

**The Stakes of Mimesis: Tracing Narrative Lines in the Works of
E. T. A. Hoffmann and Honoré de Balzac**

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My project offers a set of new comparative close readings of texts by E. T. A. Hoffmann and Honoré de Balzac. Balzac's early fiction, I contend, grapples with questions relating to the representational practice of mimesis through an explicit engagement with Hoffmann's work. Hoffmann's fiction, in turn, in its playful interventions into the staging of narrative creation, proves itself repeatedly to contain the traces of a proto-realist tendency. The contribution of my project to scholarship is twofold. First, it offers comparative readings of texts that have not yet been drawn together, hoping to re-adjust the common ascriptions of 'Romanticism' and 'Realism' to Hoffmann and Balzac respectively, and to identify a new complication in the relationship of those generic categories to one another. Second, it aims to articulate a new account of mimesis. By drawing on the work of twentieth-century theorists such as Erich Auerbach, Walter Benjamin and Merleau-Ponty, it shows that 'mimesis' refers not merely to the copy or imitation of an object, but rather to the reproduction of a particular sensory experience of that object. This perspective on mimesis enables me to open up new readings of the two authors.

In what ways is life compromised in the name of fiction, of the artwork? This question recurs compulsively in Hoffmann's tales, figured in repeated and near-repeated scenarios in which the everyday is pitted against an ideal or delusional alternative. When Balzac imitates or repeats this mimetic question in the works I consider, it is invariably figured in the image of Hoffmann, called upon as a fictional co-author or authorial double, or as a para-textual element, often in highly visual terms. The thesis thus addresses what I have come to term the 'stakes of mimesis'. If a particular compromise, or particular stakes, are involved in the creation of fictions, for Balzac those stakes are drawn in distinctly Hoffmannesque terms.

The thesis is structured according to the conviction that the relationship between the two writers is not simply a linear one of filiation or influence, but one led by a more complicated sense of imitation. To this end, I take to task the conventional figure of the narrative 'line' and follow it through various Romantic and modernist complications. My first chapter, 'Chiasm', works as a conceptual introduction to the readings, tracing a particular account of literary mimesis from Plato through to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The four subsequent chapters each read a pair of texts by Hoffmann and Balzac alongside one another. Chapter Two, 'Line', focuses on the arabesque lines of *Der goldne Topf* and *La Peau de chagrin*. Chapter Three, under the emblem 'Trope', examines the paper identities of characters in *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* and *Le Colonel Chabert*. Chapter Four, 'Figure', considers the delusional artist figures and ekphrastic narrative frameworks of *Der Artushof* and *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*. Finally, Chapter Five, 'Cross', examines questions of inheritance between *Die Elixiere des Teufels* and *L'Élixir de longue vie*. In unfolding these emblematic figures as models of reading, I seek new ways of thinking about the relationship between these two authors, and about the act of comparative reading.

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Prefatory Declarations

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of any work done in collaboration. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

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This dissertation does not exceed the word limit prescribed by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, University of Cambridge.

This dissertation is formatted in conformity with the *Handbook for Authors, Editors, and Writers of Theses* of the Modern Humanities Research Association.

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Abbreviations and Translations

- B Balzac, Honoré de, *La Comédie humaine*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex and others, 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1976-81)
- H E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Hartmut Steinecke and others, 6 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985-2004)

All citations of German texts have been translated into English, in footnotes or in the body of the text. I have indicated all consulted translations under the author's name in the Bibliography. Where necessary, I have modified consulted translations to bring them closer to the original. Where no translated edition was available, translations are my own.

Introduction

Die Freunde waren darin einig, daß nichts so toll und wunderbarlich zu ersinnen,
als was sich von selbst im Leben darbiete.

— E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Die Serapionsbrüder* (H IV 894)¹

Mimetic fiction has, since Plato, referred to a portion of the world seen as though reflected in a mirror or projected by a trick of the light. Such baffling visions accost the narrator of Honoré de Balzac's 'Théorie du conte', in words that ring in a faintly un-Balzacian key:

Hier en rentrant chez moi, je vis un nombre incommensurable d'exemplaires de ma propre personne, tous pressés les uns contre les autres à l'instar des harengs au fond d'une tonne. Ils répercutaient dans un lointain magique ma propre figure, comme, lorsque deux glaces se répondent, la lueur d'une lampe posée au milieu d'un salon est répétée à l'infini dans l'espace sans bornes contenu entre la surface du verre et son tain.

Pour un bourgeois de la rue Saint-Denis, c'eût été un effrayant spectacle; pour moi, ce n'était rien. Il n'y avait rien d'extraordinaire à ce que le fantastique fût venu frapper à la porte d'un pauvre homme qui vit de fantaisie.²

Critics have recognised in this fragment the crisis of the *conteur* or 'contier' reflecting on his cycle *Les Cent Contes drolatiques* and feeling the urge to move on from short fiction as the French *folie du conte* of the early 1830s reached its peak.³ It has not yet been suggested that the brief sequence might also suggest an explicit scene of reflection on the authorial process. As the narrator's hallucinatory images are

¹ 'The friends were united in the opinion that nothing more marvellous or uncommon might be imagined than that which presents itself in real life, of its own accord'.

² Honoré de Balzac, 'Théorie du conte', *Œuvres diverses*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex and others, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1990-96), I, pp. 517-18 (p. 517). Unpublished and undated, this piece was 'probably written in late 1831 or early 1832 as an introduction to the *Contes Drolatiques*' according to Tim Farrant in *Balzac's Shorter Fictions. Genesis and Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 120.

³ Farrant, *Balzac's Shorter Fictions*, p. 121.

compared to the distorting effects cast by mirrors and a lamp, those two ubiquitous tools of mimesis and autopoeisis, the finite, intimate place of his home is cast as an infinite, otherworldly space. The effect is to highlight both the dizzying capacity of the *conte* and its distortive effects, duplicating, and thereby fragmenting, his identity ad infinitum. Balzac's plural narrator here is not the duplicitous, Protean manipulator of identities of *La Comédie humaine*. He is, rather, a visionary made subject to his own visions, to the multiple versions of himself he sees pitched against the wall. In the breaking apart of his reflected image is housed an implicit fear for the integrity of his body. For the 'pauvre homme' who 'vit de fantaisie', who consumes fantasies himself, he tells us, such visions resemble 'rien d'extraordinaire'. The 'fantastique', here, may not be entirely exiled from his experiences of the ordinary, of the everyday. The fragmentary fantasy itself might also suggest the brief confession of a writer who reads: one who reads, in particular, the fantasy literature of Romanticism, cast in the familiar form of the specular encounter.

This thesis rests upon an insistence on Balzac as a reader of E. T. A. Hoffmann. In equal measure, it insists upon a reading of Hoffmann as a proto-realist, one who makes playful interventions into the staging of narrative creation. It argues against Ernst Curtius's claim that 'Die Romantik ist in Balzac, aber Balzac ist nicht in der Romantik'; that Balzac's works do not themselves betray a truly Romantic streak so much as a simple reflection of contemporary Romantic motifs; that they represent, at most, 'eine Phänomenologie der Romantik'.⁴ It argues, correspondingly, against critics who dismiss the importance of Hoffmann for Balzac's works as a mere feature of his taxonomising sweep of nineteenth-century French culture.⁵ Balzac's early

⁴ Ernst Robert Curtius, *Balzac* (Bern: A. Francke, 1951): 'Allerdings: in Balzac sind alle Zeitelemente widergespiegelt — und so auch alle seelischen Elemente der Romantik. Aber eben nur so: als Stoff. Die Romantik ist in Balzac, aber Balzac ist nicht in der Romantik. [...] Balzacs Werk ist eine Phänomenologie der Romantik; denn unter den unzähligen Typen, die Balzac schildert, befindet sich auch der romantische Mensch' (pp. 304-05): 'Certainly: in Balzac, all contemporary elements are reflected — including, thus, all spiritual elements of Romanticism. But just so: as material. Romanticism is in Balzac, but Balzac is not part of Romanticism. [...] Balzac's work is a phenomenology of Romanticism; because amongst the uncountable types that Balzac describes, Romantic man is also to be found'.

⁵ Maurice Bardèche, *Balzac Romancier* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1940): 'L'hallucination hoffmannienne dans les contes de Balzac en 1830 et 1831 demeure toujours descriptive. [...] Il ne faut donc pas exagérer, croyons-nous, l'influence d'Hoffmann sur Balzac en 1830' (pp. 207-08).

fiction, I contend, grapples with an important set of questions relating to the representational practice of mimesis, and it does so through an explicit engagement with Hoffmann's work, which repeatedly frames and unfolds such questions on its own terms. 'Romantic' concerns, cast in the face or figure of Hoffmann, play a crucial role in what we have come to call Balzac's 'realism'.⁶

In what way is life compromised in the name of fiction, of the artwork? This question recurs compulsively in Hoffmann's tales, figured in repeated and near-repeated scenarios in which 'Alltäglichkeit' ('the everyday') is pitted against 'das Phantastische' ('the fantastic'), an ideal or delusional alternative. It is this question, and its double emplacement of real and inexplicable experiences, that has encouraged critics such as Lukács and Gerhard Neumann to detect in his work the traces of a realist tendency before 'Realism' itself had yet developed as a literary category. When Balzac imitates or repeats this mimetic question in the works I consider in the following chapters, it is invariably figured in the image of Hoffmann, called upon or co-opted as a fictional co-author or authorial double, or as a para-textual element, often in highly visual terms. Mimesis, in the works that follow, functions as a particular ludic mode, with something vital to be won or lost in play. The thesis thus addresses what I have come to term the 'stakes of mimesis'. If a particular compromise, or particular stakes, are involved in the creation of fictions, for Balzac those stakes are drawn in distinctly Hoffmannesque terms.

My thesis will be structured according to the conviction that the relationship between the two writers is not a linear one, not one of simple filiation or influence, but one led by a more complicated sense of imitation and prefiguration. I depart from readings of mimesis as reflected or refracted figures cast by the mirror or the lamp, in the hope of recovering a more embodied account of mimesis within the works of these authors. To this end, I take to task the conventional figure of the narrative 'line' — the continuous line that unfolds like thread from a spool — and follow it through various Romantic and proto-Modernist complications: the Romantically turned line or arabesque; the trope; the figure; the cross. In unfolding such figures as models of reading, I seek new ways of thinking about the relationship between these two authors, and about the act of comparative reading.

⁶ Throughout this work I will follow the practice of writing 'Romanticism' and 'Realism', with a capitalized 'R', when referring to the artistic movements of the nineteenth century; and 'romanticism' and 'realism' when referring to the more general qualities and attributes denoted by those categories.

By way of introduction, I will give here a short account of Hoffmann's arrival in Paris and into the works of Balzac: an arrival that was itself non-linear, marked by the interference of translation, literary debate, and fictionalisation. I will then briefly contour the scholarship on Hoffmann and Balzac and the trends in comparative scholarship on the two authors most relevant to the project. Finally, I will outline the structure of the chapters to follow, drawing attention to the major questions and claims of the thesis.

In 1822, the year of E. T. A. Hoffmann's death, his friend Dr Koreff, one of the most famed authorities on animal magnetism, moved from Berlin to Paris. There, Koreff lit the match of Hoffmann's posthumous literary career, which took off in 1829 with a series of translations and culminated in the blazing 'vogue d'Hoffmann' of the early 1830s.⁷ So goes the story. David Koreff, the Jewish-German doctor, mesmerist, *Seraphinenbruder*, sometime private doctor to Prince Friedrich von Hardenburg — and mutual friend of both Hoffmann and Balzac — was by all accounts a curious figure, resembling something close to a literary invention himself. As a member of Hoffmann's literary circle the *Seraphinenbrüder*, then the *Serapionsbrüder*, Koreff was immortalised as the character Vinzenz in his cycle *Die Serapionsbrüder* ('The Serapion Brethren') and as Dr K. in his tale *Das öde Haus* ('The Deserted House'). Koreff has therefore retained the status not just of witness to but of participant in Hoffmann's fictional world. The two are even said to have shared an 'uncanny resemblance' to one another.⁸ In France, as a 'commis-voyageur en hoffmannisme',⁹ spreading word of his genius through the salons of the 1820s, Koreff gained notoriety as 'eine lebende Hoffmannsche Gestalt' ('a living Hoffmannesque figure').¹⁰ He provided Loève-Weimars, Hoffmann's translator and biographer, with information on the author's life gleaned from Hitzig, and with the sketch of Hoffmann on which his biographical portrait was based. Koreff quite literally, then, provided the image of

⁷ René Guise, 'Introduction' [*Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*], in B X, pp. 393-412 (p. 400).

⁸ Maria Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 156. See also Marietta Martin, *Un aventurier intellectuel sous la restauration et la monarchie de Juillet: Le Docteur Koreff (1783-1851)* (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1925), p. 68.

⁹ Martin, Marietta, *Un aventurier intellectuel*, p. 113.

¹⁰ Friedrich von Oppeln-Bronikowski, *David Ferdinand Koreff: Serapionsbruder, Magnetiseur, Geheimrat und Dichter* (Berlin and Leipzig: Gebrüder Paetel, 1928), p. 149.

Hoffmann on which his French admirers and imitators were to base their own works. The trail he traces leaves us with the strange impression of a fictional character arriving in Paris to tell the story of his author.

As ‘Botschafter Hoffmanns Werk’,¹¹ Koreff represented a kind of posturing or postulated double. Hoffmann’s posthumous path from Berlin to Paris is marked by such ambiguity and displacement. For there was no singular French ‘version’ of Hoffmann. The earliest published French translation of one of his works was a plagiarism: Henri Latouche’s *Olivier Brusson*, a version of *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* (‘Mlle Scuderi’) published without attribution in 1823. When Loève-Veimars published his own translation of *Das Fräulein* in 1830, his foreword outed Latouche’s plagiarism; Latouche’s response and the ensuing debate took place amongst the pages of journals including *Le Figaro*, in which Latouche defended his work as ‘un hommage au moins aussi sincère pour le poète’.¹² The dispute between Loève-Veimars and Henri Latouche begins to tug at the thread linking translation to homage, to imitation or copy. This tension, as my thesis will show, was to reach a head with Balzac.

The fervour that gathered around Hoffmann intensified in 1829, when a stream of translations of his works appeared, undertaken mostly by Loève-Veimars for the newly-founded *Revue de Paris*. In every issue of the journal that year, ‘on y découvre,’ as Brunel puts it, ‘la présence insistante de E. T. A. Hoffmann’, leading to the first instalment of Loève-Veimars’s *Œuvres complètes d’Hoffmann*, published with Renduel in December 1829 (dated 1830).¹³ With unlikely speed, it was shadowed by a rival edition translated by Théodore Toussenel. Toussenel even began his version with volumes 5 to 8, Loève-Veimars having paused with volumes 1 to 4, as though his were the official continuation. The translations grew side by side, each translator racing to seize works as yet untouched by the other. As a result, Loève-Veimars’s version, even in its twenty-volume version of 1833, was left incomplete. The doubling of his *œuvre* into two competing incomplete translations is perhaps a fitting testimony

¹¹ Andrea Hübener, *Kreisler in Frankreich: E. T. A. Hoffmann und die französischen Romantiker (Gautier, Nerval, Balzac, Delacroix, Berlioz)* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag WINTER, 2004), p. 75: ‘the ambassador of Hoffmann’s work’.

¹² Cited in Elizabeth Teichmann, *La Fortune d’Hoffmann en France* (Geneva: Droz, 1961), p. 51.

¹³ Pierre Brunel, ‘Notes’, in Honoré de Balzac, *Sarrasine — Gambara — Massimilla Doni*, ed. by Pierre Brunel (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), pp. 285-334.

to the character of Hoffmann's works themselves. But it also turned out to be a remarkable publicity stunt, much debated in the journals and heightening the sense that his emergence in France took place within what Germán Gil-Curiel has called a 'literary-discursive framework'. This framework was constituted not just by the stories and their translations but by 'the way they were variously introduced, praised and attacked'.¹⁴ Certainly Loève-Veimars engaged various strategies for his Hoffmannesque publicity campaign during these years. Perhaps the most controversial of these was to pit him against Walter Scott. Loève-Veimars had published a translation of Scott's damning critique of Hoffmann from the *Foreign Quarterly Review* in the first issue of *La Revue de Paris*.¹⁵ It is in this translation of the Scott essay — in which Scott condemns Hoffmann's tales as 'the feverish dreams of a lightheaded patient'¹⁶ — that the word 'fantastique' entered literary discussion in French.¹⁷ Hoffmann emerged into the French literary lexicon, then, hand in hand with 'le fantastique', and in fiery debate with Scott. Théophile Gautier, Charles Nodier and Jules Janin were quick to show themselves frank adherents both of 'le fantastique' and of Hoffmann. Essays, reviews, and responses appeared, moreover, by writers including Jean-Jacques Ampère, Duvergier de Hauranne, Saint-Marc Girardin, Edmond Cavé, Victor Euphémion, and Philarète Chasles.

Such strategies and public debates quickly turned Hoffmann into something of a 'Künstlerlegende' ('artist legend') in France,¹⁸ in which his character was an object of fascination equal to his works. Loève-Veimars published a biographical essay, 'Les dernières années et la mort d'Hoffmann', alongside his translated passages in *La Revue de Paris*,¹⁹ and a short biography bookended his twenty-volume translated edition — as though the biography itself, which interspersed its account of Hoffmann's life with details from his fictions, was another tale, completing the

¹⁴ Germán Gil-Curiel, *A Comparative Approach: The Early European Supernatural Tale. Five Variations on a Theme* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 29.

¹⁵ Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann', *The Foreign Quarterly Review* 1 (1827), 60-98; 'Du Merveilleux dans le roman', trans. by Adolphe-François Loève-Veimars, *Revue de Paris*, 1 (1829), 25-33.

¹⁶ Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition', p. 97.

¹⁷ Leslie Brückner, *Adolphe François Loève-Veimars (1799-1854): Der Übersetzer und Diplomat als interkulturelle Mittlerfigur* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013) p. 273.

¹⁸ Brückner, *Adolphe François Loève-Veimars*, p. 218.

¹⁹ Loève-Veimars, 'Les dernières années et la mort d'Hoffmann', *Revue de Paris*, 7 (1829), 248-63.

collection. Its first sentence — ‘Par une rigoureuse nuit de l’hiver de 1776, naquit dans une maison de Koenigsberg, au fond de la vieille Prusse, un pauvre enfant que sa frêle constitution et l’exiguité de ses membres semblaient destiner à ne pas vivre...’²⁰ — gives an indication of why critics have seen in this biography a renewed attempt to fictionalise the storyteller himself; to forge ‘a mythical image for Hoffmann’.²¹

An illustration completed by Tony Johannot for the fifth volume of the Loève-Veimars-Renduel edition provides a neat visual testament to the French response to Hoffmann’s tales. Corresponding to no specific work so much as, presumably, to an atmosphere evoked by the works in general, the picture shows a seated man writing. A demonic figure emerges above him, seemingly from the very material and shadows of his chair. The writer’s gaze is fixed on something before him; the pen he seems to be holding in his right hand appears not to be writing on paper but rather on his own clothes, as though he were drawing himself and the scene into existence. The background detail is rendered in single lines; in the foreground, layers of shadow and hallucinatory form are superimposed over one another in a viscous, inky black. The act of writing, in this piece — with the writer apparently intended to resemble Hoffmann himself — is both a visionary activity, in which layers of reality are laid across one another, and one that seems to invite a demonic or diabolical collaboration. This notion will have a particular resonance with the stakes of mimesis across the readings to follow.

²⁰ Loève-Veimars, *La Vie de E. T. A. Hoffmann, d’après les documents originaux. Par le Traducteur de ses Œuvres* (Paris: Renduel, 1833), p. 1.

²¹ Gil-Curiel, *A Comparative Approach*, p. 31.

CONTES
FANTASTIQUES

DE

E.-T.-A. HOFFMANN.

V.



PARIS.

Eugène Renduel.

1830.



Figure 1

If the French vogue for Hoffmann was characterised by a fascination not just with his works but with the implication of the author himself within them, this is precisely the kind of reading the works, in turn, demand for themselves. Across his *œuvre*, Hoffmann disperses his own presence as author, in networks of playful parabasis and *Herausgeberfiktionen*: the inclusion of the editor figure as a character within the fiction. He teases at the border between life and the artwork; be it through his fictional alter ego Johannes Kreisler, the Pygmalion-like delusions of his artist figures in *Der Artushof* ('The Artushof') and *Der Baron von B.* ('The Baron of B. '), or in protagonists whose artistic visions or delusions prevent them from engaging in their everyday lives, such as Anselmus of *Der goldne Topf* ('The Golden Pot') and Nathanael of *Der Sandmann* ('The Sandman'). As Gerhard Kaiser sees it, it was the combination of his 'Desillusionismus' ('disillusionism'), the disenfranchisement of the artistic ideal in the face of reality, and his 'spielerischer Leichtigkeit' ('playful lightness'), his authorial irony, that characterised the French reception of Hoffmann in the 1830s.²² For Kaiser, crucially, this project of 'überbetonen' ('over-emphasising'), Hoffmann's realistic elements characterised his reception as a 'produktiv[es] Verkennen' ('productive misunderstanding') that has lasted until the present time.

Hoffmann's authorial praxis allowed for new and viable forms of the 'fantastic' to emerge in French literature. The French responded to this, at a time when new forms of print media were emerging, namely the *petits journaux* and the literary reviews, with a reinvigoration of the *conte*. 'La découverte d'Hoffmann', notes José Lambert, 'est ainsi un phénomène français dans la mesure où elle oriente la fortune d'un genre — le conte — et dans la mesure où elle amène écrivains, critiques et lecteurs français à réexaminer les relations entre la littérature et le réel'.²³ The French reception of Hoffmann was so formative for his posthumous career that an 1857 American translator of the *Fantasiestücke* based his translation not on the German version but on the French, introducing it with the confession that 'These charming Stories of HOFFMANN, the popular Story-Teller of Germany, are translated from a French version entitled "Contes Fantastiques"' — for the tenuous

²² Gerhard R. Kaiser, "'impossible to subject tales of this nature to criticism": Walter Scotts Kritik als Schlüssel zur Wirkungsgeschichte E. T. A. Hoffmanns im 19. Jahrhundert', in *Kontroversen, alte und neue, IX: Deutsche Literatur in der Weltliteratur: Kulturnation statt politischer Nation?*, ed. by Albrecht Schöne and others (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), pp. 35-47 (p. 44).

²³ José Lambert, cited in Gil-Curiel, *A Comparative Approach*, p. 31.

reason that ‘the French possesses, in a greater degree, the ease necessary to amusing narrations, and corrects the terseness of the harsher Teutonic’.²⁴ The Hoffmannesque *conte*, in its French variant, is the form which first gave space to the fantastic — and which then defined the future of Hoffmann’s brand of the fantastic. It is, furthermore, a place in which authorial praxis itself is critically called into question: as we see both in the flurry of debates and articles inspired by Hoffmann’s tales, and staged in Balzac’s ‘Théorie du conte’.

Balzac could scarcely have escaped the fervour for Hoffmann spreading through the pages in which he too was publishing his early fiction. They shared an illustrator in Johannot, who went on to illustrate *La Comédie humaine*, and they shared a friend in Koreff, who sparked Balzac’s lasting interest in mesmerism. Yet the troubled discursive relationship between Hoffmann and Balzac began relatively late, following the publication of *La Peau de chagrin*. In August 1831, the writer Charles de Bernard published a review of *La Peau de chagrin*, in which he reads the novel as an explicit imitation of Hoffmann:

La masse d’esprit qui circule dans la société tue l’originalité individuelle. On vit sur le fond commun, au lieu de travailler sur le sien. Vient-il, à de longs intervalles, quelqu’un de ces hommes forts qui ouvrent eux-mêmes leur route, chacun se jette dans la voie qu’il a frayée, et glane sur sa trace, au lieu de chercher une moisson vierge.

Voici encore un homme de talent qui va demander, au foyer du voisin, une étincelle pour allumer le sien. Cette fois, le voisin, c’est Hoffmann, auteur de génie et d’inspiration, qui a creusé lui-même sa mine, et qui doit faire école. Tant qu’il n’inspirera que des ouvrages comme *la Peau de chagrin*, nous n’aurons pas à nous plaindre. Il y a originalité dans cette copie, création réelle dans cette imitation. Comme dans Hoffmann, une trame surnaturelle et fantastique s’y déroule au milieu des événements de la vie positive.²⁵

²⁴ ‘Publisher’s Note’, in E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Hoffmann’s Fairy Tales*, trans. by Lafayette Burnham (Boston: Burnham Brothers, 1857).

²⁵ Charles de Bernard, ‘*La Peau de chagrin*, par M. de Balzac’, originally published in *Gazette de Franche-Comté*, 13 August 1831. Cited in Charles Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de H. de Balzac* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), pp. 355-57 (p. 355).

In this brief extract we see the convergence of a number of elements indicative of the French reception of Hoffmann. First is the sense of Hoffmann emerging in France as a literary-discursive phenomenon, engaging public dialogue in and across the journals. As will become clear, such public debates had a formative role to play within Balzac's crafting of his authorial image, as he worked simultaneously to defend himself against accusations of mimicry and to situate himself in relation to a literary tradition. Second, and related to this, is the evocation of the carefully trodden line between homage and imitation, response and repetition. Bernard gently allows for a chiasmic interchange between the copy and its original: 'Il y a originalité dans cette copie, création réelle dans cette imitation'. Balzac's response in a letter to Bernard, which will be examined more fully in Chapter 2, is as complex and as wary as is the accusation, seeming both to deny the imitation and justify it in equal measure: 'Je ne me suis vraiment pas inspiré d'Hoffmann, que je n'ai connu qu'après avoir *pensé* mon ouvrage [...]'.²⁶

The strange, seemingly repressive invocation of Hoffmann continues in further letters written by Balzac. In a missive to Mme Hanska of 1833, he claims to have 'lu Hoffmann en entier'; but asserts dismissively that the German is 'au-dessous de sa reputation, il y a quelque chose, mais pas grand-chose; il parle bien musique'.²⁷ In May 1837, he writes to Maurice Schlesinger:

Lisez ce que votre cher Hoffmann le berlinois a écrit sur Gluck, Mozart, Haydn et Beethoven, et vous verrez par quelles lois secrètes la littérature, la musique et la peinture se tiennent! Il y a des pages empreintes de génie [...] Mais Hoffmann s'est contenté de parler sur cette alliance en thériaki, ses œuvres sont admiratives, il sentait trop vivement, il était trop musicien pour discuter: j'ai sur lui l'avantage d'être Français et très peu musicien, je puis donner la clef du palais où il s'enivrait!²⁸

²⁶ Honoré de Balzac, *Correspondance*, ed. by Roger Pierrot and Hervé Yon, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2006-11), I, p. 387.

²⁷ Balzac, *Lettres à Madame Hanska*, ed. by Roger Pierrot, 4 vols (Paris: Laffont, 1990), I, p. 84.

²⁸ Balzac, *Correspondance*, II, p. 233.

Such remarks are characteristic of a reading provoked by admiration and dismissiveness in equal measure. Explicit references to Hoffmann in Balzac's writings are not the primary interest of this thesis, having been fully documented elsewhere.²⁹ And yet Hoffmann has an undeniable presence, and an undeniably significant presence, in *La Comédie humaine*. Its significance lies in what form his presence takes — whether implicit or explicit, playful or repressive — in Balzac's narrative strategies. Balzac writes of 'Hoffmann le berlinois' as the storyteller par excellence, the *fantaisiste* or 'chantre de l'impossible' (B VII 956) whose practice is invoked in Balzac's terms as a resolutely un-mimetic activity. Hoffmann's narration is evoked as the narration of hallucinatory vision, of drunken reverie, of the eruption of fantasy or of blinding madness. One of Balzac's earliest and most bloodthirsty tales, *L'Auberge Rouge* (1831),³⁰ is framed as 'une histoire allemande qui nous fasse bien peur' by 'une jeune personne [...] qui, sans doute, avait lu les contes d'Hoffmann' (B XII 90). In *Le Cousin Pons* (1847), one of his last novels, the narrator speaks of 'ce besoin de prêter une signifiante aux riens de la création, qui produit [...] les griseries imprimées d'Hoffmann' (B VII 497). These two references bookend Balzac's troubled attitude to Hoffmann, which essentially begins with a seeming claim to emulation, in the early tales published in the journals, later to be collected under the *Études Philosophiques*, and moves towards parody in the more 'realist' texts of his later career.

One recent account suggests that these references 'clearly connect to the contemporary cultural fad for the fantastic tale', demonstrating 'Balzac's knowledge of characteristic examples of this literary genre'.³¹ But for other critics, the inclusion of Hoffmann in his visionary catalogue of the nineteenth century is more than 'bloße Konzession an die Mode der *contes fantastiques*', representing, moreover, an explicit

²⁹ Marcel Breuillac, 'Hoffmann en France (Étude de littérature comparée)', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire en France*, 3 (1906), 427-57, and 4 (1907), 74-105; Teichmann, *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France*.

³⁰ The dates of works by Balzac in this thesis follow those given in 'Balzac's Work: An Overview of "La Comédie Humaine"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac*, ed. by Owen Heathcote and Andrew Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. xviii-xxii, which are based on those given by S. Vachon in *Les Travaux et les jours d'Honoré de Balzac: chronologie de la création balzacienne* (Paris: Presses du CNR and Presses universitaires de Vincennes; Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1992).

³¹ David F. Bell, 'Fantasy and Reality in *La Peau de chagrin*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac*, pp. 52-66 (p. 53).

engagement ‘mit dem bei Hoffmann thematisierten Verhältnis von Kunst und Natur, imaginiertem und wirklichem Kunstwerk’.³² If Hoffmann serves as a motif for Balzac, it is as a motif which provides him with a way of discussing storytelling practices. Balzac was a long-time aficionado of mesmerism: the pseudo-science that postulates an invisible force or magnetic fluid governing human and animal relations. Mesmerism, linked to Hoffmann via the intermediary of Koreff, represented, like the other popular scientific theories included in Balzac’s works such as physiognomy and phrenology, a ‘scientific explanation for [their] supernatural events’,³³ and thus figured a way for Balzac to account for invisible forces such as human will. This thinking is at the heart of such early works as *Louis Lambert*, *La Recherche de l’Absolu*, and, most importantly for this thesis, *La Peau de chagrin*. Hoffmann and Koreff thus come to represent a complication at the heart of Balzacian realism: the relationship between the fantastic and the everyday. As Hoffmann himself points out in one of the conversations held by the fictional narrators of the *Serapionsbrüder*: ‘Die Freunde waren darin einig, daß nichts so toll und wunderlich zu ersinnen, als was sich von selbst im Leben darbiete’ (H IV 894).³⁴

In a much-cited evaluation by Baudelaire, Balzac is not just an observer of the everyday, but a visionary. ‘J’ai mainte fois été étonné’, Baudelaire writes, ‘que la grande gloire de Balzac fût de passer pour un observateur; il m’avait toujours semblé que son principal mérite était d’être visionnaire’. If the observer draws narratives from reality, the visionary enlivens reality through narration. Baudelaire continues: ‘Toutes ses fictions sont aussi profondément colorées que les rêves’.³⁵ For Tim Farrant, Balzac’s early, more explicitly dream-like fictions show up the conflict between his ‘essentially mimetic desire’ to render genre and text transparent, to open the world up before the reader, and ‘the fact that this reality is recounted, is a vision, a

³² Andrea Hübener, *Kreisler in Frankreich*, p. 180: ‘a simple concession to the fashion for *contes fantastiques*’; ‘the relationship between art and nature, imagined and real artwork, thematised in Hoffmann’s works’.

³³ Maria Tatar, *Spellbound*, p. 7.

³⁴ ‘The friends were united in the opinion that nothing more marvellous or uncommon might be imagined than that which presents itself in real life, of its own accord’.

³⁵ Charles Baudelaire, ‘Théophile Gautier [1]’, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-76), II, pp. 103-28 (p. 120).

perception, shaped by a narrator'.³⁶ My presentations in this thesis will be guided by this reading of Balzac's early works. In these works, the will to mimesis comes up against its own mediating apparatus. The texts considered in the chapters that follow constitute eight variant portraits of thinkers confounded or destroyed by their thought, or artists by their vision. They take to task precisely that 'visionary' or artistic will, the impulse towards artistic creation itself, thus evincing the stakes of mimesis.

It is emblematic of the consistently broad, lively and controversial scholarship on Hoffmann that two independent *Hoffmann-Handbücher* have been published within the last decade.³⁷ Many competing versions of Hoffmann exist, and the differences between those versions serve as indicators of changing critical currents and literary histories. In a recent collection of essays on Hoffmann's influence on contemporary art and literature, indeed, his work is introduced as a 'laboratoire à la critique contemporaine'.³⁸ There is a sense in which Hoffmann criticism works, even now, as a continuing backlash against Scott, who brought the 'fantastique' into French literary discourse by accusing Hoffmann of having a pathological imagination whose chosen themes 'cannot be reconciled to taste';³⁹ and against Goethe's corresponding recrimination of his works as the 'fiebrhafte Träume eines leicht beweglichen kranken Gehirns'.⁴⁰ It is now a broadly accepted and often repeated claim that the Hoffmannesque 'Phantastische' represents, in distinction to the 'Wunderbare' or to the 'supernatural' or the 'marvellous', an intermingling of bizarre or inexplicable events with everyday occurrences, 'Alltäglichkeit'. Such a reading aims to retrieve Hoffmann from the accusation that, whether as drunkard or as delusional, his grip on reality is singularly unsteady. It takes seriously, instead, a portion of a letter to Kunz

³⁶ Tim Farrant, 'Balzac's Shorter Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac*, pp. 140-56 (p. 141).

³⁷ *E. T. A. Hoffmann. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Detlef Kremer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009); *E. T. A. Hoffmann-Handbuch. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Christine Lubkoll and Harald Neumeyer (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2015).

³⁸ Victoire Feuillebois, '1816-2016: Bicentenaire d'une "Hoffmannomania" in *Hoffmann contemporain: Réceptions et réécritures aux XX^e et XXI^e siècles*, ed. by Victoire Feuillebois (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2016)

³⁹ Scott, 'On the Supernatural', p. 93.

⁴⁰ Cited in Hartmut Fröschle, *Goethes Verhältnis zur Romantik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), p. 385: 'the feverish dreams of an easily disturbed, sick brain'.

in 1813 in which Hoffmann describes his method in *Der goldne Topf*: ‘Feenhaft und wunderbar aber keck ins gewöhnliche alltägliche Leben tretend und sein[e] Gestalten ergreifend soll das Ganze werden’ (H I 301).⁴¹

Critical attempts at disentangling the relationship of the bizarre and the everyday have been framed since the early twentieth century by two significant figures: Sigmund Freud and Tzvetan Todorov. Freud elucidates his theory of the uncanny through a reading of Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann*. In a re-evaluation of Ernst Jentsch’s *Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen* (‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny’), Freud argues that the uncanny events of Hoffmann’s fictions represent the after-effects of repressed psycho-sexual trauma. Freud’s reading of *Der Sandmann* in ‘Das Unheimliche’ (‘The Uncanny’) has itself experienced a long and repetitive afterlife in criticism on Hoffmann.⁴² Todorov, on the other hand, uses Hoffmann’s texts amongst others in a structuralist reading of the fantastic. Taking his departure from critics such as Castex and Caillois, Todorov describes the genre of ‘le fantastique’ as characterised by ‘L’hésitation du lecteur’ vis à vis the rupture of the recognisable order of reality: ‘réalité ou rêve? vérité ou illusion?’. Again and again, Todorov returns to Hoffmann as a writer who masters both.⁴³

Critics have consistently emphasised the importance of Hoffmann’s work in the emergence of nineteenth-century Realism, and have praised his acute observational ability, for which Walter Benjamin famously dubbed him the ‘Physiognomiker von Berlin’ (‘physiognomist of Berlin’).⁴⁴ Marxist readings of the 1950s and -60s worked in particular to emphasise the ‘realist’ side of Hoffmann as a keen social commentator. For Lukács, Hoffmann’s fantastic elements betoken a rendering of reality at a historical moment when social conditions did not as yet allow Realism to

⁴¹ ‘The whole thing ought to be fairy-like and marvellous, but stepping boldly into everyday life and seizing its figures’.

⁴² Sigmund Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, in *Studienausgabe*, ed. by A. Mitscherlich and others, 11 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1972), IV, pp. 241-74. See also Sarah Kofman, ‘Le Double e(s)t le diable: L’inquiétante étrangeté de *L’homme au sable* (*Der Sandmann*)’, *Revue Française de Psychanalyse*, 38.1 (1974), 25-56; Hélène Cixous, ‘Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s “Das Unheimliche”’, *New Literary History*, 7.3 (1976), 525-48.

⁴³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), pp. 36, 29.

⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das dämonische Berlin’ in *Gesammelte Schriften*, in collaboration with Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972-99) VII.1, pp. 89-91 (p. 89).

develop. ‘Am stärksten zeigen sich die Widersprüche der Romantik in ihrer größten Gestalt, in E. T. A. Hoffmann’, he writes, going on to term him ‘ein wirklich großer Realist’.⁴⁵ An entry on ‘Phantastik und Alltäglichkeit’ (‘The Fantastic and the Everyday’) in Detlef Kremer’s edited *Handbuch* summarises Hoffmann’s relationship to Realism as follows:

Hoffmanns Strategie, ein möglichst realistisches Bild der Alltagswelt zu zeichnen, das durch genaue Angaben zu Raum und Zeit verifiziert wird, kann deshalb als eine Finte verstanden werden, um die Wirkung des phantastischen Täuschungsmanövers zu steigern. Das Ergebnis ist ein Außerkraftsetzen der historischen und diegetischen Chronologie und ein logischer Taumel zwischen unvereinbaren Zeitebenen, den Identitäten der Figuren und letztlich den ‘Realitätssystemen’ von Alltag und Phantastik.⁴⁶

All too often, the import of this ‘realism’ is confined to the inclusion of scenographic detail — which, as we see here, is mobilised only to show in finer distinction the ‘fantastic’ to which it is both opposed and joined. Such readings, by merely highlighting ‘realistic’ detail, pay insufficient attention to the structures and processes by which the real is brought into play, and the part it is given in the form and formation of the literary work.

Perhaps part of the work to be done by this thesis, then, is to plead for ‘mimesis’, a term usually reserved for the canonically ‘Realist’ novelists, as a relevant term for Hoffmann. Whilst Frederick Burwick’s *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, which makes a significant move to establish ‘Romantic’ readings of

⁴⁵ Georg Lukács, *Skizze einer Geschichte der neueren deutschen Literatur* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1955), p. 57: ‘The contradictions of Romanticism show themselves at their strongest in their greatest figure, in E. T. A. Hoffmann’; ‘a truly great Realist’.

⁴⁶ Arno Meteling, ‘Phantastik und Alltäglichkeit’, in *E. T. A. Hoffmann. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Detlef Kremer, pp. 519-25 (p. 520): ‘Hoffmann’s strategy of drawing an image of the everyday world as realistically as possible, one that is verifiable through exact indications of space and time, can thus be understood as a feint aiming to intensify the effect of the deceptive manœuvrings of the fantastic. The result is a suspension of historical and diegetic chronology, and a logical confusion between irreconcilable levels of time, identities of characters and finally between the “reality systems” of the everyday and the fantastic’.

mimesis, makes little mention of him,⁴⁷ two significant pieces of recent criticism explicitly tackle Hoffmann's mimesis. The first is Manfred Momberger's explicitly deconstructionist work *Sonne und Punsch*. For Momberger, who begins his study of Hoffmann's poetics with an invocation of the Platonic simulacrum, Hoffmann decodes the material of Romanticism to re-assemble it anew in an ironic 'Re-Inszenierung des romantischen Diskurses' ('re-staging of Romantic discourse'), thus staging the very process of a fictionalisation of reality.⁴⁸ The second is an article by Gerhard Neumann in his co-edited volume *Mimesis und Simulation*. In his account of Hoffmann's mimesis, Neumann relates his poetological praxis to the effects of anamorphosis, an experimental attitude in visual artworks which comes into play on the basis of a 'Wechselmuster von Entstellung und Wiedererrichtung des Wahrgenommenen, seiner Defiguration und anschließenden Refiguration'.⁴⁹ In Hoffmann's own disfigurative manoeuvres, Neumann argues, lies an anamorphic attempt to expand 'das Blickfeld und die Penetranz der Wahrnehmung über das bislang Sichtbare', to reveal 'verdeckte Strukturen des Realen' and thus 'damit zugleich eine neue Auffassung dessen zu begründen, was "literarischer Realismus" heißen kann'.⁵⁰ This re-configuration of how the subject might see or experience the object and the world, and correspondingly of what kind of works and attitudes we might include under the term 'literary realism', will inform the readings to come.

Neumann's piece ties into a critical current that emphasises the visual, figurative impulse of Hoffmann's practice, a current of which Günther Oesterle is another prominent representative, expanding new readings of Romantic figures such

⁴⁷ Frederic Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001).

⁴⁸ Manfred Momberger, *Sonne und Punsch: eine Dissemination des romantischen Kunstbegriffs bei E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1986) p. 88.

⁴⁹ Gerhard Neumann, 'Anamorphose. E. T. A. Hoffmanns Poetik der Defiguration', in *Mimesis und Simulation*, ed. by Andreas Kablitz and Gerhard Neumann (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1998), pp. 377-417 (p. 399): 'a switching pattern of deformation and reconstruction of the perceived material, its de-figuration and corresponding re-figuration'.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 404: 'This new capacity of literary narration as an investigation of the real, as developed by Hoffmann, represents the attempt to expand the field of vision and the penetrative capacity of perception beyond the conventionally visible, to make visible veiled structures of the real, and thus to found a new understanding of what "literary realism" can mean'.

as the *Arabeske* ('arabesque') and *Umriss* ('outline') in his works.⁵¹ Other important readings for my thesis include examinations of Hoffmann's *Inszenierung* ('staging') of the writing process, his interventions into questions of written text and *Schriftlichkeit* ('textuality'). Friedrich Kittler's media-historical work has been the most groundbreaking in this regard; Andrew Piper, too, has recently contributed significant new readings of Hoffmann in the context of the emergence of the printed book.⁵² Such criticism increasingly works to show the various ways in which Hoffmann, whilst he is perhaps not precisely self-reflexive, is explicit about the authorial process. My aim here is to contribute to this thought. The intention is neither to anchor Hoffmann into the traditions of the *Frühromantik*, nor to argue that he is a chronological misfit, as an outcast of the Romantics and a precursor of modernism (although this is an argument often, and convincingly, made).⁵³ Rather, I hope to show in an emplaced account — rooted, that is, in the context of Hoffmann's emergence and that of the 'fantastique' in the French literary world — how Hoffmann's authorial practice came into dialogue with the French writer we have come to view as the arch-Realist of the nineteenth century.

If Hoffmann has had to fend off accusations of paying too little attention to real life, Balzac's reputation has been one of engendering life, of writing the nineteenth century into reality — hence Oscar Wilde's famous claim in *The Decay of Lying* that 'One of the greatest tragedies of my life is the death of Lucien de Rubempré'. Wilde continues: 'Balzac is no more a realist than Holbein was. He created life, he did not

⁵¹ Günther Oesterle, 'Arabeske, Schrift und Poesie in E. T. A. Hoffmanns Kunstmärchen "Der goldne Topf"', *Athenäum: Jahrbuch für Romantik*, 1 (1991), 69-107; 'Die folgenreiche und strittige Konjunktur des Umrisses in Klassizismus und Romantik', in *Bild und Schrift in der Romantik*, ed. by Günter Oesterle and Gerhard Neumann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999) pp. 27-58.

⁵² Relevant to this project are Friedrich Kittler's reading of *Der goldne Topf* in *Aufschreibesysteme 1800-1900* (Munich: Fink, 2003) and of *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.* in 'Eine Mathematik der Endlichkeit. E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Jesuiterkirche in G.*', *Athenäum*, 9 (1999), 101-20. Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographical Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁵³ See, for example, the recent collection of essays *Réceptions et réécritures aux XX^e et XXI^e siècles*, ed. by Victoire Feuillebois (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2016).

copy it'.⁵⁴ More recently, in his biography of Balzac, Graham Robb narrates anecdotes of nineteenth-century readers who fell for the illusion of some of Balzac's characters, grieving for their deaths. 'By treating his characters as people who change and grow old', Robb writes, 'Balzac launched the novel into a new dimension — passing time, where life and death are real'.⁵⁵ Such readings cast the vital impulse at work in *La Comédie humaine* not merely as a social-historical or archival one, but as a life-forming or re-creating one. As Balzac's own artist figure Frenhofer cries: 'La mission de l'art n'est pas de copier la nature, mais de l'exprimer!' (B X 418). Such readings find their theoretical cornerstone in Erich Auerbach.⁵⁶ In *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* ('Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature'), Auerbach brings Balzac and the word 'mimesis' irreversibly together, as I shall show in Chapter One, in readings of a realism that derives from the physiological emplacement of an individual in his or her historical and environmental context.

Nowhere is it contested that Balzac is a great Realist: in *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, to take one amongst countless examples, Balzac's name is the first listed under the French portion of the entry on 'Realism'.⁵⁷ But Balzac, no less than Hoffmann, has been subject to re-appraisals and re-readings, as shown by the titles and topics of works such as *Balzac au pluriel*, *Balzac-mosaïque* and *Balzacian Montage Configuring*.⁵⁸ As literary-historical approaches to Realism have changed, so too has the face of Balzac. The New Novelists of the 1960s, foremost Robbe-Grillet, criticised what they saw as his naïve representation of reality. Others, such as Auerbach and Lukács — and even, more recently, the economist Thomas

⁵⁴ Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', *The Major Works*, ed. by Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 222.

⁵⁵ Graham Robb, *Balzac: A Biography* (London: Picador, 1994), p. 255.

⁵⁶ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Tübingen und Basel: A. Francke, 2001).

⁵⁷ 'The novelist Honoré de Balzac was the chief precursor of French realism, notably in his attempt to create a detailed, encyclopedic portrait of the whole range of society in his *La Comédie humaine*', *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1995), p. 934.

⁵⁸ Nicole Mozet, *Balzac au pluriel* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1990); Jeannine Guichardet, *Balzac-mosaïque* (Clermont-Ferrand: Blaise Pascal, 2007); Allen H. Pasco, *Balzacian Montage Configuring* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

Piketty⁵⁹ — have recognised in Balzac’s works a deep understanding of early capitalist society, the work of a thinker who was able to grasp society’s inner mechanisms as well as its surface functions. Balzac has come to be understood as a complex figure: a nostalgic political reactionary who, in his concerns with the problems of early capitalism, seized upon something vital in the spirit of his age. As a recent contribution on ‘Balzac’s Legacy’ puts it:

If identity is no longer a given [...] but rather subordinated to an alienating structure, how does one go about making sense of one’s place in the world, of giving meaning to one’s existence? The categories taken to be “natural” — family relationships, sexual identity, morality — are systematically shown in Balzac’s work to be unnatural, relativized by the great upheaval wrought by the advent of market capitalism.⁶⁰

There, is then, no need to plead for ‘mimesis’ as a relevant term for Balzac. The association, rather, needs honing. Lawrence Rothfield has summarised the three cornerstones of Balzacian mimesis as being, first, the novelist’s own claim for ‘the rigorous transcription of reality’; second, the impulse to penetrate the ‘sens caché’ or ‘inner mechanism’ of reality, not just its surface configurations; and third, his creation of ‘types’, characters ‘whose subjective lives are inextricably linked to their objective, social existence’ and who gesture towards a crowd of probable ‘semblables’.⁶¹ Rothfield thus includes the deep impulse, the copying impulse, and the historical emplacement of Balzac’s ‘types’ in his working definition for Balzacian realism. For Christopher Prendergast and Lilian Furst, Balzac serves as a main character in their broad configurations and analyses of European Realism, and is thus brought to the very centre of contemporary discussions of narrative, theory, and history.⁶²

⁵⁹ Thomas Piketty, *Le Capital au XXIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), pp. 184-87.

⁶⁰ Scott Lee, ‘Balzac’s Legacy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Balzac*, ed. by Owen Heathcote and Andrew Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 175-88 (pp. 186-87).

⁶¹ Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 48.

⁶² Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Lilian Furst, *All is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1995).

What remains as yet unexplored is how to accommodate the double impulse of Balzacian mimesis, in a way that might think it via its Romantic heritage: a mimesis that contains within itself both the function of copying or archiving, and the function of creating or giving life. An article by Maurice Beebe declares ‘a truce between the opposing camps’ of Balzac-as-Realist and Balzac-as-Romanticist; he goes on to make the argument that ‘Balzac’s novels are fragmentary reflections of a world which [...] was somehow within him before he created it’.⁶³ This assertion hints that there might be a phenomenological inflection to Balzacian mimesis. It questions our distinction between inner and outer worlds and the methods by which the one might lead into the other. Insufficient attention has been paid to Balzac’s early career, in which he was learning, and honing, his narrative technique: his earlier fictions, particularly the more Hoffmannesque variations such as *L’Élixir de longue vie*, are less well known and often disregarded as youthful texts or genre pieces. I hope, here, to give grounding to one of his sources in an attempt to ask what is specific to Balzac’s realism in giving it the life-bearing legacy it has had — showing that Hoffmann had a distinct role to play in Balzac’s early formulation of the interplay between inner and outer realities.

This thesis, as has already been made clear, is not the first piece of work to deal with the relationship between Hoffmann and Balzac. Twentieth-century scholarship on the subject begins with Marcel Breuillac in 1906-07, who examines Hoffmann’s influence on French authors more broadly and picks out apposite ‘Hoffmannesque’ moments from Balzac’s works, locating their stylistic commonality in a commingling of realist and fantastic modes: ‘Le réel s’y mêle à l’impossible, le naturel au surnaturel’.⁶⁴ This is a line that will find its way into almost every single piece that follows. Gerhard Pankalla’s 1939 essay runs in much the same vein, emphasising Hoffmann’s ‘realistische[r] Zug’ (‘realist trait’) as the characteristic that so many of his French imitators found compelling and worthy of imitation.⁶⁵ At this point, critics such as Pierre-Georges Castex, Pierre Laubriet, Elizabeth Teichmann, Kurt Wais and Olivier Bonard take up the topic, with Teichmann’s work in particular providing an

⁶³ Maurice Beebe, ‘The Lesson of Balzac’s Artists’, *Criticism*, 2.3 (1960), 221-41 (pp. 221-23).

⁶⁴ Marcel Breuillac, ‘Hoffmann en France’ (second installment), p. 79.

⁶⁵ Gerhard Pankalla, ‘E. T. A. Hoffmann und Frankreich: Beiträge zum Hoffmann-Bild in der französischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts’, *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 28 (1939), 308-18 (p. 312).

invaluable resource on the ‘fortune’ of Hoffmann in France, and on French translations of his works, albeit containing insufficient mention of Balzac.⁶⁶

The comparison gains real traction following the 1970 edition of *L'Année Balzacienne*, ‘Balzac à l'Étranger’, which yields three articles dealing exclusively with elements of Hoffmann found in Balzac.⁶⁷ This is followed by Marie-Claude Ambard's *L'Œuvre fantastique de Balzac* in which she significantly relativizes Hoffmann's function as a ‘source’ for Balzac's fantastic.⁶⁸ Much of the work these pieces do is archaeological, digging up Balzac's allusions to Hoffmann, and occasionally their conclusions seem overwrought, such as Lucie Wannufel's claim that ‘si Balzac emploie tant de métaphores animales, c'est sans doute aussi par réminiscence hoffmannesque’.⁶⁹ Such statements demonstrate an eagerness to uncover some kind of ‘Hoffmannesque’ paradigm underlying Balzac's texts; or, in the case of Ambard, to pre-emptively deny its validity. And, as their titles make explicit, these studies tend to fall under the framework of influence studies, or reception studies, attempting to pick out the strings of Hoffmann from Balzac's weave. Such approaches are not truly comparative because by reading their authors in a strict sequence, they impose on them an ordering structure or a hierarchy of relevance. Whilst it is true that Balzac read Hoffmann and that this relationship cannot be reversed, readings that focus on ‘The Influence of E. T. A. Hoffmann on Balzac’ or on ‘Die produktive Rezeption E. T. A. Hoffmanns in Frankreich’⁷⁰ (‘The productive Reception of E. T. A. Hoffmann in France’) enforce a linear, one-way view on the

⁶⁶ Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: Corti, 1951); Pierre Laubriet, ‘Influences chez Balzac: Swedenborg, Hoffmann’, *Les Études Balzaciennes*, 5 (1958) 160-80; Elizabeth Teichmann, *La Fortune d'Hoffmann en France* (Paris: E. Droz, 1961); Kurt Wais, ‘Le Roman d'Artiste: E. T. A. Hoffmann et Balzac’, *La Littérature narrative d'imagination* [Colloque de Strasbourg, 23-25 avril 1959] (Paris: P.U.F., 1961); Olivier Bonard, *La Peinture dans la création balzacienne: Invention et vision picturale de La Maison du Chat-qui-pelote au Père Goriot* (Geneva: Droz, 1969).

⁶⁷ Lucie Wannufel, ‘Balzac, lecteur des *Élixirs du Diable*’, 57-67; Lucie Wannufel, ‘Présence d'Hoffmann dans les œuvres de Balzac (1829-1835)’, 45-56; Marie-France Janin, ‘Quelques emprunts possibles de Balzac à Hoffmann’, 69-75, all *L'Année Balzacienne* (1970).

⁶⁸ Marie-Claude Amblard, *L'Œuvre fantastique de Balzac: sources et philosophie* (Paris: Didier, 1972)

⁶⁹ Wannufel, ‘Présence d'Hoffmann dans les œuvres de Balzac’, p. 51.

⁷⁰ T. W. Lewis, ‘The Influence of E. T. A. Hoffman on Balzac’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1991); Ute Klein, *Die produktive Rezeption E. T. A. Hoffmanns in Frankreich* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000).

confluence of two writers in literature; and in them, the confluence of two distinct and yet crucially convergent and dialogic literary styles. Readership, as Auerbach so finely demonstrates, involves a silent communion between (at least) two distinct individuals — and Hoffmann proves himself over and over again to be painfully aware of his own readership.

A further current emerging from this early work is the comparative study of artistic themes and theories of the two writers, with Pierre Brunel, Marianne Kesting, Max Andréoli, Dominik Müller and Sigbrit Swahn all publishing on themes of visual art and music in the two writers' works from the 1980s into the early 2000s.⁷¹ In recent years pieces have appeared that deal more closely with elements of the fantastic in Balzac's works;⁷² with Hoffmann's role in the development of the European Gothic⁷³ and French Romanticism;⁷⁴ with their early contributions to the development of the detective story;⁷⁵ and with Balzac's depiction of and relationship to Germany more broadly.⁷⁶

The most recent significant contribution to scholarship is Sotirios Paraschas's *The Realist Author and the Sympathetic Imagination*, a study of authorial doubles which includes a powerfully suggestive chapter on Balzac's specifically 'Hoffmannesque' staging of an authorial presence in his works, in characters such as the *marchand des antiquités* in *La Peau de chagrin*. Paraschas, outlining the literature on Balzac and Hoffmann, points out that 'What has not been studied is Hoffmann's

⁷¹ Pierre Brunel, 'La Tentation hoffmannesque chez Balzac', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann et la musique*, ed. by Alain Montandon (Bern: Lang, 1987), pp. 315-24; Marianne Kesting, 'Das imaginierte Kunstwerk: E. T. A. Hoffmann und Balzacs *Chef d'œuvre inconnu*, mit einem Ausblick auf die gegenwärtige Situation', *Romanische Forschungen*, 102.2/3 (1990), 163-85; Max Andréoli, 'Sublime et Parodie dans les "Contes Artistes" de Balzac', *L'Année Balzacienne* (1994), 7-38; Dominik Müller, 'Self-portraits of the Poet as a Painter: Narratives on Artists and the Bounds between the Arts (Hoffmann-Balzac-Stifter)', in *Text into Image: Image into Text*, ed. by Jeff Morrison and Florian Krobb (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 169-74; Sigbrit Swahn, 'Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu, récit hoffmannesque de Balzac', *Studia Neophilologica* 76.2 (2004), 206-14.

⁷² José-Luis Diaz, 'Ce que Balzac fait au fantastique', *L'Année Balzacienne*, 13 (2012), 61-85.

⁷³ Gil-Curiel, *A Comparative Approach*.

⁷⁴ Andrea Hübener, *Kreisler in Frankreich*.

⁷⁵ Robert Vilain, 'Bringing the villains to book: Balzac and Hoffmann as antecedents of the modern detective story', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 84.3 (2002), 105-23.

⁷⁶ *Balzac und Deutschland — Deutschland und Balzac*, ed. by Bernd Kortländer and Hans T. Siepe (Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2012).

impact on realism'.⁷⁷ My hope in this thesis is to respond to this point whilst re-framing it according to my investigation of mimesis. Re-aligning it around the question of authorial strategies in this way might mean to investigate realism's impact on or intrusion into Hoffmann as well as Hoffmann's impact on or intrusion into realism. This is the chiasmic structure, or chiasmic order, that I see to be at stake in 'mimesis'.

The thesis consists of five chapters: a conceptual chapter investigating the history of literary mimesis, followed by four further chapters, each of which deals with a pair of texts by Hoffmann and Balzac. My aim across them is to re-think mimesis, or to expand its reach: to draw it away from the visual register of shadows and reflections with which it has long been associated. Consistently there will be a focus on the *affective* register of mimesis, foremost in the figure of the skin, which is introduced in Chapter Two's *La Peau de chagrin* and which returns throughout the work. The visual and affective work done by the skin, or by figurations of the skin, in the borderline or *Umriss*, is to highlight the limits of the physical self in narrative. The framed edges of the body mark its point of contact with and submission to the world and the other, forming the basis for a phenomenological experience of the subject, imbricated in the object world; and, consequently, for empathy. In paying attention to this intermediary area of the body, I argue that Hoffmann and Balzac, taken together, are in a unique literary-historical position to give a face to the Romantic, embodied impulse that animates the realist practice of mimesis.

In my first chapter, under the title 'Chiasm', I trace a particular narrative of literary mimesis. It begins with Plato and Aristotle, moving through to the German Romantics Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel, then to Auerbach and Benjamin, and finally to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The chapter aims to accommodate the charges of doubleness mimesis has faced over its history by incorporating that doubleness within a new structure. This structure is Merleau-Ponty's 'chiasm'. I aim to reintegrate subject-object relations in mimesis by showing how, in the Merleau-Pontian chiasm, subject and object reciprocally fold into, reflect, and re-form one another. The reading

⁷⁷ Sotirios Paraschas, *The Realist Author and the Sympathetic Imagination* (Oxford: Legenda, 2013), p. 83.

aims to re-accommodate the sense of touch in what has traditionally been a discourse of vision.

The four chapters that follow take as emblematic headings four different versions of the narrative ‘line’, each one aiming to complicate that singular structure and to show how, as a figure, it might allow for different acts of comparison, all of which challenge its very presupposition of singularity. In Chapter Two, ‘Line’, I read Hoffmann’s *Der goldne Topf* (1814) and Balzac’s *La Peau de chagrin* (1831). Both texts, in my reading, stage scenes of writing or narration. In *Der goldne Topf*, a *Märchen* brimming with serpentine and hieroglyphic lines that merge into and out of legibility, I read the arabesque or romantic line as a line that has been freed from its taxonomical or physiognomical function as borderline or outline. I show how the tale, in setting the line against the inkblot, the ‘Tintenleck’ — and thus setting a writerly mark against an imagistic one — troubles the point of the narrative subject’s attachment to the world. Such a line comes to ask questions about how to undertake the deliberate articulation of meaningful form out of the un-deliberate material of life, and hence becomes emblematic for the subject’s encounter with the nonhuman world. In *La Peau de chagrin*, which opens with an explicitly serpentine, and implicitly Hoffmannesque, epigraphic line, the narrative foregrounds a protagonist who comes to understand himself both as narrative subject and as narrative object. The line of its epigraph is emblematic of the borderline of the body, and works also as a figure of the magic skin at the heart of the novel. Examining these encounters first through the vector of physiognomy, then through twentieth-century theories of play, and paying particular attention to the visual aspects of touch and feeling, I read them as moments of ‘corporeal mimesis’ which cast Raphaël in a thing- or object-like state. In doing so, and in mirroring it against *Der goldne Topf*, I situate this work, Balzac’s only fantastic novel, in the context of his wider project by showing how it works as an expression of the sensory experience of realist narrative.

In Chapter Three, ‘Trope’, I read Hoffmann’s *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* (1815: ‘A New Year’s Eve Adventure’) and Balzac’s *Le Colonel Chabert* (1832) under the emblem of the trope, the line over-turned in repetition or turned back on itself. These two very different texts — the one a spectral fantasy of doubled selves, the other a legal melodrama written in a Gothic register — nonetheless feature comparable plots of an incomplete return, in which the narrative subject, having already undergone some critical singular alteration, refuses to sign his soul away

entirely. They are, ultimately, two tales of paper identities, foregrounding the loss undergone by the subject when translated onto the page as script or signature. The subject's singular alteration reaches the status of repeated trope in a series of intertextual repetitions. These include, significantly, Hoffmann's appropriations of Adelbert von Chamisso's story *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* ('Peter Schlemihl's Marvellous History'); whilst Balzac, for his part, draws on the spectral image of Hoffmann as a co-authorial presence in exploring the uncanny register of his legal case. I end the chapter by making some suggestions about how the use of trope in both works is mirrored by the writers' own self-stagings, their enactment of authorial presence. This chapter thus works to foreground the loss undergone by the narrative subject in what I term throughout the 'stakes of mimesis'.

In Chapter Four, 'Figure', which explores *Der Artushof* (1817) and *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (1831/37), Balzac once again explicitly invokes the voice of Hoffmann, this time in his use of ekphrasis. I begin this chapter with a brief excursus, pausing first with Auerbach's 'Figura' essay and second with Pliny's myth of the origins of painting. In these two tales of incomplete artworks I read also tales of figuring lines, understood through a reading of Auerbach's 'figura'. The figuring line is not just a motif but a formative principle of the two tales. Hoffmann's *Der Artushof* is structured by the reappearance of facial traits and *Umrisse*. Significance gathers in the edges of the body, its recognisable contours. In *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, the narrator draws upon figuring lines in an ekphrastic feint. Balzac's artist character Frenhofer, who has often been read as a distinctly Hoffmannesque portrait, does not represent the end of the Hoffmannesque portrait in this tale: Balzac draws on Hoffmann's ekphrastic strategies in an elaborate portrayal of the act of reading. Both stage impotent artworks — blank canvases by mad painters — in the frame of an anamorphic reading, which demands a particular strain from the reader.

In Chapter Five, the crossover between authors becomes tighter as Balzac explicitly invokes Hoffmann as the source of his work. This chapter re-evokes the Merleau-Pontian chiasm in its title 'Cross', as I read *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815-16: 'The Devil's Elixirs') alongside *L'Élixir de longue vie* (1846), paying attention to Balzac's claim in the preface that his story is an explicit imitation of Hoffmann's. I look at the cross in its various guises, both as a model for the meeting point of the two writers and as an object of inheritance in which Balzac's refusal of Hoffmann and his reliance on him are articulated. The cross, composed of two opposed stakes,

represents the ultimate confoundment of the narrative line in these two complicated, self-contradictory pieces, but also a confoundment of lines of inheritance. The transfer of Gothic motifs and particularly of certain configurations of the Gothic body between the two texts highlights the reproducibility of such motifs. Read next to Hoffmann's original, Balzac's imitative text finally seems to articulate a sense of how it might feel for a text to inscribe itself into a literary tradition; or how it might feel to imitate Hoffmann.

What might seem lacking in these chapters is a sense of Balzac's mimesis as it operates in the more famous and indeed the more 'realist' works of his later career, the works that have championed his position within the canon of European literature. It might be argued that these earlier texts function differently to the works that really define Balzac's career, or that no full account of his mimesis can be given without considering such novels as *Le Père Goriot*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *La Cousine Bette* — those texts in which he is truly believed to have 'created' the French nineteenth century. I acknowledge this deficiency from the outset. Spatial constraints of the thesis, and considerations of balance, make working with the rest of Balzac's *œuvre* unwieldy. Many of Hoffmann's masterpieces, too, have been left aside — in particular the extraordinary experimental novel *Kater Murr* (*Tomcat Murr*) and his *Nachtstück* ('night piece'), *Der Sandmann*, which has earned Hoffmann a place not just in literary history but in the history of literary theory. What I offer here is a set of particular, playful readings that might begin to tease out the tendencies of a broader pattern. The selection of texts has been guided simply by correspondences that have emerged between them in reading, accompanied always by the conviction that Hoffmann's reappearance throughout Balzac's works is not incidental, is more than a flourish; that it has a significant role to play — a figurative or emblematic role — in Balzac's narrative strategies.

My conclusion, however, turns briefly to *Illusions Perdues*, Balzac's great novel of novel-making, in order to make some suggestions about what has become of Balzac's Hoffmann in that work, and indeed in the later Balzac. Reading Lucien de Rubempré's final confrontation with Vautrin, the ultimate Protean shape-shifter, I return to the question of authorial identity with which this introduction began. The difference between the illusions of *Théorie du conte* and the illusions of *Illusions Perdues* is the involvement of an intervening player. Lucien de Rubempré, again and

again, signs himself over to the fictions of others, culminating in this pact with the name-changing criminal mastermind Vautrin. I offer a reading that sees Hoffmann act as a diabolical accomplice in Balzacian realism — and, by extension, in 19th-century European Realism itself.

Chapter 1: Chiasm

To call a thing ‘realist’ is not to call it the real thing. To call a thing ‘realist’, in fact, means to call it *not* the real thing.¹ This is the tension at stake in literary mimesis. The works of Hoffmann and Balzac, read together, offer an account of this tension. My thesis does not aim to explain, to disperse or dissolve the tension, but to account for it by means of these two authors’ works; to give it narrative space or to figure it; to give it contour, or even — in a movement of prosopopoeia — to give it a face. If to make a narrative of mimesis — to tell the story of how stories are told — is to move no further than in a self-referential or recursive circle then this is apt, for mimesis has been faced with charges of doubleness and duplicity from the very beginning. My aim in this chapter is to negotiate and to accommodate that doubleness on its own terms. In doing so, I will suggest that what we might call the ‘Realist’ claim to reality as it comes to life in the French literature of the early nineteenth century, the heyday of mimetic thought, owes something to what we might term a ‘Romantic’ claim on reality. I come to the question through these two writers who have, since the time of their writing, been bound up in the respective categories of ‘Realism’ and ‘Romanticism’.

The thesis starts from the assertion that Balzac’s approach to Hoffmann is to appropriate him — in the vague, shadowy forms of the ‘hoffmannien’ or the ‘hoffmannesque’ — as part of his own mimetic attitude. This seems at first a curious move, for it suggests that Balzac’s narrator, the self-proclaimed secretary of history — who so famously claims in his *Avant-Propos* to *La Comédie humaine* to represent society in all its surface figurations and subterranean forces, ‘copiant toute la Société, la saisissant dans l’immensité de ses agitations’ (B I 14) — references the presumed adversary of his own claims in order to bolster those claims and to put them into play. And so my argument begins with the assumption that to read Hoffmann and Balzac together presents us with an exemplary case of the doubleness that inheres in mimesis. This will involve a questioning of the attribution of ‘Realism’ to Balzac, and of the attribution of ‘Romanticism’ to Hoffmann, and an attempt to situate those two labels in a less antagonistic relationship to one another. This in turn depends on a

¹ See Terry Eagleton: ‘To call something “realist” is to confess that it is not the real thing. False teeth can be realistic, but not the Foreign Office’. In *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 10.

more nuanced account of mimesis: one that pays close attention to the cost or conditions involved in putting it into play.

The task of this chapter will be to trace a particular narrative of mimesis. The aim here is not to reproduce a history of the term. A fuller historical perspective on literary mimesis may be found, for instance, in Gebauer and Wulf's *Mimesis: Kultur, Kunst, Gesellschaft*.² The narrative here, instead, will focus on a few select moments in mimeticist history in which mimesis comes to resemble a condition of life, rather than an activity secondary to it. Mimesis, in these accounts, is not simply an act of exposure or interpretation via copy. It may be described as an act of world-disclosure, exposing the passage taken by the world and its material from sensibility to intelligibility, from being felt to being knowable. In turn, mimesis comes to re-form the narrative subject.

A description that will return within my readings will be that of mimesis as a kind of play. This line of argument follows on from Peter Brooks, who suggests in *Realist Vision* that representation, 'making models of the things of the world', is 'a function of our desire to play'.³ The mimetic project has to feel 'real' in order to be played at all — it has to have some measure of authority; like any game, it must have rules — but it is an acknowledged pretence, and one that may well look absurd from the perspective of non-players. Significantly, Balzac's major fantastic novel, *La Peau de chagrin*, opens onto a protagonist who has gambled away his last coins. Gambling is a form of play with definite stakes. In mimesis, as in gambling, the cost of play is as high as the potential winnings. As illusion, mimesis is a dis-ordering force, presenting a threat to taxonomy and order. This is a suspicion that begins with the writings of Plato. Or else it parades its independence without acknowledging its debts to reality and hence disavows its reproduction of an established order. Much of the twentieth-century criticism of mimesis, in the line of Derrida and Barthes, has attacked it in this vein. Here is the double face of the criticism that has been pitched against mimesis over the course of its history: that it is, confusingly, both an over-ordered and a dis-ordering force. It seems, in the face of this, true to say that mimesis orders a re-ordering of our accounts of reality by demanding of us an impossible view: the view of truth and illusion at once. In a formulation of Merleau-Ponty, as we will see, it is

² Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, *Mimesis: Kultur, Kunst, Gesellschaft* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992).

³ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 2.

the view from the eyes of another. As a role-switching, or a doubling-up, mimesis refers to the impossible task of true empathy: a moment in which the sovereignty of the self is compromised, or is done away with altogether.

The earliest accounts of mimesis — Plato's account in the *Republic*, in which he declares its banishment from the ideal city state, and Aristotle's rehabilitation of it in the *Poetics* as a human activity both instinctive and therapeutic — set up a contradiction from which it will never entirely free itself. This is the problem of whether its products are to be understood as flimsy copies, subservient to and dependent upon 'the real thing', or are self-sustained things themselves, to be judged independently of external reality. The question is how to account for both at once. I begin to articulate an answer to this by turning to the German Romantics, who — far from rejecting mimesis, as they have been accused of doing — expand the limits of the mimetic reach, allowing it to encompass not just objects but processes, relations, and attitudes towards objects. For Schelling and Schlegel, what is copied in the artistic act is not the object itself but rather those processes by which the object comes to be perceived. What is reproduced in mimesis for these thinkers, and for the thinkers who follow them here, is not the object itself but the subject's encounter with the object.

From this implied expansion of the reach of the mimetic act, I move to Auerbach's *Mimesis*. Although Auerbach does not write explicitly of the Romantics, one of his earlier essays, 'Romantik und Realismus' ('Romanticism and Realism'), may shed light on the chapter of *Mimesis* that deals with Balzac by locating a 'romantic' urge within Balzacian realism. This is a specifically sensory impulse: one that aims to disclose the 'Leib der Zeit' ('body of the age') by means of an encounter with the artwork. Mimesis in this account may be said to take place in the sensory collision of a narrative subject with his or her context. Walter Benjamin, in his two esoteric essays on mimesis, 'Lehre vom Ähnlichen' ('Doctrine of the Similar') and 'Über das mimetische Vermögen' ('On the Mimetic Faculty'), offers a correspondingly emplaced account. Language, for Benjamin, is the archive of a time or state in which the subject's experience of the world was empirically different; a time in which meaning inhered within the things themselves, rather than being fixed onto them. He puts this into play in his sketches in *Berliner Kindheit um 1900* ('Berlin Childhood around 1900'), in which the child subject comes to be formed as subject by virtue of his or her encounter with his or her material environment.

The writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty offer a vocabulary for the contradictions of mimesis in the form of the phenomenological ‘chiasm’. In Merleau-Ponty’s writings, the world comes into being by virtue of the subject’s perception, whilst the subject is likewise and equally formed by his or her sensory impressions of the world. The subject opens up onto a world which reciprocally opens onto, and forms, the subject. A chiasmic mimesis, then, unfolds a complex set of encounters between layers of subjective experience and sensory reality. The phenomenological language of Merleau-Ponty, coupled with Auerbach’s insistence on the sensory impulse within realism and Benjamin’s intimate scenes of play, enable me to trace an account of mimesis as a sensory encounter. It describes the moment in which the narrative subject, reaching outwards to touch the world, feels his or her self touched back by that same world and hence returns upon his- or herself, if only for an instant, as narrative object. This reading will form the basis for my accounts of Balzac’s and Hoffmann’s texts, and of Balzac’s readings of Hoffmann, in the four chapters that follow.

Plato and Aristotle

Mimesis first enters discourse by way of its prohibition.⁴ Plato, speaking through the figure of Socrates in a discussion in Book III of the *Republic*, summarily bans the mimetic poet from the ideal city state. Socrates’s general concern is what to keep in — keep both inside the city, that is, and the narrative — and what to expunge from it. His more specific concern at this point is the education of the ideal city’s guardian class. ‘We need to come to an agreement’, he declares, ‘about whether we’ll allow poets to narrate through imitation, and, if so, whether they are to imitate some things but not others’, having established already that different genres of writing call for different intensities and amounts of imitative narrative.⁵ Knowing that our

⁴ In standard accounts, Plato is taken to be the first thinker to bring the question of mimesis into art, and the first to define art as mimetic. For a history of pre-Platonic mimetic thinkers, such as Aristophanes, see Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

⁵ Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 394d. In this translation, ‘imitation’, ‘imitative’, etc., are used: I will use ‘mimesis’, ‘mimetic’, etc. throughout, for consistency.

personalities can be moulded by the stories that we hear, Socrates recommends the expulsion of mimetic art because the representation of base or wicked characters risks fostering — as if by a process of contagion — similarly base behaviours in the pliable minds of their actors and audiences. ‘They mustn’t be clever at doing or imitating slavish or shameful actions’, he warns, ‘lest from enjoying the imitation, they come to enjoy the reality’.⁶

But in Book X Socrates gets to the heart of his critique, which moves beyond the understanding of mimesis as impersonation or imitation. This new critique begins with the accusation that mimesis is a falsehood. The product of mimesis here — whether as a visual or a literary artwork — is a version of experience placed at two removes from the truth. The hierarchy he establishes leads from ideal forms, to humanly crafted things (appearances of the ideal forms), to artworks (imitations of the appearances). His example is a bed. In the first instance is the ‘form’ of a bed, the idea of a bed, an original to which all empirical beds refer. These real, wooden beds of the world, in turn, are the work of carpenters or craftsmen. A painting or a literary representation of a bed is at one further remove along this trajectory, making the painter or poet ‘someone whose product is third from the natural one’.⁷ Under this logic, an image or a literary work is a semblance, a likeness — a copy of a copy. For this reason, mimesis constitutes a threat to knowledge and order, forming its products by distancing them from reality: ‘imitation is far removed from the truth, for it touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image’.⁸ Coupled with this is the implicit, hubristic claim of mimesis that it may reproduce anything: ‘we say that a painter can paint a cobbler, a carpenter, or any other craftsman, even though he knows nothing about these crafts. Nevertheless, if he is a good painter [...] he can deceive children and foolish people into thinking that it is truly a carpenter’.⁹ The artist, possessing no real knowledge of the things or ideas themselves, can give only the aped appearance of knowledge. This means, finally, that the imitative artist is a charlatan, a producer of illusions, having ‘neither knowledge nor right opinion about whether the things he makes are fine or bad’.¹⁰

⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 395c.

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 597e.

⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 598b.

⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 598b.

¹⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 602b.

And so the Platonic fear of mimesis is the fear of a world ruled by fragmentary appearances: a world of tenuous, self-replicating copies standing in for the real thing. The image he uses here is, as we might have suspected, the mirror: ‘You could do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you, for that’s the quickest way of all. With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else mentioned just now’.¹¹

The final movement of Plato’s critique is a turn to mimesis’s threat to rationality. This is where Socrates speaks most severely, declaring that the mimetic poet ‘arouses, nourishes, and strengthens [the irrational] part of the soul and so destroys the rational one’.¹² Mimesis, by virtue of its being a duplicative power, is also a duplicitous one, appealing to our most irrational beings and duping us into believing in false realities. Plato’s definition of all art as mimetic comes simultaneously with the subjection of mimesis to secondary control, to policing. Indeed, prior to Plato there is no concept of art, meaning by implication that the reflection on art — the recognition of art as art — begins with its disenfranchisement. Mimesis presents to the city a taxonomical threat — a fundamental threat to category and order — and an educational threat, for repetition can lead to thoughtless imitation by weak or unformed minds. Most of all, it is a threat by virtue of its multifariousness, of its claim that, like a mirror, it can take on anything, be anything; and of the worry, finally, that its audience might be convinced by (or complicit with) its phantom reflections.

In most standard accounts of mimesis, Aristotle follows Plato in swift opposition.¹³ Aristotelian mimesis as laid out in the *Poetics* is given to be a therapeutic, rather than a pathological, phenomenon. Aristotle takes on mimesis with a double move: both confirming Plato’s ascription of mimesis to all art whilst at the same time building this confirmation into a robust defence of such art. For Aristotle, mimesis is not merely the stuttering imitation of an appearance, separated twice from the truth on which it is dependent — and as such incomplete — but is an activity natural and authentic to humans, who grow and learn through imitating others. Accordingly, the

¹¹ Plato, *Republic*, 596d.

¹² Plato, *Republic*, 605b.

¹³ See Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis*.

emphasis shifts from mimetic copying to mimetic creation. Artistic mimesis is defined not by its repetition of reality but by its expression of universal truths within particular scenarios. ‘The poet is engaged in imitation, just like a painter’, Aristotle argues, ‘and the object of his imitation must in every case be one of three things: either the kind of thing that was or is the case; or the kind of thing that is said or thought to be the case; or the kind of thing that ought to be the case’.¹⁴ Aristotelian mimesis, further, is an ethical practice, one that through the successful arousal of ‘pity’ and ‘fear’ in its audience leads to the cathartic refinement or release of these emotions and helps to foster identification, self-reflection and empathy in those beings upon whom it acts.

The tension produced by setting Aristotle against Plato gives rise to a question that frames the long history of debate concerning mimesis. Is the mimetic artwork a mere copy, or is it an autonomous (in Aristotle’s word, a ‘complete’) thing? This question has continued to dog mimeticist history, as Stephen Halliwell has shown, by showing it to be ‘an intrinsically double-faced and ambiguous concept’ formed ‘around a polarity between two ways of thinking about representational art’.¹⁵ The first of these is the ‘world-reflecting’ model, whereby mimesis refers to a world that is accessible and knowable beyond art; the second is the ‘world-creating’ model, which casts ‘mimesis [as] the creator of an independent artistic heterocosm, a world of its own’.¹⁶ Accounts of realism tend to drain the mimetic attitude into one or the other model, envisaging representational art either as a faithful, reflective portrayal of a world or as an independent discursive reality. The mimetic product either subsists as imitation or parades as truth. The logic of Plato’s duplicitous illusion, after all, is either that we see it for what it is, or that we are fooled by it entirely. A wry awareness of this is lodged within the lofty proclamation at the beginning of Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*: ‘sachez-le: ce drame n’est ni une fiction, ni un roman. *All is true...*’ (B III 50). Lilian Furst’s account of realism, which takes Balzac’s resounding ‘All is True’ as its title, concludes that realist writers of the nineteenth century hide the ‘world-creating’ aspect behind the ‘world-reflecting aspect’. As she puts it: ‘*Poiesis* is in realism masked as mimesis’.¹⁷ Furst uses the term ‘mimesis’ here, and throughout

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 42.

¹⁵ Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Furst, *All is True*, p. 190.

her work, strictly in the sense of ‘imitation’, which cannot do justice to its complex history and significance. In her reading, again, mimesis is based on a binary model, whereby the imitative or reflective impulse is only superficially, though resolutely, imposed on the creative one.

Christopher Prendergast, in another influential account, draws attention to mimetic ‘order’, acknowledging that mimesis is both part of our structuring accounts of reality and a demand upon reality: ‘Mimesis is an order, in the dual sense of a set of arrangements and a set of commands’. By claiming the status of truth, it both depends on and hides the fictions upon which it is based: it ‘deals in familiarities (“recognitions”), but the recognitions it supplies are often misrecognitions (“méconnaissances”); and what is characteristically misrecognised, in the interests of conferring legitimacy on the familiar, is the arbitrariness of the symbolic forms we make and which make us’.¹⁸ Mimesis takes hold by the pretence that we are living facts, and not fictions. This naivety is ‘purchased at a price, which is precisely what in order to proffer itself as “naïve”, it is compelled to mask; it rests on making tacit what, if brought out into the open and critically examined, might cause the whole theoretical edifice to collapse’.¹⁹ The imitative or derivative mode of mimesis lingers behind the parade of fact.

The mimetic order has always been made to seem dependent on this binary by which illusion may survive as truth. There are nonetheless moments, as I shall attempt to show, when, in being viewed askance, the binary may seem to resolve itself into another shape entirely. Such accounts of mimesis — we might cautiously at this stage term them ‘romantic’ accounts — will arise in the writings of Erich Auerbach and Walter Benjamin. Before turning to these two, however, it is worth considering briefly what a ‘Romantic’ mimesis might be.

German Romanticism

‘When literary history searches for the sources of the modernist insistence on the autopoietic nature of poetry’, Matthias Pirholt writes in a recent book on mimesis, ‘it

¹⁸ Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis*, p. 27.

repeatedly places the turning point in the late eighteenth century'.²⁰ This 'turning point' refers to the emergence of what we call 'Romanticism' in European literature. The field of Romantic studies has tended to locate the decline of 'mimesis' proper at the emergence of a new emphasis on its obverse, 'poesis' or 'autopoesis'. M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) famously sees in the Romantic period the replacement of the metaphor of mimetic representation, Plato's mirror, with metaphors of expression and poetic productivity such as the 'lamp' with its self-sufficient inner glow. This 'change from imitation to expression, and from the mirror to the fountain, the lamp, and related analogues', for Abrams, was indicative of a change 'of the role played by the mind in perception'.²¹ René Wellek writes correspondingly, in 1955, of the 'rise of an emotional concept of poetry [...] and the implied rejection of the imitation theory'.²² If such accounts have been generally dismissed in recent times, these examples nonetheless speak of a tendency in literary theory to dispel 'mimesis' from our definitions of modern literary praxis. Even a more recent account of German literature, from 1997, claims to locate in Romanticism 'the origin of non-mimetic poetry'.²³

Romanticism, by all accounts, incited a paradigm change in artistic forms. The group of writers and thinkers loosely known as the 'Jena Romantics' — the Schlegel brothers, Tieck, Novalis and others, the precursors of Hoffmann — wanted new things from their art and their criticism, including a rethinking of the classical and neo-classical aesthetics they regarded as obsolete, such as a certain conception of Aristotelian mimesis. Hence Novalis's declaration, in a letter to his brother on poetic technique: 'Ja keine Nachahmung der Natur. Die Poësie ist durchaus das Gegenteil. [...] Alles muß *poëtisch* seyn'.²⁴ Wellek reads this as an outright condemnation of

²⁰ Matthias Pirholt, *Metamimesis: Imitation in Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre and Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

²¹ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 57.

²² René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, 8 vols (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), II, p. 2.

²³ Nicholas Saul, 'Aesthetic Humanism (1790-1830)', in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. by Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 202-71 (p. 227).

²⁴ Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*, ed. by Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel, 3 vols (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1978-87), I, p. 737: 'No imitation of nature. Poetry is thoroughly the opposite. [...] everything must be *poetic*'.

what he calls ‘the imitation theory’: after all, his argument goes, Novalis ‘wrote totally unrealistic prose himself’.²⁵ But such a reading depends on equating ‘the imitation theory’, mimesis, with the strictly ‘realistic’. More recent works on the relationship between Romanticism and mimesis such as those of Pirholt and Frederick Burwick,²⁶ show that a more ambiguous understanding of ‘Nachahmung’, dependent on a complicated relationship between the artist and the object of his or her reflection, was already developing in the thought of the German Romantics. Mimesis has always carried the seeds of contradiction within itself, and if the Romantics were hyper-aware of this, it did not lead them to reject it. On the contrary, they were forced to find new ways to account for this sense of contradiction.

This is not the place for a full discussion of these new accounts. I will offer only two examples, selected for their relevance for my readings of Hoffmann and Balzac by allowing for an embrace of fantastic elements which may paradoxically both seem to be ‘totally unrealistic’ and yet allow for a closer grasp on ‘reality’. The first is Schelling’s *natura naturans*. For Schelling, who dismisses ‘dienstbare Nachahmung’,²⁷ servile copying in art, what may be reproduced in artistic production are not the products of nature themselves, *natura naturata*, but rather the living process of natural production itself: *natura naturans*. To poetically grasp not simply natural objects but nature’s own animating power provides for ‘an interactive concept of mimesis that dissolve[s] the boundaries between product and process’.²⁸ For Schelling, then, the imagination is able to repeat a finite version of nature’s infinite act of creation. My second example, Friedrich Schlegel’s conception of romantic irony, runs in line with this notion by accentuating the insufficiency or ‘idle rivalry’ of poetically reproducing natural objects. Schlegel’s irony recognises that the world is paradoxical and holds that only an ambivalent attitude on the part of the artist may grasp it in all its contradictions:

²⁵ Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, II, p. 83.

²⁶ Pirholt, *Metamimesis*; Frederick Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*.

²⁷ Friedrich Schelling, *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Thomas Buchheim and others, 33 vols (Stuttgart: Frommann Holzboog, 1976-82), I.7, p. 294.

²⁸ John A. McCarthy, ‘Forms and Objectives of Romantic Criticism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. by Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 101-18 (p. 106).

In ihr [Ironie] soll alles Scherz und alles Ernst sein, alles treuherzig offen, und alles tief verstellt. Sie entspringt aus der Vereinigung von Lebenskunstsinn und wissenschaftlichem Geist, aus dem Zusammentreffen vollendeter Naturphilosophie und vollendeter Kunstphilosophie. Sie enthält und erregt ein Gefühl von dem unauflöselichen Widerstreit des Unbedingten und des Bedingten, der Unmöglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer vollständigen Mitteilung.²⁹

For Schlegel, a correct aesthetic stance may only be achieved through a critical distance from the artistic work; any grasp on the Absolute may come only through an expression of its elusiveness. ‘Structured in this way’, as one critic puts it, ‘art indicates one’s reflective inability to grasp final content in the very act of trying to do so, paralleling one’s situation as a discursively bound being in relationship with a fundamental, unbounded nature that can never be known as such’.³⁰ Poetic production is achieved not through the ‘dienstbare Nachahmung’ of an object, but through the reproduction of the distance and ambiguity involved in the experience of that object. Irony, then, reproduces the structure of paradoxical experience. Sotirios Paraschas shows first how Schlegelian irony, as ‘an unresolved dialectical process between identification and detachment, involvement and distance’, is the function of the novel, which both representationally mirrors the world and ‘mirrors the creative process of which it is the result’, oscillating between subjectivity and objectivity and ‘between representation and reflexivity’.³¹ Second, he shows that the works of E. T. A. Hoffmann, with their digressive addresses to the reader and structures of duplication, adhere to a conception of irony that falls ‘within the theoretical framework set by

²⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, ‘Lyceums-Fragmente’, n. 108, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. by Ernst Behler and others, 35 vols (Padingborn: Schöningh, 1958), II, pp. 147-63 (p. 160): ‘In irony, everything is supposed to be both jest and sincerity, everything naively open, and everything deeply distorted. It arises from the merging of a sense for the art of living and scientific spirit, from the convergence of a complete philosophy of nature and a complete philosophy of art. It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication’.

³⁰ Fred Rush, ‘Irony and Romantic Subjectivity’, in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. by Nikolas Kompridis (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 173-95 (p. 180).

³¹ Paraschas, *The Realist Author*, pp. 40, 51.

Schlegel'.³² Irony thus becomes a key way in which Hoffmann may be drawn into discussions about realism set out by the great novels of the nineteenth century. Hoffmann's irony, for Paraschas, becomes a catalyst for Balzac's use of 'authorial doubles' and thus serves as a figure for the self-reflexive realist *mise en scène* of authorship.

Schlegelian irony suggests that the mimetic enterprise involves a more complicated entanglement between the narrative self and its object than many literary histories have allowed it, demanding, as Stephen Halliwell puts it, 'a more subtle and patient investigation of the ways in which elements in the tradition of mimeticist thought were transformed' in the era of Romanticism.³³ In a world where everything is or 'muß *poëtisch* seyn', the world never ceases to provide material for reflection. The poet as servile copyist or amanuensis is replaced by one who is continually enchanted by reality and continually re-formed out of his or her renewed perceptions of the world. In Romantic thought, the complex act of mimesis is characterised as a paradoxical state shared between the subject and the objects of his or her perception. This experience is pushed further by certain accounts of mimesis from the twentieth century: particularly those of Erich Auerbach and Walter Benjamin.

Erich Auerbach

Erich Auerbach pays little explicit attention to the German Romantics. He has been accused of ignoring them entirely.³⁴ But, as the first writer to develop a complex and subtle account of mimesis — a theory which is elusive and implicit, unfolding not through explicit ideological claims but through his practice of close-reading — Auerbach shows that modern realism emerges from a 'romantic' impulse. *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (1946) is the first full work dedicated to that theme, and is probably the most well-known and acclaimed chapter of scholarship on it. Auerbach's reading of a passage from Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* in *Mimesis* has, in turn, become a canonical moment within Balzac scholarship.

³² Paraschas, *The Realist Author*, p. 53.

³³ Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, p. 8.

³⁴ Burwick, *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*, p. 1.

It is worth, here, pausing to examine the principle of the separation of styles ('Stiltrennung') in *Mimesis*, both in order to show how it forms Auerbach's reading of Balzac, and to show the role played by Balzac's realism in the formulation of that principle. The mutual underpinning of the two makes a delayed entrance in the text, for Balzac does not appear until the eighteenth chapter of twenty, by which time Auerbach has moved us through readings of literary works from antiquity to the Enlightenment. But in two essays published in the decade prior to *Mimesis*, 'Romantik und Realismus' (1933) and 'Über die ernste Nachahmung des Alltäglichen' (1937: 'On the Serious Imitation of the Everyday'), and in other appendages to the text such as the Epilogue and the Epilegomena, the role of Balzac's realism in the formulation of Auerbach's overarching ideas becomes apparent. In outlining briefly the tenets of Auerbach's theory of *Stiltrennung*, this chapter cannot attend to the fullness of his ideas as they are expressed in *Mimesis*, nor can it do more than hint at their many fruitful inconsistencies: I intend only to begin to illustrate Balzac's place within them, and consequently to begin to make suggestions about a particular strain of mimeticist thinking: one that locates the beginnings of modern realism in what Auerbach sees as a sensory experience, borne out in Romantic thought.

The doctrine of the separation of styles is given in the well known first chapter of *Mimesis*, in which Auerbach sets a passage from Homer's *Odyssey* — Odysseus's return to Ithaca — against the story of the sacrifice of Isaac from the Old Testament. Homer's text deals with heroic figures in a style appropriate to their status. Every detail is given space in an overwhelming present; there is no tension, no background; nothing is permitted to remain hidden or unexpressed or undetected. Narrative details and developments are set in a relationship of parataxis or appendage, rather than of subordination, to one another. The narrative exalts in sheer physical sensory existence, with its 'ausgeformte, gleichmäßig belichtete, ort- und zeitbestimmte, lückenlos im Vordergrund miteinander verbundene Erscheinungen'.³⁵ In the piece taken from the Old Testament, on the other hand, we are given the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, 'was für das Ziel der Handlung wichtig ist', such that it is 'in höchster und

³⁵ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 13: 'externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena [...] connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground'.

ununterbrochener Spannung auf ein Ziel gerichtet' — and, finally, 'rätselvoll und hintergründig'.³⁶ If the Homeric poems are built upon the rigidity of the static hierarchy of Greek society ('Dabei wird man sich bewußt, daß sich das Leben in den homerischen Gedichten nur in der Herrenschicht abspielt')³⁷ — the biblical passage, steeped in doctrine and promise, shows the events and individuals of everyday domestic life to be resonant with the sublime.

The commingling of the tragic with the real borne out in the Judaeo-Christian text is continued in Auerbach's reading of New Testament texts in his second chapter, when he singles out the story of Peter's denial from the Pauline Epistles, contrasting it to texts by Petronius and Tacitus. Peter, a hero from the lowliest background, who is called upon to complete a task of otherworldly significance, presents common man in his most tragic guise. To track movements of historical significance through the actions and reactions of a humble individual represents the furthest literary remove from the separation of styles as it is enacted in the texts of antiquity. Action taking place entirely amongst common people would, in antique terms, be mired in a low or intermediate style, betokening farce or comedy. But the Pauline piece represents 'das Entstehen einer Tiefenbewegung, das Sichentfalten geschichtlicher Kräfte', in the midst of crude everyday reality.³⁸ Christian texts, like Christian doctrine, effect the embodiment of sublime dignity in the commonest figures. 'Selbstverständlich besteht bei dieser Mischung der Stilbezirke durchaus keine Kunstabsicht', Auerbach writes, 'aber sie ist im Charakter der jüdisch-christlichen Schriften von Anfang an begründet, wurde durch die Inkarnation Gottes in einen Menschen niedrigsten gesellschaftlichen Ranges [...] noch augenfälliger und greller herausgestellt'.³⁹ Such writing came to have a most decisive bearing on our conception of the tragic and the sublime. This conception is crucially rooted in the senses. For, Auerbach goes on, the texts of antiquity do not know the antagonism between sensory meaning and appearance,

³⁶ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 14: 'directed with the most unrelieved suspense toward a single goal'; 'fraught with background'.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24: 'Thus one becomes aware that life in the Homeric poems is enacted only among the ruling class'.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47: 'the emergence of a deep subsurface movement, the unfolding of historical forces'.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52: 'Of course this mingling of styles is not dictated by artistic purpose [...] but it was rooted from the beginning in the character of Jewish-Christian literature; it was graphically and harshly dramatized through God's incarnation of the humblest social station'.

‘kennen den Kampf zwischen sinnlicher Erscheinung und Bedeutung nicht, der die frühchristliche, ja überhaupt die christliche Wirklichkeitsansicht erfüllt’.⁴⁰ This ‘Kampf’ is not just an antagonism between what is sensed and what is true, but points to an understanding of the contextual self as being only relevant and meaningful in its collision with the objective world.

The key movement within *Mimesis* is to show representational literature as being caught between, on the one hand, the search to convey lived experience in all its immediacy and sensuousness, and on the other, the search for meaning. Judaeo-Christian texts invest the real with a new spiritual dignity, one that is grounded in sensory experience. Auerbach states in his *Nachwort* (‘afterword’, one of the few moments in his writing that touches on something like a statement of methodology) that the story of Christ, ‘mit ihrer rücksichtslosen Mischung von alltäglich Wirklichem und höchster, erhabener Tragik’, had conquered the classical rule of styles.⁴¹ The next break in this literary history comes with Dante’s *Inferno*, on which Auerbach had written his doctoral thesis, *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* (‘Dante, Poet of the Secular World’), in 1929. Dante’s Christian realism does not entirely overcome the doctrine of separate styles for Auerbach — it is, in his words, at best an intermediate one, ‘höchstens einen mittleren’.⁴² But Dante’s is the closest that literature has ever come, he argues, to true realism: ‘nie zuvor [...] ist so viel Kunst und Ausdruckskraft verwendet worden, selbst in der Antike kaum, um die irdische Form der menschlichen Gestalt bis zu einer fast schmerzhaft eindringlichen Anschauung zu bringen’.⁴³ Dante’s is the first text to have opened ‘den Blick auf die allgemeine und vielfältige Welt der menschlichen’.⁴⁴ For Auerbach, this represents the first moment in which man is represented as a sublime and tragic, and simultaneously a concrete and sensuous, being. Stendhal and Balzac — whose ‘human’ comedy tips its cap to the *Divina Comedia* — would be the next.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 52: ‘do not know the antagonism between sensory appearance and meaning, an antagonism which permeates the early, and indeed the whole, Christian view of reality’.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 516: ‘with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy’.

⁴² Ibid., p. 179.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 191: ‘never before [...] has so much art and so much expressive power been employed to produce an almost painfully immediate impression of the earthly reality of human beings’.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 210: ‘the panorama of the common and multiplex world of human reality’.

The break in the first half of the nineteenth century is, then, a secondary break, a repeat of the first; a break this time with the stylistic convention erected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the adherents of a rigorous imitation of antique literature. ‘Die klassische Tragödie der Franzosen’, Auerbach writes in Chapter 15 of *Mimesis*, a chapter dealing primarily with Molière and Racine, ‘stellt das äußerste Maß von Stiltrennung dar, von Loslösung des Tragischen vom Wirklich-Alltäglichen, das die europäische Literatur hervorgebracht hat’. Stendhal and Balzac do away with the classical separation of styles by taking random individuals from daily life, ‘beliebige Personen des täglichen Lebens in ihrer Bedingtheit von den zeitgeschichtlichen Umständen’ as the subjects of ‘ernster, problematischer, ja sogar tragischer Darstellung’.⁴⁵ In doing so, they open the way for modern realism. Divergent elements of reality are, for the first time, able to move freely within a hierarchy of styles. ‘Alltäglichkeit’ is introduced as a serious principle of philology. The mingling and mixing of styles heretofore kept (largely) in a strict hierarchy articulates itself in the serious representation of commonplace reality. Literary realism is thus, simply put, ‘located at the nexus of the humble and the sublime’.⁴⁶ Before returning to the eighteenth chapter of *Mimesis*, and in particular to its reading of a passage from Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*, one of Auerbach’s earlier essays may help us more closely understand the impulses in Auerbach’s thinking that led to this chapter, and its importance in his narrative.

The claims of ‘Romantik und Realismus’ are considerable; they also reveal how early on in Auerbach’s thinking he had developed what would become the cornerstones of thought in *Mimesis*. As he explains in the ‘Epilegomena’ to *Mimesis*, the motif of a stylistic break first became clear to him in his studies of Dante in the 1920s. It was later, during the time he spent teaching at Marburg before his exile to Istanbul, that he developed the thought ‘daß man das Prinzip des modernen Realismus in entsprechender Weise darstellen könne’, and that he published this thought in the two essays of 1933 and 1937.⁴⁷ ‘Romantik und Realismus’, the first of these, opens

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 515: ‘The classic tragedy of the French represents the ultimate extreme in the separation of styles, in the severance of the tragic from the everyday and real, attained by European literature’; ‘serious, problematic, and even tragic representation’.

⁴⁶ Seth Lerer, ‘Introduction’, in *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology: The Legacy of Erich Auerbach*, ed. by Seth Lerer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) pp. 1-10 (p. 5).

⁴⁷ Erich Auerbach, ‘Epilegomena zu Mimesis’, *Romanische Forschungen*, 65.1/2 (1953), 1-18 (p. 14).

with a characteristically lofty claim: ‘Es wird wohl als die eigentümlichste literarische Leistung des 19. Jh. anerkannt werden müssen, daß es zuerst den Versuch gemacht hat, den Menschen in der ganzen Breite seiner alltäglichen Wirklichkeit darzustellen’.⁴⁸ To readers of *Mimesis*, this claim is already familiar. So too is the following assertion that the tragic is, in the texts of Stendhal and Balzac, firmly ‘eingebettet’ (embedded) in everyday reality;⁴⁹ and also the formulation of that originary unfolding of ‘tragic realism’ in the Christian literature of the Middle Ages, following the story of Christ. At moments of tragic realism, the elevated style is wrecked in the name of the common individual. ‘Alltäglichkeit’ is reconceived as a space in which tragic, dignified events may take place: ‘nicht mehr als Einbruch in das Tragische, sondern als dessen Heimat’.⁵⁰

What we see in ‘Romantik und Realismus’, and what persists, though fragmentarily, in the eighteenth chapter of *Mimesis*, is the notion that Balzac is the founder of modern realism, along with Stendhal, on account of his ‘romantischer Geist’ (‘romantic spirit’).⁵¹ Auerbach’s use of ‘romantisch’ and ‘die Romantik’ is at least vague if not inconsistent, referring at times to a ‘Geistesform’ (‘intellectual form’) and at others to a specific historical trend.⁵² As is so consistently the case with Auerbach, terms and figures accrue meaning by virtue of their context. If, in this earlier essay, Balzac is pushed towards the camp of Romanticism, it is because, in Auerbach’s thought, ‘Romantik’ and modern realism are, at heart, after the same thing. ‘Die innere Verbindung zwischen den ersten realistischen Werken und den geistigen Grundlagen der Romantik,’ he writes, ‘ist eng und unmittelbar,’ for they ‘bemüh[en] sich [...] um den Geist nicht allein, sondern um einen Leib der Zeit’.⁵³ It

⁴⁸ Erich Auerbach, ‘Romantik und Realismus’, in *Erich Auerbach: Geschichte und Aktualität eines europäischen Philologen*, ed. by Karlheinz Barck and Martin Treml (Berlin: Kadmos, 2007), pp. 426-38 (p. 426): ‘It will likely be recognised as the literary achievement most proper to the nineteenth century, that it first made the attempt to represent humanity in the whole breadth of his everyday reality’.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 429: ‘no longer as an interruption of the tragic, but as its home’.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁵² Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 441.

⁵³ Auerbach, ‘Romantik und Realismus’, pp. 426-27: ‘The inner relationship between the first realistic works and the spiritual conditions of Romanticism is narrow and immediate’; ‘they strive not just for the spirit, but for the body of the age’.

is the ‘Leib der Zeit’ which interests me here particularly, and which I will carry over into a reading of the eighteenth chapter of *Mimesis*. A few pages after this, Auerbach claims that Romanticism is ‘ein Versuch, die echte Wirklichkeit des eigenen Ich und der Welt wiederzugewinnen’, arguing that:

Der romantische Historiker trennt nicht mehr seine Tätigkeit in ein rein auf Tatsachen ausgehendes, sammelndes Quellenstudium, wie die Mauriner, und in ein rein rasonnierendes Darstellen wie Voltaire — sondern er vereint beide: die Urkunde erschließt ihm nicht mehr nur die in ihr bezeugte Tatsache, sondern in den Einzelheiten ihrer Form den leiblichen Geist einer vergangenen Epoche und inspiriert unmittelbar seine Darstellung: echte Konkretion ist sein Ziel.⁵⁴

We have, then, in quick succession, ‘die echte Wirklichkeit des eigenen Ich und der Welt’, ‘den leiblichen Geist’ of an age, and ‘echte Konkretion’. Auerbach fits the ‘romantic’ impulse within the scheme of what we know as ‘realism’ by figuring that impulse as a sensory one. It is the self-creative energy of *poesis*, merging with (and not opposed to) an imitation based on information (‘ein rein auf Tatsachen ausgehendes, sammelndes Quellenstudium’) that propels a body of work like *La Comédie humaine*. What Auerbach brings to our understanding of Balzacian realism is this new sense in which mimesis can hold open both poles of activity at once. And, in enacting that version of ‘mimesis’, Balzac’s works figure the ‘body’ of an age, the ‘Leib der Zeit’: historical experience made corporeally and sensuously expressive. Mimesis, as the moment of an unfolding of tragic realism, is the tangible coming-to-itself of the subject with its position in a historical context.

We are now in a position to turn to Auerbach’s notion of Balzacian ‘atmospheric realism’ and to his close reading of the ‘Maison Vauquer’ passage in *Le Père Goriot* with its insistence on ‘die Harmonie zwischen ihrer Person einerseits und

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 430 ‘an attempt to win back the reality of the actual subject and the world’; ‘The Romantic historian no longer divides his activity into a study of sources relating purely to the facts, like the Maurist, and a purely reasoning portrayal like Voltaire — rather, he unites the two: the document no longer opens up to him only the facts attested within it, but rather, in the singularities of its form, the bodily spirit of a past epoch, directly inspiring its portrayal: real concretion is its aim’.

dem, was wir (und auch schon Balzac zuweilen) ihr Milieu nennen'.⁵⁵ This passage of *Le Père Goriot* closely follows the narrator's sly claim that 'All is true'. And Auerbach's reading of it is the clearest articulation of the moment described above. It suggests an individual who accrues subjectivity through his or her belonging within a particular context. Choosing a passage that is, in plot terms, for the melodramatic *Le Père Goriot* fairly nondescript — the introductory description of Mme Vauquer's *pension* — Auerbach shows how an osmotic, organic relationship between person and place suffuses Balzac's worlds. Madame Vauquer, presented as the 'Synthese der Einheit des von ihr beherrschten Lebensraums',⁵⁶ is a being who 'explique' her *pension*, which completes the cycle of influence by reciprocally 'implique[r]' her character. Place is replete with character, character pregnant with place. The relationship is an explicitly chiasmic one. Neither can be understood without the other; each is the condition of the other's being.

This 'Harmonie-these' ('harmony thesis') is a reading of Balzac's organicism, the means by which individuals are bound by necessity to their environment and thus typified like animals under zoological scrutiny (Auerbach goes on to single out those moments in the *Avant-propos* to the *Comédie* where this is even more explicit). The stakes of mimesis, in this reading, are clear: imprisonment in the law of representation and typification. Narrative repeats and enacts doxas enunciated from above. This is the version of mimesis that Barthes, according to Prendergast, finds intolerable: 'For Barthes, the mimetic text is "sickening", and exhibits "une sorte de vertu vomitive", not because it troubles an order in which everything is in its proper place, but, on the contrary, because it *confirms* that order. [...] it participates in the production of a stable economy of signs and meanings through its perpetual re-cycling of the "ready-made" (the "déjà-vu, déjà-lu, déjà-fait")'.⁵⁷ If Mme Vauquer is a product of her situation, she comes to life in being read and lives as a formulation: 'elle est *bien femme au fond*, disent les pensionnaires' (B III, 55). And so she becomes a sensory plenum for a multitude of readers, imaginary or real, who agree, on the basis of recognition of particular signs, to read her in a certain way: 'Die ganze Beschreibung, soweit wir sie bisher betrachtet haben, wendet sich an die nachbildende Phantasie des

⁵⁵ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 438: 'the harmony between her person on the one hand and that which we (and meanwhile also Balzac) call her milieu'.

⁵⁶ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 440: 'synthesis of the unity of the milieu she governs'.

⁵⁷ Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis*, p. 12.

Lesers, an die Erinnerungsbilder von ähnlichen Personen und ähnlichen Milieus, die er gesehen haben mag'.⁵⁸

Auerbach's reading of this passage, however, comes in two parts. Where the first part pertains to the 'harmony-thesis', the second fixates around the adjective Auerbach ascribes to it, 'dämonisch' ('demonic'). Here, he draws out a set of traits in the passage that seem both dark and fantastic: 'die Gegenstände und Personen, welche ein Milieu bilden, [gewinnen] für ihn oft eine Art zweite, von ihrer rational erfassbaren verschiedene, aber weit wesentlichere Bedeutung: eine Bedeutung, die man am besten mit dem Adjektiv "dämonisch" bezeichnet'.⁵⁹ We find a clue to this reading in Auerbach's earlier essay 'Über die ernste Nachahmung des Alltäglichen', an essay often twinned with 'Romantik und Realismus', in which he describes Balzac as 'so sehr Kind seiner Zeit, dass er Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Politik, menschlich-innergeschichtliches Schicksal nicht mehr rein vernünftig und moralistisch zu zergliedern vermag, sondern geheime und magische Kräfte in ihnen spürt', such that, just as 'die Magie die Natur dämonisiert, so dämonisiert er das moderne gesellschaftliche Leben des Menschen'.⁶⁰ This is a complex claim. What it seems to suggest is that Balzac's move is a figurative one: that he is able to suggest social, economic, and political forms through the evocation of fantastic ones. Whilst this does not seem immediately apparent in the description of Mme Vauquer, the 'demonic' vision of her as a witch-like, greasy 'rat d'église' is, as Auerbach points out, prefigurative of her character as it unfolds in the plot, which is one of the self-serving greed of the lower classes in the emerging economy of the July Monarchy. Mme Vauquer, we find out, is not as poor as she gives the appearance of being, and

⁵⁸ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 439: 'The whole description, as far as we have considered it, is directed to the mimetic imagination of the reader, to his or her memory-pictures of similar persons and similar milieux which he or she may have seen'.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 439: 'the objects and persons which form a *milieu* [earn] for him often a kind of second significance, far removed from their rationally comprehensible one but far more fundamental: a significance best characterised by the adjective "demonic"'.

⁶⁰ Erich Auerbach, 'Über die ernste Nachahmung des Alltäglichen', in *Erich Auerbach: Geschichte und Aktualität eines europäischen Philologen*, ed. by Karlheinz Barck and Martin Tremml (Berlin: Kadmos, 2007), pp. 439-65 (p. 461): 'So much a child of his time that he is not merely able, judiciously and with moral acuity, to unpick the economy, society, politics and the intimate histories of human destiny, but rather feels secret and magical forces within them'; '[just as] magic demonises nature, so he demonises the modern social life of humans'.

‘ist zu jeder gemeinen Niedrigkeit fähig, um das eigene Los ein wenig zu verbessern’.⁶¹

In a figural reading, one historical event is the fulfilment of another. Meaning comes about in the fusion of the two events. In Auerbach’s argument in ‘Figura’ (1944),⁶² figural thinking emerges as a way for early Christian thinkers such as Tertullian and Augustine to reconcile the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is seen as a prophetic prefiguration of the New, which thus becomes a figural realisation or fulfilment, indeed a reincarnation, of the Old. History, then, is stripped of teleological linearity, becoming instead an oscillation or exchange, a creature with two distinct countenances. Auerbach’s figural interpretation, on the one side, and his theory of mixed styles, on the other, constitute the two grounding *Ansatzphänomene* (‘points of departure’) of his work. Both function, in complementary ways, to guarantee that base vernacular things, the low, be treated with dignity and seriousness: this is Auerbach’s realism, Auerbach’s *mimesis*. For Hayden White, Auerbach’s reading of Balzac is a figural reading, whereby ‘the literary text appears as a synecdoche of its context, which is to say it is a particular kind of a fulfilment of the figure of the context [...] or a fulfilment of the figure of the author’s experience of his/her milieu’. It is, then, ‘exactly the kind of relationship which, according to Auerbach, Balzac posits, in *Le Père Goriot*, between Mme. Vauquer and the pension over which she presides as *patronne*.’⁶³

The reading of Mme Vauquer as a figural ‘fulfilment’ of her own setting, in osmotic synthesis with the greasy walls and floors of her apartment, is complicated once we know that her character is in part a dissimulation. Something of this is contained within the de-personalised *style indirect libre* Balzac’s narrator absorbs into the passage: ‘Qu’avait été M. Vauquer? Elle ne s’expliquait jamais sur le défunt. Comment avait-il perdu sa fortune? Dans les malheurs, répondait-elle. [...] elle avait souffert tout ce qu’il est possible de souffrir’ (B III, 55). Balzac’s ‘demonic’ figures,

⁶¹ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 440: ‘is capable of any baseness in order to improve her own situation a little’.

⁶² Erich Auerbach, ‘Figura’, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Romanischen Philologie* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1967), pp. 55-92.

⁶³ Hayden White, ‘Auerbach’s Literary History: Figural Causation and Modernist Historicism’, in *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology. The Legacy of Erich Auerbach*, ed. by Seth Lerer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 124-39 (pp. 129-30).

for Auerbach, show up the Platonic fear of mimesis as illusion, where the products of representation amongst which we are trapped are at a gaping remove from their origins. The stakes of mimesis seem suddenly higher when mimesis proves itself to be a dis-ordering force. The role of the demon, as the devil's agent, is invariably to suggest a pact in which his or her partner agrees to hand something over — something invariably pertaining to his or her subjectivity. In the demonic pact, as in the mimetic exchange, we buy into a devilish logic (in the first) or into the readings our surroundings coax out of us. This figure of the mimetic compromise will reoccur in the readings to follow, not least in Raphaël's encounter with the *marchand* in Chapter 2, and in Lucien de Rubempré's encounter with Vautrin, in my Conclusion. Figurative demons like Mme Vauquer appear again and again in Balzac's writings — and in appearing, they admit that strain of Romantic thought Auerbach identifies in him. In allowing that strain in, Balzac, as I have shown, both attempts to grasp more completely the sensory fullness of a world and simultaneously admits a certain paranoia vis-à-vis the power of self-replicating images.

To complete this point, I will turn to another passage of Balzac, this time from *Illusions Perdues*, and a passage taken up by Christopher Prendergast. It is the description of the Cosmorama in the Galeries:

Une fois entré, vous vous trouviez nez à nez avec une grande glace. Tout à coup une voix, qui eût épouvanté Hoffmann le Berlinoise, parlait comme une mécanique dont le ressort est poussé. 'Vous voyez là, messieurs, ce que dans toute l'éternité Dieu ne saurait voir, c'est-à-dire votre semblable. Dieu n'a pas son semblable!' Vous vous en alliez honteux sans oser avouer votre stupidité.
(B V 359)

Prendergast's reading of the scene is to locate within it the Platonic fear of 'an uncontrolled and degraded *mimesis*', for 'the Galeries admit to the city everything and everyone that would be rigorously banished from Plato's city; they realise Plato's nightmare of an invasion of the body politic by the charlatan and the magician, the disturbance of hierarchy by the circulation of false images and deceptive signs'.⁶⁴ Prendergast's reading reflects back to us Balzac's image of a self-creating world that

⁶⁴ Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis*, p. 92.

deals in the trafficking of images: one that figuratively corresponds, perhaps, to the post-Revolutionary economy of emergent capitalism in which no sign is stable. What has not yet been attended to is the invocation of Hoffmann, ‘le Berlinois’, at such a moment, and at many others, in Balzac’s works: moments that tighten his narrator’s mimetic grasp on reality and at the same time allow in the fear of mimetic illusion. This will be the task of the chapters that follow. But there is more, first, to note on the historical trajectory of mimesis, to prepare the ground for these readings.

Walter Benjamin

Walter Benjamin, a contemporary and a friend of Erich Auerbach, was, like Auerbach, in political exile from Germany at the time during which he developed his own theory of mimesis. Benjamin’s ‘mimesis’ is formulated over the course of two short essays. The first, ‘Lehre vom Ähnlichen’, was written in the unstable political atmosphere of Berlin in early 1933, the same year in which Auerbach published ‘Romantik und Realismus’. At the end of February, Benjamin wrote to Gershom Scholem of ‘das Problem, das mir die nächsten Monate stellen, von denen ich weder weiß, wie ich sie in noch außerhalb Deutschlands überstehen kann’, going on to suggest that the ‘vier kleine Handschriftenseiten’ he was writing at the time were to be inserted amongst the first sketches of *Berliner Kindheit um 1900* (1950), a series of intimate passages describing a child’s sensory experience of his earliest environments.⁶⁵ He returned to the mimesis essay in the summer of that year, which he spent in Ibiza, separated — like Auerbach — from his books and manuscripts. At that time, Benjamin was forced to write to Scholem to ask for a copy of an earlier essay on language theory, ‘Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen’ (1916: ‘On Language as Such and on the Language of Man’), in order to complete the new piece on his return to Paris in the autumn, in a version now called ‘Über das mimetische Vermögen’.

To take ‘mimesis’ as a question, as Auerbach’s work has so thoroughly shown, means to turn not simply to texts but to the conditions of historical reality as they are disclosed through texts. For these two German-Jewish scholars forced into emigration

⁶⁵ Quoted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, II.3, pp. 950-51: ‘the problem posed to me by the next fourth months, which I do not know how I can survive, in or outside of Germany’; ‘four small handwritten sides’. Hereafter, references to Benjamin’s collected works will be noted as *GS*.

from National-Socialist Germany, literary mimesis emerges explicitly as a topic in the state of exile: a state, perhaps, of forced reflection on an order from which prevailing historical forces have excluded them. A sparse correspondence persisted between the two during the years they spent abroad in the mid-1930s, beginning with Auerbach's response to the earliest published passages of Benjamin's *Berliner Kindheit*. For Auerbach, who like Benjamin was born and grew up in Berlin-Charlottenburg, Benjamin's writing rings with nostalgia. In a letter from Rome, dated 23 September 1935, he writes of Benjamin's 'verschollen-heimatliche Töne'; and in a subsequent letter from Florence dated 6 October 1935, he writes of the *Berliner Kindheit* as 'Ihr Kindheitsbuch, das ja auch das unsere ist'.⁶⁶ Two years later and settled in Istanbul, in a letter of 3 January 1937, he writes more explicitly of the political situation facing them both:

Immer deutlicher wird mir, dass die gegenwärtige Weltlage nichts ist als eine List der Vorsehung, um uns auf einem blutigen und qualvollen Wege zur Internationale der Trivialität und zur Esperantokultur zu führen. Ich habe das schon in Deutschland und in Italien, angesichts der grauenvollen Unechtheit der Blubopropaganda vermutet, aber hier erst wird es mir fast zur Gewissheit.⁶⁷

The reference here is specifically to the Westernizing reforms in Turkey throughout the 1930s. But Auerbach also laments the loss of meaning, nuance, and

⁶⁶ Quoted in Karlheinz Barck, '5 Briefe Erich Auerbachs an Walter Benjamin in Paris', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 9.6 (1988), 688-94 (pp. 690-91): 'forgotten homely tones'; 'your childhood book, which is also ours'.

⁶⁷ This letter is quoted in full in Martin Vialon, 'Verdichtete Gesichtserfahrung. Erich Auerbachs Brief vom 3.1.1937 an Walter Benjamin', in *Raum der Freiheit. Reflexionen über Idee und Wirklichkeit. Festschrift für Antonia Grunenberg*, ed. by Michale Daxner and others (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009): 'It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the present international situation is nothing but a ruse of providence designed to lead us along a bloody and torturous path to an international state of triviality and a culture of Esperanto. I suspected as much in Germany and Italy, in view of the dreadful inauthenticity of the "blood and soil" propaganda, but only here has it almost reached the point of certainty'. This is the fourth of five of Auerbach's letters to Benjamin from Istanbul (see Karlheinz Barck, '5 Briefe'); only one of Benjamin's responses has survived. See also Karlheinz Barck and Anthony Reynolds, 'Walter Benjamin and Erich Auerbach: Fragments of a Correspondence', *Diacritics*, 22.3/4 (1992), 81-83.

correspondence in a world facing the perverse homogeneity of fascism, an ‘Esperantokultur’ whose modes of writing and expression culminate in the inauthenticity of ‘Blubopropaganda’. According to Konuk and Holbrook in *East West Mimesis*, Auerbach’s psychic ‘state of exile’ pre-dates his actual emigration from Germany, having ‘unwittingly chosen’, in his study of Dante’s *Commedia*, which he reads as the ‘attempt to recuperate a world that had been lost’, ‘a model for his own exile’.⁶⁸ They suggest, further, that Auerbach’s sense of detachment from his own historical environment was a life-long, and partially self-fashioned, identity (that he was not, for example, as bereft of books in Istanbul as the epilogue to *Mimesis* suggests). Whether or not these claims are helpful, what is undoubtedly lodged in the groundwork for a study on ‘the representation of reality in Western literature’ is a profound sense of historical detachment.

Throughout its history, mimesis has been confronted with exile. For Plato, mimesis is to be summarily banished from the republic. Auerbach and Benjamin, writing far from home, both broadly understand mimesis as a set of oscillating detachments and re-attachments between the subject and his or her immediate context. For Auerbach, as we have seen, mimesis, the unfolding of tragic realism, is a sensory mode borne out of Romantic thought, achieved in the tangible coming-together of the subject and his or her position in a historical context. Modern realism finds a home for the sublime in earthly experience. For Benjamin, the ‘mimetic faculty’ is a bodily mode calling back to an earlier, pre-semiotic relationship between self and environment, and persisting fragmentarily in language. For both, above all, writing on mimesis means to restore and to reassure particular forms of intelligibility and particular forms of correspondence bound up in literature and reading, at a time when those forms are threatened with extinction. Mimesis becomes a mode in which alternatives to the given order of things may, or must, exist. It is, after all, a place of fiction.

That Benjamin’s work on mimesis comes through a pair of texts has a bearing on the thinking they perform. The notes in the Tiedemann *Gesammelte Schriften* edition suggest that the second text presents a ‘Zurücktretenlassen okkultur und sprachmystischer Motive, wie sie — gewissermaßen ungeschützt — den Tenor der

⁶⁸ Kader Konuk and Victoria Holbrook, *East West Mimesis: Auerbach in Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 29-30.

ersten Fassung bestimmen’, prioritizing in their place a ‘mimetisch-naturalistisch[e] Sprachtheorie’.⁶⁹ I will, here, expand from this view, referring to the essays not as a single piece, nor as a modulating series of two, but as a dialogic, or chiasmic, pairing that share and modify particular crucial resonances and correspondences. The addendum of the first essay, a point about the mimetic faculty — ‘Die Gabe, Ähnlichkeit zu sehn, die wir besitzen, ist nichts als nur ein schwaches Rudiment des ehemals gewaltigen Zwanges, ähnlich zu werden und sich zu verhalten’ — predicts the second essay’s more focused description of the mimetic faculty and its anthropological archetypes in dance and play.⁷⁰ The second, conversely, ends abruptly with a reference to the mystical linguistic argument elaborated in the first, in which language is ‘ein Medium, in welches ohne Rest die früheren Kräfte mimetischer Hervorbringung und Auffassung hineingewandert sind, bis sie so weit gelangten, die der Magie zu liquidieren’.⁷¹ Between as well as within the two essays, then, Benjamin puts into motion a correspondence between corporeal sensation and modes of reading.

Benjamin detaches mimesis from its Platonic cast as the production of secondary illusions. His mimetic faculty, on the contrary, recuperates legibility from a world brimming with ‘adamistic’ correspondences and impulses. It recovers non-explicit but meaningful correspondences in the natural world: what he calls non-sensuous similarities, ‘unsinnliche Ähnlichkeiten’. The mimetic faculty demonstrated, for example, in children’s natural inclination to mime, is a gift both for recognizing and for producing such similarities: it is the lasting rudiment of a powerful compulsion, as we have seen, ‘ähnlich zu werden und sich zu verhalten’, to become similar and to behave mimetically, and figures, as such, a fleeting return to a moment preceding the abrupt division between object and subject to which we have become accustomed. Physiognomic reading — ‘Die mit Bewußtsein wahrgenommenen Ähnlichkeiten — z.B. in Gesichtern’ — is perhaps the most common manifestation of the mimetic faculty. Faces demand recognition: they insist on being read. But the similarities that occur in faces, Benjamin argues, are only a surface manifestation of

⁶⁹ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 950: ‘mimetic-naturalistic theory of language’.

⁷⁰ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 210: ‘The gift which we possess of seeing similarity is nothing but a weak rudiment of the formerly powerful compulsion to become similar and also to behave mimetically’.

⁷¹ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 213: ‘language may be seen as [...] a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic’.

‘unzählig vielen unbewußt oder auch gar nicht wahrgenommenen Ähnlichkeiten’.⁷²

The world contains an uncountably fuller set of physiognomic-like legible correspondences. These can be seen in the earliest mimetic acts, such as astrology: ‘Wir müssen nämlich [...] damit rechnen’, Benjamin puts it, ‘daß sinnfällige Gestaltung, mimetischer Objektcharakter bestanden habe, wo wir ihn heute nicht einmal zu ahnen fähig sind. Zum Beispiel in den Konstellationen der Sterne’.⁷³

The shapes made by stars may now bear no direct relation to human destiny, but — to follow the logic of these essays — once, in human perception, they did. Scholem, writing of their conversations in Berlin in 1918, describes how for Benjamin ‘Die Entstehung der Sternbilder als Konfigurationen auf der Himmelsfläche’ represented, in effect, ‘der Beginn des Lesens, der Schrift, die mit der Ausbildung des mythischen Weltalters zusammenfalle’.⁷⁴ The mystical act of reading stars and entrails and runes, ruled over by the mimetic faculty, persists in language. Language is not, for Benjamin, a system of arbitrary links between words and their objects, mired in convention. His language theory here comes closer to that assumption (following Herder) of an essential or onomatopoetic relationship between words and the things they represent.⁷⁵ Knowledge of such relationships, once accessible to ‘dem Geist des Sehers oder Priesters’,⁷⁶ has made its way into language and writing, making language a canon or archive of these lost experiences, which are preserved fleetingly in its non-sensuous correspondences:

Wenn nun dieses Herauslesen aus Sternen, Eingeweiden, Zufällen in der Urzeit der Menschheit das Lesen schlechthin war, wenn es weiterhin Vermittlungsglieder zu einem neuen Lesen, wie die Runen es gewesen sind,

⁷² Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 205: ‘The similarities which one perceives consciously, for instance in faces’; ‘the countless similarities perceived unconsciously or not at all’.

⁷³ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 206: ‘we must take into account the possibility that human beings might have perceived manifest formulations, that is, that objects had a mimetic character, where nowadays we would not even be capable of suspecting it. For example, in the constellations of the stars’.

⁷⁴ Benjamin, *GS* II.3, p. 955: ‘The emergence of constellations of stars as configurations on the surface of the sky [represented] the beginning of reading, of script, which coincides with the education of the mythical world’.

⁷⁵ See Anson Rabinbach ‘Introduction to Walter Benjamin’s “Doctrine of the Similar”’, *New German Critique*, 17 (1979), 60-64 (p. 61).

⁷⁶ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 209: ‘the mind of the augur or priest’.

gegeben hat, so liegt die Annahme sehr nahe, jene mimetische Begabung, welche früher das Fundament der Hellsicht gewesen ist, sei in jahrtausendlangem Gange der Entwicklung ganz allmählich in Sprache und Schrift hineingewandert und habe sich in ihnen das vollkommenste Archiv unsinnlicher Ähnlichkeit geschaffen.⁷⁷

In his theory of language, then, Benjamin probes the ontological stakes of mimesis, describing a primordial state of being in the world; a return to a time preceding the rational subject/object divide. The mimetic faculty, as we have seen, is the capacity to perceive and simultaneously to produce those similarities — ‘Die Gabe, Ähnlichkeit zu sehn, die wir besitzen, ist nichts als nur ein schwaches Rudiment des ehemals gewaltigen Zwanges, ähnlich zu werden und sich zu verhalten’. This compulsion is made visible in scenarios of play, when children imitate not just other humans but objects too, ‘sondern auch Windmühle und Eisenbahn’; and it is likewise preserved in gestural activities such as dance — ‘Im Tanz, in anderen kultischen Veranstaltungen, konnte so eine Nachahmung erzeugt, so eine Ähnlichkeit gehandhabt werden’.⁷⁸ To behave mimetically, then, is to produce successive versions of the self as object: fully absorbed and at home in its own context. For Michael Taussig, reading Benjamin, ‘The ability to mime, and mime well [...] is the capacity to Other’.⁷⁹ And reading, in which ‘Ähnlichkeiten, flüchtig [...] aus dem Fluß der Dinge hervorblitzen’, and which is always, for Benjamin, ‘at once a secular and a mystical activity’, dependent

⁷⁷ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 209: ‘If, in the dawn of humanity, this reading from stars, entrails, and coincidences represented reading *per se*, and further, if there were mediating links to a newer kind of reading, as represented by the runes, then one might well assume that the mimetic faculty, which was earlier the basis for clairvoyance, quite gradually found its way into language and writing in the course of a development over thousands of years, thus creating for itself in language and writing the most perfect archive of non-sensuous similarity’.

⁷⁸ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, pp. 210-11: ‘The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher but also a windmill and a train’; ‘in dance, on other such cultic occasions, such imitation could be produced, such similarity manipulated’.

⁷⁹ Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) p. 19.

on a particular concentration, energy and speed, allows the spirit ('Geist') to participate in this alternative mimetic mode.⁸⁰

Elizabeth Stewart reads Benjaminian mimesis as a re-writing of subject-object relationships into 'dialogic structures' that might 'survive the deadening and reifying forces of modernity'.⁸¹ In this sense, Benjamin's mimesis relates to Surrealist discourses of mimetic metamorphosis.⁸² One of the most influential papers in this field is that of Roger Caillois, a member of the Collège de Sociologie in Paris, at which Benjamin attended lectures and seminars during the 1930s. Caillois's 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire' (1935) describes how camouflage and insectile mimicry entail a schizophrenic confusion of self with environment, a radical state of passivity which he terms a 'tentation de l'espace'. This dispossession or mimetic assimilation into space is a movement into automatism, 'une sorte d'*instinct d'abandon* qui le polarise vers un mode d'existence réduite' — towards what he calls '*l'inertie de l'élan vital*'.⁸³

This radical suspension of self, first glimpsed and given a quasi-theoretical base in 'Lehre vom Ähnlichen' and 'Über das mimetische Vermögen', is a state returned to more fully in the sketched narratives of *Berliner Kindheit um 1900*. It is a state which once more allows for that sense of mimesis not simply as copying but also, and alongside that sense, as *re-enactment* — as 'mimesis' once meant in the original Greek. That this state can at once fall under the order of a nostalgic sense of belonging, the child's absorption into his environment, and under the order of mass passivity, speaks to the ambivalent position of historical context and 'home' in Benjamin's formulation of mimesis. The *Denkbilder* ('thinking images') of the *Berliner Kindheit* transform the world, enlivening it through play, into a set of experiences that precede the arbitrary semiotic attribution of words to things. 'Die

⁸⁰ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 209: 'similarities flash up fleetingly out of the stream of things'; Michael Jennings, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 118.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Stewart, *Catastrophe and Survival: Walter Benjamin and Psychoanalysis* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 78.

⁸² See, for example, Joyce Cheng, 'Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis: Roger Caillois, Walter Benjamin and Surrealism in the 1930s', *Modernism/Modernity*, 16.1 (2009), 61-86, and Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*.

⁸³ Roger Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire', *Minotaure*, 7 (1935), 4-10 (p. 9). Emphasis original.

Mummerehlen' ('The Mummerehlen'), one of these sketches, is a paradigmatic image of mimetic subject-formation. It shows a child-subject who comes into being through the formation of its perceived world when that formation looks like an *Entstellung*, a displacement or disfigurement. The character 'Muhme Rehlen' of a children's song is misheard by the child narrator as the nonsensical word 'Mummerehlen'. This misunderstanding comes to command his conception of the world: 'Das Missverstehen verstellte mir die Welt. Jedoch auf gute Art; es wies die Wege, die in ihr Inneres führten'.⁸⁴ The mis-hearing, by rousing up the alterity that resides in things, gives rise to a set of experiences in which the world becomes both playground and mask, camouflage and costume: Benjamin's child learns 'in die Worte, die eigentlich Wolken waren, mich zu mummen' — where his own lilted use of language, 'mummen'/'Mumme'/'Muhme', words of masking and misunderstanding, heightens the sense of an embracing alterity.⁸⁵ When he paints, 'Die Farben, die ich dann mischte, färbten mich'. The subject, 'entstellt vor Ähnlichkeit mit allem, was hier um mich ist', laid low against the alterity of the world, is given form by that world and its alterity.⁸⁶ The subject is formed through his or her own fictions. Mimesis returns upon the self.

Auerbach's and Benjamin's 'romantic', exilic rehabilitations of mimesis may seem to suggest isolated moments in a literary history that has continued to denunciate, to expel or prohibit it from discussions of narrative. In twentieth-century literary theory, truthfulness of representation is considered either suspect or else naïve, and so a mimesis taken to be the vehicle of such truth must be done away with. For Barthes and the structuralists, mimesis represents a perpetuation of the conventions of the dominant ideology. For Derrida, similarly, the mimetic act only redoubles the figurations of the self. But I turn now to a third point in this line of mimeticist thinking, and one in whose writings this re-thinking of mimesis is given a new and concrete figure.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

⁸⁴ Benjamin, *GS* IV.1, p. 260

⁸⁵ Benjamin, *GS* IV.1, pp. 260-61: 'I learned to disguise myself in words, which really were clouds'.

⁸⁶ Benjamin, *GS* IV.1, pp. 262, 261: 'The colours I mixed would colour me'; 'distorted by similarity to all that surrounds me here'.

This figure is one that may allow us to view a binary structure askance or anamorphically, and hence to allow that binary to appear to resolve itself. It is the figure of the chiasm. The *chiasm* comes from the graphic of the Greek letter ‘chi’ (χ) and denotes a crossing over or an interlacing. It is a contradictory figure, representing the entanglement of two opposites, their undecidable fusion and separation. It violates the principle of binary logic, initiating a suspension of binary oppositions without collapsing those oppositions into sameness, holding two in one, and maintaining both the sameness and difference of the two it relates. It is, in a sense, the figure of a benign contradiction. The French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty develops his notion of the chiasm as a figure for subjective perception in the fourth chapter of his unfinished book *Le Visible et l’invisible* (1968), as well as in his final essay, ‘L’Œil et l’esprit’ (1961). These are the two major works to which I will make reference in the following description of chiasmic structures.

In *Le Visible et l’invisible*, Merleau-Ponty seeks to give a reciprocal or dialectical definition of being: one that might account for the living subject as ‘une seule question continue, une entreprise pépétuelle de relèvement de nous-mêmes sur les constellations du monde’.⁸⁷ This subject is in constant dialogue with the world; he or she solicits, encroaches on, and completes the objects of his or her perceived surroundings just as those objects solicit, encroach on, and complete his or her presence amongst them. The subject opens up onto a world which reciprocally opens onto, and forms, the subject. Or, as he puts it in an unpublished piece of 1962, ‘Le sujet de la perception n’est pas ce penseur absolu, il fonctionne en application d’un pacte passé à notre naissance entre notre corps et le monde, entre nous-mêmes et notre corps, il est comme une naissance continuée, celui à qui une situation physique et historique a été donnée à gérer, et l’est à chaque instance de nouveau’.⁸⁸ An essential intimacy between the perceiving subject and his or her surroundings exists in balance with a sense of radical alterity or distancing between them.

Merleau-Ponty privileges the realm of lived perceptual experience originating in the body. This primordial perception denotes a pre-cultural, pre-semiotic layer of experience which is subjected, in social life, to constant revision and interpretation. In the unpublished 1962 essay, he writes, in summary of his phenomenological project:

⁸⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 138.

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, ‘Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty’, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 4 (1962), 401-09 (p. 404).

L'esprit qui perçoit est un esprit incarné, et c'est l'enracinement de l'esprit dans son corps et dans son monde que nous avons cherché d'abord à rétablir, aussi bien contre les doctrines qui traitent la perception comme le simple résultat de l'action des choses extérieures sur notre corps, que contre celles qui insistent sur l'autonomie de la prise de conscience.⁸⁹

This is an explicitly anti-binaristic (anti-Cartesian) proposition, aiming to get under, or to break apart, the caked acculturation of a binaristic self/world opposition. The relationship of the incarnated subject with its material surroundings is here already explicitly 'chiasmic' in nature.

In *Le Visible et l'invisible*, the world comes into being by virtue of our perception of it, and vice versa: 'le monde n'est notre lieu natal que parce que d'abord nous sommes comme esprits le berceau du monde'.⁹⁰ The world cannot pre-exist my consciousness of it. Behind this premise is the dilemma of the perception of the other. There is no way to inhabit the other's sensory experience of the world. We must simply, for necessity's sake, assume that it corresponds in some way with our own. It is this assumption that initiates the kind of work that goes into the formulation of the 'chiasm': for when I see the other, an intractable, opaque being, I see that she or he perceives, like I do — and at this point 'l'évidence éclate que là-bas aussi, minute par minute, la vie est vécue'.⁹¹ Here is the first clue that, in the world of visible things, I must for a moment abandon the notion of myself as the centre of all experience. In Merleau-Ponty's formulation, therefore, 'ce n'est que par le monde que je puis sortir de moi'.⁹² For 'le "si j'habitais"' (inhabited the body or the perceptual experience of the other) is not, he explains, 'une hypothèse, c'est une fiction ou un mythe', it is a prohibited experience, 'une expérience interdite, c'est un impossible, et il doit en être ainsi si vraiment autrui est autrui'⁹³ — a guarantee of self against the premise of alterity. And, as in a kind of mirror-image scenario, or indeed in a chiasmic crossing, 'nous-mêmes n'avons pas, de quelqu'un et de nous, deux images côte à côte, mais une

⁸⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 'Un inédit', p. 402.

⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, p. 53.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 108

seule image où nous sommes impliqués tous deux [...] l'envers l'un de l'autre'; such that 'nous sommes des moments de la même syntaxe, nous comptons au même monde, nous relevons du même Être'.⁹⁴ The prohibition on experience from the point of the other, then, this drastic alterity, turns out to be both the origin of an ethics — one that works through empathy — and also of mimetic thinking, in the sense of the imagined narrative of an other.

To begin to think from that radically inaccessible place — to think through the eyes of another, which is impossible — is to experience the self as a thing perceived. In turn, I as subject become aware of myself as visible object, or: 'je me sens vu'.⁹⁵ The body, in its double identity as subject and object, acquires a view upon itself whereby 'corps objectif et corps phenomenal tournent l'un autour de l'autre ou empiètent l'un sur l'autre'.⁹⁶ The classic account for this, recalled in several places throughout the text, is the image of one hand touching the other, such that the body feels, as touching subject, and simultaneously feels itself as object under that same touch. This reversibility is the experience of the chiasm par excellence; it also defines Merleau-Ponty's notion of *flesh*. He writes:

Encore une fois, la chair dont nous parlons n'est pas la matière. Elle est l'enroulement du visible sur le corps voyant, du tangible sur le corps touchant, qui est attesté notamment quand le corps se voit, se touche en train de voir et de toucher les choses, de sorte que, simultanément, *comme* tangible il descend parmi elles, *comme* touchant il les domine toutes et tire de lui-même ce rapport, et même ce double rapport, par déhiscence ou fission de sa masse.⁹⁷

This 'déhiscence' or 'fission' is the state of the body in its chiasmic double identity as subject and object. It is 'un être à deux feuillets, d'un côté chose parmi les choses et, par ailleurs, celui qui les voit et les touche [...] il réunit en lui ces deux propriétés, et sa double appartenance à l'ordre de l'"objet" et à l'ordre du "sujet" nous dévoile entre les deux ordres des relations très inattendues'.⁹⁸ Perception happens at the point of

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 113

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 108.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 155.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 178.

crossover between the seeing and the visible, toucher and touched. But there is also, explicitly, something *lost*, or handed over, in that moment. For to account for the anonymity of the self is, perhaps, to lose the (solipsistic) sense of self as truly sovereign agent. It is to acknowledge the self's own doubleness. I am also something in somebody else's view, or something touched by something else; am, finally, a stranger in my self.

'L'Œil et l'esprit' is in some ways a simpler text than *Le Visible et l'invisible*. It offers in its brevity a closer description of chiasmic perception through the exploration of a specific action: painting. In doing so it explicitly designates the chiasm as the figure of a mimetic act. The essay draws on a body that is familiar to the reader of *Le Visible et l'invisible*: a body 'qui est un entrelacs de vision et de mouvement'; 'Il se voit voyant, il se touche touchant, il est visible et sensible pour soi-même'; a body which is 'au nombre des choses, il est l'une d'elles, il est pris dans le tissu du monde et sa cohésion est celle d'une chose'.⁹⁹ This set of exchanges conditions the action of painting such that painting may finally be defined as a coming-to-itself of the visible. The painted image, he shows, is not, necessarily, a copy of a second order to the thing it purportedly represents. The things or objects to be represented are already implanted in my body by virtue of my perception; they have an 'équivalent interne, cette formule charnelle de leur présence que les choses suscitent en moi'.¹⁰⁰ The painting, then, acknowledges this carnal sense of things: it 'n'offre pas à l'esprit une occasion de repenser les rapports constitutifs des choses, mais au regard pour qu'il les épouse, les traces de la vision du dedans'.¹⁰¹ Painting pays its dues, then, simultaneously to the painting subject and to the object of his or her painting. Moreover, it is a sort of 'concentration et venue à soi du visible [...] en crevant la "peau de choses" pour montrer comment les choses se font choses et le monde monde'.¹⁰² Merleau-Ponty goes on to detail the action of several minutiae of painting that contribute to this coming-into-being of visibility, including shadows, outlines, light, and colour. Painting, then, exists in the perceptual crossing-over between the subject and the 'real' world. It describes the act of seeing and seeing's action on the subject. Painting is not simply the servile copy-work of a perceived

⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 'L'Œil et l'esprit' (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 69.

object, such as a mountain, but is rather the kind of work that might ‘dévoiler les moyens, rien que visibles, par lesquels [la montagne] se fait montagne sous nos yeux’.¹⁰³ This seems, to me, to be an apt description of the kind of mimesis that, after readings of Auerbach and Benjamin, is freed from all charges of ‘dienstbare Nachahmung’, reproducing not worldly objects themselves but rather the subject’s felt encounter with those objects.

It has now become clear that the chiasm, which simultaneously solicits and resists the notion of a principle split between subject and object, is for this reason an appropriate figure for mimetic strategies. As a point of exchange and crossover between subject and world, it designates a place in which modes of intelligibility, sensibility and empathy come into being; and is thus also the point at which mimesis might be said to most tangibly ‘happen’. The chiasm, as I have suggested throughout, provides us with a unique way to think through the doubleness of mimetic narrative, to come upon and accommodate that doubleness on its own terms. Merleau-Ponty explicitly writes of mimesis in his essay ‘Les relations avec autrui chez l’enfant’ in the *Cours de Sorbonne* series of 1960. His formulation of corporeal mimesis in this piece prefigures the phenomenological chiasm. ‘Le mimétisme’, he writes, ‘est la captation par autrui, l’invasion d’autrui en moi [...] Il est une manifestation du système unique qui réunit mon corps, le corps d’autrui, et autrui lui-même’. As the child learns to mime and mimic, it learns — as we saw with Benjamin — to other itself, and as such learns empathy (or sympathy): ‘La sympathie [...] ne suppose pas une véritable distinction de la conscience de soi et de la conscience d’autrui mais plutôt l’indistinction de soi et d’autrui. Elle est le simple fait que je vis dans les expressions de physionomie d’autrui comme je le sens vivre dans mes expressions de physionomie’.¹⁰⁴ Mimesis is the point at which the narrative subject becomes aware of his or herself as narrated *object* and the point at which a compromise is made on the subject’s self-sovereignty.

My selected readings of Balzac and Hoffmann in what follows work as narratives of this particular experience, offering in variant formulations the narrative of a subject who ‘returns’ upon him- or herself through acts of crossing with the

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

¹⁰⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Les Relations avec autrui chez l’enfant’, in *Parcours. 1935-1951* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1997), pp. 147-229 (pp. 215-16).

other. As a point of conscious return, and a point of explicit connection, furthermore, the 'chiasm' will also appropriately furnish the scene for comparative work. As I follow the narrative 'line' through four distinct variations, I return, in Chapter 5, to the image of the cross. Under the emblem of the cross, I show how the contradictory relationship persisting between the two writers, in which Balzac both affirms and denies the presence of Hoffmann in his work, is figured in the motifs of a troubled inheritance. The chiasmic cross comes to represent the experience of inscription into a literary inheritance — and how this is felt and registered across formulations of the literary body. My readings begin, however, with an enquiry into the line.

Chapter 2: Line

Der goldne Topf and La Peau de chagrin

I.

The line, or thread — ‘fil’ or ‘Faden’ — has long served as a figure for the movement of narrative. In *Ariadne’s Thread*, J. Hillis-Miller interrogates the idiom of the ‘plotline’ by means of the image of Ariadne unwinding a spool of thread as she moves through the labyrinth. ‘The thread is the labyrinth’, he writes, ‘and at the same time it is a repetition of the labyrinth’.¹ The narrative thread works as a visual figure for reading because it is a simulation or a double of the route it marks. We follow the turns of a plotted line which repeats or indicates a path but which is nonetheless always at a remove from that path. The undulating line has in other contexts — notably psychoanalysis and Surrealism — acted as a pretext for narrative, being not quite, or not yet, legible as letters, and thus teasing at the edges of intelligibility. In D. W. Winnicott’s ‘squiggle game’, child and analyst take turns to draw a formless ‘squiggle’ — ‘some kind of an impulsive line-drawing’ — which the other then articulates into an intelligible image. The game encourages the reading of narrative from random forms, purporting to let analysis be guided by the impervious will of the thread: ‘to play and see what might happen’.² The playful or undulating line, for Merleau-Ponty, once divested of its servitude as borderline or outline, is freed, and in being freed no longer merely contains but constitutes the narrative impulse in an image.³ Such a line, in Paul Klee’s famous phrase, is a ‘Punkt’ that has transformed into ‘ein Spaziergang um seiner selbst willen’,⁴ inviting its reader’s eyes along for the walk. The line, which in its meandering shape mimics the turns of plot, of narrative logic, is also committed to the accident of vision. It brings the act of reading a text up against the act of viewing an image.

¹ Joseph Hillis Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 19.

² Donald W. Winnicott, ‘The Squiggle Game’, in *Psycho-analytic Explorations*, ed. by Clare Winnicott and others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 299-317 (pp. 302, 311).

³ Merleau-Ponty, *L’Œil et l’esprit*, p. 74.

⁴ Cited in Toni Hildebrandt, ‘Die tachistische Geste 1951-1970’, in *Bild und Geste: Figurationen des Denkens in Philosophie und Kunst*, ed. by Ulrich Richtmeyer and others (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), pp. 45-64 (p. 52): ‘point’; ‘a walk for its own sake’.

There is no evidence that Balzac read *Der goldne Topf*, although he likely would have encountered the first translated extracts in *La Revue de Paris*. Hoffmann's *Märchen* in fact fell victim to the frenzy of his French translators in the late 1820s. As one of the first of his works to be translated into French, beginning with Saint-Marc Girardin's extracts from May 1829, *Le Pot d'or* was ultimately left out of Loève-Veimars's translated edition, having already been published in full in Toussenel's rival version in 1830 — and because what was foremost in the competing translators' minds was the novelty of their respective editions.⁵ In drawing together *Der goldne Topf* and *La Peau de chagrin*, then, in the absence of concrete textual backing, I work on the basis of two observations. The first is generic, and stems from a certain parallelism of the two texts, which both lie somewhat out of the order of their respective authors' *œuvres*. *Der goldne Topf* is often, in the critical literature, deemed to bear the traces of realism — more so, seemingly, than many of his shorter tales — whilst its subtitle, 'Ein Märchen aus der neuen Zeit' ('A modern-day Fairytale'), is deliberately intended to frustrate the Romantic category of the *Märchen*. *La Peau de chagrin*, on the other hand, is Balzac's only fantastic novel, and functions as a bridge between the narratives of *Les Études philosophiques* and the rest of his 'realist' career. *La Peau de chagrin*, as I showed in my introduction, was read from the outset by its reviewers as not just a fantastic, but a Hoffmannesque work: 'Comme dans Hoffmann, une trame surnaturelle et fantastique s'y déroule au milieu des événements de la vie positive'.⁶ Yet few readings of the novel sufficiently probe the stakes of the Hoffmannesque connection. Considered together, both works, more than any others discussed in this thesis, trouble the contouring impulse of taxonomical lines, by playing with the generic genealogies habitually associated with either writer.

The second basis for comparison, connected with the first, is the use of an undulating, playful line — I will come to term it the romantic line, or arabesque — as an emblem for narrative in these two texts which both foreground characters who learn to write or narrate, and which thus stage, in different ways, the mimetic act. When Balzac reproduces the romantic line as the epigraph of *La Peau de chagrin*, he does so in explicit citation of Laurence Sterne, not of Hoffmann, although it is certainly at least suggestive of Hoffmann (himself a keen reader of Sterne) and

⁵ Brückner, *Adolphe François Loève-Veimars*, p. 195.

⁶ Bernard, 'La Peau de chagrin, par M. Balzac', p. 355.

particularly of *Der goldne Topf*. Both of these tales take the line as a central mimetic figure. The indefinite, squiggly or romantic line refuses or fails to take on significant form, being neither a teleological nor a contouring force, not a describer of things but a figure of the passage that things might take into visibility, and a figure beholden to an order of legibility which is as closely linked to image as it is to text. Such a line, landing its viewer or reader back with the accident of vision, as a mimetic indicator of plot, reproduces the state of the narrative subject, faced with the contingency and obstinacy of the object world, and with his place within it.

II. *Der goldne Topf*

At the heart of *Der goldne Topf* is the subject's seduction by a line. As the figure of writing and as the visual reflex of the fantasy realm of Atlantis, Serpentina, the daughter of Archivarius Lindhorst, is suggestive of the very art of storytelling, of fiction-making. Through her curling forms, which appear to Anselmus variously as reflections of light and water, or as the projections of a living script, his world takes on new forms. Anselmus — the hapless amanuensis caught between the familiar prosaic streets and lines of Dresden and an indefinable realm of poetic experience, Atlantis, unable to console the one within the other — may be read as a precursor of Balzac's Raphaël, the subject who, in learning how to narrate his life story, must simultaneously learn the price of his earthly life. Both romantic heroes, followed by their variant successors in this thesis, are faced with the question: is life a price worth paying for an image? — or, put differently: what are the stakes of mimesis?

Der goldne Topf has long been read as a *Märchen* tracing Anselmus's snaking path from 'Schreiber' (writer) to 'Schriftsteller' (author), and thus as something like a 'Bildungsroman in fairy-tale form'.⁷ Such a reading sees the subject Anselmus discover his own visionary capacities which initiate him, through the figure of Lindhorst and his daughter Serpentina, into a realm beyond the stultified bourgeois society around him: whether as artist, as madman, or as drunkard. There has, in parallel, been a consistent critical tendency to read the *Märchen* as a precursor of

⁷ Uwe Wirth, 'Der goldne Topf', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann. Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed by Detlef Kremer, pp. 114-24 (p. 118). See also Hartmut Steinecke's commentary in *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Sämtliche Werke*, II.1, p. 770; James McGlathery, 'The Suicide Motif in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Der goldne Topf"', *Monatshefte*, 58 (1966), 115-23 (p. 115).

realism, owing largely to its ‘true-to-life depiction of Dresden’.⁸ Such readings began with the work of Lukács and Hans Mayer in the 1950s and -60s. More recently, Horst Daemmrich, Wolfgang Preisendanz and John Reddick have shown how *Der goldne Topf* engages a double-edged representation of reality, a ‘Stilmittel der zweifachen Optik’,⁹ in which a ‘realistic’ narrative style is enacted as a contouring device to show in heightened definition the tale’s ‘fantastic’ events. For Reddick, this realistic style ‘points to the beginnings of the German realist tradition’ but more importantly works as ‘part of the ironic apparatus of the tale inasmuch as it helps to show up the decidedly uncertain nature of everything else that is silhouetted against it’.¹⁰ Momberger’s more aggressive approach to this double-edged narrative style is to trouble the generic descriptions themselves. ‘Beide der Romantiker wie der realistische Schriftsteller,’ he argues, ‘verstehen Schreiben als Rekonstruktion des Sinnes, als Inszenierung der Wahrheit’ — adding that ‘die fiktionalste Form der Literatur ist der Realismus’, for realism works to conceal the very apparatus on which it is built.¹¹ Hoffmann, if he ‘produces’ neither realist nor Romantic fiction, produces narrative experience itself, in a kind of fiction that, by masquerading as realism, yields an insight into ‘die Produziertheit, die Fiktionalität der “Wirklichkeit” selbst’.¹²

My reading of *Der goldne Topf* will start with this question of fictionality, understanding it, as an ‘Inszenierung’ of the production of ‘Wirklichkeit’, as a staging of the *mimetic* act. If we take seriously Preisendanz’s insistence that a realist style is not determined solely by the material of a work (‘von dem Stofflichen eines Werkes’), then, as he argues, it may instead be said to reside in a particular kind of view: one dependent on the extraction of legibility from *physiognomic* forms. As he puts it, ‘die hier dargestellte alltägliche Wirklichkeit [wird] erst von Belang, indem sie auf den Umschlag des bloßen Wahrnehmens in ein physiognomisches Schauen

⁸ John Reddick, ‘E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Der goldne Topf” and its “Durchgehaltene Ironie”’, *The Modern Language Review*, 71.3, 577-94 (p. 579).

⁹ Horst Daemmrich, ‘Wirklichkeit als Form: ein Aspekt Hoffmannscher Erzählkunst’, *Colloquia Germanica*, 4 (1970), p. 43: ‘stylistic device of double optics’.

¹⁰ Reddick, ‘E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Der goldne Topf”’, p. 579.

¹¹ Momberger, *Sonne und Punsch*, p. 92: ‘Both the Romanticist and the realist author understand writing as the reconstruction of sense, as a staging of the truth’; ‘the most fictional form of literature is realism’.

¹² Momberger, *Sonne und Punsch*, p. 94: ‘the produced character, the fictionality of “reality” itself’.

bezogen wird’ — thus proving itself as ‘ausgesprochene “Poesie der Poesie”’.¹³ This notion finds an echo in Peter von Matt’s loaded verb ‘Schauen’ in *Die Augen der Automaten*;¹⁴ and in Walter Benjamin’s radio piece ‘Das dämonische Berlin’ (‘Demonic Berlin’), which speaks of Hoffmann’s uncommon observational ability, as the ‘Physiognomiker von Berlin’ whose talent for narrative lies not in his capacity to invent but in his ‘Falkenaugen’, able to extract ‘das Außerordentliche’ from ‘ganz bestimmten Menschen, Dingen, Häusern, Gegenständen, Straßen usw.’.¹⁵ This line of thought has been drawn out most thoroughly in readings of Hoffmann’s final tale, *Des Veters Eckfenster* (‘My Cousin’s Corner Window’), regarded by some critics as a ‘precursor of nineteenth-century realism’.¹⁶ The trajectory suggested of Hoffmann’s narrative career by such readings is one of a visionary Romanticism that moves into a more focused realism by this final instalment.¹⁷ But the role of vision in reading and writing, and moreover the role of the face and physiognomic readings of facial lines and features, are evident in the workings of this earlier *Märchen*. If we describe Hoffmann’s ‘realism’ as a physiognomic world-view, committed to the extraction of legible forms from arbitrary ones, then the facial arrangements it recognises have a degree of subjectivity of their own. This notion betokens a Romantic worldview, being committed to an experience that surpasses human subjectivity. It is figured concisely, here, in the grotesque and unexpected appearance of die alte Liese’s face from Lindhorst’s doorknocker. As I shall show, to feel my own state of subjecthood is also to feel myself the object of an unexpected gaze, a state resonant with Merleau-Ponty’s viewing subject, and staged here by Hoffmann’s invocation of faces within domestic objects, in the appearance of mirrors which reflect back the subject’s gaze

¹³ Wolfgang Preisendanz, *Humor als dichterische Einbildungskraft. Studien zur Erzählkunst des poetischen Realismus* (Munich: Fink, 1976), p. 117: ‘the everyday reality depicted here first becomes relevant when it is understood as a switch from bare perception to a physiognomic vision’; ‘the expression of a “poetry of poetry”’.

¹⁴ Peter von Matt, *Die Augen der Automaten. E. T. A. Hoffmanns Imaginationslehre als Prinzip seiner Erzählkunst* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971).

¹⁵ Benjamin, *GS VII.1*, pp. 89-91: ‘Physiognomist of Berlin’; ‘his hawk’s eye, able to extract the extraordinary from quite concrete people, things, houses, objects, streets, etc.’.

¹⁶ Roger Cook, ‘Reader Response and Authorial Strategies: E. T. A. Hoffmann’s View from “Des Veters Eckfenster”’, *German Studies Review*, 12.3 (1989), 421-35 (p. 421).

¹⁷ See Neumann, ‘Anamorphose’, p. 404.

— and perhaps also in Anselmus's entrapment in a *Krystallflasche*, condemned not to move, nor to touch, but only to see.

My argument will lay its focus, in equal measure, on two key forms within the tale: the serpentine line and the accidental inkblot. Any implicit evocation of the line of narrative logic, akin to the line traced by Ariadne's thread, is complicated when it is read as a counterpart of the *Tintenfleck* ('inkblot'), which is in turn closely connected to the mirror image through the function of the witch-nurse, die alte Liese. I intend to incorporate the line and the inkblot, the one within the other, in a reading which, in engaging a double- or skewed optic appropriate to a reading of Hoffmann, will also allow for a closer attention to some of Hoffmann's most critically overlooked female characters, Veronika Paulmann as well as die alte Liese.¹⁸ The line that is articulated as a contemporary of the *Tintenfleck* is one that will not configure into shape. Existing between ornament and accident, Hoffmann's line here will figure something about the crossover of the fantastic with the realistic, by foregrounding the question of mimesis in a text about the production of delusory images. Balzac's subsequent adoption of the romantic line as a figure for his own fantastic narrative will, in turn, help to ask questions about how 'realist' writing might undertake the deliberate articulation of meaningful form from the non-deliberate material of life.

A pictured line traces the intersection between drawing and text. This we see clearly in a sequence in Lindhorst's 'blaue Bibliothek' ('blue library') in which Anselmus first copies out the lines of Lindhorst's manuscripts:

War ihm schon vor dem Essen das Kopieren der arabischen Zeichen geglückt,
so ging die Arbeit jetzt noch viel besser von Statten, ja er konnte selbst die
Schnelle und Leichtigkeit nicht begreifen, womit er die krausen Züge der
fremden Schrift nachzumalen vermochte. [...] Da wehte es wie in leisen, leisen,
lispelnden Krystallklängen durch das Zimmer: ich bin dir nahe — nahe — nahe!
— ich helfe dir! — sei mutig! — sei standhaft, lieber Anselmus! — ich mühe

¹⁸ Notable exceptions, which bring these female characters to the forefront of their readings, include Franz Fühmann, *Fräulein Veronika Paulmann aus der Pirnauer Vorstadt, oder Etwas über das Schauerliche bei E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984) and Bettina Adank, 'Déesse ou Sorcière? Représentations de la femme dans "Der goldne Topf" d'E. T. A. Hoffmann', *Merveilles & contes*, 4.2 (1990), 177-85.

mich mit dir, damit du mein werdest! Und so wie er voll innern Entzückens die Töne vernahm, wurden ihm immer verständlicher die unbekanntenen Zeichen — er durfte kaum mehr hineinblicken in das Original — ja es war, als stünden schon wie in blasser Schrift die Zeichen auf dem Pergament, und er dürfe sie nur mit geübter Hand schwarz überziehen. (H II.1 274)¹⁹

The lines of script here move fluidly between the ‘krausen Züge der fremden Schrift’, the incomprehensible lines of foreign words — lines that may as well be indecipherable images to Anselmus — through the sinuous lines implied by the body and sibilant words of *Serpentina*, into legible lines of script that appear ‘immer verständlicher’ before him. The lines thus trace the fluid process by which matter makes itself intelligible.

Lines have a particular role to play in Anselmus’s social setting. The bourgeois inhabitants of Hoffmann’s Dresden prove a clear obsession with the cutting and casting of their silhouettes, with particular focus on such costume and appendages as wigs, hats, and cloaks, the material tokens of recognition. Hoffmann mimics Lavaterian discourse in his narrative, engaging the physiognomic assumption that the body is inherently meaningful in its shape, and that it may literally be read as a narrative — one dependent, above all, on its bounding lines. ‘That the body becomes legible in the nineteenth century’, writes Michael Shortland, ‘owes more to Johann Caspar Lavater [...] than to any other figure’.²⁰ Translated into six languages and totalling fifty-seven publications by 1810,²¹ with the German edition containing over eight hundred illustrations, Lavater’s *Physiognomische Fragmente* was not only one

¹⁹ ‘If Anselmus had been doing well in copying these Arabic symbols before dinner, he now did even better. In truth, he could not understand the speed and the ease with which he was able to transcribe the convoluted strokes of these foreign characters. [...] Then, throughout the room, whispers floated, as in low undulating crystal tones: “I am near, near, near! I am helping you. Be brave. Be steadfast, dear Anselmus! I am working with you so that you may be mine!” And as soon as Anselmus heard these sounds with inner rapture, the unfamiliar characters grew ever clearer to him, and he hardly needed to look at the original script at all; in fact, it seemed as if the characters were already outlined on the parchment in pale ink and there was nothing more for him to do but fill them in with black’.

²⁰ Michael Shortland, ‘Skin Deep: Barthes, Lavater and the Legible Body’, *Economy and Society*, 14.3 (1985), 273-312 (p. 284).

²¹ John Graham, ‘Lavater’s “Physiognomy”: A Checklist’, *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 55.4 (1961), 197-308 (pp. 298-99).

of the most successful and voluminous early illustrated books but was also a key site within which the art of reading text and image together was put into practice. A figure from an English edition of *Essays on Physiognomy*, captioned ‘The Physiognomical Face — realised or dissolved?’ shows the importance, in Lavaterian thinking, of the bounding line in readings of the face (Figure 2).²²

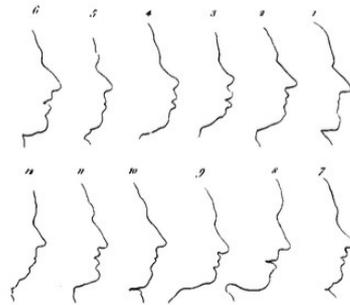


Figure 2

Here, certainly, we gain a sense of the narrative capabilities of the bounding line as Lavater saw it, in twelve distinct variants. One of Lavater’s planned publications (never completed) was even to have borne the title ‘Physiognomische Linien’ (‘Physiognomic Lines’).²³ It is thus with mock-Lavaterian sincerity that the first description of Anselmus settles on his idiosyncratic outline. ‘Sein hechtgrauer Frack war nehmlich so zugeschnitten’, observes the narrator, making himself briefly complicit with this attachment to the describing line, ‘als habe der Schneider, der ihn gearbeitet, die moderne Form nur von Hörensagen gekannt’, leaving Anselmus ‘einen gewissen magistermäßigen Styl, dem sich nun wieder Gang und Stellung durchaus nicht fügen wollte’ (H II.1 230).²⁴ From the very beginning, Anselmus, with his misshapen silhouette, is a character who, it is repeatedly emphasised, is unable to align himself into social decency and order. He treads his own meandering way: ‘er

²² Reproduced as Fig 10 in Shortland, ‘Skin Deep’, p. 301.

²³ John B. Lyon, “‘The Science of Sciences’: Replication and Reproduction in Lavater’s Physiognomics”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40.2 (2007), 257-77 (p. 264).

²⁴ ‘His pike-grey coat was cut as if the tailor had only known of contemporary styles from hearsay’; ‘a certain schoolmasterish air which was at odds with the gait and bearing of the wearer’.

schlich langsam vorbei und schlug endlich den Weg an der Elbe ein' (H II.1 231).²⁵ For Lindhorst, it is this misalignment — his 'kindliches poetisches Gemüt' (H II.1 291: 'childish, poetic temperament') — which makes Anselmus a suitable apprentice and son-in-law. Lindhorst himself expands physiognomic categories beyond their own logic, unleashing the variant descriptive powers of the outline. He is a hybrid being who will not settle into ordinary shapes, a salamander whose mercurial flesh seems to change between the human and the animal, appearing in turns as a man, a 'weißgrauer Geier' (H II.1 257: 'white-grey vulture') and a 'Feuerlilienbusch' (H II.1 270: 'bush of fire-lilies'). And to Anselmus, in the lithe botanical library, the act of handing over to Lindhorst his own handwritten lines makes them suddenly appear unpractised and stripped of meaning: 'Anselmus wurde wie vom Blitz getroffen, als ihm seine Handschrift so höchst miserabel vorkam. Da war keine Ründe in den Zügen, kein Druck richtig, kein Verhältnis der großen und kleinen Buchstaben' (H II.1 273).²⁶

Such a passage seems to invite a reading of Anselmus's predicament as a disambiguation of the romantic or serpentine line from a world committed to a strict regime of legibility. Andrew Piper has traced the emergence of the sinuous or 'romantic' line as a figure distinct from the line which might work, in science or geography, as a 'marker of either distinction (the outline) or linearity (teleology)'. He places its emergence 'as *the* image of the interaction between text and image' at a time of 'an increasingly sophisticated intermedial sensibility', which inspired new fascination for outline drawings, *Umrisse*, silhouette drawings, *Schattenrisse*, and for illustrated books.²⁷ For Piper, the romantic line, a wavy or serpentine line, with its roots in the visual arts and in Hogarth's *line of beauty*, emerges from the crossover of text and image, marking 'the possibility of textual and visual simultaneity'.²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, discussing the function of lines in art in 'L'Œil et l'esprit', writes of 'une conception prosaïque de la ligne comme attribut positif et propriété de l'objet en

²⁵ 'he slipped slowly past and finally turned to follow the route of the Elbe'.

²⁶ 'Anselmus was struck as if by lightning, his handwriting appearing to him now so utterly wretched. The curves were not rounded, the hairstroke failed to appear where it should have been; capital and small letters could not be distinguished from one another'.

²⁷ Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, p. 185.

²⁸ Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, p. 189.

soi'.²⁹ In certain works of modern painting, he argues, artists do away with a concept of the line that naturally inheres in things, the descriptive or contouring line — replacing it with a freer, undulating 'ligne flexueuse'. Such lines are 'indiqués, impliqués, et même très impérieusement exigés par les choses'; they come from things, but they are not things themselves, 'choses eux-mêmes'.³⁰ For a painter like Klee, in particular, the line no longer imitates the visible but 'rend visible' — *renders visible*. Such a line is, Merleau-Ponty writes, 'l'épure d'une genèse des choses'.³¹ Unshackled from its servitude to the contour or the terminal outline of things, as articulator of objects, the undulating line no longer describes the visual but participates in visibility.

For Günther Oesterle, the lines that Anselmus copies from Lindhorst's manuscripts resemble hieroglyphic or runic figurations, with poetic, esoteric meaning. In Oesterle's argument, Anselmus's apprenticeship in copying the contents of the manuscripts is a process of writing as 'Wiederfinden', a rediscovery, through copying, both of Lindhorst's tale of origins and of a synaesthetic language that might be closer than our everyday language to forms found in nature, a *Schrift* approaching a *Naturschrift* or *Urschrift*.³² Lindhorst's face appears like a set of natural imprints in a craggy landscape, with 'funkelnden Augen, die aus den knöchernen Höhlen des magern runzlichten Gesichts wie aus einem Gehäuse hervorstrahlten' (H II.1 256).³³ The natural physiognomic configuration of the landscape here is mixed with the logic of facture, in which the eyes glisten like jewels housed or embedded in the face. In Oesterle's reading, *Serpentina*, as a reflection of Lindhorst's manuscript lines, becomes an equivalent of the romantic line, as the *Schönheitslinie*, the *figura serpentinata*, or the *arabesque*. The arabesque, a visual ornamental element comprising a linear motif and originating in wall paintings, is an important point of reference for the German Romantics, theorised extensively, though erratically, by Friedrich Schlegel. Bettina Schäfer suggests that its importance for the Romantics, and for Hoffmann, lies in its status as 'Bild eines neuen Textmodells, das durch eine

²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 'L'Œil et l'esprit', p. 72.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 'L'œil et l'esprit', p. 73.

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, 'L'œil et l'esprit', p. 74.

³² Günther Oesterle, 'Arabeske, Schrift und Poesie', p. 71.

³³ 'sparkling eyes, which shined forth from inside the bony sockets of his gaunt, wrinkled face, as if from within a case'.

Verdopplung der Lesbarkeit gekennzeichnet ist und ein entsprechendes Lektüremodell voraussetzt'.³⁴ The arabesque is not necessarily committed to an 'amimetische Verfahrensweise' ('a-mimetic approach'), as Oesterle claims.³⁵ The arabesque, rather, may be interpreted as a stylistic or manneristic shorthand for how things might come into intelligibility. The arabesque, that is, by marking the crossover between text and image — by acting as 'Bild eines [...] Textmodells' — is an expression of mimesis in its more capacious, and figurative, mode: suggestive of the passage taken by the sensible into the intelligible. The convergence of pictorial and textual modes is geared towards a representation of the *coming into being* of legibility, always taking into account the precariousness of that process.

There is, then, a convincing underlying reading of Lindhorst as the guardian of the lines of an ultimate or original insight, or some more authentic mode of reading. However, it remains that Lindhorst stands for something that will not easily be read — despite his associates' ready attempts to interpret his stories by their own prosaic logic, with Paulmann claiming that he is 'nur kurios in absonderlichen Redensarten' (H II.1 250), and Heerbrand that his stories are 'orientalischer Schwulst' (H II.1 246); that the whole business is 'wohl nur eine poetische Allegorie' (H II.1 314).³⁶ L. C. Nygaard argues that Lindhorst holds 'the power to restore impact and significance to a worn and vitiated language', grown stale in the mouths and on the pages of Dresden's bureaucrats.³⁷ To follow this line of thought would be to see the *Märchen* as a disambiguation of poetry from a bourgeois world of bored prose, an untangling of meaning from a world grown arbitrary. But such readings do not fully account for the pictorial side of the new lines emerging from the space beneath Anselmus's fingertips. Such readings come perilously close, even, to the kind of taxonomising criticism that attempts to class Anselmus as madman or as visionary, putting him on one side of the line or the other (such criticism would also include readings that align

³⁴ Bettina Schäfer, 'Arabeske', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Detlef Kremer, pp. 481-84 (p. 482): 'the image of a new textual model characterised by a doubling in legibility, and which presupposes a corresponding model of reading'. See also Patricia Stanley, 'Hoffmann's *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier* in light of Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of the Arabesque', *German Studies Review*, 8 (1985), 399-415.

³⁵ Oesterle, 'Arabeske, Schrift und Poesie', p. 90.

³⁶ 'somewhat strange in his phraseology'; 'Oriental bombast'; 'nothing but a poetic allegory'.

³⁷ L. C. Nygaard, 'Anselmus as Amenuensis: The Motif of Copying in Hoffmann's *Der goldne Topf*', *Seminar*, 19 (1983), 79-104.

descriptions of Anselmus with contemporary conceptions of madness, or that piece together textual evidence that he has committed suicide).³⁸ The line, however, as we know, is not straight; it is squiggly, arabesque, like the meandering course traced by the Elbe. In a reading that takes into account the pictorial dimension of the line, the life within that line will not be drawn into letters. In my reading, then, Lindhorst is less a gatekeeper of the intelligible than he is a complicator of lines — and, most of all, of the story-line of the *Bildungsroman* hero or anti-hero, Anselmus. Such a line, like Merleau-Ponty's, is neither teleological nor taxonomical. It is a figure that renders things visible, bringing them *into* play. Such a line is not yet committed to legibility. In the moments before legibility comes something else: a different kind of encounter. At Lindhorst's very door, after all, is positioned a figure who seems to stand for illegibility itself, die alte Liese.

For Friedrich Kittler, who likens Anselmus's tutelage under Lindhorst to the practice of standardising handwriting in German schools at the turn of the nineteenth century, Liese is an impediment to the programme of alphabetisation put in action by the paternal Lindhorst. 'Lindhorsts Feindin heißt sie', he writes, 'sofern es beim letzten Treffen mit Anselmus ihre Lust ist, aus Folianten die Blätter zu reißen'.³⁹ Liese is even less amenable than Lindhorst to Lavaterian description. Known variously as 'das Äpfelweib' ('the apple woman') who tells fortunes by the Dresden gates, as 'die alte Liese' ('old Liese'), Veronika Paulmann's childhood nurse, and as 'die Rauerin' ('old Rauerin'), Lindhorst's sworn enemy, she is also, according to Lindhorst's mythology, the hybrid child of a 'schnöde Runkelrübe' and a 'lumpichter Flederwisch' (H II.1 298: 'dirty beet', 'ragged wing-feather'). As a figure of mixed and messed forms, introduced in the event of being spilt when Anselmus upturns her apple-cart, and associated repeatedly with *Ge-* words, the 'Gekrächze' and 'Gepiepe' and 'Gesindel' of her home (H II.1 264-65: 'croaking', 'squeaking', 'rabble'), she is nonetheless, as fortune-teller, a guarantor of a particular kind of knowledge. It is, after all, Liese's prophetic repeated line, 'Ins Krystall bald dein Fall' (H II.1 229: 'Into the crystal you

³⁸ Maria Tatar, 'Mesmerism, Madness, and Death in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Der goldne Topf"', in *Studies in Romanticism*, 14 (1975), 365-89; McGlathery, 'The Suicide Motif'.

³⁹ Friedrich Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800-1900* (Munich: Fink, 2003) p. 110: 'She is Lindhorst's enemy because she takes pleasure, in her last encounter with Anselmus, in tearing the pages out of folios'.

will fall’), which decides the trajectory of the text. In Kittler’s reading, her female knowledge seems to make reading and writing unnecessary, ‘[macht] Schreiben und Lesen überflüssig’, thus representing a threat to ‘die ganze alphabetische Verbesserung Mitteleuropas’.⁴⁰ But Liese’s method of divination is to draw narrative figures from the mess of reflected material in a mirror: revealing ‘in einem hellpolierten Metallspiegel ein wunderliches Gemisch von allerlei Figuren und Gestalten’, which only she is able to interpret (H II.1 263).⁴¹ Liese’s knowledge is therefore not an alternative kind of knowledge to Lindhorst’s for it mirrors his own methods, as the recuperation of meaning from material that may otherwise remain unaccounted for. The figure of the archivist is thus partnered with the figure who threatens, as Kittler points out, to tear his library apart.

Before entering Lindhorst’s library for the first time, Anselmus must contend with the appearance of Liese’s face from the doorknocker:

Da stand er und schaute den großen schönen bronzenen Türklopfer an, aber als er nun auf den letzten die Luft mit mächtigem Klange durchbebenden Schlag der Turm-Uhr an der Kreuzkirche den Türklopfer ergreifen wollte, da verzog sich das metallne Gesicht im ekelhaften Spiel blauglühender Lichtblicke zum grinsenden Lächeln. Ach! es war ja das Äpfelweib vom schwarzen Tor! Die spitzigen Zähne klappten in dem schlaffen Maule zusammen und in dem Klappern schnarrte es: ‘du Narre — Narre — Narre — warte, warte! warum warst herausgerannt! Narre!’ — Entsetzt taumelte der Student Anselmus zurück. (H II.1 243-44)⁴²

At the moment of Anselmus’s entry into the library, his grasp, ‘ergreifen’, provokes a prosopopoeic invocation. His touch gives way to vision as the world animates itself

⁴⁰ Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme*, p. 111: ‘[makes] writing and reading unnecessary’; ‘the whole alphabetical improvement of central Europe’.

⁴¹ ‘the weirdest combination of intermingled figures and forms in a polished metallic mirror’.

⁴² ‘There he stood, looking at the beautiful large bronze knocker; but then, when he raised his hand to grip the knocker, precisely as the last stroke of the clock in the church steeple boomed loudly through the air, the glowing, blue eyes rolled horrifyingly, and the metal face became contorted into a sneering smile. Oh! It was the apple woman from the Black Gate! The sharp teeth clattered together in the flabby jaws, and in the clattering there was a rasping which seemed to say: “You fool — fool — fool! Wait, wait! Why did you run away? Fool!” Terrorstruck, Anselmus tumbled backwards’.

and a face emerges from the bronze surface of the doorknocker. This sequence enacts the very limits of Hoffmann's physiognomical wranglings. For Hoffmann, Lavaterian physiognomies tantalisingly go both ways, as taxonomical extractions *from* the world that nonetheless never entirely forego the suggestion that they might really be projections *by* the world. It is the indecipherability of those two trajectories that characterises Hoffmann's ironic descriptions of faces and forms.

Prosopopoeia is a particular mimetic figure, designating the function by which the dead literary object is injected with narrative voice. It touches on the heart of the narrative act by endowing the fictional thing with a life of its own. The word 'prosopopoeia' comes from the Greek *prosopon poein*, meaning literally 'to confer a mask or a face', and so describes the act of giving a face to an inanimate entity. It is, in Barbara Johnson's words, 'the figure for reading' because it is the *face* of reading, acknowledging in the central fold of the literary act the human features that we bestow on things.⁴³ Representations of prosopopoeia also acknowledge a particular stubborn subjectivity in worldly figurations. In Merleau-Ponty's 'L'Œil et l'esprit', the face of the world, and hence the figure of prosopopoeia, is evoked through the moment in which the artist, in looking, finds himself or herself fixed, in turn, as object. '[M]on corps est à la fois voyant et visible. Lui qui regarde toutes choses, il peut aussi se regarder, et reconnaître dans ce qu'il voit alors l'"autre côté" de sa puissance voyante [...] mon corps est au nombre des choses, il est l'une d'elles'.⁴⁴ In acknowledging myself both as observer and as visible, I acknowledge the gaze I attribute to the world beyond my self.

Veronika Paulmann, like Anselmus, is subject to unwanted prosopopoeic encounters. Hers come in the form of a domestic imp who mocks her dreams of becoming 'Frau Hofrätin': 'hinter jeder Tasse, hinter der Kaffeekanne, die sie aus dem Schrank nahm, sprang jene Gestalt wie ein Alräunchen hervor und lachte höhnisch' (H II.1 261).⁴⁵ Veronika's story, which develops in the fifth and the seventh 'Vigilien' ('vigils'), on both occasions followed or crossed by Anselmus's first experiences in the 'blaue Bibliothek', neatly reflects Anselmus's. Like Anselmus, Veronika suffers strange fantasies that nearly wrench her from her ordinary life. It

⁴³ Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (London: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 14.

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 'L'œil et l'esprit', pp. 18-19.

⁴⁵ 'Wife of the Privy Counsellor', 'behind every cup, behind the coffeepot which she brought from the cupboard, peeped that malicious figure, like a little mandrake, and laughed mockingly'.

seems appropriate, then, that what she receives from die alte Liese, in place of a spoken prophesy, is a small reflective metal surface, ‘ein kleiner runder hell polierter Metallspiegel’ (H II.1 282), dependent for its communicative possibilities on the play of light and the fortuitous arrangement of surfaces. The mirror, following Plato, would come to represent the ever ambiguous nineteenth-century mimetic object, ‘the symbol of realism and, simultaneously [...] the incarnation of the pretence that it tries to maintain’,⁴⁶ seeming to reproduce reality in its entirety — but always in the form of a projected image, a *mirage*, and in reverse formulation. The *goldner Topf* itself is, we should remember, a reflective surface, over whose surface ‘soll sich unser wundervolles Reich [...] in blendendem herrlichen Widerschein abspiegeln’ (H II.1 291).⁴⁷ It is not difficult to imagine the distorted variant of the world that might be rendered by the convex surface of the pot. Veronika’s mirror gains importance when Anselmus looks into it over her shoulder and their faces appear together in the scrap of metal:

Da kam ihm aber wieder einmal der Dämon des Ungeschicks über den Hals, er stieß an den Tisch und Veronika’s niedliches Nähkästchen fiel herab, Anselmus hob es auf, der Deckel war gesprungen, und es blinkte ihm ein kleiner runder Metallspiegel entgegen, in den er mit ganz eigener Lust hineinschaute. [...] Da war es dem Anselmus als beginne ein Kampf in seinem Innern — Gedanken — Bilder — blitzten hervor und vergingen wieder — der Archivarius Lindhorst — Serpentina — die grüne Schlange — endlich wurde es ruhiger und alles Verworrene fügte und gestaltete sich zum deutlichen Bewußtsein. (H II.1 295)⁴⁸

This moment marks the crossing over of female and male narrative trajectories. And in this new configuration of shapes in Veronika’s mirror — ‘alles Verworrene fügte

⁴⁶ Lilian Furst, *All is True*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ ‘our kingdom of wonders [shall be] imaged back in glorious dazzling reflection’.

⁴⁸ ‘But once again his old demon of awkwardness possessed him, and he stumbled against the table, Veronika’s pretty little sewing box tumbling to the floor. Anselmus picked it up; the lid had fallen open and his attention was attracted by a little round metallic mirror into which he looked now with special pleasure. [...] Suddenly, Anselmus felt as if a battle were commencing in his soul. Thoughts and images flashed before his eyes — Archivarius Lindhorst — Serpentina — the green snake. But the tumult finally abated and this chaos was clearly converted into consciousness’.

und gestaltete sich zum deutlichen Bewußtsein' — Anselmus recognises himself as an object: first as a figure in Veronika's fantasy narrative, and second, less explicitly, as 'Objekt in eine[m] Vernichtungskampf ungekannter Mächte',⁴⁹ that is, of Liese and Lindhorst. As a structural element, the mirror provokes a shift in Anselmus's perception which will cast the world's visual register back in the prosaic lines and shapes of which it consisted before the introduction of Serpentina: '[er] konnte sich nicht genug wundern wie ihm das Alles sonst so seltsam und wundervoll habe vorkommen können' (H II.1 300).⁵⁰ It is in this state that Anselmus makes the fatal *Tintenfleck* on his manuscript:

Aber er sah auf der Pergamentrolle so viele sonderbare krause Züge und Schnörkel durcheinander, die ohne dem Auge einen einzigen Ruhepunkt zu geben den Blick verwirrten, daß es ihm beinahe unmöglich schien das Alles genau nachzumalen. [...] Er wollte dem unerachtet das Mögliche versuchen und tunkte getrost die Feder ein, aber die Tinte wollte durchaus nicht fließen, er spritzte die Feder ungeduldig aus und — o Himmel! ein großer Klecks fiel auf das ausgebreitete Original. (H II.1 301)⁵¹

The 'krausen Züge' from before are now just that, curling traces or lines, without also being the arcane imprints of something else. As die alte Liese corresponds to Lindhorst, the *Klecks* here plays the part of counterpart to the serpentine line. As the meaningful line or figure is drawn from a blot of ink, the stubborn or accidental *Tintenfleck* marks a moment that precedes or interrupts artistic figuration. Franz Fühmann's bleakly 'realistic' reading of this tale through the figure of Veronika states of her behaviour: 'Ins Tiefste zu schaun und nichts daraus zu ziehen als ein Mittel,

⁴⁹ Fühmann, *Fräulein Veronika Paulmann*, p. 81: 'an object in a battle of destruction played out by unknown forces'.

⁵⁰ 'He could not help but wonder at how all of this had once appeared to him to be so strange and marvellous'.

⁵¹ 'But he saw so many strange crabbed strokes and twirls on the manuscript, all twisted together in inexplicable confusion, perplexing the eye, that it seemed to him to be almost impossible to transcribe it all exactly. [...] He nevertheless resolved to do his very best and boldly dipped his pen in the ink, but regardless of what he tried, the ink would not flow. He impatiently flicked the point of his pen and — O heavens! — a huge blot fell on the outspread original!'

schneller Frau Hofrätin zu werden, ist das nicht furchtbar? — Es ist alltäglich'.⁵² Veronika and Liese's magic is precisely 'alltäglich' because if the narrative act can make banal things seem fantastic, it can do the inverse, too, rehabilitating the domestic shapes that once appeared momentarily threatening, turning Lindhorst's blue library back into a normal building. This does not have to mean that in the final reading things are bland and meaningless — after all, the *Märchen* ends in a vision of transcendence — but rather, as through the *Tintenfleck*, the mirror image, and the romantic line, that things can be both transcendent and meaningless at once, that those two states are co-existent and dependent on one another, and that in this tale Hoffmann is attached to the precariousness of the second state, warning that the first is never far behind it. It is, of course, die alte Liese who knows this better than any: hence her prophetic line 'Ins Krystall bald dein Fall'.

This gains significance in the context of the narrative frame, in which the narrator pauses several times to confess the difficulties he experiences in telling his story. The longest of these confessions forms the 'Zwölfte Vigilie'.

Ich härmte mich recht ab, wenn ich die eilf Vigilien, die ich glücklich zu Stande gebracht, durchlief und nun dachte, daß es mir wohl niemals vergönnt sein werde, die zwölfte als Schlußstein hinzuzufügen, den so oft ich mich zur Nachtzeit hinsetzte um das Werk zu vollenden, war es, als hielten mir recht tückische Geister (es mochten wohl Verwandte — vielleicht Cousins germains der getöteten Hexe sein) ein glänzend poliertes Metall vor, in dem ich mein Ich erblickte, blaß, übernächtig und melancholisch wie der Registrator Heerbrand nach dem Punsch-Rausch. (H II.1 316)⁵³

⁵² Fühmann, *Fräulein Veronika Paulmann*, pp. 89-90: 'To see into the depths and to take nothing from it but a means to more quickly become the wife of the Privy Counsellor — is that not dreadful? — It is everyday life'.

⁵³ 'When I looked over the eleven vigils, which are now fortunately completed, it grieved me to the heart to think that inserting the Twelfth Vigil, the very keystone of the whole, would never be permitted me, for whenever I tried during the night to complete the work, it was as if mischievous spirits (they might indeed be blood cousins of the slain witch) were holding a polished and gleaming piece of metal before my eyes in which I could behold my own mean self — pale and anxious and melancholy, like Registrar Heerbrand after his bout with the punch'.

This lament may be drawn into the line of thought traced by Peter von Matt through several of Hoffmann's works, from *Ritter Gluck* to *Des Veters Eckfenster*: '[d]as Motiv von der grundierten Leinwand, die als vollendete Gemälde gesehen wird, obwohl kein Pinselstrich daraufkommt'.⁵⁴ It will surface again in Chapter 4 here, in *Der Artushof* and *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, whose genius artists produce unintelligible artworks. In this case, the young artist to be, Anselmus, at first seduced and then disenchanted by his own visions, is a feature in a vision that the external narrator confesses to be incomplete. In the endlessly inter-reflecting images of the narrator and his character Anselmus within one another, both find themselves caught before a mirror, fixing the subject in his or her own gaze. Like its central image, the arabesque, the line that refuses the fixity of letters, the *Märchen* is, in the final instance, a tale that cannot be completed, whose narrator confesses himself to be incapable of its completion.

As the 'Inszenierung' of a mimetic encounter between Anselmus and the fantasy world of Atlantis, as he tries to recover the fantasy realm within the prosaic lines of Dresden, *Der goldne Topf* is concerned with the narrative subject's attachment to the world, and with the figures this attachment might take. When Hoffmann's line is no longer the describer of the visual, it marks the point at which image merges with text, and thus mirrors back the accidental inkblot, the seeming interrupter or disturber of lines. In a final image that presents the experience of narration as a bodily attachment, the narrator re-absorbs Lindhorst into himself by drinking him, in a draught of punch:

Tragen Sie keine Sorge mein Bester, rief der Archivarius, warf den Schlafrock schnell ab, stieg zu meinem nicht geringen Erstaunen in den Pokal und verschwand in den Flammen. — Ohne Scheu kostete ich, die Flamme leise weghauchend, von dem Getränk — es war köstlich! (H II.1 318)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Peter von Matt, *Die Augen der Automaten*, p. 33: 'the motif of the blank canvas, which is seen as a completed painting although it bears not a single mark of paint'.

⁵⁵ "'You need have no fear, my good fellow,'" Archivarius Lindhorst said. Then, quickly throwing off his robe, to my great amazement he climbed into the goblet and vanished in the flames. I enjoyed the drink without fear, softly blowing back the fire — it was delicious!'

Consumption and mimesis converge when the image in question has become reproducible. In this intricate textual flourish, the narrator drinks the fictional character he has produced, in the context of a scene in which that character has ostensibly become a ‘real’ one. Lindhorst is simultaneously a narrating subject himself — the letter he writes to the narrator, prior to his appearance, is aligned with the same level of reality as is the narrator’s own narration — and an object, part of the narrator’s material currency of inspiration, punch. The specific trope of the drinking writer is a recurrent image throughout Hoffmann’s works and life.⁵⁶ The trope of drinking suggests not only the loss or distortion of reality that comes about with inebriation, but the pact made with the devil through the consumption of his potions. We will see the image re-occur in *Abenteuer der Silvester Nacht* in the following chapter, and again most decisively in *Die Elixiere des Teufels* in Chapter 5. The narrator here re-absorbs into himself the very narrative he has produced, delineating the fictional character as object, as production — but he does so on the whim and instruction of that very object (‘Tragen Sie keine Sorge, mein Bester...’). The object is then articulated through and against the narrative body, a body that has become a kind of engine of production and consumption.⁵⁷ This metabolic bodily articulation will come to bear on my reading of *La Peau de chagrin*, in which the narrative act itself is figured as a piece of skin.

A problem that must be addressed by mimesis is the deliberate articulation of a non-deliberate feature. Something of this is captured in the fictional character who paradoxically comes to life as consumable object. The arabesque, or flourish, is one visual response to this difficulty — and it is an approach that lies on the same page as prosopopoeia. In freeing the narrative line from the constraints of the outline, in reading such a line against the blot of ink, an approach is made towards accounting for a non-deliberate, objective world, a world with its own face. The line, in this way, takes on the form of the non-human features of the world, threatening to engulf the subject, playing around the edges of the subject’s body, suggestive of both touch and consumption. Hoffmann draws his narrative by means of this capricious, contingent

⁵⁶ See Victoria Dutchman-Smith, *E. T. A. Hoffmann and Alcohol: Biography, Reception and Art* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2009).

⁵⁷ For a broader investigation of consumption and Romanticism, see *Cultures of Taste / Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism*, ed. by Timothy Morton (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

narrative of lines. In this way, he brings the arabesque — the playful decoration of the margin — to the centre of his page.

III. *La Peau de chagrin*

In Honoré de Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin*, the marginal arabesque is brought to the top of the page, given the role of pre-text, in its most literal sense, as epigraph:



(STERNE, *Tristram Shandy*, chap. CCCXXII.)

Figure 3

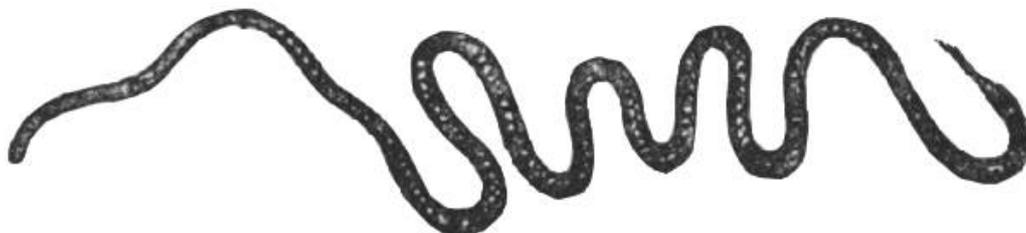
In this novel, which is an account not just of a life but of the act of telling a life, the compromise made on the entry into narrative becomes the subject of its plot. The novel's visual epigraph, a figure of wandering or walking, of life's wayward turns, may be taken to be emblematic of this compromise. As a figure on the page, it looks like an orphaned 'thing', a glitch or a hitch, a serpentine squiggle that we might not be able to figure out. It appears beside the point, existing just before or just beside the fix of intelligibility, inhabiting the register between the cryptic sense of a hieroglyphic and the imperviousness of the accidental *Tintenfleck*.

The squiggle, as Balzac notes, is a pictorial quotation from Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, where it illustrates the formless line traced by the flourish of Corporal Trim's walking stick as he gestures at the pleasures and whimsy of a bachelor's dissolute life: 'Whilst a man is free—cried the Corporal, giving a flourish with his stick thus—'.⁵⁸ Compromised at every turn, however, the quotation is a misleading one, for not only has it been rotated by ninety degrees onto its side, but Balzac's attribution — 'STERNE, *Tristram Shandy*, chap. CCCXXII' — refers to

⁵⁸ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Cambridge: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 549.

a chapter of *Tristram Shandy* which does not exist (the Corporal makes his flourish in the fourth chapter of volume IX). From the very beginning of the text, then, reading is a troubled affair. Intertextuality, as Jeri Debois King reminds us, often amounts to nothing more than a dubious game played with magic mirrors: ‘French translations of Sterne inspired Balzac and simultaneously acted as screens to conceal the real Sterne from Balzac’.⁵⁹ As a pre-text, or a pre-figure, it resembles, like Gérard Genette’s *paratexte*, ‘[p]lus que d’une limite ou d’une frontière étanche’; is something like a threshold, a ‘seuil’, or ‘un “vestibule” qui offre à tout un chacun la possibilité d’entrer, ou de rebrousser chemin’.⁶⁰ The paratextual squiggle, as Balzac’s opening line, acts as an antechamber or an entranceway (and these are figures that will return within this chapter), denoting the beginning of a passage.

My reading begins with the assumption that the line is an emblem of the fantastic, with latent Hoffmannesque implications. It is not the first to do so. In the posthumous 1855 edition of *La Peau de chagrin* published by Houssiaux, Sterne’s flourish suffered yet another distorting transformation, this time a full-bodied one, into the specific image of a serpent:



STERNE (Tristram Shandy, ch. cccxxii.)

Figure 4

This, the fifth and most distorted incarnation of the flourish, was the result, according to Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, of Houssiaux’s conviction that the titular skin must have been the skin of a snake: ‘Ce dernier éditeur s’était persuadé sans doute qu’une *peau de chagrin* ne pouvait être qu’en *peau de serpent*, et en avait probablement conclu que

⁵⁹ Jeri Debois King, *Paratextuality in Balzac’s La Peau de Chagrin* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1992), p. 771. See also Maurice Ménard’s article ‘Balzac et Sterne’, *L’Année Balzacienne*, 13 (1992), 21-37.

⁶⁰ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), p. 8.

l'épigraphe de l'ouvrage devait préciser ce point!'.⁶¹ Certainly it is a disquieting testimony to the life and logic that the line may lead, morphing, or, to follow Klee, 'spazieren[d]' in unexpected ways, in its readers' readings, not unlike the lines that morph before Anselmus's eyes from marks into letters.⁶² The living, morphing, serpentine line will inform and structure my argument here — which will in turn be something of a 'Hoffmannesque' reading — returning as an emblem for the narrative project of drawing deliberate forms from life: life, which Balzac describes in an article for *La Caricature* on 11 August 1831, as a 'drame qui *serpente*, nodule, tournoie et au courant duquel il faut s'abandonner'.⁶³

La Peau de chagrin opens, in Part I, 'Le Talisman', with the wretched Raphaël de Valentin by the Seine, in a neat reflection of the wretched Anselmus introduced to us on the banks of the Elbe. Raphaël, following a spell of crippling impoverishment and a series of failed intrigues with the ruthlessly deflective courtesan Fœdora, plans to drown himself. After losing his last few coins in a gambling den, intending to delay the moment of death a little longer, he enters an antique shop. The Mephistophelian *marchand* inside offers to sell him a scrap of magic skin. Etched into the skin is a pact promising to fulfil all of his desires at the expense of his continued life. With every wish it grants the skin shrinks, tracing out the curtailment of his lifespan. Raphaël, who promptly wishes for and is granted an evening of excess in the form of a debauched party, begins, in its aftermath, the narration of his history to a drunk and sleeping audience. This narration is the content of the novel's Part II, 'La Femme sans cœur', in which he recounts the miserable history of paternal stricture and the scuppered courtship with Fœdora which landed him in the murky predicament with which the novel started. In Part III, 'L'Agonie', the promise of the pact catches up with him, the skin having shrunk to almost nothing, and Raphaël, in fear of expressing any desire at all, withers away into an almost vegetative state of seclusion and atrophy. Committed to an existence of desire without life, or of life without desire, Raphaël finds his only solace and only means of survival

⁶¹ Charles de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, 'Les "Études philosophiques" de Honoré de Balzac (Édition Werdet)', *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 3 (1907), 393-441 (p. 408).

⁶² See Joseph Hillis Miller, 'Balzac's Serpent', in *Reading Narrative* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), pp. 78-83.

⁶³ Cited in Raissa Reznik, 'Sur l'épigraphe de *La Peau de chagrin*', *L'Année balzacienne*, (1972), 373-75 (p. 374). My emphasis.

in a pared down, object-like existence, drained of desire. In a final, particularly melodramatic sleight of authorial hand, he retreats into the mountains: ‘uni à cette terre animée [...] Il avait fantastiquement mêlé sa vie à la vie de ce rocher, il s’y était implanté’ (B X 282). On his re-encounter with Pauline, another figure of desire, death begins to catch up with him: and it does so most decisively in the novel’s gruesomely florid final scene.

Form distinguishes narrative from life, where *form* is the mimetic ordering, the construction of narrative intention. As Nadine Satiat explains, ‘C’est que pour Balzac, la création, l’œuvre est sans doute le seul moyen de se rendre maître du temps et du foisonnement chaotique du réel, de ne pas s’y dissoudre’.⁶⁴ My concern in the current reading is the encounter between reader (from the dissolute world or ‘foisonnement chaotique’ of life) and mimetic form. In other words, I am concerned with the moment when I, as reader, see the bits and pieces of the world conspire into the kind of meaningful topos or physiognomy I can recognise, and to which I respond in embodied or affective terms. My reading takes as its impetus Peter Brooks’s argument in *Reading for the Plot* that enfolded within the novel is a story about the death instinct: showing how the realisation of desire must also mean the death of that desire; ‘that Eros is subtended by the death instinct, the drive of living matter to return to the quiescence of the inorganic, a state prior to life’.⁶⁵ I take the prevailing desire in the novel to be the desire to make the self legible, to narrate and to be understood: ‘Ah!’ Raphaël sighs to Émile, ‘si tu connaissais ma vie’ (B X 119). On his acquisition of the skin he confesses to the *marchand* the difficulty of articulating why he wants to die:

Pour me dispenser de vous dévoiler des souffrances inouïes et qu’il est difficile d’exprimer en langage humain, je vous dirai que je suis dans la plus profonde, la plus ignoble, la plus perçante de toutes les misères. (B X 81)

This yearning for narrative intelligibility — to account for the self, ‘de se rendre maître du temps et du foisonnement chaotique du réel’ (Satiat) — runs concurrent to the fear of dissolution, of illegibility, figured by the snaking line which is not yet

⁶⁴ Nadine Satiat, ‘Introduction’, in Honoré de Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), pp. 9-53 (p. 49).

⁶⁵ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 51.

coherent narrative. In coming to know ourselves narratively, we must come to know or to feel ourselves as narrative object. For Brooks, as for Walter Benjamin, death — which enunciates itself in banal materiality, the sheer object form that we all, as bodies, are — bestows all final meaning. As Benjamin writes in ‘Der Erzähler’, ‘Der Tod ist die Sanktion von allem, was der Erzähler berichten kann’. Death, then, is the ultimate result of narration.⁶⁶

La Peau de chagrin contends with how the subject Raphaël is formed by his narrative, with a biting concern for the constraints of plot: enacting, in Peter Brooks’s words, ‘an allegory not only of life but of the telling of the life story’.⁶⁷ Much existing criticism on the text responds to it broadly in this vein. Patrick M. Bray has argued that the text ‘inscribes within its pages a theory of its own writing’; that the piece of skin is ‘a fiction, which allows a theory of willpower to become materialized in a tangible object’.⁶⁸ Surprisingly few critics, however, have explicitly broached the fact that this novel is concerned above all else with the *feel* of the narrative. Bray’s focus, for one, is the ‘vicissitudes of theoretical visions’ and the text’s ‘obsession with vision’.⁶⁹ Régine Borderie recognises the centrality of the body, ‘[l]e corps perturbateur’, for the individual who, alienated within a new market society whose universal equivalent is money, finds himself or herself ‘ramené d’abord à ce qu’il a de plus proche, sa peau, ses sens, son corps’.⁷⁰ But even this only begins to touch upon the lived, sensing body, not just as an allegorical figure seen from without but as the sensate envelope it is experienced as from within: as a figure of feeling. The skin, here — taken to be the skin of the serpent, or the skin of the pre-textual line, may be read in its Merleau-Pontian sense, as the borderline or boundary-line that does not foreclose or delineate but rather opens on to the phenomenal world beyond itself.

The argument that follows, then, will trace its way through a series of significant sensory encounters in the novel. It first draws together Raphaël’s meeting with the doorkeeper of the gambling den and his encounter with Fœdora; then

⁶⁶ Benjamin, *GS* II.2, p. 450 (‘Death is the sanction of everything the storyteller can tell’).

⁶⁷ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 48.

⁶⁸ Patrick M. Bray, ‘Balzac and the Chagrin of Theory’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 54.3 (2014), 66-77 (pp. 66, 68).

⁶⁹ Bray, ‘Balzac and the Chagrin of Theory’, pp. 75, 67.

⁷⁰ Régine Borderie, ‘Le Corps de la philosophie: *La Peau de chagrin*’, *L’Année Balzacienne*, 12 (2001), 199-219 (pp. 201, 216).

examines his entrance into the *magasin de curiosités*; then his final encounter with Pauline and the very last articulations of the *peau de chagrin*. Each of these encounters, I shall show, provokes a coincidence or collaboration of visual and tactile orders. They might be described as *haptic*, where, for Mark Paterson, “‘Haptics’ is always that larger human system of perception that deals with touch’, and where *touch* in turn means the ‘co-implication of body, flesh and world’.⁷¹ By examining these encounters through the vector of physiognomy, then through twentieth-century theories of play, and always paying particular attention to the visual aspects of touch and feeling, I read them as moments of corporeal mimesis in which Raphaël is cast in a ‘thing’-like state, feeling his embodied self as object, caught like Anselmus in crystal, just before or just beside the fixed state of subjecthood. Each encounter expresses this condition in terms of a Hoffmannesque encounter with the world, which always seems to possess some strange subjectivity that might surpass the subject’s own.

Following its epigraph, the novel begins with Raphaël’s entry into a gambling den. The payment exacted on his entry is his hat:

Quand vous entrez dans une maison de jeu, la loi commence par vous dépouiller de votre chapeau. Est-ce une parabole évangélique et providentielle? N’est-ce pas plutôt une manière de conclure un contrat infernal avec vous en exigeant je ne sais quel gage? [...] Est-ce enfin pour prendre la mesure de votre crâne et dresser une statistique instructive sur la capacité cérébrale des joueurs? (B X 57-58)

Like Hoffmann’s narrator, Balzac’s is prone to seizing upon Lavaterian discourse. The hat as ‘gage’, as a marker of phrenological intelligibility, is a material toll for his entry into a space of play, ‘le Jeu’. Hats, extravagant, made to be removed (*Chapeau!* — hats off to you) are invariably significant of leavings and entries, partakings, done deals; suggestive here both of a social measure of class, and of the measuring frenzy of a social ‘science’ like phrenology. Balzac, discussing the function of ‘la toilette’ in

⁷¹ Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 132, 2.

‘*Traité de la vie élégante*’, writes of ‘l’homme hiéroglyphé’, arguing that ‘la *vestignomie* est devenue presque une branche de l’art créé par Gall et Lavater’ (B XII 251). Gall’s phrenology was a nineteenth-century pseudoscience based on the assumption that a human subject may be characterised by taking measure of the size and shape of his or her brain. It was, in this sense, ‘a kind of diagnostic shorthand’ for reading character.⁷² Phrenology is a correlate to Lavaterian physiognomy in method if not in conceptual framework, since phrenology derives from a scientific discourse and physiognomy from a religious one (Lavater was a pastor; Gall and Spurzheim, the founders of phrenology, were physicians). In general, though, for Balzac these two diagnostic methods are implicitly conflated as modes of reading based on ‘the assumption that a single trait [...] could provide a telltale sign of one’s type’ (this is made clear in the passage from ‘*Traité*’ cited above); and implying, together with other marginal pseudo-sciences like mesmerism, ‘a world at once material and spiritual’, in which body is the expression of spirit.⁷³ Here, then, the two methods will be taken as twin faces of a general taxonomical impetus.

As a prosthetic mould for the head, ‘la mesure de votre crâne’, the hat might be taken as a mimetic measure: an indexical sign confirming *type* and thus acting as a way of reading Raphaël. The hat, *chapeau*, is modelled on the head still contained within it, shaped in inverse. The doorkeeper of the gambling den, couched in shadow and described as a ‘Cerbère’, is the gatekeeper to a space obsessed with material things and governed by chance and contingency. And he bears, significantly, ‘une figure moulée sur un type ignoble’ (B X 57): a thing-like face, moulded or masked. Such limbic figures – as in the French *figure*, meaning face as well as character — proliferate in the text (Cerberus himself, of course, is said to have fifty heads — and fifty faces). A face, after all, seldom exists alone: the condition of a face is that it must be seen, must be faced. The logic that follows is that the face, as a point in a wider system of legibility, must always be accompanied by a prosthetic mask-like diagnostic measure to ensure intelligibility. Being read, the face turns from flesh into *figure*. The shopkeeper in the antique shop is another figure with a mask-like face, bearing ‘l’apparence de ces têtes judaïques qui servent de types aux artistes quand ils veulent représenter Moïse’ (B X 78). These two mask- or mould-like beings, hovering

⁷² Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, p. 54.

⁷³ Rothfield, *Vital Signs*, pp. 52-53.

around entrances and passageways, are both associated with the mimetic measure. To enter the space of narrative play entails, in these instances, a pact or deal with a masked figure. As reader, I can recognise you only by virtue of your mimetic guarantors.

The masked figures of the introduction prefigure Fœdora, the central figure claiming to condition Raphaël's passage into social and erotic figuration. Fœdora, the *fée d'or* or the *fainte d'or*, the marble and money 'statue de marbre', 'statue d'argent', 'incarnation de [s]es espérances' (B X 159, 184, 146), seems to mark out the passage towards social and financial fortune that Raphaël wants to tread. And as he strains to read her features — 'Je voulais lire un sentiment, un espoir, dans toutes ces phases du visage' (B X 154) — her face comes to be expressed in the physiognomic forms of the world — 'Les arbres, l'air, le ciel, toute la nature semblait me répéter le sourire de Fœdora' (B X 167). Indeed, Fœdora's features seem to promise so much that in one scene Raphaël, suddenly anxious about what surfaces may or may not conceal, hides in her room to see her naked: 'Pour examiner cette femme corporellement comme je l'avais étudiée intellectuellement, pour la connaître enfin tout entière' (B X 179). Housed within this is an explicit anxiety about reading and reading's potential failure. What worries Raphaël specifically is that Fœdora's features will not yield what they seem to promise; that there might be nothing beyond the face; or that behind one inscrutable surface might lie only another. In the privacy of her room, Fœdora does indeed strip away a caked layer of social artifice, in accordance with Raphael's suspicions: 'Elle venait d'ôter un masque; actrice, son rôle était fini' (B X 182). But what is left beneath is no imperfection or abnormality, as he fears. Instead, she is smooth, whole, 'comme une statue d'argent qui brille sous son enveloppe de gaze. Non, nulle imperfection ne devait lui faire redouter les yeux furtifs de l'amour' (B X 184). Glinting, then, and intangible, associated explicitly with metal and the slippery surface of coins, Raphaël can gain no more purchase on her than he can on the money that so readily confounds his grasp. Fœdora too bears the metallic face of the gatekeeper, the *marchand*, whose own voice 'avait quelque chose de métallique' (B X 79). She is figured precisely as all that Raphaël has lost in trying to get close to her: the clinking and glinting of money, like the last of his coins lost to 'le Jeu'.

Raphaël, waiting for nightfall before he dares throw himself into the Seine, wanders aimlessly into a *magasin de curiosités*. In the face of the disordered jumble of

curiosities he encounters there, it becomes apparent that, despite having left the gambling den, he is nonetheless securely in a space governed by the non-rule of play and chance:

L'oreille croyait entendre des cris interrompus, l'esprit saisir des drames inachevés, l'œil apercevoir des lueurs mal étouffées. Enfin une poussière obstinée avait jeté son léger voile sur tous ces objets, dont les angles multipliés et les sinuosités nombreuses produisaient les effets les plus pittoresques (B X 70).

The jumble of objects is made up of non-corresponding forms, out of context and accounted for by no organising conceit: 'toutes les œuvres humaines et divines se heurtaient [...] Le commencement du monde et les événements d'hier se mariaient avec une grotesque bonhomie [...]' (B X 69). The description is a dense, arresting edifice of indigestible matter: a narrative passage caught up in and blocked by its own excess. Described as 'un poème sans fin' (B X 71) — being thus without ending but also without aim, without conclusive signification — it wriggles onwards, perhaps not unlike an incontinent inked line. And, as the object-world appears to come to life, Raphaël is all hands and eyes, caught transfixed — arrested, or apprehending — before the things he sees. He slumps back into the half-life of a thing, expressed in fantastic terms: 'Enfin, doutant de son existence, il était comme ces objets curieux, ni tout à fait mort, ni tout à fait vivant' (B X 73).

This is one of the novel's most fantastic scenes, in which objects seem to come to life and the self is muddled up in objects. It is an atmosphere of play, where *play* means an indulgence in the coincidence and contingency of the objective world. Play, in this reading, suggests an engagement with the material world prior to that material's socialisation into normal systems of meaning. This reading follows the logic of Walter Benjamin's book of play, *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*. In one fragment of this series of *Denkbilder*, under the title 'Schränke' ('Cupboards'), Benjamin's child subject rummages through a sock drawer. The process of recuperating the interior kernel of the sock merges with the sensuous experience of the act of seizing as he pushes his hand into the sock's body:

Nichts ging mir über das Vergnügen, meine Hand so tief wie möglich in ihr Inneres zu versenken. [...] Es war ‘Das Mitgebrachte’, das ich immer im eingerollten Innern in der Hand hielt und das mich derart in die Tiefe zog. [...] Nicht oft genug konnte ich so die Probe auf jene rätselhafte Wahrheit machen: dass Form und Inhalt, Hülle und Verhülltes, ‘Das Mitgebrachte’ und die Tasche eines waren.⁷⁴

The sock experience is reminiscent again of the wilful movement of Balzac’s epigraph, indulging in the soft indistinction between playful figuration and what the figure might finally bear out as meaning. Form and content loop into and out of one another.

Balzac’s epigraph is also a work of the hand, a scribble, deriving from a (fictional) gesture made with a walking stick. In reading a traced-out line, as Tim Ingold writes, ‘the eyes follow the same path as did the hand in drawing it’ (and might this again be a haptic logic, the conspiring together of vision with touch?).⁷⁵ In figuring out Balzac’s playful figure, the reader’s eyes vicariously re-trace the line made by the hand: the hand holding the stick, and the presumed hand or handiwork of the amanuensis. Henry James, in ‘The Lesson of Balzac’, writes that Balzac ‘at all events robustly loved the sense of another explored, assumed, assimilated identity—enjoyed it as the hand enjoys the glove when the glove ideally fits’.⁷⁶ This is to figure the narrative, following the logic of the sock and the line drawn by the hand or stick, as a further piece of hand-work, the work of touch. Gloves, like socks, hats or masks, are spaces to be inhabited. Like Benjamin’s encasements and interiors, or like narrative spaces, they draw us in. On the subject’s passage into narrative, mimesis acts upon that subject, consuming it like the sock or glove drawing in the hand or eye. I am formed and I disappear in things.

⁷⁴ Walter Benjamin, *GS III*, p. 401: ‘For me, nothing surpassed the pleasure of thrusting my hand as deeply as possible into the pocket’s interior. [...] It was “the little present” rolled up inside that I always held in my hand and that in this way drew me into the depths. [...] I could not put this enigmatic truth to the test often enough: the truth, namely, that form and content, veil and what is veiled, “the present” and the pocket, were one’.

⁷⁵ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 73.

⁷⁶ Henry James, ‘The Lesson of Balzac’, in *The Question of Our Speech; The Lesson of Balzac; Two Lectures* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), pp. 96-97.

This narrative staging of play, in which the pre-existing liveness of the subject gives over to the objects around it — in the process, becoming ever more material — can seem at times to resemble a kind of life-in-death. Life, in the spectacle of mimesis — as we shall see by Raphaël’s slump into objecthood — is partly surrendered as the subject is mixed up with the inanimate and driven towards inertia. Following the logic of Roger Caillois in ‘Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire’, Raphaël’s narrative trajectory, as a movement into automatism (‘une sorte d’*instinct d’abandon* qui [...] polarise [le sujet] vers un mode d’existence réduite [...] *l’inertie de l’élan vital* pour ainsi dire’),⁷⁷ may be taken as a spectacle of mimesis. He is driven into stupor — into an automaton-like or vegetative state — into an excessive hermetic identification with space, giving up on life in order to merely live on. For with each time that the skin grants him a new pleasure, he dies a little more. And so Raphaël comes to know himself as an object or effigy: a thing-like body, slave to the wasting effects of time and desire.

The etymologically orphaned word *chagrin* leads a doubled or a wayward life in this novel. *Chagrin* both means the *shagreen* — skin, the organ of touch — and an affective state akin to melancholy; it means *touching* and *feeling*. Since it is through the acquisition of the skin that Raphaël accedes to the narration of his life, narrative coincides with this figure of feeling. The *peau de chagrin* works to literalise or to ‘figure’ the narration of the chagrined self, asking how it feels to be a feeling subject — or to be subject to feeling. For if one *chagrin* — a life of poverty and rejection by Fœdora — has already turned Raphaël into the errant orphan of a harsh and unfeeling world, the second, the figure of the skin, does the same in taking such harsh stock of his desire and literalising the descent into thing-hood. As a structural element, the skin makes of the text a self-reflexive fold, with Raphaël’s own history of his *chagrin*-as-misery couched within the encompassing frame-narration about the *chagrin*-as-skin. The novel, then, is structured like skin on skin: touching feeling. In making a spectacle of narrative mimesis, it has at its eccentric centre the shock of the self-reflexive, the bafflement of narrative catching sight of its own reflection or sensing the jolt of skin on skin.

⁷⁷ Roger Caillois, ‘Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire’, p. 9.

La Peau de chagrin is, then, at its heart a book of skin: it has as its titular and narrative focus the organ of touch, albeit in object form. We encounter it at first, pathetically and paradoxically stripped to an un-touching state and strung up on the wall of an antique shop to be looked at, but enjoined to its behaviour before the eyes (as it works as a visual measure of Raphaël's shortening lifespan) is always the implication of the skin's touch. Raphaël has entered into narrative on the condition of his feeling, his own *chagrin*. The novel *La Peau de chagrin* opens up the knottiness of 'feeling': as an act of grasping or apprehension (to 'apprehend' means 'to understand' but also 'to lay hold of'), and as something undergone. Touch is, after all, the most self-reflexive sense. The subject, in touching, becomes, by virtue of the skin which unknowingly acts upon itself, the object of that same touch. Implicit here is Merleau-Ponty in *Le Visible et l'invisible*: 'mon corps qui fait que, visible, tangible comme une chose, c'est lui qui prend cette vue de lui-même, ce contact avec lui-même, où il se dédouble, s'unifie, de sorte que corps objectif et corps phenomenal tournent autour de l'autre'.⁷⁸ This is made finally and most urgently clear in an encounter, this time, from the perspective not of Raphaël but of Pauline, on the event of her discovery of the truth about Raphaël's predicament, shortly preceding his death:

Un cri terrible sortit du gosier de la jeune fille, ses yeux se dilatèrent, ses sourcils, violemment tirés par une douleur inouïe, s'écartèrent avec horreur, elle lisait dans les yeux de Raphaël un de ces désirs furieux, jadis sa gloire à elle; mais à mesure que grandissait ce désir, la Peau, en se contractant, lui chatouillait la main. (B X 291-92)

The shift in narrative perspective over to a character other than Raphaël, beginning at the start of this final chapter — here to Pauline, and elsewhere to his doctor — sidelines Raphaël into the state of narrated matter. And here we find perhaps the most potent example of the 'haptic' collision of the visual with the tactile as the note of desire glowing in Raphaël's eyes is felt in the skin contracting in Pauline's hand: a three-pointed encounter of eye on skin on skin. This has been the logic all along: that the visual function is registered sweepingly across the body — here as a sensation on the skin of her hand. This 'chatouille' felt as the skin shrinks suggests an unformed

⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, p. 155.

feeling, akin to an affective state and reminiscent of the squiggle, being both excessive and lacking, pre-intelligible and autonomic, played out on the level of the skin. The *peau de chagrin*, functioning as the mimetic measure — as did the hats and masks earlier — marks out the conditions on which the narrative life may be lived. Raphaël's final predicament is that, in order to have his desires fulfilled, he must hand over the due material fee: his life as autonomous subject.

The recent critical turn, or re-turn, towards the corporeal under the name of affect theory might be said to prescribe a renewed return to material form in literary studies, suggesting a narrative of the feeling subject who finds his or her way back into a world of physical forms. 'Affect marks a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters,' write Seigworth and Gregg in their *Affect Theory Reader*.⁷⁹ There is a potential for conceiving of corporeal mimesis as I have laid it out here, as a set of unbidden bodily encounters with the world, in tandem with such thought on affect — as a way of dragooning material bodies into a larger system of meaning-making. But *La Peau de chagrin* sticks playfully in the excess, or in the lack, with which affective or feeling states confound meaning. Raphaël is hungry to make himself intelligible. Narrative coincides with feeling, but at a cost. Given the talisman of a skin — feeling — he is subjected to the skin's own wayward will. To follow the logic of the Hoffmannesque epigraph, before the fix of the intelligible *figure*, or just beside it, is the condition of narrative 'stuff', contingent matter, living in a state of dis-figuration or of pre-figuration.

La Peau de chagrin, Balzac's only fantastic novel, relates to the wider realist project of *La Comédie Humaine* like an intractable or stubborn epigraph. The novel, taking to task the act of narration, both sets its reader hunting for meaning and distorts that activity, challenging how meaning might ever be drawn from a seemingly illegible figure. This suggestion seems to be confirmed by Balzac's claim in a letter to Charles de Montalembert of 1831, in which he describes *La Peau de chagrin* as an opening emblem for the rest of his work: '*La Peau de chagrin* est la formule de la vie humaine, abstraction faite des individualités [...] tout y est mythe et figure. Elle est donc le point de départ de mon ouvrage'.⁸⁰ By incorporating a flagrantly fantastic element, a magic piece of skin, within descriptions of Parisian life grounded in

⁷⁹ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregg and Seigworth (London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 1-25 (p. 2).

⁸⁰ Balzac, *Correspondance*, I, pp. 396-97.

sociological and historical detail ('Cet ouvrage est, peau de chagrin à part, une étude de mœurs,' as one critic writes),⁸¹ the key tenet of this novel which so singularly bridges 'le fantastique' of Balzac's earlier works and the realism of his later career lies in the depiction of how the conditions of reality are *felt*. If the novel shows, as Cohen-Vrignaud has argued in a recent article, that 'despite romance's attachment to the extraordinary, perhaps realism has its own way of mystifying' — or fantasizing about — 'how things "really" happen', then those mystifications or fantasies are shown to take distinctly sensory forms.⁸²

To conclude, then, I make a brief return to the scrap of skin. The *peau de chagrin* appears for the first time to the reader and to Raphaël in the antique shop. The skin, which appears here to give off its own ethereal glow, on closer inspection only *reflects* light. It hangs on a wall facing the portrait of Jesus painted by Raphael — 'sur le mur qui faisait face au portrait' — and so locking the painter Raphael, the narrative subject Raphaël, the skin, and the figure of Jesus, in a series of cross-reflections. And:

par un phénomène inexplicable au premier abord, cette peau projetait au sein de la profonde obscurité qui régnait dans le magasin de rayons si lumineux que vous eussiez dit d'une petite comète. (B X 82)

Lindhorst's 'blaue Bibliothek' seems at first also to emanate its own light as well: 'Ein magisches blendendes Licht verbreitete sich überall, ohne das man bemerken konnte wo es herkam, da durchaus kein Fenster zu sehen war' (H II.1 269-70).⁸³ Lindhorst's realm shows itself up to be only a reflection of the real world in a mirroring surface. As for Balzac's skin, it is, as Raphaël soon finds out, illuminated by trickery, having been polished in a particular way to make it reflect light and so give the illusion of luminosity. At the heart of Balzac's novel, then, as of Hoffmann's *Märchen*, the reading encounter finds itself face to face with a reflective surface, a magic mirror.

⁸¹ Maurice Allem, 'Introduction', in Honoré de Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin* (Paris: Garnier, 1964), pp. I-XXVIII (p. VI).

⁸² Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud, 'Capitalism's Wishful Thinking', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 76.2 (2015), 181-99.

⁸³ 'A magic dazzling light shone over the whole, though you could not discover where it came from, for no window whatever was to be seen'.

The contingent fall of light on material marks out that material's beholdenness to the world. It is not an innately meaningful inner glow but the play of light from elsewhere that makes forms legible. Narrative 'stuff' is trapped in the contingency of the material, subject to the wayward play of light and ink. This may figure another return to the dissolute *hasard* and the accidents of life to which we are always subject, and which appear in the epigraph's flourish, a metamorphic, serpentine line, as a figure of wandering or walking, of submitting to chance and play. Form distinguishes the novel from life. And so form may, to follow Brooks and Benjamin, correspond in some way to a figure of death or dying — but life always creeps back in, and it does so as contingency, in the haphazard play of light and ink, in the buzz or tickle of corporeal sensation. Life returns, then, in all the lacks and the excesses to which narrative form can only ever half-respond.

IV.

Raphaël, before being named Raphaël, appeared in one of Balzac's first drafts of *La Peau de chagrin* under the name 'Scribonius'.⁸⁴ This early appellation holds a trace of the importance of written text, script, in this novel which is otherwise so compelling an account of how a subject learns to narrate. As the subjects of *Bildungsromane*, Anselmus and Raphaël ostensibly learn to read and understand, in the one instance, Lindhorst's arcane manuscripts, and in the other the pact etched on the scrap of skin. Their formation or *Bildung* as narrative subjects is intertwined with a coming to sensibility, an awareness of themselves as objects, perceived — or perhaps inscribed — in a non-human state, under the gaze, or touch, of other beings.

In the reading of *La Peau de chagrin* here, the skin has functioned as a formulation of the line. In Lavaterian thought, the skin is drawn as a legible *Umriss* or outline. The legible bounding line gains life in Romanticism through the text-image collision articulated by the *arabesque* and other such lines, and given room to flourish in the new trend for illustrated books. The skin as a boundary line becomes, in the thought of Merleau-Ponty, the point of a body's limits as well as the point at which that body opens outwards onto other bodies. His notion of flesh, *chair*, is intertwined with the chiasm in the final chapter of *Le Visible et l'invisible*, where the body is

⁸⁴ Spoulberch de Lovenjoul, 'Les "Études philosophiques" de Honoré de Balzac', p. 428.

described as ‘un être à deux feuillets, d’un côté chose parmi les choses et, par ailleurs, celui qui les voit et les touche’ with a ‘double appartenance à l’ordre de l’“objet” et à l’ordre de “sujet”’.⁸⁵ This bifurcated body, object and subject at once, both participates in and is touched by the world of things and touches them, knows them, resting somewhere apart from them. Merleau-Ponty’s flesh or chiasm allows us to articulate how something might be both read as ‘other’, externalised, and contained at the same time, in a movement that loops back and forth between the reader and the object of his or her reading. Something of this may be seen, too, in Benjamin’s childhood *Denkbilder*, and most of all in the image of the child for whom the tactile content and form of a sock merge softly into and out of one another.

The romantic line, then, has worked to mark the point at which the subject, in all bodily force, comes into representation or into narrative, containing the collision of touch and vision, the image and the word. A dimension of the line that has so far remained only implicit here is the repeated linear turn of words as trope. We might argue that Hoffmann becomes a ‘line’ for Balzac in this way — in Balzac’s invocation of the ‘hoffmannien’, or of ‘le fantastique’. Such lines — as we have seen in Sterne’s line, turned and twisted by Balzac, then turned and twisted further by the whims of his editors — can seem to lead strange lives when taken out of their original context. The trope — as the line overturned, knotted, or turned back on itself — will be the figure of reading in the following chapter, in which we see a renewed articulation of Sterne’s flourish by Balzac’s character Chabert. Chapter Four will in turn consider the line in its representative character, as the compulsive *Zug*, this time in its ekphrastic capacity; and Chapter Five will turn to the image of the ‘cross’ as the final confoundment of linear logic.

In a letter of August 1831, Balzac rebukes Charles de Bernard for his review of *La Peau de chagrin*, in which de Bernard had read the novel as an imitation of Hoffmann’s work:

Vous accusez peut-être légèrement la jeune littérature de viser à l’imitation des chefs-d’œuvres étrangers. Croyez-vous que le *fantastique* d’Hoffmann n’est pas virtuellement dans *Micromégas*, qui, lui-même, était déjà dans *Cyrano de*

⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l’invisible*, p. 178.

Bergerac, où Voltaire l'a pris? Les genres appartiennent à tout le monde, et les Allemands n'ont pas plus le privilège de la lune que nous celui du soleil, et l'Écosse celui des brouillards ossianiques. Qui peut se flatter d'être inventeur? Je ne me suis vraiment pas inspiré d'Hoffmann, que je n'ai connu qu'après avoir *pensé* mon ouvrage; mais il y a dans ceci quelque chose de plus grave. Nous manquons de patriotisme entre nous, et nous détruisons notre nationalité et notre suprématie littéraire, en nous démolissant les uns les autres. Les Anglais ont-ils été dire eux-mêmes que *Parisina* était la *Phèdre* de Racine, et vont-ils se jetant à la tête les littératures étrangères, pour étouffer la leur? Non. Imitons-les.⁸⁶

With this, Balzac sounds the cautionary note that a Hoffmannesque reading of his novel may be an over-reading; it may mean to read words or lines against themselves, or to turn them away from their original shape. And yet the extract, in its ironic circularity, strangely seems to want both to defend the act of imitation ('Imitons-les'), in a rebuttal of the common attribution of 'le fantastique' to Hoffmann, and to deny the imitation altogether ('Je ne me suis vraiment pas inspiré d'Hoffmann'). There is a sense, then, in which the Hoffmannesque reading of the novel is both acknowledged and denied in one stroke. There is a risk, Balzac warns, in reading his novel in this way. It compromises the reading. But this risk runs in line with his own play with intertexts, the mode of reading indicated by his serpentine epigraph — the line that does not describe so much as it implies: the line with a life and logic of its own, the line that always points elsewhere. To cast a Hoffmannesque line, I will come to show in the following chapters, suggests the sense of a demonic or poetological pact, the sense that character is in some way compromised or put on the line by the plot. This is precisely the experience of Anselmus and Raphaël, both of whom are made complicit in the business of powers beyond their subjective understanding, in giving up life for an image of life. But the line is always contradictory, characterised by unexpected turns, re-draftings, crossings-out and crossings-over. This capricious behaviour will form the shape of the argument as it unfolds in the chapters that follow.

⁸⁶ Balzac, *Correspondance*, I, pp. 386-87.

Chapter 3: Trope

Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht and Le Colonel Chabert

I.

The snaking arabesque traces an unexpected return in the epilogue of *Le Colonel Chabert*. In one of Balzac's more Gothic manoeuvres, Chabert, a soldier recorded as dead in battle, returns to the world of the living only to be denied his place within it.¹ In the novel's epilogue the ghostly *revenant*, condemned to end his life in a hospice and reduced to the nameless state of the prisoner, 'numéro 164, septième salle', draws out the familiar turning line in the air with his cane:

Il se mit au port d'armes, feignit de les coucher en joue, et s'écria en souriant: 'Feu des deux pièces! vive Napoléon!' Et il décrivit en l'air avec sa canne une arabesque imaginaire. (B III 372)

The fictional gesture made by the bachelor with his cane in *Tristram Shandy* and recorded by Sterne in the form of an inked drawing, then imitated by Balzac in *La Peau de chagrin*, is here transformed back into a fictional gesture made in the air by a bachelor with his cane. As a turning line, the arabesque traces the passage taken by a gesture into an image that resembles writing, and its passage back again; it records the alchemic transformation of movement into a legible figure. As a figure of the act of writing, the line is also a gesture of writing's flimsiness or its potential for dissolution. For in this text, the arabesque — accompanied by the random hieroglyphs that the colonel 's'amusait à tracer [...] sur le sable' (B III 372) — functions as the reflection or empty mockery of meaningfully etched lines: the signatures made on legal contracts that signify birth, marriage, and death. The return or reproduction of these narrative lines can make them more indistinct. Such a line, when repeated, may alter as much as it may serve meaning. To follow this line of thought is to follow the logic of the trope.

Definitions of the literary 'trope' run in two main strands. The first and more technical definition, common in literary handbooks, settles on the trope as a derivative

¹ Peter Brooks calls it a 'tale of ultimate Gothic horror articulated in the law office' in 'Narrative Transaction and Transference (Unburying *Le Colonel Chabert*)', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 15.2 (1982), 101-10 (p. 109).

of the Greek *tropos*, ‘turn’, and hence as a pattern or a series of words that changes the meaning of those words ‘by a “turn” of sense’ (as in figures of metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche).² In a corresponding definition, tropes are ‘[f]igures of thought [...] (meaning “turns,” “conversions”), in which words or phrases are used in a way that effects a conspicuous change in what we take to be their standard meaning’.³ The second major definition of ‘trope’, pertaining to its more popular use, is, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a ‘significant or recurrent theme, esp. in a literary or cultural context; a motif’.⁴ The reading that emerges from this double sense is of the trope as a singular, recognisable literary figure which both alters the text’s conventional sense and returns within it as a figure of repetition. Literary writing cannot do without trope, both in the sense that it rests on figurative or non-conventional language, and in the sense that it depends on the repetition of recognisable motifs, as in Wordsworth’s description of poetic language as ‘the turnings intricate of verse’.⁵ The trope, as an ambiguous turn or re-turn, is a deformation of conventional sense; as a repetition, it marks a process of obscuring, of becoming indistinct. ‘Trope’, then, as the mark of singularity or the repeated and recognisable literary trait, might run the same ambit as the ‘stereotype’, or the related ‘cliché’, the firmly fixed image from the printer’s block. In the process of being copied, such images are at risk of losing significance, blurring in proliferation.

Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht and *Le Colonel Chabert* have not yet been drawn together in critical writing. *Les Aventures de la nuit de Saint-Sylvestre*, much like *Le Pot d’or*, was taken up over-eagerly by Hoffmann’s French translators: it too was left out of Loève-Veimars’s edition of Hoffmann, having been translated and published in Toussenel’s rival edition in February 1830, following extracts in Loève-Veimars’s essay ‘Les Dernières Années et la mort d’Hoffmann’ in *La Revue de Paris* in 1829.⁶ Gérard de Nerval, a contemporary and friend of Balzac, published his own

² Chris Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 342.

³ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1999), p. 96.

⁴ ‘Trope, n.’, *OED Online*

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⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. by Mark L. Reed (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), V.603.

⁶ Brückner, *Adolphe François Loève-Veimars*, p. 195; Teichmann, *La Fortune d’Hoffmann en France*, pp. 25-26.

incomplete translation in *Mercure de France au XIXe siècle* a year later.⁷ Another contemporary, Théophile Gautier, included reference to it in his 1832 novella *Onuphrius ou les vexations fantastiques d'un admirateur d'Hoffmann*. The delirious protagonist of this tale, Onuphrius, finds himself obsessed with Hoffmann's tale of shadows and reflections and with Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, which Hoffmann's tale reflects:

L'histoire de Pierre Schlemil [*sic*], dont le diable avait pris l'ombre; celle de la nuit de Saint-Sylvestre, où un homme perd son reflet, lui revinrent en mémoire; il s'obstinait à ne pas voir son image dans les glaces et son ombre sur le plancher.⁸

It is likely, then, that Balzac would have encountered this tale which enjoyed such success amongst his contemporaries and which seems for itself to have acquired, in the same manner as its sibling tale *Schlemihl*, a certain Franco-German identity. *Le Colonel Chabert*, which appeared in 1832, has experienced a reputation as one of Balzac's stranger case studies, 'une des plus remarquables réussites de son auteur',⁹ but difficult to categorise amongst his works, being part legal intrigue, part realist melodrama, part Gothic fantasy. In reading these two texts alongside one another, I mean to interrogate the singular *Le Colonel Chabert* with the help of Hoffmann's trope or returning figure, which is put to exemplary and pre-eminently strange effect in 'Abenteuer'.

Both works, I show, narrate tales of a singular alteration. In *Abenteuer*, this alteration returns as part of a frustrated series: its very character, indeed, is serial. The loss undergone by its protagonist, the 'Enthusiast', is uncovered through his encounter with other characters, Schlemihl and Spikher, and by the sense of repetition that emerges from their three interlocking narratives. Hoffmann's enduring success and appeal owes much to his reputation as a master of repetition: a reputation crystallised, famously, by Freud's reading of *Der Sandmann* in 'Das Unheimliche'. For Freud, the

⁷ Gérard de Nerval, 'Aventures de la nuit de la Saint-Sylvestre, conte inédit d'Hoffmann', *Mercure de France au XIXe siècle*, 32 (1831), 547-97.

⁸ Théophile Gautier, 'Onuphrius, ou les vexations fantastiques d'un admirateur d'Hoffmann', in *L'Œuvre fantastique*, ed. by Michel Crouzet, 2 vols (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), I, pp. 251-77 (p. 276).

⁹ Pierre Barbéris, 'Introduction' [*Le Colonel Chabert*], in B III, pp. 293-309 (p. 293).

effect of Hoffmannesque repetition or return is the ‘unheimlich’, a feeling of singularly intense strangeness stemming from repressed childhood trauma; the re-emergence of that ‘was ein Geheimnis, im Verborgenen bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist’.¹⁰ Andrew Piper has begun to widen the potential scope of Hoffmann’s repetitiousness by relating it to his concern with emerging nineteenth-century bibliographic practices — the mass printing of the popular novel and novella collection — and ‘with the impact of technological reproducibility on modern cultural spaces’.¹¹ My reading of *Abenteuer* will draw on these new media-technological considerations of Hoffmann’s repetitiousness in attempting to give a new account of the Hoffmannesque ‘return’. I will suggest that *Abenteuer*, a tale about turning over other tales, reveals an anxiety about the turn from oral to written narratives: an anxiety at the heart of which lies the question of being an object in another character’s eyes; and, simultaneously, the state of being a paper character or an image, the material of a narrative. The Hoffmannesque trope represents an act of subversion, whereby in the reproduction of a figure in serial form, that figure can be stripped of meaning. Balzac puts a similar mimetic anxiety to devastating work in *Le Colonel Chabert*, a tale which deals in a more pressing way with the ‘paper’ identity of its protagonist. Both tales, I will argue, hinge upon a singular alteration — the dead colonel, ‘singulièrement altéré[s]’; and the reflection-less man, ‘etwas alteriert’ — and magnify that alteration to the status of repeated trope.

In both cases, the narrative subject ultimately refuses to commit his signature to a document that would consign his everyday identity away. Spikher, having given away his reflection, refuses to sign away his soul to the devil, but his wife nonetheless gently banishes him from their marital home. Chabert finally refuses to sign Rose Chapotel’s settlement contract, and lives on as a person recorded as dead, as much a ‘homo nefas’ or ‘mauvais sujet’ as Spikher, in the words of Hoffmann’s jeering onlookers. Balzac’s narrative of the impossible return, I shall show, is coloured by the implicit presence or co-authorship of Hoffmann. A reading of Balzac’s and Hoffmann’s tropes, finally, allows me to consider wider questions about the authors’ own invented names, self-fashioning and self-investment in their works. To trouble the act of signing a name or committing authorship to a work is to ask another

¹⁰ Freud, ‘Das Unheimliche’, p. 249: ‘everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden and which has come to light’.

¹¹ Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, p. 66.

question about the stakes of mimesis, about what might disappear beneath the written or drawn reproduction of identity.

II. *Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht*

To *tell*, Hoffmann's works achingly remind us, can mean to attempt an impossible return. When the eponymous literary circle of *Die Serapionsbrüder* regroups to continue telling stories to one another following twelve years of estrangement, one of its members Lothar laments that 'nicht wegzubannen ist die bittere Überzeugung daß nimmer — nimmer wiederkehrt, was einmal da gewesen' (H IV 13).¹² Home, in my absence, has inevitably changed.

A tale or telling is the transmission, but also the reading or retrieval, of the events that constitute a narrative. In his essay 'Der Erzähler: Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows' ('The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov'), Walter Benjamin details two archetypal storyteller figures: 'der Vielgewanderte', the traveller or seaman returning home with tales from distant places; and the 'Seßhaft[e]', the craftsman or tiller of the soil with his knowledge of community tradition and history. Benjamin's idea is that, in the workplace of the Middle Ages, these two models of telling — the 'Kunde aus der Ferne' ('lore of faraway places') recuperated from far away and the 'Kunde aus der Vergangenheit' ('lore of the past'), encrusted in the here-and-now — interpenetrate with one another.¹³ The sociable art of storytelling is born out of this double tradition of staying and going, returning and never having left. In both cases, what is told has weight, form, substance. Not only does it come into being in the workplace, 'im Kreis des Handwerks — des bäuerlichen, des maritimen und dann des städtischen', but it even takes on its own 'handwerkliche Form'. Benjamin compares the story to a clay pot, a 'Tonschale': an object that takes shape by being turned over and over in the hands of its maker.¹⁴

The telling of narrative demands a return to a sequence of events that may not be fully recuperated. The *Erzählung*, the 'reckoning', is a taking stock or a laying out

¹² 'the bitter conviction is not to be got rid of by persuasion, or by force, that what has been never, never can be again'.

¹³ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 440.

¹⁴ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 447: 'in the milieu of work — rural, maritime, and then urban'; 'artisanal form'.

of accounts. In relaying the new or unexpected (a feature more readily accounted for in the subgenre of the *Novelle*), it nonetheless lingers on a half-turn backwards, demanded by its own stock of inherited structures, motifs, or tropes. E. T. A. Hoffmann — writer, musician, critic, judge — is an indubitable master of trope, spanning those professional activities and employing it in his works to both political and aesthetic effect. On two occasions Hoffmann's predilection for political trope put his legal career in jeopardy. The first was the caricatures of military officers he sketched and distributed in Posen in 1802, resulting in his prompt exile; the second was the polemical episode in *Meister Floh* ('Master Flea') of 1822, which satirised Minister of Justice Albert von Kamptz as 'Polizeischnüffler Knarrpanti'. Whilst Hoffmann may not have been a revolutionary as such, his works nonetheless subversively turn telling on its head. In what follows, I intend to read one of Hoffmann's tales by means of the master trope: the telling itself as it is played out face-to-face, through the turns and returns of narrative exchange. In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks defines plot as a contouring force: 'the very organizing line, the thread of design, that makes narrative possible because finite and comprehensible'.¹⁵ To read *Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht* is to feel Hoffmann play this line; or put characters *on* the line by subordinating or reducing them to objects of plot, tropes, events of the narrative turn or of the telling.

My argument shows that *Abenteuer*, first in presenting its plot as an event of impossible return, and second in depriving the storyteller figure of the sociability or solace the act of telling seems, at first, to offer, exposes the telling as an increasingly recursive move. This recursion, in my reading, has to do with Hoffmann's own reading of another tale, Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*. The reading here will therefore move to follow the tale's own over-turning of a certain reading. What it finds in the tale, at last, is an unsettling return to the self: a self which has undergone a singular, radical alteration, and which is seen as such, again and again, as a paper figure in the eyes of the other.

Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht takes the form of a singular, interrupted encounter with the seductive portrait or figure of Julie/Giulietta, repeated three times over and in increasingly distorted formulations. In its first section, the narrator 'Der reisende Enthusiast' is out without hat and cloak. He is fleeing the *Justizrat*'s New Year's Eve

¹⁵ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 4.

Teegesellschaft, at which he encountered his ex-lover Julie, and was rebuffed, first by her own ironic aloofness, then by the appearance of her husband: a bourgeois philistine with unhuman contours, a ‘tölpische, spinnbeinichte Figur mit herausstehenden Froschaugen’ (H II.1 330).¹⁶ The Enthusiast then, hurtling onwards, meets two curious characters in a tavern: Peter Schlemihl, who has lost his shadow — a character who has been lifted from Adelbert von Chamisso’s *Märchen* written a year earlier — and Erasmus Spikher, who has lost his reflection. Following the group’s dispersal, the Enthusiast rents a room in an inn, only to find it occupied by the ghostly Spikher. He then re-lives the Julie experience in a dream, in correspondingly distorted fashion, and on waking up discovers the written remains of Spikher left behind in their room on ‘ein frisch beschriebnes Blatt’ (‘a fresh manuscript’), recounting Spikher’s own Schlemihlian ‘wundersame Geschichte’ (H II.1 341). The following narrative records how Spikher gave his reflection away as a token of devotion to an Italian courtesan, the demonic Giulietta, and consequently lost his place within his family and society, despite finally refusing to sign his soul away to the devil, thus following the model of Schlemihl. The tripartite cycle of encounters presents us with the same story, headily overtold — three times, circling, with each character reflecting or re-figuring the others. As Ethel Matala de Mazza writes, ‘In der Kreisspur des Zyklus entgleitet die Bewegungsfigur einer Autorschaft, die sich in keinem Bild und keinem Namen feststellen lassen will’.¹⁷

The catch of the narrative seems to be that return — a return to a particular moment in the past or, implicitly, to some prior state of authenticity — is both repeatedly demanded of the Enthusiast and shown to be impossible. Hence the significance of *Silvesternacht*: a point of no return that reoccurs, itself, with time’s calendrical ‘ewiges furchtbares Räderwerk’ (H II.1 326: ‘dreadful eternal gearwork’). The Enthusiast has returned to an all too familiar scene, the *Justizrat*’s traditional New Year’s Eve gathering, where his encounter with Julie compels him to recall his own history, ‘als ginge ein Strahl aus herrlicher Vergangenheit, aus dem Leben voll Liebe und Poesie zu mir herüber’ (H II.1 328). And yet the seeming appearance of

¹⁶ ‘a spindle-shanked cretin, eyes a-pop like a frog’s’.

¹⁷ Ethel Matala de Mazza, ‘Erinnerungen, Wiederholungen, Löscharbeiten: Zur Nachtseite der Bilder in E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Abenteuern der Silvester-Nacht*’, in *Hoffmanneske Geschichte: zu einer Literaturwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft.*, ed. by Gerhard Neumann and Alexander von Bormann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), pp. 153-78 (p. 160): ‘In the cycle’s looping track, the moving figure slips away from an authorship which will not be identified in any image or name’.

what he once had, in the form of Julie's face, shows it to be irretrievable — 'auf ewig verloren' (H II.1 330) — and so denotes a tantalising point of no return.¹⁸

Much criticism on this tale has focused on its articulation of a split between prosaic and fantastic levels of experience.¹⁹ The longed-for Julie represents a Romantic ideal who seems to promise absolution to the subject, only for that promise to be shattered by the intrusion of prosaic reality. Julie is seen and recognised on three occasions. With each subsequent recognition the protagonist's grip on his experience of her grows more unstable. The encounter with her face thus marks the narrative's obsessive point of return. Specific details are repeated from one encounter to the next. From the initial meeting at the *Teegesellschaft*, Julie is associated with a cup of alcohol, the brimming *Pokal*. And the Enthusiast's fingers touch hers electrically — 'elektrische Feuerstrahlen blitzten durch alle Pulse und Adern' (H II.1 330) — only for their contact to be broken by intruding 'dazwischen tretende Personen' and by her repulsive husband (H II.1 329).²⁰ Then later, in his dreamed encounter in the inn:

der Traum erfaßte mich plötzlich und trug mich wieder zum Justizrat, wo ich neben Julien auf der Ottomane saß. [...] Julie stand auf und reichte mir den kristallinen Pokal, aus dem blaue Flammen emporleckten. Da zog es mir am Arm, der Kleine stand hinter mir mit dem alten Gesicht und lispelte: 'Trink nicht, trink nicht — sieh sie doch recht an! — hast du sie nicht schon gesehen auf den Warnungstafeln von Breughel, von Callot oder von Rembrandt?' (H II.1 340)²¹

The appearance of these painters in triplicate reflects the tale's logic of expressing a singular occurrence in a series of three. Ricarda Schmidt's reading of *Abenteuer*

¹⁸ 'a gleam of our wonderful past came through to me, a fragment of our formed life of love and poetry'; 'lost forever'.

¹⁹ Cynthia Chalupa writes: 'This work [...] traditionally has been read as an allegory of the author's divided existence as artist and civil servant'. In 'Re-Imaging the Fantastic: E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Story of the Lost Reflection"', *Marvels & Tales*, 20.1 (2006), 11-29 (p. 11).

²⁰ 'electric sensations pulsed through my veins'; 'people treading in between us'.

²¹ 'I suddenly fell into a dream, and was back at the Justizrat's again, sitting beside Julie on the ottoman. [...] Julie stood up, handing me the crystal goblet, out of which blue flames licked. Someone tugged at my arm, and there was the little man, his old man's face on, whispering loudly to me: "Don't drink it, don't drink it. Look at her closely. Have you not seen her before, in the warning images of Breughel, of Callot, of Rembrandt?"'

draws it into line with *Die Fermate* and *Der Artushof*, in a series of tales which thematise the encounter with the image. *Abenteuer* represents, for Schmidt, the ‘subtilste Gestaltung’ of this ekphrastic ‘medial[e] Interferenz’.²² And indeed, in the following chapter, Hoffmann’s ekphrastic schemes of *Der Artushof* will be seen to figure a comprehensive loop between life and art. In this tale, the content of an image is best expressed in a string of titles or names; and, in drawing something by means of repetition, the figure outstrips its content.

The encounter with the image of Julie — who resembles, for Christian Baier, a ‘zum Leben erwachtes Bild’²³ — clearly re-figures the first but also pre-figures the next: her third appearance, this time in the form of the Italian courtesan, Giulietta, recalled in the written narrative of Spikher, which he has left behind in the inn — although which, in being recounted by the Enthusiast, takes the form of another impersonal third-person account. It recounts Spikher’s travels to Italy, where he is seduced by the ravishing Giulietta, counterpart to the Devil, and agrees on her persuasion to part ways with his reflection:

Giulietta nahm einen vollgeschenkten Pokal und stand auf, ihn dem Erasmus freundlich darreichend; *der* ergriff ihn, Giuliettas zarte Finger leise berührend. Er trank, Glut strömte durch seine Adern. [...] ‘Ja, du bist es, dich habe ich geliebt immerdar, dich, du Engelsbild!’ (H II.1 344)²⁴

The thrice-enunciated event of distorted recognition works through the repetition and subtle disfigurement of small details: the proffered cup, the contact of flesh, the rush of heat, ‘Flämmchen’, ‘Glut’ — and the comparison of Julie to a painted image or ‘Engelsbild’ (‘heavenly image’). It gains a calamitous relevance in this final remembered scene, where Giulietta and her flaming alcohol are the explicit catalyst of Spikher’s banishment from family life.

²² Ricarda Schmidt, ‘Die *Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht* im Lichte malerischer Intertexte’, in *Wenn mehrere Künste im Spiel sind: Intermedialität bei E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 90-114 (p. 98): ‘most subtle formulation’, ‘medial interference’.

²³ Christian Baier, ‘Nur der “Traum eines Ichs”? Identitätsspaltung, Ich-Verlust und Doppelgängertum in E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht*’, *E. T. A. Hoffmann Jahrbuch*, 18 (2010), 7-24 (p. 7): ‘an image roused to life’.

²⁴ ‘Giulietta took a full goblet, and standing up, handed it with a friendly smile to Erasmus. He seized the goblet, touching her soft fingers, and as he drank, fire streamed through his veins. [...] “Yes, it’s you, I have loved you forever, you heavenly image!”’

It is also in Spikher's narrative that the devil gains bodily presence as Doktor Dapertutto. Mockery, in its double sense of derision and copy, is mimicry's cruellest face. To be mocked is to see oneself turned into an object in the eyes of another. Hoffmann's mocking 'Teufel' not only uncannily reflects the *Justizrat* who hosts the *Silvesterabend* gathering, but is a citation or troped repetition of the dandyish devil in Chamisso's *Schlemihl*, known in that story as 'der graue Mann' ('the grey man'). Peter Schlemihl, in this tale, sells his shadow to the grey man for a bottomless purse of money; then, finding himself in this shadowless state excluded from society, expends a great deal of time and energy in trying to recover it. When the Devil offers a further exchange — the return of Schlemihl's shadow, this time, for his soul — Schlemihl refuses, and spends the rest of his life in exile as a natural scientist at the ends of the earth. The grey man is fittingly monotone, contoured but indistinct, suggesting a character who is reduced, in the tellings and re-tellings of himself, to a flattened figure or a drawing-room silhouette. He is the pale, bourgeois, omnipresent devil. 'Signor Dapertutto', his Italian name in *Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht*, means 'Mr. Everywhere'. Dapertutto's name and presence suggest a repetitiousness, a sense of proliferative similitude which throws the authenticity of the 'Original' into uncertainty. Following Michael Rohrwasser, Andrew Webber has suggested of Hoffmann's 'Der Sandmann' that the visual compulsions in that text point to the 'control mechanisms of a new political order of discipline and surveillance in the first half of the nineteenth century'.²⁵ If this is so then the smirking *Justizrat*/Dapertutto figure in this text (written in the same year) might also be seen, in correlation with the Coppelius/Sandmann coupling, as a figure of Restoration socio-political control whose gaze is as reductive as it is commanding.

Spikher's tale is a reflected vision of the Enthusiast's, both in its position — as the fourth and final section set against the first — and in its content. For Spikher's is also a tale of social exclusion, a tale of no return. Having travelled back to his home from Italy — the land of images where he has relinquished his own, in the name of desire — Spikher finds home a fatally changed place, one in which he no longer belongs. Dapertutto confronts him: "Dieselben haben sich etwas alteriert wie es scheint", sprach der Mann, der sich neben ihn gesetzt hatte, in teutscher Sprache,

²⁵ Andrew Webber, 'About Face: E. T. A. Hoffmann, Weimar Film, and the technological afterlife of Gothic physiognomy', in *Popular Revenants: German Gothic and its International Reception 1800-2000*, ed. by Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane (Rochester: Camden House, 2012), pp. 161-80 (p. 173).

“Dieselben haben sich etwas alteriert” (H II.1 350).²⁶ This twice-repeated observation, with the unwieldy pronoun ‘Dieselben’, has a strange, doubling effect on the subject Spikher. It turns out that, much like Schlemihl discovers of his shadow, we are so tightly welded to our own image that to forego it means certain social exclusion: ‘ein mauvais sujet’, citizens call after him, ‘ein homo nefas, werft ihn zur Türe hinaus!’ (H II.1 352: ‘Kick him out the door!’). The adoption of the French ‘mauvais sujet’ is one trace of several antagonistic references to France and the French in this and other of Hoffmann’s tales, particularly in the period 1813-15. The reference to the Siege of Mainz, and the use of Latinate words in derisive, mocking comments, here and in Dapertutto’s ‘alteriert’, suggest the conflicted cultural attachments of a Prussian writer and perhaps something of Hoffmann’s ‘complicity in the cultural war against France’.²⁷

For Roland Barthes, the image comes to resemble ‘une sorte de service militaire social’. He adds that ‘je ne puis m’en faire exempter; je ne puis me faire réformer, désertre, etc. Je vois l’homme malade d’Images, malade de son Image’.²⁸ Spikher, a theoretical deserter along with Schlemihl, is condemned, like Schlemihl, to die on the run. But even then — and this will be elaborated in what follows — there is no consolation or companionship to be found in these parallel lives of exclusion, for when the two try to exchange silhouette for reflection — ‘beide wollten Compagnie gehen, so daß Erasmus Spikher den nötigen Schlagschatten werfen, Peter Schlemihl dagegen das gehörige Spiegelbild reflektieren sollte’ — they do so to no avail: ‘es wurde aber nichts daraus’ (H II.1 359).²⁹ The reason for this is not clear. What is clear is that the three stories in *Abenteuer* imitate, impose themselves and intrude on one another in a way that nonetheless fails to offer any solace or sense of community. The singular alteration is understood in serial formation. But the seriality itself, as the characters view themselves in and amongst one another’s narratives, as if in a magic mirror, comes to offer, in the place of sociability, no more than a dislocating sense of *Unähnlichkeit*.

²⁶ ““You are somewhat changed, it seems,” said a man in German, who had taken a seat beside him. “You are somewhat changed””.

²⁷ Stephen Rumph, ‘A Kingdom not of this World: The Political Context of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Beethoven Criticism’, *19th-Century Music*, 19.1 (1995), 50-67 (p. 58).

²⁸ Roland Barthes, ‘L’Image’, in *Prétexte: Roland Barthes Colloque de Cerisy*, ed. by Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Bourgeois, 2003), pp. 333-45 (p. 341).

²⁹ ‘they planned to travel in company, so that Erasmus Spikher could provide the necessary shadow and Peter Schlemihl could reflect properly in a mirror. But nothing came of it’.

One of the driving lines of argument in Walter Benjamin's 'Der Erzähler' and a text related to it, 'Krisis des Romans: Zu Döblins *Berlin Alexanderplatz*' (1930), is the disintegration of oral narrative following the emergence of the novel. The oral tradition derives from the epic, but is a feature on which the genre of the *Erzählung* also depends. For Benjamin, there is a practical component to this, a particular social intention: 'Dieser Nutzen mag einmal in einer Moral bestehen, ein andermal in einer praktischen Anweisung, ein drittes in einem Sprichwort oder in einer Lebensregel — in jedem Falle ist der Erzähler ein Mann, der dem Hörer Rat weiß'.³⁰ Storytelling hinges, in this account, on the transmissibility of experience, the giving of counsel by one human subject to another via the mouth: 'Erfahrung, die von Mund zu Mund geht, ist die Quelle, aus der alle Erzähler geschöpft haben'.³¹ For Benjamin, the rise of the novel is heralded by the disintegration of this oral tradition in the age of print production. The printed novel, with 'sein wesentliches Angewiesensein auf das Buch', loses the art of counsel-giving: 'Mitten in der Fülle des Lebens und durch die Darstellung dieser Fülle bekundet der Roman die tiefe Ratlosigkeit des Lebenden'. The novel is born of perplexity, and in the isolation of the individual, a point Benjamin's text shares with Lukačs's *Theorie des Romans*: 'Die Geburtskammer des Romans ist das Individuum in seiner Einsamkeit, das sich über seine wichtigsten Anliegen nicht mehr exemplarisch aussprechen kann, selbst unberaten ist und keinen Rat geben kann'.³² The novel is at once the product and mirror of modernist individualisation. By virtue of the standardisation that accompanies this process, individuality and particularity appear as no more than empty tokens.

In Peter Brooks's reading of Benjamin, the oral transmission of narrative has critical psychoanalytic import, centred on shared knowledge, sociable exchange and the authenticity of spoken narrative. 'For Benjamin,' Brooks explains, 'storytelling belongs to the world of the living word, the world of a communication that is

³⁰ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 442: 'In one case, the usefulness may lie in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his audience'.

³¹ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 440: 'Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn'.

³² Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 443: 'its essential dependence on the book'; 'In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living'; 'The birthplace of the novel is the individual in his isolation, the individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion, who himself lacks counsel and can give none'.

authentic because it concerns the transmission and the sharing of experience, and that can thus become wisdom, the counsel of man to his fellow men'. Written or printed narrative does away with human context 'and belongs, strictly speaking, to no one' — pulling the 'social situation of storytelling' into stark implicit opposition with what Benjamin calls elsewhere the age of mechanical reproduction.³³ My reading of Hoffmann here aligns with Brooks's interpretation of Benjamin in the sense that I see, in *Abenteuer*, the implications of a shift towards the impersonality of reproducible narratives, a decentring of the oral narrative, of 'telling'. *Abenteuer* is haunted by a feeling that each character's narrative might be a repetition of another's; that the story I thought was mine might belong to somebody else.

We have seen that these characters live intersecting, inter-reflecting narratives. Spikher's break from family and society articulates an experience of social exclusion or exile at which the Enthusiast's more indistinct account seems to gesture. There are subtler moments throughout the narrative that stage a troubling of the authenticity of oral communication. In a short sequence in the tavern, the Enthusiast pre-empts one of Schlemihl's lines: 'Botanik scheint nicht eben Ihr Fach zu sein, sonst hätten Sie nicht so — Er [Schlemihl] stockte, ich lispelte kleinlaut: "albern —" gefragt, setzte er treuherzig hinzu' (H II.1 334).³⁴ The mockery played out here is a complex one. What the characters share in this line is the prediction of an antagonism on the part of Schlemihl towards the Enthusiast. And yet there is a certain mocking condescension on the part of the Enthusiast, too, who interacts with Schlemihl as though he were no more than a character from a book — which, of course, is precisely the case, as becomes clear in the final moments in this scene when he runs out of the illuminated tavern and reveals himself: 'er warf keinen Schlagschatten. Voll Entzücken rannte ich nach — Peter Schlemihl — Peter Schlemihl!' (H II.1 337).³⁵

The most telling of these unsettling moments takes place between the Enthusiast and Spikher in the inn. Entering the room, and examining his own distorted reflection in the mirror (where he finds it to be 'so blaß und entstellt, daß ich mich kaum selbst wieder erkannte')³⁶ the Enthusiast sees in it another vision of Julie, and

³³ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, pp. 288-90.

³⁴ "'Botany does not seem to be your specialty, or else you would not have asked such a —" he [Schlemihl] hesitated, and I supplied in a low voice: "foolish —" "question," he finished, innocently.'

³⁵ 'he cast no shadow. I ran after him in delight — "Peter Schlemihl! — Peter Schlemihl!"'

³⁶ 'so pale and disfigured that I could scarcely recognise myself'.

then immediately discovers Spikher who delivers up his own desperate cries of ‘Giulietta—Giulietta’ from the bed:

Juliens Bild war verschwunden, entschlossen ergriff ich ein Licht, riß die Gardinen des Bettes rasch auf und schaute hinein. Wie kann ich dir denn das Gefühl beschreiben, das mich durchbebte, als ich den Kleinen erblickte, der mit dem jugendlichen wiewohl schmerzlich verzogenen Gesicht da lag und im Schlaf recht aus tiefer Brust aufseufzte: Giulietta — Giulietta — (H II.1 338)³⁷

A few moments later, the Enthusiast, having put himself to bed, wakes up to see, in an explicitly crossed or chiasmic formulation, Spikher dramatically illuminated by candlelight and writing frantically at the desk:

Es mochte wohl schon Morgen sein, als ein blendender Schimmer mich weckte. Ich schlug die Augen auf und erblickte den Kleinen, der im weißen Schlafrock die Nachtmütze auf dem Kopf, den Rücken mir zugewendet am Tische saß und bei beiden angezündten Lichtern emsig schrieb. Er sah recht spukhaft aus, mir wandelte ein Grauen an; der Traum erfaßte mich plötzlich. (H II.1 340)³⁸

The presumed narrator finds himself suddenly turned into a narrative object, caught and fixed in the presumed gaze of another. Illuminated before his own half-dreaming eyes, the writer sees the act of writing take place before him. Even the source of light is reversed: it comes first from the Enthusiast’s candle, falling on Spikher’s face, then from Spikher’s desk lights which wake the Enthusiast. These moments of unexpected, chiasmic synchronicity are part of the tale’s pervasive sense that one character lives, acts out or dreams what another ‘tells’. As Todd Kontje points out, the confusion is finally extended to the tale’s reader itself, named at last as ‘mein lieber Theodor Amädeus Hoffmann’ — such that the writer ‘becomes the direct addressee of his own

³⁷ ‘The image of Julie had disappeared, and resolutely I seized a candle, ripped the curtains of the bed apart, and looked in. How can I describe my feelings to you when I saw before me the little man whom I had met in the beer cellar, asleep on the bed, youthful features dominant, though contorted with pain, muttering in his sleep, “Giulietta! Giulietta!”’

³⁸ ‘It must have been early morning when a light awakened me. I opened my eyes to see the little man, still in his white dressing gown, nightcap on his head, back turned to me, sitting at the table busily writing by the light of the two candles. There was a weird look about him, and I felt the chill of the supernatural; suddenly I fell into a dream’.

fictional character’, and no more or less a product of fiction.³⁹ The ever-mocking Dapertutto puts it with biting accuracy when he says to Spikher, referring to his costume: ‘Ihr seid wohl aus einem alten Bilderbuch herausgestiegen [...]. Kehrt doch nur ruhig zurück in Euer Pergamentband’ (H II.1 346).⁴⁰ The *Pergamentband*, a parchment-bound volume, would at this time have been a heavy, expensive tome, bound with sheep- or goatskin, and one which resisted new technologies of mass printing. As one historian writes: ‘had the expensive parchment been the only material available the craft of printing could never have been developed’.⁴¹ To resemble a figure from such an antiquated piece of binding, still dependent on the original hand-work of its artist or calligrapher, is a state cruelly derided by the Devil, who comes to form in brief flashes of light and in ever-changing guises — here, ‘in den aufsprühenden Funken’ (H II.1 346); later revealed by the light of a flare: ‘Erasmus sah seinem Begleiter ins Gesicht und erkannte den häßlichen Doktor Dappertutto’ (H II.1 351).⁴² In these passages the devil himself appears as little more than an unexpected reflection or a shadow.

The tale, then — like *Der Artushof* in the following chapter — expresses an anxiety about image-making or portraiture, undertaken always in plural. As the Enthusiast describes his encounter in the tavern: ‘In dem Maskenspiel des irdischen Lebens sieht oft der innere Geist mit leuchtenden Augen aus der Larve heraus das Verwandte erkennend, und so mag es geschehen sein, daß wir drei absonderliche Menschen im Keller uns auch so angeschaut und erkannt hatten’ (H II.1 335-36).⁴³ Faces, here, are oddly disconnected from the spirit’s ‘leuchtend[e] Augen’. They might, as parts of a ‘Maskenspiel’, be replaceable. Andrew Webber writes in the case of *Der Sandmann* that Hoffmann might be seen to transmute ‘the Enlightenment philanthropy of Lavater’s project into distortions from the night-side of such

³⁹ Todd Kontje, ‘Biography in Triplicate: E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht,”’ *The German Quarterly*, 58.3 (1985), 348-60 (p. 356).

⁴⁰ ‘you look as if you have come from an old picture book [...]. Go quietly back to your parchment binding’.

⁴¹ Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978) p. 17.

⁴² ‘in spraying sparks’; ‘Erasmus looked his companion in the face and recognised the sneering Doctor Dapertutto’.

⁴³ ‘In the masquerade of life our true essence often shines out beyond our mask when we meet a similar person, and it so happened that we three strange beings in a beer cellar had looked at one another thus and knew what we were’.

“sciences”⁴⁴. Physiognomy encounters, in *Abenteuer*, its own capacity for distortion. It shifts, moreover, between the two faces of ‘telling’ — as transmission and as reading — by subtly enacting or enforcing the reading it claims merely to detach, or to recuperate, from the face. The proliferation of encyclopaedic ‘pocket Lavaters’ and other such publications from around this time pay due testament to this. By posing as a set of instructions for the diagnosis of various legible social types, they allow their readers to construct a narrative about the people around them; and as such, we may assume, to feel safer in the assurance of a guaranteed recognition.

Like shadows or reflections, the proliferative figures in this tale are subject throughout to sudden, artificial illuminations. Spikher’s idiosyncratic appearance is even explicitly compared to the flickering of a phantasmagoria: ‘als führen viele Gestalten aus- und ineinander wie bei den Enslerschen Fantasmagorien’ (H II.1 334).⁴⁵ Julie, in the first scene, resembles a parlour-room silhouette after the tradition of silhouetting popularised by Lavater, in which a person’s shadow was cast against a wall to be read, peeling the likeness — the *Ebenbild* — away from the body of the represented subject, to serve both as physiognomic hieroglyphic and as memento, an implicit ward against time and loss. Not only are Julie’s contours specifically emphasised — the ‘besondere[r] Schnitt’ of her clothes — but she readily evokes nostalgia, ‘etwas alertümlisches’, with the effect of recalling and enlivening the past, ‘jene dunkle Erinnerung immer lebendiger und farbiger hervorzurufen’ (H II.1 328).⁴⁶ In silhouetting, it is, crucially, not the body that is traced but the body’s own trace. The shadow, much like a footprint or fingerprint, is an indexical sign guaranteeing identity. At the same time, it is a marker of contingency, proof (only) that the body exists as an opaque being in an illuminated world. The shadow, a visual element that pre-exists the picture, is, as will become clear in the following chapter, a blind spot that marks the place of our attachment to the world. This unintentional material forms the grounds for representation. Benjamin suggests of the tale-as-*Tonschale* that ‘[Das Erzählen] senkt die Sache in das Leben des Berichtenden ein, um sie wieder aus ihm hervorzuholen. So haftet an der Erzählung die Spur des Erzählenden wie die Spur der

⁴⁴ Webber, ‘About Face’, p. 178.

⁴⁵ ‘as if a series of forms were dissolving and emerging from one another, as in Ensler’s fantasmagoria’.

⁴⁶ ‘particular cut’; ‘an antique look’; ‘awaken those dark memories with increasing life and colour’.

Töpferhand an der Tonschale’.⁴⁷ Another indexical trace of the body, here, is left behind in the act of telling: a print that both confirms the act of transmission, and yet inevitably turns the teller back on him- or herself: ‘Kehrt doch zurück’...

I have suggested, first, that to tell is, at least implicitly, to extract a reading, to retrieve and offer its distorted return; and second, that a tale concurrently resembles, as in Benjamin’s *Tonschale* motif, a certain over-turning of material. I have also suggested that for the subject to narrate his or her own experience is to show it to be bound up in the experiences of others, in a way that compromises the authenticity of his or her own narrative act. ‘The Enthusiast’, as Kontje argues, ‘becomes a reader of his own fictionalized biography’.⁴⁸ If these premises hold, then Hoffmann’s gesture towards and simultaneous departure from *Schlemihl* — as he turns the figure of the shadow into the figure of the reflection — is more than an exuberant or extravagant homage to Chamisso; more than what Klaus Deterding calls a ‘Pointe für die Kenner der deutschen Literatur’.⁴⁹ Hoffmann’s move here, on the contrary, is to turn an individual literary experience into a plural one — in a way that sets out not to repeat or imitate that experience in the singular but to enact a simultaneity so drastic as to upset the distinction between self and other, or original and revision, altogether.

I want finally to argue for a reading of *Abenteuer* as a reading of *Schlemihl*, and hence as an enactment of the trope or the figure of return it so expressly evokes. Peter Schlemihl, exiled like Spikher from his homeland, is an impossible, transnational figure. Adelbert von Chamisso himself, the son of French aristocrats, was exiled during the Revolution, and found a new home in Berlin, where, notwithstanding the anti-French sentiment in Prussia, he became a close associate of Hoffmann and a member of the *Seraphinenbrüder*. Chamisso’s *Peter Schlemihl* was itself well received in France, and was translated more than twenty times into French, making it a token, contemporary to Hoffmann, of Franco-German literary transfer.⁵⁰ That Hoffmann was greatly taken with *Schlemihl* is made clear by his appropriation of it

⁴⁷ Benjamin, *GS* II.1, p. 447: ‘[Storytelling] submerges the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus, traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to a clay vessel’.

⁴⁸ Kontje, ‘Biography in Triplicate’, p. 354.

⁴⁹ Klaus Deterding, *Hoffmanns Erzählungen: Eine Einführung in das Werk E. T. A. Hoffmanns* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), p. 44: ‘punchline for connoisseurs of German literature’.

⁵⁰ See Gil-Curiel, *A Comparative Approach*, p. 30.

here and in other tales,⁵¹ and in a number of his illustrations: such as his drawing of ‘Der graue Mann’ (reproduced as Plate 10 in H II.1). Hitzig, who first read *Schlemihl* to Hoffmann in 1814, writes in a letter to Fouqué of the impression it made on his companion:

Außer sich vor Vergnügen und Spannung, hing er an meinen Lippen, bis ich vollendet hatte; nicht erwarten konnte er, die persönliche Bekanntschaft des Dichters zu machen; und sonst jeder Nachahmung so abhold, widerstand er doch der Versuchung nicht, die Idee des verlorenen Schattens in seiner Erzählung ‘Die Abenteuer der Silvesternacht’ durch das verlorne Spiegelbild des Erasmus Spikher ziemlich unglücklich zu variieren.⁵²

Hitzig’s criticism is echoed by many other of his contemporaries, including Schenck — ‘[Diese] Nachahmung erreicht nicht das [...] Original’⁵³ — and Chamisso himself, in a letter to De la Fone of 1824: ‘Es ist vielfältig gesagt worden, daß diese Nachahmung weit hinter dem vortrefflichen Original zurückgeblieben’.⁵⁴ *Abenteuer* itself then, is a ‘Nachahmung’, a reproduction or imitation, or a mockery, of another text. This has been a long-standing feature of its critical reception — to the point where it seems impermissible to write about ‘Abenteuer’ without writing about that other tale (see, for example, works by Klaus Deterding, Albrecht Driesen and Sabine Kohls).⁵⁵ Segebrecht notes that, where Chamisso’s tale is told ‘gradlinig, mit der

⁵¹ See the reference to the Schlemihl’s boots in *Die Brautwahl*: ‘Der Goldschmidt hatte Recht, daß wohl keiner so leicht ihm hätte folgen können, denn als hätte er Schlemihls berühmte Siebenmeilen-Stiefel an den Füßen, war er mit einem einzigen Schritt, den er zur Saaltür hinaus machte, dem bestürzten Geheimen Kanzlei-Sekretär aus den Augen verschwunden’ (H IV 701): ‘The goldsmith was right in saying that it would not be possible for Tusmann, or anybody else, to keep up with him, for he was off through the door and out of sight, as though he had Schlemihl’s seven-league boots on’.

⁵² Adelbert von Chamisso, *Werke*, 6 vols (Leipzig: Weidmann’sche Buchhandlung, 1842), IV, p. 267: ‘Beside himself with pleasure and trepidation, he hung onto my every word until I was finished; he could not wait to make the personal acquaintance of the author; and although averse to every kind of imitation, he could not withstand the temptation to modify, rather infelicitously, the idea of the lost shadow in his tale “A New Year’s Eve Adventure” through the lost reflection of his Erasmus Spikher’.

⁵³ Cited in Segebrecht, ‘Kommentar’, H II.1 799: ‘[This] imitation does not equal the original’.

⁵⁴ Chamisso, *Werke* VI, p. 157: ‘It has been said many times that this imitation has remained far behind the splendid original version’.

⁵⁵ Deterding, *Hoffmanns Erzählungen*; Albrecht Driesen, *Das Spiegel-Bild in E. T. A. Hoffmanns ‘Der goldne Topf’, ‘Die Abenteuer der Silvesternacht’ und ‘Prinzessin Brambilla’* (Würzburg:

(vorgeblichen) Naivität des Märchens' (although there are notable disruptions and disturbances within it), 'Abenteuer' bears up a considerably more complex and riddled structure, in which 'der Ich-Erzähler wird selbst [...] verstrickt'.⁵⁶ Hoffmann, that is, drastically pluralises the loss depicted in *Schlemihl*, making it the experience of several characters, looping and complicating the narrative line. Schlemihl's lost shadow finds a double in the figure of Spikher's lost reflection. A reflection may be just as accidental as a shadow: both are no more than the play of light. To notice the lost reflection, however, implicates a mirror: which is, as we know, a particular framing device, and a highly self-conscious one. The story of the lost reflection then, turns into a self-reflexive moment of reading — the reading of another tale of an unnameable loss. In a way, then, 'Abenteuer' is a text relating the experience of reading *Schlemihl*, narrating an impossible return to fictional events implicated elsewhere.

Hoffmann's notorious feel for the unwilling compromise that the artist must make to be a member of society — the wrenching fall into philistine sociability — goes hand in hand, in 'Abenteuer', with a poetological compromise. In the sociable situation of being told, being made legible, reckoned with or recognised, we suffer a loss. To be a character is to be a form or figure, something partial; it is to have given 'etwas von unserm teuern Selbst' (H II.1 336: 'something of our valued self'), away. It is to have bartered off a shadow, or handed away a reflection — or to have left a cloak and hat hanging somewhere on the devil's snag. Our paper copies render us socially legible. The corresponding threat is that, uncapped or uncloaked, left as without passport or paper auxiliary, we are nothing but what de Mazza calls 'obskure Mängelwesen':⁵⁷ story-book characters, 'wohl aus einem alten Bilderbuch herausgestiegen...' (H II.1 346). In *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics*, Terence Cave writes:

Königshausen und Neumann, 2007); Sabine Kohls, *E. T. A. Hoffmanns 'Die Abenteuer der Silvesternacht': Eine Analyse der Gestaltung und Grundprobleme unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Spiegelbildmotivs* (Hamburg: Diplomarbeiten Agentur, 1984).

⁵⁶ Segebrecht, 'Kommentar', H II.1 798: '[told] in linear fashion, with the (apparent) naivety of the Märchen'; 'the first-person narrator is himself entangled'.

⁵⁷ Matala de Mazza, 'Erinnerungen, Wiederholungen, Löscharbeiten', p. 173: 'obscure, deficient beings'.

Life may be — perhaps normally is — itself constructed and understood as a plausible fiction: we live by mimesis, protecting and reassuring ourselves at the cost of being anaesthetized. It is only when the mimesis is disrupted, defamiliarized, that the sense of life is delivered.⁵⁸

To live in a ‘plausible fiction’, a bland mimesis, then, submerged in our own tellings and in the insipid philistinism of *Teegesellschaften*, is to be anaesthetically complicit with the rules of conduct and representation that hold us in place. Benjamin’s ‘mimetisches Vermögen’, which not only allows us to recognise or read similarities but also speaks to our compulsion to act them out — ‘Die Gabe, Ähnlichkeit zu sehen [...] ist nichts als ein Rudiment des Zwanges, ähnlich zu werden und sich zu verhalten’ (II.1 210)⁵⁹ — is what keeps us complicit with Cave’s ‘plausible fiction’. It is the force Taussig speaks of which, before the façade of social convention, impels us to ‘keep the show on the road’, to ‘get on with living, pretending [...] that we live facts, not fictions’.⁶⁰ E. T. A. Hoffmann makes a playful enquiry into the artificial by defamiliarising mimesis, foregrounding what it leaves lost or devilishly hanging. The world for Hoffmann, that is, is best captured by the mimetic turn or deformation, the face reduced to a likeness or to a trope in recapitulation.

Hoffmann, in his acts of doubling and seriality, turns back to trouble the very plausibility of the original. The act of readerly retrieval or return is from its outset, as I have argued, destined to end in failure or in capsize — where ‘*capsize*’ etymologically evokes the body that turns on its head (or on its face). Without our representative doubles we are nothing but what Matala de Mazza calls ‘obskure Mängelwesen’, and yet the very presence of the paper double throws our sense of authenticity into a place of flickering, phantasmagoric confusion. Hence a conclusion like Baier’s, which sees in the tale ‘E. T. A. Hoffmanns Analyse der Daseinsbedingungen des Individuums in der beginnenden Moderne’, and thus moves towards an assertion of Hoffmann’s realism.⁶¹ In Hoffmann’s circling over-telling, the act of the *turn* itself, as the making of tropes, becomes a stand-in for authentic

⁵⁸ Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 462-63.

⁵⁹ Benjamin *GS* II.1, p. 210: ‘The gift which we possess of seeing similarity is nothing but a weak rudiment of the formerly powerful compulsion to become similar and also to behave mimetically’.

⁶⁰ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, p. xv.

⁶¹ Baier, ‘Nur der “Traum eines Ichs”?’’, p. 24: ‘E. T. A. Hoffmann’s analysis of the individual’s conditions of existence in the beginning of modernity’.

experience. This text itself is dependent on another, Chamisso's *Schlemihl*, implied and felt within it but held necessarily apart from it, beyond or outside it. In the face of fiction turning on fiction, perhaps the words that sound loudest are those of the bourgeois devil, borrowed from another story, commanding Spikher to make an impossible return: 'Kehrt doch nur ruhig zurück in Euern Pergamentband...' ('go quietly back to your parchment binding...') H II.1 346).

III. *Le Colonel Chabert*

Le Colonel Chabert recounts Balzac's version of the false return. On file, Chabert is dead, recorded in the *Victoires et Conquêtes* as having fallen at the 1807 Battle of Eylau (B III 323). Returning to Paris after a long and grisly escape from Germany, Chabert finds not only that he is supposed, by all accounts, not to exist, but that his wife has re-married le comte Ferraud, becoming in the process la comtesse Ferraud, and has liquidated Chabert's fortune. As a hero of the Napoleonic wars, and a remnant of the Empire returned to the changing faces of Restoration-era society, Chabert, whose own eyes and voice have been, he confesses, 'singulièrement altérés' by his experiences (B III 331), is now forced to live as a fragment of something unassimilable into society's new figurations. He finally refuses to commit his signature to the settlement contract offered to him by his former wife, refusing the final paper identity offered to him, which amounts to a bribe that would pay the Colonel to stay legally 'dead'. The unguided arabesque that he draws in the epilogue is, as I have suggested, both a reproduction of the signature which would effectively sign his identity away, and which Chabert ultimately refuses to give, and the tired imitation of the narrative line, the drawing-out of 'intricate turnings' suggestive of plot. The aim of the reading here will be to follow the arabesque as a trope, working from the Hoffmannesque assumption that the reproduction of meaning through copy can run meaning into the ground, as seen in the serial portraits of *Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht*. This tale, originally called 'La Transaction', takes the form of a spoken wager which determines the 'stakes of mimesis'. Chabert's fate, I will show, is determined by the compromise made on life by mimesis: the risk of illegibility. Finally, I will follow the argument that this is tied up in a bureaucratic or

‘administrative uncanny’,⁶² in which the figure of Hoffmann is implicitly present. By paying attention to the pressure put on fictions by distortive outsider elements, this chapter aligns itself with the idea in Chapter Two that Balzac’s epigraph works as a figurative emblem that interacts with, but remains apart from, the text itself.

The apparent paradox at the heart of Chabert’s predicament is the unhappy convergence of literal and figurative realities, such that the trope or the mimetic figure — as the turning line, the figure of speech, the signature — comes to take precedence over his living body. Chabert’s legally documented ‘death’ carries more importance than his physical survival. This has been the focus of much of the secondary literature on the text. Readings have insisted on seeing Chabert and Mme Ferraud as the representatives of two clashing narrative strategies. In an extreme measure, the two characters are pitted against one another as the respective allegorical representatives of the Napoleonic Empire and of the Restoration. For Eileen Sivert, Chabert represents the will for an unambiguous mimesis, conceiving of his own identity as stable and fixed and narrating his story ‘as if representation itself were not problematic’.⁶³ He inevitably falls foul of the slippery Rose Chapotel, ‘a modern “non-character,” who has no stable identity’ and ‘many names’.⁶⁴ In this reading, an unproblematic ‘mimesis’ comes apart in the hands of the shape-shifting, modern — and female — storyteller: ‘Neither unambiguously modern nor wholly traditional, *Le Colonel Chabert* explores different textual strategies as it points clearly to the coming crisis in narrative’.⁶⁵ Sivert’s argument runs within a trend of criticism to emphasise the threat to identity staged by this novel, including articles by Graham Good — in which ‘Chabert’s identity is pasted on to him by those who look at him’⁶⁶ — and by Marcel Marini — in which the narrative ‘entraîne le lecteur dans le procès même de la constitution d’un personnage’.⁶⁷ In recent years, this line of thinking has come to draw particularly on the roles of bureaucracy, media technology and the archive in the creation of persons and fictions. Such thought is concerned with the emergence of a

⁶² Michael D. Garval, ‘Balzac’s “La Comédie humaine”: the Archival Rival’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 25.1/2 (1996-97), 30-40 (p.36).

⁶³ Eileen B. Sivert, ‘Who’s Who: Non-Characters in *Le Colonel Chabert*’, *French Forum*, 13.2 (1988), 217-28 (p. 218).

⁶⁴ Sivert, ‘Who’s Who’, p. 220.

⁶⁵ Sivert, ‘Who’s Who’, p. 226.

⁶⁶ Graham Good, ‘Le Colonel Chabert: A Masquerade with Documents’, *The French Review*, 42.6 (1969), 846-56 (p. 856).

⁶⁷ Marcelle Marini, ‘Chabert mort ou vif’, *Littérature*, 13 (1974), 92-112 (p. 93).

‘new ontological order in which a person’s existence is constituted through documentation’⁶⁸ and pays great attention to Balzac’s own characters’ names and their specific resonances,⁶⁹ as well as to his own famous claim to rival the registry office or ‘faire concurrence à l’état civil’ (B I 10).

The anxiety at the heart of this text in such readings is that human identity is a social fiction, which might as readily be un-made as it is made up. Peter Brooks traces a strong psychological bent to this question of fictionality, emphasising the importance of the lawyer Derville’s presence as listener to Chabert’s narrative, and hence suggesting the piece to be a tale of ‘what is at stake in telling and listening’.⁷⁰ Cathy Caruth, in a comparable psychoanalytical account, shows the text to be predictive of Freud’s death drive whilst acting out a historical trauma on the site of the law.⁷¹ My reading hopes to maintain an interest in the production and fiction of persons as characters, but to move away from the Chabert/Rose binarism which casts Rose as the chief manipulator of the tale. Some of the secondary literature slides into the suggestion that Chabert embodies narrative integrity and that Mme Ferraud is a slippery customer who exercises a postmodern control over his narrative: a claim that risks forgetting the patriarchal structures which have outlined her own existence; and thus risks outright sexism when it turns to questions of her past career as a prostitute (as in remarks like ‘she moves easily from man to man, first as a prostitute, then as a wife’).⁷² By more precisely outlining the importance of the character of Derville, whom I will show to set the stakes of mimesis, and by turning attention to the details of the bureaucracy of which Chabert is a victim — that is, to the set of letters from Germany that would confirm his identity — I intend to give a more complex account of mimesis in the tale, without falling into a reading that sees it as a simple, male, outmoded or Napoleonic feat. Instead, I will pay attention to the interaction of the hand and the eye — the eyes that see the spectacle and the writing hands into which the task of ‘manipulation’ (from the Latin *manipulus*, ‘handful’) falls. The task of mimesis, in this tale, passes between hands, and from hands to eyes, as the figure of

⁶⁸ Garval, ‘The Archival Rival’, p. 35.

⁶⁹ Michael Lastinger, ‘The CAPital Letter: Balzac’s “Le Colonel Chabert” and the Names of a Rose’, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 30.1 (2001), 39-57.

⁷⁰ Brooks, ‘Narrative Transaction and Transference’, p. 102.

⁷¹ Cathy Caruth, ‘The Claims of the Dead: History, Haunted Property, and the Law’, *Critical Inquiry*, 28.2 (2002), 419-41.

⁷² Sivert, ‘Who’s Who’, p. 221.

Chabert moves in and out of legibility. Again, this reading means to follow the logic of the bachelor's line, dragging both eye and hand along in its wake. I will draw from the focus on touch from the previous chapter in paying new attention to the role of hands in the narrative, and also to the hands that are not quite in it at all; or the hands that are only half in it, hands remembered or implied. It is in spaces such as these that Hoffmann's presence, for Balzac, is most pressingly felt.

Chabert is introduced as a figure of narrative interruption. The novel begins in an attorney's office in which a number of clerks are copying out legal documents. These documents represent a decree of Louis XVIII's Charter of 1814, which stipulated the return to the nobility of the lands and property that had been taken from them during the Revolutionary period. The office, then, is not just a place of copy but a place of legal restitution: of 'an attempt at a kind of historical return' to a pre-Revolutionary state of things.⁷³ One of the background cries from the clerks — 'voilà un pâté sur la requête!' (B III 315) — is a brusque preparation for Chabert, who resembles a kind of living blot (or *Tintenfleck*) on the paper of historical narratives. Between Chabert's cinematically staged knock and his physical appearance in the room comes a description of Derville's office so dense as to rival the passage describing the *Maison Vauquer* in *Le Père Goriot*. The claustrophobic office, 'grasse de poussière', in which the stench of food mingles with 'le parfum particulier aux bureaux et aux paperasses', with its yellowed papers and posters, is a heightened scene of drama, a place where legal documents collide with mess, and drawn explicitly into alignment with the 'maison de jeu', 'tribunal' and 'bureau de loterie'. It is a place, Balzac's narrator assures us, of high stakes in the drama of human lives (B III 313-14).

Le Colonel Chabert deals from this earliest scene with the price to be paid for a narrative, formulated by Peter Brooks, following Barthes, as the question '*Que vaut le récit?*'⁷⁴ Derville, the lawyer to whom Chabert confesses his tale is, as Brooks and others have argued, made a significant figure, here and elsewhere in *La Comédie humaine*, on account of his authorial role. This is made clear by Balzac's successive re-workings of the tale, which give progressively more prominence to his character. It is the work of the lawyers Derville and Godeschal, later to become his successor, to set the 'stakes of mimesis', the compromise involved in giving oneself over to a fiction. For Derville, it means believing in Chabert's narrative. In the clerks' office,

⁷³ Caruth, 'The Claims of the Dead', p. 422.

⁷⁴ Brooks, 'Narrative Transaction and Transference', p. 110.

the young Godeschal rashly bets ‘un spectacle’ that (the anonymous) Chabert, whom they mockingly term ‘le vieux carrick’ on account of his old-fashioned clothes, was never a soldier. Godeschal cries: ‘Qu’ai-je parié, messieurs? un spectacle. Qu’est-ce qu’un spectacle? une chose qu’on voit’ — he qualifies — ‘Qu’on voit pour de l’argent’. The stakes of mimesis, in this turn of phrase, amount to whatever payment it is that must be handed over for the narrative or spectacle to be enjoyed by the eyes. Indeed, what happens on Chabert’s return is that Derville, on seeing the gruesome ‘spectacle surnaturel’ of Chabert — who is even compared to a ‘figure en cire de ce cabinet de Curtius’ (B III 321) — and on listening to his story, gives him money to stay alive and promises to work on his case, thus essentially putting money on the wager that Chabert’s presumed identity is real. As if to drive the point home, Derville pays him in money won in the gambling house. It is established, then, in the tale’s earliest *mise en scène*, that, in the turning between the figures of eye and hand, fiction demands a vital payment.

What Chabert has already given up in the name of his narrative is considerable. Chabert, according to the story he tells Derville, was condemned to an asylum in Stuttgart for giving his name as Chabert. He was able to escape and return to the world only by renouncing this claim. Now, in Paris, he finds that he needs precisely his name in order to fully return. Hoffmann, as we will see in the final chapter of this thesis, expresses this paradoxical state most succinctly in *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, as the condition of the subject with no socially legitimized identity, faced with the demand: ‘den Paß oder in den Turm!’ (H II.2 100: ‘Your papers, or into the tower!’). In order not to be imprisoned as a madman, I must prove my imprisonment in the world of images. And we have seen this imprisonment already, in the states of the men without shadow and without reflection in *Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht*. It is with these men in mind that we might turn to an early passage describing Chabert:

L’ombre cachait si bien le corps à partir de la ligne brune que décrivait ce haillon, qu’un homme d’imagination aurait pu prendre cette vieille tête pour quelque silhouette due au hasard, ou pour un portrait de Rembrandt, sans cadre. Les bords du chapeau qui couvrait le front du vieillard projetaient un sillon noir sur le haut du visage. (B III 321)

Rembrandt’s artworks form an obvious link between these two texts. Balzac, ‘apparently unaware’ that Rembrandt’s famous series were self-portraits, invokes

them repeatedly in his portraits of old men.⁷⁵ For Balzac, as for Hoffmann, Rembrandt's artworks appear always in series. Chabert, the antiquary of *La Peau de chagrin* and Frenhofer, along with other characters including Gobseck, are described as Rembrandtian figures (B II 624, 671). But the portrait here is pure chiaroscuro: 'sans cadre'. In a Hoffmannesque ekphrasis whose resonances we will see across the following chapter, to describe the painted subject sees him emerge from his frame. To draw out the singular portrait, the singular identity, is for both authors an endlessly troubled activity. Chabert's 'sillon noir', the dark groove at the top of his face, represents a singular mark, projected onto his face by the shadows of the two framing sides of his cap. The singular trait — what should be an identificatory trace or inscription — is only cast onto the face by means of its double borders, a para-physiognomic phenomenon. Furthermore: if the description suggests that he is 'but a silhouette'⁷⁶ here, cast in distorting shadow, elsewhere he is but a cloak, the metonymic 'vieux carrick'. Chabert might be all shadow or all cloak — or, indeed, all scar — but in a swift inversion, he visually echoes the pitiful shadow-less and coat-less undone men of Hoffmann's 'Abenteuer', suggestive of an altered physiognomy, an identity formed and un-formed by the fall of shadow (or the play of ink) within the office of the law.

Chabert removes his hat, accidentally pulling away his wig at the same time, and so reveals his scar, the seam or 'couture' that follows the shadowy 'sillon', and the visual marker of what he has lost:

le cuir qui grandissait l'intérieur de son chapeau étant sans doute fort gras, sa perruque y resta collée sans qu'il n'aperçût, et laissa voir à nu son crâne horriblement mutilé par une cicatrice transversale qui prenait à l'occiput et venait mourir à l'œil droit, en formant partout une grosse couture saillante. (B III 322)

If Mme Vauquer is, in Auerbach's reading, osmotically conditioned by her environment, oozing out of the walls of her *pension*, Chabert is in a very real sense a product of the 'impitoyable mécanique' that whirs under the hands of the clerks in the

⁷⁵ Donald Adamson, *Balzac and the Visual Arts* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1971), p. 101.

⁷⁶ Jean-Marie Roulin, 'The Return of the Undead: the Body Politic in *Le colonel Chabert*', trans. by Colette Windish, *South Central Review*, 29.3 (2012), 20-35 (p. 24).

lawyer's office.⁷⁷ Whilst the description of Chabert's appearance recalls Derville's office — the greasy wig, his pale, dusty, dry appearance — bureaucracy creates the lines of texts; as the law, in the guise of the registry office, it produces names and characters, denoting their physiognomy. Inside the office where physiognomic and life-lines are drawn and detailed, Chabert's scar, his own idiosyncratic line, is the mark of an identity that no longer seems to belong to him. 'Une coupure s'est faite', Marini argues, 'qui condamne le sujet à être toujours à la poursuite de lui-même'.⁷⁸ The scar of the *revenant*, as a literary trope deriving from Homer's Odysseus, acts in that legend as the token of recognition or *anagnorisis*. But the potential significance of the scar, here, is inverted, being a mark gained in battle, and thus a mark of the rupture within, rather than the continuity of, his identity. The viewer's reaction — to think 'Par là s'est enfuie l'intelligence' (B III 322) — is suggestive only of the arabesque's seductive potential of lost meaning. Such lines can mean and un-mean, can intend and coyly disavow intention. The scar, appropriately, is positioned such that Chabert can neither face it nor see it in full — nor, presumably, Derville — for the scar runs over the top of Chabert's skull, on the back of his face. It is thus a mark of the *ineffaçable*, as in the un-faced; it lies, literally, behind the face of the intelligible, as something blank and fleshy; the uneraseable or the left-over.

George Levine resoundingly opens a collection of essays on Victorian realism with the words 'The hardest thing in the world is not to be you'. Most realist texts, we might argue, fixated as they are with literature's unique ability to 'register the reality of otherness', overcompensate for this trouble by acting as though 'not to be you' is the easiest thing in the world.⁷⁹ Chabert's narrative is extraordinary, as a work of realism, for settling within the traumatic space of an invented subject who is no longer allowed to remain 'himself'. If mimesis depends on a degree of Merleau-Pontian empathy — getting as close to the impossible state of the not-me as possible, by recognising the self as an object in the other's gaze — then Chabert is the most extreme case of the subject who, in Merleau-Pontian terms, feels himself seen, reduced to an object in the eyes of the other,⁸⁰ as if under the mocking double gaze of that other lawyer figure, the *Justizrat*, and his counterpart, the devil Dappertutto.

⁷⁷ Pierre Barbéris, 'Introduction' [*Le Colonel Chabert*], B III, pp. 293-309 (p. 298).

⁷⁸ Marini, 'Chabert mort ou vif', p. 107.

⁷⁹ George Levine, *Realism, Ethics and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 1-2.

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 78.

Where identity is produced in the lawyer's office, the place of copy, Chabert is now condemned to exist in the precarious gap established between original and paper identities. 'Maintenant', he declares at the moment of refusing to sign Rose's conciliatory agreement, 'je remercie le hasard qui nous a désunis. [...] Je ne suis plus qu'un pauvre diable nommé Hyacinthe' (B III 367). By relinquishing himself to his original name, 'Hyacinthe', the faceless flower, sprung from death, Chabert — far from 'first [becoming] truly legible' — is stuck in a state approaching illegibility.⁸¹ The work of this narrative is not, as has been argued, to pit a naïve representative of mimesis against a postmodern, demonic woman: it is, rather, to show how the collective act of mimesis embodied in practices like the law reflects upon the act of mimesis embodied in novel-writing. This act involves a loss of identity or authenticity, and Chabert comes to represent that loss.

Chabert's narrative, like Raphaël's in *La Peau de chagrin*, enacts a spectacle of corporeal mimesis, in which Chabert finds his subjecthood compromised at the site of something irretrievable, something it cannot face, like the scar on the back of the head. Such characters become the victims of entropy: which, with *en*, 'in', and *trope*, 'turn', is a figure turning inwards, and containing the state or act of the turn within it. Stuck in the state of turning, of removing his face from the world, Chabert declares 'mon nom m'est désagréable. Je voudrais n'être pas moi' (B III 47). Mimetic vision, in the moment of recognition or *anagnorisis*, invokes the work of both hand and eye, where the one works as proxy for the other, as in the line drawn by the cane through the air, or in the line carved by the Russian soldier's sabre across the head. The amanuensis, the copier of things — the scribe of mimesis, after the model of Anselmus — is etymologically the slave always 'within hand's reach', such that the face of copying always bears the imprint of authority's hand: an act, then, never innocent of power. Beyond the 'spectacle' for the eyes in this piece are its proliferative hands — not least that of the disembodied arm, 'le bras d'un Hercule' (B III 325) that Chabert, according to his story, uses to dig himself out of a pile of dead bodies. The eye, in reading, turns to the writing hand. The final turn I will enact here, correspondingly, will be to another set of ghostly writing hands, belonging to the lawyer in Berlin, the spectral and unseen keeper and writer of Chabert's identificatory documents.

⁸¹ Caruth, 'The Claims of the Dead', p. 440.

These German documents have the power, purportedly, to guarantee Chabert's narrative. They amount to a deposition drawn up by his surgeon Sparchmann, and to Chabert's own declaration of identity made 'chez un notaire d'Heilsberg' (B III 327). This set of documents is, Garval has argued, 'the most ambivalent element in the text', working to produce 'a sort of "administrative uncanny" that in many ways anticipates Gogol, or even Kafka',⁸² and — we might add — reprises Hoffmann. What they might actually do to further Chabert's case is not clear: 'Même en admettant l'authenticité des pièces qui doivent se trouver à Heilsberg', Derville admits, 'il ne m'est pas prouvé que nous puissions triompher' (B III 333). Moreover, the documents never explicitly arrive. What Derville receives in their place is a statement from a 'notaire de Berlin' announcing the authenticity of those other documents, their being 'parfaitement en règle, et revêtues des légalisations nécessaires pour faire foi en justice' (B III 335). The series of documents thus heightens the ambivalence of Chabert's predicament, introducing a potential source by which his identity might be clarified and in the same instance making that source a peculiarly spectral one, putting it out of sight and text. The documents heighten the ambiguity of the text such that two distinct readings are held up at once: Chabert as a legibly identifiable being and Chabert as the unnamed, illegible, but living, corpse. As Garval notes, 'the seemingly illusory nature of these documents is enhanced by the letters' point of origin: Berlin, a town Balzac associates with E. T. A. Hoffmann'.⁸³ We can take this further — the connection is irresistible — for, in 1816, the year in which Chabert makes his return and the year after the publication of 'Abenteuer', Hoffmann was working as *Kammergerichtsrat* (a judge of the Supreme Court) in Berlin. If legibility, to follow the text's own logic, is shadowed by illegibility, then these extra-textual features resemble the shadow of the reading, and the 'notaire de Berlin', Chabert's absent guarantor, becomes something like Derville's counterpart or ghostly double. The office of the 'notaire de Berlin' is stationed as the vanishing point at which lines of text fade away, from which only the promise or the image of writing emerges. As in *Abenteuer*, which turns out to be a reading of *Schlemihl*, this text too is dependent on its recursion to another textual figure not contained within it. It is not just up to the devilry of Rose Chapotel to pull the strings of Chabert's paper existence. If Chabert's German documents would give him back his official name,

⁸² Garval, 'The Archival Rival', p. 36.

⁸³ Garval, 'The Archival Rival', p. 36.

then Balzac has given the task of naming to the absent Hoffmannesque ‘notaire de Berlin’.

As Brooks puts it of Derville: ‘The lawyer is the arch-narratee, and also figure of the novelist: he who listens to, and retells, all the secret, buried stories of a society’.⁸⁴ Balzac’s own work as a clerk for the lawyer Fuillonnet-Merville in 1817 is commonly cited in this vein. For Paraschas, Hoffmann’s irony ‘found its way into Balzac’s work through the device of the authorial double’ — the character who ‘re-enact[s] the task of the author’.⁸⁵ This line of argument will become all the more pertinent in the case of Frenhofer, the artist figure of the following chapter. Pierre Citron also references a letter written by Balzac to Mme Carraud in March 1831, describing the process of writing *Chabert*: ‘tout cela me fait travailler nuit et jour. J’ai, pendant un mois, à ne pas quitter ma table, où je jette ma vie comme un alchimiste son or dans un creuset’.⁸⁶ Balzac, like Derville, the man of letters, hard of cash, working through the night, is, in his own word, the ‘secrétaire’ of history. Writer, lawyer, and secretary, all busily reproducing names and physiognomies, face in this tale the nocturnal side of that act. Hoffmann, the ‘notaire de Berlin’, who is reproduced paradoxically, unwittingly, within the tale as an outsider element, like the arabesque of *La Peau de chagrin*, both reproduces and troubles images of legibility.

IV.

Die Abenteuer der Silvester-Nacht turns out to relate the feeling of reading another text, revealing, through the unsettling proliferation of narrative lives, the serial status of its main figures. For Hoffmann, this might suggest a reaction to the turn from oral to written narratives in the emergence of mass printing techniques, as articulated by Walter Benjamin in his essay ‘Der Erzähler’. Balzac’s text, too, is fixated with the threat to identity posed by the ‘paperasse’ of bureaucracy. Colonel Chabert, as a kind of living administrative error, sees himself reduced to the status of something illegible and irrelevant in the narrative of the law. Chabert, in this way, is written as a character in the line of Schlemihl or Spikher, forced to live on in the face of an inexplicable but crucial loss to his self.

⁸⁴ Brooks, ‘Narrative Transaction and Transference’, p. 109.

⁸⁵ Paraschas, *The Realist Author*, pp. 84-86.

⁸⁶ Pierre Citron, ‘Introduction’, in Honoré de Balzac, *Le Colonel Chabert*, ed. by Pierre Citron (Paris: Didier, 1961), p. xi.

The narrative subject in these texts, in the moment of being reproduced as narrative character, sees him- or herself turned into an object in the eyes of the other. This is neatly resumed in the idea of the ‘trope’ as the repeated or over-turned figure. The arabesque from *La Peau de chagrin*, which once resembled a hieroglyphic or an esoteric sign, now, in being reproduced, looks like the reproduction of meaninglessness itself. For Balzac, this is a ‘Hoffmannesque’ feint. Chabert becomes the ghostly *revenant* with the broken skull, whose fate is manipulated in the hands of a spectral ‘notaire de Berlin’. If the ‘stakes of mimesis’ refer to the potential loss incurred by authentic life in narrative reproduction, then in this tale as elsewhere, the loss is registered on the level of the Hoffmannesque.

I began this chapter with a repetition of Sterne’s and Balzac’s arabesque, suggesting it here to be an image of the act of writing — and more specifically of the act of signature, of committing a name to paper. The particular relevance of this for Balzac and Hoffmann becomes clear when we consider their own changing names as authors, and their changing attitudes to their paper identities. Hoffmann is better known, in this regard, for his *Herausgeberfiktionen* and self-stagings as a character within his own narratives, for his returning fictional alter-ego, Johannes Kreisler, and for his gleeful, repeated acknowledgement of authorship itself as fiction.⁸⁷ In *Abenteuer*, the narrating Enthusiast passes a reflective ‘Tabakdose’ (‘tobacco box’) to Spikher, an object given to him by his fictional addressee, ‘Du’: ‘Ich trug die spiegelblank geschliffene Stahldose in der Tasche, die Du mir einst schenktest, die zog ich gleich heraus und wollte dem kleinen Tabak anbieten’ (H II.1 335).⁸⁸ Later, ‘Du’ is addressed again explicitly as E. T. A. Hoffmann himself:

— Was schaut denn dort aus jenem Spiegel heraus? — Bin ich es auch wirklich? — O Julie — Giulietta — Himmelsbild — Höllengeist — Entzücken und Qual — Sehnsucht und Verzweiflung. — Du siehst, mein lieber Theodor Amadäus Hoffmann! daß nur zu oft eine fremde dunkle Macht sichtbarlich in

⁸⁷ See Uwe Wirth’s chapter on *Kater Murr* in his exploration of the function and role of the fictional *Herausgeber* in German Romanticism, as counterpart and discursive ‘double’ of the author. Uwe Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors aus dem Geist der Herausgeberfiktion: editorial Rahmung um 1800, Wieland, Goethe, Brentano, Jean Paul und E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Munich: Fink, 2008).

⁸⁸ ‘I carried with me the small steel tobacco box, polished like a mirror, given to me once by you; I took it out at once and offered the little man some tobacco’.

mein Leben tritt und den Schlaf um die besten Träume betrügend mir gar seltsame Gestalten in den Weg schiebt. (H II.1 358)⁸⁹

As Spikher hands his reflection over to Giulietta, here as the gift of the mirroring surface is transferred between the hands of writer and fictional characters, authorship is brought into the space of fiction. The authorial signature, as his singular trait or monogrammatic sign, is brought into confusion.

Hoffmann's own alteration of his original name, Ernst Theodor Wilhelm, to Ernst Theodor *Amadeus*, acts as homage both to Mozart and to the malleability and potentially arbitrary character of these names. The authorial name becomes, as Pankow puts it, both 'Schauplatz und Produkt einer vielfach explizierten artistischen und kulturellen Selbstverständigung'.⁹⁰ Balzac's own play with pseudonyms is seen within his works, both fictional and journalistic, published under names including Lord R'Hoone, Horace de Saint-Aubin, Eugène Morrissette, Aldred Coudreux, Alcofribas, D., Le Comte Alex de B., Henri B., H de B., H and B.⁹¹ In 1830, with the publication of 'El Verdugo' in *Le Monde*, he settled on Honoré de Balzac — a name that is, as Genette points out, 'quelque peu pseudo, puisque l'état civil auquel il devait un jour faire concurrence ne le connaissait que sous le nom plus roturier d'Honoré Balzac'.⁹² Balzac acknowledges the difficulties of his 'physiognomie littéraire', or 'physiologie scripturale' (B X 48-49) in the *préface* to *La Peau de chagrin*. In this foreword, he takes on his readers' misunderstandings about the anonymous author of the *Physiologie du mariage*, which he had published in 1829:

Malgré l'incertitude des lois qui régissent la physiognomie littéraire, les lecteurs ne peuvent jamais rester impartiaux entre un livre et le poète. Involontairement, ils dessinent, dans leur pensée, une figure, bâtissent un homme, le supposent

⁸⁹ 'What is it looking out of the mirror there? — Is it really I? — O, Julie — Giulietta — divine image — image from Hell — delight and torment — longing and despair. You see, my dear Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, that all too often a strange dark power manifests itself in my life, stealing the best dreams from sleep and pushing strange forms before me'.

⁹⁰ Edgar Pankow, 'NAMENSPOLITIK: Über einen Aspekt der Schriftstellerkarriere des Honoré de Balzac', *Poetica*, 34.3/4 (2002), 369-88 (p. 369): 'showplace and product of an artistic and cultural self-understanding, explicated multiple times'.

⁹¹ Edgar Pankow, 'NAMENSPOLITIK', p. 372.

⁹² Genette, *Seuils*, p. 51.

jeune ou vieux, grand ou petit, aimable ou méchant. L'auteur une fois peint, tout est dit. *Leur siège est fait!*

Et alors, vous êtes bossu à Orléans, blond à Bordeaux, fluet à Brest, gros et gras à Combrai. Tel salon vous hait, tandis que dans tel autre, vous êtes porté aux nues. [...] Vous devenez enfin un être multiple, espèce de créature imaginaire, habillée par un lecteur à sa fantaisie, et qu'il dépouille presque toujours de quelques mérites pour la revêtir de ses vices à lui. Aussi avez-vous quelquefois l'inappréciable avantage d'entendre dire:

'Je ne me le figurais pas *comme ça!*...' (B X 48)

Honoré de Balzac, or 'Honoré de Balzac', is a fiction, a portrait, as much as it is a token of reality: 'L'auteur une fois peint'. To feel oneself read, here, is to feel oneself become a 'multiple' being, 'imaginaire', dressed and undressed by readers according to their whims. In the commitment of identity to paper, Balzac, in the manner of Hoffmann, insists on troubling this most repeated, troped moment of conventional recognition and understanding between reader and author. These two texts offer differing, vivid accounts of the loss undergone by the subject in the signing of his name; the feeling, that is, of what might go missing in the transfiguration of life into narrative figure.

Chapter 4: Figure
Der Artushof and Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu

I.

It is a telling comment on Balzac's and Hoffmann's portrayals of artist figures that the scene of comparison in this chapter is the juxtaposition of two empty canvasses: the one blank and the other a blur. If in previous chapters my project has been to face up or to align two very different works in relation to one another, I want to suggest, now, that in his preeminent narrative of creative obsession, Balzac explicitly cites the character and traits of Hoffmann in his figure of the delusional artist and his demise, framing a Hoffmannesque portrait and including it within his own narrative. The narrative lines that curlicued into the arabesques of Chapter 2 and that turned back on themselves in the repeated tropes of Chapter 3 will be gathered in this chapter under the title 'Figure', as I examine practices of artistic and literary portraiture as an act of figuration. The 'figure' opens up new ways of thinking about mimesis. The 'figure', being always incomplete or in outline, always refers back to an original: attempting not to reproduce the form of an object but to capture an experience of that object by means of its contouring lines. The 'figure', as we shall see with Auerbach, remains always partial, in anticipation of something fuller. And 'figure', as in the French *figure*, may also correspond to the most commandingly recognisable human form, the face.

In Auerbach's 1944 essay 'Figura', figural thinking emerges as a way for early Christian thinkers such as Tertullian and Augustine to reconcile the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is seen as a prophetic prefiguration of the New, which in turn is seen to be a figural realisation or fulfilment of the Old. Auerbach summarises: 'Die Figuraldeutung stellt einen Zusammenhang zwischen zwei Geschehnissen oder Personen her, in dem eines von ihnen nicht nur sich selbst, sondern auch das andere bedeutet, das andere hingegen das eine einschließt oder erfüllt'.¹ Historical interpretation, then, is stripped of teleological linearity, becoming instead an oscillation or exchange, a creature with two distinct countenances. I will

¹ Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 77: 'Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfils the first'.

pause, here, amongst the first few pages of the ‘Figura’ essay, in which Auerbach details the origin and earliest history of that word. ‘Figura’ — from *ingere, figulus, factor, effigies* — originally meant ‘plastic form’. Its earliest occurrence is in Terence, *Eunuchus*, where a young girl has a ‘*nova figura oris*’, ‘an unaccustomed form of face’; its next occurrence, in Pacuvius, was as ‘*Nova figura factam*’, ‘fashioned in unaccustomed shape’. That both earliest usages occur in combination with ‘nova’, Auerbach argues, is significant, because ‘das neu Erscheinende, sich Wandelnde am Beständigen der ganzen Geschichte des Wortes das Gepräge gibt’.² If *figura* is always new, but rests upon the archetypally recognised or familiar, then it commands the same affective force as mimetic recognition — *re-cognition, Wiedererkennung* — which depends simultaneously on the cognitive categories of the old and the new, the unaccustomed and the familiar.

Figura, Auerbach continues, plays between the poles of form and imitation: he describes it as ‘das Schöpferisch-Bildende, den Wandel im bleibenden Wesen, das Spiel zwischen Abbild und Urbild’, a formulation that recurs throughout the essay.³ *Figura*, associated always with terms such as the simulacrum and the shadow, refers beyond itself, expressing the ‘Lebend-Bewegtes, Unvollendetes und Spielendes’ — a description that might apply to the spectral beings, or to ‘dem täuschend nachahmenden Traumbild’ of previous chapters.⁴ Recent writings on *figura* have focused on its duplicitous, and partial, character. For Gabriele Brandstetter and Sibylle Peters, ‘Figur [...] beinhaltet immer schon die Doppelgestalt von Bild und Abbild [...]. An diesem Punkt ist wohl die Nähe des “Figur”-begriffs zur Mimesis und zur Fiktion am deutlichsten’.⁵ For Daniel Müller Niebala, Yves Schumacher and Christoph Steier, in a collection which brings concepts of the ‘figure’ to bear specifically on Hoffmann’s works, ‘Kaum ein Wort scheint besser geeignet, die

² Auerbach, ‘Figura’, p. 55: ‘for the notion of the new manifestation, the changing aspect of the permanent runs through the whole history of the word’.

³ Ibid., pp. 74, 58, 61: ‘the creative, formative principle, change amid the enduring essence, the shades of meaning between copy and archetype’.

⁴ Ibid., p. 61: ‘something living and dynamic, incomplete and playful’; ‘the deceptive likenesses that walk in dreams’.

⁵ Gabriele Brandstetter and Sibylle Peters, ‘Einleitung’, in *de figura. Rhetorik — Bewegung — Gestalt*, ed. by Brandstetter and Peters (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), pp. 7-31 (pp. 9-10): ‘Figure [...] contains within itself already the double figure of image and copy [...]. At this point, the proximity of the term “Figure” to mimesis and fiction is clearest’.

romantische Denkfigur der “Duplizität” vorzustellen, als *figura* und seine begriffsgeschichtlichen Derivate’.⁶ *Figura*, always referring beyond itself, clears a space in which the semblance of a unified shape is guaranteed precisely by the destabilising returns of the different, the deformed, the unaccustomed.

Before turning fully to the two image stories in question here, I will briefly sketch a third: Pliny’s myth of the origins of art, a myth that puts the ‘figure’ into play. According to Pliny, the first painting is the work of a Corinthian maid as she traces the shadow cast on a wall by her lover who is about to travel away. The story appears twice in the *Natural History*. The first version is cursory: ‘all agree that it [painting] began with tracing an outline around a man’s shadow and consequently that pictures were originally done in this way’. The second, though more extensive, is similarly dismissive:

Enough and more than enough has been said about painting. It may be suitable to append to these remarks something about the plastic art. It was through the service of that same earth that modeling portraits from clay was first invented by Butades, a potter from Sycion, at Corinth. He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by the lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to fire with the rest of his pottery; and it is said that this likeness was preserved in the shrine of the nymphs.⁷

Even in this more comprehensive account, the act of painting is pushed to the background of its own picturing: ‘more than enough has been said about painting’. As Victor Stoichita remarks in his commentary on the tale, ‘nothing in this account is

⁶ Daniel Müller Nielaba and others, ‘Figur/a/tion: Möglichkeiten einer Figurologie im Zeichen E. T. A. Hoffmann’, in *Figur – Figura – Figuration: E. T. A. Hoffmann*, ed. by Müller Nielaba and others (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), pp. 7-14 (p. 7): ‘There seems scarcely a word better suited to the representation of the Romantic thought figure [*Denkfigur*] of “duplicity” than *figura* and its conceptual derivatives’.

⁷ Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 35.43, pp. 371-73.

certain; it is mysterious and nocturnal, leaving everything in it wide open to conjecture'.⁸ For one thing, emphasis is less on the maid than it is on her father, whose act of making a sculpture from her picture becomes a framing mechanism of the picturing act. This will be important for my argument here, which sees that act to be tightly enmeshed within a web of actions and exchanges, between fathers and daughters, painters and their models.

Crucially, the lover's body is absent from the scene. The maid does not draw the silhouette of his body but the 'shadow of his face'. This is an act of figuration in the mode of Auerbach, where the face comes to mark both a site of leaving, of splitting or splintering off, and a place of recognition. The image drawn from the face is both the marker of the departed lover and the place from which he might be recalled. In a swift inversion of the Pygmalion myth, the image she draws becomes a substitute or a surrogate for life. For the artwork to live, the model must exit the frame.

It is, as I have noted, not the lover's body that she traces in outline, but that body's own trace. The shadow, as an indexical sign, is a guarantee of identity. It is also a marker of contingency, proof that the body exists as an opaque being in an illuminated world. 'If everything begins with the shadow', writes Michael Newman, 'it is with something received from elsewhere, not necessarily human, and nothing intended'. This contingent material in its unintended state forms the grounds for representation. 'Art', Newman goes on, 'is that which will have transformed the contingent into the necessary. In other words, art legislates nature, but in order to do so it needs a "hint" [...]. This "hint" legitimates the law; it is what gives the sketch its necessity'. This 'hint' is the precondition of art forms, a kind of blind spot, the 'place in the visible from which we cannot detach ourselves, and which we cannot objectify', marking the place of 'our attachment, or our adhesion, to the world'.⁹ Something in this thought might suggest that the act of drawing — as an act of pulling, an extrication, a drawing *from* reality — marks the point at which we are adjoined to the world and its forms.

This is made explicit in Merleau-Ponty's 'L'Œil et l'esprit', in which

⁸ Victor Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, trans. by Anne-Marie Glasheen, (London: Redaktion, 1997), p. 14.

⁹ Michael Newman, 'The Marks, Traces, and Gestures of Drawing', in *The Stage of Drawing: Gesture & Act*, ed. by Catherine de Zegher (New York: Tate, The Drawing Center, 2003), p. 98.

shadows, along with lighting, reflections and colour, fall out of the order of objects:

Ils ne sont même que sur le seuil de la vision profane, ils ne sont communément pas vus. Le regard du peintre leur demande comment ils s’y prennent pour faire qu’il y ait soudain quelque chose, et cette chose, pour composer ce talisman du monde, pour nous faire voir le visible.¹⁰

For Merleau-Ponty, phenomena such as shadows mark a primordial experience of the object world. To pay attention to shadows is to probe the conditions by which the world’s visibility opens up to human perception. For the Corinthian maid, tracing around the outline of the shadow means to recognise the shadow’s form and to invest it with significance. It is to make the shadow explicit. Hagi Kenaan writes: ‘In tracing a shadow’s contour, Butades has changed forever the form of our human encounter with the visual’, having ‘allowed the visual to show itself *as* visual’.¹¹ As painted subject, the shadow participates in visibility; as a figure, it rings with the absence of life and body to which it always refers. This fable, which focuses on the vulnerable edges of the body — as will the narratives that follow here — brings those edges to the centre of the narrative, making the outline the point.

‘Texts about paintings, painters and sculptors’, as Diana Knight writes, ‘are obvious test cases for issues of representation’. It is on this basis that I will take these two artist tales, examining the transfer of an ekphrastic discourse between Hoffmann and Balzac. In both cases, art and eroticism interlock, following the model of the Pygmalion myth, which ‘conflates creative and erotic desire with mimetic representation’.¹² Hoffmann’s *Der Artushof* narrates the young artist’s experience of sameness via the return of a figure — or rather, the return of particular features, *Züge*, over a set of different figures: unaccustomed in their turn but legible as a series in the mould of the original beloved, Felizitas. It is in the light of a Hoffmannesque reading of *figura* that I come to Balzac’s *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*. I read both *Chef-d’œuvre*

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *L’Œil et l’esprit*, p. 29.

¹¹ Hagi Kenaan, ‘Tracing Shadows. Reflections on the Origin of Painting’, in *Pictorial Languages and their Meanings*, ed. by C. Versar and G. Fishof (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Publishing, 2006), p. 26.

¹² Diana Knight, *Balzac and the Model of Painting: Artist Stories in ‘La Comédie humaine’* (London: Legenda, 2007), p. 1.

and *Der Artushof* as stories which, in an ekphrastic move, bring images to life through text — calling back to the model of Pygmalion or the delusional Serapiontic artist — but which nonetheless narrate portrayals of impotent artworks. In *Der Artushof*, intelligibility takes its form through the return of traits different in their turn but recognisable in succession. The final outcome of the tale, however, is one of misrecognition. In *Chef-d'œuvre*, the *mise en scène* of an illegible, unrecognisable image paradoxically stages the act of reading. In both tales, lines, *lignes* or *Züge* — as facial features, the constituent elements of painted portraits — come to mark something unavailable. These incomplete or puzzling lines function not simply as recurring motifs but as the formative principle of both tales. The scene of beholding figures by means of their lines works, in both texts, to stage an elaborate analogy of reading. In this staging, Balzac's text calls upon Hoffmann's co-authorship, not only in the character portrait of Frenhofer but in the excursions, deliberations and desires of the painterly narrative voice.

II. *Der Artushof*

Der Artushof has repeatedly been drawn into a series of Hoffmann's *Künstlernovellen*, including *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.*, *Rat Krespel*, and *Ritter Gluck*, as if its main characteristic were its exemplary nature.¹³ Readings of *Der Artushof* have accordingly focused almost exclusively on its articulation of Hoffmann's 'Künstlerproblematik' ('artist complex') and the tussle between art and life.¹⁴ An exemplary tale is not qualitatively distinct from any other member of its series but is characteristic of it, its adherence to that series being its main trait. This is one of the conditions of reading set out in *Die Serapionsbrüder*, whose frame narrative consists

¹³ Wulf Segebrecht writes: 'Die Erzählung versammelt zahlreiche Motive und Konstellationen einer Künstlernovelle in E. T. A. Hoffmanns Manier', in 'Kommentar', H IV, p. 1318: 'The tale brings together multiple motifs and constellations of an artist novella in E. T. A. Hoffmann's style'. In a similar judgment, Christian Begemann writes: 'Zusammengenommen formieren diese Texte eine Reihe variierende Bearbeitungen der gleichen Grundproblematik'. In '*Der Artushof* (1816)', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann-Handbuch: Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, pp. 93-96 (p. 93): 'Taken together, these texts form a series of varying adaptations of the same fundamental complex'.

¹⁴ Mitsunori Owari, 'Versteckspiel des Zeichens: zu E. T. A. Hoffmanns "Der Artushof"', *E. T. A. Hoffmann-Jahrbuch*, 12 (2004), 52-67; Marianne Kesting, 'Das Lebendige Portrait', *Athenäum*, 3 (1993), 27-54; Peter von Matt, *Die Augen der Automaten*.

of the conversations of a group of six companions telling stories to one another that they have previously written down. The *Vorwort*, the work of a fictional editor, emphasises its combination of tales old and new: ‘daß der Herausgeber seine in Journalen und Taschenbüchern verstreuten Erzählungen und Märchen sammeln und Neues hinzufügen’. He also pleads that the reader should not compare the collection to an archetypal collection, Tieck’s *Phantasmus*, ‘jenen ihm nachteiligen Vergleich nicht anzustellen’, an act that necessarily acknowledges the similarity of their forms (H IV 11).¹⁵

From the outset, then, the novella collection is marked by an ambivalence towards copy and imitation: an acknowledgement of the contextual ground the pieces are settled in and a simultaneous plea for them to be read on their own terms. This ambivalence is worked out and through by the tales themselves and by the ways in which, in their serial form, they relate to and reflect on one another. Lothar Pikulik writes that ‘Je weiter man in den *Serapions-Brüdern* mit der Lektüre fortschreitet, desto besser erkennt man, wie sehr Hoffmanns Erzählungen Variationen einiger weniger Grundmuster sind’.¹⁶ In this account, what the reader recognises, ‘erkennt’, is in fact the patterning, the strategies of recognition and recognisability, that structure the series. Pikulik compares our act of reading the collection of tales to the uncanny physiognomic encounters that occur within the tales themselves:

Für den Leser handelt es sich gewissermaßen um Déjà-vu-Erlebnisse, ähnlich wie auch Hoffmanns Figuren immer wieder auf schon Bekanntes oder doch in Ahnungen bereits früher vage Erfahrenes stoßen, das in der Wiederbegegnung konkretere Züge annimmt.¹⁷

¹⁵ ‘that the editor collects here his tales and *Märchen* spread throughout various journals and pocketbooks, and introduces new material’; ‘not to draw him into this unfavourable comparison’.

¹⁶ Lothar Pikulik, *E. T. A. Hoffmann als Erzähler: ein Kommentar zu den Serapions-Brüdern* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1987), p. 84: ‘The further one advances with his or her reading of *Die Serapionsbrüder*, the better one recognises that Hoffmann’s tales are variations on a few basic schemes’.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: ‘For the reader, it is, to a certain extent, a question of *déjà-vu* experiences, similar to the way in which Hoffmann’s characters again and again encounter something long-known, or vague notions of something experienced once before, which take on more concrete traits in the re-encounter’.

The recurrence of a face, or rather of that face's particular traits or 'Züge', is the recurrent trope of *Der Artushof*, a tale in which the protagonist Traugott, on the hunt for his ideal, settles finally for a lookalike. It works, in this way, through mimicking the feeling of the *déjà vu*. The physiognomic 'Züge', 'Umrisse', denoting recognisable bounding lines, predominantly in the face, come to present not only a motif but the formative principle of this tale both as a stand-alone work and as an exemplary artist piece of *Die Serapionsbrüder*. Where we saw how the undulating arabesque lines of *Der goldne Topf* begin to loosen themselves from the cataloguing, taxonomising lines of physiognomy, here the recognisable bounding line or outline is again set loose, running amok to form a 'Trugbild' ('illusion'), not committed to legibility, with unsettling consequences for the would-be artist.

The tale begins with the drawing of an arabesque line. The merchant Traugott, poised in the act of writing a business letter, finds himself instead sketching out the faces of two figures painted in the Artushof in Danzig: a *Börse* by day whose frescoes seem to come to life in the 'magisches Helldunkel' of the evening.

Er nahm ein Blatt, tunkte die Feder ein und wollte eben mit einem kecken kalligraphischen Schnörkel beginnen, als er, nochmals schnell das Geschäft von dem er zu schreiben hatte, überdenkend, die Augen in die Höhe warf. Nun wollte es der Zufall, daß er gerade vor den in einem Zuge abgebildeten Figuren stand, deren Anblick ihn jedesmal mit seltsamer unbegreiflicher Wehmut befieng. [...] Niemals konnte er loskommen von dieser beider Anblick, und so geschah es denn auch jetzt, daß statt den Aviso des Herrn Elias Roos nach Hamburg zu schreiben, er nur das wundersame Bild anschaute und gedankenlos mit der Feder auf dem Papier herumkritzelte. (H IV, 178-79)¹⁸

¹⁸ 'He took a sheet, dipped his pen in the inkwell, and was about to begin his letter of advice with a bold flourish when, trying to assemble in his mind the exact wording of his first sentence, he happened to cast his eyes aloft. As chance would have it, he was standing right in front of one of the figures in the procession which, whenever he saw it, always filled him with a strange, incomprehensible feeling of melancholy. [...] He always experienced the greatest difficulty in tearing himself away from the sight of these two faces, and so it was now: instead of getting on with Herr Elias Roos's letter of advice for Hamburg, he remained gazing at the marvellous picture and without thinking what he was doing, began scrawling loops and lines on the paper in front of him'.

The ‘kecke[r] kalligraphische[r] Schnörkel’, the signatory flourish, here scarcely materialises before it transforms into a thoughtless ‘herumkritzeln’. This scribbling finally takes the form of two figures ‘in zierlichem kecken Umriß’, led by the energy of the undeliberated line and condemned by his authorities as ‘dumme Kinderstreiche’ (‘childish scrawlings’, H IV 179-80). The ‘Schnörkel’ therefore acts as an intermediary between two different kinds of figuration: the officious detail of the *Avisobrief* and Traugott’s involuntary scribbled drawing. My reading here draws in particular on works by Günther Oesterle and Charlotte Kurbjuhn on the medial implications of *Umriss* (outline) and *Kontur* (contour) in the tale.¹⁹ Oesterle writes: ‘Statt einer Zahl und der Angabe einer Zahlung (dem Keim des Geldverkehrs) entsteht eine Zeichnung, ein Umriß. An die Stelle von Ornament, Schrift und Zahl treten Ornament, Schrift und Figur’.²⁰ As the Artushof transforms from the daylight *Börse* into the ghostly evening gallery of living paintings, hosting both scenes in the same space, so the space on the page opens from line and number to the bold life of the copied outline. What is in the eyes of the bourgeois businessmen a childish act of de-figuration is in another sense a prosopopoeiac giving of face to otherwise commonplace lines. And once again, we find an *arabesque*, a line freed from its traditional properties or delineation, marking the threshold of the mimetic encounter. ‘Keck’ (‘bold’) appears elsewhere in Hoffmann’s works in reference to the act of drawing. Jacques Callot is named the ‘kecker Meister’ (H II.1 17) in the introduction to the *Fantasiestücke*; ‘keck’, here, thus resonates with the self-fashioning artist or *artiste* figure. In the *Nachtstück*, *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.*, which has been read as the nocturnal counterpart of *Der Artushof*,²¹ the artist Berthold is first seen by the narrating *Enthusiast* drawing the lines of his altar piece: ‘keck zog er seine Linien,

¹⁹ Günther Oesterle, ‘Romantische Urbanität? Börse und Kunst in E. T. A. Hoffmanns “Der Artushof”’, in *Hoffmanneske Geschichte*, ed. by Neumann and von Bormann, pp. 243-58; Charlotte Kurbjuhn, ‘E. T. A. Hoffmann: Umriss-Bilder und Serapiontisches Erzähl-Prinzip an der Grenze zwischen Kunst und Leben in *Der Artushof*’, in *Kontur: Geschichte einer ästhetischen Denkfigur* (Ochsenfurt: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 655-74.

²⁰ Oesterle, ‘Romantische Urbanität’, p. 252: ‘In the place of a number and the indication of a payment (the heart of transactions) emerges a drawing, an outline. In the place of ornament, script and number come ornament, script and figure’.

²¹ Christian Begemann calls *Der Artushof* the ‘komödienhaft-heiteres Gegenstück’ (‘cheerful, comedic counterpart’) to *Die Jesuiterkirche*. ‘*Der Artushof* (1816)’, in *E. T. A. Hoffmann-Handbuch*, p. 93.

niemals gefehlt, immer richtig und rein' (H III 116).²² The boldly drawn line — which is transformed, for Traugott, into a bold line, a 'kecke[r] kalligraphische[r] Schnörkel' — seems, at moments, to exercise an intention of its own.

The 'Schnörkel' acts as a 'romantische Schleife' or loop,²³ marking the threshold at which observation or 'Beobachtung' slips into a Romantic or Serapiontic 'Schauen', a seeing in double, wherein prosaic lines are charged with supernatural significance and life. The wry narrator at the very beginning of the tale describes the magical double atmosphere of the *Artushof* by invoking the reader, 'Du, günstiger Leser!' ('You, kind reader!'), as witness (H IV 177). This ironic interpellation, characteristic of Hoffmann, is itself a narrative flourish or arabesque, attempting a breach in the divide between reader and fiction. The intersubjective 'Du', an interpolated position existing somewhere between reader and fictional character, will read anew 'das seltsame Bild- und Schnitzwerk' in the evening light, he claims, such that its figures seem to come alive, becoming 'rege und lebendig'. And 'Du' will feel, as does Traugott, the compulsion to reach for 'Tinte und Feder' and 'jenen prächtigen Bürgermeister mit seinem wunderschönen Pagen abzukonterfeien' (H IV 178).²⁴

The two figures who then take human form before Traugott, having seemingly come to life from the paintings, thus appear, as Kurbjuhn points out, to have been drawn or written by means of Traugott's act, 'von der Wand auf den Boden der Realität (der Erzählebene) *geschrieben*'.²⁵ The narrator's flourish or loop, which leads the eye to see new configurations within pre-existing lines, is reflected in Traugott's 'Schnörkel' on the page. Hoffmann stages the threshold at which life is teased from the image, in Pygmalion-esque tones. As Edgar Pankow writes: 'Er markiert die linguistische Schnittstelle, an der die Darstellungsmedien des Bildes und der Schrift sich überkreuzen'.²⁶ In this ekphrastic crossover, images come alive from within lines of text. The figures who emerge from this first scene — images he discovers,

²² 'he drew his lines boldly and without error, always clearly and cleanly'.

²³ Kurbjuhn, 'Umriß-Bilder', p. 664.

²⁴ 'the strange pictures and carvings'; 'animated and lively'; 'ink and pen'; 'to reproduce that splendid *Bürgermeister* and his handsome page'.

²⁵ Kurbjuhn, 'Umriß-Bilder', p. 665 ('*written* from the wall onto the floor of reality [the level of narrative]').

²⁶ Edgar Pankow, 'Medienwechsel: Zur Konstellation von Literatur und Malerei in einigen Arbeiten E. T. A. Hoffmanns', *E. T. A. Hoffmann-Jahrbuch*, 10 (2002), 42-57 (p. 45): 'He demarcates the linguistic interface at which the representative media of image and script intersect'.

furthermore, that he has drawn before as a child, ‘in freilich verzerrten, jedoch sehr kenntlichen Umrissen’ (‘in faltering but nonetheless recognisable outline’, H IV 186) — come to occupy Traugott’s every thought. The tale thus works to follow, in a similar line to *Der goldene Topf*, the narrative subject’s immersion in his own lines and fictions, to the detriment of his ordinary life.

The figure who appears to have come to life from Traugott’s undeliberated lines claims to be the two hundred year-old painter Godofredus Berklinger, accompanied by his mysterious son. These two characters, and a woman who features in one of his paintings, Felizitas, come to occupy Traugott’s every thought. The burgeoning artist rapidly abandons his everyday duties towards his work and his fiancée, Christina, the daughter of his boss Elias Roos. Artistic vision becomes a kind of delusional double vision, suffusing everyday lines with new significance, and skewing ‘die Differenzierung von innerer subjektiv transformierter Welt und äußerer Realität’.²⁷ This, Traugott’s predicament, in turn frames the more desperate case of Berklinger, an extreme version of the deluded artist who is subject to his own visions. This is brought to a climax when Traugott comes to witness his masterpiece, ‘das wiedergewonnene Paradies’ (‘Paradise Regained’):

Der Jüngling, ganz altdeutsch gekleidet, öffnete ihm [Traugott] die Tür und führte ihn in ein geräumiges Gemach, wo er den Alten in der Mitte auf einem kleinen Schemel vor einer großen aufgespannten grau grundierten Leinwand sitzend antraf. “Zur glücklichen Stunde”, rief der Alte ihm entgegen, “sind Sie mein Herr gekommen [...]. Dies ist nun, wie Sie sehen, das wiedergewonnene Paradies, und sollte mir um Sie leid sein, wenn Sie irgend eine Allegorie herausklügeln wollten. Allegorische Gemälde machen nur Schwächlinge und Stümper; mein Bild soll nicht *bedeuten* sondern *sein*. [...] Immer stärker, aber immer unverständlicher und verworrener wurde des Alten Ausdruck. (H IV 191)²⁸

²⁷ Kurbjuhn, ‘Umriss-Bilder’, p. 659: ‘the distinction between the internal, subjectively transformed world and external reality’.

²⁸ ‘The door was opened by the son, who was clad entirely in old German garb and who led him into a spacious room, in the middle of which the old man was sitting on a little footstool in front of a large empty canvas. “You have come at a happy hour, dear sir [...]. This, as you see, is Paradise Regained, and I should be much disappointed in you if you sought to extract some sort of allegory out of it. Only

Berklinger insists that all his viewer needs to appreciate the masterpiece is a working pair of eyes — ‘wie Sie sehen’: that there is no ‘Allegorie’ or extraneous message to be wrangled from the canvas. And yet his words exceed his art: his is an instruction to look with nothing to see. His own description of his masterpiece becomes so frenzied and ‘verworren’ as to dissipate in irrelevance beneath the sheet of grey.

As a piece within *Die Serapionsbrüder*, *Der Artushof* can seem like another exposition of the ‘Serapiontisches Prinzip’ and that principle’s crude failure: first in the character of Berklinger, and then again in Traugott’s tale, as a framing or contouring narrative to Berklinger’s. Hoffmann’s definition of the ‘Serapiontisches Prinzip’ runs, in the character Lothar’s words, as follows:

Jeder prüfe wohl, ob er auch wirklich das geschaut, was er zu verkünden unternommen, ehe er es wagt laut damit zu werden. Wenigstens strebe jeder recht ernstlich darnach, das Bild, das ihm im Innern aufgegangen recht zu erfassen mit allen seinen Gestalten, Farben, Lichtern und Schatten, und dann, wenn er sich recht entzündet davon fühlt, die Darstellung ins äußere Leben [zu] tragen. (H IV 69)²⁹

A Serapionic mimesis, then, would be the complete sensuous translation of a phenomenological reality into art. What the inner eye sees must be transferred in its entirety into the external work. For Wulf Segebrecht, in artists such as Serapion and Krespel the balance of *Verstand* (‘reason’) and *Phantasie* (‘fantasy’) is skewed, such that they ‘kultivieren [...] nur eine Seite ihres Seines’ (‘cultivate only one side of their being’).³⁰ Hence, many critics conclude that Berklinger is to be drawn into alignment with Serapion and Krespel as another hero who proves only the incommensurability

bad and bungling painters paint allegorical pictures; my picture is intended not to *signify*, but to *be*. [...] His voice grew more and more forceful, yet at the same time what he said grew more and more incomprehensible and obscure’.

²⁹ ‘Let each of us try, and examine himself well, as to whether he has really *seen* what he is going to describe before he sets to work to put it in words. At all events, let each of us strive, very strenuously, to get a clear grasp, in his mind, of the picture he is going to produce — in every one of its forms, colours, lights and shadows, and then, when he feels himself thoroughly permeated and kindled by it, bring it out into outer life’.

³⁰ Segebrecht, ‘Kommentar’, H IV, p. 1247.

of art and life: 'daß die Realisierung im Kunstwerk selbst mit dem Leben nicht vereinbar ist'.³¹ And yet, to take the character of Berklinger too seriously is to neglect the narrative of Traugott: the framing structure of Berklinger's narrative, and which is, as I shall show, itself the narrative of a confusion of outlines. Berklinger, as a figment of Traugott's own art, is just as much part of his fictional ideal as is Felizitas. When Traugott leaves, he goes in search of both, leaving with the rash claim that 'Berklinger ist mein Meister, mein Vater, mein Alles!' (H IV 199: 'Berklinger is my master, my father, my everything!').

Determined to hunt down the beautiful figures, Traugott is condemned never to 'erfassen' ('grasp') his *Ideal*, but always to land in a series of successive compromises, mere *Ähnlichkeiten*, for Felizitas has been near him all the time, disguised as the nameless 'Jüngling'. Clues to this are present everywhere in the text, leading Mitsunori Owari to read it as a 'Verstecksspiel', a game of hide and seek.³² In the presence of Berklinger's son, Traugott experiences a feeling of Felizitas's proximity, 'als stehe lichthell das geliebte Bild neben ihm, als fühle er den süßen Liebeshauch, und er hätte dann den Jüngling, als sei er die geliebte Felizitas selbst, an sein glühendes Herz drücken mögen'. In this 'queer' moment, recognisable traits seem momentarily to be shifted or displaced from their rectilinear configurations; as if 'in freilich verzerrten, jedoch sehr kenntlichen Umrissen' (H IV 186), Traugott fails to recognise the features of the woman he loves.³³ Hence, we may argue that the tale follows the emergence of the physiognomic *Umriss* or *Zug*, emerging from the 'Trugbild' of Felizitas (H IV 198).

When Traugott catches a glimpse of Berklinger's son, exposed briefly as Felizitas, Berklinger is desperate to hide his daughter from suitors on account of an old prophecy declaring that he will die as soon as she marries. He whisks her away and they disappear without trace from the town, 'auf dem Mantel des Mephistophiles

³¹ Kesting, 'Das lebendige Portrait', p. 35: 'that realisation in the artwork is not commensurable with life'.

³² Owari, 'Verstecksspiel des Zeichens'.

³³ 'It often seemed to him as though the beloved portrait was standing vividly beside him and that he could feel its sweet loving breath, and then he would have liked to have pressed the youth to his glowing breast as if he were the beloved Felizitas herself'; 'in faltering but nonetheless recognisable outline'.

davongeflogen' (H IV 196).³⁴ Traugott travels under an errant premise to Italy to look for them, mistaking the German town Sorrent for its orthographic twin, the Italian Sorrent/Sorrento. Bound up in this doubling of names, in which the physiognomical shape and sound of the word outweighs its content, the specificity of its place, is a heavy-handed comment on the German artist's clichéd attraction to Italy, 'Land der Kunst' (H IV 199: 'land of art'); an irony we have seen reflected in the figure of Spikher in Chapter 3. Felizitas, always tragically closer than Traugott realises, marries the bourgeois criminal counsellor Mathesius in his absence. Meanwhile, the *Zug*, the turn of the pen or the brush, becomes the main narrative player, for in Sorrento, Traugott discovers Dorina, a second-rate version of Felizitas, who possesses her traits: 'Sie hatte die Züge der Felizitas, sie war es aber nicht' (H IV 201).³⁵ The *Zug* is a measure of difference, as a distinct token of recognisability, but is also, when read as part of a series, a mark of similitude and seriality. The narrative therefore follows a series of ironic compromised versions of life, in which Traugott finds himself landing in each instance back with a painted copy, one piece in the series of imitative inauthenticities that his narrative proves itself to be. In this way, Traugott and Berklinger may be seen to function as doubles of one another: both sacrifice material reality in the name of the ideal.

To read by means of *Züge*, individual traits, is to pay note to insignificant-seeming information. Carlo Ginzburg, discussing the 'Morellian' method of identifying paintings via their ostensibly extraneous details, calls it 'a method of interpretation based on discarded information, on marginal data, considered in some way significant'.³⁶ He draws Morelli into a constellation with Sherlock Holmes and Sigmund Freud, theorising a 'conjectural paradigm' that developed in the nineteenth century alongside medical semiotics and police identificatory methods, with its roots in an ancient cynegetic impulse to hunt out and read clues. In Hoffmann's tale of reappearing 'Züge', the identificatory work of the trait, trace or 'clue' is troubled when it returns in a series. What the reader Traugott recognises, 'erkennt', is in fact not the individual herself but the patterning, the strategies of recognition and recognisability, that he sees in a set of faces. When Traugott first encounters Dorina,

³⁴ 'as if borne away on the cloak of Mephistopheles'.

³⁵ 'She possessed the features of Felizitas, but it was not she'.

³⁶ Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', trans. by John and Anne Tedeschi, in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Maryland: John Hopkins, 1989), p. 101.

he recognises her only as part of a series of which Felizitas is a necessary other part: ‘Sie war in der Tat beinahe Felizitas selbst, nur schienen ihm die Züge starker, bestimmter, so wie das Haar dunkler. Es war dasselbe Bild von Raphael und von Rubens gemalt’ (H IV 201).³⁷ In the eyes of the young artist, the image emerges from within the contours and lines of text. This impossible statement, in which ‘dasselbe Bild’ is painted by two different masters, might be read as an uncanny moment, in which lines are obliquely displaced from their expected positions. The effect is yet stronger when Dorina’s father is shown not to be Berklinger, as Traugott had originally expected and desired, but another distorted variant:

Traugott sah nun wohl, daß die Höhe des Gerüsts in der Kirche, auf dem der Alte stand, ihn sehr getäuscht hatte. Statt des kräftigen Berklinger war dieser alte Maler ein kleinlicher, magerer, furchtsamer, von Armut gedrückter Mann. Ein trügerischer Schlagschatten hatte in der Kirche seinem glatten Kinn Berklingers schwarzen krausen Bart gegeben. (H IV 201-02)³⁸

Here the ‘trügerisch’ capacities of lines are put to work: the lines of perspective introduced to the scene by the ‘Gerüst’ distortingly amplify the stranger’s appearance. The ‘trügerischer Schlagschatten’, furthermore, throws the appearance of Berklinger’s beard onto his face, as a para-physiognomic projection; a legible layer not etched into, but pitched onto, his face, not unlike the projected physiognomy of Colonel Chabert in the previous chapter. In *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.*, Berthold boldly traces the lines of shadow cast by a net, positioned in between model and surface, as a means of delineating the perspective of his picture. Dorina’s father, proportionally distorted, at a height and on a scaffold like Berthold, is given a momentarily skewed appearance which, like Berthold’s perspectival guidelines, is only the result of the accident of light and shadow. In a re-casting of the Corinthian maid’s silhouette-work, and Lavaterian parlour-room silhouetting, a shadow reading comes to determine a

³⁷ ‘She was, indeed, almost Felizitas herself, only her features were stronger and more clearly defined, and her hair was darker. It was the same picture, painted first by Raphael, then by Rubens’.

³⁸ ‘Traugott could now see that the height of the scaffold on which he had been standing in the church had been deceptive: this aged painter was, unlike the vigorous Berklinger, diminutive, and had been wasted and disheartened by poverty. A black shadow falling across his clean-shaven face had bestowed upon it Berklinger’s curly black beard’.

physiognomy. Dorina and her father, images cast in the likeness of Berklinger and Felizitas, in their brief similarity to those originals are resonant in appearance with everything they are not. Like painted figures, they are the crooked result of the distorting apparatus of representation, of copying, of mimesis.

Friedrich Kittler, writing of Berthold's contraption for painting perspective in *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.*, concludes that 'Die Forderung nach materialer Ähnlichkeit stellt [...] die Malerei vor Probleme, die nur durch Medientechniken wie Camera obscura und Laterna magica oder aber durch Magie zu lösen sind'.³⁹ The very means by which the mimetic product is made to seem recognisable is also a kind of interference. We are left with the familiar scene of Hoffmann's archetypal young artist caught between idealised and real images: 'Felizitas stand ihm wieder lebhaft vor Augen, und doch war es ihm, als könne er Dorina nicht lassen'.⁴⁰ The 'lebhaft', life-like image remains a projection. There is something weightier, fleshier, about Dorina, whom he feels he cannot leave: something that demands more of his touch and body. Whereas Felizitas is a 'geistig Bild' ('an image in his mind'), Dorina inspires in him 'süße Schauer' and 'sanfte Glut' (H IV 202: 'sweet desire', 'gentle joy').

In committing art to paper, Traugott signs away the possibility of ever possessing his ideal. This is a compromise he is forced to repeatedly acknowledge. And the repeated moment of his acknowledgement takes the form of the 'Umriss' or the contour, the figure's wily, deceptive edge. 'Umrisse' themselves come to figure this very mediation or interference. The 'keck[er] Schnörkel' which turns unthinkingly from writing to image, letting images come to life, 'in zierlich keckem Umriß' (H IV 180: 'in bold outline'), with that compulsively repeated 'keck', hints always at the image that might have an intention of its own. Kurbjuhn writes of contours as the 'Spiegelachse und die ewig trennende und dennoch verknüpfende Grenze zwischen innerer Schau und äußerem Leben, Vergangenheit und Gegenwart',

³⁹ Friedrich Kittler, 'Eine Mathematik der Endlichkeit. E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Jesuiterkirche in G.*', *Athenäum*, 9 (1999), 101-120 (p. 118): 'The demand for material resemblance poses problems for painting that can only be solved through media techniques like camera obscura and laterna magica or by magic'.

⁴⁰ 'Felizitas appeared visibly before him, yet it seemed to him he could not desert Dorina'

calling them also the ‘symbolische “Figur” dieser Kunstströmung’.⁴¹ These outlines, figures of the slippage between ‘seeing’ and *Schauen*, are also ironic figures that lead Traugott astray, outlines that refuse to remain subject to their own image. The irony is intensified by Felizitas’s philistine marriage, a move that leads Claudia Liebrand to call the whole work a ‘Komödianschema’ (‘comedy scheme’), operating in ‘trivialer Lustspielmanier’ (‘trivial comedic fashion’) by pitting the literal against the figurative in a ‘Doppelspiel’ (‘double play’) of meanings.⁴² Liebrand relates this comedy character to the work’s original publication in the popular *Taschenalmanach* (‘pocket almanac’) *Urania, Taschenbuch für Damen auf das Jahr 1817*. But of course the version that found its way into the *Serapionsbrüder* expresses, in cuttingly ironic tones, an obsession with copy and imitation in repeated form, in a series of visual layers that comprises a *Trugbild*, and that inevitably reflects on the collection of which it is a constituent piece.

In *Der Sandmann*, one of Hoffmann’s keenest expositions of the intangible ideal in the form of its artificial human, Olympia, the narrator begins with a flourish reminiscent of that of *Der Artushof*. Positing ‘du’ as his interlocutor, he describes the difficulty the writer has to find the words with which to begin his narrative — ‘Worte zu finden, um nur anzufangen’ — and turns, by contrast, to the task of the painter:

Hattest du aber, wie ein kecker Maler, erst mit einigen verwegenen Strichen, den Umriß deines inneren Bildes hingeworfen, so trugst du mit leichter Mühe immer glühender und glühender die Farben auf und das lebendige Gewühl mannigfacher Gestalten riß die Freunde fort und sie sahen, wie du, sich selbst mitten im Bilde, das aus deinem Gemüt hervorgegangen! (H III 26)⁴³

⁴¹ Kurbjuhn, ‘Umriss-Bilder’, p. 674: ‘The mirror axis, the border between internal sight and external life, past and present, eternally separating and nonetheless enjoining them’; ‘symbolic “figure” of this artistic current’.

⁴² Claudia Liebrand, ‘Die Ästhetik der Affirmation: *Der Artushof, Der Kampf der Sänger, Meister Martin der Kürfner und seine Gesellen*’, in *Aporie des Kunstmythos: Die Texte E. T. A. Hoffmanns* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1996), pp. 139-74 (p. 146).

⁴³ ‘But if, like a bold painter you had first sketched in a few audacious strokes the outline of the picture you had in your soul, you would then easily have been able to deepen and intensify the colours one after the other, until the varied throng of living figures carried your friends away and they, like you, saw themselves in the midst of the scene that had proceeded from your own soul’.

Again, the compulsive ‘keck’ delineates the discourse of painting. The narrator goes on to describe the series of letters with which he began the story as ‘den Umriß des Gebildes, in das ich nun erzählend immer mehr und mehr Farbe hineinzutragen mich bemühen werde’, hoping to complete his figures ‘wie ein guter Portraitmaler’. Again, the outline of the figure is brought to the centre of the picture: the figure which always calls for completion, here in the addition of colour. He concludes with his hope ‘dass du es ähnlich findest, ohne das Original zu kennen’ (H III 27).⁴⁴ The written narrative is wryly submerged in the discourse of painting, which in turn reflects on writing, ‘die eigene künstlerische Praxis spielerisch ironisiert’.⁴⁵

In an anecdote concerning Balzac’s purported fear of the daguerreotype image, the constituent contours of a portrait again attain heightened significance. In his autobiography, the photographer Félix Nadar narrates how, according to Balzac, being photographed entails the stripping away of the body’s constitutive layers:

Donc, selon Balzac, chaque corps dans la nature se trouve composé de séries de spectres, en couches superposées à l’infini, foliacées en pellicules infinitésimales, dans tous les sens où l’optique perçoit ce corps.

L’homme à jamais ne pouvant créer, — c’est-à-dire d’une apparition, de l’impalpable, constituer une chose solide, ou de *rien* faire une *chose*, — chaque opération Daguerrienne venait donc surprendre, détachait et retenait en se l’appliquant une des couches du corps objecté.

De là pour ledit corps, et à chaque opération renouvelée, perte évidente d’un de ses spectres, c’est-à-dire d’une part de son essence constitutive.⁴⁶

Balzac’s anxiety, as Susan Sontag notes, runs in line with the notion that reality ‘is an aggregate of appearances, appearances which can be made to yield, by proper focusing, infinite layers of significance’, such that ‘Reality itself has started to be

⁴⁴ ‘the outline of the picture, into which I will endeavour to introduce more and more colour as I proceed with my narrative. Perhaps, like a good portrait painter, I may succeed in depicting Nathanael in such a way that you will recognise it as a good likeness without being acquainted with the original’.

⁴⁵ Owari, ‘Versteckpiel des Zeichens’, p. 52: ‘playfully ironises his own artistic practice’.

⁴⁶ Félix Nadar. ‘Balzac et le daguerreotype’, in *Quand j’étais photographe* (Paris: Flammarion, 1900), pp. 1-8 (p. 6).

understood as a kind of writing'.⁴⁷ For Balzac, in the moment of its mediation as artwork or other representation, reality undergoes a particular compromise: he understands it here as a kind of loss directed towards the very edges or contours of the body; a dissolving of the self into its constituent layers or lines. For Hoffmann too, as we have seen in this tale of 'Umrisse', it is consistently in the edges of the body that significance is gathered, and that reading and mis-readings take place. The rise of the new medial forms that seemed to put these edges at risk, specifically of the daguerreotype, at the end of the 1830s, is neatly framed by Balzac's period of writing and re-writing *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, which lasted from 1831 to 1846, and which represents perhaps his most potent tale of the fearsome work an image may exact from life.

III. *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*

Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu, heralded by Cézanne and Picasso as a champion of non-representational art, bore in its first publication in *L'Artiste* in 1831 the parenthetical subtitle '(Conte fantastique)'. Despite losing this epithet after its extensive re-writing in 1836-37, the tale retained its major fantastic, Faustian flourish: the brutal exchange of a life for an artwork. The artwork at stake here is a portrait — the putative master-portrait, indeed, revealed in its climax to be nothing more than 'une multitude de lignes bizarres qui forment une muraille de peinture' (B X 436), bearing no recognisable features beyond a single foot. As a portrait piece, *Chef-d'œuvre* depicts, in the manner of all portraits, what Goetz calls 'ce dialogue entre le peintre et son modèle': or whatever it is that passes between those two characters in the scene of painting.⁴⁸ Like in the fable of the Corinthian maid's shadow drawing, what is present in the portrait is resonant with all that is lost or absent from the scene.

The tale, in an introduction that rings with references to *Der goldne Topf*, begins with the tremulous youth Nicolas Poussin, pausing on the threshold of great art:

⁴⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2008) pp. 159-60.

⁴⁸ Adrien Goetz "'Une Toile de Rembrandt, marchant silencieusement et sans cadre": L'esthétique du portrait peint dans *La Comédie Humaine*', *L'Année Balzacienne*, 3.2 (2001), 99-112 (p. 104).

Quand il parvint en haut de la vis, il demeura pendant un moment sur le palier, incertain s'il prendrait le heurtoir grotesque qui ornait la porte de l'atelier [...]. Le jeune homme éprouvait cette sensation profonde qui a dû faire vibrer le cœur des grands artistes, quand, au fort de la jeunesse et de leur amour pour l'art, ils ont abordé un homme de génie ou quelque chef-d'œuvre. (B X 413-14)

Another hopeful, Romantically-inclined hero in the cut of Anselmus, Raphaël, and Traugott is introduced in the moment of his encounter with the bounding lines of an artistic world sealed off from the uninitiated. The 'heurtoir grotesque' which marks the entranceway is no casual reference to Lindhorst's uncanny doorknocker: the copyist, here, is about to receive instruction. By the workings of chance — 'un secours extraordinaire que lui envoya le hasard' (B X 414) — the renowned painter Frenhofer appears on the scene. Porbus lets them both in, and all three enter the studio to examine Porbus's masterpiece the *Marie égyptienne*. Frenhofer declares that the painting, although good, is not yet complete, for 'elle ne vit pas' (B X 416), and proceeds at length to expound his own theories on art. Poussin, under the scrutiny of his elders, quickly sketches a copy to prove his own artistic potential. On his return home, Poussin begs his uncommonly beautiful lover Gillette to pose for Frenhofer as an ideal model, so that Frenhofer, in turn, will reveal to them his own ideal woman, Catherine, his masterpiece. Against her better judgment Gillette agrees, knowing that in some critical way she has been sacrificed in the name of art. In the second part of the tale, some three months later, after Frenhofer has expressed doubts about exposing his treasured masterpiece to the eyes of others, the transaction is carried out and Gillette poses nude for Frenhofer in a sealed room. The two secret observers are finally, in turn, permitted a glimpse at Frenhofer's *chef-d'œuvre*, in which they see nothing but a canvas empty of any recognisable human form, bar a single foot. The dismayed Poussin declares out loud what he sees — 'il n'y a rien sur sa toile' (B X 437) — and Frenhofer angrily banishes them from his studio. The next day, he is found dead in his studio amongst the ruins of his burned paintings.

A large swathe of criticism dealing with Balzac's reception of Hoffmann has gathered around their artist tales, *Künstlernovellen* or *contes artistiques*. For Balzac, this amounts to a trio of early texts: *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, *Gambara* and *Massimila Doni*, and a set of essays entitled 'Des Artistes' published in *La Silhouette* in three

instalments from February to April 1830. A range of Hoffmann's texts are drawn on in this context, including the above mentioned *Rat Krespel*, *Die Jesuiterkirche in G.*, *Ritter Gluck* and *Der Artushof*, as well as *Die Elixiere des Teufels* and *Der Baron von B.* Critics have focused on how the deranged artist figures in these texts, 'Heroen des Absoluten' who are blinded by their own ideals,⁴⁹ function as doubles of the authorial figure,⁵⁰ and they have questioned the structural relationships between tales of musical art and tales of visual art.⁵¹ They have broadly agreed on the influence of Hoffmann and of German Romanticism more generally in Balzac's depiction of the frenetic artist consummately embodied in Frenhofer, a character of 'direct Hoffmannesque descent'.⁵² René Guise goes so far as to call *Le Chef-d'œuvre* 'une imitation, voire un pastiche d'Hoffmann'.⁵³

In 1828, *Le Gymnase* — a journal printed 'on Balzac's own press'⁵⁴ — published the first translation of Hoffmann's *Der Baron von B.*, under the title *L'Archet du baron de B.* It was translated for a second time by Loève-Veimars as 'La leçon du violon' in *L'Artiste* only a few months before the first version of *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* was published in the same journal. Critics have repeatedly highlighted the importance of this early *Künstlernovelle* for Balzac. William Paulson calls the first version of *Chef-d'œuvre* 'une refonte, voire un calque' of this story;⁵⁵ Sigbrit Swahn highlights a common literary source, Diderot, whose *Le Neveu de Rameau* Hoffmann had encountered in Goethe's 1805 translation,⁵⁶ and whose influence on Frenhofer's artistic theories Guise has extensively traced in his commentary on *Chef-d'œuvre*.⁵⁷ *Der Baron von B.*, in which a young student,

⁴⁹ Marianne Kesting, 'Das imaginierte Kunstwerk', p. 174: 'Heroes of the Absolute'.

⁵⁰ Sigbrit Swahn, 'Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu, récit hoffmanesque de Balzac'; Tim Farrant, *Balzac's Shorter Fictions*, p. 101.

⁵¹ See Patrizio Collini, 'Iconolâtrie et iconoclastie: "Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu" et le romantisme allemand', *L'Année Balzacienne*, 1.5 (2004), 75-85.

⁵² Sotirios Paraschas, *The Realist Author*, p. 83.

⁵³ René Guise, 'Introduction' [*Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*], B X, pp. 393-412 (p. 410).

⁵⁴ Wayne Connor, 'Reviewed Work(s): Balzac's Frenhofer', *Modern Language Notes* 69.5 (1954), 335-38 (p. 337).

⁵⁵ William Paulson, 'Pour une analyse dynamique de la variation textuelle: *Le Chef-d'œuvre trop connu*.' *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 19.3 (1991), 404-16 (p. 406)

⁵⁶ Swahn, 'Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu', p. 212.

⁵⁷ Guise, 'Notes et Variantes' [*Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*], B X, pp. 1410-28.

encouraged by his mentor, takes music lessons from the renowned Baron, displays all the tropes of the Hoffmannesque *Künstlernovelle*. As in *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, a triangular constellation of men forms in a homosocial 'cross-generational [hierarchy] of masters and pupils'⁵⁸ around the artwork, which in turn is configured as a woman. When the student sees the deluded musician perform for the first time:

Dicht am Stege rutschte er mit dem zitternden Bogen hinauf, schnarrend,
pfeifend, quäkend, miauend — der Ton war dem zu vergleichen, wenn ein altes
Weib, die Brille auf der Nase, sich abquält, den Ton irgend eines Liedes zu
fassen. (H IV 904)⁵⁹

The face of the bespectacled old woman, emerging in a strange kind of musical prosopopoeia, reminiscent perhaps of die alte Liese from *Der goldne Topf*, is the face taken by dissonance itself. In this distinctly unerotic formulation, Hoffmann subverts the image of the female muse associated with the production of art. I will draw my reading from the question of the face encountered by the deluded male artist, showing that *Chef-d'œuvre* as a portrait piece is not so much about a particular face with its particular traits as it is about the shifting, dissonant emergence, the 'unaccustomed form' or strange exchange that a face (or a picture of a face) is. In turn, this reading draws on the puzzling, interfering 'Züge' that both lead Traugott astray and face him with the limitations of his own artistic vision.

My reading of *Chef-d'œuvre* begins in the simple conviction that there is something 'Hoffmannesque' about the application of the artist to the life of his artwork. Enter Frenhofer: the artist-eccentric par excellence, a figure who might well have been lifted straight from a story by Hoffmann, who is often understood as such, and whose face will contour my reading of the text and of Balzac's encounter with Hoffmann within it. Frenhofer is a ready successor of the Serapiontic artist — as 'Wahnsinnige[r], Wiedergänger, Seher, Askete[r] und genial[er] [Poet]' — who is

⁵⁸ Knight, *Balzac and the Model of Painting*, p. 22.

⁵⁹ 'Laying his quivering bow close to the bridge, he slipped up and down on the strings, rasping, whistling, squawking, mewling — the resulting tone was comparable with that of an old woman, spectacles on her nose, straining to hit the tune of some song or other'.

‘darauf eingestellt [...] “mehr zu sehen als das Sichtbare”’.⁶⁰ Numerous commentaries on the text suggest that the image of Frenhofer’s face is a Hoffmannesque one: with its ‘quelque chose de diabolique’ and its ‘barbe grise taillée en pointe’ (B X 414, 422). It has been suggested that *Frenhofer* is a directly Hoffmannesque name⁶¹ — to take such logic a step further, it might even contain a verbal echo of the *Artushof*. There is certainly something to be said for the visual and verbal physiognomy of the Hoffmannesque in this tale. But to gesture towards Hoffmann’s relevance or influence or presence, to recognise his physiognomic cast — ‘La parenté entre Frenhofer et les personnages d’Hoffmann est ici très nette’⁶² — is not grounds enough for such a reading. The cast demands more careful attention. I will show here that Frenhofer, whose ultimate aim is to equate life and art and to exchange the one for the other, is a keen parody of Hoffmann, or rather of the figure of Hoffmann that entered Balzac’s world and artistic practice at this stage of his career. And this will concern figuration itself, in the terms of Auerbach, and with the way in which figuration is staged in the tale: through making incomplete outlines explicit, as in the tale of the Corinthian maid. I will draw on the presence of the artistic outline, as in *Der Artushof*, to suggest that in ekphrastic sequences, Balzac draws on the co-authorship of Hoffmann, and to take seriously the claim made by Alexandra Wettlaufer that the tale ‘evokes the gothic tradition of Hoffmann’s popular tales’ in functioning as ‘a parable of the visual arts that reflected just as self-consciously on the art of narration’.⁶³

In Frenhofer’s spontaneous painting lesson in Porbus’s studio — much of which comprises, as Guise has painstakingly noted, scraps of art theory from Diderot, Gautier and others — the artistic line is at stake from the outset. Frenhofer subordinates the bounding line to the prominence of light and colour, inspired by ‘l’ardeur éblouissante, l’heureuse abondance des peintres italiens’, and positioning himself against the ‘flegme minutieux, la raideur précise’ of Dutch and German

⁶⁰ Günter Oesterle, ‘Die folgenreiche und strittige Konjunktur des Umrisses’, p. 136: ‘Madman, revenant, clairvoyant, ascetic and great poet’; ‘disposed [...] “to see more than the visible”’.

⁶¹ Connor, ‘Balzac’s Frenhofer’.

⁶² Adrien Goetz, ‘Notes’, *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Folio, 1994), pp. 333-81 (p. 341).

⁶³ Alexandra Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac, and the Myth of Pygmalion in post-revolutionary France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 218.

painters (B X 417). ‘La ligne,’ Frenhofer declares, ‘est le moyen par lequel l’homme se rend compte de l’effet de la lumière sur les objets; mais il n’y a pas de lignes dans la nature où tout est plein’ (B X 424-25). The line distinguishes the artwork from what it was, marking its incommensurability with life: for, he points out, ‘le corps humain ne finit pas par des lignes’ (B X 424). The fictional, represented body — the edgy, framed body — is always mediated by lines. In art, lines are always intentional — perhaps even, as Baudelaire suggests, writing on Delacroix, an act of violence: ‘ligne dure cruelle despotique immobile, enfermant une figure comme camisole de force’.⁶⁴

As in *Der Artushof*, lines as a mimetic measure thus represent both the moment at which the artistic act begins as well as a kind of medial interference. Frenhofer’s conception of mimesis, as that of any Serapionitic master, is as an expression, and not merely a copy, of life: ‘La mission de l’art n’est pas de copier la nature, mais de l’exprimer! Tu n’es pas un vil copiste, mais un poète! [...] Nous avons à saisir l’esprit, l’âme, la physionomie des choses et des êtres’ (B X 418). Merely to reproduce a subject’s anatomical outlines, her figure and not her ‘forme’, for Frenhofer, is to fail in this task: ‘vous croyez avoir tout fait lorsque vous avez dessiné correctement une figure et mis chaque chose à sa place d’après les lois de l’anatomie!’ (B X 416). The artist who copies lines produces only flattened or shadow-like versions of images, ‘figures’, which do not truly live: ‘Vos figures sont alors de pâles fantômes coloriés que vous nous promenez devant les yeux, et vous appelez cela de la peinture et de l’art’ (B X 419).

Such images precisely correspond to the characters we have come upon so far in this thesis: characters who have given up something crucial in order to live the half-life bestowed upon them by narrative. This tale is an active and explicit figuration of that loss, giving an account of what is handed over of life in the name of the artwork. The Pygmalion-esque act of rousing life from an image is reflected back by the narrator here as an act of distilling image from text. Where Frenhofer calls upon the lexicon of the poet to articulate the task of the painter, the writer here calls back to the artist. The tensions and similarities between these arts, and the shifting hierarchy between them, are expressed in his essay ‘Des Artistes’, in which: ‘Il est de la peinture comme de la poésie, comme de tous les arts; elle se constitue de plusieurs

⁶⁴ Cited in Oesterle, ‘Die folgenreiche und strittige Konjunktur des Umrisses’, p. 31.

qualités: la couleur, la composition, l'expression'.⁶⁵ We see this dialogue activated most readily in the *tableau* introducing Frenhofer:

Un vieillard vint à monter l'escalier. À la bizarrerie de son costume, à la prépondérante sécurité de sa démarche, le jeune homme devina dans ce personnage ou le protecteur ou l'ami du peintre. Il se recula sur le palier pour lui faire place, et l'examina curieusement, espérant trouver en lui la bonne nature d'un artiste, ou le caractère serviable des gens qui aiment les arts; mais il y avait quelque chose de diabolique dans cette figure, et surtout ce *je ne sais quoi* qui affriande les artistes. Imaginez un front chauvé, bombé, proéminent, retombant en saillie sur un petit nez écrasé, retroussé du bout comme celui de Rabelais ou de Socrate; une bouche rieuse et ridée, un menton court, fièrement relevé, garni d'une barbe grise taillée en pointe [...]. Mettez cette tête sur un corps fluet et débile, entourez-la d'une dentelle étincelante de blancheur et travaillée comme une truelle à poisson, jetez sur le pourpoint noir du vieillard une lourde chaîne d'or, et vous aurez une image imparfaite de ce personnage auquel le jour faible de l'escalier prêtait encore une couleur fantastique. Vous eussiez dit une toile de Rembrandt marchant silencieusement et sans cadre dans la noire atmosphère que s'est appropriée ce grand peintre. (B X 414-15)

Yvette Went-Daoust calls this a sequence of 'écriture picturale': comprising a *tableau*, as she notes, through engaging a 'métalanguage de la peinture' and allowing the character to take shape 'comme s'il oeuvrait sur une toile'.⁶⁶ The canvas unfolds before the perspective of Poussin, the apprentice painter, who is himself described only cursorily — bringing him into alignment with Traugott, through whose artist eyes *Der Artushof* begins. Critics have variously noted how the character description of Frenhofer colludes with, or contradicts, his own artistic theories. Andrew Piper, calling Frenhofer an 'extraordinarily linearized hero', draws this description into a dialogue with Frenhofer's own discourse on the line.⁶⁷ But this epithet needs

⁶⁵ Balzac, 'Des Artistes', in *Œuvres diverses*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1990-6), II, 707-20 (p. 719).

⁶⁶ Yvette Went-Daoust, 'Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu de Balzac ou l'écriture picturale', in *Description-Écriture-Peinture*, ed. by Yvette Went-Daoust (Groningen: CRIN, 1987), pp. 48-64 (pp. 49, 53).

⁶⁷ Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, p. 218.

modification, for later in the tale we see Frenhofer all colour and trembling pools of flesh: ‘ses yeux avaient de l’éclat et de la vie; ses joues pâles étaient nuancées d’un rouge vif, et ses mains tremblaient’ (B X 432). In this sense, as line gives way to light and colour, the character description calls upon the painterly discourse of Frenhofer himself by moving between line and colour.

It is not least in those painterly imperatives — ‘Imaginez’, ‘Mettez’, ‘Vous eussiez dit’ — that the writer here engages the language of the visual artist, in what we might call an *ekphrastic* passage, aiming to mediate between visual and written signs. It is also here that Balzac’s narrator recalls the narrator of *Der Artushof*, by making the outline, the means by which the figure comes to life, explicit, and explicitly incomplete, calling for the collaboration of the viewer or reader. In Murray Krieger’s work on ekphrasis, the ekphrastic principle is first defined as clearly supposing ‘that one art, poetry, is defining its mission through its dependence on the mission of another art — painting, sculpture, or others’. He then expands this definition in multiple directions, suggesting that ekphrastic writing tries ‘to force its words, despite their normal way of functioning as empty signs, to take on a substantive configuration — in effect to become an emblem’. And, finally: ‘Ekphrastic ambition gives to the language art the extraordinary assignment of seeking to represent the literally unrepresentable’.⁶⁸

We have seen Hoffmann engage a similar language in the opening sequence of *Der Artushof*. In a following sequence, his call upon the language of painting becomes yet more explicit:

Wohl könnte ich dir, günstiger Leser! die fünf Personen, während sie bei Tische sitzen, bildlich vor Augen bringen, ich werde aber nur zu flüchtigen Umrissen gelangen, und zwar viel schlechteren als wie sie Traugott in dem ominösen Avisobriefe recht verwegen hinkritzelte, denn bald ist das Mahl geendet, und die wundersame Geschichte des wackern Traugott, die ich für dich, günstiger Leser! aufzuschreiben unternommen, reißt mich fort mit unwiderstehlicher Gewalt! (H IV 181)⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 6-9.

⁶⁹ ‘Of the five people at that dinner table I might, kind reader! offer you so lively a picture that you would believe you saw them before your eyes; but the meal lasted only a short while, and the strange

The narrator here, as in the case of Balzac, plays at being a bad painter. These parallel strategies of hypotyposis both, in accounting for pictures by means of writing, question the hierarchy of the sister arts. They might, on the one hand, ‘posit the inferiority [of writing] vis-à-vis painting, since, in order to describe, writing must resort to the suggestion of the image’.⁷⁰ Conversely, as critics including Went-Daoust, William J. Berg and Wettlaufer have convincingly concluded, they might suggest the triumph of the writer, heralding ‘his own powers of visual representation’ over ‘the failures of his fictitious painter’.⁷¹

Wettlaufer goes on to point out, however, that ‘an image is an *image* and, whether painted or described, will always be imperfect, falling short of the reality of lived experience’.⁷² In either case, what our narrators are left with is an ‘image imparfaite’ or ‘flüchtige Umrisse’: the *figure*, not the form, ‘La forme’, being for Frenhofer, ‘un Protée bien plus insaisissable et plus fertile en replis que le Protée de la fable; ce n’est qu’après de longs combats qu’on peut la contraindre à se montrer sous son véritable aspect’ (B X 418-19). These tales of failed image-making are both mediated by a narrator who admits to being able to achieve only the compromise of the shadowy *Ebenbild* or semblance. Thus, figuration, as a way of making the outline of a shadow explicit, serves to subordinate character to the mediating or interfering line, as in the final predicament of Traugott’s ideal in *Der Artushof*: ‘Sie hatte die Züge der Felizitas, sie war es aber nicht’ (H IV 201).⁷³

Ekphrasis is an endless problem in these texts, whose masterpieces are submerged under the ramblings of deluded master painters. The framing narrative voice claims to

tale of valiant Traugott which I have undertaken to indite for you urges me irresistibly forward, so that I must present them to you in only the most fleeting outline, in sketches far inferior, indeed, to those with which Traugott daringly covered that fateful letter of advice’.

⁷⁰ Roland Le Huenen, ‘Reflections on Balzacian Models of Representation’, trans. by Paul Perron, in *Honoré de Balzac*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Yale: Chelsea House, 2003), pp. 51-60 (p. 52).

⁷¹ Went-Daoust, ‘Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu de Balzac’; William J. Berg, ‘The Modern Pygmalion: Balzac and Daumier’, in *Imagery and Ideology: Fiction and Painting in Nineteenth-Century France* (Newark : University of Delaware Press, 2010), pp. 70-91; this quotation Alexandra Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush*, p. 221.

⁷² Alexandra Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush*, p. 221.

⁷³ ‘She possessed the features of Felizitas, but it was not she’.

have seized the methods and language of the painter at the same time as he undermines them. Balzac draws upon Hoffmann's co-authorship in order to re-iterate the stakes of the pact. Frenhofer the painter is the Germanic, Faustian creature who believes that he can equate life and art, can make the one stand in for the other:

‘Eh bien! le voilà!’ leur dit le vieillard dont les cheveux étaient en désordre, dont le visage était enflammé par une exaltation surnaturelle, dont les yeux pétillaient, et qui haletait comme un jeune homme ivre d’amour. — Ah! ah! s’écria-t-il, vous ne vous attendiez pas à tant de perfection! Vous êtes devant une femme et vous cherchez un tableau. [...] N’ai-je pas bien saisi la couleur, le vif de la ligne qui paraît terminer le corps?’ (B X 435)

Hoffmann's co-authorship in Balzac's text is brought into play not only in the character portrait of Frenhofer but in the excursions and deliberations of the painterly narrative voice. In the parodied wish for words to work as images, this ekphrastic voice sardonically recognises the demonic frenzy, and the inevitable failure, of the mimetic project.

This project is recognised as one of making the outline of the figure explicit. And it exacts a definite demand on its reader. Naomi Segal defines realism as ‘how a sense of material reality is represented in a verbal artefact that makes certain demands on readers to believe or not to believe, assent or not assent’. This material complicity, or ‘assent’, involved in reading takes place between writer and reader, at the body's borders, the ends of ourselves and the start of the other. What this means, perhaps, is that we read by means of edges, and that there is always a risk involved; that ‘Any approach to any text is a fantasmatic adventure of the body’.⁷⁴ The body at stake here is of course the body of the woman, in the form of the model, Gillette, and her reproduction as Catherine Lescault (or, in earlier versions of the text, as *La Belle Noiseuse*). And the body is reduced to a foot, a surviving fragment of the mimetic project and of what it might have been.

There are several ways in which a reader must pay, materially, for access into the tale, for its legibility. There is an affective aspect, feeling, in the sense of that

⁷⁴ Naomi Segal, ‘The Body in the Library: Adventures in Realism’, *Romance Studies*, 30 (2012), 199-208 (pp. 199-200).

body-shocking acknowledgement of newness in the old form, ‘the changing aspect of the permanent’. There is also time, for reading takes time, and time ages us: ‘[R]eading,’ Garrett Stewart writes, ‘is always a putting in of body time [...] including the prolonged, fluctuating engagement of the nervous system and its multiple affective and physiological registers’.⁷⁵ Time is a particular problem in ekphrasis, which intends ‘to interrupt the temporality of discourse, to freeze it during its indulgence in spatial exploration’,⁷⁶ always questioning the narrative capacities of text and image, probing our assumptions about the momentariness of image, and the time it takes to read.

There is something like a contortion involved in reading, and this is particularly evident in a work of supposedly abstract art like Frenhofer’s painting. It is an effort even to view such a portrait properly: Porbus and Poussin, once inside the sealed room facing the portrait, must twist and turn to look at her, ‘en se mettant à droite, à gauche, de face, en se baissant et se levant tour à tour’ (B X 436), a scene that recalls the sequence in *La Peau de chagrin* when Raphaël sees the piece of skin for the first time and must study it ‘sous toutes les faces’ in order to read it. And it is recalled, again, in the epigraph of the text, in the five rows of dots beneath ‘À un Lord’, which like the arabesque of *La Peau de chagrin* seems to mimic, in emblematic form, the feel of reading. Reading — following and metabolising with my eyes the patterned lines of ink across a surface — seems often to want to leave me out as much as it wants to let me in. The outcome of the tale, for Wettlaufer, is ‘a final refusal of the “realism” of the painted image and a stark illustration of the futility of trying to instill art, or confuse art, with life’.⁷⁷ At its apex, in an echo of its ‘opening’ scene before the ‘heurtoir grotesque’, the reader is left outside a sealed-off room, at whose door one artist strains to relate to another the painting of his lover by a third.

IV

The genealogy of living portraits and of writerly Pygmalions casts a long line through the literature of the nineteenth century. Narratives that challenge the equation of art

⁷⁵ Garret Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 3.

⁷⁶ Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, p. 8.

⁷⁷ Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush*, p. 248.

with life, in the pattern of *Der Artushof* and *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, include Poe's *The Oval Portrait*, James's *The Madonna of the Future* and Zola's *L'Œuvre*.⁷⁸ Balzac's tale was, famously, taken up by Post-Impressionist and Modernist artists, including Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso. Barthes writes that 'la lecture du portrait "réaliste" n'est pas une lecture réaliste: c'est une lecture cubiste'.⁷⁹ In the 'Cubist' piece, we are forced to read through the turnings and torqueings of the internal viewers Porbus and Poussin, as well as through their narration and commentary, such that we are doubly removed from the image by its frames, lines, edges.

But as well as looking forward to Modernism's eschewal of conventional modes of representation, the effort or strain required in the reading also looks back, as I have shown, to a Hoffmannesque ekphrasis, in which the narrative voice playfully draws attention to the lines with which he has begun to sketch his tale. We may liken this 'strain' in reading to the effort demanded by the anamorphic image. Such images require a contortion, an oblique strain, to be read aright. 'The anamorphic image,' writes Piper, 'was one that required the reader-viewer to move one's eye and body to make something legible'.⁸⁰ The portrait produced by the daguerreotype, of which Balzac was apparently so fearful, also required its own strain to be read: a 'tilting this way and that to bring the image into view'.⁸¹ Hoffmann writes of his fascination for anamorphosis in an entry in his *Notizheft* from 1821:

Ein sehr schönes Bild ist von den sogenannten deformierten Gemälden herzunehmen. — Es sind z.B. auf einer Tapete verschiedene Theile, Züge eines Bildes verstreut, so daß man nichts deutliches wahrnimmt, aber ein besonders dazu geschliffnes Glas vereinigt die verstreuten Züge, und durch dasselbe schauend erblickt man das Bild.⁸²

⁷⁸ See Kesting, 'Das Lebendige Portrait', *Athenäum* 3 (1993), 27-54.

⁷⁹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993-2002), III, 119-340 (p. 169)

⁸⁰ Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, p. 217.

⁸¹ Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 163.

⁸² Cited in Oesterle, 'Die folgenreiche und strittige Konuktur des Umrisses', p. 124: 'A very beautiful image can be extracted from the so-called deformed paintings. — There are, for example, various pieces, traits [*Züge*] of an image, scattered across a carpet, so that one perceives nothing clearly, but a

The oblique dispersal of ‘Züge’, which gather in formation to suggest a projected form, is resonant of the contours in *Der Artushof*, the constituent lines of a duplicitous *Trugbild*. Every scene of reading or of ekphrasis, in image or text, occasions a particular internal doubling, where the reader’s site of reading encounters the narrator’s or fictional character’s site of reading, or indeed of painting. Traugott and Poussin, apprentice painters and consummate observers, become the sites of such doubling. And like in many doubles, the result is not an intensification of feeling so much as it is a fracturing or splintering: such that the result is the sense of having not the whole thing, but only the figure, an ‘image imparfaite’.

If legibility is enjoined to the feel of reading as much as to the sense that reading yields — the line, in Chapter Two, tickles the eye and, in so doing, the hand — then legibility is staged in *Chef-d’œuvre*, in the figures of men facing up to a canvas, or rather trying to face it in anamorphic re-positionings. *Chef-d’œuvre* is a bodily piece, full of gesture and panting and blushing, poising and posing — and yet it is a piece without an intact body: a point made clear by its fragment of a foot. It is a text about re-touching and -telling. Not only does it deal with Frenhofer’s re-touchings, as he daubs excess paint over what was once a figure, but the tale itself was subject to a series of revisions. Four distinct versions exist, dating from 1831 to 1847, with the 1837 version adding to the original script two extra pages of Frenhofer’s theories on artistic method. Like *La Peau de chagrin*, it peaks in a submission, a giving-over of life for art. If it is a ‘pastiche’ of a Hoffmannesque theme, then the subject of the pastiche is not merely the look of the demonic Frenhofer, but his own artistic practice, and its oblique co-option by the narrator. Both attempt to put life on a level with art. What kind of a degeneration, disfiguration, does life undergo when it is equated with a set of lines on a canvas or page? Balzac insistently draws on Hoffmann in his articulation of this question. The ‘pastiche’, figured in the character of Frenhofer and in the very figuration of the narrator, will become both more explicit and more contradictory in the next chapter, in which Balzac incorporates the figure of Hoffmann in the prefatory claims of one of his most gruesome and fantastic works.

glass polished especially for that purpose unites the scattered traits, and through that glass one sees the image’.

Chapter 5: Cross

Die Elixiere des Teufels and L'Élixir de longue vie

I.

For the protagonists assembled across this thesis, something crucial is to be gained or lost in the playing out of fiction. Mimesis, in the sequence of chapters here, has come to mark a moment of interaction, one in which the protagonist makes a wager against the world, or — as is so often the case in these tales — when he or she signs a pact with a devilish figure, handing over something vital in return for a fiction or vision. The readings here began in Chapter Two with a claim about the entry into narrative. To read or to tell, as that chapter suggested, means to cross over into a fictional narrative and to be crossed by the narrative in turn. This is a formulation of the figure I identified in Chapter One as Merleau-Ponty's 'chiasm', which describes the moment in which the subject, in turning to the world, returns upon him- or herself as a material participant within the world. At this moment of crossover or interlacing (*entrelacs*), the subject is aligned with the orders both of subject and of object, as the viewer and the visible, as body touching and touched.

This chapter will settle on the figure of the 'cross' as a visual key for such a moment of encounter and as a particular confoundment of the narrative line. The cross, as an intersection, denotes the crossroads, an opening of ways, but also the crossfire or the exchange of blows. To be 'crossed', in another context, means to be afflicted or marked. We might be reminded of Anselmus of *Der Goldne Topf*, who laments 'Wahr ist es doch, ich bin zu allem möglichen Kreuz und Elend geboren!' (H II.1 231).¹ Before it came to denote the intersection of two lines, the word 'cross' referred to the crucifix and to the effigies made in its shape.² The verb to 'cross',

¹ 'In truth, I am born to all possible crosses and misery!'

² The first entry for 'cross' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is 'The instrument of crucifixion with its representations and *fig.* applications. A kind of gibbet used by the ancients (and in later times by some non-Christian nations); a stake, generally with a transverse bar, on which they put to a cruel and ignominious death certain criminals, who were nailed or otherwise fastened to it by their extremities'.

'Cross, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/44807?rskey=wCuVcp&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 18 January 2017].

accordingly, meant ‘to make the sign of the cross’ long before it came to mean ‘to intersect’. To ‘cross’, then, bears the frustrated history of a sacrifice.

Die Elixiere des Teufels and *L'Élixir de longue vie* both feature images of Christian crosses in the context of a darkly playful Gothic anticlericalism. And the cross features in both texts as a structural element, as a confusion or contradiction of the narrative line. For Medardus of *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, hounded by his double, lines of genealogy and inheritance proliferate, as if deliberately set against one another. This culminates in a moment at which a particular cross-shaped scar on his neck fails to do its identificatory work, and his second self is permitted to live on as an imposter. In *L'Élixir de longue vie*, lines of genealogy and inheritance are confounded by a Faustian attempt to prolong life indefinitely — an attempt that ends in gruesome misadventure. *L'Élixir*, by consciously evoking Hoffmann's text in its preface, furthermore begins explicitly to draw out the stakes of this particular literary encounter.

Read alongside (or across) one another, the two narratives tell the story of a specific inheritance — the inheritance, we might say, of a certain ‘Gothic’ narrative extravagance. The term ‘Gothic’ indicates not a homogenous movement so much as the emergence of a set of literary trends, images and forms from a process of European ‘cultural cross-fertilization’ during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³ These two texts provide an example of one such intersection. The Gothic afterlife of Hoffmann's text in Balzac's, I shall show, is played out across the body. My chapter will move from a set of close readings of *Elixiere* to a more literary-historical analysis of *L'Élixir*, as in accordance with the logic of my argument, I examine the question of inheritance and crossover between them. The cross-shaped scar on Medardus's neck in *Elixiere* comes to signify the protagonist's impossibly doubled identity. The fantastic ointment in *L'Élixir*, in being applied to the skin, impossibly lengthens a dying man's life. The forms of life that persist in both are garbled, feeding into a trajectory of Gothic bodies that resonates, across the nineteenth century, with the memory of Hoffmann's artificial and cloned bodies, automata and *Doppelgänger*.

L'Élixir de longue vie is the only one of Balzac's narratives to acknowledge Hoffmann explicitly as an influence in its preface — a preface that was added to the

³ Neil Cornwell, ‘European Gothic’, in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 64-76 (p. 68).

tale on its incorporation into *La Comédie humaine*, sixteen years after its first publication in *La Revue de Paris*. Another fantastic Balzacian *conte*, *Sarrasine*, published in the issue directly preceding this one, had borne the epigraph: ‘Croyez-vous que l’Allemagne ait seule le privilège d’être absurde et fantastique?’⁴ — a response, of course, to the vogue for Hoffmann exploding in the Parisian literary reviews at that time. When *Sarrasine* was included in the *Scènes de la vie parisienne* in 1844, its epigraph was erased and replaced by a dedication to Charles de Bernard, who as we saw in Chapter 2 had published a review of *La Peau de chagrin* in 1831, claiming it to be a text of explicitly Hoffmannesque descent. Where one Hoffmannesque preface was removed, another more veiled one was re-inserted, and shortly afterwards *L’Élixir de longue vie* gained its own explicitly Hoffmannesque preface. The recognition of Hoffmann in these early works is thus characterised by the appearance and disappearance of attributions and prefaces. As we will see, his is the figure of somebody remembered and recognised, but not quite, or not quite in full, like a spectral ‘ami, mort depuis longtemps’ (B XI 473), or a source text attributed to the wrong author, or a signature with an indistinct form. These variants — drawn, crossed out and compulsively re-drawn — resemble the anonymous faces or the impossible shapes of intertextual resonance: of a troubled literary crossover.

II. *Die Elixiere des Teufels*

Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, a religious confession of a most bewildering sort, demonstrates in lurid terms the fear of the mimetic crossing. For the monk Medardus, for whom the text serves as confessional autobiography, to have confessed — to have made a crossing into narrative — means to confront the narrative self in its very wildest formulations. The novel takes the form of the written confession by Franz, alias Medardus, presented to the reader by the putative *Herausgeber*, who claims to have found his near-illegible manuscript in the Capuchin monastery at ‘B.’. In it we read how, as a young monk, Medardus tastes an antique wine kept in the reliquary believed to be the elixir with which the devil tempted St. Anthony. Related to this, though not in a strictly causal sense, Medardus, discovering within himself a keen talent for oration, learns the seductive hubris of preaching at the pulpit. As his

⁴ Pierre Citron, ‘Notes et Variantes’ [*Sarrasine*], in B VI, p. 1544.

throng of exalted spectators grow, so does his arrogance. He also learns the first temptations of the flesh, wracked by desire for a young woman whom he identifies with the painting of St. Rosalia hanging above the altar. Eventually Prior Leonardus, disconcerted by the young monk's restless behaviour, sends him on an errand to Rome. Armed with a bottle of the devil's wine, and already determined to go his own way, Medardus sets out. His journey has scarcely begun when he unwittingly causes a sleeping nobleman to fall from the edge of a ravine, the *Teufelsgrund*. Oblivious that the stranger, Graf Viktorin, will rise, in near demonic state, from his fall, and that their lives are to run from now on in an abysmal 'Kreuzsymmetrie' ('cross-symmetry'),⁵ Medardus takes on the count's identity. From this moment on, he follows a path of murder, attempted rape, repentance, self-chastisement and imprisonment — first in jail and then in an asylum — and is haunted throughout by a series of returning figures, including the figure of *der alte Maler* ('the old painter') and Viktorin, who has come to play the part of Medardus's delirious *Doppelgänger*.

Medardus's grim narrative breaks off in the second part of the novel and crosses into a set of others, including that of *der alte Maler*, whose genealogical account of Medardus's ancestry seems to explain the mysterious identities at play in his story. According to this account, Viktorin is his half-brother: both are the descendants of a line of sinful men, the first of whom, Francesko, the painter of the image of St. Rosalia back in the chapel at B., was seduced by a succubus-like woman in league with the devil. The implication is that Medardus/Franz is part of a line marked by generations of inherited wrongdoings: a line that will now, with his written confession, come to an end. When Medardus finally returns to his monastery, Prior Leonardus instructs him to write down his life story as penance for his sins. The intricately wrought novel shows in no uncertain terms that a life may not be reduced to a single reading. Attention is drawn to this by means of the ironic 'Faden' ('thread'), a motif taken up at several points in the narrative only to be broken or knotted into confusion, revealing how bafflingly non-linear the story's trajectory is. The 'thread' or line of narrative logic is confounded, as I shall show, by the paradoxical structure of the cross: the line cloned in a kind of cross-fertilisation and at odds with its own double.

⁵ Detlef Kremer, 'Gebrochene Identität mit Doppelgänger: *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815/16)', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Erzählungen und Romane* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1999), pp. 40-63 (p. 54).

In criticism on *Elixiere*, two distinct trajectories emerge relating to the structure of the novel. The first is of those broadly deconstructionist accounts, most prominently Manfred Momberger's and Sarah Kofman's, that assign it to the representation of the wild dispersal of an 'Ich' deprived of any stable identity.⁶ They see the novel to be in excess of its historical context, a bald anachronism on the track to modernity. The second consists of accounts, most recently and notably Ricarda Schmidt's, that insist on the novel's inherent structural order, be it genealogical or psychological, informed by patterns of doubling and repetition.⁷ Such accounts insist on a teleology, drawing attention to the fact, for example, that Medardus scarcely deviates, 'kaum merklich [...] abgewichen [ist]', from 'der Reiseroute, die mir Leonardus bezeichnet', from the path set out for him by Leonardus (H II.2 122). Or they anchor it within the context of German Romanticism, likening it to Schlegel's conception of the artwork as 'gebildetes künstliches Chaos' ('formulated artistic chaos'), or to a masterpiece of romantic irony;⁸ or relate it to literary-historical trends, whether as *Bildungsroman*, *Schauerroman* or *Stammbaumroman*.⁹ These various identificatory labels might themselves be a symptomatic response to a text that crosses between genres, as a kind of literary hybrid. My reading here intends to account for some of the more complex knots in the novel's narrative structure, aligning itself broadly with Momberger, who convincingly argues that the 'Kernproblem' ('core problem') of the text is 'das Problem der Mimesis' ('the problem of mimesis'). Building from his claim that 'Die Unterscheidung zwischen

⁶ Momberger, *Sonne und Punsch*; Sarah Kofman, 'Vautour rouge (Le double dans *les Élixirs du diable* d'Hoffmann)', in *Mimésis des articulations*, ed. by Sylviane Agacinski and others (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), pp. 95-163.

⁷ Ricarda Schmidt, 'Narrative Strukturen romantischer Subjektivität in E. T. A. Hoffmanns *Die Elixiere des Teufels* und *Der Sandmann*', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 49 (1999), 143-160.

⁸ Allienne Becker, "'Alice Doane's Appeal": A literary Double of Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 23.1 (1986), 1-11 (p. 3).

⁹ *Bildungsroman*, Gothic novel, or genealogical novel. See, for example, Eric A. Blackall who writes in *The Novels of the German Romantics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) that 'The structure of *Die Elixiere* is clearly a geometrical progression. [...] It is a study of the surfacing of the subconscious' (p. 235). Sabine Kleine argues for a reading of *Elixiere* as a *Bildungsroman*, suggesting that it tracks 'the individuation of the protagonist in terms of his education and growth to maturity through contact with the world. The way into the world is identical with the way to the self'. In 'Elixiere des Teufels: Notes on E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Black Romanticism" and the idealist critical response', *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 91.1 (1999), 27-44 (p. 39).

Ebenbild und Trugbild, zwischen Kopie und Simulacrum [...] wird in diesem Roman fragwürdig',¹⁰ I intend to move beyond the reading of a Platonic distrust of appearances to show how mimesis is made a phenomenological problem in this text: a problem experienced on the visual field, but also felt, sensed in the body, and registered across the skin. To this end, I will also draw on the work of a third strand of *Elixiere* critics, those who focus on the artistic and media-historical aspects of the novel — in particular, Peter von Matt, Detlef Kremer, Friedrich Kittler, and Claudia Liebrand.¹¹

Elixiere, I will show, provides grounds for a reading of the fear of the double resonant not just on a psychological level but on the level of artistic mimesis, and with the body at stake. Artistry or 'Kunstfertigkeit', as Liebrand argues, comes in this novel at a devilish cost.¹² By explicitly animating the compulsion to narrate, the novel draws attention to moments when narrative trajectories cross over or into one another. A 'cross' marks the arbitrary point where two trajectories meet. As a bunching together or branching out of ways, the cross here marks the point at which the subject's identity is set shaking. As an emblem for this doubling or fracturing of ways, the cross is an endlessly replicated image in a novel where the way forward is never clear. And it is a violent image, too: for something of the body, of the sensuous self, is inevitably lost — sacrificed — in the crossing.

As Hoffmann's first novel, *Elixiere* plays with and re-works its generic form, mimicking tropes typical of the Gothic novel or *Schauerroman*, not least of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, a work that occupies a crucial intertextual position within Hoffmann's work as the novel read by Aurelie, Medardus's half-sister and almost-lover (whom he attempts at various points to rape and kill). Indeed, *Elixiere* returns compulsively to the act of reading. Hoffmann would come to exploit the tradition for framing stories within stories most fully in *Die Serapionsbrüder*. *Elixiere*, too, is a novel concerned specifically with the moment of crossover from one narrative into another, and with the shifting relationships of those narratives to one another. The

¹⁰ Momberger, *Sonne und Punsch*, p. 156: 'The distinction between likeness and illusion, between copy and simulacrum [...] becomes uncertain in this novel'.

¹¹ Peter von Matt, *Die Augen der Automaten*; Detlef Kremer, 'Gebrochene Identität mit Doppelgänger'; Friedrich Kittler, 'Die Laterna magica der Literatur. Schillers und Hoffmanns Medienstrategien', *Athenäum*, 4 (1994), 219-237; Claudia Liebrand, *Aporie des Kunstmythos*.

¹² Liebrand, *Aporie des Kunstmythos*, p. 68.

preface of the *Herausgeber*, the inheritor of Medardus's papers, sets this chain of interlocking readings in motion:

Entschlieest du dich [...] mit dem Medardus, als seist du sein treuer Gefahrte, durch finstre Kreuzgnge und Zellen — durch die bunte — bunteste Welt zu ziehen, und mit ihm das Schauerliche, Entsetzliche, Tolle, Possenhafte seines Lebens zu ertragen, so wirst du dich vielleicht an den mannigfachen Bildern der Camera obscura, die sich dir aufgetan, ergtzen. — Es kann auch kommen, da das gestaltlossscheinende, so wie du schrfer es ins Auge fassst, sich dir bald deutlich und rund darstellt. (H II.2 12)¹³

What is shapeless, 'das gestaltlossscheinende', the editor distinctly suggests, will in our reading gain shape. As with the image of the Balzacian arabesque, what looks like mess will configure itself into order. What was an illegible thing of touch, the 'unleserliche mnchische Handschrift' (H II.2 12: 'illegible monastic handwriting'), will be transformed, in being read, into a series of images. Kittler identifies in this passage a medial transformation from word to image: 'unter Bedingungen zugewandter Lesergunst, geht das Medium Alphabet in Optik ber'.¹⁴ Like Medardus, or with him, we are to read images projected, as if into a camera obscura, into the monastery's darkened *Kreuzgnge*: its crossed or crossing ways. The paranoia and frustration engendered by the claustrophobic recurrence of cloisters and cells — episodes, like the time Medardus spends in jail, of suffocating over-proximity — are intensified by this topography of *Kreuzgnge*, crossed narrative passages that seem always to arrive back at the same point. The dubious reward, the stakes for our sympathetic suffering, our 'ertragen' as we follow Medardus through them, are only for those delirious images to appear more lifelike. In the *Herausgeber*'s promise, then

¹³ 'If you decide to accompany Medardus through gloomy cloisters and cells, through the lurid episodes of his passage through the world, and to bear the horror, the fear, the madness, the ludicrous perversity of his life as if you were his faithful companion — then, maybe, you will derive some pleasure from those glimpses of a *camera obscura* which have been vouchsafed to you. — It may even be that, as you look more closely, what seemed formless will become clear and rounded in form'.

¹⁴ Kittler, 'Die Laterna magica der Literatur', p. 220: 'under the conditions of devoted readerly favour, the medium of alphabet passes into optics'.

— his caveat or preface for what is to come — legibility, madness and lifelikeness congregate under the act of readership.

Medardus's life-story, presented as a document salvaged from history, depends on the prominence of two separate documents alluded to or included within it: the legend of St. Anthony, which in manuscript form accompanies the devil's elixir hidden in the reliquary; and the painter's manuscript, given to Medardus by Prior Leonardus. The first of these, the text of St. Anthony, introduces the devil's elixirs into the novel. Potions and poisons, as a Gothic trope, are life-altering items, existing to be consumed, and, in being consumed, initiating a break or a turn in the course of a narrative. Medardus's elixirs are brought into the text in a discussion between Medardus and Cyrillus of the authenticity of religious relics. Medardus confesses his doubts as to the provenance of these relics: 'So z. B. besitzt irgend ein Kloster das ganze Kreuz unsers Erlösers, und doch zeigt man überall wieder so viel Späne davon, daß [...] unser Kloster ein ganzes Jahr hindurch damit geheizt werden könnte' (H II.2 33).¹⁵ Cyrillus objects that the spiritual importance of such objects lies not in their origins but in the stories told about them, in their narrative identities: 'das, wofür man sie ausgibt' ('what they are claimed to be'). It is in the shadow of these words that Medardus, back in the dark *Reliquienkammer*, succumbs to the elixirs:

Glut strömte durch meine Adern und erfüllte mich mit dem Gefühl
unbeschreiblichen Wohlseins — ich trank noch einmal, und die Lust eines
neuen herrlichen Lebens ging mir auf! [...] Ein buntes Bild jug das andere bei
dem, wie aus tiefem Schlaf ausgerüttelten Geiste vorüber. (H II.2 47)¹⁶

The *Elixiere* may have no devilish powers at all. They smell suspiciously like Syracusan wine (H II.2 44). The 'Strom' ('current') they release — of alcohol and fumes but also Medardus's verbal 'Feuerstrom' (H II.1, 49: 'current of fire') at the pulpit — is only a doubled version of the first convulsive 'Strom der Rede' (H II.2 41:

¹⁵ 'A certain monastery, for example, possesses the whole of the Saviour's cross, yet, so many pieces of it are displayed in various places that [...] they would provide our monastery with firewood for a whole year'.

¹⁶ 'My veins glowed and I was filled with a feeling of indescribable satisfaction — I drank again, and there arose in me the desire for a new and splendid life! [...] One vivid impression after another passed through my mind, as if I had been shaken from a deep slumber'.

‘current of words’) that he delivered when preaching before. His preaching, as Kittler points out, has already seen a transmedial shift from written to oral language: when Medardus begins to preach, he need no longer think of his writing, ‘[denkt] nicht mehr an die Handschrift’ (H II.2 38: ‘[thinks] no more of his handwriting’). This shift, as I have begun to suggest, is crucial for a novel so concerned with acts of writing and inscribing, because it has to do with an understanding of reading as a set of synaesthetic releases from the strictures of script — shifts between touch, vision, and sound — by which handwritten script gains life and body. It calls back to the enlivenment of written language seen in *La Peau de chagrin* and *Der goldne Topf*, in which written lines merge fluidly between letters and images. Drinking the elixirs, for Medardus, is to enact one of these shifts but it is only a doubled version of what has already been. The elixirs, then, provide a concrete instance of how narrative lines are confounded in this work. If we are to read the text by means of its elixirs, the text takes on a particular form. They suggest that Medardus is, at least in part, being played by the devil, resembling an object controlled by unknown forces. This is the narrative Medardus himself adopts when explaining himself to the Pope: ‘Wie ein von giftigen Dünsten geschwängertes Wasser gab er Kraft dem bösen Keim, der in mir ruhete, daß er fortzuwuchern vermochte!’ (H II.2 300).¹⁷ To follow the logic of the conversation between Medardus and Cyrillus in the *Reliquienkammer*, this may be a false reading — the elixirs might be nothing but wine; Medardus was preaching before he ever opened the bottle — but it need not be an invalid one. Not every proclaimed splinter of the cross might be ‘das, wofür man [es] ausgibt’, but the doubt in its authenticity is not enough to cut those narratives short. Its copied or repeated versions are permitted to live out their narrative lives such that those copies cross back into the original.

Hoffmann’s deftness in *Elixiere* consists in creating multiple, distinct narrative trajectories that allow for discordant, if not exactly contradictory, interpretations of Medardus’s predicament. Victoria Dutchman-Smith, for one, has given a lucid account of the role of the devil’s drink, suggesting that it unfolds a set of symbols and structures that embrace a ‘conscious fluidity and doubling of narratives’.¹⁸ The second major ‘doubling’ of the narrative occurs in the *Pergamentblatt* of the painter. Peter

¹⁷ ‘Like water teeming with foul odours it gave strength to the seed of evil latent within me, so that it grew rampant!’

¹⁸ Victoria Dutchman-Smith, *E. T. A. Hoffmann and Alcohol*, p. 155.

von Matt draws great significance from the inclusion of this document, using it as a basis for a reading of *Elixiere* as a *Künstlerroman*.¹⁹ Once again, the *Herausgeber*'s promise that messy images will cohere into intelligibility seems to hold — almost word for word this time for, fittingly, Leonardus describes how what had previously resembled ‘verworrenes Gekritzeln’ in the manuscript ‘nur dann erst erkennbar und lesbar wurde, als du, mein lieber Bruder Medardus! mir gebeichtet hattest’ (H II.2 274).²⁰ Life and text, it seems, might only be made intelligible by means of one another. Medardus, indeed, recognises the life depicted in the manuscript to be his:

Das, was der Maler auf den letzten Seiten des Buchs in kleiner, kaum lesbarer bunt gefärbter Schrift zusammen getragen hatte, waren meine Träume, meine Ahnungen, nur deutlich, bestimmt in scharfen Zügen dargestellt, wie ich es niemals zu tun vermochte. (H II.2 275)²¹

The painter's script is ‘kaum lesbar’ (‘barely legible’) and yet delineates the features of Medardus's predicament more clearly and distinctly, we are told, than Medardus might have managed himself. The manuscript follows, and in following seemingly puts into focus, a set of otherwise indistinct images or episodes — Medardus's life — by purporting to set out, in near diagrammatic terms, the course of history that has led to its emergence. Yet there is an irony in the fact that the painter's story is so complicated that it is almost impossible to visualize, not simply because of the sheer wealth of characters and intrigues he draws out, but also because the painter has the tendency to refer to characters by their epithets rather than by their names, and some, such as Medardus's mother, remain unnamed. There has nonetheless been a tendency, in scholarship, to reproduce images of Medardus's *Stammbaum*. Critics including C. G. von Maasen, Walter Harich, Kurt Willimczik, Kenneth G. Negus and Hartmut Steinecke devote articles to working out Medardus's genealogy or contrive family

¹⁹ Peter von Matt, *Die Augen der Automaten*, p. 60.

²⁰ ‘all the confused scribblings [...] only seemed to me to be fanciful sketches and did not become intelligible until you, my dear Brother Medardus, had made your confession to me’.

²¹ ‘The barely legible writing in brightly coloured ink on the final pages described all my dreams and forebodings, but with such clear, sharply defined outlines as I could never have achieved’.

trees to map the complex connections and interactions between characters.²² The novel's own obsession with sources and with its literary genealogy is thus mirrored outwards by its readers' compulsion to put it into a visual order.

Two critics in particular, however, Manfred Momberger and Jeremy Tambling, offer robust commentaries on the unreliability of the painter's manuscript as a model for reading. For Momberger, 'er ist selbst nur fragmentarisch, bruchstückhaft, nicht linear-kausal fortschreitend' — as broken a logic as is the logic of the devil's wine, offering only further confusion. Medardus, Momberger explains, 'kann aus der schwierigen Dechiffrierung der unleserlichen Schrift eigentlich nur einen Schluß ziehen: daß seine Lebensgeschichte die eines Anderen ist'.²³ This second narrative, then, is no more than a repetition of the confusions of the first. For Tambling, more recently, the conclusion Medardus draws from the manuscript — that his *Doppelgänger* is in fact his half-brother Viktorin, 'would resolve nothing. The text denies any way of knowing, which makes more ironic Leonardus's demand to Medardus that he write his autobiography [...] Medardus cannot know his own life'.²⁴ The implication, finally, is that Medardus's autobiography must have a more complicated relationship to his life than we might have tacitly assumed in reading it. At a crucial juncture on his path, Medardus discovers the impossibility of travelling without a narrative — 'inkognito' — when a village judge in an unnamed town demands of him: 'Den Paß oder in den Turm!' (H II.2 100: 'Your papers, or into the tower!'). Medardus's choice is to make himself intelligible, in society's terms, by flattening himself out into a socially legitimized narrative, or to be lost to the life of the criminal or madman, the nobody or the nameless. Recognition demands due payment. That Medardus is able to short-circuit the system by bribing the judge, thus feeding money back into the demand for a narrative, intensifies the sense of

²² E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Hoffmanns Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Carl Georg von Maassen, 9 vols (Munich, Leipzig: Müller: 1908-28), II, p. 375; Walter Harich, *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Das Leben eines Künstlers*, 2 vols (Berlin: Reiß, 1920), I, p. 282; Kurt Willimeczik, *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Die drei Reiche seiner Gestaltenwelt* (Berlin, 1939), p. 123; Kenneth G. Negus, 'The Family Tree in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*', *PMLA*, 73.5 (1958), 516-520 (p. 519); Hartmut Steinecke in H II.2, p. 592.

²³ Momberger, *Sonne und Punsch*, p. 155: 'it is itself only fragmentary, disjointed, not advancing in a causal linear mode; [Medardus] can conclude only one thing from the difficult deciphering of the illegible script: that his life-story is that of another person'.

²⁴ Jeremy Tambling, 'Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*: The Double, the Death Drive, and the Apotropai', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 51.4 (2015), 379-393 (pp. 391-2).

contrivance by which our validated social identities are given credence. Medardus is drawn into a line of characters — including Schlemihl, Spikher, Chabert — who, having lost something of their image, must learn what it means to lack paper validation.

The cross emerges in this novel as an ironic emblem, not unlike the elixirs themselves, suggestive of a specific literary inheritance, particularly in reference to Lewis's *The Monk*, in which the cross becomes an extravagantly Gothic distortion of a religious symbol, emblazoned on the forehead of the Wandering Jew. Crosses are always reproductions, *Abbilder*, referring to an original model now lost to fragments and copies. The cross appears again and again in acts of visual representation. One of Medardus's earliest memories is of the young child who accompanies the pilgrim in *die heilige Linde*, under whose innocent hands the figure of the cross, like a natural hieroglyph or a face in the landscape, seems to draw itself:

[...] ich schenkte ihm alle meine bunten Steine und er wußte damit allerlei Figuren auf dem Erdboden zu ordnen, aber immer bildete sich daraus zuletzt die Gestalt des Kreuzes. (H II.2 16-17)²⁵

To draw a cross is to draw two lines that intersect: it is to draw something twice, a bifurcated act or an act of doubling. The double drawn figure, as we have seen in Chapter Three's *Der Artushof*, invites all manner of distortion. *Die Elixiere* is full of such twice-drawn figures, the most central being St. Rosalia, painted twice by Francesco. Charles Passage, in an article on *Elixiere*, cites an anecdotal episode of Hoffmann's life, in which, in the autumn of 1809, he drew a picture of Julia Marc alongside her two siblings. 'It is reported,' writes Passage, 'that he easily completed the figures of the sister and brother but that he reworked the face of Julia ten times'.²⁶ Whilst the biographical sketch remains vague and anecdotal, it stages a scene, as part of Hoffmann's biography, in which compulsion, copy and desire are played out over the face, as each successive copy fails in its task to stand in for the original. Lines and traits are overlaid across one another to no avail.

²⁵ 'I gave him my coloured stones and he laid them out on the ground in all sorts of shapes, but in the end they always came together in the form of a cross'.

²⁶ Charles Passage, 'E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Devil's Elixirs": A Flawed Masterpiece', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 75.4 (1976), 531-45 (p. 540).

The most vivid cross in the narrative is the cross-shaped scar on Medardus's throat. This scar, as the mark of a curse or an affliction, was seared there by the diamond necklace of the Äbtissin in his childhood:

da rief die Fürstin mit der tiefsten Wehmut: Franziskus! Und hob mich auf und drückte mich heftig an sich, aber in dem Augenblick preßte mir ein jäher Schmerz, den ich am Halse fühlte, einen starken Schrei aus, so daß die Fürstin erschrocken mich los ließ [...]; es fand sich, daß das diamantne Kreuz, welches die Fürstin auf der Brust trug, mich, indem sie heftig mich an sich drückte, am Halse so stark beschädigt hatte, daß die Stelle ganz rot und mit Blut unterlaufen war. (H II.2 18)²⁷

Kremer calls this moment a 'magische[r] Akt der Benennung' ('magical act of nomenclature').²⁸ And this performative mark made on him on his unwitting initiation into his narrative which has, after all, everything to do with his original name, *Franz*, an echo of his forebears and another mark of his fated line, becomes a token of identity under which the problems of mimesis and recognition in the text are gathered. For the cross, in a later episode, becomes a node of recognition which ultimately fails, allowing Medardus to live on as his own impersonator and so, by means of his double, to part ways with his self. This recognition scene comes in a chapter significantly named 'Der Wendepunkt' ('The Turning Point'), when Medardus has been condemned to prison under suspicion of the murders of Hermogen and Euphemie (of which he is, by his own account, guilty). The court case is an exercise in narrative invention as Medardus relates a fictional Romantic identity for himself as a Polish count under the name of Leonard, and convinces himself of it entirely, if not his listeners: 'indem ich Alles befriedigend beantwortete', he confesses, 'ründete sich

²⁷ 'The abbess cried in tones of deep emotion: "Franciscus!" And she lifted me up and pressed me tightly to herself. At that moment I felt a sudden pain in my neck and gave a loud cry, so that the abbess became frightened, and let me go [...]; the diamond crucifix she wore on her breast had so hurt my neck when she clasped me to her, that the place was red and bruised'.

²⁸ Detlef Kremer, 'Die Elixiere des Teufels. Nachgelassene Papiere des Bruders Medardus, ein Capuziner', in *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, pp. 144-156 (p. 155).

das Bild davon so in meinem Innern, daß ich selbst daran glaubte' (H II.2 199).²⁹ Then, before the judge, and even when the attempt seems completely lost in the face of their scepticism: 'aufzuschreiben beschloß ich daher den Roman, der mich retten sollte! [...] Alles formte sich wie eine geründete Dichtung, und fester und fester spann sich das Gewebe endloser Lügen' (H II.2 208-09).³⁰ The repeated use of 'ründete' and 'geründet' ('rounded') here echoes the *Herausgeber's* initial promise that figures will become 'deutlich und rund' ('clear and rounded') in reading. To spin a narrative, here, is not to remain master of its forms. The 'rund' or rounded form, suggestive of the circle, represents a narrative emblem antagonistic to the figure of the cross. A circle or 'Kreis', another figure of repetitive compulsion for Hoffmann, as in the 'Feuerkreis' ('circle of flames') of *Der Sandmann*, returns in this novel as a figure of completion or resolution. A circle or sphere remains the same, wherever it is placed. Medardus yearns to be initiated into the 'Zirkel' of the court (H II.2 189): the closed 'Zirkel' here signifying a functional or established society that attempts to reject such miscreants as the criminal and his clone. The figure of the cross, in contrast, is never resolved. As a figure of ostensible wholeness, it is also one of pervasive fragmentation: the cross is an arbitrary, moveable point of reference, the intersection between lines. Medardus's attempts at rounding out or completing his narrative dissolve back into the unresolved and unresolvable contradictory lines of the cross.

Medardus, like any common criminal, must be identified before the law, and it is Cyrillus, significantly, to whom the task of recognition falls. Medardus's 'rote kreuzförmige Narbe', as an unmistakable mark of his identity, an indexical trace, 'die die Zeit nicht vertilgen konnte', threatens to give him away. Cyrillus, knowing this, cries out on seeing it — 'Heilige Mutter Gottes, es ist es, es ist das rote Kreuzzeichen!' (H II.2 205).³¹ Medardus is recognised and on being recognised he is condemned. The scene mimics a classic scene of *anagnorisis*. Like Odysseus,

²⁹ 'by giving satisfactory answers to all the questions asked of me, I rounded off the image in my own mind so that I really believed in it myself'.

³⁰ 'I decided to make a record of the romantic story by which I would clear myself! [...] Everything took on the shape of a polished work of art, and the tissue of endless lies grew more and more closely woven'.

³¹ 'red cross-shaped scar [...] which time had not been able to eradicate; "By the Holy Virgin! It is! It is the red mark!"'

Medardus may be recognised by means of his scar. Unlike Odysseus's scar, which spells reintegration into society, Medardus's spells his extermination. But after one delirious night in his cell, Medardus is declared, in a heady anticlimax, to be innocent after all, and is acquitted. The body's signature turns out to be no sufficient guarantee of identity against the presence of his *Doppelgänger* who has appeared in the town, resembling 'jener abscheuliche Mönch' (H II.2 218: 'that odious monk') that Medardus the criminal is supposed to be, and confessing to the crimes that Medardus has committed. The scar, which is submerged under the discussion of the 'ganz genaue Ähnlichkeit' ('complete and exact resemblance') between the two, is, as with Medardus's other features, perfectly replicated on the person of his double. As Andrew Webber explains: 'the security of anagnorisis, as ensured by the canny forces of criminal law and mental order, is confounded by the *Doppelgänger* mystery, and the scar remains a resistant mark of unsolved crimes and untreated trauma'.³² With the exception of one further cursory mention in a vision, the scar now disappears from the novel altogether (H II.2 313).

Mimesis is here, as Plato alleges, no more than the production of similarities. For Hoffmann, this turns out to be of little consequence when similitude is allowed to take the place of reality. The difference between the choices of 'den Paß' and 'den Turm' is markedly narrower when both refer to false images — the one to the contrivance of the social narratives, the other to the ramblings of the madman. The scar, here, functions as the exemplary false image. For Auerbach in *Mimesis*, the episode of Odysseus's scar is taken as an exemplary moment of the Classical separation of styles. The scar provides an impetus for a narrative digression: not to build suspense, but as a seam describing the segue into the next narrative episode, and marking the parity of the episodes it joins. Terence Cave takes up the same scene in *Recognitions* in acknowledged mimicry of Auerbach (he playfully calls it plagiarism),³³ as he constructs a counter-account to Auerbach's *mimesis*. 'Recognition,' he writes, 'works against mimesis in Auerbach's sense of the word'. The scar is, for both, a point of entry into a second narrative. For Auerbach, the crossing is smooth; for Cave, it is a rupture, 'a sign that the story, like the wound, may

³² Andrew Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 189.

³³ Cave, *Recognitions*, p. 11.

always be reopened'.³⁴ Recognition, Cave explains through the cases of Martin Guerre and Odysseus, 'unmasks a crisis' because at moments of recognition gaps in our knowledge are opened up and the 'most fundamental of the ordering structures of life — the difference between individuals — is at least temporarily shaken'.³⁵ In the story of Martin Guerre, a man disappears from society, to return, be recognised and accepted back, including by his own wife, on two occasions. The imposter or impersonator, the copy, succeeds in displacing the original (and on which occasion, the first or the second?). Anagnorisis, Cave argues, 'makes the world (and the text) intelligible. Yet it is also a shift *into* the implausible'.³⁶ It is a moment in which the spectral copy might well survive in parallel to its original, contrary to all expectations.

At the crossing point of mimesis and anagnorisis, discussions of narrative become frustrated. For Cave, plots of recognition articulate what he calls the 'scandal' in mimetic narrative; a mimesis that is expressed by Auerbach, he argues, in terms far too 'reassuring'.³⁷ The recognition plot begins to pull the seams — or the scars — of mimesis open. Medardus, having traipsed through his own odyssey of dubious encounters, falsely assumed personae and wrongdoings followed by bouts of guilt and repentance, emerges before an authority finally bent on pinning him down, and at that moment again he can only break in two. Medardus's scar — the failed counterpoint of Odysseus's scar — might be a marker of how *disturbingly* 'reassuring' mimesis might be. Reassurance may be disturbing, that is, when the dominant narrative is one that seems to be at odds with itself. Medardus's figurative path, which leads him into hedonism and sin, is, after all, geographically contemporaneous to, but at spiritual loggerheads with, the path of redemption set out for him by Leonardus. This gives rise to the feeling of compromise and of paradox that I have suggested to be engendered by the figure of the cross. It is a sign, too, that the individual's actions are already decided upon by the actions of his predecessors or spiritual betters: that he is subject to the whims of his own narrative. And so Medardus comes to Rome.

In Rome, and beginning his penance in earnest, under the gaze of his onlookers Medardus feels himself definitively to be a character in his own life-story, 'Held[en] irgend eines frommen Märchens' (H II.2 298: 'hero of some religious

³⁴ Cave, *Recognitions*, p. 24.

³⁵ Cave, *Recognitions*, pp. 14-15, 13.

³⁶ Cave, *Recognitions*, p. 1.

³⁷ Cave, *Recognitions*, p. 22.

tale’). The strange events in Rome — events which bring the body violently into play — will close my reading of *Elixiere* as an exploration of mimesis as it works upon the body. The first of these events is the puppet play, which Medardus stumbles upon after his meeting with the Pope. Medardus is amused to recognise the diminutive Belcampo, the peculiar, capering hairdresser character who has surfaced, and intervened, at various fortuitous points in Medardus’s journey, always in the doubled role of both ‘puppet and puppeteer’,³⁸ as Lucia Ruprecht notes, here playing the part of Goliath — or rather of Goliath’s head (H II.2 303). As Belcampo’s head plays amongst the puppets, the living body is given over to art. As Claudia Liebrand puts it: ‘Nicht nur also, daß Bilder Leben präfigurieren, Lebendiges wird in das künstlerische Artefakt rückverwandelt’.³⁹ The metamorphosis of life into narrative is a grotesque reflection of what Medardus has done all along, particularly in the Baron’s castle, where in a parallel case of life mimicking performance he plays the role of Viktorin playing at being a monk. The sinister abbot who approaches Medardus seems to acknowledge this as he warns him: ‘spiele deine Rolle — ausgespielt ist bald, was munter und lustig begann’ (H II.2 304).⁴⁰ The appearance of the living head given over to the story performed on stage is then gruesomely repeated in the following scene, by the rolling head of Cyrillus who is decapitated by the Dominican monks before Medardus’s eyes. The act is repeated for a final time, in a distorted variant, when the Dominicans attempt to poison Medardus, who deftly pours the liquid down his sleeve rather than his throat. In place of his head, he loses his arm — the organ of touch — and once again part of the body is given over to the vicissitudes of plot and play.

He retraces his steps from Rome, in pieces, back to the Capuchin monastery. And on the way he is made to feel, again, in visceral terms, the character he has become. This comes first in the form of Reinhold’s terror, on being told as Medardus nears that he is being approached by a monk: ‘Der Alte nahm alle Kraft zusammen, die ihm geblieben, um vor mir zu fliehen, wie vor dem reißenden Tier’; and

³⁸ Lucia Ruprecht, *Dances of the Self in Heinrich von Kleist, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Heinrich Heine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 72

³⁹ Claudia Liebrand, *Aporie des Kunstmythos*, p. 82: ‘Not simply, then, do images prefigure life, but the living itself is transformed back into an artistic artefact’. For more on Hoffmann’s performative and theatrical literary manoeuvres, see Ruprecht, *Dances of the Self*, pp. 57-64.

⁴⁰ ‘go on playing your role — what begins happily is soon played out’.

Medardus's reaction is likewise to flee — 'fort von dem Schauplatz meiner höchsten Frevel' (H II.2 318).⁴¹ He then finds himself at the *Teufelssitz*, at the fearful spot, 'an dem schauerlichen Plätzchen', from which the sleeping Viktorin had earlier tumbled to his death. In fact, Medardus wakes up there, having been approached by a peasant keen to tell him of the mad Capuchin monk who once haunted that very area. It seems that he has fallen asleep in the very same place that Viktorin once had: now, significantly, marked with 'ein Kreuz'. His final penance, once back at the Capuchin monastery, is to write down his life story. 'Die Fantasie,' Leonardus declares, 'wird dich wirklich in die Welt zurückführen, du wirst alles [...] noch einmal fühlen' (H II.2 349).⁴² To write himself again is to discover himself as something partial, something given over to the turns of the world and of a wayward plot. The punishment, then, is to feel — or rather, is to feel *again* — the self, in the double formation that the narrative provides. It is to feel oneself at once as narrative object and narrative subject.

Tambling, in his recent article, argues that 'Hoffmann departs earlier, and more decisively [...] from any realist mode, as we see in *Die Elixiere des Teufels*'.⁴³ In this he writes against a long line of critics who have seen *Elixiere* as a precursor to the realist novel. Christiane Zehl Romero, for example, suggests that Hoffmann, in bringing the genre of the Gothic novel to the realm of the psyche, 'puts the lesson of Romanticism to "realistic" use, for a deeply questioning look at man and his precarious hold upon the world'. This 'precarious hold' might refer to the uncertainty of the senses; to the kind of world whose appearances, in their being reproduced, slip away. Hoffmann paves the way for writers such as Balzac, Zehl Romero goes on, by having 'rescued the gothic from its remote and merely sensational associations to bring it to contemporary life and new artistic vitality'.⁴⁴ Whether or not *Elixiere* acts either as antagonist to or as precursor of the realist novel, it prepares the way — and in a manner that is particular for Hoffmann because of its genre as a novel — for writers such as Balzac. This is, for one thing, a question of literary inheritance. Works

⁴¹ 'Summoning his remaining strength he made to flee from me as from a beast of prey [...] Hastily I left the scene of my most dreadful crimes'.

⁴² 'The fantasy will lead you back into the world [...] you will feel it all once again'.

⁴³ Tambling, 'Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*', p. 379.

⁴⁴ Christiane Zehl Romero, 'M. C. Lewis' *The Monk* and E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*: Two versions of the Gothic', *Neophilologus*, 63 (1979), 574-82 (p. 581).

that inscribe themselves in the Gothic tradition consciously account for their own literary genealogy. But more importantly, *Elixiere* individuates its narrative subject through his encounters with a world shown to be infinitely reproducible in its appearance. The cross, as I have shown, comes to resemble the ultimately reproducible image or sign, as purported identificatory mark whose identificatory work is undone by its being reproduced, re-drawn, crossed out, and mirrored on the physiognomy of the *Doppelgänger*. And if Hoffmann here looks forward to Balzac, the gaze is obliquely returned in a prefatory note to one of Balzac's most unexpected and most 'Hoffmannesque' works.

III. *L'Élixir de longue vie*

L'Élixir de longue vie is singular amongst Balzac's early tales in being prefaced, in its revised version of 1846, by an *avis au lecteur*. In no other prefatory note of *La Comédie humaine* is the reader called upon so unmistakably as in this narrative conceit.⁴⁵ The short note begins with one of Balzac's few overt references to Hoffmann:

Au début de la vie littéraire de l'auteur, un ami, mort depuis longtemps, lui donna le sujet de cette Étude, que plus tard il trouva dans un recueil publié vers le commencement de ce siècle; et, selon ses conjectures, c'est une fantaisie due à Hoffmann de Berlin, publiée dans quelque almanach d'Allemagne, et oubliée dans ses œuvres par les éditeurs. *La Comédie humaine* est assez riche en inventions pour que l'auteur avoue un innocent emprunt; comme le bon La Fontaine, il aura traité d'ailleurs à sa manière, et sans le savoir, un fait déjà conté. (B XI 473)

We are dealing here, then, with the only one of Balzac's stories to be marked from the very outset, in an extra-diegetic feint, as *Hoffmannesque*. And although he leaves his source text unnamed, Balzac explicitly invites us to relate his tale to *Die Elixiere des Teufels*: first in the unmistakable echo of its title, and second in the comment that the

⁴⁵ See Aude Deruelle, 'Les adresses au lecteur chez Balzac', *Cahiers de Narratologie*, 11 (2004), 2-11. Deruelle opens by tracking the sparsity with which the word 'lecteur' is used as a narrative appeal, and asserts that *L'Élixir de longue vie* is the only work with a *dédicace* titled 'Au Lecteur' (p. 3).

source tale of Hoffmann had been ‘oubliée [...] par ses éditeurs’. *Elixiere* was indeed left out of Loève-Veimars’s edition of Hoffmann’s work: the novel had been translated by Jean Cohen in 1829 but was falsely attributed to Carl Spindler.⁴⁶ Yet the statement of origins is garbled by the vagueness of memory — ‘selon ses conjectures’ — and by the faceless third party, the ‘ami, mort depuis longtemps’ said to have provided Balzac with his original. The ambiguity of the phrasing hints that the friend himself might be a ghostly figure. The spectral reputation of Hoffmann’s character and works at this time would not rule out such a reading of the long-dead friend. And so the acknowledgement of Hoffmann is characteristically troubled: he is not drawn out in full, but figured only as a suggestion or in outline, his features tentatively undone by the dream-like quality of the anecdote, reminiscent of one of his own *Herausgeberfiktionen*. Hoffmann — or the kind of fiction that might be attributed to Hoffmann — has become a paratextual contrivance. As simultaneously unclear and suggestive as the arabesque of *La Peau de chagrin*, the *avis au lecteur* stands in for the reading of another fiction it refuses to name: reminiscent less of a literary inheritance, perhaps, than of a haunting.

Before examining the precise claims of this prefatory note, however, we should first note that the publication of *L’Élixir de longue vie* marked one of the earliest appearances of Balzac’s name in *La Revue de Paris*. This journal, as the place of publication for the majority of his works in the early 1830s, and the main setting for the frenzy surrounding Hoffmann’s works, was thus the first site of crossover between the two.⁴⁷ When in its first issue Loève-Veimars published a translation of Walter Scott’s essay on Hoffmann from the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, the word ‘fantastique’ was first used in French in a literary essay, as shown in my Introduction. The genre of *le fantastique*, then, was first articulated with the arrival of Hoffmann into France, via Scott and an enthusiastic translator. When Loève-Veimars reprinted an abridged version of the essay in the first volume of his collected edition, he did away with Scott’s harshest criticisms, leaving only the vague suggestion of a rivalry between two great foreign writers — and the resonance of Scott’s name on the cover.

⁴⁶ See René Guise, ‘Balzac, lecteur des Élixirs du diable’, *L’Année balzacienne*, 10 (1970), 57-67 (p. 60). The French translation of *Elixiere* was Carl Spindler [E. T. A. Hoffmann], *L’Élixir du diable, histoire tirée des papiers de frère Médard, Capucin*, trans. by Jean Cohen, 4 vols (Paris: Mame et Delaunay-Vallée, 1829).

⁴⁷ Tim Farrant, *Balzac’s Shorter Fictions*, p. 85.

Scott's dismissive tone ('the FANTASTIC mode of writing, — in which the most wild and unbounded license is given to an irregular fancy')⁴⁸ became in its French variant, through the distorting effects of repetition and by setting the English Scott against the German Hoffmann, a term of rampant innovation.

Hoffmann's entry into French narrative, then, is marked by a decidedly mixed inheritance. The 'fantaisie due à Hoffmann' suggests as much a warning about the content of what follows as it does a homage to Hoffmann. Such warnings were common stock of early translations of Hoffmann. A footnote to the translation of Hoffmann's 'Don Juan', presumably by Loève-Veimars, interrupts the text with a digression:

En lisant les souvenirs et les récits d'Hoffmann, il ne faut jamais oublier qu'il s'enivrait et qu'il puisait sa verve dans la bouteille: chaque image s'offrait à son esprit, colorée par les vapeurs du vin; de là le prisme fantastique qui, dans ses récits, environne toujours la réalité.⁴⁹

A paratextual device, again, is used to colour a reading: with the caution, this time, that to read may be to enter into delusion. Alcohol is an ambiguous elixir, prone to distortion, and Hoffmann's tales enter the French literary scene firmly under its hold, threatening to disrupt or disturb any reader to fall under their influence. The French brand of Hoffmann, then — as the figure of the drunken visionary, of the addict, subject to his own compulsions and delusions — reflects back onto Balzac's 'fantaisie due à Hoffmann', the brand with which he chooses to mark his own tale, in Balzac's own variant on the story of Don Juan.

Criticism on *L'Élixir* has been almost exclusively devoted to unravelling the claims of Balzac's preface and to constructing an alternative line of inheritance considered to be more plausible. In the 1950s and -60s, Pierre-Georges Castex, Elizabeth Teichmann and Bruce Tolley all published articles working to figure out 'la source véritable' of 'L'Élixir'.⁵⁰ This was identified to be a story by Steele in the

⁴⁸ Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition', p. 72.

⁴⁹ Loève-Veimars, 'Une représentation de Don Juan, par E. T. A. Hoffmann', *La Revue de Paris*, 6 (1829), 57-69 (p. 57).

⁵⁰ Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France*, pp. 194-5; Elizabeth Teichmann, 'Une source inconnue de l'Élixir de longue vie', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 24 (1955), 536-8; Bruce Tolley, 'The Source of

Spectator, one which Steele claims to have taken himself from an original text by Adam Olearius, abridged and adapted anonymously as *L'Élixir de l'immortalité* in *L'Almanach du spectateur* in 1805. We know Balzac to have borrowed this volume from the library in 1829 and Steele's story is thus taken to be, in Tolley's words, 'without doubt the direct source of *L'Élixir*'.⁵¹ In October 1830, weeks after the publication of *L'Élixir*, an article appeared in *Mercure de France au dix-neuvième siècle* under the name of Paul Pry (a pseudonym of Amédée Pichot, director of *La Revue de Paris*) which summarised Steele's original story as 'Les aventures de trois Valentins'. The article implicitly accuses Balzac of plagiarism, soberly insisting on the primacy of the original version. 'Je ne dis pas', Pry writes, 'qu'on ne puisse refaire ce conte, le broder, le mettre en dialogue et y coudre avec esprit des digressions à la Don Juan; mais on relira toujours avec plaisir le conte original du *Spectateur*'.⁵² Balzac's preface takes its place, in this account, as a defensive apology for an 'innocent emprunt' — but acknowledges the wrong source. Castex, Teichmann and Tolley all suggest, moreover, that *Die Elixiere des Teufels* and *L'Élixir de longue vie* have little, by way of their content, to invite a comparative reading.

Critics since have paused longer over the apparent misattribution of Balzac's paratext. It has been emphasised that Balzac's text, importantly, represents a kind of literary crossroads between variants of many others: including not just Hoffmann's *Elixiere* and Steele's tale, but *Faust*, *Melmoth*, and *Don Juan*. After acknowledging the alternative line of inheritance put forward by Teichmann and others, René Guise asks 'pourquoi Balzac attribue-t-il à Hoffmann la paternité de ce récit de Steele?' — and Edgar Pankow probes further: 'was hätte es dann zu besagen, daß Balzac sich gerade *in dieser Weise und in bezug auf Hoffmann* getäuscht haben sollte?'.⁵³ It is along the trajectory of such questions that I align my own reading of Balzac's tale, with its purportedly false, or ambiguous, claim to a Hoffmannesque inheritance. I will

Balzac's *l'Élixir de longue vie*, *Revue de littérature comparée*, 37 (1963), 91-7. This quotation is from Teichmann 'Une source inconnue', p. 537.

⁵¹ Tolley, 'The Source of Balzac's *l'Élixir de longue vie*', p. 93.

⁵² Paul Pry, 'L'Élixir de vie', *Le Mercure de France au dix-neuvième siècle*, 31 (1830), 227-29 (pp. 227-8).

⁵³ Guise, 'Balzac, lecteur des *Élixirs du diable*', p. 57. Edgar Pankow, 'Literatur — Geschichte: Honoré de Balzac und E. T. A. Hoffmann und die Genese von Traditionen im *Élixir de longue vie*', *Arcadia*, 39 (2004), 27-54 (p. 34): 'what does it mean that Balzac was mistaken, precisely *in this way and in relation to Hoffmann*?' Emphasis original.

follow what Olivier Besuchet calls the ‘fausse piste hoffmannienne’⁵⁴ — the wrong way — allowing the reading to emerge from a confusion of paths. The apparent falseness of the paratextual claim, the cross-inheritance, will come, appropriately, to mark my reading of these two tales, which are both tales of heredity, sin, and of the life or body compromised by mimesis.

A crucial divergence of Balzac’s from Hoffmann’s text is the role of the elixir, which is a more central feature in *L’Élixir de longue vie* than it is in *Die Elixiere des Teufels*. The elixir’s life-transformative qualities in Balzac’s *conte* are both more potent and more in keeping with its Gothic inheritance: it grants immortality to its user. Unlike Hoffmann’s devilish wine, Balzac’s is an ointment, and works through being applied to the skin. The story is divided into two halves, each of which follows the life and death of a father and his son respectively (in its original 1830 version, these halves were clearly separated under the titles of ‘Festin’ and ‘Fin’). It opens onto a lavish orgy hosted by Don Juan Belvidéro at his palace in Ferrare, whilst his ancient father Bartholoméo lies dying in his bed. When the moment of death is imminent, Don Juan is called into his room. ‘Jamais sur cette terre’, the narrator explains, ‘un père si commode et si indulgent ne s’était rencontré’. Don Juan Belvidéro, by turn, ‘avait-il tous les défauts des enfants gâtés’ (B XI 477-78). The dying Bartholoméo instructs his son to apply to his skin, following the moment of his death, an elixir contained in a crystal glass, barely able to intimate that it will bring him back to life. ‘Après avoir pris conseil du trésor amassé par son père’ (B XI 482-83), Don Juan tentatively dabs a little of the ointment onto one of his father’s eyes. The eye unmistakably comes to life. Don Juan, after some deliberation, squashes it and pockets the elixir. The second half of the tale follows his life after this fragmented version of a parricide, in the knowledge that he has the power to overcome death — on the condition that his own heir plays the part he refused to play himself. And when his own deathbed scene arrives, his son Philippe dutifully begins to carry out what Don Juan did not — but, having anointed his father’s head and arm, the arm, suddenly roused to life, grabs him around the neck, surprising him so much that he drops the vial and the remaining elixir evaporates. In a heavy-handed and grotesque conclusion, we see Don Juan — now in the form of a living arm and head attached to a dead body

⁵⁴ Olivier Besuchet, “‘Rien de nouveau sous le soleil?’” L’indice intertextuel dans *L’Élixir de longue vie* de Balzac’, *A Contrario*, 20.1 (2014), 113-27 (p. 126).

— declared a saint and brought to a mass before throngs of onlookers. Inside the church, his head detaches itself from his corpse and falls upon the head of the priest saying mass, who is killed between its teeth as it cries out ‘Imbécile, dis donc qu’il y a un Dieu?’ (B XI 495).

Proposed twice over in this tale is an alternative family structure in which the father is to fail to die, to outlive his son, and thus to inherit his own inheritance. Both fathers, Bartholoméo and Don Juan, want to upturn the laws of inheritance — the keystone of the *Code Civil* — by defying death and keeping their wealth instead of passing it on. That this fails twice — first because of the rebellion of Don Juan, who in a crucial moment of reflection decides that he wants his father’s inheritance for himself; and second because Philippe, at *his* crucial moment, falters — re-instates, as Dorothy Kelly shows, the inevitable forward thrust of the ‘invisible law’ of inheritance practices. Kelly reads the tale as a ‘failed revolt against the marriage/inheritance system’, representing ‘the strength of that system as well as the inevitable [...] transmission of social codes’.⁵⁵ Balzac’s preface, indeed, after its false acknowledgement of Hoffmann, moves into a short diatribe on the self-serving greed inspired by the bourgeois inheritance system, which blatantly encourages heirs to wish for the death of their forefathers, such that ‘on vit de la mort’ and that ‘Dieu seul sait le nombre des parricides qui se commettent par la pensée!’. This reflection should, in the ironic narrator’s view, colour our reading of Don Juan’s ‘élégant parricide’. ‘Toute la civilisation européenne,’ he bleakly continues, ‘repose sur l’HÉRÉDITÉ comme sur un pivot’ (B XI 473-74).

We might, then, consider the alternative narrative trajectory that the elixir proposes, as if in answer to the preface, were it to have been used successfully. In a family whose inheritor-son is usurped by the father himself, in a kind of neat Oedipal inversion, the logic of heterosexual reproduction is pre-emptively cut short. A line of genealogy is replaced by the inheritance system of the double, or the clone. The father becomes the recipient of his own legacy, greedily assuming the place of the ‘other’ by virtue of whom a family is otherwise able to reproduce itself. This might suggest an extreme vision of the kind of queer family narrative (*queer*, oblique; perhaps from the

⁵⁵ Dorothy Kelly, ‘The Marriage of Don Juan: Balzac and the Inheritance of Culture’, *Dix-Neuf: journal of the Society of Dix-Neuviémistes*, 11 (2008), 49-58 (pp. 55, 49).

German *quer*)⁵⁶ that Michael Lucey considers in *The Misfit of the Family*. Lucey explains of heritage in Balzac that:

the concept of *héritier* lies at the center of a complex legal, historical, cultural, and psychological web that could be thought of as the French epistemology of the family. This epistemological web is *felt* as well as *known*. How it is felt and known in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s, both by those woven into it and by those woven out of it, was one of the primary theoretical concerns of Honoré de Balzac.⁵⁷

L'Élixir de longue vie undoubtedly gives a lurid demonstration of how that web is 'felt' — felt, that is, in its insistent presence, reflected through the face of a monstrous alternative. But this potential family narrative also calls back to Medardus's cursed familial line: another oblique, non-normative genealogy, knotted through with incestuous and illegitimate relationships — and haunted by another father who will not die, in the figure of *der alte Maler*. *Elixiere* too is a patrilinear text, governed by an obsessive logic of fraternity, from the monastery to Medardus's spectral forefathers and his inherited sins. This patrilinear order is reflected back through the queer figure of Belcampo, Medardus's eccentric devoted companion, who is explicitly unbound by family ties and whom Seán Williams reads as being 'free of the burden of inheritance' and thus able to use 'his outsider personality to his advantage, in contrast to those whose subjectivity is instead constituted by their (phantasmic) family tree'.⁵⁸ We may re-trace Hoffmann's patrilinear 'fausse piste' in *L'Élixir* by following through the logic and genealogy of the double. Not only does the logic of Don Juan and his father suggest doubling as an alternative to reproduction — and that alternative's horrific failure — but doubling informs the very structure of the tale. As much as this is a story about the inheritance of wealth, it is a story about a son who

⁵⁶ 'Queer, adj. 1.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156236?rskey=SwtqQC&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eidWeb>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁵⁷ Michael Lucey, *The Misfit of the Family: Balzac and the Social Forms of Sexuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 4.

⁵⁸ Seán Williams, 'E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Hairdresser around 1800', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 85.1 (2016), 54-66 (pp. 57, 59).

copies his father. And it is also a story about the ‘double talk’ engendered by the narrative break between the *avis au lecteur* and the narrative proper. Kelly suggests of the relationship between the preface and the text that ‘the “illegal” transmission of the story from literary “fathers” to “sons” echoes the theme of filial theft in “L’Élixir de longue vie” itself’.⁵⁹ In untangling something of the relationship between these two fragments of prose, Balzac’s *conte* comes to deal with a clash between structures of *autopoeisis* and literary mimesis. The figure of Hoffmann, however briefly, however out of place he appears, is crucial to working out this clash.

I have shown that the image of Hoffmann in French literature of this time was inflected by the caricature of the delirious drinker. To refer explicitly to Hoffmann — and to Hoffmann’s Medardus, the monk secretly guzzling the devil’s wine — is to play with this association. I have also shown that in the French translation of Hoffmann’s *Don Juan*, an extra-diegetic warning about his alcoholism is issued to inflect our reading. Here, in Balzac’s own take on *Don Juan*, a similar warning is issued: that the ‘fantaisie due à Hoffmann’ might be the product of that ‘diseased’ (Scott) or intoxicated mind. *L’Élixir*, too, is a tale about drinking. The elixir itself may not be a draught of wine, but in a critical moment it comes to resemble one, when Don Juan studies the vial over the dead body of his father ‘comme un buveur consulte sa bouteille à la fin d’un repas’ (B XI 481). For Michael Tilby, Balzac’s drinking scenes are always Hoffmannesque: ‘The origin of the Balzacian orgy as such,’ he argues, ‘is to be found in the tales of Hoffmann’.⁶⁰ *L’Élixir* opens onto an alcohol-fuelled orgy of the same genre as those in *Sarrasine* and *La Peau de chagrin*. The scene is staged as a narrative movement between the physiognomies of a succession of glistening women whose faces and gestures in each instance seem to speak, characterised by the repeated formulation: ‘[Elle] semblait dire’. The impression given is one of an ironic compliance with appearances; one in which semblances themselves are given narrative power. Two more such physiognomic semblances follow:

⁵⁹ Kelly, ‘The Marriage of Don Juan’, p. 52.

⁶⁰ Michael Tilby, ‘Balzac’s Convivial Narrations: Intoxication and its Discourse in *La Comédie humaine*’, in *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Evans and Kate Griffiths (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 53-72 (p. 60).

Une troisième, novice de ces fêtes, voulait rougir: ‘Au fond du cœur je sens un remords!’ disait-elle. ‘Je suis catholique, et j’ai peur de l’enfer. Mais je vous aime tant, oh! tant et tant, que je puis vous sacrifier l’éternité.’

La quatrième, vidant une coupe de vin de Chio, s’écriait: ‘vive la gaieté! Je prends une existence nouvelle à chaque aurore! Oublieuse du passé, ivre encore des assauts de la veille, tous les soirs j’épuise une vie de bonheur, une vie pleine d’amour!’ (B XI 475)

Here, as the guest drains her wine glass, the narrative of semblances outlines a life of temporary pleasures. Whilst the ‘troisième’ seems to declare herself ready to ‘sacrifier l’éternité’ by sinning against her religion in the name of pleasure, the ‘quatrième’ seems to delight in the thought of an ever-renewed drunken ‘vie de bonheur’.

Where alcohol has full sway, the appearance of sensuous pleasure is given precedence over longevity. And this comes only lines before an alternative is introduced in the character of Don Juan’s father, Bartholoméo:

Si ce volontaire anachorète allait et venait dans le palais ou par les rues de Ferrare, il semblait chercher une chose qui lui manquait; il marchait tout rêveur, indécis, préoccupé comme un homme en guerre avec une idée ou avec un souvenir. Pendant que le jeune homme donnait des fêtes somptueuses [...], Bartholoméo mangeait sept onces de pain par jour et buvait de l’eau. S’il lui fallait un peu de volaille, c’était pour en donner les os à un barbet noir, son compagnon fidèle. (B XI 477)

Bartholoméo resembles, here, the repentant Raphaël at the end of *La Peau de chagrin*, or the repentant Medardus at the end of *Die Elixiere des Teufels*. Both Medardus and Raphaël, having given in to the pleasures of the senses, must finally stifle their desires in order to prolong their lives. The ‘barbet noir’ Bartholoméo keeps alongside him is a note that we are treading on the grounds of the Faustian pact, emphasised by the pointedly named guest ‘Brambilla’ (inevitably reminiscent of Hoffmann’s *Prinzessin Brambilla*), who asks the company ‘Avez-vous remarqué le chien noir?’ (B XI 482). Between the drinking youths and the ascetic father with his Mephistophelian hound, the stakes of a particular question begin to trace themselves: what kind of a life is it worth bargaining for? The kind that is pleasurable, or the kind that is long? We are

here approaching the line of thought that would be necessary for the completion of *La Peau de chagrin*. Besuchet, in fact, calls the two works ‘deux pans d’une même méditation sur la durée de la vie et les sacrifices à faire pour la prolonger’.⁶¹ What is at stake is the kind of sacrifice the subject might make in the name of the fictional life he or she wants to live: the question that we have seen repeated, obsessively, throughout the texts of this thesis and which reappear throughout the *Études philosophiques* in varying formations. The question, in turn, references a literary inheritance, and particularly the lineage of Faust, but it is under the emblem of Hoffmann, whether as intertextual figure or extra-diegetic referent, that it is most readily ordered, as is the case here.

Edgar Pankow describes Balzac’s attitude to Hoffmann in this tale as ‘ein Konflikt zwischen Autopoeisis und literarischer Filiation’.⁶² This is also a fitting description for the struggle between the apparently immortal father and the mortal son. Having embalmed his father’s eye in the liquid, Don Juan looks on in horror:

‘Ah! ah!’ dit don Juan en pressant le flacon dans sa main comme nous serrons en rêvant la branche à laquelle nous sommes suspendus au-dessus d’un précipice.

Il voyait un œil plein de vie, un œil d’enfant dans une tête de mort, la lumière y tremblait au milieu d’un jeune fluide; et, protégée par de beaux cils noirs, elle scintillait pareille à ces lueurs uniques que le voyageur aperçoit dans une campagne déserte, par les soirs d’hiver [...]. Il éclatait tant de vie dans ce fragment de vie, que don Juan épouvanté recula, il se promena par la chambre, sans oser regarder cet œil, qu’il revoyait sur les planchers, sur les tapisseries. La chambre était parsemée de pointes pleines de feu, de vie, d’intelligence. Partout brillaient des yeux qui aboyaient après lui! (B XI 483-84)

Critics have pointed out the significance of the multiplying eyes as a trope inherited from Hoffmann, most obviously from *Der Sandmann*, although the trustworthiness of vision and visions also forms part of the subject matter of *Elixiere*. Pankow draws out a reading of the eye as ‘Organ der poetischen Genesis’ as the son crushes the poetic

⁶¹ Besuchet, ‘Rien de nouveau sous le soleil?’, p. 124.

⁶² Pankow, ‘Literatur – Geschichte’, p. 32: ‘a conflict between autopoeisis and literary filiation’.

potency of the father between his fingers.⁶³ The bearing of this reading on the preface here, as the son crushes the life of his literary father, is obvious. The eye is also the organ by which the perceiving subject takes on the world: the point at which that world is distilled into images, and a point of the body's greatest vulnerability. Accordingly, a series of refracted narratives here is glimpsed within the single living eye. With 'tant de vie dans ce fragment de vie', it functions as a measure or figure of the life that Don Juan is now to take from his father. In a brief collision or crossover between vision and touch, the parricide can be carried out only in blindness as Don Juan averts his own eyes and the father's eye is crushed beneath the (covered) skin of the son:

Puis, rassemblant tout ce qu'il faut de courage pour être lâche, il écrasa l'œil, en le foulant avec un linge, mais sans le regarder. Un gémissement inattendu, mais terrible, se fit entendre. Le pauvre barbet expirait en hurlant. (B XI 484-85)

If, as in Pankow's reading, this represents an Oedipal struggle over the property of vision, vision is an ambiguous legacy. The life that Don Juan offers his dying father as a platitude, before seeing the elixir, is that of an internalised image: 'votre image', he promises, 'sera sans cesse dans mon cœur'. The father's death is to be preserved in the potency of the son's eyes. Bartholoméo's dismissive response — that 'Il ne s'agit pas de cette vie-là' (B XI 479) — colours what follows, which is illustrated as a tussle between a life preserved in images and copies and some indistinct alternative. The statue Don Juan erects in the name and memory of his father, in its ironically religious posture, is a visual spectacle of parricide:

Il éleva un monument de marbre blanc sur la tombe de son père, et en confia l'exécution des figures aux plus célèbres artistes du temps. Il ne fut parfaitement tranquille que le jour où la statue paternelle, agenouillée devant la Religion, imposa son poids énorme sur cette fosse, au fond de laquelle il enterra le seul remords qui ait effleuré son cœur dans les moments de lassitude physique. (B XI 485)

⁶³ Pankow, 'Literatur – Geschichte', p. 51: 'the organ of poetic genesis'.

Where life was, art is erected: and the sum of Don Juan's filial remorse, we are told, is 'enterr[é]' at its heart. The art-piece, then, whose white marble reflects back the white of Bartholoméo's dying eye, is a picture of the duplicitousness of images; a monument to what has been lost in order for appearances to remain as they are. For the son's secret is, of course, not just that he has killed his father, but that he will make exactly the same attempt against the laws of life, death and inheritance as Bartholoméo did. The destiny he prepares for himself is to copy his father — and when this destiny plays out, it is precisely the act of copy that ruins him. For if what stops Bartholoméo's plans is the most violent iteration of touch, what stops Don Juan's, when Philippe falters, is another blunder of the body: 'Quand il eut mouillé le bras droit, il se sentit fortement étreindre le cou par un bras jeune et vigoureux, le bras de son père!' (B XI 492). Despite having mastered the scene such as to take control of it entirely, by keeping the room in darkness and by manipulating the behaviour of his son to make him obedient, touch once again comes in the way of the illusion. And so the final image of Don Juan is that of the copy driven to its most hideous extreme as the 'œil d'enfant dans une tête de mort' is mirrored and horrifically amplified in the grotesque vision of a living head attached to a dead body.

When Don Juan is pictured as 'Maître des illusions de la vie', playing the part of the Romantic 'autant que sait l'être un étudiant allemand' (B XI 486), we may read him as an explicitly Hoffmannesque figure. Like the addict or the alcoholic, the master of illusions is also subject to his illusions: this, as I have shown, resonates with the image of Hoffmann resonant in French literature of the time. Don Juan is, finally, no more than a literary copy:

Il fut en effet le type du Don Juan de Molière, du Faust de Goethe, du Manfred de Byron et du Melmoth de Maturin. Grandes images tracées par les plus grands génies de l'Europe [...]! Images terribles que le principe du Mal, existant chez l'homme, éternise, et dont quelques copies se retrouvent de siècle en siècle. (B XI 486-87)

To these may be added Hoffmann's Medardus, already a composite image, a point on a long line of Faustian wrongdoers. The presence of Hoffmann throughout the tale reflects on the lineage of the story: as a composite of others, a narrative life crossed by copy. The elixir, as the twice-drawn motif copied from *Elixiere* into *L'Élixir*, is the

motif of a tale about the life-diminishing risks that are run in mimetic reproduction. Balzac's narrative offers a kind of commentary on this compulsive mimetic or imitative desire, one that expresses itself in the terms of a conflictual imitation. We are left, with the 'cross' that highlights the reproducibility of motifs from one tale to another, with the embodied experience, the feeling, of a tale's inscription into a literary tradition. The tale seems to narrate the feeling of copying Hoffmann.

IV

The errant son's body in *L'Élixir* is left deformed or crossed by a wager made against inheritance. The body lives on only in parts, a grotesque composition of fragmented limbs. Balzac's tale of literary and social inheritance foregrounds the living arm and head, uncannily persistent forms of life — a life singularly altered — as the legacy of Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*.

In this chapter I have argued that mimetic narratives involve a compromise, as an impersonator threatens to usurp its original; as life folds into writing and writing into life. This I have traced through figures of the cross. Following Medardus's cross-shaped scar, the proof of his impossible double identity, Balzac's *élixir* is another literary device that plays out across the subject's skin. The son anoints the flesh of the father in the name of extending his life and escaping the laws of inheritance. In *La Peau de chagrin*, Raphaël's scrap of skin marks out the loss of life in the name of fulfilling his desires. These three texts thus feed into a troubled chain of literary inheritance. *L'Élixir de longue vie* both calls back to Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* as its predecessor and looks forward to *La Peau de chagrin*. The triad of Gothic or fantastic skins — in which the skin marks the sensuous edge between the subject and his world, a middling layer between subject- and object-life — might resemble strange visions of the act of writing or inscription, calling always to how that act might feel or work upon the body. What makes *L'Élixir* and *Elixiere* unexpected forefathers of *La Peau de chagrin*, a novel that so singularly bridges 'le fantastique' and 'le réalisme', is that they suggest how an experience of 'le fantastique', even in its most awful or most garbled forms, might come to usurp or to confound a reality shown to be composed of reproducible images. This experience in Balzac's early work is insistently marked, as we have seen, by the figure of Hoffmann.

The Gothic body in European nineteenth-century literature is one of the non-human or the not-quite-human, figured in hideous lifelikeness by the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the ultimate animated compendium of body parts. The Gothic inheritance of Hoffmann appears in the form of another impossible body: the double. For Neil Cornwell, Hoffmann's influence on the Gothic genre is such that without him, 'many subsequent works in the Gothic mode (by Nerval or Gogol, Poe or Dostoevsky, and indeed many others) would seem inconceivable'.⁶⁴ The league of nineteenth-century doubles and clones that follows him grows to include the figures of Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Poe's *William Wilson* and Maupassant's *Le Horla*. Hoffmann's work resonates, too, in the robotic fantasies of the fin de siècle, such as Villiers de l'Isle Adam's *L'Ève future*, which recalls both Hoffmann's automata tales and the impossible predicament of the *Doppelgänger* or the clone, as a kind of object-self. The Gothic also carries a bodily charge into nineteenth-century realism. In the British context, a 'Victorian Gothic' has been theorised in which the Gothic remains a primarily 'affective form', persisting in linguistic and imagistic formulations in the works of writers such as Wilkie Collins and the Brontës.⁶⁵ For Balzac, the Gothic flourishes of his early career, most evident in texts such as this and *Melmoth réconcilié*, a re-telling of Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, feed into the realism of his later works. *La Comédie Humaine* teems with devilish figures and infernal pacts, making, as one critic notes, 'Gothic diabolism credible in a realistic setting, in the banks and theatres of Paris'.⁶⁶ As the diabolical Vautrin wagers in *Le Père Goriot*: 'Je vous défie de faire deux pas dans Paris sans rencontrer des manigances infernales' (B III 140).

The fascination for and fear evoked by the spectacle of the Gothic body, and its strange variations on human life, culminates here in an image of Balzac's text feeding from the dead body of Hoffmann's, in its own extravagant Gothic flourish as reference to its literary predecessor. 'Toute la civilisation européenne', in the words of his preface, 'repose sur l'HÉRÉDITÉ comme sur un pivot' (B XI 474). And as the elixirs reproduce themselves and one pact begets another, as the living arm replaces

⁶⁴ Neil Cornwell, 'European Gothic', p. 70.

⁶⁵ *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).

⁶⁶ Hope Crampton, 'Melmoth in "La Comédie Humaine"', *The Modern Language Review*, 61.1 (1966), 42-50 (p. 48).

the withered arm and one decapitation follows the last, the production of new textual life self-consciously evokes, and draws energy from, the dead words of another writer. To come ‘under the influence’ of Hoffmann’s bloody text, finally, suggests another return to Chapter 2, and another way in which Balzac might incorporate Hoffmann, as in the image of the anonymous narrator of *Der goldne Topf*, who consumes the figure of one of his own characters in a glass of punch. The body of inheritance — crossed, marked, feeding off the death of its predecessors — might yet, like a copy in the face of its original, survive against all expectations.

Conclusion

‘Cette réalité à mi-hauteur, trop chimérique pour la vie, trop terre à terre pour la
littérature...’

— Proust, ‘Sainte-Beuve et Balzac’¹

Across this thesis, I have unfolded visual figures in four distinct comparative readings of Hoffmann and Balzac in order to trace a new account of the relationship between their works. It is a fitting moment, at the culmination of these readings, to cite a letter in which Fyodor Dostoevsky names the two authors alongside one another:

You plume yourself on the number of books you have read... But don’t please imagine that I envy you that. At Peterhof I read at least as many as you have. The whole of Hoffmann in Russian and German (that is, ‘Kater Murr’, which hasn’t yet been translated), and nearly all Balzac. (Balzac is great! His characters are the creations of an all-embracing intelligence. Not the spirit of the age, but whole millenniums, with all their strivings, have worked towards such development and liberation in the soul of man.)²

It speaks to the key tenets of this thesis that Hoffmann and Balzac are mentioned together in the reading list of someone such as Dostoevsky: the writer of works that range in scope and style from *The Double* to *The Brothers Karamazov*; a writer who has himself been associated with a literature termed ‘romantic realism’.³

Champfleury, in the preface to his 1856 translation of Hoffmann, *Contes posthumes d’Hoffmann*, makes a similar move when he confesses ‘Aussi ne renierais-je jamais l’influence qu’ont exercé sur moi Diderot, Balzac et Hoffmann plus particulièrement’.⁴ And Baudelaire writes, in an article on Poe originally published in

¹ Marcel Proust, ‘Sainte-Beuve et Balzac’, in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), pp. 228-67 (p. 238).

² Dostoevsky, letter to his brother dated 9 August 1838. *Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky to his Family and Friends*, trans. by Ethel Golburn Mayne (London: Ghatto & Windus, 1914), p. 4.

³ Donald Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

⁴ Jules Champfleury, *Contes posthumes d’Hoffmann* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1856), p. I.

La Revue de Paris in 1852: ‘Que ne fit pas Hoffmann pour désarmer la destinée? Que n’entreprit pas Balzac pour conjurer la fortune?’.⁵ A strange tension is engendered by this persistent enjoinder of the two writers. In the distinctions of the literary canon, we are used to holding Balzac and Hoffmann apart from one another. And yet, on the bookshelves of these major nineteenth-century writers and readers, they appear, again and again, side by side.

It is a risk of comparative work that its readings might too forcefully dredge together distinct texts, paying insufficient attention to the differences between them in the hurry to bring them together. The readings here have been quick to hunt out similarities and correspondences in these texts, without explicitly acknowledging the wealth of differences that separate the writings, contexts and worldviews of Hoffmann and Balzac. The readings respond to a lack in scholarship of full comparative close readings working between and across the authors, despite a consistent tendency of literary histories to list the two side by side. They respond, thus, to the notion of linearity — to the singular bounding line of narrative, taxonomy and filiation — which has been troubled repeatedly across the thesis. My readings have attempted to push these texts in new directions, to see what they might yield. In doing so, I have hoped to challenge canonical assumptions: including both those assumptions that clearly hold the two apart, and those that list them next to each other.

The major contributions of this thesis have worked on two levels. I have attempted, first, to articulate a new account of mimesis: one that moves away from the visual, reflective aspect of copy, and that attempts to draw on the significance of the subject’s body in his or her encounter with the object, accounting for the paradoxical experience that characterizes subject-object relations in the writings of Merleau-Ponty and others. I have repeatedly returned to the materiality of the skin, and its visual depiction in the figure of the *Umriss* or outline, as the area through which the subject’s body comes up against its environment, both passing into it and resisting it, feeling itself as an object against and within the object world. This was set up in Chapter One, which culminated in the figure of the Merleau-Pontian ‘chiasm’ as a figure for the looping exchange or *entrelacs* which subsists between subject and

⁵ Charles Baudelaire, ‘Edgar Allan Poe. Sa vie et ses ouvrages’, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975-6), II, pp. 249-88 (p. 249).

object. This articulation of mimesis, informed by the accounts of Erich Auerbach and Walter Benjamin, works to acknowledge and to account for the charges of duplicitousness with which mimesis has been confronted since the writings of Plato. Second, I have shown how the literary intersection of Hoffmann and Balzac yields a set of scenarios that foreground this reading of mimesis. Because of their historical positioning and the discursive framework through which Hoffmann entered the French literary scene, as detailed in my Introduction, the crossover between the two is characterised by the emergence of new, self-conscious modes of storytelling in French literature. Hoffmann introduced the ‘fantastique’ into France in a highly mediated form, and with it a set of new enquiries into literary genre, innovation, and imitation. Balzac’s response to Hoffmann in these early works is thus itself at least in part a response to the literary-discursive atmosphere in which Hoffmann was being publicly read and digested. With these two movements in mind, I hope to have re-adjusted the common ascriptions of ‘Romanticism’ and ‘Realism’ to Hoffmann and Balzac respectively, and to have identified a new complication in the relationship of those generic categories to one another.

Over the course of four distinct comparative sets of readings, I have written of the ways in which Balzac draws Hoffmannesque figures, and furthermore draws on a Hoffmannesque narrative voice in his staging of scenes of reading and intelligibility. The thesis statement to which I have returned in every chapter is that there is a material compromise involved in the act of mimesis, and that for Balzac, this compromise is expressed in Hoffmannesque formulations. I have written of this compromise or mediating interference in the phenomenological terms of Merleau-Ponty, whose subject must recognise him- or herself as an object, precisely in order to recognise him- or herself as subject: as both toucher and the touched, as both viewer (or visionary) and the visible. This work relates to the recent rise in interest in affect.⁶ What we now call ‘affect theory’ prioritises emotional or affective responses manifested throughout many levels of culture and behaviour but that begin in the body. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg define them as ‘those forces — visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion — that can serve to drive us toward movement and

⁶ See, for example, the recent Palgrave Macmillan series *Palgrave Studies in Affect Theory and Literary Criticism* (2016-17).

extension'.⁷ My interest in the 'felt' and 'feeling' registers of the texts here, in the bodily response of narrative subjects, in the complicity of the reader with narrative bodies — and in scars and dismemberments, in the traces left by narrative on the body — betrays an undercurrent of interest in this recent 'affective turn'.

In Chapter Two, Raphaël and Anselmus both, in coming to the act of writing (Anselmus) and narration (Raphaël), sign away something of their lived realities in the name of a different kind of life. Anselmus's tenuous transcendence in the fantasy mirror-world of Atlantis meets its obverse in the death of Raphaël, who makes a wager against death by means of a pact made on a piece of magic skin, and loses. I showed that in both narratives — the one a modern-day *Märchen*, the other a fantastic-realist novel — the subject returns upon himself as narrative object in the staging of legibility. In Chapter Three, Hoffmann's Enthusiast, Spikher, and Schlemihl, all of whom have all lost a metonymic piece of themselves, be it shadow, reflection, or cloak, see that loss refracted and repeated within one another's narratives. Balzac's Colonel Chabert meets a similar fate. Having lost the paper confirmation of his life at the hands of his former wife, he finds it impossible to win back any form of authentic life. In both tales, the narrative or paper confirmation of identity is an assault on subjectivity itself. Again, the narrative subject re-discovers himself as narrative object, in terms that bring vision up against touch as the spectacle of the narrated or mimetic life is felt: against and within the reading, seeing, sensing body.

Chapter Four suggested a literal enactment of the 'stakes of mimesis' in a reading of two tales in which intelligibility is given up in the name of the artwork. The anamorphic strain demanded by the void artworks at their centres — Berklinger's canvas blank, Frenhofer's a blur — is framed by the ekphrastic discourse of the narrator, who consistently emphasises his painterly use of lines and traits in the construction of narrative. Reading, in these works, becomes a process of recognition via those outlines and edges — reiterations of the skin, the edges of the body — at the risk of endangering their content. The lines themselves become traces of compromise and loss, marking the disfigurement undergone by life when turned into an image on the page. In Chapter Five, Balzac's engagement with Hoffmann becomes explicit in the preface of 'L'Élixir de longue vie'. Once again, their crossover is expressed in the

⁷ Gregg and Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', p. 1.

terms of a pact made against death. Here I returned to the figure of the chiasmic ‘cross’, as an image of inheritance and crossover and as a final confoundment of the narrative ‘line’. Balzac’s text, so often derided as a Gothic genre piece, plays out the tale of the pact against death, citing Hoffmann’s as its model. The tale turns out to suggest an expression of how it might feel to situate a narrative in a literary history through the use of arbitrary motifs; and hence works to articulate a sense of how it might ‘feel’ to copy Hoffmann.

In eight distinct variations, these texts stage, in the broadest terms, the handing over of life or of some aspect of life in the name of a vision or a fiction. I have termed this transactional element ‘the stakes of mimesis’. My use of this phrase as a structuring figure for my argument is intended to have been suggestive, rather than allegorical; a supplementary narrative structure to direct, rather than to command, the readings. A character to whom I have found myself often returning is the devil or demon, proffering to his victim a Mephistophelean pact: be it in Raphaël’s encounter with the *marchand*, Rose Chapotel’s settlement pact with Chabert, or Hoffmann’s explicitly diabolical tempters and seducers in *Abenteuer* and *Elixiere*. The living narrative subject must hand something over in the name of his or her (though in every case it is *his*) fiction or vision. The motif of the diabolical sacrifice or pact, as a figurative account of the confrontation between man and the supernatural, might of course be taken much further. One possible line of enquiry would be to more closely consider the resonances of Faust in these stories; to draw on Goethe as a third writer and shared influence, and to probe the significance of the Faustian or Mephistophelean wager in its original context.⁸ Another route might be to consider the broader theoretical implications of the ‘sacrifice’, which has been a watchword of twentieth-century anthropological and literary theory for writers such as Freud, Bataille, and Girard. This might provide a productive avenue of investigation into the kind of life or half-life engendered by the artwork. If the myth and delusion of Pygmalion has often been referenced in the artist tales of these two writers (particularly of Hoffmann), the theme of sacrifice might yield an alternative set of

⁸ For Faustian elements in Balzac, see Scott Shinabargar, ‘Absolute Seduction: The Faustian Motif in Balzac and Valéry’, *The Coastal Review*, 2.1 (2008), 1-16; Henry F. Majewski, *Paradigm & Parody: Images of Creativity in French Romanticism — Vigny, Hugo, Balzac, Gautier, Musset* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), pp. 96-115.

models for the kind of cultural production we see played out in these texts about writers and artists who so often give up life for their art.⁹

Play has been an implicit force throughout, suggested not least by the ‘stakes’ of the gambling den. On the one hand, play involves an opening up and a re-forming of material: as in the *Denkbilder* of Benjamin’s *Berliner Kindheit*, in which the object world is experienced on a pre-semiotic, pre-linguistic level. In the ‘squiggle game’ of D. W. Winnicott, too, play involves a reciprocal activity of interpretation and re-interpretation as random drawings are transformed into meaningful hieroglyphs and back into un-meaning matter. On the other hand, play can repeat structures already in place, as in Freud’s investigations of child’s play, particularly the ‘fort da’ game, in which a trauma is re-enacted through the repetitions of the game. This double nature makes play an apt analogy for mimesis.¹⁰ Play, like mimesis, is both an ordering and a dis-ordering force, committed both to illusion and to the reiteration of the reality from which illusion springs, and always calling into question the manner in which the subject engages with the object world.

One of the risks of play is an adherence to an established set of rules and conventions. Gender is a troubling topic in this patrilinear set of works. I have tried to respond, when appropriate, to the female characters of the texts by re-examining their plot functions, particularly in the case of figures who have been continuously overlooked or mis-read in scholarship, such as die alte Liese of *Der goldne Topf* and Rose Chapotel of *Le Colonel Chabert*. But to give an incisive reading of gender relations demands more than a consideration of the surface figurations of texts and their male and female characters. It would mean, in this instance, to probe how gender relations inflect the very functioning of mimesis. In this thesis about men, I have unfolded a set of nuanced readings of male-male relationships. These relationships have included two main archetypes. One is the collaboration between the devil and the male protagonist, including instances when the devil acts through a female agent such as Julie/Giulietta — who, like Gillette of *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*, arguably assumes the position of a bargaining tool, and token of seduction, between men. Another is the relationship of the (male) original to his *Doppelgänger*, as in Chapter Five, in which the patrilinear logic of the double threatens to bypass the familial

⁹ See, for example, Derek Hughes, *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹⁰ See Brooks, *Realist Vision*.

networks through which society structures itself. The texts in this chapter suggested, as a radical alternative to heterosexual reproduction, the inheritance system of the double or of the clone. Two female characters stand out from this pattern, both of them Balzacian: Foedora of *La Peau de chagrin*, and Rose Chapotel of *Le Colonel Chabert*. Both of these figures hold sway over the transactions the male protagonist makes with the world. Foedora, a being of money and masks, represents Raphaël's potential entrance into social configuration. Rose Chapotel offers Chabert the settlement pact, acting as part of the machinery of the law. Both, as I showed in Chapters Two and Three, are intimately concerned with the laws of physiognomy, with the face or more often the masked face, as the showplace of dissimulation. More work might yet be done to sufficiently account for their roles in the playing out of male narratives, here and in the context of Balzac's work more broadly. As it stands, the lack of sufficient attention to constellations of female figures in this thesis can only be testament to the fact that it traces a particular narrative of a relationship between two male authors.

For some readers, the figure of Sigmund Freud might seem to have played a conspicuously small role. Freud not only crystallised *Der Sandmann* into a centrepiece of psychoanalytic literary theory, but he was also an 'obsessive reader of Balzac'.¹¹ He had a distinct relationship to *La Peau de chagrin*, which is said to have been the last book he read before his death, and which he is said to have described as follows: 'Das war das richtige Buch für mich; es handelt von Einschrumpfen und Verhungern'.¹² This project might have examined moments or articulations of the 'uncanny' in Balzac, within a Freudian framework. My omission of Freud was a considered move. My aim has been to articulate a Hoffmannesque poetics of 'strangeness' not couched in the terms of psychoanalysis, but rather of literary imitation. This has involved a move back towards an 'uncanny' which has something more to it, perhaps, of E. Jentsch's indecipherability and uncertainty — particularly the uncertainty over whether a thing may be living or dead — unhitching it from Freud's psycho-sexual framework. The confusion over whether a figure is a human, or work of art or fiction, has returned throughout — explicitly, of course, in the artist

¹¹ Knight, *Balzac and the Model of Painting*, p. 22.

¹² Cited in *Freud-Handbuch: Leben — Werk — Wirkung*, ed. by Hans-Martin Lohmann and Joachim Pfeiffer (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013), p. 75: 'That was the right book for me; it is about shrinkage and starvation'.

works of Chapter Four, but implicitly in the notion of Chapter Two's narrative objects, Chapter Three's paper characters and passports, and in Chapter Five's *Doppelgänger*. There is an otherworldliness or uncanniness, a sense of the 'fantastic' which is inherent to the problem of mimesis itself: and to the feeling of recognizing the paper version of the object-like self, like the Hoffmannesque narrator of Balzac's 'Théorie du conte', who sees himself cast in dizzying multiple across the walls of his home.

In Chapter One, I cited a passage from *Illusions Perdues* in which Hoffmann is invoked in a phantasmatic spectacle of mirror and voice in the Cosmorama. I acknowledged then that Hoffmann often appears in these fantastic moments, and questioned the significance of his appearance. Having considered several such apparitions, I return now to *Illusions Perdues*, which traces the corruption and downfall of the romantic hero Lucien de Rubempré, an *arriviste* from the provinces, in the literary and journalistic circles of Paris. I move, this time, to a sequence from the very end of the novel when Lucien, having lost everything, intends to commit suicide by throwing himself into the waters of the Charente — 'le poète voulut finir poétiquement' (B V 688) — in a distinct reflection of both Raphaël de Valentin and Anselmus of Chapter 2. Wandering along the snaking route of the river, Lucien comes across a Spanish traveller, the Abbé Carlos Herrera. Over the course of their long discussion, the Spaniard makes an offer to Lucien whose stakes are Lucien's agency over his own life. Under the terms of their pact, Lucien will become the abbot's 'secrétaire', and will receive whatever he desires in fortune and position in exchange for total compliance with the whims of this character — who is subsequently revealed to be Vautrin, alias of Jacques Collin, the criminal mastermind of *La Comédie humaine*. The links with Raphaël's pact in *La Peau de chagrin* are strong: Vautrin's opening gambit is 'Vous me semblez avoir du chagrin' (B V 690). And it has been pre-figured in Faustian terms, in a warning letter from D'Arthez to Lucien's sister Ève, in which he warns that Lucien 'signerait volontiers demain un pacte avec le démon, si ce pacte lui donnait pour quelques années une vie brillante et luxueuse' (B V 578). Balzac thus clearly outlines this encounter as a meeting with the devil.

Lucien narrates his story to Herrera/Vautrin, attaining the status of narrative subject through the confession of his life story, like Raphaël, though in distinctly more ironic terms in the case of this failed writer: 'd'autant plus poétiquement débité

que Lucien le répétait pour la troisième fois depuis quinze jours' (B V 694). Vautrin's response is a rambling speech, interspersed with strange digressions, aiming at the temptation and seduction of Lucien. Vautrin suggests that Lucien needs to find a new attitude to 'l'histoire', one that moves on from a mere 'collection de dates et de faits' in the name of discovering within history 'les causes humaines des événements' (B V 696). He goes on:

Vous voulez dominer le monde, n'est-ce pas? il faut commencer par obéir au monde et le bien étudier. Les savants étudient les livres, les politiques étudient les hommes, leurs intérêts, les causes génératrices de leurs actions. Or le monde, la société, les hommes pris dans leur ensemble, sont fatalistes; ils adorent l'événement. Savez-vous pourquoi je vous fais ce petit cours d'histoire? c'est que je vous crois une ambition démesurée... (B V 697)

This reads as a lesson in realism. Vautrin puts forth the task of the writer as Balzac's narrator articulates it throughout *La Comédie humaine*: to 'dominer le monde' by grasping 'les causes génératrices' of events and effects: or to 'surprendre', as he writes in the *Avant-Propos*, 'le sens caché dans cet immense assemblage de figures, de passions et d'événements' (B I 11). It seems significant in the light of the *Avant-Propos*, too, that Vautrin's offer to Lucien is to become his 'secrétaire', his amanuensis. Vautrin has frequently been compared to Balzac: for Paraschas, Vautrin represents 'the most developed of the authorial doubles' — becoming finally 'as omniscient as the novelist who is the master of the world he (re-) creates and manipulates'.¹³ Vautrin clearly functions as a kind of authorial voice when he goes on to suggest that, in this project of 'dominer le monde', the subject's task must be to hide his own strategies for doing so: 'Se donner un but éclatant et cacher ses moyens d'arriver, tout en cachant sa marche' (B V 701). The craft of authorship is a project of dissimulation. Vautrin's tactics are the image of that mimetic practice which is specific to realism, that which tries to make tacit its own techniques for coming into being. He goes on, turning to the familiar analogy of a card game:

¹³ Paraschas, *The Realist Author*, p. 96.

Comment vous conduisez-vous à la bouillotte?... dit le prêtre, y pratiquez-vous la plus belle des vertus, la franchise? Non seulement vous cachez votre jeu, mais encore vous tâchez de faire voire, quand vous êtes sûr de triompher, que vous allez tout perdre. Enfin, vous dissimulez, n'est-ce pas?... vous mentez pour gagner cinq louis! [...] Et bien, l'ambitieux qui veut lutter avec les préceptes de la vertu, dans une carrière où ses antagonistes s'en privent, est un enfant à qui les vieux politiques diraient ce que les joueurs disent à celui qui ne profite pas de ses brelans: 'Monsieur, ne jouez jamais à la bouillotte...' Est-ce vous qui faites les reflets dans le jeu de l'ambition? Pourquoi vous ai-je dit de vous égaler à la Société? ... C'est qu'aujourd'hui, jeune homme, la Société s'est insensiblement arrogé tant de droits sur les individus, que l'individu se trouve obligé de combattre la Société. Il n'y a plus de lois, il n'y a que des mœurs, c'est-à-dire des simagrées, toujours la forme. (B V 702)

It is, he argues here, the author's job precisely to hide the traces and mechanics of his artistic strategies. Vautrin thus works to uncover the very secrets of the realist's attempts to cover things up, remaining all the while pseudonymous. And at the heart of this game of masking and un-masking is the attempted seduction and co-option of Lucien into his schemes. Vautrin's aim is to draw in the life of his listener, and to recreate him as his own. 'Je vous ai pêché', he declares, 'je vous ai rendu la vie, et vous m'appartenez comme la créature est au créateur' (B V 703).

Balzac here makes explicit the trappings of mimesis. If we are to take seriously the readings of the texts in this thesis, this is a Hoffmannesque move. It is to play amongst those eminently Hoffmannesque sly, ironic authorial self-stagings and doublings. Once again, authorship finds itself doubled or fractured in the face of a contemporary or co-author. Lucien will give his life to be the secretary of this Protean, world-dominating being; Vautrin, the ultimate shape-shifter, name-changer, here the shadowy-faced foreigner, embodies the craft of authorship as dissimulation — mimesis. The relationship between the writer and his apprentice is at once homoerotic and paternal-filial, in the line of Anselmus/Lindhorst, Frenhofer/Poussin and the other masculine couplings that have played a role in the readings here.

Lucien does finally give his life up for Vautrin, for he goes on to commit suicide in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Like Raphaël, his suicide in the river

is only postponed. Lucien's downfall and death is marked not by the lines traced by a shrinking skin, but by the authorial figure of Vautrin.

When Oscar Wilde announces that Lucien's suicide represents 'one of the greatest tragedies' of his life, he marks a foundational moment in Balzacian readership, and in Balzac scholarship, that recurs in varying formulations until the present time.¹⁴ Marcel Proust cites Wilde's comment in 'Sainte-Beuve et Balzac', comparing him to Lucien and suggesting that Balzac's fiction reflectively pre-empts this particular real life. He goes on to claim that Balzac's characters are real; that in Balzac, we continue to 'ressentir', even to 'satisfaire', 'les passions dont la haute littérature doit nous guérir'. Where in the writing of another writer, 'notre mondanité y est purgée comme dirait Aristote', he argues, 'dans Balzac, nous avons presque une satisfaction mondaine à y assister'.¹⁵ In this doggedly non-transcendent, anti-Aristotelian realism, the true measure of mimesis lies in our affective response to a text. In the course of a heated discussion with Richard Ellmann on the topic of Lucien de Rubempré across the pages of the *New York Review of Books*, Susan Sontag acknowledges herself as 'one of the countless readers of Balzac brought to tears by the suicides of Esther Gobseck and Lucien de Rubempré'.¹⁶ A. S. Byatt, in an article from 2005, likewise admits to having found 'tears rising to my eyes' at Lucien's death.¹⁷ In a literary feint reminiscent of Graham Robb's stories of nineteenth-century readers who grieved for Balzac's characters, Lucien becomes a point at which Balzac's writing spills into accounts of 'real life'. These scholars form a corpus of readers keen to emphasise what they feel in response to his death, and whose response is given in the documentation of their tears. The demand that literature makes from us as readers, again, is a bodily one; once again, mimesis happens at the affective crossover, marked by what readers give of themselves in response to the text. Their tears are then worked back into writing, and re-enter the world of literature.

Having begun my introduction with David Koreff's journey from Berlin to Paris, suggesting this to be an extension of Hoffmann's fiction intruding into life, I

¹⁴ Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', p. 222.

¹⁵ Marcel Proust, 'Sainte-Beuve et Balzac', pp. 242-43.

¹⁶ Richard Ellmann, 'A Late Victorian Love Affair', *New York Review of Books*, 4 August, 1977; Susan Sontag, 'Vautrin's Cigar', *New York Review of Books*, 27 October, 1977.

¹⁷ A. S. Byatt, 'The Death of Lucien de Rubempré', *The Kenyon Review*, 27.1 (2005), 42-64, (p. 42).

am tempted now to end with these Balzacian figures, tripping in their turn from fiction into the real. There is a tendency, in common parlance, to see ‘reality’, or perhaps ‘realism’, as the measure of good fiction. We attach ourselves to the sentiment ‘based on a true story’. Undeniably, fiction loops back and forth, into and out of life, with varying degrees of grace and intensity. But ‘realism’ and ‘romanticism’ are unreliable terms in this light, though they are interesting ones, being as labels no more than approximations of what they want to suggest. As Auerbach notes in the Epilegomena to *Mimesis*, ‘ihr Wert [...] besteht darin, daß sie im Leser oder Hörer eine Reihe von Vorstellungen hervorrufen, die es ihm erleichtern zu verstehen, was im jeweiligen Zusammenhang gemeint ist. Exakt sind sie nicht’.¹⁸ The readings here have aimed to unfold some of this inexactness, to disentangle the work and play of figuration from any sense of strict taxonomy. Hoffmann, the ‘chantre de l’impossible’ (B VII 956), again and again provides Balzac with new ways of translating the ‘real’ into his fiction, paying testament to the fact that the life-giving or life-interfering tendencies of literature do not necessarily lie in its capacity to reflect.

‘Mimesis’, once delivered from its servitude to the mirror and the lamp, and when brought to bear on a phenomenological, embodied experience of narrative, denotes a vital set of compromises in literary production. As a figure of wresting or grasping, or of the interference of masked or diabolical agents, it is a figure for literary production itself. It marks the meeting point of life with art, tracing how the one crosses over into the other, and crosses back again.

¹⁸ Auerbach, ‘Epilegomena zu *Mimesis*’, p. 16: ‘Their worth consists in that they elicit in readers or hearers a set of ideas that facilitate for them an understanding of what is meant in the particular context. They are not exact’.

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