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Dr. Cinderella and the Bronze Artifact, Cardinal Napellus and the Copper Globe: Was Gustav Meyrink an Early Adopter of M.R. James's Ghostly Fiction?

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Abstract: Hitherto unnoticed similarities between two short stories by Gustav Meyrink and two of the most renowned and widely read ghost stories of M.R. James are detailed through comparative literary analysis. Specifically, one early occult horror tale of Meyrink, *The Plants of Dr. Cinderella* (1905), shows no less than about 15 congruences beneath the plot level (concerning specific story requisites) with M.R. James's '*Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad*' (1904), as does, to the same extent, a later, widely known Meyrink tale (*The Cardinal Napellus*, 1914) vis-à-vis M.R. James's *Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance* (1911). Although direct, conclusive evidence is unavailable, a nexus of circumstantial evidence, building on extensive biographical and bibliographical inquiries, convergently attests to these assumed literary influences on Meyrink: for both cases, the chronology is intact and thus possible; Meyrink was expertly fluent in English and well-connected to England and English literature; and, these borrowings are reminiscent of other, already known originality issues surrounding Meyrink's work. Altogether, these new discoveries shed fresh light on idiosyncrasies of Meyrink's creative process, imagination, and literary production; on his still under-researched literary inspirational sources; as well as on the early reception of M.R. James's ghostly fiction beyond the anglophone sphere.

Keywords: comparative literary analysis; European fantastic literature; ghost story; Montague Rhodes James (1862–1936); literary borrowing; literary echoes; literary influences; literary plagiarism; Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932); short story; supernatural fiction; weird fiction

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1. Introduction

The aim of this account is to adduce evidence for not inconsiderable similarities between two short stories by Gustav Meyrink[1] and two ghost stories of M.R. James, which hitherto have gone unnoticed by both M.R. James and Meyrink researchers. The method utilized for bolstering this argument is comparative literary analysis, applied in a comprehensive and systematic way, drawing on extensive biographical and bibliographical inquiries. The chain of convergent, circumstantial evidence unearthed through this approach appears sufficient to suggest that the hypothesized literary borrowings of Meyrink from M.R. James are corroborated. This serendipitous discovery, enabling a de novo reading of Meyrink, not only sheds fresh light on some already known idiosyncrasies of Meyrink's creative process, imagination, and literary production, but also serves as a case study of his literary sources and inspirations, which generally, still, are under-researched. As well, these discoveries constitute yet another case of early reception of M.R. James's ghostly fiction outside the anglophone sphere.

To begin with, consider the parallels between the following two pairs of stories. One each is by M.R. James, and both of these two ghost stories rank among his most widely known and renowned ones. The respective two others are enigmatic, and much less circulated and lesser known, occult horror tales by Meyrink.

For ease of comparison, in the following Sections 2 and 3, the story requisites (i.e., props) similarities within each story pair (the first one abbreviated with W and C, standing for the '*Oh, Whistle*' and *Dr. Cinderella* stories; the second pair with H and N, for the *Mr Humphreys* and *Cardinal Napellus* stories, respectively) are indicated through consecutive numbering within curly brackets following each text element, with identical numbers signifying the correspondences between the M.R. James and Meyrink stories; for instance, the M.R. James story element marked as {W1} is mirrored by {C1} in Meyrink's tale, {H7} corresponds to {N7}, and so forth.

2. A Tale of Two Stories: Comparisons of M.R. James's '*Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad*' (1904) and Meyrink's *The Plants of Dr. Cinderella* (1905)

M.R. James's story '*Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad*'[2] is about the scholar {W1} Professor Parkins, who, in the course of an improvised amateur excavation {W2} nearby the sandy {W3} shore of East Anglia, with his knife {W4}, incidentally secures a small {W5}, ancient {W6}, bronze {W7} artifact from the ground of a religious cult site {W8} (ruins of a Templars preceptory). He takes his find {W9} to his lodgings. He does not quite understand the purpose and significance of the object {W10}, which resembles a dog whistle. In particular, he cannot fully translate and interpret the Latin inscription {W11} cut into the whistle. As he is quite curious, he does what he thinks is the most obvious {W12}: he blows into the whistle. This, in turn, unleashes frightening supernatural forces {W13}, in the form of an entity with its arms raised high {W14}, pursuing him, in waking dream (visions) {W15} and waking state (reality) alike. During these nightly incidents, the moon {W16} is shining very brightly.

Meyrink's story, *The Plants of Dr. Cinderella*[3], is about an unnamed first-person narrator (quite likely a scholar, considering his activities {C1}), who, during a stay (no details provided) at Thebes in the Egyptian sand {C3} desert, with his cane {C4}, incidentally {C2} secures a small {C5}, ancient {C6}, bronze {C7} artifact from the sand {C3} (assumingly nearby a religious cult site {C8}). He takes his find {C9} back to Europe, Prague. He does not quite understand the purpose and significance of the object {C10}, a statuette resembling an Egyptian hieroglyph (and thus being an inscription itself {C11}). As he is quite curious, he does what he thinks is the most obvious {C12}: he imitates the posture of the statuette (arms raised over head {C14}, and fingertips pointing down, to touch the parting of the hair). This, in turn, unleashes frightening supernatural forces {C13}, in the form of various visions {C15} (hallucinations, states of hypervigilance and alienation, and depersonalization and out-of-body experiences), which come and go with the waxing and waning moon {C16}. One night, the narrator feels driven to enter an old house in the historic city of Prague, where, in the cellar, he makes a most dreadful discovery: a breed of pulsating, humanoid plants, apparently grafted on (or amalgamated with) parts of human corpses (eyeballs, veins, and fingernails). On making a report at a police station, he is reassured that this is the house of Dr. Cinderella, the renowned Egyptologist, who is merely cultivating novel forms of carnivorous plants there. Strangely enough, it appears that he himself might be Dr. Cinderella; leastways, he sees this name on his own visiting cards.

3. A Tale of Two Further Stories: Comparisons of M.R. James's *Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance* (1911) and Meyrink's *the Cardinal Napellus* (1914)

M.R. James's story, *Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance*[4], is about the eponymous character visiting the estate {H1} his uncle bequeathed {H2} to him. On the property, he finds a globe {H3} made of copper {H4} in the center of a yew {H5} maze, both designed by his ancestor James Wilson, of whom no grave is known {H6}. Closer inspection of the globe reveals strange, inexplicable details {H7}: it is adorned with depictions of mythical and biblical demons and villains, including Cain. Wilson might have been a follower of an age-old gnostic sect {H8} (perhaps the Cainites; Pardoe and Nicholls 1997). When sitting in the library {H9}, Humphreys sketches a plan of the maze, causing a bottomless pit {H10} to open underneath the paper (at the globe's location in the plan), from which the burnt body of Wilson crawls up (possibly from hell?) {H11}. The shock confines Humphreys to his

sickbed {H12}. When at the end of the story the globe is intentionally and forcibly opened {H13}, it turns out that the globe contains the ashes of his ancestor {H14}, who likely was an evildoer.

Meyrink's story *The Cardinal Napellus*[5] is about an unnamed first-person narrator, who, together with three acquaintances, is visiting one Hieronymus Radspieller, who lodges in one floor of a decaying castle {N1} in a mountain region. The holder family is extinct, and the castle and property are inherited {N2} by a former family servant. Yews {N5} are found on the estate, as well as a mountain lake, tiny, but of abysmal depth {N10} (possibly down to hell?) {N11}. Radspieller spends his days in a boat on this lake, fathoming the perhaps deepest point on earth with a plumb bob (but made of copper {N4}, instead of the usual lead). In his youth, he had been a follower of an age-old, obscure sect {N8}, the monastic order of the Blue Brothers. The legendary, ancient founder of this congregation was one Cardinal Napellus, and the doctrines of faith centered on the helmet flower (or blue monkshood, *Aconitum napellus*).[6] The Blue Brothers flagellated themselves, watered their personalized (and baptized) helmet flowers with their own blood, ate from the poisonous flower seeds, and, finally, let themselves be buried alive. The first helmet flower on earth is said to have sprout out of the grave of Napellus within one night, and this was the origin of the flower's name. Napellus' grave was found empty {N6}. Radspieller eventually lost his faith and turned away from the sect in hate. A shrine in the refectory was said to contain the relics of Cardinal Napellus, but Radspieller only found a wooden globe {N3} therein, which he stole, gave away, got back, and now shows his visitors, who gather in the library {N9}. Closer inspection of the ancient globe reveals strange, inexplicable details {N7}: although produced centuries ago, all five continents are charted. It is therefore assumed to be a contemporary fake. Unexpectedly enough, the mountain lake, tiny as it is, is charted on this globe as well {N7}. When at the end of the story one visitor pokes a pin into the globe {N13}, a papery crust falls off, and it turns out that inside the globe is a glistening, glassy sphere. Enclosed in this crystalline structure is a figure: Cardinal Napellus transformed {N14}, carrying a helmet flower like a candle. The shock drives Radspieller into madness {N12}.

4. Story Props Similarities, Not Plot Similarities

It is important to realize that the layer or level of resemblance between the Meyrink and M.R. James stories, decidedly, is not so much on the plot itself (with regards to which, on the whole, both story pairs indeed differ considerably). Rather, the observable, striking, and eye-catching similarities mainly concern story requisites (sometimes minute details), as they appear and are used in these tales. The number of such correspondences is anything but small: about 15 for each story pair. One is also left with the impression that these similarities of requisites tend to cluster in certain passages of Meyrink's texts, rather than being more or less evenly distributed across the story text. Following such a cluster of literary echoes (or literary "nods" to M.R. James), the plots in the Meyrink stories then take a different path. Also, Meyrink, at times, seems to combine, modify, and interchange the inventory of story requisites rather freely, evidently in an aleatoric fashion, and sometimes the story requisites also appear in different sequence than in the respective M.R. James tale.

Surely, almost all of these individual text elements, when encountered and considered separately, would seem inconspicuous and merely coincidental. An exception from this might be the very specific story element of a strange globe that is opened and discovered to contain the remnants of a dubious ancient personage. This idea ranks among those highly original, and thus rightly acclaimed, creations within M.R. James's ghostly fiction for which no forerunner or inspirational source has been discerned.

However, the emphasis here is on the fact that it is precisely the joint appearance of quite a number of such text requisites from M.R. James's stories in the Meyrink stories which renders mere coincidence as an explanation quite improbable. Taken together, the sheer number of such requisites similarities (whereas, as emphasized, lesser so, plot similarities) between the two Meyrink stories and the genuine inventions presented in the story counterparts by M.R. James are striking and, on the whole, seem to be far too many

and too close. Evidently, somehow or other, Meyrink must have had knowledge of these two M.R. James stories.

In the absence of direct, conclusive evidence for this idea, any such argumentation along these lines should try to address and affirmatively answer the four following questions, in order to calibrate and clarify the case: (Q1) Is the chronology possible? (Q2) Was Meyrink fluent in English? (Q3) Was Meyrink well-connected to England and English literature? And, considering that the extent of these story element adoptions, or literary echoes, might be perceived as approaching literary plagiarism: (Q4) are there indications for further conspicuities surrounding the originality of Meyrink's literary production?

In what follows, evidence for a Yes to all these four questions is advanced, thus weaving a sufficiently dense web of circumstantial evidence. The upshot of these investigations is presented and elaborated on in the following sections (5 to 8). As for information sources, the argumentation mainly draws on the four contemporary Meyrink biographies by Binder (2009), Harmsen (2009), Mitchell (2008), and Smit (1988).[7] These are based on widened archival accesses and novel sources; hence, older accounts on Meyrink's life and work were not consulted. As one would assume, M.R. James is not mentioned in any of these biographies. In addition, the bibliography of Aster (1980) was perused, an invaluable resource documenting all first editions, reprints, and re-editions of Meyrink's works, along with early translations of Meyrink's fiction and Meyrink's own output as a literary translator and editor.

5. Questions of Chronology

First (Q1, above), is the chronology possible at all? M.R. James's story '*Oh, Whistle*' was probably written in 1903, as it was read by him in Cambridge at the King's College 1903 Christmas gathering, and lined up as seventh of the eight stories comprising his first story collection, *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (James 1904). As for the exact publication date of the book, M.R. James's preface is dated "Allhallows' Even, 1904"; Cox (1983, p. 140) writes that M.R. James checked the proofs "towards the end of October", and the book was published "in time for the Christmas trade". This should be taken to mean that it was on display in bookshops' windows sometime during November 1904, and certainly not later than the first December days (otherwise, the book would not have been "in time for the Christmas trade" anymore).

Meyrink's *Cinderella* first appeared on 17 January 1905 in the Munich satirical weekly *Simplicissimus*.[8] It was, then, incorporated into Meyrink's collection entitled *Gustav Meyrinks Wachsfigurenkabinett: Sonderbare Geschichten* (Meyrink 1908)[9], incorporated further into his three-volume collection *Des deutschen Spießers Wunderhorn: Gesammelte Novellen* (1913)[10], first anthologized in 1914[11] and, during Meyrink's lifetime, again in his 1925 story selection *Die heimtückischen Champignons und andere Geschichten*[12].

Meyrink started writing fiction at 33 years of age, in 1901, in Prague (Binder 2009, p. 10). *Cinderella* is therefore an early work of his. Finer details and exact dates regarding the life of Meyrink are generally difficult to substantiate, as he kept no diary and discarded of many letters. Sometime between late March and early June 1904 (the exact date is unknown), Meyrink left Prague for Vienna, his native town (either directly, or with a stopover in Berlin; Binder 2009, pp. 346, 358). Sometime between May and August 1905 (once again, the exact date is unknown), he left Vienna for his next domicile, Montreux at Lake Geneva, Switzerland.[13] Meyrink's main engagement in Vienna, in 1904, was the editorship of the short-lived literary-cultural magazine *Der liebe Augustin*, of which the last issue came out in November 1904.[14] In his Viennese months in 1904, Meyrink wrote three stories, including *Cinderella*. All of these were likely written from November 1904 onwards, with the magazine's cease, because, prior to that, his editorial duties allowed Meyrink little time for his own work (Binder 2009, pp. 384, 422).

Considering this dating in conjunction with the publication date of January 17, 1905 in the *Simplicissimus*, the print lead time of this weekly magazine (roughly two weeks; Binder 2009, p. 404), and the publication date and availability of M.R. James's book, this

does not leave much time: Meyrink must have almost immediately dashed off *Cinderella* during advent season 1904 or around Christmas time at the latest.

It could be objected that such a tight chronology is suspect in itself and, therefore, the assumed progress of events was not credible. All of this, however, is entirely consistent with the chronology and, put into context, such a course of events does not seem exceptional or unlikely either: *Cinderella* is a brief tale, of about 2700 words, and Meyrink usually wrote quickly and worked in spurts. Apart from *Cinderella*, between 1901 and 1908, Meyrink *published* (i.e., not merely jotted down) a total of more than 50 stories; that is, on average, at a pace of about one new story every other month. It is also known that Meyrink, during his literary career, practically never received rejection slips: editors and publishers seem to have accepted his submissions without hesitation or requests for changes (Bachmann 2008). Further, thinking of strategies of intentional literary borrowing, it definitely would make sense to borrow from a foreign-language writer, not yet widely internationally known (as M.R. James was as a writer of supernatural fiction at that time), as well as doing so in quick reaction to a release fresh from the press (thereby creating exactly the impression of suspect chronology, should doubts be raised later on). An additional possibility (neither excludable nor verifiable) is that Meyrink, already earlier in 1904, at some point after M.R. James's Christmas 1903 reading of *Whistle* at Cambridge, through one of his manifold and longstanding English postal contacts (see Section 7 below), had been acquainted with the contents of this tale.

In the case of the second story pair, the chronology is less tight and possible beyond any doubt. M.R. James wrote *Mr Humphreys* in 1911, to fill up his second story collection, *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (James 1911), wherein the story appeared as the seventh and last one. *Napellus* first appeared in the July 1914 issue of the magazine *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*[15], and Meyrink deemed the story worthy of a stand-alone edition (1915)[16], before including it in his story collection *Fledermäuse* (Meyrink 1916b)[17]. Meyrink experienced a creative crisis between 1908 and 1913, a period when he was busy with his multivolume translations of the novels of Charles Dickens into German (see Sections 6 and 7 below). *Napellus* was the single harvest from this otherwise barren period in his literary career (Binder 2009, pp. 428, 443). Text precursors in a notebook of Meyrink suggest that the story, initially, was planned as an embedded narrative for his *Golem* novel (but then singled out) and, therefore, must have been written in 1913 or during the first half of 1914, at the latest (Binder 2009, p. 489).

6. Meyrink and the English Language

Second, in response to Q2 above, Meyrink's command of English was excellent. Despite a checkered school career, with varying grades, perhaps comprehensible in the light of change of localities (first Hamburg, then Prague) and school types, his grades in English were uniformly excellent (Binder 2009, pp. 44, 60–61). Biographically, it is known that Meyrink read indiscriminately ever since he was a child, which included extensive reading of Dickens and Shakespeare (Binder 2009, pp. 60–61, 64–66). Meyrink was a founding member (1891) and then chair of the theosophist lodge *Zum blauen Stern* in Prague, which was an offshoot of Helena Blavatsky's (1833–1891) Theosophical Society (Binder 2009, pp. 107, 120–21 [fn. 407]). Meyrink's leading role in this lodge was partly due to the fact that he was the only member properly fluent in English. He procured various esoteric and occultist books from England, eventually accumulated an extensive library on these topics, and was in the habit of reading aloud and translating on the spot from such English-language writings during the meetings of the lodge (Binder 2009, p. 127 [fn. 422]; Harmsen 2009, p. 77; Mitchell 2008, p. 124). Already at this time, much preceding any plans of a literary career, he also entertained the idea of editing English-to-German translations of the esoteric journal *Sphinx*, which did not, however, come into being (Binder 2009, p. 149; Harmsen 2009, p. 74). The first book he translated was from French.[18] For the sake of completeness, it should also be mentioned in this context that none of M.R. James's stories were translated into German earlier than the 1950s (Voracek 2021). In other words, if

Meyrink came across any tales of M.R. James, inevitably so, they must have been their original English versions.

7. Meyrink's Connections with England

Third, in answering Q3 above, Meyrink was well-connected to England and English literature. He, clearly, was an Anglophile. Already in Prague in the 1890s, Meyrink attired himself in English fashion, with suit cloth ordered from Manchester, and, according to English custom, wearing his wedding ring on his left hand (Binder 2009, pp. 233, 245, 360). Owing to a scarcity of preserved letters and lack of a diary, Meyrink's private life has proved difficult to elucidate. However, it is known that he married his second wife in Dover[19], and longer stays of Meyrink in London, in July 1908 (Binder 2009, p. 427), and in London and Scotland in spring or summer 1911[20], are documented. From 1891 onwards, when still in Prague and well before the onset of his literary career, Meyrink was affiliated with various international (mostly, England-based) secret societies and masonic lodges (Harmsen 2009, p. 61). He was admitted to Annie Besant's (1847–1933) Eastern School of Theosophy in London in summer 1892 (Binder 2009, p. 163); in the 1890s, he corresponded with the esotericist John Thomas (1826–1908) (Binder 2009, p. 142), further with English Rosicrucians, among others, with the cofounder of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Binder 2009, p. 146) William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925), and with John Yarker (1833–1913), exchanging manuscripts and books with the latter (Harmsen 2009, p. 77; Mitchell 2008, p. 63); and, he maintained contacts with societies in Manchester and Wadebridge, Cornwall (Mitchell 2008, p. 64). Several of these contacts with English occultists were long-lasting, continuing well into the 1920s.[21] Meyrink was aware of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and his writings as well, although Meyrink's initial appreciation seemed to have diminished over time. Conversely, it is known that Crowley showed interest in Meyrink as late as 1930 (Harmsen 2009, p. 167 [fn. 200]).

Of special note is Meyrink's acquaintance with the English theosophist George R.S. Mead (1863–1933), who was secretary to Blavatsky (Harmsen 2009, p. 77). An early meeting of Meyrink and Mead in autumn 1892 in Vienna is documented (Binder 2009, p. 164), and their friendship lasted well into the 1920s. For instance, a letter from Meyrink to Mead from 1921 is preserved, wherein Meyrink requested him to send titles (if not copies) of English occultist novels suitable for translation into German (Harmsen 2009, pp. 109, 166). Mead was almost the same age as M.R. James and, likewise, undertook his university education at Cambridge in the early 1880s.[22] It is, thus, perfectly conceivable that Mead was aware of M.R. James early on. Considering all of these facts, Mead could be the prime candidate for a possible intermediary who could have conveyed information regarding M.R. James, and his ghostly fiction, to Meyrink. A second such candidate is the Austrian entrepreneur, patron of the arts, and founding member of the Wiener Werkstätte, Fritz Waerndorfer (1868–1939).[23] Waerndorfer, due to repeated stays in England from the early 1890s onwards, had extensive knowledge of England and the English art scene, and Meyrink's story collection, *Wachsfigurenkabinett* (Meyrink 1908), wherein the *Cinderella* story made its first book appearance, is dedicated to Waerndorfer (Binder 2009, pp. 381, 383, 424). As a third alternative, it is known that Meyrink frequently researched in the Bavarian State Library in Munich, as well as in libraries in Berlin (Binder 2009, p. 587). Online catalogue researches indicate that these libraries do not own early copies of M.R. James's 1911 volume *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, but this fact is less than conclusive, as the losses to German library stocks through National Socialism and World War II are well known. In this context, it would be informative to know the contents of Meyrink's extensive library which was, however, never catalogued and, after his death, entirely dispersed to various public libraries and private collectors. More generally, Meyrink scholars unanimously agree on the fact that Meyrink's sources for his fiction are still under-researched (Harmsen 2009, pp. 54–55, 80, 98; Mitchell 2008, p. 63).

In this context, it is perhaps not off the point to emphasize that Meyrink started with short fiction and wrote his series of novels only *after* his translation work of Dickens

(Harmsen 2009, p. 107), which should now briefly be discussed. In the half decade preceding World War I, Meyrink translated no less than 18 volumes of Dickens, thereby demonstrating his deep immersion into English literature and culture, although his main motives, as is frequent with literary translations, were financial ones.[24]

With regards to Meyrink's assumed knowledge of M.R. James's ghost stories, there are ample indications that he was fond of supernatural fiction in general. The occultist writer Hargrave Jennings (1817–1890) was possibly known to Meyrink as an author of ghost stories as well (Harmsen 2009, p. 105), and one friend of Meyrink in Prague, and later on correspondent, was the author Paul Leppin (1878–1945), who also wrote ghost stories[25]. Further, Meyrink contributed a foreword to the 1913 anthology *Das Gespensterbuch* [The Ghost Book],[26] and his tale *Cinderella* was anthologized in a 1914 anthology entitled *Das unheimliche Buch* [The Uncanny Book][27]. In the 1920s, Meyrink's main source of income became English literary translations (Mitchell 2008, p. 120), which also included Lafcadio Hearn's (1850–1904) collection of ghost stories *In Ghostly Japan* (originally published in 1899), under the title *Japanische Geistergeschichten* [Japanese Ghost Stories][28].

8. Originality Issues Surrounding Meyrink's Work

Fourth, in response to the final (Q4) of the above four questions, there indeed are indications for other originality and intellectual property issues relating to Meyrink's fictional work, and these are not trifles. *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster* is a novel about Rosicrucianism, mysticism, and alchemy, featuring John Dee, Edward Kelley, and the Habsburg emperor Rudolf II. It was published under Meyrink's name in 1927 as the last (and, by far, longest) of his novels. Shortly after its publication, rumors about plagiarism were afloat, and not for the first time. In 1925, Meyrink had published a three-story collection, *Goldmachergeschichten*[29], possibly being precursor studies for the 1927 novel, which already had prompted accusations of plagiarism, voiced anonymously in a Munich newspaper. Meyrink identified the originator and published a rejoinder (Harmsen 2009, p. 171; Binder 2009, p. 643). Linguistically and stylistically, the novel *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster* differs markedly from Meyrink's earlier novels. Indeed, as is now known, Meyrink neither wrote this novel, nor the *Goldmachergeschichten*.

The actual origin of both works was as follows. Meyrink, always in financial difficulties, had received considerable, much-needed advance payments by his publisher in good prospect, but, at that time, already struggled with failing health. Friedrich Alfred Schmid Noerr (1877–1969),[30] a German university professor of philosophy and writer, was a like-minded personality who lived nearby Meyrink's domicile at Lake Starnberg, and, from 1919 onwards, became a frequent visitor of Meyrink (Harmsen 2009, p. 187). Both contracted that Schmid Noerr would write the two works, to be published as Meyrink's, in order to earn and share the publisher's payments due to Meyrink's famed name.

Knowledge of this course of events is still not widespread[31] (and evidently was suppressed by early Meyrink scholars who knew; Harmsen 2009, p. 189), but the evidence is unambiguous, owing to various documents from the Meyrink and Schmid Noerr estates, which even include their covert written financial agreement. Meyrink, at most, did contribute some ideas and short text passages, but mainly discussed concepts with Schmid Noerr and edited the other's drafts. Outwardly, Meyrink always presented both of these works as his own, which misrepresentation has not yet been corrected in modern editions and translations of them (Binder 2009, pp. 641–51; Harmsen 2009, pp. 178–84). The main impetus for the plot of the novel *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster*, seems to have been a book on John Dee by the German occultist and theosophist Carl Kiesewetter (1854–1895), which Schmid Noerr had read and then shared with Meyrink.[32] As an aside, it is tempting to speculate whether Schmid Noerr, during his researches for the novel, might also have come across M.R. James's work on John Dee (James 1921).

A further intellectual property issue concerns Meyrink's *Walpurgis Night* novel of 1917. Therein (chapter 4: *Im Spiegel* [In the Mirror]), Meyrink apparently made free use of personal conversational statements and published ideas of his acquaintance Joseph

Anton Schneiderfranken (1876–1943), a German painter and author of religious-spiritualist writings (under the alias Bô Yin Râ).[33] This is known due to a disapproving article which Schneiderfranken wrote on this matter in 1933, shortly after Meyrink's death (Binder 2009, p. 569; Harmsen 2009, p. 146; Mitchell 2008, p. 203). Doubts also surround Meyrink's voluminous translation work of Dickens novels: Meyrink scholar Eduard Frank, in a letter from 1968, passed on hearsay information that Meyrink had a female language teacher prepare him rough translations, which he then merely polished up stylistically (Harmsen 2009, p. 209 [fn. 109]).

9. Synopsis, Evaluation, and Conclusions

To sum up, it appears that all of the four questions posed above (Q1: chronology; Q2: English proficiency; Q3: English contacts; and Q4: intellectual property issues) can be answered in the positive. No further reminiscences of M.R. James's ghost stories as literary influences or echoes in other works of Meyrink seem to be discernible. The striking story requisite parallels between '*Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad*' and *The Plants of Dr. Cinderella* on the one side, and between *Mr Humphreys and His Inheritance* and *The Cardinal Napellus* on the other side, may have gone hitherto unnoticed for quite mundane reasons: foremost, language barriers and intricacies of literary reception. Certainly, the majority of those interested in M.R. James's fiction were (and are) not fluent in German, and there were no early English translations of either of these two Meyrink stories.[34] Meyrink is, of course, absent in contemporary compilations of "Jamesian writers" (i.e., supernatural, speculative, and weird fiction in the tradition of M.R. James's ghost stories; for the most recent version of these lists, see Pardoe 2001). Relatedly, interest in Meyrink traditionally focused on his novels (foremost, on the *Golem*[35]), whereas considerably less so on his short fiction, and Meyrink researchers may well have not been thoroughly familiar with the ghost stories of M.R. James (who, in turn, is absent in all Meyrink biographies presented so far).

On balance, the evident M.R. James borrowings of Meyrink perhaps should not be regarded as plain cases of literary plagiarism alone. It is true that these borrowings occurred in significant phases of Meyrink's literary career. When he wrote *Dr. Cinderella* in late 1904, he was still a newcomer, striving to become established as a short-story writer, had relocated from Prague to Vienna, and was just over a time-consuming engagement as a magazine editor. It is entirely conceivable that, in such a situation of pressure to devise and sell one story after another, it may well have been tempting for him to resort to somebody else's stock of imagination. In a similar vein, when Meyrink wrote *The Cardinal Napellus* in 1913/14, he had just recovered from a creative crisis lasting several years. Again, it is perfectly understandable if he succumbed to the same temptation.

In fairness, it also needs to be emphasized that Meyrink arranged and transformed the building blocks, apparently borrowed from M.R. James, in ways that are unmistakably Meyrinkian. While in both cases he seems to have borrowed a chain of story requisites, the plots of *Dr. Cinderella* and *Cardinal Napellus* are distinct and original. With such ingenious twists applied (and masterly crafted, as they are), the two Meyrink stories distinguish themselves from their assumed M.R. James sources of inspiration in many ways. This includes the writing style, the narrative perspective, the unsettling dream-like ambience, and an additional (very Meyrinkian) doppelgänger theme implemented into both Meyrink stories. Generally, in these works Meyrink achieves a metamorphosis of the ghostly to the more magic, enigmatic, esoteric, and mystic, and to undercurrents of the occult, in particular. These two Meyrink stories thus lend themselves to quite different readings and interpretations than their counterparts by M.R. James.

Hence, apart from the theme of literary borrowing (or plagiarism) on the part of Meyrink, these discoveries are also apt to shed new light on Meyrink's creative process, imagination, and some specifics of his literary production: both *The Plants of Dr. Cinderella* and *The Cardinal Napellus* seem to follow the logic of dreams, in that the story props apparently borrowed from the two M.R. James stories are adopted like day residues (*sensu*

the Freudian approach to dream interpretation and analysis) and then, surreally processed, build up into nightmarish story plots.

Finally, the current discoveries also inform ongoing research about the early reception of M.R. James's supernatural fiction outside the anglophone sphere. As for some examples, the earliest known translations were into Norwegian (two booklets comprising a selection of his ghost stories, published in 1919, translated by Ragnhild Undset, a younger sister of Sigrid Undset, the 1928 Nobel Laureate in literature); an Italian translation, dating from 1932 and likely unauthorized, of a single M.R. James story has only recently been detected (for details of both of these 1919 and 1932 translations, see Voracek 2021); and the 1941 novel *The Maze* of the Swiss writer of fantastic/speculative fiction Maurice Sandoz (Carbonell 2022) contains a *tour de force* of allusions to, and story props adoptions and traces of, more than half a dozen of M.R. James's ghost stories (Voracek 2017).

Yet, preceding all of this, Meyrink wrote *Cardinal Napellus* just two years after *Mr Humphreys* came out in 1911, and *Dr. Cinderella* really within weeks after '*Oh, Whistle*' was issued in late 1904. It, therefore, remains fascinating what an early adopter in the germanophone language area M.R. James had in the guise of Gustav Meyrink, particularly considering emerging evidence for the fact that, conversely, M.R. James's own inspirational sources for his ghostly fiction seemingly also included some from 19th century German Romanticism (Voracek 2020).

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Notes

1 Meyrink started as a writer of satirical and weird fiction, whose stories were collected in three volumes, under the title *Des deutschen Spießers Wunderhorn* (Meyrink 1913). Further weird fiction was collected in *Fledermäuse* (Meyrink 1916b). *Der Golem* (Meyrink 1915) was his first novel, with which he already gained international fame. As a writer of supernatural and weird fiction, to the present day, Meyrink is still best known for this work. His further novels include *Das grüne Gesicht* (Meyrink 1916a), *Walpurgisnacht* (Meyrink 1917b), and *Der weiße Dominikaner* (Meyrink 1921). Of the last novel published under his name, *Der Engel vom westlichen Fenster* (Meyrink 1927), as well as of the story collection *Goldmachergeschichten* (Meyrink 1925), see further on below (Section 8). A first collected works edition of Meyrink already appeared towards his 50th birthday (Meyrink 1917a, 6 vols., Leipzig, Albert Langen), and modern reissues of this collection are still available. Furthermore, two legacy editions have been edited by the Meyrink expert Eduard Frank, the first being *Das Haus zur letzten Latern: Nachgelassenes und Verstreutes* (Meyrink 1973) and the other entitled *Fledermäuse: Erzählungen, Fragmente, Aufsätze* (Meyrink 1981; an extended edition, assembling additional contents beyond Meyrink's same-titled story collection).

2 For analyses and discussion of various aspects of this M.R. James story, see Murphy (2017, pp. 40–54, 199–200); Murphy (2022); Murphy and Porcheddu (2013); Mydla and Keithline (2017); Ray (2021); Simpson (1997, 2000, 2013); Thompson (2001, 2021, 2022, 2023); and Wiseman (2016).

3 Original German title: *Die Pflanzen des Doktor Cinderella* (with the academic title spelled out; other editions included the genitive suffix of *Doktor*, i.e., *Die Pflanzen des Doktors Cinderella*). For analyses and interpretations of this Meyrink story, see Boyd (2006); Etzler (2017); and Janzen (2016). No discussion of the allusive (reminiscent of the world of fairy tales) and odd (namely, female) character name is encountered in the Meyrink literature.

4 For analyses and discussion of various aspects of this M.R. James story, see Buchanan (2002); Duffy (2007); Hughes (1993); Longhorn (2000); Murphy (2017, pp. 140–45, 225–26); Oryshchuk (2017); and Pardoe and Nicholls (1997).

[5] Original German title: *Der Kardinal Napellus.* For analyses and interpretations of this Meyrink story, see Boyd (2006) and Kadir Albayrak (2020).

[6] A symbol of toxicity and death, frequently cultivated in medieval cloister gardens (see, for instance, https://teufelskunst.com/2013/04/23/aconite-info/; https://teufelskunst.com/garden/library/aconite/, accessed on 6 November 2024).

[7] Some introductory, additional remarks regarding these different biographies are in order. Smit (1988), as indicated in his title, focuses more on Meyrink's connections with occultism, rather than on life details and work interpretation. Mitchell's (2008) is the first English-language biography of Meyrink, written by the translator of all five novels of Meyrink. His account is frequently superficial, often relying on the anecdotes and fables that surround Meyrink's life. Harmsen's (2009) monograph is well-researched and much more detailed than either Smit's or Mitchell's. Harmsen draws heavily on the contents of previously privately held collections of Meyrinkiana, which have been merged and made accessible for research in a single collection now located in Amsterdam. For these reasons, Harmsen is able to provide many details hitherto unknown. Finally, Binder (2009) is the most exhaustive and, thus, currently, the primary biographical reference work on Meyrink (about 800 pp., 2500 footnotes, and 300 figures), drawing on rich and hitherto unexploited archival contents. Boyd (2012) provides an informative comparative view and analysis of the latter three Meyrink biographies.

[8] Volume 9 (1904/05), issue 43, portioned on pp. 422, 423, and 426. The publication date noted in Aster (1980) (namely, 23 January 1905; bibliography entry #69) is incorrect. A scan of the magazine issue, containing Meyrink's story, is available from http://www.simplicissimus.info/index.php?id=6 (accessed on 6 November 2024). The *Simplicissimus*, founded in 1896, was widely read and best known for its satirical contents. Rainer Maria Rilke and Hermann Hesse were among its contributors, and Thomas Mann was sometimes the subeditor. Of the 53 stories Meyrink published 1901–1908, 37 appeared in the *Simplicissimus*, making Meyrink one of the magazine's leading contributors (Mitchell 2008, pp. 96–97, 121). Close comparison between the first printing of *Cinderella* in the *Simplicissimus* and its ensuing anthologizations reveals slight differences between text versions. This is also true for the other Meyrink story discussed here. These differences are minor and exclusively pertain to the levels of spelling variants, interpunctuation, paragraph boundaries, and a very few instances where Meyrink (or a publisher's editor?) later has deleted or added some text, ranging from a single word up to half a sentence. Contentwise, all these versions are unmodified.

[9] This would translate into *Gustav Meyrink's Wax Museum: Strange Stories*. This 1908 edition has 25 illustrations by André Lambert, among which are two plates for *Cinderella*, showing of which kind the eponymous plants are.

[10] 1913 (Munich, Albert Langen).

[11] In *Das unheimliche Buch*, edited by Felix Schloemp (1914, Munich, Georg Müller; pp. 127–39 therein). This edition of the story has an illustration by Alfred Kubin (Binder 2009, p. 431).

[12] This would translate into *The Malicious Champignon Mushrooms and Other Stories* (1925, Berlin, Ullstein).

[13] Binder (2009, pp. 392, 394). Previous claim: end of 1905 (Mitchell 2008, p. 112).

[14] Harmsen (2009, pp. 86, 102); Mitchell (2008, pp. 108–10). The magazine was named after a legendary, folkloristic figure and balladeer of 17th century Vienna (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marx_Augustin; https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marx_Augustin, accessed on 6 November 2024).

[15] Volume 11, issue 10, pp. 473–82. See Harmsen (2009, p. 129); Binder (2009, p. 198 (fn. 784)). An early, undated, handwritten, and fragmentary story manuscript in Meyrink's estate, titled *Der Club Amanita (Der Cardinal)* [*The Amanita Club (The Cardinal)*], already features an old man or cardinal (Harmsen 2009, pp. 65, 74).

[16] As volume 11 in the bibliophile series *Münchener Liebhaber-Drucke* [Munich Bibliophile Editions], edited by Berthold Sutter (Munich, Heinrich F.S. Bachmair), with a onetime print-run of 750 copies (a scan of this edition is available from http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-buch?apm=0&aid=368, accessed on 6 November 2024). Among others, this bibliophile series featured editions of Gottfried August Bürger (his ballad *Lenore*), Hermann Hesse, and Friedrich Hölderlin.

[17] *Fledermäuse: Sieben Geschichten* ([Bats: Seven Stories]; 1916, Leipzig/Munich, Kurt Wolff). *Napellus* was the only story of this collection which did not previously appear in the magazine *Simplicissimus* (Harmsen 2009, p. 129). The philosopher and esotericist Rudolf Steiner mentioned the story in a speech of him held in Berlin, 13 April 1916 (Binder 2009, p. 641).

[18] *L'inconnu et les problèmes psychiques*, an account of psychical research by the French astronomer Camille Flammarion (1842–1925), translated as *Rätsel des Seelenlebens* [Mysteries of Inner Life]; 1909, Stuttgart, J. Hoffmann); see Harmsen (2009, p. 107 (fn. 105)); Mitchell (2008, p. 122).

[19] Binder (2009, pp. 240, 391); Harmsen (2009, pp. 62, 67); Mitchell (2008, p. 49); Smit (1988, pp. 56, 81). Philomena (Mena) Bernt (either a niece or a childhood friend of Rilke) and Meyrink resided in the Swan Hotel and were married on May 8, 1905 in the Dover Congregational Church. The reason for their marriage taking place in Dover seems to have been that, according to the German marriage law at that time, Meyrink's remarriage would not have been formally accepted by the authorities, even though his first marriage had been protestant and legally dissolved.

[20] Confirmed through information in a letter to Martin Buber (Binder 2009, p. 459). During this stay (amidst his translation work of Dickens and in the year of his resettlement from Munich to Lake Starnberg; Mitchell 2008, pp. 139–40), Meyrink discussed with George R.S. Mead the possibilities of an English edition of his forthcoming *Golem* novel. Meyrink had initially planned for

simultaneous German and English editions of *The Golem*, and, in the same year, told his publisher Kurt Wolff he would publish *The Golem* in English first (Harmsen 2009, p. 201, fn. 119).

21 Harmsen (2009, p. 80). An important intermediary appears to have been Baron Adolf Franz Leonhardi (1856–1908), who in the early 1890s apparently put Meyrink in touch with several English occultists, as is evident through mentions of his name in the exchange of letters (Binder (2009, pp. 102, 106, fn. 313)).

22 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._R._S._Mead (accessed on 6 November 2024).

23 See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz_Waerndorfer; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiener_Werkst%C3%A4tte (accessed on 6 November 2024).

24 Sixteen volumes (of 20 initially planned) were published by Albert Langen 1909–1914, namely *Christmas Stories*, *David Copperfield* (three vols.), *Bleak House* (four vols.), *The Pickwick Papers* (two vols.), *Nicholas Nickleby* (two vols.), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (three vols.), and *Oliver Twist* (Mitchell 2008, p. 123). Two further volumes (*Master Humphrey's Clock*), withheld with the outbreak of World War I, were not published until 1924, and by a different publishing house (Binder 2009, pp. 487, 632). Meyrink's Dickens translations definitely are a matter of their own, but beyond the intended scope of the elaborations of the topic elucidated here: although powerfully eloquent, his rendering is quite freely, in the tradition of *belles infidèles* translations, to the point that he rearranged or even omitted whole text passages. Although there was praise from personalities like Hermann Hesse (Binder 2009, p. 444), Meyrink's Dickens translations were met with quite mixed reception, and criticized and questioned by reviewers, readers, and Albert Langen's editors alike (Mitchell 2008, p. 124). This, and the fact that prior to 1914 at least five further publishers had issued German translations of Dickens, impacted on sales figures and led to the premature abandonment of the project. Notwithstanding this, statements of the German author and literary translator Arno Schmidt (1914–1979) in the 1950s, to the effect that Meyrink's translations were by far the best German versions of Dickens's novels, led to an unexpected renaissance: they are currently still available (as single editions, as well as in a six-volume edition). According to Schultze (1987, pp. 191–92, 207, 212), Meyrink's translations of Dickens largely were adaptations of predecessor translations and copyist work rather than original achievements, without indicating these facts, and thus cases of translation plagiarism. For more on this topic, including comparative analyses of Meyrink's and other German Dickens translations, see Czennia (1992). As mentioned, Dickens was one of Meyrink's earliest, and most intense, reading experiences. Hence, searches for Dickens borrowings in Meyrink's works may well be worthwhile. Indeed, some parallels between grisly passages in Dickens's *Bleak House* and Meyrink's weird fiction have already been noted (Binder 2009, p. 65).

25 Harmsen (2009, p. 87); see also https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Leppin (accessed on 6 November 2024).

26 Edited by Felix Schloemp (1913, Munich, Georg Müller), see https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Felix_Schloemp (accessed on 6 November 2024). This anthology comprised tales by E. Bulwer-Lytton, Gogol, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Kipling, de Maupassant, E.A. Poe, and others, and one by Meyrink (Harmsen 2009, p. 92).

27 Also edited by Felix Schloemp (1914, Munich, Georg Müller); see Binder (2009, p. 496).

28 A collection of 16 ghost stories (1925, Berlin, Propyläen-Verlag). Meyrink also translated a selection of Indian tales by Kipling (Harmsen 2009, p. 109), and, in the series *Romane und Bücher der Magie*, which he edited in 1921–1924 for the Rikola publishing house (five vols. issued), his translation of one novel by P.B. Randolph appeared (Mitchell 2008, p. 202; Binder 2009, pp. 624–25). For listings of Meyrink as translator, see Harmsen (2009, p. 248) and Aster (1980, pp. 44–46).

29 [Gold-Maker Stories], Berlin, August Scherl Verlag.

30 See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Alfred_Schmid_Noerr (accessed on 6 November 2024).

31 As for just a few examples, as of this writing, the English Wikipedia article devoted to this novel (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Angel_of_the_West_Window, accessed on 6 November 2024) makes no mention whatsoever of Meyrink's ghost writer. Stableford (1992), in his book review of the novel's English translation, also was apparently not aware of this fact, as was Kadir Albayrak (2020), when mentioning the novel's Turkish translation.

32 Kiesewetter (1893); see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Kiesewetter (accessed on 6 November 2024), and Harmsen (2009, pp. 99, 190).

33 See https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Anton_Schneiderfranken (accessed on 6 November 2024).

34 According to the bibliography of Aster (1980), French translations of Meyrink's *Cinderella* story appeared in 1940, 1962, and 1976; and of his *Napellus* story, Italian (1976) and French (1976, 1977) translations. The *Napellus* translations are due to the well known series *Die Bibliothek von Babel* (see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Bibliothek_von_Babel#Buchreihe_Die_Bibliothek_von_Babel; accessed on 6 November 2024), which was issued from 1974 onwards by the Italian publisher Franco Maria Ricci (and later on in other languages, including German, from 1983 onwards). The series editor was Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), and *Napellus* (as the title story), together with two further Meyrink stories, formed vol. 18 of this series' total of 30 booklets. The short introductions by Borges to each of the booklets, featuring his favorite literary works, have also been translated into other languages. According to Borges's preface to his Meyrink selection, he came across Meyrink's *Golem* novel within just a few years of its publication (circa 1920, when Borges lived in Switzerland). Back in Argentina, Borges translated one Meyrink story into Spanish, and, upon its publication, had an exchange of letters with Meyrink (circa 1929). Given the international publicity and circulation of the *Bibliothek von Babel* series, *Napellus* by now may well be Meyrink's most frequently read story. As for *Cinderella*, there is now a German stand-alone edition (vol. 22 of the *Kabinett der Phantasten* series; 2011, Hannover,

jmb-Verlag; see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabinett_der_Phantasten, accessed on 6 November 2024), along with a readable afterword by the series editor (and *Cinderella* translator) Heiko Postma (b. 1946). Curiously enough, Postma has also translated the assumed inspirational source of *Cinderella* discussed here, namely, M.R. James's '*Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad*', which appeared as vol. 19 in the same series. As for English translations of *Cinderella* and *Napellus*, the following bibliographic data can be ascertained (via the Internet Speculative Fiction Database: http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?1374896, and http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/title.cgi?1249708, accessed on 6 November 2024): *Cinderella* appeared in the small-press fanzine *Fantasy Macabre* #6 (1985; translated by Michael Bullock), a version which was anthologized in *Ghost Stories* (1987, Eds. Aleš Hama & Irena Zítková, New York, Exeter Books). Another *Cinderella* translation, by Maurice Raraty, is included in the Meyrink reader *The Opal (and Other Stories)* (1993, Sawtry Riverside (CA), Dedalus, pp. 102–11). *Napellus* appeared in *Fantasy Macabre* #8 (1986; translated by Michael Bullock), a version which was anthologized in *Tales by Moonlight II* (1989, Ed. Jessica Amanda Salmonson, New York, Tor Books).

[35] For instance, the Meyrink entry in the massive reference work of supernatural fiction by Bleiler (1983, pp. 363–64) only discusses *The Golem*, and just mentions two further novels (*The Green Face*, *Walpurgis Night*), but no further works of Meyrink.

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