

Kinaesthetic, Spastic and Spatial Motifs as Expressions of Romantic Irony in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* and Other Writings

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E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* has attracted a plethora of critical interpretations since it was first published in 1816, the most famous being Freud's essay on *The Uncanny* (1919). Many critics have focused on the motif of the eye and the legend of the Sandman who steals children's eyes when they refuse to go to sleep. The legends of Narcissus, Pygmalion and the Doppelgänger, which underpin the narrative of Hoffmann's novella, have also provided scope for psychological, poststructuralist, feminist, historicist and meta-romantic criticism.¹ This article examines Hoffmann's motivic preoccupation with kinaesthesia, spasticity, kinetic energy and paralysis.² First, it seeks to interpret the con- and in-voluted narrative structure of *The Sandman* as formally symbolic of the Romantic³ idea of infinite perfectibility, in which the process of becoming is in continuous and creative flux.⁴ Furthermore, it will show that the pervasive motif of grotesque bodies and awkward motor-neural movement is dialectically at variance with the spiralling prose form of the novella, thus generating Romantic Irony through this formal inner contradiction.⁵ The aim is to interpret this Romantic Irony as a critique of the Romantic poet and his artistic quest.⁶ Second, the article demonstrates that Hoffmann's particular use of kinaesthetic and spastic

¹ For semiotic excess, deferral of meaning, and reader as author, see: Detlef Kremer, *E.T. A. Hoffmann: Erzählungen und Romane*. Berlin: Schmidt, 1999, pp. 68, 86, 85. For feminist readings underpinned by Freudian analysis see: Hélène Cixous, 'Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's 'The Uncanny.'" *The New Literary History*, 7.3 (1973), 525-48., pp.525-48; Jutta Fortin, 'Brides of the Fantastic: Gautier's *Le Pied de Momie* and Hoffmann's *Der Sandman*.' *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41.2 (2004), 257-75., pp.265-7; Ricarda Schmidt, 'E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*: An Early Example of *Écriture Féminine*? A Critique of Trends in Feminist Literary Criticism.' *Women in German Yearbook*, 4 (1988), 21- 45., p.41.

² "Kinesis" means movement, but also the energy of movement, which causes bodies, or more abstract entities, to move. As an extension of this concept, "kinaesthesia" in human beings is "the inner sense of one's own body". See: Kevin T. Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synaesthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956. rpt. 1998, p.171. "Spasticity" means the condition or quality of performing involuntary, contractile movements.

³ The term "Romantic" applied to the Romantic literary period was in circulation amongst German scholars by 1800. Its first use in 1798 is generally attributed to Friedrich Schlegel. See: Friedrich Schlegel, *Characterisation and Criticism 1 (1796-1801)*. ed. Hans Eichner. München: Schöningh, 1967, pp.116, 182. Schlegel's idea of Romantic poetry is inclusive of literary prose fiction. All quotations attributed to Schlegel in this article refer to Friedrich, not to his brother.

⁴ Behler describes "infinite perfectibility" as the Romantics' perception of their historical period as "an all-pervasive moment of becoming", and their literature and criticism as in "a process of endless development" that would "yield new meanings from ever new modes of historical consciousness". See: Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. rpt. 2005, p.4.

⁵ Schlegel describes the contradictions inherent in Romantic Irony as the exercise of self-restraint (Besonnenheit) by the artist during the artistic process, so that he balances between "self-creation and self-destruction", stamping his self-hood onto his fictional work, and simultaneously mocking it as limited and fictional (37, 151). Romantic Irony, therefore, involves continuous oscillation rather than finite synthesis, a state of creative equilibrium often expressed by Hoffmann through the metaphor of hovering.

⁶ The masculine pronouns, "he", "his" and "him", are used advisedly throughout to refer to male artists.

metaphors is as much influenced by contemporary technology, science and graphic arts as by the German Romantic Movement.⁷

Although most critics now regard Freud's essay on Hoffmann's *The Sandman* as reductive, it did much to re-establish Hoffmann's reputation as a writer of fiction, and to dispel fallacious nineteenth-century criticism which attributed the madness of his artist figures to the author himself.⁸ Freud reads *The Sandman* as representing the castration complex, symbolised in the fear of losing one's eyes.⁹ Freudian analysis has spawned numerous critical studies, which engage with, extend or contradict his theories.¹⁰ Lucia Ruprecht's study, *Dances of the Self in Heinrich von Kleist, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Heinrich Heine* (2006) offers an analysis of the influence of dance on the work of those three authors. Her argument that, in the work of Kleist, Hoffmann and Heine, "bodily performances . . . bear testimony to, and articulate, an unspeakable, whether ineffable or censored [psychological] wound" is apposite to this study.¹¹ However, Ruprecht's main focus is the formation of subjectivity as part of the human condition, whereas my emphasis gives particular attention to the individual artist/writer and his relationship with contemporary ideas about Romanticism. Furthermore, putting aside Freud's perspective on castration, the loss of eyes is not only sexual but also suggestive of a dysfunctional body, which could be taken as a potent motif for a struggling writer.

Arabesques and kinaesthesia in the service of Romantic Irony

The arabesque structure of *The Sandman* demonstrates Hoffmann's consummate skill at combining apparently disparate narrative components.¹² This practice resembles

⁷ Contemporary developments in telescopic and optical lenses, electrical equipment for animal magnetism, anatomical experiments, and the vogue for building automata exemplify this claim.

⁸ See McGlathery's account of the changing reception of Hoffmann's work: James M. McGlathery, *E. T. A. Hoffmann*. World Authors 868. New York: Twayne, 1997, pp.21-25.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. ed. and trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955. rpt. 1991 xvii: 219-52.

¹⁰ For Freudian critical approaches, see: James M. McGlathery, *Mysticism and Sexuality: E. T. A. Hoffmann, Part Two: Interpretation of the Tales*. New York: Lang, 1985, p.57; Frederick Burwick, *The Haunted Eye: Perception and the Grotesque in English and German Romanticism*. Heidelberg: Carl-Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987, p.259; Siegbert, S. Prawer, 'Hoffmann's Uncanny Guest: A Reading of *The Sandman*'. *German Life and Letters*, 18 (1965), 297-308., pp.300-3; Lee B. Jennings, 'Blood of the Android: A Post-Freudian Perspective on Hoffmann's *Sandman*.' *Seminar*, 22 (1986), 95-111., pp.97-9, 102; Samuel Weber, 'The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment.' *Modern Language Notes*, 88 (1973), 1102-33., pp.1105-10; John M. Ellis, 'Clara, Nathanael and the Narrator: Interpreting Hoffmann's *Der Sandman*.' *German Quarterly*, 54 (1981), 1-18., p.17; Malcolm V. Jones, 'The Sandman' and 'The Uncanny': A Sketch For an Alternative Approach.' *Paragraph*, 7 (1986), 77-101., p.78.

¹¹ See: Lucia Ruprecht, *Dances of the Self in Heinrich von Kleist, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Heinrich Heine*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p.15.

¹² "Arabesque", in this context, means an apparent digression, the centrality of which is often revealed through a retrospective understanding of the whole text. Stanley's critique of Hoffmann's narrative arabesques describes these looping forms as similar to polyphonic musical structures and to "the total concentration required of a dancer executing the arabesque turn in ballet in order to keep . . . the aesthetic line". See: Patricia Stanley, 'Hoffmann's 'Fantasy Pieces in the Style of Callot' in Light of Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of the Arabesque.' *German Studies Review*, 8.3 (1985), 399-419., pp.404-6. Rotermund uses Schlegel's phrase "artistically ordered entanglement" to describe Hoffmann's arabesque mode of writing, see: Erwin Rotermund, 'Musical and Poetic 'Arabesques' in E. T. A. Hoffmann.' *Poetica*, 2 (1992), 48-69., pp.59-60. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text. See also: Friedrich Schlegel, *Characterisation and Criticism*, pp.218, 311. Schlegel

the weaving together of form and substance, as described by the contemporary writer and critic, Friedrich Schlegel.¹³ The woven texture of the novella works against definitive closure, giving the illusion that, even when the pagination stops, the reader never arrives at an ending. For example, the first narrative component comprises three letters, the first of which is analeptic. In that letter Nathanael describes the psychological and domestic catastrophe of his childhood. This allows the reader to understand Nathanael as an adult. The last component, after Nathanael's death, jumps forward several years in narrative time and describes a domestic tableau in which Klara sits contentedly with a future husband and family. This abrupt carnivalisation of Nathanael's tragedy by the addition of a fairy-tale ending has attracted much criticism.¹⁴ However, the addition is consonant with an arabesquing narrative, which joins together heterogeneous and generically hybrid components without clear causation of events in the transition from one to another. The incongruous ending depicts domestic stasis after the rapid forward movement of events immediately preceding it. Thus, the first and last framing arabesques of *The Sandman* are integrally significant, the first providing an insight into Nathanael's neurosis and the last calling into question whether Klara's character was ever compatible for married life with a volatile poet. The ironic tone of the happy ending also undermines closure by inviting inexhaustible possibilities of interpretation. Form, substance and endless re-interpretations of the novella enact in narrative, textual and hermeneutic terms the contemporary Romantic idea of infinite perfectibility. The arabesque style of the novella halts and flows. Thus the form of the novel closely resembles periods of advance and stasis in Nathanael's frequently interrupted quest to excel as a poet.

The inner narrative components of *The Sandman* move sideways and forwards in narrative time and loop from one narrator to another. As Rotermund argues, the Hoffmannesque version of the Romantic arabesque style forces the reader to destroy what is "arbitrary" and to piece together the narrative bit by bit. Even though Rotermund is referring to the interwoven structure of Hoffmann's novel, *Tomcat Murr* (1820-1822), his observation is true of all Hoffmann's fiction (69). His use of "arbitrary", is probably taken from Schlegel (238, 389), but unarguably reiterates contemporary debates about artistic form. The relationship between the inner components becomes clearer after reading the whole text. Kinaesthetic and spastic imagery internally connects and contrasts with the formally sinuous shape of the narrative structure. For example, the unnamed narrator stops the story advancing after the three letters at the beginning by describing the difficulties of writing a story. He confesses how much he struggles, his thoughts boiling and whirling in his breast, to

describes arabesques generally as the most prominent trope of the Romantic period: p. 337. Hoffmann uses visual arabesques to frame his own illustrations for his novel *Tomcat Murr*, see: Ernst Theodore Amadeus Hoffman, *Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman: Collected Works* Vols. 1, 2003; 2/1, 1993; 3, 1985; 4, 2001; 5, 1992. Frankfurt: Steinecke, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, V: p.944, plates 1-4.

¹³ See: Friedrich Schlegel, *Characterisation and Criticism 1 (1796-1801)*, ed. Hans Eichner. München: Schöningh, 1967, pp.238, 389. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text. In the early Romantic period, the terms, grotesque and arabesque, were often used interchangeably, only later diverging in meaning, see: Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Indiana: McGraw-Hill, 1966, p.22. Schlegel's footnote to fragment 389 states that grotesque is synonymous with arabesque, see: Friedrich Schlegel, *Characterisation and Criticism*, p.238.

¹⁴ Indicatively, Holbeche describes the closing paragraph as 'crass', see: Yvonne, J. K. Holbeche, *Optical Motifs in the Works of E. T. A. Hoffmann*. Göppingham: Kümmerle, 1975, p.104.

negotiate such creative manoeuvres.¹⁵ Nathanael's awkwardness is emphasised by its extreme contrast with the narrator's skilful handling of chaotic thoughts and his ability to keep his balance when on the move. The difference between the fictional narrator and Nathanael is that the narrator (and the author) successfully completes the novella, whereas Nathanael's progress towards becoming a poet eventually falters. For example, at the ball Nathanael dances stiffly and lumpenly in time with the automaton, Olimpia, believing her to be a real woman. His motor functions are poor, which metaphorically suggests that his apprenticeship as a poet is not running smoothly. Through the advice of a fictional Professor of Poetry and Rhetoric present at the ball, Hoffmann indirectly guides the reader to interpret the mobility of the dancing couple as metaphor (3: 46). Of course, this advice can be followed in several ways. A common critical reading interprets the ball as a satire against the stereotyping of women in bourgeois society, since many of the assembled company also believe Olimpia to be a real woman.¹⁶ However, for the purpose of the argument here, the important point is that it ironises Nathanael's misconceptions and immaturity.

Kinaesthetic and spastic motifs recur in many guises throughout the story, bringing cohesion and structural irony to the novella. In contrast to *The Sandman's* sinuous arabesque structure, its dominant metaphors feature motoric jerkiness and paralysis. This halting movement, both in the narrative and the kinaesthetic images, bears all the hallmarks of Romantic Irony, which characteristically operates in a switch-back motion. Schlegel describes Romantic Irony as a kind of self-parody, wit or Socratic irony in which positive and negative elements oscillate until the critic/reader becomes giddy. Uncertainty of interpretation arises from the rhythmic overlap of jest and seriousness in the text (108, 160). As a formal equivalent in *The Sandman*, propulsive (moving forward) narrative arabesques are in tension with its spastic motifs. The effect of this Romantic Irony is to critique Nathanael's endeavours. Nathanael, like many artist figures in Hoffmann's work and Romantic literature in general, represents the artist who faces many trials during his apprenticeship. The particular mode and genre of writing used to present this trial in *The Sandman* is macabre comedy. The set of kinaesthetic motifs that Hoffmann weaves through the narrative shows Nathanael failing to gain control over his body or to move it forward. This is concomitant with his lack of development as a writer.

The influence of Romantic writers

Hoffmann's work belongs to and mediates the texts and debates of German Romanticism. In Europe, a massive cross-fertilisation of ideas took place between artists, philosophers and scientists during a period of political upheaval and rapid paradigm-shift at the end of the eighteenth and the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Hoffmann's letters and diaries, which understate his struggle to survive in the teeth and aftermath of the Napoleonic occupation of Germany, testify to his participation in these changes and exchanges of ideologies, literature and culture. A compulsive bibliophile, he acknowledged, among many other writers, the influence of

¹⁵ See: Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, *Collected Works*, III: p.25. Subsequent parenthetical references to Hoffmann's writing are to this edition of his collected works.

¹⁶ See: Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, p.47; John M. Ellis, 'Clara, Nathanael and the Narrator,' pp.11-12.

Novalis, Wackenroder, and Tieck (whom he knew).¹⁷ This list is not in the least exhaustive, but suggestive of the context of *The Sandman* within Romantic literature.

In pursuit of the harmony of body and soul, Novalis advocated the breaking down of barriers between art and science; feeling and reason; and the material and spiritual world.¹⁸ His Romantic novel, *Henry Ofterdingen* (1802), encapsulates his anti-binary way of thinking and demonstrates the importance to the early Romantics of the genre of romance or quest. The novel's protagonist, Ofterdingen, has a dream vision, in which a prophetic spirit inspires him with the words: "World turns to dream and dream to world".¹⁹ The vision sets Ofterdingen on his quest to become a poet. Hoffmann's fiction similarly combines everyday life with the world of dreams. However, their amalgamation is often uncanny, whereas Novalis's dream world tends to be more mystical. As a polymath, Hoffmann has close affinities with Novalis's promulgation of encyclopaedic knowledge.²⁰ The former's literary language invariably merges auditory and visual images, colour, tone and rhythm; and his broad knowledge of literature, fine art, music, philosophy, science, technology and psychology blends into and informs all his writing and musical compositions.

Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck's work often focused on the incompatibility of the artist's vocation with the necessity of living in a material, peopled world. This tension between art and life is repeatedly expressed through metaphors of whole-and-part body movement, spasm and the maintenance of balance, together with the allegory of travelling. In Wackenroder's *Fantasies on Art for Friends of Art* (1799), for example, the musician, Berklinger, strives to reconcile the everyday demands of his life with his desire to reach a dream-like state of consciousness in which he can compose.²¹ He describes this higher consciousness in terms of physical isolation and constriction of body movement, a position in which even his hand would not be able to reach out and touch a fellow human being (76). Instead he gloomily perceives himself as attached to the world for the duration of his life, suspended like an Aolian harp, and subject to the vagaries of the wind in order to make music (79).²² Wackenroder's 'A Wondrous Oriental Fairy-Tale about a Naked Saint' (1799) in *Fantasies* offers another variation of kinaesthesia as a motif to represent the creative process. In this allegory, the saint may be read as an artist (whether writer, painter or musician) who has transcended the limitations of the material world. He spins above the ground in "mighty hurtling wheels of time" where Art, personified, reaches out its "shining hands from heaven...so that we hover above

¹⁷ Hoffmann described himself as uplifted by the ideas of Schlegel and Novalis in diary entries for 12 January and 17 April 1812, both written during bouts of illness. (1: 378, 407). The title and contents of his first published piece (1803), which purports to be a letter from a monk to his friend, bear a notable resemblance to Wackenroder's *Outpourings of an Art-loving Friar* (1797). His own fairy-tales were influenced by Tieck's and, in a letter to him in 1820, Hoffmann described Tieck's collection, *Fantasia*, as "magnificent". See: Ernst Theodor Hoffman, *Selected Letters of E. T. A. Hoffmann*. ed. and trans. Johanna C. Sahlin. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977, pp.274, 300.

¹⁸ See Behler's commentary on Novalis's encyclopaedic philosophy: Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, p.287.

¹⁹ Novalis, *Henry Ofterdingen*, Vol. 1. *Novalis's Writings: The Works of Friedrichs von Hardenberg*. ed. Richard Samuel and Hans-Joachim Mähl. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960-88, p.319.

²⁰ For example, Novalis's *Brouillon*, published in 1788-1799.

²¹ Wilhelm H. Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, *Fantasies on Art for Friends of Art*. 1799. Deutscher National-Litteratur, Historische Kritische Ausgabe 145. Berlin: Spemann, 1885, pp.75-9. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text.

²² In Hoffmann's novel, *Tomcat Murr* (1820-21), the name of the mad painter, Leonhard Ettlinger, is probably a reworking of Wackenroder's musician, Joseph Berglinger.

the desolate abyss in a bold position, between heaven and earth" (66-7). In this telling example of poetic levitation, he physically vibrates with anxiety and, after a transfiguring experience, ascends to heaven in angelic form. Wackenroder's imagery unarguably influenced Hoffmann's much more ironic presentation of Serapion in *The Hermit Serapion* (1820). The *Naked Saint* may also have shaped the motifs of spinning and circles of fire in *The Sandman*. Nathanael has a similar mental obsession with circles, but he gyrates inelegantly and the transformation of his consciousness is downwards or away from the centre towards madness.

In historical accounts of German Romanticism, it is a familiar fact that Wackenroder and Tieck planned their writing together and Tieck published Wackenroder's texts after the latter's death. Tieck was also influenced by the Schlegel brothers, to whom he dedicated his collection of stories and fairy-tales called *Fantasia*.²³ The fairy-tales follow in the steps of Wackenroder, but are often more satiric, which would, no doubt, have had particular appeal for Hoffmann. Tieck's novel, *Franz Sternbald's Wanderings* (1798), exemplifies the Romantic theme of the artistic quest. Sternbald, like Ofterdingen, journeys by indirect routes and makes progress circuitously. The brief sketch of Novalis, Wackenroder and Tieck's work already suggests that the motif of body movement, whether in a personal space or a large spatial area, tends to be symbolic of the imaginative process of creating works of literature or other arts.

Hoffmann's writing reveals its debt to these antecedent novels and fairy-tales. In *The Sandman* images of kinaesthesia and spasticity, in extreme forms even seizure, correlate with Nathanael making progress and marking time during his troubled journey from child to adulthood. Hoffmann's fiction persistently focuses on the awkward or gauche bodily presence of artist figures in pursuance of their arts. For example, the old painter, Bickert, in *The Mesmerist* (1814); the writer, Anselmus, in *The Golden Pot* (1814); the violin-dismantler, Krespel, in *Councillor Krespel* (1819); and the composer and musician, Kreisler, are all physically challenged, as well as spiritually driven, when facing detours and setbacks. Even Anselmus who, unlike Nathanael, eventually reaches the dream kingdom of Atlantis, the world of poetry (2/1: 321), is clumsy. His journey is tortuous, interrupted at one stage by immobilisation inside a glass bottle. The common feature of all Hoffmann's wandering artists is that their travelling towards and entry into the realm of the imagination demands as much physical toil as spiritual elevation. Although, like his fellow writers, Hoffmann used body movement as an aesthetic metaphor for artistic expression, he favoured grotesque variants of this motif. Even though biographical criticism has its limitations, it must be of some significance that his own physical hyperactivity gave him an especial awareness of restless muscle movement.²⁴

Since motoric functions of various parts of the body and travelling across extensive spatial areas occur frequently as metaphors for the creative process in German Romantic literature, it is not surprising to find another variation in the motif of the dance. For example, Heinrich von Kleist's allegorical story, *On the Marionette Theatre* (1810), is apposite and contrastive to Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. Although

²³ Ludwig Tieck, *Fantasia*. Vol. 6. *Ludwig Tieck: Collected Works*, Frankfurt: Frank, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985, pp.9-10.

²⁴ Bleiler describes Hoffmann's hyperactivity thus: "The mobile features of his-deeply lined face were in perpetual motion . . . His hands and feet, too, shared this activity, and the simile may have occurred to the others at the banquet that he was like a stick puppet in his movements". See: Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman, *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*. ed. E. F. Bleiler. New York: Dover, 1967, p.v.

principally a playwright, Kleist nevertheless published a collection of prose fiction in 1810. This collection engaged with contemporary politics and the problems of becoming a successful artist while living under the Napoleonic occupation of Germany. The motifs of Kleist's story concern the beauty of physical movements executed without conscious thought. The principle dancer of a local theatre explains to the narrator why he gives his engrossed attention to the movement of marionettes whose limbs swing like pendulums. The dancer "added that this movement was very simple; that every time, when the centre of gravity was moved in a straight line, the limbs already described curves; and that often . . . the whole puppet fell into a kind of rhythmic movement which resembled dance".²⁵ The force which "lifts" the limbs into the air is greater than the one that "feters" them to the ground (559), whereas the most light-footed of human dancers is weighted down by bodily mass. The dancer concludes that desiring the graceful movement of a puppet in motion is a worthwhile, but eventually unattainable, goal.²⁶

In comparison, Hoffmann's automaton, Olimpia, moves in strict clockwork time, imitating but not expressing human movement. In a macabre reversal, her dancing partner, Nathanael, becomes mechanised. This Hoffmannesque emphasis on the grotesquerie of the dance sets him apart from Kleist. Both Kleist and Hoffmann's dancers, as representatives of artists in general, fail to reach their end-goal, but the means to the end are different. Kleist's dance motif of the string puppet suggests a freely swinging weight that barely touches the ground. Hoffmann's Nathanael needs to trust the weight and energy of his own body, which is capable of moving sympathetically to music if it were not artificially governed by the automaton (3: 39). Kleist's motif is an image of transcendence, while Hoffmann's is one of transcendence through groundedness. Yet both writers use kinaesthetic metaphors to symbolise the Romantic quest, whether the aim is to create a dance, poem, painting or musical composition. In summary, the examples above are recurrent enough to show that German Romantics, alongside a vast range of other tropes, did use metaphors of kinaesthesia, kinetics and travelling to signify creativity. Hoffmann belongs to this family of writers, while imprinting his own mark on their shared mode of writing. If awareness of the whole body in relation to itself and the space it moves in (kinaesthetic awareness) is associated with writing poetry (painting or composing), then, conversely, bodily disintegration or spasticity is symbolic of loss of creativity. Thus, by extension of this metaphoric schema, violent movement and violation of body parts come to signify miscreation or loss of creativity. There is, certainly, a distinctive emphasis in *The Sandman* on grotesque variants of kinaesthesia. Oppositional motifs of spasticity and paralysis in this novella provide an ironic counterpoint to images of progressive locomotion.

²⁵ Heinrich Kleist, 'On the Marionette Theatre,' in *Heinrich Kleist: Collected Works*. Frankfurt: Müller-Salget, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990, III: 555-63., p.556. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text.

²⁶ Further formative influences on Hoffmann's use of the dance motif may stem from Goethe's depiction of Lotte in *The Sufferings of Young Werther* and Mignon in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Goethe 9: 469). See: Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *The Sufferings of Young Werther*. trans. Bayard Quincy Morgan. London: Calder, 1964, pp.33-4; *Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission and Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship*, Vol. 9. *Goethe: Collected Works: Letters, Diaries and Conversations*. Frankfurt: Voßcamp und Jaumann, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992, p.469. See also Broszeit-Rieger's interpretation of Mignon's egg-dance as a Romantic allegory for the production of meaning: Ingrid Broszeit-Rieger, 'Practice and Theory of Dance in Goethe's *Meister*.' *Neophilologus*, 90.2 (2006), 303-20., p.316.

Callot's grotesque engravings – irony and dynamic movement

In literary and theatrical traditions the grotesque embraces principles of digression, paradox, oxymoron, comic relief and satire, and displays itself in farce, low comedy and burlesque. Writers such as Rabelais, Cervantes, Sterne and Swift, all of them favourites of Hoffmann, worked in the genre of the grotesque. The work of painters and engravers also fed into Hoffmann's perception of artistic form. As has been well documented, he chose to model the themes and structure of his writing on the illustrations of French engraver, Jacques Callot, whose original carnivalesque illustrations he first saw in Berlin.²⁷ He dedicated *Fantasy Pieces* (1814), his first collection of novellas, fairy-tales and musical anecdotes, to Callot, expressing his passionate interest in the engraver's dancing demons, peasants and clowns, and the burlesque figures of the *commedia dell' arte* (2/1: 17-18). Unarguably, the influence of Callot had a residual effect on his second story collection, to which *The Sandman* belongs.

Hoffmann was particularly inspired by Callot's engraving, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, in which "thousands of figures come to life" and "stride powerfully forth" (17). He confessed that he could not get enough of Callot's grotesque forms, which "emerge beside each other, even within each other, yet without confusing the eye, so that individual elements are seen as such, but still blend with the whole"(17). Above all he wished to emulate Callot's irony because, he averred, it combines the fantastic with common subjects from everyday life and "derides man with his paltry works and endeavours" (18). In both versions of Callot's *St Anthony* engraving, hybrid creatures mingle with human beings, all of them energetically engaged in mundane, nightmarish or scatological activities. There are multiple Bosch-like vignettes of balletic demons that dance, fly or dangle from precipices and towers, while peasant dancers step it out firmly on the ground. Perhaps vestiges of these grotesque motifs find an attenuated expression in the penultimate episode of *The Sandman* when, after Nathanael has pushed her over, Klara holds on to the parapet of the tower until rescued, for longer than human strength could endure. Callot's fantastic world defies gravity. The visionary and spatial features in his picture, which influenced Hoffmann so much, are transmuted into narrative themes and composition, and replicated in Nathanael's demonic behaviour on the tower.

Hoffmann eventually possessed prints of Callot's *Sfessanian Dances* (circa 1621 sequence).²⁸ These engravings of ballet dancers encapsulate the dynamics of balance. They execute arabesques with speed and energy, while at the same time their suggested phalluses and carnival masks provide an ironic comment on their fluidity and beauty of movement. Their bodies are grotesquely distorted, but they are also poised in a spin. They combine elements of both *zanni*, the clown, and *balli*, the dancer. Their masks appear to enlarge the eyes and elongate the nose. Metaphorically,

²⁷ Although Hoffmann admired Hogarth as a satiric artist, he chose Callot's engravings as a model. Walter Scott in 1827 condemned Hoffmann for preferring the work of Callot, whose "garden" produced "wild and fantastic weeds", to those of Hogarth, whose "garden" was "carefully cultivated" and testified to his moral fibre. See: 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman (sic).' (*London Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1 (1827), 60-98., p.94.

²⁸ See: Gerald Kahan, *Jacques Callot: Artist of the Theatre*. Athens: Georgia University Press, 1976, pp.11-20, figs 1-24. Hoffmann had the prints re-engraved and simplified as illustrations for his *Princess Brambilla: A Caprice in the Style of Jacques Callot* (1820); see: Lucia Ruprecht, *Dances of the Self*, pp.74-95.

eyes and noses are phallic, but also carnivalesque. Masks limit the vision of the wearers, deceive onlookers about the identity of the wearer and give licence for temporary aberration and transgression.

The mood of menacing comedy in Callot's figures is traceable in *The Sandman* in the character, Advocate Coppelius, the principle agent of the plot. He does not dance, but his heavy gait and repeated tread on the stairs over many years prompt the child, Nathanael, to identify him as the Sandman. His massive head, large nose, a pair of piercing eyes and wig of inadequate size mark him out as grotesque (3: 15). His hairy hands and hissing voice also terrify the children in Nathanael's family (16). In the penultimate episode on the tower, Nathaniel perceives Coppelius to be of variable size, both microscopically small at the foot of the tower and then rising to the size of a giant (49). This metamorphosis reinforces the idea of distortion and instability. Professor Spalanzani, the fraudulent trickster who, together with Coppelius, made the automaton, also has piercing eyes and an ill-proportioned body. There are discernible resemblances here to Callot's series of dwarf figures called *Gobbi* (1616), all of whom have beady eyes within large mask-like surrounds, and absurdly misshapen heads and bodies.²⁹ The scene on the stairs when Coppelius and Spalanzani fight for possession of the automaton is authentic slapstick farce (3: 44). Both of these characters are figurative of artists because they are artificers as well as academics, and both are roundly mocked. The poet, Nathanael, also cuts a comic figure who absurdly careers off course but, as argued below, lacks their powerful gaze. This web of motifs which links body dynamics, clowning and looking gives Hoffmann the scope to lampoon the aspiring artist who strives to create, but fails to keep a sense of equilibrium in the process.

Hoffmann's use of Callot-like grotesques in the examples above brings to the fore the invariable alliance between kinaesthesia and kinetics in *The Sandman*. This motivic connection has a negative side which subverts the idea of bodily wholeness and co-ordination and includes violent dismemberment, animated body-parts, and inanimate objects injected with movement. The pattern is so persistent that kinaesthesia and kinetics begin to emerge as integral to the themes of the novella, rather than being merely decorative. Hoffmann indisputably knew that the grotesque could be used as a satiric tool, and had a strong propensity to mock anything self-congratulatory.³⁰ His own version of the grotesque is distinctively dynamic. Eyes, in particular, are often grotesquely relocated in places unnatural to them. Much critical attention has been accorded to the ocular grotesque in the novella, but the particular emphasis here is on the kinetic distortion of the whole body and is directed at exploring Hoffmann's handling of Romantic Irony.³¹

²⁹ See: Gerald Kahan, *Jacques Callot*, pp.92-4, figs. 70-6.

³⁰ See: Ernst Theodor Hoffman, *Selected Letters*, p.324. When accused of libel in his novella, *Master Flea* (1822), Hoffmann wrote a letter from his deathbed in defence of its publication. The defence quoted Karl Flögel's *A History of Grotesque Comedy* (1788). Hoffmann's endorsement of Flögel's theories suggests that the motif of the grotesque in his own work was consciously chosen, fully informed and symbolic.

³¹ See: Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque*, pp.71-6; Siegbert S. Praver, 'Hoffman's Uncanny Guest,' p.303; Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978, p.130; Yvonne, J. K. Holbeche, *Optical Motifs*, p.88; Detlef Kremer, *E.T. A. Hoffmann*, p.84; Frederick Burwick, *The Haunted Eye*, pp.264-5 and Martin Willis, *Mesmerists, Monsters, and Machines: Science Fiction and the Cultures of Science in the Nineteenth Century*. Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2006, pp.55-61.

The childhood trauma, which shapes Nathanael's future life, begins with the wrenching and twisting of his joints in their sockets, as well as with a threat to his eyes. In the letter that opens *The Sandman*, he relates how, as a child, he secretly watched his father engaged in an experiment with Coppelius, a visitor to his family home whom he dreaded. What he saw shocked him so much that he fell out of his hiding-place. Hoffmann's own pen-and-ink sketch of this scene captures the imminent moment as Nathanael peeps out with a startled expression from behind curtains, just before he tumbles from his hiding place to the floor (3: 17, 921 - fig. 2). Coppelius then seized him, manipulated his hands and feet, threatened to take out his eyes, hurled him towards the furnace, singed his hair and caught up lumps of coal to throw in his eyes. Brantly's critical reading that Coppelius and Nathanael's father are attempting to make a homunculus is expedient because it provides motivic cohesion.³² The fictional Klara's suggestion that the scientific experiment is alchemical does not explain Coppelius's interest in joint-articulation and artificial eyes. Violent movement and physical violation are often associated with miscreation, or creativity that is out of joint in Hoffmann's work. For example he uses the same metaphor in *The Mesmerist*, published two years earlier, in which the tormented artist, Bickert, describes his dream of a devil taking him apart "like a jointed puppet", to see how it would look "if a foot might grow out of my neck or my right arm might be joined to my left leg" (2/1:190). In *The Sandman*, the body in a state of trauma brings on temporary paralysis. In his letter to Klara, Nathanael describes himself as motionless, as if held under a spell or "pressed under a heavy, cold stone" (3: 16, 19) while he watched Coppelius at his furnace. After being violated by Coppelius, a convulsion passed through his limbs and he blacked out. Later, after an accidental explosion that killed his father, Nathanael became unconscious. His early identification of the Sandman with Coppelius sets up a cycle of terror, trembling, paralysis and recovery, which is repeated until he dies.

Nathanael's ability, or lack of ability, to control his body, is reiterated in many ways in *The Sandman*. Hoffmann's use of this kinaesthetic motif is more complex than a simple analogy between mastering dance movements and taking control of the creative imagination. For example, the scene of the ball dramatises, among other things, the danger of losing touch with human physicality and retreating into the solipsistic world of fantasy. Nathanael succeeds in executing a dance with Olympia, but he never gains control over the maelstrom of emotions that rack his encounters with her/it. He does not achieve a conscious state of mental or physical equilibrium in the material world. This state of balance has affinities with the contemporary aesthetic of "Besonnenheit", which might be translated as artistic level-headedness or self-restraint.³³ The unbalanced Nathanael dances under the illusion that Olympia is a physical entity, and it is the brutal shattering of that illusion which tips him towards madness. An informative comparison lies in Hoffmann's Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler, the central human character in Hoffmann's musical essays and anecdotes, *Kreisleriana* (1814), and his novel, *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* (1820-1). Kreisler's gait demonstrates that a kind of ethereal weightlessness, such as Wackenroder's saint and Kleist's string puppets possess, is not a prerequisite for the imaginative leap into writing poetry or, in Kreisler's case, into composing music. Kreisler never overcomes his jerky movements. Nonetheless, he acquires enough

³² See: Susan Brantly, 'A Thermographic Reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*.' *German Quarterly*, 55 (1982), 324-35., p.326.

³³ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Characterisation and Criticism*, pp.37, 151.

physical co-ordination (to use the kinaesthetic motif) to control his creative imagination within the confines of the visible and tangible world. Speaking of himself in the third person, Kreisler explains his name in this much-cited quotation:

You cannot get away from the word Kreis, a circle, and heaven grant that you may then immediately think of those wonderful circles in which our entire existence moves, and from which we cannot escape, even should we want to resist. Kreisler circles in these circles, and it may well be that, tired out by the hyperactivity of St. Vitus dance which constrains him, and battling with the dark inscrutable power which circumscribed these circles, he often yearns . . . to free himself. (5: 78)

After long years of apprenticeship, the mature Kreisler learns to accept material and psychological parameters, and to harness his chaotic visions within them. His truly inspired moments of musical composition fluctuate with a sceptical view of himself and the world. Within the parameters of Romantic Irony, Hoffmann presents him as a figure of fun *and* a composer of beautiful church music.

By comparison, the adult Nathanael teeters on the edge of madness when he dreams of Coppélius touching Klara's eyes as they stand at the altar. The burning eyes leap into his breast, while Coppélius "hurls him into a circle of flames" (3: 31). Later, in a horrific adaptation of the Pygmalion myth, Nathanael watches the tearing apart of the mechanical doll, Olympia. Spalanzani picks up her eyes fallen from their sockets and throws them at Nathanael's chest, "Now madness seized him with its red-hot claws and entered his inner being, tearing his mind to pieces". His vision of a horrific dance causes him to shout at her "Spin fiery circle! Come on! . . . Spin wooden dolly, hey, spin . . ." (45). He hurls the same insult at Klara before pushing her over the edge of a tower in the penultimate episode of the narrative. Nathanael's vision of spinning in flames symbolises the elevated state of consciousness from which the artist creates.³⁴ His flights of imagination, so disapproved of by Klara, produce a poem that conjures up further deadly visitations from the Sandman and augurs his own death. However, as events unfold, Nathanael fails to control the kinetic energy of spinning or the white heat of inspiration. He does not learn to manoeuvre himself like Kreisler. His uneven decline from inspired poet to raving madman is charted in a mock-heroic way, graphically dramatised in scenes where he reels in the ecstasy of poetic ideas, dances in turgid fashion, and leaps about "like a tormented animal" (48).

Hoffmann's appropriations from science and technology

Metaphors of violent body movement are repeatedly associated with a crisis in poetic vision in *The Sandman*. As a variation, sensitive trembling and flowing energy (possessed by the fictional narrator) indicate the potential for poetic inspiration. Catherine Minter's detailed correlation between artistic sensibility in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German literature and the work of several influential scientists, is certainly relevant here.³⁵ For example, of the neuro-physical science of

³⁴ See Brantly's pertinent analysis of Hoffmann's use of metaphors of heat, fire and flickering light as symbolic of poetic inspiration and, conversely, ice and darkness as associated with its destruction: Susan Brantly, 'A Thermographic Reading,' pp.332-3.

³⁵ Contextually, sensibility means "hair-triggered" sensitivity and "an intense emotional responsiveness to beauty and sublimity, whether in art or nature". See: M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fort Worth: Harcourt & Brace, 1993, pp.190-1.

vitalism and the vitalist Albrecht von Haller, she writes "[he] provid(ed) what to the eighteenth-century mind was strong evidence that the nerves are hollow fibres filled with a subtle fluid (the nervous fluid or vital spirits) rather than solid vibrating 'strings'".³⁶ It is highly probable that the paradigms of vitalism influenced contemporary received understanding of the union, rather than the separation, of body and mind. In brief, the human brain was judged to be the *sensorium commune*. As the seat of sensation, the *sensorium commune* was regarded as the percipient centre to which sense-impressions were transmitted by the nerves. The sensorium was believed to operate through one unified sense, which fused differentiated stimuli. The vitalistic driving force of perception was thought to be feeling and emotion, rather than reason, cognition and abstract thought. This medico-scientific understanding of the sensorium informed the contemporary cultural validation of "hair-triggered" sensibility, which was considered a great virtue of character, unless indulged to excess (3-8). Minter's analysis of how Jean Paul Richter and fellow writers appropriated the vocabulary of eighteenth-century German neuro-science in order to express Romantic sensibility is helpful in understanding Nathanael and the artists he represents (2, 8-9).³⁷ As one of these writers, Hoffmann himself had a detailed knowledge of contemporary science, medicine and psychology.³⁸ His descriptions of Nathanael's sensibility and "hair-triggered" responsiveness to any situation conflate medical and Romantic terminology. Nathanael's hypersensitivity is conjointly muscular, neural *and* embodied in his life as a poet. It is, therefore, doubly significant that he "trembled" when Coppelius climbed the stairs (3: 13); and "felt himself shake in his innermost heart" when Coppola knocked on his door (34).

In addition to his familiarity with eighteenth-century medical science, Hoffmann was fascinated by the mechanical bodies of automata.³⁹ He admired their ergonomics and made use in his literary writing of that brief moment when the onlooker could not be quite sure whether they were mechanical or sentient, dead or alive.⁴⁰ A compelling example in *The Sandman* occurs when Nathanael associates Olimpia with the legend of the dead bride (40). Post-Freud, one can anachronistically and confidently describe such moments as "uncanny".⁴¹ However, in historical context, the contemporary reader, unlike the writer, might well have been more aware of the reputation and popularity of automata than of current neuro-scientific ideas. It

³⁶ Catherine J. Minter, 'Literary 'Empfindsamkeit' and Nervous Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Germany.' *The Modern Language Review*, (2001), 1-15. 9 Feb. 2008.

<<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc.1G1-80448776.html>>, p.2. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in the text.

³⁷ Jean Paul Richter wrote the Foreword to Hoffmann's first story collection.

³⁸ Maria M. Tatar, 'Mesmerism, Madness, and Death in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Golden Pot*.' *Studies in Romanticism*, 14 (1975), 365-89., pp.366-7.

³⁹ Hoffmann visited displays of working automata in Danzig (1801) and Dresden (1813). See Kremer's account of Hoffmann's precise knowledge of automata and artificial intelligence: Detlef Kremer, *E.T.A. Hoffmann*, p.68. Hoffmann's novella, *Automata* (1819), explores extensively the contrast between the Romantic artist and working automata.

⁴⁰ Todorov cogently argues that the reader's uncertainty whether a fictional character or situation is "real" or supernatural produces the literary uncanny, see: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. trans. R. Howard. Ohio: Cleveland University Press, 1973, p.26.

⁴¹ Robertson reads Hoffmann's reference to the uncanny legend of the dead bride as an allusion to Goethe's poem *The Bride of Corinth* (1798), see: *E. T. A. Hoffmann: The Golden Pot and Other Tales*. ed. and trans. Ritchie Robertson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.403. Kremer also remarks on the uncanny effect when a mechanical doll triggers a fantasy of creative power that collides with its extreme opposite – the horror of death, see: Detlef Kremer, *E.T.A. Hoffmann*, pp.68, 81-2.

is likely, though speculative, that Hoffmann's main readership did not theorise too deeply about the uncanny aspects of the novella, but rather, simply enjoyed the "shudders" that the story engenders in a similar way to enjoying the spectacle of a working automata. Whether one takes a historicist or psychological interpretive approach to Nathanael's downfall, it is clear that the release of his repressed fears and desires is largely triggered by the incongruous movements of a mechanism that simulates human kinetics.

Contemporary technologies that made possible the projection, magnification and distortion of images were also adapted and reworked as literary motifs by Hoffmann. Phantasmagoria and magic lantern shows were at the height of popularity in Europe in the late-eighteenth century. Hoffmann himself designed and executed phantasmagorias for the Bamberg Theatre.⁴² Alongside many references to these in his fiction, the affectionate portrait in *Tomcat Murr* of the necromancer, Master Abraham, bears witness to Hoffmann's enjoyment of mechanisms, illusion, mirrors and magic. Surviving antique magic lanterns betray their mechanical movement as each wooden-framed glass slide is inserted. Though revolutionary in their time, their projected images are jerky and unsteady. This suggests that Hoffmann's literary use of optical distortion must have had an even stronger contemporary impact than is obvious to today's reader. Moreover, transportation into a dream world through visual illusion is a compelling metaphor for Romantic transcendence.⁴³ The kinetic motifs of *The Sandman* aptly suggest that Nathanael, as a representative of all Romantic artists, needs to negotiate the flickering, phantasmagoric images of his mind in order to render his visions in palpable form.

With the overlapping motion of magic lantern slides, the phantasmagoric grotesque in *The Sandman* merges together motifs of mobile eye-balls and eye spectacles. Another variation of these ocular and optic motifs, which are synecdochic of disembodied eyes, is a pocket-spyglass. Coppélius, impersonating an Italian pedlar of optical goods named Coppola, spread out these flickering, gleaming "eyes" on Nathanael's table, where they "stared at Nathanael . . . and flaming glances jumped about ever more wildly and darted their blood-red rays" into Nathanael's breast (3: 35).⁴⁴ Hoffmann creates a macabre theatrical scene as Coppélius/Coppola, in clown-like fashion, takes more spectacles from his wide pockets than one coat could be expected to hold. This scene is a fine example of Romantic Irony, described by Schlegel as combining jest and seriousness (108, 160). Nathanael's failure to sense anything comical, however black, in the pedlar's performance renders him vulnerable to manipulation. Before the confidence trickster leaves, he gives Nathanael the pocket-spyglass so that he can see Olimpia in close focus. The spyglass is a literal

⁴² See: David Charlton, ed., *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.64. See also Myrone's account of contemporary German phantasmagoria in: Martin Myrone, Christopher Frayling and Marina Warner, *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination*. London: Tate, 2006, pp.146-7.

⁴³ Castle encapsulates the connections between theatrical phantasmagoria and the nineteenth-century poetic imagination by noting that it "conveyed exquisitely . . . that state of neurasthenic excitement in which images whirled chaotically before the inward eye, impressing on the seer an overwhelming sense of their vividness and spiritual truth". See: Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.159.

⁴⁴ That the fictional narrator, refracted through Spalanzani, calls Coppola Coppélius (3: 44-5), shows they are one character. Metaphoric interpretations of Coppélius impersonating Coppola invite ideas of doubling and the *doppelgänger*.

object, a metaphor *and* a performative agent, which drives forward the momentum of the plot by increasing Nathanael's manic behaviour and facilitating his death. The motifs of kinaesthesia and kinetics come into play in yet another variation here because a spyglass appears to cause distant objects to leap forward in one bound. In the penultimate scene on the tower, Nathanael inadvertently directs his spyglass onto Klara standing by his side, causing a grotesquely enlarged image of her to jump into view. Although the narrator does not spell out cause and effect, it is the suddenly enlarged image of Klara which initiates Nathanael's final manic episode, in which his muscles convulse and he pushes Klara over the parapet (to which she clings for dear life). This precedes Nathanael noticing Coppelius below the tower, goading him to jump to his death. Thus, his whole body is disturbed, not solely his eyes (49). The grotesquely distorted telescopic image and Nathanael's bodily dysfunction are closely associated just before his definitive paralysis in death.

Furthermore, *The Sandman* makes a figurative link between travelling circuitously, circling, climbing steps and stairs, and pushing a lever, which are related kinaesthetic metaphors through which Hoffmann expresses, rather than theorises, his perception of Romantic aesthetics. An initial context for this is the contemporary scientific research into electricity and the popular obsession with animal magnetism. Many critics have noted Hoffmann's use of the mesmerist, magnetiser, magus or magician as representative of the artist, for example Alban in *The Mesmerist* and Count S---i in *The Uncanny Guest* 1820.⁴⁵ The mesmerist was believed to have a powerful gaze, which caused the person gazed upon to move involuntarily. Webber relates artistic creativity and electrical magnetism in the following way:

Hoffmann's tales recurrently set up magnetic fields and electric circuits in order to galvanise fictional life. . . . Not only the electric eye, but also discursive power, the charged narrative, takes galvanic effect. Through the electric conduction of the story the narrator is able to subject his readers or hearers to his mastery. . . . By operating the right levers, [Hoffmann] contrives to induce live currents into the narrative machinery and to vivify the automaton. (155)

Although the leverage metaphor is not prominent in *The Sandman*, except as a parody in Olympia's clockwork mechanism, Hoffmann frequently used the idea of fine adjustment or fine-tuning to suggest the creative process of lifting the artist to higher levels of consciousness and of sustaining the reader in higher realms of the poetic imagination.⁴⁶ The sense of force and danger in these electrical and mechanical metaphors is strong, and the potential for the creative process to double-back and electrocute or crush the artist is ever present. The eccentric artist figure, Councillor

⁴⁵ For readings of Hoffmann's symbolic use of mesmerism, see Liane Bryson, 'Romantic Science: Hoffmann's Use of the Natural Sciences in *The Golden Pot*.' *Monatshefte*, 91.2 (1999), 241-55., p.243; Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound*, pp.132-42; Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.148-184; Siegbert, S. Praver, 'Hoffmann's Uncanny Guest,' p.303; Martin Willis, *Mesmerists Monsters and Machines*, pp.54-61.

⁴⁶ In fictional discussions about literary principles between the Serapion brothers, Hoffman uses the lever and circle motifs together. He combines them in a dialogue following the anecdote, The Hermit Serapion (1819) to describe the poet, Serapion, who permanently inhabits his own imaginative world, unaware of the "lever" and the "circle" of the material world around him. Unlike Wackenroder's naked saint, who becomes the apotheosis of the artist, Serapion is much ironised by Hoffmann (*The Serapion Brothers* 4: 68).

Krespel, exemplifies the artist who has curbed the excesses of his own (and temporarily his daughter's) creativity in order to stay relatively sane. He combines to perfection a physical condition characterised by involuntary gestures, jerks and leaps, together with a disposition that is attuned, like "a lightening conductor", to the higher realms of the imagination (4: 54).

In *The Sandman* the eyes of the artist figures, Coppelius and Spalanzani, have mesmeric power.⁴⁷ As briefly alluded to earlier, Coppelius's "greenish cat's eyes" and Spalanzani's "small, piercing eyes" have life-changing effects on those around them. Coppelius/Coppola displaces his magnetic influence into the optical lenses he displays to Nathanael. The influence of these multiple eyes on Nathanael is galvanising and destructive. In contrast to these artist figures, Nathanael's eyesight is dull, which he puts down to juvenile terror stemming from witnessing Coppelius and his father engaged in experimentation (3: 18).⁴⁸ In the long term, this experience stunts his growth as a poet. As an alternative to a Freudian reading of eyes as a phallic motif, his pale eyes and fear of losing his eyes form part of an extended metaphor concerning the lack of poetic power to inspire his listeners. Passionate reading of his poetry to the two women he loves fails to activate either the automaton Olimpia, or his fiancée Klara, except for eliciting her disgust. Both are static in different ways. Klara's only extreme involuntary physical exertion occurs when Nathanael pushes her over the parapet. She is invariably composed as if for a portrait or tableau (28, 49). Olimpia, in a comparable way, is either stilted or immobile once her spring mechanism has wound down.⁴⁹ Neither Klara nor Olimpia is "endowed with an electrical current sufficient to charge the atmosphere" of the novella, or "spark the imagination" of the writer, as are many muse-like women in Hoffmann's work.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the fictional narrator of *The Sandman* gains control over "the swirling bustle of multiple abstract forms" in his head and searches for effective, highly-charged words to give "an electric shock" to his readers (26). The kinetic imagery of swirling and electrical current symbolises the search for a concrete form in which to express the Romantic imagination. The narrator, who may be taken as a composite of successful artists, taps into the energy and moving chaos of his imagination. In contrast, the words of the poet, Nathanael, are only intermittently "electrified" or "electrifying".

Romantic antics and artistry in Hoffmann's stories

Metaphors of suspension and level-headedness, widely used by German writers at the beginning of the nineteenth century as part of the developing discourse of Romanticism, are also reworked by Hoffmann. A common Romantic "principle" urged artists to maintain a state of balance between the spiritual and the material. One

⁴⁷ Tatar traces the mesmeric influence of many "magnetic personalities [with] a penetrating gaze and basilisk-like eyes" in Hoffmann's fiction, but not with regard to *The Sandman*: Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound*, p.130.

⁴⁸ Although Ruprecht's argument about the effect of eyes and kinesis in *The Sandman* is illuminating, her claim that "Olimpia and Coppelius are being deliberately kept animate by the protagonist's burning gazes, and by the glowing colours of his writings" cannot be substantiated. See: Lucia Ruprecht, *Dances of the Self*, p.70.

⁴⁹ Belgardt's claim that "the most comprehensive meaning of Olimpia" is "the embodiment of a spiritual world of higher understanding and perception, of the poetic ideal" is not convincing. See: Belgardt, Raimond, 'The Artist and the Puppet: Towards an Interpretation of Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*.' *German Quarterly*, 42.4 (1969), 686-700., p.692.

⁵⁰ Tatar usefully describes several "electrical muses", who offer a stark contrast to Klara and Olimpia: Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound*, pp.127-30.

of Schlegel's maxims, for example, states that the true Romantic artist is suspended between two spheres. Temporarily balanced between creative chaos and order, he is empowered to "hover in the middle on the wings of poetic reflection" (116, 182-3). Clearly this concept of the creative process has a lightness and airiness not present in Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. Even in his musical writings, which employ the imagery of rarefied flight to signify Romantic transcendence more persistently than does his prose fiction (2/1: 53, 4: 103-4), Hoffmann still retains the notion that the composer, or artist of any kind, achieves "flight" only after an apprenticeship. Hoffmann describes Beethoven's instrumental music and Gluck, Mozart and Spontini's operas in this way.⁵¹ He observes that creative genius cannot be taught, but neither, without considerable development and practice, can the budding composer "walk on his own without the need for a leading rein" (5: 627). The point need not be laboured that Nathanael's flights of the imagination are eventually abortive. He cannot hold together two opposing ideas of poetic inspiration and groundedness; neither can he sustain an ironic view of himself and the experiential world with all its complexity and ugliness.

The aesthetic concept of airy suspension was readily available to Hoffmann in contemporary fairy-tales. He regularly reworks it to ironise Romantic images of flying and breaking the bounds of earth.⁵² Indeed, the artists in his fiction are frequently shown to need the weight of self-irony to keep them sane. The painter, Bickert, in *The Mesmerist*, is one such pragmatist. Ottmar, an enthusiast in that novella, describes reaching the higher realms of imagination in terms of climbing a step-ladder. Bickert mockingly observes that "Once we believe we are quite high . . . we tumble down disgracefully and, through the giddiness which gets hold of us, we realise that the thin air in these higher regions does not suit our heavy heads" (2/1: 193). The German word for giddiness, "Schwindel", is a pun meaning both giddiness *and* swindle or deception. Thus, the metaphor of falling emphasises the dangers of solipsism and the questionable rewards of a Romantic dream world. The dialogue between Bickert and Ottmar is also "Romantic" in a formal, structural sense by anticipating how, in the later collection, *The Serapion Brothers* (1819-1821), Hoffmann intersperses and embeds his artistic formulations between and within stories. The dialogical structure of the four volumes of *The Serapion Brothers* typifies the Romantic aesthetic which favours fragmentary writing that mixes genres and discourses.⁵³

One of the main contributors to aesthetic discussion of Serapiontic principles is the narrator, Theodore, who describes the Romantic artist in this way:

⁵¹ Hoffmann praises Beethoven's high degree of "Besonnenheit" (circumspection) as well as his true genius (2/1: 55). Appositely, Benert analyses Hoffmann's ecstatic review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony by drawing attention to the convergent and positional concepts which underpin Hoffmann's critical position, and by arguing that Hoffmann's comment: 'Beethoven's music operates the lever of fear, of horror, and pain, and awakens the infinite yearning that constitutes the essence of Romanticism' (2/1: 54), "couple[s] evocations of the infinite with allusions to the mechanical", see: Colin Benert, 'Dividing Time: Musical Memory and the Dis-closure of Fate in E.T.A Hoffmann's *Automata*.' *Studies in Romanticism*, 45 (2006), 559-634., p.613.

⁵² See Chapin's reading of Hoffmann's use of metaphoric elevation, not as connoting escape, but as suggesting intensification of experience within a single, material world: Keith Chapin, 'Lost in Quotation: The Nuances behind E. T. A. Hoffmann's Programmatic Statements.' *Caliber: 19th-Century Music*, 30.1 (2006), 44-64., p.48.

⁵³ Schlegel describes this Romantic aesthetic by mixing examples from Dante, Shakespeare and Cervantes, see: Friedrich Schlegel, *Characterisation and Criticism*, p.337.

I think that the bottom of the ladder to heaven on which one wants to climb up into higher regions must be grounded in life, so that everyone is able to climb up. If, having climbed higher and higher, he [the artist] then finds himself within a fantastic magical realm, he will come to believe that this realm too is part of his life, and that this realm is actually the most wonderfully beautiful part of it. (4: 721)

This kinaesthetic metaphor is illuminating in retrospect with regard to *The Sandman*. It is a banal observation that most of its characters do not live or work on the ground floor of buildings. This entails much use of stairs and steps, giving Hoffmann the scope to introduce the Gothic menace of footsteps echoing on the stairs, and the gruesomely macabre effects of fighting on stairs or falling from a height. By the penultimate episode, the recurring preoccupation with kinetics and contractile body movements renders the spiralling steps within and the encircling parapet at the top of the tower particularly resonant.

Bickert and Theodore's metaphor of climbing, one of many that Hoffmann uses to illustrate his aesthetic principles, suggests that the artist who separates himself from the rest of humanity loses touch with either or both the infinite and the material world.⁵⁴

Nathanael's fall from the tower is figured in the metaphoric ladder. Theodore's kinaesthetic verbs, "aufsteigen" (to climb or rise up) and "aufklettern" (to climb or clamber up), imply the physical and sensory effort required by the writer to progress. Fluency of movement is not necessary, but co-ordination between eye, hand and foot is. Such kinaesthetic control has to be laboured after and learnt. Simultaneously, (the Serapion brother) Theodore's biblical reference to Jacob's Ladder between heaven and earth (*Genesis* 28: 11-19) invokes the notion of ascent and controlled descent as symbolic of poetic inspiration. By transferring the concept of Jacob's mystical dream to the artist's task, Theodore's comparison encapsulates the special gifts of the artist as a mediator between spirit and matter. Climbing up and down the ladder implies both the need for some degree of kinaesthesia to prevent precipitous descent *and* an elevated vision to lift the poet, painter or musician upwards.

Nathanael's intermittent spasticity weakens his ability to ward off either internal or external invasive forces. He fails to "dance within the circle" (5: 78) of his life.⁵⁵ He cannot stay balanced nor make progress in any direction. His final (down)fall, both from the tower and the metaphoric ladder, follows a long tradition of mock-heroic romance narratives in which the hero falls short of his aspirations. In accord with the positional motifs of the circle, the lever and the ladder, *The Sandman* shows that the pathway between the spiritual and the material world is a continuum where the poet wanders back and forth, across, or up and down. The kinetic and kinaesthetic motifs suggest that the maturing artist strives to avoid a divided life. He positions himself medially and travels expansively. He chooses to move along a continuum, instead of delimiting himself, in binary fashion, to the mundane on the one side or the infinite on the other.

⁵⁴ Hoffmann was much influenced by the Romantic idea that an aesthetic principle was not rigid, but rather "a mental view, a visual perception, and not at all a systematisation or construction of the results and contents of knowledge", see: Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, p.77.

⁵⁵ For philosophical corroboration of this argument, see Chapin's account of Hoffmann's circumscribed world in terms of contemporary German positive idealism: Keith Chapin, 'Lost in Quotation,' p.50.

This interpretation of motor-muscular co-ordination and three-dimensional movement as Romantic motifs differs in emphasis from R. Murray Schafer's comment that "[e]xtension horizontally into space is almost unknown" in Hoffmann; and also from Mirjam Jooß's reading that Hoffmann's presentation of creative inspiration is invariably a "two-fold" movement upwards.⁵⁶ However, the analysis offered here is consonant with Hoffmann's professed admiration for Callot's aesthetic practice of creating pictorial compositions "from the most heterogeneous elements" (2/1: 17).⁵⁷ A close literary equivalent of Callot's spatiality of design occurs in Hoffmann's first story, *Sir Gluck* (1809). The dominant motif of horizontal circumambulation is significant in this story of Romantic quest. The narrator wanders around the even spread of streets in Berlin, periodically meeting the composer Gluck, a visitor from the spirit world (2/1: 19-31).⁵⁸ These excursions allow him sporadic and, finally, triumphant access to Gluck's visions. In contrast, Nathanael only makes quixotic progress in his journey towards poetic inspiration.⁵⁹ He does succeed in writing impassioned poems, which conjure up the Sandman and prophesy the future, but his creative vision careers off course, ending, before the last arabesque leaps forward in narrative time, in his death.

Conclusion

The Sandman is syncretically enmeshed with the German Romantic Movement. However, Hoffmann's ironic presentation of the artist quest has a distinctive "signature". His strikingly graphic images have a quirky animation, making them verbal equivalents of his idiosyncratic line-drawings.⁶⁰ *The Sandman's* vigorous kinaesthetic and kinetic motifs are as much influenced by contemporary engraving, technology and medical science as by literature. Its recurrent body metaphors represent a vitalistic flow of creative energy that manifests itself in a multi-directional momentum. These offer a negative critique of artistic compartmentalisation of perceptions, and specifically of the Romantic impulse to transcend or escape material, sensory constraints. Hoffmann demonstrates a nuanced and pragmatic Romanticism.

⁵⁶ R. Murray Schafer, *E. T. A. Hoffmann and Music*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1975, p.161; Mirjam Jooß, 'Attempting to Solve the Paradox of E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Aesthetics.' *WMA Forum*, (2007) 1-10. Word and Music Association. 2 Feb. 2008. <<http://www.wordmusicstudies.org>>, pp.5-6.

⁵⁷ Hoffmann uses motifs of the mosaic and the kaleidoscope in Serapiontic discussions to express spatial, rather than vertical, aesthetic structure. Rotermund usefully interrogates the "flattening", heterogeneous effects of both these literary motifs, see: Erwin Rotermund, 'Musical and Poetic,' p.54.

⁵⁸ Critics dispute whether the revenant, Gluck, is "real" or imagined in this story, see Schmidt's summary: Ricarda Schmidt, 'Classical, Romantic and Postmodern Musical-Aesthetic Paradigms in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Sir Gluck*,' in "*Seelenaccente*" – "*Ohrenphysiognomik*". *Zur Musikanschauung E. T. A. Hoffmanns, Heines und Wackenroders*. ed. Werner Keil and Chris Goer. Hildesheim: Olms, 2000. 11-61., pp.15-16. Whichever interpretation is favoured, the argument here concerning spatial and kinetic motifs still holds.

⁵⁹ The physical antics of Cervantes' anti-hero, Don Quixote, shaped Hoffmann's love of the grotesque. Forced to bed by fatal creeping paralysis in February 1822 Hoffmann sent a dictated letter to Dümmler, asking for Tieck's translation of Cervantes' novel. The letter states: "I am astonished how much it matters to me, for *Don Q.* is truly a book to cheer one's spirit!" See: Ernst Theodor Hoffman, *Selected Letters*, p.328. Equally, the picaresque adventures of Rabelais and Sterne's characters made their mark on the internal dynamics and arabesque structure of Hoffmann's writing.

⁶⁰ Hoffmann's own cartoons of Kreisler careering about, one foot on the ground and arms flung wide, illustrate this dynamic quality (5: 944, figs. 5, 6 and 7).

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