully employing positive methods of scientific research for corroborating, instead of contradicting, the bizarre experience of the diarist, he still abides by and arrives at — from within the narrative — "[l]'affirmation de réalité qui carácterise le fantastique du xixe siècle (avec le protocole de l'authentification, de l'expérimental, de l'interrogation savante et informée)" (Neefs 1980: 232) [the affirmation of reality that characterizes the nineteenth century fantastic (with the protocol of authentication, of experimentation, of wise and informed questioning)].

This does not mean, however, that the supernatural element in the story is ever rationalized. On the contrary, the Horla is conceived in such a way, as a living entity as well as a rhetorical construct, that its nature remains unverifiable. This is only reinforced in the narrator's successful but irremediably inconclusive experiment. Using the materials of writing — if we take the piece of graphite and the white muslin as analogues of pencil and paper —, the narrator's experiment produces a strange form of defunctionalized, untraceable writing. It does not provide clear evidence of the Horla, but it confirms that the effects of its presence are independent from the signs of it, or, in other words, it shows that direct evidence may be equivocal and ultimately obsolete in the kind of knowledge that the diarist is seeking. And so he wraps up the creature in a "transparently opaque" text that, as the empty reflective surface of the mirror, can only say that the Horla exists by saying *nothing at all*, thus putting in question the referentiality of literary language while emphasizing its poetic powers.

At this point, the protagonist's impasse between madness and reason seems to find a parallel in the impasse between literature and science. And Domenico Tanteri sees in fact these two concepts in a fundamental dichotomy that pervades the work of Maupassant in "un contrasto, quasi una lotta tra due forze contrapposte" (2011: 2) [a contrast, almost a struggle between two opposing forces]. Although this may be true, I believe that in the three stories of the Horla cycle, but particularly in the final one, Maupassant explores what could be best described as a short-circuit, or a distinction that is more diffuse than it is contrasting, between literature and science. Instead of struggling with each other, it seems they struggle together (though not always harmoniously) against something else. Their common adversary goes by many names, but throughout this study it has been called dogma, certainty, or solution, and it represents the epistemological hubris — which Maupassant, Machado, and James fought against — affecting our knowledge and investigation of the world as much as our knowledge

and investigation of literature and fiction. The author of the "Letter from a Madman" put this in terms that are characteristically hyperbolic, but nonetheless incisive:

> Donc, nous nous trompons en jugeant le Connu, et nous sommes entourés d'Inconnu inexploré.
> Donc, tout est incertain et appréciable de manières différentes.
> Tout est faux, tout est possible, tout est douteux.
> Formulons cette certitude en nous servant du vieux dicton: "Vérité en deçà des Pyrénées, erreur au-delà." (II: 463-4)

> [So we deceive ourselves when we pass judgments on the Known. We are surrounded by an unexplored Unknown.
> Everything is uncertain, and can be perceived in different ways.
> Everything is false, everything is possible, everything is doubtful.
> Let us formulate this certainty by using the old dictum: "Truth this side of the Pyrénées, error beyond."] (2005: 53)

Exploring a multifarious interrogative mood is Maupassant's way of addressing this problem, and it emerges with a particular effectiveness in the death of the narrator at the end of "The Horla". If the author of the diary made his final words come true, then his suicide is, on one hand, a pinnacle of psychosis, and, on the other hand, the ultimate act of reason and abnegation, intended at annihilating the Dreadful Being after a failed attempt at destroying it in the flames with which the diarist thoughtlessly killed his servants and made his house into "un bûcher horrible et magnifique, un bûcher monstrueux, éclairant toute la terre, un bûcher où brûlaient des hommes, et où il brûlait aussi, Lui, Lui" (II: 938) [a terrible and magnificent pyre, a monstrous pyre, illuminating all the land around, a pyre where people were burning, and where he was burning too, He, He] (2005: 42).

The ruination of the house, resulting from a voluntary act on the part of the fictional writer, recaptures a motif identified in several other stories analyzed in this thesis (see p. 177 and 187) and which seems to testify to a tendency of the nineteenth-century short fiction to represent a re-structuring or a closure of the fictional world through its destruction by fire.

However, the conflagration also foreshadows the soon-to-follow interruption of the narrative, coinciding with the diarist's apparent declaration of suicide: "Non… non… sans aucun doute, sans aucun doute… il n'est pas mort… Alors... alors... il va donc falloir que je me tue, moi!..." (II: 938) [No… no… of course not… of course he is not dead… So then — it's me, it's me I have to kill!] (2005: 44).

The sense of global collapse that the burning house and the announced death of the narrator epitomize is in fact in play since the beginning of the story, marked by an apocalyptic undertone that emerges sparingly and yet is hard to overlook. Not only is the progression of the story a dystopian reversal of the *locus amoenus* of the inaugural diary entry, in which the narrator simply describes the beauties and comforts of his property in a village outside Rouen, as the arrival of the Horla is also incorporated by the narrator in a parallel narrative of pest and contamination. As his affliction escalates, he providentially comes across an article in the *Revue du Monde Scientifique* which states:

> Une folie, une épidémie de folie, comparable aux démences contagieuses qui atteignirent les peuples d'Europe au moyen âge, sévit en ce moment dans la province de San-Paulo. Les habitants éperdus quittent leurs maisons, désertent leurs villages, abandonnent leurs cultures, se disant poursuivis, possédés, gouvernés comme un bétail humain par des êtres invisibles bien que tangibles, des sortes de vampires qui se nourrissent de leur vie, pendant leur sommeil, et qui boivent en outre de l'eau et du lait sans paraître toucher à aucun autre aliment. (II: 932)

> [A madness, an epidemic of madness, like the contagious dementias that attacked the population of Europe in the Middle Ages, is raging now in the province of São Paulo. The inhabitants, distraught, are leaving their houses, deserting their villages, abandoning their crops, claiming are pursued, possessed, ruled like human livestock by invisible but tangible beings, sorts of vampires, which feed on their life while they sleep, and which drink water and milk without seeming to touch any other food.] (2005: 33)

The narrator is quick to link this piece of news to his own memory of a "superbe trois-mâts brésilien, tout blanc, admirablement propre et luisant" (II: 913) [superb Brazilian three-master, all white, admirably clean and gleaming] (2005: 4), that he described coming

up the Seine in his first diary entry. And his conclusion swiftly follows: "L'Être était dessus, venant de là-bas, où sa race est née! Et il m'a vu! Il a vu ma demeure blanche aussi; et il a sauté du navire sur la rive. Oh! mon Dieu! À présent, je sais, je devine. Le règne de l'homme est fini" (II: 933) [The Being was on it, coming from down there, where his race was born. And he saw me! He saw my white house too; and he jumped from the ship onto the shore. Oh my God! Now I know, I have guessed. The reign of mankind is over] (2005: 34).

The choice to have the Horla originate in a country with a history of colonialism and slavery — which was only legally abolished in the year following the publication of this story —, and where people are "ruled like human livestock", was certainly not innocent on the part of Maupassant,91 who was aware and wrote extensively (in short stories, *croniques*, and travel writings) of France's own imperialistic dwellings. For the purposes of this study, however, I should like to focus on the broader *topos* of the "animal dompté" [tamed animal] (II: 933), which, according to Brewster E. Fitz, lies at the heart of a "master/slave relationship in the story" (1972: 957). What is particular and innovative about this relationship, however, is that by conceiving the master as a super-human being, Maupassant is in a way depoliticizing the question and, parting from metaphor (in the taming of beasts), turning it into a truly general, cosmological issue. But the metaphor is also not casual, as it stems from a Darwinian idea of competition and succession between species,92 which, in turn, contributes to the pervasive eating metaphor in the diarist's reasoning:

---

91 For a thorough reflection on the "colonial anxieties" suggested in the transatlantic route of the Horla, see the article by Lisa Ann Villarreal published in *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, in which the author discusses the historical idea of "reverse colonization", as "a preoccupation with figures like the Horla who invade the metropole from the colonies" (2013: 82).

92 "Nous sommes quelques-uns, si peu sur ce monde, depuis l'huître jusqu'à l'homme. Pourquoi pas un de plus, une fois accomplie la période qui sépare les apparitions successives de toutes les espèces diverses?" (II: 934) [There are just a few of us in this world, so few species between oysters and men. Why not one more entity, now that the era is over when all the various species appeared in orderly succession?] (2005: 36). Commenting on similar passages, Atia Sattar looks into the "evolutionary process" as a dominant idea in "The Horla", further

Ah! le vautour a mangé la colombe; le loup a mangé le mouton; le lion a dévoré le buffle aux cornes aiguës; l'homme a tué le lion avec la flèche, avec le glaive, avec la poudre; mais le Horla va faire de l'homme ce que nous avons fait du cheval et du bœuf: sa chose, son serviteur et sa nourriture, par la seule puissance de sa volonté. Malheur à nous! (II: 933)

[Now the vulture has eaten the dove, the wolf has eaten the lamb; the lion has devoured the sharp-horned buffalo; man has killed the lion with the arrow, with the sword, with powder; but the Horla will make man into what we made the horse and the steer: his thing, his servant and his food, by the simple power of his will. Our woe is upon us.] (2005: 35)

At the same time as he introduces the Horla into this food chain, Maupassant is once again stepping away from nature and from socio-political realities by defining the creatures of which it is supposed to be a specimen as "vampires", who feed not on flesh and blood but on "life" (II: 932). So, using vampirism as "part of a constellation of fears of human edibility" (Snaza 2014: 225), the author seems to indicate that he is not exactly making an evolutionary argument *tout court*, but instead conceiving a more generalized and intersectional doom: a *fin-de-siècle* ecological disaster which reverberates with modern psychopathology, the Black Death of the 14th century, evolutionary theory, and the specter of colonialism.

The diarist's own version of the end of the world is, however, more than a madman's prophecy, as it is tightly connected to the end of his own world and to his anticipated death. If the wave of destruction is halted, or eternally put on hold, by the very inconclusiveness of the story, so are the deaths of the narrator and of the Invisible Being. "The Horla" has no real closure; it does not *end* so much as it stops. This is simply due to the fact that writing cannot be synchronized with the death of the author. Death is completely mute and unwritten, and the diarist's final words, necessarily written *in life*, permanently bring him back, and back to himself. The last word of the diary is in fact "moi!" [me!], with a resolute exclamation mark. The protagonist clearly means to kill himself, but he cannot actually die — or can never *finish*

---

connecting it with the changing role of the human being, in the text, "from predator to prey", and with the narrator's frustrated pursuit of "scientific rationality" (2011: 230-1).

dying — in the same story of which he is the narrator. He cannot narrate his own death, which means narration will keep him forever on the side of life and eloquence, where the Horla also remains. Reflecting the Horla in so many instances, the diarist has also "touché la limite de son existence" (II: 938) [touched upon the limit of his existence], making himself, in writing, as undying as the mystery represented in the Invisible and Dreadful Being.

The principle of reanimation may seem very oblique in the way it is inserted in the narrative structure of the story, but in truth the protagonist is the one who firstly sees himself as something like a walking corpse while under the influence of the Horla: "Figurez-vous un homme qui dort, qu'on assassine, et qui se réveille, avec un couteau dans le poumon, et qui râle couvert de sang, et qui ne peut plus respirer, et qui va mourir, et qui ne comprend pas — voilà" (II: 919) [Imagine a man asleep, who is being killed, and who wakes up with a knife in his lung, with a death rattle, covered in blood, who can no longer breathe, who will die, and doesn't understand why — that's what it's like] (2005: 63-4). By the end of the story, it becomes clear that this is what he always was: a man about to — forever *about to* — die.

Apart from preparing the way for the multifarious topic of reanimation which I will look into, in much greater detail, in the following sections, in a specific group of supernatural stories by Maupassant, this passage of "The Horla" contains a strange form of address that is surely unexpected in a journal: *figurez-vous*. This is a kind of apostrophe that we may expect to find in the first "Horla" or in "Letter from a Madman", or, for that purpose, in any letter establishing a dialogue with a concrete or an imaginary recipient. As such, a passage like this indicates that, as a first-person narrative, "The Horla" is in a way an extended suicide letter, which is confirmed by its tragic ending. However, like the suicide note of Antero da Silva in Machado's "The Decadence of Two Great Men" (see p. 75), the purpose of the letter as an act of communication collapses under a narrative aporia: if he is still the author of the letter,

he has not died; if he has died, he is no longer the author of the letter of which he still is the author. The diarist's authorial status is, then, what keeps him *animated*. The narrator says *he will die* now, which also means that *he has not died* so long as he can say that he will (which he eternally repeats in the text), corroborating Todorov's idea that "I can die only for others" and "conversely, for me, only others die" (1984: 98), as well as Bakhtin's claim (quoted in Todorov) that "the specificity of consciousness" — linguistically represented in this story — precludes the experience of "a conscious death (death-for-oneself)" (98).

This sense of impending but unconsummated death has a concrete manifestation in the story, also, in a scene of strangulation that not only reinstates a motif analyzed in James's "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" (see p. 175), but also harks back to the spectral hands in the story that Maupassant himself wrote in 1875 and rewrote later (and which is examined in the following pages):

> Je dors — longtemps — deux ou trois heures — puis un rêve — non — un cauchemar m'étreint. Je sens bien que je suis couché et que je dors... je le sens et je le sais... et je sens aussi que quelqu'un s'approche de moi, me regarde, me palpe, monte sur mon lit, s'agenouille sur ma poitrine, me prend le cou entre ses mains et serre... serre... de toute sa force pour m'étrangler. (II: 915-6)

> [I sleep — for a long time — two or three hours — then a dream — no — a nightmare grips me. I am fully aware that I am lying down and sleeping... I feel it and I know it... and I also feel that someone is approaching me, looking at me, feeling me, is climbing into my bed, kneeling on my chest, taking my neck in his hands and squeezing... squeezing... with all his strength, to strangle me.] (2005: 7)

By combining a lucid dream, an exploration of subconscious life, a succubus, and an atmosphere of Fuselian nightmare — apart from a notable example of strangulation that is a recurrent topic in Maupassant and one that plays a special part in his fantastic narratives —, the narrator's hypnopompic state, recovered in part from a drug-induced sleep in the first

story,93 attests to an increasingly complex treatment of realism in Maupassant's supernatural stories. And it is an inverted reflection of the hypnagogia that we find in many of Machado's stories (see p. 67, for example) as a similar way of producing the fantastic.

As Maupassant's own critical observations on Paul Bourget, whom he considers an "'observateur profont et mélancolique' du 'fond secret' des pensées, 'au premier rang des romanciers observateurs, psychologues et artistes'" ["profound and melancholic observer" of the "secret depth" of thought, "in the first rank of novelists observers, psychologists, and artists"] (Mitterand, in Maupassant 2008: 1109-10), the final version of "The Horla", written three years after the referred essay, testifies to "l'évolution de Maupassant, d'un naturalisme de pulsions sensuelles brutales, dans le sillage de Zola, à une esthétique qu'on dira bientôt 'fin de siècle', plus curieuse des replis de la conscience et exactement résumée dans ces deux mots: 'psychologues' et 'artistes'" [the evolution of Maupassant, from a naturalism of brutal sensual impulses, in the wake of Zola, to an aesthetic that will rather be called "fin de siècle", more curious about the folds of consciousness and summarized exactly in those two words: "psychologists" and "artists"] (1110). This evolution, as well as the complex interrelation of realism and aestheticism, will be critically examined in the following section.

---

93 "Je me fis donc doucher matin et soir, et je me mis à boire du bromure. Bientôt, en effet, je recommençai à dormir, mais d'un sommeil plus affreux que l'insomnie. À peine couché, je fermais les yeux et je m'anéantissais. Oui, je tombais dans le néant, dans un néant absolu, dans une mort de l'être entier dont j'étais tiré brusquement, horriblement par l'épouvantable sensation d'un poids écrasant sur ma poitrine, et d'une bouche qui mangeait ma vie, sur ma bouche. Oh! ces secousses-là! je ne sais rien de plus épouvantable" (II: 823) [So morning and evening I made myself take showers, and I began to take the bromide. Soon, in fact, I did begin to sleep again, but the sleep was more terrifying than the insomnia. As soon as I went to bed, I closed my eyes and was annihilated. Yes, I fell into the void, into an absolute void, into a death of my entire being from which I was suddenly, horribly jolted by the dreadful feeling of a crushing weight on my chest, and of a mouth that was eating up my life, on my mouth. The shock of it — I've never known anything more horrible] (2005: 63).

3.3. Realism Revisited

To continue this reflection, one must recall the assumption that Maupassant's short stories may fall into two essential categories. According to theme and tone, they are allocated by critics, editors, scholars, and readers, on one hand, to a naturalistic style linked with sexual and financial frivolity, pessimistic disillusionment, social injustice and moral degeneration, or, on the other hand, to a fantastic style associated with the enigmatic events that accompany a psychiatric theme predominant in the author's madmen narratives such as "A Madman?", "Letter from a Madman", or "The Horla", already analyzed in the previous section of this chapter. Even if simplistic, this divide between realism and the fantastic is pertinent for us to understand the global complexities of Maupassant's fiction, and it is pictured by Joan Kessler as a two-sided construct.

Maupassant's fantastic texts, she argues, offer "the 'other side' of the positivist coin: a nagging disquietude about the invisible, intangible dimension of reality that remains inaccessible to empirical investigation" (1995: xlii). We might infer, according to this line of reasoning, that the accessible dimension of reality is then reserved for Maupassant's realist narratives. The problem with such an inference — even if it is partly correct — is that when he is back on the other side of the coin Maupassant is still not a positivist, which complexifies the type of realism that he pursued as a writer, as well as his understanding of the supernatural as the opposite and/or complementary dimension to that realism.

We have seen in James's comments to Maupassant's critical observations on the art of the novel that the author of *Pierre et Jean* ascribes an inherent illusory quality to literature (see p. 209, note 81). Moreover, this conscience of an in-built and inescapable illusion, with which James seems to largely sympathize, applies to fiction at large and is not specific to the

fantastic story, which, as a matter of fact, Maupassant does not feel the need to single out on that particular occasion. In this respect, it is also important to notice how the writer speaks in "Le roman" of several literary schools from a careful distance, not subscribing to any of them, and, in fact, reserving the greater part of his hesitation to the "realist artists", whose theory on "Rien que la vérité et toute la vérité" (2008: 1512) [the truth, and nothing but the truth] he advises us to dispute, believing instead that "Le réaliste, s'il est un artiste, cherchera, non pas à nous montrer la photographie banale de la vie, mais à nous en donner la vision plus complète, plus saisissante, plus probante que la réalité même" (1512) [The realist, if he is an artist, will seek not to show us a banal photograph of life, but to give us a more complete vision of it, more striking, more convincing than reality itself].

An *artistic vision* more representative of life than *real reality* must be composed of what, according to Maupassant, many critics of his time often fail to observe: "tous les fils si minces, si secrets, presque invisibles, employés par certains artistes modernes à la place de la ficelle unique qui avait nom: l'Intrigue" (1512) [all the threads, so thin, so secret, almost invisible, used by certain modern artists in place of that single string named: the Intrigue]. Apart from defining modern literature as one which escapes from conventional teleology and is not reduced to visible action (that is, to literality), the very terms used by Maupassant in this passage of his preface to *Pierre et Jean* (published slightly ahead of the novel, in 1887), are strikingly reminiscent of James's definition of artistic experience as a "huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness" (see p. 179).

But the two authors are not exactly addressing the same issue. Maupassant is trying to circumscribe and advance a tendency that he clearly regards as a necessary alternative to, or development from, more traditional and doctrinaire forms of realist representation, while James is making a more general argument for his own conceptualization of artistic sensibility.

246

Nevertheless, it is clear that both of them are looking to revise current notions of "reality" in order to allow it to encompass also that which is not visible or even immediately expressible. In sum, they both fall into the category that Maupassant himself devised of "modern", which is to say, *fin-de-siècle*, "psychologists" and "artists" (see p. 244).

This brings me back to the question of illusion in its relationship with reality. And I say "relationship" precisely because Maupassant conceives of the link between the two terms as one of sameness, and not of antagonism. For him, the physical nature of perception is not opposed to the subjectivity of psychic life, since our common sensibility as a species and our absolutely individualized absorption of the world are ultimately indistinguishable:

> Quel enfantillage, d'ailleurs, de croire à la réalité puisque nous portons chacun la nôtre dans notre pensée et dans nos organes. Nos yeux, nos oreilles, notre odorat, notre goût différents créent autant de vérités qu'il y a d'hommes sur la terre. Et nos esprits qui reçoivent les instructions de ces organes, diversement impressionnés, comprennent, analysent et jugent comme si chacun de nous appartenait à une autre race.
>
> Chacun de nous se fait donc simplement une illusion du monde, illusion poétique, sentimentale, joyeuse, mélancolique, sale ou lugubre suivant sa nature. Et l'écrivain n'a d'autre mission que de reproduire fidèlement cette illusion avec tous les procédés d'art qu'il a appris et dont il peut disposer.
>
> Illusion du beau qui est une convention humaine! Illusion du laid qui est une opinion changeante! Illusion du vrai jamais immuable! Illusion de l'ignoble qui attire tant d'êtres! Les grands artistes sont ceux qui imposent à l'humanité leur illusion particulière. (1513-4)
>
> [What childishness, moreover, to believe in reality since we each carry ours in our thought and in our organs. Our eyes, our ears, our sense of smell, our different tastes create as many truths as there are men on the earth. And our spirits, who receive the instructions of these organs, variously impressed, understand, analyze and judge as if each of us belonged to a different race.
>
> Therefore, each one of us makes himself an illusion of the world, a poetic, sentimental, joyful, melancholy, dirty or gloomy illusion, depending on our nature. And the writer has no other mission than to faithfully reproduce this illusion with all the processes of art that he has learned and can dispose of.
>
> Illusion of beauty, which is a human convention! Illusion of the ugly which is a changing opinion! Illusion of the true, never immutable! Illusion of the ignoble that attracts so many beings! Great artists are those who impose on humanity their particular illusion.]

In the first chapter of this thesis, we have seen that Machado invites us to "turn our eyes to reality" while excluding "realism" in his comments on Queirós's *Cousin Bazílio* (see

p. 120). This is also, perhaps, what Maupassant — a writer who, like Machado, is often called a realist and even deemed a paragon of Realism — is in search of in his problematization of artistic illusion: a *realer* reality that may actually dispense with the limits and conventions of a "school" whose teachings on the necessity to represent our own world are precious for these end-of-century writers, but also fail to encompass what, turned to the inner landscape of the mind, they now perceive as the limitless depth and ramification of reality.

The image of the coin used by Kessler is in fact quite illustrative of this redefinition of the real. No coin is one-sided, and its visible side is not the opposite, but the glaring proof, of its invisible one. The two sides do not exclude but implicate each other. Likewise, what we see is for Maupassant, as well as for Machado and James, an evidence of all that remains unseen, and what we are, from the moment our psychological person is added to the equation, far outweighs — and deeply underlies — what we look like and how we behave. A mirror, as exhaustive and accurate as it may be, can no longer fit a whole character in its frame.

Considering what stays in the dark, then, Kessler explores her view of Maupassant's anti-positivism in a series of negative adjectives whose common prefix points to a form of reverse perception: *in*visible, *in*tangible, and *in*accessible. But instead of separating the two dimensions of the perceptible and the imperceptible, the morphology of Kessler's vocabulary reflects the structure of the (*false*, if Baudelairian) coin and is in itself a sign of porosity and an indication that we are not exactly discussing a negation of perception, but a discovery or acceptance of planes of perception which are amplified to include gaps and negative markers, or "blanks" and "invisible threads" to fall back on Jamesian terms.

Referring to "the intangible dimension of reality", Kessler is already advancing a decisive principle in the fiction of Maupassant: since reality is multidimensional and contains

what seems to negate it — the intangible —, the supernatural is not antonymous with nature but integral to it. Thus, the "other side" of the coin is not anti-realist insofar as it is *also* a part of reality, comprising what is natural and what is above or below nature, what is within and what falls outside the limits of perception. If we equate sensory perception with *knowledge* of the world — something Kessler invites us to do in her reference to the philosophical trend of positivism and her use of the concept of "investigation" —, we conclude that Maupassant's fantastic stories advance a theory of reality according to which to *not-know* is an important part of knowing. That said, if "empirical investigation" is not effective it does not mean that investigative activity is suspended altogether but that other forms of investigation (or, in other words, of knowing and shaping the objects of perception) may come into play.

This is why, while avoiding his biographical reading, Kessler's understanding of the oxymoronic Invisible Being harks back to Ponnau's comments on the link between madness and writing, which, in Maupassant, is thought to bring the characters, "par délégation" [by delegation] (Ponnau 1997: 300), face to face with a medical and an artistic problem that their author also experienced. The problem is that to conjure up the invisible is in itself a challenge to language, for it originates a modern representational conundrum that Ponnau relates to the increasing association between the fantastic and the new-found territories of the psyche, and which he formulates as follows: "Ce qui, pour certains auteurs particulièrement modernes, ne peut plus être physiquement décrit à l'intérieur du récit, doit être cependant, par un paradoxe caractéristique de ce changement, *représenté*" (1997: 77) [That which, for some particularly modern authors, can no longer be physically described in the narrative, must be, nevertheless, through a paradox which is characteristic to this change, *represented*].

Broaching the same subject matter, Andrea Schincariol underscores the optical incongruencies of "The Horla", seeing the arrival of the mysterious being "comme la marque

d'une anomalie au sein du visible, comme le symbole du surgissement de l'invu au centre même de ce visible" (2013: 102) [as the sign of an anomaly within the visible, as the symbol of the emergence of the unseen at the very heart of that visible]. In short, different critics emphasize the fact that Maupassant's take on the supernatural (whether actual or suggested) — through the invisible, the intangible, and the inaccessible — does not preclude plausible representation. Instead, it begs the question of how to, if possible, *realistically* represent the invisible, and how to make the inexistent intelligible. As a critical question, this is different from how to sustain fantastic ambiguity between the factual and the miraculous, how to make it impossible to tell whether we are witnesses to, as Todorov put it, an "illusion of the senses" or "an actual event" (1973: 26).

In her study on the influences of classical tragedy on the nineteenth-century novel, Jeanette King reminds us opportunely that "our very use of the term 'realism' acknowledges that realism is not reality, but merely another convention" (2010: 161). If we accept King's notion of literary realism as an aesthetic convention that, like any other, is founded on stylistic and narrative formulae that do not regulate an actual reflection of reality, but the processes through which a purported image of (certain parts of) reality is to be fabricated, the distinction between the realist and the fantastic tales of Maupassant begins to dissolve under the common denominator of artifice. But Roland Barthes goes even further into this matter, stipulating in a parenthesis in his "L'effet de réel" that: "Realistic literature is narrative, of course, but that is because its realism is only fragmentary, erratic, confined to 'details', and because the most realistic narrative imaginable develops along unrealistic lines" (1989: 147-8). Barthes calls this the "referential illusion" of realist narrative. Once again, this notion suggests that (for a writer like Maupassant) the relationship between truth and illusion as explored in the fantastic genre can be more a matter of overlap and non-differentiation than a matter of ambiguity.

250

Following the same line of thought, Richard Fusco invokes a pictorial metaphor of overlapping layers to describe the probable indebtedness of James's "The Turn of the Screw" to Maupassant's "The Horla". He argues that, like the French writer, "James wanted to paste a transparent sheet of realism over his surrealistic prose painting" (1994: 207). In what comes to literary composition, the confluence of spheres that we generally assume to be oppositional contains a *poetic*, by which I mean generative, in a Romantic sense, potential of which Pierre-Georges Castex, in turn, was well aware:

> Si troublante que soit l'atmosphère où se déroulent ces récits, le sens commun n'est jamais heurté de front. Maupassant présente des cas de démence; il analyse des aberrations nées de la peur. (…) Les obsédés qui tiennent les rôles principaux de ces deux contes se produisent devant des témoins sains d'esprit et les forcent à *admettre la réalité matérielle des phénomènes contraires aux lois communes de la nature. Leur raisonnement est si serré, leurs démonstrations si probantes, qu'ils rendent l'absurde évident et l'impossible manifeste*. (1987: 381, my italics)

> [No matter how troubling the atmosphere in which these stories take place, common sense is never struck in the face. Maupassant presents cases of madness; he analyzes aberrations born out of fear. […] The maniacs who play the main roles in these two short stories ["A Madman?" and the first "Horla"] appear before witnesses of sound mind, forcing them to *admit the material reality of phenomena contrary to the common laws of nature. Their reasoning is so clenching, their evidence so compelling, that they make the absurd obvious, and the impossible manifest*.]

While Fusco addresses the broad question of James's compositional style under the influence of Maupassant, Castex isolates the narrative device of intradiegetic legitimization employed by the French author in two of his fantastic stories (and which, as we have seen, is problematically absent from "Letter from a Madman" and the final "Horla"). In spite of this difference with regard to the object of their reflection, however, both critics are approaching the issue of how James and Maupassant equally sought effective ways to *write the unknown*, or, in other words, to make realistic — and not necessarily *realist* — literature out of subjects and elements whose placing in reality is uncertain or even indiscernible.

My goal is to demonstrate how this oxymoronic proposition emerges in a specific group of short stories by Maupassant analyzed in the remaining sections of this chapter, and to understand how it ultimately impacted the very nature and form of the supernatural short story at the end of the century. More specifically, I will look into how doubt, dogma, and the dead triangulate at the core of Maupassant's supernatural stories, following the mechanisms through which dogmatic stances are constantly put at stake at the meeting point between, on one hand, the "theory of doubt" instated in the stories of madmen examined before, and, on the other hand, the exploration of death and deathly writing in the stories of reanimation.

3.4. The Reanimation Plot

Instead of concentrating on genre features in order to circumscribe the fantastic tale of Maupassant, and, by extension, the supernatural short fiction from the end-of-century in the context of which it originates as a literary form, I will now focus on a narrative segment. My subject matter from hereon is a plot device, and, more specifically, the *reanimation plot*, by which I refer to the awakening of a dead object, whether we are talking of a human figure, a body part, or a prosthetic element.[94]

We have already seen how in his so-called "madmen narratives" Maupassant uses the theme of psychopathology and the intricacies of narration, both in entirely subjective and also in frame-stories, to problematize the concept of reality. This problematization, however,

---

[94] In a strict sense, the term "reanimation" would only apply to objects that have been animated or alive before, such as a person or a body part. However, I am also using it as an operative concept to designate what happens with objects that are *inanimate* (like a set of artificial teeth or a lock of hair) considering that their function in the story is entirely dependent on a metonymic relation with the human figures that they represent. In this sense, these inanimate objects enact a vicarious "reanimation" insofar as they enclose, or seem to enclose, in all cases, the ghost of a human figure.

does not result from the author's exploration of "les croyances populaires au surnaturel, les légendes des esprits rôdeurs, des fées, des gnomes, des revenants" (II: 922) [popular beliefs in the supernatural, legends of wandering spirits, fairies, gnomes, revenants] — to speak of a universe of literal fantasy that is actually scorned in "The Horla" and many of these stories — but because he seeks to enlarge our common notion of "real" by recognizing the unknown and invisible dimensions that make it inherently "supernatural".

Now, focusing on a different group of fantastic stories will permit us to understand how important the consistent use of the reanimation plot — a return to life of that which has stepped beyond the frontier of death — was for Maupassant, both for devising a significant part of his short stories associated with the fantastic genre and for conducting, at the heart of that type of narrative, a veiled meditation on the powers of fiction. I want to argue that, under the reanimation plot and at the backdrop of Maupassant's take on narration as a metaphorical and sometimes a literal form of exhumation — approaching death through the acts of writing and telling — lies a broader reflection on literature and its possibilities.

However, before advancing to a deeper analysis of this motif we must acknowledge its heterogeneity and the variety of shapes in which it emerges, even in the limited context of Maupassant's oeuvre. Considering this, I do not aspire to formulate a stylistic constant, nor to search for a paradigm or even a formal pattern in what comes to the reanimation plot. What I am looking to systematize is a motif that repeats itself, but always in a diversified manner, along the period of twelve years during which Maupassant published his *contes* and *nouvelles* in literary journals and magazines, from the first text of this kind, in 1875, to the last one, in 1887, with irreducible differences as well as unexpected links. Furthermore, my analysis will focus on five stories that have never been grouped and interpreted as a cohesive corpus, most of them having been undeservedly left in the shadow of more widely known works.

253

3.5. "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse"

I begin my analysis with what is possibly the most unorthodox example among all of the texts I collect here under the rubric of the reanimation plot. Oddly enough, Maupassant showed little interest in the figure of the undead, or the vivified corpse itself. As a result, his version of the "clinical fantastic", to use Bertrand Marquer's concept developed in *Naissance du fantastique clinique* (2014) — explored before in his "madmen narratives" — remained within the limits of psychiatry, and did not extend to more corporeal experiments linked, for instance, to Galvanism, or the induction of electricity to the nervous and muscular systems of the dead body, as witnessed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), a novella hailed since the first half of the nineteenth century as the modern archetype of the reanimation narrative.

There is nonetheless one story by the French writer — "Auprès d'un mort" [Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse][95] (1883) — in which we are offered what looks like, as the narrator of "Ligeia" calls it, "this hideous drama of revivification" (Poe 1984: 276). Here, however, the body in question is a historical one: that of Arthur Schopenhauer, the German philosopher who passed away in 1860, more than twenty years before this text was published in *Gil Blas*.

In terms of narrative structure, "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse" is a classic case of Maupassantian frame story. The core narrative is told by a German stricken with tuberculosis (a *poitrinaire*) to the frame narrator, a Frenchman who does not understand a word of German but seems aware of the irony underlying the association between the second narrator's morbid account and his impending doom. The connection is perceptible to such an extent in the eyes of the first narrator that he not only describes his companion as a prospective skeleton — "il

---

[95] I use the same title with which this story generally circulates in translated collections in English.

croisait (…) ses longues jambes, si maigres qu'elles semblaient deux os" (I: 727) [he crossed his long legs, so thin that they looked like two bones] —, but he also seems to suggest a direct correlation between the telling of the story and the extinction of the voice that tells it, or, in other words, a subtle but certain equivalence between narrating and dying, since it is "d'une voix fatiguée, que des quintes de toux interrompaient par moments"] (I: 729) [in a tired voice, sometimes interrupted by fits of coughing] that the German begins his tale.

The alleged case happened subsequently to Schopenhauer's death, during his wake, which the sick German and another close friend of his attended, and in the middle of which the two men felt even more overwhelmed by the power of the philosopher than when he was alive. What impressed them most, he explains, was Schopenhauer's diabolical smile, which his face had kept, and which seemed to contradict the very fact of his death:

> La figure n'était point changée. Elle riait. Ce pli que nous connaissions si bien se creusait au coin des lèvres, et il nous semblait qu'il allait ouvrir les yeux, remuer, parler. Sa pensée ou plutôt ses pensées nous enveloppaient; nous nous sentions plus que jamais dans l'atmosphère de son génie, envahis, possédés par lui. (I: 729)

> [The face had not changed at all. It was laughing. That pucker which we knew so well lingered still around the corners of the lips, and it seemed to us that he was going to open his eyes, to move, to speak. His thought, or rather his thoughts, enveloped us. More than ever we felt inside the atmosphere of his genius, absorbed, possessed by him.]

However, before the German is given the opportunity to tell the story of his earlier confrontation with death, he is observed by the frame narrator in the act of reading, which, in the eyes of the Frenchman, seems also to drain him of life, in what looks like an acute case of immersive reading that turns his entire body, as well as his soul, into an attentive eye:

> Alors il ne remuait plus, il lisait, il lisait de l'oeil et de la pensée; tout son pauvre corps expirant semblait lire, toute son âme s'enfonçait, se perdait, disparaissait dans ce livre jusqu'à l'heure où l'air rafraîchi le faisait un peu tousser. (I: 727)

[And then he did not stir any more, but he read, he read with his eye and his mind; all his poor dying body seemed to read, all his soul diving, losing itself, disappearing in this book, up to the hour when the cool air made him cough a little.]

The two concurring descriptions — of Schopenhauer's corpse and of the German's body — derive from opposing movements performed by the two narrative voices in relation to each one of their objects of attraction. The frame narrator describes the second narrator as if his living body were immobile and his soul gone, while he, in turn, pictures the dead body of the philosopher as if he were still alive. As a matter of fact, the distinctly morbid visuality and the delicate chiasmus constructed at the heart of this short story illustrate the paradoxical alliance between photography and death in nineteenth-century iconography. In this respect, Geofrrey Batchen reminds us that the practical demands of the daguerreotype stipulated that "if one wanted to appear lifelike in a photograph, one first had to act as if dead", while with posthumous photography — or *memento mori* — even before the craze of spirit photography in the 1860s, the dead were immortalized, and the grieving family "could console themselves with a photograph of their departed loved one, an image of the dead *as* dead that somehow worked to sustain the living" (2000: 130).

As they also attempt to fixate a disturbing image through storytelling, both narrators follow, as I have mentioned, the chiasmic principle of photography. The unnamed Frenchman sees the German as if he were dead already, while the German and his friend find it difficult to accept that Schopenhauer, whose wake — a particularly ironic term in English — they are participating in, was indeed not alive: "'Il me semble qu'il va parler', dit mon camarade" (I: 729) ["It seems to me that he is going to speak", says my comrade]. However, feeling penetrated and nauseated by the putrefying body, and constantly aware of its sickening smell, the two men remove themselves to a different room, where they hear a distinct sound coming

from the dead's chamber. Going back in, they manage to capture, in a brief glance, a strange white object rolling over the bed and falling to the ground:

> "Il n'est pas mort!"
> Mais l'odeur épouvantable me montait au nez, me suffoquait. Et je ne remuais plus, le regardant fixement, effaré comme devant une apparition.
> Alors mon compagnon, ayant pris l'autre bougie, se pencha. Puis il me toucha le bras sans dire un mot. Je suivis son regard, et j'aperçus à terre, sous le fauteuil à côté du lit, tout blanc sur le sombre tapis, ouvert comme pour mordre, le râtelier de Schopenhauer.
> Le travail de la décomposition, desserrant les mâchoires, l'avait fait jaillir de la bouche.
> J'ai eu vraiment peur ce jour-là, Monsieur. (I: 730-1)
>
> ["He is not dead!"
> But the terrible odor ascended to my nose and stifled me. And I no longer moved, but kept staring fixedly at him, terrified as if in the presence of an apparition.
> Then my companion, having seized the other wax candle, bent forward. Next, he touched my arm without saying a word. I followed his glance, and saw on the ground, under the armchair by the side of the bed, all white on the dark carpet, and open as if to bite, Schopenhauer's set of false teeth.
> The work of decomposition, releasing the jaws, had made it jump out of the mouth.
> I felt true fear that day, mister.]

My recent mention to Edgar Allan Poe was not casual, since this story seems to have taken direct inspiration, not from "Ligeia", but from "Berenice", a previous tale, from 1835, in which the American author stages his "hideous drama of revivification". In what concerns this subject, it is interesting to verify that in his portrait of Maupassant written in 1888 James argues that "the only occasion on which he has the weakness of imitation is when he strikes us as emulating Edgar Poe" (1984: 536). But James's negative judgement of "The Horla" on this passage not only fails to recognize the boldness and originality of Maupassant's creation and the striking differences separating his *hallucinés raisonnants* from Poe's monomaniacs — assuming that James based his criticism on the issue of mental derailment common to the two writers, although he offers no specification on this subject —, but also overlooks the fact that "The Horla" is by no means the *only* or the first story to attest that Maupassant read the

works of Poe, knew them well, and took direct inspiration from them. As a matter of fact, the description of Schopenhauer's white teeth and spectral smile seems to be vividly reminiscent of the "*phantasma* of the teeth" of Berenice (Poe 1984: 231), according to the self-diagnosed monomaniac who narrates Poe's story:

> The eyes were lifeless, and lustreless, and seemingly pupil-less, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, the teeth of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died! (230)

However, apart from rejecting the melodramatic and erotic streak of Poe's narrative, Maupassant ascribes the bizarre phenomenon in his story to a mere *post mortem* reflex, while the American writer explains the grimace in Berenice's face with a form of catatonic epilepsy that makes her *look dead*. Both stories explore the *topos* of the ghostly smile by suggesting a natural cause for the horrific image, but while one arises in the face of a girl who is wrongly presumed dead, the other emerges from a dead body that gives the impression of being alive. But this contrast is not the only crucial difference between the two stories, as the monomania of the narrator of "Berenice", obsessed with the girl's teeth, and the malaise of the German, distraught with the unexpected vision, modulate the parallel events in very distinct ways. If Poe plunges his reader in the fantasy of a narrator who turns out to be an unconscious violator of graves, Maupassant frees the German from such psychic impediments, giving him and his readers a clear daylight vision of the scene, undisturbed and unjustified by hallucination. The horror is not only much more realistic — although both are factual in essence —, as it is also particularly menacing in theoretical terms. While Poe illustrates the extent to which an altered mind can, on occasion, disturb our world, Maupassant suggests that an unexpected alteration

of our world, small as it may be, can irreversibly disturb our mind. Like Machado and James, but unlike Poe, Maupassant regards the supernatural as a natural potency.

In other matters, however, Maupassant seems to have taken Poe's lesson to heart, as in the fact that there is no element of proper fantasy in "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse" apart from the suggestive, eerie atmosphere. In addition, the image resulting from the movement of the dead body — the loosening of the jaws and the expulsion of the teeth — seems to also carry a "peculiar meaning" (like Berenice's face) when the smile is undone: "Schopenhauer ne riait plus! Il grimaçait d'une horrible façon, la bouche serrée, les joues creusées profondément" (I: 730) [Schopenhauer was no longer laughing! He was grinning in a horrible fashion, with his lips pressed together and deep hollows in his cheeks].

Commenting on this scene, Maxime Prévost argues that "le dentier, paradigme du grotesque, mine toute l'horreur de la nouvelle — et tout son sérieux" (2000: 380) [the set of teeth, as a paradigm of the grotesque, undermines all the horror in the story — and all its seriousness], and that by using it Maupassant actually parodizes, and distances himself from, authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, who cultivated more "serious" forms of fantastic horror. It seems difficult to sustain, however, taking the immediate example of "Berenice", that the grotesque, and even the caricature, is not an important characteristic of Poe's supernatural universe as well. And, in fact, critics such as Charlotte Sleigh have suggested that there may be a lot of humor in Poe's writing; particularly in the twisted verisimilitude of his consistent fictionalization of the manuscript.96 I have discussed similar forms of critical distancing with

---

96 "The stories of Edgar Allan Poe (…) are worth analysis in relation to Poe's own formal framework — the 'preconceived effect'. Questions of factuality and plausibility are nearly always central. (…) A central question regarding Poe always concerns whether or not, or in what respects, he is joking. In this sense he forms part of a literary tradition of authors whom critics have struggled to pin down (…). Epistolarity and texts-within-texts are an interestingly problematic feature of humorous literature" (Sleigh 2011: 102).

regard to Machado's "fiction of fiction" and James's frame-writers and editors, but it seems safe to admit that in stories such as those of the Horla cycle Maupassant has also been greatly influenced by Poe's potentially humorous "formal framework".

Coming back to Maupassant now, we may inversely contemplate the seriousness of his story. The transformation of Schopenhauer's proud smile — his *moquerie* (I: 728) — for example, into a terrifying grin emphasizes the dead body's mute scream, the "nothing" told by a mouth that is shut and empty, in the middle of a collapsed face, in apparent reaction to the fact that, in life, the philosopher is said to have "tout vidé" (I: 728) [emptied everything]. Moreover, it is a confirmation that what Maupassant looked for in E.T.A. Hoffman and Edgar Poe, as he puts it in "Le fantastique", was "cette façon particulière de coudoyer le fantastique et de troubler, avec des faits naturels où reste pourtant quelque chose d'inexplicable et de presque impossible" (2008: 1367) [that particular way of rubbing shoulders with the fantastic and of disturbing, with natural events where there still remains something of the inexplicable and almost impossible].

The change from the smile to the expression of inexpressibility, or, in other words, the subtraction of any form of meaning from the face of a philosopher whose bright formulas had before been like "des lumières jetées (…) dans les ténèbres de la Vie inconnue" (I: 729) [lights thrown (…) into the darkness of the Unknown Life], echoes, however, what had been previously addressed as a problem of intelligibility and, consequently, of epistemology. With no grasp of the German language, the frame narrator is unable to read the book that the sick man carries with him — a volume of Schopenhauer fully annotated by the philosopher's own hand — and whose opaque vision inspires him to trace an analogy picturing the author as a sneering skeleton whose own smile is a ghostly entity, and the reader, who cannot help but to search for that smile and be haunted by it, as nothing less than a grave robber:

Je pris le livre avec respect et je contemplai ces formes incompréhensibles pour moi, mais qui révélaient l'immortelle pensée du plus grand saccageur de rêves qui ait passé sur la terre. Et les vers de Musset éclatèrent dans la mémoire:
"*Dors-tu content, Voltaire, et ton hideux sourire*
Voltige-t-il encor sur tes os décharnés?" (I: 728)

[I took the book from him reverently, and I gazed at these forms incomprehensible to me, but which revealed the immortal thoughts of the greatest shatterer of dreams who had ever dwelt on earth.
And Musset's verses arose in my memory:
"*Hast thou found out, Voltaire, that it is bliss to die,*
And does thy hideous smile over thy bleached bones fly?"]

In his annotations to the Pléiade edition, Louis Forestier mentions that around the same time this story was published Émile Zola was preparing his own novel, *La joie de vivre* (1884), having a disciple of Schopenhauer as a main character (I: 1510). And I think we can explore this relationship a bit further, because in the case of Zola's novel the philosopher's literary life-after-death (his *survie*) does not imply a return from the dead, not even as fleeting as in Maupassant's story. And yet that same idea is still associated, through different means, to the two main characters: a young girl afflicted with bad luck but still full of *joie de vivre*, called Pauline, and a feeble young man, terrorized by the thought of dying and the idea that the inexorable end that awaits us all somehow extirpates all meaning from what preceded it, and whose name is none other than Lazare (hinting obliquely at the topic of resurrection such as we find it, also obliquely, in "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse"). So, Zola brings back the biblical figure of Lazarus to personify a dual movement between lust for life and progression towards death, as well as, of course, since this is a resurrected man, the possibility of passing from one stage to the other *if only* — this is Zola's novel and not the Gospel of John — they are understood metaphorically: life, simply, as *joie de vivre*, and death as desperation in the full sense of the word, that is, as a negation of hope (*le désespoir*).

This ethical-emotional, but also aesthetic, exploration of the limits of death and life, with which Maupassant was well-acquainted,97 echoes what I have referred to before as the meta-literary reflection that the author of "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse" seems to develop with a particular consistency in his short stories of "revivification". And, in connection with the formal framework inherited from Poe, it is also an evidence that we are dealing with an author equipped with "des *idées* littéraires" [literary ideas] (Suwala 1993: 244) that remained unremarked by his contemporaries and not rarely continue to escape present criticism.

In order to obtain a fuller grasp of these ideas, it is necessary to look at the tales I am analyzing here in their collectivity, because if we consider the productive ways these texts relate to each other, as opposed to looking at them independently, inconspicuous correlations become crucial for their mutual understanding; and this interrelatedness involves, once again, the topic of writing. In this respect, for instance, Schopenhauer's scribblings at the margins of the volume carried around by his disciple — not only a token of the philosopher's life, but also a concrete trace of himself and his movements — are unintelligible, standing as such in complete opposition to the clear and even elucidating *posthumous writing* featured in "La Morte" [The Dead] (1887), a story on which I will focus at the end of this reflection.

However, before addressing the oppositional dynamics between these two stories and see how it contributes to a general discussion, the group of texts selected to be analyzed here on the common principle of reanimation will only be complete if we include three more works: "La Main d'Écorché" [The Flayed Hand] (1875), its later rewriting, "La Main" [The Hand] (1883), and, finally, "La Chevelure" [The Lock of Hair] (1884).

---

97 In fact, by the end of April of 1884, Maupassant wrote an article for *Le Gaulois* in which he jointly commented on Edmond de Goncourt's *Chérie* and Zola's *La joie de vivre*, a book over which he envisioned death hovering as a "oiseau noir aux ailes étendues" [black bird with wings outstretched] (see "La jeune fille", 2008: 295-302).

3.6. Beasts with Five Fingers

Exploring a topic of mutilated hands that punctuates nineteenth-century literature, and going back, as noted by Katherine Rowe, to the "Hand of Glory folk traditions" that, in turn, spawned several "beast with five fingers" stories later in the twentieth century (1999: 128), the two stories written by Maupassant on a possibly animated hand seem to draw close, as Susan Hiner points out (2002: 303) — although they follow a different path —, on Charles Nodier's "Une Heure, ou la vision" (1801), and Gérard de Nerval's "La main enchantée" (1854). Maupassant's mutilated-hand diptych circles around a largely similar plot, with the second story, written almost a decade after the first, adding to the crime a specific setting (the city of Ajaccio, in Corsica) and a probable motivation (revenge).

Through rather unclear means — whether buying it from the spoils of a sorcerer, in the earlier story, or obtaining it as a kind of hunting trophy in America, in the latter — a man comes to the possession of a mummified human hand. At a certain point in "The Hand", the owner of the desiccated member suffers a deadly aggression whose perpetrator seems to be impossible to identify, since there are no signs of anyone having invaded his rooms. The man is inexplicably found in a gruesome scenario:

> L'Anglais était mort étranglé! Sa figure noire et gonflée, effrayante, semblait exprimer une épouvante abominable; il tenait entre ses dents serrés quelque chose; et le cou, percé de cinq trous qu'on aurait dits faits avec des pointes de fer, était couvert de sang.
> Un médecin nous rejoignit. Il examina longtemps les traces des doigts dans la chair et prononça ces étranges paroles:
> "On dirait qu'il a été étranglé par un squelette." (I: 1120-1)

> [The Englishman had been strangled to death! His black and swollen face, frightful, seemed to express a terrible fear; he held something tightly between his teeth; and his neck, pierced by five holes which looked as if they had been made by iron spikes, was covered with blood.
> A physician joined us. For a long time, he examined the finger marks on the neck, and uttered these strange words:

"It looks as though he has been strangled by a skeleton."]

If the setting and the revenge plot of this story are evocative of Prosper Mérimée's "Colomba", written in the tradition of Corsican *vendetta* and published in 1840 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the strangulation scene brings back the memory of a previous *nouvelle* of Mérimée: "La Vénus d'Ille", from which Henry James also took direct inspiration in one of his earliest reformulations of the fantastic genre, "The Last of the Valerii" (1874).

We may even find a subtle trace of Mérimée's Venus in the governess of "The Turn of the Screw", considering that young Miles perishes while caught in the stifling embrace of that other enchantress. In fact, it is in conscription — a motif we observed before in James's "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" and Maupassant's "The Horla" (see pp. 175 and 243) — that the connection between "The Hand" and Mérimée becomes more evident. Apart from the uncertainty surrounding, in both stories, the perpetrator of the crime, whose main suspect seems to be in one case an animated hand and in another case an animated statue, the murder scene of Alphonse de Peyrehorade, in "La Vénus d'Ille", with the victim's "clenched teeth", "blackened features", expression of "dreadful anguish", and skin lesions seemingly induced by a metal object, may have provided more than just a few descriptive elements for the death of the Englishman in Maupassant's story.98

---

98 "Je m'approchai du lit et soulevai le corps du malheureux jeune homme; il était déjà roide et froid. Ses dents serrées et sa figure noircie exprimaient les plus affreuses angoisses. Il paraissait assez que sa mort avait été violente et son agonie terrible. Nulle trace de sang cependant sur ses habits. J'écartai sa chemise et vis sur sa poitrine une empreinte livide qui se prolongeait sur les côtes et le dos. On eût dit qu'il avait été étreint dans un cercle de fer" (Mérimée 1951: 432-3) [I approached the bed and lifted the body of the unfortunate young man; it was already stiff and cold. His clenched teeth and blackened features betokened the most dreadful anguish. It was quite apparent that his death had been violent and his last struggle a terrible one. Yet there was no trace of blood on his clothes. I lifted his shirt and saw on his chest a livid imprint that extended to his ribs and back. It was as if he had been squeezed in an iron hoop] (2008: 157).

I will later explore a possible meaning in all of these strangulations as they recur in the following stories. For now, however, I want to focus on one symbolic aspect of the one in "The Hand". The description of the crime scene in this story, transcribed above, includes an example of wordplay rarely found in Maupassant's writing, with *étranglé* as a homophone of *être Anglais* (to be English), pointing to an essential coincidence between the character's national identity and his gruesome fate. This subtle clue embedded in the sound chain of the sentence, as a form of lyrical conciseness that, as discussed before, may be a distinctive trace of short fiction (see p. 125), invites us to look more attentively at the differences between the two stories, beyond the specification that changes the more mythical tone of the first one into the more realistic outline of the second. Comparing the two, we see a notorious increment in the violence surrounding the acquisition of the hand and the circumstances of the murder.

In "The Flayed Hand", the preserved body part is already bought as such, a *memento mori*, or an artifact, and the strangled victim ends up dying only seven months after the attack, having gone mad in the meantime believing that he was "toujours poursuivi par un spectre" (I: 7) [still pursued by a specter]. In "The Hand", however, the member is obtained through man-hunting — "J'avé beaucoup chassé l'homme aussi" (I: 1119) ["I've also hunted men a lot"], confides the Englishman —, it is kept in an iron chain like a wild animal, and its captor dies immediately after the attack. Looking at the two stories, it becomes clear that the bizarre and ghostly dimension of the first one — truly seminal, since it is one of the first texts that Maupassant published in his lifetime, later inaugurating the author's Pléiade collection — is transformed into crude, and, surprisingly, *human* monstrosity in the second.

In the final analysis, the unstoppable revenge that the colonial subject — the Native American whose hand was mutilated — takes on Sir John Rowell for his *being English* seems to corroborate Rowe's suggestion that, in fiction of the nineteenth-century and beyond, the

disembodied hand calls our attention to Elias Canetti's "differences of class, condition, and intellect", that is, differences that generate, between individuals of the same kind, "unequal, rather than ubiquitous, experiences of helpless horror" (1999: 112). Following this idea, the horrific payback in "The Hand" seems to conform to a colonial parable under the guise of a fantastic tale, adding to the story a layer of reflexivity and social critique that was absent or, at best, very subtly hinted at in "The Flayed Hand".

Indeed, something had changed for Maupassant in the interval that separates the first version of the story from the second. In 1881, he visited newly-colonized Algeria for the first time as an envoy from *Le Gaulois*, reporting back his impressions and views of the conquered territory in travel sketches and letters that were sometimes simply signed "Un colon" or "Un officier". One of the reasons for covering the author's true identity behind such a general and "official" label was the sensitive nature of many of these articles, in which — although he personally believed in the ideals of colonial activity — Maupassant very harshly criticized the inhumanity and the lack of true political and moral principles in the French invasion. The experience produced *Au Soleil*, a volume of travel writings published in 1884, and a number of short stories that came to be known as *nouvelles d'Afrique*, where the author expresses in different ways his conflicting position with regard to colonization.[99]

Is it possible that, in 1883, Maupassant channeled his experience of two years before in the Maghreb into the rewriting of "The Flayed Hand", imbuing it with a new kind of horror that he had never known before, one that is intrinsic to imperialism and derived from direct observation? And may we read the reference to British imperialism (even if the United States were already an independent nation) and to the exploitation of Native Americans as a mask

---

[99] For a reflection on the problematic interrelation between colonial history and colonial fiction in the works of Maupassant that refer to this period, see Reis 2017: 35-55 and Toit 2003: 77-89.

or a decoy that allowed him to represent the terrors, the imminent conflicts, and the possibility of retaliation or vengeance stemming from the occupation of Algeria?[100] The short answer is that certainly yes; but there are other aspects to this narrative that prevent us from reducing it to a simple allegory on the misdeeds of colonization.

Returning to the central subject matter of this reflection, it is important to notice, for instance, that the supernatural potential of the tale is deflected from the victim's delirium in the first story to a problem of perception on the part of the narrator himself in the second one. After the crime, the dead hand goes missing. It is then eventually found, with no explanation, on top of Sir John Rowell's grave, from where it is finally taken to the narrator, who happens to be the judge in charge of the case. One day before the finding, however, the judge-narrator had had an ominous dream already featuring the reanimated hand:

> Or, une nuit, trois mois après le crime, j'eus un affreux cauchemar. Il me sembla que je voyais la main, l'horrible main, courir comme un scorpion ou comme une araignée le long de mes rideaux et de mes murs. Trois fois, je me réveillai, trois fois je me rendormis, trois fois je revis le hideux débris galoper autour de ma chambre en remuant les doigts comme des pattes. (I: 1121)

> [Now, one night, three months after the crime, I had a terrible nightmare. I seemed to see the hand, the horrible hand, running like a scorpion or spider over my curtains and walls. Three times I awoke, three times I went to sleep again; three times I saw the hideous object galloping around my room while moving its fingers like legs.]

The narrator's retelling of his nightmare, in which the hand had become a menacing arachnid, relies on a zoological metaphor that had already emerged, using a different animal, in "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse". To give an impression of the philosopher's sharpness and ability with words, the German compares his speeches to the merciless play of a canid

---

[100] In fact, Maupassant arrived at the recent colony with the mission to cover for *Le Gaulois* an insurrection lead by Cheik Bou-Amama (see Toit 2003: 77-8), which surely marked his first impressions by the spirit of rebellion.

when he describes him, in a premonition of the teeth set episode, "assis au milieu de disciples (…), mordant et déchirant les idées et les croyances d'une seule parole, comme un chien d'un coup de dents déchire les tissus avec lesquels il joue" (I: 728) [seated among his disciples (…), attacking and tearing to pieces ideas and beliefs with a single word, as a dog tears with one bite of his teeth the rags with which it plays].

Put together with the snake-like image of the tress of hair in the story that I analyze next, these metaphors confer an animal quality to body parts that are also a personification of their original owners. As a consequence, the rhetorically opposite tropes of personification and zoomorphism contaminate each other along these stories, pointing to the human aspect of the disembodied members as much as turning the human subjects that they represent into beastly predators. Once again, the author of "L'Homme-fille" uses antithetical combinations to indicate coalescence more than stark contrast. But there is another symbolic element in the severed hand that deserves further consideration.

Differently from Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), in which the identity of the author of an impossible crime, similarly committed in an undisturbed, closed room, is finally revealed in the end, these two stories keep an absolute degree of undecidedness in what concerns the killer. The homicide might have been perpetrated by "the hand", or by the specter of its original proprietor (who had been in the first version a serial killer, and in the second version a Native American eager to execute his revenge on the Englishman that slayed him), or by some other unidentifiable entity.

The uncertainty of the story, however, is once more related to a problem of reading and writing that is fully articulated in the text. As in "The Flayed Hand", the narrative *cadre* of "The Hand" is a scene of oral storytelling. In lines that seem to have directly inspired the prologue of James's "The Turn of the Screw" and the discussion therein about what the story

will "tell" and and what it "*won't* tell" (James 1996: 637), M. Bermutier, the judge-narrator of "The Hand"— two occupations surely not combined here by chance — predicts and plays with the expectations of his narratee. His narratee being, more specifically, a group of women who "frissonnaient, vibraient, crispées par leur peur curieuse, par l'avide et insatiable besoin d'épouvante qui hante leur âme, les torture comme une faim" (I: 1116) [shuddered, trembled, made tense by their curious fear, by the eager and insatiable desire for the horror that haunts their soul, that tortures them like hunger].

What seems to make M. Bermutier's audience particularly uncomfortable, similarly to what happens in the narrative frame of "The Turn of the Screw", is the narrator's insistence on the impenetrable darkness of the whole affair, and his reiterated inability to explain a case that "Il a fallu l'abandonner d'ailleurs, faute de moyens de l'éclaircir" (I: 1116) [actually had to be abandoned in the absence of means to clarify it]. In view of this lack, and confronted with the avidness of his listeners, the narrator offers an interpretive clue:

> N'allez pas croire, au moins, que j'aie pu, même un instant, supposer en cette aventure quelque chose de surhumain. Je ne crois qu'aux causes normales. Mais si, au lieu d'employer le mot "surnaturel" pour exprimer ce que nous ne comprenons pas, nous nous servions simplement du mot "inexplicable", cela vaudrait beaucoup mieux. (I: 1117)
>
> [Do not think, at least, that I could, even for one moment, believe in anything superhuman about this adventure. I only believe in normal causes. But if, instead of using the word "supernatural" to express what we do not understand, we were simply to make use of the word "inexplicable", that would be much better.]

Quite evidently, the conceptual substitution that he recommends his listeners — and, by implication, that Maupassant recommends his readers — as the proper way to understand the story does not make it any clearer. It simply advocates an especially cautious interpretive attitude that goes against the disposition of everyone else around him. M. Bermutier's choice

of "unexplainability" as the lens through which this story should be looked at — anticipating a similar admonition from the narrator of "The Horla" (see p. 209) — challenges, already before Maupassant's madmen narratives, the notion of fantastic ambiguity. It neutralizes any realist explanation (which seems to be out of reach) and dispenses with any supernatural one, not seeing them as mutually exclusive, but judging both as inappropriate.

We must remember, in what concerns the (un)reliability of narration in its mutual relationship with the fantastic potential of the text, that, unlike Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille", there is no supernatural vision in "The Hand". As such, the question of knowing if the story is focalized in the eyes of a sane or of a delirious character — Mademoiselle de Puygarrig in Mérimée, or the governess in "The Turn of the Screw" — is simply out of the equation. Thus, the narrative is at the same time a provocation to our interpretive instincts and a declaration of irremediable ignorance. Like the universe created according to the word of a divine Judge, "The Hand" cherishes in the idea of just *being*, telling itself out of any explanation. However, without satisfying the hunger of the female audience for conclusion (*dénouement*), the story's closure complicates this seemingly unquestionable state of affairs by delving into an almost comical discussion on the politics of storytelling:

> Les femmes, éperdues, étaient pâles, frissonnantes. Une d'elles s'écria:
> "Mais ce n'est pas un dénouement cela, ni une explication! Nous n'allons pas dormir si vous ne nous dites pas ce qui s'était passé, selon vous."
> Le magistrat sourit avec sévérité:
> "Oh! moi, mesdames, je vais gâter, certes, vos rêves terribles. Je pense tout simplement que le légitime propriétaire de la main n'était pas mort, qu'il est venu la chercher avec celle qui lui restait. Mais je n'ai pu savoir comment il a fait, par exemple. C'est là une sorte de vendetta."
> Une des femmes murmura:
> "Non, ça ne doit pas être ainsi."
> Et le juge d'instruction, souriant toujours, conclut:
> "Je vous avais bien dit que mon explication ne vous irait pas." (I: 1122)

> [The women, desperate, were pale, shuddering. One of them exclaimed:
> "But that is not an ending, nor an explanation! We will not sleep if you do not tell us what happened in your opinion."

The judge smiled severely:

"Oh! Me, ladies, I shall certainly spoil your terrible dreams. I simply believe that the legitimate owner of the hand was not dead, that he came to look for it with the one he had left. But it wasn't possible for me to know, for example, how he did it. It was a kind of vendetta."

One of the women murmured:

"No, it mustn't have been like that."

And the judge, still smiling, concluded:

"I did tell you that my explanation wouldn't suit you."]

While seeming to contradict his initial statement, judge Bermutier offers, of course, a skeptic's explanation for the case, but one that he admits is only an opinion which cannot be confirmed by facts. Leading us once more into Maupassant's surreptitious meditation on literature, the narrator's flawed attempt to pacify his narratee looks more like a caricature of popular writing and naïve reading, and a defense of a different way of relating to literature. That is, a relationship founded on mystery — if we recall that one of the main attractions of Schopenhauer's corpse, as unreadable as his own scribblings in the margin of the narrator's book, was the "mystery" that he exuded and which merged with his "incomparable spirit" (I: 729) — and on the challenges of the unknown, of the inaccessible, nurtured by an author who was quite popular with the public and had himself a weak spot for *légèretés*.

As I believe has become clear, the reflection on reading promoted in the narrative frame of "The Hand" is inextricable from a deeper thought, also, on writing. This brings me to a final commentary on the role of the disembodied hand — that weaving spider that we have seen conjured up in James's critical writings on art and literature (see p. 179) — as an instrument of creation that projects the figure of the author unto the fictional world. In this respect, recalling the popularity of the art of palmistry, or palm reading, throughout all of the nineteenth century, Sima Godfrey argues that:

> The thematic imbrication of *reading hands* and *writing hands* further activated the romantic confusion of the subject perceiving and the object perceived; for the same hand that might signify the object of reading simultaneously implicated the writing subject. Hence the inevitable appeal of these lively and dead hands for the genre of the fantastic which, by nature, problematizes the discrete boundaries of subject and object to blur familiar distinctions. (Godfrey 1987: 75, qtd. in Hiner 2002: 302-3)

To conclude this reflection on the stories of "beasts with five fingers", I underline the fact that, be the author of the crime a living human, a revenant, or an autonomous body part, the protagonism remains with the mutilated hand. The centrality of the member confirms its double status as a figure of fascination and horror, and it substantiates readings such as David Bryant's, who associates the mutilated hand with a form of writerly anxiety connected to the fear to lose command of the creative process, "to lose control of the writing hand and be taken over by the pessimism that informs this vision of the world" (1994: 86).

I am not as sure as Bryant, however, that Maupassant's figuration of the murdering hand is a sign of his own fear of being taken over by pessimism. What seems clear to me is that by making use of it, as the closing frame of "The Hand" distinctly suggests, he is playing with authorial and readerly functions, thus modernizing an old *topos* in order to explore the supernatural — in the sense of that which escapes naturalization — as a means through which literature can resist explanation. I suspect that if examined by a palm reader, an interpreter of only visible surfaces, his flayed hand would be unreadable. It would offer no *dénouement*.

3.7. A Lock of Hair Locked in a Text

In their reading of "The Lock of Hair" Gale MacLachlan and Ian Reid emphasize a point with important consequences for the understanding of all the short stories in this study. They suggest that, if we take Maupassant's "literary ideas" into account, as well as the way

they are developed in narrative, we quickly see that for him writing is *always*, from its very inception, an activity that challenges all form of established control, even at a personal level (see MacLachlan and Reid 1995: 292). The author's exploration of writing throughout many of his stories seems to rely on the practice's inherent ability to counter regulation and to defy the preconditions of normalcy, which becomes particularly relevant in a short story like "The Lock of Hair", which, again, enacts reading and writing. The story's composite text conflates the journal of a mental patient with the framing observations of a man who went to visit him in the asylum, our first narrator, made in the beginning and in the end, that is, before and after he has read the patient's journal. The *fou* seems to suffer from a case of sexual paraphilia, a combination of necrophilia and partialism (that is, the exacerbated interest in one single part of the body), directed at a lock of blond hair from an unknown woman, inadvertently found inside a secret compartment in a seventeenth-century piece of furniture.

We are quite evidently in the presence of another madman narrative. However, this is the only one in which Maupassant also included a reanimation plot. And, like in the Horla cycle, notwithstanding important variations in framing and structure which differentiate all of these texts, we are also presented with a first-person account — in this case, a written document, like in "Letter from a Madman" and in the last version of "The Horla" — that we are asked or at least expected to interpret, following a structure according to which medical diagnosis and literary reading overlap, either matching or repelling one another.

The real addressee of all these *letters from madmen* is, of course, the reader, standing in for the learned "Doctor" who is the fictional addressee. But interpretation is never an easy or an obvious task, as I have discussed apropos of the closing statements of "The Hand", and MacLachlan and Reid notice how particularly problematic it becomes in "The Lock of Hair",

with as many consequences for the reader-character as for the writer-character, or, if we are

willing to take a theoretical leap, for those who receive literature and for those who make it:

> Interpretive control is obviously an issue in a text that dramatizes loss of control. As the
> journal shows, if boundaries are not maintained between the imagined and the real,
> between self and other, a writer can experience a progressive loss of identity as the
> fictional universe takes over. (…) [I]ndeed what [the madman] desires is not a dead
> woman but the product of an overwrought imagination. (…) Like the "pensiveness" that
> so often signals the interpretive activity of the narratee(s) at the conclusion of such tales,
> the "reverie" of the narrator of this journal can be read as a sign of his entry into the world
> of writing. Carried away by the power of a desiring imagination, the possessor of the
> braid becomes, in turn, possessed by the creature he has "written" into being.
> (MacLachlan and Reid 1995: 292-3)

In this respect — to isolate one of the most interesting aspects of the relationship of

the supposed manuscript and the frame narrative enclosing it —, it should be noted that the

madman's journal does not *look* like a journal at all, and especially not so when put side by

side with the rhetorical sophistication of the faux-autobiographical register of the 1887 "The

Horla", the epitome of fictional diaries in Maupassant's oeuvre. The personal diary replicated

in "The Lock of Hair" does not showcase the habitual attributes of a diary, nor is it divided

in various entries given in chronological order. It is simply one cohesive stream of discourse

that limits itself, specifically, to the chain of events experienced by its writer, from searching

for antiques as a personal interest to being institutionalized for promenading in the streets

with the lock of hair "comme ma femme" (II: 113) [as my wife].

The notebook does have, however, one division, indicated simply by a blank space

that separates the two phases of the character's account of his own experience, marking the

transition between the building-up to the story and what seems to be a posterior, deeper dive

into hallucination. But in a story founded on the principle of *dédoublement* — the hair and

the woman, the fool and the narrator, the writer and the reader —, it only makes sense that

the text itself should exhibit a mirror-like nature. What I would like to emphasize, though, is that this structural hinge between the two parts also points to the fact that the diary is already written *as* literature. It does not give space to unnecessary information, keeping itself strictly within the limits of its subject matter even when it seems to wander away from it. The way the narrator describes his adventures when looking for antiques and furniture, for example, is nothing but a foreshadowing of his destiny, an early sign of his overly imaginative nature, and an evidence of the teleology and rhetorical intention of his writing:

> Je restais souvent pendant des heures, des heures et des heures, à regarder une petite montre du siècle dernier. (…) Elle n'avait point cessé de palpiter, de vivre sa vie de mécanique, et elle continuait toujours son tic-tac régulier, depuis un siècle passé. Qui donc l'avait portée la première sur son sein dans la tiédeur des étoffes, le cœur de la montre battant contre le cœur de la femme? Quelle main l'avait tenue au bout de ses doigts un peu chauds, l'avait tournée, retournée, puis avait essuyé les bergers de porcelaine ternis une seconde par la moiteur de la peau? Quels yeux avaient épié sur ce cadran fleuri l'heure attendue, l'heure chérie, l'heure divine?
>
> Comme j'aurais voulu la connaître, la voir, la femme qui avait choisi cet objet exquis et rare! Elle est morte! Je suis possédé par le désir des femmes d'autrefois. (II: 108)

> [I sometimes stayed for hours, hours and hours, looking at a little watch of the last century. (…) It had not ceased to vibrate, to live its mechanical life, and it still kept up with its regular tick-tock, since the last century. Who had first worn it, then, on her bosom amid the warmth of her clothing, the heart of the watch beating against the heart of the woman? What hand had held at the tips of its warm fingers, had turned it over, turned it again, and then wiped the porcelain shepherds tarnished for a second with the moisture of the skin? What eyes had watched on this flowered dial for the awaited hour, the beloved, the divine hour?
>
> How I wished I had known her, seen her, the woman who had selected this exquisite and rare object! She is dead! I am possessed with a desire for women of former days.]

All things considered, the journal is synthetic and calculated, and confessional only in a premeditated or plotted way (as the passage quoted above indicates with its abundance of clues of what is to come). It is short enough to be concentrated in its effect, but also detailed enough to be realistic and persuasive. In sum, it is carefully and lucidly written, suggesting that we are dealing with another case in Maupassant's collection of eloquent *aliénés*. As such,

the formal scheme of the text produced by the patient, to quote Louis Forestier, "soumet le naufrage de la conscience à la lucidité de l'écriture" [submits the shipwreck of consciousness to the lucidity of writing] inside the limits of an autonomous literary space where "[l]'étrange y devient spécieusement normal" (II: 1348) [the strange becomes seemingly normal]. As we saw in Machado (see p. 55), this idea of fictional autonomy is not far from Romantic *poiesis*, and from the principle that "the poem of the marvelous [or, here, the *supernatural narrative*] is a second creation, and therefore not a replica nor even a reasonable facsimile of this world, but its own world, *sui generis*, subject only to its own laws, whose existence (…) is an end in itself" (Abrams 1971: 278).

Not limited by the encumbrance of having to correspond to the strictures of an outer world, the madman's narrative constitutes an "heterocosm" that is self-contained in practical and theoretical terms: spatially, inside the asylum cell where the meeting takes place, but also materially, in the form of the book (*carnet*) that his journal emulates.

The story does not tell us why the first narrator visits the madmen and speaks with his doctor. We do not know if he is the patient's relative, his friend or his acquaintance, or a medical student, or even someone with a secret personal interest in the phenomenon. In any case, if we look at his situation from the "heterocosmic" perspective delineated above, we see that his readerly problem does not have to do with deciding whether what is stated in the journal is true or false, and if the owner of the lock of hair did return or not from the dead.

The truth or falsity of the madman's account is irrelevant in the face of the integrated reading experience we have been the witnesses to by the end of the short story, on the second segment of the narrative frame. The narrator's dilemma, which is also the reader's dilemma, is instead born from the fact that his own perception of reality, as he quickly senses it, has been transformed — not fabricated, because it already was only a *perception* — by the story.

276

Reading irrevocably alters his worldview. It provides him certain interpretive tools that give him a deeper access into his own lived experience, but it does not offer, of course, an elucidation of that experience. It is worth recalling at this point that one of the reasons for the distress felt by the protagonist of "The Horla" is the fact that he "never read anything that resembles what is going on" with him (see p. 216). If he had read it, however, it is not certain that he would understand it any better, but he would at least have a special awareness of the role he could play in that fusion of allegedly separate worlds. He would see its inexorability. This is, at least, the realization that this story's narrator comes to when he, too, is confronted with the material evidence of the *unreal* lock of hair:

> "Mais... cette chevelure... existe-t-elle réellement?"
> Le médecin se leva, ouvrit une armoire pleine de fioles et d'instruments et il me jeta, à travers son cabinet, une longue fusée de cheveux blonds qui vola vers moi comme un oiseau d'or.
> Je frémis en sentant sur mes mains son toucher caressant et léger. Et je restai le cœur battant de dégoût et d'envie, de dégoût comme au contact des objets traînés dans les crimes, d'envie comme devant la tentation d'une chose infâme et mystérieuse.
> Le médecin reprit en haussant les épaules:
> "L'esprit de l'homme est capable de tout." (II: 113)
>
> ["But… this lock of hair… does it really exist?"
> The doctor rose, opened a cupboard full of phials and instruments and threw me, over his cabinet, a long tress of blond hair that flew toward me like a golden bird.
> I shivered at feeling its soft and light touch on my hands. And I stood there with my heart beating with disgust and desire, disgust as in the contact of objects utilized in crime, desire as before the temptation of something infamous and mysterious.
> The doctor spoke again as he shrugged his shoulders:
> "The mind of man is capable of anything."]

In her Benjaminian and fetishist reading of "The Lock of Hair", Jutta Emma Fortin equates the (*supposed*, it is worth remembering) madness that afflicts the writer of the journal with "his way of dealing with material objects" (2005: 39). But Fortin never admits that his way of dealing with material objects may be highly idealistic and quite precise — as opposed to general —, insofar as it depends on each individual object. This is why it is *that* particular

lock of hair that turns him into a necrophile, and not any other lock that could, likewise, have awakened his latent paraphilia (if we are, as Fortin suggests, to psychoanalyze him).

This specificity had, before, already convinced Philippe Lejeune to reject a fetishist understanding of the text.[101] In fact, what a strictly materialist reading fails to recognize is that even the Decadent works of authors like Georges Rodenbach and Joris-Karl Huysmans, with which Maupassant's story is so often associated, coupled their opulent materialism and apparent triviality with "a longing for the insubstantiality of the sublime" (Ziegler 2002: 129), as well as a "longing for the eternal things that no wealth can procure" (2013: 116), following the anti-empiricist and anti-naturalist suspicion that "beyond the physical world there were still mysteries unfathomed" (114).

It is through the creative faculty of imagination, in the world of ideas and dreams, and readerly chimeras, that the narrator of "The Lock of Hair" comes to meet the diary writer and share with him his own propensity (as expected from any reader) for abstraction, signaled in the use of capital letters that elevate common terms and elusive words to absolute concepts with the weight of divinities: "Sa Folie, son idée était là, dans cette tête, obstinée, harcelante, dévorante. Elle mangeait le corps peu à peu. Elle, l'Invisible, l'Impalpable, l'Insaisissable, l'Immatérielle Idée minait la chair, buvait le sang, éteignait la vie" (II: 107) [His Craze, his idea was there in his brain, insistent, harassing, devouring. It consumed the body little by little. It, the Invisible, Impalpable, Intangible, Immaterial Idea mined his health, drank his blood, extinguished his life]. Such hyperbolic musings on the part of the frame-narrator are only mirrored by those of the mental patient himself in his diary: "Oui, je l'ai eue, tous les jours, toutes les nuits. Elle est revenue, la Morte, la belle Morte, l'Adorable, la Mystérieuse,

---

[101] See Lejeune 1988: 101, qtd. in MacLachlan and Reid 1995: 292, note 6.

l'Inconnue, toutes les nuits" (II: 113) [Yes, I have had her every day, every night. She came

back, the Dead, the beautiful Dead, the Adorable, the Mysterious, the Unknown, every night].

The qualities that the narrator and the diarist attribute to the idea and to the specter, respectively, are a further evidence of the rhetorical construction of *ungraspability* such as we saw it on my previous reflection on the intermittences of Maupassant's realism, and which in fact permeates all these short stories. The vocabulary that both of them employ points to a lack of concreteness that is at the same time the negation of *and* a mechanism for unlimited forms of physical, sensory, intellectual, expression.

Like the texts or text-analogues — by which I mean the philosopher's face and the desiccated hands — that I have analyzed in previous stories, the madman's journal in "The Lock of Hair" is mute, insofar as it does not speak for itself. It cannot explain itself, but only reiterate the undeniable experience it has already transmitted to its readers; and, like the diary in "The Horla", it can only reiterate the questions that are already its driving force as a piece of writing. The danger that these stories make us face is as old as Plato, who made Socrates advise young Phaedrus against the "strange quality" of written words that, in the manner of painted creatures, "preserve a solemn silence". "If you question them, wishing to know about their sayings" — Socrates continues, as if he were judge Bermutier addressing his unsatisfied audience — "they always say only one and the same thing" (Plato, *Phaedrus* 275d).

Thus, the madman's report can only reaffirm itself. And the lock of hair at the center of it is indeed an "object-simulacrum" (Fortin 2005: 42), not only because it is a madman's fancy, but because, being the fancy of a writer and a madman, it is a *figure of fiction*, which does not make it any less dangerous, since, if there remains a degree of ambiguity about the existence of the ghost, there is no question that when the diarist was arrested he was holding in fact a lock of hair. Thus, the lock of hair is a *neutral object* according to José M. Martínez's

sub-categorization of Lucio Lugnani's concept of *oggetto mediatore*, which the latter uses to address "those objects that in fantastic stories materialize the encounter between the mimetic and the non-mimetic ontological levels, and support by their presence the real occurrence of an extraordinary, illogical or unexplainable event" (Martínez 2008: 370). As a *neutral object*, the lock of hair is indeed not "extraordinary in itself" (372) — such as the *talismanic object* of the mummified hand —, but it still participates in the story by belonging to that class of objects "which are presented as evidence of the actuality of the event, but also as proofs of the disorder and insufficiency of the stable and established gnoseological concepts" (371). Furthermore, some of its intrinsic qualities point to a correlation with the diary of the patient: "Because of its materiality, obvious presence and unusual origin, the *oggetto mediatore* is simultaneously eloquent and silent, conclusive and inquisitive" (371).

This substantial peril,[102] like the madman's writing, is transmissible. This is what the narrator realizes when he shivers with both disgust and desire for the hair lock now at the reach of his hand, displaying its sheer materiality, showing that it is not only *textual*, but also *textile*. The lock of hair must then remain locked in the text from whence it came, hidden, as it was hidden in the first place in the secret drawer of a piece of furniture that, like so many of James's locked and vaulted chests (see p. 185), is also a doorway into the past. Only the coercive, or, in fact, constrictive powers of the textual boundaries where the frame-narrator

---

[102] I am alluding to Martínez's concept of "substantiality" as a decisive trait of the *oggetto mediatore* in fantastic stories: "When applying these metaphysical categories to fantastic discourse, the common etymology of 'substance' and 'substantive' (the noun) should not be forgotten, because both come from the Latin 'sub-stare,' i.e., what is stable, what unifies the *ens*. Obviously, the 'substantive,' the noun, will be the type of word or morphological entity that will contain the *oggetto mediatore* used as the referent, thus intensifying the substantive and realistic dimension of fantastic stories. As I said before, the preeminence of substantiality is materialized by the frequent use of eponymous titles for these accounts, and also by positioning the objects that confirm the actuality of the enigma in a specific place or moment of the plot. Since what is essential to the fantastic discourse is the absence of an answer, it is common that the *oggetti mediatore* shows at the end of the account the special protagonism of the mediating objects, so that they eloquently remain as the final and definite — substantive — proofs of the actuality of the event. In this way, the space for the readers and characters to question the identity of the object is also drastically reduced" (376-7).

resides prevent him from giving in to the Quixotic, anachronic mania of the diarist, because as long as he/we remember/s his/our role as a *reader*, he/we will perhaps be safe:

> Just as [the obscene madman's] howls and uncontrollable desires must be doused with water in the institution to which society has consigned him, so, too, must the *delirium narrans* represented by the text of the journal be controlled in some way. This is achieved through the device of a textual *garde-fou* or framing narrative, the return to which in the closing pages works to distance the reader from the dangers of a "mad" text. (MacLachlan and Reid 1995: 291)

The atmosphere of peril surrounding the lock of hair, seen by the narrator as one of those "objects that are accessories to crimes", brings it closer to Schopenhauer's denture and to the presumably murderous dead hand, regardless of the fact that it is additionally, unlike the other two, an object of sexual desire. Comparing these bodily items, it becomes clear that all three of them possess, on one hand, a prosthetic value, because although invariably related to the death of their proprietors, they are in some way dispensable, removable, while also co-extensive to their original bodies, and, on the other hand, a metonymic value, found in that semantic co-extensiveness that allows for a part to stand for the whole, or for the independent members to be living equivalents of their deceased owners. It is not only in themselves, but in their symbolic function as figures of fiction that they activate the return, or the reanimation, of the entities that they represent. In this regard, the "lock of hair" of the long-deceased lady is particularly effective as a symbolic object: since hair is inherently bloodless, it is not alive in itself, but, for the same reason, we can never say it is exactly dead. Thus, hair materializes (in the sense that it is the unliving and undead *matter of*) the spectral liminality of the story.

In anticipation of *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892), the Decadent novel by the Belgian author Georges Rodenbach, Maupassant's "lock of hair" also emphasizes the potential for violence that, within the *garde-fou* of the narrative frame, qualifies these objects often associated with

281

constriction, to come back to a subject that recurrently emerges in this study. Schopenhauer's teeth set is expelled by pressure exerted to the jaws, and, in the eyes of the German, it looks eager to bite; the flayed hand seems to have strangled its possessor to death, leaving him with his teeth clenched in horror; and, by laying siege on his deepest desires, the snake-like lock of hair ultimately condemns the obsessed lover to physical incarceration. A few years later, testifying perhaps to Maupassant's contribution to *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism, the protagonist of Rodenbach's novel would also strangle his new lover, using for that purpose, precisely, a braid of hair from his deceased wife.

3.8. Writing Back to Life

It is also under the influence of fatal love that I arrive at the last text analyzed in this reflection, and which guides me to its conclusion: "The Dead". Here, an apparently common story of love and precocious, symbolical widowhood suffers a radical transformation when a young man decides to spend the night in a graveyard in a desperate attempt to be back, even if only through remembrance, in the company of his dead lover, recently taken by pneumonia. He merely wishes to spend "une dernière nuit, à pleurer sur sa tombe" (II: 941) [one last night in weeping over her grave].

Unlike Allan H. Pasco, who dismisses this story as "scarcely more than a grotesque joke" (1969: 158), I propose to rehabilitate the place of "The Dead" — which continues to suffer from an almost complete lack of critical attention — in the evolution of Maupassant's supernatural works. I want to argue that, in fact, it is the pinnacle of the author's sometimes explicit and other times insidious exploration of the theme of *deathly writing*, started in the very beginning of his career, as we have seen, with "The Flayed Hand".

282

The turning point of "The Dead" takes place when, reaching the climax of night and darkness, the "city of the dead" [*ville des disparus*] (II: 941) — as it is called by the narrator-protagonist, who had in the meantime abandoned himself to considerations on matters such as the putrefaction of his beloved's body — shows to be, after all, brimming with life.

The resident of the grave on top of which the narrator had been sitting emerges from the ground and interrupts his eternal rest to correct the inscription on his tombstone, written in the flattering terms that are expected of this type of text. With the help of a sharp stone the specter erases the original inscription, which stated: "Ici repose Jacques Olivant, décédé à l'âge de cinquante et un ans. Il aimait les siens, fut honnête et bon, et mourut dans la paix du Seigneur" (II: 942) [Here lies Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He loved his family, was honest and good, and died in the piece of the Lord].

He then proceeds to rewrite the inscription using his own forefinger as a piece of chalk. Thus, his new epitaph reads: "Ici repose Jacques Olivant, décédé à l'âge de cinquante et un ans. Il hâta par ses duretés la mort de son père dont il désirait hériter, il tortura sa femme, tourmenta ses enfants, trompa ses voisins, vola quand il le put et mourut miserable" (II: 942-3) [Here lies Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He hastened by his unkindness the death of his father, from whom he wished to inherit, he tortured his wife, tormented his children, deceived his neighbors, robbed when he could, and died a wretch].

In little time all the dead had started doing the same thing, correcting the lies that their loved ones had inscribed on their tombstones with the purpose to, according to the text, "rétablir la vérité" (II: 943) [restore the truth]; the truth being that

> tous avaient été les bourreaux de leurs proches, haineux, déshonnêtes, hypocrites, menteurs, fourbes, calomniateurs, envieux, qu'ils avaient volé, trompé, accompli tous les actes honteux, tous les actes abominables, ces bons pères, ces épouses fidèles, ces fils

dévoués, ces jeunes filles chastes, ces commerçants probes, ces hommes et ces femmes dits irréprochables.

Ils écrivaient tous en même temps, sur le seuil de leur demeure éternelle, la cruelle, terrible et sainte vérité que tout le monde ignore ou feint d'ignorer sur la terre. (II: 943)

[all had been the tormentors of their neighbors, hateful, dishonest, hypocrites, liars, rogues, calumniators, envious; that they had stolen, deceived, performed every disgraceful act, every abominable act, these good fathers, these faithful wives, these devoted sons, these chaste daughters, these honest tradesmen, these men and women said to be irreproachable,

They were all writing at the same time, on the threshold of their eternal abode, the truth, the terrible and the holy truth which no one knows or pretends not to know on this earth.]

No longer terrified by the situation, and guessing that his lover, too, must have had some truth to "restore" on her tombstone, the narrator quickly returns to her grave, in time to witness her dedicated to the same task:

Je la reconnus de loin, sans voir le visage enveloppé du suaire.
Et sur la croix de marbre où tout à l'heure j'avais lu: "Elle aima, fut aimée, et mourut."
J'aperçus:
"Étant sortie un jour pour tromper son amant, elle eut froid sous la pluie, et mourut."
Il paraît qu'on me ramassa, inanimé, au jour levant, auprès d'une tombe. (II: 943)

[I recognized her at a distance, without seeing her face, covered by the winding-sheet.
And on the marble cross, where shortly before I had read: "She loved, was loved, and died."
I now saw:
"Having gone out one day to deceive her lover, she caught cold in the rain and died."
It seems that I was picked up, unconscious, at daybreak, lying beside a grave.]

"The Dead" follows many of the same coordinates I identified in my reading of the previous stories, but it gains a particular interest if confronted with "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse", with which I initiated this reflection and which does not include any traces of the erotic or romantic theme, nor of an actual return to life. The reanimation plot is based, in that story, on nothing but the supernatural ambience surrounding a natural occurrence.

The connection between the two stories, and that which allows me to use them also as the framing elements to this chapter, has to do with writing, and more specifically with the

way writing relates to death. Exploring the ideas of erasure and correction that gained a visual and material form in the tombstones of "The Dead", we will see that writing emerges at the meeting point between the two stories under a process of revision, and as a further expression of Maupassant's "poétique de réécriture" [poetics of rewriting] (Maillard 1993: 96).

There is certainly a moral dimension to the rewriting of the tombstones, since, as an act of posthumous confession, it is intended to redeem the dead from the hypocrisies and the lies that they had been bound to for eternity by mere convention. It is a way of *coming clean*, so to speak. But the correction is also a literary device — or the concrete manifestation of a larger poetics — that brings the physical act of writing into the heart of fiction. Furthermore, and returning to the path opened by Godfrey in her reflection on reading and writing hands, we are speaking of an act that turns into subjects those who were the objects of writing, which suggests that Maupassant aimed to destabilize certain literary postulates and to cross untried borders of narrative convention by way of the reanimation motif.

Epitaphs — a "genre" highly praised among Romantic poets — are by definition *the* definitive, conclusive, unalterable, written statement. So, to dissolve and to reformulate that which is *engraved in stone*, as Maupassant finds a way to do in "The Dead", is somehow to question the supposed fixity of all writing, as well as to suggest that the History into which the epitaph inscribes all individuals given one is, after all, plainly wrong and deceptive, but also revisable, or rewritable. In addition, the task is left in the (dead) hands of the deceased, thus pitting the first-hand accuracy of each personal story against the equivocal dissolution of collective history. Making the dead rise from their eternal writerly sleep so as to intervene on what had been *prescribed* to them also gives way to some problematic hypothesis around "literary ideas". What if, for example, the characters in a story could liberate themselves from

the protocols of fiction and have a say on their own story; or even write it or change it according to their own terms?

The twentieth century would provide a great variety of answers to the disquietudes which Maupassant is subtly hinting at in this story; but, in spite of this indirect approach, the French writer is still consistent and challenging in the way he vividly represents his characters as the embodiment of writing. We have already seen this idea put into practice, for instance, in the analogy between the mirror and the personal diary in the final version of "The Horla" — published by Paul Ollendorff, in the volume *Le Horla*, only two weeks before "The Dead" appeared in the 31 May 1887 issue of the *Gil Blas* —, or in the way the mutilated hands of "The Flayed Hand" and "The Hand" may refer to authorial preoccupations (and perhaps even anxieties) on the matter of literary creation. But in "The Dead" the embodiment of writing is particularly complete as an analogy, as well as particularly emphatic in how in invokes, apart from the action itself, the materiality — that is, the (corpo)reality — of writing.

In what concerns this subject, we see that the darkness of night and of the graveyard, against the whiteness of the animated skeletons and of their "lettres lumineuses comme ces lignes qu'on trace aux murs avec le bout d'une allumette" (II: 942) [bright letters, like those lines that one traces on walls with the tip of a match], activate and reverse, like a photographic *negative*, the black-and-white chromatic pattern that, in Maupassant's fiction, according to Hannah Scott, "draws our attention to text itself" (2013: 270). Scott further states, apropos of this Maupassantian meta-textual imagery, that "[w]ithin his narratives, the black ink and white paper of letters, books, diaries and journals trouble Maupassant's characters and hold discomforting implications for the apparently benign text in the reader's own hands" (270-1). Once again, the author's vivid treatment of textuality is associated, in his stories as well as in the criticism written about them, with some form or other of silent peril.

Following this cue, we see that in "The Dead", unlike what happens in the previous tales, writing finally manages to completely escape from the boundaries of paper (and stone), becoming fluid, metamorphic, and ruggedly material. Reading is construed not as a mental, but as an entirely bodily act, a direct confrontation: a head-to-toe clash with the written word. It is actually through touch, and not eyesight, that the narrator *leafs* through the tombstones of the cemetery as if they were the pages in a book, with his whole body — as the German's in "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse" (see p. 255) — turned into a reading instrument:

> Les bras étendus, les yeux ouverts, heurtant des tombes avec mes mains, avec mes pieds, avec mes genoux, avec ma poitrine, avec ma tête elle-même, j'allais sans la trouver. Je touchais, je palpais comme un aveugle qui cherche sa route, je palpais des pierres, des croix, des grilles de fer, des couronnes de verre, des couronnes de fleurs fanées! Je lisais les noms avec mes doigts, en les promenant sur les lettres. (II: 941-2)
>
> [With extended arms, open eyes, knocking against the tombs with my hands, with my feet, with my knees, with my chest, even with my head, I walked on without finding her. I touched and felt about like a blind man groping his way, I felt the stones, the crosses, the iron railings, the metal wreaths, and the wreaths of faded flowers! I read the names with my fingers, passing them over the letters.]

The three-dimensionality of epitaphic writing is, however, diametrically opposed to the vacuity of the flat mirror where the woman used to contemplate herself, and which now stands as a symbol of her absence, as the surface where her image should have been fixated, but was not, and from where it cannot be retrieved, in a reiteration of the invisible-reflection motif that Maupassant also explores in "The Horla". Promoting an equivalence partly similar to the one that we find in that story between reflecting surfaces and writing surfaces, the fleeting mirror of "The Dead" is juxtaposed with the everlasting gravestone. However, the superimposition of these apparently conflicting objects only emphasizes how deceptive they both are as portraits of an absent entity; it suggests that spectral images and spectral words

may equally stand, like void referents, in the place of emptiness, unable to deter the march of oblivion against the constant presumption of meaning:

> J'étais là debout, frémissant, les yeux fixés sur le verre, sur le verre plat, profond, vide, mais qui l'avait contenue tout entière, possédée autant que moi, autant que mon regard passionné. Il me sembla que j'aimais cette glace — je la touchai, — elle était froide! Oh! le souvenir! le souvenir! miroir douloureux, miroir brûlant, miroir vivant, miroir horrible, qui fait souffrir toutes les tortures! Heureux les hommes dont le coeur, comme une glace où glissent et s'effacent les reflets, oublie tout ce qu'il a contenu, tout ce qui a passé devant lui, tout ce qui s'est contemplé, miré dans son affection, dans son amour! (II: 940-1)

> [I was standing there, shuddering, with my eyes fixed on the glass, on that flat, profound, empty glass, which had nonetheless contained her entirely, had possessed her as much as I had, as much as my passionate gaze. I felt as if I loved that glass — I touched it —, it was cold! Oh! the recollection! painful mirror, burning mirror, horrible mirror, which imposes all forms of torture! Happy are the men whose hearts, like a mirror where reflections slip and fade away, forget everything that it contained, everything that passed before it, everything that looked at itself in it, reflected in its affection, in its love!]

The mirror's double-sidedness, in parallel with the reversibility of the tombstone, is also what further connects this story with "Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse" if we assume that the correction of the deceitful lover's funeral inscription, coupled with her empty reflection, is in some way a strong correlative of the change to nothingness on the philosopher's facial expression. In this respect, I suggested before that the way writing is represented in these two texts seems to be diametrically opposed : the narrator of the first one is incapable of reading what Schopenhauer wrote while he was alive because of his ignorance of German and given the added difficulty of discerning the philosopher's handwriting, while the narrator of the second collapses upon reading his lover's posthumous but perfectly legible confession.

Bringing the two short stories together, however, we can shed a more powerful light on what writing actually has in common in both of them. Above all, it helps us realize that what is always at stake in the two cases is a *post mortem* adjustment of meaning intended to

remedy interpretive blindness, or, in other words, the illiteracy prior to death. Because, oddly enough, the incapacity to read seems to be an inherent quality of life; life being in both cases presented as an *erroneous* state in comparison to clear and corrective death.

If "the dead" rewrites her own epitaph, rewriting at the same time the happy love story which her betrayed "widower", together with the reader, had believed in up to that point — the text which we were also reading —, the change in the philosopher's face, attributed to an after-death reflex, also corresponds to a radical inversion of meaning: his despicable smile turns into a grin that is *insignificant*, or, in etymological sense, devoid of meaning. According to the performative language of Maupassant — which Maillard believes "fait ce qu'il dit en le disant" (1993: 96) [makes what it says by saying it] —, the tombstone and the grin, both of which are *rewritten after death*, silently articulate the threat of the unknown and the terror of the unknowable.

3.9. Writing into Death

In one case as well as the other, Maupassant proposes that to be effective, to *make* what it *says* and thus materialize its supernatural potency, literature must inquire beyond the threshold of death. As a matter of fact, it is precisely "sur le seuil de leur demeure éternelle" (II: 943) [on the threshold of their eternal abode] that the dead are given the gift of writing in "The Dead". To be able to present us with something closer to the truth, even if that truth is nothing more than the ineffable, or the affirmation of a practical or a moral unsayable, fiction must give the word to the dead — something that a bit earlier, in 1881, Machado had already literalized in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*.

The author figure that we see embodied in many of the storytellers, fictional writers, and first-person narrators that populate these pages plays the role of a ventriloquist, but also the role of a "possessed" — the term itself occurs abundantly —, and the role of a resuscitated man, as the subject and not rarely also the object of verbal exhumation. He is a master of, as Maillard puts it in a pun intended to be serious, "mots passants" (1993: 98) [passing words], that is, dying words but also reanimating words, words that are evanescent, especially apt to travel across different worlds, between the world of the dead and the world of the living, as fiction surely allows us to do, but also — and above all —, in a deeper level of Maupassant's "literary ideas", the world of the book and the world of its reader.

The original title of the first story is, we must recall, "Auprès d'un mort" [literally, beside a corpse], while the final words of the last story are "auprès d'une tombe" (II: 943) [beside a grave]. These two delimiting instances testify to, and in a way tie up the ends of, a fundamental exploration of *besidedness* as a characteristic of the fantastic narrative as it was understood and rewritten by the three authors that I contemplate throughout this study. It is a form of simultaneous location and displacement, inasmuch as it tells us where something is only in relation to something else, in the place of which, of course, the thing being referred to is not. Thus, besidedness is inherently comparative. As an adverb, "beside" is additive, as it points out the fact that *apart from* something there is something else; not an alternative, but a second element that modifies our view of the first by embedding it in a (new) plurality. We have to always contemplate "that" in addition to "this". As a preposition — which is how it surfaces in the examples I analyze here —, "beside" instructs us on how to imagine space by framing it in an undefined interval between two objects. In fact, it works as to almost bridge that interval, or to reduce it to nothing but the minimal degree of separation that is necessary for it to continue to exist as an idea. It seems to provide a spatial marker, when in fact, most

of the times, it only underlines an uncertain proximity, exactly because what it means to say is not where something is, but where and *how* it is in-relation. The consequence of this is that to grasp the spatial synchronicity of the two objects, and how one expresses the undetermined location of the other by determining its location in relation to it, is much more important than to know where either of them actually is.

Besidedness is thus an optimal form of circular deferral, and as such we have seen it assume different shapes so as to produce a variety of effects along this reflection. It is the force behind the rotating doors in the stories of Machado, separating (which is to say, opening a communication link between) the room and the house, or the house and the outside, or, in either case, the encircled bodies of young Cecília and Dr. Antero, in "The Angel of Maidens" and "Captain Mendonça", respectively — physically restrained by the shackles of sleep, of sickness, or even of forced captivity — and their unbound, aging, expanding chambers of consciousness, three knocks away. And it is also the thread connecting James's unreadable and sometimes even unwritten ghostly texts — such as the governess's original manuscript in "The Turn of the Screw", the diaries of the betrayed wife in "The Friends of the Friends", or the ever-postponed theatre play in "The Private Life" — and the haunted stories in which the absence of those texts is so emphatically made present through narratives that emerge as if they were *in their place* or right beside them: the supposedly "exact transcript" of the third-person narrator, the dramatist's account (in prose) of Blanche Adney's *coup de théâtre*, and the edited diaries, copied out and divided "into small chapters" for our convenience.

As the great mechanism also underlying Maupassant's understanding of, not exactly fantastic literature, but the fantastic qualities of literature — or, more precisely, what he refers to as its ability to *coudoyer*, that is: to barely touch, to walk around, to rub shoulders with the fantastic (see p. 260) —, the besidedness of life and death, in its more concrete manifestation

as a narrative motif in the stories of reanimation, is one of the main tools used for instilling doubt and undermining dogmatic assumptions. As such, the full circle traced throughout this analysis, from "beside Schopenhauer's corpse" to "beside a grave", has had to contemplate also the dangerous proximity of the Horla, and the ontological and representational problem that it creates from being perceived while being fundamentally *not-here*, bringing us back to the "paradoxes of place" explored by Bayard:

> La question de savoir *où* est l'Autre travaille toute l'oeuvre de Maupassant. Car si l'autre se réfère au sujet, il est difficile de le situer exactement par rapport à lui. Il n'est pas le sujet lui-même, même si la menace est toujours présente que le sujet ne finisse par le devenir. Il nest pas simplement *hors* de lui, même s'il surgit souvent dans l'éclair d'une rencontre ou d'un regard. Il n'est pas non plus *en* ou *dans*, ou en tout cas pas seulement, même si, à un moment ou à un autre, c'est bien à cette place qu'il se retrouve. (1994: 143)

> [The question of knowing *where* the Other is pervades all the work of Maupassant. For if the other refers to the subject, it is difficult to situate it exactly in relation to him. It is not the subject himself, even if the threat that the subject does not end up becoming the subject is always present. It is not simply *outside* of him, even if it often emerges in the flash of an encounter or a glance. Nor is it *on* or *inside*, or in any case not only, even if, at one time or another, it finds itself precisely at that place.]

The way this problem is dealt with in "The Horla" as well as in the remaining texts analyzed here demonstrates that Maupassant consistently explores the notion of marginal or interstitial writing (the anonymous letter, the suspended diary, the unexplainable *hand*-event, the illegible scribblings, the revised epitaphs) in his approach to the supernatural short story, which he intently places at the borderline between mental life and sensory imagination, or, in one single word, at the heart of human experience, where the two are inextricable.

In what comes to the literary translation of that experience, the stories of Maupassant founded on the reanimation plot seem to suggest that to write in close proximity to death is not a betrayal of the realistic principle — which is never directly harmed, or *heurté de front*, just like the "common sense" of his mad narrators according to Castex (see p. 251) —, but

an exploration of the possibility to revise deceptive statements exclusively based on the truth of visible evidence and appearances. In fact, fiction is for him the territory where, in spite of, or *beside*, visible evidence, the invisible can still reside, and the opaque and the unexplainable are at their rightful home.

This means that a kind of literature only associated with the life that is presumed to be real, that is, with natural occurrences, with the conventions of realism, with the explicable and the *known*, would condemn itself and its readers to error, or, at least, to incompleteness, in its aspiration to represent reality. That is why, I believe, Maupassant thematizes madness and lucidity in such a fundamental correlation with first-person narration: not to "naturalize" the supernatural short story, as Maxime Prévost suggests (2000: 376), but, on the contrary, to *supernaturalize* what he saw as our very partial notion of reality, thus bringing it closer to the doubtfulness that is, paradoxically, truer to our own experience of the world, or, at least, problematizing our faith in the way the world and each worldview may be translated (or not) into literature.

In what concerns this complicated imbrication, we have seen that Maupassant stated in his preface to *Pierre et Jean* that a realist vision of reality must be "more complete" than reality itself (see p. 246). At first, we may think that this means, simply, that transposing a slice of life into paper is not enough to produce a life-like piece of fiction, since we must add to it a richness of detail, of context, of *effet de réel*, in order to make it plausible, and as such allow it to be perceived as realistic, even if not as literally "real".

However, following this declaration, Maupassant makes an even bolder claim that seems to turn the tables on it and force us to revise our initial assumption. He says that "les Réalistes de talent devraient s'appeler plutôt des Illusionnistes" (2008: 1513) [talented Realists should call themselves Illusionists instead], adding also that "les grandes artistes sont

ceux qui imposent à l'humanité leur illusion particulière" (1514) [great artists are those who impose on humanity their own particular illusion]. This does not mean, however, that adding to his existential pessimism, under the influence of Schopenhauer, Maupassant suffered also from a form of representational pessimism according to which all perception is false. It means perhaps that art is precisely the place where the realness of our impressions and of our most intangible ideas — ideas that are sometimes as unverifiable and as inconceivable as the Horla, which has nevertheless been *fully conceived* — is articulated and materialized. Thus, literary fiction is where the dark illusions informing our world can finally be recognized as real; it is the place where the unknown can be written, and where, as a consequence, it becomes clearer that human reality, inseparable from imagination, is by definition supernatural.

Conclusion

Writing the Unknown, Knowing the Unwritten

The idea advanced by Maupassant that every artist's "particular" illusion is in fact what ought to constitute the "reality" of art is certainly not unprecedented. As many critics have pointed out, the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer plays a relevant role in the author's thinking, and, I would add, it is also noticeable in his defense of perspectivism. The modern, anticipatorily Conradian (see p. 10) hyperesthesia explored in the Horla cycle, and specially in its final story, with a particular emphasis on the association between the activity of sensory organs and our defective knowledge of the universe, seems in fact to echo the epistemological problem placed by the German philosopher in what concerns empirical perception as a kind of cognition that "proceeds from consequent to ground", thus following an inductive method that is "never unconditionally certain" (Schopenhauer 2010: 103). However, the philosopher admits, this is also the only "truth" that we can aspire to as experiential beings:

> All cognition by way of sensory intuition, and most experience, only ever has this kind of truth. The affecting of one of the senses makes the understanding infer from the effect to the cause; but because inference from the grounded back to the ground is never sure, false semblance, i.e. sensory deception, is possible, and indeed often actual, as explained above. Only when several or all five of the senses are affected in ways that indicate the same cause does the possibility of illusion become extremely small; although even here the possibility still exists, since in certain cases, like that of counterfeit coins, all the senses are deceived at once. (103)

While Montesquieu, quoted in "The Horla" (see p. 206), speculates about what new organs could give us — if we accept that the hypothesis of "one less organ" still represents a *new* perceptive apparatus — by changing our expressive abilities, Schopenhauer reflects on

the resilience of illusion, which subsists even when several or all of our senses concur to the same impression. I believe that bringing these two considerations together can help us discuss Maupassant's economy of perception, which may, after all, differ from both. Schopenhauer's odd example of "counterfeit coins" as the symbol of an illusion corroborated by all the senses inspires me to proceed in a monetary analogy that complexifies this distribution of potential losses and gains.

We could think of the insistence on perceiving the Horla through a variety of senses, by hearing it speak its name, seeing it lift the pages of a book, feeling it over the shoulder, as an effort of the narrator to earn "perceptive capital", thus reducing the "possibility of illusion" and raising the chances of, ultimately, gaining "cognition", or, at least, of arriving at a sensory intuition that is *as true as possible*, in the sense that it is assessed through the largest possible variety of means. But, after all, this is not surprising: he is an *halluciné raisonnant*, and, like many others in that position — we have only to think of James's governess —, he is in search of evidence to sustain his "intuitions" sufficiently, and, of course, he soon finds it. What does not quite fit into this schema, however, is the fact that what he wants to be knowledgeable of is something that, as he is perfectly aware, is not cognizable through such means.

This detail of great relevance is articulated in the diary entry of "*6 août*", stating: "je suis certain (…) qu'il existe près de moi un être invisible, qui se nourrit de lait et d'eau, qui peut toucher aux choses, les prendre et les changer de place, doué par consequent d'une nature matérielle, bien qu'imperceptible pour nos sens" (II: 927) [I am certain (…) that there exists close to me an invisible being, who feeds on milk and water, who can touch things, hold them, make them change places. He is gifted, consequently, with a material nature, although it is imperceptible to our senses] (2005: 25).

As we have seen, this apparent contradiction is only reinforced with the progression of the story, since the presence of the Horla is repeatedly proved by its resistance to become *phenomenological*. It only shows itself through "reverse perception", to go back to a term I used to synthesize the fact that it is *invisible*, *intangible*, *inaccessible* (see p. 248) and yet — and this is the new factor we must consider — "gifted with a material nature". Considering this, a Schopenhauerian reading of the epistemological framework explored by the author of "The Horla" seems to fail when we consider that what is at stake for him is not the conscience of how much our intuitive perception may deceive us in the search for the truth (or cognition), but a real experience of intuitive truths (or knowledge) that remains outside the scope of what Schopenhauer understood as empirical perception, *whether deceptive or not*. It seems rather contradictory, then, that the narrator's quest is guided by an obsessive gathering of empirical evidence to support the existence of that which, having a material nature, is not *phenomenon*, and, while being imperceptible to the senses, is not *noumenon* either.

It also seems contradictory that an author who defends "illusion" as the proper way to represent "reality" chooses as a motto for his short story a reflection in which Montesquieu emphasizes the mechanistic effectiveness of our senses: those we could lose, those we could have, and those we *do* have. Coming back to an economic vocabulary, we could suggest that the perceptive deficit that the diarist is confronted with is irreconcilable with the surplus promised in Montesquieu, comprising not only what our sensory "machine" — this is the term employed in the original — is, but also what it *could be* in myriad variations. It is as if the narrator of "The Horla" had misread Montesquieu so as to arrive at an interpretation that takes him closer to the unreliability of perception conceived by Schopenhauer, which, however, takes him back to a worldview in which our senses are infinitely variable, and not necessarily deceptive, to such an extent that we may be lacking those which would allow us

to access certain "material natures" that do not participate in sensory intuition but materialize, nonetheless, in cognition, as an impossible "ground" with no "grounded" or an "effect" with no "causes", to use the terms of *The World as Will and Representation*.

I believe we can provide two possible answers to this epistemic short-circuitry. First, we can see this not as a contradiction, but as a form of liminality that is inscribed in the text itself, in the sense that the narrator — and the epistemological proposition that he personifies in the story — juxtaposes sensory optimism and sensory deception, originating an impasse that is never resolved and which the ending of the story eternalizes. The fact that the being is felt "près de moi" [close to me], in the narrator's words, reiterates the motif of *besidedness* discussed in the previous chapter (see p. 290) and suggests that the narrator sees himself and his writing tangentially to the Horla, which relates them to its imperceptible materiality. He knows *he* exists, but his reflection disappears in the mirror; and he knows that the water and the milk are drank, but *he* leaves no graphite stains on the sheets. In sum, he also escapes empirical perception, and yet he is an *object of knowledge* for himself and his readers.

The second way of addressing this issue is to think of it indeed as a contradiction. If so, the inconsistency of the narrator's reasoning only underlines the futility of his search and, possibly, of his suicide. This confers to a story frequently deemed an illustration of existential horror a farcical streak that invites us to revise our common assumptions about Maupassant's pessimism, and, perhaps, about the influence of Schopenhauer on a literary work that touches upon the transcendent without delving into the sublime. This is exactly what Mariane Bury suggests in her portrayal of Maupassant's nuanced philosophy: "Là réside sans doute la force du pessimisme de Maupassant, dans la découverte d'une écriture du pessimism qui lui donne sa vraie couler, non le noir, mais le gris" (1988: 79-80) [There surely lies the strength of Maupassant's pessimism, in the discovery of a writing of pessimism that gives it its true

color, not black, but grey]. And this grey tone is probably what allows the author to intertwine horror and humor: "L'originalité du pessimisme littéraire de Maupassant réside dans une conception farcesque de l'humanité: farce tragique, mais surtout grotesque, farce au quotidien. (...) La blague, la farce, prend parfois des allures sinistres" (Bury 1988: 81) [The originality of Maupassant's literary pessimism lies in a farcical conception of humanity: a tragical farce, but above all a grotesque one, an ordinary farce. (…) The joke, the farce, sometimes take on a sinister appearance].

If we read "The Horla" through this ironic perspective, then its haunted narrator is as pitiful as Tito, Machado's romantic, visionary poet strolling in a "country of chimaeras", casting him more as a product of aesthetic detachment than as a projection of Maupassant's own fears and philosophical anxieties. All things considered, the narrator's desperation is not distant from that of M. Bermutier's audience in "La Main", "made tense by their curious fear, by the eager and insatiable desire for the horror that haunts their soul, that tortures them like hunger" . Like them, he also begs for an explanation that cannot be provided.

Whichever way we see the story, or even contemplating both options conjoinedly, it seems clear that Maupassant stroke a balance that involves profiting from *perceived* flaws in perception as an opportunity to invest in expression, or "poetry". His partial misquote of Montesquieu can then be regarded as a calculated rhetorical adjustment that emphasizes the narrator's obsession over his failing "intelligence" while disguising Maupassant's true intents in what regards literary "eloquence". Even the writing of the diary enacted in "The Horla" is an indication of this artistic drive, if like Bury we think it is possible to

deceler chez Maupassant un lieu du bonheur: celui de la création littéraire. Ce n'est pas tant son pessimisme qui est spécifique que le bonheur d'expression qui en résulte. La précision du travail stylistique, le souci de discipliner la langue pour rendre la dure

sensation du réel permettent à l'artiste d'échapper, 'pendant les heures exaltées du travail, à l'obsession de la vraie vie banale, médiocre et monotone'" (1988: 82)

[discover in Maupassant a place of happiness: that of literary creation. It is not so much his pessimism that is specific, as the happiness of expression that results from it. The precision of the stylistic work, the concern with disciplining language so as to convey the harsh sensation of the real, allow the artist to escape, "during the exalted hours of work, from the obsession of true, banal life, mediocre and monotonous".]

Even if we do not make Bury's extrapolation from Maupassant's stories to his actual working disposition, described by himself in an article on Gustave Flaubert, her emphasis on the creative process sheds a new light on the "grey" subject of the author's dark "epistemic figures" (Pierssens), which we can now associate with an exponentiated power of expression. But Maupassant is surely not alone in the exploration of a "conspicuous silence" (Flora) in writing, and in fact I have discussed a similar principle with regard to James and his preface to "The Turn of the Screw", where the American author declares that what distinguishes his story from others of the same kind is the fact that, in his, "some things are never done at all", and "this negative quantity is large" (1946: 174). Toward the end of the preface, James admits that his "values are positively all blanks" (177). In James's habitual manner, such statements play with dubious senses. The "negative quantity" of "things never done at all" is "large" not only because *many things are not done*, but because *things not done involve a lot of doing*. Briefly, the gaps in his ghost stories are more than an open question or a calculated mystery, as they are in fact intended to *mean a lot*. Likewise, we must see that his "values are positively all blanks" not only because they are *effectively* blank (that would be the immediate meaning of "positively"), but above all because they are blanks *positively* charged, that is, once again, negative poles that attract meaning in direct proportion to their blankness.

Exploring the potential of literature to articulate the unsaid and visibilize the unseen, James and Maupassant arrive at an economy of expression that allows them and their readers

to know the unwritten through writing the unknown. And it is worth recalling that *writing* is a term accumulating various senses, and an action involving — as we have seen in many of the stories analyzed before — the real writer, the fictional writer, the narrator, and the reader. As such, it often remains within the realm of possibility, or of imagination — a key-word whose relevance I will shortly discuss —, and it is sometimes equivalent to *resignifying* (as in Antero's suicide letter in Machado's "The Angel Raphael"), *unwriting* (as in the work of drama projected by the narrator of James's "The Private Life"), or *rewriting* (as the epitaphs in Maupassant's "La Morte"). The supernatural short story, with its population of shadowy "epistemic elements", is then the ideal ground for the amplification of literary expression that results from (our) hovering over erased texts and imperceptible entities, or from haunting the ghost. In fact, addressing the question of, so to speak, *filling the gaps*, with regards to James's late style — of which "The Turn of the Screw" is one of the inaugural texts —, Ruth Bernard Yeazell conceives of a process of reader-engagement that does not quite arrive at, or seek, an explication, but culminates in the reader's own reperformance of literary language, which is not far-off from what Todorov stipulates as our cooperative response to the fantastic:

> In his late fiction James does indeed "make the reader very much as he makes his characters": the fascination of knowledge — and some measure of the fear — becomes the reader's own. And in guessing at the facts, in trying to make conscious and explicit all that the characters themselves fear to think and speak, we may conclude by writing our own fictions — ending our search for the truth, strangely enough, where James's characters so often begin: in the realm of metaphor. (1976: 36)

Toward the end I elaborate on how Machado's stories participate in this exploration of a literary "eloquence" that is never hindered and never truly silent, insofar as saying *silence* is already to confer it a representational "value" that makes it intervene in the rhetorical chain of a literary text as a *positive blank*. Before arriving at the Brazilian author with whom this

reflection began, however, I would like to return to the initial ideas of *realistic illusion* and/or *artistic reality*, as they seem intimately related to James's and Maupassant's literary visions discussed until now, as well as to the genre of the short story in its modern configuration.

If indeed we follow the various routes leading to literary rhetoric opened up by Bury and Yeazell, new connections begin to emerge between the experience of haunting the ghost and that of artistic illusion. This change of focus also allows us to re-orient the question of the mutual relationship between fiction and reality, from its disputation between pessimistic philosophy and scientific positivism, to the formulation of an aesthetic problem that is in fact the subject matter of this dissertation. Regarding this problem, I have stated at the start of this conclusion that Maupassant was by no means the first to reflect on it. In fact, we see it fully articulated in a letter sent from Flaubert to Hippolyte Taine in 1 December 1866:

> Dans l'hallucination artistique, le tableau *n'est pas bien limité*, quelque précis qu'il soit. Ainsi je vois *parfaitement* un meuble, une figure, un coin de paysage. Mais cela flotte, cela est suspendu, ça se trouve je ne sais où. Ça existe seul et sans rapport avec le reste, tandis que dans la réalité quand je regarde un fauteuil ou un arbre, je vois en même temps les autres meubles de ma chambre, les autres arbres du jardin, ou tout au moins je perçois vaguement qu'ils existent. (…)
> Vous me demandez si [l'hallucination artistique] s'emboîte, pour moi, avec la réalité ambiante? — non — La réalité ambiante a disparu. Je ne sais plus ce qu'il y a autour de moi. J'appartiens à cette apparition exclusivement. (Flaubert 1954: 96)

> [In artistic hallucination, the picture is *not definitely circumscribed*, exact though it may be. Thus, I see *perfectly* a piece of furniture, a face, a bit of landscape. But it floats, as though suspended; I don't know where it is. It exists by itself, disembodied from the rest; whereas, in reality, when I look at an armchair or a tree, I see at the same time the rest of the furniture in my room, the other trees in the garden, or at least I perceive vaguely that they exist. (…)
> You ask whether, for me, [artistic hallucination] adapts itself to the surrounding reality. No. The surrounding reality has disappeared. I no longer know what exists around me. I belong exclusively to that apparition.] (1982: 98-9)

It is important to note that in this letter Flaubert is actually attempting to distinguish "artistic hallucination" from the "real hallucination" caused by his epilepsy. What is perhaps remarkable about his distinction is the fact that, by characterizing artistic hallucination as an

experience of *alienation* — in the sense that is corresponds to an uncircumscribed *separation* or detachment from reality —, he is also describing it to an extent as similar to, or at least not so different from, the hallucination induced by mental illness. As Jean-François Chévrier observes: "Quand Flaubert se dit entièrement pris par ce qui lui apparaît, cette 'apparition' exclusive implique la disparition de la 'réalité ambiante'. On peut interpreter cet antiréalisme comme un triomphe de l'imagination, qu'elle soit pathologique ou artistique" (2012: 67) [When Flaubert declares himself to be entirely taken by what appears to him, that exclusive "apparition" dictates the disappearance of the "surrounding reality". We may interpret this antirealism as a triumph of the imagination, be it pathologic or artistic].

Considering, however, the specification from "réalité" to "réalité ambiante", which suggests that other adjectives may attach to the concept and reconfigure it — as, for example, inner reality, or experiential reality — I am not so certain that Flaubert is transitioning from realism to "antirealism", and not to a form of *critical realism*. In any case, he is in fact taking this chance to explore his views on creative imagination, a process in which he contemplates an apparitional phenomenon deserving of our attention. Looking closely at the image that the author of *Madame Bovary* conjures up to illustrate the experience of art, we see that he is not exactly gripped (*pris*, as Chevrier suggests) by the apparition but becomes a part of it, he *belongs* to it, in an instance of autoscopy in which he is both the observer *and* the apparition.

This sense of "belonging" that mixes up the seer and the ghost — switching to terms that are more reflective of what the stories analyzed in this dissertation offer to us — is not unfamiliar. We have seen it before in the episodes of "disembodiment" in Machado's "The Decadence of Two Great Men" (with Miranda's nose turning before his eyes into a hat and a fruit), and "Eternal Life" (in which Camilo witnesses his own dismemberment from above). It is also the underlying principle of the Doppelgänger-hypothesis in the relation between the

303

narrator and the Being in Maupassant's "The Horla", enacted in the mirror scene that brings them together as an apparition of invisibility. And it is also implied in Miss Amy's and Miss Susan's *ghostly appearance* after either of them have seen the ghost of their great-uncle in James's "The Third Person". However, its most powerful expression is perhaps to be found in the governess and fictional writer of "The Turn of the Screw", and in her haunting presence at Bly. For even if James would never be so peremptory as to claim, like Flaubert, a clear cut from the "surrounding reality", his treatment of writerly specters and ghost texts shows that he saw literary ghosts as border-crossing emblems of aesthetic hallucination, involving their creators as much as their interpreters.103 As J. Hillis Miller suggests:

> [James's] ghost stories "proper" are really, obliquely, about the act of literature. They bring into the open the way all works of fiction that are "believed in" by the reader work their magic by using language to "raise the ghosts" of the characters. These characters then have a spectral existence in the mind, feelings, and imagination of the reader. They go on permanently dwelling there, obscurely haunting the reader's mind. They abide there permanently, ready to be brought forward again if the reader thinks of the story, or especially, re-reads it. (2005b: 299)

This is the flaw and the ability inherent to literary language, and which Miller thinks ghost stories epitomize: its verbal confinement entails an indispensable conjuration. This act of conjuring allows the representation of literature to spill out (Flaubert) of its material limits, overcome its intrinsic blindness, and become imagistic, which is to say, *imaginative*:

> En réalité, la représentation elle-même déborde le champ des images visuelles, actualles ou virtuelles. Si on peut parler de representation visuelle, c'est bien que les deux notions ne se recouvrent pas. L'ambiguïté de l'*image* elle-même tient à cet écart. L'image verbal du poète n'est pas visuelle, elle ne donne rien à voir dans le champ du regard, sinon des

---

103 On this subject, Lustig argues that: "In spite of herself, the governess acts as a medium of exchange, crossing borders and enabling borders to be crossed. As a ghost seer and as the narrator of ghostly experiences, she herself becomes an apparitional figure. At a more general level one could argue that the writer of this ghostly narrator also endows himself with a degree of spectrality, hovers near thresholds as a mediatory, interstitial, half-glimpsed presence" (2010: 190).

lettres, des mots sur une page, qui ne correspondent pas, du fait de l'arbitraire du signe, aux choses qu'elle "représente" ou évoque. Paul Éluard a pu dire toutefois que la poésie "donne à voir" dans la mesure où elle stimule l'imagination du lecteur ou de l'auditeur. (Chevrier 2012: 67)

[In reality, representation itself overflows the field of visual, actual, or virtual images. If we can speak of visual representation, this is because the two notions do not overlap. The ambiguity of the *image* itself contributes to this gap. The verbal image of the poet is not visual, it puts nothing in sight with regards to gaze, except letters, words on a page, which do not correspond, given the arbitrariness of the sign, to the things it "represents" or evokes. Paul Éluard could say, however, that poetry "shows", insofar as it stimulates the imagination of the reader or listener.]

As in the failed reading scene of "The Horla" (see p. 215), when for some reason or other hallucination or imagination — in the sense that Flaubert and Chevrier give to these terms — becomes compromised, legibility itself collapses. They are in a way the added *value* that compensates for the emptiness of words-in-themselves. It is also this essential connection that allows Yeazell to use the verb "to write" in a metaphorical sense when she states that in reading James we end up "writing" — that is, representing (Chevrier) — "our own fictions".

The fact that James explores these notions with a special recurrence in his stories of the fantastic shows that, even if he is more nuanced in his assertions, he is not so distant from the aesthetic principles of his Continental peers. In fact, in his description of the "imaginative mind", in "The Art of Fiction" (see p. 179), we have seen that he *pictures* sensitive experience as a "huge spider-web of the finest silken threads", adding that it is "the very atmosphere of the mind" (1987: 194). Although the experience James is referring too includes the reality of which Flaubert claims to separate himself, the concept of the "atmosphere of the mind" itself implies that there are other, unlimited atmospheres apart from the *réalité ambiante*, behind and below the plane of immanence. Likewise, his image of a huge spiderweb of experience places the "arachnid" *experient* at the center of a diaphanous web of imaginative stimuli from which she or he is inextricable, to which she or he *belongs* fundamentally.

These considerations permit me to continue on a retrospective path concerning this subject matter which could include many stops and take us much further back. For practical reasons and for his special pertinence, however, I would like to contemplate another French writer for whom the role that supernatural imagination plays in the interrelationship of fiction and reality also deserved a few very relevant critical pages. Furthermore, his related reflection on short fiction allows me to go back to the question of genre as my argument evolves into a conclusion. For, before Maupassant and before Flaubert, Charles Baudelaire declared in "La Reine des Facultés", in the *Salon de 1859*, that:

> L'artiste, le vrai artiste, le vrai poète, ne doit peindre que selon ce qu'il voit et sent. Il doit être *réellement* fidèle à sa propre nature. Il doit éviter comme la mort d'emprunter les yeux et les sentiments d'un autre homme, si grand qu'il soit; car alors les productions qu'il nous donnerait seraient relativement à lui, des mensonges, et non des *réalités*. (1976: 620)

> [The artist, the true artist, the true poet, should only paint in accordance with what he sees and with what he feels. He must be *really* faithful to his own nature. He must avoid like the plague borrowing the eyes and the feelings of another man, however great that man may be; for then his productions would be lies in relation to himself, and not *realities*.] (1956: 234)

On a first reading, what stands out from this passage is Baudelaire's firm opposition to more dogmatic versions of naturalism and to the related problem of epigonism, in favor of originality and of inevitably *individual* expressions of art. The terms he uses in his argument, however, show the complexity of his thinking and its connection to the questions at hand. In fact, even his claim that the poet should "paint" does more than reiterate the *ut pictura poesis* statement. In direct association with the "reality" achieved in the poet's coincidence with his own nature, we see that it already contains the idea of hallucinatory-imaginative experience, and the idea that it is in the conjuration of images that do not simply "copy" nature, but which

strive to surpass it,[104] that poetry or literature *realizes* its ghostly self. But Claude Mouchard's reading brings this text even closer to Maupassant's observations on the artist's own *illusion* and on the higher class of novelists who are also reflective — that is, who mirror themselves, but also who *see* with a critical distance — as "artists" and "psychologists" (see p. 244):

> La "réalité" de l'imagination propre à l'artiste se comunique à ses oeuvres. Plus l'artiste est créateur, mieux il donne à sentir la singularité de son point de vue. Le regard qui peut recueillir la diversité des points de vue artistiques n'est pas sans rapport avec celui du romancier figurant une multiplicité de foyers subjectifs: c'est celui du critique — ou, parfois, de l'historien ou du psychologue. (Mouchard 1991: 187)
>
> [The "reality" of the artist's own imagination communicates with his works. The more creative the artist, the better he conveys the singularity of his point of view. The gaze that can collect the diversity of artistic points of view is not unrelated to that of the novelist representing a multiplicity of subjective foci: it is that of the critic — or, sometimes, of the historian or the psychologist.]

However, what seems particularly relevant in the context of this dissertation about Baudelaire's considerations on imagination, "the queen of the faculties", is its connection to — and the fact that it is predated and, we might infer, prepared by — his reflection on short fiction. Baudelaire states in "Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe" (1857):

> L'imagination n'est pas la fantaisie; elle n'est pas non plus la sensibilité, bien qu'il soit difficile de concevoir un homme imaginatif qui ne serait pas sensible. L'imagination est une faculté quasi divine qui perçoit tout d'abord, en dehors des méthodes philosophiques, les rapports intimes et secrets des choses, les correspondances et les analogies. (1976: 329)
>
> [Imagination is not fantasy; nor is it sensibility, although it may be difficult to conceive of an imaginative man who would be lacking in sensibility. Imagination is an almost divine faculty which perceives immediately and without philosophical methods the inner and secret relations of things, the correspondences and the analogies.] (1964: 127)

---

[104] "À ces doctrinaires si satisfaits de la nature un homme imaginatif aurait certainement eu le droit de répondre: 'Je trouve inutile et fastidieux de représenter ce qui est parce que rien de ce qui est ne me satisfait. La nature est laide, et je préfère les monstres de ma fantaisie à la trivialité positive'" (1976: 620) [To these doctrinaires, who were so completely satisfied by Nature, a man of imagination would certainly have had the right to reply: 'I consider it useless and tedious to represent what *exists*, because nothing that *exists* satisfies me. Nature is ugly, and I prefer the monsters of my fancy to what is positively trivial'"] (1956: 233).

Once again, imagination is being described, according to Poe's great mastery of it, as a "chamber of consciousness" (James) which captures the finest and the most hidden links. In addition, it is poetically "epistemological", in Pierssens' sense, and not philosophically so, inasmuch as it deals with the "epistemic elements" of perception (see p. 22) but "without philosophical methods"; and it is inherently comparative: "an almost divine faculty which perceives immediately (…) the inner and secret relations of things, the correspondences and the analogies". But Poe brings a crucial new element to Baudelaire's reflection:

Parmi les domaines littéraires où l'imagination peut obtenir les plus curieux résultats, peut récolter les trésors, non pas les plus riches, les plus précieux (ceux-là appartiennent à la poésie) mais les plus nombreux et les plus variés, il en est un que Poe affectionne particulièrement, c'est la *Nouvelle*. Elle a sur le roman à vastes proportions cet immense avantage que sa brièveté ajoute à l'intensité de l'effet. Cette lecture, qui peut être accomplie tout d'une haleine, laisse dans l'esprit un souvenir bien plus puissant qu'une lecture brisée, interrompue souvent par les tracas des affaires et le soin des intérêts mondains. L'unité d'impression, la totalité d'effet est un avantage immense qui peut donner à ce genre de composition une supériorité tout à fait particulière, à ce point qu'une nouvelle trop courte (c'est sans doute un défaut) vaut encore mieux qu'une nouvelle trop longue. (…)

Il est un point par lequel la nouvelle a une supériorité, même sur le poème. Le rythme est nécessaire au développement de l'idée de beauté, qui est le but le plus grand et le plus noble du poème. Or, les artifices du rythme sont un obstacle insurmontable à ce développement minutieux de pensées et d'expressions qui a pour objet la vérité. Car la vérité peut être souvent le but de la nouvelle, et le raisonnement, le meilleur outil pour la construction d'une nouvelle parfaite. (1976: 329-30)

[Among the literary domains where imagination can obtain the most curious results, can harvest treasures, not the richest, the most precious (those belong to poetry), but the most numerous and the most varied, there is one of which Poe is especially fond; it is the *Short Story*. It has the immense advantage over the novel of vast proportions that its brevity adds to the intensity of effect. This type of reading, which can be accomplished in one sitting, leaves in the mind a more powerful impression than a broken reading, often interrupted by the worries of business and the cares of social life. The unity of impression, the totality of effect is an immense advantage which can give to this type of composition a very special superiority, to such an extent that an extremely short story (which is doubtless a fault) is even better than an extremely long story. (…)

There is one point in which the short story is superior even to the poem. Rhythm is necessary to the development of the idea of beauty, which is the greatest and the most noble aim of poetry. Now, the artifices of rhythm are an insurmountable obstacle to the detailed development of thought and expression which has truth as its object. For truth can often be the goal of the short story, and reasoning best tool for the construction of a perfect short story.] (1964: 127-8)

Baudelaire's notion of a "perfect short story" is still very much aligned with Poe's own considerations on the short form in what comes to the principles of "brevity" and "unity of effect", to the idea of "totality" associated with uninterrupted reading, and to the evaluative contrast and/or complementarity with poetry. And even if Poe's excessively limiting as well as too imprecise requisite that the short story is only effective if its reading can be "completed at one sitting" (Poe 1984: 571) has since been debated, challenged, and invalidated by critics, the American author's pictorial and imagistic conception of the genre has undoubtedly helped to substantiate the French poet's vision of the modern literary art form.[105]

The fact that Poe's critical observations emerge in his review of Hawthorne's short story collection *Twice-Told Tales*, published in *Graham's Magazine* in May 1842, also shows that the inaugural contributions for a modern theory of the short story (his and Baudelaire's) have been made by literary authors in their critical appreciation of other short story writers, and, specifically, of their works associated with the supernatural, which, once again, testifies to the inextricable link between the supernatural genre and the consolidation of modern short fiction. But in spite of the apparent harmony between Poe's and Baudelaire's critical notes on the short story, it is also clear that while Poe sees the form as a concentrated expression of the author's "skillful" craft, of his ability to produce effects and achieve a "pre-established design" (572), Baudelaire takes this conception of the short story and recasts it as an example,

---

[105] "A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents — he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided" (Poe 1984: 572).

not of the author's careful designing and capacity to manipulate the reader, but of an object through which the "painter of modern life" can attain an artistic "truth", or an "imaginative" reality if we return to the terms later employed in "The Queen of the Faculties".

The distinction may be subtle, but it brings us back to the interrelation between the short story and the question of literary representation that guided the authors analyzed in this dissertation in the late nineteenth century. Specifically, it allows me to return to Machado's claim quoted in the end of Chapter 1: "Voltemos os olhos para a realidade, mas excluamos o realismo, assim não sacrificaremos a verdade estética" (1955a: 178) [Let us turn our eyes to reality, but let us exclude realism, that way we will not sacrifice aesthetic truth].

It is true that later, in an obituary note, Machado revises his negative appreciation of Eça de Queirós,106 shedding praise on an author who, as Rocha suggests, may have been a great — albeit oblique — influence for him,107 but the artistic principle at the center of his statement does not suffer from his retraction in what concerns the relevance and true talent of the Portuguese novelist, nor is it a mere defense of "decorum" as opposed to the realistic ugliness and the moral ambiguity from which Queirós did not shy away in his writing.

The crucial distinction between "reality" and "realism" as well as the defense of an "aesthetic truth" not only show that Machado held strong and radical ideas about the nature of the literary art — reflexive of itself and not of what is presumed to stay within the borders of reality —, but also that his ideas were greatly in tune with James's view of an imaginative experience that is "never limited" by representational conventions, and with Maupassant's understanding that, in what comes to art, only the artist's "illusion" (or his "aesthetic truth")

---

106 See Machado 1955a: 258-9.

107 For a richly detailed reflection on how the arrival of *O Primo Bazílio* at Brazilian shores, in 1878, may have been at the origin of "a turning point" in Machado's writing, see the chapter "In the Middle of the Way There Was an Author" in Rocha's *Machado de Assis: Toward a Poetics of Emulation* (2015: 45-87).

is *real*. This is also the point in which, as we have seen, the three of them appropriate, explore, and advance a Baudelairean notion of literary modernity.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to offer a clear image of how the late-nineteenth century supernatural short story — comprising and intermingling the fantastic, the ghostly, the morbid, and the bizarre —, dramatizes this modern expression and becomes the "evanescent" meeting-point of fiction and reality, in an encounter that, in turn, problematizes the interrelationships between these terms. Machado, James, and Maupassant follow this path without ever crossing the line that leads into fantasy but also without restricting themselves to what is ordinarily understood as real. However, I argue that more than simply formulating an ontological and gnoseological ambiguity, these authors call our attention to the essence of literature, exploring its supernatural (that is, its more-than-natural) dimension as the motor of the fantastic narrative, and thus an enabler of fiction.

This sense of enhanced fictionality actively pervades the short stories of James and Maupassant, but it is in Machado that it reaches a more flagrant and surprising configuration. Creating supernatural stories whose great supernatural quality resides in an effectively poetic and rhetoric irony, and in them being in fact a lie ("Um Esqueleto"), a prank ("Sem Olhos"), or even a publishing scheme ("Eternal Life"), Machado's meta-literary approach and "fiction of fiction" seem to be more direct, more explicit, and more defining in his case than in those of his renowned peers from across the Atlantic. In point of fact, writing from the periphery, he published as early as 1881 a *realist* novel written from beyond the grave by its dead author, in a bold exploration of the possibilities of supernatural narration that is difficult to imagine any other author of his time replicating.

Nevertheless, bringing these authors together we also see that they have given shape to different but related forms of *fantastic textuality*, identified and described in each of the

previous chapters according to the elements that exemplify them more openly (although not exclusively): 1) in Machado's rotating "doors of fiction", demarcating the borders of dreams and hallucinations, or of states that replicate dreams and hallucinations, in a direct association with the device of frame narration and with the play between diegetic and even extradiegetic levels; 2) in James's exploration of the ghost text as a meta-literary figure that complexifies notions of authorship and narrative responsibility in the same degree to which it destabilizes the epistemics of reading and the correlation between the story and the elusive text that haunts it as the origin of storytelling and as a meaningful gap; and 3) in Maupassant's "interrogative mood", in his characters' psychology and in the syntax of his narratives, which leads him in a gradual metonymizing of *mediating objects* of fiction, from his manuscripts of madmen to the embodiment of the text in the ghostly body parts of his later stories.

A reconsideration of these authors' individual and conjoined relevance in the history of the late-nineteenth century short story across various languages and literary traditions also shows that they seized the opportunity given to them by supernatural short fiction to explore the ability of literature to write (in the various senses this term acquired along these pages) the unknown, giving it a *legible shape* in the mind of a character, in the unexplainable event in a story — or in a story framed as an unexplainable event —, or in the metaleptic transition between the shifting borders of fiction and reality.

Analyzed in proximity, the supernatural short stories written by Machado, James, and Maupassant seem to suggest that the knowledge that literature can offer us of the *realities* or *truths* that it constitutes is essentially incomplete and filled with positively "blank values", as it also pushes us in the hesitant, haunting, and creative task of knowing the unwritten.

Works Cited

Works of Machado de Assis

(2009), "The Immortal", Trans. Alfred Mac Adam, *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (666-686).

(1982), *Counselor Ayres' Memorial*, Trans. Helen Caldwell, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press [1972].

(1966), *Dom Casmurro: A Novel*, Trans. Helen Caldwell, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

(1962), *Dom Casmurro*, São Paulo: Cultrix.

(1961), *Memorial de Aires* e *O Alienista*, São Paulo: Cultrix.

(1956a), *Contos Avulsos*, Ed. Raimundo Magalhães Júnior, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

(1956b), *Contos Esparsos*, Ed. Raimundo Magalhães Júnior, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

(1956c), *Contos Esquecidos*, Ed. Raimundo Magalhães Júnior, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

(1956d), *Contos Recolhidos*, Ed. Raimundo Magalhães Júnior, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

(1956e), *Contos sem Data*, Ed. Raimundo Magalhães Júnior, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

(1955a), *Crítica Literária*, *Obras Completas de Machado de Assis*, Vol. 29, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Porto Alegre: W. M. Jackson.

(1955b), *Papéis Avulsos*, *Obras Completas de Machado de Assis*, Vol. 12, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Porto Alegre: W. M. Jackson.

(1955c), *Relíquias de Casa Velha* II, *Obras Completas de Machado de Assis*, Vol. 17, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Porto Alegre: W. M. Jackson.

(1955d), *Relíquias de Casa Velha* I, *Obras Completas de Machado de Assis*, Vol. 16, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Porto Alegre: W. M. Jackson.

Works of Henry James

(2008), *Ghost Stories of Henry James*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth [2001].

(1996), *Henry James: Complete Stories*, Vols. I-V, New York: Library of America.

(2000), "The Aspern Papers", *The Turn of the Screw & The Aspern Papers*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth (95-175) [1993].

(1999), *The Turn of the Screw*, Ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren, New York and London: Norton (Norton Critical Editions).

(1987), *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, Ed. Roger Gard, London: Penguin.

(1984a), *Henry James Letters*, Vol. IV, Ed. Leon Edel, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.

(1984b), *Literary Criticism II: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, Ed. Leon Edel, New York: The Library of America.

(1970), *Stories of the Supernatural*, Ed. Leon Edel, New York: Taplinger.

(1963), *Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, Ed. Leon Edel, New York: Universal Library.

(1948), *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James*. Ed. Leon Edel. New Brunswick: Rutgers U. Press.

(1946), *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, New York and London: Scribner [1934].

Works of Guy de Maupassant

(2015), *Au Soleil* suivi de *La Vie Errante* et Autres Voyages, Ed. Marie-Claire Bancquart, Paris: Gallimard (Folio Classique).

(2008), *Croniques: Anthologie*, Ed. Henri Mitterand, Paris: Le Livre de Poche (Librairie Générale Française).

(2005), *The Horla*. Trans. Charlotte Mandell. Brooklyn: Melville House (The Art of the Novella).

(1974), *Contes et Nouvelles*, Vols. I-II, Ed. Louis Forestier, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade).

Works of Criticism on Machado, James, and Maupassant

BANTA, Martha (1973), *Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

BAPTISTA, Abel Barros (1991), *Em Nome do Apelo do Nome: Duas Interrogações sobre Machado de Assis*, Lisboa: Litoral.

BARROS, Nismária Alves David (2011), "O estranho e o fingimento literário em 'Um esqueleto', de Machado de Assis", *RL – Revista de Letras*, No. 14 (1-14).

BAYARD, Pierre (1994), *Maupassant, Juste avant Freud*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

BELL, Millicent (1991), *Meaning in Henry James*, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press.

BROOKS, Peter (2007), *Henry James Goes to Paris*, Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

----- (2005), *Realist Vision*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

----- (1995), *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press [1976].

BRYANT, David (1994), "Maupassant and the Writing Hand", *Maupassant conteur et romancier*, Ed. Christopher Lloyd and Robert Lethbridge, Durham: University of Durham Press (85-95).

BURY, Mariane (1988), "Maupassant Pessimiste?", *Romantisme*, No. 61 (75-83).

BOSI, Alfredo (2007), *Machado de Assis: O Enigma do Olhar*, São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

----- (1999), "Decifração do Tempo", Caderno Mais!, *Folha de São Paulo* (March 28, 1999) [Interview]. URL: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs28039905.htm>

CARGILL, Oscar (1963), "*The Turn of the Screw* and Alice James", *PMLA*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (238-249).

CRESTANI, Jaison Luís (2006), "A colaboração de Machado de Assis no Jornal das Famílias: subordinações e subversões", *Patrimônio e Memória*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (146-175).

----- (2012), *Machado de Assis no Jornal das Famílias*, São Paulo: EDUSP – Editora da Universidade de São Paulo/Nankin.

CUNHA, Patrícia Lessa Flores da (1998), *Machado de Assis: Um Escritor na Capital dos Trópicos*, Porto Alegre: IEL/Unisinos.

DANIEL, G. Reginald (2016), "Machado de Assis: From 'Tragic Mulatto' to Human Tragicomedy", *Emerging Dialogues on Machado de Assis*, Ed. Lamonte Aidoo and Daniel F. Silva, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (71-90).

DEFAZIO, Maria Teresa (2004), *Il Mito dell'io Impossibile: Allucinazioni e Identitá Mancate in Guy de Maupassant, Henry James, Luigi Pirandello*, Roma: Bulzoni.

DESPOTOPOULOU, Anna, & Kimberly C. REED (2011), "I see ghosts everywhere", *Henry James and the Supernatural*, Ed. Anna Despotopoulou and Kimberly C. Reed, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (1-10).

DESPOTOPOULOU, Anna (2011), "Mysterious Tenants: Uncanny Women and the Private or Public Dilemma in the Supernatural Tales", *Henry James and the Supernatural*, Ed. Anna Despotopoulou and Kimberly C. Reed, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (79-96).

DIEBEL, Anne (2011), "'The Dreary Duty': Henry James, *The Yellow Book*, and Literary Personality", *The Henry James Review*, No. 32 (45-59).

DIXON, Paul (1992), *Os Contos de Machado de Assis: Mais do que Sonha a Filosofia*, Porto Alegre: Movimento.

EDEL, Leon (1996), *Henry James: A Life*, London: Flamingo.

FELMAN, Shoshana (1977), "Turning the Screw of Interpretation", *Yale French Studies*, No. 55/56, *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (94-207).

FERNANDES, Túlio, & Wiebke Röben de Alencar XAVIER (2016), "A recepção transatlântica do '*Gespenster*-Hoffmann' no Bruxo do Cosme Velho", *Graphos*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (135-155).

FERNANDES, Marcelo J. (2011), "Machado de Assis Quase-Macabro", *Vernaculum*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1-12).

FISCHER, Luís Augusto (1998), "Contos de Machado: Da Ética à Estética", *Machado de Assis: Uma Revisão*, Org. Antonio Carlos Secchin, José Maurício Gomes de Almeida, and Ronaldes de Melo e Souza, Rio de Janeiro: In-Fólio (147-166).

FITZ, Brewster E. (1972), "The Use of Mirrors and Mirror Analogues in Maupassant's *Le Horla*", *The French Review*, Vol. 45, No. 5 (954-63).

FUSCO, Richard (1994), *Maupassant and the American Short Story: The Influence of Form at the Turn of the Century*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

GEYER, Charles H. (2018), "Rethinking Todorov: The Fantastic and the Ironic in *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* and 'O Pirotécnico Zacarias'", *Chasqui – Revista de literatura latinoamericana*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (176-189).

GINWAY, M. Elizabeth (2016), "Machado's Tales of the Fantastic: Allegory and the Macabre", *Emerging Dialogues on Machado de Assis*, Ed. Lamonte Aidoo and Daniel F. Silva, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (211-222).

GODFREY, Sima (1987), "Lending a Hand: Nerval, Gautier, Maupassant and the Fantastic", in *Romanic Review*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (74-83).

GREENHAW, Charles R. (1965), *The Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, North Texas State University [Dissertation].

GREGORY, Melissa Valiska (2004), "From Melodrama to Monologue: Henry James and Domestic Terror", *The Henry James Review*, No. 25 (146-67).

GUIMARÃES, Hélio de Seixas (2012), *Os Leitores de Machado de Assis*, São Paulo: EDUSP – Editora da Universidade de São Paulo/Nankin.

HADLOCK, Philip G. (2003), "Telling Madness and Masculinity in Maupassant's 'Le Horla'", *L'Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (47-56).

HALE, Dorothy J. (1998), "Henry James and the Invention of Novel Theory", *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, Ed. Jonathan Freedman, Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press (79-101).

HEILMANN, Ann (2009), "The Haunting of Henry James: Jealous Ghosts, Affinities, and *The Others*", *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*, Ed. Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (111-32).

HINER, Susan (2002). "Hand Writing: Dismembering and Re-Membering in Nodier, Nerval and Maupassant", in *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3-4 (301-15).

HORNE, Philip (2019), "Strings of Pearls: James, Maupassant, and 'Paste'", *Literary Imagination*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (137-157).

----- (1996), "Henry James and the Economy of the Short Story", *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*, Ed. Ian Willison, Warwick Gould, and Warren Chernaik, New York: Macmillan (1-34).

HUTCHINSON, Hazel (2011), "Haunting the Churches: Henry James and the Sacred Space in 'The Altar of the Dead'", *Henry James and the Supernatural*, Ed. Anna Despotopoulou and Kimberly C. Reed, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (59-78).

JACKSON, K. David (2015), *Machado de Assis: A Literary Life*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

KIERNAN, Katherine D. Wickhorst (2005), "L'Entre-moi: *Le Horla* de Maupassant, ou un monde sans frontières", *Littérature*, No. 139 (44-61).

KING, Jeanette (2010), *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel: Theory and practice in the novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press [1978].

KROOK, Dorothea (1967), *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, London and New York: Cambridge University Press.

LEJEUNE, Philippe (1988), "Maupassant et le fétichisme", *Colloque de Césiry*, Saint-Denis: PUV (91-109).

LIND, Sidney E. (1951), "James's 'The Private Life' and Browning", *American Literature*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (315-22).

LULA, Darlan de Oliveira Gusmão (2005), *Machado de Assis e o gênero fantástico: um estudo de narrativas machadianas*, U. Federal de Juiz de Fora [Dissertation].

LUSTIG, T. J. (2010), *Henry James and the Ghostly*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1994].

MACLACHLAN, Gale, & Ian REID (1995), "Framing the Frame: Maupassant's 'La Chevelure'", *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, Vol. 22, No.2 (287-299).

MAILLARD, M. Pascal (1993), "L'innommable et l'illimité. Poétique de la nature et du souvenir dans quelques nouvelles de Maupassant", in *Romantisme*, No. 81 (95-99).

MERQUIOR, José Guilherme (1972), "Género e Estilo das *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*", *Colóquio/Letras*, No. 8 (12-20).

MILLER, J. Hillis (2005a), "Henry James and 'Focalization', or Why James Loves Gyp", *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, Ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, Malden and Oxford: Blackwell (124-35).

----- (2005b), *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James*, New York: Fordham University Press.

MITTERAND, Henri (2008), "Donner l'illusion du vrai", in Guy de Maupassant, *Croniques: Anthologie*, Ed. Henri Mitterand, Paris: Le Livre de Poche (1097-1123).

NEEFS, Jacques (1980), "La représentation fantastique dans 'Le Horla' de Maupassant", *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, No. 32 (231-245).

PASCO, Allan H. (1969), "The Evolution of Maupassant's Supernatural Stories", in *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (150-59).

PEREIRA, Diogo Nonato Reis (2014), "A Construção do Fantástico na Narrativa Machadiana: Leitura dos Contos 'A Vida Eterna', 'Os Óculos de Pedro Antão' e 'Sem Olhos'", *Memento*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1-28).

PEREIRA, Rubens Alves (1999), *Fraturas do Texto: Machado e Seus Leitores*, Rio de Janeiro: Sette Letras.

PERROT, Andrea Czarnobay (2001), *Do Real ao Ficcional: A loucura e suas representações em Machado de Assis*, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul [Dissertation].

PIPPIN, Robert B. (2000), *Henry James & Modern Moral Life*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

PRÉVOST, Maxime (2000), "Le cadavre de Schopenhauer dans le cercueil d'Edgar Poe. Notes sur *Auprès d'un mort* de Guy de Maupassant", *Neophilologus*, No. 84 (371-83).

REIS, Amândio (2017), "A história do Futuro: 'Tombouctou', de Guy de Maupassant", *Lettres Françaises*, No. 18 (35-55).

RIEDEL, Dirce Côrtes (1979), *Metáfora: O Espelho de Machado de Assis*, São Paulo: Francisco Alves.

ROCHA, João Cezar de Castro (2015), *Machado de Assis: Toward a Poetics of Emulation*, Trans. Flora Thomson-DeVeaux, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

ROPARS-WUILLEMIER, Marie-Claire (1978), "La lettre brûlée (écriture et folie dans le Horla)", *Colloque de Cerisy: Le naturalisme*, Paris: Union générale d'éditions (349-60).

SATTAR, Atia (2011), "Certain Madness: Guy de Maupassant and Hypnotism", *Configurations*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (213-41).

SCHINCARIOL, Andrea (2013). "'Le Horla' et l'imaginaire du portrait composite", *Études françaises*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (87-102).

SCHWARZ, Roberto (2001), *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism: Machado de Assis*, Trans. John Gledson, London: Duke University Press.

----- (2000), *Ao Vencedor as Batatas*, São Paulo: Duas Cidades [1977].

SCOTT, Hannah (2013). "*Le Blanc et le Noir*: The Spectre behind the Spectrum in Maupassant's Short Stories", *Nottingham French Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (268-280).

SENNA, Marta de (1998), *O Olhar Oblíquo do Bruxo: Ensaios em Torno de Machado de Assis*, Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira.

SHEPPARD, Elizabeth A. (1974), *Henry James and The Turn of the Screw*, Auckland: Auckland University Press.

SNAZA, Nathan (2014), "'The Reign of Man is Over': The Vampire, the Animal and the Human in Maupassant's 'Le Horla'", *simplokē*, Vol. 22, No. 1-2 (215-33).

SUWALA, Halina (1993), "Maupassant et le naturalisme", *Maupassant et lécriture: Actes du coloque de Fécamp, 21-22-23 mai 1993*, Ed. Louis Forestier, Paris: Nathan (243-252).

SWEENEY, Gerard M. (1991), "Henry James's 'De Grey': The Gothic as Camouflage of the Medical", *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (36-44).

TANTERI, Domenico (2011), "Dialettica del fantastico. Il (mobile) confine tra noto e ignoto in Guy de Maupassant", *Between*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1-16).

TEIXEIRA, Ivan (1987), *Apresentação de Machado de Assis*, São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

TODOROV, Tzvetan (1978) [1971], "Le secret du récit: Henry James", *Poétique de la Prose* suivi *de Nouvelles recherches sur le récit*, Paris: Seuil, 81-116.

TOIT, Catherine du (2003), "Beyond the Mask: Guy de Maupassant in Algeria", *Africa and Europe: En/Countering Myths*, Ed. Carlotta von Maltzan, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang (77-89).

TORTONESE, Paolo (2015), "Platitudes: Zola sous le regard de Henry James", *L'expression des émotions: Mélanges en l'honneur de Patrizia Lombardo*, Ed. Martin Rueff and Julien Zanetta. URL: <http://www.unige.ch/lettres/framo/melangeslombardo/>

VILLARREAL, Lisa Ann (2013), "'[L]à-bas, où sa race est née': Colonial Anxieties and the Fantasy of the Native Body in Maupassant's *Le Horla*", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1-2 (74-87).

YEAZELL, Ruth Bernard (1976), *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

WALTON, Priscilla (1992), "'There had to be some way to show the difference': Authorial Presence and Supplementarity in James's 'The Private Life'", *Victorian Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (13-23).

Other Works

ABRAMS, M. H. (1971), *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press [1953].

ABREU, Márcia, and Ana Cláudia Suriani da SILVA (2016), *The Cultural Revolution of the Nineteenth Century: Theatre, the Book-Trade, and Reading in the Transatlantic World*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

AUDET, René (2014), "To Relate, to Read, to Separate: A Poetics of the Collection and A Poetics of Diffraction", *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties*, No. 12 (35-45).

AUERBACH, Erich (1984), *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Trad. Ralph Manheim, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press [1944].

BARTHES, Roland (1989), *The Rustle of Language*, Trans. Richard Howard, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press ["L'Effet de Réel", 1968].

----- (1966), "Introduction à l'Analyse Structurale des Récits", *Communications*, No. 8 (1-27).

BATCHEN, Geoffrey (2000), *Each Wild Idea: Writing Photography History*, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press.

BAUDELAIRE, Charles (1976), *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 2, Ed. Claude Pichois, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade).

----- (1964), *Baudelaire as a Literary Critic: Selected Essays*, Trans. and Ed. Lois Boe Hyslop and Frances E. Hyslop, Jr., Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

----- (1956), *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies by Charles Baudelaire*, Trans. and Ed. Jonathan Mayne, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

BELL, Alice, & Jan ALBER (2012), "Ontological Metalepsis and Unnatural Narratology", *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (166-192).

BLANCHOT, Maurice (1959), *Le livre à venir*, Paris: Gallimard.

BOLONGARO, Eugenio (2014), "The Fluidity of the Fantastic: Todorov's Legacy to Literary Criticism", *Ticontre. Teoria Testo Traduzione*, No. 1 (61-83).

BRIGGS, Julia (1977), *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*, London: Faber and Faber.

BRYANT, David S. (1991), "The *Revue de Paris* and the Rise of the Short Story: 1829-1830", *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, Vol. 101, No. 1, 10-8.

BURROW, J. W. (2000), *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

CASTEX, Pierre-Georges (1987), *Le Conte Fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant*, Paris: José Corti [1951].

CHEVALIER, Jean-Marie (2016), "What is the Welträtsel? (1880-1915)", *Limits of Knowledge: The Nineteenth-Century Epistemological Debate and Beyond*, Ed. Michael Anacker and Nadia Moro, Milano: Mimesis International (13-42).

CHÉVRIER, Jean-François (2012), *L'Hallucination Artistique de William Blake à Sigmar Polke*, Paris: L'Arachnéen.

COOK, Michael (2014), *Detective Fiction and the Ghost Story: The Haunted Text*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

DAVIES, David Stuart (2009), "Introduction", *Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth (vii-xii).

D'HOKER, Elke, & Bart VAN DEN BOSSCHE (2014), "Cycles, Recueils, Macrotexts: The Short Story Collection in a Comparative Perspective", *Interférences littéraires/ Literaire interferenties*, No. 12 (7-17).

ENGSTROM, Alfred G. (1945), "The Formal Short Story in France and Its Development before 1850", *Studies in Philology*, No. 42 (627-39).

FERGUSON, Suzanne C. (1994), "Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form", *The New Short Story Theories*, Ed. Charles E. May, Athens: Ohio University Press (218-230).

----- (1989), "The Rise of the Short Story in the Hierarchy of Genres", *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, Ed. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press (176-92).

FLAUBERT, Gustave (1982), *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert (1857-1880)*, Trans. and Ed. Francis Steegmuller, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

----- (1954), *Correspondance — Supplément (1864-1871)*, Vol. 2, Ed. René Dumesnil, Jean Pommier, and Claude Digeon, Paris: Louis Conard.

FLORA, Joseph M. (1982), "The Device of Conspicuous Silence in the Modern Short Story", *The Teller and the Tale: Aspects of the Short Story*, Ed. Wendell M. Aycock, Lubbock: Texas Tech Press (27-46).

FORTIN, Jutta Emma (2005), *Method in Madness: Control Mechanisms in the French Fantastic*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.

FRANK, Zephyr L. (2016), *Reading Rio de Janeiro: Literature and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

FREUD, Sigmund (2003), *The Uncanny*, Trans. David McLintock, Londond and New York: Penguin Books [*Das Unheimliche*, 1919].

GARCIA, Patricia (2017), "Paris and the Birth of a Modern Fantastic during the Nineteenth Century", *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, Vol. 19, No. 1. Web.

GENETTE, Gérard (1980), *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Trans. Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

GIRARD, René (1965), *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Trans. Yvonne Freccero, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

GOGOL, Nikolai (2009), *Petersburg Tales, Marriage, The Government Inspector*, Trans. Christopher English, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

GOOD, Graham (1994), "Notes on the Novella", *The New Short Story Theories*, Ed. Charles E. May, Athens: Ohio University Press (147-64).

HANSON, Clare (1985), *Short Stories and Short Fictions: 1880-1980*, London: Macmillan.

HOBSBAWM, E. J. (1989), *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*, London: Cardinal [1987].

JAMES, William (2007), *The Principles of Psychology*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press [1890].

KESSLER, Joan C., Ed. (1995), *Demons of the Night: Tales of the Fantastic, Madness, and the Supernatural from Nineteenth-Century France*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

KLEPPER, Martin (2011), *The Discovery of Point of View: Observation and Narration in the American Novel (1790-1910)*, Memmingen: Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg.

LOVECRAFT, H. P. (1973), *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, New York: Dover.

LUNDÉN, Rolf (2014), "Centrifugal and Centripetal Narrative Strategies in the Short Story Composite and the Episode Film", *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties* No. 12 (49-60).

LUSCHER, Robert M. (1989), "The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book", *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, Ed. Susan Lohafer, and Jo Ellyn Clarey, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press (148-67).

MARCH-RUSSEL, Paul (2006), "Introduction" to May Sinclair, *Uncanny Stories*, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth (7-21).

MARLER, Robert F. (1974), "From Tale to Short Story: The Emergence of a New Genre in the 1850's", *American Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (153-69).

MARQUER, Bertrand (2014), *Naissance du fantastique clinique. La crise de l'analyse dans la littérature fin-de-siècle*, Paris: Hermann.

MARTÍNEZ, José M. (2008), "Subversion or Oxymoron?: Fantastic Literature and the Metaphysics of the Object", *Neophilologus*, No. 92 (367-84).

MAY, Charles E. (1994), "Chekhov and the Modern Short Story", *The New Short Story Theories*, Ed. Charles E. May, Athens: Ohio University Press (199-217).

----- (1989), "Metaphoric Motivation in Short Fiction: 'In the Beginning Was the Story'", *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Ed. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press (62-73).

MÉRIMÉE, Prosper (2008), *Carmen and Other Stories*, Trans. Nicholas Jotcham, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

----- (1951), *Romans et Nouvelles*, Ed. Henri Martineau, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade).

MONTESQUIEU (1951), *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. II, Ed. Roger Caillois, Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade).

MOUCHARD, Claude (1991), *Un Grand Désert d'Hommes 1851-1885: Les Équivoques de la Modernité*, Paris: Hatier.

O'ROURKE, William (1989), "Morphological Metaphors for the Short Story: Matters of Production, Reproduction, and Consumption", *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, Ed. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press (193-205).

OWENS, Susan (2017), *The Ghost: A Cultural History*, London: Tate.

PARREIRA, Marcelo Pen (2012), *Realidade Possível: Dilemas da Ficção em Henry James e Machado de Assis*, São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial.

PASCO, Allan H. (2019), *The Nineteenth-Century French Short Story: Masterpieces in Miniature*, New York: Routledge.

PENDEN, William (1982), "Realism and Anti-Realism in the Modern Short Story", *The Teller and the Tale: Aspects of the Short Story*, Ed. Wendell M. Aycock, Lubbock: Texas Tech Press (47-62).

PIERSSENS, Michel (1990), *Savoirs à l'Oeuvre: Essais d'Épistémocritique*, Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille.

PLATO (1925), *Phaedrus*, Trans. Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

POE, Edgar Allan (1984), *Poetry and Tales*, Ed. Patrick F. Quinn, New York: Library of America.

PONNAU, Gwenhaël (1990), *La folie dans la littérature fantastique*, Paris: CNRS.

PRATT, Mary Louise (1994), "The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It", *The New Short Story Theories*, Ed. Charles E. May, Athens: Ohio University Press (91-113).

REID, Ian (1977), *The Short Story*, London: Methuen.

ROAS, David, Ed. (2001), *Teorías de lo Fantástico*, Madrid: Arco/Libros.

ROWE, Katherine (1999), *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

RYAN, Marie-Laure (2006), "Metaleptic Machines", *Avatars of Story*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press (204-230).

SACHS, Murray (1969), "Introduction", *The French Short Story in the Nineteenth Century: A Critical Anthology*, Ed.Murray Sachs, New York: Oxford University Press (3-13).

SCHAFFER, Talia, Ed. (2007), *Literature and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, New York: Pearson/Longman.

SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur (2010), *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, Trans. and Ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [1819].

SCOFIELD, Martin (2006). *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SHUSTERMAN, Ronald (1998), "Fiction et Re-connaissance: Les Limites du Savoir Littéraire", *Fiction & Connaissance: Essais sur le Savoir à l'Oeuvre et l'Oeuvre de Fiction*, Ed. Catherine Coquio and Régis Salado, Paris: L'Harmattan (145-57).

SLEIGH, Charlotte (2011), *Literature & Science*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

TODOROV, Tzvetan (1984), *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Trans. Wlad Godzich, Manchester: Manchester University Press [1981.

----- (1975), *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Trans. Richard Howard, New York: Cornell University Press.

WALKER, Warren S. (1982), "From Raconteur to Writer: Oral Roots and Printed Leaves of Short Fiction", *The Teller and the Tale: Aspects of the Short Story*, Ed. Wendell M. Aycock, Lubbock: Texas Tech Press (13-26).

WALKOWITZ, Rebecca L. (2009), "Comparison Literature", *New Literary History*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (567-82).

WOOLF, Virginia (1988), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 3: 1919-1924, Ed. Andrew McNeillie, San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (319-326).

ZIEGLER, Robert (2013), "J.-K. Huysmans's Spiritual Naturalism and the Alchemy of Redemption", *Romance Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (113-122).

----- (2002), *Beauty Raises the Dead: Literature and Loss in the Fin de Siècle*, Newark: University of Delaware Press.