

Beyond the Uncanny: Weiner's War and Kafka's Message

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One of the signal works of Czech modernist prose, Richard Weiner's volume of stories *Lítice* [The Furies], was published in 1916.¹ The stories largely reflect Weiner's experience of active service on the front in Serbia. Weiner had suffered a nervous breakdown in early 1915 and had been discharged as a consequence, and *Lítice* is commonly described as the first work of Czech literature to respond to the experience of modern combat in the Great War (WIDERA 2001: 48). Given the early date the volume appeared, and the role one presumes it must have played for Weiner as a way of confronting his traumatic experience on the front, one might expect the stories to focus on themes now familiar in cultural representations of modern warfare: the horrors of battle, the fragility of life, and the thin veneer separating civilization from barbarism. Such topoi – not to say: clichés – indeed play some role in *Lítice*, yet they are hardly Weiner's central concern.

Rather than shock, horror, and the suspension of humane modes of conduct, the War serves Weiner as setting for uncanny situations that are not so very different from those he explores in other early prose works set before or outside the War.² “Uncanny” (*unheimlich*) should be understood here in the technical sense, for the degree to which a story such as *Kostajník* – one of the most important texts contained in *Lítice* – anticipates the central concerns of Freud's famous essay, published three years after *Lítice*, is in fact nothing short of uncanny.³ Since similar claims are commonly raised with reference to Franz Kafka's works as well, we may be dealing here with one of those elective affinities between Weiner and Kafka, often declared yet rarely examined in any detail.⁴ One may be tempted to explain this thematic congruity between three great, early twentieth-century authors by means of appeal to a “Zeitgeist”: the uncanny was “in the air”, so to

1 This first edition was partially censored. A full, somewhat revised edition appeared in 1928.

2 As Steffi Widera states (2001: 50): “Die Extremerfahrung [des Krieges] bringt Verzweiflung, Angst, Schuld als Grundempfindungen Weiners und somit als Grundkomponenten in seinem dichterischen Schaffen nicht hervor, sondern verstärkt lediglich, was bereits in frühen Erzählungen und Gedichten angelegt war.”

3 Some contemporary critics also observed that Weiner's early literary work was remarkably consonant with other central psychoanalytic concepts (DONATH 1930: 238f.).

4 For some recent, more detailed comparative discussions of Kafka and Weiner, however, see WUTSDORFF (2013), ZUSI (2012), and MÁLEK (2008). See also Tim Beasley-Murray's discussion of “the Slav uncanny” in relation to Kafka and other Austrian modernist writers (which contains a brief reference to Weiner's story *Kostajník*) (BEASLEY-MURRAY 2006).

speak, with Kafka and Weiner responding through intuitive literary form shortly before Freud's expository investigation. Explanations through 'Zeitgeist', however, are as conceptually unsatisfactory as they are impossible to refute – in any event, the following discussion shall pursue a rather different route. For whatever anticipation of Freud's uncanny one might find in Weiner (and Kafka), it must be remembered that Freud's essay took its central inspiration not from contemporary literary modernism but rather from E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* – a text a century old when Freud was writing. The following analysis, therefore, does not focus simply on the ways *Kostajnik* constructs an emblem of the uncanny but also on the ways Weiner's story operates on the far side of Freud's concept *Jenseits des Unheimlichen*: here is where Weiner and Kafka share common ground.

Kostajnik explores the mental and emotional responses of an Austrian soldier (who context indicates is a Czech, though this is never stated explicitly)⁵ as his unit moves into position to join the offensive against Serbian forces located on a low mountain named Kostajnik – a skirmish of tactical importance only, a station on the way to more significant targets, yet the scene of lethal fighting nonetheless. In the course of the approach, the implied narrator begins to recall events from an earlier period in his life, events that took place in Munich and Paris during peacetime, and these memories slowly emerge as the most significant aspect of the confrontation with mortality that Kostajnik represents for him.⁶

The story progresses through several phases, increasingly unexpected. The opening pages operate rather in the manner one might most expect of a war story (or more precisely, a story about a soldier on the cusp of battle). Wartime is characterized through various forms of defamiliarization: foremost, the reduction of human beings to objects, mere material. In the first paragraph the narrator describes watching from safety as columns from another division, appearing in the distance like a "chain" (řetěz), move into position and into danger: "V hrozném, chorobném tichu mám 17. divizi doslova za věc. A hnusně pošetilá nevěra mě napadá: nevěřím, že jsou v 17. divizi lidé, a nemám soucitu se 17. divizí." (WEINER 1996: 270f.) [in that awful, morbid silence the 17th division strikes me literally as a thing. Grossly absurd disbelief assails me: I don't believe there are actually people in the 17th division, and I have no sympathy with the 17th division.] The monotonous repetition of the term "17. divize" serves to dehumanize the unit, transforming it into a piece in what the narrator refers to as the "mlčeliv[á] šachov[á] hr[a]" (WEINER 1996: 270) [silent game of chess]. Shortly

5 The geographical orientation points in the story – the Serbian front, Munich, Paris, southern Bohemia – were all important ones in Weiner's own life, though any autobiographical elements here have surely been greatly transformed.

6 As is often the case in Weiner, the distinction between the 'implied' narrator and the 'de facto' narrator is important, although for ease of reference I shall hereafter simply refer to the 'narrator.'

afterwards, however, the narrator experiences such objectification himself: while advancing, he feels his own unit transform into a chain (“jsme řetěz, jsme jeden”; WEINER 1996: 274 [we are a chain, we are one]), though from inside this chain he feels reassured by the dilution of risk: transformation into an object (he also compares his unit to a “vlak,” a train) not only reduces the anxiety of each individual but also gives rise to fraternal compassion:

mezi tímto tisícem lidí ... není jediného, jehož bych neměl rád. ... Hroznát' jen opuštěnost v samotě, a já nejsem sám. (WEINER 1996: 274)

[among these thousand people ... there is not a single individual I would not love ... desolation is terrible only if one is isolated, but I am not alone.]

Further, the driving rain that soaks the narrator and his comrades expresses a hostile nature: nature is not simply indifferent to suffering but indeed conveys “trapný pocit nezasloužené pohany” (WEINER 1996: 272) [the embarrassed sense of an undeserved disgrace] – a sense that takes on greater significance as the story progresses. Finally, the landscape itself transforms through the overlay of ambiguous significance that mortal danger and tactical calculation introduce: “Jak to, že jsem včera mohl věřit v hory, jichž netřeba dobývat, v pole, po nichž je hospodářem zakázáno kráčet.” (WEINER 1996: 275) [how is it possible that yesterday I was still able to believe in mountains that did not need to be conquered, in fields across which a farmer forbids one to tread.] While the soldiers have been transformed from unique individuals into mere units of material – links in a chain, wagons in a train – the transformation of the landscape works in the opposite direction: from raw material, mountains and fields become uniquely individuated through their tactical importance and the degree of danger they represent. In wartime, no mountain is simply a mountain.

So far these various instantiations of defamiliarization are not so very different from what one might expect (though Weiner's handling of these topoi is exceptionally subtle). This first phase of the narrator's psychosomatic journey can be associated with the name of the first destination his division heads for: Cip. Just one small mark makes this Serbian place-name swerve from the narrator's familiar world: add a long-mark over the 'i' and one has the Czech word 'číp' (“tip” or “corner”), a word with connotations of protrusion into the open, of exposure, thus making the narrator's uneasiness at first hearing the name understandable. In reality, however, Cip is a deep forest—not a 'číp' at all. Upon realizing that Cip is not, in fact, a point of danger, the narrator's superstitious sense that “na Cipu cosi čeká” [something awaits on Cip] is replaced by the understanding that “cesta tam vede přes Cip” (WEINER 1996: 274 and 277) [the journey there leads through Cip].

The following phase of the story begins when the narrator learns the name of his unit's next destination: Kostajnik. The name stands out on the military

map, printed in a different typeface, and the narrator feels immediately compelled to parse it into its basic components in order to gain control over the uncanny mixture of strangeness and familiarity the Slavonic toponym represents.⁷ The result is not reassuring: “Slabikuji: Kost-aj-nik. Zůstává: Kost –. Fuj! Kost, kosti, kostem. Vzor měkké ženské deklinace.” (WEINER 1996: 276) [I enunciate the syllables: Kost-aj-nik. That leaves: *Kost* [‘bone’ in Czech] –. Ugh! *Kost*, *kosti*, *kostem*. Noun, feminine gender, soft declension.] The attempt to take control of the strange word by transforming it into a familiar Czech word (declined with the mechanical obedience of a schoolboy), by reducing it to basic grammatical functions, has backfired: rather than domesticating the word, it has reshaped it as ‘memento mori.’ The narrator’s exchanges with his comrade-in-arms, the sober-minded cadet Jandera, do little to dispel the ominous symbolism. Hearing the name Kostajnik, Jandera responds laconically: “To je tahle hora.” [that’s that mountain.] The narrator responds: “Jak lhostejně to řek! – To je tahle hora! – Hora jako hora. A já vím, že nikoliv.” (WEINER 1996: 278) [How indifferently he said that! – That’s that mountain! – A mountain like any other. But I know that’s not true at all.] The apparent calm on the mountain itself also fails to reassure, for when the narrator says “Zdá se, že je klidná.” [it appears to be calm.], Jandera replies “Zuří, není klidná.” (WEINER 1996: 276) [it’s ferocious, it’s not calm.]

At this point, however, the narrative takes a truly strange turn: “Kostajnik! pravím, kdybych jen věděl! – Proč, vyslovuji-li jméno této hory, myslím na mnichovské Propyleje, na nic než na mnichovské Propyleje?” (WEINER 1996: 277) [Kostajnik! I tell you, if only I knew! Why, when I pronounce the name of that mountain, do I think of the Munich Propylaea, of nothing other than the Munich Propylaea?] Gradually the reader learns that this unexpected association is because the narrator has in fact encountered the name Kostajnik before. Years earlier he had lived in Munich. One day he received a package from an old school friend, now a geologist starting a promising career. The friend sent an offprint of his new study, published by the Czech Academy of Sciences: a study of the intriguing chemical properties of the sulfur contained in a mountain named – Kostajnik. The narrator might well have forgotten this quickly, as the geological peculiarities of Kostajnik sulfur meant little to him; but as it happened, the same day he received the package the narrator had arranged a rendez-vous at the Pro-

7 Following his discussion of how Slavs have often stood as emblem of the uncanny for German-language writers in Austrian modernism, Beasley-Murray notes “the ways in which Slav cultures [of the Empire] themselves perceive elements of other Slav cultures as similarly both alien and domestic. In the Czech writer, Richard Weiner’s, ‘Kostajnik’, a half-remembered Serbian place-name and its half-deciphered significance play just such a role.” (BEASLEY-MURRAY 2006: 143)

pylaea with a certain Milena Popovičová, in whom he had a romantic interest. Miss Popovičová – a Serb – never showed up.

The narrator's fixation on such banal associations might be understood as a desperate attempt to defuse the perceived threat of Kostajnik by pinning it to a safe, recognizable world: a world where mountains are objects of interest to geologists, and where "danger" means the possible bruise to one's ego by being stood up for a date. But in fact this further level of association only deepens the uncanniness of the name Kostajnik. Freud's essay on *Das Unheimliche* (The uncanny) first focuses on how uncanniness transforms the familiar into the strange: *das Unheimliche* can only emerge from material that retains a trace of familiarity ("das Altbekannte, Längstvertraute"; FREUD 1989: 244). We have seen how the Slavonic toponym Kostajnik represents for the narrator just such a mingling of the strange and the familiar, and it is not difficult to understand his Munich associations as representing a further interpenetration of the strange and the familiar, since they incorporate two unsettling coincidences simultaneously: the original coincidence that on the day of his disappointment by this Serbian woman the narrator received an article about an obscure mountain in Serbia, is extended by the nearly unbelievable coincidence that now, years later and facing mortal danger, he finds himself at the foot of precisely that obscure mountain.⁸ The narrator's sense of uncanniness has shifted from its earlier linguistic register to a social one: the sense of a familiar central European milieu, where reading a publication of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Munich makes perfect sense, is displaced by the spectre of "Serbia": wild, dangerous, yet Slavonic – the perfect dilemma for a Czech-speaking citizen of the Habsburg Empire.

But this tension between the strange and the familiar is merely the first step of Freud's analysis of *das Unheimliche*. Scouring the dictionaries, Freud uncovers in the word a curious dynamic between that which is 'secret' and that which is 'open'. What makes this second contrast striking is that *das Unheimliche* begins to infect, as it were, its apparent opposite on the semantic level. *Das Heimliche*, Freud's dictionaries assure us, often emphasizes the root not of 'Heim', 'home', but rather 'geheim', 'secret', thus allowing the adjective 'heimlich' to assume connotations that are sinister or, indeed, uncanny. One dictionary provides Freud a quotation from Gutzkow illustrating this shift: one speaker describes a group of people as 'heimlich' and intends this in the sense of "mysterious" or "secretive", to which the other speaker responds: "*Wir nennen das un-h[eimlich]*; *Sie nennen's*

8 Coincidences of this sort are, according to Freud, one of the most common sources of a feeling of the uncanny most people encounter outside of fiction, and often give rise to the conviction that they represent "eine geheime Bedeutung" (FREUD 1989: 261). Indeed, when the narrator points out to Jandera that the name Kostajnik contains the word for "bone", Jandera replies "I to může být souvislostí. Proč ne? Není náhod." (WEINER 1996: 276) [Even that may connected. Why not? Nothing's just coincidence.]

h[eimlich].” (FREUD 1989: 247, emphasis in original) Thus Freud concludes that “das Wörtchen heimlich unter den mehrfachen Nuancen seiner Bedeutung auch eine zeigt, in der es mit seinem Gegensatz unheimlich zusammenfällt. Das Heimliche wird dann zum Unheimlichen.” (FREUD 1989: 248) Freud’s dictionaries point out that this uncanny slippage from ‘heimlich’ to ‘unheimlich’ only works in one direction: there is no standard usage of the term ‘unheimlich’ in a positive sense, that is as meaning ‘unsecretive’ and thus ‘open’ and reassuring. This may seem a point of detail but shall have crucial significance for Weiner’s story, as we shall see below.

In Freud’s essay the slippage from ‘heimlich’ to ‘unheimlich’ leads to a final formulation, which takes its cue from a quotation from Schelling: “*Un-h[eimlich] nennt man Alles, was im Geheimnis, im Verborgnen ... bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist.*” (FREUD 1989: 248, emphasis in original) *Das Unheimliche*, in short, is related to repression – or rather, the failure of repression and the appearance of what had been, and perhaps should have remained, repressed.

Now we have enough from Freud’s essay to return to Weiner’s *Kostajnik*. My earlier discussion of the mountain as image of *das Unheimliche* focussed on the tension between strangeness and familiarity, as evinced both in the vague associations the Slavonic toponym raised and the familiar memories the obscure mountain evoked. But the polarity ‘secret’ – ‘open’ is operative here as well. Indeed it is inscribed in the very name *Kostajnik* – for ‘kost’ (‘bone’) is not the only Czech word that lurks in this Serbian cipher. As much as it would fit in perfectly with the narrator’s paranoid analysis, however, he steadfastly refuses to see this second obvious analogy. Twice he parces the name into units: the first time, as seen earlier, into “Kost-aj-nik”, which revealed ‘kost’; and the second time, a few pages later, into “Ko-staj-nik”, which reveals the Czech word ‘staj’ (‘stable’), though he leaves this without comment (indeed, it seems almost laughably ‘heimlich’). But the narrator never performs the obvious analysis into *Kos-taj-nik*, which is not only the most natural way for a Czech-speaker to break this word into components but also clearly shows the morpheme for the Czech word ‘tajný’ (‘secret’) at the heart of the toponym. Even more striking is that immediately following the passage quoted earlier, where he attempts to convince himself that *Kostajnik* is just “a mountain like any other”, the narrator continues: “A já vím, že nikoliv. Od včerejška. Souvislost tajemně ve mně přede.” (WEINER 1996: 278) [But I know that’s not true at all. Since yesterday. Associations are spinning covertly [*tajemně*] within me.] Unconsciously, at the least, the narrator’s use of the word ‘tajemně’, with same morpheme ‘taj’- that lurks in *Kostajnik*, betrays that he is aware of this conspicuous allusion to secrets. Yet he refuses to say it openly. Might this be the symptom of a repression?

One could interpret the repression at hand in a manner that reinforces the understanding of the mountain *Kostajnik* as symbol of the uncanny. In such an

interpretation, sulfur – the infernal element – lurks under the natural surface of the mountain much as the narrator's repressed foreboding lurks under the surface of his consciousness. In both cases, the intermingling of the strange and familiar, of the hidden and the open, reinforces the sense of uncanny premonition. Such an ominous understanding of what the mountain connotes transforms it into an animistic environment where individual features of the landscape – observed with particularly anxious attention by a soldier whose life may depend upon their proper interpretation⁹ – appear to embody enigmatic, menacing forces. There can be little doubt that Weiner baits the reader to share in some such symbolic understanding of the mountain, an understanding that leaves the reader uncomfortably anticipating just what the sulfur portends. The actual development that next occurs in the narrative, however, is all the more disorientating in that it fails to fulfil the expectations such a symbolic understanding of Kostajnik raises.

For in the final pages of the story we encounter an entirely unexpected layer of characters and narrative. The story of Miss Milena Popovičová, it turns out, did not end at the Munich Propylaea, with a shrug of the shoulders. The narrator encountered her again in Paris – in fact, there is a strong implication that he followed her there and had effectively been stalking her. For he had earlier discovered that she had spurned him for another man, named Ivo Ristič – a man who was an invalid, both physically fragile and mentally unstable. This repressed episode, which returns to the narrator in the night as he climbs towards the slope of Kostajnik, comes to a climax when we learn that back then in Paris the narrator had intentionally induced in Ristič a fit of jealous insecurity and had physically prevented Milena from going to comfort him. As a result, Ristič shot himself.

This episode from an atelier in Paris, rather than any sinister animistic forces in the mountain, represents “[das,] was im Geheimnis, im Verborgnen ... bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist”. It casts an entirely different light on the narrator's assertion at the beginning of the story that “zamítám nezasloužené štěstí; hledám v sobě příčinu zla, jež snáším, a nenalézaje jí, říkám si, že jí nenalézám jen proto, že jsem pokrytec” (WEINER 1996: 272) [I refuse undeserved happiness; I seek in myself the cause of the evil I bear, and not finding it, I tell myself that I don't find it only because I am a hypocrite]. That painfully embarrassed sense of undeserved disgrace (“trapný pocit nezasloužené pohany”) the narrator mentioned in the opening pages of the story turns out not to have been quite so undeserved after all. These early references to undeserved happiness and undeserved shame shows that, in his unconscious, the narrator's conscience has been heavy all along. But it is not until the end of the story, in the dark on the slope of Kos-

9 The narrator's paranoid and uncertain analysis of the landscape features is described at length as he prepares to advance towards the mountain in twilight; see WEINER (1996: 284ff.).

tajnik, that the “izolační komor[a]” (WEINER 1996: 290) [isolation chamber] in which he tried to hide from this shameful memory is finally breached.

The return of this repressed memory follows patterns described in Freud’s essay to a degree that is truly remarkable. After the memory of his complicity in Ristič’s suicide returns, the narrator, who has become separated from his unit and is disorientated on the mountainside in the deep darkness of night, feels hounded by the sound of Serbian covering fire near him. He pulls out his pistol and shoots blindly. To his astonishment, he then hears a body fall through the bushes and land at his feet. The covering fire falls silent. In Weiner’s story, therefore, the return of the repressed memory – for Freud one of the central characteristics of the uncanny¹⁰ – is accompanied by a further factor Freud emphasizes: the compulsion to repeat (“Wiederholungszwang”; FREUD 1989: 261). The repetition compulsion here not only indicates the inability to escape a discomfiting mental stimulus, but in itself, as a “Moment der unbeabsichtigten Wiederholung” (FREUD 1989: 260), becomes an uncanny event. In Weiner’s story the uncanniness of the repetition is underscored by the way the figure of the deceased Ristič returns, as it were, as a double in the form of the unknown Serbian soldier.¹¹ The final words of the story dwell on precisely this uncanny doubling, as the narrator describes Kostajnik as the place “kde jsem dnes v noci podruhé zabil Ivo Rističe, který mi nikdy neublížil” (WEINER 1996: 293) [where this night, for the second time, I killed Ivo Ristič, who had never done me any harm]. One most commonly understands the literary Doppelgänger as embodying a split between conscious subject and unconscious desires, along the model of Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In *Kostajnik*, however, the psychic fissure appears an odd overlay of this and something else Freud discusses in a footnote to his essay. There Freud links doubling not to a split between consciousness and precariously repressed forces but to that “zwischen der kritischen Instanz und dem Ich-Rest” (FREUD 1989: 258, n. 2), or in other words between conscience and consciousness – a struggle we have observed in Weiner’s narrator from the

10 “[S]o muß es unter den Fällen des Ängstlichen eine Gruppe geben, in der sich zeigen läßt, daß dies Ängstliche etwas wiederkehrendes Verdrängtes ist. Diese Art des Ängstlichen wäre eben das Unheimliche [S]o verstehen wir, daß der Sprachgebrauch das Heimliche in seinen Gegensatz, das Unheimliche übergehen läßt . . . , denn dies Unheimliche ist wirklich nichts Neues oder Fremdes, sondern etwas dem Seelenleben von alters her Vertrautes, das ihm nur durch den Prozeß der Verdrängung entfremdet worden ist.” (FREUD 1989: 263f.)

11 *Kostajnik* thus belongs among the many works by Weiner in which “the double” features as a prominent theme. In the volume *Litice* the most extensive such treatment is – as the title indicates – the story “Dvojníci” [The Doubles]. On doubling in Weiner, see WIDERA (2001: esp. 227-262).

beginning of the story. The narrator thus experiences the redoubled killing of Ristič simultaneously as reinforced wish-fulfilment and searing self-censure.¹²

This guilty memory of Ristič, however, is not the only mental event the narrator has attempted to repress and that has come out into the open on the slopes of Kostajnik. There can be little doubt that his hostility towards the hapless Ristič stems from a repressed sense of humiliation that is inseparable from the castration complex. He “lost the girl” to Ristič – a man, moreover, who is presented as a damaged example of masculinity. The degree to which the narrator has been unconsciously seething over this sexual defeat emerges gradually yet clearly over the course of the story. When the Paris episode first reappears to him, for example, he lamely reminds himself that two days after Popovičová had stood him up at the Munich Propylaea he had had an affair “s jistou mnichovskou sklepnici” [with a certain barmaid in Munich] – an affair one imagines was far more likely an arrangement of mutual expedience than the “nejšťastnější poměr” (WEINER 1996: 290) [happiest relationship] he claims.¹³ Castration anxiety is inherent in the killing of the double on Kostajnik as well: it occurs in pitch dark, when the narrator is completely blinded.¹⁴ Both killings, moreover, occur as merely semi-intentional events rather than acts of vengeance or dominance: the killing of Ristič was indirect, since his tragically extreme response to jealousy could hardly have been taken for granted; and the killing of the soldier was literally a shot in the dark. The semi-intentionality of these killings, however, hovers ambiguously between two qualities that are apparently opposed yet each partake of the uncanny. On the one hand they reinforce the narrator’s sense of emasculation: he cannot claim responsibility for these moments of ‘potency’, and thus they reinforce the castration anxiety Freud sees at the heart of the feeling of the uncanny. But on the other hand they represent deeply felt wishes that have – of their own accord, as it were – transformed into reality: his antagonist in battle or in sexual competition has been magically eliminated. Freud associates the uncanny nature of such effortlessly fulfilled wishes with the feeling they evoke of “Allmacht der Gedanken” (FREUD 1989: 263), which he then in turn associates with traces of a primitive, animistic view of the world, traces that linger even in the most rational modern mind. The semi-intentional killings in *Kostajnik*,

12 Andrew J. Webber states this as a general principle of the literary double: “any neat notion of the double as either prohibitive or transgressive – in Freudian terms, the corrective socializing super-ego or the rampant, instinctive id – is insufficient.” (WEBBER 1996: 7f).

13 The narrator’s apparent cynicism here is so unexpected that the German translation of the story misrenders “nejšťastnější poměr” as “äußerst unglückliches Verhältnis” (WEINER 2005: 123).

14 On the connection between loss of eyes or eyesight and fear of castration, see FREUD (1989: 254).

therefore, express both the physical impotency of the emasculated narrator and the uncanny potency of the animistic world.

Weiner's story and Freud's essay, therefore, share a thematic matrix (strange/familiar; hidden/open; return of the repressed; repetition; doubling; castration complex; animism) to an extent that is – to repeat the point – nothing short of uncanny. These remarkable parallels, however, easily blind one to the essential moment where Weiner's story goes against the grain of Freud's analysis. For if *Kostajnik* is without doubt a study of *das Unheimliche*, in the end that uncanniness is grounded somewhere we did not expect: not on an obscure mountain in war-torn Serbia, but in a Parisian atelier. It is fuelled not by the lethal danger of a cruel and threatening environment, but by the repressed jealousy of a spurned lover.

The mountain *Kostajnik*, in other words, is suddenly released from its earlier association with the uncanny. It is revealed as, quite simply, just a mountain – one that contains a form of sulfur with chemical properties of interest to a small circle of experts, but otherwise unremarkable. The final sentences reveal this double movement with chilling clarity:

Ráno vrátili jsme se do vlastního řád. Brzo poté, v devět hodin, počala bitva. Mnoho jich padlo v proláklíně pod *Kostajnikem*, kde jsem dnes v noci podruhé zabil Ivo Rističe, který mi nikdy neublížil. (WEINER 1996: 293)

[In the late morning we returned to our own ranks. Shortly thereafter, at 9 o'clock, the battle began. Many were those who fell in the valley below *Kostajnik*, where this night, for the second time, I killed Ivo Ristič, who had never done me any harm.]

Soldiers died on the mountain, to be sure; yet this now appears as stark fact rather than uncanny event. The skirmish could just as well have occurred on any other mountain. *Kostajnik* is indeed “hora jako hora” – a mountain like any other. Freud claimed that *das Unheimliche* could never become ‘heimlich’, that is, the term ‘unheimlich’ could not be understood to mean ‘un-secretive’ and thus reassuringly legible. Yet this is precisely what has happened here: the mountain *Kostajnik* has, so to speak, become ‘un-geheimlich’, or devoid of secrets. This surprise turn at the end of the story is not incidental but rather essential to Weiner's move beyond the uncanny as described by Freud. For the “recannification” with which the story ends offers no consolation. Rather, the moment of refamiliarization – and the clarity and closure this brings – simply feels barren.

One might compare this turn in *Kostajnik* with the structure of a famous, brief text by Kafka, *Eine kaiserliche Botschaft* [An imperial message]. Upon first reading this appears a trenchant parable about the loss or impossibility of communication. A dying emperor, the center of a circumscribed universe, has a message to deliver to ‘you’, his lowly subject – and by analogy ‘you’ equates with ‘us’, Kafka's readers. The emperor whispers the message into the ear of his messenger, confirms its accuracy, and sends the messenger off. Although the mes-

senger, we are told, would be capable of almost inhuman speed if unhindered, he must push his way through the palace, crowded with the greats of the empire who have come to attend the emperor's death. In a figure familiar to any reader of Kafka, the obstacles become ever greater the more the messenger progresses, so that ultimately there seems no hope that he will ever clear the first courtyard of the palace, let alone enter the surrounding city, not to mention reach his destination. In the final sentence of this short text Kafka's narrator leaves the messenger to his struggles, turns to the recipient waiting for the message (that is, to 'us', the readers) and states: "Du aber sitzt an Deinem Fenster und erträumst sie Dir, wenn der Abend kommt." (KAFKA 1994: 282) Clearly, there is no hitherto unimagined hermeneutic technique that could recover the imperial message: dreaming of it is all we have. Yet to conclude that the story is about inaccessibility – that Kafka has withheld all determinate significance from the reader, that the absence of the imperial message constitutes the story's dire truth – is not entirely right. Such an interpretation ignores the sheer power of Kafka's tale: while the imperial messenger may fail to reach his destination, the force of that failure touches the reader directly. The dreaming by the window is not merely desperate or vain, and indeed the chilling final sentence only heightens the text's power. "Power" may sound too vague, too subjective, too untheoretical to be a useful term. But it identifies the communicative efficacy of Kafka's text. The power of this story is clear, albeit resistant to articulation; it shows that clarity need not preclude ambiguity. The clarity of Kafka's story, in fact, may ultimately be more enigmatic than the obscurity of the imperial message. A commonplace of late twentieth-century literary criticism holds that the closer one reads a text, the more its meaning becomes indeterminate, yet one might claim that Kafka's story has the opposite effect: it undermines its apparent meaninglessness. In some furtive yet crucial sense, the imperial messenger does indeed arrive. His whispered words are incoherent yet command the reader's rapt attention.

These texts by Weiner and Kafka, therefore, share a surprising double movement: a movement that takes them to the far side of the interpretive categories through which we might be tempted to assimilate them to our conventional understanding of literary modernism. We intuitively read them, we can read them, we must read them through categories we expect to find in a work of modernist literature: uncanniness, disorientation, linguistic failure. Yet these categories operate only with the quiet cooperation, as it were, of their opposites: a 'making canny' in the case of Weiner, a 'communicative efficacy' in the case of Kafka. Like a wave on a sea-shore, which before it crashes down draws back the water from the previous wave, these texts force us to question where, precisely, they conform to our expectations for literary modernism and where they confute those expectations entirely.

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