

https://dspace.org/

From mechanics to imagination: Goethe's Faust and Hoffmann's The Sandman as a romantic response to the Enlightenment

Pampallis, Karin

2014-01-21
http://hdl.handle.net10539/13570

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

From Mechanics to Imagination: Goethe's *Faust* and Hoffmann's *The Sandman* as a Romantic Response to the Enlightenment

Karin Pampallis

**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in German Studies
Johannesburg, 2013**

Abstract

The research report utilises the way in which artificial life-forms are portrayed by two writers of the German Romantic as a tool to examine the dialectical relationship between the worldviews of the Enlightenment and the Romantic. Working from the hypothesis that the latter's affective attitudes were largely a reaction to the former's rationality, the research examines the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. In Hoffmann's novella *The Sandman,* the main character, Nathaniel, falls in love with a too-perfect young woman; when he later discovers that she is an automaton, he goes mad. In his renowned work *Faust,* Goethe's character, Dr Wagner, creates Homunculus – an artificial mannikin made of light and confined to a glass phial. The incorporeal Homunculus goes in search of completion. The research examines *L'Homme machine* by Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1747) as a text exemplifying the materialist and mechanist attitudes of the Enlightenment. Hartmut and Gernot Böhme's (1983) concept of *Das Andere der Vernunft* and Horkheimer and Adorno's (1973) critique, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* are examined as a theoretical framework for the study. The analysis shows that Hoffmann used his clockwork doll to expose the inadequacy of the kind of materialism which La Mettrie had espoused, and Goethe utilised Homunculus to examine the relationship between body and spirit. The Romantics believed that the rationalism and reductive materialism of the Enlightenment did not explain the world adequately. Enlightenment divided body and spirit, the rational and the extra-rational, but both are necessary for a whole, fulfilled, balanced human being.