

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF THE FANTASTIC

by

KENNETH DAVID WIDGREN

(Under the Direction of Timothy Raser)

ABSTRACT

The fantastic is an inherently problematic genre. There exist as many definitions of the fantastic as there are critics of the fantastic. In fact, perhaps the only definable characteristic of the fantastic is its very indefinability. This difficulty is discussed in the introductory chapter. What is proposed in this dissertation is not a new definition but a new approach to the fantastic, specifically as pertains to 19th century French fantastic texts. In chapter two, I discuss the sublime as developed by Kant, Burke and Schiller and then show how the fantastic is a literary representation of an experience with it. In chapter three, I show how language does and does not work in relating the fantastic event, based upon thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Saussure and Benveniste. In the chapter four, I explain how narrators in these stories make use of phenomenological reduction as a means to understand their perceptions. Additionally, we as readers are also forced to use the same process when we engage with these troublesome texts. Finally, in the conclusion, I show that the fantastic is, by nature, an inherently philosophical kind of text, evoking many of these concepts long before they are fleshed out by later thinkers. Moreover, while active involvement of the reader in any text is required, this is even more important in the fantastic, a genre which seems to defy easy categorization.

INDEX WORDS: Fantastic, France, Nineteenth Century, Maupassant, Gautier, Lorrain, Merleau-Ponty, Kant, Benveniste, Saussure, Sublime, Phenomenology, Schiller, Identity, Burke

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Debbie Riddle. She has always believed in me and supported me in everything I have chosen to do. She also instilled in me for as far back as I can remember a love of literature, so it is probably her fault that I own so many books.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In France, fantastic literature and its stories about ghosts, vampires, werewolves, haunted houses and the like, have maintained their popularity since exploding onto the literary scene during the early part of the 19th century. At the very heart of these stories lies a deceptively simple question: are these events real? This question confronts not only the characters in the stories, but also the reader. Literature in general forces us to rethink our conceptions of the world, fantastic literature more so than perhaps any other genre. The fantastic is especially troubling for epistemology. After the last word is read, we, just like the characters in these stories, are still unsure of what actually happened in the text. Moreover, these stories leave other questions implicitly asked, which include, among others, “what is reality,” “how do we know that what we, in our everyday experience, consider to be real is, in fact, real?” For that matter, how do we even come to a precise accounting of what is “real” and what is “false” ? In other words, how do we “know” what we know; how do we account for what we call “real?” On what foundation can we firmly plant our feet in order to respond to questions seemingly so simple, yet at the same time so troubling? In our everyday lives, how often have we experienced that unsettling feeling of *déjà vu*, certain that we have already lived a moment that, in principle, is brand new? Developments in theoretical physics, for example, make us question basic conceptions of time and reality. In fact, with each new discovery, those fundamental “truths” to which we have so long clung pose more questions than they seem to answer. According to quantum theory, for example, the long-held tenet that nothing springs forth *ex nihilo* could

actually prove to be incorrect; some physicists suggest that the entire known universe could have indeed come into existence from just such a state of utter nothingness, a quantum fluctuation, a fluke (Kaku 93-96). Moreover, those very things that seem to us to be “real” could in fact simply be synapses firing in such a way as to make us believe, erroneously or not, that what we see, feel, taste, smell, and hear actually “are.” Even more dreadful, could we simply be the dream of Descartes' evil genie, and, as Hannah Arendt explains in *The Life of the Mind*, could the famous dictum *je pense donc je suis* be merely an illusion? (49).

The questioning of the nature of reality is by no means, however, a recent development. Since humanity first acquired that all-powerful weapon that sets us apart from all other animal species on the planet—reason, or the capacity for reflective thought—we have questioned the existence of the world surrounding us. This drive to find a response to the question, which seems so frustratingly easy, “what is real?,” has been one of the cornerstones of mankind’s search to find our place in the world and, consequently, to dominate that world. For example, primitive cave paintings could have served a “magical” purpose, in which early man attempted to ensure a successful hunt. To depict was to master. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we do the same thing every day as we navigate through the world around us; we create for ourselves images and concepts that we can “classify” or “categorize,” thus trying to make some sense of all that surrounds us. For the characters in the fantastic (and thus, by extension, the readers), this activity is precisely the problem. How does one classify what is unclassifiable? At the very heart of the fantastic is a constant rejection of everyday epistemology. The 19th-century authors of the fantastic seem to be intuiting what Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and other philosophers will take as the basis for a new epistemology, namely, that the classical distinction between subject and object is neither clear nor rigid and that what must be considered above all is the very nature

of the *interaction* between subject and object. Both literature and philosophy are a means to an end and “poursuivent la même interrogation: Qu’est-ce que l’homme, et quelles sont les limites de l’humain?” (Malrieu 24)

For centuries philosophers have considered this epistemological problem and have proposed, to varying degrees of success, answers that try to resolve it. At the same time, literature, in its own way, has been pursuing a similar goal. In both cases, the same underlying force is at work. Literature and philosophy both have at their foundation the question of the nature of knowledge. Philosophy wishes to lend itself to a more rigorous viewpoint, seeking to explain the outside phenomena of everyday life by postulating theories, categorizing these events, and devising “proofs.” On one end of the spectrum, empiricists will argue that experience alone, without any recourse to reason or theory, holds the key to knowledge, while at the other extreme, rationalists assert that all knowledge comes from *a priori* principles, which are universal and necessary. Meanwhile, there are approaches in between these two antipodes. Who can lay claim to that “final answer” which would explain it all? At some point, we are constrained perhaps to look beyond philosophy for answers. Could literature hold the hint of one? At a most basic and essential level, both literature and philosophy are a means to a unique end: to answer those eternal questions...what is reality, how is meaning constructed and finally, what is the reality that we hope to know? It is surely of no small importance that philosophers often borrow examples from literary sources to clarify their own points of view, just as authors commonly make use of philosophical ideas in their own fictive creations. Plato formed all of his investigations as dialogues, or even as a mini-tragedy, a literary give-and-take. The metaphysics of Swedenborg take on life in the poetry of William Blake. Going even further, if one takes the example of existentialism, in the literary text (such as *La Nausée* of Sartre or *Le Mythe de*

Sisyphé of Camus), the philosophic quite literally becomes the literary, as both of these texts are literary presentations of existential philosophy.

One source, perhaps the chief source, of literature's power is that its very essence is to create its own reality, a fictive reality which changes at the whim of the omnipotent author or poet. We readers, then, are forced to recreate this reality for ourselves, which may not correspond to what we normally consider "reality" to be. In literature, everything is possible (though again according to modern physics, *everything* may in fact be literally possible, given enough time). Through the imagination, the author sweeps us up into a world which, to a greater or lesser degree, according to the genre in which he or she creates, resembles our own "real," everyday world. Authors are nothing less than a Platonic *demiourgos*, for they mold the clay, made up of their talent, a shared cultural knowledge and a common linguistic base, to make an artifact whose contours have never been seen before. Literature *forms* a new world experience, but it does so by *transforming*, *deforming*, and *reforming* the things given-to-us of the world. As Gaston Bachelard says in the introduction to *L'Air et les songes*, "on veut toujours que l'imagination soit la faculté de *former* des images. Or elle est plutôt la faculté de *déformer* les images fournies par la perception, elle est surtout la faculté de nous libérer des images premières, de *changer* les images" (5). Moreover, Tzvetan Todorov points out that "la littérature existe par les mots; mais sa vocation dialectique est de dire plus que le langage ne dit, de dépasser les divisions verbales" (175). A literary text is a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Indeed, literature's vocation is to express the inexpressible, to see the unseeable, to know the unknowable. One could make the comparison with a watch: by breaking the watch apart, by *deforming* it, one can come to a better understanding of its inner working. By deforming, changing the everyday use of language, literature creates a fiction that allows for a better

understanding of the world around us. Metaphor and simile, rhetoric and diction, are the alchemist's stone that permits the transmutation of reality into literature.

The fantastic, perhaps more than any other variety of literature, poses a series of problems for the reader. This is a genre which deliberately toys with notions of reality and illusion, the concrete experience of the waking world and the hallucinatory images of dream. Boundaries are blurred, skewed and often completely erased; one enters a realm of ghosts, vampires, mesmerism and magic. Moreover, one of the major difficulties (if not the principal one) we have to address concerning this genre is the very notion of the word: what *is* the fantastic? How does one draw clear lines of demarcation, placing on this side certain texts considered “fantastic” and on the other side, others “not fantastic”? And while different anthologies of the French fantastic may contain many of the same, “canonical,” texts, each editor has his or her own preconceived notion of just what the fantastic is. Jean-Baptiste Baronian insists that “il faut préciser que chacun vient au fantastique comme dans une auberge espagnole: en n’y trouvant que ce qu’il apporte” (24). He qualifies the fantastic as “d’abord une idée, un simple concept que le récit littéraire module à sa guise, à l’infini” (27). One almost finds oneself in the shoes of Justice Potter Stewart and has to say, “I may not be able to define the fantastic, but I know it when I see it.”

For example, Pierre-Georges Castex characterizes the fantastic by the brutal intrusion of mystery into real life, linked to nightmares and delirium (*Le Conte fantastique* 8), while for Roger Caillois, “le fantastique ... manifeste un scandale, une déchirure, une irruption insolite, presque insupportable dans le monde réel” (*Anthologie du fantastique* 23). Joël Malrieu sees it as “la confrontation d’un personnage isolé avec un phénomène, extérieur à lui ou non, surnaturel ou non, mais dont la présence ou l’intervention représente une contradiction profonde avec les

cadres de pensée et de vie du personnage, au point de les bouleverser complètement ou durablement” (49). Todorov, in his well-known *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, bases his definition on a structural distinction in which the reader is faced with two mutually exclusive possibilities; for Todorov, the fantastic is not as much a genre as it is “l’hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel” (29). Finally, Charles Nodier tells us that “le fantastique prend les nations dans leurs langes, comme le roi des aulnes, si redouté des enfants, ou vient les assister à leur chevet funèbre, comme l’esprit familier de César; et quand ces chants finissent, tout finit” (*Du Fantastique en littérature* in Baronian, *La France fantastique* 20). Does this mean that one should give up all hope of trying to find a definition of the fantastic on which everyone can agree? Yes and no. First of all, such an explanation is a theoretical impossibility; with so many conceptions of the fantastic offered, faced with *l’embarras du choix* so to speak, we will not find a single definition that will please everyone. Second, the fantastic is far too complicated a genre to be reduced to a single, all-encompassing, ten-word definition. Lastly, one should never be afraid of running out of answers, only of running out of questions, and indeed, because the fantastic raises more questions than it offers answers, it is an endless source of speculation and debate. These so-called “problems” that the fantastic poses are more strengths than weaknesses; the inherently ambiguous nature of the fantastic is the source of its charm, and is, in fact, its *raison d’être*.

Too often, the fantastic is reduced to list a themes and motifs; it is condensed into a list of its common elements. Looking at the table of contents of Gilbert Millet and Denis Labbé’s *Le Fantastique*, one sees an example of an approach frequently taken: in chapter 1, they offer their definition of the fantastic; in chapter 2, they give a “history” of the fantastic; in chapter 3, they review the dominant themes and images associated with the fantastic (demons, ghosts, monsters,

haunted houses and castles, etc.); in chapter 4, they treat how the ideas of death, time, identity, etc. appear in the fantastic, and finally in chapter 5 (perhaps the most useful) they discuss the uses and purposes of fantastic writing. While such an approach has merit and should by no means be neglected, there is nevertheless much more at work in the fantastic. The genre is far too complex to be summarized in a grocery-list fashion. In this sense, by no means does the present essay attempt to classify, delineate and offer yet another “once and for all” description of the fantastic. Rather, I intend to offer a new *approach* rather than a new *definition*. By merging the literary and the philosophical, by following “the path not taken” by conventional criticism of the fantastic, I believe new light can be shed on this problematic genre. The number of secondary sources treating the history of the fantastic is daunting, so I refer the reader to the texts of Baronian, Castex, Malrieu, and Todorov, all of whom give an extremely useful and informative review of the origins of the fantastic, and will dispense with repeating here the history they present. This is not an essay on the *génétiq*ue of the fantastic.

As with any analytical work on a genre of literature, and especially so with the fantastic, the choice to include one text and not another lies at the discretion of the author; the reader will no doubt find some texts absent that he or she would have included. I make no pretention to exhaustivity and have chosen those texts that best suit the proposed approach, including primarily those authors who figure among the “canon” (so to speak) of the fantastic (Gautier, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, and Maupassant) as well as some authors (such as Balzac) better known for their non-fantastic work, but who nevertheless experimented with this genre. Should the reader be able to take the ideas presented here and apply them to other texts that have not been included but that he or she would have expected to see, then my goal will have been accomplished.

Because it creates a sense of doubt between the subject and the object, the fantastic is a privileged means of speaking about taboo subjects, to reveal fears, hopes, dreams and desires that otherwise could not have been brought to light. Todorov compares the fantastic to reading “une liste de thèmes interdits, établie par la censure” (166). At the heart of many of these stories exists a conflict between reason and passion, between intellect and desire, a conflict that risks forever damaging the psyche of the main character. Once he (as the vast majority of the main characters in these stories are male) has passed through the experience with the “fantastic,” the hero emerges as a new man.

The first chapter of this dissertation will discuss this life-altering nature of the fantastic and how it finds its source in an experience with the sublime. When one speaks of the sublime, one often makes references to some natural scene: the ominous black clouds of an approaching storm, for example, or the majestic snow-capped peaks of towering mountains, such as Wordsworth's Mount Snowden. One of the iconic images of the sublime is undoubtedly Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 painting, *The Traveler Above the Sea of Clouds*. The sublime, however, is not limited to the natural; it can also find its power in the *unnatural* or the *supernatural*, as is the case in fantastic literature. Here, ghost and phantoms, women possessing an unearthly (and often inhuman) beauty are also sources of the sublime. More often than not, these experiences with the sublime are tightly linked to their novelty, in the original etymological sense of the word, for the main character. Novelty, derived from the Latin *novitas*, is not often considered a positive thing in Latin literature; indeed, the term *res nova*, literally “a new thing” is the standard term in Roman literature for “revolution.” Revolution is precisely what happens to the characters caught up in the sublime brought about by their encounter with the fantastic, as their life is “revolutionized” (again, not necessarily in a positive sense). The characters, through their

encounter with the fantastic, are, in a sense, “reborn” into a new world, a world they see with new eyes, a world of which they must try to make sense with new knowledge.

As thinking beings, we are pulled towards the unknown, driven by a desire of discovery, above all *curious* about what lies beyond our everyday experience. Edmund Burke notes this in his *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, by saying that “the first and simplest emotion which we discover in the human mind is curiosity” (41). He goes on to explain that this drive-to-know exists because we find ourselves in a state of indifference, what Roland Barthes might call a “degree zero” between pleasure and pain. Each event, each moment we experience in life makes us swing back and forth, like a pendulum, between the two ends of this spectrum. This motion is not always a smooth one, however. Any time we experience a strong, unfettered emotion, a residue of that emotion stays with us. Burke tells us that, “when we have suffered from any violent emotion, the mind naturally continues in something like the same condition, after the cause which first produced it has ceased to operate” (50). Such is the power of the fantastic to alter forever all of our conceptions (which turn out, in fact, to be *misconceptions*) of the “normal” world. Any experience with the sublime, by definition, implies a change, for the better or the worse, in the person in question. One cannot look into the abyss without the abyss looking back.

The second chapter will deal with the language used by the narrators to describe these experiences. Words are the only tools we possess to present ourselves to others and to conceptualize the world surrounding us. Both the school-child and the scholar, when confronted with an unknown word, go to the dictionary to find the meaning. What is found there? Still more words. Merleau-Ponty points out to us that, no matter what we see and experience, “[on] ne peut jamais être confronté avec les visions précédentes ou avec celles des autres hommes que

par l'intermédiaire du temps et du langage" (*Phénoménologie* 83-4). The problem is, however, that, according to Lacan, the signifier is inherently unstable; there is no unbreakable bond that links the signifier and the signified together. We can never fully mean what we say, nor can we ever fully say what we mean. Hence the reason that two people can hear the exact same words pronounced and yet have two different interpretations of the message. As Sokolowski points out, "the human power of speech, the noble power that gives us our dignity as human beings, also makes it possible for us to seem to be thinking when we really are not" (105).

However, we have no other means at our disposal; we are all trapped within the prison of language. We can only attempt to communicate, because language can only be vague and uncertain. In the realm of the fantastic, signifiers and signifieds rarely match up. It is far too common to find in analyses of the fantastic the invocation of psychoanalysis to explain just what is happening. This is by no means an ineffectual means of interpretation, and indeed I will make use of it here. However, what is more interesting, in psychoanalytic terms, is how it is linked not to the perception or interpretation of the events, but to how those events are expressed. For the main characters of fantastic stories, there are no adequate words, no appropriate signifiers for what they experience, what they see (their signifieds). In the definition given above of the fantastic by Malrieu, this inherent linguistic instability is precisely the domain of the fantastic; not only does the protagonist encounter serious difficulty in trying to express what has happened to him, we, as reader, are often just as perplexed, as we have only the narrator's point of view.

In the final chapter, we will deal with problems arising from that point of view. We will borrow from phenomenology and show how the narrators make use of it in these stories in an attempt to explain the unsettling events. They will often call their own perceptions into question, essentially asking "do my eyes deceive me?" or something similar. An encounter with the

fantastic, so far outside our everyday experience, throws us into a special point of view, makes us doubt our own sensory apparatus and thus shifts us into the phenomenological attitude. In addition, questions of time and the perception of it are often at issue in the fantastic. What fantastic literature does is to take a slice, however small it may be, of the syntagmatic line and to explode it, by analogy, into an “other” time, a time that is, so to speak, “outside of time,” even if illusory, imaginary. It is a way to turn diachrony into synchrony, an attempt to master an experience, a reality (or better yet, an experience of reality). The narrators, however, are not the only ones required to undertake such a reduction. As we will see, the fantastic is an *active* genre in which the reader is swept up in the confusion in which the narrator finds himself. Along with the narrator, as readers we too must question what we take for granted, as we, in a sense, *become* the narrator. We will see that the fantastic is an inherently philosophical genre, anticipating many of the tenets of phenomenology. This makes it all the more surprising that such an approach has, to date, been largely neglected by critics and theorists of the fantastic. By making use of these philosophical approaches, yet another level of richness can be discovered and explored in these intriguing texts.

CHAPTER TWO

DO YOU FEEL WHAT I FEEL? THE SUBLIME AND THE FANTASTIC

Though late to arrive in France, once there, fantastic literature flourishes and never ceases to be a pervasive literary genre. One reason to explain this perennial popularity is that fantastic literature brings us in contact with the sublime. One must take into consideration, however, the problematic nature of the sublime itself. As Morris points out, “the sublime...embraces such a variety of historical practices and of theoretical accounts that the quest for a single, unchanging feature or essence is futile” (300). Surely it is not fortuitous that the same is often said of the fantastic. For example, Diaz-Brown speaks of “l’infinie variété de la substance fantastique” which is “un des éléments constitutifs du genre” (74). Nevertheless, following Burke, Morris proceeds to admit that among all of its “family resemblances” (as Wittgenstein calls them), one thing does seem to rise to the surface: the sublime is fundamentally a terrifying experience. The sublime, then, seems to be any experience, brought about by any type of sensual stimulus (which does not “require unfamiliar mountain scenery or barbaric violence” (Morris 307)), which reveals mankind’s inherent inferiority in relation to the world we inhabit. The German philosopher and dramatist Friedrich von Schiller, in *On the Sublime*, explains these moments as a disconnect between what one perceives (and attempts to rationalize) and the inherent *irrationality* (or even, irrationability) of perception, stating that “in the sublime, however, reason and sensuousness do *not* accord, and precisely in this contradiction between the two lies the magic with which it captures our minds” (199-200). This explains why we love to be frightened,

why we enjoy a good ghost story or even enjoy watching an illusionist make a Boeing 747 disappear. It reminds us that there are and always will be things beyond our comprehension.

First though, let us review briefly the concept of the sublime as elucidated by two of its most famous theorists, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. As we will see, though sharing superficial similarities, the end result of the sublime experience in these two philosophers could not be more different. We will then turn back to Schiller before examining three fantastic stories in which we see the sublime at work, “Jésus-Christ en Flandres” by Honoré de Balzac, “Le Horla” by Guy de Maupassant, and finally, “La Cafetière” by Théophile Gautier.

For Burke, as explained in his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the main source of the sublime is “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (36). This terror can come either from the objective size or power of the object in question or can be a function of the subject’s own mind, for Burke tells us that “whatever is terrible ... is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimension or not” (53). This explains why something as small as a poisonous insect can be just as dreadful for us as the towering black clouds of a storm. Gazing upon a wide, open expanse of a grassland is not enough to elicit a sense of the sublime as there is no danger or fear involved, whereas the vast plain of a raging ocean does occasion our trepidation, and hence, the sublime. In the final analysis, “terror is in all cases whatsoever either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime” (Burke 54).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Burke’s instances of catalysts for the sublime are external to the subject. He speaks first, for example, of darkness, which is terrible because it deprives us of sight; the unseen is the unknown, and the unknown is a source of fear. Darkness

also implies an absolute grandeur, suggests infinity, and nothing can be considered sublime without in some way referring to infinity, because it “has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime” (67).

Even objects which we fundamentally “know” not to be infinite can nevertheless seem infinite, due to the limitations of human senses: take for example something as grand as the solar system, which we can scientifically measure, yet when the imagination attempts to conceive of such distances, the sublime arises precisely because, within the bounds of our five physical senses, such vast expanses defy our limited imaginative capacities. The vast and infinite, the formless and unformable-by-the-mind are horrific. Yet we must note that, for Burke, the terror and horror that we feel when faced with the sublime are qualified as “delightful” if “we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances,” that is, if we can step back (figuratively) from the sublime object and allow the mind/imagination a little space in which to contemplate what it apprehends (47). Moreover, again according to Burke, mankind is driven by the will of God to improve itself and to seek out the novel; curiosity is the fundamental trait of our character. To do this, we are instilled with ambition, and it is the role of ambition to spur on the Imagination’s power to conceive the inconceivable. Burke cites Longinus’ observation of the glory inherent in mankind, and remarks that:

Now whatever ... tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates. (46)

Furthermore, he claims that “the elevation of the mind ought to be the principal end of all our studies,” and that such a study, such an exaltation of the mind and the power of imagination to take hold of the sublime and control it (for however fleeting a moment it may be), would let us “into the counsels of the Almighty by a consideration of his works” (48). Burke’s description of the sublime, though based in terror and pain, is an overwhelmingly positive one, a jubilant paean to the potential inside mankind to read the mind of God. This optimism characteristic of the Burkian sublime will be overturned, as we shall see, in Kant’s later formulation, in which the hallmark of the sublime is the utter failure of the Imagination.

In accordance with Burke, Kant also says that the sublime is to be found in the “formless object, so far as in it by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented” (102). This is in contrast to the Beautiful, associated with limits and boundaries. For Kant, our judgment serves two functions, a determinative function and a reflective function. In the first, particular objects are categorized and classified under a general heading, which Kant refers to as the concept. This allows us, for example, to classify a particular chair under the more general concept of “chair” (akin to a Platonic Idea of “chairness”). Determinative judgment is what permits us to navigate and make sense of our everyday phenomenal world. Reflective judgment, on the other hand, comes into play when we are faced with phenomena for which we have no preexisting concept, and Imagination must work hand in hand with Reason in an attempt to find a purposive whole behind the unusual phenomenon at hand. This is precisely the problem that arises when one is confronted with the sublime object; Imagination’s capacities find themselves severely inadequate, indeed powerless:

...that which excites in us, without any reasoning about it, but in the mere apprehension of it, the feeling of the sublime, may appear as regards its form

to violate purpose in respect of the Judgment, to be unsuited to our presentative faculty, and, as it were, *to do violence to the Imagination*; and yet it is judged to be only the more sublime. (103, emphasis mine)

The inability to apprehend, in its totality, a sublime object sends the viewer's Imagination into a whirlwind of confusion, as it is at the same time "attracted by the object but is ever being alternately repelled," resulting in a sense of unease, which Kant calls a "negative pleasure" (102).

However, for Kant (and here is a major difference from Burke), the sublime cannot be found in any *external* object, but is decidedly an *interior* phenomenon. Though the Beautiful is to be found outside of ourselves, the sublime is to be sought "merely inside ourselves and in our attitude of thought which introduces sublimity into the representation of nature" (104). He goes on to claim further that "nothing ... which can be an object of the senses, is ... to be called sublime" (109). The sublime exists for Kant only in the noumenal realm, as Kant's main concern in all three of the *Critiques* is to determine how we know what we know or even what we *can* know.

Whereas in Burke's conception of the sublime, our thought and imagination are able to rise up to meet and even participate in the sublime, Kant's Imagination is doomed to fail. Using the example of gazing upon the great pyramids of Egypt and St. Peter's in Rome, he tells us that there is "a feeling of inadequacy of the Imagination for presenting the Ideas of a whole" and that Imagination reaches an acme beyond which it cannot go and then "sinks back into itself" (112). At the source of Imagination's failure, for Kant, is a disconnect between Imagination and Reason: "The feeling of the Sublime is therefore a feeling of pain, arising from the want of accordance between the aesthetical estimation of magnitude formed by the Imagination and the

estimation of the same formed by Reason.” This pain, however, implies for Kant a “respect,” an obedience to Imagination’s “incapacity to attain an Idea, *which is a law for us*” (119).

The transcendental, noumenal foundations (the Idea) upon which Kant builds his theory of knowledge prove dangerously unstable as concerns the sublime. In searching for the concept under which to subsume an object bereft of one, the transcendent opens up beneath the subject’s (metaphorical) feet and “is for the Imagination like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself” (120). “Grounded in the transcendental,” Brooks explains, “Kant’s theory of sublimity necessarily requires that the imagination, since it deals with both noumenal and phenomenal provinces, fail. This is the point at which the self’s exaltation, *as* affective response, disappears” (20). Everything in Kant’s conception of the Imagination and its interaction with the sublime, though at first glance a mirror of Burke’s participatory depiction of the sublime, ultimately leads back to the same, inevitable consequence: Imagination’s inadequacy to the task, its utter failure to lead to any type of cognition or understanding, “a sense of deprivation and sacrifice” (20).

Another text related to these two approaches is *Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, in which Schiller traces the development of Sentimental (i.e., Romantic) poetry, distinguishing it from the preceding century’s Naive (i.e., Enlightenment) poetry. The hallmark of sentimental poetry is an unstable, ever-shifting process of introspection and self-questioning. As Schiller tells us, the danger of such poetic expression is that the poet will become irretrievably caught up in this reflective mode of thinking. The power of sentimental poetry lies in the fact that the very same reflection that produces the sage (who is able to pull back from the abyss into which sentimental thought plunges him or her) is also responsible for the fantast (who cannot).

This moment can lead to two possible outcomes: once confronted with the sublime, one either realizes and accepts one’s own inferiority, thereby embracing the sublime moment and

taking control of it (as does Wordsworth at the end of *The Prelude* when he gazes out from Mount Snowden) or one becomes crushed under this feeling of insignificance, leading ultimately to an entire unraveling of identity and self-conception. The former is, as we have seen, a Burkian result, the Positive sublime, while the latter is a negative, Kantian sublime.

It is no mere coincidence that the *fantastique* explodes in popularity in France at the same time as Romanticism is finding its wings as well. The fantastic requires a certain amount of introspection to function. The scientific attitude of the 18th century, which sought rational explanations for all phenomena, can hardly be applied to a genre which, by definition, defies the rational. What is at work in romantic poetry is not a simple description of nature, for example, a verbal painting of the scene before the writer's eye, but rather an interaction with that scene, a contemplation of it, a reflection (in both senses of the word). This is the key factor of romantic poetry, which moves beyond the "classical," 18th-century notion of poetry as fundamentally mimetic or representational. As Abrams explains, Enlightenment poetry is a mirror, reflecting exactly external reality, while romantic literature is a lamp, illuminating the deeper shadows and thus giving a new shape and form to that same external reality (*The Mirror and the Lamp*). Put another way, when asked to describe a tree, an 18th-century poet (whom Schiller would call "naive") would give exact measurements, tell the number of branches and leaves, and even give a genus and species. A romantic (or sentimental) poet, on the other hand, would describe an emotive reaction to the tree, the memories that the tree evokes, and, in the end, one would end up with a description of everything *but* the tree itself.

Such a way of looking at (or better yet, examining) the surrounding world inevitably leads to a deep introspection; if the tree evokes this or that memory, the question immediately arises of why the tree does this. The romantic poet begins not only to reconsider nature and our

relation to it, but also one's own relation to one's self. One of the dangers, Schiller warns us, is that the sentimental poet guides us away from the actual *living* of life: "From the naive poet one turns with facility and eagerness to the active environment; the sentimental will always for a few moments disaffect one for actual life" (*Naive and Sentimental* 156). The risk one runs is to become too caught up in (self-)reflection; one loses one's grip on reality. The sentimental poet has free reign in his expression, in terms of form and substance. Yet even this freedom (which, it must be noted, should not be taken in any moral sense since the naive and sentimental are both *moral*) must have some kind of limit, something that keeps the poet from running amok in endless flights of fancy. The poet must either bind himself to an Ideal (the goal towards which all sentimental poets strive), or he must make use of Reason (his "earthly" limit), "since by one of these two anchors freedom *must* be secured" (*Naive and sentimental* 168, Schiller's emphasis).

Should the poet ever lose either of these points, he or she passes over into the realm of the "fantast," one of madness and the "mere wild play of imagination" (*Naive and Sentimental* 168). This risk is ever present for the sentimental poet and is one that is not there for the naive, since the naive worldview is so fundamentally different. Schiller states explicitly that

The sentimental genius ... is exposed to the danger, due to the effort of removing all limitations from it, of suppressing human nature altogether, and not only, as it may and should, elevating or *idealizing* it above all determined and limited actuality to absolute possibility, but rather of going still further beyond possibility or otherwise falling into extravagant *enthusiasm*. (164)

The problem is that, given the constant state of self-reflection in which the sentimental poets find themselves, the task of imposing limits is one easier said than done. Schiller goes on to imply that at any given point in his or her career, every sentimental poet must pass through this period of “enthusiasm,” that is to say, into madness, to which the sentimental path inevitably leads. What distinguishes one poet from another is whether or not they remain a madman. “Thus the very same produces the fanatic,” Schiller states, “that was solely able to engender the sage, and the advantage of the latter may perhaps subsist less in that he did not become the former than that he did not remain so” (*Naive and Sentimental* 174).

In light of Schiller’s conception of romantic writing, it becomes all the more clear why, during the early 19th century in France, the genre of “fantastic” literature becomes so popular. The late eighteenth century was a period of great turmoil, in all areas of life: social, literary, political, and industrial. Cracks were already appearing in the cold, stony edifice of Enlightenment ideals. With the arrival of romantic literature, the death knell was sounded for the classical, canonical conceptions of poetry. On the one hand, the Romantics reject the Enlightenment notion of the objective author, the quasi-scientific *philosophe-écrivain* who examines a given subject from without, seeking to understand how all the individual parts of the watch fit together to make a cohesive and functioning whole; on the other, they do maintain the curiosity exhibited by their 18th-century predecessors. Romanticism is a movement based fundamentally on questions, especially about humanity and the individual’s place in society, in the world and, ultimately, in the very universe. While the questions may have been similar between the two movements, the nature of the inquiry changed in a significant way, requiring a concomitant modification of the use of literature. Old rules could no longer be applied. Classical prescriptions, such as this from the first *chant* of Boileau’s *Art poétique*,

J'aime mieux un ruisseau qui sur la molle arène
 Dans un pré plein de fleurs lentement se promène,
 Qu'un torrent débordé qui, d'un cours orageux,
 Roule, plein de gravier, sur un terrain fangeux. (166-170)

do not allow the Romantic poet or writer the room required for the internal exploration called for by the movement, simply because what is of interest to the Romantics is precisely “le torrent débordé” of our inner workings. The mathematical language demanded by Boileau is too restrictive for the Romantic, whose writings often read more as interior monologues. The human psyche, though Boileau would have it otherwise, rarely walks a straight and narrow path from point A, through points B, C and D, finally arriving at point E. Instead, we skip from point A to point D, perhaps, or even leap over it entirely to end up at point X before coming back to E. This irregular path is the cornerstone of Romantic investigation into the self: why does point A invoke point X at all? What are the links, rational or irrational, between the two? This is what Romantic literature asks. Such a re-evaluation of the purpose of literature in a world that scientific reasoning failed to explain had nowhere else to go but deeper and deeper into the realm of the natural, and beyond that, the supernatural. By going back into the domain of folklore, fairytale and the marvelous (which had been dismissed by the Enlightenment), the poets and writers of the age attempted to re-examine our place in the larger order of things. These stories had always been a part of the oral tradition, but with the advent of fantastic literature, they come to the forefront, not as quaint, antiquarian objects to be preserved in an archival impulse *à la* Walter Scott, but rather as the main area of interest. They are an attempt to explain the irrational world by what could be considered *irrational* logic (if one contrasts it with an 18th-century conception of “rational,” Cartesian logic). Schiller, in another work entitled *On the Sublime*,

suggests this very notion by wondering what would happen if “one abandons the possibility of *explaining* Nature and takes this incomprehensibility itself as a principle of judgment” (207).

This is, in fact, what seems to be at play in the genre of fantastic literature. The romantic lamp illumines not only what is easily perceived by our senses, but also what lies hidden in the shadows, that area of Nature to which we have no normal access, that which lurks just beyond the reach of our everyday senses and thought. These are the things that “go bump in the night.”

As a first example to show how the sublime is intimately connected to the fantastic, we shall examine the story “Jésus-Christ en Flandres” by Honoré de Balzac, better known, of course, for his monumental series of novels collectively called *La Comédie humaine*. The fact that Balzac ventured into the fantastic genre shows the appeal that this literary form exerted during the period. As we will see, this story exemplifies the Burkian concept of the sublime, a positive one in which the narrator emerges from his experience of the sublime changed in a positive manner.

The story is constructed in two parts. In the first, a nameless narrator recounts a disastrous ferry crossing, in which the boat sinks due to a terrible storm. However, a mysterious figure, which the reader is to understand as Jesus Christ, through the power of faith, saves the good and decent passengers, while the corrupt ones drown. This first story serves as a frame of sorts, localizing the events in which the narrator actually takes part. Having gone to visit this location, he wanders into a cathedral where he has a vision, accompanied by all the hallmarks of the Burkian sublime.

From the very beginning of the story, the reader is warned of the problematic nature of the narration to follow: “Avouons-le, cette histoire se ressent étrangement du vague, de l’incertitude, du merveilleux que les orateurs favoris des veillées flamandes se sont amusés

maintes fois à répandre dans leurs gloses aussi diverses de poésie que contradictoires par les détails” (250). Already the reader must ask just what is expected of them. How does one deal with a story characterized as “vague, uncertain, and marvelous,” one that, by the narrator’s own admission, has several versions which mutually contradict? Nevertheless, we have the narrator’s own assurance that what he will relate is believable:

Le narrateur y croit, comme tous les esprits superstitieux de la Flandre y ont cru, sans en être ni plus doctes ni plus infirmes. Seulement, dans l’impossibilité de mettre en harmonie toutes les versions, voici le fait dépouillé peut-être de sa naïveté romanesque impossible à reproduire, mais avec ses hardiesses que l’histoire désavoue, avec sa moralité que la religion approuve, son fantastique, fleur d’imagination, son sens caché dont peut s’accommoder le sage. (251)

However, the story offered to the reader will have been modified; according to the narrator, it is “stripped of its novel-like naïveté impossible to reproduce.” Thus, in true fantastic fashion (which the narrator himself underlines by specifically mentioning “son fantastique,” qualified as “fleur d’imagination”), we are from the very beginning put into a sense of doubt, of hesitancy à la Todorov, as regards the events about to unfold.

Before the ferry even sets off, the reader knows that something untoward is going to happen, if only because of the time of day: “La nuit approchait, les derniers feux du soleil couchant permettaient à peine de distinguer dans l’île les passagers attardés” (251). Once underway, the scene becomes even more ominous, replete with indications of the sublime:

La mer faisait entendre *un murmure sourd*, une espèce de mugissement intérieur, assez semblable à la voix d’un chien quand il ne fait que gronder...Le ciel était

généralement *grisâtre*. A l'ouest, de longs espaces étroits simulaient *des flots de sang*, tandis qu'à l'orient des lignes étincelantes, marquées comme par un pinceau fin, étaient séparées par des nuages plissés comme des rides sur le front d'un vieillard. Ainsi, la mer et le ciel offraient partout *un fond terne*, tout en demi-teintes, qui faisait ressortir *les feux sinistres du couchant*. (254, emphasis mine)

Of particular note are the straits compared to “streams of blood” and the clouds “folded like wrinkles on an old man’s forehead.” Both of these images invoke a sense of dread, because linked to death. Death is the ultimate fear for mankind, the greatest of the unknowables, and thus the most appropriate idea to bring about the sublime. In true Balzacian style, the narrator summarizes this description, telling the reader how to interpret it: “Cette physionomie de la nature inspirait un sentiment terrible.”

The premonitions prove accurate, as, halfway through the crossing, a terrible and violent storm breaks out: “En ce moment, les nuées se déchirèrent sous l’effort du vent, précisément au-dessus de la barque. Les masses grises s’étant étalées avec une sinistre promptitude à l’orient et au couchant, la lueur du crépuscule y tomba d’aplomb par une crevasse due au vent d’orage” (255). Most of the passengers are terrified, overwhelmed by the natural force attacking their small bark. One, however, an old soldier, stands resolute: “jaloux de se montrer tranquille et calme autant que ce courage supérieur, il finit par s’identifier, à son insu peut-être, au principe secret de cette puissance intérieure” (257). Here we see precisely this kind of exaltation described before by Burke. The ferry capsizes, but the final mysterious passenger “se leva, marcha d’un pas ferme sur les flots” (259). Along with him come those passengers either pure and innocent or those who, though having sinned, are contrite and humbled before the divine

awe of God. On the spot where they arrive at the pier, a massive cathedral is built to commemorate the miracle. It is here that the narrator takes up his own story.

It opens with the narrator wandering aimlessly through the streets:

Ce fut là que, fatigué de vivre, je me trouvais quelque temps après la révolution de 1830. Si vous m'eussiez demandé la raison de mon désespoir, il m'aurait été presque impossible de la dire, tant mon âme était devenue molle et fluide ... le ciel versait un froid noir, et les nuées brunes qui passaient au-dessus de ma tête donnaient une expression sinistre à la nature. L'immensité de la mer, tout me disait : —mourir aujourd'hui, mourir demain, ne faudra-t-il pas toujours mourir, et alors... J'errais donc en pensant à un avenir douteux, à mes espérances déçues. (260-1)

Similar to the opening of the story, the fantastic mood is set, as Balzac plays with the common tropes of the genre. The narrator wanders aimlessly, pensive about a “doubtful” future and “unrealized” hopes. He is prey to his thoughts (remember the dangers of reflection as explained by Schiller). From the outset, the narrator finds himself wavering on the edge; indeed, he has already told the reader that he is “weary of living” and that, if asked about the source of this weariness, “it would be almost impossible to find the reason for it.” Nature itself reflects his mindset (or rather, his mindset reflects nature?): a cold, black sky full of brownish clouds, the vastness of the sea, all calling him to death. Almost without thinking (“machinalement” he tell us), the narrator enters the cathedral, whose gray towers appear as ghosts in the mist (261). Once inside the cathedral, the building takes on an ethereal, other-worldly quality; the roof begins to sparkle with stars, at one moment pale and colorless, the next shimmering in various hues. The narrator goes on to say: “À force de regarder ces arcades merveilleuses, ces arabesques de

marbre, ces festons, ces spirales, ces fantaisies sarrasines qui s'entrelaçaient les unes dans les autres, capricieusement éclairées, tour à tour sombre et brillantes, mes perceptions devinrent confuses ... je me trouvai presque étourdi par la multitude des aspects" (261).

Much as nature outside, the cathedral becomes a representation of the emotional state of the narrator. Just as his mind whirls, so do the chains and arabesques; the cathedral becomes alive. The narrator's vertigo, brought about by his contemplation of the scene around him, is often invoked as a symptom of the sublime. He is slipping into a trance-like state in which he no longer understands what it is that he sees. At this point, the sublime could take him in either direction.

A few moments later, the narrator sees an apparition that he calls a "bleuâtre vapeur" (94). The apparition approaches the narrator and even begins to speak to him. She repeats, "Il faut souffrir...il faut souffrir!" (263). The reader suspects that a vision beginning in such a manner must lead inevitably to the *negative* sublime. The narrator is confused, lost, cannot comprehend what is happening around him. Yet as the story progresses, it is, in fact, the opposite that results.

Suddenly, the narrator realizes what is happening. "Ah! Ah! lui dis-je, maintenant je te reconnais" (264). Once struck by this realization, he then takes control of his vision and proceeds in a diatribe against this ghostly woman, calling her, among many other things, a "vieille caduque, édentée, froide," and a "Messaline aimant le cirque et les débauches" (265). Similar to Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, the narrator makes the vision his own, but goes one step further, by railing against the vision. He has not only survived his encounter with the sublime, but has also, in a sense, mastered the sublime. As Schiller states, "Fearlessly and with a terrible

delight he now approaches these ghastly visions of his imagination and deliberately deploys the whole force of this faculty in order to represent the sensuously infinite” (203-4).

A seemingly minor temporal detail mentioned at the beginning of the story takes on a new importance at the end. The events related here take place shortly after the Revolution of 1830, a revolt that overthrows Charles X, the reactionary, ultra-Catholic king who comes to power after the death of his brother, Louis XVIII, during the period of the Restoration. The backlash against the monarch was accompanied by a similar one against the Catholic Church. The vision presented in this story then becomes more than just a fantastic/sublime event; in addition, it is now part of a political statement. One new aspect of the sublime in the Romantic period is precisely this political point of view. “Penser les événements de France et en tirer les leçons,” Saint-Girons explains, “telle sera désormais l’exigence à laquelle devra satisfaire toute réflexion sur le sublime” (111). The legend recounted at the beginning of the story establishes a basis for comparison, the Church as she used to be versus the haggard, debauched prostitute she has become. The sublime results in a rejuvenated, exhilarated narrator in place of the dejected one who began the story. The tale ends with a call to arms empowered by this sublime vision, that “Croire!...c’est vivre...il faut défendre l’église!” (266). The reader is swept up in the encounter just as much as the narrator; there is always interaction between the reader and the fantastic text. We are in just as much confusion throughout the story as is the main character. Literature in general, but especially fantastic literature, is a gateway to the sublime, a way to experience (and re-experience) a taste of it, though mediated through text (and thus, less frightening and dangerous). However, only by invoking the sublime can the reader make sense of the apparent contradictions in the story. The Church, personified in the vision as a toothless, hideous crone who transforms, by means of the narrator’s ability to seize control of his

experience with the sublime, into a beautiful angel wielding a fiery sword, is both at the same time. The fantastic in this story acts as a time machine, with the first half of the story showing the past (the Church as she was) and the second the future (as she “should” be). We should note that during his positive vision, the narrator describes three colossal statues rising up and tells us that “à la lueur *fantastique*, projeté par un luminaire aussi grand que le soleil, je lus sur le socle de ces statues: SCIENCES. HISTOIRE. LITTÉRATURES” (266, emphasis mine). Throughout the 19th century, the sublime “tend à se christianiser” and “vient plutôt des artistes” (Saint-Girons 112). Two out of three of the statues that represent the saving grace of the Church and its rebirth belong precisely to the liberal arts. By learning from the lessons that history has to teach, by expressing those lessons and sharing them through literature, a new era will come about. With the narrator overcoming the terror of the negative sublime (the Church as crone) and garnering strength from the positive (the Church as angel), the seemingly contradictory images of the Church as presented in the story can be reconciled.

In “Le Horla” by Guy de Maupassant, the narrator’s experience of the sublime is the complete opposite of that of Balzac’s narrator. The story is told in the form of a journal, in which the narrator explains an overwhelming sense of dread and paranoia, and the reader travels with him deeper and deeper into madness. Ultimately, the narrator is completely destroyed by his fear. It is a terror which Schiller describes as part of the experience of the sublime: “This single terror ... will haunt him like a specter and, as is the case in the majority of people, will deliver him up prey to the blind terrors of imagination” (194).

The version discussed here is in fact the second version of the story, published in 1887, only one year after the first. The 1886 version follows the pattern typical of most fantastic stories: Maupassant sets up a frame in which one character will relate his personal experience to

a generally incredulous audience. Here, the frame is set in an insane asylum, to which a Dr. Marrande has invited some friends and colleagues to hear the story of one of his patients. From the very beginning, therefore, a naturalizing theme of sanity versus insanity is put into place (even if the doctor describes the case as one of the most “bizarre and troubling cases” he has ever encountered), already prejudicing a certain interpretation of the events narrated: namely, that the narrator is insane and that the events can be dismissed as the hallucinations of a troubled man. In addition, the first version of the story is more overtly supernatural than the second, weakening their effect upon the reader, though some of the events described do occur in both stories.

The second version, however, dispenses with the frame and instead takes the form of a personal journal. Though the events are narrated in the first person in both stories, by recasting the story in the form of diary entries Maupassant minimizes even further the affective distance between narrator and reader. At the same time, by removing the frame set in a mental asylum, the reader begins the story with no preconceived notions as to the sanity of the narrator. In fact, there is nothing whatsoever to give the slightest hint that anything is wrong with him. His first entry speaks of the beautiful weather, the spires of the Rouen cathedral that he can see from his windows, the singing of the birds, in short, an idyllic day. A reader finding this story in an anthology other than one specifically labeled as “fantastic” would have no reason even to suspect that this story is considered a masterpiece of that genre after reading the journal’s first entry.

In either case, the narrator of “Le Horla” finds himself in a situation similar to that of the narrator in “L’Eglise;” his senses betray him, and his perceptions are jumbled and unordered. He must reconsider his own place and way of viewing the world:

Tout ce qui nous entoure, tout ce que nous voyons sans le regarder,
tout ce que nous frôlons sans le connaître, tout ce que nous touchons sans

le palper, tout ce que nous rencontrons sans le distinguer, a sur nous, sur nos organes, et, par eux, sur nos idées, sur notre cœur lui-même, des effets rapides, surprenants et inexplicables? (914)

These words echo Schiller when he tells us that “by means of the feeling for the sublime, therefore, we discover that the state of our minds is not necessarily determined by the state of our sensations, that the laws of nature are not necessarily our own, and that we possess a principle proper to ourselves that is independent of all sensuous affects” (198).

Plagued by these thoughts of doubt and fear, the narrator slowly slips further into insanity, despite all attempts to find a respite. “Ai-je perdu la raison?” he asks (919), and again later on “Oh! mon Dieu! Je deviens fou! Qui me sauvera?” (920). He begins to have hallucinations as he tries to grapple with this unseen, paranoia-inducing force to which he has fallen prey. The title of the story itself reflects this, as “Horla” is play on words: “Le Horla” is “the Out-there,” (the *hors là*) that which is beyond anything that he can comprehend.

The narrator seeks all kinds of rational explanations for his situation, blaming it on everything from the weather to a simple lack of sleep. Nevertheless, all these reasons crumble under the weight of his madness, and he arrives at the conclusion that even “la lumière est une illusion...le bruit est une illusion” (922). All his reflection upon his current state amounts to nothing; he is unable, however, to cease this reflective activity, which must bring to pass the danger that Schiller warns us about.

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. Je ne serais donc, en somme, qu'un halluciné raisonnant. (93-4)

The narrator's failed efforts to approach his problem scientifically and systematically show the power of the negative sublime here.

Schiller warns us what could eventually happen to the fantast, he who "is completely lawless, hence nothing in himself and fit for nothing." Inevitably, should he be unable to check the course of the negative sublime, "it leads ... to an infinite fall into a bottomless abyss and can only terminate in complete destruction" (190). We can compare this to Kant's abyss into which Imagination risks falling when confronted with the impossibility of cognizing the sublime (120). This is precisely what happens to the narrator of *Le Horla*. Convinced that the dread he feels is caused by some other-worldly presence, he arrives at the conclusion that he can, in fact, kill this other that haunts him. He sets fire to his own home, but ends up killing only his servants who are trapped in the house. Finally, the story closes on the pitiful note of the last entry, in which the narrator writes:

Non...non...sans aucun doute, sans aucun doute...il n'est pas mort...

The broken syntax of this last entry, when compared to the graceful style of the rest of the story is a syntactic representation of his descent into madness, one of the only two possible outcomes after an experience of the sublime. Ultimately, the only recourse is suicide, a complete auto-annihilation.

Thus the sublime is at once a path to salvation or damnation. Much like Blake's "clashing contraries," the two are in fact necessary fully to realize human potential. Schiller says as much when he speaks of the importance of the two anchors. While it is the task of sentimental poets to strive for a lost Ideal, to find once more some semblance of wholeness, they must never give up their rational, human footing, lest they fall into the abyss of the fantast, the madman. The sublime is one path towards this goal; when moderated and controlled, it leads to a deeper

and truer understanding of mankind's place in the order of things. When the sublime is allowed to usurp our rational capabilities, however, the consequences are dire. In "Le Horla," the narrator is reduced to a broken syntax to express his death-wish. Fantastic literature has this ability to put one into situations striking in their peculiarity. Yet, it is this very peculiarity that takes us out of our comfort zone and so enables us to move beyond what we know (or at least what we think we know), that peculiarity referred to under the name of "sublime."

Published in 1831, "La Cafetière" is the first *histoire fantastique* written by Théophile Gautier, though in it we can see the elements that will characterize his later, more mature, œuvre. The plot of the story is relatively simple: the narrator, a young man named Théodore, is invited to spend a few days in the countryside of Normandy along with some friends. After a difficult journey, the companions arrive, and being fatigued, are shown to their rooms. Théodore, though tired, is ill at ease and unable to sleep. The fire in his room suddenly comes to life, and portraits of the host's ancestors step from their frames, seating themselves around the fire and drinking from a coffee-pot that moves of its own accord. He watches them perform a minuet, and then notices a ravishingly beautiful young woman who keeps herself apart from the others. Struck by her unearthly beauty, he begins to dance with her, learning that her name is Angéla. The two share a moment of sheer bliss, but once the dawn arrives, Angéla falls from his arms. When he bends down to help her up, he finds only fragments of shattered porcelain, the eponymous coffee-pot. The next morning, while sketching, Théodore's host informs his guest that he has made a drawing of Angéla, his sister who died two years previously. The young narrator then realizes that never again will he know such happiness.

From the beginning of the story, Gautier introduces elements that create a feeling of unease. "Le temps, qui, à notre départ, promettait d'être superbe, s'avisa de changer tout à coup,

et il tomba tant de pluie, que les chemins creux où nous marchions étaient comme le lit d'un torrent" (3) The personification of the weather, implicit in the anthropomorphic verbs "promettait" and "s'avisa de changer," implies a menacing Nature, and as Burke repeatedly points out, Nature is often a source of the sublime.

The weather hinders their progress such that they arrive "une heure après le coucher du soleil" (3). "To make any thing very terrible," Burke says, "obscurity in general seems to be necessary" (99). In full daylight, our eyes can take in and clearly define what we are seeing, and thus the apprehension that accompanies the unseen and unknown is lost. Darkness and shadows are, logically, a common motif in fantastic literature. In order for a supernatural event to arise, the narrator must find himself in an obscure and shadowy place. This is part of the reason why night is the domain *par excellence* of the fantastic.

Upon arrival, the voyagers are exhausted, "harassés" according to Théodore, unable to keep themselves from yawning; thus their host has them shown to their rooms immediately after dining. The fatigue felt by the voyagers serves a double function: on the one hand, it allows a possible explanation for the events about to unfold, while at the same time it reinforces the general unease and uncertainty of the decor. The empty space between waking and sleep is a liminal space. Recall the etymology of the word "sublime": *limis* in Latin means literally "lintel," but acquires a metaphorical meaning pertaining to any "threshold" or "limit," while *sub* is a preposition indicating not only the stationary position "under" something, but also implies a movement towards the base of something. Etymologically speaking, therefore, the sublime, by definition, implies either position under or motion towards a limit, a threshold or a frontier to cross. Similarly, moving from a state of alert wakefulness to sleep is a passage from relative safety to total vulnerability. While sleeping we are helpless, not only physically defenseless

from outside forces but, perhaps more frightening, we fall prey to those wandering thoughts that become dreams and nightmares: a double defenselessness. In this interstitial place between these two states, fear is all the greater as the characters are just alert enough to know that they are not at full strength, and thus all the more helpless when faced with the uncanny and novel events of the fantastic.

Théodore's chamber is "vaste," and he tells us "je sentis, en y entrant, comme un frisson de fièvre, car il me sembla que j'entrais dans un monde nouveau" (3). The size of the room may seem a trivial detail but, in fact, is important. "Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime" (Burke 127). Vastness implies infinity, a concept almost impossible for the human mind to fathom, trapped as we are in the world of the finite, a world circumscribed by the two ultimate barriers of birth and death. The size of this chamber physically affects the narrator, who feels a "frisson de fièvre" when faced with this "monde nouveau." Ironically, however, rather than entering into a "new world," the narrator has penetrated into an old one, "le temps de la Régence," the period between 1715 and 1723, between the death of Louis XIV and the accession of Louis XV. Théodore describes the furniture as "surchargés d'ornements de rocaille du plus mauvais goût" and remarks on "les trumeaux des glaces sculptés lourdement" (3). Rather than indicating past luxury or refinement, the pejorative descriptors create a sense of unnecessary excess, to the point of being physically discomforting. The objects in the room indicate that this was (or is) clearly a woman's domain: boxes of combs, powder-puffs, dresses, and a sequined fan. Yet we have more than just a room with an outdated decor, for each of the items "paraissait avoir servi la veille" and the floor is still "bien ciré." This chamber is literally from another time; Théodore finds himself in a room through which time has ceased to flow. The discomfort

occasioned by the other-worldliness of the room helps lay the foundation from which the sublime will later arise.

Once he has noticed all these details, Théodore admits, “je commençai à trembler comme la feuille,” yet he describes his fears as “sottes frayeurs,” an attempt to rationalize what is happening around him. The sublime, however, is decidedly irrational, and it is just this irrationality that makes the sublime such a terrifying force. “Le sublime surgit,” according to Saint-Girons, “dans un aura de scandale, comme ce qui oblige à penser ce qui, dans le réel, résiste le plus radicalement à une interprétation déterminée, tout en suscitant sans fin la pensée” (20). The narrator tries to calm himself, in an almost childlike or comic manner, by closing his eyes and turning towards the wall. However, the bed beneath him “s’agitait ... comme une vague,” moving apparently under its own power.

As stated before, terror is a privileged emotion of the sublime, its hallmark. Burke explains that there is no other emotion which can so easily overcome our capacity to reason and to act, and that “whatever is qualified to cause terror, is a foundation capable of the sublime” (119). The fever felt by the narrator changes into a sweat, whose strength is underlined by the fact that it “[inonde] tout [son] corps.” Reaction to the sublime manifests itself, above all else, physically (Burke 59). The “tic-tac” of the pendulum also changes into a singular sound, emphasized by the verb “retentir.” Moreover, the narrator himself hesitates to explain what it was he witnessed, fearful that “l’on [le] prendrait pour un fou.” An inexpressible fright has gained hold of him; the sublime slips more and more into his spirit.

Gautier insists on what the narrator *sees*. Vision is our primordial sense, our main way of perceiving the world around us. “Je ne savais que penser de ce que je voyais,” the narrator tells us. Milner, who devotes a work to the uncertain nature of vision in the fantastic, explains that

“l’aspect illusoire et relatif du monde visible [se trouve] souligné et ... la multiplication des dispositifs destinés à modifier, selon les lois de l’optique, la forme et la dimension des objets, ou le sentiment de leur distance, accroît, dans le concret de l’expérience, l’impression de vivre dans un univers dont les apparences déjouent nos habitudes et nos attentes” (13). Saint-Girons refers to the same idea when she writes “la vérité nous apparaît du côté de nos habitudes et nous avons tendance à ne croire vraiment réel que ce que nous appréhendons à travers des constantes de perception” (23). In such circumstances, the narrator does indeed feel deceived by his senses: nothing is as it seems nor is what one expects it to be. It is also interesting to note the presence of the key used by one of the “phantoms” to “open” the frames, releasing the other figures trapped in the portraits into “our world,” so to speak. As mentioned before, the fantastic, for many theorists, implies an Other-world, a different world distinct from our own, but which collides violently with it from time to time. Though terrified, Théodore cannot help but turn back around in order to see what is happening: “force me fut de me retourner et de voir.”

What he sees is truly in the realm of the fantastic. From one of the portraits hanging on the walls, a figure steps out and with a small key “unlocks” the other portraits, allowing them also to step into our world. Diaz-Brown, in *L’Effet fantastique*, takes issue with this scene, arguing that the humor of a chubby character dressed in a century-old outfit who “unlocks” the frames for the others is too humorous and that humor and the fantastic are not, in fact, compatible (49). I would reply, however, that the two are not incompatible, but rather represent two sides of the coin, and that the humor she rightly finds in this episode serves only to accentuate the tragedy of the ending. It is not a question of *bathos* detracting from *pathos*, but rather *bathos* emphasizing the underlying *pathos*. Additionally, both humor and the uncanny find their origins in the same place: the return of the repressed.

After arranging themselves around the fire, they begin to speak to each other. Of note here is not so much the conversation itself as the fact that the speakers do not look each other in the eye, but rather hold their attention fixed on the pendulum. This emphasis on the passage of time is linked to the essence of the fantastic and, concomitantly, the sublime: both are, by their very nature, fleeting, otherwise one runs the risk of falling forever into madness. The fantastic universe is not ours; we have no more place there than it has here. It is a transitory event, the meeting with the sublime, even though the effects of that meeting may prove much more durable. Moreover, we are approaching the hour *par excellence* of the fantastic, midnight, a liminal time, a “between time,” as it were.

Having taken their coffee, the phantoms begin to dance. Though beginning benignly enough, the dance progressively turns into a “dance of the damned.” Oddly, this infernal dance is a minuet, a dance important for two reasons: first, this dance, already outdated in the 19th century, accords well with the outdated decor of the chamber, and second, it is a dance normally associated with slow, stately rhythms, a refined dance of courtly quality. Nothing could be further from the case than what Gautier puts before the reader.

The music is not a delightful distraction; it becomes a kind of torture. Moreover, the dancers have no choice whether or not to participate; “il faut danser,” they are told by “une voix” that is never fully identified. The polysyndetic structure in the following passage, along with the hyperbolic language, brings into sharp relief the excruciating aspect of the music:

L’archet des virtuoses passait *si* rapidement sur les cordes, qu’il en jaillissaient des étincelles électriques. Les doigts des flûteurs se haussaient et se baissaient comme s’ils eussent été de vif-argent; les joues des piqueurs étaient enflées comme des ballons, *et* tout cela formait un déluge de notes *et* de trilles si pressées

et de gammes ascendantes et descendantes si entortillées, si inconcevables, que les démons eux-mêmes n'auraient pu deux minutes suivre une pareille mesure.

(6, emphasis mine)

The unearthly nature of the music is so strong that the fingers of the flautists are transformed through comparison into quicksilver, while the cheeks of the *piqueurs* become balloons. All the various elements become one single amorphous “tout cela,” which is no longer truly music, but rather a “flood of notes and trills...and scales,” all tied up together. Instead of rhythm and harmony, there is only sheer chaos, a cacophony so overwhelming and fast that “demons themselves would not have been able to follow such a measure for two minutes.” Such musical madness can only be summed up by the adjective used here, “inconceivable.” “Marquer la mesure” and “to keep time” both describe an attempt to control time, the failure of which produces anxiety. Gautier, like all poets, is trying to overcome time and mortality, though as is proven in the story, this effort is ultimately doomed to fail, rendering the anxiety all the more acute, thus all the more disturbing.

This infernal music, while indicative of the sublime, elicits pity on the part of the narrator. The dancers, just as the demons, do their best to keep time with the music, but in vain; the orchestra is always ahead of them:

Aussi, c'était pitié de voir tous les efforts de ces danseurs pour rattraper la cadence. Ils sautaient, cabriolaient, faisaient des ronds de jambe, des jetés battus et des entrechats de trois pieds de haut, tant que la sueur, leur coulant du front sur les yeux, leur emportait les mouches et le fard. Mais ils avaient beau faire, l'orchestre les devançait toujours de trois ou quatre notes. (6)

This delay between the music and the dancers' movements underscores the unreal, surreal aspect of this scene. For hyperbolic music, we must have hyperbolic movements as well, brought out by the enumeration of verbs and nouns: "ils sautaient, cabriolaient, faisaient des ronds de jambe, des jetés battus et des entrechats de trois pieds de haut." Gautier makes an almost comic comparison ("aussi chaque couple de danseurs, au bout de quelques minutes, se mit à pirouetter comme une toupie d'Allemagne") to underscore the pathetic nature of the scene (once again combining the humorous with the uncanny), and later he collapses all the individual dancers into one "tourbillon dansant."

Théodore's attention is then captured by the sight of a beautiful young woman. Angéla embodies the archetypal figure of the inhumanly beautiful woman who captivates the protagonist. She is distinct from the others, not dancing and holding herself apart from them; for some unknown reason, she is exempt from the "il faut danser" to which the others are subject. Even among Other-worldly figures, she herself is "other." Consider the description given of her: "Jamais, même en rêve, rien d'aussi parfait ne s'était présenté à mes yeux; une peau d'une blancheur éblouissante, des cheveux d'un blond cendré, de long cils et des prunelles bleues, si claires et si transparentes, que je voyais son âme à travers aussi distinctement qu'un caillou au fond d'un ruisseau" (7). The reader immediately remarks the hyperbolic nature of the description. The other-worldly beauty of this woman recalls the medieval notion of the ideal beauty, with her exaggeratedly pale skin, blond hair, long lashes and blue eyes. Gautier exploits a semantic field built around light to describe her: "éblouissante," "blond cendré," "si claires et si transparentes." She goes beyond even a dreamlike beauty, and it is this beauty that frees the narrator from his overwhelming fear. Just as the sublime, her beauty *acts upon* the narrator, without being able to describe just what exactly it is:

Et je sentis que, si jamais il m'arrivait d'aimer quelqu'un, ce serait elle. Je me précipitai hors du lit, d'où jusque-là je n'avais pu bouger, et je me dirigeai vers elle, *conduit par quelque chose qui agissait en moi sans que je pusse m'en rendre compte*; et je me trouvai à ses genoux, une de ses mains dans les miennes, causant avec elle comme si je l'eusse connue depuis vingt ans. (7, emphasis mine)

And the dance starts over, but the difference between Angéla and Théodore's dance and the earlier one must be explained. First, only the two of them dance. Also, as opposed to the out-of-date minuet, they instead perform a waltz, the r(R)omantic dance *par excellence*. Their dance is a sensual one, with the ternary rhythm of the phrase imitating grammatically the $\frac{3}{4}$ time of a waltz: "Le sein de la jeune femme touchait ma poitrine, sa joue veloutée effleurait la mienne, et son haleine suave flottait sur ma bouche" (7). Gautier's language is charged with overt eroticism here: Angéla's breast, her velvet-smooth cheek, and her sweet breath each paired with the corresponding place on Théodore's body. Even the verbs, "touchait," "effleurait," and "flottait" imply a sensuousness both curious and yet virginal at the same time, a hesitancy imbued with both hunger and restraint.

As the waltz continues, Théodore's reaction grows stronger. He tells us, "Jamais de la vie je n'avais éprouvé une pareille émotion; mes nerfs tressaillaient comme des ressorts d'acier, mon sang coulait dans mes artères en torrent de lave, et j'entendais battre mon cœur comme une montre accrochée à mes oreilles" (7). The delicate, almost chaste language becomes more insistent, even more patently sexual. Comparing Théodore's nerves to loaded springs, his blood to torrents of lava and the beating of his heart to the beating of a clock, Gautier brings the young man to a kind of sustained climax, a moment of sheer pleasure. "Pourtant cet état n'avait rien de pénible. J'étais inondé d'une joie ineffable et j'aurais toujours voulu demeurer ainsi, et, chose

remarquable, quoique l'orchestre eût triplé de vitesse, nous n'avions besoin de faire aucun effort pour le suivre," says Théodore, his response pushing hyperbole to the point of cliché. This joy however is mitigated by the comparison of Théodore's heart to a clock, a reminder of the clock that issued the warning before the dance and of the fact that, by definition, this happiness must be fleeting. If the negative sublime (terror and shadows) cannot be maintained indefinitely, neither can the positive sublime; in both cases, the same risk is present, namely, the renouncing of life and the fall into madness. Théodore is already in danger of forgetting himself, given away by the fact that, were it possible, he would remain forever just where he is.

Then comes the inevitable lassitude that follows the sexual act, as Angéla's fatigue announces the end of the story. The two dancers become metaphorically one as she must sit in his lap, since all the other seats have been taken. Sitting with him, she becomes "froide comme un marbre" (8). Little does this seem to matter to Théodore: "Je ne sais pas combien de temps nous restâmes dans cette position, car tous mes sens étaient absorbés dans la contemplation de cette mystérieuse et fantastique créature" (8).

Théodore is fully immersed in this Other-world that he had so greatly feared before; the sublime has taken full possession of him:

Je n'avais plus aucune idée de l'heure ni du lieu; le monde réel n'existait plus pour moi, et tous les liens qui m'y attachent étaient rompus; mon âme, dégagée de sa prison de boue, nageait dans le vague et l'infini; je comprenais ce que nul homme ne peut comprendre, les pensées d'Angéla se révélant à moi sans qu'elle eût besoin de parler; car son âme brillait dans son corps comme une lampe d'albâtre, et les rayons partis de sa personne perçaient la mienne de part en part.

(8)

Théodore has abandoned the real world to fall willingly into another realm of existence. His rational beliefs have crumbled, granting him a sense of liberation, though this freedom will, of course, prove fleeting. “C’est au moment où la croyance est en train ou vient de disparaître,” Milner explains, “que l’imaginaire est investi avec le plus de force, parce qu’il bénéficie à la fois de l’effet de libération produit par l’adoption d’une conception rationnelle du monde et du vide affectif que provoque la renonciation à tout moyen de communiquer avec l’au-delà” (19). Angéla, and all the other “characters” are part of this *au-delà*. Théodore no longer questions what is happening, an important point, for “si le propre du sublime est de déchirer la toile protectrice des certitudes ... disons qu’il n’entraîne l’irruption du chaos qu’avec ma complicité” (Saint-Girons 106).

The song of the lark signals the end of the experience Théodore just had. Angéla, her brief time in our world over, must return to the Other-world whence she came, she must die once more. Théodore, unable to (under)stand this, faints. The brusque disappearance of this “illusion diabolique” of which he considers himself the dupe is catastrophic. As Grivel explains, “le fantastique provient de l’effondrement visuel d’un lieu donné pour plein; le lieu ne tient pas, on le sait, sa substance s’émiette, s’étiole, se délite; une apparence croule” (53).

When he awakens the next morning, Théodore holds in his hand a piece of porcelain, a piece of the coffee-pot, the proof-object so common to fantastic stories. These objects only aggravate the question: was what happened real or not? Smith remarks that “an aspect which Gautier considers essential for the successful literary exploitation of the fantastic is the author’s refusal to explain objectively the mysterious phenomena which he represents” (31). Whyte tells us that this lack of explanation “laisse implicitement entendre qu’il s’agit de bien plus qu’un rêve ou une crise de sonambulisme” (15).

As the guests try to entertain themselves later that day, Théodore sits idly sketching and suddenly notices that he has drawn the coffee-pot without even realizing it. When his host looks at the drawing, he is struck by the fact that Théodore has drawn a portrait of his sister, Angéla. Théodore seems to have repressed the previous night's events, though as Freud tells us, "quiconque connaît la vie psychique de l'homme, sait que presque rien ne lui est aussi difficile que de renoncer à un plaisir qu'il a une fois connu. A vrai dire, nous ne pouvons renoncer à rien" (36). When asked by Théodore where his sister is, his host replies that she died two years previously, "d'une fluxion de poitrine à la suite d'un bal" (10). Faced with the flash of hope that this woman with whom he shared such a sublime experience the night before might actually exist, Théodore is thrown all the deeper into despair on hearing of her death. He tells us, "Je venais de comprendre qu'il n'y a plus pour moi de bonheur sur la terre!" (10). The fleeting moment he had with the sublime has transformed him forever, and any possibility for true happiness has vanished. Finally, the negative sublime wins out over the positive sublime that he, momentarily, knew.

At the end of the story, the reader is faced with a final irrational image. While believing himself to be sketching the coffee-pot from the previous evening, he has in fact drawn a portrait of Angéla. In his mind's eye, Théodore sees "only" a coffee-pot, while his host sees (as would presumably everyone else) an image of his departed sister. Why, if Théodore is in love with Angéla, would he see the coffee-pot and not the image of the object of his affection? What is the relationship between these two images?

When Théodore sees Angéla fall, he leaps to help her up but finds only the shattered pieces of the coffee-pot. After the reader learns the identity of Angéla and her fate, the breaking of the coffee pot comes to represent Angéla's original death, which she is doomed to repeat over

and over again. The fact that she is told that she can dance with Théodore if she wishes, but with the warning “vous savez ce qui en résultera,” implies that this is not the first time the transformation has taken place. The emotional link forged between the two young people during their dance the previous evening is so strong that Théodore is unable to accept her loss. Unable to reconcile the two extremes of his emotions for her, his love and his sadness, Theodore expresses both at the same time: he sketches her portrait, but his mind refuses to see that portrait, replacing the face of his beloved with the everyday coffee-pot. Once his host points out to him the actual subject of his drawing, a sense of loss crashes over him, and when speaking of pain, loss is always in the forefront, Burke explains (69). The negative sublime overcomes Théodore’s attempt at self-protection, which is why he realizes, in that instant, that “il n’y avait pour [lui] plus de bonheur sur la terre.”

So what is the nature of this link between Angéla and the coffee-pot? Is it a question of resemblance, hence metaphorical, or of contiguity, hence metonymic? On the one hand, an argument can be made for metaphor: the whiteness of the porcelain coffee-pot could easily be compared to the whiteness of Angéla’s skin, its inherent fragility to the apparently fragile nature of Angéla’s health, even the curves of the coffee-pot to Angéla’s feminine curves. On the other, the fact that the broken coffee-pot *cum* deceased Angéla serves as the direct cause of Théodore’s unhappiness would lend support to the possibility of metonymy. For Théodore, the question is moot. It is not a matter of choosing one figure of speech over the other. Angéla *is* the coffee-pot, and the coffee-pot *is* Angéla. This is precisely why the two are interchangeable for him, why he sees one while drawing the other. The reader is the one forced to decide between one interpretation or the other. However, this is the game of the sublime and of the fantastic in general. The reader must choose between option A or option B, all the while remaining

blissfully ignorant of the unknown (and perhaps unknowable) option C, D, or E lurking just beyond reach. By changing our perspective, the sublime allows (if not requires) that we combine metaphor and metonymy into something new that is both at the same time. “C’est dans cette manifestation *conjointe simultanée* de deux contraires,” according to Diaz-Brown, “que réside peut-être l’essence du fantastique” (37, emphasis mine). The same idea is put forth by Bessière, when she writes that what characterizes the fantastic is “la juxtaposition et les contradictions de divers vraisemblables, autrement dit des hésitations” (12). Angéla is and at the same time is not the coffee-pot. The sublime, by its overwhelming power to overturn our preconceived notions, explains how this can be the case, not only for Théodore but for the reader as well, who, whether conscious of the fact or not, identifies with him.

Carried to an extreme, such endeavors to depict the sublime in literature result in a sort of “written madness” that (at least) balances precariously between (barely controlled) reason and madness, or that (at worst) crosses completely over into the realm of chaos. As the work of Bonaventura and Hoffmann attests, the underlying schism between the rational and the irrational is ever-present, and the slightest push sends the writer down into the chasm. This hesitation between two extremes is at the very heart of the “fantastic” story, so popular in the early and mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, Todorov makes this hesitation the fundamental structural characteristic of fantastic literature. But to speak of such writing in purely structural terms is to remove the very heart of the matter. Todorov’s conception of the fantastic is, on the one hand, well articulated and useful in understanding this genre. Nevertheless, on the other hand, grounded as it is in formalist perspective, is too reductive to explain fully the deeper sense of fantastic literature as a whole. The fantastic story is not simply a mechanical function of vacillation on the part of the reader or a character between certainty and uncertainty. At stake in

the fantastic is the very conception of life, death, indeed our very place in the greater scheme of things. The fantastic short story reflects what happens when man confronts the terrors, hopes and ideas that lurk in his psyche. As such, they become a literary representation of the violent and terrifying encounter with the Sublime. In each of these three stories, the sublime functions in a different way. In the story by Balzac, the reader is presented with a positive, Burkian sort of sublime, in which the main character is edified, built-up, exalted and moves on all the stronger for his experience with the sublime. In "Le Horla," by contrast, the exact opposite happens as we see the narrator crumble under the destructive force of the negative sublime. Finally, in "La Cafetière," there is a kind of fusion of the two, as the negative sublime slips for the briefest of moments into the realm of the positive, only to fall back down once more into the utter despair of the negative.

For a true depiction of the power of the sublime, it would seem reasonable to claim that, in fact, both conceptions are necessary. In Burke we find a physical and psychological investigation into the sublime, how we are affected by it from external sources and how the mind then attempts to deal with it internally. In Kant, the sublime is completely internalized as a problem of cognition, in which the physical and external factors have little, if any, importance. However, if literature followed either conceptualization alone, it would be all the poorer. For relying only on Burke, we would be presented with nothing more than an overflow of adjectives attempting to describe the vast, horrible objects surrounding the narrator. If, instead, we were to make use of Kant alone, we would have little more than an interior monologue, a stream of consciousness recounting the Imagination's attempt to understand what the senses apprehend. Neither alone can fulfill the promise of literature, to reveal ourselves to us, to say the unsayable

and investigate the unknowable “essence” of mankind. One way, in fact the privileged way, to accomplish this is through the use of the sublime.

The sublime is the land of superlatives; mediocrity is totally alien to it. It is the domain of “as ifs,” the realm of simile and metaphor: the attempt to say that which cannot be put into words. Language fails us; words reveal themselves hopelessly inapt to communicate the full force and effect of the sublime. Language reaches for, yet constantly falls short of, true expression of the sublime. The sublime is always the x in an unsolvable equation. It is the mystery wrapped in a riddle surrounded by an enigma. It is at the same time the lack and overabundance of words. It is the need to say everything without the possibility of saying anything. A barrier, a crushing blow and a veil. The two-sided sword. The sublime is “out there” where we are not: Maupassant’s *Horla*, the *hors* and *là*? The sublime is “in here” where we are not. It is the undefinable that redefines all, the great signifier leading to a host of signifieds, a back-and-forth between meaning and nonsense. As we will see in the next chapter, it is exactly this problem of language that is exemplified in *la littérature fantastique*.

CHAPTER THREE

DO YOU SAY WHAT I SAY? LANGUAGE AND THE FANTASTIC

As we saw in the last chapter, the fantastic uses the experience with the sublime as one of its cornerstones. However, one of the key problems in the fantastic is the inability of language to express fully that collision between the speaking “I” and the sublime that overcomes us. We are trapped in a world of words. These are the only tools at our disposal to relate events, to describe people, places and things. “Contre l’arrogance de ceux qui croient pouvoir sortir des mots pour déterminer l’être,” Saint-Girons explains, “une pensée court à l’intérieur de la langue, structure nos modes d’appréhension et produit par elle-même de l’être dans une ‘*ontopoièse*’, si l’on peut dire” (29). Words create our reality. We run into a major obstacle, however, when it comes to language. On the one hand, language can be used to lie. Through clever verbal prestidigitation, we can purposefully exaggerate, obfuscate and distort the message we transmit. On the other, even when we make a sincere effort to speak clearly, we do not always achieve clarity, because words are, by their very nature, polyvalent. Misunderstandings arise when we incorrectly interpret the message another has transmitted to us. The imprecision of language means that all communication is approximate at best. We will see in this chapter how the fantastic exploits the ability our speech gives us to lie and how the instability of meaning can bring about catastrophic consequences.

In “La Morte” by Guy de Maupassant, the problematic nature of language in general comes to the forefront, starting from the very title of the story. Because “morte” is determined by the definite article “la,” the reader knows that this refers to one specific dead woman, but at

the same time, no clue is given as to her identity: the title is at once specific and general. In fact, the reader almost wonders whether there is a typographical error and if the title should actually be “La Mort,” or death in general.

Maupassant plunges us into the action *in medias res*, creating an immediate connection between the narrator (who, it is worthy to note, is never positively identified) and the reader. The frame story structure so common to the fantastic generally serves to anchor a story securely to the realm of the real, accentuating the oddities that are to take place in the framed story. The narrating character is most often depicted as a sane, respectable person, thus lending credence to his story. Here, however, the frame disappears, and the reader is given no clue as to the identity of the narrator. He is simply an anonymous “je,” yet it is this anonymity that allows the reader to forge a stronger link with him. As Georges Poulet remarks, one of the most astonishing aspects of the experience of reading is precisely that “I am someone who happens to have as objects of his own thought, thoughts which are part of a book I am reading, and which are therefore the cogitations of another ... I am thinking the thoughts of another” (“Phenomenology” 55). This transference happens to a lesser or greater extent with any type of narrator, but it is particularly striking with a first-person narrator, as the shifter pronoun “I” of the narrator melds with the “I” of the reader. Try as one might, when reading a first-person narrative, it is impossible not to identify one’s own “I” with the “I” of the narrator, even if only on a subconscious level. This is an additional factor to explain why first-person narrative is the overwhelming choice made by writers of the fantastic in the 19th century. The fantastic (as distinct from the medieval marvelous, for example) is an outgrowth of Romanticism, a movement that emphasizes the importance of the individual over the group; logically, one finds a first-person investigation of thoughts and emotions in many, if not the majority of, Romantic texts. At the same time, the use

of the first person also allows for a stronger sharing of those thoughts and emotions first between author and text, then between text and reader and finally, by borrowing the transitive property of mathematics, between author and reader.

The plot of the story itself is (relatively) simple, with “relatively” in parentheses because as any reader of the fantastic has noticed, it is often quite difficult to give a short summary of a fantastic story. Nevertheless, in its most abbreviated form, this is the plot: an unnamed narrator has just lost the woman with whom he was madly in love. He recounts to us his reaction to her unexpected death and her subsequent burial. Unable to deal with his emotional pain, he leaves on a trip, but when he returns to the home they shared, his agony comes flooding back over him. When he sees a mirror that hangs next to the front door, the mirror in which his love would make the final adjustments to her outfit before exiting, he is unable to remain in the house, flees, and goes to the cemetery in which she is buried. Finding her tombstone, he is struck by the desire to spend the night “next to her,” so to speak. Afraid that he would be driven off by a groundskeeper, he makes for an older part of the cemetery and hides next to a tree until everyone has left. After night has fallen and once he is alone in the cemetery, he begins to wander back towards his beloved’s tomb, but he is no longer able to find it and becomes more and more agitated. Finally, the fantastic enters as he sees a tombstone raising up, pushed up by the skeleton buried underneath, who uses a stone to erase the stock inscription on his tomb, of the type “He was honest and good, loved by all.” Then, using the end of his skeletal finger, he writes another inscription, revealing the truth of his life, the exact opposite of what had been found before, namely that he tortured his wife, tormented his children, drove his father to an early grave and finally died a miserable man. The narrator looks around and sees that all the tombs have opened up and that the dead are correcting the errors on their tombstones. He heads back to

his love's tomb, on which had been written "She loved, was loved, and died." He sees her rise from her grave to replace that inscription with this: "Having left one day to cheat on her lover, she caught a cold in the rain and died." The narrator then passes out and is found the next morning.

During the first reading of this story, the reader is struck by the highly poetic and evocative language Maupassant uses to recount the events. From this aspect alone, the story is worthy of examination. Yet on a second, retroactive reading, the story becomes a pessimistic text on the inherent unreliability of language and its inability to convey any full, meaningful sense. Thus we are presented with a story that ironically makes masterful use of language to reveal language's inherent weaknesses.

As stated earlier, the title of the story already makes the reader pose questions: who is "la morte" and is this a typographical error? The first sentence of the story reveals that there is no error and that the narrator is speaking indeed of a dead woman. He tells us, "Je l'avais aimée éperdument!" (2: 939). The strength of the adverb "éperdument" places the reader in an already exaggerated state of emotion, setting up the hyperbolic nature of his love for the woman. This leads the narrator to ask the simple question, "Pourquoi aime-t-on?" While in an abstract sense, this question is incredibly complicated and has been the source of philosophical and literary production for centuries, the answer given by the narrator nevertheless seems highly disproportional: "Est-ce bizarre de ne plus voir dans le monde qu'un être, de n'avoir plus dans l'esprit qu'une pensée, dans le cœur qu'un désir, et dans la bouche qu'un nom: un nom qui monte incessamment, qui monte, comme l'eau d'une source, des profondeurs de l'âme, qui monte aux lèvres, et qu'on dit, qu'on redit, qu'on murmure sans cesse, partout, ainsi qu'une prière" (2: 939). His answer is not really an answer at all, but rather another question set off by,

we should remark, “est-ce bizarre.” Love is fundamentally impossible to define. Like the narrator, we can describe its effects and its symptoms, but we can never explain precisely *why* we love. We should also note the complexity of this sentence, built up on a structure resembling that of a wave which becomes evident when the sentence is divided into its component sections:

Est-ce bizarre	de ne plus voir de n'avoir plus	dans le monde dans l'esprit dans le cœur dans la bouche	qu'un être, qu'une pensée, qu'un désir, qu'un nom : un nom	qui monte incessamment qui monte (comme l'eau d'une source) des profondeurs de l'âme, qui monte aux lèvres qu'on dit, qu'on redit, qu'on murmure	sans cesse, partout, (ainsi qu'une prière).
(et)					
(et)					

From one element which begins the question, we move to two elements, then to two groups of four elements, reaching its crescendo in a set of six elements before fading back to three. The final words, “ainsi qu'une prière” reprises the incantatory, almost mystical, nature of this lengthy sentence. The narrator is carried away by the force of his love, “lost” (“je l'avais aimée **éperdu**ment”) in his reverie. After this poetic and highly rhetorical meditation on what it means to love, the narrator then refuses, surprisingly, to tell us the story of that love: “Je ne conterai point notre histoire. L'amour n'en a qu'une, toujours la même. Je l'avais rencontrée et aimée. Voilà tout.” (2: 939). The terseness of these sentences contrasts with the preceding one, and the reader has the impression that the narrator is not only unwilling but also unable to relive the love he has lost, a sort of defense mechanism against the pain brought about by his beloved's death. Yet this is proven false because, though he does not give us specific details, the narrator launches into another long explanation: “Et j'avais vécu pendant un an dans sa tendresse, dans ses bras, dans sa caresse, dans son regard, dans ses robes, dans sa parole, enveloppé, lié, emprisonné dans tout ce qui venait d'elle, d'une façon si complète que je ne savais plus s'il faisait jour ou nuit, si j'étais mort ou vivant, sur la vieille terre ou ailleurs” (2: 939). The much vaunted “unity” of love

is here taken to an extreme degree, in which unity seems to pass into the domain of obsession. The repetition of the preposition “dans” (7 times) determines the use of the adjectives “enveloppé, lié, emprisonné.” Yet once more, the narrator falls into a staccato series of short sentences when he invokes her actual death: “Et voilà qu’elle mourut. Comment? Je ne sais pas, je ne sais plus” (2: 939). These first two paragraphs serve to set a basis for how the rest of the story is to be structured, as an alternating series of longer complicated sentences divided by more concise ones, so I will pass over the rest of the story, in the interest of space, and move on to the retroactive reading, showing how the story overall shows the inherent weakness of language.

In the first sentence quoted above, the narrator places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of words when one is in love, “un nom qui monte incessamment, qui monte comme l’eau d’une source des profondeurs de l’âme, qui monte aux lèvres, qu’on *dit*, qu’on *redit*, qu’on *murmure* sans cesse, partout, ainsi qu’une prière” (2: 939, emphasis mine). He does the same when he tells us that he lived for a year “dans [la] parole” of his lover. After she returns from her outing in the rain and has fallen ill, the narrator says that “je lui parlais, elle me répondait,” once again emphasizing the fact that they *spoke* to one another. Ironically, however, the narrator admits that he cannot remember what they actually said: “Que nous sommes-nous dit? Je ne sais plus. J’ai tout oublié, tout, tout!” (2: 939). This strikes the reader as quite odd, for given the hyperbolic nature, established at the very beginning of the story, of his love for this woman, one would expect that he should remember vividly their final moments together—and especially their final conversation. He does recall one detail though: “Elle mourut, je me rappelle très bien son petit soupir, son petit soupir si faible, le dernier” (2: 939). He may not remember her final words, but he does clearly recall her final sigh, as though the words themselves, individual,

distinct, theoretically meaningful have been reduced to a mere sound, a sigh, imprecise, vague and meaningless. In a similar fashion, when he speaks of the actual burial, again what he remembers is the sound of the hammer. “Je me rappelle cependant très bien le cercueil, le bruit des coups de marteau quand on la cloua dedans” (2: 940). He gives us no details regarding the ceremony itself, the words pronounced by the officiating priest or those offered by the other persons present. “On me consulta sur mille choses pour l’enterrement,” he says, “Je ne sais plus” (2: 940). Moreover, those present at the burial are lumped together into an indefinite “quelques personnes” from whom he must flee. While not indicated in the text itself, the reader can extrapolate and guess that he was fleeing not so much the people as their words, the platitudes and clichés offered under such circumstances, in which one is not quite sure what to say to console the bereaved.

The narrator subsequently departs on a trip, bringing the first part of the story to a close. The reader is given no indication of the duration of his trip, as all the narrator tells us as the second half begins is “Hier, je suis rentré à Paris” (2: 940). Once he returns to the house, however, we realize that his trip has not fulfilled its intended goal of allowing him to grieve and accept the death of his lover:

Quand je revis ma chambre, notre chambre, notre lit, nos meubles, toute cette maison où était resté tout ce qui reste de la vie d’un être après sa mort, je fus saisi par un retour de chagrin si violent que je faillis ouvrir la fenêtre et me jeter dans la rue. Ne pouvant plus demeurer au milieu de ces choses, de ces murs qui l’avaient enfermée, abritée, et qui devaient garder dans leurs imperceptibles fissures mille atomes d’elle, de sa chair et de son souffle, je pris mon chapeau, afin de me sauver. (2: 940)

In a reaction similar to the one he has at the funeral, when confronted with the objects that remind him of his love, an unendurable sadness forces him to flee the home. This time he is not fleeing from people, however, but from objects which remind him of her. The objects, functioning as avatars of the linguistic sign, designate her; they are the signifiers of which she becomes the signified. It is as though the narrator sees a physical manifestation of language, a manifestation he finds intolerable and before which his only choice is denial, symbolized in his near hysterical flight from their shared domicile. Eco reminds us that one of the requirements of the semiotic sign is that the signifier “must be potentially present and perceptible while the consequent is usually absent” and that it “may be produced even though the consequent does not subsist or has never subsisted” (214). The objects in the house are the present “smoke” that indicates her absent “fire.” Interestingly, all these empty signs denoting the woman are metonymic in nature, as there was a bodily connection between her and the furniture, a relationship of contiguity. The intimate, physical association here makes them all the more symbolically potent for the narrator, as there is a direct link between the dead lover and the objects which remain behind. Metaphor, being more abstruse, would not have served as well in this instance, as metaphor requires more time for interpretation and decoding, thus delaying the narrator’s extreme reaction. The immediacy of metonymy is required here for the emotional effect.

In spite (or perhaps because) of his inability to remain in the home, in which he is surrounded by objects that are constant reminders of her presence-in-absence, he makes his way to the cemetery where she is buried. In true fantastic fashion, he wanders through the cemetery until he realizes that night is coming on, at which point, he tells the reader, “Alors un désir bizarre, fou, un désir d’amant désespéré s’empara de moi” (2: 941). The adjectives “bizarre” and

“fou,” as well as “désespéré” resound with fantastic connotations, and we should note that this desire takes hold of him...as night is falling...in a cemetery. So he decides to spend one final night next to her, or at least next to her tomb. In fact, for him there is little difference between the two, as he wishes to spend the night “près d’elle...à pleurer sur sa tombe” (2: 941).

Worrying that someone will see him there and make him leave, he goes to an older part of the cemetery, in order to hide there until night has fallen. “Au bout du cimetière habité,” he says, “j’aperçus tout à coup le cimetière abandonné, celui où les vieux défunts achèvent de se mêler au sol, où les croix elles-mêmes pourrissent, où l’on mettra demain les derniers venus. Il est plein de roses libres, de cyprès vigoureux et noirs, un jardin triste et superbe, nourri de chair humaine” (2: 941). The abrupt shift from the expected imperfect of description to the present tense “il est” shocks the reader and lends an immediacy to the description of this part of the cemetery, necessary to set up the unnatural events that are soon to occur. Cypresses, a variety of tree associated with death since ancient times, stand alongside roses growing wild—a negative rubbing shoulders with a positive. Moreover, the use of the noun “jardin” to describe the cemetery seems odd, yet at the same time logical, because it refers to the unending cycle of death feeding life.

Here in this part of the cemetery, the narrator tells us that he is “seul, bien seul” and that he remains in his hiding place until “la nuit fut noire, très noire” (2: 941). Of course this would be the case, because the fantastic almost always happens when we are alone and in the dark, either a literal darkness or a metaphorical one, and often it is both. The anchors of reality (other people, for instance, who could possibly belie the fantastic event or at least attempt to give some kind of grounding explanation for it) must be removed before the fantastic can manifest itself. The repeated pattern of “adjective, intensifying adverb, adjective” underscores this necessity.

He then leaves this part of the cemetery and attempts to head back to his lover's tomb, but he is unable to find it. "J'errai longtemps, longtemps, longtemps. Je ne la retrouvais pas," he states (2: 942). Surrounded by tombs that all look identical in the darkness, he becomes afraid: "J'avais peur, une peur affreuse dans ces étroits sentiers, entre deux lignes de tombes! Des tombes! des tombes! des tombes! Toujours des tombes! A droite, à gauche, devant moi, autour de moi, partout, des tombes ! Je m'assis sur une d'elles car je ne pouvais plus marcher tant mes genoux fléchissaient." His heart begins to beat faster and faster, and he hears "un bruit confus innommable." We have already learned that sounds are what he recalls foremost, the final sigh of his lover and the smack of the hammer as it closes up the coffin. Seated on the tomb, he is "paralysé par la terreur, . . . ivre d'épouvante, prêt à hurler, prêt à mourir." Just as he reaches a paroxysm of terror, he feels the tomb on which he is seated begin to move, and leaping up, he says, "je vis, oui, je vis la pierre que je venais de quitter se dresser toute droite; et le mort apparut, un squelette nu qui, de son dos courbé la rejetait. Je voyais, je voyais très bien quoique la nuit fût profonde." We should note the repetition of the verb *voir*, as though the narrator is insisting upon the reality of what he is relating. Moreover, although the night was so dark before that he could not find his way back to his lover's tomb, now, at the precise moment of the fantastic event, there is enough light for him to see the inscription upon this particular tomb: "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."

The dead rising from their graves is fantastic in and of itself, but Maupassant does not stop there. As I have argued, this story makes use of the fantastic to comment on the unreliability of language. The skeleton of Jacques Olivant "aussi lisait les choses écrites sur son tombeau. Puis il ramassa une pierre dans le chemin, une petite pierre aiguë, et se mit à les gratter

avec soin, ces choses.” Having accomplished this step, the skeleton then rewrites the epitaph: “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 misérable” (2: 942-43). Turning from this sight, the narrator sees that all the tombs in the cemetery have been opened, so that the dead can rise and erase “*les mensonges* inscrits par les parents sur la pierre funéraire, pour y rétablir *la vérité*” (emphasis mine). Finding the tomb of his lover, he sees that she too has risen and written the truth upon her tombstone. The lie of “Elle aima, fut aimée, et mourut” has become “Étant sortie un jour pour tromper son amant, elle eut froid sous la pluie, et mourut.” At this point, the narrator faints, and the story comes to an end.

Once the reader has completed the first reading, many of the earlier details take on a new significance. A prime example is the mirror he passes as he flees from the house before coming to the cemetery. The narrator says, “Tout à coup, au moment d’atteindre la porte, je passai devant la grande glace du vestibule qu’elle avait fait poser là pour se voir, des pieds à la tête, chaque jour, en sortant, pour voir si toute sa toilette allait bien, était correcte et jolie, des bottines à la coiffure” (2: 940). On the hand one, the first time through the story, readers do not necessarily see anything disturbing about this mirror. With a retroactive reading, on the other, they realize that the mirror is not there out of the woman’s concern to appear neat and presentable, but rather out of vanity and the desire to attract other lovers. As in communication in general, we must revisit what has been said in order to give it full meaning, or at least attempt to give it full meaning. Often we must discard our initial hypotheses in order to create new ones. Language requires time and requires deciphering.

Another example is found in a comparison the narrator makes when he finds his hiding place in the older part of the cemetery. “J’attendis,” he says, “cramponné au tronc comme un naufragé sur une épave” (2: 941). This comparison at first seems odd, but as with the mirror, it takes on a new symbolic meaning when revisited after having finished the story. By definition a symbol is a retroactive structure, as it is the only way it can take on a meaning, when time has passed to allow the old sense to be supplanted by a new one. The shipwrecked sailor is at the mercy of the sea, with only a piece of wreckage keeping him alive. In the same way, we are adrift in a sea of language, with only individual words to cling to, always waiting, just as the narrator, for the full sense or meaning of those words, for truth, much like another ship or land, to appear.

Unfortunately, the very signs that make up our linguistic world cannot be trusted, for “signs can be used *to lie* about the world’s state of affairs” (Eco 214), as evidenced by the inscriptions upon the tombstones in the story. Obviously, Jacques Olivant’s wife (whom he tortured), his children (whom he tormented) and his neighbors (whom he deceived) knew exactly what kind of man he was; nevertheless they inscribe a lie upon his tombstone. Maupassant does not refer to the inscription as “words” but rather as “things” to be read: “le mort aussi lisait *les choses écrites* sur son tombeau...et se mit à les gratter avec soin, *ces choses*” (2: 942, emphasis mine). By denying the lie the appellation of “mots”, Maupassant draws attention to the fact that the lie is just another “thing” of the world, ubiquitous and pervasive. The fact that the skeleton uses a tool, a small sharp stone, to erase the lie, but uses the tip of its own finger to write the truth implies that truth and/or meaning is highly personal, and that “the content of an expression *may be interpreted*” (Eco 215). We believe what we believe because we choose to believe it, whether because we are convinced by empirical evidence or because even in the absence of such

evidence, we nevertheless “intuit” that something is true or meaningful. In addition, the tombs that surround the narrator and the repetition of “tombes” throughout the second part of the story symbolizes this ever-present danger posed by language, namely, the lie taken as truth. All of the dead rise from their graves, and the narrator realizes 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” (2: 943). The force of the enumeration shows the universal nature of the lie and the inherent untrustworthiness of language. But this game of deceit is not imposed upon us; we are complicit. The narrator remarks on the “cruelle, terrible et sainte vérité que tout le monde *ignore* ou *feint d’ignorer* sur la terre” (emphasis mine).

The narrator seems just as guilty of this willful ignorance. After the death of his lover, he mentions the visit of a priest: “Je vis un prêtre qui prononça ce mot: ‘Votre maîtresse.’ Il me sembla qu’il l’insultait. Puisqu’elle était morte on n’avait plus le droit de savoir cela. Je le chassai” (2: 939). Like the wife and children of Jacques Olivant, he too denies the truth of his relation with this woman, who was, in fact, his mistress. At no point does the narrator make any use of the word “wife” when speaking of her, yet when someone else uses the word “mistress,” he is offended. The priest’s use of this word (with a period, and not a question mark, we should notice) is an insult in the narrator’s eyes. The adage “de mortuis nil nisi bonum” is alive and well.

The cemetery, at least as far as the dead are concerned, becomes in the story the locus of truth, of meaning. This reinforces the deliberate ignorance and denial of the truth of which the narrator is guilty. Notable is the fact that he finds her tomb the first time, then goes and hides,

but is unable to find it again once he comes out of hiding. On a literal level, we can say that this is due to the extreme darkness of the night. But if we continue the analogy, then his inability to find her tomb parallels his inability to accept the truth of the situation, namely her death and the events that led up to it. This is something that he can accept only after the fantastic event, which, we must emphasize, is the truth revealed in writing, something he can see. The words, vibrations of air that dissipate and disappear, are fleeting; we have already seen that words have vanished in the narrator's mind, replaced by imprecise sounds. The truth has to be written down, chiseled in stone, literally and figuratively, before he can accept it.

Moreover, the text written by Olivant's skeleton appears in "lettres lumineuses" (2: 942), undeniable and shining. This is precisely when the narrator, who just moments before was paralyzed by fear, tells us that "sans peur maintenant, courant au milieu des cercueils entrouverts, au milieu des cadavres, au milieu des squelettes, j'allai vers elle, sûr que je la trouverais aussitôt" (2: 943). Now, as the language has been clarified and the lie removed, his fear disappears, and he is able to find the tomb of his lover. Surely it is no accident that up until the moment when Jacques Olivant rises from the grave, one finds thirty-six exclamation points in three-and-a-half Pléiade-size pages. Once the truth is revealed, however, the exclamation points disappear entirely from the text. The lie is emotional, the truth cold and unyielding.

A consequence of signs sending to other signs is that texts (which, at their base, are nothing more than an amalgam of various signs) send to other texts. The very instability of language is the key to intertextuality, as one word read in one text makes the reader think of the same word in another text. The narrator of "La Morte," when passing in front of the mirror by the front door, says "Heureux les hommes dont le cœur, comme une glace où glissent et

s'effacent les reflets, oublie tout ce qu'il a contenu..." (2: 940). This comment immediately invokes the beginning of Du Bellay's sonnet:

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage,
 Ou comme cestuy-là qui conquit la toison,
 Et puis est retourné, plein d'usage et de raison,
 Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son âge! (1.1-4).

The narrator is, in fact, just returned from a voyage; however, whereas his trip should have been therapeutic, he is certainly far removed from the joy that Ulysses feels upon returning home. In Du Bellay's poem, the narrator speaks of the happiness he feels to be back in his own home, where he can live the rest of his life among family and friends. Maupassant's narrator finds himself in the opposite situation. He has neither family nor friends among whom to live. He is alone, terribly alone. His voyage has given him no "usage" or "raison" with which to console himself for the loss of his lover. By invoking the 16th-century poem of Du Bellay and using it as a counterpoint, Maupassant underscores the narrator's desperation and sense of desolation. The narrator of "La Morte" is no Ulysses or Jason; there is no happy homecoming, as he finds, none of Du Bellay's simple pleasures—only pain and isolation.

As seen in "La Morte," one can use language to lie precisely because it is vague and approximate at best. For all the thousands of words that exist in any given language, at some level there is inevitable overlap and repetition. The very polyvalence of words means that we can say one thing while meaning another; otherwise puns and word-play would not exist. At the same time, however, the polyvalence of words means that ambiguity is an essential part of communication; language is never more than approximate, no matter how many adjectives or verbs or nouns one throws out. This is one of the most important aspects of fantastic literature.

When faced with the unnatural or unusual event or object, the fantastic narrator is often at a loss for words, and for all the poeticity of the fantastic text, for all the descriptive power it harbors, more often than not, the object or event is reduced to an imprecise “quelque chose.” For example, in Maupassant’s “Lui?,” the narrator speaks of a “*vague inquiétude qui [lui] passe dans l’âme*” (1: 870, emphasis mine) and, in “La Peur” the narrator can only define fear as “*quelque chose d’effroyable, une sensation atroce*” or as “*quelque chose comme une réminiscence des terreurs fantastiques d’autrefois*” (1: 601, emphasis mine).

Another way in which language fails the fantastic narrator is its inability to categorize neatly the events or objects which he must confront. Once more the narrator must throw as many words as possible at the reader in an effort to come to some sort of satisfactory explanation, if such a thing can even be said ultimately to exist. Yet by so doing, he is himself offered up as prey to language’s divisive power. Théophile Gautier’s “La Morte amoureuse” exemplifies this process.

The theme of the double is central to this story, in which a young, newly ordained priest, named Romuald, falls in love with a mysterious woman, the eponymous “morte amoureuse,” who turns out to be a vampire named Clarimonde. His liaison with her results in a splitting or doubling of his personality, to the point that he can no longer tell if he is a priest who dreams that he is Clarimonde’s lover or Clarimonde’s lover who dreams that he is a priest. The theme of the double is common enough in fantastic literature, especially in Gautier’s works. The same doubling of character appears in his “Le Chevalier double” and in “Deux Acteurs pour un rôle.” What is interesting in “La Morte amoureuse” is not so much the doubling of Romuald’s character, as the way in which this doubling is reflected at the level of the language used to describe it. The entire story is a like a pendulum swinging back and forth from one extreme to

the other, constantly making use of juxtaposition to create, if not a literal oxymoron, then at least an oxymoronic effect.

Similar to the title “La Morte” by Maupassant, here too the title is itself an odd juxtaposition of terms, even more troubling, for the reader at once asks how a dead woman can be “amoureuse.” The pairing of an adjective used for animate, sensing, feeling beings and inanimate noun announces from the start the linguistic and structural doubling that will occur throughout the story as a whole. At the very beginning, as a preview of the story to come, Romuald tells us, “Le jour, j’étais un prêtre du Seigneur ... la nuit, dès que j’avais fermé les yeux, je devenais un jeune seigneur, connaisseur en femmes ... et lorsqu’au lever de l’aube je me réveillais, il me semblait au contraire que je m’endormais et que j’étais prêtre”(525). The confusion between the two identities into which Romuald feels split is linked to the dichotomy of day and night, but without the obvious and neat delimitation between the two times of the day. Moreover, the subtle contrast between the fact that he is a “prêtre du Seigneur” with a capital S and at the same a time a “jeune seigneur” underscores this split even further. Romuald’s inability to identify clearly, much less reconcile, the two different sides of his existence begins the very moment he sees Clarimonde for the first time, ironically, during his ordination ceremony. Immediately upon leaving the church, he remarks, “je comprenais toute l’horreur de ma situation, et les côtés funèbres et terribles de l’état que je venais d’embrasser” (531). This is the same person who earlier admits that “Dès ma plus tendre enfance, je m’étais senti de la vocation pour être prêtre; aussi toutes mes études furent-elles dirigées dans ce sens-là, et ma vie, jusqu’à vingt-quatre ans, ne fut-elle qu’un long noviciat” (526). Before his relationship with Clarimonde is even consummated, Romuald already is split in two, as his most heartfelt desire (to become a priest) is immediately usurped by a sense of horror and dread now that his desire has been

realized. He bemoans the fact that to be a priest is to be “chaste, ne pas aimer, ne distinguer ni sexe ni l’âge, se détourner de toute beauté, se crever les yeux, ramper sous l’ombre glaciale d’un cloître ou d’une église, ne voir que des mourants, veiller auprès des cadavres inconnus et porter soi-même son deuil sur sa soutane noire, de sorte que l’on peut faire de votre habit un drap pour votre cercueil” (531), in short to turn from any sort of physical pleasure such as he could enjoy with Clarimonde. However, the reader is struck by the irony that he complains of having to spend his time next to “cadavres” and “mourants” when that is precisely what Clarimonde represents; she is, after all, a vampire, a being that is by definition part of two worlds, that of the living and that of the dead.

In a sense, Romuald himself also belongs to this liminal state of “living death.” In the first sentence of the story, he says, “Vous me demandez, frère, si j’ai aimé; oui. C’est une histoire singulière et terrible, et, quoique j’aie soixante-six ans, j’ose à peine remuer la cendre de ce souvenir” (525). At sixty-six years of age, Romuald is certainly not dead, though given the average life expectancy in the 19th century, he is not far off. In many ways, this story could be said to be a “livre d’un mort,” a final confession on Romuald’s part. This would also, on one hand, offer a possible explanation of the identity of the “frère” to whom he addresses his story, a fellow clergyman. On the other, however, we as readers could be the “frère” to whom he speaks, creating from the start an intimate connection between the narrator and the reader. Finally, as we shall see, his use of the word “cendre” foreshadows the end of the story.

His regret continues as Romuald searches for a way to see Clarimonde again, and once more he expresses the possibilities that could have offered themselves had he not become a priest: “Ah! Si je n’eusse pas été prêtre, j’aurais pu la voir tous les jours; j’aurais été son amant, son époux ... au lieu d’être enveloppé dans mon triste suaire, j’aurais des habits de soie et de

velours ... mes cheveux, au lieu d'être déshonorés par une large tonsure, se joueraient autour de mon cou en boucles ondoyantes" (531-2). The fact that Romuald refers to his cassock as a "shroud" (modified by the adjective "sad") appears to the reader as a Freudian slip, given the similarity between the two words in French, "soutane" and "suaire." In this same vein, his tonsure becomes a dishonor to his hair, which otherwise would be long and flowing. Continuing the comparison, he likens being a priest to being dead: "une heure passée devant un autel, quelques paroles à peine articulées, me retranchaient à tout jamais du nombre des vivants, et j'avais scellé moi-même la pierre de mon tombeau" (532). The single hour spent in front of an altar to become ordained contrasts sharply with the permanent results of said ordination: "une heure" becomes "à tout jamais," reinforced by the strength of the verb "retrancher."

This doubling of possibilities then manifests itself in Romuald's physical world. Leaning out of his window, he describes the scene, saying "Le ciel était admirablement bleu, les arbres avaient mis leur robe de printemps; la nature faisait parade d'une joie ironique." The subjective nature of the description, revealed by the adverb "admirablement," and the transferred epithet of "ironique" betrays Romuald's state of mind. He goes on to describe young couples walking hand in hand, a family playing together, friends walking arm in arm while singing drinking songs, then resumes everything in "c'étaient un mouvement, une vie, un entrain, une gaieté qui faisaient péniblement ressortir mon deuil et ma solitude." All of this fills him with "une haine et une jalousie effroyables dans le cœur." After several days of this, the Abbot Sérapion comes to Romuald to inform him that he is to be sent to his new parish, there to take up his duties.

One night a knock comes to the door, and Romuald discovers a strangely dressed man come to request his presence at the side of a dying lady nearby. Once he arrives at the manor, he realizes of course that the dying woman to whose bedside he has been summoned is none other

than Clarimonde. Here again, in her room, Romuald is struck by the contrast between expectation and reality. “Cette chambre n’avait rien d’une chambre de mort,” he describes. “Au lieu de l’air fétide et cadavéreux que j’étais accoutumé à respirer en ces veilles funèbres, une langoureuse fumée d’essences orientales, je ne sais quelle amoureuse odeur de femme, nageait doucement dans l’air attiédi” (538). The place of death becomes an exotic place of seduction, to the point that Romuald admits to forgetting the purpose of his visit. “J’oubliais,” he states, “que j’étais venu là pour un office funèbre, et je m’imaginai que j’étais un jeune époux entrant dans la chambre de la fiancée qui cache sa figure par pudeur et qui ne se veut point laisser voir” (539). The juxtaposition of these two contrasting images is striking, but Romuald has already used a similar comparison earlier in the story, albeit in a much different context. Awaiting his ordination, he says that “jamais jeune fiancé n’a compté les heures avec une ardeur plus fiévreuse” (526). From a psychoanalytic point of view, Romuald’s repressed sexual desires, channeled into his wish to join the priesthood, cannot help but be unintentionally expressed by his language. He compares his anticipation of taking orders to that of a young bridegroom anticipating not just the marriage ceremony itself, but even more so, the wedding night, as symbolized in the words “ardeur fiévreuse,” a sexually charged expression. This explains why here, in Clarimonde’s supposed death chamber, the original comparison takes on an almost literal meaning. The religious element is completely discarded, forgotten as he says, in favor of the carnal image of the bridegroom. The erotic nature of this comparison overflows into his description of Clarimonde herself, a description that the reader cannot help but qualify as belonging to the domain of necrophilia. Romuald himself seems to recognize this on some level, as, about to pull back the sheet covering Clarimonde’s body, he describes himself, once again, with a series of antithetical adjectives. He is “navré de douleur, éperdu de joie, frissonnant de

crainte et de plaisir,” and moreover, in terms that easily could be used to describe someone about to engage in (or who is in the middle of) the sexual act, he says “mes artères palpitaient avec une telle force, que je les sentais siffler dans mes tempes, et mon front ruisselait de sueur” (539).

As the scene continues, a sense of unease invades the reader thanks to the overtly erotic nature of Romuald’s description of Clarimonde, which merits citation in its entirety:

La pâleur de ses joues, le rose moins vif de ses lèvres, ses longs cils baissés et découpant leur frange brune sur cette blancheur, lui donnaient une expression de chasteté mélancolique et de souffrance pensive *d’une puissance de séduction inexprimable*; ses *longs cheveux dénoués*, où se trouvaient encore mêlées quelques petites fleurs bleues, faisaient un oreiller à sa tête et protégeaient de leurs boucles *la nudité de ses épaules*: ses belles mains, plus pures, plus diaphanes que des hosties, était croisées dans une attitude de pieux repos et de tacite prière, qui corrigeait ce qu’auraient pu avoir de *trop séduisant, même dans la mort, l’exquise rondeur et le poli d’ivoire de ses bras nus* dont on n’avait pas ôté les bracelets de perles. (539, emphasis mine).

The way in which she is described here, as though a centerfold in an adult magazine, is all the more discomfiting as, at this point in the story, Romuald does not yet know her true nature and thus truly thinks that she is dead (or at least dying). Yet even in this patently sensuous description, Romuald is torn, as the superego of his priestly side reasserts itself, even if only linguistically. The unexpected comparison of her hands to the sacramental wafer (though to her benefit, let us note) and their position of “pieux repos” and “tacite prière” shows the dual natures at war in Romuald, as he tries linguistically to force the seductive woman into a mold of pious chastity. The use of the verb “corriger” is also worthy of comment. Generally speaking, “on

corrige une faute,” and so the “exquise rondeur et le poli d’ivoire de ses bras nus” would be the “faute,” the error, the wrong thing, which nevertheless for him has (or has the potential to have) a quality “trop séduisant.” Romuald is trying to assure himself that he does in fact know “right” from “wrong” or “acceptable” from “unacceptable,” though we as readers are not entirely convinced given the rest of the language in the description. He also advances another argument, saying “plus je la regardais, moins je pouvais croire que la vie avait pour toujours abandonné ce beau corps” (539). Perhaps, as someone with a great deal of experience around those dying, Romuald notices something different in her than what he is accustomed to seeing (as he indeed says upon entering the chamber as quoted above); nevertheless, this is immediately mitigated by the fact that he admits “je ne sais si cela était une illusion ou un reflet de la lampe, mais on eût dit que le sang commençait à circuler sous cette mate pâleur.” The most persuasive proof possible, this is not. The modal verb “on eût dit” implies only possibility, not certainty, and he himself acknowledges that it could be either a simple illusion or an effect of the play of light upon her features. Again, the reader is not won over.

As Romuald leans over to place a kiss upon her lips as a gesture of farewell, the miracle occurs (“Ô prodige!” he exclaims) as Clarimonde returns his kiss, promises to see him soon, and then actually “dies,” at which point Romuald (as seems to happen to so many fantastic narrators) faints. When he awakes, he finds himself back at the presbytery and learns that he has been unconscious for three days. The number three appears several times in the story. At the beginning of the story, Romuald tells the reader that “j’ai été pendant plus de trois ans le jouet d’une illusion singulière et diabolique” (525). In the passage cited above where he looks out upon the animation of the street below him, he compares himself to a “tigre à jeun depuis trois jours” (532). It takes “trois journées de route” for him to arrive at his new parish. At least two

possible reasons can be given for this repetition of the number three. First, it implies a triangle, the three vertices of which would be Clarimonde, Romuald as priest and Romuald as her lover. Another possible explanation could place Clarimonde at one vertex, Romuald (even the split/dual Romuald) at another, and the third occupied by Abbot Sérapion, whose function in the story is complex. On the one hand, he is the “voice of reason” pulling the young Romuald back “down to earth,” constantly warning him of the dangers represented by Clarimonde; moreover, at the end of the story, it is he who leads Romuald to Clarimonde’s grave in order to show him her true nature and to destroy her “cadavre immonde dévoré des vers et près de tomber en poudre” (551). On the other, Sérapion is also possessed of a dual nature. When they arrive at Clarimonde’s grave, “le zèle de Sérapion avait quelque chose de dur et de sauvage qui le faisait ressembler à un démon plutôt qu’à un apôtre ou à un ange.” Moreover, the abbot’s motivation is called in doubt by two questions: 1) how is it that he knows Clarimonde’s true nature as a vampire, and 2) if he knows this all along, why has he not already done something about it? He suffers from the same fascination as Romuald, it would seem, revealed in the language that he uses when he tells Romuald of Clarimonde’s death. “La grande courtisane Clarimonde,” he relates, “est morte dernièrement à la suite d’une orgie qui a duré huit jours et huit nuits. Ç’a été quelque chose d’infinalement splendide” (541). Even this secondary character does not escape the doubling, contradictory force at work in the story.

Mais revenons à nos moutons.

Later (it is never specified how much later after the three days of unconsciousness), Romuald is on the verge of falling asleep when he hears the curtains being pulled aside and sees Clarimonde standing in his room. Once more, his perception of her is pervaded with a blatant sensuality: “elle avait pour tout vêtement le suaire de lin qui la recouvrait sur son lit de parade,

dont elle retenait les plis sur sa poitrine, comme honteuse d'être si peu vêtue, mais sa petite main n'y suffisait pas; elle était si blanche, que la couleur de la draperie se confondait avec celle des chairs" (542-3). In addition, she still cannot be definitively placed in the realm of the living or the dead, as "enveloppée de ce fin tissu qui trahissait tous les contours de son corps, elle ressemblait à une statue de marbre de baigneuse antique plutôt qu'à une femme douée de vie. Morte ou vivante, statue ou femme, ombre ou corps, sa beauté était toujours la même" (543). The two make plans to leave together the next day. She disappears, and "un sommeil de plomb, un sommeil sans rêve" (545) falls on Romuald, who, despite having just said those very words, nevertheless writes off this vision as "une pure vapeur de mon imagination échauffée." However, as soon as he falls asleep that night, his "rêve continua." The two leave together, and Romuald tells the reader that "à dater de cette nuit, ma nature s'est en quelque sorte dédoublée, et il y eut en moi deux hommes dont l'un ne connaissait pas l'autre. Tantôt je me croyais un prêtre qui rêvait chaque soir qu'il était gentilhomme, tantôt un gentilhomme qui rêvait qu'il était prêtre" (546-47).

Such a state of affairs cannot subsist, as Romuald is suffering from what, in lay terms, one would call schizophrenia or split-personality disorder. There comes a point at which he himself admits this, saying "pour moi, j'étais si fatigué de cette double vie, que j'acceptai, voulant savoir, une fois pour toutes, qui du prêtre ou du gentilhomme était dupe d'une illusion, j'étais décidé à tuer au profit de l'un ou de l'autre un des deux hommes qui étaient en moi ou à les tuer tous deux, car une pareille vie ne pouvait durer" (551). Diaz-Brown speaks of the power of the fantastic to combine contradictory information, disclaiming the rationalist, positivist need to differentiate and categorize the data with which we are constantly bombarded; instead of "one OR the other," the fantastic proposes "one AND the other" (75). Romuald is split, certainly, into

two competing identities, that of the chaste priest and that of the young lord, lover of Clarimonde. Yet this is an untenable situation, for by being both at the same time, Romuald is effectively neither. The doubling results in an annihilation of his identity, hence the reason he says that his double life “ne pouvait durer.” Only by “destroying” one or the other, Romuald *cum* priest or Romuald *cum* lover, can his identity be reestablished.

According to Saussure, “le lien unissant le signifiant au signifié est arbitraire” (100). There is no natural, unbreakable tie by which the series of sounds [aRbR] is linked to the psychic image of a tree. As proof of this, one only has to think of the multiplicity of words used in different languages to denote the same psychic image. Émile Benveniste will find fault with such a conception of the sign, claiming that Saussure left out a key element: the actual, real object. “Il est clair que le raisonnement est faussé,” he objects, “par le recours inconscient et subreptice à un troisième terme, qui n’était pas compris dans la définition initiale. Ce troisième terme est la chose même, la réalité” (50). Saussure completely rejects “reality” from his definition, because according to him, there is no “attache naturelle” between signifier and signified. But, Benveniste argues, we must replace reality in the definition of the sign because no matter the signifier (the series of sounds), they all “s’appliquent à la même *réalité*” (50). The differences between “árbol” in Spanish, “tree” in English, or “puu” in Finnish in no way change the fact that all refer to same psychic image, and so “voilà donc la *chose*, expressément exclue d’abord de la définition du signe” (Benveniste 50). He continues to say that the signifier is always identical in the speaker’s conscious to the signified, and so the link between them is not at all arbitrary, but rather necessary (51). This is why learning foreign languages can be difficult, because the student does not have that necessary link established between the “foreign” signifier and the “native” signified. Lacan takes Saussure’s conception of the sign and performs his own

alterations, reversing the importance of signifier and signified. For Lacan, the signifier is of prime importance, because it is only through signifiers that we represent ourselves to the world. The problem, however, is that the link between signifiers and signifieds is more than just arbitrary: the link is inherently unstable. One signifier can send to many different signifieds. As Nasio points out, “j’avance une parole ou pose un acte, y compris le plus authentique, pour rencontrer aussitôt une foule d’équivoques à l’origine de tous les malentendus possibles” (48).

These considerations are not a mere digression. The doubling of Romuald’s personality parallels this problem of identification and meaning. In essence, Romuald *is* a linguistic signifier suffering from a multiplicity of signifieds. The signifier “Romuald” points to both the chaste priest and the young lover of Clarimonde. This lack of stability between the two is precisely what makes his position untenable; it is the source of his suffering. In addition, Benveniste’s referent in “reality” is also missing, as by definition the fantastic calls into question the nature of “reality.” Romuald himself states the following, “Je ne pouvais plus distinguer le songe de la veille, et je ne savais pas où commençait la réalité et où finissait l’illusion...deux spirales enchevêtrées l’une dans l’autre et confondues sans se toucher jamais représentent très bien cette vie bicéphale qui fut la mienne” (546-47). Again, the objects and events, everything around him lack any constant point of reference which would allow Romuald to establish a true meaning. Clarimonde herself is a signifier without a certain signified. Romuald says of her that, “avoir Clarimonde, c’était avoir vingt maîtresses, c’était avoir toutes les femmes, tant elle était mobile, changeante et dissemblable d’elle-même; un vrai caméléon!” (547). When he first sees her during his ordination ceremony, he is struck by the force of her gaze, the power of her eyes, explaining, “je ne sais si la flamme qui les illuminait venait du ciel ou de l’enfer, mais à coup sûr elle venait de l’un ou de l’autre. Cette femme était un ange ou un démon, et peut-être tous les

deux” (527-8). Even Clarimonde, as the object of affection, has no certain identity in the story. By becoming *all* women for Romuald, she is none of them. Her distinctiveness disappears: she is either angel or demon, or angel and demon at the same time; then to complicate matters further, she all women at once. Just as in the case of Romuald, an overabundance of signifiers leads to a multiplicity of signifieds, which then, ironically, leads to an emptying of the sign, a destruction of meaning and identity. While at the end of the story, the exhumation of Clarimonde’s corpse by Romuald and Sérapion would seem to give a final stability to the empty signifier that is Clarimonde and thus establish some kind of consistency, we should note that even this solidity is only fleeting. Sérapion sprinkles the body with holy water, and “[I]a pauvre Clarimonde n’eut pas été plutôt touchée par la sainte rosée que son beau corps tomba en poussière; ce ne fut plus qu’un mélange affreusement informe de cendres et d’os à demi calcinés” (552). Here we have the literal destruction of the referent, the culmination of the constant back and forth of meaning at work throughout the story. As mentioned earlier, the main problem with signifiers is that they do not always match up with a given signified. The “mélange affreusement informe” of Clarimonde’s remains is symbolic of this, inasmuch as the referent, which would theoretically lend a reliable substance to the signifier, dissolves before our very eyes in a shapeless mass of ash and bone, no longer identifiable as a body, much less as Clarimonde herself.

We can go one step further, however, and advance a criticism of Benveniste’s criticism of Saussure. When postulating the necessity of a referent, Benveniste uses Saussure’s example of a tree, a physical, tactile object. Yet there are a plethora of signs that do not send to any concrete object: what could the possible referent be for abstract concepts such as “love” or “justice” or “hatred”? One might suggest actions that display such concepts, but actions are not referents in

the strictest sense of the term. A husband might offer his wife a dozen roses for no other reason than to express his love for her, but all this act truly signifies, in the most basic sense, is the act of giving flowers, whatever interpretation we might later ascribe to it. Similarly, what about signs such as “unicorn” or other mythical beasts? These are purely conventional signs: we as speakers “agree” on what the sign “unicorn” means, though no one has ever seen a unicorn in the world around us. Nevertheless, this tacit agreement results in a comprehension of that particular sign. So while the lack of a stable referent for Clarimonde (as for Romuald as well) can be called unnecessary (Clarimonde as unicorn, for example), this argument is not entirely satisfying. There is no agreement as to her signified: Romuald is unable to assign a certain referent to her, and there is obviously no agreement between Romuald and Sérapion on this subject. Convention breaks down, just as Clarimonde’s corpse is reduced to an unrecognizable pile of ashes. Romuald cannot even agree with himself as to his identity, his referent, and this is precisely the cause of his torment. Trapped as he is in a vicious circle of potential signifieds, he has no sure ground upon which to stand.

A striking example of this annihilation of identity is found in Jean Lorrain’s *Histoires de masques*. The mask, in and of itself, is a perfect symbol of one identity destroying and usurping another. Whether through the effects of make-up or with an actual, physical mask, they discomfort us as we always are unsure just what is underneath. This is the case of the narrator of one of the stories in Lorrain’s collection, “Les Trous du masque.” The story is qualified as the “récit d’un buveur d’éther,” which would seem to give the reader a warning that the events described therein are the result of the narrator’s intoxication. However, this does not mitigate the symbolism of the mask in the story. Indeed, many fantastic stories use such a device as way of qualifying the fantastic contained within—Gautier’s “La Pipe d’opium” or “Le Club des

hachichins,” for example. However, to consider the use of a drug in these stories as the *source* of the fantastic is dismissive; the drug serves not a source of the fantastic, but rather as a *tool* of the fantastic, a means of opening up the narrator to new possibilities, new visions of the world: revelation, not hallucination. In an experience analogous to that of the sublime, the outcome can be positive or negative. Here, in “Les Trous du masque,” the vision given to the narrator proves catastrophic.

The narrator explains that a friend, de Jakels, has invited him to a masked ball, so having donned his costume, he awaits his arrival. When “de Jakels” finally shows up, the narrator already is unsure as to the identity of his guest. “J’y ai songé souvent depuis,” he says, “enfin, de Jackels [sic] était là devant moi, de Jackels c’est-à-dire un long domino, une grande forme voilée et masquée comme moi” (87). The narrator assumes that the visitor is his friend, though this judgment is based purely upon a guess, as all he sees is a “a form veiled and wearing a mask.” In fact, we can go one step more: the identity of the two is the same (“comme moi”). The two leave in de Jakels’ carriage, making their way out of Paris, yet during the ride, more doubts creep into the narrator’s head, telling the reader that “...une peur irraisonnée me prenait, une peur aggravée par le silence inexplicable de de Jakels; j’en arrivai à douter de sa présence et à me croire auprès d’un inconnu” (89). Arriving at their destination, they are introduced into a large, high-ceilinged room, and the narrator remarks that “les rares déguisés qui buvaient assis autour des tables, étaient masqués de velours et de satin” and that “aucun des êtres rencontrés là n’avait visage humain” (91). They spot the door leading from this room into the actual ballroom, with a guard standing watch over it, but not just any guard. “Un garde municipal,” the narrator describes, “montait la garde auprès. C’était au moins une garantie; mais en passant, ayant heurté sa main, je m’aperçus qu’elle était de cire, de cire comme sa figure rose hérissée de moustaches

postiches, et j'eus l'horrible conviction que le seul être dont la présence m'eût rassuré dans ce lieu de mystère, était un simple mannequin!" (92). The inanimate mannequin, devoid of any autonomy, any identity other than its outward appearance, contrasts with the faceless, yet living, guests. The fact the narrator mistakes the former as one of the latter plays upon the difficulty in attributing signs to fantastic events.

As he enters the ballroom, he realizes that they are in an abandoned church, and at the same time, he notices that all the guests are seated on either side of the central aisle. There is no dancing, no music, no conversation. "Ils se tenaient là," he explains, "muets, sans un geste, comme reculés dans le mystère sous de longues cagoules de drap d'argent, d'un argent mat au reflet mort; car il n'y avait plus ni dominos, ni blouses de soie bleue, ni Colombines, ni Pierrots, ni déguisements grotesques mais tous ces masques étaient semblables, ... et tous encapuchonnés de vert sombre avec, dans le vide du capuchon, les deux trous d'yeux de leur cagoule d'argent" (93). Finally, he is overcome by a terrified curiosity. "Fou de terreur, j'arrachai la cagoule du masque assis dans la stalle voisine: le capuchon de velours vert était vide, vide le capuchon des autres masques assis le long des murs. Tous avaient des faces d'ombre, tous étaient du néant," he tells us (94). The narrator has come into contact with the ultimate signifier: death. Yet in its own way, death is not just the ultimate signifier, but the ultimate *empty* signifier. To borrow the narrator's adjective, it is and only can be "vide" in the sense that death is the last unknown, the eternal question mark; it has no referent as described by Benveniste. Various religions can attempt to explain what happens after death, what happens to the soul (though that notion also enjoys a superabundance of signifieds), but none can factually explain what death is. Even calling it the "cessation of the physiological functioning of the body" is only a scientific observation, a description of what happens to the physical body. The narrator is struck by the

horrifying thought that perhaps he as well has become one of these empty costumes. Finding a mirror, he is devastated to see that his suspicion was correct: “Et ce masque était moi, car je reconnus mon geste dans la main qui soulevait la cagoule et, béant d’effroi, je poussai un grand cri, car il n’y avait rien sous le masque de toile argentée, rien dans l’ovale du capuchon, que le creux de l’étoffe arrondi sur le vide: j’étais mort et je...” (94-5). At this point, the narrator’s loud cry is reduced to a stunned silence before the “normal” world reasserts itself as he is awakened by the arrival of his friend de Jakels, who chastises the narrator for having used ether while waiting. Nevertheless, the final words of the story (“il était temps”) leave the reader in suspense, wondering what exactly will happen at this party.

As in the case of “La Morte,” this story also by its subject creates an intertextual link, this time with a poem by Baudelaire, “Danse macabre.” The masks in Lorrain’s story, covering the nothingness of death, are emblematic of our very existence. Given the inevitability of death and annihilation, we are all “morts-vivants” in a certain sense. Baudelaire writes:

Le gouffre de tes yeux, plein d’horribles pensées,
 Exhale le vertige, et les danseurs prudents
 Ne contempleront pas sans d’amères nausées
 Le sourire éternel de tes trente-deux dents.
 Pourtant, qui n’a serré dans ses bras un squelette,
 Et qui ne s’est nourri des choses du tombeau? (l. 37-42)

Under our skin, we are all skeletons, the face itself serving as a kind of mask, hiding the nothingness that exists (or will one day exist...if nothingness can be said to exist) underneath.

In this sense, our very being is a sort of shifting signifier to which we ascribe different meanings as time passes. This problem of shifting signifiers is at the very heart of the difficulty

of the fantastic. As stated in the introduction, the number of definitions as to what exactly the fantastic *is* is as many as there are theorists of the fantastic. The fantastic, by definition, rejects any attempt at definition. As Louis Vax remarks, trying to answer the question “what is the fantastic?” is like trying to answer the question “what is France?” (6). Merleau-Ponty, in *La Prose du monde*, says of language that “en tout cas, nous ne trouvons jamais dans les paroles des autres que ce que nous y mettons nous-mêmes, la communication est une apparence, elle ne nous apprend rien de vraiment neuf” (13). He then goes on to explain that “après tout, je comprends ce qu’on me dit parce que je sais par avance le sens des mots qu’on m’adresse, et enfin je ne comprends que ce que je savais déjà, je ne me pose d’autres problèmes que ceux que je peux résoudre” (14). While perhaps true (though to what degree is debatable) in ordinary conversation, as soon as one enters the domain of literature, such a conception of language becomes much more problematic. The fantastic makes use of the very language that we would, in other circumstances, consider rational and comprehensible in order to deny that rationality and comprehensibility. As readers, we are often forced to admit that while we may understand the individual words, their combination and use in a given literary context leaves us perplexed. Though not always to the extent found in surrealism, the fantastic is in many ways equivalent to that Earth of Éluard’s, blue like an orange.

If language were capable of expressing exactly our thoughts, emotions, hopes, desires, etc. in a clear and concise manner, why would so many descriptions of the supernatural events in these stories be reduced to a “quelque chose comme...” or “une sensation similaire à...”? Jakobson postulates two separate axes for language, as in a Cartesian grid. The vertical axis is the paradigmatic axis, or axis of selection. In any given sentence, among all the possible words, we select one to convey a certain concept. When speaking of a friend’s offspring, we might say

“child” instead of “kid,” “toddler,” “infant” (or even “brat” or “monster”) while at the same time obviously discarding words such as “table,” “giraffe” or “zucchini” as purely nonsensical in the context. The paradigmatic axis is the axis of metaphor, as a relation of semantic equivalence (to a greater or lesser degree) or difference which operates simultaneously. The syntagmatic axis is the axis of combination, as the words chosen along the paradigmatic axis must be combined in some logical, meaningful way if the message is to be understood. It is the axis of metonymy, of contiguity, one element of the message touching upon the other in order to create a coherent whole, greater than the sum of its parts. This makes it more remarkable that the fantastic relies so heavily upon the aforementioned “quelque chose” and upon comparison and metaphor. It means that, on the axis of selection, there is often nothing to select that can be applied to it. The fantastic exists at the limits of language and expression.

Jakobson also claims that the poetic function of language (which is not limited to literature, though it does find there its fullest use) projects the equivalence found on the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic axis. Equivalence/difference becomes the defining criteria of combination. Essentially he is speaking of overdetermination, the idea that in any given text, one word, because of its meaning, sound or shape leads to the following in a logical way. Riffaterre explains that the thing which “entraîne l’adhésion du lecteur tient simplement au caractère irrésistible de sa ‘logique’ verbale: elle n’est pas autre chose qu’une phrase qui déroule le long du texte les potentiels sémantiques d’un mot initial” (182). Riffaterre is speaking of poetry here, but the same rule applies to prose. We as readers come to any given text with certain expectations, or even prejudices, to which we want the text to conform. When the text meets those expectations, we call the text “realistic” or “plausible” or (horror!) “believable.” When, on the other hand, the text does not conform to our expectations, we call it a case of

“style” (at best) or reject the text as unworthy of our attention (at worst). The fantastic undermines the very notion of overdetermination, much in the style of garden-path sentences, in which we must constantly rework our expectations. For example, in a sentence like “The old man the boats,” the process is as follows:

The: definite article, we expect a noun or an adjective to follow.

old: our expectation is met by the adjective “old,” so we now expect another adjective or a noun.

man: again, our expectation is met by the noun “man,” so we now expect a verb.

the: Another definite article, so we must revisit our interpretation of the first three words.

boats.: Another noun. We know we are at the end of the sentence, so we reconfigure the function of what has preceded and reinterpret “old” not as an adjective, but as a substantive, while at the same time recasting “man” as the verb of the sentence.

The fantastic could be called, in this light, a “garden-path genre,” as our expectations are consistently frustrated throughout a given text, requiring us to reinterpret everything that has preceded, much as we saw in “La Morte” by Maupassant. The fantastic requires a retroactive reading, for only after we have reached the end of the story do we have any hope of deciphering the events depicted therein.

However, the fantastic does not replace overdetermination with what, to maintain the parallel, could be called an underdetermination; it lies at the intersection of the two, in the space where the two joined loops of magical fame intersect. The fantastic must maintain some level of overdetermination to establish the “veracity” or the “vraisemblance” of the text against which the

uncanny events will distinguish themselves. At the same time, because, as we have seen, words are insufficient to convey the fantastic message, to relate and describe the fantastic events, the text is underdetermined: there is no inherent, logical connection between one event and another, one word and another. Hence the use of “quelque chose comme” or the retreat into tautology as in Maupassant’s “La Peur:” “...et la peur, l’épouvantable peur entrain en moi” (605). The fantastic verifies the “vraisemblable” while refuting it, or rather, *by* refuting it. The fantastic, according to Bessière, is founded on “des réalia, du quotidien, dont il relève les disparates, et mène la description jusqu’à l’absurde, au point où les bornes mêmes, que l’homme et la culture assignent traditionnellement à l’univers, ne circonscrivent plus aucun domaine naturel ou surnaturel” (12). Moreover, the very nature of the word “vraisemblable” (“semblable au vrai”) in French poses a problem, as we must ask, if the “likely” is “similar to the truth,” just what does that mean? How do we decide how one thing is “similar” to another, much less decide what is “truth”? Such a question inevitably leads us into the realm of figurative speech, of simile and metaphor. But as in the case of catachresis, such as “the arms of a chair,” metaphor dies, as no one (at least in everyday experience) stops to consider that to call the “arms of a chair” as such is a metaphor. At what point does the “semblable” (the “similar to”) become the thing itself? When, in short, does metaphor let out its dying gasp and fade into that “néant” from which nothing returns, unless in the fantastic story?

The consistent use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language has led some, as does Malrieu, to state that “au XIX^e siècle, l’enjeu du fantastique est, chez les auteurs, d’ordre purement esthétique” (11). While Gautier may have been a Parnassien, and thus creating “art for art’s sake,” this label certainly cannot be applied to Maupassant, or for that matter, to Flaubert or Balzac before them, both of whom also wrote fantastic stories. The fantastic cannot be

considered to be mere word-play, to creating extended prose-poems whose only function is to say “this text is an esthetic exercise.” This is especially true if, as Bessière claims, “la poétique du récit fantastique suppose l’enregistrement des données objectives et leur déconstruction... par leur définition comme un ensemble de systèmes de signes soudainement inaptes à dire et à transformer, dans le registre de la régulation et de l’ordre, l’événement place au cœur du drame fantastique... on peut tenir Sade pour un auteur fantastique” (13). Though perhaps we should restate the initial observation that the fantastic cannot be *reduced* to mere “word-play,” as this, ironically, is just what the fantastic does. It plays on, plays off, and plays about language, thereby showing us the fundamental inaptitude of language. Like Zeno’s arrow, language can only approach the finish line of sense, without ever truly reaching it. However, this is precisely why the fantastic holds such fascination for readers, because by surpassing our expectations, by juxtaposing the (theoretically) known with the unknown, by imparting to language a new creative force, we fall prey to its seductive charm. It forces us to rethink and to redefine our own preconceived notions, to realize that we only “think we know.”

CHAPTER FOUR

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE? PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE FANTASTIC

We have seen that the fantastic can be interpreted as an experience with the sublime and that the fantastic exemplifies the problematic nature of language. Yet both of these approaches are based upon a third, overarching consideration, because at the very heart of the fantastic experience is the question: just what is it that the narrator is experiencing? This is then followed by a series of corollary questions: Is it a dream? Is it a hallucination brought on by fatigue? Or even, did the narrator have too much to drink at dinner? In classical, Cartesian dualism, our mind is shut off from the objects that we experience. We are “aware” of a thing primarily through the inferences we make about that object, all the while remaining closed off from it. This model of perception is reworked by phenomenology, whose principal lesson is “that every act of consciousness we perform, every experience that we have, is intentional: it is essentially ‘consciousness of’ or an ‘experience of’ something or other” (Sokolowski 8). Maurice Merleau-Ponty says in the introduction to his *Phénoménologie de la perception*, that it is “un compte rendu de l'espace, du temps, du monde ‘vécus’” (i). Accordingly, nothing is just a simple appearance, a trouble-free sensory perception; everything that we perceive, all that we think, is, in fact, real—“they belong to being,” as Sokolowski says, “Pictures, words, symbols, perceived objects, states of affairs, other minds, laws, and social conventions are all acknowledged as truly there, as sharing in being and as capable of appearing according to their own proper style” (15).

He uses the perception of a cube as a model of conscious experience. When we look at the cube, we necessarily see the cube from a particular side, from a particular angle, at a

particular time. Though we may only see one side of the cube, we nevertheless “know” that the other sides are there and can posit them as such. Phenomenologists call the side that is *given* to us to perceive a “filled intention,” whereas the other sides that we must postulate, while still given to us, are given to us as absent, that is, there are “empty intentions” (Sokolowski 18). All perceptions thus become a game of hide-and-seek, with filled intentions becoming empty and empty intentions becoming filled as we move around the cube. However, even as we move around the cube, our perception of the cube is more than just a series of independent visions; the whole is more than the sum of its parts. We have the same cube given to us through *all* of our impressions, not only visual, but also those given to us by our other senses. “When we perceive an object, we do not just have a flow of profiles, a series of impressions; in and through them all, we have one and the same object given to us, and the identity of the object is intended and is given” (Sokolowski 20).

This fluctuation between absence and presence, between filled and empty intentions is an essential part of all perceptual experience. The object intended, which we must note is not necessarily a physical *thing*, will always have novel ways of presenting itself. Consider, for example, Beethoven’s 7th Symphony: each time this exceptional piece of music is played, it is present in a slightly different way, no two conductors giving exactly the same nuances. Even if I listen to a recorded version, it still will be different each time *for me*, for the simple reason that *I* am different each time; I pick up on tones and phrasing that I had not noticed before. Moreover, even my mood at the moment will change the way I experience the music. This particularity of experience is also true of any text, but even more so in the case of the literary text. Each time I read “Le Cygne” by Baudelaire, for example, I will see something new that I had not seen before. Each time I read “La Cafetière” by Théophile Gautier, I will discover something missed

in previous readings. Each time I read a text, the text presents itself to me in a novel way. Just as you cannot step into the same Heraclitean river twice, you cannot have the same literary experience twice. Reading is inherently an object for phenomenological description. A text, like any other work of art (for what is a literary text but a work of art), makes you want to approach it from different angles, makes you want to see it from as many perspectives as possible; if not, reading is only the placid transmission of marks on a page. As Georges Poulet explains it, “A book is not shut in by its contours, is not walled-up as in a fortress. It asks nothing better than to exist outside itself, or to let you exist in it. In short, the extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside” (“Phenomenology” 54).

The task of phenomenological interpretation is therefore, to borrow from Horia Bratu and Ileana Marculescu, “first and above everything, to do intentional analysis: i.e., to analyze the various modes of givenness of objects—whether natural or imaginary—in the various ways of intending them, such as unveiled in the aesthetic constitution of every art object” (337). In the fantastic, this is precisely where one runs into problems. The main characters (just as we are as readers) of these stories often do not know exactly what it is that they are intending, trapped as they are in what is referred to as the “natural attitude,” the default attitude in which we live our daily lives. “We accept things in the world, and the world itself, as a matter of belief, as *doxa*,” Sokolowski explains, adding that “as we grow older and more clever, we can modify certain beliefs, but this modification is episodic, sporadic, it doesn’t make us suspicious about everything we experience” (45). We go through our lives taking what we experience for granted, rarely (if ever) stopping to question those experiences and what they can tell us about ourselves and the world around us; we live in an essentially passive state. In order to escape this natural

attitude, we must willingly and actively suspend our everyday, unquestioning viewpoint, and “bracket” the world, that is to say, approach it now from the “phenomenological attitude.” Here, everything comes into question, and while our inherent, everyday world view is the basis of the natural attitude, the phenomenological attitude brings that fundamental world view into question as well. When we perceive a tree in the natural attitude, we take it for granted that the tree exists in the real world and do not question our perception of it. When we bracket the tree, we suspend that belief and must examine how we perceive the tree, or, more technically, how the tree is *given to us* to perceive. “The shift into the phenomenological attitude ... is an ‘all or nothing’ kind of move that disengages completely from the natural attitude and focuses, in a reflective way, on everything in the natural attitude, including the underlying world belief” (Sokolowski 47).

We will see that fantastic narrators, on the one hand, will often initially support the reality of their experiences by calling upon the evidence given to them by their senses, particularly the fact that they “saw” what happened. On the other, given that perception and its problematic nature is the foundation of the fantastic, they will then call those senses into question and bemoan their insufficiency in helping them to make sense of those experiences. The narrators will then slip into a kind of phenomenological reduction as they examine their own state of mind and the way in which they perceive everything with which they are faced. In these stories, however, it is not only the perception of objects and events that are called into question. Time, and the narrators’ perception of it, is also a fundamental problem in the fantastic. As many, if not the majority, of fantastic stories make use of a first-person narrator, we must also consider the fact that these stories are necessarily remembrances. The narrators are not experiencing the uncanny *hic et nunc*, but rather as lived, past experiences. At the same time,

through the use of the first-person narrative voice, an intimate, immediate link is created between the reader and the narrator. In essence, we, as readers, become the narrators of these stories, at least for the time required to read them. After our reading is over, however, we step back from the text, and we ourselves are forced, as are the narrators, to bracket the text as we also attempt to understand just what happened there. All literature, but the fantastic in particular, is a catalyst for shifting into the phenomenological perspective.

According to the old adage, “seeing is believing.” Yet in the fantastic, this is exactly the idea that is called into question. Fantastic narrators consistently rely upon sensory evidence, particularly visual evidence, as proof of the events they relate to the reader. For example, in “Le Horla,” in the journal entry for 6 August, the narrator writes, “Cette fois, je ne suis pas fou. J’ai vu...j’ai vu...j’ai vu!...Je ne puis plus douter...j’ai vu!...J’ai encore froid jusque dans les ongles...j’ai encore peur jusque dans les moelles...j’ai vu!...” (2: 927). The quasi-maniacal repetition of the verb (five times) shows the narrator’s insistence that what he “saw” actually “occurred.” Moreover, he underscores this as proof by stating that he can no longer doubt what is happening, precisely because he *saw* something. As we have seen, however, the narrator is never able to comprehend fully just what it is he saw, because the sublime by definition defies such comprehension.

In “Sur l’eau” the narrators (as this story makes use of a frame structure) both insist on sight as confirmation of the fantastic. The first narrator, speaking of the second who will tell the framed story, describes him as “un homme de trente à quarante ans, qui était bien le type le plus curieux que j’eusse jamais vu” (1: 54). While a seemingly innocuous detail, I suggest that the use of the verb *voir* in this sentence is important. Maupassant does not choose *rencontrer* or *connaître* here, but instead, *voir*. Why? Again, seeing is believing, confirmation and

recognition. This is why it is important that the secondary narrator is the most curious (in the sense of strange or unusual) man the first narrator has ever seen. The fantastic events to be related are already presaged by their narrator, who is a passionate boater and is thus imbued with a certain level of reliability as the narrator of a story that is to take place on the water. “Il devait être né dans un canot,” the first narrator says of him, “et il mourra bien certainement dans le canotage final” (54). The story this boatman will tell concerns an experience he had one night, and he begins his tale by describing the river on which the events took place. The river, according to the narrator, “c’est la chose mystérieuse, profonde, inconnue, le pays des *mirages* et des *fantasmagories*, où l’on voit, la nuit, des choses qui ne sont pas, où l’on entend des bruits qu’on ne connaît point, où l’on tremble sans savoir pourquoi, comme en traversant un cimetière: et c’est en effet le plus sinistre des cimetières, celui où l’on n’a point de tombeau” (1: 54, emphasis mine). This description merits remark on several different levels. First, the river here is reduced to the status of a “chose,” an imprecise and vague “thing,” and the adjectives describing it all belong to the same semantic field and are all in their own way just as vague as the “chose” they describe, for how does one define “mysterious” or “deep” except from a highly subjective point of view. What is mysterious to one person may not be so at all to another. The important thing is that all of them underscore the seeming unintelligibility of the river, hinting at a perfidious side to it. Next, the narrator insists upon the tricks the river can play upon the senses by calling it the “pays des mirages et des fantasmagories.” The use of this last word leads logically to the following verb which is the first in a series (in typical Maupassantian ternary structure), all of which refer to one of the senses: *voir* for sight, *entend* for hearing and *tremble* for the sense of touch (by the fact that the verb refers to a movement which the body “feels”). In turn, finally, the use of the verb *trembler* authorizes the following comparison of the river to a

cemetery. The river, however, is not just any cemetery, but “le plus sinistre” of cemeteries, because in the river “on n’a point de tombeau.” There is a total disappearance of identity when one drowns; there is literally nothing left to mark our final resting place, though in the case of so painful and violent a death as drowning, the very notion of “resting” is called into question, hence the appropriateness of this setting for the fantastic events. We have seen the problematic nature of identity as expressed through language in our discussion of “La Morte” and “La Morte amoureuse” in the last chapter. Here in “Sur l’eau,” it works in a much more simplified way. When the narrator speaks of what one sees, he specifies that it is “at night.” The lack of light denies our sight the ability to distinguish shapes or identities. Thus, “quand, par exemple, le monde des objets clairs et articulés se trouve aboli, notre être perceptive amputé de son monde dessine une spatialité sans choses. C’est ce qui arrive dans la nuit. Elle n’est pas un objet devant moi, elle m’enveloppe, elle pénètre par tous mes sens, elle suffoque mes souvenirs, elle efface presque mon identité personnelle” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie* 328). Complete darkness is not just another “thing” in the world that we perceive as “the absence of light.” It is of a different nature entirely, as it is not just light that is absent in darkness. Everything is absent in darkness, including our own sense of self. Drawing from the narrator’s comparison of the river to the most sinister of cemeteries, darkness is the absolute darkness of the tomb, of death, of no-thing-ness.

The narrator uses the same word “fantasmagorie” later in the story, as he describes his eerie surroundings: “Je fus ébloui par le plus merveilleux, le plus étonnant spectacle qu’il soit possible de voir. C’était une de ces fantasmagories du pays des fées, une de ces visions racontées par les voyageurs qui reviennent de très loin et que nous écoutons sans les croire” (1: 58). The surreal nature of the sight is even stronger now, as shown by the use of the superlatives “le plus merveilleux, le plus étonnant.” Moreover, beyond just a simple visual perception, his

surroundings have become a “spectacle;” the narrator, and the reader along with him, are invited, if not obliged, to look, to watch, . . . to *see*. The vision is so bizarre to him that it seems like some fairytale setting, a far-fetched yarn in which most people would refuse to believe. Interestingly, the narrator implicitly puts himself in the very position of a teller of tall tales, as though cognizant of the fact that the reader will be (or already is) incredulous of his story which takes on the same guise. Because it is something he *sees*, he believes it, just as we readers who can “see” along with him are obliged, at least momentarily, to believe as well.

Another example is “L’Intersigne” by Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, in which the narrator goes to visit an old friend whom he has not seen in some time, a certain Abbé Maucombe. As he approaches his friend’s home, he describes its charm: “L’aspect champêtre de cette maison, les croisées et leurs jalousies vertes, les trois marches de grès, les lierres, les clématites et les roses-thé qui s’enchevêtraient sur les murs jusqu’au toit, d’où s’échappait, d’un tuyau à girouette, un petit nuage de fumée, m’inspirèrent des idées de recueillement, de santé et de paix profonde” (697). As he takes hold of the doorknocker, he casts a quick glance behind him, “un coup d’œil de voyageur” as he says, and he is struck speechless by the beauty of the house’s natural surroundings. He tells the reader that “la nature était si belle, au milieu de ces airs calmés, dans cette campagne déserte, à ce moment où tombe le silence, que je restai—sans quitter le marteau suspendu,—que je restai muet.” His next words, however, seem odd to the reader in comparison to the idyllic description he has just given: “Ô toi . . . qui n’a point l’asile de tes rêves, . . . voyageur si joyeux au départ et maintenant assombri, . . . regarde ! Ici l’on peut s’asseoir sur la pierre de la mélancolie ! —Ici les rêves morts ressuscitent, devant les moments de la tombe ! Si tu veux avoir le véritable désir de mourir, approche : ici la vue du ciel exalte jusqu’à l’oubli.” He becomes so absorbed by his meditation upon this theme that even the slight sound of a falling

leaf makes him shudder. “Le magique horizon de cette contrée entra dans mes yeux!” he exclaims. After a few moments, he snaps out of his reverie, as the “sentiment de réalité” returns (698). He turns back to the house but is amazed to see that it now appears completely different, prompting him to wonder if he has been “le jouet d’une hallucination” (698). He asks, “Était-ce bien la maison que j’avais vue tout à l’heure? Quelle ancienneté me dénonçaient, *maintenant*, les longues lézardes, entre les feuilles pâles?” (698). In addition, a detail that he previously missed comes to his attention: “le portail hospitalier m’invitait avec ses trois marches; mais, en concentrant mon attention sur ces dalles grises, je vis qu’elles venaient d’être polies, que des traces de lettres creusées y restaient encore, et je vis bien qu’elles provenaient du cimetière voisin ... et la maison me sembla changée à donner le frisson” (698). The “idées de recueillement, de santé et de paix profonde” inspired by the house shift meaning as his perspective it changes. The narrator now connects the peace and tranquility of the scene before him with the peace and tranquility that can only be found after death, as symbolized by the steps, which are literally funerary stones taken from the nearby cemetery, leading up to the door. He attempts to explain this sudden change in appearance, telling himself that “ces sortes de *vues*, étant plutôt morales que physiques, s’effacent avec rapidité. Oui, j’étais, à n’en pas douter une seconde, la victime de cet abattement intellectuel que j’ai signalé” (698).

The same phenomenon occurs when the narrator looks upon his host. At first, he describes his friend as being “d’une santé vigoureuse” and adds that “les années l’avaient fort peu atteint” (699). Just moments later, however, after Maucombe has shown him to his room, his old friend suddenly becomes almost unrecognizable:

Était-ce un agonisant qui se tenait debout, là, près de ce lit? La figure qui était devant moi n’était pas, ne pouvait pas être celle du souper ! Ou, du moins, si je la

reconnaissais vaguement, il me semblait que je ne l'avais jamais vue, en réalité, qu'en ce moment-ci. Une seule réflexion me fera comprendre : l'abbé me donnait, humainement, la *seconde* sensation que, par une obscure correspondance, sa maison m'avait fait éprouver" (700).

Abbé Maucombe undergoes a transformation analogous to that of his house, as his youthful appearance disappears, replaced by a "tête ... grave, très pâle, d'une pâleur de mort." The narrator closes his eyes, and then he tells us, "quand je les rouvris, après une seconde, le bon abbé était toujours là,—mais je le reconnaissais maintenant!—À la bonne heure! Son sourire amical dissipait en moi toute inquiétude. L'impression n'avait pas duré le temps d'adresser une question. Ç'avait été un saisissement—une sorte d'hallucination." Twice the same object takes on two completely different appearances within a matter of moments. As the narrator explained earlier, when we look upon objects or persons, we do not see them only with our eyes; vision is more than just a physiological process. We invariably color our perception with our thoughts, emotions and attitudes, because "ce qui est donné, ce n'est pas la chose seule, mais l'expérience de la chose, une transcendance dans un sillage de subjectivité" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie* 376). This is the reason one person can look at a painting by Mondrian and see a commentary on the human condition, while another will see nothing more than a series of black lines and colored squares.

The narrator suggests that these changing visual phenomena are perhaps the result of fatigue, telling himself that what he really needs is a good night's sleep. He is unable to fall asleep, however, because of the sounds in the room. "J'entendais des tic-tac," he says, "des craquements brefs du bois et des murs. Sans doute des horloges-de-mort. Chacun des bruits imperceptibles de la nuit se répondait, en tout mon être, par un coup électrique" (701). This time

it is not any vision that affects him, but rather sounds, which are ironically qualified by the adjective “imperceptibles.” How could an imperceptible sound keep him awake, as by its very definition, such a sound would not be able to be perceived? Perhaps it is because, as he tells us, “j’avais, surtout, le sens de l’ouïe d’une acuité pareille à celle des gens qui meurent de faim.” This is a quite unexpected comparison and deserves comment. Given the tenor “le sens de l’ouïe,” the reader would expect the vehicle to be something more like an owl, a bat or some other creature known for its keen auditory sense. In this comparison, however, the narrator compares his sense of hearing to people dying from hunger, which would seem to pair more readily with an acute sense of taste. If we interpret this hunger as a metaphorical one, then what exactly would the narrator be hungry for? The most obvious response, as we are in the middle of a fantastic story, would be that the narrator wants that which all fantastic narrators want: answers, explanation and/or rationale. Unfortunately this is precisely what the fantastic refuses to give, despite the narrators’ best efforts to the contrary.

Just as he is on the verge of falling asleep, the narrator then hears three sharp knocks upon his door. As he rises and moves to open it, on his hand he notices a small spot of light coming from the keyhole, but as he tells us, it is “une lueur glacée, sanglante, n’éclairant pas” (702). It is a light, which, ironically, does not illumine anything and which disappears as soon as he asks who is at the door that then opens of its own accord. Standing in the hallway is a figure whose face is hidden by a large three-cornered hat, whose only discernable feature is “le feu de ses deux prunelles” which stare at the narrator with “une solennelle fixité.” The narrator states that “le souffle de l’autre monde enveloppait ce visiteur.” When this strange apparition holds out a heavy traveling cloak to him, the narrator admits “je fermai les yeux, pour ne pas voir cela. Oh! je ne voulais pas voir cela!” In the quote from “Le Horla” above, the narrator insisted upon sight

as confirmation that the unusual events described in the story actually occurred. Here, conversely, the narrator refuses to see, shuts out the vision in order to deny it any existence in reality. If “seeing is believing,” then perhaps, in the narrator’s mind at least, “not seeing is not being required to believe.”

The following morning, the narrator receives word that he must cut his visit short and leave to settle a professional matter. Though disappointed, Abbé Maucombe offers to accompany his guest to the train station. Shortly after their departure, it begins to rain, so the narrator, worried about his friend’s health, tells him to return to the presbytery. Maucombe acquiesces, but as he turns to leave he tells the narrator to take his cloak: “Allons! continua l’abbé Maucombe, moi, je serai chez moi dans une minute; ainsi, *prenez,—prenez ce manteau! ... Je vous en prie!*” L’abbé, en prononçant ces paroles, me tendait son manteau noir. Je ne voyais pas sa figure, à cause de l’ombre que projetait son large tricorne ; mais je distinguai ses yeux *qui me considéraient avec une solennelle fixité*” (707). Though he uses the same words to describe here the “real” Maucombe, the narrator never explicitly makes the connection with his vision from the previous evening, leaving it to the readers to make that link on their own. Left alone now in the wilderness, the narrator becomes successively uneasy, agitated and then terrified by the darkness and the eerie sounds coming from all around him. He presses his horse to a full gallop, desperate to make it back to town. Once there, he exclaims, “Enfin! je voyais des maisons! des boutiques éclairées! les figures de mes semblables derrière les vitres! Je voyais des passants!...Je quittais le pays des cauchemars!” (708). The *sights* reassure him that he has left behind the supernatural, the uncanny and the unnerving and has returned to the ordinary world of his “semblables.” He leaves the cloak with a young man who is to return it to the priest. Shortly after the narrator returns to Paris, a letter arrives, informing him of Maucombe’s death from an

illness caught that night while returning in the rain to the presbytery. The story ends as the narrator reads to us the last words of the letter, telling him that his friend “était très heureux ... d’être enveloppé à son dernier soupir et enseveli dans le manteau qu’il avait rapporté de son pèlerinage en Terre sainte, *et qui avait touché LE TOMBEAU*” (709).

The importance of vision is also seen in “Omphale” by Gautier. One of his greatest literary powers is his descriptive ability. “Il est par excellence...un descripteur,” says Baronian, who goes on to state that “il semble de surcroît que Gautier ait été attiré par le fantastique parce que le genre pouvait ... lui fournir de larges possibilités descriptives, un maximum de matériaux visuels susceptibles de colorer un récit dans le détail ou de suggérer un phénomène dans sa totalité” (64-65). In any of his stories, the reader is struck by the precision, as well as the poeticity, of his descriptions, such as this sentence from “Omphale,” in which the narrator is describing the courtyard of his uncle’s home: “Quelques pauvres fleurs étiolées penchaient languissamment la tête comme de jeunes filles poitrinaires, attendant qu’un rayon de soleil vînt sécher leurs feuilles à moitié pourries” (199). Such descriptions, however, serve as more than mere literary ornament, as more than an exercise in esthetic effect, but rather form an integral part of the fantastic narrative. By so clearly setting the stage, Gautier lays the background against which the fantastic moment will contrast. In addition, such descriptions can also be used to foreshadow the preternatural events at the heart of the story. In any fantastic tale, not only does the narrator have to take in his surroundings so as to be firmly anchored in the “here and now,” but we as readers must also “see” the setting as clearly as does the narrator. To ensure that his reader takes part in the *survol* of the surroundings, Gautier will often make allusion to him or her, as when he describes his bedchamber in the same story: “L’ameublement, *comme on voit*, n’était pas des plus modernes. Rien n’empêchait que l’on ne se crût au temps de la

Régence, et la tapisserie mythologique qui tendait les murs complétait l'illusion on ne peut mieux" (200, emphasis mine). The "on" refers indirectly to the reader, for this is not a frame story, so there are no other characters present to whom he could be speaking. The tapestry mentioned at the end will be central to the story, as the woman depicted therein will descend from her woven prison to seduce the young narrator. One night, as he is getting undressed for bed, he notices that something has changed in the tapestry: "il me sembla que les yeux d'Omphale avaient remué; je regardai plus attentivement, non sans un léger sentiment de frayeur, ... Je crus voir qu'elle avait la tête tournée en sens inverse" (202). Nevertheless, the narrator is fascinated by her gaze, though he admits that he is afraid to look upon her too long or too closely. "Je fus plusieurs jours sans oser jeter les yeux sur la maudite tapisserie," he remarks, but then later tells us that, "un soir, pourtant, je m'aguerris au point de jeter un coup d'œil sur la belle maîtresse d'Hercule; elle me regardait de l'air le plus triste et le plus langoureux du monde. Cette fois-là j'enfonçai mon bonnet jusque sur mes épaules et je fourrai ma tête sous le traversin" (202). Once he finally screws up his courage to look upon the woman in the tapestry, he is shocked to find her looking back at him, so he pulls his nightcap over his head and buries his head under the bolster. Normally, an active subject looks at a passive object. What is so frightening to the narrator in this story is that the positions become reversed. The narrator is reduced to the state of passive object by the now active gaze of the tapestry. That this plays as a rather comic scene in a somewhat lighthearted tale does not change the general function of the scene, only how we might react to it.

As a final example of the weakness of our sensual apparatus in the fantastic, consider "Chez l'une d'elles" by Jean Lorrain, taken from the same collection as "Les Trous du masque" discussed in the last chapter. The narrator is asked by his friends to tell them a story, so he

relates an experience he had one winter's night as he was returning from an evening at the Opéra. He sets the scene: "J'enfile l'avenue de l'Opéra, la place du Carrousel, et sur le pont des Saints-Pères, tout en velours blanc au-dessus de la Seine figée, à la fois boueuse et brillante comme de la cassonade, j'avise une étrange silhouette accoudée au parapet" (28). He cannot clearly make out the identity of this figure, for it is wearing a costume and a mask. "J'eus l'immédiate pensée d'un suicide," he comments, fearing that this person is about to leap into the Seine. The narrator then offers to guide the figure home, saying "Mon enfant, il ne faut pas rester là. Je vais vous reconduire, si vous êtes souffrante." The use of the feminine ending on the adjective shows that the narrator, at this point, assumes that he is seeing a woman. But as the two make their way through the city, the narrator seems to have doubts:

Étrange rencontre et plus étrange créature! Un loup de satin noir dérobaient son visage, et les boucles de sa perruque blonde me venaient à peine à l'épaule, mais ses jambes étaient fines et musclées, d'un dessin très pur ; ses hanches me frôlaient en marchant, précisant peu à peu leur caresse ; son bras maintenant appuyait sur le mien et, sous le satin du loup, les yeux sollicitaient avec une insistance bizarre.

C'était une fille. Au bout de dix minutes, je n'avais plus un doute et, chatouillé par un demi-désir, tenté par l'occasion, je l'avais prise à mon tour par la taille, et nous marchions serrés l'un contre l'autre. (28-9)

The narrator then decides to make of this woman a sexual conquest for the evening, though he is unwilling to bring her back to his home. She suggests a hotel on a street with which the narrator is unfamiliar, but what is important is that he notices something odd about her voice: "la voix enrouée de ma conquête venait de me jeter un froid. 'Mais bah! me disais-je, les Espagnoles ont

encore la voix plus rauque, et la créature paraît avoir un joli corps” (29). Despite the unexpected timbre of her voice, which, the narrator seems to admit, does not sound quite feminine, he nevertheless continues in his original conjecture that this is truly a woman. Once they arrive at the hotel, the narrator refuses to enter because of its dilapidated and unsafe appearance. At this point, the “woman” reassures him, saying, “Entre donc, va! Il n’y a pas de danger, c’est moi le garçon de l’hôtel!” (29-30). The narrator now knows that his senses had been deceived all along, perhaps due to his sexual arousal. One might object to considering this story fantastic, but there are justifications. Given that it is included in a collection of other fantastic stories, it becomes at the very least “fantastic by association,” as the reader is already in this particular mindset when beginning the story. Additionally, the story is a perfect example of Todorov’s definition of the fantastic, even if such a definition is admittedly not without problems. The reader, just as the narrator, hesitates throughout the story as to the identity of this “étrange créature,” not only in terms of deciding if it is male or female, but also in terms of its reality at all. Does the figure exist in flesh and blood, or is it a phantom? When he sees this person, the narrator immediately thinks of someone about to commit suicide, so given the context of the story, this *garçon d’hôtel* could just as easily have been one of those suicides come back from the dead and a female one at that. That he turns out to be a flesh and blood man makes the story slip from the fantastic into the strange, but in no way does this negate the existence of that fantastic uncertainty privileged by Todorov.

We cannot forget that during the 19th century developments in optics and the physics of light, a study seriously undertaken in the 17th and 18th centuries, were eventually to bring about the invention of the daguerreotype and, with Méliès and the Lumière brothers, the cinema. With the invention of the kaleidoscope by Brewster in 1816, the public spectacle of these

“fantasmagories” becomes big business and a source of endless fascination among the public, because with it, “une nouvelle forme d’imagination tend à s’imposer, qui suppose l’ouverture d’un espace intérieur...et qui constitue à la fois une voie d’accès vers les profondeurs où l’être intérieur et l’être extérieur, le désir et la réalité, entretiennent des rapports autres que dans la vie de tous les jours, et une puissance redoutable, mettant l’homme à la merci de ce qu’il y a en lui de moins contrôlé...” (Milner 23). It is no mere coincidence of history that the fantastic in France, as distinct from the marvelous of the Middle Ages, should flourish at the same time as these scientific developments, nor that the writers of the fantastic should place such an emphasis upon vision in their stories.

However, as we have already seen, the senses can be deceived, and so narrators will often bemoan the inadequacy of sensory evidence and will then slip into a kind of phenomenological bracketing, as they question not only their perceptions but their own state of mind.

In “Un fou?” by Maupassant, the narrator laments the inability of our senses to register the world around us. “Tout est mystère,” he asserts, explaining that “nous ne communiquons avec les choses que par nos misérables sens, incomplets, infirmes, si faibles qu’ils ont à peine la puissance de constater ce qui nous entoure. Tout est mystère. Songe à la musique, cet art divin, cet art qui bouleverse l’âme, l’emporte, la grise, l’affole, qu’est-ce donc? Rien” (2: 310). Of course this attitude is perfectly understandable in the context of a fantastic story, in which there must exist, by definition, things and events that the narrator cannot understand and that he can attempt to explain only by blaming our “miserable senses” which are “incomplete” and “weak.” But at the same time, we must go a step further. To a large degree, the narrator here is involved in a type of phenomenology *avant la lettre*. If our perceptions are inherently unreliable, the immediate question must be *why are they unreliable* and, even more fundamentally, *what does it*

mean to perceive? This is the question at the very heart of phenomenology. One of the results of the weakness of our perceptive capabilities is, as the narrator points out, that “nous sommes entourés de choses que nous ne soupçonnerons jamais, parce que les organes nous manquent qui nous les révéleraient” (2: 311). Doubting the evidence we gather through our senses, precisely because of their inherent limitations, is the necessary first step to understanding perception as a process. It is therefore the necessary first step in phenomenological reduction, regardless of the object intended.

Maupassant in particular seems taken with this idea, as it appears time and time again in his fantastic output. We see the same idea in “Le Horla,” perhaps Maupassant’s *chef-d’oeuvre* of the genre. The similarity of the language in the following quote to the one above is no simple autoplagiarism on Maupassant’s part, but rather a proof of his continual questioning of what it means to perceive:

Comme il est profond ce mystère de l’Invisible! Nous ne le pouvons sonder avec nos sens misérables, avec nos yeux qui ne savent apercevoir ni le trop petit, ni le trop grand, ni le trop près, ni le trop loin, ni les habitants d’une étoile, ni les habitants d’une goutte d’eau...avec nos oreilles qui nous trompent, car elles nous transmettent les vibrations de l’air en notes sonores...avec notre odorat, plus faible que celui d’un chien...avec notre goût, qui peut à peine discerner l’âge d’un vin! (2: 914)

In both quotes, the world around us is a “mystère” precisely because our “sens misérables” are incapable of perceiving all there is to be perceived. We need microscopes to see the “trop petit” and telescopes to see the “trop loin.” Sight is deficient. But here Maupassant takes the critique even further, as not only our sight is insufficient, but also our hearing, our sense of smell and our

sense of taste. By comparing the perceptive abilities of a scientific instrument, a dog and an oenophile, he realizes that perception is not only an intrinsically personal, singular process, but is also independent of the object. A study of the perceptive process is thus merited, if not essential to our understanding of the world around us. Nevertheless, given the relative weakness of our corporeal senses, we will never be able, according to the narrator, to understand fully all the things that make up our world. For that, we would need “d’autres organes qui accompliraient en notre faveur d’autres miracles” and only then “que de choses nous pourrions découvrir encore autour de nous” (2: 914). Elsewhere in the story, he makes a similar comment:

mon œil est si faible, si imparfait, qu’il ne distingue même point les corps durs, s’ils sont transparent comme le verre!...Qu’une glace sans tain barre mon chemin, il me jette dessus comme l’oiseau entré dans une chambre se casse la tête aux vitres. Mille choses en outre le trompent et l’égarent? Quoi d’étonnant, alors, à ce qu’il ne sache point apercevoir un corps nouveau que la lumière traverse. (2: 934)

This is precisely the problem the narrator faces in the story. In chapter one, I argued that the narrator of “Le Horla” is undergoing an experience with the sublime; this complaint of the lack of sensory input reinforces that interpretation, as the sublime is, by definition, something that goes so far beyond our ability to comprehend it that it cannot actually be perceived. The towering clouds of an approaching storm, the raging waves of the sea are simply a physical manifestation of something more, of a force or a power that we cannot name. The sublime is the unexplainable, the unseeable, the indefinable, yet at the same time, one “knows” what the sublime is. We can *know* what the variables mean in the famous “ $E = mc^2$ ” without actually *understanding* why this formula was so revolutionary in its day. The sublime and the fantastic find themselves in an inverse, almost chiasmic, relationship. We *know* what the sublime is

without actually *understanding* it. In the fantastic, however, we have an inherent *understanding* of what it is but face a great deal of difficulty in explaining how we *know* a given event or text is fantastic. This is why there are as many definitions of the fantastic as there are critics of it.

Returning to the quote, yet we again see the narrator of the story attempting a phenomenological reduction as he attempts, in vain, to explain what is happening to him. He brackets himself to examine his own situation: “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. Je ne serais donc, en somme, qu’un halluciné raisonnant” (2: 928). Of course, the reader can become stuck upon the fact the narrator refers to himself as a “halluciné raisonnant” and then explain away the narrator’s reaction to the events in the story. Nothing really happened, the reader says, it was all a hallucination dragging the poor narrator down into madness. However, Merleau-Ponty, when speaking of hallucinations, tells us that

le perçu pris en entier, avec l’horizon mondial *qui annonce à la fois sa disjonction possible et son remplacement éventuel par une autre perception*, ne nous trompe absolument pas. Il ne saurait y avoir erreur là où il n’y a pas encore vérité, mais réalité, nécessité, mais facticité. Corrélativement, il nous faut bien refuser à la conscience perceptive la pleine possession de soi et l’immanence qui exclurait toute illusion. (*Phénoménologie* 396, emphasis his)

Illusions, false perceptions that may or may not be “corrected” by an ulterior perception, are the inevitable byproduct of our corporeal limitations. Thus, to claim that the narrator is simply a victim of madness or hallucinations would be reductive to the extreme. At the heart of the fantastic is the refusal to allow for such simplifications, for easy answers or explanations. The fantastic forces us to reexamine our preconceived notions of what is real and what is illusion,

that is to say it forces us to suspend the natural attitude in which we live our daily lives and to shift into the phenomenological attitude. This is identical to the process at work when we look upon an image with two possible subjects, such as the famous Rubin's vase:



(image taken from *Wikicommons*: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rubin2.jpg>)

Confronted with this type of image, we are forced to shift into phenomenological perspective, because we cease to look at the image(s) as simply presented like any other object or image in the natural attitude and begin to examine them as *seen* images; we examine how they are presented to us through vision, as perceived. In the fantastic, we are presented with a text which functions much like Rubin's vase. As we look at the text in a perspective stemming from the natural attitude, we experience it in one way, but if we shift our perspective, a completely different way of considering the text comes to the fore. The question that naturally follows is why do we see what we see in one case or the other?

As a *fantastiqueur*, Maupassant seems to have an inherent understanding of this notion, as he makes reference to it again in "Lui?" Once more the narrator attempts to explain away the events as a mere hallucination, but again he arrives at this conclusion through a shift out of the natural attitude:

J'avais eu une hallucination, c'était là un fait incontestable. Or, mon esprit était demeuré tout le temps lucide, fonctionnant régulièrement et logiquement. Il n'y

avait donc aucun trouble du côté de mon cerveau. Les yeux seuls s'étaient trompés, avaient trompé ma pensée. Les yeux avaient eu une vision, une de ces visions qui font croire aux miracles les gens naïfs. C'était là un accident nerveux de l'appareil optique, rien de plus, un peu de congestion peut-être. (1: 873)

Ironically, the narrator here is reducing his hallucinations to what Sokolowski calls a “biological reductionism,” by which “many want to reduce the generation of knowledge and other rational achievements to merely physical brain states” (114). By ascribing what he sees to the improper functioning of his eyes, the narrator is able to reassure himself that he is not, in fact, going mad. His reason is still intact, “functioning regularly and logically.” He even distinguishes himself from the “gens naïfs” who believe in miracles and superstition. He appears to be invoking Cartesian dualism as well, as his eyes, he claims, deceived his mind, as though they were two separately functioning entities, rather than part of the same corporeal structure. I say “ironically” because what he is actually doing, by questioning the source of his visions, by stepping back and examining the way in which these troubling appearances are perceived, is once again using a distinctly phenomenological method of investigation. That he comes up with a rationalist or “biological reductionist” answer does not change the fact that he achieved that insight through a phenomenological process.

Maupassant's narrator in “La Chevelure” also makes use of bracketing and phenomenological reduction, when questioning why certain objects entice us more than others. He remarks:

Quelle singulière chose que la tentation! On regarde un objet et, peu à peu, il vous séduit, vous trouble, vous envahit comme ferait un visage de femme. Son charme entre en vous, charme étrange qui vient de sa forme, de sa couleur, de sa

physionomie de chose; et on l'aime déjà, on le désire, on le veut. Un besoin de possession vous gagne, besoin doux d'abord, comme timide, mais qui s'accroît, devient violent, irrésistible. (2: 109)

More than simply desiring to possess an object, the narrator questions the nature of that desire. He suspends his natural attitude; he no longer simply desires to possess a certain piece of furniture, nor does he question why that particular piece of furniture is so attractive. Rather he investigates and questions what it means to desire any object, "temptation" in general. This is precisely what phenomenological reduction does.

Along with the appearance of unusual events often comes a corresponding shift in the narrator's perception of time. For example, as we saw previously, the dance in "La Cafetière" seems to take place in a time that is at once all-time and no-time. Two examples of this can be found in Maupassant's "La Nuit" and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's "Véra," both of which demonstrate the warping of time, albeit in two different ways.

The narrator in "La Nuit" describes to the reader, from the very beginning, his love of the night: "J'aime la nuit avec passion. Je l'aime comme on aime son pays ou sa maîtresse, d'un amour instinctif, profond, invincible." He then goes on to invoke his senses: "Je l'aime avec tous mes sens, avec mes yeux qui la voient, avec mon odorat qui la respire, avec mes oreilles qui en écoutent le silence, avec toute ma chair que les ténèbres caressent" (2: 944). But this love of the night has a sinister side announced just after, as the narrator remarks that "ce qu'on aime avec violence finit toujours par vous tuer" (2: 945). The story he tells concerns one of his nocturnal walks around the city of Paris. Throughout the story we see not only see the narrator's insistence upon the sights and sounds he perceives during his evening promenade, but also our inability to understand time in any fundamental way.

This starts almost immediately, as the narrator cannot precisely place when he took this walk. “Donc hier—était-ce hier—oui, sans doute,” he says seeming to be certain, but he immediately qualifies his assumption by stating, “à moins que ce ne soit auparavant, un autre jour, un autre mois, une autre année,—je ne sais pas.” Yet he again vacillates: “Ce doit être hier pourtant, puisque le jour ne s’est plus levé, puisque le soleil n’a pas reparu. Mais depuis quand la nuit dure-t-elle? Depuis quand?... Qui le dira? qui le saura jamais ?” (2: 945). Even then, his supposed certainty only leads to more questions. However, we should note that the narrator does not base his assumption on the fact that the sun has not yet risen (*ne...pas encore*). Instead, he says that it has no longer risen (*ne...plus*), implying he has been trapped in a kind of eternal night since this experience. The sun has not reappeared and no one is or will ever be able to say how long this “night” has lasted, least of all the narrator himself.

He arrives at the Arc de Triomphe and is captivated by the stars which “dessinent des figures bizarres, qui font tant rêver, qui font tant songer” (2: 946). He then goes to the Bois de Boulogne, where an odd sensation takes hold of him: “un frisson singulier m’avait saisi, une émotion imprévue et puissante, une exaltation de ma pensée qui touchait à la folie.” He makes his way back and he loses track of time. “Quelle heure était-il quand je repassai sous l’Arc de Triomphe?” he asks, and his only answer is “Je ne sais pas.” But this strange emotion will not go away; in fact, it becomes more acute. He explains, “pour la première fois je sentis qu’il allait arriver quelque chose d’étrange, de nouveau. Il me sembla que la nuit, que ma nuit bien-aimée, devenait lourde sur mon cœur.” He checks his watch and sees that it is two am, giving for the first time a chronological point of reference. He continues on to the Place de la Bastille as the night grows ever more dark, which does not escape the narrator’s attention: “Là, je m’aperçus que je n’avais jamais vu une nuit si sombre, car je ne distinguais pas même la colonne de Juillet,

dont le génie d'or était perdu dans l'impénétrable obscurité. Une voûte de nuages, épaisse comme l'immensité, avait noyé les étoiles, et semblait s'abaisser sur la terre pour l'anéantir."

The night has become a metaphorical structure, a vast building whose room is formed by a vault of clouds. The following comparison, "thick as immensity" is both specific and vague at the same time, as it gives a sense of crushing weight (it seems to annihilate the earth, the narrator tells us), yet it is also hard to define: *denotatum* wins out over *connotatum*.

He continues, stopping to ask a ragpicker for the time, who has no idea. The narrator decides to head for les Halles, certain to find more people there, but he must count the streets he passes to find his way, as the darkness is so complete now that he cannot see his way through the city. This story is first published in 1887, well after the renovation of the city of Paris under Haussmann. One of the most important improvements the latter made to the city was the installation of gas lighting in the streets, making the city more modern and, theoretically at least, safer. The complete lack of light in the story goes against our expectations, accustomed as we are to streetlights. Darkness functions here not as an indication of "hourly" time but as an absolute suspension of time. In addition, it also creates a sense that the narrator has in some sense traveled back in time to the period before Haussmann's renovations and the installation of streetlamps.

More and more agitated, the narrator cries out for help, yet there is no response. Once again he wonders what time it is. He says:

Quelle heure était-il donc? Je tirai ma montre, mais je n'avais point d'allumettes. J'écoutai le tic-tac léger de la petite mécanique avec une joie inconnue et bizarre. Elle semblait vivre. J'étais moins seul. Quel mystère! Je me remis en marche comme un aveugle, en tâtant les murs de ma canne, et je levais à tout moment les

yeux vers le ciel, espérant que le jour allait enfin paraître; mais l'espace était noir, tout noir, plus profondément noir que la ville. (2: 947-8)

The sound of the ticking of his watch reassures him, although he is unable actually to see what time it is, as the darkness prohibits this. He becomes desperate to see daylight, though earlier in the story he calls the day “brutal et bruyant” (2: 944). Not only does the narrator not know the exact hour, he has also lost all sense of how long he has been walking: “Quelle heure pouvait-il être? Je marchais, me semblait-il, depuis un temps infini, car mes jambes fléchissaient sous moi, ma poitrine haletait, et je souffrais de la faim horriblement” (2: 948). The question has changed from “what time was it” to “what time could it be?” Time has become “infini,” a time which is at once all time and no time. This is symbolized in the story by the narrator’s watch that eventually stops working altogether. “Mais l’heure? L’heure? Qui me dirait l’heure? Aucune horloge ne sonnait dans les clochers ou dans les monuments [...] Je tirai ma montre... elle ne battait plus... elle était arrêtée. Plus rien, plus rien, plus un frisson dans la ville, pas une lueur, pas un frôlement de son dans l’air. Rien! Plus rien!” He no longer has even the ticking sound of the watch to comfort him. The narrator finds himself in a completely empty city, a void in which even time has ceased to pass. He has lost any and every connection to reality, alone in a vast nothingness. Finally, he wonders if the Seine itself is still flowing: “La Seine coulait-elle encore? Je voulus savoir, je trouvai l’escalier, je descendis.” At first, it seems as though the river is also fixed in time, as he cannot hear the sound of the river’s water. He sticks his arm into it, telling us that “elle coulait... froide... froide... froide... presque gelée... presque tarie... presque morte” (949). Even the river itself is slowing in its course, becoming frozen just as the passage of time in the story has become frozen. The comparison of the flowing of time to the flowing of a river is common, so it is no coincidence that Maupassant would make use of the image here.

Obviously, however, time has to resume, otherwise we would not have the narrator recounting this story to us now. This is why the adjectives used to describe the river are all modified by the adverb *presque*. In addition to time's eventual compression into a "temps infini," we should also note that space seems to be compressed too. Considering the narrator's trajectory through the city, we are dubious as to how he could cover so much ground in one evening. He never tells us exactly where he starts from, but retracing his journey, landmark by landmark, he travels over almost the entire length and breadth of the northern side of the city: down the Champs-Élysées to the Arc de Triomphe, from there to the Bois de Boulogne, back to the Arc de Triomphe, to the Place de la Bastille, up to the Place du Château-d'Eau, then to the faubourg Montmartre, back down past the Bourse to les Halles, then finally ending up next to the Seine. This is an impressive journey to be accomplished in the space of one evening.

"Véra" by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam also provides an example of the suspension of time, though in a different manner, for in this story the narrator himself tries in vain to suspend the flow of time. The story recounts the experiences of the Comte d'Athol whose wife of only six months, who gives her name to the story, has just died the night before. As he is leaving his wife's tomb, he throws the key to it inside, "à coup sûr d'après quelque résolution mystérieuse de ne plus revenir" (554). Once back in their marital chamber, described by a transferred epithet as "la chambre veuve," he focuses upon all the objects which remind him of her. Particular attention is paid to the bed in which she died: "sur le lit d'ébène aux colonnes tordues, resté défait, auprès de l'oreiller où la place de la tête adorée et divine était visible encore au milieu des dentelles, il aperçut le mouchoir rougi de gouttes de sang où sa jeune âme avait battu de l'aile un instant." The imprint of her head upon the pillow is equated with a physical presence, as though she were still in reality in the room and thus still alive. "Et là, là, dans l'ombre," the narrator

points out to us, “la pendule, dont il avait brisé le ressort pour qu’elle ne sonnât plus d’autres heures.” Without his wife, time has ceased to have any meaning for the count, who has deliberately damaged the clock so as to halt the passage of time, symbolic of his unwillingness to live without his beloved. Taking this emotion to the extreme, the Count begins to live as though Vera were still alive, dismissing all his servants but one, whom he informs of “their” desire no longer to receive visitors. The narrator tells us that after this moment, “D’Athol, en effet, vivait absolument dans l’inconscience de la mort de sa bien-aimée! Il ne pouvait que la trouver toujours présente, tant la forme de la jeune femme était mêlée à la sienne,” and, moreover, that “le soir, auprès du feu, les deux tasses de thé sur un guéridon, il causait avec l’*Illusion* souriante, assise, à ses yeux, sur l’autre fauteuil” (557). The count’s voluntary self-delusion reaches a point where it begins to affect his remaining servant as well, who “se sentit, par moments, presque dupe lui-même de sa bonne volonté” and “se prenait à ce jeu funèbre et oubliait à chaque instant la réalité.”

This goes on for some time, so that “il devenait difficile de distinguer le point où l’imaginaire et le réel étaient identiques” (558), until eventually, on the one-year anniversary of his wife’s death, truly supernatural events begin to occur. After reading a story to “Vera,” the count begins examining her possessions. He finds the handkerchief stained with spots of her blood, but these spots are still “humides et rouges comme des œillets sur de la neige” (559). Other details are given: “Là, sur le piano, qui donc avait tourné la page finale de la mélodie d’autrefois? Quoi! La veilleuse sacrée s’était rallumée, dans le reliquaire! ... Et ces fleurs orientales nouvellement cueillies, qui s’épanouissaient là, dans les vieux vases de Saxe, quelle main venait de les y placer?” Even in this text told by a third-person narrator, we still see the Count’s point of view as Villiers de l’Isle-Adam makes use here of the *style indirect libre*. The

questions are not asked by the narrator but by the Count himself. This is also confirmed by the use of the exclamation “Quoi!” and its accompanying punctuation. By the doubling of the narrative perspective through the use of *syle indirect libre*, we have a reinforcement of the veracity of events, since we have not one, but two different personae commenting upon them, one “outside” the text, the other “within.” But the most surprising aspect of the scene actually escapes the count’s notice, for the clock which he had deliberately broken begins working again: “Cela lui semblait tellement normal, qu’il ne fit même pas attention que l’heure sonnait à cette pendule arrêtée depuis une année.” In a neat reversal, we see a new twist on an old trope. Rather than the supernatural event suspending the flow of time as in “La Nuit,” fixing the character into a moment of timelessness, here the supernatural does the exact opposite: it restores the flow of time. The count had intentionally stopped the clock by breaking the spring, but nevertheless the clock begins once more to chime the hour; in an unexpected turn, the supernatural here actually returns the count to the *natural*. After a year of living within a voluntary illusion, d’Athol finally “sees” what he has feigned to see for so long:

Un frais éclat de rire musical éclaira de sa joie le lit nuptial; le comte se retourna. Et là, devant ses yeux, faite de volonté et de souvenir, accoudée, fluide, sur l’oreiller de dentelles, sa main soutenant ses lourds cheveux noirs, sa bouche délicieusement entrouverte en un sourire tout emparadisé de voluptés, belle à en mourir, enfin! la comtesse Véra le regardait un peu endormie encore [...] Il vint auprès d’elle. Leurs lèvres s’unirent dans une joie divine,—oublieuse—, immortelle! (560)

This moment of pure joy is short-lived, however, because the count, who has ostensibly just been reunited with his beloved, makes a surprising observation: “Ah! maintenant, je me

rappelle!...fit-il. Qu'ai-je donc?—Mais tu es morte!” Ironically, after living for an entire year denying her death and thus her absence, now that she is actually “there,” *present* to him, the lie he has been telling himself for so long crumbles as Véra’s ghost disappears forever. With her vanish as well all the signs of her presence as time once more is suspended:

Le pâle petit jour du matin—d’un matin banal, grisâtre et pluvieux,—filtra dans la chambre par les interstices des rideaux. Les bougies blémirent et s’éteignirent, laissant fumer âcrement leurs mèches rouges; le feu disparut sous une couche de cendres tièdes; les fleurs se fanèrent et se desséchèrent en quelques moments; le balancier de la pendule reprit graduellement son immobilité. (561)

The count is thrown into a state of despair even deeper than the one he felt upon her death a year ago. He cries out, asking how the two of them could be reunited. As an answer, the *objet-preuve* often seen in the fantastic appears: the key that he had thrown into his wife’s tomb falls from the bed. In this story, as in “La Nuit” by Maupassant, the narrators are confronted with a time that escapes their understanding, let alone their control. As Augustine says, time is something we understand so long as we do not think about it but which loses all meaning once we do reflect upon it (*Confessions* 11:14).

This story is somewhat exceptional in 19th-century fantastic in that it is told by a third-person narrator rather than a first-person one. Fantastic stories which make use of a first-person narrator are, by definition, remembrances. A *je narrant* recounts to the reader an experience he had in the past as *je narré*. Romuald, the narrator of “La Morte amoureuse,” refers to the story he will tell the reader as a “souvenir” (525). Gautier in particular will often exploit the double meaning of “souvenir” in French by inserting a physical object, the “objet-preuve,” at the end of his stories as proof of the encounter with the fantastic. However, he is not the only writer to

insist upon the remembered aspect of narration. For instance, in Maupassant's "Sur l'eau" discussed above, the second narrator says, "puisque vous me demandez quelques-uns de mes souvenirs, je vais vous dire une singulière aventure qui m'est arrivée" (1: 55). In "La Peur," the narrator invokes memory as a necessary element of fear: "La peur ... c'est quelque chose d'effroyable, une sensation atroce, comme une décomposition de l'âme, un spasme affreux de la pensée et du cœur, dont le souvenir seul donne des frissons d'angoisse." Just a few lines later, he says that "la vraie peur, c'est quelque chose comme une réminiscence des terreurs fantastiques d'autrefois" (1: 601). Remembering is a doxic modality distinct from normal perception, as when we remember something or someone, we are not actually *seeing* that thing or person. As Sokolowski explains, "what we store up as memories is not images of things we perceived at one time. Rather we store up earlier perceptions themselves. We store up the perceptions we once lived through. Then, when we actually remember, we do not call up images; rather, we call up those earlier perceptions" and, most importantly, "what happens in remembering is that we relive earlier perceptions" (67-8). The narrators of fantastic tales are not just explaining that, at one particular time in front of one particular phenomenon, they "felt" a particular emotion. The narrators are reliving the experience, feeling now what they felt then.

This also explains why so many fantastic stories end with a comment by the narrator about the lasting effects of his experience with the fantastic. For example in Gautier's "La Cafetière," the narrator tells the reader in the last line of the story, "Je venais de comprendre qu'il n'y avait plus pour moi de bonheur sur la terre!"(10). This is similar to the ending of "Omphale," in which the narrator finds the tapestry from which Omphale descended in a second-hand store. When he returns with the money to purchase it, it has already been sold. The narrator then reflects upon the events in the story, explaining that "peut-être vaut-il mieux que

cela se soit passé ainsi et que j'aie gardé intact ce délicieux souvenir. On dit qu'il ne faut pas revenir sur ses premières amours ni aller voir la rose qu'on a admirée la veille. Et puis je ne suis plus assez jeune ni assez joli garçon pour que les tapisseries descendent du mur en mon honneur" (207). Time is necessary for such a reflection to occur, for the narrator to be able to recognize the fact that his encounter with the fantastic has forever changed him. The narrator of Maupassant's "Apparition" speaks of the persistence of the fantastic long after the fact when he says "je sais une chose étrange, tellement étrange, qu'elle a été l'obsession de ma vie. Voici maintenant cinquante-six ans que cette aventure m'est arrivée, et il ne se passe pas un mois sans que je la revoie en rêve. Il m'est demeuré de ce jour-là une marque, une empreinte de peur, me comprenez-vous ?" (1: 780).

That these stories are recalled events, memories handed over to us, raises an important question: that of the reliability of fantastic narrators. One danger with memory is that it passes easily into the realm of imagination. The reader must then wonder just how accurate is the depiction of the events as told by the narrator, especially since the time elapsed between (narrated) then and (narrating) now may have allowed imperfections or exaggerations to have crept into the memory. However, to decide that one narrator is "reliable" while another is not is always an interpretative deduction made by the reader. Yacobi calls the unreliability hypothesis a "perspectival mechanism" by which we explain any inaccurate or incongruous information given to us by the narrator as a means to some kind of rhetorical, psychological or thematic end (224). But how does this apply to the fantastic, in which even the most reliable of narrators is faced with occurrences that are in and of themselves incongruous with everyday experience? While perhaps not inherently satisfying, to a large extent the answer can be reduced to this: we must give the narrator the benefit of the doubt. In any description of an event given by a first-

person narrator, the statements he or she makes are always true and false at the same time because “the reality about which such statements are made is not ... actual or empirical/historical in status, and for this reason they are not disconfirmable by *any* subjects, including the statement-subject himself or herself” (Casey 184). As we are dealing with works of fiction and not historical or scientific descriptions of events, the “reality” of the events is at best a posited reality, an illusion of a reality. If the fictional world and the narrator describing it conform to our personal conception of what the world is “really” like, we decide that they are, in fact, reliable. On the other hand, we judge anything which deviates from the norm as “false,” hence “unreliable.” The oft-invoked “suspension of disbelief” become of crucial importance in the fantastic, for without it, the fantastic essentially ceases to exist as an object of interest. The story then becomes an object of another sort, be it an esthetic exercise, a social commentary, etc.. While the fantastic can certainly perform these roles, it is its very strangeness that highlights any other type of commentary found therein, because it is on account of this strangeness that the reader pays particular attention to the story in the first place. To deny the presence of the fantastic on account of the so-called unreliability of the narrator is to reduce it to “sound and fury signifying nothing.”

As I said in the previous chapter, the use of the first person narrator is privileged in the fantastic because it allows for a closer, more immediate connection between the narrator and reader. Any time we hear “I”, it is difficult for us not to identify ourselves with that I, even more so than in a text such as Michel Butor’s *La Modification*, which makes use of the second person plural. In the latter, the use of the second person plural “vous” would seem to make the connection all the stronger, yet by using the pronoun “vous” throughout the text, the effect is actually the opposite. First, the extreme rarity of this type of narration only underscores the

“literariness” of such a usage. Given the overwhelming dominance of third person narration, with first person narration coming in a distant second, the use of a second person point of view is beyond the reader’s normal experience and thus highlights the unusual nature of the text. Second, as, linguistically speaking, the first person is the speaker, the second person the one spoken to, and the third person, the one spoken about, the use of the second person point of view implies, by definition, an intervening narrator, as the reader is the one “spoken to” by an invisible first person “speaking” to him or her, acting as a screen preventing a true identification with the narrator. Finally, because of the presence of these two elements, we must ask if the second person can even constitute a “point of view” in the truest sense of the term. Though the text may tell us that “we see” this or “we do” that, nevertheless, it is not “we” who do anything. Someone else is telling us what we “do” in the story, as though our free will has been suspended, turning us into marionettes controlled by the narrating voice. At no time do we truly identify with the “vous” of the text, and therefore the text becomes more of a literary exercise, an esthetic experiment, which, though it is certainly an interesting experiment and can perhaps create certain effects that would not be as easily achieved in a first-person or third-person narrative, nevertheless fails to incorporate the reader fully into the overall literary experience.

The first person, on the other hand, does allow for this inclusion of the reader into the text. As stated before, given that the “I” of our everyday experience invariably refers to ourselves as the source of an utterance, the identification of our reading “I” with the narrating “I” of the text in front of us becomes almost immediate. Even though we know that there is a definite distinction between the two, we nevertheless establish, on some level, a correlation between them. As Poulet points out, this is on account of “the strange invasion of [our] person by the thoughts of another” and the fact that our “consciousness behaves as though it were the

consciousness of another” (56). If as readers we allow the text to wash over us, to charm us, as if by some linguistic and esthetic sorcery, then we run the risk of so closely identifying ourselves with the narrating “I” that we lose, even if only during the time of our reading, our own “I,” subsumed into that of the narrator. Even when the narrative “I” is fundamentally distinct from us, as when the narrator is of another time period or another gender, the effect is not necessarily lessened. In, for example, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, we in turn become each of the narrating characters: we are Madame de Merteuil, the Vicomte de Valmont and Cécile de Volanges. And paradoxically, while we are each of the characters for the time required to read their respective letters, we are also always each of the characters. Here we find an example of a more successful use of the second person. We become Madame de Merteuil’s “I” as she writes a letter to Valmont. We become Valmont’s “I” as he writes his response. But having identified with both of them, when we read “vous” in Valmont’s letter addressed to Madame de Merteuil, we are at one and the same time the “I” of Valmont’s voice and the “vous” addressed to Madame de Merteuil.

On the other hand, we as readers can forbid such an usurpation of our person by the text, maintain our distance, and hold in place an objectivity allowing us to function as critics and interpreters, though this is most often a secondary step, predicated upon the first. By identifying ourselves with the narrating voice of the text, we allow the effects, linguistic, esthetic, or otherwise, to overcome us. Yet once the reading is over, we go back and ask ourselves just what exactly produced that effect. What was there in the story that so moved us, charmed us, frightened us...seduced us? As we saw in the case of “La Morte” by Maupassant, a retroactive reading was required to appreciate fully the various symbolic elements in the story. Much like Schiller’s sage and fantast, discussed in chapter one, we peer over the “abyss” of the literary text,

and we either pull ourselves back from it, as the sage, or we lose ourselves completely in it and become the fantast. As critics, we must be the sage, able to remove ourselves from the pure emotional experience of reading and distinguish our “I” from the “I” of the text. “Aware of a certain gap,” Poulet writes, “disclosing a feeling of identity, but of identity within difference, critical consciousness does not necessarily imply the total disappearance of the critic’s mind in the mind to be criticized” (“Phenomenology” 60).

When Barthes divides up the story “Sarrasine” into different narrative segments for analysis, he is essentially treating them as pieces, independent parts that become, in turn, a whole presented for investigation. Even deprived of their context in the overall story, they nevertheless remain meaningful and coherent, even if in a different way. The literary text is an amalgam of these pieces, separable elements which are combined to create a whole. Any interpretation of a literary text must be based, by definition, on these pieces, just as a botanist examines the leaves, petals, stamens, pistils, stem, etc. of a flower to identify its overall method of functioning. Yet at the same time, the literary text seems to occupy a privileged position in that, while the individual pieces of the text may make sense independent of the whole they comprise, nevertheless it is a *different* sense. We can say to someone that “il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits” and be understood in some way by our interlocutor, who might interpret this sentence as an expression of our unhappiness, uneasiness...our general outlook on life. No doubt, we would be called into question for the unusual comparison we employ, but at any rate, we would achieve the communication of our idea. If, however, our interlocutor knows the poem “Spleen” by Baudelaire, he or she would immediately place the dislocated sentence back into the overall structure of the poem, which in turn would call to mind all the concomitant associations, not only with the poem itself, but with the circumstances surrounding the writing of the poem, the culture

of 19th century France, or even the recollections of his or her personal reaction upon reading the poem for the first time. An entire web of ideas and emotions are activated simultaneously; one sentence becomes a nexus of myriad correlates, both literary and non-literary. “Ce qui est irremplaçable dans l’œuvre d’art,” as Merleau-Ponty points out, “c’est qu’elle contient mieux que des idées, des *matrices d’idées* ; elle nous fournit d’emblèmes dont nous n’aurons jamais fini de développer le sens...” (*Prose* 126).

As Sokolowski states, “the being of identity is elusive, difficult to grasp...If the identity presents itself now in one way, it also holds in reserve other ways of being given and of reappearing as the same thing again, to ourselves and others; it always both reveals and conceals itself” (31). This holds true on many levels. In the fantastic, with its first person point of view, the same event is considered under different circumstances. The narrating “I,” through the intermediary of time and development, reflects upon the events as they happened to the narrated “I,” who are at once both the same and different persons (even if only fictional persons). The events as lived are not the same as the events as narrated. On a larger scale, the quote applies to the reading of literature in general, which can be illustrated by a musical analogy. Imagine a lover of opera, who, with unlimited means at his or her disposal, manages to go see seven performances of *Tosca* given in various opera houses throughout a given season. This opera fan, though theoretically hearing the exact same score, is obviously going to hear seven *different versions* of that score, subject to personal interpretations on the part of the conductors, the singers, the directors, the set and stage designers and others involved in the production. Even should this theoretical opera nut purchase a DVD of his or her favorite performance, the law still applies. Though what he or she may watch is, in principle, an identical production over and over again, each viewing will nevertheless always be a novel experience *for him or her*. Each time he

or she will have changed since the last viewing of the production. He or she will pick up a note here, an effect of the lighting there: something new will always present itself. The exact same phenomenon occurs during the reading of a literary text. Every time we open a book, no matter how many times we have read it before, we will happen upon something new that we missed before. We will find a turn of phrase or a symbol that escaped us during our first (or second or third or n^{th}) reading of the text. “A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence” (Jauss 21). While this is true to a greater or lesser degree in any type of literary text, it is especially true of the fantastic. I would even argue that it is a necessary element of the fantastic, for such texts require that we read, then reread, then reread again if we are to understand and appreciate them. By living and reliving the experience through the narrator, by *becoming* the narrator, we gain greater insight not only into the text itself, but also into what it means to feel a particular emotion, to be in another’s (literary) shoes. The fantastic seduces us by raising more questions than it answers, by always leaving us wanting to know more, to go one step further. Yet as in any labyrinth, one must beware: for unless we are able to step back and engage objectively with the text, to follow Ariadne’s thread so to speak, it is all too easy to become forever lost in that absolute darkness so dear to this genre.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In chapter one, we saw how the fantastic serves as a privileged vehicle for the sublime, for the two share many common traits. Both are primarily concerned with an experience that surpasses our everyday understanding; both confront us with mysteries whose resolution is provisional at best, if not impossible; both require a separation, a dissolution of the concept of the self in order to rebuild that notion, “car, paradoxalement, le moment où le sujet s’éprouve saisi et dessaisi est aussi celui où il acquiert la conscience la plus aiguë de lui-même, de sa nudité et de son exigence d’autodépassement” (Saint-Girons 15). We saw in chapter one how this process is at work in the fantastic. In “Le Horla” the narrator’s identity collapses under the weight of the negative sublime. “Jésus-Christ en Flandres” gives us an example in which the opposite occurs, as the narrator is invigorated by the power of the positive sublime. Finally, “La Cafetière” shows how the positive can easily slip into the negative. But whether for good or ill, any encounter with the sublime leaves the subject forever changed, indelibly marked, as it were, by his or her experience. Similarly, in any encounter with the fantastic, the narrator after the experience is not the same as the narrator before. The sources of the sublime, as given by Burke, are also the preferred elements of the fantastic setting: darkness, solitude, the unknown, any and all of which provoke terror. This is perhaps the most ironic element in the sublime. On the one hand, the physical manifestations which create in us a feeling of the sublime must be perceptible, accessible to our senses, but on the other, the sublime itself is imperceptible. We see the towering thunderclouds looming on the horizon, hear the mighty roaring of the crashing waves,

and are overcome with a feeling of helplessness before their awesome power. We perceive the source, but as with any other sensation, there is no “object” of the sublime. Kristeva explains that

...le sublime, lui non plus, n'a pas d'objet ... L' « objet » sublime se dissout dans les transports d'une mémoire sans fond... Aussitôt que je le perçois, que je le nomme, le sublime déclenche—il a toujours déjà déclenché—une cascade de perceptions et de mots qui élargissent la mémoire à l'infini. J'oublie alors le point de départ et me trouve portée dans un univers second, décalé de celui où « je » suis : délectation et perte. Non pas en deçà mais toujours avec et à travers la perception et les mots, le sublime est un *en plus* qui nous enfle, qui nous excède et nous fait être à la fois *ici*, jetés, et *là*, autres et éclatants. (19)

The sublime destroys the barriers retaining the flow of memory and language, and along with them, the very notion of our identity.

The second chapter showed how language proves itself duplicitous, deficient and even dangerous in the fantastic text. If words in and of themselves are polyvalent, then the text, an agglomeration of words, must also share this quality. The fantastic exploits words' multiplicity of meanings to achieve its effect. Just as it must deform the real world to give more weight to the strange and unusual, it must also deform the ordinary sense we attribute to words and what they express. In the fantastic, ordinary language is made extraordinary. The fantastic is poetic. As Bessière comments, “le récit fantastique est le lieu où s'exerce parfaitement le travail du langage” (13). She goes on to explain that “la poétique du récit fantastique suppose l'enregistrement des données objectives ... et leur déconstruction ... par leur définition comme un ensemble de systèmes de signes soudainement inaptés à dire et à transformer, dans le registre

de la régulation de l'ordre, l'événement placé au cœur du drame fantastique" (13). The fantastic must pose its cornerstone in the realm of objective, verifiable reality. One way of doing this is through the use of, theoretically at least, reliable narrators, specifically those whose advanced age and/or social status lends them a seriousness and credibility. Romuald's age of sixty-six, combined with his vocation as priest, lends him authority. Another example is the narrator of Maupassant's "Apparition," the 88-year-old marquis de La Tour-Samuel, whose elevated social standing as well as his age reinforces the believability of his story. As a last example, there is the narrator of "La Peur" by the same author. Though his age is never given, his experience as an adventurer allows him a basis of comparison between the real and the fantastic, making us willing to believe him. He prefaces his story by telling his audience:

Et, pourtant, j'ai traversé bien des hasards, bien des aventures qui semblaient mortelles. Je me suis battu souvent. J'ai été laissé pour mort par des voleurs. J'ai été condamné, comme insurgé, à être pendu, en Amérique, et jeté à la mer du pont d'un bâtiment sur les côtes de Chine. Chaque fois je me suis cru perdu, j'en ai pris immédiatement mon parti, sans attendrissement et même sans regrets.

Mais la peur, ce n'est pas cela. (1: 601)

Surely, the reader thinks, if this man has undergone so many dangerous and deadly adventures, then he must know what he is talking about. Yet even these trustworthy narrators have difficulty describing the nature of the events that they experienced. No one can escape from the inherent ambiguity of language.

Merleau-Ponty observes that "le langage exprime autant par ce qui est *entre* les mots que par les mots eux-mêmes" (*Prose* 61-2). The fantastic too exists in the "between" of language,

between denotation and connotation, between reading and understanding, between perceiving and processing. Valéry's definition of poetry can just as readily be applied to the fantastic: "cette hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens" (637). We read the words on the pages of the fantastic text, but we hesitate as to their sense. Despite the descriptive and narrative details given to us by the narrators, these texts nevertheless strike the reader as imprecise, precisely because the fantastic event is, just as the language used to describe it, at the same time full and empty. Take the example of the word "coffee-pot." We know what a coffee-pot is, its intended use, what steps we must fulfill in order to use it: in this sense, it is a banal object *par excellence*, empty of any particular connotations. However, even a step as simple as adding the adjective "Meissen" to "coffee-pot" creates another level of meaning. Now we have not just any coffee-pot, but a "Meissen coffee-pot" with all its connotations of a certain quality, a certain design and a certain monetary value. By qualifying it, distinguishing it as distinct from other coffee-pots, it takes on a new sense as individual, as unique...as special. Even more effective, then, is creating a coffee-pot that is the transformation of a beautiful young woman. The "ordinary" coffee-pot becomes the vehicle of the extraordinary. We as readers are surprised and confused by such a mutation, and thus we hesitate in giving a meaning or an interpretation to this event. And we are surprised and confused because the denotation of the coffee-pot is suddenly suffused with a wealth of connotations, but connotations far removed from our normal experience and which, no doubt, it would not occur to us to attribute to such an object in most circumstances. "Le sens d'un ouvrage littéraire est moins fait par le sens commun des mots qu'il ne contribue à le modifier," says Merleau-Ponty (*Phénoménologie* 209). In our reading of the fantastic, we must open ourselves up to the unexpected, or even undreamed-of, possibilities. Another quote from Valéry is a propos:

Une valeur littéraire, donc une *richesse*, peut être due à certaines lacunes dans un tempérament.

Un piano se fait remarquer par l'oreille, grâce à l'absence de telles ou telles cordes.

Il fait voir très clairement que mon esprit s'enrichit de différences bien plus que de ressources positives importées.

Il dépend donc de moi, niveau autre.

Parce que ton registre est incomplet, parce que tel ordre de pensées—tels moyens—telles émotions te sont interdits ou inconnus, tu as fait œuvre qui m'enrichit. J'y trouve surprise et merveilles.

C'est que l'esprit vit de différences, l'écart l'excite ; le défaut l'illumine ; la plénitude laisse inerte. (672)

The sounds of Valéry's piano take on their meaning, their actuality, because of the notes that are not played, just as the fantastic lies in the in-between of language, in what *is not* said as much as in what *is* said. The fantastic plays on the differences in possible meanings of words just as poetry does, requiring us to renounce, at least momentarily, our "ressources positives importées" in order to look for the "surprise et merveilles" that the fantastic offers to us. Explaining the fantastic as the result of a dream, hallucination or intoxication is to collapse the metaphorical wave function of the text, in which multiple interpretations, multiple meanings, all exist simultaneously. It is the holes in the whole, the "défauts" in the "plénitude" so to speak, that renders the fantastic so captivating, so polymorphous. Anything *but* "inerte."

The last chapter demonstrated how both narrators and readers make use of phenomenological reduction as an attempt to explain, or at least attempt to explain, the fantastic.

This genre calls our sensory apparatus into question, both on a physiological level (Are my eyes deceiving me?) and a psychological one (Is my mind deceiving me?). As Vax remarks, “Nous ne sommes certains de rien, sinon de notre incertitude; et cette incertitude même, l'objet le plus illusoire aux yeux de l'utilitaire, est en même temps l'objet le plus essentiel et le plus solide aux yeux de l'esthète et du phénoménologue” (130). The fantastic is a troublesome perception, requiring a bracketing, a suspension not only of disbelief but also of belief. In suspending our disbelief, we voluntarily relinquish our doubts that event X is not possible. We decide to play the game, or better yet, to *immerse* ourselves into the game, and by rejecting our inner desire to rationalize the events, we experience the fantastic along with the narrators. Yet once we have read the story and shared in the incident that has been recounted to us, we step back from the text, return to our normal world and must now suspend our belief in what we have just read. We bracket the text and examine it as a text transmitting a certain view of the world, a certain message about that world and about ourselves as part of that world. The world to which we return, however, is not that same as the one we left behind us as we entered into the fictional universe created by the literary text. Or rather, we are not the same upon our return as we were when we left. Better still, neither we nor the world are the same. We are influenced by what we have just read, and in the case of the fantastic, the shadows are just a bit darker, the wind in the trees just a bit more ominous and the creaking of floorboards just a bit more menacing. Through our perceptions of and reflections on the world, we not only create that world but also ourselves along with it. This is the project of phenomenology, to understand how that process works. “Le système moi-autrui-le-monde,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “est ... pris pour objet d'analyse et il s'agit maintenant de réveiller les pensées qui sont constitutives d'autrui, de moi-même comme sujet individuel et du monde comme pôle de ma perception” (*Phénoménologie* 73). Millet and

Labbé make this connection by claiming that one function of the fantastic is to make us question our own nature, even if the genre rarely offers any answers (272).

This division of these three concepts, however, was purely for illustrative purposes, as they are all inextricably linked together. Without sensory perception, how could anything provoke an experience of the sublime? And without language, how could we ever describe such an experience? And that which links all three of these ideas to the fantastic is that, like the fantastic, they all shift in meaning, making an understanding of them exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. To make use of a scientific analogy, we can state that gravity is the force of attraction exerted upon one body by another: on the one hand, we *know* what gravity is. But when asked how that attraction works, what conveys that force between the bodies, we are at a loss for explanation: on the other, we do not *understand* how gravity functions. With the fantastic, we seem to know instinctively that this or that text belongs to the genre, but when it comes time to explain the functioning of the different elements, we run into problems. Interpreting the text, understanding it, becomes troublesome.

The fantastic is the literature of doubt and is thus particularly apt to express the *mal du siècle* of the 19th century. According to Janet, “le XVIIe est un siècle qui croit, le XVIIIe est un siècle qui nie et le XIXe est un siècle qui doute. Croire c’est affirmer, nier c’est rejeter résolûment [sic] ce que l’on affirmait, douter c’est hésiter entre l’affirmation et la négation” (271-2). Like its distant ancestor, the *merveilleux chrétien*, the fantastic is a product of its era. The 19th century is a period torn between the old world of the *ancien régime* and modernity, a period going through its “growing pains.” It is a century caught between two extremes, one symbolized by Viollet-le-Duc and his restoration of cathedrals and other medieval monuments, the other by the modernization of Paris under Haussmann with its concomitant destruction of

much of medieval Paris. Often, the fantastic serves to illustrate a rite of passage. It is a liminal genre representative of this liminal period. Many fantastic narrators, as we have seen, are older narrators looking back upon events that happened to them during their youth. Oftentimes the story serves as a way of speaking of their initiation into the world of sexual desire. Sometimes the stories take on a humorous tone, as in Gautier's "Omphale." At the same time, as in his "La Morte amoureuse," the consequences are more deleterious to the psychological well-being of the narrators.

Moreover, as Millet and Labbé point out, "définir le fantastique revient à s'attaquer à un genre protéiforme en perpétuel mouvement" (8). As I stated earlier, when it comes to the fantastic, there are as many definitions as there are critics creating them. If nothing else, this proves that the fantastic is a genre worthy our attention, precisely because the harder we attempt to hold on to it, the more easily it slips from our grasp. The fantastic refuses to be tied down. It delights in being the proverbial square peg which theorists consistently try to force into the equally proverbial round hole. Diaz-Brown observes that, "en effet, la définition du genre fantastique est loin d'être établie. La plupart des discussions sur le fantastique aboutissent, dans leurs conclusions, non à une définition claire et finale, mais plutôt à un point d'interrogation, soit chez l'auteur critique, soit chez son lecteur, peu convaincu en somme par l'analyse"(1).

Humans never outgrow that most incessant of questions asked by children: "why?" We as academics are part of the positivist tradition. We delight in describing, explaining and, above all, defining. This is what Todorov does, for example, by defining the fantastic as the moment of hesitation before definitively declaring that 1) there is a rational explanation, so the text is "étrange" or 2) there is not a rational explanation, and thus the text is "merveilleux." To reduce the fantastic to a mere moment in the text is to commit a kind of interpretive homicide, a

“murder by dismissal.” Granted, from his structuralist point of view, Todorov is attempting to explain how the elements of the fantastic work together to create the text. The fantastic text, however, is infinitely more than the sum of its parts. Neither can it be reduced to a list of themes or motifs, such as “the vampire,” “the ghost” or “the haunted house.” Again, while these may be essential elements to many fantastic tales, they function as vehicles for the fantastic, not its *raison d’être*. To impose a denotation upon the fantastic to the detriment of its connotation is to empty it of its seductive, dangerous charm. The observation made by one of the narrators in Maupassant’s “La Peur” seems to apply particularly well to such an approach:

À mesure qu’on lève les voiles de l’inconnu, on dépeuple l’imagination des hommes. Vous ne trouvez pas, monsieur, que la nuit est bien vide et d’un noir bien vulgaire depuis qu’elle n’a plus d’apparitions.

On se dit : ‘plus de fantastique, plus de croyances étranges, tout l’inexpliqué est explicable. Le surnaturel baisse comme un lac qu’un canal épuise ; la science, de jour en jour, recule les limites du merveilleux.’ (2: 199)

More than anything else, the fantastic is an *emotion*, a sentiment, the malaise emanating from the text that we as readers cannot help but feel. “Le fantastique se repère à l’effet qu’il engendre,” Grivel rightly claims. In which case, as he continues to say, “tout peut donc ‘fantastiquer’—un chou, un chapeau, une machine à coudre— ... pourvu que ce soit dans les conditions requises” (186). Though this goes against our desire not only as academics, but as humans, to rationalize and to explicate the events in the world, we must admit that the fantastic is to a large degree a *subjective* phenomenon. Louis Vax suggests this when he says, “*Fantastique* est un mot dont il ne nous appartient pas de fixer le sens. Il semble que ce qui fait l’unité du genre fantastique soit moins, aujourd’hui, l’idée d’une irruption inopinée d’un événement surnaturel dans le mode

naturel ... que de la parenté affective qui lie les sentiments ambivalents, j'entends l'attrait de la peur, de l'horreur, du dégoût" (139). By underscoring the emotions the fantastic provokes, he at the same time accentuates the personal reaction we as readers have to these texts.

One might certainly object, and with reason, that such a conception of the fantastic is equally unsatisfying, lacking rigorous, defining criteria and thus opening the door to *any* text being called fantastic, so long as it provokes an emotional response in the reader. Is it not the case, however, that any interpretation, the application of any "rigorous, defining criteria" to a text is to engage in a subjective analysis? If three people study the same text, each one from a different point of view, have they not each applied what they considered, *in their opinion*, to be the guiding principles of the text? For example, for a Marxist, texts are the products of a bourgeois, capitalist society reinforcing the status quo of rich against poor, as the production and reception of such texts belongs to those who enjoy a privileged lifestyle freeing them from the necessity of manual labor. For an adept of psychoanalytic theory, texts are the productions of the unconscious, so it is there that we are to seek their meaning, because were the subconscious not to exist, there would be no need for psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic readings of texts. Indeed, Jutta Emma Fortin makes use of both approaches, and admirably so, in her book *Method in Madness: Control Mechanisms in the French Fantastic*. But again, to reduce the fantastic text to an example of one particular school of thought is to ignore the polyvalence of the genre. As Vax again points out, "le sentiment du fantastique ne jaillit pas d'une *connaissance* de l'extraordinaire, mais d'une *participation* à une situation qui, tout à la fois, déconcerte et menace...Il n'est de fantastique que *vécu*" (61, emphasis mine).

The reader of the fantastic experiences the text in a different, more direct way. We do not share in the experiences of Emma Bovary or Eugène Rastignac in the same way we "live"

the experience of Théodore in “La Morte amoureuse,” for example. One obvious reason is the extended length of Flaubert and Balzac’s novels. Though they certainly exist, *romans fantastiques* are definitively in the minority in the 19th century, hence the reason we speak of *contes* or *nouvelles fantastiques*. Their shorter length permits a more rapid identification of reader with narrator, as we showed at the end of the last chapter. This interaction is one of the defining characteristics of the fantastic. Yet at the same time, the fantastic distorts the traditional construction of the short story just as it plays with the notions of self and (self-)certainty. Baroni states that “les charnières principales du récit, qui correspondent aux trois phases fondamentales de son actualisation, visent successivement à intriguer l’interprète par le biais d’un *nœud* suscitant des interrogations marquées, à entretenir une attente orientée vers un dénouement incertain en *retardant* stratégiquement la survenue de ce dernier, et à *dénouer* les fils de l’intrigue dans la phase finale” (138). For him these three stages are necessary and required: “la séquence narrative prototypique est donc composée de trois ‘phases’ fondamentales qui se succèdent *toujours dans le même ordre* ... Le *nœud*, le *retard* et le *dénouement*, ces macro-propositions narratives qui structurent le texte à un niveau transphrastique, peuvent être exprimées par les symboles suivants : [?] → [...] → [!]”(139). The fantastic, however, does not fit so easily into his schema. While readers certainly formulate questions during their reading, rarely does the fantastic *dénouement* offer an answer. Indeed, more often than not, the ending of a fantastic story serves only to raise even more questions. For this genre, we must reformulate Baroni’s symbolic interpretation as [?] → [...] → [?]. Yet even if the fantastic “n’invente pas de structures qui lui soient propres, le fantastique, de même qu’il s’adapte comme un caméléon aux divers mouvements artistiques, romantisme, réalisme, symbolisme ou surréalisme, est à l’affût de toutes les structures qui existent dans la production littéraire ou

cinématographique” (Millet and Labbé 334). This is another sense in which the fantastic is a liminal genre, in that it stands at the intersection of prose and poetry, of writing and cinema, of art and literature.

At this point, one might ask how my approach is any different from what I have decried as reductive and willfully dismissive of many aspects of the fantastic. Is not applying a “philosophical” approach the same as applying a “Marxist” or “psychoanalytic” interpretation? The chief difference lies in this, that I do not claim absolute sovereignty over the fantastic. I have tried to open another door to the fantastic that has surprisingly been left closed by critics of the fantastic. As I said in the introduction, in no way do I wish to give yet another hard and fast definition of the fantastic: I have sought amplification, not limitation. Such a project of definition would be doomed from the start, because as we have seen, the fantastic, in all its “protéiforme” glory, actively resists such a treatment. I am in complete agreement with Louis Vax when he says that “les œuvres sont polyvalentes, multiformes et susceptibles d’éclairages infinis. On n'en aura jamais fait le tour. Non pas qu'elles recèlent des abîmes de profondeur ; mais parce que, les mettant sans cesse en question, on multiplie les éclairages qui rendent possibles les interprétations les plus disparates” (113). By using these philosophical approaches to the fantastic, I hope to have shown that the fantastic is more than a list of themes, motifs, elements or other textual procedures. By the ontological and epistemological questions it poses, the fantastic is an inherently philosophical genre. Saudan and Villanueva rightly assert that “il ne saurait être question de confondre littérature et philosophie, mais en dépassant l’opposition souvent proclamée, de s’autoriser le passage de l’une à l’autre” (174).

The literary text is a type of strange, alien being, much like Schrödinger’s pitiful cat, which is simultaneously both alive and dead. The text requires a reader. It requires reception to

be actualized; if not, it's just scribbling, black marks on a page. Literature exists in a constant state of *in potentia*, not only waiting for a reader, but waiting for the reader to give it meaning, sense, fulfillment, life. By adding philosophy into the interpretive toolkit, we allow another level of meaning or sense to arise from the text. It is not a question of literature *or* philosophy, but in perfect fantastic fashion, literature *and* philosophy. “La philosophie, qui veut comprendre [la littérature], la suppose. Elle ne la supprime point. Penser ne dispense pas de vivre. Si le rôle de la philosophie était de capter l'essence de la littérature, elle la rendrait inutile. La philosophie se nourrit des œuvres tout autant que les œuvres appellent la philosophie” (Vax 239). Once more, amplification, not limitation. While we can think our way through literature in general and the fantastic in particular, as Vax says, this “ne dispense pas de vivre.” Philosophy and literature are both ways of looking at the world, of attempting to understand the world and, most importantly, of living in the world. The two are mutually linked and mutually beneficial. Cicero perhaps said it best in *Pro Archia Poeta*, and so I leave him the final word: “Etenim omnes artes quae ad humanitatem pertinent habent quoddam commune vinculum et quasi cognatione quadam inter se continentur” (lines 20-22).

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