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Rethinking the vampire: the fantastic on the puppet stage

Manuela Mohr

Abstract

This article examines the new production of *The Tales of Hoffmann* at the Salzburger Puppentheater under the direction of Philippe Brunner (2019). Afterlife figures such as the devil, the vampire and the ghost are not always identifiable figures located in one single body. They are interiorised, becoming an expression of psychological distress, and spread to many characters. The staging with string puppets in Salzburg dematerialises the afterlife figures and helps rethinking their traditional characteristics.

KEYWORDS: fantastic, Hoffmann, devil, vampire, interiorisation, psychologisation

In 1851, a play for actors called *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (*The Tales of Hoffmann*) was written by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré. Barbier transformed it into a libretto for Offenbach's opera of the same name (1881). At the Salzburger Marionettentheater, Offenbach's opera was first staged in 1985. Then, in 2019, the Marionettentheater announced a new production of *Hoffmann*.¹ The three main story parts (Olympia, Giulietta and Antonia inspire love leading to tragedy) are well known. Hoffmann and his friends meet in Luther's tavern; the former recalls one by one the three women he has loved and his suffering. Olympia is not a real woman but an automaton; Giulietta fakes her love for him and steals his reflection; Antonia dies under mysterious circumstances. E.T.A. Hoffmann's fantastic works belong to a fantastic type called “exterior”, in opposition to the “interior” type which came up in the middle of the 19th century under the influence of Poe's fantastic stories, and which is more psychology-oriented.² Whereas ghosts, devils, vampires and other afterlife figures

1 *Hoffmanns Erzählungen* (*The Tales of Hoffmann*), Salzburger Marionettentheater, premiered 13 April 2019. New production by Philippe Brunner, staging by Günther Schneider-Siemssen, costumes by Bernd-Dieter Müller. The author would like to express her gratitude to Mr. Brunner who provided many useful details for this research.

2 On this matter, see for example the introduction by Italo Calvino in 1983 to *Racconti Fantastici dell'Ottocento*, vol. 2, Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, and also Castex, Pierre-Georges. 1951. *Le Conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant*. Paris: José Corti.

materialise in Hoffmann's conception of the fantastic, they appear more interiorized in the libretto, as an expression of inner turmoil. How does puppetry deal with these figures, and to what extent do the specificities of string puppets, the dramaturgy and the staging affect the questions and challenges that come with the particular interaction of the vampirical and the diabolical figure in the Austrian production?

The dramatic experience interacts with literary fantastic but works in its very own way when it comes to vampires. Although the devil is explicitly invoked and incarnated by the male antagonists, the vampire is not an identifiable character. His presence is discreet. Research on 19th century fantastic literature has pointed out the transformations of the diabolical figure becoming a literary motif (Milner 2007) and the assimilation of vampires and ghosts (Sangsue 2018). However, we are interested in the implications of the staging of Hoffmann's works at a string puppet theatre in the 21st century. Therefore, we will see how details of the staging lead to a rethinking of the vampirical figure and the specific possibilities of string puppets to explore mental, invisible processes. The devil and the vampire are strongly related. The staging with string puppets can ask in what way they lead to a special configuration of the fantastic genre and the vampirical figure. A puppet theatre choosing Offenbach's opera shows that the puppet can capture a fantastic world in a unique way while at the same time having to find solutions to the staging of afterlife figures evoking ontological issues.³

Evil afterlife figures: from Hoffmann to Offenbach

In Hoffmann's fantastic stories, which came to France in 1829 translated by Adolphe Loève-Weimars, the devil is strongly related to the *Doppelgänger*. The devil functions as the hero's antagonist and is responsible for the division of the individual who becomes a stranger to itself. A

³ “We are able to realize a whole number of Hoffmann’s visionary shapes along with figments of Offenbach’s lively imagination that are inevitably unattainable on 'full-size' opera stages. The irreality associated with the *Tales of Hoffmann* is thus a challenge” (Ludwig 2019).

part of the individual's identity is repressed, allowing the evil *Doppelgänger* to come forward. The devil maintains his traditional characteristics : he tempts innocent souls, promising them what they desire in exchange for their soul. Medardus, the protagonist of *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815), drinks from the potions he was told to keep ; his uncanny *Doppelgänger* then feels the need to drink blood. Hoffmann was familiar with the vampirical figure. He discreetly associates the devil and the vampire, an aspect one also observes in Offenbach's opera and in Philippe Brunner's production at the Marionettentheater. Hoffmann is interested in showing how madness is induced by stories about the devil and the vampire, i.e. how words and narratives cause loss of control or acts of violence associated to these afterlife figures.

In every act of the libretto, a diabolical opponent apparently prevents Hoffmann from being with the woman he loves. However, a closer look reveals that several characters combine multiple diabolical traits as well as characteristics of other afterlife figures. Therefore, they defy the limits between each other and contaminate Hoffmann by their presence. The characters between life and death question stable identities, but Offenbach's opera does not refer to the vampire like the Austrian string puppets. Hence, the vampirical figure is not displayed in the same way. This offers the possibility to highlight particular consequences of the interaction of the devil and the vampire in the libretto, and to track the specificities of Brunner's work.

The story which forms the framework of the libretto is set in master Luther's tavern. The owner's name relegates to the religious sphere. Martin Luther was feared as a dangerous opponent of the catholic doctrine. According to Luther, God does not bargain: the human being has to take responsibility for his actions in the present, as we cannot change the past. The libretto does not emphasize Luther's potential to be an antagonist. As we will see, Brunner confers more depth to Luther and works on the diabolical opponent influencing character dynamics by playing with light and colours.

Lindorf is Hoffmann's opponent. Irritated and egocentric (“Le conseiller Lindorf, parbleu ! Tu ne

connais pas le conseiller Lindorf ?”⁴ (Salzburger Marionettentheater, 2019, 1) [“The councillor Lindorf, by Jove! Do you not know the councillor Lindorf?”]), he is dislikeable from the very beginning. Lindorf subjects the servant Andres to a rude interrogation about the beautiful singer Stella. The competition for Stella's love favours Hoffmann (“Mon rival est aimé, je ne le suis pas” (2) [“My rival is loved, and I am not”]), but he fakes carelessness and still has an ace up his sleeve: “[J]e suis vieux, mais je suis vif !” (2) [“I am old, but full of life”]. He will never tell his exact age, but his vividness is evident. Lindorf never stops conspiring, observing and plotting. He unites a strange power in a body defying physical limits. He therefore describes himself as an afterlife figure. Given that the vampire has to be active in order to provide for himself, movement is a component of a vampire's definition.⁵ Musical *Leitmotive* emphasize the diabolical traits of Hoffmann's opponents. When Lindorf and others appear and the word “devil” is pronounced, a specific bass motif sounds. This arrangement by Offenbach (Oeser 1977, 25) links the afterlife figure to the music and transforms it into an obsessively recurrent mental issue, the *idée fixe* (*idem*). After the Kleinzach-song, Hoffmann offers to talk about “ces folles amours” (Salzburger Marionettentheater, 2019, 5) [“This mad love”]. Of course, it was the song's lyrics that made him think about the past. However, there is another reason: as an afterlife figure, Lindorf who is also on stage brings back memories of another figure between life and death, that is Olympia the automaton.

Coppélius enters when Hoffmann is alone at Spalanzani's house, as if he had waited on purpose to catch an unstable and enamoured soul. Dapertutto also prowls around, waiting for the right moment to strike. Both resemble the devil and the vampire. Dapertutto uses Giulietta to get to the reflections she substracts from those who trust her. Maybe he makes her work for him because he does not have a reflection or a shadow either. According to some superstitious beliefs, vampires can lack

4 The German translation of Salzburg's bilingual libretto says “zum Teufel” (1), a significant choice, as Lindorf invokes the devil twice during his short interaction with Andres: “[V]a-t-en au diable !” [“Go to hell!”]. Translation mine.

5 “[L]e déplacement est consubstantiel au vampire” (“[movement defines the vampire]”). Sangsue, 2018, 46.

both. He makes Hoffmann wonder whether he is “le jouet de l'enfer” (6) [“Hell's toy”]; he maliciously comments on his “pâleur mortelle” (*idem*) [“deathly pale”]. Hoffmann's pale skin can indicate vampirisation. Nevertheless, the devil and the vampire are not just deathbringers. They can offer immortality or a longer life. Religious and mythological accounts state that the devil wanted to create life, for which he was punished by God. In the 19th century, fewer people believe in him or picture him as a hideous creature. As the devil's religious power fades, his power in the artistic field rises. He transforms into a familiar and human-like character (Milner 2007, 48), stimulating new aesthetical interpretations for this role. The vampire is one of the demon's maleficent creatures. A pact with the devil can lead to a vampirical condition of the victim. He is also related to ghosts since the 19th century, a general term including vampirical figures (Sangsue 2018, 7). The vampire is a cursed being: he suffers from his condition he did not choose deliberately. The ambivalence of the devil and the vampire is highly stressed in Brunner's production by means connected to the possibilities of the puppet.

Spalanzani is the creator of a woman without blood in her veins. Hoffmann says: “[L]a vie manque à ce regard, le sang à ce visage” (Salzburger Marionettentheater, 2019, 8) [“These eyes are missing life, this face is missing blood”], as if Spalanzani has drunk the blood of his daughter, which makes him a vampire. His manipulative power becomes manifest in the way he arranges Olympia's performance in front of the ball guests. He tells them that his daughter will do everything they want although it is really him who pushes and drags Olympia to the right place and makes her speak and sing at the right moment. Nevertheless, Spalanzani and Coppélius both have to concede defeat. Spalanzani cannot earn any money with Olympia destroyed by Coppélius in a rage (we will see how Brunner modifies this detail and inserts the effects in a broader perspective), and Coppélius cannot claim his 500 ducats from the bankrupt Jew Elias. Neither Hoffmann nor his antagonists win.

Antonia's mother emerges from a life-sized portrait, a fantastic *topos*. Antonia reaches out to her in a moment of despair, after having already shown signs of a mysterious illness. At first, the stage

direction indicates: “[s]a mère lui apparaît” (29) [“Her mother appears before her eyes”]. The following stage directions call the deceased mother “une voix” (*idem*) [“a voice”] and “le fantôme” (30) [“the ghost”] even after Antonia has explicitly identified her. The lack of specificity of the libretto and the repeated identification audible for the public and other characters create a discrepancy. With the mother rising from the dead and the daughter being killed, Miracle combines the evil powers of the devil and the vampire. But the mother is herself a ghost, a vampire and a devil⁶. Crespel sees in Antonia his deceased wife and says “quelle illusion me poursuit” (23) [“what illusion persecutes me”], but the German translation in Salzburg's bilingual libretto refers to the ghostly figure: “illusion” is translated “Spuk” meaning spook or ghost. The dead mother sucks the life out of her own offspring. Antonia's music stresses that her feelings do not come from her: she expresses herself through songs that could have been part of her mother's repertoire.⁷

Living characters, an automaton, figures between life and death, visible and invisible figures appear together, questioning categories and limits between various forms of existence. Intrinsically fantastic (Plassard 2014, 13), the puppet can intervene in such a configuration in its very own way. It becomes an expression for particular bodies and mental states by rethinking mechanicity and hybrid life forms, thus broadening the range of expressions of the vampirical afterlife figures.

We have considered the evolutions and specificities of the afterlife figures from E.T.A. Hoffmann to Offenbach, and presented the main male characters who, in Brunner's production, seem to be Hoffmann's antagonists and have certain traits in common. In the following, we will see how Brunner uses concepts and implications related to the imaginary world of the machine.

6 This particularity shows that the diabolical figure is not limited to male characters.

7 “*Antonias Gefühlsäußerungen sind aus zweiter Hand. Sie singt von Gefühlen, sie äußert sich in Kunstprodukten, [...] vom Aktbeginn [...] bis zum Finale. Dort produziert sie sich mit vollem Einsatz, wie auf Podium oder Opernbühne, mit einer Arie im Donizetti-Stil, die, hart an der Grenze der Banalität, offensichtlich dem Repertoire der Sängerin-Mutter entnommen ist*”. Oeser 1977, 17. [“Antonia's expression of feelings is a reach-me-down. She sings about emotions, she expresses herself through artefacts [...] from the beginning of the act until the finale. There she commits entirely to her performance, as if she was on a podium or a stage, with an aria in the style of Donizetti which, at the limit of triteness, has obviously been extracted from her mother's repertoire, who has also been a singer”]. Translation mine.

Machineries and mechanisms

In Brunner's production, Olympia is the only character who is not a string puppet but a remote-controlled, partly mechanical partly electrical figure. Olympia's evilness is much more problematic because she is staged like a vampire's victim who takes revenge on her torturers who are at the same time perpetrators and victims with a complex inner life. Her two "fathers", Spalanzani and Coppélius, show more evil traits related to afterlife figures through specific staging choices. The puppet transforms the afterlife figures with respect to questions and challenges about identity and relationships. Olympia's artificiality and her state between life and death are dealt with in a way that does not leave room for doubt. For this, the zombie figure is used: Olympia mostly holds her arms up in front of her, and this gesture resembles the typical posture of a zombie [Fig. 1]. The all-invading presence of artificiality establishes a dialogue between Offenbach's opera and the puppet. Artificiality introduces considerations on inner processes and uncertainty of identity.

The projections on the back of the stage during the first scenes of the Olympia act are black and white anthropomorphic figures. The second figure to the left seems to be a woman in distress on a table under which scientific instruments can be seen. Science resembles torture: this detail is part of a staging which makes Olympia a strong female figure trying to scotch her cruel fathers' plans. When Coppélius enters the stage,⁸ Olympia is not directly illuminated any more. The attention is directed towards Coppélius, meaning that there exists a conflict between these two. It is almost as if Olympia wanted to hide from him. The semi-darkness surrounding her gives her a life-like appearance because there is not enough light for the audience to determine whether she moves or not. Ambiguity is therefore a threat for human beings and their psychological integrity, but an opportunity for puppets (Wolfson 2018, 212). As Olympia seems most powerful with little light, she evokes the vampire who cannot tolerate sunlight.

⁸ The libretto indicates that Coppélius carries a bag. On the puppet stage, he does not have one, but carries everything in his coat pockets. Coats and capes are the traditional attire of vampires.

During the argument between Spalanzani and Coppélius, the automaton's eyes constitute an important part of the latter's reasoning. As Olympia has his eyes,⁹ he should be considered her father and get his fair share. A kind of a horrific genetic creation process is evoked. Spalanzani declares that Olympia is his daughter, suggesting that Olympia inherited mostly *his* genetic make-up. Coppélius then makes a spyglass appear in the air which flows over Hoffmann's head. When the hero turns around, the audience discovers that he wears a pair of pink, round-shaped glasses. A comical moment of surprise ensues. The expression “to wear rose-coloured glasses” is taken literally to state that Hoffmann sees Olympia with different eyes, namely Coppélius' reality-distorting ones. The hero's glasses are related to the love he feels for Olympia, but they also take on a darker meaning because a part of the whole world remains hidden from his conscience, as Hoffmann never puts them down. This lasts until Hoffmann loses his “eyes”, triggering Olympia to lose hers. As soon as he does not wear his glasses any more, Olympias eyes pop out of her head and keep dangling under her face. The very special lighting chosen for Olympia at that moment creates pitch-black shadows surrounding her eyes, which accentuate her empty eye sockets. She almost looks like a demon. This has an absolutely shocking effect which persists until she leaves the scene. Cochenille pushes Olympia from the stage; a green light flashes several times, then something explodes and the stage goes dark. In the libretto, Coppélius destroys Olympia right after Hoffmann breaks his glasses. However, in Brunner's production, Olympia is not destroyed,¹⁰ only broken. The staging shows that the enchantment is over and suggests Olympia's rebellion against her fathers.

During Coppélius' presence on stage, an enormous single eye pulsates on the back of the stage. Circles and gear hang from the ceiling, one looks like a clock and another like a steering wheel.

They convey a mechanical imagery pointing Olympia's artificial nature, but the clock and the wheel

9 Coppélius may have given her the eyes he had previously stolen from children. From the opening of the opera, eyes are an important motive. The devil and the vampire are at the same time predators and seducers; this is why they are often associated to cats. The performance begins with two lights resembling two cat's eyes shining in the dark. The eyes have a slightly different colour, announcing Coppélius' assembly of “eyes”. The left eye closes before the right one, almost as if the animal winked, like a huge, dangerous creature foreshadowing evil things to come and setting the tone for afterlife figures.

10 What is more, the public discovers a strange figure in Spalanzani's laboratory. It seems to be a female body in a glass case. Could it be Olympia's prototype or even a newer version of her?

are related respectively to time and space. Olympia defies both (an automaton cannot die and she can roll anywhere very quickly without getting tired), just like devils and vampires do. When Olympia moves, a mechanical whir can be heard. Spalanzani makes her execute movements which only make sense for humans, such as the hand movements following her voice going up and down. What serves as facilitation to real humans is no more than a reproduction of their imperfection. Olympia never risks singing out of tune, but only being out of batteries. Suddenly, she bends forward and her voice gets deeper and deeper. This is a very intriguing detail.¹¹ Quickly, Spalanzani has to straighten her back until her voice goes up. Another unexpectedly comical scene occurs when Olympia leaves the scene rolling backwards: Spalanzani panicks and rushes behind the stage where he pushes her in the right direction until Olympia comes out rolling forward again. One has the impression that Olympia sabotages her father's plan. When she forces him to catch her, Spalanzani adopts a posture similar to a puppeteer or a hypnotist, putting his arms in front of him and fixing Olympia with his eyes. The comical moments of the staging are not an indication of parody. They offer a comic relief and make funny scenes significant with respect to the way specific staging choices point towards essential ontological issues related to afterlife figures.

In Brunner's production, Spalanzani is not quite the mean and carefree villain figure he appears to be in the libretto. He has to overlook, and is in charge of, everything and everyone. It is only natural, then, that he is very agitated, walks around very fast and waves his arms a lot. Secretly tormented, Spalanzani often looks directly to the guests, encouraging them to admire his daughter. As he tries to induce the "right" opinions, his ambition is to enter and to control their feelings. He is not only craving approval, as the libretto states, but also seems scared because his identity as a proud father of an irreproachable daughter is at stake. During Olympia's performance, Spalanzani leans far backwards several times, remaining in a position that only a puppet can maintain. His position is important because even him, Olympia's creator, seems overwhelmed by his creature.

¹¹ Philippe Brunner confirms that Olympia's voice going deeper is used in order to make the audience understand that her batteries are dying. He wanted to find an acoustic expression for her technical problem.

Hoffmann's friend Niklaus approaches Olympia from behind her back after Spalanzani has stepped aside for a second, but as soon as he sees Niklaus, he comes running and chases him away. Spalanzani goes as far as to stand between Niklaus and Olympia so that the young man cannot see her at close range. But with the guests to enchant and Niklaus to monitor, Spalanzani has so much to do that he calls Cochenille for help who guides the guests to another room whilst Spalanzani prevents Niklaus from coming too close. Finally, Niklaus gives up and follows the guests; however, he never attempts to inform Hoffmann about the doubts he obviously has. When Hoffmann follows Olympia around, Niklaus makes no convincing effort to prevent his friend from doing so.

The afterlife figures are reconfigured and function as catalysts of the plot and relationship dynamics. Making characters side with the antagonists or suggesting the hero's betrayal by those he calls his friends underlines the dynamics of vampirism. The staging reinterprets the affinities of afterlife figures who give new impulses to the puppet stage. As we have seen how the imaginary world of machines and mechanisms influences characters, the stage design and the character dynamics, we will show how a vampirical dimension invests these elements of Brunner's production.

Vampirical machinations

Nathanaël's entrance in the first act makes him appear suspicious. He hides behind the back of the Muse; when she turns, he stays behind her, his back against hers, and they turn around by 180 degrees at the same time. The Muse transforms into Nathanaël in order to stay next to Hoffmann because she feels neglected. Nevertheless, this movement seems vicious because he hides behind another string puppet. Entering the stage whilst hiding behind something is ominous, as this is also the way Dapertutto¹² comes on stage, for example. Nathanaël then flows into the dark back of the stage by making a huge step in the air. When everyone enters the tavern in the first act, Lindorf

¹² When he first appears, smoke rises from his body, as if he was a diabolical creature smelling like sulphur.

stays at his separate table at the left of the stage. He is partially hidden in the shadows [Fig. 2], illuminated only by a bluish light which confers him an eerie aura. At first, he is the only one of the characters present on stage who is in a blue luminous spot. Later however, the same light is also directed towards Luther. The bluish cold colour contrasts with a warmer yellow used for the other figures. This is indeed a relevant aspect because Luther defects to Hoffmann's enemy and will not protect him from Lindorf's racketeering taking places at his tavern. At the end of the first act, those who remain visible on stage when the lights slowly fade are Lindorf and Luther. Back in the tavern after the Antonia act, a warm, yellow light illuminates everyone but them.

Also in the first act, when Hoffmann's mind is about to wander to the woman he once loved, Nathanaël stands behind him and thinks he is going mad. Hoffmann's respiration is difficult, as he is in emotional distress, but Nathanaël bent over his neck seems to analyse him (he does not understand what is going on with his friend and interrupts his thinking) as if he could see into his head and take it off, making his puppet-status once again obvious. Traditionally, the vampire bites the victim in the neck; therefore his position suggests that a vampirical force threatens Hoffmann. Indeed, as Hoffmann sings, two young men to the right seem to whisper to each other. This gesture points towards a conspiracy or at least a lack of compassion and interest in Hoffmann's feelings. Finally, in the last act, Nathanaël leaves Hoffmann alone, who falls on his knees in despair. Hoffmann struggles to be a real part of a community or a group.¹³ As the vampire is a solitary figure, the staging makes him become more and more motionless and do things that question his mental health.

At the beginning of the second act, Hoffmann is alone on the dark stage. He seems to walk with caution, putting his entire sole of foot on the ground, feeling his way. He walks slowly and is ultimately swallowed by darkness. The string puppets who put their whole foot on the ground when they walk convey Hoffmann's disoriented and lost state. Physical properties of the puppet's body

¹³ In the last act at the tavern, the young men form a group and sway simultaneously to the music, but Hoffmann stands farther away from everyone. Again, Hoffmann stands out as a solitary figure who cannot integrate any social group. As an outsider, he is vampirised and becomes the very same thing that has destroyed his life.

gain importance as they give an insight in a character's mind, and the foreboding of this scene indicates that Hoffmann faces, and will lose against, an ominous force.

Then a little light illuminates the hero who converses with someone. The scene is still very dark, therefore his interlocutor only becomes apparent when the light gets brighter: it's a statue! However, Hoffmann is clearly turned towards it and makes gestures in its direction. He even tries to speak to another statue right next to the first one before noticing a third statue, ending the dialogue and disappearing briefly from the stage. The statues are illuminated one by one as Hoffmann tries to speak to the the first and the second one. This is an eloquent staging element. It blurs the lines between animate and inanimate figures even before Olympia appears. The confusion is not limited to her but emerges as a larger concept. Thus, this scene can account for amalgamations of categories and characters. In fact, Hoffmann always needs to interact in order to exist. He never managed to distance himself from the women he loved: interestingly, in some versions of Offenbach's opera (Oeser 1977, 24) and also in Brunner's production, Hoffmann has “not a single monologue, solo aria without other listeners, or commentary on himself to himself” (*idem*) [“[K]einen einzigen Monolog, keine Solo-Arie ohne Lauscher, keine Aussage über sich selbst zu sich selbst”]. He only emerges as a character through others. In the middle of the second act, Hoffmann aligns with the three statues, standing as immobile as them. He stands between the first (the smallest) and the second statue (a little taller) so that their four heads form a perfect straight line guiding the eye towards the centre of the stage where the great eye pulsates. Hoffmann finds his place between these inanimate figures, leading to an exchange of characteristics: he becomes more like a statue whereas the statues seem more alive.

At the beginning of the *Giulietta* act, Hoffmann is in a dream-like state. He contemplates without moving. The servant has to shake his arm in order to guide him to *Giulietta* in the seashell. Hoffmann then sings for the guests with a glass of wine in his hand. He wants to give a toast but nobody else has a glass. Hoffmann is excluded from the group. At the end of the act, the servant

kills Giulietta with a lime-green, poisoned drink. As both Hoffmann and his antagonist carry a glass, they become complementary figures. The limits between individuals are problematic; figures communicate and correspond, their characteristics overlap.

In the following scene, Dapertutto hides behind a statue and glides on stage. He shows himself and small lights at the statues go on. As a diabolical figure, he reminds us that “Lucifer” means “light-bringer”. The light in Dapertutto's chest glows in a bright yellow when Giulietta appears. He is a torn figure with a burning desire, as the round-shaped light covers exactly the spot of his heart. When his chest light is on, the lights of the statues are off. An incompatibility of those lights is suggested; as they cannot shine at the same time, an inner conflict emerges between Dapertutto's vulnerable side (he loves Giulietta) and his evil side (he is Lucifer). The staging makes afterlife figures more complex by giving them contradictory, tormenting feelings.

An interesting difference between the libretto and the staging concerns the duel between Hoffmann and Schlemil. According to the libretto, the former takes Dapertutto's sword and kills the latter, but on stage, Dapertutto makes two swords appear from the ground (where Hell might be, this underlines his diabolical nature). The swords kill Schlemil without Hoffmann ever touching them. This makes Dapertutto stand out as a figure with magical powers he uses for his own interests, related to the devil as well as to the puppeteer, the vampire and the mesmerist, insofar as he controls other characters and objects.

How the characters' bodies are positioned to one another says a lot about their relationship. In Brunner's production, character dynamics expresses ambiguous feelings. This translates to parallel back and forth body movements: characters are trapped in a hesitation between attraction and repulsion. These contradictory emotions are vividly expressed when several characters approach and retreat again and again in a synchronised way, or when one character repeatedly approaches another one who backs off. This is what happens at Crespel's music room and is related to hypnosis that induces a state of mind similar to the victim of an afterlife figure. Antonia is forbidden to sing

because her father fears for her health. She dies singing, accompanied by Miracle. Of the three family members, the mother is the last one to be seen on stage: at first, Antonia is illuminated, then Antonia's father. Only then the portrait of the mother becomes visible. It is slightly inclined to the left, an early sign of her animation. When the mother moves, Miracle touches the frame and a light behind the upper part of the frame goes on. Rather than in a portrait, the mother seems to be in a cage or a showcase. During the examination performed by Miracle, Antonia is offstage. The doctor waves with his hands and mumbles Antonia's answers to his questions. Miracle's behaviour imitates a *séance* or a suggestion session. A very intense moment is created as a crystal blue light illuminates a door opening abruptly, then closing noisily. When the door is open, Antonia's voice is louder and strident. She is singing in pain because her favourite activity has been transformed into a harmful one. Finally, as Antonia lies dead on the floor and Hoffmann enters, he does not look at her or touch her. His friend Niklaus¹⁴ guides him to a chair. Only Antonia's father exteriorises his grief by throwing himself over his daughter.

The interactions between Crespel and Miracle show how the puppet, the vampirical figure and the reflection on mental states are intertwined. When the doctor arrives, they greet each other with *la bise*, an occasion for Miracle to get dangerously close to his neck – he could bite him like vampires do. From this point on, Miracle enchants Crespel who adopts an impossible posture defying the laws of physics, leaning backwards like a plank in an angle of about 45 degrees. Antonia's father behaves as if he was possessed. Then the doctor suddenly glides behind the chair Crespel is sitting in, although he has walked normally before. The string puppets can glide and therefore underline the supernatural or treacherous nature of a character. They achieve a unique effect making Miracle a supernatural afterlife figure flying just above the ground. Behind the chair, the doctor resembles a devil with horns because of his hair, but also a puppeteer because of his posture. They both walk with their head turned to the right, their arms slightly open and stretched out. Crespel is under Miracle's hypnotising influence. Whereas the doctor had to stay very close to his victim in the

¹⁴ Niklaus has arrived on scene with a huge jump over the harpsichord. Those who can fly are suspicious figures.

beginning, he can now control him over a greater distance, from one end of the stage to the other. Again, Crespel bends backwards into an improbable position stressing how ambiguous their relationship is.¹⁵ The hypnosis performed by the doctor receives a particular expression with regard to string puppets when he juggles with his potions: the flacons fly away from his hands and come back like yo-yos. He uses them as if they were weapons, pushing Crespel into a corner. Then Miracle lays his back on the piano, still juggling, like a possessed.

Some figures are conscious about their puppet identity. Crespel's servant Frantz looks at his bent leg, holds his arm above it and moves the arm and the leg as if he knew he was a string puppet, pulling an invisible string to move the leg up and down. Hoffmann himself makes a strange and unique movement in the first act: he rapidly moves his head to the left and to the right several times. In E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Sandman*, Nathanaël is afraid of the mean man visiting his family's house who could unscrew his head. He imagines being treated like a puppet; emotional suffering and puppet identity are strongly linked. The intertextuality underlines how string puppets not only execute movements impossible for real humans, but also use their puppet identity, made explicit, to explore how individuals influence each other's inner life. When the puppet signals that it knows about its puppet identity, a loss of control becomes evident, closely linked to vampirisation and hypnosis.

In Brunner's production, numerous degrees of animation and life and death are displayed. Not everything that comes to life has a physical body (Kleinzach materializes; he becomes an animated character moving like Hoffmann's antagonists), and not every character has exactly one identity. Julie Postel has identified the concept of an existence between bodies in contemporary puppet plays (Postel 2019). The possibility of the fantastic at the theatre has recently attracted the attention of

15 Once he tries to get up from the piano chair, but Miracle just has to turn in order to make him sit again. Then, when an eerie green light shines brighter and brighter and leaves green reflections on Miracle's cheek, Crespel makes an effort to attack the doctor and get him out of the house, but all he achieves is the extinction of the green light. Miracle's power cannot be defeated by Crespel. It is interesting to note that the green colour is linked to death. For example, in the *Giulietta* act, the green lights are the last thing we see on stage after *Giulietta* has been poisoned.

certain scholars (Bionda 2016) but Brunner's production challenges already existing concepts and theories because it requires a thorough reflection on the interiorisation of afterlife figures and because it transposes literary procedures on the scene, acknowledging the specific forms of presence and movement of the string puppet. Characters resemble other characters or objects; the exchange of characteristics could support the hypothesis that the puppet allows to soften up the strict distinctions between the figures of afterlife which are not located in one puppet body: they appear between characters or between a figure and an object. The string puppet dematerialises the devil and the vampire. The female figures also question the validity of categories and limits. Olympia does so by her hybrid nature, Giulietta by stealing a part of an individual's identity, and Antonia by resembling her mother so much that she practically relives her life. Brunner's production can rearrange, reinterpret and rethink afterlife figures: string puppets become a particular mode of communication conferring them new opportunities, asking new questions through an already existing text.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2

