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The Uncanniness of Form

A Reading of C. J. L. Almqvist's *Amorina*

Det kusligas form. En läsning av C.J.L Almqvists *Amorina*

Boris Lazic
borislazic70@gmail.com
Boris Lazic has earned Master's degrees in Comparative Literature and English at Karlstad University, Sweden. His research interests are mostly oriented towards poetry, theories of literary form and the exploration of how the formal organization of texts relates to the interpretive activity of the reader.

ABSTRACT
This article is concerned with Carl Jonas Love Almqvist's *Amorina* from 1839 and aims to exemplify how its formal organization relates to the Freudian uncanny. The convergence of the formal and the uncanny is explored in relation to the formalist concept of defamiliarization. I argue that the defamiliarizing potential of form can bring about the convergence of the strange and the familiar that Sigmund Freud identified with the uncanny. This potential overlap of the formal and the uncanny is also shown to be present in the tradition of Romantic irony, to which *Amorina* has frequently been related. The reading of Almqvist's text is mainly centred on two of its most prominent aspects: its fictitious "publisher's preface" and its continual shifts between a dramatic and a narrative form. In both cases the text is shown to stage great contrasts of form, genre and style, which disrupt the reader's interpretive activity, placing them in an uncanny position of ambivalence and disorientation.

SAMMANFATTNING
Denna artikel behandlar Carl Jonas Love Almqvists *Amorina* från 1839 och ämnar visa hur dess formella aspekter kan relateras till det kusliga i Freuds bemärkelse. Sambandet mellan form och det kusliga utforskas i relation till formalismens föreställning om form som främmandegörande. Jag menar att formens främmandegörande potential kan ge upphov till den sammanblandning av det främmande och det familjära som Sigmund Freud angav som kännetecken för det kusliga. Mötet mellan form och det kusliga visas också vara närvarande i den tradition av romantisk ironi vilken *Amorina* ofta hänförts till. Läsningen av Almqvists text fokuserar främst på två av dess mest framträdande aspekter: dess fiktiva "utgifvarens företal" samt dess genomgående skiften mellan en dramatisk och en narrativ

form. I båda fallen uppvisar texten omfattande kontraster av form, genre och stil, vilka stör läsarens tolkningsaktivitet och placerar denne i en kuslig position av ambivalens och tvivel.

Keywords
Gothic, The Uncanny, Formalism, Romanticism, Irony

Nyckelord
gotik, det kusliga, formalism, romantik, ironi

Carl Jonas Love Almqvist (1793–1866) holds a unique position in the literary history of Sweden in terms of the breadth and scope of his *oeuvre*. Almqvist's earlier works stand among the greatest expressions of literary Romanticism in the Swedish language, while his later writings mark a transition towards literary realism and a more explicit political liberalism. During the course of this career he produced literary works in many different genres and also wrote philosophical and political works, as well as being a prolific journalist. In the following reading I will make use of Almqvist's *Amorina* (published in 1839 but mostly written long before that) to exemplify the potential relationship between literary form and the Freudian uncanny, which goes beyond the traditional surface elements of the Gothic genre. While it has long been recognized that *Amorina* does indeed make use of themes and motifs from the Gothic novel and related popular genres,[1] there has been a reluctance to take these aspects seriously, or at least to place them in the foreground. While it is arguable that the conventional horror elements of the text can be seen as marginal, this does not mean that *Amorina* as a whole is not, at least potentially, marked by a sense of the sinister. Thus it is my intention to reframe, somewhat, the Gothic aspects of *Amorina*, by shifting focus away from its thematic elements and towards the areas of literary form and the uncanny. I aim to show that the formal organization of *Amorina* is such that its reader is constantly confronted with an indeterminate sense of ambivalence and ambiguity, which Sigmund Freud and his commentators have identified with the uncanny. In doing this I also hope to show how the intersection of form and the uncanny is latently present in the Romantic tradition of irony to which *Amorina* has often been related in the past.

DEFAMILIARIZATION AND THE FREUDIAN UNCANNY

The uncanny has been firmly established as a literary phenomenon ever since Freud's 1919 investigation of "Das Unheimliche", which partly consists of a discussion of E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story "Der Sandmann" from 1816. Freud has subsequently been accused of being less than diligent in his treatment of Hoffmann's text, to the point of excluding or distorting certain aspects of it. His perceived neglect has perhaps been seen as especially egregious when it comes to the formal features of "Der Sandmann". Sarah Kofman argues that, in trying to find universally uncanny "themes", Freud elides both the narrative structure

1. Almqvist's interest in popular Gothic literature was pointed out by Martin Lamm as early as 1915 (Lamm, 1915 106–108), and has been re-affirmed several times since, see: Holmberg (1922, 9–10) Olsson (1927, 320–321), Tykesson (1942, 126–127), Svedjedal (1987, 244–245) and Leffler (1991, 50–53).

and the concluding ambiguity of the story (Kofman 1991, 131–133). Nicholas Royle makes a similar observation in regard to Freud's neglect of the shifting genre of "Der Sandmann", which shifts from an epistolary form to a more conventional mode of narration (Royle 2003, 45). Freud's alternative focus is of course understandable given his psychoanalytic framework and purpose, but from a literary perspective, there is clearly a potential overlap between literary form and the uncanny. Freud defines the uncanny partly in terms of a conflict of familiarity: "[*h*]*eimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny (*das Unheimliche* 'the unhomely') is in some ways a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homely')" (Freud 2003, 134). This convergence of familiar and strange bears a clear parallel to the formalist view of literature as being defined by defamiliarization, a commonality which has been taken to suggest that "the uncanny is central to any description of the literary" (Bennet and Royle 2009, 36). In his 1916 essay "Art as Technique" Viktor Shklovsky famously asserts that "[t]he technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar'" (Shklovsky 2004, 16) and further conjectures that "defamiliarization is found almost everywhere form is found" (Shklovsky 2004, 18). It should be noted that in Shklovsky's theory, the defamiliarizing tendency of form carries a positive connotation, as it de-habituates and de-automatizes perception, thereby allowing a recovery of a lost or forgotten "sensation of life" (Shklovsky 2004, 15–16). It is, however, precisely such a loss of habitual or conventional modes of understanding that scholars have wanted to bring out in Freud's theory as an uncanny aspect of form. Kofman, for example, describes the form of "Der Sandmann" as "play[ing] the decisive role in the production of [uncanny] effects" (Kofman 1991, 137) and Royle, who stresses the disruption of genre conventions, similarly sees the uncanny as "a reading-effect" (Royle 2003, 44). Marc Falkenberg, who also conducts a critique of Freud's methods and places a stronger emphasis on the disorienting and uncertain aspects of the uncanny, suggests a category of the "poetical uncanny", defined as a disorienting uncertainty "on the level of reader-text interaction" which is enacted through the formal features of the literary text (Falkenberg 2005, 18). While Shklovsky himself was more oriented towards the text rather than its effects on the reader, the defamiliarizing role of form nonetheless seems to have a significant uncanny potential, and it is in such terms that I will formulate my reading of *Amorina*.

UNCANNINESS AND THE TRADITION OF ROMANTIC IRONY

While not insensitive to the particulars of its form, previous scholarship on *Amorina* has been unwilling to assign any uncanny effect to the text, despite recognizing it as drawing upon Gothic conventions. This reluctance seems to partly stem from the traditionally "low" or marginal status of the Gothic and horror genres. Olle Holmberg, one of the earlier commentators of *Amorina*, recognizes the Gothic aspects of the text, but dismisses them as "tiresome", "turgid" and "baroque" and sees them as something of a youthful indiscretion (Holmberg 1922, 8–10; my translation). Bertil Romberg, writing in 1973, is on the whole more positively disposed towards *Amorina*, but still refers to its "clichés and blood-dripping exaggerations" (Romberg 2007, 138; my translation). The dismissal of its Gothic aspects cannot, however, be solely attributed to elitism, but is also a consequence of the heterogeneous nature of *Amorina* itself. Almqvist's text is marked by radical contrasts of genre,

tone and content, shifting between a dramatic and a narrative form, between lyrical intensity and farcical comedy, between Gothic horror and religious allegory. Henry Olsson notes in another early treatment of *Amorina* that its plot is overburdened with exaggerations, heavy-handed religious symbolism and strange coincidences, which exist side by side with "captivating" dramatic scenes as well as early examples of the realism which would characterize Almqvist's later work (Olsson 1927, 216–219; my translation). These great contrasts, and their tendency towards illusion-breaking, have led later commentators to discuss *Amorina* in terms of irony, and more specifically to place it within a tradition of Romantic irony.[2] I claim, however, that an ironic reading of *Amorina* does not preclude a recognition of its uncanny aspects, and may in fact facilitate such effects.

Originating in German Romanticism (and especially associated with the philosophical writings of Friedrich Schlegel), Romantic irony is understood as a process or method of aesthetic self-reflexivity which aims to transcend the finite limitations of human subjectivity and reach for the infinite (Behler 1988, 44–45). The concept is somewhat esoteric and evolved significantly over time (Furst 1988, 294), but its practical literary manifestation is most often described in terms of a meta-fictive self-awareness. Ernst Behler (drawing on Schlegel's definition) speaks of the ironic aesthetic as an oscillation between "self-creation" and "self-destruction", whose ideal is "a hovering, mediating, position between enthusiasm and scepticism" (Behler 1988, 61). Christian Quendler notes that this oscillating movement is born of a realization that the absolute is artistically (and linguistically) unrepresentable and only approachable in a negative way. The method of Romantic irony is thus to "make an affirmative statement of the world, and point to its illusory nature" (Quendler 2001, 19–20). In practical terms the ironic text is primarily recognizable through its use of strategies that work to alert the reader to its own fictive status. There is a clear similarity here to Shklovsky's defamiliarization (although it is more firmly a self-defamiliarization by the text of itself) and Romantic irony has a similar ideal of directing the reader towards a more complete understanding of the world by breaking or revealing habitual modes of understanding. Just as with defamiliarization, however, this notion of irony holds potential openings for the uncanny. The illusion-breaking self-reflexivity of the ironic text bears a suggestive similarity to Freud's idea of the uncanny as marking the return of that which has been hidden or repressed (Freud 2003, 148). Instead of establishing a suspension of disbelief, the ironic text deliberately exposes its own artifice, denies the reader a conventional norm of fiction and thus risks placing them in an uncanny position of disorientation and ambiguity.

The potential overlap of Romantic irony and the uncanny can be further exemplified by the way in which the two are applied in practice. In a reading of Ludwig Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* from 1797, for example, Raymond Immerwahr suggests that the text ironically draws attention to its fictitious nature by merging the genres of fairy tale and Gothic romance and by staging a "confusion of levels of fictional reality" (Immerwahr 1988, 89). The focus on narrative organization, genre and form have a direct parallel in Falkenberg's work on the poetical uncanny. Falkenberg also makes use of *Der blonde Eckbert* (as well as

2. See, for example, Pagrot (1962), Engdahl (1986), and Schröder (1995). Almqvist's Romantic irony has also been treated in English by Marilyn Johns Blackwell (1983), though her study has unfortunately been implicated in plagiarism; see reviews by Romberg (1984) and Svedjedal (1985).

"Der Sandmann") and, despite arguing for its uncanniness rather than its irony, his reading is strikingly similar to Immerwahr's. The uncanniness of Tieck's text is said to arise from "a structure that disorients the reader" and the combination of "the marvelous elements of the classic fairy tale and medieval romance with the psychological realism of the novella" (Falkenberg 2005, 135–137). The same analytical overlap can be seen in relation to Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" which, apart from its near omnipresence in discussions of the uncanny, has also been placed in a tradition of Romantic irony. Maria M. Tatar, for example, not only reads "Der Sandmann" as an ironic text, but also draws attention to its ambiguous manner of narration as well as its crossing of genre borders (Tatar 1980, 589). While obviously born of different contexts and traditions, there is a clear area of overlap between Romantic irony, form and the uncanny, at least in terms of textual and analytical practice.

The same kind of analytical practice can also be seen within scholarly treatments of *Amorina*; Lennart Pagrot, whose study of Almqvist's irony was the first to treat the subject at any length, notes several ironic features in *Amorina* and describes them in clearly defamiliarizing terms: "A literary work generally aims at making the reader forget that what he is experiencing is literature and not reality […]. [The Romantic author] instead destroys the illusion by underlining the fictive nature of his work" (Pagrot 1962, 149; my translation). There are obvious similarities here to the de-automatizing aspect of form, and Pagrot also mentions Tieck and Hoffmann as exemplifying this Romantic tradition of irony, thus citing the same examples as Falkenberg uses in search of the poetical uncanny. Pagrot himself, however, upholds the transcendental aspects of the Romantic tradition, and (with reference to Almqvist's own writings on the subject) understands the goal of this irony as consisting of an "elevation towards a higher vantage point" and a "deeper transcendental purpose" (Pagrot 1962, 142–143; my translation). Pagrot's interpretation has in turn been questioned by Horace Engdahl, who also reads *Amorina* in ironic terms, but who claims that "the proportions of sincerity and self-parody within [*Amorina*] are incredibly difficult to judge", and suggests that the great formal and stylistic contrasts of the text can be read as undermining its transcendental aims as well (Engdahl 1986, 203; my translation). Though he does not draw such conclusions himself, Engdahl's recognition of the complicating aspects of form also approaches the above noted connection of generic ambiguity and uncanny effects. Given these similarities, it seems that Almqvist's text is also heavily implicated in the merging of form, irony and the uncanny. My reading of *Amorina* should thus not be seen as a rejection of its ironic aspects but rather as a shift in emphasis, away from questions of what it means and towards an exploration of how its ironic and formal features figure in staging a sense of uncanny defamiliarization.

TEXTUAL DESTABILIZATION – A READING OF THE "PUBLISHERS FOREWORD"

A practical complication of writing about *Amorina* is that the text exists in two different versions; there is the original (and incomplete) version from 1822, the printing of which was started but never finished, and the version from 1839 which actually reached publication (and which will be the focus of my reading). The latter version was revised in many particular and in a few larger ways, the most notable being the addition of a fictitious "publisher's fore-

word", the interpretation of which has been somewhat contentious. Holmberg briefly mentions the foreword as being among the "most amusing" things written in the Swedish language (Holmberg 1922, 11; my translation). Romberg similarly acknowledges a potentially ironic and exaggerated pedantic style within the foreword, but also sees it as being largely "humour-free" and instead characterized by a "learned snobbery", which is set up as a contrast to the excesses of *Amorina* itself (Romberg, 1973, 123; my translation).[3] These tensions and interpretive conflicts have naturally been of interest to readings that focus on Almqvist's use of irony, but even in this context there is little consensus as to the purpose and function of the foreword. Suggestions range from the foreword simply being a further strategy of Romantically ironic illusion-breaking (Pagrot 1962, 158), a way for Almqvist to distance himself from an early work (Melin 1976, 32) or as a non-Romantic irony which deliberately sabotages the transcendental pretensions of that tradition (Schröder 1995, 22). Given these conflicting interpretations, there seems ample room for the kinds of disruptive effects that complicate the reader's interpretive activity, thus providing an opening for the uncanny.

The most immediately defamiliarizing aspect of the foreword lies in its incongruent stylistic and generic markers. The introduction is presented as written by an anonymous librarian who, supposedly, found a handwritten manuscript of *Amorina* and prepared it for publication. In keeping with the conventions of a foreword, the narrator introduces his intention as being one of simply describing the origins and character of the now published manuscript, and of giving a brief exegesis of certain aspects of its subject matter. The pretension to a scholarly form is quickly made problematic, however, by the introduction of several defamiliarizing features. The text begins to bear rather overt marks of fiction, such as when the narrator explains how the manuscript was discovered, but does so in an oddly stylized and ominous manner. It is said that the discovery happened on the stormy evening of April 3 in 1837, and the narrator gives a detailed description of his entry into the manuscript room: "Just as I had entered the long, narrow hallway, turned the key and removed my galoshes, I heard a terrible thunderclap, a bolt of lightning passed by the windows" (Almqvist 2000, ii–iii; all translations of Almqvist's text are mine). After this, rather blatant, attempt at establishing a sense of tension, the narrator digresses into an odd meditation on the general nature of handwritten manuscripts which he describes as being "daemonic" and even responsible for hauntings:

> Who has not heard stories of the restless dead, who have risen again, only to lead the living to this or that hiding place, where some secret manuscript or other, some document lay hidden, containing important information. (Almqvist 2000, iii)

This sudden leap into the occult is a further disruption of the supposed scholarly authenticity of the foreword, which is even more apparent than the previous stylistic incongruity. The text is, somewhat paradoxically perhaps, compromised yet further by the narrator's oddly empirical justification for his belief in ghosts; he notes the apparent decline in ghost sightings over time and concludes:

3. Romberg notes that such elusive and semi-ironic games are characteristic of much of Almqvist's work, which often plays with various forms of narrative framing devices and manuscript fictions in a way that is said to parallel the work of Hoffmann (Romberg, 1973, 13).

> I find the greatest cause of the *decline* in hauntings to be the *increase* in printing, which does not allow any secret to lay hidden in archives, thus removing the primary reason for spirits to haunt the living. The peace in the spirit realm is guaranteed as the publicity on Earth increases. (Almqvist 2000, v)

The text thus exhibits several defamiliarizing tendencies as it moves from an inappropriately ominous treatment of the mundane to an inappropriately rational treatment of the supernatural. This gives rise to the kind of poetical uncanny that Falkenberg describes as "purposefully disorient[ing] the reader's act of interpretation" (Falkenberg 2005, 18). The reader of Almqvist's text will find it difficult to fully accept the factual and scholarly connotations of the genre designation "foreword" and is left questioning the motives of the text and its narrator. This, in turn, makes it difficult to wholly integrate the text into a conventional interpretive framework. The lack of a stable interpretive ground thus forces the reader to notice the incongruities of the foreword, and risks placing them in an uncanny position of ambivalence and doubt.

It could of course be argued that there is an established tradition of manuscript fiction and that readers are unlikely to approach the foreword of *Amorina* as anything but a piece of fiction. This is true, but I would argue that such fictions usually aim at inducing a certain suspension of disbelief that is made almost impossible in the case of *Amorina*. A comparison can be made to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* from 1764 (commonly deemed to be the first Gothic novel), which is similarly introduced as a found manuscript and preceded by a fictitious translator's preface. This preface also touches upon matters of the supernatural, but where Almqvist's librarian boldly asserts the existence of ghosts, Walpole's translator is explicitly apologetic for the "preternatural" elements of the tale and tries to excuse them by reference to the (supposedly) medieval context of the text: "Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the *manners* of the times who should omit all mention of them" (Walpole 2008, 6). The narrator eases the reader into the text, so to speak, by acknowledging the potential reservations of its audience and by providing an acceptable interpretive context. The discoverer of *Amorina*, by contrast, is not only unapologetically accepting of the supernatural as a literary device, but is actually presenting it as an extra-literary fact. This disturbance of narrative levels works to estrange the text from the reader, while paralleling Freud's idea of the uncanny as the return of "primitive" beliefs which were thought to have been surmounted, among which he especially mentions the belief in the returning dead (Freud 2003, 153–154). While the preface of Walpole's text frames the "preternatural" as an unfortunate remainder of a bygone age, the foreword of *Amorina* directly confronts the reader with an oddly unceremonious belief in the afterlife. Its defamiliarizing stylistic incongruity is thus coupled with the uncanny return of primitive belief.

The uncanny defamiliarization of the foreword does not only compromise the introductory text itself, but also performs a substantial destabilization of *Amorina* as such. This begins with the actual material manuscript, the discovery of which is also described in highly mystifying terms:

> Now I opened the locker. I stepped away in horror – it was completely empty! […] As I stood in this way, and stared at nothing, in front of a locker which may not have been opened for fifty years; there

> came again the sound of thunder, a lightning bolt broke past the nearest window, in a flash illuminating the inner nooks of the locker. There I now saw the back of something folded in half. (Almqvist 2000, vi–vii)

Stephan Michael Schröder has noted how this passage is constructed in such a way that the reader expects to encounter a ghost rather than a manuscript (Schröder 1995, 21) and while Schröder stresses the potentially comical effect of the narrator's style, such stylistic incongruities are also a continuation of the defamiliarizing uncanniness of the text. The shift from foreword to ghost story marks yet another instance of generic disruption making the passage doubly uncanny in Freudian terms, as it represents the return of the repressed in both thematic (the resurfacing of the forgotten in the form of a manuscript) and formal terms (the intrusion of the fictive nature of the foreword itself). The substitution of the manuscript in place of a ghost, along with the aforementioned haunting potential of manuscripts in general, also alerts the reader's apprehension towards the text of *Amorina* itself; the very text which the foreword is, at least nominally, intending to introduce and explain. This introductory aspect is marred even further, however, both by frequent digressions, but also by the particular claims actually made for the text. The narrator takes for granted that the manuscript describes actual events and draws the conclusion that these took place 100 years ago (which here means in 1739), but were not written down until 50 years later. To this end he puts forth both historical and stylistic evidence, but his conviction seems mostly to stem from a fascination with the number 100 "which is an even and most respectable number: it is, so to speak, a century" (Almqvist 2000, xv). To prove that 50 years is the "normal" and proper time for a manuscript to "collect itself" before publication, the librarian offers up the following anecdote:

> [A]lready at the beginning of the 1820s, or only 30 years after being authored, this poetic work [*Amorina*] was brought, through the haste of some confused mind, to the printing press; and what happened? It never reached the market: it was never fully printed: the abortive sheets where scattered or simply destroyed. Such is the power of fate, which no one can resist. Fate had allocated 50 years of dormancy for the manuscript, and these years have only now passed. (Almqvist 2000, xv)

This passage makes reference to the troubled real-life publication history of *Amorina*, a self-referential joke which is of course congruent with the idea of Romantic irony, but also with Freud's characterization of the uncanny as arising "when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred" (Freud 2003, 150). The reference is still potentially uncanny, however, even if the reader is unaware of its basis in actual events. The passing reference to a previous version contains a substantial destabilizing potential that the narrator does not defuse or account for in any way. The existence of a textual double casts immediate doubts on the supposed authenticity and primacy of the presented version. Far from serving the commonsensical function of introducing and contextualizing the main text, the foreword merely defamiliarizes and estranges it from the reader, producing more questions than it answers, making it difficult to accept the text at face value and opening up possibilities for uncanny uncertainties.

The claims to historical truth made by the narrator are already undermined by the idea that 50 years passed between the original events and the writing of the manuscript, but the

final, and perhaps most severe, complication of *Amorina* arises in relation to its suggested author. The narrator of the foreword claims to have identified the writer of his found manuscript as a, by now long deceased, sexton's son by the name of "Andreas Morin Andersson", who died of illness at a young age and whose correspondence he came to possess by coincidence (Almqvist 2000, xvi). The reader cannot help noticing the obvious similarity between "A. Morin A." and the titular character "Amorina" and this authorial signature is commented upon in the following terms:

> Surely I am correct in presuming that [Morin] felt a need to immortalize his name and, in a manner often used in previous times, interweave his own person into his poem. Thus I take for granted that he has, in the hectic Mrs. Libius, whose consumption is united with a great beauty of spirit, wanted to give an image of his own illness, his hectic temperament, his love of the heavenly as well as his earthly misery. (Almqvist 2000, xxiv)

This may seem an innocuous statement, but it represents yet another problematic blurring of genre boundaries where the text is simultaneously claimed to be a historical chronicle of actual events *and* an allegorical self-portrait of a suffering artist. The foreword pretends to provide the reader with a genre or a valid interpretive framework but actually presents two different frameworks and declines to resolve their contradictions. Instead of giving an explanatory exegesis of the origins of the text, the foreword is constructed in such a way so as to defamiliarize and undermine both itself and *Amorina*, once again forming a sense of uncanny ambivalence and disorientation. Even before getting to the "main" text, the reader thus comes to regard it with apprehension and suspicion, as a strange hybrid work whose origins and purpose are shrouded in mystery.

COLLISIONS OF STYLE AND GENRE – THE UNCANNY AS READING-EFFECT

The mystifications of the foreword are, in some sense, appropriate given the disorienting hybridity of *Amorina* itself, with its wild oscillations between genres and styles. The plot of *Amorina* is similarly labyrinthine and not easily summarized. The premise of the story is founded on an ancestral curse resting upon the noble Falkenburg family, which condemns each generation to be struck by insanity and death and while also stating that the family line will eventually perish due to incestuous ties. The text, as published in 1839, carries the subtitle "The Tale of the Four", referring to the four members of the Falkenburg family who serve as main characters. First there are the twin brothers and counts Rudman and Wilhelm Falkenburg (the latter known as Herman in the 1822 version), who seemingly fall prey to the ancestral curse, with Rudman going insane and Wilhelm committing suicide. The two brothers are both in love with the young daughter of a priest, Henrika, who is actually their unknown sister. Henrika later becomes known as "Amorina" and eventually takes to wandering the countryside as a saint-like miracle worker; she is also prophesied to redeem her family by sacrificing herself. Finally there is also Johannes, a soldier and wanted murderer who works for Rudman but is also his (and thus also Henrika's) unknown cousin. Even in this rudimentary outline it is possible to see the Gothic aspects of *Amorina*

and, besides ancestral curses and incestuous relations, the story is liberally sprinkled with strange coincidences, murders, ghosts, vampirism and even a literal bloodbath. There is also much room for uncanny doubles, both with the twin brothers Rudman (who is portrayed as evil) and Wilhelm (who is portrayed as good) but also in the parallel between the saintly Amorina and the bloodthirsty Johannes who, as Jonas Asklund notes, share a "paradoxical similarity" (Asklund 2008, 186; my translation). Despite the seeming abundance of uncanny fodder on a thematic level, however, the traditional horror elements have mostly been read as being undermined by the more ironic elements of the text (Engdahl 1986, 204) and as being deliberately clichéd, outmoded and exaggerated (Schröder 1995, 17). While I believe that the potential ironies of *Amorina* do not preclude the uncanniness of its conventional Gothic motifs, I also argue that these plot elements are not strictly necessary for its overall uncanny effect, which is a more fundamental and pervasive consequence of its formal organization.

The most striking formal aspect of *Amorina* is that, despite its substantial length, it is largely presented through dialogue as a drama, but with more traditionally narrative sections interspersed. This has led to some apprehension concerning what actually to call the text. Almqvist himself used the term "poetic fugue" to describe the unification of drama and narrative. Lars Melin has taken this to also signify an approach to structuring the narrative in a "fugal" manner, where the text repeats and varies a central theme (which Melin takes to be the redemptive function of the titular character) at various levels of the text (Melin 1976, 13–16). Such overarching structures are of course possible to find in *Amorina*, though my interest in the form of the text lies on the much more immediate level of reader interaction, where the juxtaposition of different genres and styles can stage a defamiliarizing sense of the uncanny, as was done in the foreword.

Romberg has pointed to a previously existing tradition of the "dramatic novel", which may have influenced Almqvist (Romberg 2007, 139), but does not explore how this mixing of forms affects the reading of the text. I argue that the different forms of expression in *Amorina* are juxtaposed in such a way so as to, more or less overtly, alert the reader to their potential strangeness. The majority of the text is written in the form of dramatic dialogue, which in itself makes the reader engage differently with the occasional narrative sections. The most obvious contrast between the two lies in the simple fact that, in the dramatic sections, every utterance is explicitly labelled with a speaker's name, while the origins of the narrative portions are always unaccounted for. This may not seem significant in itself, but the text continually draws attention to this fact by the intrusive nature of its narrator. The narration is often expressed as if the narrator actually has a physical presence within the world, such as when a scene is interrupted by the following remark: "The door, which has stood ajar, is blown shut by the draught, so that nothing more can be heard" (Almqvist 2000, 183). Apart from this, the narrator often seems to have a limited insight into the world and its characters as shown in the following parenthetical doubt concerting the description of a scene: "On one side of this area, two people are coming. – By their way of acting towards each other, it seems (*unless we are mistaken*) […]" (Almqvist 2000, 16; my emphasis). Royle argues that the conventional "omniscient" narrator is potentially or implicitly uncanny by its similarity to a state of telepathy (Royle 2003, 260–261) and while this is a valid suggestion, it is also true that the "omniscient" form of narration has been

naturalized to the point of transparency (as Royle also recognizes). The conspicuously limited nature of the narrator in *Amorina*, however, carries a greater defamiliarizing (and thus uncanny) potential that the reader is unlikely to miss or overlook. By being situated in a largely dramatic context, but still drawing attention to its own limitations, the narrative instance of the text becomes an almost spectral figure, or disembodied voice which seems to partly exist within the world of the text, and partly outside of it. Engdahl has touched on a similar idea, in saying of Almqvist's early works in general that "the narrator is not at home in the text", meaning that the "meaning can be destabilized at any time" (Engdahl 1986, 196; my translation). Such hermeneutic disruption is also stressed by Falkenberg, who claims that uncanny effects often depend on the indeterminacy or juxtaposition of different diegetic levels that disorient the reader (Falkenberg 2005, 30–31). Simply by being a minority part of the text, the narrative portions of *Amorina* seem like something of an intrusive element that, in conjunction with the strange position of the narrator, makes the reader experience an uncanny apprehension about the presentation as a whole.

The narrative sections of *Amorina* also have an uncanny implication for the reader's own position in relation to the text. In stressing the limited perspective of its narrator, the text simultaneously draws attention to the reader's similar limitations. This becomes especially evident in an early scene where Wilhelm destroys some of his personal notes and the reader is invited to take a look at the scattered fragments: "We sneak up there to steal a glance at his papers" (Almqvist 2000, 105). The use of the inclusive pronoun begins to form a coincidence between the reader's perspective and that of the narrator as the two are joined together in the act of reading the notes in question. This joint reading has clearly uncanny implications as it blurs the line between reader and narrator by merging their respective viewpoints. The precarious nature of this arrangement is forcefully brought to the reader's attention when the account of the contents of Wilhelm's notes is interrupted by their author's re-entry into the scene: "Quickly, away with the papers: The count and his servant are coming to the balcony" (Almqvist 2000, 107). The apparent need to hide is highly defamiliarizing, not only because it implies the (somewhat absurd) possibility of getting caught, but also because it reveals the potentially voyeuristic aspects of the reading process as such, and also carries an implied moral condemnation that is reinforced by the wording "to *steal* a glance" (my emphasis). The defamiliarizing narrative instance thus becomes a defamiliarization of the reading process as such. The role of the uncanny as simultaneously strange and familiar is powerfully realized in the way a previously apprehended anomaly (the ambiguous position of the narrator) is shown to be constitutive of the reader's own activity.

The distanced and voyeuristic nature of the narrator's (and reader's) perspective also highlights certain features of the dramatic portions of *Amorina*. In particular, it emphasises the inherently limited insight into the thoughts of the characters offered by the dramatic form. The uncanny implications of this are clearly exemplified by another early scene, where Johannes buys a lamb from a passing farmer and proceeds to kill it and drink its blood. The character has not shown any vampiric tendencies up to this point in the text, and the dramatic form gives the act an unexpected sense of suddenness; Johannes exclaims: "Wonderful thirst! Sweet drink, which so many call dreadful!" whereupon what can tentatively be called a "stage direction" matter-of-factly informs us that "[h]e slits the

lamb's throat and beholds the running blood" (Almqvist 2000, 27–28). Such sudden revelations instantly force the reader to reconsider their previous understanding of the character and also work more generally to defamiliarize the characters of the text, making them seem alien and potentially sinister. The unknown inner thoughts of the characters become radically foreign places from which something hidden is uncannily revealed.

Another example of where the text estranges the reader from its characters is the insanity of Rudman Falkenburg. His lunacy is caused by an extended ghostly vision in which he learns of the curse resting on his family and sees himself condemned to death and insanity (Almqvist 2000, 199–202). The passage has often been claimed as being central to the text as a whole, but, as with the foreword, there has been little agreement as to how it should be interpreted. Melin regards the scene as being among the essential passages of the text in terms of expressing and consolidating the religious and redemptive theme that he sees as informing the thematic structure of *Amorina* as a whole (Melin 1976, 16–17). Engdahl, who is sceptical towards a transcendental or religious interpretation, points out that Rudman's reliability is questionable and that the passage is described so as to allow the possibility of being read as merely his "subjective impression" (Engdahl 1986, 203–204). It is true that the vision is punctuated by remarks such as "a fiery light appears *to Rudman's eyes*" (Almqvist 2000, 199; my emphasis), but it is also the case that his vision seemingly comes true and that it reveals his kinship to Henrika, of which he was previously unaware. Just as with the foreword, there is an ambiguity here that, while perhaps reducible to a single meaning, is more immediately an uncanny unsettling of the reader's interpretive activity.

Even if taken as merely a consequence rather than the cause of Rudman's insanity, the potential uncanniness of the vision remains, as it then comes to represent the shattering of his psyche due to the return of a repressed family history of incestuous desire. Freud also remarks on the uncanniness of witnessing insanity in others and relates it to an anxiety regarding the potential instability of one's own personality (Freud 2003, 150). Rudman's insanity also causes bouts of erratic behaviours, such as in the scene where he enters "in a sleeping-gown, *eyes closed*, knife in hand" and speaks incoherently: "That painting could cost a hundred riksdaler. Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Rudman, Nero; four walls in the tomb, make four; two green-flamed candles at each wall" (Almqvist 2000, 231). His state of split, or fragmented, personality is emphasised by one of his doctors who notes that "[w]hen he says Rudman, he does not seem to mean himself" (Almqvist 2000, 231). The superficial, or external, nature of the dramatic form further foregrounds the inscrutability of his mental state, and enhances the uncanny impression.

The potential instability of personal identity is also realized with regards to the titular character; she is known as Henrika at first and later takes the name Amorina (which she was given by her lover and brother Wilhelm). This change of name is given certain uncanny implications by the narrative and formal organization of the text. The switch happens after Henrika discovers the body of Wilhelm, who took his own life, an event which is presented only as an incomplete fragment: "She came closer, she came all the way up to him, and –" (Almqvist 2000, 123). This abrupt interruption marks the end of the second (out of five) larger sections, or "books", of *Amorina* and at the beginning of the third book, several months have passed, "Henrika" has become "Amorina" and her life and character have changed greatly. The narrative is thus organized in such a way so as to make the reader

perceive her transition as sudden and discontinuous, once again emphasizing the potential instability and mutability of personal identity. The change of name gains further significance on a very concrete level, given the dramatic form of the text. The names of characters are attached to all of their utterances, so that a change of name is a substantial disruption at a crucial point of interaction between reader and text. In textual terms the characters consist almost entirely of their names, making a change in this area a fundamental shift of their very being.

The use of such concrete textual features for defamilarizing effect is a frequent strategy of *Amorina* as a whole. A prominent example of this can be found in an early scene, in which Wilhelm searches the woods for Henrika and is answered by "Echo":

[*Wilhelm.*]
Oh hurry to our meeting, youthful joy, my friend, oh come!
Echo.
(The love-trickster, elusive spirit of the groves.)
My friend, oh come.
Wilhelm.
I am here.
Echo.
I am here!
Wilhelm.
Where do you hide, cruel one? Shall I search forever, never to meet you?
Shall I believe this night's dreary dream? Shall I lose – Oh do not hide!
Echo.
Do not hide.

(Almqvist 2000, 8)

There is already an uncanny potential in the echo, since the hearing of one's own voice represents the externalization of something internal and intimately personal, forming a collision of strange and familiar. The scene is also uncanny in more textual terms, however, because it draws the reader's attention to the immaterial status of all of its characters. On the diegetic level "Echo" is of course likely to be understood as less substantial or "real" than Wilhelm, but on the textual level they are essentially equal, both consisting of a name with attached utterances. This further disrupts the perceived stability of the characters and once again leads the reader to contemplate the inherent strangeness of the act of reading as such.

A similar effect arises from the fact that the characters of *Amorina* alternately speak in verse and prose, and often do so in the same scene. This can be exemplified by the section wherein Wilhelm makes long speeches in blank verse where he declares his love for Henrika as the two wander the forest:

Never before have I breathed such ambrosian
Coolness; unless for just a single night,
It happened here, this grove, this very place
Where now we sit; and on that night it was

I swore to only serve the pious lily,
To drink but life from dark-blue skies,
From Amorina's eyes; that I'd be fettered
Only by angelic chains, the darkest locks
Which slumbering recline in godly dreams
Around this neck –

(Almqvist 2000, 99–100)

His lyrical exuberance is rudely interrupted, however, by the arrival of a messenger whom Wilhelm addresses in much more prosaic terms: "Damned man, are you not a servant of my brother? Filips, which devil has sent you?" (Almqvist 2000, 100). The immediate shift from verse to prose produces a defamiliarizing effect with its juxtaposition of styles and forms. In a traditional verse-drama or narrative poem, the metre becomes a more or less transparent stylistic feature, but its alternate presence and absence within *Amorina* forces the reader to notice the artificial nature of the text. The juxtaposition of styles and forms also carries further ambiguities with regards to the diegetic levels of the text; it is not apparent if the difference between prose and verse is to be taken as "actually" present at the level of the narrative itself. The persistent foregrounding of its own formal and stylistic features is of course understandable in terms of a Romantically ironic strategy, but it also makes *Amorina* uncanny in more than one way. The reader is not only estranged from the events and characters that are represented by the text, but is also alerted to the strangeness of the text in itself. In its disorienting and defamiliarizing use of form, *Amorina* reveals the potential uncanniness of *literature as such*, independent of content. The unsettling events and characters of the text of course contribute to a sense of the uncanny, but the formal disruptions at play manage to extend this uncanniness far beyond the Gothic or horror-elements.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is worth noting that I do not claim that *Amorina* is totally unapproachable or unresponsive to interpretation, but only that it resists and problematizes the reader's attempts to fully integrate it into a coherent or conventional framework. It is this resistance, rather than any potential or eventual meaning, which seems to me the most significant feature of *Amorina*. Almqvist's text is constructed so as to estrange and disorient its readers in such a way that it not only describes or portrays uncanny events or situations, but actually induces uncanny effects. By using form in this way, it also reveals the potential uncanniness of all literature, forcing the reader to confront the otherwise unnoticed aspects of the reading process. It should also be pointed out that the formal and stylistic features are not necessarily unusual or strange in themselves, but are made so by being juxtaposed against each other in different ways. All dramatic texts, for example, have something of the same voyeuristic externality present in *Amorina*, but do not usually draw attention to this in the way it is done in Almqvist's text. Defamiliarization and de-automatization thus become crucial in giving rise to the uncanny aspects of the text. The process of reading *Amorina* is never allowed to become an unreflecting absorption of a transparently presented "content", but is consistently marked by disruption, apprehension and disorientation.

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