THE UNCANNY: A FREUDIAN READING ON “DRACULA” AND “GREEN TEA”

Gothic Literature in England is said to have begun with Horace Walpole’s “The Castle of Otranto” (1764). Starting from then, Gothic novels, poems and short stories had some certain elements (such as ancestors, haunted castles, supernatural happenings) which occurred frequently and added to the horror depicted in the work. Sigmund Freud gives a systematic explanation to this situation in his “Uncanny” by analyzing and giving examples from both real life experiences and literary works. Freud uses the uncanny as a means of psychological and psychoanalytical analysis of the characters in the works he examines. I shall elaborate on Freud’s idea of “uncanny” and set out the main points; then go on to analyzing “Dracula” by Bram Stoker and “Green Tea” by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu according to Freud’s ideas on the “uncanny”.

To begin with, I would like to talk about “The Uncanny” by Sigmund Freud by studying three points he makes in his work: the relationship between unheimlich and heimlich (which paves the way for the issue of concealment and repression), doubles (Doppelgänger) and repetition. Freud starts his work by observing the meanings of heimlich and unheimlich in Sanders’ Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, and states that “among its different shades of meaning the word heimlich exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, unheimlich. What is heimlich thus comes to be unheimlich.”, “on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight”, “everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light”, “unheimlich is in some way or other a sub-species of heimlich” (Freud 4). He also states that the uncanny is

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“nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old -established in the mind that has been
estranged only by the process of repression” (Freud 13). For Freud, the uncanny derives its terror
not from something external, alien, or unknown but -on the contrary- from something strangely
familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it.³ Later, when talking about the
idea of the double, Freud states that the double is concerned with/occurs as “constant recurrence
of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a
same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations” and “reflections in mirrors,
with shadows, guardian spirits, with belief in the soul and the fear of death” (Freud 9). He goes
on to say that “the immortal soul was the first double of the body ... as a preservation against
extinction”, however this “primary narcissism ... has been left behind the double takes on a
different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly
harbringer of death” (Freud 9). Freud explains the “factor of involuntary repetition” as “the idea
of something fateful and unescapable where otherwise we should have spoke of ‘chance’ only”
(Freud 11). He goes on to talk about the uncanny in literature, and states that “uncanny ... in
literature ... is a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life, for it contains the whole
of the latter and something more besides, something that cannot be found in real life” (Freud 18).

I would like to comment on these arguments shortly by relating them to (uncanny in)
literature. It has been stated that the uncanny stems from the same things that reside within all
human beings but must not come out. For this reason, the uncanny element is repressed and
silenced. However, repression cannot be successful in keeping the unheimlich inside; it finds a
way to creep up to the surface. Considering the double images, it may be said that the doubleness

can be used to underline the hidden and wild ‘self’ within people/characters. Repetition also contributes to/underlines the idea of something relating to the hidden self will break out.

Secondly, I would like to talk about “Green Tea” by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu with the aid of Freud’s arguments. In terms of repetition, two kinds of examples can be seen: the constant mentioning of green tea from the beginning (even the title is “Green Tea”) and how silent Jennings is (even his house is described as silent). This gives the reader the feeling that something might be wrong under all the silence and drinking of green tea; or something bad and fearsome might happen because of the excessive green tea drinking and exaggerated silence. Lady Mary states that “… he likes tea ... extravagantly.” up to such a point that it became “a subject on which [they] used almost to quarrel.” (Le Fanu 374). Later on Mr Jennings himself admits that he “made tea two or three times between eleven o’clock and two or three in the morning, [his] hours of going to bed.” (Le Fanu 385), the huge amount of green tea consumed must surely be a sign of something “uncanny”. Moreover, silence is a sign of concealment; it gives the feeling of something about Jennings is repressed. Hesselius describes Jennings as a “slight, timid, kindly but reserved gentleman” (Le Fanu 371) with “quiet stealthy steps” (Le Fanu 383) and his lodgings as “... perfectly silent room, of a very silent house” (Le Fanu 376); “Blank Street” (Le Fanu 376) where Jennings’ house is located also indicates emptiness, hidden ideas/issues. Silence seems to run in the family as well, for during a conversation between Hesselius and Lady Mary, she says that Jennings’ father “was a silent, whimsical man” (Le Fanu 375). At this point ‘silence’ becomes an example of the double (since it is a recurring issue in a family throughout generations, as Freud puts it). Also, just like Jennings’ seeing a non-existent

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4 Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. Green Tea.
monkey, his father has seen a ghost (Le Fanu 375); again, the idea of doubleness occurs.

However, it must be stated that the chief double is the monkey; which causes even Jennings’ reflection in the mirror (another symbol of doubleness) to seem “so dark and wild that [Hesselius] should hardly have known him.” (p.379). Furthermore, Jennings describes the monkey’s eyes as “two small circular reflections” (p. 385) (instead of saying i.e. circular objects) which brings up the idea of mirror-doubles. A good example of the monkey being a ‘mirrored double’ of Jennings can be seen in the scene where he first encounters with it; “As I stopped so did it”, “I stood ... It did not move” (Le Fanu 387), “at all hours, it is awake and looking at me” (Le Fanu 389) (only at all hours Jennings is awake, he can observe the monkey). The fact that the “uncanny” is the same hidden, wild self in everyone can be seen in Jennings’ words: “It knows everything—it knows you, and is frantic and atrocious. It reviles.” (Le Fanu 397), it is about to ‘come into light’ in Freud’s terms. So, in the end, what must have stayed hidden (monkey) comes out and kills the real self. In short, “Green Tea” fulfills the points made by Freud: repetition of tea and silence, monkey as the twin self and Jennings trying to conceal the fact that he sees a monkey by staying silent and isolated all together create the feeling of “uncanny”, both in the characters and in the reader.

Thirdly, I would like to touch upon the occurance of the uncanny in “Dracula” by Bram Stoker.⁵ Mina Harker is constantly described as a woman who is wise and realistic, with “a man’s brain ... and a woman’s heart” (Stoker 281); this is not a characteristic of a Victorian woman to begin with, and being brought up very frequently, it gives the feeling of something might be wrong about this ‘wisdom’ and something uncomfortable might happen originating from Mina Harker’s reason. Although this repetition is not as prominent as Jenning’s silence, the idea of a

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Victorian woman standing out as smarter and more cunning than the men (who are professionals in their fields and life in general) indicates that there is something unusual going on; as this quite ‘unbelievable’ trait gets repeated constantly by Van Helsing (who is the utmost authority of them all) the reader gets suspicious that a disturbing event might happen with regard to this excessive mentioning of Mina’s dominant wisdom. Unlike Mr Jennings, when it comes to concealing fearsome/grusome truths, Mina Harker is exposed. After having been bitten by Dracula, Mina gets sanctified by Van Helsing with the wafer; however “[a]s he had placed the Wafer on Mina’s forehead, it had seared it... had burned into the flesh ...” which causes her to scream “Unclean!” in agony (Stoker 353). The “uncleanness” of Mina will be brought up frequently after this point, it is no longer a secret. However it might be said that since the ‘uncleanness’ stems from Dracula’s evil, it is not Mina but Dracula who gets blamed by the others. However, Dracula and Mina Harker can be seen as doubles, thus partners in crime (of ‘sinning’). As the wild and inner self, Dracula feeds upon innocent humans, turning the act merely into a metaphoric sexual intercourse; kills humans without any regrets. On the contrary, the real self Mina Harker is the perfect innocent, homely and pure wife with reason and conscious. Also, as stated by Jonathan Harker, Dracula has no reflection in the mirror (Stoker 37), neither a shadow (Stoker 286); so he is nonexistent in terms of physical existence, as if he is a hidden self. In addition, ‘the mark on the forehead’ is an interesting issue to touch upon, since both Mina Harker and Dracula have such a ‘mark’. When Johnathan Harker finds where Dracula lies down during the day and encounters the seemingly younger Count, he wants to “get rid the world of such a monster.” (Stoker 68) He hits Dracula with the only weapon he can find close at hand: a shovel; thus his blow is not lethal, however it leaves a mark on the Count’s face, which will be talked about repeatedly later in the novel. For example, when the men go to one of the lodgings of Dracula in England, they encounter the Count and during the quarrel Count’s “red scar on the forehead showed on the
pallid skin like a palpitating wound.” (Stoker 365). No sooner than this encounter, Mina Harker gets marked in the forehead by the wafer. Moreover, when Dracula gets killed at the end of the novel, the mark on Mina Harker’s forehead disappears. Another point to make about Mina Harker and Dracula is about both characters’ attitude towards Jonathan Harker. When Count Dracula saves Jonathan Harker from his first encounter with the three vampire ladies, what he utters to them is quite protective: “how dare you touch him, any of you? ... This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you’ll have to deal with me.” (Stoker 53) Here, Dracula seems more of a wifely and motherly figure rather than a good host. In the same way, Mina Harker is protective of her husband (while Jonathan should be the one protecting Mina): even after having been bitten by the Count, Mina tries to make Jonathan happy: “do not fret dear. You must be brave and strong ...” (Stoker 341). While Jonathan Harker is reduced to a ‘mere’ and ‘helpless’ woman, both Count Dracula and Mina Harker become his powerful and vigorous protectors. Thus, it can be said that Mina Harker and Count Dracula become mirror images of one another. However, Dracula represents the primitive fears and desires hidden in everyone while Mina Harker is supposedly the one in control. In the end, there has been two possibilities concerning which ‘double’ would get to live or die: either the hidden and unfamiliar (Dracula) would get destroyed and the conscious and better self (Mina) would get to live or the hidden would become familiar and come into the light, thus forcing the men to get rid of the real self (Mina). (Of course, as a lesson to the Victorian society, the hidden and “uncanny” was got rid of, sending the innocent woman to where she belonged, to her home/husband/wisehood, erasing the mark of shame) In the end, unlike “Green Tea” the unfamiliar which has started to become familiar is completely erased.
In conclusion, “Dracula” by Stoker and “Green Tea” by Le Fanu make perfect examples to the elements of the uncanny stated by Freud: repetitions, silencing and concealing the unfamiliar which will eventually become familiar, and creating doubles. When these three characteristics of the uncanny are used as traits of the characters in a literary work, the affect of uncanny gets even more dominant since the characters depicted in the works are actually addressing to the character traits in the reader. The uncanniness of characters reminds the reader that they have the same fears, desires and ideas at the core. In short, when uncanny is used as a psychological and psychoanalytical tool in a literary work, it is actually used in order for the reader to analyze himself/herself with those tools. When the reader realizes that such fearsome monsters/creatures might exist within them, the literary work is both familiar and unfamiliar. One novel witnesses unheimlich become heimlich, while the other observes the success of the pure heimlich. In the end, it is the uncanny that is the victor.


