THE GORGON'S GAZE

German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE
NEW YORK PORT CHESTER MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1991

First published 1991

Printed in Canada

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Coates, Paul, 1953–
The gorgon's gaze : German cinema, expressionism, and the image of horror /
Paul Coates.
p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in film)
Filmography: p.
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.
ISBN 0-521-38409-5
1. Motion pictures – Germany – History. 2. Expressionism.
3. Monsters in motion pictures. 4. Film noir.
I. Title. II. Series.
PN1993.5.G3C64 1991
791.43'0943 – dc20 90–14998

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
Coates, Paul, 1953–
The gorgon's gaze : German cinema, expressionism, and the image of horror. –
(Cambridge studies in film).
1. German cinema films, history
I. Title
791.430943

ISBN 0-521-38409-5 (hardback)

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Introduction: The uncanny and the gorgon's gaze

The world becomes uncanny when it is perceived as no longer simple substance, but also as shadow, a sign of the existence of a world beyond itself, which it is nevertheless unable fully to disclose. The uncanny sign is not allegorical, for it only *suggests* the presence of another world. Such suggestivity may seem to render it akin to the symbol, but it is in fact neither symbol nor allegory; it lacks both the transparency of the allegory and the positivity of the symbol. It is frustrated allegory, negative symbol.*

The uncanny world is a world of conspiracy. It is experienced as such by the modernist imagination, with its fascination by – and anticipation of – total systems. In his famous essay "The 'Uncanny,' " Freud may have noted sardonically his own lack of an instinct for its perception, but he is nevertheless himself enough of a modernist – sufficiently interested, like the great modernist novelists, in the creation of a personal encyclopedic system – to be able to cite an experience of the uncannily that itself uncannily resembles the accounts Hofmannsthal or Mann† give of passage through Venice, that labyrinthine deathly city of alienated desire:

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* The following passage from Böll's *Billiards at Half-past Nine* casts an interesting light on the uncanny. In it Fähmel's secretary longs for "Leben. Nicht diese makellose Ordnung, nicht diesen Chef, der makellos gekleidet und makellos höflich war – und ihr unheimlich; sie witterte Verachtung hinter dieser Höflichkeit" [Life. Not this impeccable order, not this boss, who dressed impeccably and was impeccably polite – and made her feel uneasy; she sensed contempt behind the politeness] (*Billard um halbzehn*, DTV, Munich, 1987 [1959]). (*Unheimlich* has as its dictionary meaning "uncanny.") One sees here how the *unheimlich* involves a sense that reality is a deceptive façade. (Might not this render *film* particularly uncanny – for its sets really are unreal, while it is projected onto a wall *behind which* something else may indeed be happening?) I will be returning to Böll's novel in my final chapter.

† The resemblance between Freud's Italian town and Mann's Venice is intriguing, for one of the forms of the uncanny world of conspiracy is the Venetian carnival (a profoundly un-Bakhtinian carnival): During a conspiracy, faces become masks. One of the most powerful uncanny works of recent years is Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective*, in which *every* face is a series of masks, which the work employs a quasi-Freudian analysis to lift: mother, whore, Lili Marleen, and one's wife are all interchangeable, as are

> Once, as I was walking through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was strange to me, on a hot summer afternoon, I found myself in a quarter the character of which could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a while without being directed, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, but only to arrive yet a third time by devious paths in the same place. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to abandon my exploratory walk and get straight back to the piazza I had left a short while before.[1]

The uncanny experience of movement in circles itself reflects the uncanniness of the modernist evocation of the totality the circle symbolizes (cf. Eliot's crowd of people walking round in a ring in "The Waste Land"). It becomes clear that the modernist theme of temporality is linked to a perception of the uncanny, which establishes itself as time is abolished and one becomes trapped in the moment. Freud's provincial Italian town, with its suspended time, is out of De Chirico.* If this collapse of temporal succession is a concomitant of the post-Romantic regression to the talismanic immediate experiences of childhood, it is also the movement of psychoanalysis itself, to which the compulsion to repeat is as central as it is to the quoted passage. Psychoanalysis reveals itself to be a machine for the creation of the uncanny – a possibility Freud himself entertains only whimsically,[2] as if seeking to obscure the degree to which his newly founded discipline really *is* uncanny. One can understand why he should wish to do this: The Jew's decipherment of the hidden structures of German life could itself be demonized as part of the international conspiracy against the Germanic. And so, in his essay on the uncanny, Freud addresses to Hoffmann the reproaches he fears may be directed against himself: It is Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann," not

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father, a scarecrow, and Hitler; the detective, meanwhile, tries to recover a lost God (and father) by becoming himself the author and the one who devises and uncovers mysteries. It is hardly surprising that Potter's work is steeped in the conventions of film noir, which emanates an atmosphere of conspiracy. For more on film noir, and on its two primary male protagonists, the detective and the lover (protagonists amalgamated in Potter's Philip Marlow), see "*The Big Sleep* and the little dreamer" in Chapter IV.

* Freud defines the uncanny as, among other things, the return of superstitious mental habits once surmounted, be it in the individual or in humanity in general. This is surely a definition of what he himself would find uncanny: the bending of the line of progress into a circle. (It is the circularity of his movement within the Italian red-light district that bothers him, not the possibility of an unconscious desire to remain in the presence of the painted ladies.) He accords only cursory mention to the return of the dead, deeming it gruesome rather than uncanny, even though his preferred definition of the uncanny as the manifestation of that which should have remained hidden fits precisely the appearance of a revenant. Even as his intellectual curiosity and desire for inclusiveness cause him to consider the relationship between the uncanny and the dead, his distaste for the supernatural causes him almost simultaneously to nip the theme in the bud.

Freud's essay, that "leaves us in bewilderment."[3] May this not also be the reason why Freud seems to repress the most brilliant section of his essay, relegating to a long footnote his analysis of the mutability of character in Hoffmann's story,[4] in order to mitigate the sense of the uncanniness of a psychoanalytic interpretation that sets everything in motion? Was it any accident that psychoanalysis, that uncanny remedy for the uncanny, was devised by a member of a race whose own *Heim* – the German-speaking area – was to become *unheimlich* later in the century?

If the uncanny world is the domain of conspiracy, it manifests itself whenever the fragmentation and incoherence that characterize twentieth century everyday life are suddenly reversed, in a moment of dialectical shock, to yield intimations of a world of enigmatic power and powers, a world with a *plot*. This uncanny world, some of whose most powerfully inscrutable images are to be found in the works of Kafka, Welles, Lang, and Rivette, is the fruit of projection, as becomes apparent from two works from the same moment of the midsixties, Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* and Antonioni's *Blow-Up*. I will not dwell on Pynchon's book here, having commented on it at some length elsewhere,[5] but will concentrate upon *Blow-Up*.

Blow-Up begins in utter fragmentation, in the infinitely divisible world of photography. The uncanny enters it as the conspiracy the photographer cannot name, for he does not know the identities of the two people he photographs in the park. The scenario is the very Freudian one of the primal scene, whose hidden insistence beneath the reality of consciousness creates the atmosphere of the uncanny that pervades the windblown park. In the primal scene the son watches mother and father make love, which is experienced as an aggression against the mother. (The uncanny aspect of love is intimated.) Antonioni's film embodies the son's reaction-formation of a fantasy in which the father is separated from the mother, whom the son is allowed to appropriate on the grounds of her relative youth (the man in the park is much older than the Vanessa Redgrave character, who, stripped to the waist in the photographer's flat, is associated with the teenage girl who appears thus the moment before Thomas asserts his sexual power over her and her friend). The father is killed by the camera's shots, which are metaphorically identical with those of the gun hidden in the bushes. The corpse that is still there when Thomas visits the park by night may well be a phantasm, a projection.* It is still there, in a sense, because the father's corpse is always present in the mind's eye and conscience of the son, the Fury that convicts him of the guilt of the survivor. Why does Thomas fail to take his camera to the park at night, where its impartial gaze might confirm the reality he thinks he has glimpsed through blowing up the pictures he took by day? Night is of course the sphere of the invisible, the unconscious. Thomas cannot realistically have expected to find the corpse still in the park – his own photographs of it having been threatened at birth. Does he not in fact visit the park as the criminal's double, to make sure the corpse is *not* there? As the criminal's double (camera as a gun with a silencer) Thomas has become superfluous. His disappearance in the final frame matches that of the corpse, marking his own transformation into corpse. The prelude to this metaphorical death is the death of his art: His photographs have become uncanny, not so much because they reveal a

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* Robin Wood has advanced a powerful, if testy, riposte to the argument that the corpse in the park is a hallucination; he fails to realize, however, that the corpse in the photograph and the one *still* present in the park when Thomas visits it are images of vastly different probability. (The former is probable, the latter highly improbable.) His argu-

ment gains in credibility by addressing itself primarily to the film's daytime events. It deserves quotation in full:

> I know intelligent people who deny that there is a murder at all, except in Thomas's fantasy. This theory seems to me chiefly interesting in its unwitting confirmation of the universality of the film's theme – that we are all in danger of losing our grasp of objective reality – but it had better be answered briefly. It takes two forms: (a) Everything that happens in the park, everything involved in the mystery, is fantasy; (b) only the body is fantasy – the rest really happened, but Thomas misinterpreted his pictures and then hallucinated the corpse. The chief argument underlying the former seems to be that no-one but Thomas sees Vanessa Redgrave or the body, or notices the photographs (which are hanging up during the scene with the teenage girls). It quickly reveals its full absurdity if one just pursues it logically: The murder is fantasy, Vanessa Redgrave is fantasy, Thomas's photographing of them is fantasy, the park (perhaps) is fantasy; then the developing and printing of the photos is fantasy; the pictures hanging round the walls during the romp with the teenagers is fantasy, the theft of the photos is fantasy, the print the thieves leave behind is fantasy. No psychological theory of fantasy-making could possibly cope with all that, and it obviously makes no artistic sense whatever. The latter objection also (but less decisively) destroys the far more interesting second hypothesis. At the end of the film Thomas hallucinates the sound (at least) of a tennis ball hit by a racquet. This hallucination is the film's logical climax, and marks a decisive stage in the character's evolution; consequently, for him to have had a far more extreme hallucination much earlier would entirely destroy the film's logic. (Wood, in Ian Cameron and Robin Wood, *Antonioni* [Studio Vista: London, 1970], p. 131).

One notes the omission in Wood's account of the very important nocturnal encounter with the corpse. This encounter is improbable in the extreme, causing one to suspect the cooperation of fantasy in the image's generation: Why should the photographs testifying to the murder be stolen, while the corpse itself – a far more material, less grainily ambiguous, piece of evidence – is left in the park? It seems that Wood's argument (b) ought in fact to be subdivided into (b) and (c): (b) would run "Thomas misinterpreted the pictures," a statement it is relatively easy to refute; while (c) – "Thomas... then hallucinated the corpse" – is far harder to contravert. Assigning the corpse to the realm of fantasy does not destroy the logic of the film's conclusion: It retains force – though a different force from the one ascribed it by Wood – as the moment at which nocturnal delusion invades the day. The unreality of some of the other nighttime scenes (e.g., the incredibly catatonic rock concert, which is not "badly staged" but deliberately alienating) does indeed suggest that fantasy plays a part in the generation of the corpse's presence in the dark (though *not* throughout the film). The fantasy in question can be explicated in Oedipal terms, as the sign of Thomas's scopophiliac desire to assure himself that the father figure – the prime obstacle to the beckoning, but mysteriously elusive female image (Vanessa Redgrave) – truly is dead.

corpse as because they are now less akin to photographs (with the time-honored function of furnishing objective evidence) than to works of abstract art. Again, the sense of the uncanny is linked to the reversal of time: Photography becomes uncanny as it dissolves into the painting whose realistic functions it once appropriated – as the utmost realism uncannily discloses its hidden affinity with abstraction.

Thomas's projection, like that of the paranoiac, is a reaction to exclusion: exclusion from the primal scene. Paranoia counters the sense of exclusion by asserting one's actual presence everywhere in the world, as the object of its designs and hidden principle of its unity. It may seem as if all there is is the world, as if the world is all that is the case. But what if there *is* a plot after all? The artwork is virtually compelled to entertain this hypothesis, since it has a plot itself. However apparently random it may seem to be, it will always display a unifying principle, become a fingerprint of sorts. In perceiving a plot in the world, it projects its own constitution onto it. Its alibi for so doing is epistemological uncertainty: Pynchon's Oedipa Maas cannot know whether her ex-lover Pierce Inverarity has sought a vengeful afterlife by planting clues calculated to foster obsession within her. Pynchon's work is exemplary, because it examines the preconditions for the emergence of the projections it simultaneously employs. Nevertheless, it is also possible for the artist to succumb to the projection, transforming his fiction into a myth in order to aggrandize the status of his art. This is, I think, a clearly pathological and compensatory move. It can be seen to occur in Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice,* whose willed decision to take signs for wonders (to inflate a private dilemma into a cosmic one) is the source of its utter falsity. The film itself becomes uncanny: It may look like art, but in actuality it aspires to the condition of myth.

Freud's essay on the uncanny accords great prominence to Schelling's definition of the experience: "'*Unheimlich*' is the name for everything that ought to have remained... hidden and secret and has become visible."[6] Schelling's words may be rewritten to define the uncanny moment as one in which the other emerges within the same. Thus Jung notes its appearance as the male approaches the anima, "the woman in man";[7] it is also present in the revelation of the man within the woman, and androgyny in general (see the remarks on Dietrich in Chapter I, "The cold heaven of *The Blue Angel*"). The male monopoly of power in most societies may have lent prevalence to the tendency to identify the uncanny with the emergence of the woman within the man – this is the hidden subject of "The Fall of the House of Usher" – but the opposite transformation is equally uncanny. Thus the moment of the uncanny punctuates a transformation, and the sense of the uncanny is widespread in a society that perceives itself to be in transition. Occurring while the transformation is still incomplete, it forces one to hold one's breath, as one's wonder over which reality will prevail, the old or the new, gives way to a suspicion of the imminence of negative revelation. The uncanny moment of modernity is interposed between residual feudal or agrarian cultures and emergent industrial ones. A later uncanny moment can be seen in the cinema of the twenties, corresponding to the imminence of totalitarianism in the thirties. It is present in the films of the period in the form of the dissolve or superimposition. As one scene emerges through another, it indicates that nothing is substantially itself; in the society governed by Identity, a separate identity is denied to all its component parts. The superimposition or dissolve can be described as the intervention of the principle of System – as the takeover bid of a prospective monopoly. If a sense of the uncanny is again prevalent in the late eighties (often being theorized in terms of the pervasiveness of a quality termed the postmodern), it is a result of a repression of one's awareness of the interdependence of almost everything in an increasingly integrated world economic system. People are clearly unwilling to admit the uncanny insight of psychoanalysis and Marxism: that "their" reactions are not really "theirs" at all. The more strident the official proclamations of individual rights, the greater the individual's actual subjugation, and the more uncanny (and consequently the more likely to be repressed) the recognition of where one actually stands.

The uncanny action is inherently displaced: Deeds apparently committed in the present reveal themselves to be inappropriate repetitions of past actions. An adherent of Bergson's theory of comedy might deduce from the lack of fit between behavior and environment that such actions are comic in effect. But although works of would-be horror are indeed often unwittingly comic, the uncanny clearly is not. The prototype of the uncanny action is given by Benjamin when he describes Baudelaire waving his pen to stab a path through the invisible city crowd. Such action has more of the heroism of modern life than the comic. Because modernity has rendered us all displaced persons, no safe place is available from which to mock an action as inappropriate. Moreover, the atmosphere of the uncanny generally accompanies a growth in the power of the person or object one perceives as uncanny; its threat to overwhelm us is no laughing matter.

Consideration of the threat posed by the moment of the uncanny ought to prompt one to reflect on the nature of the relationship between the uncanny and the monstrous. The uncanny is not the monstrous or horrific. While the moment of the uncanny lasts, the Other has not yet been externalized; its location is not out there but *here,* in the blind spot that is the self's place vis-à-vis itself. The process of the projection of the Other has begun, but has not yet been completed. Consequently, one cannot be sure of its presence. Reality may seem to mean more than itself – to have become "possessed" – but one cannot yet be certain of this. Events are off-key, but not yet utterly discordant. And so the observer has to seek confirmation from others. Büchner's Lenz asks Oberlin, "Can't you hear that terrible screaming men call silence?"[8]

Büchner's great short story "Lenz" is worth dwelling on at greater length here; its role in this introduction will in fact resemble the one played by "Der Sandmann" in Freud's theorization of the uncanny. Büchner's work pungently establishes the relationship between the sense of the uncanny and the defamiliarization of the family. Its usefulness is enhanced by the self-consciousness of Büchner's fusion of novella and case study, which anticipates the practices of psychoanalysis itself, thereby undermining the superior position psychoanalysis habitually assumes vis-à-vis the texts it explicates.

In the moment of the uncanny the apparently familiar reveals its unfamiliarity: The *heimlich* melts into the *unheimlich*. The sense of the uncanny is one of entrapment, as one grasps that one's failure to penetrate the essence of the apparently human being or seemingly friendly situation has allowed the Other to gain power over one. If Freud – echoing Schelling – saw the uncanny as the coming to light of that which should have remained concealed, the secret that discloses itself is the true identity of the ostensibly familiar being or situation, which is now sufficiently strong and in control to be able to discard all pretense. The familiar is of course the family itself. To leave the context of Büchner for a moment, it is interesting to note the experience of Frances Farmer, as documented in the film *Frances*. Frances mistakes her mother's feelings for her for love and becomes aware too late that they are founded upon hatred. One is unprepared to combat an enemy secreted within one's own family. The family is not interested in the welfare of its individual members, but in perpetuating itself. The realization that home is not really home but *unheimlich* is what drives Lenz – like so many other Romantic writers – into exile from it.

Büchner's story begins on January 20, with Lenz crossing a mountain range. The paratactic, sometimes verbless sentences indicate the lack of relationship that pervades his world and can only be overcome by a monumental effort of synthesis (mimicked by a breathtakingly long descriptive sentence that recalls a virtuoso tracking shot) that then leaves him drained. Lenz is engaged in a journey from an earthly father, whose bourgeois ambitions he repudiates, to a spiritual one: On entering the mountain valley of Waldbach, he will live with the pastor Oberlin. His flight from the world outside is the result of the uncanny fissure in language caused by the splitting of the word "father" from its referent. Although Lenz has realized that the word connotes threat as well as goodness and security, the word has such power over him that he is seeking to recover its old meaning and referent elsewhere, through the substitute father who will then become "the true father."

Throughout Büchner's story Lenz's actions are "inappropriate," for he lives amid afterimages generated by a sense of loss. His situation resembles that of Baudelaire, as described by Benjamin, repeating shocks in an effort to domesticate them. For Baudelaire the primary shock appears to have been the loss of the mother to his stepfather: The images of women in black in "À Une Passante" or "Le Cygne" reflect the son's feeling that the mother should have continued to mourn the dead father rather than remarry (and so betray the poet); the son is mortified to discover that the father's death does not free the mother for himself alone, since the father returns in the form of the stepfather. In the case of Lenz the trauma appears to have been far more complex, and hence all the more difficult to manage: It is a compound loss of self, of father, of lover, and of God.

As he crosses the mountains, Lenz imagines that he can suck the whole universe into himself; but in doing so he shrinks it into a point as small as the one he himself occupies. If Lenz can swallow the universe, then he can be everywhere. Hence processes of association can permit him to identify a series of different figures, primarily female ones, with one another. During the absence of Oberlin, the pastor who has taken him into his care, Lenz hears the maid singing: "Auf dieser Welt hab ich kein Freud, / Ich hab mein Schatz, und der ist weit." ["In this world I have no joy at all, / But my sweetheart, and he's away"].[9] The song evokes multiple echoes in Lenz's mind. It can refer to the distant Oberlin, for instance. Lenz consciously correlates it with his lost lover, Friederike Brion; and although Madame Oberlin cannot possibly know Friederike's fate, Lenz enquires of her after it. He identifies with the desolate maid, though for him the distant sweetheart is female. He sees the distance as unbridgeable, and will later accuse himself of having murdered a girl whose remoteness is that of death. When he makes the accusation, he is no longer sure of the identity of his victim. Speaking to Madame Oberlin of Friederike, he says, "Doch kann ich sie mir nicht mehr vorstellen, das Bild läuft mir fort." ["And yet I can no longer picture her, the image runs away from me."][10] Because the vagueness of her image allows her to be assimilated to other people, Lenz can reproach himself with having murdered the sick girl from Fouday, whose name was also Friederike, and whom he failed to wake from the dead. When speaking to Kaufmann of his aesthetic ideals, he had voiced a wish to be a Medusa's head so as to freeze a scene with two girls, preserving it from such loss. The wish now returns to haunt him: To desire to hold unchanged one of the evermutable forms of beauty is to desire its death, its transformation into an unresistant thing. Lenz may see his attempt to raise the dead girl as an effort to undo damage he himself has already done. But the attempted expiation fails. Lenz describes Friederike to Madame Oberlin as having been like a child, as was he himself:

> Ganz Kind; es war, als wär ihr die Welt zu weit: sie zog sich so in sich zurück, sie suchte das engste Plätzchen im ganzen Haus, und da sass sie, als wäre ihre Seligkeit nur in einem kleinen Punkt, und dann war mir's auch so; wie ein Kind hätte ich dann spielen können.
>
> [She was wholly a child; it seemed as if the world were too wide for her, she was so retiring, she would look for the narrowest place in the whole house, and there she'd sit as though all her happiness were concentrated into one little point, and then I thought so too; then I could have played like a child.][11]

Her reduction of herself to a minuscule point is reiterated in the gesture with which Lenz distills the universe into himself. To compel an adult into the frame of a child is, however, as constricting as it is idyllic:

> Jetzt ist es mir so eng, so eng! Sehn sie, es ist mir manchmal, als stiess ich mit den Händen an den Himmel; o, ich ersticke!
>
> [Now I feel so hemmed in! So restricted! You see, sometimes I feel my arms colliding with the sky; oh, I'm suffocating!][12]

Regression to childhood turns the world into the coffin of the adult; the ingestion of the universe deprives one of the space in which to live, of air to breathe. To be content with one's place, as Lenz says Friederike was, is to be feminized to the point of death. And so the male is doubly suffocated: by his enclosure in the silent position patriarchy assigns to the female, and by his identification with the death he too has wished upon her. In seeking to heal the dead girl, Lenz is attempting to recover Friederike, and to heal himself, the wounded child. Identifying with Oberlin also, his voice as he instructs her to rise is the voice of God. But it is not that of God the Father (and here the identification with Oberlin collapses) but that of God the Son. Since Lenz would rather cast himself as child than as father, his momentary adoption of the fatherly role of Oberlin the healer is false and is bound to fail. So does his attempt to heal himself by taking the advice of the father figure (Oberlin) and praying to God when unable to sleep.

As Lenz's mental deterioration approaches its nadir, one encounters the following fascinating sentence:

> Wenn er allein war, war es ihm so entsetzlich einsam, dass er beständig laut mit sich redete, rief, und dann erschrak er wieder, und es war ihm, als hätte eine fremde Stimme mit ihm gesprochen.

> [When he was alone he felt so horribly lonely that he constantly talked, called out to himself in a loud voice, and then again he was startled, and it seemed as though a stranger's voice had spoken to him.][13]

Büchner's own sentence has the uncanny duality of the event he describes. Is Lenz ascribing his own voice to another; or does he, after hearing his own voice, then hear that of another person? In identifying with a healer who is both father figure (Oberlin) and son (Christ) Lenz has split his own voice in two. His disturbance deepens as he applies to language the freezing tactic previously used for the look of things:

> Im Gespräch stockte er oft, eine unbeschreibliche Angst befiel ihn, er hatte das Ende seines Satzes verloren; dann meinte er, er müsse das zuletzt gesprochene Wort behalten und immer sprechen.
>
> [In conversation he frequently stuttered, an indescribable fear possessed him, he had lost the conclusion of his sentence; then he thought he must hold on to the word he had last spoken, say it again and again.][14]

Fear freezes language. The stammer is generated by the Medusa's head's turn in the direction of language. The concluding word is avoided by the man unwilling to look death in the face. (One notes the crucial organizing importance of the last word of the sentence in German syntax; everything tends toward it.) The stammer repeats an arbitrarily chosen word as one repeats one's own name, fearful of losing one's identity; the very arbitrariness of the obstructive word itself embodies the arbitrariness of one's identity once one has swallowed the whole universe, and so become identical with everything within it. It is surely significant that as Lenz's desires for apocalypse grow more intense – at the start of the story he simply wished to invert himself; now he wishes to turn houses upside down – a new name should appear for the first time, that of Satan.

> Es war ihm dann, als existiere er allein, als bestünde die Welt nur in seiner Einbildung, als sei nichts als er; er sei das ewig Verdammte, der Satan.
>
> [Then it seemed to him that he alone existed, that the world was only a figment of his imagination that there was nothing but he himself, and he the eternally damned, Satan.][15]

Büchner's critique of aesthetic idealism here encompasses philosophical Idealism. Like Lenz, Idealism extends into adulthood the child's belief in the omnipotence of thoughts. The Lenz who accuses himself of murder mistakes thinking the deed for doing it; it is a confusion abetted by the Christian belief that to think evil is virtually equivalent to its commission. Like a child, Lenz conceals his impotence through overcompensation. Büchner aligns Lenz with a Satan who is the tormented child his father cannot – or perhaps will not – save.

For Lenz, the father is a trinity: Oberlin, the pastor whom he doubt-less addresses as father, the physical parent, who wants him to come home to provide support, and God the Father. Lenz finds repose with Oberlin because he mediates between the earthly and the heavenly father; his very name – with its reference to the above (*Ober-*) – connotes transcendence, the divine superiority that exists *to serve*: One recalls the "*Ober!*" wherewith a waiter is addressed in German. Just before leaving Waldbach, Lenz presents himself as the prodigal son, kneeling before Oberlin and placing his head on his lap. As Kracauer noted,[16] the gesture was a frequent one in Weimar cinema, where the lap was that of a woman, and the underlying wish one for the womb's security. For Lenz the father figure is there to stop him from falling forward, as he had done while crossing the mountains at the start of the story. Lying down is an embrace of Mother Earth that is associated with death.

"Lenz" includes many references to home and to the *heimlich*. In the end, as one would expect, the *heimlich* becomes *unheimlich*. As the story nears its end, *heimlich* loses its association with home, thereby indicating the collapse of Lenz's search for a second home, and assumes its other meaning of "secretly," as the following passage shows. Lenz has to be watched:

> Sein Begleiter war ihm endlich lästig, auch mochte er seine Absicht erraten und suchte Mittel, ihn zu entfernen. Sebastian schein ihm nachzugeben, fand aber heimlich Mittel, seinen Bruder von der Gefahr zu benachrichtigen, und nun hatte Lenz zwei Aufseher, statt einen.
>
> [His companion began to be a burden to him; also perhaps he guessed his intentions, and now tried to get rid of him. Sebastian seemed to give in to him, but found secret means of informing his brother of the danger, and now Lenz had two keepers instead of one.][17]

Although *unheimlich* is a recurrent word in the text, up to its end it is applied to phenomena outside Lenz: the moonlight on the face of the sick girl, the darkness. Lenz's fate is sealed when the adjective fits himself – when he looks at Oberlin "mit unheimlichen Augen" [with uncanny eyes].[18]

Near the story's end Lenz is described as having become "doppelt" (double). The splitting of self from itself at this moment is also Büchner's own separation from Lenz: He abandons the doomed vessel, leaving his story a fragment. The double is of course a key image in the repertoire of the uncanny; I do not intend to investigate it closely here, for the reader can find an ongoing examination of the image's meanings in my other critical works.[19] At one point in "Lenz," however, Büchner is virtually identical with, doubled in, his protagonist, who enunciates his aesthetic creed in colloquy with his friend Kaufmann. Lenz's rejection of the doctrine that Greek art offers ideal forms for im-