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Illness and Scandinavian Gothic

Unnatural Illness Narratives in Scandinavian Fiction

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Dedicated to my father, Rune Mikalsen (1956-2019),

in whose footsteps I will always follow.

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Contents

1 Introduction

In this dissertation I analyse three Scandinavian novels about illness, and find that they all incorporate Gothic conventions and supernatural phenomena in their illness depictions. The dual narratives in Ragnar Hovland's *Ei vinterreise* (2001) alternate between a cancer diary and a preacher's road trip to the underworld; Olga Ravn's unnamed protagonist in *Celestine* (2015) starves herself to enable herself to become possessed by a girl who was buried alive; and in Mats Strandberg's *Hemmet* (2017) Joel and Nina must work together to determine if Joel's mother's strange behaviour is due to her dementia or if something else has taken over.

These novels depict illness as cancer, disordered eating, mental illness and dementia, mobilised as a catalyst that doubles, fragments and refracts identities and events. Time and space are seemingly governed by different laws of physics than ours, which creates a disorienting effect that complicates the narratological constellation. Attempts to quantify the narrative time are a destabilising factor, as it is often unclear *who* or *what* is speaking, and *when* they are speaking. Doubt as to the origin and intent of the voices in the text afflicts characters within the text and readers without. Additionally, there are instances where characters relate information they could not have come by 'naturally', which raises epistemological and phenomenological quandaries on the dissemination of knowledge within the textual universe. I posit that the fragmented narratives and refraction of narrators are caused by a regulation of speech. Some aspects of illness are difficult to communicate due to shame, fear or failure of language itself, and these refractions and fragmentations are caused by illness as an "ontological assault" (Brody, 1987, 49). In other words, the repercussions of illness can lead to a re-examination of how one understands, interacts and communicates with the world.

To account for these strange compositions, I employ *unnatural narratology* (Alber, 2016; Alber et al., 2013; Iversen, 2018; Peel, 2016; Richardson, 2015; 2016), the study of narratives that violate "physical laws, logical principles, or standard anthropomorphic limitations of knowledge by representing storytelling scenarios,

narrators, characters, temporalities, or spaces that could not exist in the actual world" (Alber, 2014, paragraph 1). I ask how, and with what consequences, the unnatural refracts aspects of illness in these texts.

Also present in the texts are supernatural and uncanny phenomena, like doppelgangers, ghosts and characters that can speak after death. Each novel connects illness with a suggested supernatural origin, or considers it as a tool to achieve a supernatural purpose. I argue that these texts employ tropes and techniques from Gothic fiction, and I will examine how these novels adapt these tropes in the Scandinavian context. I discuss the characteristics of the Gothic genre at length in Chapter 2 because the presence of Gothic tropes in the novels I have chosen to study indicates that the Gothic is much more prevalent in contemporary Scandinavian literature than is currently acknowledged. The Gothic aspects of these texts were uncovered as a result of my analysis rather than being an aspect of the premise of this dissertation. Consequently, I chose to write my dissertation in English in order to offer Gothic readings of Scandinavian texts to the international Gothic studies community[1].

The Gothic makes itself known on multiple levels in these texts, in terms of characters, rhetoric, imagery and narratological composition, while maintaining its penchant for transgression. Primarily, the Gothic can be traced in the novels by metaphors used to describe an illness, such as persecution, possession and invasion, which imbue the illness with a kind of antagonistic agency. The illness is in some cases depicted as monstrous, which suggests a particular literary strategy: if the illness is demonic and/or monstrous, a tangible effort from the protagonist is required to subdue it, whereas in narratives of realistic illness this struggle is more metaphysical. Moreover, this strategy suggests that certain ill bodies can function "as a signifier of difference and otherness at a time when 'traditional' monsters have lost their ability to

[1] Note that I have cited my primary texts in their original language in the main text, with English translations provided in footnotes. My translations are meant to convey the meaning of the citations as well as possible in order to make them accessible, but the main body of the text aims to present and engage with the original material in the same format as I encountered it. All translations are my own.

horrify and shock" (Michelis, 2015, 78), as monstrosity is currently "neither more nor less than the norm" (Botting, 2008, 158). My aim is to explore the significance and benefits of portraying serious illnesses in Gothic and monstrous garb and discuss whether their inclusion perpetuates or challenges stereotypical notions of illness.

This dissertation employs research from *literature and medicine,* a research field that examines literary approaches to illness as part of the broader interdisciplinary field of medical humanities[2]. *Literature and medicine* examines illness perspectives through its focus on "det enskilda subjektiva perspektivet og individuella erfarenheter och upplevelser"[3] (Bernhardsson, 2010, 49). Michel Foucault suggested that the standardised medical gaze that originated in the eighteenth century limited and elided "the presence of disease in the body, with its tensions and burnings, the silent world of the entrails, the whole dark underside of the body" (1963, xi). Similarly, the conceptual possibilities of the Gothic have been limited in Scandinavian literary scholarship. I propose that the Gothic acts as a prism that refracts and reflects many different aspects of an illness experience, often revealing that which is concealed and repressed. The Gothic prism offers a complex and innovative narrative illness space that reveals "what we reject, what disturbs the systems of culture, continuity, and beliefs" (Yang & Healey, 2016, 3), and it is not "lack of cleanliness or health…but what disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva, 1980, 4). Illness stories set in a Gothic frame thus have the potential to engage with and critically re-view stereotypes of illness, as well as creating a space that includes dark, uncomfortable and ugly feelings as part of the thematic fabric of the text, precisely because the Gothic pays particular attention to the frissons between a body and psyche in crisis.

Applying the Gothic prism to works of different genres, geographies, languages, periods, and styles reveals connections between novels that would otherwise have been unrelated. *Hemmet, Ei vinterreise* and *Celestine* were therefore chosen because they fit a very narrow set of criteria: I wanted to examine one novel from each

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[2] See (Evans, 2003; Hurwitz, 2003).

[3] "the individual subjective perspective and individual experiences"

Scandinavian country, they had to address different illnesses and they had to contain Gothic tropes. My examples represent a limited scope, but I argue that their diversity (regarding genre, style, language, etc.) demonstrates not only the Gothic's pervasive nature but also how its "useful darkness" (Wasson, 2015) offers new perspectives on well-known illnesses.

Susan Sontag famously posited that all humans have a dual passport, enabling the crossing between the "kingdom of the well and [the] kingdom of the sick" (1987, 3). Sontag's essays hint at a transformation caused by the crossing between these imaginary nations, in that it triggers something more than a mere reminder of corporeal fragility. When introduced to a Gothic framework, aspects of illness narratives that deal with extremes, the borders of life and death, and confrontations between good and evil, and human and non-human, are exposed. The result of this confrontation varies between accepting the illness as a dark companion, vanquishing the evil at great cost, and merging with the monster. These illness depictions are thus fraught with the *abject*, what Julia Kristeva in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* identifies as "the crying-out theme of suffering – horror" (1982, 141). The horror of sickness is mobilised, and to some degree enforced, by the cultural valuation of seemingly healthy bodies. Fear of sickness is a horror genre staple, notes Catherine Pugh, as it distinguishes the human from the non-human through a simple binary of healthy/sick (2018, 55-56), where "the mythology of sickness suggests that repression leads to the body becoming contaminated" (ibid.) [4]. In other words, the manifestations and depictions of various forms of illness are construed as simultaneously horrible and mundane, but often aim to make visible the marginalised Other. The naturalised repudiation of non-normative bodies as used in Gothic traditions, and genres like horror, thrillers and crime fiction, seem at first glance to "criticize impairment as a feature of the monstrous" (Pugh, 2018, 54). Conversely, there is an inherent danger in continuously contextualising *the sick* with *monstrosity*, which is not my aim. The

[4] Classic and contemporary horror habitually features villains whose deformed, non-normative exterior reflects a sadistic, evil personality, as in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Pugh, 2018, 56).

relationship between illness and the monstrous in my corpus is balanced by each narrative's concept of what is construed as uncanny (Freud, 1919) and what is unnatural (Alber et al., 2012; 2013b). Illness is not unnatural or monstrous, but rather a transformation of the sick body into something new and unfamiliar, something uncanny[5]. The uncanny is here employed to examine relationships between the body and its environments as they become unfamiliar and strange. Within the scope of this dissertation, the term 'unnatural' is only applied to narratological events, without engagement with the term as a phenomenological binary. This implies that while I recognise that the term 'unnatural' may suggest an antithetical relationship with the 'natural', I would argue that such an approach to my case studies would be counterproductive. Unnatural narratology aims to illuminate textual ontological ruptures, whereas the uncanny speaks to aesthetic and emotional disconnects that occur when the body (our most intimate home) becomes strange and unfamiliar. These terms serve specific purposes for different and separate parts of my analysis. Gothic and horror fiction do not shy away from the transformed body, and in this way invite "the spectator to re-evaluate notions of capability… a reminder of the strange and terrible and wonderful things the human body can do" (Pugh, 2018, 60). The uncanny can here invite us to consider how illness not only transforms the body, but also how it affects spaces and environments that, under normal circumstances, "förväntas kännas som hemma"[6] (Wijkmark, 2012, 9).

Abjection in illness narratives and in Gothic fiction mobilises a critical examination of, and dialogue with, the monstrous otherness the sick body sometimes begets. In the Gothic, Marlene Goldman suggests, abjection is part of a strategy "mobilized to identify and resolve what a particular society deems dreadful or evil" (2015, 75). Although illness is not a societal 'evil', its impact on the narration affects others as well as the person's body, and leads to an external (and often monstrous)

[5] For more on the constitution and development of the uncanny after Freud, see (Castle, 1995; Masschelein, 2011; Royle, 2003)

[6] "are expected to feel like home"

manifestation of the illness. Jerrold Hogle also highlights abjection as a substantial Gothic component because "the most multifarious, inconsistent, and conflicted aspects of our beings are 'thrown off' onto seemingly repulsive monsters or ghosts that both obscure and reveal this 'otherness' from our preferred selves that actually exists very much *within* ourselves" (2012, 498), while "contrary states and categories are cast off into antiquated and 'othered' beings" (2012, 499)[7]. I am not suggesting that these texts equate illness with monstrosity or deformity, but rather that the presence of monstrosity in my corpus is employed to examine and criticise epistemological suppositions regarding patient agency and narrative control. One reason why this conceptualisation is undercommunicated in Scandinavian literary research is that mainstream Gothic depictions of illness or disability are often consigned to the horror genre, or to other genres, which negatively affects their literary status. However, "som litterater kender mange af os sikkert fornemmelsen af, at teksten, vi har imellem hænderne simpelthen vil noget andet, end de teorier, vi har imellem ørerne"[8] (Skiveren, 2019b, 22). The strategy employed in my corpus of texts could represent an alternative depiction of bodies in crisis and provides, however vicariously, tools to help us cope as we inevitably, as Sontag suggests, are "obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place" (Sontag, 1978, 3).

1.1 Structure and Source Material

The dissertation has six chapters and a concluding afterword. Chapter 2 details and discusses my theoretical foundation, where I outline the Gothic genre and trace its conventions and effects in the Nordic and Scandinavian region. From there I situate

[7] Examples of this process can be seen in Gothic classics such as *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus* (Shelley, 1818), *The Curious Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886), *Carmilla* (Le Fanu, 1872) and *Dracula* (Stoker, 1897).

[8] "As literary scholars, many of us will recognize the feeling that the text we have in our hands wants [to do] something different than the theories between our ears."

my dissertation in the intersection of Gothic studies and literature and medicine, and I argue that the Gothic acts as a prism that refracts aspects of illness which may be difficult or impossible to explore through plain prose.

Chapter 3 discusses my main methodological approach to my source material through unnatural narratology, an analytical tool that enables me to study narrative textual features across different genres. Where the Gothic provides motifs and intertext, unnatural narratology offers an analytical gaze that accepts the non-mimetic nature of the Gothic as an enrichment to illness narratives, and those aspects of illness which for one reason or another require strange or unnatural narrative elements in order to tell a specific story.

I have structured the analysis chapters in accordance with the level of experimentation and narratological complexity of each novel, beginning with Mats Strandberg's *Hemmet* (2015). It is the most formulaic and genre-conventional text of the three, but it is playful and self-aware in its treatment of a quintessential Gothic fear: disintegration of the self. *Hemmet* is narrated through three perspectives. The first focaliser is Joel, who returns to his small home town to arrange for his mother's move to a dementia care home called Tallskuggan. While there Joel grieves the loss of his mother Monika to dementia, while struggling with feelings of shame and failure, as his move away from his bigoted home town to Stockholm to pursue a career in music resulted in heartbreak and drug abuse. The second focaliser is Joel's childhood best friend, Nina, who is now a nurse at Tallskuggan. They have not spoken since Joel left for Stockholm, and with his return come the memories from an abusive childhood, and how Monika acted like a second mother to Nina. As Monika's condition worsens, she becomes verbally abusive and frightening, and she is somehow familiar with the intimate secrets and thoughts of the other residents and the staff at Tallskuggan. The care home itself is the third focaliser, an unnatural narrator mobilised to humanise and give voice to all its patients, a vulnerable group whose illness physically and mentally removes them from society. I argue that Strandberg applies the Gothic conventions studied by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to aspects of dementia, while narratively

composing a space that acknowledges the helplessness and pain of the typical experience of a close relative.

My Norwegian case study is Ragnar Hovland's *Ei vinterreise* (2001). Part cancer diary, part road trip, the novel presents us with dual narrators who must journey through a landscape (and by extension, a body) in decay, in a quest for family and closure. The chapter examines the novel's Gothic apertures through unnatural narratology, and addresses instances of how the Gothic opens up a space that negotiates masculinity, relationships and fear of the unknown. *Ei vinterreise* is especially interesting because of the way the author frames the cancer narrative with another fictional narrative. The cancer narrative is a diary, identified early in the text as a "living as normal" narrative (Frank, 1997). The diary narrator clearly states that he will live normally to the best of his ability despite his diagnosis: "Gjere hyggelege ting. Høyre god musikk og sjå gode filmar. Bevege på meg. Ete god mat"[9] (Hovland, 2001, 9). However, our first meeting with a narrator is the fictional character, Lindemann. The fictional narrative tells the story of a preacher named Lindemann, who is suffering from a crisis of faith, and goes back to his home town in Western Norway. On his journey through a mythologised landscape of mountains, ghost towns and forests, he is joined by Tomas 'i Dalen', a loquacious rapscallion afraid of oblivion, and Liv, a girl on the run from a terrorising father. Hovland, whose own illness inspired *Ei vinterreise*, wrote a book containing two seemingly separate narratives, one where the physical illness is the explicit topic, while the other narrative reads more like a ghost story about an unnarratable fear of death.

The final chapter analyses Olga Ravn's *Celestine* (2015). Ravn employs different conventions and Gothic sartorial emblems, mainly mad women in attics and the white dress, to highlight the various deliminations of feminine health and ill health. Ravn's nameless and featureless protagonist hides away in a school (not unlike a mental institution) and puts on a white gown to commune with the spirit of a dead girl.

[9] "Do pleasant things. Listen to good music and watch good films. Exercise. Eat good food."

Kristeva's "recasting of vocabulary" (1980, 141) seems descriptive of the protagonist's actions, as her identity (and grip on reality) seems to become more tenuous with every page. The novel aestheticises bodies, living and dead, their functions and fluids, often in nauseating detail, and it is as concerned with the materiality of the body as with the poetic language used to describe the silent and lonely spaces associated with ill health. There are many stylistic elements that make this a very different novel from the previous two. Ravn's prose and approach to structure bears kinship to poetry, and the borders between the internal and the external are seemingly intentionally vague. Interestingly in terms of the Gothic tropes employed, Ravn's protagonist is not merely empathising with or trying to escape from the 'monster's' clutches; she wants to become the 'monster'. *Celestine* is an apt novel to discuss multifaceted aspects of mental illness, and how certain illnesses are culturally envisioned and enforced, to the detriment to those sufferers whose illness expression is deemed too 'monstrous' to have a public voice.

2 Theories of the Gothic

This chapter provides an overview of the Gothic genre and discusses how its conventions transcend geographical and historical boundaries. I will also outline the Scandinavian Gothic and discuss the ways in which it has been excluded from the Scandinavian literary canon. This will form the basis for my discussion of how my chosen novels negotiate the boundaries of the Scandinavian Gothic. I will discuss the relationship of the Gothic with the uncanny, and how the uncanny and supernatural are used in my chosen texts, and finally I will situate the Gothic in the field of *literature and medicine.*

2.1 Gothic Conventions and the Effect of the Gothic

First, let us consider the Gothic genre. The Gothic refers to a literary genre that concerns itself with "the fragmented and often doubled nature of the self" (Hopkins, 2005, xi). The genre originated with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a tale that fused the mediaeval romance with the romantic sentiment of the 18th century[10]. Walpole's hybrid marked the era of early Gothic literature, or Gothic romances, which ended with Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820. The main aspect of the first wave of Gothic narratives (1764-1820) was the dichotomous relationship between terror and horror, where "terror is soul-enriching and subtle, and horror claustrophobic and visceral" (Reyes, 2015, 49). In her posthumous essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826), Ann Radcliffe explained that the essence of Gothic lies in the effect it creates, and thus demonstrated that even if a narrative contains none of the stylistic props of *Otranto*, a Gothic effect can still be achieved[11]. Simply put, a

[10] Being wary of its potential perception, Walpole initially published the book as an anonymous, 'recovered' manuscript. The second edition included the subtitle "A Gothic Story" and a preface identifying authorship, indicating that the book was a great success.

[11] Predominantly because the Gothic as employed by Radcliffe and her peers was their interpretation of the life and spirit of the Renaissance, an interpretation based on an Elizabethan gaze, i.e. through Shakespeare (Baldick & Mighall, 2012; McIntyre, 1921).

text can be Gothic without being a novel or featuring monsters or supernatural phenomena, so long as the text mobilises events that create an effect of either terror or horror (Punter, 1980). Moreover, there is a hierarchal and strategic difference between terror and horror that has physical consequences. Horror paralyzes the body and the mind, which results in a general ambience of confusion, chaos and stagnation. Conversely, terror stimulates the senses and the imagination, which actualises problem solving and propels the subject into action. One could argue that, for Radcliffe, *horror* and *terror* are phenomenological states that attempt to expel evil or enable an escape from a threatening situation.

Hogle states that a Gothic tale is usually situated in an "antiquated or seemingly antiquated space – be it a castle, a foreign palace, an abbey, a vast prison, a subterranean crypt, a graveyard, a primeval frontier or island" for at least part of the story, and that these sites are imbued with "secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise" (Hogle, 2002, 2). This definition applies to many (European) Gothic texts published in the nineteenth century but seems contingent on circumstances where the frequent use of vestigial Mediaeval sites as Gothic locations effectively achieves the designated aim of the Gothic, to "produce fear and desire within the reader" (Halberstam, 1995, 2). Hogle further proposes that the quintessence of the Gothic is its "betwixt-and-between nature" (2002, 17), its "heterogeneity and transgressiveness" (Troy et al., 2020, 2), suggesting that its conventions are flexible enough to traverse national, linguistic and symbolic boundaries, while maintaining distinguishable features. The Gothic announces itself when "the supernatural constantly bleeds into the natural; human distinction from the non- or sub-human weakens or even disappears… the past invades and pervades the present; the mind cannot distinguish dreams or madness from reality… and architecture is riddled with passages to the secret and terrible, the abject" (Yang & Healey, 2016, 3).

Yang and Healey's thematic overview of general Gothic conventions is useful because its inclusive wording encompasses contemporary as well as classic Gothic texts. In addition to its conventions, the Gothic is characterised by "a certain affect or

effect of terror or horror, by a dark and often uncanny atmosphere, and by a specific ideological endeavour: the interrogation of enlightenment rationality as a potentially destructive patriarchal, colonial and anthropocentric, yet anti-human force" (Troy et al., 2020, 1-2). This definition features the primary function of the Gothic and its core ideas, the effects of which are corporeal as well as psychological. Through its resilience, the Gothic concept has remained a "sinister corner of the modern […] imagination" for almost three centuries, its conventions conveyed to its audience almost "by intuitive suggestion" (Baldick, 1992, xi) rather than by any clear definition. Nevertheless, the genre inspired a toolbox of conventions, tropes, and character types that have been introduced into pop culture, testifying to the Gothic's elasticity, and its potential to function across genres and historical and geographical settings. The Gothic is thus a literature of duality that strategically pushes at and transgresses boundaries as a means of upholding them.

The novels examined in this dissertation are obviously not part of the original Gothic literary genre, i.e. the Gothic literary movement of the late 1700s and early 1800s, or the Gothic revival in the mid to late 1800s. Rather, they rely upon and activate conventions generated by the genre. Gothic conventions are flexible and can be applied to other literary genres and media, the products of which need not belong to the Gothic genre, but rather a Gothic mode. The Gothic mode can be understood, as Mattias Fyhr suggests, as a semiotic system, "där ett inslag kan upplevas olika av två olika läsare men ändå vara påvisbart för dem båda. En labyrintisk miljö är till exempel labyrintisk oavsett om det labyrintiska har olika betydelser i olika kulturer"[12] (2017, 63). This is the mode with which my corpus texts engage. That being said, Fyhr criticises research that reads Gothic texts "med våld"[13] (2017, 48) to make them fit into different theories, and as symbols of social and cultural anxieties.

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[12] "where an element can be experienced differently by two different readers and still be detected by them both. A labyrinthine environment for example is labyrinthine irrespective of cultural differences."

[13] "in a violent manner"

I agree with Fyhr's critique that the conceptual possibilities of the Gothic can be unfairly reduced, but his definitions and perspectives are nevertheless pertinent in this dissertation, as illness is far from a mere social anxiety: it is an inevitability made no less frightening by its ubiquity. Moreover, medicine and illness have long been part of the Gothic repertoire (Punter, 1998; Wasson, 2015), often with the aim of portraying "medicine gone wrong" (Wasson, 2015, 7). By the same token, illness narratives are equally the victim of social and cultural discourses and reductive metaphoric language, which adds to an already substantial narrative and existential burden, which I will elaborate on in Section 2.3. Fyhr also states that the Gothic "vägrade [att] skapa positiva lösningar på ambivalenta känslor"[14] (2017, 44), and this hesitation ("vägrande") is the crux of these novels; the Gothic is not employed as a cathartic solution to complex negative emotions but as a mode that allows ambivalent emotions to simply exist, without the pervasive demand to maintain a positive attitude throughout one's illness[15].

As stated, my chosen novels are not necessarily part of the original Gothic genre. I read them as Gothic texts that, according to Fyhr,"skildrar en eller flera subjektiva världar, som saknar högre ordning och utmärks av en atmosfär av förfall, undergång och olösbarhet, samt innehåller grepp som ger texten labyrintiska egenskaper" [16] (Fyhr, 2017, 64) [17]. These aspects translate seamlessly into the context of illness

[14] "Refuses [to] create positive solutions to ambivalent feelings"

[15] See (Ehrenreich, 2018)

[16] "[A Gothic text] depicts one or more subjective worlds without a higher order, and is distinguished by an atmosphere of decay, doom and insolubility, and also contains features that give the text labyrinthine qualities."

[17] A Gothic text, notes Fred Botting, is the "writing of excess", and is the result of an "imagination and emotional [effect that] exceeds reason. Passion, excitement and sensation transgress social proprieties and moral laws. Ambivalence and uncertainty obscure single meaning" (1996, 1-2). The Gothic conveys a greater sensitivity that could have a transgressive expression, as well as producing transgressions of physical laws "with marvellous beings and fantastic events [and] the bounds of reality and possibility" (Botting, 1996, 4). These narratives presented characters who were exposed to not only the violence and freedom of adventure, but to Gothic terrors that threatened the character's sanity and honour, and the values and proprieties of society.

narratives (corporeal and mental decay, subjective focalisation, etc.). The labyrinthine in my source materials is inferred in the ways that the environment causes the characters to lose their bearings (2017, 97). Other labyrinthine qualities are secret passageways and hidden rooms, unruly and surprising architecture that "ökar den labyrintinska effekten och får till och med väggar och golv att kännas osäkra"[18] (ibid.). The hidden room which holds a secret, or a person held prisoner, is a classic motif with many different variations. The hidden room is used in *Hemmet* as a place where people are hidden from sight and in *Celestine,* the hidden room is sought after to assuage a claustrophile impulse. Another labyrinthine motif is that of the portrait or pictures "som dels visar eller antyder någonting som har betydelse för hovudpersonens öde"[19] (idem, 101). Lastly, the labyrinth is also inferred through doubles, and "de mest uppenbara dubbelgångaran är förstås de som inte nödvendigvis liknar varandra till det inre, men som är lika på andra sätt"[20] (idem, 102).

The very image of the labyrinth also adds momentum; it creates a nervous energy that propels the protagonist(s) toward the centre, and increases the ambience of isolation, hopelessness and insolvability. The main difference between a labyrinth and a maze is that the former has a single path to its centre, and while latter has a more complex system of pathways that do not necessarily lead to the centre[21]. One could argue that some Gothic texts appear maze-like due to their complexity, but in this dissertation, the singular, myopic focus of the labyrinth accentuates the protagonists' lack of control over their own environment. I apply Fyhr's definition with a particular focus on labyrinthine qualities as an analytical tool for the novels I have chosen to study.

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[18] "increase the labyrinthine effect and even make walls and floors feel unsafe"

[19] "which partly shows or suggests something that is significant for the protagonist's fate"

[20] "the most obvious doppelgängers are, of course, those that do not necessarily resemble each other through and through, but are similar in other ways"

[21] Scandinavian languages do not distinguish between the two; the word "labyrint" applies to both structures.

In addition to Fyhr, I employ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1980) conventions, because the conventions she outlines, the primary energies of the Gothic, resonate with the illness perspectives of this dissertation. Gothic classics, Sedgwick argues, share a similar thematic and structural foundation that is visible through the impact of a Gothic convention on the fictional 'self'. These conventions can be summarised as doubleness, the unspeakable, and live burial. Doubleness relates to the 'self' becoming 'spatialised' when it is blocked off from that which ought to be accessible to it. This barrier could be anything: a person, the ability to communicate, even the ability to breathe when one has been literally buried. The self wants to overcome barriers that can only be breached through "violence or magic, and both of a singularly threatening kind" (1980, 14). The impossibility of a reunion causes the self and what it seeks to carry on separately as corresponding more than communicating partners. This interplay between what happens outside and within the self, and the forces separating them, establishes "doubleness where singleness should be" (1980, 13), and this, argues Sedgwick, is the Gothic's most characteristic energy. The lengths to which the self goes to reintegrate and restore itself, creating order from chaos, is a quintessential Gothic endeavour (ibid.).

The unspeakable relates to the structural and thematic struggles of a Gothic narrative on every level of storytelling: a lack of cohesion, multiple (doubling) narrators, a distorted sense of time, and a general despair at the uselessness of language when faced with things that cannot be uttered. All these factors combine to create a milieu in which events that ought to bring characters together instead keep them separate. The unspeakable, or the unutterable, refers both to mundane topics that are generally difficult to discuss, but also to acts and events that are too horrible to articulate. Language, though generally accessible between characters, becomes the interpersonal barrier that can only be breached by violence and a deepened separation. Cessation of communication also creates an irrevocable doubleness (Sedgwick, 1980, 18), a narrative divide articulated as a Chinese box narrative, or a story-within-a-story-

within-a-story[22]. These stories are usually parallel to each other, which means that while they each add to the overall narrative, they - like the fragmented self - might never converge. Language, notes Sedgwick, can act as a safety valve between the interior and the exterior, but it can also become "solitary, furtive, and explosive" (1980, 18), capable of both healing and destruction. In my text corpus, the disruption of language and communication are primary barriers that occur when characters approach a moment of unbearable narration and must relinquish their narrative power lest they be consumed or buried by the horror. The barriers can be understood as a protective measure to guard the self from forces deemed too volatile to internalise and articulate.

Live burial relates to both internal and external factors, the physical walls as well as the mental walls that separate characters from each other. Combined with the unspeakable, characters could thus become doubly immured, buried from both the world and themselves. The horrible aspect of being physically or mentally buried is often juxtaposed with the redundant, mundane tasks that accompany it, while the arbitrary construct of separated space is pointed out. Placing a wall as a means of imprisoning one party effectively imprisons the other as well[23].

Sedgwick's conventions of doubleness, the unspeakable and live burial enable the Gothic mode to appear and be applied to texts of different genres because conventions are independent of specific linguistic contexts. The texts I have chosen are Gothic because of their labyrinthine environments, and because illness is manifested as linguistic, physical and mental barriers that the protagonists endeavour to overcome.

Moreover, Sedgwick claims that "written language 'is' Gothic" (1980, 45), especially correspondence. Correspondence here refers to letters and fragmented manuscripts, which signal a stagnation of information and communication. Sedgwick

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[22] A convention predominantly made famous by Maturin's *Melmoth* (1820).

[23] In classic Gothic texts, vaults and closed rooms are sites of unspeakable, terrible events like rape, murder and torture. The locked room, tower or attic in nineteenth century Gothic reveals cases of domestic abuse, gender inequality, and the callous ambition of clinical medicine.

suggests that "'correspondence' is distinguished from direct communication, which is seen as impossible; instead, it moves by a relation of counterparts and doubles, and is subject to dangerous distortions and interferences" (1980, 63). In the novels I examine, the fragmented correspondence is translated, at least in some instances, to narrative sequences of broken conversations between the narrator and the medical apparatus, but also within the narrator itself. All three novels have more than one narrator, i.e. *doppelgangers*, and at the close of the narrative they must destroy one for the whole to survive, because the doubles can only merge through violence, or, in the case of illness, "the madness, suicide or death of the divided subject: 'self' cannot be united with 'other' without ceasing to be" (Jackson, 1981, 91).

The act of narration in the Gothic and illness narratives is the creation of doubles, in characters and repeating events, and spaces. A frequent image for this re-production of self is the mirror. The mirror in a Gothic context emphasises the abject and the repressed. The mirror establishes a space for our *self* to radically change, as Rosemary Jackson suggests. The mirror "instigates a transformation from the familiar to the unfamiliar" (1981, 43), and allows what is hidden to emerge. This is an important tool, Jackson continues, in instances where a culture "equates the 'real' with the 'visible' and gives the eye dominance over other sense organs, the un-real is that which is in-visible" (1981, 45). This idea can easily apply to depictions of illnesses that are "corpo-real", namely those whose effects are visible to the naked eye (hair loss, weight loss, etc.). By contrast, chronic pain or mental illness are often rendered invisible. The idea of the mirror as a textual concept is thus more important than the physical and literal representation of one, because the mirror depicts a non-space, a heterotopic space that in turn reflects overlooked facets and aspects of illness. A mirror in this context is therefore any surface, medium or experience that requires a character or a reader to meta-reflect on uncomfortable or unstable representations of the self for the purpose of metamorphosis.

2.1.1 The Uncanny

Following the notion of re-producing selves, I move on to briefly discuss the uncanny and its relationship with the Gothic, before explaining how the term applies to the corpus texts. The uncanny, Freud claimed, "is undoubtedly related to what is frightening - to what arouses dread and horror" (1919, 59), "a resurrected secret that has scratched its way to the surface of a shallow grave" (Perram, 2019, 591). It is the transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar, the "*heimlich*" developing in the "direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*" (Freud, 1919, 64). Contemporary theories expand this application of the uncanny to concepts such as deconstruction and defamiliarisation in literary studies (Masschelein, 2011; Royle, 2003), as corporeal homelessness in phenomenology (Svenaeus, 2000) and as confrontations of the different selves in ageing studies (DeFalco, 2009). In Gothic studies the uncanny appears as a fixed set of furniture that everyone accepts but cannot quite explain why it complements the room as a whole. My use of the uncanny, similar to that of Stefan Iversen, is founded on ways of reading and understanding the uncanny that raise the issues of intentionality, and doubt caused by narrators or textual voices (Iversen, 2015, 17). This approach is to avoid the generalising tendencies which often accompany Freud's uncanny, e.g. that it imbues the analysis with psychoanalytic overtones, and to maintain the main focus of the thesis. Illness complicates narration, and the novels I examine resolve this issue differently, but all of them include elements which can be read as uncanny. In the following, I aim to specify where the uncanny belongs in this dissertation.

Mark Windsor clarifies that Freud's notion of the uncanny comprises two particular theories, one concerning the return of the repressed, and the other a confirmation of primitive beliefs. The former is exemplified by the Oedipal fear of castration as the return of the repressed: "the very ur-theory of psycho-analysis" (2020, 40). The latter is the confirmation of certain (atavistic) elements of knowledge, which constitute many of the listed characteristics that evoke the uncanny, a list which Terry Castle notably termed a "'theme-index': an obsessional inventory of eerie fantasies, motifs, and effects, an itemised tropology of the weird. Doubles, dancing dolls and

automata, waxwork figures, alter egos and 'mirror' selves" (1995, 5). These are now recognised as often used Gothic features that signal a specific narrative environment. The uncanny is that which subverts the distinction between the known and the foreign (here understood as that which challenges established knowledge). The latter notion is the one predominantly evoked in my chosen texts as tropes or narratological elements. The uncanny and the unnatural may seem to be overlapping or interchangeable concepts, but as I will explain further in Chapter 3, the term unnatural is only applied to narratological queries; the uncanny applies when discussing Gothic elements of the texts, but also in instances of unnatural narratology that refer to these elements.

Some further mitigating remarks are required regarding the uncanny. Freud claims that in calling a living person uncanny "we ascribe evil intentions to him" (1919, 76), a statement which is wholly unnuanced, and counterproductive to the illness context of this dissertation. The instances of uncanny behaviour we shall encounter in my chosen texts are not always geared towards acts of evil; rather, the 'living persons' in my novels are by turns victimised by the supernatural elements employed to emphasise certain illness characteristics[24]. The uncanny has been connected to illness in academic contexts, in terms of madness by Freud (1919, 76) and through phenomenology (Perram, 2019; Svenaeus, 2000), but these lines of enquiry lie beyond the scope of this project. This dissertation understands illness as intrinsically neutral and I will only engage with Freud's notion of the uncanny as regards its manifestation in the texts (doubles, repetitions, a perversion of homeliness), and its effects on the supernatural expression of illness, not the ill individual itself.

[24] Such as the monster in Strandberg (2017), whose possession of Monika results in increased fear, and subsequent abusive behaviour from some of the ward staff.

In summary, for my analysis I will employ Sedgewick's three primary thematic conventions, Fyhr's focus on the labyrinthine[25], and Troy's emphasis on the intended effect of the Gothic, with a particular focus on how they complement the illness aspect of the novels. These tools enable the Gothic to "speak the unspeakable" (Yang & Healey, 2016, 3) and "imagine the unimaginable" (Punter, 1980, 111). The Gothic thus provides a set of grammatical, symbolic, and transmogrifying conventions that enable the creation of narrative worlds with permeable and constantly shifting boundaries whereby the Gothic can superimpose its own chaotic nature onto other media to reveal the reasons for, and the beliefs that support, the need of a culture to abject that which is disturbing, shocking and monstrous.

2.2 A History of Scandinavian Gothic

In the field of Gothic studies, Nordic[26] and Scandinavian Gothic are somewhat underrepresented in publications on international Gothic studies. The following is an outline of existing research on Nordic and Scandinavian Gothic, and a delineation of what constitutes the 'Scandinavian' aspect of the Gothic.

Part of the explanation for the exclusion of the Gothic from the Scandinavian literary canon appears to be that it employs different nomenclature from international Gothic studies. In Norwegian literary studies, the Gothic is instead referred to with names such as "Black Romanticism" (Ljøgodt, 2009), "demonisk romantikk" [27]

[25] Interestingly, Hélène Cixous calls Freud's essay "a tightly woven net that strangely inscribes a system of anxieties…in order to track down the concept *das Unheimliche*, the disquieting strangeness, the uncanny, a search that in turn constitutes its own labyrinth" (Cixous, 1976, 15).

[26] The Nordic region encompasses Norway, Sápmi, Sweden, Finland, Åland, Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. As I am only using material written in the main Scandinavian languages (Norwegian, Danish and Swedish) due to language barriers, this dissertation contributes primarily to the Scandinavian Gothic.

[27] "demonic romance"

(Hagen, 2019, 153) and "skrekk-romantikk"[28] (Andersen, 2012, 171; Hagland, 2002). Similarly, Leffler and Johnsson apply the Swedish equivalents of these terms, such as "skräckromantik" (Johnsson, 2009, 26; Leffler, 1991, 11), which are relevant to the literary period and subject matter of their studies. Nevertheless, as Fyhr has established, *skräck* or terror is not always necessary to portray a Gothic world (2017, 44-45), and would perpetuate an understanding of the Gothic as the 'dark side' of the Romantic period[29]. Lack of consensus on terminology is an issue in literary sciences in general, but a substitute phrase such as "demonic romance" is arguably unscientific because it is vague and elides the Gothic as a textual mode. Moreover, inventing new terminology for discussions of imagery that are clearly cemented in a Gothic tradition only breeds confusion and leads to an understanding of the Gothic as an established literary phenomenon everywhere *except* in Scandinavia.

This tendency seems more prevalent in Norwegian literary scholarship in the early 2000s. To give a few examples, Jakob Lothe's *Litteraturvitenskapelig leksikon* defines the Gothic novel as a subgenre of the novel, "der handlingen er lagt til middelalderen og ofte foregår på et dystert, isolert slott med underjordiske ganger, spøkelser og mystiske eller overnaturlige hendelser som skaper skrekkpreget spenning hos leseren" [30] (2007, 79), exemplified by the oeuvre of British, American and German authors. Lothe notes that the term also applies to novels that "ivaretar elementet av skrekk

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[28] "horror/terror romance"

[29] Anne Williams notes that early Gothic criticism also strove to separate the Gothic, a genre "habitually linked with popular prose fiction while the works of the high Romantics are 'great poetry'" (1995, 4). Gilbert and Gubar further observe the transparent hostility of Modernist reception towards this genre as a 'feminine' phenomenon because Romantic scholarship was dominated by male authors in terms of both production and reception (1988, 125-62), This consecutive gendering of literary periods and their output speak of a tendency among "men of letters [who have] felt impelled to redefine what had been stereotypically 'feminine' as ontologically 'masculine' in order to certify their aesthetic virility" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1991, 75).

[30] "the plot is set in the Middle Ages, and often takes place in a gloomy, isolated castle with subterraneous passages, ghosts and mysterious or supernatural events that create a horror-filled tension in the reader."

gjennom en dyster og truende atmosfære, makabre og [dramatiske] hendelser, og personer med varierende grader av sinnsforstyrrelse"[31] (2007, 79). Granted, Lothe's entry is meant to give a brief overview into the origins of the genre, but it appears overly reductive and simplified. Erik Bjerck Hagen's discussion of the different writing styles of the Romantic period with an emphasis on poetry does not mention the Gothic by name, but refers to Lord Byron and his literary villains as "demonisk-romantiske personer"[32] (2019, 154). Hagen stipulates that "det demoniske er primært en tematisk kraft" [33] (ibid.), propelled forth by focusing on an outsider whose values are antithetical to societal norms, morals and religion.

This claim is similar to Fred Botting's observation that in the Gothic "[passion], excitement and sensation transgress social proprieties and moral laws" (1996, 2), the main difference being that Hagen situates these properties in a moralistic binary with religious overtones, whereas not all Gothic texts associate transgression with the demonic, at least not in a Scandinavian context. While Hagen's discussion concerns styles of poetic expression, he refers to Gothic texts and characters under the "demonic" epithet, which carries significant negative connotations that negate the conceptual possibilities of the Gothic. Hagen further surmises that there are few characters exactly like Lord Byron's *Manfred* (1816-17) in the Norwegian or Scandinavian canon. However, this does not mean that brooding, transgressive characters are the Gothic's only detectable footprint in Scandinavian literature[34]. It merely reveals that efforts to isolate the primary forces of the Romantic movement in the Scandinavian canon has set a precedent for the Gothic's appearance in later scholarly works.

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[31] "preserves the element of horror through a gloomy and threatening atmosphere, macabre and [dramatic] events, and characters with varying degrees of mental derangement."

[32] "Romantic-demonic persons"

[33] "the demonic is primarily a thematic force"

[34] I disagree with Hagen's implication that Norwegian fiction has few Faustian motifs or character arcs, but that is a separate discussion.

The majority of research on Nordic and Scandinavian Gothic, which predominantly focuses on nineteenth century novels, has been conducted by Swedish scholars. Prominent examples include Mattias Fyhr's dissertation on the Gothic in selected works of Swedish literature, film, music and videogames (2017), Sofia Wijkmark's analysis of the oeuvre of Selma Lagerlöf (2009), Yvonne Leffler's investigation of the Gothic tradition and narrative techniques in nineteenth century Swedish novels (1991), Henrik Johnsson's dissertation on August Strindberg (2009), and recent queer-gothic readings of Knut Hamsun (2020). Kirstine Kastbjerg's dissertation (2013) and articles (2007; 2009) highlight Danish Gothic in the works of canonical Danish authors, including Karen Blixen and Hans Christian Andersen. Kati Launis traces the Gothic in Finnish literature in her article "From Italy to the Finnish Woods. The Rise of Gothic Fiction in Finland" (2013). Nordic and Scandinavian Gothic is not included in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic* (2020), but Yvonne Leffler's chapter on the "Gothic in Modern Scandinavia" (2021) provides an overview of both literary and cinematic contributions to "the Gothic revival in modern Scandinavia" (2021, 424).

Gerd Karin Omdal examines the works of Tryggve Andersen (1866-1920), Sigurd Mathiesen (1871-1958) and Ragnhild Jølsen (1875-1908) in her monograph *Grenseerfaringer* (2010) as key Norwegian authors at the turn of the 20th century whose works went against the grain of the dominant literary movement. These authors employed techniques and themes that enabled a textual universe to be more than a foil for reality and allowed less room to rationalise the supernatural; the characters and narrators became more unreliable, and the borders of the individual were more fluid, to the point of dissolving into the supernatural events. Andersen, for example, anthropomorphised a narrator's soul in "Den døde mand" (1895), enabling the interaction between a man and his mirror image. The soul visited the narrator as "det velkjente forvrengt eller ukjenneliggjort utgave, det er til og med hans egen aller nærmeste, hans sjel"[35] (Omdal, 2010, 137). Andersen also made a point to exclude the

[35] "the familiar distorted or unrecognizable version, it is even his most intimate possession, his own soul."

reader from the main character's inner monologue at crucial moments, withholding information in order to challenge the reader's confidence in the narrator, as well as the dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Omdal, 2010, 138-139; Schiff, 1985, 111).

Lars Rune Waage's dissertation *Skrekkens grenser* (2009) explores the queer Gothic oeuvre of Sigurd Mathiesen. Waage examines how "Mathiesen i gotikken fant en sjanger som kunne skildre 'forbudt' seksualitet uten å gjøre det eksplisitt", arguing that the Gothic mode can create "et litterært rom som både er et tekstrom og et fristed"[36] (2009, 25). The navigation of social and sexual gender expressions is at the centre of Waage's work, and his research focuses on nineteenth century discourses on masculinities, and the conventions of the Scandinavian Gothic. Waage also highlights the oeuvre of Maurits C. Hansen (1794-1842), author of the first Norwegian Gothic novel, *Othar af Bretagne* (1819) and one of the world's first crime novels, *Mordet paa Maskinbygger Roolfsen* (1840) (Andersen, 2012, 170; Waage, 2009; 2013, 4). Åsfrid Svensen mentions Hansen's use of the fantastic in realism but does not commit to the Gothic epithet (Svensen, 1998). Henrik Ibsen's retrospective technique was possibly influenced by Hansen's way of revealing characteristic relations by gradually uncovering past events (Andersen, 2012, 172). Dipsikha Thakur also explores the possibility of "a larger trend in Ibsen's work that imbues his plays with Gothic conventions, motifs and images without compromising the realist mode that they rest on" (2018, 450).

While books on the contemporary Scandinavian market are rarely advertised as "Gothic"[37], its conventions are now characteristics of other genres, such as thrillers, horror novels and fantasy[38], and Scandinavian crime fiction ("Nordic Noir") is

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[36] "Mathiesen found in the Gothic a genre that could depict 'forbidden' sexuality without making it explicit, [and argued that the Gothic could create] a literary space that is both a textual space and a sanctuary"

[37] One exception is Leonora Christina Skov's *Silhuet af en synder* (2018).

[38] The inclusion of Gothic tropes in contemporary Norwegian fiction is often found in fantasy novels aimed at children and young adults, such as *Den onde arven* (2014) by Thomas Enger. Drawing

currently an international export item. Scandinavian crime fiction sets itself apart by its readiness to play with the contract between reader and author, destabilising expectations of form and genre, and expands on the "possibilities of the medium" (Forshaw, 2012, 3). In novels aimed at a younger audience, the use of Gothic conventions is often referred to as "skrekkfantastiske fortellinger" (Svensen, 2001, 75). These texts aim to create "nøling, uro og destabilisering i personane og i lesaren"[39] (Slettan, 2018, 169), which is a central aspect of the Scandinavian Gothic. The tormented madmen of eighteenth-century Gothic novels are recast as psychologically disturbed killers, while the mediaeval southern European settings are replaced by the northern forests, mountains and rocky shores.

Contemporary fantasy, crime and horror novels as well as Scandinavian canonical works of the nineteenth century are rife with Gothic tropes and the use of affective terror, yet these aspects are rarely included or mentioned as part of a Gothic tradition in literature anthologies or encyclopaedias[40]. A possible explanation could be that while nineteenth-century Scandinavians clearly had an appetite for the Gothic, "those concerned with public weal warned against the effects of reading fiction. Especially the Swedish critics raged against stories about extreme passions, horror and the use of violence" (Leffler, 2008, 50). Consequently, Gothic works published in the Nordic region were "all but erased from Nordic literary history" (Leffler & Höglund, 2020, 14). Nevertheless, novels by British authors published in the first phase of the Gothic (1765-1820) were translated and published in Sweden in the decades following their

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on the rich mythologies of the Nordic region, novels such as Siri Pettersen's *Ravneringene trilogien* (2013-2015), Asbjørn Rydland's *Galderstjerna* (2016), and Kristine Tofte's *Song for Eirabu* (2009) and the sequel *Vargtid* (2012) employ Gothic tropes of evil, ecological decay and mythological creatures.

[39] "hesitation, unease and destabilisation in the characters and the reader".

[40] Petterson and Schönstrom's *Nordens litteratur* (2017) mentions only Karen Blixen's *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (1934) briefly in relation to the Gothic tradition. Franzén and Möller's *Natur och Kulturs litteraturhistoria* (2021) comments on the popularity of the Gothic novel (2021, 473) and connects the thriller genre "mot skräckromanen, med litteraturhistoriska rötter i den gotiska romanen" [to the horror novel, with literary historical roots in the Gothic novel] (2021, 917).

publication in Britain (Leffler & Höglund, 2020, 12). The works of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and her peers, among them John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) influenced Danish author Bernhard Severin Ingemann's *Varulven* (1834) and Swedish author Victor Rydberg's *Vampyren* (1848). Hans Christian Andersen at times used the *doppelganger* motif in his fairy tales, which were inspired by German folk tales and fairy tales. His short story "Skyggen" (1847) illustrates the function and essence of the *doppelganger* motif, in that the shadow gains corporeal form and drains the original body of life (Leffler & Höglund, 2020, 13).

Similarly to continental Europe, the Scandinavian countries were fascinated with Gothic fiction, and the genre held a wide appeal to both readers and writers[41]. Aurora Ljungstedt (1821-1908) was Sweden's most widely read Gothic crime author of her time. Her oeuvre has clear references to Ann Radcliffe and the haunted house trope, and her use of the *doppelganger* motif in "Harolds skugga" (1861) as an expression of the dual nature of man's ego predates Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by more than two decades (Leffler, 1991; Leffler & Höglund, 2020, 13-14). August Strindberg's *Spöksonaten* (1907) and *Tschandala* (1889) and Henrik Ibsen's *Gengangere* (1881) used tropes such as the vengeful ghost and the *doppelganger* to illuminate the ills of contemporary bourgeois society (Johnsson, 2009; Leffler & Höglund, 2020; Thakur, 2018). Nevertheless, the Gothic ancestry of these texts has often been neglected.

Wijkmark's (2009) and Leffler's (1991) analyses of Selma Lagerlöf's oeuvre examine the influence of Radcliffe's *female Gothic*[42] on *fin-de-siècle* authors,

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[41] Leffler and Höglund also discuss how the emergence of Nordic Gothic is contingent upon the historical, geographical, political and linguistic context of the Nordic region (2020).

[42] Coined by Ellen Moers, this term applies to "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic" (1986, 90). *Female Gothic* is recognised as "a politically subversive genre articulating women's dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures and offering a coded expression of their fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body" (Wallace and Smith, 2009, 2). That being said, in maintaining two (gendered) 'categories' of Gothic texts, one ought to be wary of characterising "elements of women's writing in contrast with

pinpointing Lagerlöf as instrumental in the Swedish Gothic renaissance of the 1890s. Lagerlöf constructed place, space and landscape as characters with agency and impact on the narrative. Her use of the wilderness and local folklore as mediators of evil in mankind and in nature give a distinct shape to the Scandinavian Gothic[43]. Similar aspects are found in Ragnhild Jølsen's (1875-1908) novel *Rikka Gan* (1904) (Wærp, 1998)[44]. Omdal argues that the Gothic traits in Jølsen's works demonstrate the subversive possibilities of the texts (2010, 152) in terms of defying expectations of gender and identity. Despite being at odds with the literary realism in fashion in the mid to late nineteenth century, the Gothic was indisputably present in the Nordic literary landscape. Whereas fantastic fiction produced alternative worlds and alternate perceptions, Gothic fiction confronted its readers with the boundaries and rationale of their morality (Waage, 2013, 4). Gothic stories therefore appeared morally corruptive and transgressive, which in part explains their popularity and impact on Scandinavian authors from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Deriving from the earliest British Gothic novels, tropes like ghosts, veiled portraits, convoluted family secrets, etc. cannot be described as uniquely Nordic or Scandinavian. However, their effect is no less poignant in these geographical settings. The 'Nordic' and 'Scandinavian' aspect of the Gothic signifies a geographical direction toward darkness and light, both in terms of the people and creatures that inhabit the region, and, moving above the Arctic Circle, the climate and seasonal phenomena, such as the midnight sun and the aurora borealis (Schimanski et al., 2011, 9). The North has since the Middle Ages been construed as a place of "spøkelser, monstre, uhyrer…mørke, kulde og fortapelse…et kaos i verdens randsone, hinsides grensene av den kjente verden"[45], note Schimanski et al. (2011, 10). While the word

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men's writing as if one is the original and the other a derivation, nuance or challenge" (Wisker, 2016, 8).

[43] Ravn (2015) references Lagerlöf's short story "Spökhanden" (1898).

[44] Andersen (2012, 362-363) acknowledges the Gothic conventions in Jølsen's works.

[45] "ghosts, [monsters and monstrosities], darkness, cold and damnation…a chaos in, and beyond, the borders of the known world".

'gotisk' appears in some academic discourse on the sublime and the Arctic (Schimanski et al., 2011, 19), the Gothic is used purely as an adjective, without explaining or acknowledging the history or the function of the Gothic in Scandinavian literary history. This demonstrates the versatility and ubiquity of the Gothic as logos, and arguably its intimate connection with the awe-inspiring forces of nature. It also further demonstrates how the Gothic is misconstrued in Scandinavian literary scholarship.

The emphasis on the darker aspect of the Nordic is also evident in how images of the North are combined with death, even evil, in the context of colder climates. Lucifer in Dante's *Divina Commedia* is frozen in a lake, and Mediaeval witches were believed to make their home in the colder parts of the world[46]. Even the *Edda* situates the realm of Hel, one of the Norse underworlds, in the north (Schimanski et al., 2011, 10). However, European perceptions of the North conceive of a liberated, fierce environment that breeds an equally tough and strong people, and which like most frontier landscapes implies a (masculine) impetus to conquer and explore[47]. This conception of the North was part of a "Romantic and Victorian aesthetic of threatening landscapes, terrible creatures, and deathly danger" (Morgan, 2016, 4), which Chauncey Loomis called the *Arctic sublime* (1977). The North was therefore the perfect location for the Romantics, as Ellen Boucher summarises, referring to how "the very cultural remoteness of the region, with its mighty icebergs, fierce temperatures, and months of sunless winter… offered a dramatic backdrop for transformative scenes in a host of early nineteenth-century novels, from *Frankenstein* to *Jane Eyre*" (2018, 49). We might therefore expect to see evidence of landmasses and nature presented as unwelcoming and treacherous, as a substitute for Gothic abbeys and castles, in my chosen texts.

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[46] The witch trials of Scotland and Finnmark, Norway are examples of the demonisation of indigenous peoples whose relationship with nature was considered demonic by central government powers and the clergy (Willumsen, 2013).

[47] See (Hauan, 2021).

Consequently, a conceptualisation of the North as a Gothic situ inspired established authors outside the Nordic region, exemplified by texts such as Edgar Allen Poe's "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841), set in the Lofoten archipelago, and Victor Hugo's *Han d'Islande* (1823), set in Trondheim. These texts reveal the versatility of the Gothic in both urban and remote settings, the former having a closer relationship to the introspective Gothic of the mid to late 1800s, while the latter is a classic Gothic tale of murder, captivity and a monstrous creature. While Loomis' *Arctic sublime* rose and fell with the disappearance of the Franklin expedition in the 1850s[48], the above-mentioned imagery is connected to perceptions of the Gothic North (Spufford, 1996, 33-38) and shapes how the Gothic is constructed in the Nordic literary landscape.

The 'excess' of the Nordic Gothic is situated in the effects caused by indeterminable forces. Placed in a stark landscape, the intrusion of the Gothic acts in a similar manner to the fantastic (Todorov, 1975). It destabilises and defamiliarises epistemological knowledge of spaces and places of safety. Schimanski et al. agree that the conceptualisation of the North and horror movies have a similar appeal because they are reminiscent of greater forces beyond mankind's control (2011, 13). The duality of the North as a place of comfort (*hygge)* as well as discomfort (*uhygge)* supports my argument that the Scandinavian Gothic produces texts that play with traditional archetypes of the Gothic genre and conveys an ambience of believable terror through the horrible and the familiar, because the North represents both.

It is safe to say that the Gothic genre has exerted an influence on the Nordic canon, as illustrated by Troy, Höglund, Leffler and Wijkmark's *Nordic Gothic* (2020). This anthology is a significant contribution that collates research on the lasting effects of the Gothic's passage into the Nordic literary canon. Troy et al. establish the Gothic as "a continuously productive, transhistorical genre characterised by a certain affect or effect of terror or horror, by a dark and often uncanny atmosphere, and by a specific

[48] The expedition to chart unnavigated sections of the Northwest Passage inspired several plays, theatrical performances and novel adaptations. The latest is a mini-series, "The Terror" (Borenstein & Woo, 2019), based on Dan Simmon's eponymous novel (2007).

ideological endeavour: the interrogation of enlightenment rationality as a potentially destructive patriarchal, colonial and anthropocentric, yet anti-human force" (2020, 1-2). These characteristics are spatially articulated in the Nordic and Scandinavian Gothic. According to Botting, Gothic fiction is constructed of in-between spaces, or *heterotopias*, cultural counter-sites that represent, contest and invert (Botting, 2012; Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986). Botting also recites "wild landscapes, the ruined castles and abbeys, the dark, dank labyrinths" (Botting, 2012, 19) as suggestions of particularly Gothic spaces, but castles are few and far between, the further North one travels. Yvonne Leffler suggests that these are replaced by "the Nordic wilderness, the vast dark forest, the snow-covered Nordic mountains, or the icy stormy sea" (2013, 587), arguably equally capable of conveying a sense of "the marvelous [sic], supernatural events, distant times and customs" (Botting, 2012, 19).

Leffler further emphasises regional folklore and local traditions as effects used to enhance the Gothic ambience, in which the darker aspects of a protagonist are "often bound to and triggered by the wilderness and the pagan past of the region" (2013, 587). Additionally, the *Nordic* quality is not just a matter of geography, but of identity formation. The Scandinavian Gothic protagonist who is "bound to and triggered by the wilderness" instead of demonic or other religious forces seems more endemic to a Scandinavian way of being in the world. This protagonist is not (necessarily) tormented by demons and the Devil, but by the defamiliarising and destabilising framework that constitutes, and leads to, a loss of home. The subsequent effect of placing characters in threatening spaces where they should feel at home, interspersed with health discourses, allows darker nuances of an illness experience to emerge. This is accomplished in part through the impact of the landscape, the Gothic topography, as a situ that terrifies not from without, but within:

> The protagonist is not so much threatened by a distinct monster as by an undefined ever-present force connected to the wilderness. The scenery is… an emotionally coloured landscape that expresses the emotional state of the main characters or the narrator… It has a life of its own and acts as an alien force or organism threatening the protagonist. Its function is not solely… to enhance the atmosphere by causing mists and storms, but to

> literally attack, invade, and transform the protagonist into a savage creature. (Leffler, 2010, 46)

Nature in Scandinavian Gothic is simultaneously a familiar cultural sanctuary and the site of strange creatures of folklore and myths. The forests and mountains are steeped in traditional tales of trolls and goblins who live under the mountains, the mischievous *Nøkken* living in streams and waterfalls, and the cow-tailed *huldra*, coming out of the mists to lure unsuspecting men and boys away from their homes. Most contemporary horror films of Scandinavian origin are also set in nature, in mountain cabins and ski lodges, eerie lakes and isolated archipelagos, underscoring the ambivalent juxtaposition of nature both as a place of safety and a place of horror (Leffler, 2021, 429-430). Exposure to the wilderness for any span of time dissolves spatial and temporal distinctions, resulting in a landscape where the supernatural intrudes upon the ordinary, and the resulting conflict for control "over the wilderness and its uncivilized past" (Leffler, 2013, 589), perhaps because losing control of one's surroundings mirrors inner emotional turmoil[49].

To summarise, we have established that a text can be Gothic across geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries, and that many texts from Scandinavian literature were influenced by and are arguably part of a Scandinavian Gothic tradition. The heritage of these texts suggests that the Scandinavian Gothic is actualised in the different ways. Firstly, a Scandinavian Gothic text balances on the border of the supernatural in the literal sense of the word: "beyond the natural world". This facet is explored through characters in terms of their unreliability, and a more open corporality, meaning that a person's physical body and psyche are more susceptible to a supernatural transformation. Secondly, the Scandinavian Gothic disconnects from Southern European conventions regarding religion, and there is thus less (if any) emphasis on the supernatural entity being evil, devilish or demonic in origin. Rather,

[49] What then distinguishes the uncanny from the fantastic "is not whether the fantastic events are given a rational explanation or not, but rather if the portrayal of the supernatural and the characters' reaction to it is such as to arouse a sense of horror in the audience" (Leffler, 2008).

the supernatural originates in nature, as primordial powers awoken by some Anthropocene threat, and aims at destabilising its readers, creating a deep sense of unease and discomfort. The Gothic topography is therefore a significant factor in invoking a literary safe space, as suggested by Waage, which can be tailored to explore difficult themes such as illness and death. That is the topic of the following section, where I examine how the Gothic intersects with medical humanities, especially in the field of *literature and medicine.*

2.3 Situating the Gothic in Literature and Medicine

The field of literature and medicine, a subcategory of medical humanities[50], situates illness in a social and cultural context and provides insight into patient experiences of illness (Frich et al., 2004), while offering a critical gaze on the objectifying and instrumental aspects of medicine (Bondevik & Kveim Lie, 2007). One of the most influential and often cited texts in this context is Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1977). Sontag criticises how metaphors surrounding an illness eclipse the sufferer, and especially how metaphors of cancer become synonymous with a host of negative characteristics imposed on the sufferer by external forces. Metaphorical language, moreover, perpetuates myths and misinformation regarding the aetiology and transmission of illness, most notably AIDS (Sontag, 1988; Treichler, 1987). The benefit of using metaphorical language to describe an illness lies in its potential to offer sufferers comfort and the linguistic power of definition. Sontag thus advocates for a view of illness as "meaningless", in order to separate illness as a natural bodily phenomenon from illness as punishment, a curse, or as a shameful

[50] Medical Humanities can be defined as the humanistic study of experiences of health and illness focused on the clinical meeting between patient and health services, and "the value of the arts in health promotion, as forms of artistic and communicative display" (Hurwitz, 2003, 498), while its subcategory literature and medicine underscores the potential of literature in humanising illnesses and patient perspectives. It is primarily aimed at medical practitioners who employ techniques from literary studies as pedagogical tools to improve communication skills and maintain a professional curiosity about embodied human nature (Evans, 2003, 383).

reflection of internal decay. To that end one might consider the Gothic an unsuitable medium, as Gothic texts are often textually metaphorical. Hidden trapdoors, ghostly apparitions and similar tropes are emblems of the past re-emerging to haunt the present but can also be interpreted as indicators of psychological distress/disorders, or as cultural anxieties (Baldick & Mighall, 2012; Forsyth, 2016; Leffler & Höglund, 2020; McAllister & Brien, 2015; Punter, 1980; Williams, 1995).

Illness narratives represent depictions of legitimate transcultural anxieties, and therefore in reading my chosen novels through a Gothic lens, I do not mean to imbue the illnesses with negative connotations or to suggest that "själva egenskapen att vara sjuk används för att förklara olika problem, eller till och med förekomsten av ondska"[51] (Bernhardsson, 2010, 65). As Laura Kremmel states, not only can "declining health make the body seem foreign and strange, but medicine also increases alienation by threatening familiarity and ownership of the body in response to the ailment… Illness is, therefore, a sensation inherent to the Gothic" (2018, 314-18).

My aim is to examine how my source materials engage with illness metaphors to discuss whether and how they negate negative illness stereotypes. The Gothic in this respect, with its longstanding tradition of describing and criticising medicine and its practices, is a useful tool. To further examine this idea, we must look at the relationship between medicine and literature in the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth century Gothic fiction and medical discourse shared a mutual fascination for 'bodies and minds constrained', from depictions of vulnerable victims trapped in castles to the way "medical practice controls, classifies and torments the body in the service of healing" (Wasson, 2015, 1). At that time medicine and Gothic literature visibly intertwined and influenced each other on the level of discourse, and "det vil være så godt som umuligt at skrive disse perioders litteraturhistorie uden på den ene eller anden måde at komme ind på den tætte forbindelse mellem litteratur og

[51] "the very quality of being sick is used to explain various problems, or even the presence of evil"

medicin"[52] (Andersen & Jørgensen, 2013, 339), and the "interdisciplinary merging of literature *and* medicine derives [from] a cultural recognition that literature has always resided *in* medicine" (Rachman, 1998, 123-124) [53]. Flaubert's description of hysteria in *Madame Bovary,* for example, not only shaped the diagnosis in medical texts, but the novel itself was also considered contagious (Bondevik & Stene-Johansen, 2011, 29). Ernst Lochmann (1820-1891) proclaimed that both Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, in their descriptions and depictions of 'hysterical women', allowed the 'illness' to spread: "Denne Literatur er baade et Symptom paa Hysterien og en Aarsag til den" [54] (Bondevik & Kveim Lie, 2007, 15). Similar arguments were used to blacklist Gothic, sentimental, and romance novels elsewhere in Europe. As Gerd Karin Omdal notes, the central argument was that the separation between the exterior and the psychological was too fluid and transgressive (2010, 88). The emphasis on the protagonist's thoughts and feelings encouraged sympathising and identifying with the protagonist, which was to be discouraged[55].

Nevertheless, the depiction of illness in literature contributed to medical and scientific discoveries. The path of infection (droplet infection) of tuberculosis was suggested in J.P. Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* (Jacobsen, 1880), years before it was verified by the medical community (Jørgensen, 2008). Conversely, following the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859), debates arose regarding scientific texts as potential carriers of infection, degeneracy and moral corruption (Karschay, 2015). Victorian doctors[56] wrote literary reviews in medical gazettes (Talairach-Vielmas,

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[52] "It would be nearly impossible to document the literary history of this period without touching upon the close connection between literature and medicine."

[53] See Hurley (1996), Karschay (2015), Kennedy (2011), Mangham (2021), Smith (2004), and Talaraich-Vielmas (2009; 2021).

[54] "This literature is both a symptom of hysteria and a cause of it."

[55] Infectious literature was a source of inspiration and vexation for the medical communities of Europe. See (Binhammar, 2003; Min, 2011; Sears, 1999; Mikalsen, 2019).

[56] Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), a famous Victorian alienist (early term for a psychiatrist), used his medical expertise to "'explain' literature in physiological terms and trace literary genius to the

2009, 1), and some authors such as Wilkie Collins submitted manuscripts to London physicians before they went to print (Collins, 1996, 39). Collins' oeuvre demonstrates how Gothic themes were represented through the "prism of contemporary scientific, medical and psychological discourses, from debates revolving around insanity to those dealing with heredity and transmission" [57] (Talaraich-Vielmas, 2009, 7). Talaraich-Vielmas explores these discourses in her book on Collins' authorship and explains that the nineteenth century study of medicine "seemed to be breaking taboos, from the treatments related to insanity, in particular, often linked to electrical experimentation, to animal experimentation" (2009, 7)[58]. Consequently, nineteenth century Gothic texts substituted "traditional aristocratic villains, dusty ghosts and derelict castles [with] ambitious scientists, helpless patients and newly painted asylums or laboratories" (Talaraich-Vielmas, 2009, 7). Halberstam supplements Talaraich-Vielmas by noting how in Gothic fiction this societal development shifted "the fear of corrupted aristocracy or clergy, represented by the haunted castle or abbey, to the fear embodied by monstrous bodies" (1995, 16). As the Gothic genre developed, so did its monsters and menaces, now recognised by their white coats.

Similarly, when Norway's Medical Faculty was established in 1814, it was the only European country that had combined medical and surgical education, legitimising medical surgery as a practice that would serve society better (Haave, 2009, 2637). However, the views of the populace regarding autopsies and the sanctity of bodies after death remained unchanged for decades. The sensationalism of the body and its

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bones and marrow of a particular writer", most notably the works of Edgar Allan Poe (Talairach-Vielmas, 2009, 2).

[57] This genre gained popularity in Great Britain in the 1860s and 1870s. Meegan Kennedy argues that sensation fiction is saturated with medicine, mainly as a plot device, to create suspense and drama, and it is "fascinated with the body and its responses" (2011, 481). Winifred Hughes further argued that sensation fiction is the contradictory union of romance and realism (1980, 16).

[58] Moreover, Talaraich-Vielmas calls Maudsley's analyses of Poe's Gothic fiction a practical demonstration of how closely connected science and literature merged throughout the nineteenth century. Maudsley's comments provided writers and readers with brand new plot devices and thrilling experiences 'founded' in medicine and science (2009, 2).

many unchartered configurations and mutations were bountiful material for storytellers and medical professionals alike, which in turn created a shift in the way literature portrayed the sensationalism of medicine. Scandinavians, as well as the British and Americans, were equally fascinated by the deviant and sensational[59]:

> Til forskjell fra dagens vitenskapelige publikasjoner, der man først og fremst legger vekt på representativitet og generaliseringsverdi, var medisinske tidsskrifter tidlig på 1800-tallet preget av særegne og mer spesielle observasjoner. Det var avvikene fra det kjente og forventede som fikk mest oppmerksomhet[60] (Nylenna et al., 2016).

Nearly 200 years later this fascination with the body in crisis remains, and this fascination serves a poignant purpose in 21st century medicine: to humanise and to normalise suffering.

> Eksistensielle erfaringer som angår oss alle, som fødsel og død, smerte, lidelse og sorg, er i vår tid langt på vei tatt opp i medisinske forståelses- og behandlingsformer. Både inngangen og utgangen til livet skjer for de fleste av oss i dag på sykehus og sykehjem, mens uunngåelige opplevelser av smerte, lidelse og sorg er i ferd med å bli noe patologisk og blir forsøkt fortrengt gjennom medikamentell lindring[61]. (Bondevik et al., 2017, 8)

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[59] One example is the experiences of provincial doctor Peter Jensen in Norway as described by Nylenna et al. (2016). In 1830 Jensen wrote an article called "Ei høist mærkeligt Sygdomstilfælde hos flere Søskende" [A most peculiar case of illness in several siblings], a case study of four siblings suffering from a rare neurological condition that led to contortion of all the limbs, aphasia, extreme emaciation and loss of motor function. All four children died before they reached puberty. However, Jensen gained permission to perform an autopsy, perhaps because the case was so puzzling; but the cause of death was difficult, "om ei umuligt, at afgjøre" [if not impossible, to determine] (Nylenna et al., 2016). Jensen wrote that on a general basis "…Overtroe og Afskye herfor ere fast uoverstigelige Hindringer [Superstition and revulsion are insurmountable hindrances]" for practical medicine (ibid.)

[60] "In contrast to today's scientific publications, where emphasis is primarily placed on representativeness and generalisation value, medical journals in the early 19th century were characterised by distinctive and more unusual observations. It was the deviations from what was known and expected that received the most attention."

[61] "Existential experiences that concern us all, such as birth and death, pain, suffering and grief, are in our time largely included in medical forms of understanding and treatment. Both the beginning

Bernhardsson (2010) and Bondevik and Stene-Johansen (2011) have primarily focused on literary classics like *Madame Bovary* or prose fiction in their analyses. Katarina Bernhardsson's *Litterära besvär* (2010) is a seminal text in the Scandinavian discourse of literature and medicine as a methodological illustration of how to conduct literary analyses of illness narratives. Bernhardsson asks why one should study fictive depictions of illness (2010, 54), when biographies and pathographies based on real illness experiences are readily available. My dissertation offers readings of illness narratives that are less genre-coherent. These texts were chosen for their hybridity and level of experimentation in order to present diverse examples of what the Gothic mode accomplishes. Another point is that regardless of genre capabilities and research interests, our analyses share a similar focus and aim, that "med hjälp av berättelser kan utanförstående människor försöka förstå och sätta sig in i sjukdomsupplevelsen; [den sjuka] kan förstå och gestalta det omskakande som en allvarlig sjukdom innebär, och kan genom berättande återskapa den identitet som splittras"[62] (2010, 57) [63].

Another poignant expression comes from Sara Wasson, who refers to the Gothic as a "useful darkness" (2015), a mode that offers insight into illness narratives in many different ways, not just by virtue of its expanded dark lexicon. Although the Gothic usually represents "confinement and diminished agency" (2015, 6), Wasson

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and the end of life happen to most of us today in hospitals and nursing homes, while unavoidable experiences of pain, suffering and grief are becoming somewhat pathological and are being repressed through drug relief."

[62] "with the help of stories, outsiders can try to understand and familiarize themselves with the experience of illness; [the patient] can understand and shape the upheavals that a serious illness entails, and can through narrative recreate the identity that has been divided"

[63] In the article "Text and Context" (2019), Nesby and Hambro outline the benefits of narratology in the study of pathographies (autobiographical narratives of illness), as used by Petter Aaslestad in his seminal work "Pasienten som tekst" (1997). Aaslestad's text focused not on the patients themselves, but "the gaze they [were] subjected to" (Aaslestad, 1997, 12), and exposed the dehumanising linguistics and semantic practices in Norwegian psychiatry from the 1890s to the 1990s. His book is just one example of how literary scholars can offer insights into patient stories and illness narratives.

nevertheless points to the similarities of circumstance between a Gothic hero and patient experiences as "dominated by a sense of confinement, constraint, bewilderment and despair, a sense of their story being under the control of others – if under control at all" (2015, 4). The quest for narrative autonomy and clarity of language surrounding one's circumstances, which is intrinsic to illness epistemologies, is already a key element of Gothic representation.

Moreover, Gothic literature often aligns with the "most disturbing form of illness narrative" (2015, 5), namely what Arthur Frank labels the chaos narrative (1997). This narrative category is closely related to horror fiction, an extension of Gothic fiction, as the plot and the "untellable silence" in both chaos narratives and horror "[alternate] with the insistent 'and then' repetitions" (2015, 5). In other words, horror and chaos narratives are both cumulative and disorienting in nature, and they have a predilection for themes such as constraint and helplessness. Most important, Wasson states, is the fact that the Gothic and chaos (anti-narratives) are a "mode alert to the dead hand of the past" (2015, 6), meaning that both modes highlight facets that modernity's progress would leave behind, such as "vulnerability, futility, and impotence" (Frank, 1997, 97).

Gothic studies offer cultural context to medical humanities perspectives, but alert as these readings are to "structural inequities and [marginalisation]" (Wasson, 2015, 3), one might be wary of paying too much attention to malpractices and the more disturbing aspects of medicine. Jack Halberstam's book *Skin Shows,* for example, employs the Gothic as an analytical tool and a symbolic and/or semantic category in its discussion of "the emergence of the monster within Gothic fiction [that] marks a peculiarly modern emphasis upon the horror of particular kinds of bodies" (1995, 3). The point of the Gothic prism, however, is to expand and liberate the individual illness experience from the linguistic confines of mimetic representation, because illness can annihilate and destroy language (Wasson, 2015, 7). External forces such as medical apparatus or economic factors are merely props and backdrops to the true horror of illness narratives that are founded in a lack of causality and understanding. This circles back to Sontag's wish to avoid entangling illness with a particular meaning, because

illness, as we now know, is often completely arbitrary rather than causal. What connects Sontag, Frank and Wasson is their advocacy for a reader's willingness to listen to stories framed by fear, despair, and even terror.

I am not suggesting that my analysis will enable the real-life application of fictionally produced knowledge and experience, but I argue in favour of studying fictional illness narratives of different genres because it enables a more flexible, analytic approach. In *The Wounded Storyteller*, another seminal text in the field of literature and medicine, Arthur Frank argues that illness defamiliarises the body, "but as the language of the story seeks to make the body familiar, the body eludes language… The body is often alienated, literally 'made strange', as it is told in stories that are instigated by *a need to make it familiar*" (my italics, 1997, 2)[64]. Genre fiction holds a reader's attention differently from ordinary prose fiction, and the analyses will explore how a playfulness regarding genre allows for a dissolution of mimetic corporeal constraint, which in turn demands a different kind of attention to the 'diseased body'. Within genre fiction and hybrid texts, chaos stories can manifest and conceptualise internal struggles, and thus move further away from a medical colonialisation of the illness experience (Bondevik & Synnes, 2018, 163), and reclaim, rather than surrender, narrative control.

My selection of source materials demonstrates the viability and potential of the Gothic prism as an object of research that helps, as Linda Nesby suggests, "å sette den subjektive sykdomserfaringen på agendaen, vise noen av de mange sammenfiltringer og relasjoner som oppstår i kjølvannet av en sykdomserfaring, og bidra til et språk for å kommunisere om hvordan sykdom berører både pasienter og pårørende på en

[64] Fredrik Svenaeus has also noted that while illness can make us strangers to ourselves, "også når vi er friske, rommer kroppen en fremmed, autonom dimensjon…I sykdommen forvandles imidlertid disse autonome funksjonene fra stille følgesvenner til fremmede irriatsjonsmomener og plageånder…kroppen viser seg i sin dobbelthet" [even when we are healthy, the body has a foreign, autonomous dimension… In illness, however, these autonomous functions are transformed from quiet companions to strange irritating elements and tormenting spirits… the body manifests itself in its duality] (2007, 49).

nærmest grenseløs, kompleks måte"[65] (2021, 202). The language of the Gothic with its metaphors of darkness and chaos, offers a literary mode of conventions, tropes and imagery that organically emphasises the darker aspects of illness stories[66]. The Gothic narrative tradition features opportunities to reveal that which has been concealed or hidden, and while Gothic representations are often excessive and fantastical, they are nevertheless representations of "highly subjective, fraught experience[s] of crisis" (Wasson, 2015, 2). These representations complement illness narratives by not shying away from the aspects of illness one would rather overlook. The Gothic can dwell in the uncomfortable and encourage readers to reflect on what this discomfort truly disturbs: the portrayal of illness and how it reflects on us.

[65] "to place the subjective illness experience on the agenda, to show some of the many entanglements and relationships that arise in the wake of an illness experience, and to provide a language for communicating how illness affects both patients and their family in an almost boundless, complex way."

[66] As I have argued previously (Mikalsen, 2019).

3 Methodological Considerations

My source materials are connected through a similar portrayal of characters encountering the supernatural, impossible and inexplicable within more or less mimetic universes, but their approaches to epistemological reconciliation, e.g. how protagonists account for and react to the apparent rupture in their reality, differ drastically. The illness is given form, if not agency and voice, which enables the exploration of the sick body through a multitude of unnatural and impossible narrative events, all of which can be termed supernatural, unnatural or uncanny events. I find that these terms intertwine and overlap, and having briefly discussed the uncanny in the previous chapter, we will now examine the supernatural and the unnatural. I employ the term 'unnatural' solely as a narratological signifier, and as a positive and fascinating phenomenon in literature, construed outside an aestheticising binary of natural/good and unnatural/bad. Applying this term to the illness depiction in my chosen texts would be counterproductive and would imply that illness is somehow unnatural. The unnatural aspects of these texts are confined to narratological events that cause an ontological breach, not to illness descriptions that veer towards the supernatural.

I regard the supernatural as a genre convention, while the unnatural is understood as a branch of narratology whose focus is on events that are narrated in a strange or ontologically impossible manner. The supernatural is here defined as that which defies the laws of nature, and that which often constitutes "estrangement, unease…the other and unseen" (Jackson, 1981, 179). Jackson connects the supernatural to the uncanny (ibid.), again with a mind towards the defamiliarising effect they have in common.

The inclusion of supernatural entities like ghosts or incorporeal voices is a confusing move that often leads to doubt as to whether these phenomena are real or not. Tzvetan Todorov (1975) suggested a method to read texts with supernatural elements that pertained to the resolution or suspension of doubt and which ultimately designated a narrative as belonging one of three genre categories: the fantastic, the

marvellous, or the uncanny. Unnatural narratology on the other hand is not a tool that attempts to reconcile a text in terms of genre, but rather to study motifs and narrative features that for various reasons appear unnatural or strange, without being supernatural or fantastic. The Gothic, for instance, is rife with the fantastic, but that does not make it unnatural. A vampire is not an unnatural monster in a Gothic novel, but an expected or at least a plausible one. The unnatural is rather that which enters the text as a breach of established conventions, or, as is the case in more experimental texts, as a convention not yet categorised. Depending on *what* presents as supernatural or strange, different methods will be necessary to analyse it. If the supernatural appears as a motif or theme, it can be illuminated through the Gothic, but if it appears as a narrative feature, one can approach it through unnatural narratology.

While I argue that my chosen texts can be categorised as Gothic texts, Brian Richardson would argue that the inclusion of the Gothic here counteracts the effect of the unnatural, as "such narratives employ consistent storyworlds and obey established generic conventions or, in some cases, merely add a single supernatural component to an otherwise naturalistic world" (2016, 386). However, Richardson's comment does not apply to my chosen texts. They play with different intertexts, genre characteristics and types of prose, and they do not obey generic conventions. The unnatural narrative style instead leads to hermeneutical and interpretational issues, which will be addressed in the individual analysis chapters.

The difference between the supernatural as a theme and the unnatural as a narrative feature is that one can imagine Gothic motifs narrated as one would expect, like the description of Dracula's superhuman strength: "his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed cold as ice – more like the hand of a dead than a living man" (Stoker, 1897, 17). One might similarly imagine commonplace incidents or objects that are given supernatural qualities, such as the three-dimensional letter in Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), that consists of "a forged message to Pym's father on one side, a blank page on the reverse, and an implausible third page on which a warning to Pym is penned in blood" (Lilly, 2015, 34). Dracula's supernatural quality lies in non-

humanity, but his place as the antagonistic monster of the story is not an unnatural element within the narrative. He is supernatural in a way that befits the setting, and his presence is made more discomforting by his attraction to body fluids. A three-dimensional letter, however, defies ontological understanding and physical laws. Such an object becomes unnatural in a narrative that in other respects clings to mimesis by including in its preface facts that reference actual people from the real world (Lilly, 2015, 39). A sheet of paper has two sides, even if torn apart and pieced together (Poe, 1838, 895-897). The unnatural nature of the third page, apart from the blood-inked message, is that it appears *only* as a result of the paper's reconstruction. Such a process of concealment is impossible in our time as it was at the time the short story was published, and how it was accomplished in the narrative is never revealed. Similarly, my texts engage with impossible objects and situations, openly defying laws of physics and probability, which adds to their textual complexity.

I have detailed how reading these texts with a Gothic lens opens these narratives in terms of vocabulary and greater depth to the textual fabric, but what is particularly illuminated by using unnatural narratology? The topic I trace in my source material is illness, the experience of which is enhanced by and reflected through Gothic motifs and tropes. This affects how the illness is portrayed, and it is far from picturesque. These novels dwell in the uncomfortable emotions, spaces and qualities of illness that other narrative styles and genres might try to romanticise or mitigate. These texts focus on and develop the discomfort and *uhygge* brought on by illness. I mention the Norwegian term to illustrate that the effect of the uncanny more than the term itself has passed into everyday Scandinavian language use. Like the uncanny, the term refers not only to discomfort (unlike *hygge*, which roughly translates to familiar and safe cozyness), but also to an ambience of unease and terror. The *uhygge* operates on two different levels: illness is an uncomfortable textual motif, and it is textualised in a way that is discomforting. This has transfer value and connects to the uncomfortable in terms of health communication: the Gothic and the unnatural communicate the uncomfortable things the narrator neither wants to nor is able to describe. These matters can be examined through unnatural narratology.

3.1 Unnatural Narratology

Examining my corpus texts with a Gothic focus emphasises the strange and uncanny events that occur in seemingly mimetic textual universes. The Gothic is a response to the perceived threat of illness, and while it causes fragmentation in characters and narration, it also provides familiar tropes and figures that readers can readily understand. The Gothic is identified and employed through tropes, imagery and narration in my texts, but these facets alone are insufficient to explain strangeness on the narrative level of the texts, which is arguably their most revealing attribute. The Gothic does not always account for strange narrative sequences[67] or complex temporal configurations. Howard Brody states that "patients come to physicians with broken stories as much as with broken bones and broken bodies" (2003, 16). He emphasises the need for narrative as well as corporeal healing, as some illness stories are too chaotic and unstructured to easily understand. The unspeakability of illness combined with Gothic and supernatural elements underlies my argument of the methodological relevance of unnatural narratology.

Unnatural narratology is a slippery term because, as is common in a relatively new field, there is as yet no universal definition, methodological approach, or agreed outline of what the unnatural is and accomplishes. Monika Fludernik was the first to use the term "non-natural" narratives (Fludernik, 1996). Her focus was not on 'unnatural' as the antithesis of "the moralistic, phallogocentric, heterosexual and generally conservative ideologies of the natural" (Fludernik, 2012, 357). Rather, Fludernik's definition of the unnatural denotes narratives depicting 'unnatural' embodied experiences, including instances of "the fabulous, the magical, and the supernatural besides the logically or cognitively impossible" (2012, 362), aspects that had been neglected in favour of the purely realist novel. She posits that unnatural narratology may "characterize in more detail how the fantastic is woven through the

[67] By this I mean events that appear strange without supernatural overtones or Gothic theatricality.

texture of realism, and how the fabulous relies on the cognitive frames of realism to become interpretable" (2012, 363).

In the late 2000s, scholars such as Henrik Skov Nielsen, Maria Mäkelä, Jan Alber and Brian Richardson built on the idea that there were other ways of interpreting narrative beyond a cognitive approach (Alber et al., 2013a, 67). I find Jan Alber's definition to be a beneficial starting point. He suggests that unnatural narratology is the study of narratives that violate "physical laws, logical principles, or standard *anthropomorphic limitations of knowledge* by representing storytelling scenarios, narrators, characters, temporalities, or spaces that could not exist in the actual world" (Alber, 2014, paragraph 1). In simpler terms, Ellen Peel suggests that it is the study of fictional narratives that "narrate something very strange or narrate something very strangely" (2016, 81). It is in simplifying the definition that I find traction with my texts, because they are indeed strange in both narration and theme, and it is therefore fitting for me to approach them with an aim "to approximate and conceptualize Otherness, rather than to stigmatize or reify it" (Alber & Heinze, 2011, 2).

Unnatural narratology focuses on challenging two points: "(1) the ways in which innovative and impossible narratives challenge mimetic understandings of narrative, and (2) the consequences that the existence of such narratives may have for the general conception of what narrative is and can do" (Alber et al., 2013a, 2-3). In this context, the most important quality of this approach is that the unnatural situates any strangeness (found in my chosen novels) on the narratological level and regards this as *caused* by illness, without imbuing illness with abnormality or deviancy. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests that "it is the gap between 'conventional' and 'natural' that embodied disruptions like illness make palpable" (2007, 243)[68], and I argue that this gap houses the unnarratable and the unspeakable, the very nexus of transformation. 'Convention' entails naturalisation, familiarity, even expectation, and establishes a pattern, a roadmap, in fictional events. Convention stands juxtaposed rather than

[68] Rimmon-Kenan references "naturalization" as coined by Jonathan Culler, where the natural is understood as a product of convention (Culler, 1975, 131-52).

contrasted with ‘natural’, as what is ‘natural’ is usually a result of convention or expectation.

What is interesting here is that however natural an event or state such as illness is, the embodied, conscious experience of illness cannot be fully understood as expressed through a singular perspective, as we are not privy to any consciousness but our own. Illness is a lonely space, but that need not be the case in a literary context. Rimmon-Kenan comments on the limits of narrative theory as a tension between “acceptance of fragmentation and the need to overcome it by creating a coherent narrative” (2007, 244). This tension is the locus of the unspeakable. Where there is tension, there is conflict and in the context of illness narratives, conflict manifests itself on multiple planes. Conflict disturbs the ‘natural’ body expression (healthy), it tears holes in speech and vocabulary, and it forces renegotiation of identity. Unnatural narratology enables the reader to traverse these literary landscapes predicated on chaos and ambiguity.

In the following I will discuss how I define, locate and examine the unnatural in my texts, and explore the applicability of various elaborations of the unnatural in my texts. My narratological foundation stems from the works of Jan Alber (2016), Stefan Iversen (2018), Brian Richardson (2006; 2015; 2016), and Ellen Peel (2016), who all approach the unnatural differently, and with different ideas of what the unnatural accomplishes. I begin with Jan Alber’s definition of the unnatural, as “physically, logically, and humanly impossible scenarios and events (regardless of whether we find them estranging or not)” (Alber, 2016, 14). Alber highlights the unnatural on four levels: “the narrator, the character[69], time and space… because they defy our real-world knowledge” (2016, 3-5) and “suggestively violate some sort of important

[69] “Unnatural characters proliferate in many earlier genres, such as the Gothic novel. In Matthew Lewis’ ([1796] 1998) *The Monk: A Romance*, for example, Don Raymond encounters a ghost, which he describes as follows: ‘I beheld before me an animated corpse. Her countenance was long and haggard; her cheeks and lips were bloodless; the paleness of death was spread over her features; and her eye-balls, fixed steadfastly upon me, were lustreless and hollow’ (140)” (Alber, 2016, 5).

conceptual 'boundary'" (Zunshine, 2008, 9). By "real-world knowledge" Alber refers to basic knowledge concerning time, space and a corporeal experience of the world, such as communication only being available between the living, time moving forward and chronologically, and the immutability of spaces we inhabit[70].

The unnatural appears then as a break with realism, meant here as "mimetic evocation of reality" (Fludernik, 1996, 37), but not necessarily in opposition to realism. Unnatural narratives provide representations of the world, focalised through impossible scenarios that "[address] certain intellectual needs" (Alber, 2016, 29). This is the case in Ragnar Hovland's *Ei vinterreise* (2001), where the two different narratives seemingly communicate with one another, but while the diary is an "evocation of reality", the road narrative is a mimetic reflection of reality with different laws of physics. The allegorical nature of the road narrative is a persistent reminder of its fictionality; however, my analysis treats them both as equally fictional[71] to make them easier to analyse in relation to one another. In all my chosen texts the unnatural component appears in 1) the way knowledge is transmitted between characters without direct communication, e.g. through dreams, 2) paralipsis and omissions, and 3) lifeless objects being imbued with intentionality and narrative authority, such as darkness meaning harm to the characters, or a building taking the narrative lead. In suspending the notion of fiction as the natural place to explore the impossible, one draws attention to the "largely invisible unnatural elements cached within ostensibly mimetic works" (Alber et al., 2013, 3). Alber's definition also includes perspectives on the unnatural in conventionalised genres like fantasy and science fiction[72]. In applying unnatural narratology to illness narratives and Gothic

[70] The interior of a house cannot suddenly change in terms of appearance and volume, etc.

[71] Because my analysis makes many assumptions regarding the diary author's opinions and beliefs, and because I clearly distinguish between Hovland the "real" writer, and his eponymous in-text author, I will treat this as a case of paratextual and intertextual doubt (Iversen, 2018, 15).

[72] See Alber et al. (2013).

texts (texts that can incorporate elements from more than one genre), this dissertation offers new perspectives to the field of unnatural narratology.

Brian Richardson views "anti-mimetic events" (2015, 3) as the primary signal of the unnatural, with particular emphasis on "the degree of unexpectedness that the text produces, whether surprise, shock, or the wry smile that acknowledges that a different, playful kind of representation is at work" (2015, 5). This definition has merit because it points to not only the effect of the narrative (shock or surprise) but also underlines playfulness and experimentation as points of interest. The main difference between Alber's and Richardson's definitions is the focus on the 'impossible' (which Richardson does not view as necessary for an unnatural narrative), and how it ruptures the mimetic illusion.

Unnatural narratives are detected through "actualizability", meaning whether a represented event or occurrence could exist in our world (Alber et al., 2013b, 104-105). Unactualisable occurrences are manifested through "the various ways… narratives deviate from real-world frames by being highly implausible, impossible, unreal, or insistently fictional" (Alber et al., 2013b, 104).

> The fictional island in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), for example, could exist in the real world, while the flying island of Laputa in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726/1735) could not. From our perspective, unnatural elements (such as, say, speaking corpses, a backward-moving timeline, and shape-shifting houses) are "non-actualizable" (Ronen 1994: 51): they could never be experienced in the real world, and this feature is what makes them particularly compelling (Alber et al., 2013b, 104-105).

Actualisability seems contingent on a mutual ontological or epistemological standard of perception, as the feasibility of any given event is subject to an individual's belief system, and of course, "the impossible object, and even the impossible world…is the very possibility of fiction" (Currie, 2007, 85). In relation to illness narratives, this aspect can be viewed as a matter of genre and convention. As Rimmon-Kenan proposes, "illness narratives may deter readers because they force them to encounter embodied experience, and this is, perhaps, their special contribution to the age-old problem (and challenge) of narrating the unnarratable" (2007, 249). We can accept the

way a literary concept is employed even if most of the narrative appears to adhere to its fictional boundaries. Genre conventions offers both decoding skills and blinders, as the mere concept of genre conventions breeds predictability. The narrative that heralds a certain genre, but subverts and negates its conventions, will have an unactualisable effect that prompts the question: "How could this happen here?". Actualisability could be used as a tool to challenge aspects of illness narration associated with genre.

Additionally, Alber identifies the unnatural in two different forms, either as conventionalised or unconventionalised "physical, logical, or epistemic possibilities" (2014, paragraph 2). The former refers to naturalised conventions like the appearance of magic in fantasy novels, and the latter refers to events that have yet to be familiarised in any genre. This definition thus includes scenes and instances in conventionalised genres that nevertheless spark unnaturalness, even though Richardson would argue that the conventional can no longer be considered 'unnatural' in such cases. However, I agree with Alber in that we cannot easily bypass "our cognitive architecture" (Alber and Heinze, 2011, 9), meaning the near automatic pattern recognition employed when dealing with difficult texts. It ultimately comes back to a tenet of unnatural narratology, that one has to allow different perspectives and definitions to exist simultaneously, as the 'unnatural' is also understood in a cultural context. What is unnatural to a Caucasian Western audience might come across as commonplace elsewhere in the world (Moll, 2011, 246). While genre conventions (the 'natural') often outline a narrative's possibilities, in the case of experimental texts the unnatural may be a marker not only of genre hybridity but of the unspeakable. The unnatural occurs in response to situations that are increasingly unnarratable, thus the ontological assault of illness causes a tear in the textual fabric. Recalling Sedgwick's theory of the unspeakable and the barrier it creates, the unnatural bridges the gap, not just as a dissolution of genre expectations, but as a tool to access knowledge which has been lost or subsumed by the illness.

Stefan Iversen attaches the unnatural to narratives where the reader is faced with "clashes between the rules governing a storyworld and scenarios or events producing or taking place inside this storyworld – clashes that defy easy explanations" (Alber et

al., 2013b, 103). This perspective is worth keeping in mind, especially regarding events that are simply strange without being supernatural in origin. These events are often indicators of something that is occluded from the narrative consciousness and are inevitably linked to subjective perception and expectation. However, what if *doubt* is introduced, not just in terms of plot, but of in terms of genre conventions? Doubt is here meant as Todorov employs it, but expanded to include the reader's doubt, not just a character's doubt[73]. A reader relies on the narrator's guidance, point of view and beliefs, which in turn will influence and set the tone of the narrative. If the narrator or narrators believe that their experience is discordant with the natural laws of their universe, this must also be a yardstick of actualisability. This is what Stefan Iversen aptly calls an "uncanny tale" (uhyggelig fortælling*)*.

An "uncanny tale" is "en skriftbåren fortælling, hvori tvivlen om, hvem der taler, er genkommende for både de fremstillede personer og læseren"[74] (Iversen, 2018, 14), a combination of thematic and formal elements that promote doubt in both reader and fictional character, in terms of who speaks and who gets to speak. Iversen applies the terms *dialogic doubt* and *representational doubt* to these elements, respectively. Dialogical doubt (dialogisk tvivl) is related to and experienced by fictional characters attempting to connect a voice with intentionality. These voices occur with the "endnu-ikke-helt"[75] or the "ikke-længere-helt"[76] (Iversen, 2018, 15) human, and in cases where humans express themselves mechanically, or the mechanical expresses itself in human terms. An example of the latter would be Edit Andersson (Strandberg, 2017), whose only spoken words for the majority of the novel are "God dag, mitt namn är

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[73] This relates to Tzvetan Todorov's work on the fantastic (1975), regarding individual doubt that pertains to the relationship between a perceived and an actual reality. "Det är gåtfullheten, frånvaron av enkla lösningar, som präglar den fantastiska texten" [It is the enigma, the absence of simple solutions, that characterises the fantastic text] (Johnsson et al., 2014, 106).

[74] a written narrative in which the doubt of who is speaking recurs for the characters portrayed and the reader

[75] "not quite yet"

[76] "no longer completely"

Edit Andersson, och jag er sekreterare åt Direktör Palm"[77] (2017, 18), which establishes her as a human speaking like an automaton. When she at a later stage in the novel expands this sentence (to the horror and disbelief of the other characters), she also becomes the automaton that speaks like a human. Examples of "endnu-ikke-helt" characters, "fx spøgelser, gengangere, dobbeltgængere og visioner"[78] (Iversen, 2018, 15), are Celestine, who teeters on the border of not-quite-dead but certainly-not-alive (Ravn, 2015), Johanna and Lemuel who are limned in an ethereal gauze, and Tomas and Lindemann who appear as doppelgangers of the in-text author (Hovland, 2001).

Representational doubt (fræmstillingsmessig tvivl) is experienced by the reader on three levels, an intratextual, a paratextual and an intertextual level:

> [Intratekstuelle] former opstår i tilsyneladende fortællerløse fortællinger, i fortællinger, hvor gensidigt udelukkende fortællersituationer optræder samtidig... paratekstuelle former opstår ved rystelser i forholdet mellem fortællingens indhold og dens rammesættelse, fx ved inddragelsen af biografisk stof i en fiktiv [ramme]...[intertekstuell tvivl opstår] i forbindelse med uklare, tvetydige forhold mellem fortællingen og andre fortællingers stemmer. (Iversen, 2018, 15)[79]

Paratextual doubt is exemplified in *Ei Vinterreise* and its inclusion of Hovland's biographical data, and references to historical figures in *Celestine.* Intertextual and intratextual doubt occurs in *Celestine* and *Hemmet*, as both establish narrative conditions where the reader questions who or what is speaking, and the novels allow impossible narrators to engage with the reader. Not all of my novels conform to Iversen's formula for an "uhyggelig fortælling", but they engage with textual

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[77] "Good day, my name is Edit Andersson, and I am Director Palm's secretary."

[78] "for example ghosts, revenants, doppelgangers and visions"

[79] "[Intratextual] forms appear in seemingly narratorless stories, in stories where mutually exclusive narrator situations appear simultaneously…paratextual forms arise from disturbances in the relationship between the content of the narrative and its framing, e.g. by the inclusion of biographical material in a fictional [framework]... [intertextual doubt arises] in connection with unclear, ambiguous relationships between the narrative and the voices of other narratives".

techniques which make them interesting case studies to test the plasticity of Iversen's theory.

Key to illness narrative studies and unnatural narratology is to examine the question of who is allowed to speak and why. In "Unnatural Feminist Narratology" (2016), Ellen Peel draws attention to instances where unnatural and feminist narratology[80] overlap, primarily with the focus on who has the power to see and speak, and "'who sees' is also crucial, for it determines what is seen, how it is seen, [and] what is not seen" (2016, 86). As there are varied theoretical approaches to feminist narrative critique of patriarchal constructs, Peel points to the common key strategy among them that sets out to challenge patriarchal definitions of the natural which usually entails construing women as objects rather than subjects. Even if women are considered natural, "patriarchal belief often regards it as natural to restrict them to [a] supposedly lesser space" (2016, 83), diminishing both their corporeal and narrative freedoms. One way to represent this issue in fiction is alternating narration[81] that shifts "sharply between first-person narration *by the protagonist* and third-person narration *about the protagonist*" (2016, 86). This technique is deemed unnatural because it seems strange for protagonists to refer to themselves as 'I' at one moment, and 'she' at the next. Peel notes that while this technique is observed in overtly feminist texts, or texts with female protagonists, as a representation of the burden of this double role, alternating narration serves a variety of purposes (2016, 87). Feminist unnatural

[80] Gender has only become a factor in narratology in the last 40 years. While Genette and his peers in their search for a general law in narratological matters (duration, frequency, mood, voice etc.), did not look for a "sexual" but a narrative deviancy in the texts with which they worked, their process would later be contested as an attempt to mask androcentric bias (Lanser, 2013, paragraphs 5-7). Moreover, feminist narratology reveals "that writers who are gendered feminine create absent characters, change point of view in order to disrupt plot, change scripts for women within those plots, and undermine unitary identity" (Neidel, 2016, 13). Susan Lanser (1986; 1992), Kathy Mezei (1996) and Robyn Warhol (1989) all pushed the narrative field in a more gender-inclusive direction, arguing that mere exposure of the limitations of the practices of the past is insufficient in terms of dismantling them. One must exploit and rethink the possibilities of the preceding concepts and principles of formalist structures. This is the foundation of postclassical narratology and feminist narratologies.

[81] A concept first proposed by Peel (1989).

narratology is a call to pay attention, not just to what is spoken but to assemble meanings from the contours of what, and potentially *who*, is omitted. It makes sense, Peel argues, "to relate the feminist unnatural to the narratological unnatural, since both question what is comfortable, conventional, or taken for granted" (2016, 83). These perspectives will be interesting to explore further and not merely in texts which promote female voices. Unnatural feminist narratology will here be employed as a perspective open to all marginalised voices, across the gender spectrum.

I will conclude with a few remarks on how my application of unnatural narratology is significant and innovative. I focus on unnatural texts that thematically and purposefully dwell on the uncomfortable aspects of illness by exaggerating and reflecting abject bodies and unnatural narrators, which complement the experience of illness as a threshold between chaos and equilibrium. The unnatural, and its relationship to mimesis, also functions as a mirroring technique. These aspects manifest themselves as a linguistic, physical and ontological tension, which makes literary interpretation difficult but not impossible when examined through a narrative gaze that allows and accounts for the impossible. Moreover, by focusing on who is allowed to speak and when, unnatural feminist narratology illuminates aspects of narration which reveal the valuation of certain perspectives over others. This approach is relevant to studies of narratives that deal with stigmatised illnesses, such as mental disorders, and it also provides a scrutinising look at the confines of gendered expectations in illness, exemplified by the cancer diary in *Ei vinterreise.*

In summary, with varying degrees of experimentation and adherence to genre, my source materials demonstrate narratives that play with "the impossible, the unreal, the preternatural, the outrageous, the extreme, the parodic, and the insistently fictional" (Alber et al., 2013, 9).

3.2 Monstrous Methodologies

In the following I will consider the function of monsters and monstrosity and the potential of alternative modes of narration, genre hybridity and horror in illness narratives. Such a discussion is a necessary extension of the function of metaphors, because the monster traditionally makes "negative attributes visible in order that they can be seen for what they are and be condemned and destroyed" (Botting, 2014, 8). The presence of monsters in some shape or form in illness narratives is not new, as the cause and transmission of illness has historically been subject to various forces beyond mere medicine. In ancient tragedies like *Oedipus* and the *Book of Lot*, illness, madness and deformity were punishments from a vengeful deity. The idea that some people were genetically predisposed to illness permeated the late nineteenth century.

A monster is the combination of two categories that ought never to be fused, its presence a threat to the epistemology of the self and of the world (Weinstock, 2020, 3). Horror fiction and the media have often portrayed illness and disability with monstrous (or in/non-human) configurations or connotations (Behuniak, 2011; Michelis, 2015; Pugh, 2018). The issue of monstrous metaphors must be discussed when they are connected to representations of patients and illness, in order to question the ways in which the monster regulates "our thinking [about] what is normal and abnormal" (Hellstrand et al., 2018, 147). I additionally use monster theory (Asma, 2012; Mittman & Hensel, 2018) as an extension of Gothic conventions, because the presence of the monster in a (Scandinavian) illness context is both understudied and significant.

One reason for the efficacy of Gothic illness narratives is, as Mathias Clasen theorises, that fear and horror create 'safe spaces' in which an audience/reader can experience a 'fight or flight' response in a controlled environment. For the purposes of this dissertation, this moment is experienced and focalised through the perspectives of patients and their relatives. Horror appeals because it activates a deep-rooted reflex to properly learn to gauge potential threats. Clasen suggests: "The key is to make such learning pleasurable. Hence, finding pleasure in vicarious learning about dangerous agents and situations is adaptive" (Clasen, 2012, 227). Illness represents one such

locus of dangerous agents and situations stemming from depictions of monstrous bodies and questionable doctors.

Monsters are "unnatural but of nature" and "make visible, in their transgression, the limits separating proper from improper, self from other", states Botting (2008, 8-9). Botting further suggests that current posthuman society is oversaturated with monstrosity, rendering the world "demonstered", but also dehumanised, because the monsters' "tasks and existences are identical with those of their human counterparts" (2008, 158-9). The monstrosity of Frankenstein's monster for example has diminished, considering that "in the present milieu, human bodies are being carved up, fragmented and reassembled" (Clarke, 2002, 46), not just on the operating table, but also in digitally manipulated media. As Fyhr notes, "på 1700- och 1800-talet mötte huvudpersonen monstret, idag är monstret huvudpersonen"[82] (Fyhr, 2017, 12). Just as audiences in nineteenth-century Scandinavia were enamoured with Gothic novels, contemporary audiences find equal pleasure in its descendants, horror, crime fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction. However, this begs the question: Why does this strategy work, and how does it influence illness fiction? An explanation can be found in the appeal of horror and monsters.

The word *monster* in its Latin form *monstrum* means a "divine omen, a portent of evil and misfortune". The word is also a derivative of *monere*, meaning to remind, warn and instruct[83]. The monster is a hybrid, a combination of categories that were never meant to be fused, like extreme animalistic features such as the werewolf or the vampire, but also taboo categories, like reanimating the dead and cannibalism. This dual, hybrid role is important in my chosen novels, not just because of the previously mentioned doubling of characters, but because of the function of the monstrous in an illness narrative, and the effects of the monstrous body.

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[82] "in the 1700s and 1800s the protagonist met the monster, today the monster is the protagonist"

[83]The "etymology of the word 'monster', which means to 'demonstrate' (Lat. monstrare) as well as to 'warn' (Lat. monere)" (Hellstrand et al., 2018, 147)

Stephen Asma suggests that monsters appear universally in stories and art because they are helpful navigational tools that provide "ritualized, rehearsable simulation(s) of reality, a virtual way to represent the forces of nature, the threats from animals, and the dangers of human social interaction" (2009, 282-283). This position is tangential to the function of horror fiction, however, where the monster is a personification of one or several fears. Moreover, we can isolate the monster from other textual phenomena, usually because it is situated in opposition to the protagonist. This position is challenged in illness narratives where the illness is usually viewed with a level of antagonism, but as we shall see in Celestine, this perspective does not always apply. Asa Mittman argues that the monstrous is located and "known" by the casual observer through four elements: its *embodiment*, its *location*, in how it *enacts its being*, and finally its *impact* (2012, 7, my italics), and that through their "bodies, words and deeds, monsters show us ourselves" (Mittman & Hensel, 2018, x).

Ingvild Hellstrand further argues that the dual role of a demonstrative and warning body is linked to the "ethical and political responsibilit[ies]" in knowledge production (2018, 147). Constructing the sick body in monstrous terms, a so-called monster methodology (Hellstrand et al., 2018) examines why the sick body is viewed as 'wrong' or strange. This approach aims not to heal or cure but to examine what is deemed monstrous as a body of knowledge, informed by a system that considers certain bodies as 'wrong' and others as 'correct' or 'healthy'. Such a perspective proposes that seeing beyond the "monstrous" body requires a re-evaluation of bias and stereotypes. Locating the monster in a text is not as important as understanding why or how it is monstrous. I will be using Mittman's tools and Hellstrand's monstrous methodology when discussing monstrous metaphors, particularly in Chapters 4 and 6, to examine how *Hemmet* and *Celestine* employ monstrosity in conjunction with

illness, femininity[84] and queer bodies to dissect "this fascination with the human as (also) other, this yearning to be other, to be unthinking or animal, hybrid or cyborg, mechanical or mutant, virtual, immutable, stony, inhuman, or dead" (Royle & Bennet, 2009, 252).

When compared to the evolution of horror, the Gothic emphasises "an undercurrent fear of sickness – and of the Sick – that runs throughout the horror genre, with narrative, language, and *mise-en-scène* all identifying the monster as sick and the human as healthy" (Pugh, 2018, 56). Monstrous metaphors are already part of illness and disability discourses (Hughes, 2013; Pugh, 2018; Wasson, 2015), and construing illness as a malignant external force working its way into the body and wreaking havoc is thus an established precedent. The attraction to horror is not disturbing because it, as Freud suggests, metaphorically confronts us with "repressed material such as infantile sexual and/or murderous impulses" (Clasen, 2017, 2-3). Horror fiction offers make-believe scenarios where humans may experience "negative emotions at high levels of intensity within a safe context" by targeting "ancient and deeply conserved defense mechanisms in the brain" that activate "supersensitive danger-detection circuits" honed by our ancestors going back millennia (idem, 4).

I interpret Clasen's terminology as applicable to emotions that produce a 'negative' effect, more so than a statement regarding the (cultural) value of certain emotions over others (for instance, happy is 'better than' sad). Humans are currently situated at the top of the ecological and evolutionary food chain; we have no natural predators that require an active fight-or-flight response, no consistent threat to our survival outside the ones we create for ourselves such as the climate crisis or antibiotic resistance. It therefore makes sense that we seek out fictional or imaginary spaces where these impulses and instincts can be employed safely. The context in which many tales of

[84] Toril Moi defines the monster woman as "the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who has a story to tell – in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (2002, 57).

classic and contemporary horror are set is noteworthy, because context dictates the parameters responsible for evoking a fear response:

> Humans evolved a cognitive system that automatically and non-reflectively categorizes objects in the world and assigns to the objects certain domain-specific assumptions. When an object appears to violate those domain-specific assumptions—if a rock floats, a tree speaks, or a person passes through walls—we pay particular attention (Clasen, 2018, 358)

As Clasen argues, we are attuned to certain assumptions that relate to particular environments with a specific range of emotions attached to them. Contemporary horror engages with monsters, blood mutations, viruses, haunted hospitals, and mental institutions, and generally a fear of the unseen or unthinkable. These highlight and exemplify why Gothic and horror structures work well in an illness narrative, because they are thematically connected.

Horror and terror in the Scandinavian Gothic can be understood through the juxtaposition of spaces of safety to also become spaces of fear and horror. Clasen explains that the way our mind processes so-called negative emotions is part of an evolutionary response to fear: "Horror provides us with insights into ourselves and into the dark corners of the world, and it lets us develop and refine coping skills that may be critical later in life" (Clasen, 07.01.2018). In other words, horror fiction and the Gothic mode are effective and productive 'low-impact' avenues of training and refining coping skills for difficult times, to a similar degree as for Nussbaum's *judicious*, and 'empathetic' reader (Nussbaum et al., 2016). I am not proposing that the novels I have chosen will increase empathy, as empathy is often challenged in these texts. Gothic, horror, or illness narratives do not aim to encourage empathy in their readers. Their function and effect lie in their ability to evoke, as Edgar Allan Poe suggests, an emotional progression from surprise to terror, horror, and finally disgust (Poe, 1845, 410). In the wake of these emotions comes wonder. One contemporary example could be the preliminary findings from an article on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on horror fans. The authors indicate that the interviewees felt more prepared mentally and physically to deal with the social turmoil of the pandemic,

as a result of their interest in post-apocalyptic fiction and media (Scrivner et al., 2021). This study is not a unique phenomenon, and the idea of horror media as a site of emotional exploration - even catharsis - is provable: “Horror movies cause predictable, reliable emotional states across subjects (people do not interpret what they watch arbitrarily), and horror films engender actual emotions of fear and anxiety, not simulacra or perversions of these emotions” (Clasen, 2012, 224). It is important to note that while there are distinct narrative patterns of progression embedded in the horror genre, as Clasen claims, my research material does not adhere to these patterns. The deviation from the pattern derives from the illness element that shocks, defamiliarises and destabilises a reader’s expectations, and it is through dealing with the unexpected that readers participate in honing critical coping skills.

The methods and perspectives I have outlined in this section demonstrate that when looking for a fictional monster one can focus on what the monstrous engenders rather than its appearance as a representation of internal evil. This is the method I will bring into my analyses, and I aim to examine what the text accomplishes in allowing the monstrous to emerge in an illness context. Having presented my theoretical and methodological foundation, I can move on my analyses, beginning with Mats Strandberg’s *Hemmet* (2017), followed by Ragnar Hovland’s *Ei vinterreise* (2001), and Olga Ravn’s *Celestine* (2015).

4 Mats Strandberg's *Hemmet:* Dementia, the Monstrous, and the Unhomely

4.1 Context: Dementia and the Un-Dead.

Since the first medical description of Alzheimer's disease in 1907 by Alois Alzheimer (Herskovits, 1995, 147), people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease have been construed as a homogenous group, which is strongly contested by contemporary gerontology studies. Nora Simonhjell argues that the concept of dementia "is no longer limited to expert medical discourses, but [integrated] in popular culture, film and literature [where there is] a tendency to reproduce reduced, distorted or ethically problematic images and stereotypes of dementia" (2018, 133). The reason for this, Elizabeth Herskovits proposes, is that "the subjective experience of aging and of 'senility' have become increasingly horrific and monstrous; we are all afraid of losing our minds as we grow old" (Herskovits, 1995, 148)[85].

Originally, dementia (lat. *De mentis,* out of the mind) was not determined by or related to old age (Zeilig, 2012, 259). Zeilig's article presents some metaphors surrounding dementia in the English-speaking world: a watery image, silent yet deadly, like a tsunami (ibid.). Framed as something creeping and slowly evolving, it reflects current research that states that whatever processes cause dementia start to develop decades before symptoms start to present[86]. It is "an unstoppable *force of nature* coupled with quiet stealth" (Zeilig, 2014, 260). In other words, the implied horror of dementia is that when faced with the diagnosis, we are powerless. We cannot wage war on or combat a force of nature; we can only take preventative measures.

[85] Dementia and Alzheimer's are also indelibly associated with old age, and the 'right' ways to age 'gracefully' and properly (Bülow & Holm, 2016).

[86] See (Kirsebom, 2020, 30-31)

I do not think these metaphors are accidental, nor do I think they are entirely detrimental to a broader discussion on the repercussions of dealing with a 'plague'. Juxtaposing dementia and plague metaphorically and culturally affects the way medical practitioners understand the aetiology of dementia and its subsequent treatment. As Zeilig points out, "the language of medical science is not neutral, and it is echoed by the wider cultural stories that we tell about dementia" (Zeilig, 2014, 260).

As Zeilig hypothesises, both dementia and Alzheimer's "have been subject to subtly changing psychiatric, biomedical, and social/cultural stories" (2012, 260), which means that these stories, both medical and fictional, contain that element of uncertainty that actualises Gothic possibilities. As Castricano argues, "by drawing upon such figures as the crypt, the phantom, and the living-dead" (2001, 8), one foregrounds Sedgwick's trope of live burial, and allows us to examine the metaphoric thinking prevalent in the biomedical and narrative communities: "[Alzheimer and dementia invoke] a profound dread. Dementia has replaced cancer as the scourge of modern times" (Van Gorp & Vercruysse, 2012, 1274; Zeilig, 2012, 260). Dementia is referred as a crisis, an epidemic (Mandell & Green, 2011), and a plague-like force of nature (Lees, 2012). These metaphors contribute to the construction of dementia as something to be feared. The afflicted are part of a "silent epidemic" (Gubrium, 1986) and in the contemporary fantastic imagination, the physical and mental aspects of the illness create an image that correlates dementia with "the living dead". Such monstrous metaphors present an "ethical challenge [when doing research] upon or with people living with dementia. We run a risk of invasion, exploitation and lack of respect. Literature's anonymous nature makes the ethical considerations less complex" (Aadlandsvik, 2018, 23). In other words, genres like the Gothic and horror open different avenues of questions than a straightforward query about ethical presentation of dementia in literature. Clasen argues for the strategic value of engaging with storyworlds that depict horrible events, as a means of gaining "vicarious experience with negative emotions" from which we can "develop coping strategies for handling such emotions" (2018b, 358). Moreover, finding "pleasure in vicarious learning about dangerous agents and situations is adaptive", (Clasen, 2012, 227), which is key to

representations of dementia in literature. It is not about reproducing monstrous metaphors about dementia, but rather the creation of spaces in which one can engage with the negative emotions that dementia elicits.

I now wish to contextualise *Hemmet* in a historical Gothic tradition, by showing the intersections of the Gothic and Nordic noir, and how these categories enable spaces that can support and negotiate dementia as a complex emotional territory. Moreover, I wish to explain that while this novel is marketed as a horror novel, *Hemmet* is a Gothic text because it contains Gothic conventions and effects, which legitimises its inclusion in a dissertation about the Gothic.

Building on Carol Clover's analysis of the possession plot in twentieth-century horror films (2015), Sofia Wijkmark reads *Hemmet* as a "playful transcultural reworking of American Gothic horror of the 1970s and 1980s, those dealing with possession in particular" (2020, 56). She also categorises the novel as a "geriatric Gothic" text that accentuates age as a "category of social anxiety" (2020, 57). Clover's study suggests that most possession plots focus on a female character whose body becomes a portal for the supernatural, but the narrative is fixated on the male character's internal conflict (2015). Wijkmark notes that *Hemmet* diverges from this pattern by placing the focus not on a gendered binary, but age, "depicted as bodies that are out of control and losing their grip, leaking, drying out and becoming ugly" (2020, 57). The gendered constellation of this theory is eschewed further by Joel being gay, allowing the foundation of his relationship with Nina to remain unencumbered by sexual tension.

Hemmet is a Gothic text because Monika's dementia produces a barrier that prevents outward communication, and buries the self, thereby engaging Sedgewick's conventions of the unnarratable as a barrier, and live burial. In the first pages of the novel Joel maintains a steady juxtaposition of Monika's personality before and after she was diagnosed, where the difference is too jarring to be reconciled. While she used to be a resilient, self-sufficient, proud and caring woman, the dementia reduces her to a balding, infant-like creature who drifts in and out of the here and now. Joel is trying to reconcile an image of Monika which no longer exists. What is important to know

about Monika's dementia is that it has two very Gothic facets: first of all, her dementia was the result of a heart attack from which Monika needed to be resuscitated. In other words, she has risen from the dead. Her reanimation has supposedly also given her the ability to communicate with her dead husband. Her subsequent bodily transformation reflects an interior landscape which is closer to a spectre than a human. Her grey, wispy hair makes her look bald (Strandberg, 2017, 7), and her kneecaps are "knotiga utväxter på de alldeles för magra benen" [87] (ibid.). In other words, Monika has been "replaced" with a skinny, balding wraith. Joel's childhood friend, Nina, is a nurse at Tallskuggan and is one of the few people who can get through to Monika in this state, "[Som] om de hade samma modersmål, medan [Joel] och mamma försökte mötas i ett språk som ingen av dem är särskilt bra på"[88] (idem, 95). This establishes dementia as the locus of the unnarratable, and a linguistic and emotional barrier that separates a character from that which ought to be accessible to it (Sedgwick, 1980), while also establishing the main Gothic and uncanny energy of the novel: the borderline between life and death has been dissolved, and the characters now have to deal with the consequences.

In Scandinavian Gothic texts, Leffler argues, "the romance structure is inverted: the protagonist's romantic quest is twisted into a journey back into darkness and a barbaric or savage state prior to civilization" (2008, 60). *Hemmet* refers to the savage/civilised binary in a modern and literal way, as Joel's "romantic quest" is to return from the progressive metropole Stockholm to his home town Skredsby, "ett litet samhälle på västkusten där sommarturisterna på väg till Marstrand sällan stannar"[89] (Strandberg, 2017, 9). Furthermore, Joel's physical and emotional distance from his home town (and all his family responsibilities there) is mirrored by Monika's

[87] "bony growths on her altogether too thin legs"

[88] "as if they had the same mother tongue, while [Joel] and his mum tried to meet in a language that none of them spoke well"

[89] "a small community on the west coast where summer tourists on their way to Marstrand [Sweden's sailing capital] rarely stop"

dementia, as it creates a mental distance that disregards space and time as Monika's illness 'allows' her to communicate with her long-dead husband, but she is unable to recognise her sons who are still alive.

The novel can also be situated in a context of Nordic Noir, a genre from which it borrows important plot elements. Leffler argues that following the surge of Nordic Noir, Scandi Noir and similar genres in the early 2000s, there are essentially two categories of Nordic Noir and its associated protagonist. In the first, set in "a bleak, urban landscape" and also "a desolate, wintry countryside" (2020, 65), the motives of the protagonist (usually a detective of some sort) and the general ambiance of the novel are an exploration of the underbelly of a Scandinavian welfare state. The investigation of the crime usually reveals currents of racial and gendered hatred, which demonstrates that while Scandinavian countries are highly ranked in terms of wealth, equality and wellbeing, we are far from being a homogenous group. In the second category, "a Gothic subgenre to Nordic Noir" (2020, 66), Gothic tropes interfere with a traditionally 'realistic' investigation. Leffler continues: "When the mystery is to some extent solved, the actual existence of supernatural phenomena and creatures is confirmed rather than negated" (ibid.), meaning that such narratives move, as suggested by Todorov (1975), from the fantastic into the marvellous. *Hemmet* bears similarities to the latter category, while it further subverts expectations belonging to the Nordic Noir genre. An 'uncanny' atmosphere, or perhaps more aptly, an 'unhomely' atmosphere[90] amplifies the deviances and abnormal nature of the happenings in Tallskuggan. Dementia, as an established cause of destabilisation and debilitating regression, is imbued with a sense of dread and mystery. Joel and Nina therefore become detectives as they combine Joel's theoretical knowledge of horror literature, its tropes and clichés learnt from Stephen King and Dean R Koontz (Strandberg, 2017, 123), with Nina's medical expertise and experience, to determine whether or not Monika's strange behaviour has monstrous origins.

[90] Mark Fisher advocates the literal translation of Freud's *das unheimliche* (Fisher, 2010), and it is beneficial to think about *das unheimliche* in the context of Gothic topography (Leffler, 2010).

Wijkmark analyses *Hemmet* as a critique of privatised healthcare in Sweden, an aspect which is beyond the scope of my analysis. More aligned with my interests is how her analysis construes dementia as a "very potent producer of the uncanny" (2020, 58). This is done in the ways the novel depicts the world as a strange and warped place from the sufferer's perspective, as well as through instances of repeated behaviour that invoke doubleness and automatism, the effect of which is to raise doubt as to whether "what appears to be human might in reality be a mechanical process or, reversely, with mistaking an automaton for a living creature" (2020, 59). These are aspects I wish to examine through unnatural narratology in the following section.

4.2 A Narrative Labyrinth

Dementia is an illness that requires others to speak *on behalf* of the sufferer, but it happens more often that others speak *for* them. In the following I will point to instances of the unnatural and the uncanny in the novel in relation to the narratological query: How does unnatural narration contribute to our understanding of dementia as an unnarratable situation? Further, I will examine the descriptions of the patients of Tallskuggan and discuss how the alternating narration (Richardson, 2006, 61) provides the novel with unnatural qualities, but also demonstrates how the illness is refracted and constructed from the perspective of a family member. My analysis therefore focuses on key characters and their "unnatural" functions.

In *Hemmet* the circumstances at Tallskuggan are conveyed by two human narrators, and one non-human perspective. Nina's deeply empathetic view of the patients, with her intimate knowledge of the nursing home's inner workings strikes a stark comparison with Joel's horror-stricken disgust at the unhomeliness of the building and his helplessness regarding his mother's condition. These perspectives are equally important and necessary because while Monika may be the catalyst of the plot, her dementia makes her perspective unnarratable. She is narratively powerless, which is why the third narrator is mobilised.

The heterodiegetic omniscient narrator in *Hemmet* addresses the reader directly and has access to the various rooms and interior world of the patients at Tallskuggan. This

"sophisticated strategy [means to] catch you, the extradiegetic reader, off guard, and make you the subject of diegesis, thereby spiriting or abducting you into the narrative" (Kirby, 1992, 11). This type of narrator is unnatural, suggests Alber, in its omnimentality[91], and its humanly impossible "ability to penetrate the minds of the characters and correctly report all their 'secret activities'" (2016, 93). This effect is made uncanny by the direct address as the narrator appears to give the reader a tour of what could be a future 'home' for them as well: "Dagtid öppnas [ytterdörrarna] automatisk när du närmar dig...Du kan låsa dörren inifrån om du vill, men personalen har nycklar...[Balkongerna] är inklädda med hönsnät, för att du inte ska kunna ta dig ut den vägen" [92] (Strandberg, 2017, 9), and similarly towards the end of the novel, "I morgon flyttar en ny kund in. Kanske är det någon du älskar. Kanske är det du själv"[93] (idem, 323).

Additionally, as the Tallskuggan chapters move from character to character seamlessly, they reveal every thought and sentiment and spare no detail: "*[Monika] är inte ens tio år äldre än jag*, tänker Rita…*Hoppas nån skjuter mig om jag blir som hon*"[94] (idem, 190), "*Det här går inte längre, mamma. Det är för din skull*" [95] (idem, 8), "*Envisa kärring. Ta dom [sic] förbannade pillren bara. Fattar du inte att jag försöker hjälpa dig?*"[96] (idem, 15). The general horror of Tallskuggan is thus explicated by a detached, discerning third party, and helps to connect Monika's story to a larger systemic apparatus that perpetuates stereotypes of Tallskuggan as a place to put that which 'should no longer be seen'. This offers an interesting juxtaposition with

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[91] As discussed by (Culler, 2004, 26-28)

[92] "[During the] daytime, the front doors open automatically as *you* approach…You can lock the door from the inside if you want, but the staff have keys…[The balconies] are surrounded with chicken wire, so you are unable to get out that way."

[93] "A new customer is moving in tomorrow. Maybe it's someone you love. Maybe it's you."

[94] "[Monika] is barely ten years older than me, Rita thinks to herself. I hope someone shoots me if I ever end up like her."

[95] "This can't go on any longer, mum. It's for your sake"

[96] "Stubborn old woman. Take the damn pills, come on. Can't you see I'm trying to help you?"

the so-called “dementia gaze”, referring to patients’ inability to engage with or fully understand the situation they are facing. Joel often remarks on this gaze in Monika. Her dementia is heterotopic, it shifts her perspective both in space and time: “Ingen förstår. Allt är så konstigt hela tiden och det är ingen som lyssnar”[97] (idem, 64), and she has been exiled to a place too far away from Joel’s reach (idem, 7).

Bernhardsson posits the imagery of illness as an exile: “Exilen är denna resa dragen till sin yttersta spets. I en exil är resan inte frivillig och det är ytterst osäkert om det finns någon återvändo” [98] (2010, 68). Dementia is the cause of exile for both Monika and Joel: Monika’s exile to Tallskuggan because she is unable to take care of herself, and Joel’s exile from Stockholm back to the small town where he grew up, because he must put Monika’s affairs in order. In both cases their exile is involuntary, and although Joel tries to return to the city several times, something always prevents him from leaving. Joel is terrified by Monika’s mental deterioration, and only the hope of a swift return to Stockholm, rather than a familial duty to help, keeps him by Monika’s side. In her, he sees his own future, which is essentially a slow, agonising death, and his primary instinct is to flee. “Exilen är en av de mest radikala förluster som finns av hemmet och hemkänslan” [99] (Bernhardsson, 2010, 68). Joel rationalises Monika’s admission as a necessity, but when they arrive at Tallskuggan, they both think about the institution in terms of punishment and isolation: “Vad är det han tvingat in mamma i? Ett helt hus är ersatt med knappt tjugo kvadratmeter” [100] (Strandberg, 2017, 34), like a prison cell. Monika dreads leaving her home, not just because she is unable to understand why, “‘Om jag bara visste vad jag gjort för fel’,

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[97] “Nobody understands. Everything is so strange all the time, and nobody is listening.”

[98] “The exile is this journey taken to its farthest point. In exile the journey is involuntary, and it is extremely uncertain if there will be a return.”

[99] “Exile is one of the most radical losses of home, and the feeling of home”

[100] “What has he forced his mum into? A whole house replaced with barely twenty square meters. “

säger mamma. 'Om du bara berättade det för mig så kunde jag rätta till det'" [101] (idem, 39).

Amalia DeFalco states that "the uncanny is tightly bound to temporality; the inability to return to past sites and past selves often comes into conflict with our memories of these pasts. Memories can become ghosts that haunt the present" (2010, 9). The 'dementia gaze' as read in this context is at once uncanny and unnatural because it establishes co-existing timelines in which the person with dementia is experiencing the past and the present simultaneously and is unable to reconcile the differences between the two states. Additionally, the illness establishes itself as an unnatural space (Alber, 2013, 48). On the one hand, this gaze makes it difficult not only to communicate, but to navigate one's surroundings. Anna, another resident at Tallskuggan, who often imagines herself walking to Paris is frequently baffled by how "dom [sic] har flyttat på allt igen"[102] (Strandberg, 2017, 116). On the other hand, this gaze disregards exterior and interior boundaries. For example, Monika's gaze seems to extend into the psyche of everyone around her, and she has somehow gained access to other people's mindscapes: "*[Din pappa] åker hellre tillbaka än hamnar här*. Sucdi ser på henne. *Hur vet du det?*"[103] (ibid.). Where the dementia gaze enables Anna to travel hundreds of miles away, Monika's gaze extends beyond her own, and into other people's, cognitive interior. We could, as Alber suggests, analyse these impossible spaces in different ways: as a convention adhering to a particular genre (the supernatural, the Gothic, etc.), by attributing them as part of someone's interior landscape, which applies here, or as "exemplifications of particular themes that the narrative addresses" (Alber, 2013, 48), or even "assuming they are part of a transcendental realm such as purgatory or hell" (idem, 49). Dementia could be described as a terrifying, transcendental space to occupy, but I would rather pursue a

[101] "If only I knew what I'd done wrong", says his mother. "If only you'd tell me so I could make it right."

[102] "they've moved everything again"

[103] "'[Your dad] would rather go back than end up here'. Sucdi looks at her. 'How do you know that?'"

more neutral position, and state that the dementia gaze is predominantly an interior landscape made accessible to us by an impossible narrator. This gaze humanises and reveals the doubleness of the patients' living conditions. Their physical and corporeal mobility is extremely limited, but the dementia gaze disregards physical laws and boundaries. Anna's and Monika's new perception encompasses the unactualisable and can therefore be interpreted as an unnatural perspective. Reiterating my statement from Chapter 3, the unnatural aspects of Anna's and Monika's perception should not be understood in negative terms, but rather as an "acceptance of fragmentation" (Rimmon-Kenan, 244, 2007). These characters see the world differently because of their dementia, and while their gaze enables the impossible, it need not be construed as a disability.

Additional unnatural narrative facets of the novel include an example of Iversen's "ikke-længre-helt" voices in the character Edit Andersson. As mentioned above, Edit's dialogue is limited to the following sentence "God dag, mitt namn är Edit Andersson och jag är sekreterare åt direktör Palm"[104] (Strandberg, 2017, 18). This lexical limitation establishes her as a human speaking like an automaton. When she at a later stage in the novel expands this sentence to "jag är sekreterare åt direktör Palm och nu måste ni genast sluta innan han får som han vill"[105] (Strandberg, 2017, 301), she also becomes the automaton that speaks like a human, breaking away from her programming to give a crucial warning. Monika's violent outbursts are also likened to machinery, "ögonen [är] tomma och uttryckslösa. Munnen slapp. Det går så snabbt att det påminner Sucdi om när batterierna tar slut i någon av barnens leksaker"[106] (idem, 116).

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[104] "Good day, my name is Edit Andersson, and I am director Palm's secretary"

[105] "I am the secretary of director Palm and now you must stop immediately before he gets what he wants"

[106] "the eyes are empty and expressionless. The mouth slack. It passes so quickly that it reminds Sucdi of when the batteries in her children's toys run out."

Where Edit could be said to represent the automaton that speaks like a human, the superintendent Elisabeth could be said to be a human who speaks with the dispassionate tone of a machine. As she tonelessly recites Monika's medical history, Elisabeth's tone is almost algorithmic, and her responses to Monika's condition appear like a computer programme responding to if/then events: due to her "fluktuerande konfusion efter en hjärtinfarkt"[107] (idem, 16), she has been prescribed certain medications. Monika has a history of wandering away, "så det får bli rörelselarm"[108] (ibid.), and the need for a bedrail. During Elisabeth's recitation, Nina, our second protagonist, is sweating profusely as she is forced to recall that "Joel var som en bror för henne...en tvillingsjäl…Och Monika kändes mer som hennes mamma än Ninas egen mamma någonsin gjorde"[109] (idem, 46). Elisabeth coolly informs her staff that Monika is prescribed antipsychotics, specifically Haldol, in addition to a usual roster of medications. It is worth noting that none of the other medicines are explained or commented on, except the one usually prescribed for patients with schizophrenia. The idea that Monika is not only sick, but experiencing a major psychotic break, is repeated several times and this assumption cements the characters' belief that Monika's condition is evolving according to established patterns of mental decline, and later establishes doubt as to how normal her behaviour truly is. Nina, in contrast to Elisabeth's deadpan monologue, has responded to Monika's condition in terms of connection and emotion, and she attempts to see the situation from Monika's perspective: "om Monika behöver medicin mot paranoia och psykotiska tillstånd är det illa. Då är hennes demens en mörk plats som gjort henne rädd. Kanske våldsam" [110] (idem, 17). The contrast between these two characters, while they could speak to

[107] "Fluctuating confusion after a heart attack."

[108] "so we're going to go with motion sensors"

[109] "Joel was like a brother to her…a kindred spirit [twin soul]…And Monika felt more like her mother than Nina's own mother ever did."

[110] "if Monika needs medication for paranoia and psychotic states, then it's bad. That means her dementia is a dark place that makes her afraid. Maybe violent."

different states of jadedness in dementia care, is an effective set-up for Nina's character.

Nina represents an intensely empathetic perspective, which is an important function for her as a focalised narrator. She acknowledges that the patients, however unpleasant and difficult her current interactions may be, are different because of an illness that eats away at their life, being and sense of self. Nina's perspective, as a realistic and empathetic medical standpoint, complements Joel's emotional immaturity, and Monika's fate will be decided on the strength of their renewed friendship.

Nina is diplomatic and resourceful in her work, and she has established Tallskuggan as a safe space where she can exert a semblance of control. Her work consists of clear guidelines and rules, "streckade linjer ska signeras, rutor ska kryssas i…Nina vet vem hon är här. Hon har kontroll" [111] (idem, 36). She shows compassion not just for her patients, but on behalf of them. One of her younger colleagues, Johanne, is unable to disguise her disgust of the old people, "och de märker det"[112] (idem, 37). Even if dementia takes away their ability to communicate, Nina believes that their core understanding of their own humanity remains unchanged. She knows that the patients notice if someone treats them as inferior. Johanna calls in sick with stomach flu, which her colleagues interpret as a code for 'hangover', but Nina muses that if Johanna truly is sick, she had better stay home because "[en] smitta som börjar härja på avdelningen är en mardröm för personalen och livsfarligt för de gamla" [113] (ibid.). She takes pride in her work, and actively makes an effort to distinguish the ill person from the way their illness affects their behaviour. One of her patients, Petrus, is verbally abusive, crude and unpleasant. His wife is deeply ashamed of him, "Han skulle hellre dött än bete sig så här"[114] (idem, 25). Nina, however, recognises that his

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[111] "Dotted lines to sign, boxes to check…Nina knows who she is here. She's in control."

[112] "And they can tell."

[113] "an infection ravaging the ward is a nightmare for the staff and fatal for the old people".

[114] "I'd rather he were dead than behave this way"

behaviour is completely involuntary: “Det är inte Petrus som gör det här…Det är hans frontallobsdemens. Ibland måste hon påminna sig om det för att inte hata honom”[115] (idem, 24).

Joel and Nina (re)present two sometimes opposing attitudes towards ageing and age-related illnesses. Joel is sickened and scared by his mother’s illness, and he connects her mental deterioration to his own substance abuse: “Med allt han utsatt sin hjärna för, finns det redan hål i den? *En röta som sakta sprider sig? Äter upp hans minnen, hans jag*?”[116] (my italics, Strandberg, 2017, 22). Nesby and Hambro’s (2019) employment of Ngai’s ‘ugly feelings’ (2005) concerns a trend in Scandinavian pathographies that portrays not a heroic, overbearing patient but a person whose illness breeds feelings of anger, despair and doubt. Joel’s point of view in *Hemmet* explores these feelings from the perspective of a family member. Reading his mental and physical outbursts can be cathartic because he articulates feelings and thoughts that he knows he should not mention: “‘Vem tror du att jag är?’ säger han fastän han vet att han borde låta bli”[117] (Strandberg, 2017, 21). He should not emphasise Monika’s faulty memory, but his mind is already exhausted (which mirrors his mother’s confusion), and he rants internally: “*jag kan inte ta hand om dig jag klarar inte det jag orkar inte längre förlåt du orkade alltid ta hand om oss men jag kan inte”*[118] (idem, 30-31).

On a surface level this litany appears childlike in its stream-of-consciousness delivery, but it speaks volumes on how afraid Joel truly is on his mother’s behalf. He is terrified of losing her. On the first page of *Hemmet* we are told the following:

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[115] “This isn’t Petrus’ doing… It’s his frontal lobe dementia. Sometimes she has to remind herself of that so she doesn’t hate him.”

[116] “Considering all the things that he has exposed his brain to, is there already a hole in it? A rot slowly spreading? Eating up his memories, his self?”

[117] “Who do you think I am?” He asks even though he knows he shouldn’t.”

[118] “I can’t take care of you I am not able I can’t stand it any more I’m sorry you were always able to take care of us but I can’t.”

"Sängen är en grav av fuktigt tyg" [119] (idem, 5). Joel clearly feels buried by his responsibilities, the burden of attention and care needed to look after his mother. He wishes he could just "lämpa av mamma som om hon vore ett hittebarn" [120] (idem, 31), and at one point he packs his bags with every intention of leaving Tallskuggan behind forever. The word "grave" or tomb speaks to Joel's present emotional state, as well as his fear of the future; once Monika moves to Tallskuggan, she will not leave it alive. He is incapable of taking care of her, and is deeply terrified by the implications of his mother's diagnosis. He is equally terrified of Tallskuggan as an institution: "Namnet på hemmet har varit en symbol så länge. Ett skämt för att dölja rädslan. Varje gång mamma förlagt sina läsglasögon, eller inte hittat ordet hon sökte; *Nej, snart hamnar jag väl på Tallskuggan*[121]" (idem, 8). The unspoken reality of going to Tallskuggan is something neither of them dared think or speak aloud, and can only be expressed by the omniscient third-person narrator found in the chapters bearing the epithet Tallskuggan; "Det här är den sista anhalten. Det alla vet, men ingen talar om, är att det sällan görs livsuppehållande åtgärder här"[122] (idem, 10). As Joel's brother says in disgust: "Fy fan att behöva hamna där alltså"[123] (idem, 281), Tallskuggan is presented as the worst and yet the only option for people in Monika's condition.

Joel's perspective is best exemplified as he tries to fill out Monika's life-sheet ("livsark"). A life-sheet is a brief text that summarises important life experiences and preferences on behalf of a person "som på grunn av alder eller sykdom ikke lenger kan snakke, huske eller klare hverdagen selv"[124] (in Simonhjell & Hellstrand, 2019, 3).

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[119] "The bed is a tomb of damp cloth".

[120] "wants to dump his mother like a foundling"

[121] "The name of the nursing home has been a symbol for so long. A joke to mask the fear. Every time his mother misplaced her reading glasses, or couldn't find the word she was looking for: "Why, I'll end up at Tallskuggan soon".

[122] "This is the end of the line. What everyone knows, but no one talks about, is that any form of life support is rare here"

[123] "How bloody awful to have to end up there"

[124] "that due to age or illness, cannot speak, remember or cope in everyday situations on their own"

The life-sheet serves a double purpose, according to Simonhjell and Hellstrand. On the one hand, it provides knowledge about the client's life, and a schematic tool for health practitioners to provide the best individual care for him or her. The life-sheet is important because storytelling is an especially important field of research in gerontology and ageing studies, as many age-related illnesses target memory and speech. The importance and function of the life-sheet in *Hemmet* is that it reveals the similarities between Joel and Monika, and how their lives mirror each other.

The life-sheet in *Hemmet* construes Monika's life through Joel's perspective, the most important part of which was her marriage. Joel never knew his father, "mammas stora kärlek som dog i cancer när Joel var ett par år gammal"[125] (Strandberg, 2017, 21). He makes multiple attempts to pinpoint key events in his mother's life, but as he writes he realises that he has very little to tell, because he simply does not know. At first, all the events he mentions are framed from his own perspective, "mamma var gift med *min* pappa Nils i drygt femton år tills han gick bort i cancer. Vad *jag* vet träffade hon aldrig nån annan efter honom...Min bror föddes då mamma var 28. Jag (Joel) kom när hon var 33"[126] (idem, 59). It is logical that he therefore construes his mother's illness as a punishment for his mistakes: "När han ser henne så här vore det lätt att intala sig att hon är frisk igen. Att allt bara var ett missförstånd, något tillfälligt som är över nu. *hon kan flytta hem igen och jag kan åka tillbaka till Stockholm men den här gången har jag lärt mig en läxa och jag kommer att hålla kontakten*"[127] (idem, 71). His brother Björn does nothing to dissuade him from this thought, "Det kanske inte är mer än rätt att du får ta hand om det här, med tanke på hur mycket hon har fått oroa sig

[125] "Mum's great love who died of cancer when Joel was just a few years old".

[126] "Mum was married to my father Nils for roughly fifteen years until he died of cancer. To my knowledge she never met anyone else…My brother was born when Mum was 28. I (Joel) arrived when she was 33."

[127] "When he sees her [like this] it would be easy to imagine that she is well again. Everything has just been a misunderstanding, a chance event that is over now. *she can move back home again and I can go back to Stockholm but this time I've learned my lesson and I'll keep in touch and*"

för dig genom åren. Det är dags för dig också att växa upp och ta lite ansvar”[128] (Idem, 53)

Joel cannot help shifting the focus onto himself and his role as the black sheep of the family: “Jag var aldrig som dom [sic]. Jag var konstig och lyssnade på konstig musik. Jag färgade håret och hade på mig svarta kläder” [129] (idem, 60). His brother was the one who resembled their father, blond and blue-eyed, and whose memories of his father are similar to those of Monika. Joel’s sexuality is another phantom in this text: “jag vet att [mamma] hoppades att jag och min bästa kompis Nina skulle bli ihop. Ingen hade varit gladare än jag om det funkat så”[130] (ibid.). Most importantly, this text tells us that Joel has struggled with loneliness and his own exile began long before his move to Stockholm. In his youth his queerness and artistic ambitions set him apart from his peers, and similarly his adulthood is filled with lost connections and no real attachments: “När han blev ren försvann hans enda vänner i Stockholm… Det finns ingen kvar som känt honom, inte på riktigt. Bara ytligt bekanta, tillfälliga ligg…ända sen morgonen då han slutade med drogerna vandrar han runt som ett spöke, som om det varit han som dog den natten”[131] (idem, 67). His lack of connection seems to be rooted in his family relationships: “Det finns ingen anledning att prata om något som är jobbigt. Man ska inte gräva i det...Vi pratade aldrig om nånting”[132] (idem, 60). His mother was a private person, which resulted in a borderline isolationist attitude towards the outside world. “Hon skulle avsky att Joel skriver det här brevet. Att

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[128] “Maybe it's only right that you handle this, considering how much she's had to worry about you over the years. It's time for you too to grow up and take some responsibility”

[129] “I was never like them. I was strange and listened to strange music. I dyed my hair and wore black clothes”.

[130] “I know [mum] hoped I would get together with my best friend, Nina. No one would have been happier than me if things had worked out that way.”

[131] “When he got clean, his only friends in Stockholm disappeared... There is no one left who knew him, not really. Only superficial acquaintances, random hook-ups...ever since the morning he stopped taking drugs he has wandered around like a ghost, as if he was the one who died that night.”

[132] “You’re not supposed to talk about things that are difficult. You shouldn’t dig deeper into them…We never talked about anything.”

främlingar ska läsa det. Det är mycket hon skulle avsky med sitt liv om hon förstod det" [133] (idem, 59). Upon reflection, it seems that Monika withdrew from the world after her husband's death. She had no close friends, no personal interests, no neighbours. "Gick hon bara och tänkte på pappa? Väntade på att Joel eller Björn skulle ringa?"[134] (idem, 62), almost as if Monika became a spectre herself after Nils died, her life confined and defined by the four walls of the home they shared. Joel concludes that none of these things accurately describes his mother and tries to think of details that will help the Tallskuggan staff care for his mother. "Efter hjärtinfarkten som gjorde mamma dement pratar hon ofta om att hon haft en nära-döden-upplevelse och såg pappa vänta på henne på 'andra sidan'. Ibland säger hon att han följt med henne tillbaka men har svårt att kommunicera. Ibland verkar hon ha glömt helt att pappa är död" [135] (idem, 61). Joel's attempt to speak on his mother's behalf proves to be an exercise which only reveals how unfit he is for such a role. By that I mean that the aspects of his mother's condition that seem to parallel his own experience heighten his terror and the possibility of him sharing her fate in the future. His fear is echoed by the daughter of another patient, whose anonymity heightens the hereditary aspect of this illness: "Dottern är rädd att hon själv bär på samma sjukdom som sin far…Hon har sett röntgenbilderna av Olofs hjärna. De döda nervcellerna…påminner om en mörk fjäril som brer ut vingarna"[136] (idem, 189) [137].

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[133] "She would hate the fact that he was writing this letter, that strangers were going to read it. There are many aspects of her life she would hate if she knew about them"

[134] "Was she just thinking about Dad all the time? Waiting for Joel or Bjørn to call?"

[135] "After the heart attack that triggered Mum's dementia, she often talks about her near-death experience and seeing Dad waiting for her on the 'other side'. Sometimes she says he came back with her but has difficulty communicating. Sometimes she even seems to forget that Dad is dead".

[136] "The daughter is terrified that she is a carrier of the same illness as her father…She has seen the x-rays of Olof's brain. The dead cells…remind her of a dark butterfly spreading its wings."

[137] Bernhardsson's analysis of Paulrud's *Fjärilen i min hjärna* examines the same image of the x-ray butterfly as a metaphor for the soul: "Fjärilen är själen, livet, som kämpar mot hjärntumoren…en personlig symbol som vetter mot det allmännmänskliga" [The butterfly is the soul, life, fighting against the brain

It is not my intention to reduce Joel's experience to a cliché, rather I want to emphasise why his perspective is important beyond parallelling his mother's experience. While Joel struggles with his role as the primary family member, we are guided and comforted by his point of view. He naturalises and gives voice to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, fear and emotional fatigue: "Han står inte ut längre. Ända sedan han kom hit har allt handlat om sjukdom och förfall. Allt har påmint om dåliga relationer, gamla drömmar som aldrig uppfylldes, den långa raden av misstag som förde honom till den här återvändsgränden"[138] (idem, 156). It is in reaching out, and interacting with the patients, nurses and relatives at Tallskuggan that he realises that being someone's family member is a role for which no one is prepared, but it is not a role he needs to fulfil alone.

Turning to my analysis proper, I will read *Hemmet* as a novel about family, institutions, and the dehumanising realities of dementia. My analysis in the following will examine the dementia home Tallskuggan as a Scandinavian Gothic enclosure, and as a heterotopic, unnatural space. The novel employs alternating narration to mirror and refract the unnarratability of dementia, as the interior world of the character with dementia, Monika, is seldom focalised, but viewed through dialogue and intertextual clues. Moreover, as an additional Gothic note, by not focalising Monika, the narrative 'protects' the readers from infection. If we were to see inside Monika's head, the monster would infect us too. Building on Sofia Wijkmark's reading of this novel (2020), I discuss the ways in which *Hemmet* contests the metaphors of dementia that imbue the sufferers with monstrosity by normalising dementia care and humanising the sufferers, including the perspectives of relatives.

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tumour…a personal symbol that extends to address the universally human] (Bernhardsson, 2010, 267). In Strandberg's novel, the image of the dark butterfly seems only to invoke dread, rather than hope.

[138] "He can't stand it anymore. Ever since he got here, everything has been about disease and decay. Everything has reminded him of bad relationships, old dreams that were never fulfilled, the long line of mistakes that brought him to this dead end."

4.3 Allegories of Living Death

4.3.1 Tallskuggan as a Gothic Enclosure

In the following I examine Tallskuggan as a Gothic enclosure, in being a site of double burial for both patients and staff: patients because their speech and agency are compromised, and staff due to the confining nature of their workplace and the monotony and routines of their work. I will then move on to discuss Tallskuggan as a *heterotopia* (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986), as what Heidi Sohn would call a heterotopic "space reserved for the abnormal, the other, the deviant" (Sohn, 2007, 44), and its juxtaposition with the Gothic forest[139].

Chris Baldick suggests that for "the Gothic effect to be attained, a tale should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a sense of claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration" (1992, xix)[140]. Tallskuggan fulfils these criteria, and functions as an enclosed space separated from society whose inhabitants represent a particular medical anxiety: we inherit not the sins of our fathers, but their illnesses (Strandberg, 2017, 189). Laura Kremmel also suggests that "After the haunted house, the crumbling castle, and the secret crypt, the madhouse is perhaps the most prominent and feared physical structure that has survived throughout the Gothic tradition, from the eighteenth century to its current form. A space crafted out of images of oppression and neglect" (2020, 449). While Tallskuggan is not a madhouse, the institution is nevertheless recognised as a place of dread. "När

[139] "we present the forest as Gothic in our stories because we think it is Gothic, because it frightens us, but it also frightens us because of the fearsome ways we have portrayed it in these stories" (Parker, 2020, 13)

[140] Jackson further notes that enclosures "are central to modern fantasy, from the dark, threatening edifices and castles of Gothic fiction and Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, through the threatening architecture of nineteenth-century tales of terror, to new enclosures of metropolitan nightmare in Dickens, Kafka and Pynchon. Poe's *House of Usher*, Stoker's *Dracula*, Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, Hitchen's *Psycho*, etc. all rely upon the Gothic enclosure as a space of maximum transformation and terror (1981, 47).

Tallskuggans dörrar glider isär framför honom känns det som ett gap som öppnas för att svälja honom" [141] (idem, 210), and ultimately horror: "Om du kom till Tallskuggan i dag skulle du aldrig ana att de gröna väggarna i D-korridoren nyligen varit nedstänkta av blod. Att det samlades i pölar på plastmattan"[142] (idem, 323). Tallskuggan, through its architecture and organisation, speaks of neglect at a financial and legal level; while it is privately run, maintenance of the facility is not a priority for management: "Ventilationen. Lysrören…Det känns som om hela Tallskuggan håller på att rasa ihop"[143] (idem, 155). Tallskuggan is a space of decay, both architecturally and physically (in terms of its inhabitants), and while it only has "fyra korridorer som bildar en ram runt det atrium som kallas allrummet"[144] (idem, 9), it can still be read as a Gothic labyrinth as a place that ritualises entrapment (Cox, 2018, 339). The *unhomeliness* of Tallskuggan is thus implied; not dusty attics, squeaky oaken doors or eerie paintings, but what Tallskuggan *represents*. The narrator in the Tallskuggan chapters constructs the institution with a penitentiary quality, which goes hand in hand with Joel's notion of dementia as a punishment; Monika's dementia entails exile to this terrible place, and because Joel sees so much of himself in his mother, he wants to flee Tallskuggan as soon as possible lest he be 'infected' too: "Joel måste härifrån. Ut från lukterna… han kommer själv att bli galen om han stannar kvar"[145] (idem, 42).

Historically, asylums and madhouses were sites of patriarchal domination, where 'troublesome' women were stowed away from the public to remove them from sight and society. *Hemmet* tweaks this trope of female incarceration in many interesting ways. One example is when Nina discovers Bodil flirting with an imaginary man

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[141] "When the doors to Tallskuggan slide apart in front of him, it feels like a maw opening to swallow him."

[142] "If you came to Tallskuggan today, you would never have guessed that the green walls in the D-corridor had recently been splattered with blood. Collected in pools on the plastic mat."

[143] "The ventilation. The fluorescent lights…It feels like Tallskuggan is on the brink of collapse."

[144] "four corridors creating a frame around the atrium called the common room."

[145] "Joel must get away from here. Away from the smells… he will go insane himself if he stays put."

outside the window, in the dark with the blinds down. Bodil is usually flirtatious and almost gluttonous in her appreciation of men[146], and even at this early stage in the novel, although we the readers are as yet unaware of the monster and the extent of its powers, the monster demonstrates its methods. It allows its victim to see what she wants to see, in Bodil's case, a lustful voyeur: "'Det är en snuskig karl där ute', sager Bodil glädjestrålande… 'Han hoppas väl få se mig naken'"[147] (idem, 57). Nina muses that Bodil must have been beautiful in her youth, with no lack of male companionship, and again Nina displays incredible empathy and insight into her patients' psychology: "Tallskuggan är kvinnornas värld. De flesta som arbetar är kvinnor. De flesta som bor här är kvinnor som överlevt sina män, och de flesta som kommer på besök är döttrar, väninnor, systrar" [148] (idem, 58). Bodil no longer has any real suitors, but the monster (the dirty man outside the window) pays attention to her. When his focus turns to Monika, unsurprisingly Bodil becomes enraged and jealous. What this section of the novel makes abundantly clear is that the residents of Tallskuggan are lonely and their inability to communicate in 'socially acceptable' ways prevents them from making new connections. Even with daily visits, dementia washes away the memory of them like a wave on a beach. The patients' ontological world consists of the four walls of their 'apartments', the four walls of the common room and finally the four walls of Tallskuggan proper. They are thus immured and buried alive socially, corporeally and mentally.

The conditions at Tallskuggan engage with current and long-standing discourses pertaining to welfare services in modern society (Wijkmark, 2020). The building itself is architecturally lacklustre, a greyish-brown square where "korridorernas plastmattor är så blanka att lysrören reflekteras i dem. Väggarna har ledstänger och är målade i en

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[146] Especially Adrian, a ward nurse who often plays the guitar for them, "bättre än Elvis" [better than Elvis] (Strandberg, 2017, 101).

[147] "There's a dirty man out there", Bodil says beaming with joy…"I suppose he hopes to see me naked".

[148] "Tallskuggan is a world of women. Most of the staff are women. Most of the residents are women who've outlived their husbands, and most of the visitors are daughters, female friends, sisters."

pastellgrön nyans som ska verka lugnande, men ger huden en sjuklig ton" [149] (Strandberg, 2017, 9). Under new ownership, Tallskuggan's residents are dubbed customers, "kunder" (idem, 10), and the apartments are 'sold off' quickly so as not to lose money on empty beds. The 'customers' (only Elisabeth uses this term) have their own apartments, but all the doors can be opened from the outside. Essentially, their right to privacy is negated by the institution's creed to keep its residents safe, but also concealed. The attempt to establish a sense of 'a home in the home' falls short, as Monika emphatically states that she recognises the difference between the home she built with her husband, and the 'home', and the 'family' with which she must now reside: "Låt mig följa med hem då. Jag vill inte vara här"[150] (idem, 39). Monika's home is thus established as an integral part of who she is. Joel recognises the same connection: "Vad kommer att hända med mamma när hon kommer dit? När hon inte ens har trädgården och huset och alla välbekanta saker som fyller det? Vad ska då väcka hennes minnen? Locka fram de där små glimtarna av den hon en gång var?"[151] (idem, 22-23). Monika's house (home) is inextricably connected to her memories, and by extension her personality. Removing her from her house destabilises her connection to her inner self, and even more so when the novel suggests that she is removed to a different world entirely: "Tallskuggan ligger bara några kilometer härifrån, på andra sidan berget, men det är en helt annan värld"[152] (idem, 22). Mountains in Scandinavian folklore are traditional sites associated with the supernatural, the underworld and its denizens: "de underjordiske" (those who live under the mountain), creatures like

[149] "The corridor floormats are so shiny that the fluorescent lights reflect in them. The walls have handrails and are painted in a pastel green shade that is supposed to be calming but gives the skin a sickly hue."

[150] "Let me come home with you. I don't want to be here."

[151] "What is going to happen to Mum when she gets there? When she doesn't even have the garden and the house and every familiar thing that fills it? What is going to awaken her memory then? Bring out those small glimpses of who she once was?"

[152] "Tallskuggan lies just a few kilometres from here, on the other side of the mountain, but it is another world entirely"

goblins, elves, the huldra, vetter, not to mention trolls[153]. By journeying to "andra sidan berget", Strandberg invites us to think about Tallskuggan as a reversal of a Gothic castle, and a journey into the underworld where different rules and laws apply. Tallskuggan is presented as a semi-heterotopic, unnatural space, whose inner elements (both patients and lifeless objects) are continuously rearranged, filled and emptied. The rooms are meagre reflections of the people whose lives have been downsized to "knappt tjugo kvadratmeter"[154] (idem, 34), and these rooms essentially become decorated coffins: "Joel vet mycket väl varför lägenheten blev ledig. Någon har dött. Förmodligen i den där sängen"[155] (idem, 35).

Moreover, it is significant that the institution is named after and is situated adjacent to a forest, and, as we saw in the previous section, that it is given narrative powers. The setting of Gothic fiction is, as Leffler states, often related to the characters, "but in the Scandinavian tales the setting – the landscape and the wilderness – also plays the part of a character itself" (2008, 59-60). The Gothic castle is also replaced with the wilderness, "the large, dark forest" (idem, 61), where different laws and rules apply. The reader is thus confronted by "a different world in which [ethical and behavioural codes] do not operate, or operate in distorted forms" (idem, 65). This facet of the novel demonstrates simultaneously how Tallskuggan (the institution) encloses its inhabitants, while also signalling that the location operates outside society's norms and rules. Furthermore, this novel also indicates the fascination of the *fantastic* with the unseen and absence. Unlike its sister category, the colourful and resplendent, maximalist *marvellous*, the *fantastic* offers a bleaker, unseen world, inhabited by denizens that by implication are not fit to be seen. What this means for my purposes is

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[153] In this context one might consider the folkloric motif of being "bergtagen" (taken by the mountain), which has a long tradition in Swedish literature, as intertextual patriarchal criticism in Victoria Benedictsson's *Den bergtagna* (1888) and in contemporary texts such as John Ajvide Lindqvist's short story "Gräns" in *Pappersväggar* (2006), and Stefan Spjut's *Stallo* (2012).

[154] "Barely twenty square metres."

[155] "Joel knows very well why the apartment became available. Somebody died. Presumably in that bed."

that Tallskuggan is a *place* where 'unsightly' things are enclosed. Tallskuggan has therefore become a site of horror because it is a metonymic reference to dementia, a notion which I will discuss further in the following section.

4.3.2 Mirrors and Rotting Bodies

The introduction of doubles through mirrors, reflections or portraits is a common feature of contemporary Gothic and fantastic fiction. Jackson argues this indicates a preoccupation with visibility and vision, "mirrors, glasses, reflections, portraits, eyes – which see things myopically, or distortedly, or out of focus – to effect a transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar" (1981, 43). I will therefore pay particular attention to the ways in which Tallskuggan mirrors the 'horror' of ageing, and by examining the layers of mirroring in the text we can see how these facets enable the abject to emerge.

Firstly, physical mirrors serve as moments of reflection for the focalised character, which further solidifies the Gothic effect of the text. The "fearful sense of inheritance" (Baldick, 1992, xix) is explicated through the emphasis on familial relationships, and how corporeal features like eye colour and physical build, and by extension illnesses, are inherited: "[Joel stänger] skåpdörren och möter sin egen blick i spegeln. Ögonen har samma grå färg som mammas, och han undrar vad som kommer att hända när han själv blir gammal"[156] (idem, 22). The novel regularly compares Joel and Monika by their similar eyes, which emphasises Joel's concerns about Monika's dementia being hereditary (idem, 9). In addition, Joel wonders if his substance abuse has already created a 'rot' in his brain (idem, 22), and that he is more prone to 'infection'. His concerns are echoed by another character, whose fear of dementia prevents her from doing tests that could confirm her as a carrier of the same disease as her father (idem, 189). The mirror reveals how these characters are alike, but it reflects an uncomfortable and uncanny future, one in which the younger generation is genetically forced to repeat the "sickening descent into disintegration" (Baldick, 1992, xix).

[156] [Joel closes] the cupboard door and meets his own gaze in the mirror. The eyes are the same grey shade as his mother's, and he wonders what will happen when he grows old himself."

Institutions like Tallskuggan reproduce patterns of hiding that which is unseemly, or in other words, the things in ourselves we cannot bear to examine too closely.

Tallskuggan and its patients are reflections of a world which is deeply and uncannily familiar, and as the unnatural narrator provides a panoramic overview of Tallskuggan, its residents and its staff, we are introduced to a house of the *abject*: "Wiborg fortsätter stirra på Sucdi medan de tar av henne blöjan. Avföringen är kolsvart av järntabletterna hon äter" [157] (Strandberg, 2017, 11), "Dagmar har redan börjat nicka till i sin rullstol, men Petrus stirrar intensivt på filmens vimsiga hembiträde. *Din satans fitta!* Skriker han. *Din satans slyna!* Vera hyssjar otåligt" [158] (idem, 13); *"Jag tror äpplet har åkt ut*, säger Anna när de kommer in. Hennes ilsket röda tarm sticker mycket riktigt ut ur stjärten. Det är en rektal prolaps som ingen operation fått bukt med"[159] (idem, 12-13). This is a space that mirrors and reverses the process of ageing, whereby the elderly are depicted and treated as children.

On a general level, 'unsightly' signals the abject in the format of bodies that overflow with flesh and fluids, and cognitive deficits which disregard social decorum and acceptable behaviour. An example of how this is expressed is the perspective of the nurse Johanna. She is repulsed by the patients, and their naked bodies: "Hon hoppar äcklat undan när hon hör ett vått väsande, ett plaskande mot golvet. Vera verkar inte märka att hon kissar medan hon stapplar mot sängen. *Det här är inte okej...det här är fan inte okej*"[160] (idem, 86).

The *abject* comes into play in *Hemmet* in its representations of 'evil'. 'Evil', in this example as well as in real life, is relative, and Strandberg plays with the verticality and

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[157] "Wiborg keeps staring at Sucdi while they take off her nappy. Her stool is black as coal from the iron tablets she takes."

[158] Dagmar is nodding off in her wheelchair already, but Petrus is staring intensively at the film's scatter-brained maid. You fucking cunt! he screams. You fucking bitch! Vera hushes him down impatiently."

[159] "I think the apple has fallen out, says Anna when they enter. Her glaringly red intestine is indeed sticking out of her behind. It is a rectal prolapse that no operation could remedy."

[160] "She jumps back in disgust when she hears a wet hiss, a splash on the floor. Vera doesn't seem to notice that she is peeing as she staggers towards the bed. This is not okay…this is bloody well not okay!"

mobility of evil as defined on a societal and personal level. There are several undercurrents of societal evils in *Hemmet* as well. First, there are the capitalist forces that dictate Tallskuggan's resources, which often mean that (overqualified) nurses like Nina lose shifts because management cannot 'afford' her, and while the facility is up to standard, it is in need of repair and modernisation. Secondly, Tallskuggan is located in a small town, which also acts like its own microcosm that makes room for harmful opinions and behaviours. Sucdi, the only nurse apart from Nina who seems to take pride in her work, and treats the patients with dignity and compassion, is often subjected to racist comments and micro-aggressions from other nurses, and sometimes from the patients themselves. Based on her name alone, I surmise that Gorana (Slavic origin) has a multicultural background, but she is never singled out. Notably, Gorana and Johanna have similar attitudes towards the patients: "- Jag har sänkt hennes säng så mycket det går ifall tokkärringen skulle klättra över grinden igen. Gorana verkar märka att Nina är omskakad, för dragen mjuknar. - Förlåt. Jag glömde att ni kände varandra sen innan. - Det är inte okej att uttrycka sig så där oavsett"[161] (idem, 169). Gorana also jokes about overdosing Petrus with insulin, "så att vi slipper honom"[162] (idem, 288). Sucdi and Nina stand out as the most sympathetic characters, not just because they treat the patients with respect, but also because they do their best to act according to the family's wishes. After midsummer's eve, the monster takes complete control of Monika. Joel demands that the ward manager take action: "Jag vill åka in med henne. Det är inte bara det här anfallet. Hon är sig inte lik... och ja, jag vet, hon är dement, men hon är helt personlighetsförändrad. Det här med att hon brutit armen med flit och varit våldsam... och hon pratar om sig själv i tredje person och säger att hon inte är min mamma och det är... det kan inte vara naturligt"[163] (idem, 195). Elisabeth

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[161] "I've lowered her bed as much as possible in case the lunatic climbs over the gate again." Gorana seems to notice that Nina is shaken, because her features soften. "Sorry. I forgot that you knew each other from before." "It's not okay to say things like that in any case."

[162] "So we won't have to deal with him"

[163] "I want to take her [to the hospital]. It's not just this seizure. She's not like herself…and yes, I know, she has dementia, but her personality is completely changed. [And] this about her breaking

believes these incidents lie within the scope of Monika's illness, but Sucdi speaks up and suggests that they bring in a doctor. Joel is thankful for her intervention, "Han kan inte låta bli att undra vad som händer med alla de gamla på Tallskuggan som inte har anhöriga som slåss för dem, som är obekväma för deras räkning. Vem ska kräva hjälp åt Edit Andersson, eller Lillemor, eller de konstiga systrarna längst ner i D-korridoren som ingen verkar hälsa på?"[164] (idem, 196). Elisabeth presents Tallskuggan as the best place for Monika, with saccharine platitudes that barely disguise her pecuniary motives, "nån måste ju vara här och ta hand om kunderna, eller hur?"[165] (idem, 38), "[Gamla människor] är så härliga, visst är dom [sic]?"[166] (idem, 41), but all she accomplishes is to infantilise her patients and antagonise their relatives: "Tänk ändå vad dom [sic] kan se fridfulla ut. Som små barn"[167] (idem, 262). Her emotionless delivery, compared with Joel's secret wish to drop his mother off like a 'foundling', represents an infantilising attitude which, given the many examples of child-like behaviour in the novel, is understandable, but is nevertheless construed as doing more harm than good when it comes to the patients' welfare. The text dwells on these moments of unfairness and invites the readers to contemplate the possibility that while dementia is an awful illness, the sufferers are not always met with compassion, but often with infantilisation and cavalier verbal abuse. While these nurses are portrayed as unsympathetic, the real 'evil' is not necessarily their behaviour, but how their actions and experiences unfortunately benefit the 'real' evil.

Secondly, the mirror reveals what tries to stay hidden and in so doing reflects uncomfortable truths. Foucault calls the mirror a "sort of mixed, joint experience"

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her arm on purpose and being violent…and she talks about herself in the third person and says that she isn't my Mum and it's… this can't be natural."

[164] "He can't help but wonder about what happens to all the old people at Tallskuggan without relatives to fight for them, or who are unhappy on their behalf. Who's going to demand help for Edit Andersson, or Lillemor, or the weird sisters at the end of the D corridor who no one seems to visit?"

[165] "Someone has to be here and take care of the customers, don't they?"

[166] "[Old people] are so delightful, aren't they just?"

[167] "Just think how peaceful they look. Like little children."

between utopias and heterotopias, because the mirror exists in the real world, but portrays a placeless place (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, 24). What is a mirror if not a temporary portrait of a subject? I am drawing a loose comparison between the mirror and the portrait as used in Gothic fiction as objects of duplicity and doubleness. Both can reveal something about the subject displayed, and they can also be doors that open onto secret passageways or compartments. Tallskuggan has no ominous family portraits, but there are the "Marcus Larson-tavlorna i dagrummet. Skepp på stormande hav" [168] (Strandberg, 2017, 288). Joel comments that they are too dramatic, too disquieting (idem, 32) for a dementia ward, and in a way he is right. Marcus Larson (1825-1864) was a painter primarily known for his landscapes and seascapes. These pictures that depict chaotic forces beyond human reckoning or control suggest portraits and paintings as a Gothic convention, and also as a mirror of the true inner lives of the patients at Tallskuggan. A lonely sailor upon a stormy sea is perhaps a heavy-handed metaphor for the experience of dementia, but I read them as parallel experiences, as both the sailor and the patient are isolated geographically and socially, confined by metaphysical and material boundaries in a landscape that prevents mobility and communication. Additionally, Monika conceals handwritten notes behind one of these pictures, which Nina realises that Monika tried to tell them earlier during her examination at the hospital: "*Finns i sjön"*[169] (idem, 288).

The pictures are therefore instrumental in two revelations. First, although they are dramatic and disquieting, they are truer allegorical representations of the confusing reality that is dementia. The fact that Joel finds them disturbing could indicate that he is able to imagine how terrified his mother must be, but he represses the knowledge, because he is presented with no other alternative. In this manner, he gives voice to the complex emotions felt as a family member in a situation that has very few options, and none of them are optimal. This revelation, as regards narrative and character development, must be narrated by Joel as his perspective has participated in

[168] "The Marcus Larson paintings in the common room. Ships on stormy seas."

[169] "Is in the sea".

dehumanising and ostracising the patients at Tallskuggan. He needs to understand that he is the 'parent' in this situation, and he must make hard decisions. Moreover, Joel has felt ostracised and lonely for most of his life, and in this regard, he should have the capacity to sympathise with his mother and the other patients at Tallskuggan. This emotional development, however, must be coaxed into being by accepting that decay, while difficult and uncomfortable to witness, is natural and inevitable.

Secondly, the pictures contain the vital clue that reveals the true nature of the monster: "DET VAR INTE NILS SOM VÄNTADE PÅ MIG. HAN BARA LÅTSADES… HAN SER ALLT JAG SER NÄR HAN ÄR HÄR JAG MÅSTE GÖMMA SNÄLLA HITTA DET HÄR. DET ÄR INTE NILS DET ÄR INTE NILS"[170] (idem, 288). This revelation fills Nina with a terror-infused relief: "Det är inte Nils. Och det är inte heller hennes mamma… Den där saken i D6 har ljugit hela tiden"[171] (idem, 289). Joel finds a similar note scribbled on a crossword puzzle, but he is left with the sickening realisation that this note was her last missive before the monster intervened: "*Hon kan inte skriva med bruten arm*"[172] (idem, 264).

The mythology of Tallskuggan is the metaphoric representation of the abject as a preexisting threat in society: "Det finns alltid fler bakom dig i kön"[173] (idem, 10). Yet the hierarchy of this institution treats the residents as interchangeable pieces in a larger economic system and takes advantage of the patients' reduced agency. Some of the nurses do their best to humanise and treat their charges with dignity and respect, as most of them require assistance with everything from hygiene to eating. The beginning of the first Tallskuggan chapter attempts to heighten our sense of the abject and the creepy by addressing the reader directly, but this perspective is mitigated as we follow Sucdi and Nina on their morning rounds. Their methodical and careful routine is

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[170] "IT WASN'T NILS WHO WAITED FOR ME. HE ONLY PRETENDED… HE SEES EVERYTHING I SEE WHEN HE'S HERE I HAVE TO HIDE PLEASE FIND THIS. IT'S NOT NILS IT'S NOT NILS."

[171] "It's not Nils. It's not her mother either… That thing in D6 has been lying the whole time."

[172] "She can't write with a broken arm"

[173] "There are always more people behind you in the queue."

cinematic, and as we hover above each scene, getting bits of cursive dialogue that introduce each inhabitant of the D corridor, it is strikingly normal: Tallskuggan is not a house of monsters, but houses people who require constant attention and patience. They are victims of a monstering discourse enabled by their removal from society, into a space that, depending on the perceiver, reflects only decay and suffering. That does not mean that the novel employs monstrous metaphors uncritically.

4.3.3 Metaphors of Monstrosity

In the following I will examine how *Hemmet* plays with the juxtaposition of supernatural and "natural" infection, as a way of navigating monstrous metaphors surrounding dementia. It is also an extension of the way the abject and unsightly emerge to announce the unseen supernatural. The primary textual monster is a discorporate entity, but it leaves a physical trace through greasy stains on the walls which no manner of cleaning can remove completely: "[Joel] gnuggar hårt med den gröna sidan av svampen… [tills] fläcken och tapetmönstret försvunnit"[174] (idem, 54), only for it to emerge in Tallskuggan: "Ljuset fladdrar i rummet. Glänser i en fettfläck på väggen"[175] (idem, 68). This greasy stain signifies the path and transfer of infection, and in a text that is occupied with family and notions of hereditary 'stains', this concept is complicated by the revelation that Joel was responsible for bringing the monster to Tallskuggan. This text employs a close juxtaposition between the supernatural transformation and the physical transformation of dementia, and this suggestion of dementia as an 'infection' must therefore be explored further.

The Gothic aspects of *Hemmet* enhance the clinical examples of dementia of different varieties, such as violent outbursts, loss of speech, and limited physical and social mobility. The novel plays with the ambiguity of medical uncertainty, which speaks to the function of the *fantastic*. The *fantastic* is first and foremost the hesitation

[174] "[Joel] scrubs with the green side of the sponge…[until] the stain and the wallpaper pattern have gone."

[175] "The light flickers in the room. Reflects in a greasy stain on the wall."

and the doubt that occur when the protagonist encounters the supernatural. However, in the case of *Hemmet*, the supernatural is continuously negated through medical explanations. Dementia as a general explanation for erratic behaviour is the cause by default: "Det brukar skämtas om Exorcisten-scener här i personalrummet när de fått se ovanligt tvära humörsvängningar och personlighetsförändringar, plötsligt uppdykande låtsaskompisar, kaskadspyor"[176] (idem, 285). Nevertheless, one can detect the burgeoning doubt in the characters in their attempts to circle strange events back to familiar ground: "*Det är demensen. Det är inget konstigt*"[177] (idem, 110). The novel heightens the feeling of doubt by juxtaposing images of abject bodies and supernatural imagery, such as flickering lights, ghostly shapes travelling through walls and depictions of violent possession with clinical, yet visceral descriptions of old bodies in decay, of medicines administered "oralt, analt och vaginalt"[178] (idem, 11). The monster we encounter in *Hemmet* is a clever mimic and takes advantage of dementia patients' mercurial transformations: it controls their limbs, voice, consciousness, and, perhaps its most horrific ability, it taps into other people's memories and consciousness. It manipulates its victims with Faustian callousness by offering them the cure for their dementia and assumes the form most likely to gain its victim's trust. It lies, deceives, and blurs the borders of dreams and reality, and uses the usual confusion of dementia to hide its true nature from the patients and their nurses: "[Anna] förstår nu. Både hon och Lillemor har haft fel. Det där är varken en ängel eller ett spöke. Det är nåt helt annat"[179] (idem, 147). It also mimics established conventional patterns of monstrosity "Ett kacklande skratt igen. Det känns bekant från hundratals skräckfilmer och mardrömmar och sagor. Inte äkta alls. Och Nina förstår plötsligt något. Det som ligger där i sängen bara spelar. Visar upp bilden av det

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[176] "They'll make jokes about Exorcist scenes here in the staffroom when they've seen unusually bad mood swings and personality changes, sudden appearances of imaginary friends, cascade vomiting".

[177] "It's the dementia. It's nothing weird."

[178] "administer medications orally, anally and vaginally"

[179] "[Anna] understands now. Both she and Lillemor have been mistaken. That is neither an angel nor a ghost. It is something else entirely."

förväntade. Det här är inte dess naturliga sätt. 'Duktig flicka', säger varelsen i sängen och nickar. 'Lite måste man ju göra sig till'"[180] (idem, 304). There is a performativity to the monster, as it has learned how to create an atmosphere of maximum terror.

The monster in *Hemmet* abuses the already abused demographics in a cruel and sadistic manner. It considers itself a *hitchhiker* from the manner in which it arrived in the mortal plane, but it behaves like a vampiric parasite, a possessive spirit. It shares a few characteristics of some vampiric lore, mainly the one where it needs permission 'to be let in'; the host must allow the monster to inhabit its body. Its discorporate figure is the perfect disguise for approaching its targets, as the dementia fills in the blanks: Lillemor sees an angel, pale and androgynous (idem, 86), Bodil sees a virile visitor, and Monika sees the love of her life.

Clasen argues that the primary function "of a fictional monster is to be salient. It can fulfil that function by being dangerous because humans are hard-wired to pay attention to dangerous agents, but the monster becomes even more interesting by being unnatural" (Clasen, 2012, 224). I would add that a monster becomes more salient, not to mention terrifying, when it originates in the familiar and 'safe'. Monika's transformation from mother to monster in the eyes of Nina and Joel elevates the emotional distress, because her transformation could be explained medically, to an extent. Moreover, the revelation of the monster's true nature also reveals that the world and the spaces in between are more dangerous than assumed.

Shildrick argues that while monsters are often dependent upon various cultural discourses, the truly monstrous thing about them is their embodied form, from their corporeality to how they establish their difference from the normative mode of being human (2012, 9). Moreover, "what links the monstrous others...is their unnatural and often hybrid corporeality" (Shildrick, 2012, 10), in other words: the more like *us* the

[180] "A cackling laugh again. It feels familiar from hundreds of horror movies and nightmares and fairy tales. Not real at all. And Nina suddenly realises something. The thing in the bed is just acting. Showing the image of the expected. This is not its natural behaviour. "Clever girl," says the creature in the bed and nods. "One has to put on a bit of a performance".

monsters are, the more uncanny and terrible the effect they produce. In this novel, the monster with no physical body requires a human host: “Det som tagit över Monika är en parasit som sugit all kraft ur henne. Tärt bort hennes kött tills det bara återstår ett skelett med för stor hudkostym”[181] (Strandberg, 2017, 303).

Having established that Monika’s behaviour is due to supernatural interference, Nina uses the patient records to establish a timeline (idem, 285), and discovers the monster’s behavioral pattern. She takes note of the patients who were scared when Monika moved in, “Vera hängde handdukar över badrumsspegeln…Anna slutade med sina promenader” [182] (ibid.), and those who were happy, “Lillemor fick sin ängel. Bodil sina karlar. Wiborgs föräldrar svarade äntligen i telefonen”[183] (ibid.). The monster fulfils their most desperate wishes, to be seen, heard and loved again. Even if it is all an act, a twisted reflection of reality, the monster seems to bend the natural laws of the known universe in order to gain the women’s trust. He conjures up celestial beings to comfort Lillemor’s zeal, and he disregards the separation of the living and the dead to reunite Wiborg with her parents. The monster terrifies the staff “genom att deras hemligheter hållits upp mot dem… Känner till deras smärtpunkter”[184] (idem, 286), but interestingly it does not threaten to kill or hurt them. The real threat, claims the monster, has already entered everyone: “Du håller på att bli som vi. Jag känner det på lukten. Din hjärna är alldeles rutten… Sucdi kommer att byta blöjor på dig. Och alla dina kollegor kommer att veta att ingen älskar dig, för ingen hälsar på dig. Du har bara mig och Petrus och Wiborg och dom [sic] andra, och sen dör du”[185] (idem, 252-253). The monster successfully weaponises the patients

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[181] “What has taken over Monika is a parasite that has sucked all power from her. Consumed her flesh until only a skeleton in an oversized skinsuit remains.”

[182] “Vera hung towels over the bathroom mirror…Anna stopped going for walks.”

[183] “Lillemor got her angel. Bodil got her men. Wiborg’s parents finally answered the phone.”

[184] “by using their secrets against them… [As if Monika knew] their pressure points.”

[185] “You’re becoming like us. I can smell it. Your brain is completely rotten… Sucdi is going to change your nappies. And all your colleagues are going to know that no one loves you, because nobody comes to visit. You’ve only got me and Petrus and Wiborg and the others, and then you’ll die.”

against Nina: “Petrus armbågar rör sig snabbt mot dem… Bodils fingrar sluter sig runt Ninas hals”[186] (idem, 310), adding to the horror of presenting abject bodies as mindless creatures reduced to their most basic instincts.

Joel, examining Nina’s notes, extrapolates that “Mamma har smittat ner de andra på Tallskuggan. Både Lillemor och Anna var rädda för det nya som kommit hit till hemmet. Till deras hem”[187] (idem, 299). Monika is therefore construed as a carrier of a monstrous infection, and because of the novel’s established mode of concatenating medicine with the supernatural, one might think that this was meant as a reflection of dementia as a monstrous illness. That is not the case, however. The dementia and its unnatural gaze have in fact been instrumental in discovering the monster, situating it as a monstrous entity separate from illness and character. Lillemor and Anna saw through the monster posing as something else before anyone else did, perhaps because their understanding of reality already allowed for the presence of unnatural or unlikely phenomena (like the presence of angels, or Anna casually strolling to Paris from Sweden in the course of a morning). Their experience of the world lies in the realm of *the marvellous*, if one can superimpose or merge the notion of experientiality with this genre. Joel and Nina must *acknowledge* the possibilities pertaining to the existence of the monster, in terms of a wider context, even if these possibilities are terrifying. In other words, their understanding of the world must expand in order to defeat the monster. The revelation of this monster’s origins and existence ruptures ontological suppositions of the literary universe, and this idea propels Nina and Joel’s investigation: “tänk om vi bara inbillar oss?... Men om det stämmer, fattar du vad det innebär? Inte bara för Monika utan...allt?... Liv. Död. Allt däremellan. Allt bortom det”[188] (idem, 257). Joel speculates that the monster might be “en demon? Vi kanske

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[186] “Petrus’s elbows move quickly toward them…Bodil’s fingers close around Nina’s throat.”

[187] “Mum has infected the others at Tallskuggan. Both Lillemor and Anna were afraid of the new arrival to the home. Into *their home*.”

[188] “what if we’re just imagining things?... But, if it’s true, do you realise what it means? Not just for Monika, but for…everything? Life. Death. Everything in between. Everything beyond.”

ska ringa en katolsk präst?"[189] (idem, 248), all in an effort to consolidate his doubts into familiar frames, which possibly suggests that he would be more comfortable, literally, dealing with a familiar evil than dealing with the unknown: "Efter några dagar kommar han tro att han har inbillat sig att mamma får påhälsningar av de döda. Eller rättare sagt, han kommer äntligen inse att han har inbillat sig. Det måste ju vara inbillning"[190] (idem, 239).

Denying that Monika's condition has a supernatural cause will only cause their minds to deteriorate alongside hers. *To doubt* is to give in to fear, and as Nina has commented from the start "Det är i sprickorna som kaoset sipprar in"[191] (idem, 307). The monster singles Joel out as the weakest link, and manages to possess Joel for a while, entering the cracks of his greatest insecurity: "det var tack vare dig jag *kunde* följa med henne. Infarkten var ditt fel. Hon oroade sig sjuk för dig"[192] (idem, 311). The monster weaponises the patients to get what he wants, a strong body in which to explore the world, but Monika hardly fits that description. Nina therefore surmises that the monster "vill in i nån av oss. Det är därför den utsatt oss för det här"[193] (idem, 307). Monika was merely a means to an end as the monster itself negates intentionality: "Tror du verkligen att det här har med Monika att göra? Det var bara en slump att det blev hon"[194] (idem, 304). The monster thus separates itself from the illness, and more importantly, from the person and from punishment. The monster did not target Monika or Joel, and thus offers a meta-commentary on illness as an arbitrary evil and the monstrous metaphors of the text: this was not a matter of supernatural punishment, but merely an arbitrary event.

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[189] "A demon? Should we call for a Catholic priest?"

[190] "In a few days he'll think he's imagined that his mum gets visitations from the dead. Or more correctly, he will finally realise that he has imagined it. It has to be his imagination."

[191] "Chaos enters through the cracks".

[192] "It's thanks to you that I *could* follow her. The heart attack was your fault. She worried herself sick about you."

[193] "Wants to enter one of us. That's why it has put us through all this."

[194] "Do you really think this is about Monika? It was just a coincidence that it was her."

Joel prepares to face the monster, armed with information from his horror books regarding "exorcismer och besatthet och nära döden-upplevelser. Hittade latinska citat, motstridiga råd, instruktioner om salt och salvia"[195] (idem, 298), none of which proves useful when he realises that even if the monster is vanquished, Monika's life is forfeited. Vanquishing the monster means killing his mother. This removes any hope of recovery from the monstrous infection. Adding to his psychological stress is Monika's admission that she is ready to die: "Jag måste få slippa. Jag klarar inte det här längre"[196] (idem, 316). Joel's theoretical knowledge of the monster has proved ineffectual because this monster operates with rules unfamiliar to him. Nina, by contrast, demonstrates a practical knowledge of how to deal with the person afflicted. When faced with the reality that this story will not end well, Nina does what she has always done: she acts in accordance with her patient's wishes, humanising her patients in the process. Nina is no stranger to easing souls into the next realm, and uses her experience as a mother to calm and comfort Monika. Nina does not compare Monika to a child as Elizabeth does, but she applies similar tactics to deal with her discomfort, "precis som Daniel när han hade nattskräck… Monika vrider sig precis som Daniel gjorde, försöker komma undan. Nina kramar henne ännu lite hårdare. Viskar tröstande... Monika luktar surt och motbjudande, men Nina kysser ändå hennes fuktiga tinning"[197] (idem, 314-5). Despite any discomfort to herself, Nina acts only according to what Monika needs. In advocating for and allowing Monika her agency, Nina effectively demonstrifies Monika in her last moments of belonging to herself.

The novel ends with Monika becoming a ghost story meant to scare the new employees at Tallskuggan, "Ibland kan man se henne vandra i D-korridoren om nätterna… I en annan version vandrar Monika runt i skogen på berget med en sticka i

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[195] "Exorcisms and possessions and near-death experiences. [He] looked up latin quotes, contradictory advice, instructions about salt and sage."

[196] "I have to let go. I can't do this any longer"

[197] "Just like Daniel when he had night terrors…Monika writhes just like Daniel used to, trying to break free. Nina hugs her a little tighter. Whispers comfortingly… Monika smells sour and disgusting, but Nina kisses her damp forehead anyway."

handen. Hon försöker hitta hem”[198] (idem, 323). As an institution Tallskuggan will always be a place of death and decay that will use its patients to bolster its own myth, but these are not tales of monsters, but of the exploitation of a vulnerable group at the hands of a medical machinery whose callous gaze is sometimes indistinguishable from that of monstrous intervention.

[198] “Sometimes you can see her wandering along the D corridor at night…In another version Monika wanders around in the woods on the mountain with a knitting needle in her hand. She’s trying to go home.”

5 Ragnar Hovland's *Ei vinterreise*: Cancer, Masculinity and Road Trips

5.1 Illness as a Dark Companion

Ei vinterreise (henceforth *EV*) is a story of doubles. The novel has a dual narrative structure (a diary and a road narrative), and doubles and delegates the right to speak across multiple characters. Furthermore, the diary narrator describes the anxieties and uncertainties surrounding his cancer as a "*mørk kompis*"[199] (Hovland, 2001, 285). The illness is doubled and personified as a shadow version of the one who is sick. Using language and metaphors that invoke darkness, chaos and terror, both narratives engage with cancer as a physical and psychosomatic threat[200]. The metaphors of cancers intersect with Gothic motifs and discourses, and much of the novel engages with mobile heterotopias such as the 'road', 'journey', and 'exile', which frame the individual narrators as anti-heroes, and their journey as a quest for a kind of redemption. Lindemann, a taciturn preacher having a crisis of faith, wants to reconnect with an old flame. Tomas, Lindemann's old schoolmate, wants to be part of, and remembered for, something larger than himself, and the diary narrator needs to live life to the fullest while he still can.

Earlier readings of Hovland's novel have focused on the composition of the two narratives with particular emphasis on the literary and cultural aspects of cancer (Welle, 2010), where "fiksjonsdelen opnar for ei mytologisering av kreftsjukdommen og dagbokskrivaren sin situasjon"[201] (Bondevik & Synnes, 2018, 169; Welle, 2010). Lindemann's character has been interpreted as an expression of melancholic life

[199] "a dark buddy"

[200] I reference different contemporary sources from the 1990s, such as Jackie Stacey, Arthur Frank and Susan Sontag, to illuminate the then current metaphoric discourse of cancer, which informs the novel's masculine framework, i.e. the accepted forms of masculine expression.

[201] "the fictional section enables the mythologisation of the cancer and the diarist's situation"

mastery (*livsmestring*) (Sortland, 2007), while others have emphasised the importance of a "positive social context in dealing with illness" (Nesby, 2019, 244). My contribution encompasses many of these points, but I read Lindemann's story as an unnatural narrative that employs Scandinavian Gothic imagery as a complex literary strategy. This strategy is used as a coping mechanism by the diary narrator and visualises and manifests the 'ugly' emotions in connection with illness and masculinity.

The Scandinavian Gothic is actualised in three ways: through fractured narration, monstrous body imagery, and the landscape. The shock and chaos of the cancer creates a physical and mental refraction in the diary narrator, and threatens his masculine identity, as a "*heil kar*"[202] (Hovland, 2001, 253), and the landscape of his body post-surgery feels defamiliarised and strange, with imagery and perspectives reminiscent of Frankenstein's creation. The diary narrator uses the tools available to him to write his way out and through a body in decay, represented by Lindemann's journey through a Gothic landscape. By connecting the cancer narrative with a darker, more 'savage' past and a wilderness of nature, these parallel stories indicate a deeper introspection in those who are ill, not necessarily with a pedagogical component (as in testimonial pathographies), but a phenomenological *situ*. The wilderness is connected to a Scandinavian, Northern identity, but also to a place where one surrenders control. This refers to the attempt to exert control over nature which, as stereotyped through Arctic literature (Wærp, 2017), is often construed as a masculine endeavour. To traverse the wild, go deeper and discover a *terra incognita,* can be read as a masculine ideal. I interpret the Lindemann narrative as the diarist's literary exercise to explore a masculine identity under threat in its 'natural habitat': the open road, leading into the warped, untamed country of a mythologised homeland. The Scandinavian Gothic is

[202] "Whole man", similar to the phrase "hel ved", literally translated to "whole wood", descriptive of someone honourable and genuine, honest and fair.

evoked through the landscape[203] that complements the nagging sensation of being pursued, not to mention the novel's title. Lindemann's story emphasises what the diary narrator tries to embody: the importance of family, a healthy outlet in times of fear and discouragement, and perhaps most importantly, that a good laugh is a quintessential tool for coping with a terrifying illness.

The two narratives are typographically differentiated. The diary text is italicised and dated, while the road narrative sections are chronologically numbered and shown in plain text. The narrator writes from a privileged position, being a White, published, and financially secure author[204]. It is therefore interesting that the story he writes in conjunction with a cancer diary is not a conquering hero on a semi-Arthurian quest, but a somewhat unenterprising, tacit 'everyman', whose goal is as ephemeral as it is fanciful. The notion that a spiritual crisis could be (re)solved by a woman's affection is an overly romanticised feature, and yet the object of Lindemann's fancy is founded on a memory of a vapid girl seemingly untethered from reality. Lindemann is literally chasing a ghost: "Kor tydelige minne har eg om Johanna frå skuletida? Ikkje så tydelege"[205] (Hovland, 2001, 83), "ho kan sammenliknas med ein melodi som heimsøker ein dag og natt"[206] (idem, 163).

The alternating structure of the narratives interrupts the reader's engagement with each chapter, and prompts an active, detective-like mode of reading. I would argue that the diary and the road narrative must be read as related to, and communicating with, each other, not only because of the textual evidence of their interrelatedness, but also for practical reasons. The question is: What does Lindemann's story tell us about the diary narrator that the diary itself cannot? I read the road narrative as an allegorical

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[203] Like the creepy mountain inn, the crooked roads and moor-like landscapes of Norway's west coast, and the sleepy haunts like ferry cafés and eerie hotels.

[204] There is no textual evidence of any concerns around medical bills, but that is perhaps a testament to Norway's universal healthcare system. It is however worth noting the narrator's position. I will delve into this in the following.

[205] "How clear are my memories of Johanna from our schooldays? Not very clear."

[206] "She can be compared to a melody that haunts you night and day."

outlet for the psychological terror of cancer, and as an expression of anxiety and fear of the unknown, because these are aspects of the diagnosis which are underplayed in the diary. This indicates that there are certain unnarratable elements of the diagnosis which cannot be supported by a mimetic medium such as a diary format.

5.2 The Diary

This section focuses on the diary narrative, which shares many features with a pathography, but negates this connection through the paratext, and the structure and form of the novel. I examine the diarist's views on masculinity and illness, cancer discourses in a Scandinavian context and literature, and the metaphoric discourse that enables Gothic intertexts and readings. My aim is to observe the diary narrator's subjective world as the origin of the Gothic road narrative. First, I discuss the issue of Hovland's self-portrayal in the diary narrative, and how readers can make sense of it using unnatural narratology. Next, I examine cancer discourses and metaphors. Lastly, I examine the novel as part of a masculinity project that portrays forms of coping with different physical and psychological crises, like humour, or a positive social environment. My contribution is innovative in that it reframes the narrator's illness through Gothic tropes, thereby opening the literary universe to give a shape to the abject, the monstrous, and writing as a "synonym of reflection, imagination and action" (Doig, 2014, 49).

5.2.1 Self-portrayal in Fiction

Bondevik and Synnes ask why some authors choose to write about themselves in fiction, and furthermore, "[kva] oppnår ein gjennom *ei fordobling* av sjølvet?"[207] (2018, 166). This question is fundamental in the case of EV because the diary narrative is inspired by Ragnar Hovland's personal account of his own cancer diagnosis (Nergård, 2007; Opedal, 2002)[208]. The paratext situates the book within the

[207] "what is accomplished through a doubling of the self?"

[208] See also (Andersen, 2012; Sortland, 2007; Welle, 2010).

genre of the novel, and my analysis aims to honour that distinction, and all the characters involved are treated as fictional. Nevertheless, I want to briefly address the use of autobiographical material in the diary portion of *EV,* and from there explain how unnatural narratology regards autobiographical material in fiction.

The diary chapters interact with a seminal literary movement in Scandinavian literature of the early 2000s and 2010s, *virkelighetslitteratur* (reality fiction)[209]. The book's colophon page stipulates the narrative's genre as a novel, but Hovland uses autobiographical data immediately in the diary narrative, thereby creating a one-to-one relationship between Hovland the author and the diarist: "*Og eg var på Leseforeningen på NRK2, saman med Lars Lillo-Stenberg, May-Britt Andersen og Ola By Rise*" (Hovland, 2001, 18) [210]. A quick search in the NRK TV (Norwegian National Broadcasting online) archives confirms that Ragnar Hovland appeared on this programme on May 1st 1998 (Conders & Askerøy). In another diary entry, he identifies himself using his full name (Hovland, 2001, 153) [211]. Hovland was interviewed shortly after the novel was published, and stated that the diary he wrote during his own illness was the same as the one in *EV*, albeit an edited version (Opedal, 2002; Sortland, 2007, 13). By placing the diary and the road narrative within the same covers, and paratextually defining the book as a novel, Hovland expands the expectations of the novel genre, while revealing the shortcomings of the genre of pathography. There are apparently some things that cannot be spoken in prose but can only be expressed through fiction. One could interpret these techniques in terms of performative biographism, a concept used to designate a discursive interaction with

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[209] *Virkelighetslitteratur* is the overarching genre that employs this technique, for which the works of Karl Ove Knausgård, like *Min kamp* (2009-2011) and Vigdis Hjort's *Arv og Miljø* (2016) are the primary Norwegian examples.

[210] "And I appeared on Leseforeningen on NRK2, with Lars Lillo-Stenberg, May-Britt Andersen and Ola By Rise". Leseforeningen [The Reading Union] (1998-2000) was a late 90s talkshow about books, hosted by Norwegian author Tore Renberg (1998-99) and Kari Marstein (2000).

[211] "I mitt tilfelle ville det bli t.d Berit Ragnar Hovland/In my case it would be e.g. Berit Ragnar Hovland".

the real world and the reader using discourses typically found in the genre of biography (Haarder, 2014, 9)[212]. Performative biographism emphasises the correlation between the written and the real, and there are readings of *EV* that focus on what this novel tells us about Hovland, more than what it can tell us about a general concept of the patient identity as fragmentary. Per Thomas Andersen questions whether one can discuss *EV* in terms of performative biographism (2012, 604), but Andersen *does* place the diary narrator and Hovland the author on the same narrative level, "Forfatteren skriver en høyst privat dagbok midt i en livskrise. Han har fått kreft, og vi følger ham frem mot operasjon og et stykke inn i rehabilitering etterpå"[213] (ibid.).

Genette argues that we inevitably read biographically if we possess biographical knowledge. Haarder calls this biographic irreversibility. This term refers to the fact that human communication begins through the interpersonal and corporeal, rather than the textual (referenced in Haarder, 2014, 19). Nevertheless, there are intrinsic ethical concerns of performative biographism, primarily in using people's real names and translating their lives into a fictional frame[214]. Biographic interest has grown since the memoir boom of the 1990s, a fact Siri Hustvedt discusses in *Living, Thinking, Looking* (2012), her main point being that fiction too often serves as a haven for outing people's personal lives under the guise of fictionality.

Returning to the initial question of what can be gained through a doubling of the self, previous research suggests that the doubling is very literal, i.e. Lindemann and the narrator are mirror images. Kari Garshol Welle argues that Lindemann mirrors the diary narrator's symptoms, pointing out that his ailments are physical as well as psychological (2010, 239), as Lindemann exhibits many signs of deteriorating health: lack of appetite, nausea, food intolerance, etc. (2010, 234). Welle also points to the

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[212] See also (Haarder, 2017).

[213] "The author writes a very private diary in the midst of a life crisis. He has cancer, and we follow him up to his surgery and for a while into his rehabilitation afterwards."

[214] The concept also carries sensationalist connotations, pertaining more to the realm of celebrity studies, with which I do not intend to engage.

supernatural facets of the road narrative, "grensa mellom fantasi og røyndom [er] stundom uklar, det fantasifulle glir over i det overnaturlege, realisme i surrealisme"[215] (2010, 232). While I agree that Lindemann is showing signs of poor health at times, I do not believe that Lindemann's character is a 'corporeal' double, meaning a double of the physical symptoms of cancer. The diary narrator already details his symptoms and the effects of treatment, and they therefore need not be repeated in the road narrative. Far more compelling is reading the road narrative as a representation of the psychological terror born from his cancer diagnosis, where Lindemann's nausea is an expression of anxiety and fear of the unknown. To quote Katherine Doig, the diary is "a paper self – even if this replica is finished and essentializing…it is also an *object* in the etymological sense: something separate from oneself in space, time and ontological qualities" (2014, 53). Lindemann's character represents but one facet of Hovland as narrator, a narrative manifestation of mortal dread that has been refracted into its own literary universe. Andersen suggests that "[de] to tekstene i *Ei Vinterreise* er altså ganske ulike. Overgangene mellom dem er kontante, så kanskje er det i dette tilfelle mindre treffende å snakke om et litterært grenseland. Det er to for[s]kjellige riker, og grenselandet blir leseren selv, som må finne mulige forbindelser mellom dem"[216] (2012, 604). Sontag's dual citizenship of the ill is a fitting comparison, but Andersen's comment also implies a level of active readership usually reserved for mystery and thriller novels. It is up to the reader to 'solve' the seemingly incompatible natures of the two narratives.

Reading *EV* by using unnatural narratology expands my initial understanding of the novel and offers a way to reconcile the novel's oddities such as genre-bending, strange anti-mimetic events, and the use of biographical facts within a fictional universe. The

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[215] "the border between fantasy and reality [is] often unclear, the fanciful slips into the supernatural, realism into surrealism."

[216] "[the] two texts in *Ei vinterreise* are quite different. The transitions between them are abrupt, so perhaps it is less apt in this case to speak of a literary borderland. They are two different realms, and the borderland is the reader herself, who must make possible connections between them."

matter of *representational* doubt is primarily resolved in *EV* through its paratextual and intertextual form (cf. Iversen, 2018). I have previously discussed the paratextual discrepancies of the novel, and I wish to consolidate these discrepancies by reading the novel as part of the same fictional universe, with the road narrative acting as an extension of the diary narrative. The intertextual doubt is similarly resolved; by accepting the premise of self-portrayal as an aesthetic technique here used as a therapeutic measure, the author exerts control over forces of chaos beyond human understanding.

Finally, while this novel might be considered a fictional pathography, it is not an exposé of the author or any real or invented persons mentioned. The primary indication of fictionality is that the novel is framed by the road narrative, in which most of the unactualisable events occur; the doubling of characters, shared dreaming, Gothic emblems, literary intertexts and a labyrinthine structure all frame the whole work in fictionality. Although the Gothic is not a frequent feature in the diary narrative, it bleeds into the road narrative where there is room and opportunity to address the difficult feelings, taboos and monsters surrounding cancer. These conventions are in direct opposition to the truth gestalt of the pathography genre (Hunsaker-Hawkins, 1993).

Both Arthur Frank (1997, 140) and Arne Melberg (2007, 7) connect the portrayal of the self in literature to an exploration of identity, and this question is prevalent in illness narratives. In the event of loss of an original identity, either replaced with or supplemented by the patient denomination, literary self-portrayal creates a doubling of the writing self and the written self. Similarly, Jackie Stacey argues: "When something unexpected occurs, such as illness, the scripts need rewriting, but normally the shock of the experience can be partly absorbed by the telling of a new story" (1997, 9). Haarder also remarks on two factors that apply to Hovland's novel. Firstly, he says that "litteraturvidenskab handler ikke om den empiriske forfatter, men om den eller det

der taler i teksten"[217] (Haarder, 2014, 17), and secondly, "brugen af virkelige personer repræsenterer dem i forskellige medier hvorfra de kan træde os imøde, vende tilbage, *hjemsøge*"[218] (Haarder, 2014, 12). In summary, my analysis treats the diary narrator in *EV* as a fictional character, informed by biographical information used for aesthetic effect. This chapter aims to uncover the new story brought to life by the "shock of experience" (Stacey, 1997, 9), and allow "den eller det der taler i teksten" to come forward.

5.2.2 Metaphors of Corporeal Chaos

The following aims to examine cultural understandings of cancer narratives, what metaphors they represent, and how *EV* employs them. Stacey argues in *Teratologies* (1997) that cancer is "a metaphor for the self-destructive lifestyle that has since been rejected. The tumour eating away at the body is seen as a sign of unhappiness, distress or, indeed, dis-ease" (1997, 12). The diary narrator worries initially that his illness is somehow self-inflicted, even a punishment: "*Det slår meg at det kan vere ei straff fordi eg ikkje har vore meir glad i livet. Og fordi eg har hatt denne kjensla av at eg kanskje har oppnådd – og opplevd – det eg skulle. Helvete òg*"[219] (Hovland, 2001, 40). His diagnosis is therefore enmeshed with feelings of shame and regret. Nevertheless, "nokon dødsdom har eg vel ikkje fått"[220] (Hovland, 2001, 9). It is therefore noteworthy how he employs many dark metaphors and mysterious allegories to describe and understand the ways his diagnosis affects his (new) life.

Stacey suggests that cancer narratives are populated by monsters, because they "generate fantasies of heroic recoveries and miracle cures. These are teratologies*:* the

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[217] "literary science is not about the empirical author, but about who or what speaks in the text"

[218] "the use of real people represents them in different media from which they can meet us, return, *haunt*"

[219] "It strikes me that this could be a punishment for not being more fond of life. And because I have this feeling that maybe I have achieved – and experienced – all that I was meant to. Hell [God damn it]".

[220] "This isn't a death sentence I've been given [it's not like I've been given a death sentence]".

tales of monsters and marvels that pervade the popular imaginary of cancer subcultures" (1997, 10)[221]. She elaborates, "Cancer never really invades the body as such, but rather reproduces itself from within. Malignant growths secretly proliferate" (1997, 10) Cancer can either be interpreted as a culturally constructed "monstrous physical manifestation" (1997, 12) of an unhealthy lifestyle, or of underlying repressed emotions in a body previously governed by reason, which in both cases represents an attack on masculine values (ibid.). This notion fits in well with Sontag's idea of cancer as a demonic pregnancy (1978, 14), a perversion of the fecund womb producing life. Cancer, at its worst, produces death. Sontag also notes a moral component of cancer that equates cancer with demonic possession. Tumours are either malignant or benign, and to treat them is to attack the "demonic enemy", resulting in cancer becoming "a lethal disease but [also] a shameful one" (Sontag, 1978, 59). This is even more the case when the cancer is located in the lower parts of the body, the genitalia or rectum, as is the case with the narrator.

Following this line of construing illness as a metaphoric 'evil' in narrative conjunction with the opportunities of the Gothic genre leads me to consider whether illness in a Gothic narrative substitutes for the function of the *villain*, and if so, what are the consequences? A Gothic villain is ostensibly the manifestation of anti-social and uncivilised behaviour, which Jens Kjeldgaard-Kristiansen calls "en aftegning af vores virkelige fjendebilleder og ængsteligheder"[222] (2019, 11). Villains represent attitudes, actions and personality traits diametrical to those of the hero, which one might call a moral demarcation line. There are no 'true' villains in *EV*, but the seed of a threatening presence is born in the diary and erupts into the road narrative. Something shapeless and terrifying follows Lindemann, Tomas i Dalen and Liv. I wish to focus on this dark unknown presence, or the "dark companion", because it appears

[221] "teras (med.) n. a monstrosity: teratogeny, n. the production of monsters: teratology, n. the study of malformations or abnormal growths, animal or vegetable; a tale of marvels: teratoma, a tumour, containing tissue from all three germ layers: [Gr. teras, -atos, a monster]" (Stacey, vi).

[222] "a depiction of our real enemies and anxieties"

in both the diary and the road narrative, as subtext in the former and as a shapeless threat in the latter.

Generally, the narrator finds that the healthcare is provided in a professional and courteous manner. He receives traditional cancer treatments as recommended by his doctor, but he also supplements his treatment with alternative practices[223], such as anthroposophy (2001, 111) and biopathy[224] (2001, 102). Interestingly, these alternative practices appear in a dream that casts them in a darker hue:

> For eit par netter sidan drøymde eg om biopatane, at dei var blitt hekser... Ved eit tilfelle avslørte eg dei, og dermed var dei ute etter meg for å uskadeleggjere meg med Det vonde auget. Det blei skikkeleg nifst etter kvar, og det var open slutt.
> No vil eg gjerne sleppe open slutt, eg vil ha god slutt. Det er enno mange ting eg vil gjere, har eg funne ut. Så berre ikkje prøv dykk[225] (102-103).

It is not uncommon for Gothic narratives that feature illness or medical atrocities to frame the doctors or medical personnel as villainous and callous (Anolik, 2010; Pugh, 2018; Talairach-Vielmas, 2009), but here the Gothic only briefly intervenes in the diary narrative; not because the diarist is actually pursued by witches, but to emphasise his fear that an evil force has the power to disarm ("uskadeliggjøre") him, and strip him of his own power. This supernatural imagery combined with a gendered power relation finds its counterpart in the Lindemann narrative, in the character Lemuel.

A commonly used illness metaphor is that of a journey or exile, writes Bernhardsson (2010, 68), and cancer narratives are often situated in this category. The

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[223] Some contemporary research claims that it is a common Norwegian attitude to use both traditional and complementary treatments with cancer patients regardless of gender (See Kristoffersen et al., 2019: NAFKAM, 2020)

[224] Here meaning "biological medicine", founded by Danish therapist Kurt Wienberg-Nielsen in 1984. (See also https://nafkam.no/biopati)

[225] "A couple of nights ago I dreamt about the biopaths, that they were witches… On one occasion I exposed them and then they came after me to make me harmless with the evil eye. It got really creepy after a while, and it was an open ending. Now I'd rather not have an open ending, I want a good ending. There are still many things I'd like to do, I've found. So don't you dare."

diary runs from April 29th to December 31st 1998, and begins with the narrator stating that his diagnosis signals the continuation of the rest of his life (Hovland, 2001, 8). It signals a new leg of a journey, not its end. He wants to live normally, "gjere hyggelege ting. Høyre god musikk og sjå gode filmar. Bevege på meg. Ete god mat"[226] (9), and he and his wife agree to "halde hyggefana høgt"[227] (ibid.). So far, the first diary entry bears all the characteristics of what Arthur Frank would describe as a "living-as-normal" narrative (1997). The narrator also discusses his new 'normal' with equal parts of optimism and trepidation, "*[dette] er definitivt første dagen i resten av livet ditt, tenkte eg. I går fekk eg vite det, og dei verste forutaningane slo rett og slett til. Det* er *ein svulst. Og eg må opererast. Snart*"[228] (Hovland, 2001, 8). However, the narrator later states that he does not have the disposition to be grievously ill: "*Eg har jo ikkje den indre kraft og verdigheit som skal til. Hos meg blir det heller hysteri og panikk*" [229] (Hovland, 2001, 108). The diary narrator does not want his life to have an 'open' ending, he wants it to end *well*. In lieu of a heroic exclamation of defiance, he states that there are in fact things he still wants to accomplish, see and do. These small, yet hopeful declarations are scattered throughout the diary narrative, alongside comments meant as comic relief. The not-so-subtle challenge aimed at whatever dark force wants to come at him is almost tragicomic. He knows he does not have the skill set required to fight the tumour on his own, but he will fight it the only way he can, by living.

The narrator is tentatively optimistic about his chances of making a full recovery, and he establishes a tendency, or rather a personality trait, to mitigate difficult and frightening interactions with humour and keen observational skills. His observations direct the narrative focus towards others, as if he is trying to establish himself as an

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[226] "Do pleasant things. Listen to good music and watch good films. Exercise. Eat good food"

[227] "hoist the cosy-flag high" [keep the focus on enjoying life]"

[228] "This is definitely the first day of the rest of your life, I thought. I found out yesterday, and the worst predictions simply came true. It is a tumor. And I must have surgery. Soon."

[229] "I don't have the inner strength or dignity required. With me it's hysteria and panic instead."

incorporeal intradiegetic narrator and in matters of examining his own body, he uses neutral pronouns as an objectifying technique: "Koloskopien var elles svært fascinerande, sjå *sitt* indre på tv i beste sendetid, reise innover i *seg sjølv*, lure på kva som møter *ein* bak neste sving"[230] (2001, 9). He also employs direct speech that invites the implied reader to actively engage with the medical examinations, "Du legg deg på eit sengebord, ei bergensk-talande dame drysser gelé på magen din og trykker med eit apparat ei stund. Så får du gå"[231] (2001, 62). He creates a mental distance between the narrator and the sick body, even as he exhibits a dry sense of humour. As the doctor relates the diagnosis, the narrator becomes introspective and is forced to renegotiate the impermeability of the body, "eg har trass alt trudd at eg var usårleg, og at dette ikkje kunne hende meg. No har det hendt meg"[232] (Hovland, 2001, 8). The removal of the tumour, whether malignant or benign, is non-optional. In other words, his body will be subject to an invasive procedure, the outcome of which will determine the rest of his life: "Det blir eit anna liv etterpå, same kva, eg har insett det"[233] (2001, 148). The cancer thus represents a force that dictates not just his actions but his choices; his body is no longer his own. The shock of the diagnosis leads, as Felski suggests, "to evasion, euphemism, and denial" (2008, 112), articulated in the diary narrator's efforts to make sense of his new reality.

The narrator's disposition often seems incompatible with an immobile patient identity. "Eg har ringt NORLA og avlyst Tyskland. Men eg kunne tenkt meg denne turen til Tyskland, litt vandring i kjøpesenter og slikt" [234] (Hovland, 2001, 9). He

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[230] "But otherwise, the colonoscopy was very fascinating, to see your inner self on prime time TV, travel inward into yourself, wondering what's around the bend"

[231] "You lie down on a bench, a woman with a Bergen accent spreads jelly on your stomach and applies pressure with a device for a while. Then you can go."

[232] "I have, after all, believed myself to be invulnerable, and that this couldn't happen to me. Now it has happened to me."

[233] "Life will be different afterwards, I've realised that".

[234] "I called NORLA [Norwegian Literature Abroad] and cancelled Germany. But I would have liked that trip to Germany, a bit of wandering around shopping malls and so on."

doesn't feel sick or worried, yet, so the idea of acting like a patient spurs a restlessness and a desire for the proverbial open road. While illness might invoke an introspective journey, one surmises that to the narrator a patient outwardly stays in limbo. He keeps his gaze forward with the help and support of his wife. Says the narrator, "*Eg har i alle fall ikkje tenkt å leggje meg ned og gå til grunne*"[235] (Hovland, 2001, 9). So powerful is this impulse to go on, to keep moving, that it is echoed by Lindemann and Tomas: "Sove kan ein gjere når ein ligg i grava og ikkje har anna å ta seg til (idem, 5)…Den dagen eg sluttar å følgje med, då er det jamt slutt"[236] (idem, 7).

Where the road narrative is a continuous transport relay, the diary narrative consists of multiple journeys, holidays and visits, from the deserts of Egypt (2001, 54), to Bornholm (2001, 156). On days where he clearly has surplus energy, he writes elaborate, detailed accounts of all the books he reads, music he listens to, and notes on current events. He writes down everything, as if not knowing what will be important, and not really knowing why he feels the need to do so.

> Og eg har lese vidare i Eno.
> Den svenske sjuksköterskan Madelén har no barbert meg nedantil.
> Det blir eit merkelig liv etter dette.
> Så fekk eg ei blodfortynningssprøyte i magen…
> Eg får også eit par spesialstrømper…
> Og eg skal ta beroligande tablettar før eg legg meg[237]. (Hovland, 2001, 270)

Arthur Frank proposes that "…true chaos cannot be told. The voice that might express deepest chaos is subsumed in interruptions, interrupting itself as it seeks to tell. This self-interruption is the core of the 'and then' style of speech, cutting off each

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[235] "I have no intention of lying down and perishing"

[236] "You can sleep when you're in your grave, when you have nothing else to do… The day I stop keeping up with the times, then it's all over".

[237] "And I've read on in Eno. The Swedish nurse Madelén has shaved me down below. It'll be a strange life after this. Then I got an injection of blood thinners in my abdomen…I'm also getting a pair of special stockings…And I'm taking sedatives before I go to bed."

clause with the next" (1997b, 105). The road narrative is similar, except that the world building comes primarily from dialogue and descriptive narration, mostly thanks to Tomas. This technique is not incongruent with the format of a diary. With these behaviours in mind, we can extrapolate how the diarist deals with "eit land der smerter er ein del av landskapet"[238] (Hovland, 2001, 39), with a humble, yet tongue-in-cheek attitude.

5.2.3 Writing Masculinity

This section explores illness and masculinity, and focuses on passages where the narrator must negotiate the new landscape of his body as a patient, and the consequences for his masculinity and identity:

"*Før trudde eg at om eg blei alvorlig sjuk, så ville eg ikkje klare å skrive noko*" [239] says the narrator (Hovland, 2001, 32), a statement that inextricably connects his artistic abilities to his health. He also claims that he is unfit to become seriously ill; "*Eg sa til T [at eg] ikkje skjøner kvifor dei valde meg. Eg har jo ikkje den indre kraft og verdigheit som skal til. Hos meg blir det heller hysteri og panikk*" [240] (Hovland, 2001, 108). I think it redundant to specify that the narrator is far from a hysterical character, but the intertextual connection to the male hysteria fits with the narrator's identity as an artistic individual under duress. Hilde Bondevik notes that the category of the hysteric served its purpose in the 20th century as a way of critically examining definitions of masculinity and femininity, "[i] og med det mannlige hysteriet kunne andre sider ved maskuliniteten enn de tradisjonelle eksponeres, men dermed ble også selve maskuliniteten stilt på prøve"[241], while also noting that hysteria in men of the cultural sphere enjoyed a higher status than in their female counterparts. Male hysteria

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[238] "a land where pain is a part of the landscape."

[239] "I used to think that if I ever got seriously ill, I wouldn't be able to write anything".

[240] "I don't understand why they chose me. I don't have the inner strength and dignity required. With me it's hysteria and panic instead".

[241] "considering the male hysteria, other aspects of masculinity than the traditional ones could be exposed, but in so doing masculinity itself would be tested".

was "positivt og utforskende, nærmest som noe forfinet og nødvendig for kunsterisk følsomhet og skaperevne"[242] (Bondevik, 2009, 364). While the term "hysteric" is likely meant as hyperbole, it is another indicator of the narrator's thoughts and concerns about the effects of his illness, while also revealing some preconceived notions of how one should behave as a cancer patient: with inner strength and dignity. In other words, his role models include those who bore their illness tacitly and invisibly, and he imagines himself as lacking these characteristics.

Stacey writes that "the power of cancer's horror is partly due to its association with death…Once diagnosed, death becomes part of life and refuses to be banished. It becomes a constant companion" (Stacey, 1997, 72-73). Even as the narrator believes he will survive this diagnosis, he rarely names the illness itself: "*Det* er *ein svulst*"[243] (Hovland, 2001, 12). The word "cancer" is too powerful to utter, it is still a death knell. The only time he refers to his illness as cancer, is when he shares a hospital room with a group of other men: "*Det er mange slags indre sjukdommar her på rommet, men det er så vidt eg har funne ut berre eg som har kreft. Det gir en viss status. Eg er nærmare det ukjende*"[244] (Hovland, 2001, 284). He remarks that cancer patients are prioritised over other patients: "*Dagen kjem då mine tre romkameratar blir utskrivne, meir eller mindre mot sin vilje. Dei ligg der og opptar senger for kreftpasienter, må vite*"[245] (2001, 282). It is among other sick men that the narrator can benefit from his "dark companion"; if he has to be a patient (in his mind synonymous with being weak and pitiful), then at least he is unassailable[246]. Those diagnosed with

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[242] "positive and explorative, almost refined and necessary for artistic sensitivity and creativity".

[243] "It is a tumour"

[244] "There are many kinds of internal diseases in this room, but I'm the only one as far as I know who has cancer. It gives me a certain status. I am closer to the unknown."

[245] "The day came when my three roommates were discharged more or less involuntarily. They were lying there and occupying beds for cancer patients, you know"

[246] Gaute Sortland argues that the diary narrator compels Lindemann to acquire the same epiphany that the former gained through the course of his illness; "Eit syn på livet og døden, gjennom ei melankolsk livshaldning som er å halde ut / [A view of life and death, through a melancholic attitude to life which is to

cancer are referred to as 'warriors' and 'fighters', and their 'battles' are thought to yield some spiritual or epistemic insight into how the world works, and our being in it. Among his peers, he stands in the liminal space of the kingdom of illness, a position that oscillates between the narrator as a brave 'warrior' and the reality of his physical capabilities: "*Eg kan stå lenge i korridoren i morgonkåpe og støtta på preikestolen, framfor eit halvope vindauge og sole meg og tenkje på kor gjerne eg skulle ha vore der ute, og kanskje kjem eg aldri meir ut dit*"[247] (Hovland, 2001, 283).

Is there truly a masculine recourse to dealing with serious illness? A recent study suggest that it is a myth that men suffer sickness and pain alone and in silence (Michaelsen & Kristiansen, 2017)[248]. The narrator's wife, T. is always kept abreast of everything that concerns his diagnosis, but his parents and extended circle of friends are informed through secondary sources. The diarist disseminates the news of his illness in concentric circles, prioritising those who "need to know" first, such as his spouse and his work associates, and in the case of the latter, he only tells them he needs to go on sick leave. Only when prompted does he reveal that he has cancer. He has entered a land where pain is a part of the scenery "*og eg skal kanskje ikkje døy, men det spørst kor mykje betre det blir*"[249] (Hovland, 2001, 42). Nevertheless, the narrator does not suffer in silence, nor is he alone. He finds solace in talking to his

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endure]" (2007, 7). I agree that the diary narrator exerts his power to shape Lindemann's fate in a similar direction as his own, but Sortland glosses over the implications of "å halde ut". Promoting grin-and-bear-it attitudes is as aggravating as demanding that all cancer patients gain greater insight as a result of their illness.

[247] "I can stand in the corridor for a long time in a dressing gown, leaning on my pulpit [walker] in front of a half-open window and get some sunshine, while I think about how much I want to be out there, and maybe I'll never get to go out again."

[248] Nevertheless, previous research suggests that there are established norms and cultural expectations that have shaped a 'manly' way of engaging with illness and health issues, and that this 'manly' method is predominantly detrimental to both patient and their next-of-kin (Barne-og-likestillingsdepartementet, 2008-2009, 91; Schei & Bakketeig, 2007, 89). A sociological study from the early 2000s in Norway highlighted that after getting sick, many men would not tell their spouses or next-of-kin about their diagnosis, so as not to worry them (Lilleaas, 2006), and there is textual evidence of the same tendency in EV.

[249] "and maybe I'm not going to die, but who knows how much better it will get"

wife, "*ho er velsigna*" [250] (2001, 43), and her companionship is as vital to his coping skills as the surgery is to his survival.

Towards the end of the novel, when the protagonist's surgery has been postponed yet again, he begins the entry saying, "*Yes, folks, I'm back again. Og ikkje ligg eg på operasjonsbordet, som eit møte mellom ein paraply og ei symaskin, slik enkelte vil ha det til*"[251] (Hovland, 2001, 243). He is paraphrasing the French *poète maudit* Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1870) [252]. The diarist is a well-read man, so his reference could simply be an associative literary reference to his own situation. I posit an additional implication, one that leans on the interpretation of Lautréamont's adage. Two objects that seemingly do not belong within the same parameters can still coexist, but the wrongness of their being placed together is seemingly emphasised in the novel. The wrongness has to do with the diarist's relationship with his 'new' identity as a patient, "*ein skikkelig sjuking*"[253] (Hovland, 2001, 44), and the consequences for his masculinity. His notion of masculinity is connected to doing. "*Eg har no mitt livs sjanse til å vise meg som ein mann*" [254] (idem, 237), a statement that again ties in with the dual nature of the novel. For the diary narrator, illness is simultaneously an unhomely state and a natural test of strength. As Stacey notes, cancer narratives often adhere to "patterns of a journey from chaos to control. They combine the masculine heroics of such adventure narratives with the feminine suffering and sacrifice of melodramas. The narrative structure lends itself well to such masculine heroics"

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[250] "she is blessed".

[251] "Yes, folks, I'm back again. And I'm not lying on an operating table, like a meeting between an umbrella and a sewing machine, as some would have it."

[252] Nom de plume of Isidore Lucien Ducasse. The original phrase is "comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie", from Maldoror (1869). (…the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella" (Translation: Lautréamont's Maldoror, 1972, 177.) Lautréamont took his pen name from the eponymous serialised Gothic novel Lautréamont (1837) by the French novelist Eugène Sue (1804-1857). Lautréamont was a primary influence on the surrealist movement in the 20th century.

[253] "a proper sickling"

[254] "I have the chance of a lifetime to prove myself a man".

(Stacey, 1997, 10). If we exchange "melodramas" with "Gothic fiction", a veritable source of feminine suffering and sacrifice, Stacey's point remains the same. The unnarratability of illness stands at odds with the narrator's ability to create narrative order, and the dual structure of *EV* is a testament to that effect. Illness cannot universally conform or be detained within a singular narrative. In this case, we have two narratives that seemingly do not belong within the same frame but nevertheless stem from a singular source: the moment the narrator realises that he must cross over into the land of the ill is also the moment of refraction that engages the Gothic prism. A new story must be told where illness is not an encumbrance, but a challenge to be met.

It is clear that the narrator has a healthy response to his illness and its treatment plan. He follows up every doctor's appointment and undergoes every treatment. I would also argue that he has a healthy coping response, namely, to use his skill as a writer to write his way through his illness. The narrator carves out a space for himself, where his thoughts, both good and bad, can coexist. There is a ritual aspect in his note-taking, one that dictates where he can write. He often writes outside his house, in a porch, even if a record or a film is playing in his living room. I interpret this as a voluntary exile, as opposed to his later comment on how he feels exiled from his own home post-surgery (Hovland, 2001, 286). It is also worth noting that he keeps his diary writings somewhat secret. T asks him what he is "really writing", and he answers noncommittally, "*slikt som skjer"*[255] (Hovland, 2001, 81). The cancer obviously adds a new component to their relationship dynamic, but overall, the narrator feels that it has cemented their devotion and dedication to each other. However, some topics cannot be broached, and his diary, and all the thoughts it contains, are so far private. That being said, the fractured, disassembled body in the diary narrative, does not affect the diary narrator's sense of being less of a companion to his wife, and their partnership remains a constant and durable factor throughout. The epistemic challenges to his masculinity

[255] "things that happen"

inform how he reconstructs himself post-illness, so that he can continue to be her partner.

> What unites modern science with the self-health cultures of the 1990s is the desire for mastery. It is the desire to see, to know and to control. It is the desire to fix meaning and to make outcomes predictable. It is the desire to prove that one has power over disease, the body and the emotions. In short, it is what has been identified as the masculine "urge to fathom the secrets of nature" (Stacey, 1997, 238)

The narrator projects himself as a man who wears many hats and balances them skilfully, at least prior to his illness. He is an established writer, literary reviewer and musician, and all these components entail a level of mastery. The narrator would then out of habit attempt to master his own illness, but in a domain where his power over such things is tangible; writing is thus a 'symptom' of not dying, and a reaffirmation of his initial goal (Pajaczkowska, 1995, 74; Stacey, 1997, 241). He will live as normally as possible, no matter what.

The diary entries post-surgery are again heavily detailed, "*utan at eg veit kva det skal vere til nytte for*"[256] (Hovland, 2001, 277). It makes sense that he tries to force chaos into order, as the surgery was more complicated than anticipated: his body has become a shapeless lump like a bread dough (idem, 278), and he bled so much that most of his blood is replaced. "*Nytt og frisk blod, det er tingen*" [257] (idem, 278), he jokes, but as he recuperates, he takes stock of what has been done to him, "*Kor mykje er att*?" [258] (idem, 279). The surgery is constructed as a corporeal fragmentation, where he has essentially been dissasembled and sewn together in the front and the back, an image that is comparable to the construction of Frankenstein's creation (Shelley, 1818). Some parts of him are renewed and put back together, but he walks "*[k]rumbøygd og 90-åringaktig"*[259] (Hovland, 2001, 279), sore, but eager to regain

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[256] "except I don't know what good it'll do"

[257] "New and fresh blood, that's the thing."

[258] "How much is left?"

[259] "hunchbacked and like a 90-year-old"

mobility. He feels like he is wrapped in Styrofoam, like a cast, but it is his body, full of fluids. "*Nokre dosar med vassdrivande gir meg til slutt kroppen tilbake, det som er att av den"*[260] (idem, 280). The surgical intervention took more than he was prepared to give, and his body is defamiliarised as a result. Rosemary Jackson writes that the "many partial, dual, multiple and dismembered selves scattered throughout literary fantasies violate the most cherished of all human unities: the unity of 'character'" (1981, 82), and clearly the effects of surgical dismemberment have shattered the diarist's notion of his own character. A bad reaction to anti-nausea medication provokes respiratory issues post-surgery. His heart stops beating, and he cannot breathe; in hindsight he writes that he was merely irritated at the prospect of dying alone in a hospital bed with a bad film playing on the TV, but he surrendered himself to God and "*ber mange bøner"*[261] (Hovland, 2001, 281) during the night that followed. His brush with death was not a result of the surgery itself, but of an allergic reaction, which is perhaps even more terrifying to contemplate in hindsight. The surgery, while complicated, saved his life, and was almost undone by something so trivial as anti-nausea medication. Even as his body is healing, it betrays him.

"*Kvifor skriv eg dette? For ein gong å lese korleis det var i mitt annus horribilis (anus horribilis er det jo eigentleg)?"*[262] (Hovland, 2001, 60), and this is a fair question, but I think the substance of his query is partly answered by calling it an "anus horribilis". Throughout the diary the narrator never loses his dry and warm sense of humour, and the book benefits from having moments of mirth as a counterbalance to the corporeal horror. Cancer is frightening, the narrator never negates that, but he tries to remaining uncowed by it. His body has turned against him, a 'demonic pregnancy', which if left untreated would mean certain death. So the narrator turns to his strengths. He writes a story about a man dressed all in black, a

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[260] "In the end, a few doses of diuretics will give me my body back, whatever is left of it"

[261] "pray many prayers"

[262] "Why am I writing this? To one day read about my annus horribilis (anus horribilis more like)?"

melancholy wanderer who is welcome anywhere and belongs nowhere, a manifestation of the narrator's dual citizenship in the land of the living (healthy) and the dead (sick): "*Eg har kanskje ein idé til ei bok: Ein predikant med vaklande tru på jakt etter noko, det er vinter. Eg veit ikkje meir, eller kva eg skal bruke det til, eller om det har noko med meg å gjere nett no*"[263] (Hovland, 2001, 286). The story that follows illuminates several aspects of the diary narrator's illness experience that he could not fully realise through the diary format.

5.3 The Road: Allegories of Decay

The diary narrator often laments his lack of progress on a love story he is meant to write (Hovland, 2001, 102), and from the novel's preface and the first chapter of the road narrative one might suppose that Lindemann's story initially began on those terms. Lindemann is the road narrative's main narrator, and he is indeed looking for a long-lost love (one that never really began in the first place), a girl named Johanna. The novel's preface is a quote by German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), whose *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* (1844) adds a layer of intertextual references to other male canonised artists and composers, like William Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* (1623), and the song cycle by Schubert (1828), based on Wilhelm Müller's twelve poems called *Winterreise* (1823). Schubert's winter journey reminisces about a long-lost love, and the fifth song, "Der Lindenbaum", could be Lindemann's namesake[264]. A winter's journey specifically invokes imagery signifying the end of a cycle, with connotations of death, decay or a long slumber, but also of recollection; "Eg merkar at minna kjem drivande som snø, eg minnest dagen då eg første gong tenkte tanken: 'Eg skal ikkje halde fram med dette mykje lenger'"[265] (Hovland, 2001,

[263] "I may have an idea for a book: a preacher of faltering faith on the hunt for something, it is winter. I don't know any more, or what I'm going to use it for, or if it has anything to do with me right now."

[264] Lindemann means "linden tree man".

[265] "I feel memories drifting in like snow, I remember the day the thought first came to me: "I'm not going to keep doing this for much longer".

41). It also invokes notions of transportation, both literal and figurative, and emphasises the Nordic Gothic spirit, where "the mazy architecture of the Gothic building, the labyrinthine city or the haunted house, is replaced by a boundless, uncontrollable, and wild Nordic landscape" (Leffler, 2010, 46).

Indications of the unnatural and an "uhyggelig fortælling" in *EV* are that the narrator continuously has intrusive thoughts and images that feel alien to him, and that he possesses skills and information that he technically should not have. "Sove kan ein gjere når ein ligg i grava og ikkje har anna å ta seg til. Eg ser opp mot den bleikmørke himmelen. *Var det eg som tenkte dette? Så ulikt meg*"[266] (Hovland, 2001, 5, my italics). His mind is also flooded with images he cannot account for, "kor får eg slike bilde ifrå?"[267] (idem, 115), and he is able to play songs he has never heard on the piano, "Kva er det eg sit der og seier? Eg kan då ikkje denne songen! Men eg lar fingrane mine gli…og dei finn fram til dei rette tonane, til ein song eg ikkje kjenner, men som eg no likevel har inne i meg"[268] (idem, 146). While contemplating his surroundings, there is an odd turn of phrase: "endå skorne mine har gjort teneste så mang ein vinter, og burde ikkje nokon trø litt på bremsen no, nokon med ein varm bil i mørket, nokon som ville kjenne meg att og seie at [linebreak] – Det var då som faen!"[269] (idem, 5). Who is speaking and thinking if not the narrator? And does he possess some supernatural power of manifestation? Out of the darkness comes Tomas i Dalen, "dåranes konge" [270] (idem, 6), Lindemann's old schoolmate Tomas decides to help him find Johanna, as "verken familien eller jobben går frå meg om eg kjører ein

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[266] "Sleep is for those in their grave who have nothing else to do. I look up at the pale-dark sky. [Did I think this?] How unlike me."

[267] "Where do I get these images?"

[268] "What am I saying? I don't know this song! But I let my fingers glide…and they find the right notes for a song I don't know, that I nevertheless have inside me"

[269] "even though my shoes have served me for many a winter, and shouldn't someone hit their brakes a bit, someone with a warm car in the dark, someone who will recognise me and say – Well, I'll be damned!"

[270] Tomas in the Valley, "king of fools"

gammal skulekamerat til Vike for at han skal få treffe att dama si og ta igjen forsømte frå ungdommen"[271] (idem, 20). Before long, they meet Liv, a teenage girl on the run from her abusive, alcoholic parents. Tomas and Lindemann agree to drive her to her aunt Frida, because, as Tomas sagely notes, "Dette er tydeleg ein kveld då vanlege reglar og lover er oppheva og det er heilt andre som gjeld"[272] (23), an indicator of an unnatural narrative, in accordance with Jan Alber's definition[273] (Alber, 2016; Alber et al., 2013, 102). Tomas' speech is of a fairy-tale quality, which on the one hand provides levity and comedy, and foreshadows that the narrative world is susceptible to impossible events on the other.

What textual elements give the road narrative Gothic qualities? Firstly, the road narrative is (ostensibly) focalised through a single first-person narrator, but the examples above challenge the idea of a singular, reliable narrator with a destabilising, uncanny effect. Internal focalisation is not a novel concept, but internal or subjective narration serves a particular function within the Gothic (Fyhr, 2017, 64). When Gothic texts depict landscapes in a manner that destabilises the integrity of the physical world, that world becomes, in Coral Ann Howells's words, "interiorised"; it is translated and transferred into a "private world of imagination and neurotic sensibility. Nothing is constant any more: an ordinary room can suddenly be transformed into nightmare" (1978, 26). These "landscapes of the soul" establish the relationship between how the attributes of the external world and the internal world of the narrator operate in tandem in Gothic texts. In other words, as is common in Scandinavian texts and Scandinavian Gothic texts, the relationship between the characters and the landscapes is much more symbiotic, whereby the landscape is given equal agency as the human characters

[271] "I won't lose either my family or my job if I drive an old schoolmate to Vike so he can see his girlfriend and make up for lost time"

[272] "This is clearly a night when ordinary rules and laws are void, and quite different ones apply".

[273] "the represented scenarios or events have to be impossible according to the known laws governing the physical world, accepted principles of logic (such as the principle of non-contradiction), or standard human limitations of knowledge or ability." (Alber et al., 2013, 102)

(Leffler, 2010, 46). This symbiotic relationship between external and internal forces encourages a certain style of reading Gothic texts, one which has merit in *EV*. The Gothic narrative, i.e. Lindemann's story, is an extension of the diary narrator and exploration of an interior subjective world that contains elements that break the boundaries of our known universe, such as the angel Lemuel appearing and disappearing, shared dreaming, landmarks moving and repositioning themselves, while commonplace road features like lampposts (Hovland, 2001, 5) and red streaks in the sky (idem, 287), are defamiliarised. This is a Gothic landscape in a seemingly eternal state of decay, an eternal Norwegian winter.

Further, the diary narrator delegates the power of speech to Lindemann and Tomas, essentially creating multiple narrative doubles. The double as a textual feature adds to the novel's labyrinthine qualities. The road narrative is also a story-within-a-story-within-a-story (Fyhr, 2017, 99), as Tomas and Lindemann tell each other stories that seemingly influence their own narrative. In the following I employ Matthias Fyhr's theories of the Gothic to show how Lindemann's story reflects the diary narrator's internal landscape, and point out the factors that enable speech in an unnarratable landscape of pain and decay.

5.3.1 Journey through Language

The road narrative can be described as having an atmosphere of decay and insolvability, which, according to Fyhr, signals a Gothic text (2017, 71, 89). Gothic authors often depict the symbiotic relationship between the mind and the body, which just like a fragmented text prevents communication between characters: "kroppsligt förfall [kan] göra att kommunikationen förhindras...I dessa texter kan en huvudperson förlora talförmågan på grund av [häftiga känslor]"[274] (2017, 75), which in turn causes a decay of language (2017, 80). This section will examine the delegation of narrative

[274] "physical decay [can] prevent communication ... In these texts, a protagonist may lose the ability to speak due to [violent emotions]"

control between Tomas and Lindemann, and what Tomas accomplishes with his words.

Tomas is thrilled to meet Lindemann after all these years, as it is always good to be around people "med ordet i si makt"[275] (Hovland, 2001, 7), but so far, Lindemann has barely spoken a word, and primarily addresses the reader through internal narration. Tomas notes the wrongness of Lindemann's tacit and uncertain disposition (idem, 23), as he recalls Lindemann as an inspirational speaker, and how his sermons would bring comfort and hope. The Lindemann sitting in the car with him is a shadow by comparison. Tomas tries to get both Lindemann and Liv to interact with any topic, but Liv only responds when he provokes her, and Lindemann is too lost in his own reveries and remembrances of Johanna. Note how Tomas uses darker, more horror-inclined language to engage them in conversation: "- Det er heilt tullete, sjølvsagt, seier Tomas i Dalen, - men brått fekk eg ei slik kjensle av at nokon følgjer etter oss, og at dei ikkje vil oss vel"[276] (idem, 78-79). Liv admonishes him for talking about unpleasant things, but Tomas retorts that without him, "[ville det ha vore] reine spøkelsesbilen" [277] (idem, 79). Lindemann suggests that they are already driving with a ghost in the car: "Innimellom er eg ikkje heilt sikker på om ho [Liv] finst heller, om ho ikkje er ein slik spøkelseshaikar som ein les så mykje om. Ei slik ung jente, bleik og nesten gjennomsiktig, med lyst hår, som seier ho skal ein stad, og plutseleg så er ho søkk vekke"[278] (Hovland, 2001, 52)[279].

Tomas alleviates the creepy tension through humour, which not only mirrors the coping strategy of the diary narrator, but also speaks to the function and appeal of

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[275] "with the power of words"

[276] "It's completely ridiculous, of course," says Tomas i Dalen, "but suddenly I got the sense that someone is following us, and that they mean us harm".

[277] "it would be like a ghost-car in here."

[278] "Sometimes I'm not entirely certain whether [Liv] is real, if she isn't one of those ghost-hitchhikers you read so much about. One of these girls, pale, almost transparent, with fair hair, who says she is going somewhere, and suddenly she is nowhere to be found".

[279] Where Lindemann's knowledge of ghost hitchhikers comes from remains a mystery.

horror and fear. Tomas is experiencing an emotional disconnect from his family, and it is interesting that his approach to engage his companions in speech appeals to their sensibilities, and questions their perception and epistemic knowledge. "Vi skulle ha vore ved Storekrysset for lengst… - Har dei flytta Storekrysset? Spør Liv. – Skulle ikkje forundre meg, seier Tomas i Dalen"[280] (Hovland, 2001, 122). In the same way that his fairytale-like speech pattern alerts the reader to the possibility of certain textual mechanics, he seems to offer a meta-commentary on the narrative itself: "Høyrer de noko spesielt? Seier han… Noko som på ein måte ikkje skulle vere der. Noko som fyller dykk med ei viss uro"[281] (Idem, 122). He could be referring to us, the readers, or to the fictionality of their own story, but most likely he is inferring that they need to leave their assumptions about their world behind as they travel further. All their senses are being deceived, and whatever has been lying in wait, gaining strength, is approaching, and they are being watched by glowing eyes, "kanskje ei einsleg gaupe som sit og gaupar seg, kanskje er det ein attgløymd sau, kanskje er det sjela til ei jente som har drukna ungen sin i myra"[282] (idem, 29).

Tomas' narrative juxtaposition of humour with the grotesque, the ordinary with the aberrant gives the narrative a folkloric tone. Notice also that none of the creatures mentioned, the lynx, the sheep, a soul, are human, indicating that the three travellers have entered a land of the not-quite-human, and begun their journey into a kind of underworld, where they are immediately pursued by a shapeless, menacing darkness. Lindemann is moved to issue a silent prayer, asking to be saved from "all slags utyske med lysande auge"[283], but he then thinks of the "gamle bøna fra Cornwall" [284]

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[280] "We should have been at Storekrysset [Great Cross, an intersection] long ago…" "Have they moved Storekrysset?" asks Liv. "I wouldn't be surprised," says Tomas i Dalen.

[281] "Can you hear something strange? He says… Something that sort of isn't supposed to be there. Something that fills you with a kind of unease"

[282] "…maybe it's a lonely lynx lynxing about, maybe it's a sheep left behind, maybe it's the soul of a girl who drowned her child in the marsh".

[283] "All kinds of beasties with glowing eyes"

[284] "the old prayer from Cornwall"

(Hovland, 20019, 28) instead of a traditional quote from the Bible. The traditional Cornish prayer reads "From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!" and seems appropriate for a dark country road, but it is also appropriate in this Scandinavian Gothic landscape. Lindemann invokes protection from an imagined supernatural threat, which acknowledges and supports a Gothic reading of the road narrative, because it includes folkloric influences and suggests a lack of a higher order. He might also be influenced by Tomas, whose language aligns more with the supernatural than the clerical.

Scripture, or holy words, will not avail them here, as is evident from Lindemann's silent response to their mutual agitation, but the important point we can extract from this passage is the function and power of dark and suggestive imagery. As Clasen argues, "surely there is no great need for us to be educated on the perils of demonic possession… but good horror fiction is psychologically realistic, and it engages with substantial issues that are relevant to people. It depicts in plausible and careful detail the responses of characters to monsters and monstrous events" (2017, 57). The "monsters" in *EV* are mostly metaphysical, but there are a few apt monstrous or at least horrific and uncivilised events which bring this argument forward, as doubled or repeated events. Lindemann and Tomas witness two car crashes; one is the result of their being chased by the ephemeral darkness, and the other of being chased by Liv's abusive father. Lindemann is tongue-tied on both occasions, but Tomas' torrential litanies reveal that he is more susceptible to uncanny energies, which prepares us both emotionally and intellectually for events that will challenge and test the boundaries of the textual universe, as Clasen states: "Horror stories are about engagement…actual experience [and discovering] one's ability to feel in certain ways, and deepening and widening one's emotional experience" (2009, 40).

The application of multiple uncanny elements, such as recognising someone from a dream, a shadowed pursuer, and the strangeness of character composition, enforces the unnatural, decaying ambience and indicates, as Tomas suggests, that this is a night when normal rules do not apply. We therefore have evidence of an unnatural narrative, and we see that Lindemann is experiencing the effects of Sedgwick's conventions,

doubleness and the unspeakable. The unspeakable, in Lindemann's case, is the idea that he has wasted his life on a divine mission and lost his chance for a home and a family. He has therefore lost the talent he brought to that mission: his way with words. Lindemann alone cannot be a direct mouthpiece for the diary narrator's subsumed thoughts. They can only be explored through multiple, refracted doubles and characters, and box narratives.

The doubling motif is confirmed in the uncanny manner in which Tomas and Lindemann seem to be empathically connected, as both have the feeling that they are being followed by something with ill intent and both are haunted by nightmares. Tomas rationalises: "Kanskje er berre denne kjensla eit bilde på noko eg kjenner inne i meg sjølv"[285] (Hovland, 2001, 79), but this only strengthens my interpretation of his and Lindemann's connection, as both are experiencing a disconnection of self. The feeling returns after Liv is safe with her aunt: "Det er nokon der ute, nokon som berre har vore borte ei stund, som har lege i dekning og tatt til seg næring, blitt sterkare, og som no igjen er på sporet"[286] (idem, 208). Lindemann suspects that this "something" might just be chasing one of them, and hopes that Tomas is the target, instead of himself. Suddenly their thoughts coalesce: "*Vi* kjenner det på oss at det kjem nærmare, det trør tungt gjennom skogen, så dropane fell frå dei nakne kvistane, det fyk etter vegen så postkassene snur seg og vegskilta bøyer seg til sides"[287] (idem, 211, my italics). This blending culminates in a dream that they seem to share, and it is even suggested that Liv and her aunt Frida experienced a similar dream (idem, 154-5).

> Det har vore nokon etter meg i alle draumane, nokon har forfølgt meg, har lagt feller for meg, det høyrest lydar som ikkje kan samanliknast med andre lydar, himmelen blir flerra sund, havet stig og elden herjar, kvinner og barn græt, og det er heile tida nokon etter

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[285] "Maybe this feeling is just a metaphor for something I'm feeling inside"

[286] "There is someone out there, someone who's just been gone awhile, lying in hiding and [feeding], grown stronger, and has now picked up the trail."

[287] "*We* feel it coming closer, treading heavily through the forest, making raindrops fall from the naked branches, rushing along the road and [flipping] the mailboxes and bending the road signs".

> meg, nokon i svarte klede som held ansiktet sitt løynt, og eg veit at eg ikkje vil tåle å sjå dette ansiktet som er dekt med eit slags klede, og brått fell eg framover utan å kunne ta meg føre, og brått veit eg kven det er, og eg vaknar av at Tomas i Dalen skrik i senga attmed meg[288] (Hovland, 2001, 150).

Perhaps this dream is a mirror image of the dream the diary narrator has of the biopaths turned witches. The almost apocalyptic imagery of the sky being torn apart and a frothing sea is the very image of the sublime, alongside a hooded figure whose visage Lindemann cannot bear to look upon. It is a vision of destruction and chaos, of a (subjective) world burning, and more importantly, a vision of persecution. Even as Lindemann is fearful of the veiled figure dressed in black, he also recognises it. Lindemann is frequently characterised by his clothes, "den svarte dressen og den kvite skjorta og den lange frakken"[289] (Hovland, 2001, 100). Tomas even introduces Lindemann as "dette mørkkledde spøkelse"[290] (Hovland, 2001, 14). This figure is Lindemann's mirror image, his own proper double created from his crisis of faith, and with the suggestion that they meet comes the knowledge that their meeting entails that one of them must be destroyed. This mirror image is an aspect of himself that must be removed from the narrative before he can find what he is truly looking for. With regard to the rest of the characters, the dream is a warning of the impending disaster, but also of release.

Lindemann's story features several instances of unnatural events that are "non-actualizable" (Ronen, 1994, 51), like angels casually rowing across a fjord and then vanishing in the blink of an eye, the shared dreaming between Lindemann and Tomas,

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[288] "Someone has been after me in every dream, someone has pursued me, laid traps for me, sounds are heard that can't be compared to other sounds, the sky is torn apart, the sea rises, and the fire ravages, women and children cry, and all the while someone is after me, someone dressed in black with their face hidden, and I know I couldn't bear to see this face that's covered in a kind of cloth, and suddenly I fall forwards without being able to brace myself, and I suddenly know who it is, and I wake up from Tomas i Dalen screaming in the bed next to me."

[289] "the black suit and the white shirt and the long coat".

[290] "this dark-clothed spectre/ghost"

and the relationship between the diary narrator and Lindemann. Lindemann calls attention to the fictionality of his story in his longest in-text speech which is written in an archaic Danish-Norwegian cadence. At Tomas's request, Lindemann recites the tale of Legion, a segment that emphasises the motif of persecution on all narrative levels and adds another unnatural element to Lindemann's linguistic powerlessness. In Mark 5:1-13 Jesus heals a man of demonic possession, which is here a poignant metaphor for cancer. Lindemann's narration of the story is strange, because instead of using his own words as Tomas requested (Hovland, 2001, 218), he is literally quoting a New Norwegian Bible translation from 1938[291]. The antiquated spelling gives the recitation an elevated, more solemn air, and removes all sense of character or personality from the reading: "…og med det same han steig utor baaten, kom ein mann med ei urein aand imot honom fraa gravholorne. – Det er vår mann, seier Tomas i Dalen. – Manen hadde tilhald i graverne, og ingen kunde lenger faa bunde honom, ikkje eingong med lekkjor…"[292] (Hovland, 2001, 218-9). Lindemann is completely subsumed by the verse, as if he is momentarily removed from the text, or perhaps he is removed from himself. He cannot speak with the same vigour or magnetic appeal. His automaton-like recitation is unnatural because it diverts our attention away from observing the characters, to viewing the novel as a construct, a metacommentary on intertextuality and the fictionality of the piece. Additionally, it embeds another narrative layer into the novel as a whole, as a story-within-a-story-within-a-story. Tomas admits after

[291] Bibelselskapet (The Norwegian Bible Company) had the 1921 Bible translated into New Norwegian, and published in 1938. The work was done by Hovland's grandfather, Ragnvald Indrebø (See "Bibelutgaver i Norge i 200 år")

[292] This translation does not account for the antiquated spelling of the original Bible passage, but I provide a translation for purposes of accessibility "and as he came forth out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit met him out of the tombs. 'That's our man,' says Tomas i Dalen. The man dwelled in the tombs, and none could bind him, even with chains"

Lindemann finishes that the story has lost some of its comic appeal[293]. It feels too close to home (idem, 220), but perhaps Tomas has realised the extent of Lindemann's reticence. It will take more than joviality and appeals to an instinctive fear of the dark to disinter Lindemann from his silence.

Overall, Lindemann's linguistic handicap places the narrative responsibility on Tomas, but the reader might initially struggle to extract meaning and cohesion from his speech. He cannot abide silence, and fills it with incessant chatter, essentially layering and burying his true sentiments in a constant torrent of words, stories and nonsense. As neither Lindemann nor Tomas have the words to describe or imagine their pursuer, or explain the strangeness of their experiences, the monstrous aspects of the road narrative lie beyond language. At the journey's end both Lindemann and Tomas seem to have arrived at a simple and vulnerable conclusion: "Nett no innrømmer eg at tanken på ikkje lenger å vere med i historia er ganske skremmande"[294] (Hovland, 2001, 233), "Det skremmande er altså at ting held fram utan meg, at ting vil skje og eg er der ikkje…Det er som…ja. [Eg vil at] folk skal hugse meg og ta meg med i bønene sine"[295] (idem, 241-2).

5.3.2 Journey through Faith

This section will examine how Lindemann's subjective world represents a world without a higher order, which creates an atmosphere of powerlessness and moral and corporeal decay. The aim is to scrutinise the idea of illness as a punishment, considering the allegorical nature of the road narrative and the effect metaphoric

[293] Botting remarks on the relationship in the Gothic between fear and laughter; they create "an ambivalence that disturbs critical categories that evaluate their seriousness or triviality" (Botting, 1996, 109).

[294] "Right now I admit that the idea of not being in the story any longer is very frightening"

[295] "What's frightening is that things will go on without me, that things are going to happen and I'm not there…It's like… [I want] people to remember me, and include me in their prayers."

thinking engenders in its narrator, as he travels into a decaying landscape that alludes to an afterlife with mythological and supernatural entities.

The decay of the body represents a decay of the spiritual, which is reflected in the Gothic landscape. We are essentially following Lindemann during his "dark night of the soul"[296], as he relates his struggles with his spirituality, his identity as part of a church community, and his diminished ability to offer spiritual and religious guidance to others. His travels invoke images of 'exile' and 'the fall (from grace)', which are complementary to the diary narrative. As the diary narrator muses whether his illness is a punishment for taking his health for granted, the two narratives juxtapose the diary narrator as patient in exile on the one hand, and Lindemann as an exiled Gothic hero on the other.

The Gothic landscape in decay is a mirror of the body of the protagonist. The crooked trees and towering boulders are common along country roads in Norway, but they are symbols of the wilderness, the antithesis of cultured gardens and parks. They also indicate the travellers' entry into the realm of the sublime, or their *katabasis*, the journey into an underworld, as a parallel to the diarist entering Sontag's Land of the Sick. I say *an* underworld, because while Hovland mythologises the landscape of Western Norway, there is not a concrete parallel to a specific underworld. Hovland constructs a chthonian landscape that seems native to a Scandinavian context and complements the paratext of the 2001 edition of the novel: a stark colourless countryside. The word *katabasis* (Greek, κατάβασις) can mean either a trip from the interior of a country down to its coast, but it also means a journey to the underworld, and both apply in the road narrative. I could argue for an intertextual parallel to Dante's *Divina Commedia*, of Lindemann and Tomas as the modern Dante and Virgil, Johanna as the ephemeral Beatrice, where the goal is for Lindemann to atone for his 'sins'. I would rather argue that the novel gives a gentle nod in Dante's direction, but

[296] "La noche oscura del alma" is part of Christian mysticism, and is mostly used in Roman Catholic spirituality, and I am using this term, not as a reference to mysticism, but as an extension of a Gothic trope of the fallen priest (Lewis, *The Monk*, 1796), and as an idiom of a spiritual crisis.

that its focus lies on the disenfranchised aspects of Lindemann's character and his journey through a decaying, unfamiliar landscape, or rather, a landscape that reflects his spiritual decay.

Bernhardsson writes, "Till detta komplex hör också den specifika variant av exil som *fallet* utgör, alltså ett fall som gestaltas i analogi med syndafallet och förvisningen ut ur paradiset"[297] (2010, 68). Lindemann's vocation has not required celibacy, and he has been offered and accepted private lodgings after his sermons, and "at det stundom kunne oppstå…erotiske spenningar, er ikkje til å kome ifrå…Og visst skjer det av og til noko"[298] (Hovland, 2001, 126-7). He is not ashamed of these fleeting connections resulting from his charismatic performance, but neither is he content or fulfilled.

> Eg hadde ingen rundt meg, ingen familie, ingen nære venner, ingen å snakke med…Eg hadde gitt avkall på alt dette, eg hadde trudd det var nødvendig…Eg møtte folk på mine reiser, folk eg tok inn hos, folk som kom bort til meg etter eit møte då eg hadde hatt Ånda over meg meir enn vanleg, og takka for dei gode orda…Men eigentleg hadde eg ingen. Det var omtrent på denne tida eg såg att det gamle klassebildet med Johanna i bakarste rekke til venstre[299] (Hovland, 2001, 42-43)

The image and memory of Johanna is tenuous at best, and the narrative never fully realises her as a character; she is as ephemeral as the Grail, a quest object on which all of Lindemann's hopes rely. Every clue to her whereabouts leads to disappointment, and yet he clings to the idea of her as if she is the solution and his salvation. He assumed that God had called on him to become a preacher and he never questioned that decision. His motivations are as human as they come; he wants to belong

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[297] "To this complex also belongs the specific variant of exile that *the fall* constitutes, i.e. a fall that is shaped in analogy with the fall from grace and the banishment from paradise."

[298] "that erotic tensions would occasionally arise was unavoidable…and certainly sometimes something happened."

[299] "I had no one around me, no family, no close friends, no one to talk to…I had given it all up, I'd thought it was necessary…I met people on my travels, people I stayed with, people who came up to me after a meeting when the Holy Spirit was stronger in me than usual, and thanked me for the good words… But in reality, I had no one. It was around this time I saw the old class photo with Johanna in the back row on the left."

somewhere and with someone, but he does not know how or what it takes to be vulnerable with another person (which begs the question of how well suited he is to nurture a relationship with Johanna). He always felt like an outsider compared to the rest of his (Protestant evangelical) church[300], "Dei [sic] frelste" [301] (Hovland, 2001, 42), and he claims that those around him noticed that "noko var feil" [302] (ibid.).

As Lindemann is a refraction of the diary narrator, the ideas presented in the diary regarding illness as a punishment carry some problematic connotations. Disease and sickness have often (in religious terms) been categorised as a punishment for sin or immorality, and Susan Sontag writes that the earliest "figurative uses of cancer" (in relation to the diary narrative) "are as a metaphor for 'idleness' and 'sloth'" (Sontag, 1978, 15). This sin is primarily an affliction of religious practitioners, such as monks, when they are lax and indifferent to their duties and obligations to God (Johannisson, 2010). Sloth, also known as *acedia*, takes the form of alienation of the sentient self, a withdrawal from all forms of participation in or care for others or oneself. Here is a subtle, but crucial point in connecting the two narratives, in how the psyche of the diarist refracts into the multiple personas, with varying ability to connect with the self and with others. Neither the diary nor the road narrative emphasises sin or immoral behaviour as the cause of their discomfort, but rather that the illness has brought to light a lack of self-awareness, and made obvious the disconnection between the ideal, unassailable body, and a realistic body that is always subject to decay. The religious overtones are a matter of personal worldview in the case of the diarist, in that his faith provides solace and comfort rather than adding to his suffering. In Lindemann's story his spiritual decay mirrors the physical decay of his environment, and signals that we are in a Gothic environment the laws of which allow for the supernatural to impose.

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[300] Note that the Scandinavian variety of evangelism is not the same as in evangelical churches in the United States. They share many common principles of conversion, missionary work, and belief in the sanctity of the Scripture, but the Scandinavian/Norwegian evangelist is predominantly known as a Protestant and evangelism is practised mostly in Western and Southern Norway.

[301] "the Saved"

[302] "Something was wrong".

Nevertheless, there is no textual evidence to suggest that Lindemann's spiritual crisis will lead to damnation. He feels abandoned, not punished, by the lack of a higher order.

The reason why Lindemann has been so sure of his calling is based on his encounter with an angel, "ein verkeleg engel"[303] (Hovland, 2001, 73). The analepsis describes the encounter between Lemuel and Lindemann as heralded by a bright light, akin to that of the angel announcing the birth of Christ to the shepherds, "The glory of the Lord filled the area with light, and they were terrified. The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid" (Luke 2:9-10).

> eg fekk sjå dette himmelske lyset og ein slags menneskeskapnad midt inne i det. Han bad med forhalde meg roleg og ikkje frykte noko, og om eg ville, skulle han ro meg over fjorden, og det skulle ikkje koste meg noko som helst. Han var berre glad til å få litt selskap den stunda av ein som så å seie høyrde til familien...han sa at det låg eit greitt, lite pensjonat [oppe i bakken] og der ville eg nok få rom for natta....Han løfta armen til helsing og støytte ifrå, og i same augneblink var han ikkje lenger å sjå, og eg lurte allereie på om det heile verkeleg hadde skjedd[304] (Hovland, 2001, 73-6).

There are three things I want to emphasise about this encounter and their implications for Lindemann's character: the valuation of certain masculinities as produced by Lemuel's character, the intertextual connection of Lemuel as Charon, the ferryman in Greek mythology, and the unnatural aspect of the relating of this encounter. Lemuel's diction is homely and plain, and not at all what Lindemann imagined. He seems more like a plain-speaking, ordinary fisherman of an older generation of men whose livelihood did not depend on deeper, personal

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[303] "a real angel"

[304] "I saw this heavenly light and a kind of human shape in the middle of it. He bad me remain calm and fear no evil, and if I wanted, he would row me across the fjord, and it wouldn't cost me anything at all. He was just glad to have some company at this time from someone who was part of the family, so to speak…he said there was a [small, but alright] boarding house [up the hill] and there I was sure to get a room for the night…He lifted his arm in greeting and pushed off, and in the same wink of an eye he was no longer to be seen, and I already wondered if it had happened at all."

communication. With him, Lindemann has no barrier of speech: “Eg merka at svara mine heile tida blei annerleis enn eg hadde tenkt meg. Det var som om eg, utan at eg kunne gjere noko med det, sette meg sjølv i eit dårlegare lys enn det som var meininga”[305] (idem, 75). Perhaps Lemuel has some supernatural powers that prevent the telling of lies in his presence. Even so, Lindemann is comfortable and familiar with Lemuel, and tells him about the dwindling congregation at his meetings. Lemuel replies that it is a consequence of modernity (Hovland, 2001, 74). Lemuel’s personality and social skills consolidate in his easy-going manner: he is an attentive listener, and responds in banalities, which Lindemann finds incongruous, “då eg ikkje trudde at himmelske skapningar strøydde om seg med slike heller inkjeseiande talemåtar”[306] (idem, 76). He resembles Tomas in some ways, in that Lemuel seems equally fond of platitudes, but unlike Tomas he does not dwell on difficult topics. He does what needs doing, with a natural mastery of his surroundings, “han nikka berre og såg tenksam ut, og då han oppdaga ein sluk i botnen av båten, sleppte han den straks over ripa, og det varte ikkje lenge før han drog opp ein fin og sprek lyr”[307] (idem, 75). He represents a perhaps exaggerated version of the kind of man the diary narrator imagines could handle being a patient, but it is very telling that Lemuel responds to difficult topics with silence. Lemuel is never physically described, but his actions indicate a strong and capable man, who is able to “[ta] eit tak der det trengs” [308] (idem, 73).

Lemuel is technically not an angel but a king mentioned in Proverbs 31. His mother dictated prophesies to him, and in Proverbs 31:1-9 Lemuel passes on what his mother taught him about what makes a good king. I wish to focus on two tenets from her wisdom: “Gi ikke din kraft til kvinner…Lukk opp din munn for den som ikke selv

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[305] “I noticed that my answers came out different from what I intended. It was as if I was painting myself in a worse light than I wanted to and couldn’t do anything about it”

[306] “as I didn’t think heavenly creatures would be throwing about empty phrases like that”

[307] “he just nodded and looked pensive, and when he discovered fishing bait in the bottom of the boat, he dropped it over the side and it didn’t take him long to pull up a nice, frisky pollack”

[308] “Lend a hand where one is needed”

kan tale, før saken for dem som nær bukker under"[309] (Proverbs, 31:3, 31:8). Firstly, Lemuel's mother is setting a standard, a masculine ideal for her son, an ideal Lemuel (in *EV)* subversively represents in the novel. There is a contrast between Lemuel and Lindemann; the former is powerful, strong and loquacious, the latter disempowered, taciturn and lethargic. If we assume that Lindemann has "surrendered his power" to women for many years, he must now pay for his "sins" by losing his connection to his own identity as a preacher.

Lemuel and Lindemann's meeting is a melange of scripture and the mundane; when Lemuel appears before Lindemann, he echoes the words of the archangel Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary, while offering to row Lindemann across the fjord, completely free of charge: "Han bad meg forhalde meg roleg og ikkje frykte noko, og om eg ville, skulle han ro meg over fjorden, og det skulle ikkje koste meg noko som helst"[310] (Hovland, 2001, 73-4). Lemuel offers an almost chivalric reversal of the interaction between the souls of the dead, and Charon, the ferryman in Greek mythology, who grants passage across the rivers Styx and Acheron for the prize of a coin (Charon's obol). Lemuel is not here to take Lindemann into the land of the dead, but he always appears when Lindemann is alone and preparing for another journey. He is the one who encourages Lindemann that "ein får være glad for det ein har"[311] (Hovland, 2001, 75-76), a sentiment the diarist echoes in his final entry (idem, 300). Just as quickly as he appeared, Lemuel lifts his arm in greeting, "og i same augneblink var han ikkje lenger å sjå, og eg lurte allereie på om det heile verkeleg hadde skjedd"[312] (idem, 76). Similarly to how the fantastic operated in *Hemmet,* Lindemann questions the boundaries of his universe. Even as a man of faith, he is alerted to the

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[309] "Give not your strength to women…Open your mouth for those who cannot speak, champion those who are about to give in".

[310] "He bad me remain calm, and fear no evil, and if I wanted, he would row me across the fjord, and it wouldn't cost me anything at all."

[311] "one should appreciate what one has"

[312] "and in the same wink of an eye, he was no longer to be seen, and I already wondered if it had happened at all".

presence of something more, and however brief this encounter was, it is paramount to the conclusion of Lindemann's story and his character, as we shall see at the end of the chapter. First, however, I will examine how the novel represents familial structures and spaces, as this is Lindemann's ultimate goal: to find somewhere to belong, or failing that, finding someone with which to continue his journey.

5.3.3 Journey through Family

The important points of contact between the diary and the road narrative are the portrayals of family and home, and the spaces and places they create. The diary sections relate the narrator's experience of illness as voluntary exile where he uses the threshold of his home as an immutable boundary between himself, perhaps in an unconscious impulse to protect his wife from his darker thoughts, and the 'dark companion' he writes about. 'Family' and 'home' are the two main sources from which he draws strength and support. The road narrative, conversely, establishes a literary universe in which certain familial constellations, such as the nuclear family, cannot function or exist, which in turn is reflected in the landscape. This section will explore selected 'homes' and families in the road narrative to examine the portrayal of different homely and unhomely spaces, how they play with Gothic conventions, and how Lindemann's quest for family and belonging necessitates giving up the proverbial ghost.

The first overtly Gothic and unhomely space is the mountain inn heralded by a light "av det slaget som forvilla sjøfararar ville selje mor si og oppgi barnetrua si for å sjå"[313] (Hovland, 2001, 30), "omgitt av eit ubestemmelg sus, vage kjensler og eit mørkt ingenting"[314] (idem, 33). The inn is simultaneously described as a lighthouse in a stormy sea and an *ignis fatuus*, establishing the space as a Scandinavian Gothic locale where Hovland parodies horror tropes and spaces. While the inn is not a Gothic

[313] "of the kind that lost sailors would sell their mother and surrender their childhood faith for."

[314] "surrounded by an indeterminable murmuring, vague feelings and a dark nothing".

ancestral home, Tomas describes it as "ein litt creepy plass"[315] (Hovland, 2001, 33), with columns at the entrance adorned with "underlege, framande teikn"[316] (ibid.), and the common room is inhabited by a large, dysfunctional family. There are two teenagers, one physically assaulting a pinball machine, the other scratching his crotch, while a middle-aged man is watching television, and an elderly couple are screaming at each other. Two chubby girls are bickering, a clear parody of the twins from the cinematic adaptation of Stephen King's *The Shining* (1980), and a woman in a black dress stares wildly at them from a rocking chair, a giant black dog with shining eyes at her feet. These latter characters have overt Gothic overtones, but the others are stereotypical and ordinary people. While their behaviour negates any real sense of danger, Tomas has second thoughts about staying, "det er litt mykje Picnic med døden etter min smak"[317] (Hovland, 2001, 35). This family is divided into smaller units, which each operate autonomously and seemingly uncaring as to whether or not outsiders are present. However, as if on cue, "Brått vender alle auge, elleve par, seg mot oss"[318] (idem, 35), and all activity ceases, even as the narrator says "No blir det liv i forsamlinga"[319] (ibid.). They silently watch as Stine, the proprietor, talks to the new arrivals, and when Stine turns away, they reanimate and return to their usual programme (Hovland, 2001, 37). The sudden absence of noise and the mechanical or puppet-like way Stine's family reacts to visitors is a discomforting, yet effective presentation of the road narrative's depiction of family. They are ruled by their excessive emotions and individual desires that push at the boundaries of domestic ideologies, orchestrated by a domineering matriarch.

Unlike the families described in mid-nineteenth century Gothic texts, the events at the mountain inn are not a scene of a bourgeois family "where guilty secrets of past

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[315] "a creepy place"

[316] "strange, foreign characters"

[317] "it's a little too much of a picnic with death for my taste", the Norwegian title of the 1972 survival thriller movie *Deliverance*.

[318] "Suddenly all eyes, eleven pairs, turn towards us"

[319] "The congregation came alive"

transgression and uncertain class origins are the sources of anxiety" (Botting, 1996, 74), but rather a tableau of familial decay that seems deadlocked in time and space. Stine announces that the travellers need to stay the night and her father informs them that it is because 'the dead' are out walking, as is their custom during foul weather (Hovland, 2001, 46), and they are not friendly to the living: "Dei reiv han i filler, så han såg ikkje ut når dei fan han… Dei hadde rive av han hovudet og slengt det fleire hundre meter av stad. Det var uhyggeleg å sjå"[320] (Hovland, 2001, 46-7). The big dog with the glowing eyes nods and bares its teeth, in confirmation and possibly a warning. This uncanny display of intelligence and understanding from a dog could be another example of Iversen's "not-quite-human" characters, while also referencing the many spectral dogs found in Gothic texts[321]. Although the story seems a thinly veiled sales ploy to increase revenue at the inn, it nevertheless complements Tomas' idea that this is a night where the normal rules do not apply and suggests further that the *katabasis* has begun. The party has entered a land, perhaps not of the dead but of the not-quite-living and the not-quite-dead, as suggested by Stine when she tells Lindemann the story of when her mother threw herself from the waterfall behind the inn and survived (Hovland, 2001, 68). Nothing can fully die here. This wintery, somnolent space violates laws of physics, time and nature, and is infused with a primitive, Gothic energy that distorts family and order.

In contrast to this ancestral building, Liv's aunt Frida has a summer house where they all seek refuge from Liv's father. Like the inn, it is a place of temporality and transference, but it is much more like a home. Frida stands in stark contrast to Stine; the latter is suggested to have some affiliation with darker powers, while the former inspires Lindemann to deeper contemplation: "Ho er ei spesiell kvinne, tenkjer eg. Ei

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[320] "They tore him to shreds, so he was a mess when they found him…They'd torn off his head and flung it several hundred metres away. It was unpleasant to see".

[321] Such as the gytrash in *Jane Eyre* (1847), the barghest in *Dracula* (1897), Mephistopheles appearing as a black poodle in Goethe's *Faust* (1808 & 1832), even the canine guardians of the Greek and Norse underworlds, Cerberos and Garmr, respectively.

kvinne some ein kan risikere at ein aldri vil gløyme"[322] (idem, 190-1). The summer house, and by extension, the people he meets there, represents the first space where Lindemann sees the contours of a life he could have had, and he feels more at home with people he barely knows than his previous community. "Eg tenkjer at slik kan det vere å ha ein familie (idem, 155)…Her kunne eg bli, [sitje] her om kveldane mens skoddeflaka driv som rastlause sjeler over det islagde vatnet"[323] (idem, 191). It is interesting to note that the uncanniness of the mountain inn, the eerie silence and unrestful dead, are similarly invoked in the summer house, with the 'restless souls' on the water. However, restless souls are to be expected in the underworld, and Lindemann seems to contemplate the benefits of remaining in this place, frozen in time, "høyre historiene frå farne tider fortelje seg sjølve"[324] (ibid.). Similarly to Lemuel's effect on Lindemann, Frida is able to coax speech from Lindemann, even though she asks tough questions that make him reconsider his quest: "- Elskar du [Johanna]? Eg ser bort… - Eg trur ikkje ein kan seie at ein elskar nokon som ein ikkje har sett, bortsett frå på eit uklart bilde, på nærmare tretti år"[325] (idem, 195-6). However, Lindemann cannot find peace in this place: he would simply degenerate further and further into a shadow of himself, another restless soul bound to an unquiet existence.

So his journey continues, as Tomas takes him to Vike, a small town that evokes several allusions to various afterlives. Tomas ruminates about the expansive properties of darkness, as it appears to make the streets broader, the crossroads multiply, while blinking neon lights pop up where there were none a minute ago (idem, 226), meaning that darkness creates labyrinths out of well-trodden paths. They check in at "Hotel Pearly Gate" (idem, 226), and are received by "ein mager, eldre mann i svart dress.

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[322] "She is a special woman, I reckon. A woman one might risk never forgetting".

[323] "I'm thinking that this could be what it's like to have a family…I could stay here, [sitting] here in the evenings while the fog drifts like restless souls across the icy water".

[324] "listen to the stories from bygone eras tell themselves"

[325] "Do you love [Johanna]?" I look away… "I don't think you can love someone you haven't seen, except in a blurry photo, for nearly thirty years".

Rundt heile halsen har han eit raudt arr som kan få ein til å tenkje at han ein gong, kanskje i sterk fortviling, har forsøkt å skjere hovudet av seg"[326] (idem, 227). Again we are reminded that this is a landscape where nothing can truly die, only remain. The concierge is filled with impossible knowledge as he correctly guesses the vocations of his new guests, and the fact that Lindemann will not miss the lack of pay-as-you-view TV (idem, 228). He also tries to impress upon them that the scar on his neck "ikkje er slik som du trur"[327] (ibid.), without further explanation. Perhaps this statement alludes to Lemuel's mysterious comment about the state of things in Heaven not being what people assume (idem, 75). One could interpret this character as St. Peter, as the literal gatekeeper at the Pearly Gates; however, given the parodying qualities of the mountain inn, this building and its proprietor are similarly a perversion of Gothic motifs.

Lindemann and Tomas have a last meal of fish and bread together at a restaurant aptly named "Siste Ferje"[328] (idem, 235). These two substances are associated with eternal life, or at least considered as life-giving. This aspect is reflected in the post-surgery chapters of the diary narrative, where the diarist says that he has been given his life back. Welle also argues that the symbols and metaphors of death in the fictional narrative allow the diary narrator to connect to and express his feelings concerning death (2010, 240), and in turn, "ved å knyte dei språklege bilda til kjende omgrep, får lesaren ei uhyggekjensle, som gir klare assosiasjoner til døden"[329] (idem, 241). However, as the two friends leave Vike, there is no rest in this place either, and the narration again takes on a Biblical tone, which emphasises the unnatural space they are in: "Og det var eit underleg lys denne dagen, som minte oss om ting vi hadde sett og høyrt i tider som var før desse, og eg tenkte at lyset skulle føre oss fram og kanskje

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[326] "a lean, elderly man in a black suit. He has a red scar going right around his neck which makes one think that he once, perhaps in a moment of deep despair, tried to cut off his head."

[327] "It's not what you think."

[328] "Last Ferry"

[329] "in connecting the literary images with familiar terms, the reader gets a feeling of eeriness, which provides clear associations with death."

fylle oss heilt"[330] (Hovland, 2001, 251), but it only fills them with unease ("uro"). Welle summarises Lindemann's experience perfectly: "Han føler seg splitta mellom to røyndommar og veit ikkje lenger korleis han skal halde ut den indre smerta dette medfører"[331] (242). It is therefore fitting that Tomas should be the one to journey with Lindemann. There is the obvious allusion to Doubting Thomas, but more interestingly, the name Tomas is the Greek form of the Aramaic name תָּאוֹמָא (Ta'oma'), which means 'twin'. In order to reach his goal of finding a place to belong, Lindemann must consolidate his character into one reality. That is why Tomas must leave the narrative. He is, as we have seen, keenly aware of the metaphysical landscape he inhabits, and thus, in the same way he was conjured into existence, Tomas drives off, shouting "Eg er her enno!"[332] (Hovland, 2001, 276).

Right before the novel ends, Lindemann goes back to a house he spent a night in many years ago. He slept with the woman who lived there, and she makes it clear that she is very hurt by his disappearance. A man enters (who might be Lindemann's son) and ejects Lindemann from the house. Things would have been different if Lindemann had something to give them, but he has not. He is powerless, he has nothing to offer them, in the son's eyes. Lindemann does not acknowledge that this might be his son; he only remarks that he cannot argue with such a kind man, a decent man who once did the right thing. This could of course mean that the kind man married the woman, but it is unlikely. The narrator offers no physical description, only that he has a soft male voice, and that he has the look of a kind man about him. The omission of family likeness is poignant. Not only has Lindemann lost his paternal role in his community, but he has also lost his chance at actual fatherhood.

The readers gain no insight into Lindemann's feelings or thoughts about this meeting. He feels lost and longs for snow to cover everything, so he can start again.

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[330] "And there was a strange light this day, reminding us of things we had seen and heard in the times before these, and I thought the light would bring us forth and maybe fill us completely"

[331] "He feels torn between two realities and no longer knows how to endure the inner pain this entails"

[332] "I'm still here!"

There is a lovely juxtaposition between the diary entry of 31.12 (Hovland, 2002, 300) and this passage, where in the former the diarist feels hopeful about the future (and a blank new notebook), even if things are not quite where they need to be. He is nevertheless optimistic. Lindemann, on the other hand, longs for a miracle: "Om det berre ville begynne å snø no, det ville ha vore rett. Eit ugjennomtrengeleg snødrev som kunne gøyme alt, kvit snø som kunne breie seg over alle vonbrot og knuste draumar, over alle vegar og over alle kart"[333] (idem, 301).

As Lindemann's journey reaches its end in parallel with the diary narrator's health improving, the doubles are not so much excised through violence, but rather a natural segue out of the narrative. The point of Lindemann's story was not to recapture and reconnect with his voice, as that part of him seems indelibly connected to his vocation as a preacher. Rather, the journey has been about finding peace and acceptance of things as they are. I have in some ways read Lindemann as a restless spectre looking for its final resting place, which, as a double of the diarist, merits consideration. There has been enough death and trauma in the novel thus far. The narrator wants a happy, quiet end, and as he closes off his diary with optimism and new *joie de vivre,* Lindemann is granted, not a physical home where he can settle down, but a travel companion. Lemuel returns as the final ferryman, "og til slutt sit vi og plystrar begge to"[334] (Hovland, 2001, 303). The diary narrator ends his narrative as the year turns, and Lindemann drives into the unknown, presumably towards spring and a new beginning.

[333] "If only it would snow now, that would be right. An impenetrable snowdrift that could hide everything, white snow that could cover every disappointment and broken dreams, every road and every map."

[334] "and in the end, we both sit and whistle"

6 Olga Ravn's *Celestine*: The Madwoman in the Attic Revisited

6.1 Context: Mental Ill Health

Thus far the novels I have analysed have categorised and portrayed illness as an intruder, an infection that needs to be excised. In this chapter I examine Olga Ravn's *Celestine,* where illness is employed as a method of transformation, and the illness prepares the body for the dark seed of possession to grow. The novel centres on a young, nameless protagonist working as a teacher at a boarding school who is obsessed with the story of Celestine. The title refers to a girl who supposedly lived in the Middle Ages, and whose parents put her in a wall as punishment for loving the wrong man, literally making her "en del af hjemmet"[335] (Ravn, 2015, 8). Celestine haunts the protagonist to the extent that she imagines a kinship between them. She subsequently attempts to turn her body into a new home for Celestine, to become "den, der lyttede, og også den, der gav min krop"[336] (ibid.). As the protagonist attempts to establish a kinship with Celestine, she finds an old woman in the school attic, mute and unkempt like a wild animal.

Although nothing in the novel's paratext explicitly suggests the Gothic[337], the Gothic is actualised through intertextual references to other Gothic works and authors (Fyhr, 2017, 60). The novel engages with historical, cultural and literary discourses of sickness and femininity, and it underscores conditions in which women have become ill as a means of reclaiming corporeal and verbal agency within a phallogocentric and patriarchal system. In a system that aims to control female sexuality and reproduction

[335] "part of the home".

[336] "the one who listened, and also the one who gave my body"

[337] The Danish 2015 edition of Celestine has a blue marbled cover with the title embossed in silver. The cover of the New Norwegian 2017 version, however, is a much more visual representation of the novel's content as it features the white dress, coat hangers and flowers with infants in their centre.

by associating the "feminine with disorder" (Shildrick, 2002, 37) in fear of its lack of adherence to a fixed bodily form (Braidotti, 1994, 80), Ravn presents a literary universe where nothing remains fixed or solid. Identities and consciousnesses mingle and dissolve, aspects of time appear as circular and erratic, rather than linear, and the protagonist's self-destructive behaviour is juxtaposed with aspects of a natural cycle of birth and decay. I employ insights from feminist unnatural narratology (Iversen, 2016; Peel, 2016; Richardson, 2006), Bernhardsson (2008), Haraway (1988), and Hellstrand's monstrous methodologies (2018), and I argue that Ravn's protagonist materialises a body that hollows and eviscerates itself to become a mouthpiece for the aggrieved, by evoking feminine figures of power from both myth and Gothic canon.

The novel's opening sentences establish two things. They alert the readers that this is a Gothic text, while subverting and challenging genre expectations: "Det var meningen, at hun skulle gifte sig, eller at hun skulle gøre noget, den ene ting eller den anden, men hun nægtede. Man holdt en fest til hendes ære, og om natten murede man hende inde, uden nogen opdagede det...Hvem vil så elske dig? Hvem vil lytte?"[338] (Ravn, 2015, 7). The narrator irreverently and almost callously describes how Celestine's parents immured her as a punishment and that she has become a white garbed shadow without a voice (idem, 8)[339]. A few pages later, the narrator states that she is "som et genfærd, en skygge af mig selv"[340] (idem, 15), a statement that both foreshadows the narrator's transformation into something otherworldly and signals that her mental health is fragile.

Before proceeding to my analysis of Ravn's novel, I discuss discourses of mental ill health, including but not limited to disordered eating as an intertext which is inferred through the protagonist's behaviour, and the symbols and literary images of

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[338] "She was supposed to get married, or she was supposed to do something or other, but she refused. There was a party held in her honour, and during the night they bricked her up without anyone noticing… Who will love you then? Who will listen?"

[339] Sedgwick states that live burial was a common conventional punishment in Gothic novels, but she also notes that it was used predominantly as a punishment for sexual activity (1980, 3-4).

[340] "like a ghost, a shadow of myself".

the emaciated body as well as behaviour that can be linked to mental disorders. In the previous chapter of this dissertation, the illness is present from the start, both in the body and in the text. This is not the case in *Celestine*, where the illness has yet to become an "ontological assault" (Brody, 1987, 49). The protagonist narrates a story that is only connected to her own in parallel, namely that of her foremothers, in lieu of the longer, more jagged passages detailing problematic aspects of the protagonist's childhood (sexual assault, parental neglect)[341]. Modern medical perspectives are absent from the novel. Instead, Ravn engages with historical medical discourses in fiction, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), and nineteenth century Gothic texts and imagery that reference Gothic feminine figures like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1849), Ellen in "Spökhanden" (1898) and the unnamed protagonist in *Rebecca* (1938). These intertexts add to *Celestine*'s claustrophobic atmosphere and encourage a reading of the novel as a feminist critique of socio-cultural mechanisms that favour, and yet are deaf to, feminine ill health.

The varied disordered behaviours of the protagonist function both as a criticism of external pressure to conform, but also as metaphors and images of the morbid, but no less organic, circuitry of decay and rebirth. This could be discussed as what Morton terms a "dark ecology" (2016), where bodies and identities intertwine, dissolve and regrow as a means to escape corporeal, societal and emotional confines. Ravn goes further by subverting the conventional expectations of Female Gothic narratives by having her protagonist actively seek a limited existence the likes of which her literary foremothers sought to evade. This limited existence has a double meaning in Ravn's novel: as intertext it refers to the living conditions of women in the nineteenth century, which Wijkmark has described as "det begränsade liv"[342] (2009, 169), and as a

[341] I am intentionally leaving these aspects of the novel unexamined, because any emphasis placed on these events as causal strays too close to appear as a literary attempt at diagnostics, which is neither my intention nor field of expertise.

[342] "the limited life"

supernatural motif it highlights how Ravn's protagonist tries to emulate a ghostlike existence.

I will now situate some aspects of ill health from the novel in Gothic studies and the field of *literature and medicine*. The most readily observable of these behaviours are the protagonist's relationship to food and drink, her insomnia, and her deteriorating mental state. Her disordered relationship with food and lack of sleep indelibly impact her mental health, but disordered eating discourses are particularly stigmatised. Ravn's poetic language complementss and plays with the juxtaposition of the aesthetic and the abject, as her protagonist proclaims that "[jeg] vil tabe mig, som man taber en rose, som et hjerte, der flyder over med smeltet ost"[343] (Ravn, 2015, 139).

Eating disorders are from the onset connected to horror, Gothic, and sociocultural discourses in profound ways[344]. This is mainly, as many scholars has argued before, due to their reproduction in mainstream culture as a psychosocial, cultural illness (Bordo, 2003; Ellmann, 1993; Gooldin, 2003; Heywood, 1996). The visceral image of an anorexic body is simultaneously horrible and desirable. On the one hand, the skeletal, emaciated form is the embodiment of the living dead, a reminder of famine and starvation around the world, and on the other hand, thin, wiry and lithe bodies are aestheticised and presented on runways across the world[345]. Put plainly, the body of

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[343] "I want to lose weight like one loses a rose, like a heart overflowing with melted cheese."

[344] As seen in the preface of Ingeborg Sennesets' *Anorektisk*: "Vi snakker om boken og forordet som skal bli. Og vi snakker om horror og terror. Anoreksien er horror. Og den ligner på terror" [We talk about the book, and the preface in the making. And we talk about horror and terror. Anorexia is horror. And it looks like terror] (2017, 20).

[345] Many see starvation as a condition associated with poverty and poor social infrastructure, i.e. as a circumstance, not a choice. Nevertheless, not eating is a warning sign in many respects and loss of appetite usually indicates illness. Fasting, on the other hand, as a cultural and religious practice differs from disordered eating, because it is an interlude in an otherwise healthy diet. Fasting is therefore only thematically connected with anorexia nervosa, not semantically or socio-culturally, according to Caroline Walker Bynum (1985, 1988) and Joan Brumberg (1989). Elaine Showalter in particular interpreted anorexia as a reflection of the fractured feminine ideal of the nineteenth century,

the eating disorder is polemic. The "only language their bodies are allowed to speak is the one that confirms their need to be fixed or adjusted" (Michelis, 2015, 80), because "anorexic literature" is potentially contagious: "The contagion spreads through language… the channels through which it flows and acts are so often linguistic, the disorder has inspired a perverse literary tradition, replete with patron saints…it contains and reproduces something more amoebic, perhaps more dangerous, than dieting tips: *a specific persona and sensibility"* (Waldman, 2015, unpaginated).

However, by reading disordered eating as a prominent, but not the only, sign of ill health, I can examine whether or not the text perpetuates or renegotiates stereotypical representations of feminine ill health. To explain my reasoning, I provide this citation from the text. Ravn does not aestheticise starvation; she presents us with the abject, not-quite-living and voiceless body as a result of attempts "at stå imod kulturens store øje…den, der sulter sig, der ønsker ikke at blive overvægtig af kultur"[346] (Ravn, 2015, 138). She presents a body that has been defamiliarised by the great eye of culture, a body that approaches the reclaiming of autonomy by negating societal markers and defying containment on all levels of narrative. Ravn's language overflows and oscillates between poetic innovation and shocking juxtapositions and leads to a feeling of unease and discomfort. Identities are boundless and fluid, and therefore defy external categorisation.

The protagonist's tactic is a performative and ritualistic transformation that engenders overlapping and dissolution of identity. Illness, or ill health, is employed as intertext through an unnatural and Gothic lens to create a communal space of multiple voices in which the unbearable can be narrated. The multi-layered narrative thus aims to "give voice to the body, so that the changed body can become once again familiar" (Frank, 1997, 2). Bodies in *Celestine* are at times so defamiliarised and featureless that

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exemplified by the Madonna and the whore, as the body and not-body, the angelic or the demonic (Johannisson, 1994, 136; Showalter, 1987, 128-9)

[346] "to resist the great eye of culture…the one who starves doesn't want to be overweight by culture".

boundaries between human and non-human dissolve, resulting in a narrative where voices are more prevalent that physical bodies. This is perhaps a meta-reflexion on how certain perspectives and voices require extreme measures to be heard in a society that is unresponsive to their concerns.

An additional narrative burden occurs through everyday language, and metaphors which create implicit demands on how certain illnesses and their sufferers should act. As Bernhardsson claims, in a Swedish context, many fictional and factual pathographies about eating disorders congregate around metaphors of battle, of enemies and allies, and the body as a *territory* (Bernhardsson, 2008, 98), an imagery that can be related to Anne Husaker-Hawkins' model of the "Battle Myth" (1993). Bernhardsson is here an example of the kind of imagery of the body as a territory that can be invaded. This is important in *Celestine* precisely because illness 'allows' the body to be invaded, and the psyche to expand and traverse borders between inanimate and human states, as seen in Ravn's text: "Jeg var en kugle av pink papir...Jeg var en kunstfærdig knold af flettet hår, opsat på Celestines baghoved…Jeg var Helene, min gamle veninde"[347] (2015, 101). This example shows how the protagonist treats her body like a territory that is willingly invaded. She is a passive agent who drifts between various impossible states of being, and in identifying with Celestine, her ill health is personified.

The narrator or protagonist, says Bernhardsson, fights on two fronts: the illness and the monsters they entail, and doctors and treatments representing healing, but also another form of bodily control (2008, 97-98). In *Celestine*, this discourse is channelled through multiple Gothic tropes and medical discourses stemming from the nineteenth and twentieth century: monstrous femininity and sexuality, doppelgangers, and the meeting of the *not-yet-dead* and the *not-quite-living* in floral metaphors that renegotiate images of the fecund, feminine body. The eponymous character was literally entombed in the home and lingers on as a no-longer-human figure that time

[347] "I was a ball of pink paper…I was a tuft of elaborately braided hair, mounted on the back of Celestine's head…I was Helene, my old friend"

cannot touch, preserved in a perpetual state of almost-becoming: “Hun har ingen alder, hun er altid seksten. Århundre efter århundre”[348] (Ravn, 2015, 13). The tropes and figures Ravn employs underscore that the systemic conditioning of the female body as transgressive, in need of guidance and treatment (punishment) through suppressive means like incarceration (be it tight-lacing or confinement) and starvation (voluntary or otherwise), breeds a particular kind of response: “Sickness breaks down the body, and it breaks down identity, but it cultivates beautiful monsters” (Pugh, 2018, 60).

6.2 Unnatural Voices in the Wall

Celestine is sectioned into a prologue “Sommeren”, two parts “Skolen” and “Et år senere”, and a middle section titled “Celestine (1534-1550)”. Each section has titled chapters that range from the plainly descriptive, “Den gamle dame og tårnet”[349], to the poetic and abstract, “Kysset på citronen”[350]. The prologue establishes the protagonist and main focaliser who describes Celestine’s demise and how it informs the protagonist’s goals: “Jeg vil gerne lære af spøgelset, hvordan man bliver en eneste historie, der gentager sig selv”[351] (Ravn, 2015, 8), which is reiterated through repeated events, mirrors and reflections throughout the novel. Yet despite the above-mentioned structure the text appears labyrinthine from the very start. The protagonist’s narrative jumps between her past and present at a disorienting pace with no clear separation or connection to the topic at hand, and it is interspersed with sentences and paragraphs where she appears to have knowledge of Celestine’s *current* inner thoughts: “Celestine sidder i sit hul i muren og lydder med opspilede øjne…Det sortner i hende. Hun har ingen alder, hun er altid seksten. Århundre efter århundre. Lige inden det første

[348] “She has no age, she is always sixteen. Century after century.”

[349] “The old woman and the tower”

[350] “The kiss upon the lemon”

[351] “I want to learn from the ghost how to become a single story that repeats itself.”

skybrud gik jeg rundt i parken, denne lugt af kommende regn"[352] (Ravn, 2015, 13). This technique gives the chapter and the book a feeling of incoherence and disquieting inertia. The quote above demonstrates Sedgewick's trope of *live burial*, and Celestine is here portrayed as doubly immured. She sits in a hole in the wall, and the darkness builds inside her, a symbol of her verbal outrage, but it has nowhere to go. The impossibility of the narrative universe is emphasised in the juxtapostion of objects seen with human aspects, "Genstandene opfører sig helt afsindig, og den kan ske, at de begynder at spise af menneskene"[353] (Ravn, 2015, 165). Some characters are even described as animated corpses, "En meget spiseforstyrret elev går over gården...hun ligner et lig, jeg har aldrig set et tyndere menneske andet end på film"[354] (Ravn, 2015, 137).

It is unclear whether the same narrative voice relates these situations of Celestine behind the wall and the 'I' walking through the gardens, or if it is a different narrative voice that reduces Celestine to a malformed object who cannot speak, only listen with her eyes. According to Alber's definition, these narrative voices are unnatural because they "defy our real-world knowledge" (2016, 5). The opening pages of the novel are similarly unnatural, particularly this statement: "Man sagde, sure thing, du kan blive her for evigt…Hvem vil så elske dig?"[355] (Ravn, 2015. 7). Who is the narrator addressing? If it is the protagonist addressing Celestine, one might question how she knows the specifics of what was spoken at the time of Celestine's immurement. It seems too specific to be an intelligent guess, and the inclusion of an English phrase

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[352] "Celestine sits in her hole in the wall and listens with wide eyes... She grows darker. She has no age, she is always sixteen. Century after century. Just before the first cloudburst I walked around the park, this scent of the coming rain."

[353] "Objects behave insanely, and sometimes they begin to eat parts of the humans". Note that the Danish phrasing indicates that the objects are eating away at the people, as humans would eat an apple bit by bit, or an insect eat away at a leaf.

[354] "A pupil with a serious eating disorder walks across the playground…she looks like a corpse, I have never seen a thinner person except in films."

[355] "They said, sure thing, you can stay here for ever…Who will love you then?"

supplements the anachronism of the utterance. Conversely, the protagonist could also be mimicking a heterodiegetic narrator that directly addresses the reader, as seen in the "gentle reader" from *Jane Eyre* and the works of Henry Fielding, William Thackeray and George Eliot (Richardson, 2006, 18). If the former, then the point of the second-person address is to emphasise the connection the protagonist draws between herself and Celestine, "jeg tegner hende op efter mine egne mål. Der er ikke andet, jeg kan gøre"[356] (Ravn, 2015, 8). However, the novel's intertextuality lends credibility to both interpretations. The first narrator is simultaneously addressing Celestine and the reader, to encourage the latter and ensure the former that *someone* is listening.

Despite the temporal separation between Celestine and the protagonist of over four centuries, there appears to be a horizontal temporality, or to borrow Alber's words "coexisting time flows" (2016, 6), and they appear to coexist narratively during the same period. These conditions make Celestine an impossible narrator (Alber, 2016, 4). Celestine is "hele tiden på kanten af døden, hvor du så møder mig. På grænsen til at være ingen og så alligevel så magtfuld og fuld af arbejdskraft"[357] (Ravn, 2015, 92). Again, it is unclear who is being addressed. This quote comes from Celestine's section of the novel, and it would not be unreasonable to interpret her address as directed towards the reader, as she later emphatically implores: "Du kan ikke komme til bunds i min historie…Pas godt på dig selv"[358] (Ravn, 2015, 93, 95). She later claims to have observed "at du er forfalsket af dig selv….jeg så hvordan du blev forkrøplet af så længe at leve tæt på et andet menneskes sorg" [359] (Ravn, 2015, 94), an observation that seems targeted toward the protagonist. Although the text guides the reader with the chapter titles, these are merely signposts of temporal movement, and do not specify if

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[356] "I draw her based on my own measurements. There is nothing else I can do."

[357] "always on the brink of death, wherever you meet me. On the verge of being no one and yet so powerful and full of manpower". Please note that "arbejdskraft" strictly speaking means 'will to work', and the gendered term 'manpower' is an unfortunate, but simplistic translation.

[358] "You can't get to the bottom of my story…Take good care of yourself."

[359] "you have been forged by yourself…I saw how you were crippled by living so close to another person's grief for so long."

the analepsis goes back to the Middle Ages, or if we are following Celestine up to the protagonist's time. Time in this novel is non-linear, to emphasise the novel's theme as, if not universal, then time*less*[360].

This narrative oscillation falls under Iversen's representational doubt in its intratextual form (2016, 15), and conjures the uncanny as a result: the reader cannot fully establish the origin of each individual speech, and as we have seen, the narrative voices are unpredictable. Iversen notes that an "uhyggelig fortælling" occurs under two conditions, the first being the recurring problem of intentionality, "når læseren fastholdes på narrativiseringens niveau, opsat på at ordne og normalisere stemmer, der vedbliver med at fremstå fordoblede, forsinkede eller forkerte"[361] (2016, 131). The second condition is that "de uhyggelige stemmer skal opleves både af de skildrede personer og af læseren"[362] (ibid.). *Celestine* does not fulfil all the criteria of the "uhyggelige fortælling", but the novel still discusses and proceeds from what Iversen calls "dialogisk tvivl" (Iversen, 2016, 130). Dialogic doubt is caused by a voice emerging from 1) "endnu-ikke-helt", the not-yet-quite and 2) "ikke-længere-heller", the no-longer-quite human. Celestine falls somewhere in between these categories in corporeal terms, as "endnu-ikke-helt" characters comprise "spøgelser, gengangere, dobbeltgængere og visioner"[363] (idem, 15).

Like the protagonist in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), Ravn's protagonist is nameless and the book's title cover refers to a dead woman. The anonymity of the protagonist indicates that she could be anyone, rather than inspiring identification

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[360] Alison Torn argues that in acknowledging the value and function of storytelling as a road to recovery, one must challenge the adherence to linearity in this process, "by focussing on instances when the ability to narrate apparently breaks down, periods that may be characterised as 'chaotic flux' or a 'frozen stasis'" (Stone, 2004, 18) (2011, 131). The disparate tempus and oscillating narration in Celestine seem to embody chaotic flux.

[361] "when the reader is maintained at the level of narrativisation, intent on correcting and normalising voices that continue to appear doubled, delayed, or incorrect"

[362] "The uncanny voices should be experienced by both the depicted characters and by the reader."

[363] "Ghosts, revenants, doppelgangers and visions"

between reader and protagonist. The latter as a textual feature would not only be ethically problematic, but discordant with the protagonist's current raison d'être. Her body has been filled according to the wants and demands of her contemporary culture, exemplified and referred in the text as eyes that consume as they observe. She has therefore categorically removed her own body (as a metonymy of her individuality) from the text, lest it be consumed again and again. This creates a coupling of the protagonist as a bodyless voice and Celestine as a voiceless body.

Additionally, the teacher is not only bodyless, but faceless. Early in the novel, the protagonist happens upon a teenage couple having sex, and she reacts with disbelief when they do not recognise her. Claire Colebrook (2014) connects "the loss of face" (2014, 150) to the literal loss of subjective self. In this case, losing face is not a metaphor for social missteps, but a consequence of forgetting oneself. The world seen through the protagonist's eyes is peopled with the faceless and eyeless, implying that she conceives of individuality as a complex delusion: "så faldt ansigterne af som sære, formløse pletter, men menneskene selv gik videre hen mod busstoppestederne uden ansigtstræk og uden øjne"[364] (Ravn, 2015, 16), "Eleverne lignede altid hinanden" [365] (idem, 31). Identity is here construed as interchangeable and fickle, and it benefits the protagonist's project. She is slowly becoming no one, and in so doing creates space in herself for Celestine.

Self-evisceration is a narrative feature as much as it is a Gothic marker. It further signals that this is an unnatural text that employs certain techniques with a feminist intention. *Celestine's* protagonist is carefully selecting what to tell the reader, and her name is not among those things. The teacher can exist without a name, thus the one name that matters is Celestine's. Her story is the one thing that matters, and she

[364] "…then the faces fell off like strange, shapeless stains, but the people walked on towards the bus stops without facial features and without eyes"

[365] "The pupils always resembled each other".

therefore encourages the reader to arrive in the story with a similar intent, "for at være den, der lyttede" [366] (idem, 8).

In relation to Iversen's dialogic doubt, I wish to emphasise another unnatural aspect of *Celestine* which relates to the inclusion of biographic data in fiction. The protagonist asks "[h]vad er det Celestinede i mig?"[367] (idem, 121). To account for the many-faceted entity that is Celestine, she has become an adjective, a description. The name 'Celestine' comes from the Latin *caelestis/caelum*, meaning 'heavenly', which suggests an angelic nature[368]. Considering the religious overtones of 'Celestine', it is therefore indicative of a character whose fate is bound to loci such as convents, churches and abbeys. One might also infer that Celestine was part of the nobility. To cover up her death, Celestine's family claimed that "hun var rejst til Slesvig" [369] (idem, 8), i.e. to the Danish court. "Min far hed Mogens Gyldenstierne"[370] (idem, 87), Celestine claims, identifying her family as one of the two most powerful and influential families in the Middle Ages in Denmark[371]. Mogens is a historical figure[372], a Danish knight and feudal lord of the fortress of Akershus in the 14th century; he had many children, but Celestine is not among them[373]. Nevertheless, introducing this level of historical detail causes paratextual doubt (Iversen, 2018, 15) and amplifies the assumption that Celestine has been erased from her family's history. The narrative voice we assume speaks for Celestine states: "Du kan ikke komme til bunds i min historie…[j]eg er blevet historierne…[j]eg kan ikke huske det hele"[374] (Ravn, 2015,

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[366] "I came to be the one who listens"

[367] "What is the Celestinian in me?".

[368] The names of Gothic children usually reveal their future, but more often they are "the opposite of what a child's fate appears to be" (Georgieva, 2013, 35)

[369] "She had gone to Slesvig."

[370] "My father's name was Mogens Gyldenstierne"

[371] Immortalised in Hamlet, in the characters of Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern.

[372] https://nbl.snl.no/Mogens_Gyldenstierne

[373] https://www.geni.com/people/Mogens-Gyldenstierne-till-Restrup-og-Iversn%C3%A6s/6000000000781697178

[374] "You can't get to the bottom of my story… I have become the stories… I can't remember it all."

93), because she has 'lived', or perhaps I should say endured, for so long that the details of her life come to her piecemeal as the relics different museums claim were hers (ibid.).

As the borders of reality and delusion grow ever more tenuous, the focus remains on both the corporeal and sensorial consequences of the protagonist's obsession with Celestine, which suggests that these two characters speak a similar language. Through an invocation of similar imagery and an unnatural physicality that transcends time and defies epistemological frames, they are able to communicate. "De fremstående blodårer på Kims underarm. Jeg stirred på den arm engang under et helt samleje"[375] (Ravn, 2015, 20) says the protagonist, and Celestine echoes "de tydelige blodårer, der snor sig op ad armen, jeg stirrer på den arm under hele samlejet, han er over mig"[376] (idem, 85).

Whether or not this is further proof of the cyclical nature of these women's fates, or merely a narrative feature that aims to confuse the reader, the unnatural dissemination of knowledge stands out. Celestine's section is a clear delineation of narrative voice, but in the surrounding pages there is no clear delineation. Ravn's language seems to encourage ambivalence and doubt, in terms of who (or what) the narrator truly is. Analeptic interruptions, unnatural phenomena and narrative impossibilities (Alber, 2016), not to mention the poetic thicket that is Ravn's prose, are all destabilising and defamiliarising factors for the reader. The relationship between the characters enables connection. Creating characters that violate an object's domain-specific assumptions (Clasen, 2018, 358), such as two women communicating across centuries, and the rearranging of sensorial organs, is an effort to make the reader pay attention. The unnatural is therefore mobilised in this novel to enable communication and companionship across centuries. Such companionship indicates something deeper about the relationship between the two women, that their identities

[375] "The prominent veins on Kim's underarm. I stared at that arm once all through intercourse."

[376] "The prominent veins that wind up his arm, I stare at that arm during intercourse, he is on top of me."

are merging, a theme I will explore in the following section.

6.3 Mirroring the Monster

There are three main Gothic emblems I wish to emphasise in the following: the mirror and other reflective surfaces, and how they relate to feminine monstrosity, the white dress as a transliteral symbol of Gothic heroines, and the use of subversive floral imagery, which not only emphasises the novel's Gothic qualities, but acts as Sedgwick's barrier of the protagonist's true struggle with corporeal control and autonomy.

Using Bram Dijktstra's *Idols of Perversity* (1986), I want to present some discourses which connect mirrors with feminine monstrosity. The mirror as a female vanitas motif has a long and densely intertextual tradition in literature and art. One of the most popular motifs of femininity in nineteenth and early twentieth century art was that of a woman looking in a mirror, "any mirror, but preferably a circular or, even better, an oval mirror" (Dijkstra, 1986, 135), symbolising a "precivilized, undifferentiated feminine identity" (ibid., 134) in one aspect, and circular, imprisoned existence in another. Dijkstra argues that woman as "earth mother, vulval round, moon and mirror of nature" (1986, 132) reflected the world around her. "She existed in and for what she mirrored, and unless she mirrored the world of man, she mirrored brute nature, the world of woman, herself" (idem). The central point of Dijkstra's analysis of the woman-and-her-mirror theme is that it underlines the mirror's function in the cultural construction of gender and identity. The "stabilizing glance" (ibid., 135) in the mirror would reassure a woman of her own self-sufficiency, but male poets and authors warned against, yet adored, the long, withdrawn gaze which invited a woman's monstrous aspects: "In the mirror woman's eyes became the eyes of the medusa [sic] hypnotizing her…destroying woman's modesty, dependence and self-forgetfulness, and inducing her instead to grow into a flower of evil" (idem, 137-138). In the following, I will examine how Ravn nods at these traditional themes, and counters them with her own experimental monstrous doubling of womanhood.

The purpose of the mirror in the contexts Dijkstra describes was to control the personal and corporeal liberties of women in that period. There are few instances where the protagonist uses a mirror, the notable exception being when she attempts to summon Celestine the way one would summon Bloody Mary: "på slottet stillede jeg mig foran det runde spejl ved midnat og sagde hendes navn tre gange"[377] (2015, 8). Ravn employs alternative configurations of reflective surfaces as a means for her protagonist to negate and escape her cultural and corporeal confines. As the protagonist states, "Jeg var slankere før, jeg sultede mig en smule, som unge kvinder gør. Nu er der bare den tunge krop, med dens matte ugidelige hulrom. Alt bliver en del af kroppen eller tiltvinger sig plads der. Jeg er overvægtig af kultur. Jeg er tung og søvnløs"[378] (Ravn, 2015, 81)[379]. The protagonist is never physically described beyond this feeling of heaviness (which need not strictly be a physical reference), because the mirror only shows the features of her culture, "pornofilm og forbrugsgoder, blå blomster, der forsvandt ned i mælk" [380] (idem, 19). The blue flowers could refer to the aesthetically pleasing butterfly pea flower tea[381], whose vibrant deep hue is diluted and muted by milk. Within the context of this novel, milk is associated with motherhood, and the mundane horrors of conventional family life. The blue flower is a signifier of the Romantics, the quest for the unattainable and symbolises "the deep and sacred longings of a poet's soul" (Boyesen, 1892, 324), of dreams as depictions of "the superior world of inner ideals…Or alternatively, the blue flower represents something

[377] "in the castle I stood before the round mirror at midnight and said her name three times"

[378] "I was slimmer before, I starved myself a little, as all young women do. Now there is only the heavy, dull, lazy, hollowed-out body. Everything becomes part of the body or procures a place by force. I am overweight by culture. I am heavy and sleepless"

[379] A reversal of the themes of "feminine weightlessness and the sleeping woman, whose morality was suspect in the luxury of her repose" (Dijkstra, 1986, 129).

[380] "porn films and consumer goods, blue flowers disappearing in milk"

[381] *Clitoria ternatea,* a South-East Asian plant used in Ayurveda practices. The tea's original blue hue changes based on the pH level of the substances added to it.

beyond the limits of language…or beyond the rational" (Thiher, 1999, 186)[382]. The blue flower in Ravn's story could symbolise the commodification and commercialisation of ideals and ideas associated with femininity as passive and accomodating; a poet's noble quest has been degraded to an edible trend, disappearing into milk. There is no textual evidence to suggest that the protagonist has poetic aspirations, but these images relate not just to female artists but function as unifying symbols of a particular feminine struggle: the fate of woman is to be an externally observed and valorised object[383]. Ravn counteracts this objectifying gaze by replacing images of flowers and other flora as traditional symbols of femininity with plants that are prickly, tenacious and carnivorous. The protagonist's insomnia could prevent her from exploring this deeper realm of dreams, yet there is a connection between the 'inner ideals' and a sense of shared logos, a set of symbolic connections between women of different eras, who, for various reasons, have been unjustly treated and condemned as madwomen and lunatics.

The protagonist continues her project of self-evisceration by foregoing identity markers, the effects of which untether her from society and by extension from its laws and taboos. She falls in love with one of her students, who is as faceless and featureless as herself: "Der kom noget transparent over mig…Jeg vil æde ham, suges op af ham, jeg vil presse ham som en bums ud over mit ansigt"[384] (Ravn, 2015, 65-6). She indulges in this infatuation, not because she intends to act on it – she wants a fictionalised version of him (idem, 66) – but because she is mirroring Celestine's 'crime'. She is employing "en hæftig besættelse [for] at uddrive min forelskelse"[385] (idem, 67). However, it is unclear to which "forelskelse" she is referring. In the same

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[382] Thiher's example comes from the novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) by Novalis (1772-1801), who saw dreams as a path to knowledge.

[383] As suggested by Gilbert and Gubar, in order to write "women must kill the angel's necessary opposite and double, the 'monster' in the house, whose Medusa-face also kills creativity" (1979, 17).

[384] "Something transparent came over me…I want to eat him, be sucked up by him, I want to squeeze him like a pimple over my face."

[385] "A powerful obsession [to] drive out my infatuation."

paragraphs, the protagonist reads Selma Lagerlöf's short story "Spökhanden"[386] to her boyfriend. The story is, simply put, about a woman who breaks off her engagement to a man she does not love following the appearance of a ghostly hand, and "spøgelseshånden kravler ophidset hen over bordet mod hende, da hun skal skrive sit første kærlighetsbrev, en løgn"[387] (Ravn, 2015, 66). One might therefore read the protagonist's desire to use illness, a kind of madness, to escape not just the confines of her own body, but romantic attachments altogether.

Fyhr argues that Gothic protagonists view and exist in the world in specific ways: they are tormented by a lack of control in a chaotic world without a higher order, they have complex or estranged familial connections, their inner, subjective world (including dreams) takes up considerable narrative space, and the protagonists are often dominated by their passions and feelings (Fyhr, 2017, 69-71). To soothe the anxieties, powerful emotions and passions induced by 'a Gothic environment', a Gothic protagonist will seek to "lindra sin ångest med hjälp av estetiska och kroppsliga aktiviteter…Känslans förfall börjar så fort känslorna blir för starka och då börjar även huvudpersonen att försöka lindra smärtan" [388](Fyhr, 2017, 78)[389]. The protagonist's

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[386] Lagerlöf's story intricately criticises "den borgerliga ideologins könsrollssystem, enligt vilket kvinnan var det komplementära motstycket till mannen och enligt vilket mannens liv var utåtvänt och dynamiskt medan kvinnans var inåtvänt och vegeterande [the gender role system of bourgeois ideology, according to which the woman was the complementary counterpart to the man and according to which the man's life was extroverted and dynamic while the woman's was introverted and vegetative]" (Wijkmark, 2009, 178).

[387] "the ghost hand crawls excitedly across the table towards her as she is about to write her first love letter, a lie."

[388] "assuage their anxiety through aesthetic and bodily/physical activities… The decay of emotion starts as soon as the emotions become too strong and then the protagonist will also try to ease their pain."

[389] Fyhr emphasises that the "lindring" in Gothic classics like *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *Frankenstein* is usually found in reading books, playing music, doing physical exercise and the like. However, 20th and 21st century multimodal Gothic (music, films, etc.) sometimes incorporates elements of self-harm and substance abuse as an aesthetic and physical component of a Goth lifestyle. Fyhr here refers to specific examples, like James O'Barr's *The Crow* (1989), specifying that self-harm practices are not emblematic for all contemporary multimodal Gothic.

corporeal and aesthetic activities take the form of a perfomance to emulate the conditions of Celestine's demise. Camilla Schwartz argues that similarly to *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the separation between Ravn's protagonist and "den indespærrede genganger Celestine"[390] become increasingly difficult to spot, because "begge er sat på repeat et sted imellem ungdommen og voksendommen"[391] (2017, 34). The protagonist is acting out certain behavioural patterns that she believes will help manifest Celestine's spirit, patterns that mimic Celestine's fate. Celestine was immured for 'inappropriate' behaviour, while the teacher subsequently drinks as much and as often as she can, and falls in love with and fantasises about her underage students. Her troubled relationship with her "ede-nærver"[392] (Ravn, 2015, 19) also becomes part of her attempt to establish a connection with Celestine. In mimicking Celestine's circumstances, the protagonist activates monstrous metaphors and doubling of characters, which leads to these destructive behaviours.

Following this argument, I read Celestine as a textual monster, but not in a negative sense. Her monstrosity is enacted as a disorienting restructuring of the body that relays to herself the power of seeing and what is being seen. She is an "insidious double" (Craig, 2014) of the protagonist, enhanced by the circumstances of Celestine's death. Her magnetic pull calls to other women who feel overlooked, unseen and unheard, and invites them to return to a wilder state that oscillates between life, death and the in-between, which cannot be ignored, and more importantly, cannot be contained. "By naming the illness as a monster, it can be viewed as something outside the self, or, at least, as a part of the self which is not the innermost core of identity", Bernhardsson writes (2008, 98). Recalling Asa Mittman's principles of locating the monstrous, Celestine's monstrous nature emerges primarily through her embodiment, location, actions and impact (Mittman, 2012, 7). Like the Sandman, she visits people in their sleep, but she licks the sleep from their eyes and salivates on them instead,

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[390] "the imprisoned ghost [called] Celestine"

[391] "both are put on repeat somewhere between adolescence and adulthood"

[392] "Eating-nerves".

"Hun glider ned ad gangene, hun slikker på deres ansigter, hun slikker søvnen ud af deres øjne"[393] (Ravn, 2015, 14). I read this as an intertextual reference to E.T.A. Hoffman's *Der Sandmann* (1817), a foundational text of the literary Gothic. Hoffman's text forms the basis of discussion of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (1919). Celestine's behaviour also mirrors anorexics who lick their food instead of eating it. Celestine is monstrous because she mimics the role of the Sandman, in that she removes the sleep dust from people's eyes and expresses her desire to consume the sleepers entirely, not just steal their eyes. She also becomes a double of the protagonist's insomnia.

Self-identification with the monster, not just sympathy for a monster's plight (as in *Frankenstein*), is a contemporary Gothic quest. As Fyhr observes, the monster is often a contemporary Gothic protagonist (2017, 12). Celestine starved to death behind the wall, therefore the protagonist seeks out enclosed, domestic spaces in which monsters might be found: "oppe på det trange bibliotek lukker de bogklædte vægge sig om mig som et par svedigt klistrede, men dog omsorgsfulde hænder"[394] (Ravn, 2015, 33). The abject, detached body of Celestine is the uncanny home the protagonist seeks. The protagonist actively seeks out the monster, not to vanquish it, but to come home, to dwell in a place we would consider *un-homely*.

Wasson's comparison of illness narratives and Gothic texts[395] is highly applicable to *Celestine*, and it is precisely "the claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space" (2015, 2) that the unnamed protagonist wants to achieve. It is in such enclosed spaces that the past returns: "the subjects often experience violent anachronism, in which a sense of enlightened modernity is undermined by the return of atavistic presences and practices" (ibid.). Ravn's protagonist seeks out enclosed spaces, like the broom

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[393] "She glides down the corridors, she licks their faces, she licks the sleep from their eyes".

[394] "up in the cramped library, the book-covered walls closed around me like a pair of sweaty, sticky, yet caring hands"

[395] "The subjects of these texts often experience confined spaces and a sense of imprisonment, either literal or metaphorical, 'a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space'" (Wasson, 2015, 2).

cupboard library and the attic, in a repetition of her childhood trauma of being locked in a room by her grandmother: "hun lukkede mig engang inde på et værelse som straf for noget...Nu forstår jeg vel, at hun gentog sin egen opvækst, eller dele af den" [396] (Ravn, 2015, 41). The protagonist is thereby reliving the same fate as her great-grandmother Alma[397], who was kidnapped as a child by her father and locked in a basement by her stepmother. This is a classic Gothic aperture, as suggested by Yang & Healey: "the past invades and pervades the present" (2016, 3). The protagonist makes a point not to talk about herself to her students, and yet this is the story she tells, her family's history of trauma.

The past, represented by Celestine, invades other aspects of the protagonist's life as well. Her increasing influence over the protagonist adds to her renouncement of certain types of sustenance, "det der ikke fedter, det der bare glider ned"[398] (Ravn, 2015, 139). She drinks gin and tonics in the hour before dinner, an hour "for kort til at kunne være sin egen og for lang til ikke at blive uudholdelig" [399] (idem, 44). During dinner the susurrus of the pupils magnifies until it falls like a pair of hands over the protagonist's ears, "alt blev på en gang øredøvende tydeligt og fuldstændig udvisket"[400] (idem, 45). Inside the noise is a voice, and that voice is Celestine. What she says is a mystery to us, but it seems that Celestine appears to the protagonist exponentially in relation to moments when she wants to escape, either through alcohol, seeking out confined spaces, or in moments of distress. The protagonist therefore dons a white gown and wanders the corridors at night, enacting the fantasy that she has become Celestine's avatar: "Natterunden i den hvide kjole er blevet en del af mig. Det er, som om jeg altid har gået den. Celestine er begyndt at bebo mit ansigt og lever

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[396] "She [grandmother] shut me inside a room as a punishment for something… Now I see that she was repeating her own upbringing, or parts of it"

[397] Alma is incidentally also the name of a character haunted by the madness of her ancestors (Lagerlöf, 1930).

[398] "things that don't fatten, only glide down"

[399] "too short to be its own and too long to not become unbearable".

[400] "everything was at once deafeningly clear and completely obliterated"

videre på den måde. Den der følger mig nu, er kvinden fra værelset over biblioteket" [401] (idem, 103).

The white dress connects the protagonist to a long line of female characters whose lives were dominated by patriarchal mechanisms and societal restrictions that thwarted their personal and emotional liberties. Lea Muldtofte posits that feminine bodies in sickness are often construed as ghost-like bodies that are reduced to arenas of aestheticised suffering and romanticised neurotics (Muldtofte, 2018). Muldtofte opens her article with the words "A white dress", a hospital gown in lieu of an elaborate gown. In Gothic fiction we can trace the connection of the white dress in Du Maurier's unnamed narrator in *Rebecca* (1938), who dresses in a white gown similar to that of her husband's ancestor, to the original "woman in white" in Wilkie Collins' eponymous story (1859), a woman placed in a lunatic asylum by her fiancé. Gilbert and Gubar identify the colour white as "the color of the dead, of ghosts and shrouds and spiritual 'visitors'" (1979, 620). Gilbert and Gubar note that this "iconography of whiteness" (ibid.) is especially pervasive in nineteenth century Gothic texts, whose female characters evaded masculine oppression by "wrapping themselves in white sheets and impersonating not madwomen but the ghosts of madwomen" (1979, 620).

These women in white are thus connected through imagery to something larger than themselves, a ritual for honouring the voiceless and abandoned women who were incarcerated and forgotten: "Celestines hemmelighed er et tomt område, indkranset af små historier, Celestine har fortalt sig selv igen og igen. Kvinder i hvidt" [402] (Ravn, 2015, 26). The repetition suggests that the same mechanics and social conditions that enabled and supported practices of female incarceration and cultural starvation are still present in the 21st century. We are thus left with another insidious doubleness of

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[401] "The nightly rounds in the white dress have become a part of me. It's as if I've always worn it. Celestine has begun to inhabit my face, and so lives on. The one who follows me now is the woman from the room above the library."

[402] "Celestine's secret is an empty area, wreathed by small stories Celestine has told herself again and again. Women in white"

femininity and illness, where women are antagonised as harbingers of illness on the one hand, but also aestheticised in their sickness on the other.

The old woman the protagonist finds in the attic relates to two main aspects of the Gothic: one as the traditional Gothic trope of the 'madwoman in the attic', while the other reimagines two powerful feminine figures from Nordic myths, the *fyljga* and the *volve*. Eugenia C. DeLamotte calls "the discovery of the Hidden Woman" "a staple of women's Gothic", as most Gothic romances recycle and revisit the narrative of women suffering in silence, hidden away in "the ruined castle, crumbling abbey, deserted wing, madhouse, convent, cave, priory, subterranean prison or secret apartments" (DeLamotte, 1990, 153). The spectres described in e.g. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817/18) are the results of an overactive imagination. Stories like *Udolpho* were meant to teach their readers that a woman of a wild and passionate nature would end her days locked away, hidden from polite society, and should the young heroine wish to avoid a similar fate, she must learn self-control and subservience. In Radcliffe's novels, the ghosts of the past were metaphorical, the locked-up woman a "sentimental icon" (Talairach-Vielmas, 2016, 32) that hovered between archetypal feminine categories of conduct (i.e. good and bad women). The position of the madwoman in Gothic narratives of the mid-nineteenth century, however, is much more complex. Charlotte Brontë's iconic madwoman, Bertha Mason, is not an ethereal spectre wandering in a turret, gently advising Jane Eyre to bridle her passionate nature before she can enter matrimony. Bertha's corpulent, mercurial form is both a revamping of the madwoman trope and a reflection of then current medical discourses of mental health. The idea that one's physical shape is connected with one's morals and virtues leads to a reading of Bertha as morally corrupt (Talairach-Vielmas, 2016, 34) and therefore her particular case of 'insanity' is a result of her immoral behaviour (Martin, 1987, 124-139; Small, 1996, 163; Talairach-Vielmas, 2016, 34). Bertha's confinement to the attic is a measure taken to keep her existence hidden and her moral corruption contained. The dual relationship between her and Jane as madwoman and 'angel in the house' respectively is, among other things, symbolic of monstrous versus acceptable expressions of femininity.

Women who were unable to conform to the latter were locked away, starved, infantilised and/or discredited for being unsound of mind, and by extension, carriers of corruption. Ravn reverses this pattern by making her 'heroine' take an extreme and literal approach to self-control and subservience: she changes the connotations of the madwoman in the attic, who, despite her wretched appearance, represents a desirable, free state of being. She obediently performs the conditions which free her from the weight and predictability of contemporary feminine culture, "for ikke længere at være en have, men et anfald af galskab"[403] (Ravn, 2015, 61) [404]. The old woman is no longer 'the mad woman in the attic', but a woman situated in a room above a library, in other words, she is connected to books and literature, learning and study, in a room of her own.

The reference to madness is further suggested by the protagonist, who muses that she and the woman from the attic have an unspoken agreement to keep her existence concealed: "svagt i mig er der denne viden om hende, at hun bliver så forskrækket over at være en skræmmede skikkelse, at jeg må beskytte hende fra den rædsel, hun forvolder"[405] (idem, 104). Their supernatural connection does not frighten the protagonist; rather, she responds with sympathy for the old woman and the knowledge she carries. But as the old woman appears only to the protagonist, she could also represent madness creeping ever closer, like vines growing and creeping into the cracks of a house.

In the beginning, the old woman appears shy "som et dyr, og hun må nære et ønske om at blive mindre, for når hun kommer til syne, er hun altid foroverbøjet, og tit piler

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[403] "To no longer be a garden, but a fit of madness".

[404] This line echoes Gilbert and Gubar's argument regarding the debt owed to female authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth century suffered "in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 51).

[405] "Faint in me is this knowledge about her, that she gets so terrified by being a frightening creature that I must protect her from the horror she causes."

hun museagtigt vek"[406] (ibid.). She crawls like a beast along the ground, and merely stares at the protagonist, like an echo of the creeping woman in the wallpaper in Gilman's story (1892). Ravn repeatedly refers to the protagonist's wish to become the new wall where Celestine can rest, "og ånde stille og raspende som et dyr"[407] (idem, 8), an existence which the old woman seems to inhabit. Yet she keeps her distance, as if waiting for the opportune moment. At the novel's conclusion the old woman stares at the protagonist through a window, her face as clear as ever: "hun stirrede på mig med en sådan overbevisning som sagde hun, at hun så og genkendte mig. Det var, som om jeg havde brugt år på at se på hende og altid havde kendt hende"[408] (idem, 142-3). The old woman seems to have an integral part to play in the protagonist's transformation, and this woman, this "horrible vision", is far more powerful than she admits.

In the *Elder Edda*, a *volve* was a wise woman who knew the details of the future, past and present, and she represents the darker forces in Norse mythology, associated with "død, mørke og kaos, det formløse som alltid ligger på lur og truer en ordnet eksistens"[409] (Hellang, 2005, 45). She is also connected to creation in that her awakening leads to "å formidle kunnskap og skjulte sammenhenger"[410] (2005, 46). However, the *volve* is always put back in the earth following her speech, and her powers threaten all that is masculine and orderly. Ravn's old woman in the attic is unkempt and wild-looking. She is a visual, visceral representation of the future the protagonist is propelled towards. The volve intertext is further enhanced by a reference to bog bodies (Ravn, 2015, 50), perfectly preserved bodies in a particularly Danish

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[406] "like an animal, and she must nurture a desire to become smaller, because when she appears, she is always bent forward, and often darts mouse-like away"

[407] "and breathe quietly and rasping like an animal"

[408] "she stared at me with such conviction as if she said she saw and recognised me. It was as if I had spent years looking at her and had always known her".

[409] "death, darkness and chaos, the shapelessness that always lurks and threatens an orderly existence".

[410] "to convey knowledge and hidden connections"

landscape: “their uncanny preservation a paradoxical testament to the brevity of human life” (Gere, 2010, 518). Karin Sanders argues that bog bodies, and the Tollund Man in particular, are symbolically more powerful than other vanitas symbols; the Tollund Man has not been reduced to a common emblem of our fate, like a skull, but “has maintained an individuality which mirrors our own” (2009, 39). The bog body is a subtle regional folkloric reference, that enhances “the local atmosphere, as well as intensifies the gothic [sic] mode” (Leffler, 2008, 59).

The novel’s ending indicates that the fate of the woman in the attic heralds the fate of the protagonist. I read the attic woman as a double, and in a Norse context, a *fylgja*. When the *fylgja* appears in human form, it is an omen of impending death, as is the doppelganger motif[411]. In the Norse tradition, she is also a companion, a guide to lead a person to their fate. I interpret the old woman as the latter. If the old woman is a guide, that means she has walked the same path as the protagonist. The protagonist will then finally have found companionship. Although the old woman is mute, she has not been put back in the ground waiting to be awakened for the erudition of man: “Jeg ville gerne være den nye mur, hvori hun kunne lægge sig og ånde stille og raspende som et dyr” (Ravn, 2015, 8). “Jeg åbner, og der står den gamle dame fra tårnet. Hendes hår og tøj bølger, som stod hun under vand... Så kommer det langsomt stigende fra hendes hals, en form for rallen, som bar hun på et hundeagigt dyr dernede” [412] (idem, 167).

The discovery of the madwoman in the attic in *Celestine* thus engages and challenges stereotypes of feminine ill health. In Ravn’s text these stereotypes act as intertextual discourses, as they did in *Jane Eyre*, because the protagonist’s behaviour is not the locus of horror here. Her behaviour is a horrible side effect caused by

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[411] “The definition of fylgja has three subcategories, but most important in this context are the first, ‘guidance’, and the second, ‘a supernatural woman or animal attendant’” (Friesen, 2015, 256).

[412] “I wanted to be the new wall, wherein she might lie down and breathe silently and grating like an animal”. “I open [the door], and there stands the old lady from the tower. Her hair and clothing waves, as if she was standing under water…Then slowly coming from her throat, a kind of rumbling, as if she was carrying a dog-like animal down there”.

external factors rooted in a deeply *unhomely* culture that sustains unhealthy ideals. The novel's fluid narration between the protagonist's current time and a Mediaeval past implies that Ravn is pointing to the existence of specific cultural conditions that are still active. This culture, like Celestine, is frozen in place in the sense of repeating itself. The protagonist wants to join the ranks of white-clad women who rebel against a system that consistently depicts them as a monstrous Other.

6.4 Becoming the Void

This final section will examine the novel's navigation of corporeality and identity, ending with the culmination of the protagonist's project: to become a vessel for possession. Ravn here plays with the notion of the female body as lacking boundaries "which in extension can be read as open to contamination and contagion" (Bernhardsson, 2008, 99). I focus on some aspects of the protagonist's behaviour regarding disordered eating in this section, because I argue that her starvation is essential to her project of recreating the circumstances of Celestine's demise, in order to allow Celestine to possess her. Her aim is connection and her method is a dissolution of the tethers between human and non-human to a state that transcends and nullifies the laws of what is physically possible.

The self-destructive behaviours of *Celestine's* protagonist reflect her inability to communicate the feeling of being ignored and overlooked since childhood, which has resulted in linguistic decay. Any effort towards communication, towards breaching and bearing the *unspeakable* is not a lexical matter, but rather an issue of open listening, which in a culture where women are lauded and denounced for being loquacious is a revolutionary tactic. In all the rhetoric surrounding illness and femininity, the loudest voices are often disregarded as attention-seeking. Johannisson suggests that "i en tilværelse preget av sosial og eksistensiell svikt har kvinnen kunnet velge sykdom som en utvei til å håndtere livet"[413] (1994, 8). Even though this

[413] "In a life marked by social and existential failure, women have been able to choose illness as a way of dealing with life"

statement is aimed at a *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon, one could make the argument that Ravn's protagonist is taking a similar approach: "I kærligheden er der en stor sorg… *Jeg har brugt Celestine som et værn mot det.* At i dybet av kærlighedens mørke, der har vist sig et merke, min mors blod" [414] (Ravn, 2015, 155, my italics). The question is: What comfort is there in connecting and communicating with a ghost? What can illness offer which health cannot? Johannisson suggests various benefits such as "hvile, flukt, trøst eller makt"[415] (1994, 8) and that the role of a patient creates a common language of the body, the self and society.

The bodies in *Celestine* reject conceptions of "the unrecognisable, 'sick' body in need of reorganising and disciplining" (Hellstrand et al., 2018, 153-4) as a means of fulfilling society's expectations of healthy femininity. Rather, Ravn allows the sick body to communicate in alternative ways. Tobias Skiveren states that in the process of constructing an identity, the *body* exists, regardless of whether the person is fictional (2019a, 184). He theorises the relationship between two characters, not as "en æterisk kontakt mellem to åndeligt forbundne personligheter"[416], but as a "konkret materiel samstemthed mellem kroppe, der resonerer intenst med hinanden"[417] (2019a, 186). While his case study explores new materiality through sonic impulses, *Celestine* employs a similar approach: "The body *presences* itself in illness and disappears in health. In illness, the body is perceived *as* body and not merely *res extensa*" (Sarkar, 2019, xxii).

Perhaps the performative aspects of the illness expression are attempts at invoking the disappearing body and identity of the protagonist? The relationship between the protagonist and Celestine is not a stereotypical Gothic doppelganger construct; the protagonist is not Celestine's heir or relative, nor physically similar to her. However,

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[414] "In love there is a great sorrow… I've been using Celestine as a shield against it. In the dark depths of love a mark has appeared, my mother's blood".

[415] "rest, escape, comfort or power"

[416] "an ethereal contact between two spiritually connected personalities"

[417] "a concrete material accordance between bodies that resonate intensely with one another."

their *corporeality* binds them together. Through attention and intention, their bodies create a kinship that makes them resonate with one another, which reads as an attempt to connect to a larger, intangible network unencumbered by physical constraints: "Et vesen uten kropp kan nemlig ikke kjenne noe. Stemningen har sin rot i en slags kroppslig vibrasjon når den lar oss se og forstå verden på ulike måter. Stemningen fyller verden med betydning og denne betydningen *kjennes* i kroppen"[418] (Svenaeus, 2007, 54).

The novel depicts a very one-sided relationship, where the character, more than the voice, of Celestine serves as an ideal for the protagonist. As the protagonist "communes" with Celestine, she creates a monstrous body that allows Celestine to rearrange and inhabit the parts of the protagonist's body: "Hvis jeg kunne bære Celestine i øjenhulerne i stedet for øjne"[419] (Ravn, 2015, 122). Celestine is a voice without a body, which is what resonates with the protagonist, and yet their 'union' transgresses corporeality and limits of the body, as a means of formulating "et sprog, der ikke blot griber ind i kroppen, men også er en aflejring af den: et kropssprog"[420] (Skiveren, 2019a, 185). The protagonist also says: "Jeg har en rytme i hjertet, der ikke er hjerteslaget, men en særlig tid, en slags spiral eller cirkel, der tikker langsomt rundt gennem årene, det blå, Celestine, vender alltid tilbake" [421] (Ravn, 2015, 121), which is actually an echo of the prologue "[s]om tiden gik, så blev hun jo bare noget honning

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[418] "A being without a body cannot feel. The mood is rooted in a kind of bodily vibration when it lets us see and understand the world in different ways. The mood fills the world with significance and this significance *is felt* in the body". Svenaeus's article builds on the works of Heidegger (1927) and Sartre (1956) to discuss the phenomenology of morbidity. I do not intend to discuss the phenomenology of illness at great length, but I cite Svenaeus because his descriptions and examples complement the Gothic [and uncanny] energies in *Celestine.*

[419] "If only I could carry Celestine in my eye sockets instead of my eyes."

[420] "a language that not only intervenes in the body but is also a deposition of it: a body language"

[421] "I have a rhythm in my heart that's not a heartbeat, but a particular time, a kind of spiral or circle ticking slowly through the years, the blue, Celestine, always returning."

på bunden af en skjult niche…denne rytme i hjertet som en vanvittig piges skrig"[422] (idem, 7). Celestine is slowly inhabiting different parts of the protagonist's body and is thereby in a sense able to interact with the world: "Hvor end jeg går, kan jeg se, at Celestine rejser sig. Ingenting undgår hendes opmærksomhed…Det er få ting, jeg egentlig ser og opdager" [423] (ibid.). Crucially, one notices how the protagonist allows Celestine to be the observer and the one who absorbs and takes in her surroundings, while the protagonist allows herself to see, but not to observe. She is removing the parts of herself that absorb external impulses, and her behaviour relates to what Skiveren describes as an ecstatic pleasure, or "ekstatiske nydelsen"[424] (2019a, 190). It is a specific and defined corporeal experience occurring in cases of extreme sensual (related to the senses) stimulation that leads to a phenomenological loss of control. The two novels mentioned in Skiveren's article follow the pattern of the *ecstatic pleasure*: "først mod alkoholens stimulanser, så til enhver form for seksuel penetration, men langsomt transformers driften til en decideret dødsdrift[425]" (2019a, 190). We can trace the same development in *Celestine*:

> Jeg var begyndt at drikke et par gin-tonics i timen før aftensmaden (Ravn, 2015, 44)…Jeg drak spiritus i store mundfulde... Jeg følte mig tørstig efter at ødelegge (idem, 45-6).. Min forelskelse, den består udelukkende af drømmen om penetration og vold (idem, 68)...Så gik jeg rundt på skolen i en form for blinde, jeg himlede med øjnene, jeg lod dem køre i en konstant flimren, som gik jeg i en slags trance...[det var] noget berusende, noget fantastisk over denne tilstand[426] (idem, 63).

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[422] "As time went by she became just some honey at the bottom of a hidden niche…this rhythm in the heart like a crazy girl's scream".

[423] "Wherever I go I see Celestine rising. Nothing escapes her attention… There are few things I really see and discover."

[424] "ecstatic pleasure"

[425] "first to alcoholic stimuli, then to any form of sexual penetration, but slowly this urge is transformed into a decided death drive"

[426] "I'd begun to drink a few gin and tonics in the hour before supper (44)…I drank spirits by great mouthfuls…I felt a thirst for destruction (45-46)…My infatuation consists solely of dreaming of penetration and

Note the double meaning in 'drinking spiritus', implying that she is consuming and absorbing ghostly matters, in order to make her own body habitable for spirits, with all that entails: "Jeg er vel min egen kiste. Jeg behøver ikke mere for en levende begravelse end mig selv"[427] (Ravn, 2015, 56). In imagining her body as a grave, the protagonist is stating that she, like Celestine (and the woman in Gilman's wallpaper), is equally entombed in her own body wherein "her many selves are imprisoned or buried; she is their grave, tomb and prison" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 631).

We could read this as a problematic statement that romanticises death, but also in the context of the protagonist's project as an offer of her body and voice to those who have been silenced, "dressed in uniforms of snow, and [buried] alive in mansions of shadow" (idem, 630). This speech is not made in defeat, but defiance. She cannot be buried and made to be silent, because she has already taken steps towards a greater community that transcends corporeal and cultural boundaries, taking her out of patriarchal reach. The protagonist has intentionally searched for and found her own mansion of shadow, employing and inverting the same patriarchal techniques that would entomb her.

Yvonne Leffler and Johan Höglund theorise that when "the protagonists in Nordic Gothic start losing control over their imagination, there is a fusion between ego and landscape. The landscape becomes a devious place" (2020, 24). We can see a similar development in *Celestine* whereby Celestine's body and the protagonist's psyche transgress their borders and expand into a wider network of flowers, greenery and decay: "Spøgelset vokser i mig som en plante. Planten er mørk, den vokser i skygge…Og i skyggen også, det, der ikke kan tilgives og holdes skjult"[428] (Ravn,

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violence (68)…So I walked around the school in some form of blindness, I rolled my eyes, I let them run in a constant flickering, as if I was walking in a kind of trance…[there was] something intoxicating, something fantastic about this condition (63).

[427] "I suppose I am my own coffin. I need no more for a live burial than myself."

[428] "The ghost grows in me like a plant. The plant is dark, it grows in shade… And in the shadows is also that which cannot be forgiven and kept hidden".

2015, 160)[429]. Ravn presents a strange chain of evolution and transformation between different states of matter, from the ghostly ephemeral into a solid plant substance that still contains the traits of the ghost. This is the process required for the protagonist to become the new wall, or grave, that Celestine desires. The transformation encourages the body to grow beyond the borders of what is technically possible, in what one might call transcendence through degeneration, but it is detachment from the corporeal body into a state detached from time itself that the protagonist is propelled towards by the old woman and Celestine.

Bodies and body parts are continuously rearranged in Ravn's literary universe, and often feature alongside images of flowers and plants, symbolising not only a sylvan landscape overgrowing with life, but also putrefaction and body horror: "vedbenden vokser. De grønne blade er fede, som var de hver en overarbejdende lever...nu ser vi, at slotsfacaden er dækket af et net av syge levere...Eller nu ser vi, at slotsfacaden er dækket av blundende barnehoveder"[430] (Ravn, 2015, 26). As upsetting as this imagery may seem, it is a necessary counterbalance to any preconceptions of flowery imagery as being an aestheticising female trait, both in terms of the act of writing and in the construction of character.

This juxtaposition of the growing ivy with the abject, here meaning both the display of organs and potentially infant heads, has literary precedents such as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which Ravn is surely referencing here: "Kvinnen slog ud i mig som en ond blomst"[431] (Ravn, 2015, 93). With Baudelaire such imagery "conjures up the horror of death… of flesh uncannily animated by the worms that [consume] it" (Felski, 2008, 123), but unlike Baudelaire, Ravn presents a playful rather than an aestheticising gaze, one that does not focus on the "remarkable

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[429] The garden of the castle where Celestine supposedly lived and died is full of blooming rhododendrons reminiscent of the grounds of Manderley in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938).

[430] "the ivy grows. The green leaves are fat, as if they were each an overworking liver ... now we see that the castle façade is covered by a network of diseased livers ... Or now we see that the castle façade is covered by dormant children's heads."

[431] "The woman burst out in me like an evil flower."

symmetries that thrive in the midst of putrefaction" (ibid.). In allowing the image to stand and speak for itself, Ravn distances herself from any artful representation of female bodies as vessels for the reproduction of cultural (male) ideals, and instead grants her characters complete autonomy to restructure and employ the body in any way they see fit. This positioning is accentuated by the shared perspective of both the protagonist and Celestine: "Celestine og jeg, vi udnævner hvert blad til et udtjent organ"[432] (Ravn, 2015, 26)[433]. Edgar Allan Poe called the death of a beautiful woman the most poetic topic in the world (1846)[434]. Ravn prohibits this topical gaze from emerging by suspending any possibility of a natural death. The protagonist says: "den store forskel på Celestine og mig er, at jeg endnu ikke er død"[435] (Ravn, 2015, 103), and Celestine pleads,

> ...jeg længes efter døden som en mor efter sit barn, som en hustru efter sin husbonds mund og stemme. Lær mig, hvorledes jeg kan træde ind i døden, [og] giv mig en grav, hvori jeg kan lægge mig til hvile, hvori jeg kan finde fred... Åh, kære himmelske Fader, giv mig min grav.[436] (Ravn, 2015, 88-9).

The association between death and motherhood in this citation is similar to what Michelis has described as "double femininity" (Michelis, 2015, 77). Bodies that can conceive are encouraged for their offspring, but ostracised in their embodiment of

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[432] "Celestine and I, we designate each leaf as an obsolete organ."

[433] This is the only notable example of this kind of communal narration, and I have therefore not included a longer discussion on the topic. For more on this type of unnatural narration, see (Peel, 2016) and (Richardson, 2006).

[434] Poe surmised correctly that the aestheticism of women and death has inspired many a poem and movements in literature and life, particularly in the nineteenth century (Bronfen, 1992; Dijkstra, 1986) and incidentally coinciding with the spread of tuberculosis. In 19th century France and England "one 'got' tuberculosis because one was destined to develop, or even create it, live with it, and die from it", Susan Hirsh explains (2004, 145-147).

[435] "The main difference between me and Celestine, is that I am not dead yet".

[436] "…I long for death like a mother for her child, like a wife for her husband's mouth and voice. Teach me how I might tread into death [and] give me a grave, wherein I can lie to rest, wherein I can find peace… O dear heavenly Father, give me my grave."

female sexuality[437]. Double femininity "acts as a culturally and socially intolerable and ostracised entity, incarnating a monstrous otherness which has a disturbing effect on the concept of the 'normal body'" (ibid.). We see this double femininity expressed in the analogy of flowers and greenery, whereby Celestine's body has been removed from the realm of human possibilities, not only in terms of maturation but also reproduction.

What remains of her body is more plant than human: "I murens mørke et glimt av Celestines øjne, i det ene øje vokser en nælde… jeg er et lager fyldt med hvide blomster"[438] (Ravn, 2015, 14, 92). If we interpret this in a very literal sense, then Celestine's fate seems doubly tragic. Her name indicated her parents' lofty aspirations for her future, but they grounded and immured her, making her part of the surroundings. Secondly, the only thing that can grow in Celestine is a plant which can cause uterine contractions and possibly miscarriages. In this half-life state, her body has become that which she was denied in life, a shield to combat what she perceives to be the enemy: "Det barn, der nedlader sig til at vise sit degenererende ansigt, sin tåre, er *en fjende*. I Celestines øjne, i hendes hånd. I hendes mund, under tungen. Hvad hendes hud er lavet af. Hun vokser ind i, bliver værelse"[439] (idem, 27, my italics). Nothing is growing within her, except herself: her body has grown into a room of her own.

Jorun Solheim argues that foundational cultural metaphors about women and their bodies constitute our thinking about them as anatomically 'more open' than men (1998, 69). The female body is "mat som kan spises, åker som blir sådd, kropp som kan invaderes"[440] (1998, 47). In the context of illness metaphors this falls in line with

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[437] A topic Ravn explores further in her latest book, *Mit arbejde* (2020).

[438] "In the darkness of the wall a twinkle of Celestine's eyes, in one eye a nettle grows…I am a warehouse filled with white flowers".

[439] "The child who condescends to show his degenerating face, his tear, is an enemy. In Celestine's eyes, in her hand. In her mouth, under her tongue. What her skin is made of. She grows into, becomes a room."

[440] "food that can be eaten, a field to be sown, a body that can be invaded" (translation by Bernhardsson).

thinking of the body as a battleground that can be invaded (Hunsaker Hawkins, 1992; Frank, 1997). By extension, female protagonists may try to distance themselves, "by desperately trying to close their bodies to the world outside" (Bernhardsson, 2008, 99). This is the case with our protagonist, but it is important to note that she is not trying to close herself off from Celestine, but rather refuses to take part in cultural conditioning. Celestine is her shield against external forces that would take ownership over her body[441]. The protagonist is not construed as the invaded sick territory; she is an unmapped landscape, an unfixed point which cannot be invaded or fixed by external forces, except those she lets in by choice.

It is significant that the protagonist does not achieve her goal: "Jeg skulle blive Celestine, men det blev jeg aldrig"[442] (Ravn, 2015, 150), much as Celestine was supposed to get married, "men hun nægtede"[443] (idem, 7). The protagonist is left wondering whether her experiences have been the result of an overactive imagination: "jeg ved aldrig, om hun kun er noget, man har fundet på, som jeg har fostret i mig"[444] (Ravn, 2015, 150). That begs the question of whether Celestine is merely a spectral influence excitedly moving towards the protagonist because she may be immoral or mendacious. Are we then to understand that this text has more in common with the supernatural female Gothic stories in the vein of Radcliffe and Brontë, whose aim is to tame the feminine monster, thereby suggesting that certain gendered expressions of illness are still valued over others?

My interpretation is that Celestine must be understood partially in metaphorical terms as a monstrous configuration of feminine ill health, both physical and mental. In choosing "one kind of intruder, the self-inflicted and artificial" (Bernhardsson, 2008,

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[441] Bernhardsson's article (2008) can be referenced in order to demonstrate that Ravn's protagonist is not alone in her cultural detox; the protagonist in the Swedish novel, Ludenben starves herself and binge eats, drinks and takes pills, "just för att inte låta den verkliga världen ta plats i mig" [precisely not to let the real world take up space in me] (Samuelson, 2005, 69).

[442] "I was supposed to become Celestine, but I never did"

[443] "but she refused"

[444] "I never know if she's just something that has been invented that I have fostered in me".

100), the protagonist and Celestine resort to a state of being which to others may seem sick or insane, but a process which nevertheless is more enabling than destructive. They establish a common language and a mutual space of understanding. The metaphors of ill health, which include insomnia, disordered eating, and other forms of self-destructive behaviour, are manifested as phenomena outside the protagonist, which Bernhardsson argues is important for the metaphor to be constructive (2008, 100). At the novel's end, the old woman appears at the protagonist's door, and from her throat, where before not a sound has escaped, comes a rattling sound (167). The protagonist "træder til side og lukker hende ind"[445] (ibid.)[446]. The protagonist did not become a vessel for Celestine, but she has established another connection with the old woman in the attic, whose presence at her door entails a transfer of knowledge, in the tradition of the *fylgja* and *volve*. Alluding to the feminine dichotomy in *Jane Eyre,* the protagonist thus identifies with the transgressive woman, and not the victimised young girl. The ambiguity of the end of the novel makes a single conclusion difficult to establish, but I interpret their meeting as an part of a pattern. The old woman's time has ended, and the protagonist has chosen to pick up the mantle.

Whatever Celestine "truly" is, her appeal is timeless: "Celestine, der går gennem hagen i det tiltagende mørke, bland rododendronbuskene i sin hvide kjole, og gæsten, der ser hende og kommer i tvivl, er hun spøgelse eller ej? Har hun fandtes, eller har hun ikke fandtes? Det eneste, som gæsten ved, er, at *hun* længes imod hende" [447] (Ravn, 2015, 122). In extension, Celestine and the old woman must be understood as reflections and refractions of their literary foremothers. The 'monstrous' nature of Celestine is not mobilised as an evil to be vanquished, but as a mysterious entity that not only enables narration of the *unbearable,* but also represents a community of

[445] "steps aside and lets her in"

[446] Perhaps referring to John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Låt den rätta komma inn* (2004).

[447] "Celestine walks through the garden in the increasing darkness among the rhododendron bushes in her white dress, and the guest that sees her starts to doubt, is she a ghost or not? Did she, or did she not exist? The only thing the guest knows is that *she* longs for her."

sufferers who refuse to be defined by external factors. By entering into a type of metaphorical or supernatural compact with Celestine and the old woman in the attic, the protagonist defies her culture and achieves freedom for herself. She finds community and connection, and she becomes "en eneste historie, der gentager sig selv"[448] (2015, 8).

[448] "A single story that repeats itself."

7 Unnatural Illness Narratives: An Afterword

This dissertation has analysed three fictional illness narratives: a small but varied selection of texts that have employed unnatural narration and Gothic conventions as tools to call attention to and circumnavigate aspects of illness that are difficult to communicate. The Gothic appears as motifs, intertext and thematic concerns in these texts, providing a narratological framework that explicates moments of epistemic and ontological doubt. The presence of Gothic conventions in medical and illness narratives has a long history, which has allowed me to examine how these texts draw attention to uglier, darker aspects of figurative representations of medicine and illness.

I have approached the analysis of these novels with the hypothesis that they employ Gothic conventions and unnatural narratology to circumvent linguistic decay: the horror that overwhelms a character's ability to communicate. Through the use of Gothic conventions and narrative features which give these texts labyrinthine qualities, the characters overcome the barrier that prevents them from communicating, and formulate new knowledge about a world transformed and defamiliarised by illness. I have further argued that these are Gothic texts that belong under the term Scandinavian Gothic, as they include Scandinavian folklore and situate the supernatural aspects of the novel within nature.

Unnatural narratology has allowed me to reconcile the strange narration of these texts, as the varied forms of unnatural narration that I have examined emphasise situations in which the narrative burden becomes overwhelming, manifesting itself as narrative doubles, temporal and spatial impossibilities, unnatural transfer of knowledge, and unactualisable events and personages that exist on the borders of life and death.

Hemmet takes advantage of the unnarratable aspects of dementia, and delegates narrative powers to the institution Tallskuggan, making it a heterodiegetic omniscient narrator that provides insights into all the characters of the novel. It provides an unfiltered view of an emotional landscape in turmoil, in which feelings of loneliness

and disconnection are keenly felt by both patients and their relatives. In *Ei vinterreise* the unnatural is articulated in its doubled narrators. The in-text author and his doubles are contained in a pocket universe, written into existence and semi-conscious of its own fictionality, where the latter exist only so long as the in-text author needs them. The rift closes when the author is confident in his recovery, and the inhabitants of the other dimension, and by extension the readers, are evicted from the in-text author's life. *Celestine* situates the unnatural as a great ontological chasm; Ravn dissolves the borders of life and death, of past and present, and questions the notion of consciousness as a singular experience. The not-yet-dead and not-quite-living represent a communal silence that disregards time and space, and all the borders they maintain. Identity is no longer fixed and immutable, but liquid and overflowing, and the unnatural consolidates these experiences as a matter of representing the unnarratable. During chaotic events brought on by or in connection with illness, we see that the protagonists of these novels may necessitate a refraction or a doubling of their narrative voice, thereby enabling other characters to complete the narrative, and thus creating a distance between the diagnosis and personhood.

Employing conventions of popular genres that appeal to larger audiences has proven efficacious both from a publicity standpoint and from the perspective adopted by literary evolutionary studies. Metaphors and images disseminated through horror literature and early Gothic literature provide a figurative language and a set of conventions that convey and disseminate aspects of illness by sharing the narrative burden. Horror and Gothic fiction allow us to experience terrifying things at a 'safe', literary distance, while simultaneously enriching the vocabulary of illness fiction. Unnatural narrators offer insight into multiple perspectives, whereby uglier feelings associated with illness are normalised and the sufferers are equally humanised.

Furthermore, I have examined the value and application of monstrous metaphors in illness narratives. Monstrous metaphors solidify the imbalance in the body, giving it shape and agency, and from this one can extrapolate what makes this shape *other* from the self. The Gothic vocabulary collates the experience of the body and the mind under threat, and places them into figures that are tangible and perhaps, in some ways, more

manageable. That being said, I am not arguing that all metaphors, monstrous or otherwise, are beneficial in regard to illness: monstrous metaphors are beneficial primarily as counterweights to the trope of illness as punishment. The possession in *Hemmet,* for example, is not connected to an ecclesiastical binary of good and evil. Illness is not the monster in this story, as made explicit by the monster itself. The monster instead comments on the real monstrous behaviour, which is how humans treat each other once an individual's usefulness to society is compromised or spent. Although the protagonists, Joel and his mother Monika, initially construe dementia as a punishment, at the end of the novel these concepts are mitigated by the monster itself. The diary narrator uses Lindemann's story to cope with his 'loss of self' and compromised masculinity. Although there are no physical monsters, Lindemann is nonetheless persecuted throughout the novel by a dark, intangible *something,* achieving a similar effect of terror as any monstrous manifestation. *Ei vinterreise* has two first-person narrators and depicts their internal, subjective worlds. While the diary narrative is not particularly Gothic in tone or theme, the discourses surrounding cancer create a tense atmosphere of a body at war with itself. The novel's conclusion could also be read as an acceptance of a way of living that is more about being and appreciating, less tragic and goal-driven, and more accepting of the inevitable. The monstrosity and terror of cancer is demonstrified, and relegated to a realm of mutual acceptance, a dark companion who may or may not return.

Turning to *Celestine,* the text focuses on feelings and embodied experiences of ill health, rather than any precise illness. Among these aspects are starvation, insomnia and mental illness. These facets are explored through the figures of Celestine and an old woman hiding in an attic. These figures each connect to a wider context of Female Gothic and historic malpractices regarding women's health. Furthermore, the self-destructive behaviour of the protagonist activates a particular figurative language that connects with autoethnographic accounts of disordered eating, and particularly illness metaphors that construe the body as a territory to be invaded. What this accomplishes is that the aspect of ill health inhabits a separate, metaphysical form outside the protagonist, a 'monstrous' aspect whose story has remained hidden and buried. Ravn

employs monstrous femininity as an aspect of repetition, the cyclical nature of life and death, but she focuses on the in-between states, on decay, and on the lack of catharsis. With its multiple mentions of the emblematic white dress, a layering of corporality and culture, and a balancing between inner and outer expressions of identity, *Celestine* is a complex text. I read it as a ghost story at its core, whose message demands repeating again and again; the cultural restraints and demands on the female body result only in monstrous configuration, the release from which is here strongly envisioned through a supernatural dissolution of corporeal and mental boundaries.

These are thus my primary findings, which inform my contribution to the fields of the Scandinavian Gothic and literature and medicine. I have advocated for the position of the Gothic in Scandinavian literature, and the exciting possibilities of unnatural narratology when applied to Gothic fiction as well as illness narratives. My source materials employ the Gothic's transgressive and reflective properties to reimagine the sick body as more than an object at the mercy of the medical gaze. Fiction de-familiarises illness and allows us to see an illness in a new light, as the Gothic refracts and presents anew uncomfortable aspects of illness. The Gothic milieu is predicated on states of decay and crisis. Unnatural narratology offers a methodological approach whereby chaotic narratives can be reconciled by acknowledging the need for alternative ways of narrating a story. Where the illness prevents communication, the Gothic and the unnatural expand the epistemological and phenomenological boundaries of language by giving multiple speakers access to the same consciousness. Where illness threatens mobility and agency, the unnatural dissolves the limitations of time, space and the body. Where a diagnosis undermines identity, the Gothic encourages transformation and hybridity as tools to reclaim narrative agency. The aim of the Gothic prism is not to focus on whether an illness story is conscientiously depicted or eloquently written, but on how a space may be created in which illness is recognised as a paradoxically dark and beneficial topic. Illness narratives can thus reap the benefits of a genre and a narratological method that has the capacity and the language to support 'darker', crueller stories of corporeal chaos.

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