

*“Something wicked this way
comes”: the uncanny and violence
in *Macbeth**

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Abstract

To describe Macbeth's arrival in William Shakespeare's play of the same title, the three witches exclaim: “Something wicked this way comes”. This notorious line perfectly defines the mixture of the uncanny – something that is strange and strangely familiar at the same time – and violence in the play, as well as it could express the sensation caused by Sigmund Freud in 1919, when he published his essay “The Uncanny.” By analyzing Ernst Hoffman's short story “The Sand-Man,” Freud developed the concept of the uncanny, something which should remain hidden but insists coming out into the open. The uncanny involves several characteristics, such as doubles, the compulsion to repeat, the evil eye, the gaze, the death drive, *déjà-vu*, ghosts, dolls and automatons, the blurring between fantasy and reality, liminality, epilepsy and madness. Most of these traits are present in the playtext of *Macbeth* and in several productions, and they are undoubtedly related to violence. Examples of uncanny violence abound in *Macbeth*, a playtext that has always been considered one of the most violent of Shakespeare's oeuvre, and that may well be seen as the uncanniest.

Keywords

Macbeth. Uncanny. Violence. Freud.

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“Something wicked this way comes” (Macbeth 3.4.121) is how one of the three witches, noticing Macbeth’s arrival, describes the tyrant, to the great amusement of her peers. But this famous line from William Shakespeare’s tragedy may well be an apt metaphor for the sensation caused by Sigmund Freud in the academic community after he published his essay “The Uncanny,” in 1919. Wickedness is surely only one part of the uncanny, and there are many others, as we shall see in this paper. I want to concentrate on the various elements of the uncanny, for several of them are related to violence, and show the connection of the uncanny to visible violence for, as Paul de Man points out, “[t]o make the invisible visible is uncanny” (qtd. in ROYLE, 2003, p. 108). However, if the uncanny is, in Freud’s definition, something that is strangely familiar, then the invisible may not be so invisible after all. And, as something familiar that keeps trying to be repressed, the uncanny need not be scary. We might as well approach the uncanny with a more welcoming attitude than when Macbeth, afraid of ghosts, shouts at Banquo’s spirit, “Hence horrible shadow! / Unreal mockery, hence!” (3.4.105).

Many scholars have used Freud’s essay as a starting point to arrive at definitions of the uncanny. For Samuel Weber, the uncanny is “not simply a form of anxiety, but is located between dread, terror and panic on the one side, and uneasiness and anticipation on the other” (1973, p. 1131-2). Gordon Bearn explains the difference between *eerie*—“the absence of what ought to be present”—and *uncanny*, “the presence of what ought to be absent” (qtd. in ROYLE, 2003, p. 88). For Harold Bloom, *Kafkaesque* may be “a universal term for what Freud called ‘the uncanny’” (1994, p. 448). As we shall see, the uncanny can include *déjà vu*, frightening and terrible circumstances, or things strangely beautiful, connected to the sublime. Jean-Marie Todd calls attention to the “double movement” of the uncanny, that of veiling and unveiling (1986, p. 522). And, according to Hélène Cixous, “Freud relates [the uncanny] to other concepts which resemble it (fright, fear, anguish): it is a unit in the ‘family’ but it is not really a member of the family” (1976, p. 528). When things that are unnatural happen, the uncanny arises. It is strange for a person to be not born of woman, or for an inanimate object such as a forest to move, though the violence in *Macbeth* is more than strange—it is strangely familiar.

Freud begins his essay “The Uncanny” by pointing out that the psychoanalyst seldom concentrates on the aesthetic. He continues this exploration on the topic writing in third person, as if he himself were not a psychoanalyst. On the same

page he moves from “he” to “one” to “we” and finally to “I,” when he mentions Ernst Jentsch, who appears to have been the first and only to write about the uncanny before Freud assumes this arduous mission. All of a sudden Freud goes back to using third person again, when he admits that he has not experienced the sensation of the uncanny for “a long time” (2003, p. 124). Two pages into the essay, he attempts a conclusion about what the uncanny actually means: “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (2003, p. 124). Then he goes on to look for the meaning of the *heimlich* (homely, familiar) and the *unheimlich* (unhomely, mysterious) in a myriad of dictionaries. His triumph is evident when he realizes that the two apparently antonymic terms converge at one point (mysterious *and* homely at the same time), so he adopts Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as “everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come out into the open” (2003, p. 132).

With a definition in hand, Freud is now ready to scrutinize “The Sand-Man,” a short story from 1817 written by E. T. A. Hoffman, whom he considers “the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature” (2003, p. 141). Freud makes a tremendous effort to exclude the more familiar characters, such as Clara and her brother, and confines the automaton Olympia to a footnote. For Cixous, he tries to tell the story linearly, without all the interruptions and diverse points of view that are part of its charm (1976, p. 533). Again, criticizing Jentsch, Freud tries to convince his readers that “the motif of the seemingly animate doll Olympia is by no means the only one responsible for the incomparably uncanny effect of the story, or even the one to which it is principally due” (2003, p. 136).

After offering a summary of the story, he adds that it “will probably make it clear beyond doubt that in Hoffman’s tale the sense of the uncanny attaches directly to the figure of the Sand-Man, and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes—and that intellectual uncertainty, as Jentsch understands it, has nothing to do with this effect” (2003, p. 138). This sentence is followed by another that illustrates Freud’s compulsion for repetition: “Uncertainty as to whether an object is animate or inanimate, which we were bound to acknowledge in the case of the doll Olympia, is quite irrelevant in the case of this more potent example of the uncanny” (2003, p. 138-9). And then he concedes: “It is true that the author initially creates a kind of uncertainty by preventing us—certainly not intentionally—from guessing whether he is going to take us into the real world or into some fantastic world of his own choosing” (2003, p. 139). In the

influential “Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimliche*,” Cixous makes a big deal of Freud’s use of expressions such as *no doubt*, *undoubtedly* and *certainly*. She is right to point out how excessively he recurs to these terms in an essay that uncannily and ironically leaves many doubts. At one point Freud openly admits that his interpretation of “The Sand-Man” seems “arbitrary and meaningless if one rejects the relation between fear for the eyes and fear of castration, but they become meaningful as soon as the Sand-Man is replaced by the dreaded father, at whose hands castration is expected” (2003, p. 140). His key to linking Hoffman’s tale to the uncanny is, thus, the fear of losing one’s eyes, which underneath represents the fear of castration.

In a third part of the essay Freud offers other examples of the uncanny, such as getting lost and returning to the same familiar point. He stresses sentences like “We can no longer be in any doubt about where we now stand” (2003, p. 147), confessing in earlier parts of his essay that we could have been in doubt *before*. This uncertainty is further demonstrated by a sentence like “if psychoanalytic theory is right” (2003, p. 147)—so is there a chance that it is wrong? He also discusses fairy tales, coming to the conclusion that, when Snow White reopens her eyes, it is not uncanny, for this occurs within the universe of the fairy tale, in which such things happen (2003, p. 153). Finally he creates a strange and arbitrary rule: that the uncanny and humor cannot go together. He had already suggested this when he seemed to take Hoffman’s tale *too* seriously, apparently oblivious to the fact that, especially towards the end, the story becomes hilarious, since Nathanael’s infatuation with Olympia becomes ludicrous. Now he gives another example: “Even a ‘real’ ghost, such as the one in Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Canterville Ghost’, inevitably loses any claim to arouse even feelings of fright when the author amuses himself by ironizing it and exposing it to ridicule” (2003, p. 158). Freud was probably unfamiliar with Mark Twain’s saying that “humor is tragedy plus time,” since he refuses to admit that humor may be a part of the uncanny.

It seems quite safe to say that Freud’s essay is phallogocentric in its more “literal” meaning. For instance, he writes: “one finds it understandable that so precious an organ as the eye should be guarded by a commensurate anxiety” (2003, p. 140). If tearing out one’s eyes represents fear of castration, then his “so precious an organ” is really alluding to something else. His example in this sentence looks like a give-away: “One may [...] have lost one’s way in the woods, perhaps after being overtaken by fog, and, despite all one’s efforts to find a marked or familiar path, one comes back again

and again to the same spot, which one recognizes by a particular physical feature” (2003, p. 144). Yes, and what “particular physical feature” could that be, we wonder.

Obviously, Freud’s essay possesses great qualities, or else it would not have been so influential since its publication, in 1919. Perhaps one of the ways to forgive its single-mindedness is to see it, as Cixous does, as “less a discourse than a strange theoretical novel” (1976, p. 525). If we regard Freud’s analysis of the uncanny, especially in regard to “The Sand-Man,” as fiction, Marjorie Garber’s quote makes perfect sense: “It may indeed be the case that all stories about the uncanny are stories about the repression of the uncanny” (1987, p. 91). In his book about the uncanny, Nicholas Royle puts it another way: for him, “‘The Uncanny’ is an extraordinary text for what it does not say, as well as for what it does” (2003, p. 7). It would be difficult to dispute Freud’s status as the first to connect the uncanny not only to the mysterious but also to the strangely familiar. According to Hugh Haughton, “Freud’s haunted essay certainly put the uncanny onto the aesthetic map in ways not even he could have predicted. ‘The Uncanny’ has come back to haunt subsequent commentary on literature, film, photography and art ever since” (2003, p. lv).

And yet, Freud is somewhat reductionistic in both his reading of “The Sand-Man” and of Jentsch’s “On the Psychology of the Uncanny,” the latter published in 1906. For Jentsch, the uncanny has to do with uncertainty, with not being able to decide. Like Freud, he also starts his piece with references to language: “Without a doubt, this word [*unheimlich*] appears to express that someone to whom something ‘uncanny’ happens is not quite ‘at home’ or ‘at ease’ in the situations concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him” (1996, p. 7-8). According to Jentsch, when we face something new or unfamiliar we are also facing the uncertain, and from this feeling uncanniness arises, making us want to master the unknown (1996, p. 9). He goes on to state that no feeling is as uncanny as the doubt concerning animate and inanimate objects (1996, p. 11). As an example, he mentions wax figures: are they dead or alive, real or unreal, animate or inanimate? (1996, p. 12). When in doubt it is safer for us, thus, to undergo “a kind of intellectual mastery of the situation” (1996, p. 11). He briefly mentions Hoffman, although not “The Sand-Man” in particular, as a model of uncanny literature.

Jentsch does a good job in talking about the *unheimlich* until he states that women and children may see the uncanny in more objects because they have a weak critical sense (1996, p. 13). Of course, what could be more intellectually uncertain than

women? This is the age-old prejudice linking women to hysteria, superstition, and witchcraft. However, even in “The Sand-Man,” which Jentsch refuses to analyze, Clara is the practical, rational being: Clara is the defense of Enlightenment against Romanticism, Clara is the light, unaffected by poetry or alchemy or the uncanny; for that matter, Clara is wholly ignored by Freud. Besides, *Macbeth* contradicts the thesis that women have a tendency to see more ghosts than men. It is Macbeth who sees Banquo’s ghost after all, and who hears the witches say exactly what he wants to believe. Lady Macbeth goes crazy, to be sure, but she merely sees blood on her hands and talks to herself in her sleep. She does not begin a conversation with a ghost in the middle of a banquet, nor does she become so paranoid about her own future as to order the murder of children.

Jentsch states: “Another important factor in the origin of the uncanny is the natural tendency of man to infer [...] that things in the external world [...] are animate in the same way” (1996, p. 13). Since he has made a questionable connection between women and weak intellects, we wonder if by “man” he means humankind or just the male species. To be fair, Clara does see a bush moving at the end of “The Sand-Man,” which, interestingly enough, echoes Birnanwood coming to Dunsinane at the end of *Macbeth* (5.5). But just seeing a moving bush does not make Clara want to throw herself or others from the tower.

In a way, Freud elides the fact that Jentsch has much to contribute to our understanding of the uncanny. Cixous calls it a repression of the repression: “Does not Jentsch say more than what Freud wishes to read?” (1976, p. 534) For Haughton, “Uncertainty is a more interesting subject than Freud is prepared to acknowledge, and this particular essay [‘The Uncanny’] is riddled with it” (2003, p. xliii). So much so that Freud’s abusive *no doubts* go against the general tone of his essay.

In 1901, before writing “The Uncanny,” Freud, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, mentioned the difficulty a psychoanalyst would have “to discover anything new that has not been known before by some creative writer” (1976, p. 262). This becomes clear with “The Sand-Man.” As Royle affirms, “Reading or re-reading [Hoffman’s story] after reading ‘The Uncanny’, one cannot help feeling rather sorry for the founder of psychoanalysis,” since the tale is so creative in its psychological traumas (2003, p. 39).

The uncanny also includes a compulsion to repeat, or, as Royle describes, “a sense of repetition or ‘coming back’—the return of the repressed” (2003, p. 2). He

further links this to a “compulsion to tell, a compulsive storytelling” (2003, p. 12). Freud argues that sometimes it is repetition that makes something uncanny, a return, sometimes unintentional:

In the unconscious mind we can recognize the dominance of a *compulsion to repeat* which proceeds from instinctual impulses. The compulsion probably depends on the essential nature of the drives themselves. It is strong enough to override the pleasure principle and lend a demonic character to certain aspects of mental life (FREUD, 2003, p. 144-5).

This compulsion to repeat may be one of the reasons the violence in *Macbeth* is uncanny. The tyrant starts by killing the king, and, while he hesitates to do so, he has no qualms about having women and children murdered. Once he begins, he cannot stop. And, if the violence does not start with him, it will not stop when he is dead. As Weber claims, the uncanny “involves repetition not merely as a thematic phenomenon but as a factor of interpretation itself” (1973, p. 1115). One way to look at the uncanny in *Macbeth* is to examine its interest in repetition. In this way, the uncanny, like violence, is not alien, because it has always been with us, only suppressed. We try to repress violence, but it comes back to haunt us. In fact, it never is something barely repressed, difficult to return – for something to return, it has to leave us before.

But *Macbeth* the playtext, like the uncanny, is also about what Freud calls the “evil eye.” For him, “One of the uncanniest and most widespread superstitions is fear of the ‘evil eye’ [...]. Anyone who possesses something precious, but fragile, is afraid of the envy of others, to the extent that he projects on them the envy he would have felt in their place” (2003, p. 146-7). *Macbeth* certainly has an evil eye for Duncan’s crown. One of the main themes in the playtext, that of ambition, is intrinsically connected to the evil eye.

It comes as no surprise that, for Garber, *Macbeth* “is *the* play of the uncanny – the uncanniest in the canon” (1987, p. 107). She reaches this conclusion after referring to another essay by Freud, “The Medusa’s Head,” in which Freud lists: “animism, magic and witchcraft, the omnipotence of thought, man’s attitude to death, involuntary repetition, and the castration-complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something fearful into an uncanny thing.” Garber sees this list as encompassing “practically every major theme in *Macbeth*” (1987, p. 107).

If we go back to “The Sand-Man” and to the uncanny concept of the evil eye, it seems curious that when Nathanael puts on Coppola's glasses to observe a moving bush, what he sees in front of him is Clara, just as, when Clara tries to console

him in the beginning of the story, he sees nothing but death gazing at him. Todd comments that “the male perceives the female gaze as ‘penis envy’. [...] If a woman’s gaze is threatening, it is because man feels threatened by the fear of castration confirmed by his view of the female genitals” (1986, p. 526-7). And she concludes that “women have been silenced, veiled, *hidden away*,” so that the threat they pose to men is diminished (1986, p. 528).

Looking at someone, indeed, may be a gesture of aggression, reminiscent of the primitive belief that taking a picture may take away a piece of a person’s soul (making film, which originates from photography, a very uncanny art). Thus if the male gaze, which for Laura Mulvey is the basis of cinema, transforms women into objects for men’s contemplation, the female gaze reminds men of their vulnerability, making them possible victims (1992). Philip Armstrong adds that, in visual perception the uncanny happens “when the gaze crosses over to [...] the image of the subject’s ego, which may take the form of its reflection in the mirror, or of another subject with whom it has a specular relationship. The gaze, added to the mirror image or ideal ego, creates the uncanny double” (1994, p. 425).

The double becomes a fascinating part of the uncanny, for it “absorbs the unrealized eventualities of our destiny which the imagination refuses to let go” (CIXOUS, 1976, p. 540). Freud draws on Otto Rank’s work, which links the double “with mirror-images, shadows, guardian spirits, the doctrine of the soul and the fear of death” (2003, p. 142). The double, at first “an insurance against the extinction of the self,” changes to become “the uncanny harbinger of death” (FREUD, 2003, p. 142). That is, at a more “primitive phase in our mental development, a phase that we have surmounted,” the double was not then a source of horror and dread (FREUD, 2003, p. 143). In many cases, uncanniness arises from this preoccupation with the double.

Just as in “The Sand-Man,” there are several doubles in *Macbeth*. The saintly and pious king Duncan is doubled in the three witches and their witchcraft. This point is emphasized in the beginning of Trevor Nunn’s 1976 production of *Macbeth* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, in which two different groups can be seen on stage. One group is formed by the witches and their chanting; the other by the king, his subjects and their prayer. The voices from one group start being mingled with the voices from the other group. Another double is that of Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff. They are somewhat connected, because Lady Macbeth thinks of her, as revealed by her sleepwalking monologue, when she asks, “The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she

now?” (5.1.42) This connection between the two ladies is neatly drawn in Roman Polanski’s 1971 film. By anticipating the sleepwalking scene and putting it right after the scene in which Lady Macduff and her children are murdered, Polanski makes a cut from Macduff’s home to a window in Macbeth’s castle. The doctor looks through the window before fixing his gaze on the perturbed Lady Macbeth. His gaze links the two women, reinforcing the connection.

If the renderings suggest that the violence in Scotland will continue after Macbeth is killed, they do so by stressing Macduff as Macbeth’s double. Nunn’s production is a good example. In the last scene, as aforementioned, Macduff enters the stage with bloody hands and gives Malcolm the daggers that slayed Macbeth, in much the same way as Macbeth handled the daggers to his lady right after killing Duncan. Macbeth, too, used to be Duncan’s faithful servant, the warrior who eliminated any opposition, before usurping the throne. Why not assume that Macduff, led by ambition, can become Malcolm’s Macbeth?

Even the children can be seen as doubles. The boys (Banquo’s and Macduff’s sons) are the constant target of an ambitious man who does not accept being replaced. But they may be more than victims: if they survive, they may be avengers of their fathers’ deaths, perpetuating the violence. In Nunn’s production, Banquo’s son, who escapes death, and Macduff’s, who does not, are even played by the same actor. Going one step further, both boys may be the double of Lady Macbeth’s ghostly baby, the one she describes in her violent speech:

I have given suck, and know
How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (1.7.54-59)

We do not know if this child exists, if the couple had a child who died, or if she is just saying what she would do. But it does seem like a powerful memory on her part, one that keeps returning even when it is safely stored away. For Royle, “The double is always ghostly and cannot be disassociated from a sense of *déjà vu*” (2003, p. 182).

Ironically, Freud never mentions *déjà vu* in his essay on the uncanny, but, Royle claims, “Excluded, *déjà vu* is more uncannily active in Freud’s essay than if it were included” (2003, p. 179). Freud was amongst the first to use this term, albeit years before, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, when he noted that “the feeling of

'*déjà vu*' corresponds to the recollection of an unconscious phantasy" (qtd. in ROYLE, 2003, p. 174). Royle affirms that even the fact that the term has acquired two meanings over the decades is uncanny: "*Déjà vu* signifies at once the illusion of 'having previously experienced a present situation' and 'the correct impression' of having really 'previously experienced it'" (2003, p. 173). The violence we experience in *Macbeth* not only gives a feeling of "we have seen this before" but also an almost certainty that "we shall see this again."

The uncanny, as "a crisis of the proper" (ROYLE, 2003, p. 1), also involves liminality, for there is no conviction about what is familiar and unfamiliar, what is outside and what is inside, even what is on stage and on screen and what is off stage and off screen. One of the reasons for the uncanniness in "The Sand-Man" is this disturbance of boundaries. For Sarah Kofman, "what characterizes Nathanael is precisely the impossibility of maintaining certain limits, confounding the animate and the inanimate, man and woman" (1991, p. 175). And this confusion with liminality is not only inside Nathanael's head. Hoffman himself oversteps limits in what concerns genre, humor, and horror. For example, do we even know for sure if Olympia is an automaton? She is described as one, granted, but when Coppola tears out her eyes and Spalanzani throws them at Nathanael, these eyes are all bloody. Would a robot bleed?

At a certain moment, both Jentsch and Freud deal with epilepsy and the uncanny effect that watching an epileptic attack produces on the viewer. Jentsch claims epilepsy is uncanny because it "reveals the human body to the viewer" (1996, p. 14). Every time Nathanael undergoes unbearable stress in "The Sand-Man" he breaks down, ranting the nonsensical "Spin round, wooden doll," which seems equivalent to an epileptic attack. He loses his senses. During epilepsy the patient experiences "brief periods of absence [...] during which [he or she] does something out of character, as though he were under the control of his unconscious" (Freud qtd. in ROYLE, 2003, p. 151). Freud says that, to a layperson, epilepsy, as well as madness, may be uncanny, for it unveils hidden forces that may be within the observer him/herself (2003, p. 150). In *Macbeth*, if we consider that the tyrant has an epileptic attack when he sees Banquo's ghost at the banquet, we will agree that he is unmasking more than his body—his soul. He discloses his guilt for having ordered Banquo's death to all who want to hear.

As regards Banquo's ghost, something uncanny is that Freud does *not* recognize it as an example of the uncanny, since, for him, we accept that the ghost is "fully entitled to exist" (2003, p. 156). Freud refers to the line between fantasy and

reality, connected to the concept of liminality: “many things that would be bound to seem uncanny if they happened in real life are not so in the realm of fiction” (2003, p. 156). For him, “an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary” (2003, p. 150). Jentsch also says this when he discusses the liminality between animate and inanimate objects, but now Freud brings this “blur” to the realm of fiction. As Robert Young affirms, when Freud talks of literature and “real life,” literature “is blamed for producing the uncertainties” (1984, p. 96).

Another important aspect of the uncanny is the death drive. Although Freud only coins the phrase one year after the publication of “The Uncanny,” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “the death drive lurks, as if forbidden to speak its name, everywhere in the 1919 essay” (ROYLE, 2003, p. 86). Since the uncanny involves the return of the repressed, nothing comes back again and again more than the reminder that we are all mortal. Freud claims that “our unconscious is still as unreceptive as ever to the idea of our own mortality” (2003, p. 148), that is, that we have trouble accepting the fact not only that we shall die sooner or later, but also that this is one of the objectives of all life. According to Jentsch, skeletons cause dread because they are on the limit of something inanimate that may come to life, and also because these symbols remind us of death (1996, p. 15). In a way another keepsake of death is photography, since it captures a person in an inanimate moment, and it is not in vain that one of the oldest tricks in movies is to show a photo of someone with his eyes closed, and then, in a second, show this same person with eyes wide open. After all, there is liminality between life and death. Cixous observes: “In the end, death is never anything more than the disturbance of the limits. The impossible is to die” (1976, p. 543).

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud mentions that humanity has an instinct for death and destruction (1989, p. 310). But already ten years before, with “The Uncanny,” the death drive appears in its compulsion to repeat (ROYLE, 2003, p. 89). For Royle, “[t]he death instincts (Thanatos) are the opposite of the life instincts (Eros)” (2003, p. 92). Death is also silence, when words can no longer be spoken, and silence is eerie. That is why the most uncanny image in *The Matrix* happens when Neo’s mouth disappears from his face, making him incapable of speech. Furthermore, Cixous affirms that death “does not have any form in life” (1976, p. 543). But I would argue that violence is the form of death in life.

Freud calls attention to the need of differentiating the uncanny we experience and that which we read about or watch (2003, p. 154). He attempts a conclusion: “the uncanny element we know from experience arises either when repressed childhood complexes are revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs that have been *surmounted* appear to be once again confirmed,” even though “in real life it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the two species of the uncanny that we have posited” (2003, p. 155). We can say that in the realm of fiction, the one we read about and watch, there are also two categories of the uncanny, both related to violence—the violence that occurs on stage and on screen, right in our faces, and the one that is merely suggested, happening off stage and screen. In describing the terribly violent act of the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, Armstrong, citing Bradley and Johnson, stresses how such an act produces repulsion in the spectator: “The blinding is for Bradley too horrifyingly physical to take place on the stage, which should after all be the site of fantasy, and for Johnson too extravagantly fantastic to take place in drama, which must after all be lifelike” (1994, p. 417-8). Here the two scholars, Bradley and Johnson, argue whether what Shakespeare wrote on a page should happen on or off stage, although this is a decision that *every* production based on a Shakespearean playtext has to make.

Violence taken to its limit results in death. Death is, after all, at the core of violence, for violence poses a threat to life. When violence hurts physically, it calls attention to our mortality. Most threats to life are made through violence; that is, if a person wishes someone dead, this person might not want his nemesis to die peacefully, in his sleep, but in a gruesome way. Cixous links the uncanny with death in this way: “The direct figure of the uncanny is the Ghost. The Ghost is the fiction of our relationship to death, concretized by the specter in literature. The relationship to death reveals *the highest degree* of the *Unheimliche*” (1976, p. 542). Violence can be seen as a ghost, both as a warning and as a reminder of death.

Depending on the time and place, violence can be uncanny, that is, strangely familiar to some cultures and strange to others, but even the threat of violence produces uncertainty, because it raises questions about our mortality. Jentsch mentions that children have little experience in many areas of life, so a lot is new to them, producing fear. A way parents have of solving this problem is making the child familiar with the thing that causes fear. Knowing it, mastering it, the child will not be fearful any longer (JENTSCH, 1996, p. 9). One uncanny aspect of *Macbeth* is that the two boys in the

playtext—Fleance and Macduff's son—do not seem very afraid once their lives are threatened by violence. Macduff's son even stands up to one of his murderers, calling him a “shag-ear'd villain” (4.2.81). It seems clear that the boys' lack of fear is related to their familiarity with violence. Violent acts are nothing new to them. Nathanael, as the child in “The Sand-Man,” does not have the courage of the boys in *Macbeth*. But then again, he does not live in a warrior society.

In *The Culture of Violence: Essays on Tragedy and History*, Francis Barker claims that “the way in which *Macbeth* installs violence in itself as a text is as significant as the empirical violence of the action. It is not just that violence is depicted, but that the text is instinct with violence in its very constitution as tragedy. Violence is a critical and not only a descriptive term” (1993, p. 59). However, even as a descriptive term, violence does not hold the same meaning for everybody. For instance, violence by the State is rarely seen as violence, while violence against the State is usually demonized. Putting it another way, if a social movement like the MST (movement of the landless) invades a farm or Congress, it obviously stands for violence, chaos, disorder. If the police have to kill twenty members of the MST to halt any invasion, then they are merely enforcing the law.

Anna Stegh Camati cites Hannah Arendt to say that there is a difference between power and violence. Whereas violence has the capacity of destroying power, it cannot create it. Camati adds, “It is the loss of power that makes tyrants succumb to the temptation to substitute violence for power and to implement the use of terror to maintain domination” (2005, p. 342). That is, violence can be seen as a supplement of the anxiety of not having power. Macbeth's reign starts and ends with violence, from the usurper killing the king to being decapitated himself. And he surely makes use of violence to stay in power, although Shakespeare is clear in showing that Macbeth's means of domination are always feeble, with traitors and cowards abounding in his reign. The catch is that the playtext does not problematize Duncan's reign as one of violence. According to Barker, “subversive or revolutionary violence is consistently demonised, while ruling-class violence [...] receives the mystificatory label of metaphysical and secular-historical ‘order’” (1993, p. 89). Certainly there is violence before Macbeth becomes king, but this violence is only narrated to us, not shown. We do not get to see the violence Macbeth commits in the name of law and order to maintain Duncan in the throne. We only hear, albeit in very graphic language, that Macbeth cuts his enemies from “the nave to th' chops” (1.2.22). This violence is

legitimate, sanctioned by the king, and admired by all. But the violence he engages in after becoming king is nearly all on stage, if we are to trust the stage directions that appear on the page. Except for the killing of Duncan, Banquo's murder happens on stage, as do Macduff's family massacre and the battles in the end. This is how Shakespeare gives more force to "illegitimate" violence. Barker cites Marx in his famous quote about history and tradition: history "makes possible the future, it remembers. [Tradition] weighs like a nightmare; it forgets" (1993, p. 218). Would onstage violence, then, be the one that remembers, or at least the one that leaves more traces in our minds?

Hard to say. Barker has this to observe about *Titus*, although it can also be applied to *Macbeth*:

the clear and simple expulsion of the savage beyond the limits of the civil seeks to locate safely 'out there' the violence which it codes as barbarism but which may in fact belong dangerously 'in here'. But in making violence into the spectacle of the exotic, it serves in a curious way also to domesticate that violence, or at least to render violence [...] *merely* theatrical" (BARKER, 1993, p. 191).

"Out there" may as well be the violence committed off stage, whereas "in here", the one on stage. Macbeth the savage can be killed, but the violence does not die with him, just as it was not born with him. For Freud man is close to the beast, to the savage, with an aggressiveness that can either be tamed or unleashed, but never made to go away. We live in mutual hostility, which threatens civilization with disintegration (FREUD, 1989, p. 138). Macbeth's instinctual drives are not stopped by civilization, certainly, but are Macduff's? Or even Duncan's? Duncan's real difference in comparison to Macbeth is that the former never gets his hands bloody. He has people do his dirty work in his name. But so does Macbeth. After he becomes king, he only picks up a sword to defend his life. Other than that, he can simply instruct his "secret police" to carry on the executions against his personal enemies, who are also, by the way, the enemies of the State.

No matter where we look at *Macbeth*, violence keeps coming back to the story, featuring a strange repetitiveness. Ghosts appear and disappear, Macbeth's death drive cannot be controlled, and the witches' wicked prophecies all come true, one by one, as in a *déjà vu*. The uncanny in the playtext comes to life mainly through violence. And this violence can have a powerful effect when presented on stage and on screen.

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"ALGO CRUEL ESTÁ PARA CHEGAR": SINISTRO E VIOLÊNCIA EM MACBETH

Resumo

Para descrever a chegada de Macbeth na peça do mesmo nome de William Shakespeare, as três bruxas exclamam: “Algo cruel está para chegar”. Esta conhecida fala perfeitamente define a mistura de o “uncanny” (o sinistro, o bizarro) – algo que é estranho e estranhamente familiar ao mesmo tempo – com a violência na peça, assim como poderia expressar a sensação causada por Sigmund Freud em 1919, quando ele publicou seu ensaio “The Uncanny”. Através de uma análise do conto “The Sand-Man,” de Ernst Hoffman, Freud desenvolveu seu conceito do sinistro, aquilo que deveria manter-se escondido mas insiste em aparecer. O sinistro engloba várias características, como os duplos, a compulsão em repetir, o mau olhado, o olho grande, o olhar fixo, o impulso da morte, déjà-vu, fantasmas, bonecas e autômatos, a nebulosidade entre fantasia e realidade, a limininalidade, epilepsia e loucura. A maior parte desses traços está presente no texto da peça *Macbeth* e em várias produções, e eles estão indubitavelmente relacionados à violência. Exemplos de violência sinistra são abundantes em *Macbeth*, um texto que sempre foi considerado um dos mais violentos da obra de Shakespeare, e que pode também ser visto como o mais sinistro.

Palavras-chave

Macbeth. Sinistro. Violência. Freud.

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