

*The journey of the soul towards death.*  
*The mines of Falun, by E.T.A. Hoffmann*

*El viaje del alma hacia la muerte.*  
*Las minas de Falun, de E.T.A. Hoffmann*

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**Abstract**

*Die Bergwerke zu Falun (The Mines of Falun)* is one of the most complex stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Starting from an event recalled in old chronicles, the writer fantasizes on a story that shares only the ending with the documented one, which allows for an extraordinary incursion in other depths, those of the dreams, hallucinations and obsessions. The whole narration demands a reading from a symbolic perspective, where images constantly refer to what lies beyond the apparent. The author of this paper has felt the need to put that vortex of images in parallel with the psychology called imaginal, not without reason, by James Hillman, and that of his master Carl Gustav Jung. From this perspective, the touchstone of the story, that is, the death, suicidal to some extent, of the protagonist, allows for discovering values that are not commonly accepted, not even imagined, by an Ego-centred psychology which has generally guided the preceding interpretations of this tale.

**Keywords:** E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Mines of Falun*, imaginal psychology, J. Hillman, C.G. Jung.

**Resumen**

*Die Bergwerke zu Falun (Las minas de Falun)* es uno de los más complejos relatos de E.T.A. Hoffmann. A partir de un suceso recogido en antiguas crónicas el

escritor fantasea una historia que sólo comparte el final con la documentada, lo que le permite realizar una extraordinaria incursión en unas profundidades diferentes a las del subsuelo: las del sueño, la alucinación y las obsesiones. Todo el relato exige ser leído en una perspectiva simbólica, donde las imágenes remiten continuamente más allá de lo aparente. El autor de este trabajo ha sentido la necesidad de poner en paralelo ese vórtice de imágenes con la psicología, no en vano denominada imaginal, de James Hillman, y la de su maestro Carl Gustav Jung. Desde esta perspectiva la piedra de toque del relato, la muerte, en cierto modo suicida, del protagonista, permite descubrir valores comúnmente no aceptados, ni siquiera imaginados, por una psicología centrada en el Yo, orientación que por lo general ha guiado las interpretaciones precedentes de la narración.

*Palabras clave:* E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Las minas de Falun*, psicología imaginal, J. Hillman, C.G. Jung.

*The world and the Gods are dead or alive  
according to the condition of our souls.  
J. Hillman. Re-imagining Psychology*

*Traulich und Treu ist's nur in der Tiefe:  
falsch und feig ist was dort oben sich freut<sup>1</sup>.  
R. Wagner. Das Rheingold*

## 1. Hoffmann's nostalgia. Soul, images and death

When, in one of his most programmatic excerpts, James Hillman, surely the most original continuator of the thought of Carl Gustav Jung<sup>2</sup>, tries to explain what he is going to refer to when he talks about “soul”, that is, when he presents the nucleus of his psychology, he mentions among other characteristics of the former “its special *relation with death*” and “the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image and *fantasy* –that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical–”<sup>3</sup>. Concerning the images in particular he claims, a few lines further, to follow Jung “very closely. He considered the fantasy images (...) to be the primary data of the psyche. Everything we know and feel and every

<sup>1</sup> “Now only in the depths is there/tenderness and truth:/false and faint-hearted/are those who revel above!” (R. Wagner. *Das Rheingold*).

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Samuels, A. *Jung and the Post-Jungians*, London, Boston & Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985. Young-Eisendrath, P.; Dawson, T. (Eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Hillman, J. *Re-visioning Psychology*, New York-London, Harper, 1992, p. XVI.

statement we make are all fantasy-based, that is, they derive from psychic images”<sup>4</sup>. Both distinctive notes of the soul are intensely present in the tale of Hoffmann I am going to devote this study to; a story full of psychic images (sometimes oneiric, on occasion hallucinatory ones...) and with a deep will for death, in the sense that I intend to explain.

Before starting the analysis of this work it is well worth placing it in the frame of the life of his author, which will allow us to start to attach due importance to it. I will be subject, at the moment, to the most personal aspects, leaving the historic context for later, which might not lack interest from the adopted perspective in this reading of *Die Bergwerke zu Falun* (*The Mines of Falun*).

Hoffmann writes the story, which he had been thinking out since February 1818, in December of that year<sup>5</sup>, and he published it the following year in the first volume of his vast collection of new tales, entitled *Die Serapionsbrüder* (*The Serapion Brethren*). It is, then, a maturity work –Hoffmann would die four years later, aged 46–, but its main singularity from my point of view is the fact that it contradicts a melancholic confession that its author made only two years earlier, and such denial concerns something of an enormous artistic and psychological weight.

In a letter dated on August 30<sup>th</sup> 1816, addressed to his childhood friend Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, he confesses with a tone of resignation, “*Ich schreibe keinen ‘Goldnen Topf’ mehr!*” (“I don’t write “Golden Pots” anymore!”)<sup>6</sup>. Needless to say that he refers to his tale of 1812 *Der goldne Topf* (*The Golden Pot*), probably his most beloved work and undoubtedly the most magic one, a true fairy tale –subtitled *ein Märchen aus dem neuen Zeit*– with such an extraordinary psychological charge that it deserved a study of nearly four hundred pages carried out by one of Jung’s closest collaborators, Aniela Jaffé<sup>7</sup>. Without a doubt Hoffmann missed the joyful fantasy that impregnates that work from beginning to end, and the hope –extremely idealist in my view– that its ending exudes. The passage of time had taught him many things, among them not to trust the existence of an Atlantis of poetry, as he envisioned in the last lines of that fairy tale<sup>8</sup>. But most likely he also missed the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XVII.

<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann, E.T.A. *Die Serapionsbrüder*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 4, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2001, p. 1323.

<sup>6</sup> Günzel, K. *E.T.A. Hoffman. Leben und Werk in Briefen, Selbstzeugnissen und Zeitdokumenten*, Düsseldorf, Claasen Verlag, 1979, p. 320.

<sup>7</sup> Jaffé, A. *Bilder und Symbole aus E.T.A. Hoffmanns Märchen “Der goldne Topf”*, Einsiedeln, Daimon Verlag, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> The main characters in the narration, Anselmus and Serpentina, join each other at the end in an ideal world, “Atlantis”. The author bids farewell to them with nostalgia but archivarius Lindhorst, a sort of *deus ex machina* in the story, comforts him with these words, “*Still still Verehrter! Klagen Sie nicht so!– Waren Sie nicht so eben selbst in Atlantis und haben Sie denn nicht auch dort wenigstens einen artigen Maierhof als poetisches Besitztum Ihres innern Sinns?*” (“Softly, softly, my honoured friend! Do not lament so! Were you not even now in Atlantis; and have you not at least a pretty little copy-

tremendous strength of the symbols and images that fill up that text. No, indeed he had not written, and he did not count on doing it again, a story that carried inside these many mysteries of the soul. And suddenly, a piece of news read in a work intended for the popularization of scientific knowledge awakes that sense of enquiry about the innermost, and the symbols, extremely powerful this time, lead him and lead the reader to the core of the numinous.

*Die Bergwerke zu Falun* is one of the narrations by E. T. A. Hoffmann that can be interpreted as a warning about the dangers that threaten the “romantic” way of understanding existence, since the first impression that one gets, or rather, that one can get when reading it, is that the death of the main character represents a punishment due to the way he conceives his own existence. I do not deny that such reading is legitimate, but I think I can claim that it is not the only one possible. In the best known among his works, and probably the most widely studied, *Der Sandmann* (*The Sandman*, 1815, published in 1817), the suicide of the protagonist and the circumstances that surround it clearly serve this purpose –even though the author guards himself well against defending the quiet life-style of the bourgeoisie. However, in *The Mines of Falun*, the death of Elis Fröbom, suicidal to some extent, although this cannot be flatly stated, is surrounded by circumstances that hardly allow for a simplifying judgement as the one mentioned above. I will briefly remark, since I have already delved further into it somewhere else, that what seems to be the target of his critique through the figure of Nathanael in *The Sandman* is not only the romantic attitude, but more especially certain dangers hidden in the modern technolatriy that represent, precisely, the counter figure of romanticism<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. A news report transformed into poetic matter

The narration in question presents a non trivial peculiarity, which deserves the special attention that somehow the author seems to recall; his starting point is a true story, documented in a work intended for the popularization of scientific knowledge. This does not represent an exception in the works of Hoffman; the novelty is something that I have just pointed out: in this case it is the writer who states that he has borrowed that piece of news, and he seems to do it with an explicit purpose, as we shall soon see; but I let myself establish the hypothesis that behind this evident purpose there is a hidden intention, maybe even for himself. Let us focus on the explicit aspects at the moment.

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hold farm there, as the poetical possession of your inward sensibility?”). Hoffmann, E.T.A. *Der goldene Topf*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 2/1, 1993, Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, p. 321.

<sup>9</sup> Montiel, L. «Sobre máquinas e instrumentos (I): el cuerpo del automata en la obra de E.T.A. Hoffmann», *Asclepio*, LX- 1, (2008), pp. 151-176. Montiel, L. «Sobre máquinas e instrumentos (II): El mundo del ojo en la obra de E.T.A. Hoffmann», *Asclepio*, LX- 2, (2008), pp. 207-232.

Such statement appears in a context that we could deem theoretical, conceived as the stage of Hoffmann's poetics. I am referring to the comments that the literary Saint Serapion Brethren provide at the end of each tale. Undoubtedly they are a faithful representation of the style of the interventions of their flesh and bone counterparts in the Serapiontic gatherings, but in the case of the present narration they are at the service of the aesthetic principles of its author. It is beyond dispute that in this case, as in others, Hoffmann intended to explain his way of understanding the literary creation, but, is this the only thing to learn from his brief reference to the source and the equally brief discussion that followed?

In the announcement that Theodor, a name that barely hides the author, makes of the story that he is going to recount afterwards he already notes that it is "*ein sehr bekanntes und schon bearbeitetes Thema von einen Bergmann zu Falun*" ("a well-known theme concerning a miner at Falun")<sup>10</sup>. Certainly there was something about the story when it opened up a line of artistic reflection that had apparently been started even before Hoffmann took it as inspiration, reaching Hugo von Hoffmannstahl almost a century later<sup>11</sup>. It is Ottmar, pseudonym under which Julius Eduard Hitzig<sup>12</sup> is presented in this work, who makes a detailed mention of the source at the end of the narration, that is, *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft*, by Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert<sup>13</sup>, one of the key works in medicine, inspired by the *Naturphilosophie* by Schelling. Such mention is placed within the framework of the debate held on each one's aesthetic proposals. This is what Hoffmann makes his Ottmar say:

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<sup>10</sup> Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 208. Not so elaborated but well known indeed. As I will explain now, the anecdote on which the narration is based starts to be known in Germany as a result of some conferences by the *Naturphilosoph* G. H. von Schubert in 1808 that were immediately published as a book. A transcription of his tale appears in a literary magazine, *Jason*, in 1809. In 1811 Johann Peter Hebel publishes the first, very brief, properly literary version of that story, *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen*. Selbmann, R. «Unverhofft kommt oft. Eine Leiche und die Folgen für die Literaturgeschichte», *Euphorion*, 94-2, (2000), pp.175-185. Sonia Santos, quoting Beck and, indirectly, Dürler too, adds that the subject is mentioned in Phöbus, by Heinrich von Kleist, and constitutes the motif of a ballad by Achim von Arnim, *Des ersten Bergmanns ewige Jugend* (1810), as well as the poem by Friedrich Rückert "*Die goldene Hochzeit*" (1817). Santos, S. «Análisis mito-fenomenológico de *Die Bergwerke zu Falun* de E.T.A. Hoffmann: El complejo de Novalis», *Epos*, XVII, (2001), p.390.

<sup>11</sup> After Hoffmann, other authors will use the same subject. Among them, Friedrich Hebbel, in a narration entitled *Treue Liebe*; Richard Wagner, in a projected opera; Georg Trakl in his poem *Elis*; Hugo von Hoffmannstahl, in a drama that carries the same title as Hoffmann's tale, and Robert Musil in his short narration *Grigia*. Cf. Selbmann, *Ibidem*, p.185.

<sup>12</sup> Günzel, K. *Die deutschen Romantiker*, Zurich, Artemis & Winkler, 1995, pp. 125-126.

<sup>13</sup> The book includes a series of successful conferences delivered by this doctor, a disciple of Schelling. Both these and the text had a great influence upon many romantic writers. Barkhoff, J. *Magnetische Fiktionen*. Stuttgart-Weimar, J.B. Metzler Verlag, (1995), p.100.

(...) aufrichtig gestanden, will mir all der Aufwand von schwedischen Bergfräsebesitzern, Volksfesten, gespenstischen Bergmännern und Visionen gar nicht recht gefallen. Die einfache Beschreibung in Schuberts Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft, wie der Jüngling in der Erzgrube zu Falun gefunden wurde, in dem ein altes Mütterchen ihren vor fünfzig Jahren verschütteten Bräutigam wieder erkannte, hat viel tiefer auf mir gewirkt<sup>14</sup>.

In these lines we find, evidently, an opinion, an aesthetic judgement; but something else too: “the simple account” (“*die einfache Beschreibung*”) of the news affected the reader much more deeply than the narration woven by Theodor. The event per se causes a commotion, claims Ottmar, and it also affects, without a doubt, the author of the tale; it seems to have raised in him a question, or many, which could be summarized in this one: What might have been behind that simple story? And in the absence of data it is not desk-based research, but fantasy, which provides the answer to that who wonders the same question. If that answer can be the object of interest of others is due to what we can only call the mystery of the artistic creation (no less mysterious than its success).

Simplicity versus baroque seems to be the subject of discussion in this gathering; but it is not the only one, since Cyprian, possibly another heteronym of Hoffmann, will intervene, departing from the framework of poetics to focus on an issue pertaining to Theodor’s invention:

Wie oft stellten Dichter Menschen, welche auf irgend eine entsetzliche Weise untergehen, als im ganzen Leben mit sich entzweit, als von unbekannten finstren Mächten befangen dar. Dies hat Theodor auch getan, und mich wenigstens spricht dies immer deshalb an, weil ich meine, dass es tief in der Natur begründet ist<sup>15</sup>.

Valid or not, Cyprian claims that the treatment of the anecdote deserves credit because the description of the main character’s psychic disorder constitutes an interesting matter and, much more, “it is deeply rooted in nature”; it is not just an easy literary resource treated at random. For the current reader the matter is even more complex, richer: in view of that opinion, the anecdote recalled by Schubert gains significance for Hoffmann only from the perspective of a mood disorder; surely it

<sup>14</sup> “To speak my candid opinion, I cannot say that I care about all the Swedish ‘Fraelse’ holders, the national festivities, the spectral miners, visions, and so forth. The simple account in Schubert’s *Night Side of Natural Science*, of the finding of a body in the Falun Mine, which an old woman recognized as her betrothed of fifty years before, affected me much more deeply”, Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp. 239-240.

<sup>15</sup> “Writers very often show us people who perish in some disastrous way as having been at issue with themselves all through their lives, as if under the control of unknown powers of darkness. This is what Theodor has done; and I must say I approve of it, because I think it is deeply rooted in nature”. *Ibidem*, p. 240.

is a projection in this case. Starting from the documented fact, any other of his friends would have fantasized about it in accordance with their own personality and from their state of mind at that moment, imagining even a different plot. However, what matters in this case is that the “simple account” affects and sets in place psychological mechanisms that are revealing. Even though they cannot be considered explicative, in a scientific mode, of whatever happened or might have happened to the unfortunate miner of Falun, they reveal something that operates in the mind of a writer that even today keeps having legions of readers and exegetes.

I think that the translation of the news recalled by the doctor and natural philosopher can serve my purpose; its brevity encourages me to take it as a starting point, as Hoffmann did. Here it is:

In like manner, that remarkable corpse, the one described by Hülpher, Cronstedt, and the Swedish scholarly journals, also decayed into a sort of ash, even after they had placed him, to all appearances transformed into stone, under glass to keep out the influence of air. This former miner was found in the Swedish iron mines in Falun in the course of tunnelling a connection between two shafts. The corpse, saturated in sulphuric acid, was at first soft and supple, but then petrified through contact with the air. Fifty years he had been lying low at the depth of three hundred meters in that acid water and no one would have recognized the unchanged facial features of the youth who died in the accident, no one knew the time he had passed in the shaft, since the local records and legends concerning all accidents were unclear, if it had not been for the recognition of his once beloved features, recollected and preserved within an old faithful love. For as the people crowded around the salvaged corpse to gaze on his unknown still-youthful physiognomy, there arrived a little old gray-haired mother, on crutches, who sank to her knees with tears in her eyes for the beloved dead man who had been her betrothed, and she praised the hour that had granted her, right at the portals of her own grave, such a reunion, and the people watched with amazement as this odd couple was reunited, the one who retained his youthful appearance even in death and down in the deep crypt, and the other one who had preserved the youthful love inside her faded and decaying body. The group looked on as this fifty-year silver wedding anniversary transpired between the still youthful bridegroom stiff and cold, and the old and gray bride, so full of warm love<sup>16</sup>.

Later we will see why it was interesting for me to transcribe this excerpt. Let us focus now on the tale by Hoffmann.

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<sup>16</sup> Schubert, G.H. von, *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft*, Dresden, Arnold, 1808, pp. 215-216.



### 3. Invitation to a journey (to the *nekya*)

Who is Elis Fröbom, the main character in the story? It is a young man whom the author presents plunged into a sadness that he tries to explain to others, or maybe to himself, as owed to the mourning over the death of his mother, which he learnt about when disembarking from the merchant ship he enrolled in long time ago. His shipmates insist that he partakes in the *Hönsning*, the party in which the success of their journey is being celebrated, and the way in which they try to draw him from his dejection is revealing, since for them his sadness has a different origin, deeper, less incidental. For the other shipmen there is something morbid about it – “*Bist du mal wieder ein recht trauriger Narr worden, und verträdelst die schöne Zeit mit dummen Gedanken?*“ (“Do you want to become a true sad moony, and waste your precious time with stupid thoughts?”) <sup>17</sup>–, and something innate as well:

Nun, nun (...) ich weiss es ja, du bist ein Neriker von Geburt, und die sind alle trübe und traurig<sup>18</sup>.

Those who have lived with him during a long journey think of him, then, as a melancholic<sup>19</sup>; what happens to him is neither accidental nor circumstantial. Only that can explain his attitude; instead of comforting him they warn him, almost threatening him:

Hör’ Elis, wenn du von unserm Hönsning wegbleibst, so blieb lieber auch ganz weg vom Schiff! Ein ordentlicher tüchtiger Seeman wird doch so aus dir niemals werden <sup>20</sup>.

This is not the usual attitude towards someone who is mourning, but towards that individual, out of the norm, whose behaviour generates disquiet among the normal ones. And it seems that this attitude constitutes the norm about the melancholic. Lazsló Földényi, a fine scholar of melancholy, underlines the persistence of the social rejection against the melancholic throughout the history of our culture; and

<sup>17</sup> Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> “All right, my hearty! (...) I know all about it. You’re one of these Nerika men—and a gloomy and sad lot the whole cargo of them are too”. *Ibidem*, p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> In fact dictionaries propose “melancholic” as one of the meanings of the adjective *trüb*, which in the quoted sentence has been translated as “gloomy”, precisely to avoid putting on the lips of a sailor, or Hoffmann’s hand, a word that for us can have certain value as a technical term. This is something I will allow myself to do in my analysis.

<sup>20</sup> “Look, Elis, if you are going to stay out of our Hönsning, you’d better not go back onto the ship! If you remain like that, you won’t ever be a true sailor”. Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 209.



in a way somehow reminiscent of Foucault, he notes that the apparent tolerance of the modern times towards the melancholic is fallacious<sup>21</sup>.

On the other hand, even though the main character tries to explain (and explain to himself, I insist) his sadness by attributing it to his recent loss; his way of describing it clearly refutes that interpretation: “*im Leben gibt es keinen Menschen mehr, mit dem ich mich freuen sollte!*”. (“There is not a single person in my life in whose company I can be merry any more!”)<sup>22</sup>

Note the radical terms of this negation, since, even though the sentence is enunciated in the present tense, it seems to cancel the future. The world and life lack all interest, and it gives the impression that they will remain so<sup>23</sup>. That is what the young man transmits, what his shipmates seem to air, a morbid aroma, maybe of death. A mate like him is unwanted on the ship deck. Elis Fröbom does not see anything worth living for; he is a melancholic. Even he admits that his sadness is contagious. He warns the young prostitute sent by his comrades to cheer him up:

Geh'nur hinein, mein gutes Kind, juble und jauchze mit den andern, wenn du vermagst, aber lass den trüben, traurigen Elis hier draussen allein; er würde dir nur alle Lust verderben<sup>24</sup>.

For long years, surely centuries, the journey, the “change of scenery”, was a remedy of choice for melancholy<sup>25</sup>; and this is what someone, a certain Torbern, a seemingly old miner, proposes for Elis Fröbom; we will later know how old he is indeed, since he has been dead for several years. A change of scenery and a change of life style; leave the sea, he says to Elis, and go in search of the true life, which is not other than that of a miner. And his advice goes beyond a merely therapeutic proposal, since it is based precisely on the young man's personality:

Alles, was Ihr tatet, was Ihr sprach, beweis't, dass Ihr ein tiefes in sich selbst gekehrtes, frommes, kindliches Gemüt habt, und eine schönere Gabe konnte Euch der hohe Himmel gar nicht verleihen. Aber zum Seeman habt Ihr Eure Lebetage gar nicht im

<sup>21</sup> Földényi, L. *Melancolia*, Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2008, pp. 199-201.

<sup>22</sup> Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 211.

<sup>23</sup> Without reaching such level of pessimism, the attitude that Hoffmann reflects in the quote from his letter to Hippel somehow resembles that of his character.

<sup>24</sup> “You go back. Sing and shout like the rest of them, if you can, and let gloomy, sad Elis stay out here by himself; he would only spoil your pleasure”. Hoffmann, 2001, *op.cit.* (note 5), p. 211.

<sup>25</sup> As much as the interpretation of the therapeutic efficacy of this method was explained in that time by the theories about insanity and its possible treatment, in the Middle Ages the healing or relief of the symptoms was attributed to the saints whose sanctuaries used to be visited on a pilgrimage, while the medicine of the Baroque period, in its approach to iatromechanics, believed that the shaking inside the carriages “cleared away” the channels for the transit of bodily fluids. Quétel, C.; Morel, P, *Les fous et leurs médecines de la Renaissance au XXe siècle*. (s.l.) Hachette, 1979, pp. 32-38 and 48.

mindesten getaugt. Wie sollte Euch stillem, wohl gar zum Trübsinn geneigten Neriker (...), wie sollte Euch das wilde unstete Leben auf der See zusagen (...) Folgt meinem rat, Elis Fröbom, werdet ein Bergmann!<sup>26</sup>.

It is not, I insist, a merely therapeutic proposal, or it is so only in as far as it is based on something even more ambitious, more decisive: the fulfilment of a destiny. You are unsatisfied, seems to tell him Torbern, because you have not led your life in the right direction, according to your innermost self. The term used by Hoffmann in the above quotation, which I have had to translate as “spirit”, is the almost untranslatable *Gemüt*, which finds a much better correspondence with that which I have reluctantly called the innermost of a person<sup>27</sup>. The old miner proposes to change the luminous surface of the sea for the darkness and depth of the mine; from a horizontal journey to a vertical one; and this kind of journey is characteristic of the soul<sup>28</sup>. It is much more a symbolic journey than a real one, and that is made clear in the answer that Torbern gives to the young miner when he, almost disgusted, replies to that proposal that he does not see any value in “*dem Maulwurf gleich wühlen und wühlen nach den Erzen und Metallen, schnöden Gewinns halber*” (“digging and tunnelling like a mole in exchange for a wretched gain”)<sup>29</sup>:

Schnöder Gewinn! Als ob alle grausame Quälerei auf der Oberfläche der Erde, wie sie der Handel herbeiführt, sich edler gestalte als die Arbeit des Bergmanns, dessen Wissenschaft, dessen unverdrossenen Fleiss die natur ihre geheimsten Schatzkammern erschließt. Du sprichst von schnöden Gewinn, Elis Fröbom!— ei es möchte hier wohl noch höheres gelten (...) So möcht es wohl sein, dass in der tiefsten Teufe bei dem schwachen Schimmer des Grubenlichts des Menschen Auge hellsehender wird, ja dass es endlich sich mehr und mehr erkräftigend, in dem wunderbaren Gestein die Abspiegelung dessen zu erkennen vermag, was oben über den Wolken verborgen<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> “All that you have said and done has shown me that you have a deeply reflexive spirit, and a character and nature pious and childish. Heaven could have given you no more precious gifts; but you were never in all your born days in the least cut out of a sailor. How could the wild, unsettled sailor’s life suit a quiet, gloomy Neriker like you? (...) Take my advice, Elis Fröbom; be a miner”. Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 214.

<sup>27</sup> After putting together a few quotes from German authors about the difficulty of translating this term, and even using it adequately, Georges Gusdorf strives to clarify its meaning successfully, without delivering an unassailable translation. Gusdorf, G. *Le romantisme*, vol. II, Paris, Payot, 1993, pp. 78-80.

<sup>28</sup> Brion, M. *L’Allemagne romantique. Le voyage initiatique*, vol. 2, Paris, Albin Michel, 1978, p. 191. “Heraclitus (frg. 45) first brings together *psyche*, *logos* and *bathun* (depth): ‘You could not find the ends of the soul though you travelled every way, so deep is its logos’ (...) Ever after Heraclitus depth became the direction, the quality and the dimension of the *psyche*”. Hillman, J. *The Dream and the Underworld*, New York, Harper and Row, 1979, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 214.

<sup>30</sup> “A wretched gain! As if all the constant wearing, petty anxieties inseparable from business up here on the surface, were nobler than the miner’s work. To his skill, knowledge, and untiring industry

Later we will find out that Torbern, when he lived, “*unaufhörlich Unglück prophezeite, sobald nicht wahre Liebe zum wunderbaren Gestein und Metall den Bergmann zur Arbeit antreibe*” (“prophesied that some calamity would happen as soon as the miners’ impulse to work ceased to be sincere love for the marvellous metals and ores”), working for financial gain<sup>31</sup>. The task of a miner –claims Torbern– implies the reward of unravelling the secrets of nature, secrets presented in the form of hidden wonders which are to be contemplated only by the one who dares go down in search of them. And that seemingly inferior world appears to be, according to the old miner, the reflection of the upper one, the celestial, “*über den Wolken verborgen*” (“hidden above the clouds”). Not material wealth, but knowledge; and we must not forget that, for the romantics, the knowledge of the external nature and of the innermost are nothing but two sides of the same reality, and they represent the true objective of human existence, that one in which the progress of the spirit becomes self-conscious.

This idea seems to give Elis enough motivation; he does not confine himself to dismissing it “melancholically”; though hesitant, he sets off. And the miner, adopting ever more clearly the features of a preternatural character (at some point he appears to Elis as a giant) will not stop guiding him; he is not a human being, then, but a figure, an image. It is something that is not real in the purely physical sense of the term, and that is not out of him, but comes from his inside; and that command that comes from within, incarnated in Torbern, leads him precisely downwards and inwards, to that great metaphor of the inside which are the bowels of the earth<sup>32</sup>. Elis soon recognizes that same world that Torbern announces him; it is not alien to him in any way; “*Und doch wer es ihm wieder, als (...) aller Zauber dieser Welt sei ihm schon zur frühesten Knabenzeit in seltsamen geheimnisvollen Ahnungen aufgefangen*” (“and it was something he had somehow sensed since his childhood”)<sup>33</sup>. His was, beyond appearances, an “inner journey”, thus labelled and described with master hand –although I may differ with some points of his interpretation– by one of the authors that I have quoted, Marcel Brion, in his *Allemagne romantique*; a journey that has all the features of a *nekyia*, in the psychological sense that Carl Gustav Jung gave to this Greek term<sup>34</sup>. I will try to demonstrate to what extent this

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Nature lays bare her most secret treasures. You speak of gain with contempt, Elis Fröbom. Well, there’s something infinitely higher in question here, perhaps (...) But it may be, in the deepest depths, by the pale glimmer of the mine candle, men’s eyes get to see clearer, and at length, growing stronger and stronger, acquire the power of reading in the stones, the gems, and the minerals, the mirroring of secrets which are hidden above the clouds”. *Ibidem*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 230.

<sup>32</sup> Bachelard, G. *La terre et les rêveries du repos*. Paris, José Corti, 1948, especially chapter VI, pp. 183-209. Brion, 1978, *op. cit.* (note 28), pp. 185-199.

<sup>33</sup> Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 216.

<sup>34</sup> The creator of the analytic psychology translates the Greek term *nekyia* as *Hadesfahrt*, “journey to Hades”, that is, the underworld in its psychic dimension. Its model is the *nekyia* undertaken by Ulysses

is true, as well as the sense that the images coined by Hoffmann –a sense that in all likelihood was not totally, not even partially perhaps, perceived by himself– from a up to date psychological perspective whose roots are found in the thought of Carl Gustav Jung.

#### 4. The underworld and the soul

In his study *The Dream and the Underworld* James Hillman writes: “Dreams are the primary givens and (...) all daylight consciousness begins in the night and bears its shadows”<sup>35</sup>.

Well then, Hoffmann has the enormous psychological perceptiveness of initiating Elis’s journey before he starts to walk. The same night of the Hönsning and the encounter with Torbern, the young man dreams about the mine, about that mine that in poetic and passionate tones, full of mystery and promises, has been described by the old Torbern, whose voice he keeps hearing in his dream; it is clear that there starts the journey of his psyche to the underworld, his *nekyia*. It is beyond discussion that this is a purely psychical experience that lets us assume without further digression that the mine, that foreboded mine of Falun, will end up having value for Elis as a representation of his personal underworld. In this sense, the existence of prophetic dreams<sup>36</sup> should be admitted, since indeed those dreams are the expression of an unconscious urge that *must be satisfied*. The oneiric prophecy will be fulfilled, because it is the expression of something experienced as fate, as an *unconscious* objective that draws us to it with extraordinary intensity in as much as it is felt as involuntary, as something that imposes itself upon us, and it is imposed from outside –from the dream– which is enigmatically recognized as one’s own<sup>37</sup>; in the

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in the *Odyssey*. Jung, C.G. *Picasso*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Olten, Walter Verlag, 1971, Bd. 15, §154.

<sup>35</sup> Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> I wish to emphasize again the aspect that I have introduced in the text: “in this sense”, i.e., in a purely psychological sense. In a couple of lines, so full of implications that his author highlights them in italics, Jung remarks: “I wished to distinguish the dream’s prospective function from its compensatory function”. Jung, 8, 491. In the perspective of the history of psychoanalysis, or the deep psychology, the importance of this statement lies in its break away from the Freudian theory of dreams; but what matters in this context is the claim that the dream has a prospective value, not to be confused with a prophetic one in the most common sense of the term. In the following pages Jung explains, from a purely psychological perspective, that what he understands as the prospective character of a certain oneiric activity is not the perception of future events but “the unconscious anticipation of future conscious actions, a kind of previous exercise or provisional schema, a previous plan” 8, § 493. The explanation extends up to paragraph 497.

<sup>37</sup> The idea that the psychic, in the broad sense of the word, whilst concerning the deepest, is hardly conceivable as one’s own, internal, so it seems to come from the outside, has a long tradition in Western thinking, including medical thought. In ancient Greece this idea was taken in an absolutely literal sense. Cf. the first chapter of Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley, University of

case of Elis, "something he had somehow sensed since his childhood". That command that comes from within has become explicit to the protagonist.

That the mine is, or may be, at the same time physical reality and psychical reality, object and symbol, is something that is widely documented and elaborated by 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers that have followed the wake of psychoanalysis. Jung himself, Gaston Bachelard<sup>38</sup>, and more recently Hillman, have studied the poetic and psychological metaphor of the depth, of the underworld, under this new light. The latter refers to the excerpt by Heraclitus quoted in a previous note. For efficacy purposes I will concentrate on Hillman, in whose works the other authors' thoughts come together. This is what the American author submits regarding the underworld:

Underworld is the mythological style of describing a psychological cosmos. Put more bluntly: underworld is psyche<sup>39</sup>.

But in mythology, and more particularly in the western one, the only culture James Hillman asserts he refers to, not to miss his point, the underworld is populated by figures, as our psyche is; the lord of all these figures is Hades, and in Greek religion he was considered the lord of the dead, so looking into the psyche turns out

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California Press, 1992, pp.1-18, especially 13-14. More specifically in relation with the dreams see pp. 107-111 and 118-120. Galen, already in 1<sup>st</sup> Century AC, considered that one of the *res non naturales*, that is, those "things" that do not belong to the *human* nature and, as a consequence, can produce diseases, were the "affections of the soul". None of this contradicts the fact that, also in that period, attempts were made to associate the psychic to one or some parts of the body. Cf Onians, R. B. *The Origins of the European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000: to the blood, as *thymos*, pp. 47-49, and as *animus*, p. 63; to the diaphragm, as *thymos*, pp. 23-24, to the lungs, as *animus*, pp. 42-43, and to the head, as *psyche*, pp. 107-109. This same author points out that the Jewish culture gave priority to the heart in this field, pp. 103. The efforts undertaken throughout modernity to take that original experience ad absurdum are well known, from the postulation of the pineal gland as the site of the soul by Descartes, up to the designation of the brain as an "organ of the soul" by the anatomists of the Enlightenment, a program that reaches its peak in the current times. Cf. Hagner, M. *Homo cerebrialis: der Wandel vom Seelenorgan zum Gehirn*. Berlin, Berlin Verlag, 1997. This subject has been recently addressed from the perspective of the deep psychology, both by Jung and the author whom I especially follow in my interpretation of this story. The former points at the need (and also the difficulty) of "departing from the spatial appearance and approach the 'non-spatiality' (*Unräumlichkeit*) of the soul". Jung, 6, § 921. Regarding Hillman, this is what he states: "Man exists in the midst of psyche; it is not the other way around. Therefore, soul is not confined by man, and there is much of psyche that extends beyond the nature of man. The soul has inhuman reaches". Hillman, 1992, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.173. He pronounces himself likewise in Hillman, J. *The Myth of Analysis*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1998, pp. 23-24, and in Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 47: "Underworld images are ontological statements about the soul, how it exists in and for itself beyond life".

<sup>38</sup> This author devotes a brief but suggestive analysis to Hoffmann's story. Bachelard, G. *La terre et les rêves de la volonté*, Paris, José Corti, 1948, pp. 254-260.

<sup>39</sup> Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 46.

to be an equivalent of death. One of the excerpts quoted above has a corollary that I removed from the quotation. Now I can fully transcribe it:

Dreams are the primary givens and (...) all daylight consciousness begins in the night and bears its shadows. Our depth psychology begins with the perspective of death<sup>40</sup>.

At first, Elis's dream does not seem to offer that perspective; but when he later arrives in Falun and leans out with curiosity to the entrance of the mine the images of his dream will overlay those of a shipmate's hallucination, a man who committed suicide shortly after describing those visions to Elis:

Als nun Elis Fröbom hinab schaute in den ungeheueren Schlund, kam ihn in den Sinn was ihm vor langer Zeit der alte Steuermann seines Schiffs erzählt. Dem war es, als er einmal im Fieber gelegen, plötzlich gewesen, als seien die Wellen des Meeres verströmt, und unter ihm habe sich der unermessliche Abgrund geöffnet, so dass er die scheusslichen Untiere der Tiefe erblicke die sich zwischen tausenden von seltsamen Muscheln, Korallenstauden, zwischem wunderlichen Gestein in hässlichen Verschlingungen hin und her wälzten bis sie mit ausgesperrem Rachen zum Tose erstarrt liegen geblieben. Ein solches Gesicht, meinte der alte Seeman, bedeute den baldigen Tod in den Wellen, und wirklich stürzte er auch bald darauf unversehens von der Verdeck in das Meer und war rettungslos verschwunden<sup>41</sup>.

A self-fulfilled prophecy; or, as Jung would put it (see note 36), an evidence of the prospective, not prophetic, condition of some dreams. In any case the association made by Elis has just brought death to the foreground and his reaction is fright:

Daran dachte Elis, denn wohl bedünkte ihm der Abgrund wie der Boden der von den Wellen verlassenen See, und das schwarze Gestein, die blaulichen, roten Schlacken des Erzes schienen ihm abscheuliche Untiere, die ihre hässlichen Polypen-Arme nach ihm ausstreckten<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> "As Elis Fröbom looked down into this deep abyss, he remembered what the old steersman of his ship had told him once. At a time when he was down with fever, he thought the sea had suddenly split apart, and the boundless depths of the abyss opened under him, so that he saw all the horrible creatures of the deep twining and writhing about in dreadful and vengeful contortions among thousands of extraordinary shells and groves of coral, till they stood still in a death-like immobility. The old sailor said that to see such a vision meant death, ere long, in the waves; and in fact very soon he threw himself overboard, unnoticed, and it was impossible to rescue him". Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 220-221.

<sup>42</sup> "Elis thought of that: for indeed the abyss seemed to him to be a good deal like the bottom of the sea run dry; and the black rocks, and the blue and red slag and scoria, were like horrible monsters shooting out polyp-arms at him". *Ibidem*, p. 221.



But even though the death of the pilot cannot stop relating to the end of life, in our domain, I insist, it must be seen in its symbolic context. The underworld, of which the mine is a reminder or an announcement, the realm of Hades, is a place where time as we experience it “when alive” does not exist, but that does not mean –claims Hillman– that it is beyond time or after life:

The House of Hades is a psychological realm now, not an eschatological realm later<sup>43</sup>.

This does not imply that it lacks any dangers; if the existence of the body is not at risk, the soul will be. The most experienced miners know it and warn him since the beginning of their relationship:

Es ist ein alter Glaube bei uns, dass die mächtigen Elemente, in denen der Bergmann kühn waltet, ihn vernichten, strengt er nicht sein ganzes Wesen an, die Herrschaft über sie zu behaupten, gibt es noch andern Gedanken Raum, die die Kraft schwächen, welche er ungeteilt der Arbeit in Erd’ und Feuer zuwenden soll<sup>44</sup>.

They are not referring here to something as physical as a collapse, a flood –the water is not even mentioned– or an explosion. They are talking about the struggle against the elements, and more concretely against two of them, the earth and the fire. The water and the air dominated his old life as a sailor, and in no way they were as threatening to his eyes:

O Herr meines Lebens, was sind alle Schauer des Meeres gegen das Entsetzen was dort in dem öden Steingeklüft wohnt!– Mag der Sturm toben, mögen die schwarzen Wolken hinabtauchen in die brausenden Wellen, bald siegt doch wieder die schöne herrliche Sonne und vor ihrem freundlichen Antlitz verstummt das wilde Getöse, aber nie dringt ihr Blick in jene schwarze Höhlen, und kein frischer Frühlingshauch erquickt dort unten jemals die Brust<sup>45</sup>.

This is true. But, maybe just because it is so, the pilot wanted to go in search of the abyss that the wet elements did not offer him<sup>46</sup>. By this we start to have a dif-

<sup>43</sup> Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> “It is an old belief with us that the mighty elements with which the miner has to struggle destroy him unless he strains all his being to keep command of them – if he gives place to other thoughts which weaken that vigour which he has to reserve wholly for his constant work among Earth and Fire”. Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 225.

<sup>45</sup> “Lord of my Life! What are the dangers of the sea compared with the horror which dwells in that empty abyss of rock? The storm may rage, the black clouds may come whirling down upon the breaking waves, but the beautiful, glorious sun soon gets the mastery again and the storm is past. But never does the sun penetrate into these black, gloomy caverns; never a freshening breeze of spring can revive the heart down there”. *Ibidem*, p. 221.

<sup>46</sup> In the theory of elements, which reaches its most widely accepted expression, at least in medicine,



ferent point of view regarding what the meaning of death might be, which will be useful to us when estimating the sense that Elis Fröbom's death has. But, for everything to be sufficiently proven, we must try hard to find more symbolic keys in the Hoffmannian text.

## 5. Searching for the Queen

In his dream the young man contemplates, as a promise, never seen gemstones, and he senses the presence of a tremendous hidden power in the deepest, which Torbern names "the Queen": a female power that drags him down to the depth while other female figures pull him out from the opposite direction: the mother, whose voice he hears, calling him from the surface; his girlfriend to be, whose image he contemplates, extending her hand to him, when, following her voice, he looks up. In his dream, Torbern adopts an ambiguous attitude: on the one hand, he prevents Elis from the danger, but, on the other hand – not in vain is he the messenger of the deep – he warns him, "*sei treu der Königin*" ("Be faithful to the Queen")<sup>47</sup>.

Who is this mysterious Queen? Is she, maybe, a figure invented by the fantasizer Hoffmann? Not indeed; all the opposite, she is a figure well known by the miners from ancient times, and of course by the writer's contemporaries. In a German mining treaty published in 1794<sup>48</sup> –that is, when Hoffmann was 18 years old– "the Queen" appears on the cover drawing:



in the model proposed by Empedocles, the inherent qualities of the water element are coldness and humidity, and those of the air are humidity and warmth. The earth, in contrast, is cold and dry, and the fire is hot and dry. And this adds a particularly relevant piece of information to our reading: another pre-Socratic *physiologoi*, Heraclitus, claimed that "for the soul it is death to turn into water". Thus there would be, according to that ancient wisdom, certain death threats –which Elis's new mates seem to be afraid of– that are not to be feared by the soul. Regarding the symbolism of elements, besides Bachelard's classic studies, some of which are quoted in this paper, the following can be consulted: Böhme, G. and H, *Fuego, agua, tierra, aire. Una historia cultural de los elementos*, Barcelona, Herder, 1998. In relation to the narration in hand, Santos, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 10).

<sup>47</sup> Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 217.

<sup>48</sup> Winckler, C.J. *Praktische Beobachtungen über den Betrieb des Grubenbaues auf Flötzgebirgen, besonders der Kupferschiefern zur Unterrichte des Bergwerks-Eleven zu Rothenbug bestimmt*. Berlin, Himbürg, 1794.

The figure is readily identifiable: a crown with the shape of a fortress surrounds her forehead; some keys in her hand and two lions at her feet: Hippomenes and Atalanta transformed into such beasts, which in other images appear yoked to her chariot; it is, of course, Cybele, the “Mother of the Gods” or “Mountain Mother”, lady of not only the surface of the mountains, but also, and more than anything, of what they keep inside, and for that reason she is the sacred queen of mining. The keys are, without a doubt, those which allow access to Hades’s underworld. Not for nothing there is a continuum, which often leads to identification, between the figure of this Phrygian goddess (Rhea-Cybele) with his daughter Demeter and with the latter’s daughter, Persephone, wife of Hades<sup>49</sup>. And it should not be overlooked that in the myth Demeter looks for her daughter, kidnapped by the lord of the underworld... as though she were the lost half of herself and found her at last in the underworld<sup>50</sup>.

But we not only know this: Cybele is also one of the deities to whom the antique Greek entrusted the people suffering from what we would call mental illnesses<sup>51</sup>.

This figure, comprehensive of all the aspects of the feminine must necessarily be ambiguous, for it implies both the most luminous and the darkest; it is the anima that inhabits the deepest, where it rubs elbows with the shadow (*der Schatten*), or even more, it blends until being confused with one another. It includes within itself, as could not be otherwise, love and death. I believe that its message is this: there is no love where death is denied; that who wishes love has to assume the death. But in this assumption lies the seed of certain transcendence, a domain beyond the common death (not to forget that I am talking in terms relative to the psychical life), as we will see later.

For the moment we have already discovered in the depth of the “mine” –or rather, in the underworld of dream– three images of the feminine: the mother, the

<sup>49</sup> Kerényi, K. *Eleusis. Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, p.132.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130.

<sup>51</sup> Dodds, 1992, *op. cit.* (note 37), p. 77. There is another item that surely is not trivial. According to this author the worship of Cybele reaches its acme in Athens in the context of a severe cultural and social crisis: the war against Sparta and the plague, catastrophes that occurred in the time in which a great rationalist culture unleashed under the government of Pericles (pp. 193-194). Maybe it is not a coincidence that the modern sacrifice of Attis, the young man in love with Cybele, imagined by Hoffmann, concurs with the breaking of the patriotic and democratizing ideals of the German youth through the repression triggered by the Carlsbad Decrees (1819.) Cfr. Montiel, L. *Daemoniaca. Curación mágica, posesión y profecía en el marco del magnetismo animal romántico*, Barcelona, MRA, 2006, pp. 91-94. In the case of the writer, his member status in the supreme court (*Kammergerichtsrat*) will provoke even more tension, since in 1819 he will be requested to draft files against the so-called “demagogues”, with whom he sympathizes. Hoffmann’s rebellious attitude would cause him serious complications from which only his early death freed him. Cfr. Günzel, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 5-6, 373-406 and 433-474.

girlfriend and the Queen; the first two being protective, while all three are possessive, each in their own way. Two of them offer the security of life in the outside, while the other exhibits the dangerous riches that hide in the depth. But there is also Torbern, the messenger of the depths, the mystagogue, he who teaches the neophyte what he would have never imagined on his own (by “his own” I mean his conscious self); a messenger appearing in the midst of sadness. That sadness is conditioned by a loss that is however revealed to us as the emergence of something much more radical, the melancholic mood, a predisposition to listen to the messages of an equally “sombre” herald. The miners know the legendary figure of a remote partner endowed with that character that had the rare ability to find wonderful veins and who would have died trapped, or disappeared in the mine, decades before, appearing once in a while to address them with an admonitory tone, demanding loyalty to the queen. And this legendary character also mentions a certain Prince of metals. Hades himself, perhaps? Once more it is Hillman who reminds us, or lets us know, that the Greek Hades was hardly ever referred to by his name, but with euphemisms such as “the unseen” or Trophonius, which means “the nutritor”, and who joined the Roman pantheon as Ploutos, i.e., the owner or/and provider of riches, often represented pouring out the content of a cornucopia. Did those Greeks and Romans suspect that “Hades was (...) the giver of nourishment to the soul”<sup>52</sup>?

In any case, many characters move within that underworld, which coincides with Hillman’s thesis that Greek polytheism translated the original psychological experience that the supposed unity of the self rests upon an iridescent and ambiguous multiplicity, each of whose elements is, in the end, sacred. I have already remarked how the feminine figures, the queen at the head, represent, from this perspective, what Jung called *anima*, the image of the feminine inserted in the psyche of all human being; in the same way, Torbern bears an extraordinary resemblance with the archetypal figure referred to as “shadow”, *der Schatten*. But Hillman has gone even further; for him, the *anima* represents the soul as such, in its totality (while not in its unity; we have already seen that its essence is multiple), and the shadow is also a part of the soul<sup>53</sup>:

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<sup>52</sup> Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> “By *soul* I mean (...) a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint toward things rather than a thing itself. This perspective is reflective; it mediates events and makes differences between ourselves and everything what happens. Between us and events (...) [The soul] makes meaning possible, turn events into experiences, is communicated in love and has a religious concern (...) By “soul” I mean the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image and *fantasy* – that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical”. Hillman, 1992, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. XVI. In the same page he claims to use the term “soul” as “interchangeably with psyche (from Greek) and anima (from Latin)”.

Shadow is the very stuff of the soul, the interior darkness that pulls downward out of life and keep one in relentless connection with the underworld<sup>54</sup>.

Is not this what Torbern does, what he intends to do with the other miners? And is he not indeed at the service of the Queen, as if he simply was a part of hers? The story that Hoffmann has started to narrate strongly resembles the account of the US psychologist. The mine happens to be an excellent metaphor. Among the characteristics that Hillman attributes to our representations of the psychic underworld stands out the very specific way of referring to the space; apart from being “underlying” it is always limited:

The fundamental image of all underworld is that of the *contained space* (...) whether this be the consulting room itself, the close therapeutic relationship, the hermetic vessel in which the work is done, the dream-journal or the going inward in imagination. All these derive from the deep and closeted underworld. We may experience the dream *topos* as (...) an incubation, a labyrinth, pregnancy, or claustrophobic catacomb (...) So we talk of “going in” to analysis or of finding no way “out” of analysis, for the depths of psychotherapy have become one of the “places” today of experiencing psychic space<sup>55</sup>.

We know how Elis’s adventure finishes. The day of his wedding with Ulla, the daughter of the mine’s owner, Elis, with a crumpled face, announces to the bride-to-be that he needs to enter the mine, and he does it with this argument:

Ich will dir nur sagen, meine herzgeliebte Ulla, dass wir dicht an der Spitze des höchsten Glücks stehen, wie es nur den Menschen hier auf Erden beschieden. Mir ist in dieser nacht alles entdeckt worden. Unten in der Teufe liegt in Chlorit und Glimmer eingeschlossen der kirschrot funkelnde Almandin, auf den unsere Lebenstafel eingegraben, den musst du von mir empfangen als Hochzeits-Gabe. Er ist schöner als der herrlichste blutrote Karfunkel, und wenn wir in treuer Liebe verbunden hineinblicken in sein strahlendes Licht, können wir es deutlich erschauen, wie unser Inneres verwachsen ist mit dem wunderbaren Gezweige das aus dem Herzen der Königin im Mittelpunkt der Erde emporkeimt<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 56.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 189.

<sup>56</sup> “I only want to tell you, my beloved Ulla, that we are just arrived at the verge of the highest good fortune which it is possible for mortals to attain. Everything has been revealed to me in the night which is just over. Down in the depths below, hidden in the chlorite and mica, lies the cherry-coloured sparkling almandine, on which the tablet of our lives is graven. I have to give it to you as a wedding present. It is more splendid than the most glorious blood-red carbuncle, and if, united in truest affection, we look into its streaming splendour together, we shall see how the branches that shoot from the Queen’s heart, from the central point of the Earth, grow in our hearts”. Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp. 236-237.

Perhaps it is not a mere coincidence that Hoffmann chooses to put an end to the purely physical death of the young miner the day of Saint John, the author of *Apocalypse*, a term which, as we know, is translated as “revelation”<sup>57</sup>

## 6. An “animic” view of suicide

As I hastened to add at the beginning of the article, most surely the thorniest problem that this tale poses lies at the axiological level. How to interpret the writer’s decision of having a suicidal character as the protagonist of the story? Why interpreting as a suicide the death, by an unknown cause, of the historic miner of Falun? As I observed before, there exists a certain resemblance between the character in *The Mines of Falun* and the Nathanael from *The Sandman*, which denotes the author’s evident concern about the value of an existential option of both characters that seems to have so many points in common with the deepest, the “romantic” personality of their creator. I think it is easy to accept the most immediate interpretation, which suggests the deep conviction that the radical choice of the values deemed as romantic is hardly compatible with a socially accepted existence and can lead that who fulfils it to situations incompatible with life. But Hoffmann’s insistence seems to indicate that just turning our backs to this choice is not the best resource. The problem to solve could be formulated like this: denying life, or denying an authentic and fulfilling existence? However, this would not be a problem, but a dilemma. To transform it into a problem it is necessary to consider that a third option may exist, a way to a solution that is not formulated in negative terms. Does that third way exist?

In the preceding pages I have started to outline an answer that aims at distinguishing the psychological and symbolic from the biological and material. But I will not fall into the crude idealism of supposing that both dimensions can be separated. Things are not, and cannot be, so simple, since both fields are interpenetrated in an indissoluble manner in the human being. What I postulate is that a look... a deep look may help navigate among these sandbanks. And we have the fortune of counting on an expert pilot.

James Hillman has studied the pressing problem of suicide from a new psychological perspective. Not leaving aside the material fact, be it the destruction of one’s own life or the attempt to achieve such thing, he has proposed an interpretation of the deepest sense of the urge for death; an interpretation that, even if it leads to cer-

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<sup>57</sup> This is not the only possible explanation. Sonia Santos points out that the text mentions Saint John’s day in 1687 as the date of death of the “real” Torbern, caused by the collapse of the mine, and remarks “E.T.A. Hoffmann’s personal taste for the solstice season of the year (...) and its mythical, primitive and magic significance”. Santos, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 399.

tain value judgments, does not derive from an axiological consideration<sup>58</sup>. I will try to summarize it with the purpose of putting it to test in parallel with the literary example created by Hoffmann.

The provocative novelty of such interpretation is the point of view adopted. First, the recognition of something obvious which, nonetheless, tends to be forgotten, surely in a movement of self-defense:

Suicide is one of the human possibilities. Death can be chosen<sup>59</sup>.

Once this is acknowledged death does not appear anymore as mere negativity, but as the result of a personal choice whose motives have to be discovered. To that end, it is indispensable to abandon the common point of view, which certainly is at the service of life, but –and this is essential– life considered from the merely biological point of view. Here we could not even deal with psychology, but with the human mode of that self-preservation instinct observed in the entire nature. Which must be, then, the new point of view? Hillman makes it clear in his introduction to the first edition of his book about the subject:

This little book (...) approaches the suicide problem not from the viewpoints of life, society and “mental health”, but in relation to death and the soul. It regards suicide not only at an exit from life but also as an entrance to death<sup>60</sup>.

“In relation to death and the soul”. The first thing to wonder is what kind of relationship there is, in his opinion, between soul and death which can justify the use of the copulative conjunction in the quoted text. This association had been established by Jung, but Hillman is going to deepen into it in a more detailed manner. According to both authors, the psychic adventure that unfolds, well or wrong, throughout our entire life, which Jung called “individuation process”, does not end until our biologic existence finishes, hence death is “end” in a double sense: at the same time *finis* and *telos*<sup>61</sup>, conclusion and goal<sup>62</sup>. But, as it happens with the biologic life, the psychic life can, and even needs to, experience several deaths:

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<sup>58</sup> “The issue is not for or against suicide, but what it means in the psyche”. Hillman, J. *Suicide and the Soul*, Putnam, Spring Publications, 1997, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p.11.

<sup>61</sup> Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p.30.

<sup>62</sup> Aniela Jaffé, in her book about the *Golden Pot* claims that for Jung “the psychological path of individuation is ultimately a preparation to death”. Cit. in Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 89. In that same work Hillman himself subscribes that point of view: “If we stare these questions in the face, of course we know where our individuation process is going – to death” (p. 31).

Approaching death requires a dying in soul, daily, as the body dies in tissue. And as the body's tissue is renewed, so is the soul regenerated through death experiences<sup>63</sup>.

The health of the soul demands death; the definitive one, as a true perspective<sup>64</sup>; and an indeterminate series of what we could call partial deaths, or psychic death experiences, as the only means for the change, for the development, for that called rebirth in the frame of Jungian psychology; the individuation process is and cannot stop being a series of deaths and rebirths in the psychic sphere. Our conscious ego can only conceive death as an annihilation of its physical life, but the death that is interesting for the soul is of a different kind; it is a death that has to do with that kind of immortality, the only one that the human being can experience, which manifests itself in the rebirth. “*Death* is the most profoundly radical way of expressing this shift in consciousness”<sup>65</sup>.

In this perspective the thanatotic experience loses a great part, if not all its negativity. Suicidal ideas, even suicide attempts not carried out, could be the result of this desire for change, for deepening, of the soul, which is difficult to express otherwise. At this point it is necessary to remark that, with regard to the main character in the story, while his death is suicidal to a great extent—he faces a dangerous situation and he finally loses his life— in his case it is not an active suicide, as in the case of his predecessor, the Nathanael from *Der Sandmann*, who plunges from the top of a tower—. This assertion from Hillman can be applied to him:

The impulse to death need not be conceived as an anti-life movement; it may be a demand for an encounter with absolute reality, *a demand for a fuller life through the death experience*<sup>66</sup>.

I believe that there is not a great distance between Elis's attitude and that of many of our contemporaries who practice high-risk sports, although the question is to find out how many among these perceive that, beyond money and fame, they may be looking for “the Queen” in that *fuller life*. The issue is that, even when death, or more precisely, the experience of death, as Hillman himself remarks, may entail a real danger for survival, it has or can have a positive psychological value, even a very high value:

<sup>63</sup> Hillman, 1997, *op. cit.* (note 58), p. 61.

<sup>64</sup> “Death is the only absolute in life, the only surety and truth (...) Life and death are contained within each other, complete each other, are understandable only in terms of each other. Life takes on its value through death, and the pursuit of death is the kind of life philosophers have often recommended. If only the living can die, only the dying are really alive”. *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> Hillman, 1997, *op. cit.* (note 58), p. 63.



The death experience is needed to separate from the collective flow of life and to discover individuality (...) *Then suicide is the urge for hasty transformation*<sup>67</sup>.

In that perspective we are not authorized to interpret Hoffmann's narration from the value table of "life", understanding this from both the merely biological standpoint and also the perspective of the socially accepted; and in that social acceptance I include the psychological perspective based in the self, counting the most classic viewpoint of psychoanalysis, as Hillman does in his theoretical discourse. For him, the descent into the underworld, understood as a "heroic fantasy", as a challenge for an ego that has to re-emerge victor, is a psychological error<sup>68</sup>. It goes without saying that such argument, whilst longstanding in literature<sup>69</sup>, represents the antithesis of the narrated in *Die Bergwerke zu Falun*. That "heroic fantasy", he adds, acts against the freedom of the soul<sup>70</sup>. Well then, Hoffmann had sufficient talent –genius?– to accept that freedom against the conventions of his time, and of ours.

Yes; also our time, since more than a few, and not the worst, have interpreted Elis Fröbom's and his creator's choice differently, negatively. For reasons of space I shall only mention some of the most relevant instances. Marcel Brion, whom I greatly admire, starts his interpretation in a way that closely approximates to mine, by referring to the metaphor of the *opus magnum* of the alchemists, so precious to Jung, but then he most unexpectedly affirms:

Hoffmann's tale, on the contrary, makes a petrification if it, and even if the half century spent in that substance that gives to death the appearance of life and youth brings the fifty year disappeared Fröbom back to light, this resurrection presents a repulsive aspect<sup>71</sup>.

As for Rüdiger Safranski, he compares the end of the tale with the confinement inside the crystal of the student Anselmus from *Der goldne Topf*, a confinement from which in that story he will be finally freed by his love for Serpentina:

But also his "fall" [Elis's] ends up "in the crystal"<sup>72</sup> (...) here too the immersion in the wonderful, which breaks the bridges with reality, leads to a "glass jail". That is the lesson of the story<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 64 and 73.

<sup>68</sup> Hillman, 1992, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 39.

<sup>69</sup> Hillman gives as an example the violent burst of Hercules into the kingdom of Hades. Hillman, 1992, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.38. Hillman, 1979, *op. cit.* (note 28), pp.110-117.

<sup>70</sup> Hillman, 1992, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.39.

<sup>71</sup> Bachelard, 1948, *op. cit.* (note 32), p.186. He also deems "the beauties of which the garnet is a symbol" as "chimeric", and Elis's imagination as "foolish" (p.190).

<sup>72</sup> "*Ins Kristall bald dein Fall!*" – "You'll soon end up in the crystal!"–, the old lady's curse of Anselmus.

<sup>73</sup> Safranski, R. *E.T.A. Hoffmann. Das Leben eines skeptischen Phantasten*. München & Wien, Hanser, 1984, p. 322.

The lesson? With all the respect that I have for Safranski, which is high, I think that in this case it would be better to say “the moral”; but I think that nothing is farther away from the depth of these mines than a moral. It is my honest belief that only from a line of thought as the one I have chosen to guide my interpretation can justice be made to such masterpiece. On the other hand, there are some arguments which, in close synthesis, I will explain to conclude.

Apart from Elis’s suicidal attitude, the great argument that is usually raised to claim his insanity and the negativity of his attitude –and along with them, Hoffmann’s supposed criticism to the “romantic” choice of a “fantastic” world instead of a real one– is his election of the Queen over his real beloved, since we should not forget that Elis truly loves Ulla. But let us not forget either the argument the young man presents to his fiancée when he decides to go down in search of the garnet: without it they will never get to be really united. In his book on melancholy Földényi offers us a key that can shed some light on this episode. The one who is in love, claims the Hungarian philosopher, does not seek marriage or children, “since his intentions go beyond; go to the world of imagination, of illusion, and ultimately, of nothingness”; and, as an example of his thesis –an example that is most appropriate in the case of Elis and Ulla- he quotes this text of Hölderlin: “The love dies as soon as the gods run away”<sup>74</sup>.

## 7. “By their fruits you shall know them”

On the other hand, the death of the young man and the late discovery of his petrified corpse present a symbolism that cannot be overlooked. When, fifty years later, he is unearthed, what scene might the bystanders have contemplated? Schubert – I promised I would return to his text- describes it with master hand:

The group looked on as this fifty-year silver wedding anniversary transpired between the still youthful bridegroom stiff and cold, and the old and gray bride, so full of warm love<sup>75</sup>.

The bride has aged, but the groom has remained preserved from decadence. Only when he is touched by the air of the outside world he disappears definitively, turned to dust. Bachelard, who cannot avoid the common negative assessment of this ending, has a hint of Hoffmann’s true intention though:

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<sup>74</sup> Földényi 2008, *op. cit.* (nota 21) p. 261. Following this quote Földényi writes: “The lover would like to merge the absolute abstraction and the flesh and blood individuality. That is why his destiny is always tragic”.

<sup>75</sup> See note 16.

As soon as it is taken out of the mine, the mineralized body pulverizes itself, as if it were forbidding any positive research about the wonderful occurrence, as if the author suddenly gave up on all the dreams of mineralization<sup>76</sup>.

In no way do I believe that the author gives up on those dreams; I rather think that in the first part of the quoted excerpt the true key is to be found, i.e., the idea of “forbidding any *positive* research”; positivism has no place in this narration. Matters of research upon it cannot be those of the positive science. The pulverization of the “resurrected” Elis Fröbom can perfectly be interpreted as a *noli me tangere*; indeed, that to whom those words are attributed disappeared in a comparable manner shortly after coming out of the grave.

But there is even more: a scene which has not received sufficient attention from commentators on this melancholic *Märchen*. At the beginning of the narration, and also my analysis, there is a brief conversation between the downcast and confused Elis and the young prostitute that his shipmates send him with the purpose of recruiting him for the party, of making him become “one more”. The sailors drink and make use of prostitutes. Elis, as we have seen, rejects the services of the girl, but he also offers her some coins and a handkerchief. And this is the girl’s touched answer:

Ach, behalten doch nur Eure Dukaten, die machen mir nur traurig, aber das schöne Tuch, das will ich tragen Euch zum teuern Andenken, und Ihr werdet mich wohl übers Jahr nicht mehr finden wenn ihr Hösning haltet hier in der Haga<sup>77</sup>.

I think that Hoffmann’s intention, as well as the value he places on the portrayal of Elis, is clear. The “abnormal” character concerned about his soul is he who saves from prostitution that girl of whom the “normal” ones use as if she were an object. Is it necessary to recall that the same one to whom that *noli me tangere* is attributed also said “By their fruits you shall know them”?

<sup>76</sup> Bachelard, 1948, *op. cit.* (note 38), p. 258.

<sup>77</sup> “Oh, keep your ducats; they only make me miserable; but I’ll wear the handkerchief in cherished remembrance of you. If you hold your *Hösning* in the Haga next year, you won’t find me”. Hoffmann, 2001, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 211.