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THE UNCANNY IN GERALD DURRELL'S SHORT STORY "THE ENTRANCE"

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ЗЛОВЕЩОТО В РАЗКАЗА НА ДЖЕРАЛД ДАРЪЛ „ВХОДЪТ“

The article explores the relation of Gerald Durrell's 1979 short story "The Entrance", published in a collection titled *The Picnic and Suchlike Pandemonium*, to the concept of the uncanny, as it appears in Sigmund Freud's work "The Uncanny" (1919). I first discuss Freud's account of the concept, highlighting the main points in his theory, and then I subject certain points of the narrative in "The Entrance" to an analysis in an attempt to show that the story provides numerous illustrations of the Freudian concept of the uncanny.

Keywords: *Gerald Durrell; uncanny; psychoanalysis; Freud; unconscious.*

В статията се разглежда връзката между разказа на Джералд Даръл „Входът“, публикуван в книгата „Излетът и други подобни дандани“ (1979), и концепцията за ‘зловещото’ в статията на Зигмунд Фройд „Зловещото“ (1919). В първата част на статията се дискутира фройдисткият аспект на понятието, а във втората се подлагат на анализ някои моменти от повествованието във „Входът“, за да се демонстрира, че разказът предлага многобройни илюстрации на фройдисткото тълкуване на ‘зловещото’.

Ключови думи: *Джералд Даръл; зловещото; психоанализа; Фройд; несъзнавано.*

Gerald Durrell's fiction has rarely been subjected to psychoanalysis. Most of his works are written in a humorous tone of voice and almost all of them concern his animal-collecting expeditions around the world, describing in a light-hearted manner various amusing adventures. In 1979 he published a collection of six short stories under the title *The Picnic and Suchlike Pandemonium*. "The Entrance" – the last story in the collection – came as a surprise to Durrell's readers with its shocking change in the narrative style and untypical subject matter. With its dark atmosphere, mysterious events and references to the supernatural, the story displays some characteristics of Gothic fiction and gives serious grounds for psychoanalytical interpretation. In this article I explore the relation of Durrell's story to the concept of the uncanny, as it appears in Freud's work "The Uncanny" (1919). I discuss Freud's account of the concept, highlighting the main points in his theory and then I subject certain points of the narrative to an analysis in an attempt to show that the story provides numerous illustrations of the Freudian concept of the uncanny.

From the very beginning of his essay "The Uncanny" Freud shows reluctance to accept any of his colleagues' explanations as to what causes the uncanny feeling. In the second half of the paper, however, Freud seems to change his mind and goes back to the same concepts and explanations he has rejected, using them to support his own theory. He uses Otto Rank's idea that the 'double', represented by mirrors, shadows and guardian spirits, is one of the chief sources of the uncanny. Freud manages to relate this

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concept to two of his own psychoanalytical ideas: the castration complex and the superego. In chapter VI of *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud writes: “If one of the ordinary symbols for a penis occurs in a dream doubled or multiplied, it is to be regarded as a warding-off of castration” (Freud 1900: 357).

The relation of the ‘double’ to the theory of the superego is more complicated. Freud insists that the Superego has replaced primary narcissism, typical of our ancestors, thus allowing the ‘double’ to acquire a fresh meaning. The projection of our own self is no longer a guardian against enemies and death but the Superego emerges as our conscience and guards us against destructive antisocial behaviour. The existence of this agency, forming the new ‘double’, is proved, according to Freud, by cases of neurosis, where the superego becomes detached from the ego and leads a conspicuous and almost helpless existence. In his view the elements of the ‘double’ are not the apparent ‘enemies’ – the Id and the Ego, but rather the two less hostile agencies – the Ego and the Superego.

To Freud, *repetition* is also a source of the uncanny. He hastens to compare it to the sense of helplessness experienced in dreams and gives as an illustration his own experience in Italy, where he kept returning to the same street. He asserts that the uncanniness of any experience of repetition is related to a “compulsion to repeat” (Freud 1919: 238), which is so powerful that it overrules the pleasure principle. This compulsion is visible in the impulses of children and is rooted in the very nature of the instincts. The existence of the “compulsion to repeat” is accepted by many contemporary psychologists. It explains why, for instance, some people keep marrying the same type of person, although each time the marriage collapses in exactly the same way. To Freud, “whatever reminds us of this inner ‘compulsion to repeat’ is perceived as uncanny.” (Freud 1919: 238) Judging from the examples he gives, we could assume that repetition creates an uncanny feeling provided the circumstances have the capacity to provoke a certain amount of unease or fear in themselves, but if there is no repetition the unease or fear do not develop in an uncanny feeling.

In his paper Freud attempts to give a stable definition of what causes the uncanny feeling. To achieve this, he uses his own earlier theories in a rather ingenious way. One of his fundamental earlier assertions is that every emotional impulse is automatically transformed into anxiety if it is repressed for some reason. He uses it to claim that “...among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny. (Freud 1919: 241). To Freud, it is not important whether what has become uncanny was originally frightening. The phrase ‘return of the repressed’, however, can be misleading. Freud does not use the phrase in the sense that something unconscious has become conscious. What causes the uncanny feeling is something which remains unconscious but triggers repetitive behaviour. Evidence for this claim we find in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud frequently describes situations when the analyst and the patient manage to remove the “barriers” and bring the repressed to the surface. The patient either rejects it or accepts it with an inevitable degree of now conscious discomfort. In neither case, however, does Freud report any uncanny feeling awakened in the patient. It is logical to assume that the repressed emotions can produce an uncanny effect only if they remain repressed. It is when a person, without understanding why, keeps repeating a particular pattern of behaviour, governed by the repressed, that he is overcome by an uncanny feeling. In this sense repetitive behaviour is a symptom of something that repeatedly makes itself felt but remains repressed nonetheless.

Freud makes a distinction between two types of recurring repressed emotions:

1. Emotions related to older beliefs, typical of our ancestors. These beliefs have been surmounted (rather than repressed) but are easily awakened at any opportunity. It is this type of the uncanny that usually occurs in real life.

2. Repressed infantile complexes (castration, womb fantasies etc.). This second type of the uncanny is typical for works of fiction.

As a rule, however, these two types are not sharply distinguishable (Freud 1919: 245).

Gerald Durrell’s “The Entrance” is a story told in a Gothic style. It is highly untypical of its author. Although Durrell’s great interest in the occult was no secret to his family and friends, his books did little to betray this interest. In almost all of them he amuses his readers with stories of his animal collecting expeditions around the world (*The Overloaded Ark*, *The Bafut Beagles*), or about his family (*My Family*

and *Other Animals*). Durrell was reputed for his sparkling sense of humour and when *The Picnic and Suchlike Pandemonium* came out, his readers were surprised to encounter such a horrifying story, following five other stories written in the author's well-known style.

Durrell wants his story to be as uncanny as possible and he knows how to achieve this. In the late 1960s he had a severe nervous breakdown. He was suffering from an obsessive neurosis and after his illness he showed a strong interest in psychoanalysis and the psychology of sex. He developed a compulsion, which, in Freud's terms, was a 'compulsion to repeat'. During his depression in 1968, Durrell and his wife went to the Greek island of Corfu since he wanted to revisit the place where he had spent his happy childhood. Instead of improving, however, Durrell's condition rapidly deteriorated. His wife reports that one day he set up his camera by the window of their house and proceeded to take twenty-seven identical pictures of a bay where he loved to swim as a child (Botting 1999: 348). As we will see, the "compulsion to repeat" is also reflected in "The Entrance".

The first uncanny element about the story is not in the story itself but in the fact that it is the last of a series of stories, presented by the author as true. Most of them are about his expeditions to Africa or about his family. In this way the feeling of truthfulness is projected onto "The Entrance". This leads us to the last type of the uncanny mentioned by Freud in "The Uncanny", where the reader of a work of fiction is deceived into accepting the story to be true. Freud writes that in such cases the author "is in a sense betraying us to the superstitiousness which we have ostensibly surmounted; he deceives us by promising to give us the sober truth, and then after all overstepping it. We react to his inventions as we would have reacted to real experiences..." (Freud 1919: 251).

This is exactly what Durrell does to his readers. To achieve his purpose, he employs two methods: First, he puts "The Entrance" as the last of a succession of true stories and claims in the preface that *all* of them are true to a certain extent; second, he uses the device of "a story within a story". He begins the narrative in the first person and tells the reader about his visit to a friend's house in France, where he is given an old notebook and asked to read it. The name of a well-respected doctor (Lepitre) is also mentioned as an additional source of credibility. It is at this point that Durrell, in Freud's terms, oversteps the boundaries of truth. What follows is the story within the story, which also claims to be true and is presented in the form of a diary. The reader is likely to assume that what is written on the old and yellow pages of the notebook is the real experience of an unknown person – the story begins in a truthful way and remains quite credible for a long time. The strange and frightening events do not begin until the second third of the story and that happens gradually, allowing the reader to adjust his judgement and beguiling him to start accepting increasingly incredible things. Towards the end of the story the reader can no longer be deceived but, as Freud puts it, "by the time we have seen through his trick it is already too late and the author has achieved his object." (251) He hastens to add, however: "[The author's] success is not unalloyed. We retain a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit" (Freud 1919: 251). Durrell, however, manages to a certain extent to avoid our "grudge" – when the story proper has come to its horrible ending, the author resumes – for a few lines – the first-person narrative. In a self-mocking tone, he innocently puts himself in the vulnerable position of the reader. In this way the story seems to lead an independent existence, for lack of a certain author and the uncanny effect is less likely to be diminished by disappointment on the part of the reader.

The first source of the uncanny that the reader encounters in "The Entrance" is a form of *omnipotence of thought*. This term was suggested to Freud by *the Rat man*, to describe a situation where someone's wish is fulfilled at the mere thought of it, or a short time after that (Freud 1913: 85-86). In Freud's view it is one of the most uncanny and widespread forms of superstition, related to an earlier, narcissistic stage of human development, when people overestimated their own mental processes and attributed special powers to them. In this earlier stage of superstition, omnipotence of thought was not perceived as uncanny. It became uncanny when people began to think they had surmounted this old belief. As was mentioned earlier, in Freud's view the superstitious beliefs we have surmounted are easily awakened at any opportunity. "We do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready

to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny” (Freud 1919: 247–248).

When Letting first sees Gideon at the auction, he becomes uneasy:

He was a man of medium height with a handsome but somewhat plump face, piercing and very large dark eyes and smoky-black, curly hair, worn rather long... His glittering, gypsy-like eyes were fixed on me intently, but when he saw me looking at him the fierceness of his gaze faded... I don't know why but the intense scrutiny of this stranger disconcerted me, to such an extent that I did not follow the rest of the sale with any degree of attention... (Durrell 1979: 142)

From this point on, Gideon de Teildras Villeray's presence in the story will become increasingly uncanny. This is the first of many instances, where the narrator mentions his extraordinary eyes. The fact that Letting feels so uncomfortable implies that he spontaneously perceives Gideon as a possessor of “evil eye” – the first occurrence in the story of a repressed fragment of an old and surmounted belief in the omnipotence of thought. At the same time, the reader is given to understand that the reason for Letting's unease might not be purely subjective and that Gideon's personality indeed has something unusual about it.

Another instance of suspected omnipotence of thought we find later in the story, when Letting visits Gideon in his estate. He starts a conversation about his friend's uncle, and Gideon expresses his wish that the old man would die soon and calls the day of his future death a “happy day” (Durrell 1979: 157). Several pages later, when Letting is back in London, he receives a telegram from Gideon, informing him that his uncle has died. This would have seemed only too natural if he had died a natural death and if his nephew had not wanted it. The episode is uncanny since it brings the reader back to the earlier, narcissistic stage of human development, mentioned by Freud, when people overvalued their own mental processes.

Gideon's eyes, which in the course of the narrative become increasingly magical and intimidating, are one of the three leitmotifs in the story. Letting is not sure what to think of them but gets frightened every time Gideon stares at him. Several pages later, when the dark stranger has come to Letting's house and is sipping wine by the fireplace, the narrator writes: “When his face was in repose you noticed the size and blackness and lustre of his eyes. They seem to probe you, almost as if they could read your very thoughts. The impression they gave made me uncomfortable, to say the least. But then he smiled and immediately the eyes flashed with mischief, good humour and an overwhelming charm” (147). The sexual significance of these lines is so strong that to a reader who is acquainted with Freudian theory, it becomes the primary meaning. Two pages later this is confirmed: “As I said, when his face was in repose his eyes were so fiercely brooding and penetrating that they made me uneasy and filled almost with a sense of repugnance. But then when he smiled and his eyes filled with laughter and he talked with that husky, musical voice, I had been charmed in spite of myself” (149).

Discussing E. T. A. Hoffmann's “The Sandman”, Freud makes the observation that the eye almost always symbolises the male sexual organ in dreams, fantasies and myths (Freud 1919: 231). In chapter IV of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (“The Dream Work”) he observes that eye-dreams and eye-symbolism are very important when a psychoanalyst is trying to decipher the result produced by the dream work. He relates this symbolism to Oedipal dreams (Freud 1900: 319). In “The Uncanny” Freud continues this train of thought, insisting that the threat posed by the horrible Sandman is in fact a threat of castration, posed by the bad father. The doll Olympia appears to be Nathaniel himself, in another form. When Coppola carries off her eyes, he is in fact symbolically castrating Nathaniel (Freud 1919: 252).

Gideon's eyes appear to represent the same phallic symbol in “The Entrance”, but their function in the story is more complicated. To begin with, in Durrell's work the threat of castration does not appear until the last couple of pages and it is not quite clear whether it comes from Gideon. At this initial stage of the story, however, they pose a direct sexual threat. His eyes are piercing and aggressive. In Letting's metaphorical expression, they seem to pierce him. Gideon's penetrating look, combined with his apparent charm, has the symbolic function of sexual penetration.

The way in which Letting reacts to Gideon's look is significant. He says he feels unease and even antipathy towards his guest but at the same time he feels strangely attracted to him. This looks like a

typical example of repressed emotions. Peter Letting is a middle-aged bachelor who lives on his own. He does not have relationships with women and says he is most happy enjoying his own company. It is possible, however, that this is not true. Late Victorian society was still very hostile towards homosexuality. For this reason, the majority of homosexual people did not admit their true sexual orientation and either maintained risky secret relationships or gave up sexual life completely. Others, refusing to accept that fact about themselves, repressed it and preferred to lead a solitary existence, convincing themselves that they did not actually need sex at all. One possible way of interpreting Peter Letting's way of life could be to view it as an illustration of this second pattern. For one thing, a very strong pattern of *sublimation* is present in his life. He is the best antiquarian in business. His hobby is his profession and he gives it all his energy. He possesses a collection of valuable books on the topics that interest him and feels quite happy and content when he is in his study. It is not difficult to see through this affection toward books and interpret it as sublimation of unconscious drives which find false realisation in non-sexual activities.

On the surface, Letting feels content with his quiet life. When he suddenly faces Gideon's sexual aggression, expressed in a symbolic way through his look, his first conscious reaction is uneasiness and antipathy. It can be claimed, however, that in reality his uneasiness and his antipathy are not directed towards the stranger, as Letting forces himself to believe, but towards his own unconscious impulses, which struggle to become active at the smallest opportunity. After years of relentless repression, this opportunity appears in the form of Gideon's eyes. The repressed begins to stir in Letting but it is so disturbing and so unacceptable to his conscious mind that he feels resentment towards it and manages to repress it again, convincing himself that Gideon's staring look is the real source of his discomfort. His unconscious impulses cannot be thoroughly repressed and make themselves apparent through his attraction to Gideon which Peter describes as strange. It may be strange to his conscious, waking thoughts but his unconscious cannot be deceived and it attempts to make itself "visible".

When Gideon leaves the house Letting feels confused and confesses he does not know what to think of his guest. His confusion is apparently a result of the conflict in himself. The real problem is not that he does not know what to think but that he cannot *afford* to think it. Nevertheless, he accepts Gideon's offer to visit him in France and decides to learn more about him.

The following development of the two men's relationship confirms this hypothesis. Letting enjoys spending time with Gideon, and towards the middle of the story he says: "I shall never know now, of course, whether he deliberately exerted all his charm in order to ensnare me. I like to think not; that he quite genuinely liked me and my company. Not that I suppose it matters now. But certainly, as day followed day, I grew fonder and fonder of Gideon" (Durrell 1979: 155-156).

Although he still mentions his disturbing eyes occasionally, it is obvious that he is beginning to accept his attraction towards Gideon and is probably on his way to consciously accepting parts of his own unconscious. The dreadful events that occur after this point interrupt the natural development of this interesting relationship and make it impossible for us to tell where it would have led.

Gideon's eyes are not the only phallic symbol appearing at the beginning of the story. When Letting answers the door and meets Gideon, he concludes his description with the words: "In one gloved hand he held a slender ebony cane with a beautifully worked gold top and he swung this gently between his fingers like a pendulum" (144). According to Freud, "all elongated objects, such as sticks, tree trunks and umbrellas (the opening of these last being comparable to an erection) may stand for the male organ – as well as all sharp weapons..." (Freud 1900: 354). In his paper "On Dreams" he writes: "It has been noticed that dreamers speaking the same language make use of the same symbols, and that in some cases, indeed, the use of the same symbols extends beyond the use of the same language" (Freud 1901: 683). If we accept this interpretation of the symbols, the ebony stick is an additional sign of Gideon's symbolic sexual threat.

The third leitmotif is the ring with a red opal, compared to a drop of blood: "He... held out a well-manicured hand on which a large blood opal gleamed in a gold ring." (Durrell 1979: 145) and a little later: "I showed him into my drawing-room and he walked to the fire and held his hands out to the blaze, clenching and unclenching his white fingers so that the opal in his ring fluttered like a spot of blood against his white skin" (146). In Freudian terms it symbolises the female genitals, which, in a way,

adds additional weight to Gideon's sexual aggression. On the whole, the ring does not make a negative impression on Letting but he observes that there is something mysterious or magical about it.

The three leitmotifs I have mentioned function on more than one level. On the one hand they serve as important sexual symbols. On the other, they are also partial sources of the uncanny in the story because of their repetition. What makes the recurrence of these elements uncanny are the dreadful circumstances in which they appear, combined with the sexual messages they send to the reader's unconscious mind.

The turning point in the story is the moment when Letting goes into the Blue Salon for the first time and dozes off to sleep: "I slept for perhaps an hour. Suddenly, I was fully awake with every nerve tingling, as if someone had shouted my name... Feeling sure I must have imagined a sound and yet unaccountably uneasy for no discernible reason, I threw another log on the fire..." (174). What happens next could well be part of a nightmarish dream. The dream atmosphere is strong and every element of what happens can be identified with a corresponding example in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The re-appearance of the three elements I mentioned – the aggressive eyes, the ebony stick and the opal ring – coincides with the emerging of the horrible mirror-creature, although the stick comes into play a little later.

At that moment, all that was visible of its face was a tattered fringe of faded orange hair on a heavily lined forehead and two large, pale-yellow eyes that glared with the fierce, impersonal arrogance of a goat.

... In the mirror the creature studied the parrot in its cage with its ferocious yellow eyes. (183)

The repetition is obvious. The aggression of the creature is to a great extent expressed through its eyes, just like Gideon's aggression earlier in the story. In agreement with Freud's theory, this recurrence has every chance of becoming a source of an uncanny feeling. It unconsciously reminds the reader of his unconscious "compulsion to repeat", marking "the return of the repressed". At the same time, what is happening at this point is sufficiently frightening to allow this repetition to turn into a source of an uncanny feeling.

To keep the same level of uncanniness, the narrator keeps reminding us of the creature's eyes: "Suddenly the creature's eyes appeared to blaze in its disintegrating face" (184). The strange contrast between the decomposing flesh of the beast and its flashing eyes makes the scene even more horrible and increases the uncanny feeling in the reader's mind. Another ancient and surpassed belief – that a dead body can come to life again – suddenly emerges from his unconscious and produces an uncanny effect of type one.

"It turned round, its eyes flashing terribly, its face covered with blood... It saw me and its eyes widened with a ferocious, knowing expression that turned me cold... I stopped my futile hammering on the glass and backed away, appalled by the menace in the thing's goat-like eyes" (185). Another uncanny aspect is added – the creature is deprived of one of the few human features it possesses. It becomes a dreadful hybrid between a decomposing human body and a living, predatory goat, as if the decaying corpse is gripped from inside by the animal. This time the uncanny effect has more than one aspect. On the one hand, yet another forgotten belief – about thinking animals – starts to awaken. On the other, the idea of an outer "shell", controlled by a powerful inner agency is suggestive to the reader's ego – the parallel with the conscious life, controlled by a dark and hidden unconscious is too easily drawn. The unconscious parallel is all but tolerable to the reader and is quickly repressed, leaving anxiety and a strong uncanny feeling.

The next time the eyes of the creature are mentioned, the narrator is trying to reach and break all the mirrors in the house, in a bid to prevent the beast from getting through to him. He is standing in front of a mirror, wondering what to do: "It was a curious sensation to stand in front of a mirror and not see yourself. I stood thus for a moment and then started with fright, for there appeared in the mirror, where my reflection should have been, the ghastly face of the creature glaring at me with a mad, lustful look in its eyes" (187).

This is an important moment for several reasons. The motif of the aggressive eyes keeps recurring but this time another significant symbol is added: the repulsive face of the creature appears where the

narrator's own reflection should have been. Thus, the idea of *the double* – another source of the uncanny – is developed further. At the same time, "the return of the repressed" is active once again. The image of the beast, usurping the role of Letting's reflection symbolises the repressed unconscious. As if the reader himself is standing in front of a mirror, seeing, to his horror, something that is both himself and something else, whose existence has been unknown, or forgotten, but whose presence cannot be denied. This is probably one of the reasons why this particular scene seems so uncanny. The unconscious pursues the ego in the same way as the creature hunts Letting through the house.

The last time the eye-motif appears is towards the end of the story, at the second critical moment. Letting proves faster than the beast and manages to break all mirrors but one. He hesitates for a moment, the creature breaks the mirror first and gets through. "Its blazing eyes fixed upon me, it opened its mouth and uttered a shrill, gargling cry of triumph, the saliva flowed out of the decomposing ruins of its cheeks. I could hear its teeth squeak together as it ground them" (191). The beast's aggression reaches its peak. Letting is about to be attacked and dealt with in a cruel way. Scared out of his horrified trance, he lifts the heavy iron candelabra, hurls it towards his pursuer and kills him.

The symbolic nature of this act is exceedingly strong. As I mentioned before, the beast represents in many respects the repressed unconscious. Letting is trying to escape from the beast. He breaks every mirror he can see and for a while evades his pursuer. At last he is pushed into a corner and has a simple choice: either to remain inactive and be eaten, or to kill the creature. He chooses the latter. According to Freud's theory we act in a similar way. We try for as long as possible to get away from our unconscious. We break mirror after mirror, denying it a way into "our house". We run tirelessly and try to convince ourselves that our unconscious does not really exist, just as Letting tries to convince himself that the creature is a product of his imagination. When we happen to get a glimpse of it, we are frightened and run even faster. If our unconscious manages to find a way into our conscious, we do our best to repress it again, just like Peter kills the creature.

When Letting strikes a match to see whether the beast is really dead, he sees something quite unexpected:

I bent over the thing, holding out the match and then recoiled with sudden horror at what I saw.

Lying with his head in a pool of blood was Gideon. (192)

How can we interpret this surprising outcome in psychoanalytical terms? Freud reports that in a certain number of cases, when a patient consciously accepts certain aspects of his unconscious, he may realise that what has been causing the neurosis, is in fact something which has been familiar at one time, but which has been repressed, being too disturbing to the ego. As a result, the patient loses his pathological symptoms. The key point here is that if the repressed has once been familiar, the patient becomes reacquainted with it when he lets it into his conscious mind. This scheme can provide the key for understanding to a certain extent the final scene in the story. After long hours of fear and suspense, after a frantic chase through the house, Peter Letting lights a match and takes a good look at what has been pursuing him. Suddenly, he realises that it is not a being from an outer and incomprehensible world, but someone he has known for a long time. In a subtle way, the author recreates the whole mental process of evading, fearing and, finally, recognising and accepting the repressed.

What happens in the isolated house can be viewed as a struggle between Letting and his repressed feelings towards Gideon. To investigate this possibility, we need to focus our attention on the other two leitmotifs – the ebony stick and the ring. As we shall see, the mirror creature shares several important features with Gideon. One of them is the opal ring. "What made the whole thing even worse, as a macabre spectacle, was that on one of the creature's disgusting fingers it wore a large gold ring in which an opal flashed like flame as its hands moved... This refinement on such a corpse-like apparition only served to enhance its repulsive appearance" (184).

The similarity is obvious. Durrell uses the ring as a common feature between Gideon and the beast. Another such feature is the ebony cane. The narrator mentions the cane rather casually in the beginning, when Gideon comes to his house but when the mirror creature appears from behind the door, brandishing the ebony stick, the reader sees the connection: "It disappeared through the door, only to reappear a moment later carrying in its hands the ebony stick that my reflection had been carrying (186). And sev-

eral lines later: “I saw a large portion of the mirror tinkle down onto the floor and, sticking through the mirror... was the emaciated, twisted arm of the creature brandishing the ebony cane” (186).

There can no longer be any doubt – in some strange and uncanny way the beast and Gideon are one and the same being, or parts of one being. Letting himself cannot fail to notice the similarities but he either decides not to mention them or, more probably, represses them; the image of the beast, brandishing the ebony stick, begins to represent Gideon’s sexual aggression, regardless of whether it exists in reality or, as seems more likely, in Letting’s repressed fantasies. When these fantasies begin to emerge from his unconscious, he attempts to escape, blocking the way of the repressed (represented by the act of breaking mirrors) and denying it access into his conscious. When his hidden desires manage to start emerging before his horrified ego, he makes a final desperate effort and symbolically kills them, sending them back to repression.

Although this interpretation may seem far-fetched, the similarities between what happens in the house and the process of dealing with one’s repressed desires and fantasies, are conspicuous and call for an explanation.

The roots of the uncanny in “The Entrance” can be found on several other levels. As was mentioned earlier, the demonstrative denial of the supernatural is one such level. In “The Uncanny” Freud writes: “All supposedly educated people have ceased to believe officially that the dead can become visible as spirits... their emotional attitude towards their dead, moreover, once a highly ambiguous and ambivalent one, has been toned down in the higher strata of the mind into an unambiguous feeling of piety... but we are not sure of our new beliefs and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation” (Freud 1919: 242–243). In his opinion, every time something confirms our discarded beliefs, we get a strong uncanny feeling. In “The Entrance” there is an illustration of this process. When Gideon mentions Letting’s collection of books about the supernatural and enquires whether this subject interests the antiquarian, he replies: “After all, no sane man would believe in witches and warlocks and sabbaths and spells and all that tarradiddle. No, I merely collect them as interesting books which are of value... Don’t you find amusing the thought of grown men mumbling all those silly spells and standing about for hours in the middle of the night expecting Satan to appear?” (Durrell 1979: 146).

Letting’s smug words are probably designed to awaken a suspicion in the reader that something supernatural might happen after all. Gideon’s sharp reply increases this suspicion. When the strange and frightening events begin to occur later, the discarded beliefs are gradually confirmed as Letting realises the seriousness of his plight. The sudden confirmation produces, in accordance with Freud’s theory, an uncanny feeling.

Furthermore, it can be seen that Letting has not managed to get rid of his own beliefs in the supernatural, although he claims to have done. He keeps collecting books on black magic and the supernatural and reads them avidly. When Gideon asks him about that he responds with a suspicious quickness and seems a little too sarcastic and self-assured. His defensive reaction betrays the existence of repressed guilt. Unconsciously, Letting feels guilty for being unable to discard his beliefs. He manages to convince himself that he keeps his collection just because of its bibliographical rarity and amusing subject matter and tries to convince his visitor as well.

The eye-motif appears at one more point. This time it is not directly related either to Gideon or the mirror creature. Durrell mentions it when Letting is travelling towards Fontaine: “All the rivers wore a rim of lacy ice along their shores, and the ponds and lakes turned blank, frozen eyes to the steel grey sky” (165). Although there is no direct threat in this scene, there is something particularly uncanny in the blank, frozen eyes, staring at the sky. The explanation seems to lie in the association of this picture with the idea of an animated corpse, of a lifeless body, controlled by an unknown and threatening force, which leads to the ever-repressed notion of our dark unconscious. In a way, what makes the scene uncanny is that it marks a stage in the return of the repressed. At the same time, the eyes of the frozen lakes remind the reader of Gideon’s supernatural eyes and become a bridge between them and the goat’s eyes of the beast.

Another dreamlike and uncanny aspect of the story is the strange combination of characteristics in the mirror creature. As was already pointed out, the beast displays a number of Gideon’s features

which, in itself, creates an uncanny atmosphere. In the beginning of the story, when Letting's colleague describes Gideon's uncle, he says: "One of his feet was twisted and misshapen and so he walked slowly with a pronounced limp, dragging his left foot" (151).

Seeing the creature for the first time, the narrator notes that it is limping, dragging its leg behind it. This looks like a typical instance of condensation in dreams. The beast resembles a dream-created figure, comprising features of at least three separate (and at the same time united) beings – Gideon, the uncle and something unknown.

The figure of the uncle is also fascinating. The old Marquis de Teldrais Villeray is not seen in the story but his presence is felt throughout the plot. The old man's role provides important clues for understanding the significance of what happens in the second half of the narrative. Letting's colleague, who first introduces him to the reader, expresses his strong dislike of the Marquis: "The uncle was a most unpleasant old man... with a really evil, leering face, and an oily manner that he obviously thought was charming... [The boy] seemed to be suffering from intense fear, a fear, I felt, of his uncle" (150). The personality Edward Mallenger is describing is repulsive but at this stage there is nothing uncanny about it. The uncanny appears several lines later, when Mallenger tells Letting about the conversation he has overheard: "I could hear enough to discern that the old man was doing his best to persuade his nephew into some course of action that the boy found repugnant, For he was vehement in his refusal" (150).

The Marquis becomes more and more insistent and at last the boy shouts, "No, no, I will not be devoured so that you may live... I hate you" (151). The idea of allowing oneself to be "devoured" so someone else can go on living relates to the sphere of the supernatural, which provides a good opportunity for awakening of old discarded beliefs and triggers an uncanny feeling. It is likely that the Marquis was trying to persuade the boy to do something related to the mirror creature. It seems justified to suppose that at the time of Mallenger's visit it was already inhabiting the interior reflection of the house. To understand the pattern of events caused by the appearance of the beast, we need to discuss the three scenes of death/near-death in the story. Apparently, what connects these scenes (the uncle's murder, Gideon's "accident" in Peter's bathroom and Peter's own death at the end) is what the victims see in the mirror. An important clue is provided by the inscription Peter sees in the attic of the uncle's house: "*I am your servant. Feed and liberate me. I am you*" (173). It gives us grounds to suppose that every time the creature "devours" someone's reflection, it becomes him, retaining at the same time some features of the people whose reflections it has already devoured.

The evidence we find in the story supports this view. When Peter sees the beast for the first time, it is limping and wearing an opal ring. This combination of elements suggests that it has already "devoured" Gideon's and his uncle's reflections, and has become "them". Additional support we find in the episode in Peter's bathroom. Gideon breaks the mirror and looks scared to death. With the knowledge of what happens later in the story it is easy to guess that what scares him is the sudden appearance of the mirror creature. It seems likely that during his last visit to his uncle's house, Gideon witnessed his own mirror image eaten by the beast and left convinced he no longer had a reflection. In Peter's bathroom, however, he is faced with the creature again and realises that it is now his own reflection. The monster has become "him", or at least his mirror image. A similar thing happens to Peter: his mirror image is also devoured and he thinks he no longer has a reflection. In the prison cell, however, he looks at the mirror and sees himself as the monster. He realises he still has a reflection but a reflection combining the features of the devoured people before him. It is significant that after the creature devours Peter's mirror image, it takes his weapon just as it has taken Gideon's ring and the uncle's limp.

It is important to find out what the significance of this strange parasitism is. Evidence from the text suggests that in a bizarre way the mirror monster is trying *to form an identity*. Another look at Freudian theory will provide us with an insight into the mechanism of the creature's identity formation. In chapter III of *The Ego and the Id* (1923), as well as in later works, Freud discusses the formation of the superego. He argues that the infant's "Ego Ideal" is formed through a process of internalising (or introjecting) the two parents' identities. By watching his mother and father and associating with them, the child acquires a superego and is identified as a person (Freud 1923: 217–221). It seems that this is exactly what the mirror creature is trying to do. It devours the mirror images of other people and acquires some of their

features in a bid to form a separate identity. In this sense, in a symbolic way it acts like a child. We can even suppose that each time the monster devours someone's reflection, it attempts to internalise a different "quality". Peter, for instance, is an intellectual who loves books. He can be interpreted as a symbolic possessor of Knowledge, of the "logos". Devouring his mirror image, the beast would internalise a part of this knowledge and form an important part of its own identity. Similarly, devouring Gideon's reflection could help it acquire some of his high social status.

This interpretation of the creature's behaviour throws light on another part of the mysterious inscription – "*Feed and liberate me.*" According to Freud, the internalisation of the parents' identities eventually leads to detachment. In "Female Sexuality" (1931) he writes: "After the paternal agency has been internalized and become a super-ego, the next task is to detach the latter from the figures of whom it was originally the psychical representative" (Freud 1931: 229) and in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (1924): "[The parents'] personal significance for the super-ego recedes into the background" (Freud 1924: 168). It appears that the formation of the superego leads to liberation from previous dependence. By forming an identity through devouring people's reflections, the monster is also pursuing its own liberation.

The analysis I have conducted demonstrates that Durrell's story is suitable for a psychoanalytical approach. Illustrations of the concept of the uncanny, as it appears in Freudian theory, can be found on more than one level. Moreover, it appears that discussing the uncanny in "The Entrance" leads to the introduction of other Freudian concepts. Understanding the role of the mirror monster for instance requires not only dwelling upon its relation to the uncanny but also resorting to other concepts from Freud's works such as 'superego', 'introjection' and 'identity formation', which I have not been able to discuss in detail. Nevertheless, the details I *have* discussed show that the psychoanalytical aspects of the uncanny and repressed sexual desire have been illustrated with sufficient accuracy to suppose that Durrell was doing it on purpose. Whatever the case, for a work of fiction, "The Entrance" is an insightful study into the human psyche.

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