

THE FUNCTION OF THE DEATH MOTIF IN THE WORKS
OF HEINRICH VON KLEIST

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This is to certify that the

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond Le Garret".

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ABSTRACT

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By

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Evidence of the prominent position occupied by the idea or thought of death in Kleist's thinking can be found in his biography, in his letters, and also in his works. The topic of death has been and continues to be a subject of discussion in the continually expanding volumes of Kleist literature. The intent of this study is to investigate the integration of the death motif into his works.

The first chapter examines the central elements in Kleist's conception of death from the perspective of his personal development during the Kant crisis. After his confrontation with Kantian philosophy, he became acutely aware of the need for meaningful accomplishments for this life and also sought to establish a purposeful basis for death. He felt that willingness to sacrifice one's life for a higher, nobler purpose is an essential ingredient for a meaningful existence. In his final letters, a related dimension of his conception of death is manifested.

Having experienced frustration and defeat throughout his mature years, he came to regard a self-chosen death as a legitimate conclusion for the life of an individual who had committed himself totally toward the fulfillment of his destiny in this life.

The second chapter deals specifically with the occurrences of death in his works. On the most basic level, death occurs as a result of unsatisfactory circumstances in the infirm world. The death of an individual who becomes an innocent victim of these circumstances functions primarily as a catalyst. It not only provides the impetus for the ensuing action, but it also evokes responses from the individuals responsible for or affected by this death which are indicative of the nature of their respective modes of thinking.

The majority of the instances of death in Kleist's works occur in conjunction with either the expression and acceptance or the denial of basic human rights and values. In certain works, the leading protagonists are made aware of either their own inadequacies or of the inadequacies and inequities of a social institution in the face of death. They experience either their own death or the death of another individual; it is a period of extreme anguish and inner turmoil, and the individual can no longer perceive clearly the meaning of life or his role in life. As a result of this experience, however, their rational,

cognitive facilities having been purged of all egocentric and external influences, they begin to gain an awareness of their actual role and obligations in life. There are also individuals who willfully sacrifice their lives for others as a selfless expression of their awareness of the need to preserve and uphold those rights and values which are essential for human existence. Others are compelled to offer their lives as an atonement after they have come to the recognition that they in their willful actions have violated the inalienable human rights and values of their fellow man. Those individuals who are unwilling or unable to perceive the need to atone for the offenses which they have committed against mankind must suffer death by judgment. The final section treats those individuals who are forced to succumb because they have asserted themselves against a predominant force or against the prevailing mode of thinking in their immediate environment. The author lends meaning and stature to the death of these individuals, however, in that they, in accordance with the conditions which he established for his own death, have either experienced fulfillment in life or have committed themselves totally toward the attainment of a meaningful goal in this life.

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To Jerri, Lisa and Tamara

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I. INTRODUCTION

The meaning and significance of the role of death in the life and works of Heinrich von Kleist is a topic which has long attracted the attention of German literary historians and, more specifically, Kleist scholars. Reasons for this interest are readily apparent even to those only casually acquainted with the details of Kleist's biography and with his letters and works.

Not only did Kleist suffer an untimely and tragic death by his own hand at Wannsee on November 21, 1811, but his biographers and critics have also recorded the reports of his attempts at various times to commit suicide and also the numerous instances at which he actually or reportedly attempted to persuade those (both male and female) with whom he had established an intimate relationship to commit themselves to a joint suicide venture with him.¹ He reportedly placed such great store in the willingness to enter into such an agreement that he considered refusal or reluctance to do so to be a just basis for the dissolution of the relationship.²

In his letters also one can find numerous references to death. The exact nature and content of such passages is, however, often dependent upon the psychological state

of his mind at any particular time. Consequently these utterances may assume various forms. They may express the fear of an imminent death,³ a longing for death,⁴ or the anticipation of death.⁵ There are, moreover, instances when he reflects on the metaphysical implications of death.⁶

The true significance of this personal fascination with death becomes somewhat more apparent when it is considered that in the majority of his works, both dramatic and prose, the leading figure or figures either experience an actual, physical death, or they quite literally "suffer through" a death-like experience. At the very least they overtly exhibit their willingness or preparedness to submit, if necessary, to death. Furthermore, there are strong and, indeed, very valid parallels which can be drawn between the death experience of the author Kleist and that of several of his characters. Not only are there striking similarities in some external factors which motivate the anticipation of death,⁷ but also in the manner of death⁸ as well as in the thoughts expressed in the face of death.⁹

The idea of death obviously represents an essential component of Kleist's total world view and of his experience in this world. Commentators who deal with his life, with his works, or with both can scarcely avoid discussing, in some form or another, the phenomenon of death.

In 1922 Rudolf Unger published what is often considered to be the most thorough, the most authoritative analysis of the topic.¹⁰ Although his primary intent is, as the full title of the book indicates, to investigate the development and changes in man's conception of death from the Sturm und Drang period to the Age of Romanticism, he does deal at great length with the meaning of death in Kleist's dramatic productions. After having discussed the "Todesproblem" in Kleist from the standpoint of his life, his theoretical views, and his works, Unger concludes that death represents an all-pervading basic theme in Kleist's personal experience, in his religious and philosophical speculations, and especially in his dramatic works. The detection of a consistent parallel development of this basic theme in Kleist's life and works attests to, Unger believes, a hitherto largely unrecognized deep inner unity existing between his life and works. For Kleist's personal life Unger presents this development as having been a progressive ethical sublimation of this basic theme which occurred in three distinct stages. He designates these stages as: ". . . todgeweiht (für das eigene Bewusstsein)--todesreif (in ethischer Bedeutung)--todüberwindend (durch freien Liebes-und Opfertod, wie er ihn verstanden hat)" (p. 142). The dramas which correspond to these stages are, respectively, Robert Guiskard as well as certain scenes from

Die Familie Schroffenstein and Die Hermannsschlacht,
Penthesilea, and Prinz Friedrich von Homburg (p. 142).

Josef Collin¹¹ maintains that the thought of annihilation, the thought of death and destruction, weighed so heavily upon Kleist that it became the ". . . Träger seiner ganzen Dichtung . . ." (p. 71). He regards this as having been the consequence primarily of the Kant crisis, during which, in his opinion, Kleist lost his trust in the certainty of being able to acquire knowledge not only of the nature of the life after death, but also of the meaning of life in this world. The harmonious cosmos, which seemingly had been under the guidance of a wise, all-knowing creator, revealed itself to him as ". . . ein gärendes Chaos, das menschliche Dasein wird ihm zu einem bald lächerlichen, bald traurigen Schauspiel der Irrungen" (p. 73). In addition, however, it was the Kant crisis which unleashed the creative impulses in Kleist (p. 73f.). Collin regards Kleist's presentation of death, violence, and deception in his works to be both a logical outgrowth of the developments initiated by the Kant crisis and also a means by which he was enabled to soothe his inner wounds, to compensate for or to take revenge on an unsatisfactory, threatening reality (p. 75).

Anneliese Bodensohn¹² considers death in Kleist's works first of all as a release from or an alternative to an existence in which all human values and relations have

become distorted. The individual finds himself entangled in the intricate mesh of the snares inherent in a harsh, distorted reality, and the forces operative in his environment force him to act, often contrary to his will. Under the circumstances, his only recourse is death (p. 10). Man is, however, not only threatened by forces within himself, within his environment, but he may also be acted upon, manipulated by an incomprehensible force outside of himself. This force may appear as an elemental force of nature, it may appear in the guise of a person who is already dead, or it may be God himself (p. 33f.). As a result of his confrontation with this inscrutable outside force, however, the individual becomes aware of the possibility of a higher level of existence after death (p. 62). He thus actively seeks death both as a release from the turmoil and confusion of life and also as a means to attain that higher existence. On the basis of the above, Bodensohn concludes that Kleist's relationship to the phenomenon of death becomes the determining form of his life and, more significantly, of his works (p. 63). It is in death that man is able to break through, to transcend the confusion of life and to experience the blissful freedom of the "marionette" in the new existence (p. 93).

Martin Lintzel¹³ approaches death in Kleist's works from the perspective of its relationship to love. He attempts to show that love and death are closely



associated in Kleist's works as well as in his personal experience. Although not every instance of death in the works can be regarded as the result of a love relationship, Lintzel maintains that it can be said ". . . dass zur Liebe bei Kleist immer der Tod gehört: in vielen Fällen ist die Liebe geradezu mit dem Tode identisch, und immer steht sie zu ihm in irgendeiner Beziehung" (p. 533). If the individual does not actually die for or because of his love, then he is either confronted directly with the perils of death or he is willing to or is forced to suffer greatly in order to attain the fulfillment of love. Lintzel considers the source of this unusual relationship between love and death to have been, first of all, Kleist's conception of love as being a mysterious, divine, yet fateful force (pp. 568-570). A second and more decisive source of this association is to be found in Kleist's personal encounters with love. He too experienced love as ". . . Wehetun und Töten, Leiden und Sterben" (p. 579).

Benno von Wiese discusses death in Kleist's works in developing the author's concept of the tragic.¹⁴ As an initial reaction to the Kant crisis, which destroyed completely his aspiration of being able to acquire in this life truth and knowledge which would accompany him into the next life, death became for Kleist ". . . zur negativen Folie des Lebens, mit ihm werden Willkür und Zufall zum endgültigen Schicksal des Menschenloses; das

Dasein bricht ab, ehe das Ich seine heilige Aufgabe gefunden hat, ehe es seiner eignen Wahrheit inne geworden ist" (p. 328). The artistic expression of this notion is to be found in the fragment Robert Guiskard. A modification of this can be seen in Penthesilea. Here death is no longer perceived as an outside, threatening force, but the individual has rather come to an inner recognition of the fact that it is only in death that he will be able to comprehend fully the meaning of life (p. 329f.). A third and final interpretation is presented in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. Homburg's acceptance of the Kurfürst's challenge to decide for himself whether he had been justly condemned, his acceptance of the death sentence, and the Kurfürst's subsequent pardon are seen by von Wiese as being a reflection of Kleist's personal resolution of an inner conflict: the question of how ". . . sich die vom Dichter erlebte Freiheit des Ich und das dem Gewissen aufgebene Gesetz des Staates zueinander verhalten, sich tragisch widerstreiten und dann doch übertragisch versöhnen lassen . . ." (p. 334).

It is apparent from the above that the question of death in the works of Kleist has been discussed extensively from several different perspectives. Generally speaking, scholars have based their conclusions upon one of two separate but distinctly interrelated premises. On the one hand there has been the tendency to regard the facts

of the author's biography as a basis for the interpretation of his works, thereby emphasizing the correspondences existing between the author's confrontation with death and the circumstances surrounding the death of the characters he has created in his works. On the other hand there is the tendency to attribute the preponderance of death scenes in Kleist's works to a tragic conception of existence, to a life filled with tragic experiences. The point of departure for the latter approach is generally the Kant crisis. As a result of his confrontation with Kantian philosophy, Kleist despaired completely of man's cognitive capabilities and felt himself and mankind to be under the dominance of the blind, irrational, often destructive forces in the universe. This recognition, coupled with the several other frustrations and crises which he experienced in the course of his life, contributed toward the development of a totally negative, pessimistic view of life and toward the conviction that the destiny of mankind is in the hands of the irrational forces in the universe. Death thus represents not only a form of release from these pressures, but, more significantly, it also represents the medium through which the individual is relieved of the necessity of succumbing to these forces.

This present study is not intended as a refutation of prior criticism, nor is it intended to be the definitive study on the topic. In the opening section we have

acknowledged that there are very definite parallels which can be established between the fate and experiences of the author Kleist and that of several of his characters. Likewise, there can be no question that throughout his lifetime Kleist continually wrestled with the problem of death and that the idea of suicide held a very definite fascination for him.

One must question, however, the validity of using the personal experience of the author as the basis for the attempt to come to an objective understanding of his works, and, conversely, the validity of attempting to interpret the author's personal experiences on the basis of similar experiences on the part of his characters. While examining a work of art in the light of the author's personal experiences, one must be aware, as Wellek and Warren point out, that there are several alternatives which must be considered. "A work of art may rather embody the 'dream' of an author than his actual life, or it may be the 'mask,' the 'anti-self' behind which the real person is hiding, or it may be the picture of the life from which the author wants to escape."¹⁵ This is not to deny, of course, that an author's personal experiences are often incorporated into the work of art. Before any final conclusions can be made, however, one must be aware that ". . . the author may 'experience' life differently in terms of his art: actual experiences are seen with a view to their use in

literature and come to him already partially shaped by artistic tradition and preconceptions."¹⁶ In this present study we shall attempt to determine the manner in which Kleist has incorporated his personal experiences into his literary productions.

The same objections can be made to those interpretations which focus on Kleist's "tragic experiences" in life and the resultant tragic, pessimistic view of life which is allegedly expressed in his works. There are here, too, other factors which must be taken into consideration. The view that the Kant crisis had a decidedly negative, depressing effect upon Kleist's Weltanschauung is, I believe, subject to debate. The intensity, the significance of this crisis cannot, to be sure, be questioned but must be acknowledged. Later, however, in the course of our discussion we shall attempt to identify the more positive aspects and results of the Kant crisis, emphasizing especially, of course, those elements which are related to our theme. Another related, but often overlooked, factor which must obviously be kept in mind is the observation made by Müller-Seidel who, while reminding us that there are only two tragedies among Kleist's seven completed dramas, also cautions ". . . dass man sich . . . den Dichter einer Tragödie nicht in einem Zustand der permanenten Verzweiflung vorstellen darf."¹⁷

A statement of the procedures to be followed in this investigation still remains to be given. While acknowledging that Kleist may in fact have had a "lifelong affinity with death,"¹⁸ that indeed at times he may have been obsessed with the thought of his own death, we can, I believe, come to a better understanding of the role of death in his works if we concentrate less on his personal experiences and focus rather on the manner in which he has incorporated death into his works as a motif, not as a predominant theme. The treatment of death as a motif is justified, I feel, within the context of Wolfgang Kayser's definition of the motif as ". . . eine sich wiederholende, typische und das heisst also menschlich bedeutungsvolle Situation."¹⁹ In his works we find the individual confronted time and again with either an actual physical death, the very real prospect of death, or he is subjected to an experience which is in some way similar to death. The resolution of this confrontation, or indeed the confrontation itself, is not in and of itself thematic, but it rather serves often as one medium for the expression of his major themes, a medium for the concrete expression of abstract principles.²⁰

Müller-Seidel has recognized the functional relationship between death and the process of recognition in Kleist's tragedies: "Tod und Erkennen bilden einen unlösbaren Strukturzusammenhang im Trauerspiel Kleists."²¹

Kleist himself has also given us an indication of the manner in which our topic is to be approached. In the short essay, "Brief eines Dichters an einen anderen," (II, 347-9) the author explains that he does not strive for clarity of expression, meaningful verse structure, euphony, etc., merely for their own sake, but rather in order that ". . . der Gedanke, den sie einschliessen, erscheine" (II, 348). The poetic devices employed and the techniques applied are subordinate to the thought which he, in the work of art, is attempting to project. Their significance lies in the extent to which they contribute toward the amplification of that thought. Thus also the various motifs which Kleist incorporates into his works are to be considered in terms of their relation to and their contribution toward the projection of his artistic intent.

If we are to approach our topic from this perspective, it will be necessary, first, to examine Kleist's personal statements concerning death as they are to be found in his letters. This will not be done with the intent of discerning or establishing a rationale for Kleist's suicide. Neither will the attempt be made to restate, to redefine or reevaluate the parallels and similarities existing between Kleist's personal experience and that of his characters. If, however, the transformation of this intense personal experience into a literary motif

is to be studied, if we wish to determine the function of this motif in its relation to the major themes in his works, we must establish and identify those elements which are central to his conception of death. For, although his works do not necessarily reproduce or anticipate his personal experience, his personal conception of death will serve as the conceptual basis for his employment of the death motif as one of those elements which affects the thematic structure of his works.

It will be shown that his presentation of death is consistent both with his personal conception of death and with the artistic intent of his works. In the final analysis, the death motif is inextricably linked with either the expression of basic, inalienable human values, the denial of these values, or the need on the part of an individual or a community to come to an acceptance of these values.

II. CENTRAL ELEMENTS IN KLEIST'S

CONCEPTION OF DEATH

While dealing with a topic as complex as Kleist's conception of death, one must recognize that it is but one, nevertheless essential component of his total world view. His understanding of the meaning of death to a certain extent determines and is in turn determined by his understanding of himself and of his role in life, his awareness of both his relationship and responsibilities to his fellow man, his understanding of the meaning or purpose of life, and also his concept of God.

This chapter treats matters of a conceptual nature. The individual's grasp of any of the various phenomena present within the realm of his conscious experience is, however, dependent upon premises which he has accepted to account for those phenomena, such as immortality or the nature or existence of God, which lie outside of the realm of his conscious experience and would otherwise be beyond the reach of his cognitive capabilities. The acceptance or rejection of such premises, be they religious or purely philosophical in origin, determines the manner in which the individual perceives the various phenomena of life; it establishes the frame of reference

which serves as the basis for his interpretation or evaluation of things, and it determines the course and direction which he will follow in his actions.

It is for this reason that the Kant crisis of the spring and summer 1801 was of such profound significance for Kleist. During this time the poet became convinced that the manner in which he perceived the meaning and purpose of his existence in this life was based upon invalid premises. This recognition did not culminate in, as has been maintained, a rejection of the validity of reason in and of itself;²² it was not an absolute denial of man's cognitive capabilities, but it rather awakened in Kleist the realization of the need for a shift of emphasis, a change of direction in his mode of thinking, his manner of perception, and, consequently, a re-orientation in his system of values.

A. Pre-Kant Crisis

It is not, of course, within the scope of this investigation to treat in great detail all the intricacies of the Kant crisis. We shall rather concentrate upon identifying those insights gained during this crucial period of time which have a specific bearing upon his conception of death. An analysis of the results of the Kant crisis is essential for an understanding of Kleist's conception of death, for it was as a result of the insights

gained during this time that the foundations upon which he had built his aspirations both for this life and the next were destroyed. With the invalidation of the basic premises which determined the manner in which he perceived all things, Kleist was compelled to consider the meaning and purpose of both life and death from a new perspective.

An analysis of Kleist's earlier letters will reveal that in the period prior to the Kant crisis the idea of death played a minor role in his thinking. In his earlier years he subscribed to the rationalistic mode of thinking typical of the late Enlightenment^{en} period. The manner in which he perceived all things was teleological: his awareness or consciousness of all things was predetermined by his acceptance of the premise that there is an ultimate design or purpose in the universe. Characteristic of this mode of thinking is also the conviction that it is possible for man to acquire knowledge of this ultimate design or purpose. An inevitable consequence of such a mode of thinking is the emergence of a perspective on life in which the individual perceives of the meaning of life in terms of a hope for fulfillment in a future level of existence. As a result, one must establish both immediate and ultimate goals for his life. Although his immediate goals are always subordinate to his ultimate goals, the attainment of his ultimate goals is contingent upon the degree of success he has in attaining his immediate goals.²³

In the letter of March, 1799, to his former teacher, Christian Ernst Martini, Kleist identifies his desire to find happiness in this life as being a primary cause of his decision to abandon his military career: "Ohne die entfernteren Gründe meines Entschlusses aufzusuchen, können wir sogleich bei dem verweilen, aus welchem er zunächst fließt: bei dem Wunsche, glücklich zu sein. Dieser Grund ist natürlich und einfach und zugleich in gewisser Rücksicht der einzige, weil er im richtigen Sinn alle meine andere Gründe in sich fasst" (II, 474). Although the concept "Glück" is not defined in concrete terms, it is apparent that, on the one hand, Kleist conceives of it in terms of an inner, subjective experience:²⁴ "Ich nenne nämlich Glück nur die vollen und überschwenglichen Genüsse, die--um es Ihnen mit einem Zuge darzustellen--in dem erfreulichen Anschauen der moralischen Schönheit unseres eigenen Wesens liegen" (II, 476). His conception of "Glück" is thus drawn into close relation to his conception of virtue: "So übe ich mich unaufhörlich darin, das wahre Glück von allen äusseren Umständen zu trennen und es nur als Belohnung und Ermunterung an die Tugend zu knüpfen" (II, 474).

The larger context of these passages, however, reveals that Kleist's wish to find happiness in this life is ultimately linked with his desire to establish or determine his "Bestimmung," his destiny or calling in

life. The term "Bestimmung" must be understood, as Kreutzer cautions, within the context of Kleist's teleological mode of thinking.²⁵ When Kleist speaks of his destiny, he is not speaking primarily in terms of a vocation or profession, but he is rather concerned with determining the meaning, the purpose of his existence in this life.

At one point he defines it as follows: "Bestimmung unseres irdischen Lebens heisst Zweck desselben, oder die Absicht zu welcher uns Gott auf diese Erde gesetzt hat" (II, 318). Because, however, he perceives of the meaning of existence from the perspective of the prospect of its fulfillment in the future, in the life after death, the determination of his "Bestimmung" in this life is ultimately dependent upon his perception of his eternal destiny. The vocation one selects for this life, then, becomes the concrete means by which the individual attempts to find his place within the established order. It is in his vocation that the individual is provided with the opportunity of attaining the goal of fulfillment in his earthly calling and, consequently, with the prospect of progressing toward the attainment of his ultimate goals. In the early stages of his development, Kleist attempted to find his place in the established order within the confines of such "socially acceptable" professions as the military service, the civil service, the teaching profession.

Essential for the determination of one's destiny or calling in this life is, according to Kleist, a

thoughtful, rationally composed "Lebensplan." The term "Lebensplan" is not to be construed as having reference to one specific plan which is valid for all men.²⁶ It is rather to be considered as a prerequisite, a condition for a meaningful existence and ultimately, of course, for the determination of his "Bestimmung": "Ja, es ist mir unbegreiflich, wie ein Mensch ohne Lebensplan leben könne, und ich fühle, an der Sicherheit, mit welcher ich die Gegenwart benutze, an der Ruhe, mit welcher ich in die Zukunft blicke, so innig, welch ein unschätzbares Glück mir mein Lebensplan gewährt, und der Zustand, ohne Lebensplan, ohne feste Bestimmung, immer schwankend zwischen unsicheren Wünschen, immer im Widerspruch mit meinen Pflichten, ein Spiel des Zufalls, eine Puppe am Drahte des Schicksals--dieser unwürdige Zustand scheint mir so verächtlich, und würde mich so unglücklich machen, dass mir der Tod bei weitem wünschenswerter wäre" (II, 490).

This passage has often been cited as evidence of the fact that Kleist, from his early years, was haunted by a fear of death and that he believed that his life was in the hands of an unknown, capricious fate which was driving him to his annihilation.²⁷ While this may have been true, to a certain extent, for times when Kleist was in a state of extreme depression (for example, at the time of the failure of his plans for the "Guiskard" tragedy), what is expressed here is neither a vaguely concealed longing

for or fear of an imminent death, nor is it an affirmation of his belief in the existence of an unknown, capricious fate. Kleist is rather establishing the conditions which he considers to be essential for a meaningful, purposeful existence. It is the absence of these conditions which creates the illusion that one is "ein Spiel des Zufalls, eine Puppe am Drahte des Schicksals," and it is to this state of existence that Kleist would prefer death.²⁸

Throughout the period preceding the Kant crisis, the idea of death does not occupy a prominent position in Kleist's thinking. The emphasis in his thinking seems to be placed almost exclusively upon the need to meet one's responsibilities in this life, in the present, for even speculations concerning the nature of one's destiny after death, concerning the future, are made at the expense of his immediate responsibilities. To Wilhelmine von Zenge he writes: "Kümmere Dich nicht um Deine Bestimmung nach dem Tode, weil Du darüber leicht Deine Bestimmung auf dieser Erde vernachlässigen könntest" (II, 565).

There is a threefold reason for the apparently distinct "this-worldliness" of his thinking. We have already mentioned that a teleological mode of thinking fosters an understanding of life in which the individual perceives of the meaning of life from the perspective of interrelated, interdependent immediate and ultimate goals. Although one's immediate goals must be subordinate to his

ultimate goals, the attainment of his ultimate goals is contingent upon the level of achievement which he has attained in his pursuit of his immediate goals. Also to be taken into consideration at this point is another notion which was also an integral component of the popular philosophy of the late Enlightenment period: the belief that man, because of the inherent limitations of his reasoning faculties, is restricted to knowledge of his role in this life. Kleist clearly expresses his adherence to this principle in the following passage: "Also wage Dich mit Deinem Verstand nie über die Grenzen Deines Lebens hinaus. Sei ruhig über die Zukunft. Was Du für dieses Erdenleben tun sollst, das kannst Du begreifen, was Du für die Ewigkeit tun sollst, nicht; und so kann auch keine Gottheit mehr von Dir verlangen, als die Erfüllung Deiner Bestimmung auf dieser Erde" (II, 565).

A third factor to be considered in this connection is, as Muth asserts, the fact that speculations concerning one's eternal destiny, that attempts to define or determine the design or purpose in the universe are futile.²⁹ The teleological world view, while recognizing the limitations of man's reasoning abilities, is nevertheless, as has been stated previously, based upon the premise that there is an ultimate design or purpose in the universe. Within the teleological framework, this premise is regarded as being an absolute truth. It must therefore be accepted as a

matter of faith. It cannot be, nor does it need to be subjected to a process of rational, empirical verification.

The full extent of Kleist's adherence to the rationalistic philosophy of the late Enlightenment period and also the exact nature and direction of his teleological mode of thinking is revealed in the well-known letter of March, 1801, to Wilhelmine von Zenge. It must be borne in mind, of course, that this letter was written while he was already in the midst of the throes of the Kant crisis and hence he is speaking here retrospectively: "Ich hatte schon als Knabe . . . mir den Gedanken angeeignet, dass die Vervollkommnung der Zweck der Schöpfung wäre. Ich glaubte, dass wir einst nach dem Tode von der Stufe der Vervollkommnung, die wir auf diesem Stern erreichten, auf einem andern fortschreiten würden, und dass wir den Schatz von Wahrheiten, den wir hier sammelten, auch dort einst brauchen könnten" (II, 633).³⁰ Of interest, first of all, is that life is viewed as being in a state of continual upward progression and, second, that its meaning is derived from its being preparatory for continually higher levels of existence in the life after death. In the second portion of the passage, he states more concisely the manner in which these goals were to be attained: "Aus diesem Gedanken bildete sich so nach und nach eine eigne Religion, und das Bestreben, nie auf einen Augenblick hienieden still zu stehen, und immer unaufhörlich einem höhern Grade von

Bildung entgegenzuschreiten, ward bald das einzige Prinzip meiner Tätigkeit. ~~B~~ildung schien mir das einzige Ziel, das des Bestrebens, Wahrheit der einzige Reichtum, der des Besitzes würdig ist" (II, 633).³¹

Besides giving expression to Kleist's early conviction that it is possible for man, by continually striving to improve himself through education and the quest for truth, to attain an ever closer approximation of perfection in this life, the above statements also clarify considerably the role of the idea of death within the context of the teleological mode of thinking. Because of the emphasis placed, first of all, upon the necessity of achieving as high a level of perfection as possible in this life and, second, upon the belief that this progression toward perfectibility will continue into the life after death, the idea of death occupies, as we have stated previously, a relatively minor position in his thinking. Its significance, however, lies therein, that it is only possible for man to attain complete fulfillment, to gain a full knowledge of truth in the life after death.³² On the other hand, death is but one event within the context of a much grander sequence of events: it represents a stage or condition through which one must pass as he is on the eternal path of progression from the realization of his immediate goals in this life to the expectation of continually higher levels of existence in

the life after death. The ultimate goal of all his endeavors, both in this life and the next, had been, as he states at another juncture: ". . . mich selbst auf eine Stufe näher der Gottheit zu stellen" (II, 586).

B. The Kant Crisis

During the Kant crisis, the security which Kleist had found in his "eigne Religion" was disrupted. As a result of his confrontation with certain tenets of Kantian philosophy, he came to the realization that the system of thought in which he had placed his trust was based upon an abstract conception of truth. It was based upon the false premise that, by continually striving to reach an ever higher level of perfectibility, one can gain an increasingly deeper insight into the nature and intent of the creator, the epitome of perfection. The recognition of the invalidity of this premise caused Kleist to lose sight temporarily of his role and goals in life: "Der Gedanke, dass wir hienieden von der Wahrheit nichts, gar nichts wissen, dass das, was wir hier Wahrheit nennen, nach dem Tode ganz anders heisst, und dass folglich das Bestreben, sich ein Eigentum zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ganz vergeblich und fruchtlos ist, dieser Gedanke hat mich in den Heiligtum meiner Seele erschüttert--Mein einziges und höchstes Ziel ist gesunken, ich habe keines mehr" (II, 636).

Upon close examination it becomes evident, however, that Kleist does not completely reject the idea of truth itself, neither does he reject the idea of an ordered, purposeful universe.³³ He is rather rejecting the notion that man is able to rationally determine, to comprehend truth. This is of crucial significance for Kleist, for the solution to the problem is already indicated in the nature of the problem itself. It is centered, first and foremost, about the question of man's cognitive capabilities, and it thereby identifies the source of his inner turmoil as being his faculty of reason: "Aber der Irrtum liegt nicht im Herzen, er liegt im Verstande, und nur der Verstand kann ihn heben" (II, 638). Second, he is aware that it is a personal problem which he himself has caused and which only he himself can solve: ". . . ich bin durch mich selbst in einen Irrtum gefallen, ich kann mich auch nur durch mich selbst wieder heben" (II, 638). Third, and perhaps most important of all, he is aware that the solution to his distress lies in a re-direction, a shift of emphasis in his mode of thinking. Thus he writes as he is making preparations to travel to Paris: "Aber ich werde das Wort, welches das Rätsel löset, schon finden. . . . Im Freien werde ich freier denken können" (II, 638). The above statements again clearly indicate that Kleist is fully aware that the cause of his current dilemma was his perception of things from teleological perspective. He

now realizes that, in order for him to be able to re-establish his role and goals in life, he must not place his trust in the premises of any religious or philosophical systems of thought. He must rather approach the question of the meaning of life with an open mind, unencumbered by any preconceived notions.

While considering the various ramifications of the Kant crisis, one must bear in mind that there were also pressing external circumstances which contributed considerably to the emotional intensity of his reactions to the teachings of Kant.³⁴ On the one hand he was intensely dissatisfied with his position in the civil service. In the letter of April 9, 1801, to Wilhelmine von Zenge he identifies this dissatisfaction as the primary cause of his decision to travel to Paris: "Du kennst die erste Veranlassung zu meiner bevorstehenden Reise. Es war im Grunde nichts, als ein innerlicher Ekel vor aller wissenschaftlichen Arbeit" (II, 641). In relation to this there is the realization that he himself had knowingly aroused his acquaintances' expectations for him by having first accepted a position to which he was already ill-disposed before he accepted it and, second, by having undertaken the trip to Paris under the false pretense of intending to continue his education there: "Habe ich nicht selbst die Erwartung der Menschen gereizt? Werde ich nun nicht in Paris im Ernste etwas

lernen müssen? Ach, Wilhelmine, in meiner Seele ziehen die Gedanken durcheinander, wie Wolken im Ungewitter. Ich weiss nicht, was ich tun und lassen soll--alles, was die Menschen von meinem Verstande erwarten, ich kann es nicht leisten. Die Mathematiker glauben, ich werde dort Mathematik studieren, die Chemiker, ich werde von Paris grosse chemische Kenntnisse zürückbringen--und doch wollte ich eigentlich nichts, als allem Wissen entfliehen" (II, 642-643).

If we accept that the intensity of the Kant crisis was due, at least in part, to these extenuating circumstances, then it becomes clear that, in its deepest significance, the Kant crisis represented for Kleist a crisis of consciousness. Earlier, as we have seen, his consciousness of all things, of his role and goals in life, was determined by his conception of their relation to the ultimate design or purpose in the universe. Having come to a recognition of the invalidity of the premises which served as a basis for this manner of perception, this mode of thinking, and having consequently lost sight of his role and goals in life, Kleist initially finds himself in a predicament which he describes as a labyrinth: "O Gott, wenn mir ein einziger Wunsch erfüllt würde, mich aus diesem Labyrinth zu retten--" (II, 648). At the moment his most pressing need, as he himself recognizes, is to regain clarity of thought, to regain an awareness of

purpose, of meaning in life: "Ach, liebe Wilhelmine, leicht ist das, wenn alles in der Seele klar und hell ist, wenn man nur in sich selbst zu blicken braucht, um deutlich darin zu lesen. Aber wo Gedanken mit Gedanken, Gefühle mit Gefühlen kämpfen, da ist es schwer zu nennen, was in der Seele herrscht, weil noch der Sieg unentschieden ist" (II, 654).

As the letters reveal, Kleist fluctuated between hope and despair. On the one hand we can observe a longing for the release from the turmoils of life: "Denn nichts als Schmerzen gewährt mir dieses ewig bewegte Herz, das wie ein Planet unaufhörlich in seiner Bahn zur Rechten und zur Linken wankt, und von ganzer Seele sehne ich mich, wonach die ganze Schöpfung und alle immer langsamer und langsamer rollenden Weltkörper streben, nach Ruhe!" (II, 643). On the other hand there is the confidence that the redetermination of his role in life will lead him out of his dilemma: "Alles was mich beunruhigt ist die Unmöglichkeit, mir ein Ziel des Bestrebens zu setzen. . . . Aber sei ruhig, ich werde das rechte schon finden. Falsch ist jedes Ziel, das nicht die reine Natur dem Menschen steckt" (II, 654). The contrast between the above statement and the statement in which he expressed the ultimate end of his earlier goals, ". . . mich selbst auf eine Stufe näher der Gottheit zu stellen" (II, 586), is indicative of the change of direction, the shift of emphasis which Kleist has

undertaken in his mode of thinking as a result of the insights gained during the time of the Kant crisis.

C. Post-Kant Crisis

Before the Kant crisis, Kleist had directed his entire being toward the attainment of an essentially self-serving, egocentric goal: his life was directed toward the attainment of an ever closer approximation of perfection, of divinity. All his other goals in life were subordinated to this desire. Now, realizing the futility of such efforts, he has shifted the emphasis away from his personal ambitions and has focused upon the attainment of a goal which will be of benefit to mankind in general.

This development, this change of direction in his mode of thinking, must be seen as a direct consequence of Kleist's awareness of the futility of all attempts by man to come to an understanding of the nature as well as the intent of the creator. Earlier he had presumed to be able to know God, to be able to determine rationally the will of God.³⁵ The Kant crisis did not, as some would suggest, result in the denial of the existence of a benevolent divine being.³⁶ It did not result in the conviction that the destiny of mankind is in the hands of the irrational, destructive forces in the universe.³⁷ The statement ". . . o wie unbegreiflich ist der Wille, der über uns waltet!" (II, 670) must be regarded as a positive

declaration on Kleist's part. It is, in the first place, an acknowledgment of, a statement of belief in the existence of a divine will in the universe. Second, this statement expresses clearly the new, uncommitted stance which Kleist has assumed with respect to the divine being. He has not denied its existence, but he has stated his conviction that man is incapable of comprehending it. This same conviction is restated, again with positive connotations, in the letter of August 4, 1806: "Es kann kein böser Geist sein, der an der Spitze der Welt steht: es ist ein bloss unbegriffener" (II, 766).

Because of this new, uncommitted stance, Kleist has come to a deeper understanding of and respect for one's responsibilities in this life. Accompanying this recognition is an added significance in the meaning of death. Prior to the Kant crisis, as we have seen, he had perceived of death as somewhat of an intermediate stage between life in this world and the life after death. Now death becomes the point at which all human activity ceases; at one point he refers to death as "das ewige Refrain des Lebens" (II, 783).

As a result, the thought of death may pose a threat to the individual. Because of the emphasis placed upon the notion of the necessity of meaningful accomplishments for this life, the individual may fear that he will die before he has accomplished anything worthwhile in this

life. To be sure, we can find this fear expressed in certain of Kleist's letters, for example: "So habe ich zum Beispiel jetzt eine seltsame Furcht, ich möchte sterben, ehe ich meine Arbeit vollendet habe" (II, 724). To be borne in mind is, however, the fact that the above statement is a reflection of the anxiety which Kleist experienced as a result of his desperate attempts to write the tragedy of all tragedies, Robert Guiskard. An investigation of the circumstances surrounding other instances at which Kleist expresses either the fear of an imminent death or an explicit longing for death will reveal that such sentiments can be attributed to specific conditions or events which weighed heavily on him.³⁸

In this respect it is interesting to note that there are times when a seemingly direct expression of fear of an imminent death is countered with a positive, cautiously optimistic expression of hope for the future. A prime example of the latter is the well-known "Eselsgeschrei" episode. After relating the details of the incident, he, recalling the thoughts which passed through his mind at the time, states: "Und an einem Eselsgeschrei hing ein Menschenleben? Und wenn es nun in dieser Minute geschlossen gewesen wäre, darum also hätte ich gelebt? Darum? Das hätte der Himmel mit diesem dunkeln, rätselhaften irdischen Leben gewollt, und weiter nichts--? Doch für diesmal war es noch nicht geschlossen,--wofür er uns das Leben gefristet

hat, wer kann es wissen?" (II, 666-667). At the time of the incident, he, reacting instinctively, indeed experienced an acute fear of death. This instinctive reaction caused him to question the motive, the intent of the creator. Now, while reflecting upon it, his life having been spared, he realizes that he must have been given a new lease on life for a definite, albeit undetermined reason.

More important for an understanding of Kleist's conception of death is, however, the recognition that, as a result of his new understanding of the "Geist der an der Spitze der Welt steht," the idea of death must be considered in relation to his perception of his role, his responsibilities, in life. This becomes evident in the following passage: "Ach, es ist nichts ekelhafter als diese Furcht vor dem Tode. Das Leben ist das einzige Eigentum, das nur dann etwas wert ist, wenn wir es nicht achten. Verächtlich ist es, wenn wir es nicht leicht fallen lassen können, und nur der kann es zu grossen Zwecken nutzen, der es leicht und freudig wegwerfen könnte. Wer es mit Sorgfalt liebt, moralisch tot ist er schon, denn seine höchste Lebenskraft, nämlich es opfern zu können, modert indessen er es pflegt" (II, 670). Perhaps the most striking feature of this passage is the notion that one must be prepared to give up his life easily and without regret. To be noted in this connection, however, is that Kleist is by no means degrading the value of life. Already

at an early point in his life he had a deep respect for the sanctity of life: "Aber das Leben, welches wir von unsern Eltern empfangen, ist ein heiliges Unterpfand, das wir unsern Kindern wieder mitteilen sollen. Das ist ein ewiges Gesetz der Natur, auf welches sich ihre Erhaltung gründet" (II, 492). The fact that he now views life from a different perspective has done nothing to alter this conviction.³⁹ The former passage does contain two other notions which are essential for an understanding of his conception of death and are completely consistent with his newly established goals in life. First, it must be a purposeful death. Second, he expresses the conviction that being ever prepared to sacrifice one's life is an ingredient which is necessary for a meaningful, purposeful existence.

After the resolution of the conflicts which arose during the Kant crisis, Kleist's perception of the meaning of death is inextricably linked both with his acceptance of his responsibilities for this life and with his growing awareness of his calling in this life. When he resumes his studies in Paris, he does so, no longer in pursuit of an abstract truth, but rather for what he calls his "menschenfreundlicheren Zweck" (II, 684). This shift of emphasis in his thinking and change of direction in his course of action away from the expectation of the attainment of purely selfserving, egocentric goals toward

the attainment of a more broadly conceived humanitarian goal is indicative of a reorientation in his system of values; it represents a new awareness on his part of his responsibility toward his fellow human beings.⁴⁰ He becomes increasingly more aware of an urgent inner need, ". . . etwas Gutes zu tun" (II, 692). He perceives of this need as a personal obligation to his fellow man which he must satisfy: "Besonders seitdem mich die Wissenschaften gar nicht mehr befriedigen, ist dieses Bedürfnis in mir rege geworden. Kurz, es steht fest beschlossen in meiner Seele: ich will diese Schuld abtragen" (II, 692). The attainment of his newly established goal in life and the realization of his urgent inner need become possible for Kleist in his writings. If we consider the essay "Gebet des Zoroaster" (II, 325-326) as a statement of his artistic intent, then it becomes apparent that he, speaking through the person of Zoroaster, considers it his function, his responsibility, to make man aware of his current pitiable state and to show him how he can overcome it and attain his true potential by changing his mode of thinking and effecting a reorientation in his mode of thinking.⁴¹

Although it cannot be said that Kleist's subsequent activities were all executed in a manner consistent with this goal, the will to satisfy this need does nevertheless serve as a frame of reference which will largely determine the direction of his future course of action. Since he had

already attempted to find his place within the established order in the military service, as a civil servant, and as a scholar, Kleist realizes that, in order for him to be able to satisfy his obligation to do good, he must step outside of the established order: "Eine Reihe von Jahren, in welchen ich über die Welt im grossen frei denken konnte, hat mich dem, was die Menschen Welt nennen, sehr unähnlich gemacht. . . . Daher fühle ich mich ganz unfähig, mich in irgend ein konventionelles Verhältniss der Welt zu passen" (II, 692). This recognition was an instrumental factor in his decision to openly pursue a literary career.

The drive to satisfy this need to accomplish something good in this life also has implications which are of considerable significance in the determination of Kleist's conception of death. If we consider that the determination to satisfy this obligation has become, so to speak, the guiding star of his life, then the full import of the statements concerning death which are to be found in his final letters comes to light. Again in this instance there are external circumstances which must be taken into consideration. The emotional impact caused by the current political situation, the sudden, unexpected death of his patroness, the disapproval of his manner of life by his family, the collapse of the "Abendblätter" venture, as well as the timely appearance of his partner in suicide, Henriette Vogel, cannot be discounted. The



greatest net effect of all these factors was, however, first, to give Kleist the occasion to actively seek death as a release from the pressures, disappointments, and frustrations inherent in existence. Second, by affording him this occasion, the awareness of the imminent release from these pressing matters served to contribute to the festive, almost Dionysian atmosphere surrounding his death.⁴² Thus, though standing in the presence of death, Kleist can say: ". . . ich kann ihm (Gott) mein Leben, das allerqualvollste, das je ein Mensch geführt hat, jetzo danken, weil er es mir durch den herrlichsten und wollustigsten aller Tode vergütigt" (II, 887).

In his last letters we can also detect the deeper, internal reasons for his death. In his final letter to Marie von Kleist, he states concerning his sister Ulrike: "Sie hat, dünkt mich, die Kunst nicht verstanden sich aufzuopfern, ganz für das, was man liebt, in Grund und Boden zu gehen: das seligste, was sich auf Erden denken lässt, ja worin der Himmel bestehen muss, wenn es wahr ist, dass man darin vergnügt und glücklich ist" (II, 885). These statements reflect the essence of Kleist's conception of death. Underlying the more obvious feature of the self-chosen, sacrificial death is the notion of willfully submitting to death in the knowledge of having totally committed oneself to the attainment of his goals and the fulfillment of his destiny in this life. If we consider

the above quotation in relation to Kleist's awareness of the necessity of directing his activities toward the attainment of his "menschenfreundlicheren Zweck," and also to the urgency with which he perceived of his obligation, "etwas Gutes zu tun," then we can gain insight into the meaning of the following statement: ". . . ich sterbe, weil mir auf Erden nichts mehr zu lernen und zu erwerben übrig bleibt" (II, 885). Although he was not able to find happiness in this life, although he met with little success in the profession of his choosing, he can face death without remorse in the belief that he has totally committed himself to the fulfillment of his calling in this life. Since the occasion to sacrifice his life has presented itself, since he no longer perceives of the nature of the life after death as being dependent upon the degree of perfectibility attained in this life, he may die. Feeling that he, by virtue of his artistic creations, had met his obligations for this life, life no longer has any meaning for him.

III. FUNCTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF DEATH

IN KLEIST'S WORKS

A. Innocent Victims of Circumstances

Kleist not only presents several different modes of death, but he also utilizes the death motif to serve various functions at various stages within the thematic structure to enhance his artistic intent. On the most basic level, the death of an individual can serve as an indication of the current evil state of affairs in an imperfect world. Within the individual works themselves, Kleist employs this kind of death essentially as a catalyst, i.e., the needless, at times apparently unmotivated demise of an individual evokes reactions from the surviving characters. These provide the dramatic impetus for the ensuing action and are concurrently indicative of and dependent upon the state of consciousness of each of these characters.

1. Die Familie Schroffenstein: Peter and Aldöbern

Nowhere in all of Kleist's completed works does the presence of the spectre of death appear to pose a more ominous, foreboding threat than in his first drama, Die Familie Schroffenstein. The opening lines of the play

are a litany of hatred and of the revenge about to be undertaken by the House of Rossitz against the House of Warwand under the pretense of compliance with the will of God. The conversation between Jeronimus and the Kirchenvogt in the first scene reveals both the immediate as well as the ultimate cause of the macabre ceremony of the opening scene. The immediate cause was the alleged murder of Peter, Rupert's youngest son, by two emissaries of the House of Warwand who had been apprehended holding drawn, bloody knives at the scene of the alleged crime. Although one of the men was slain immediately, the suspicions and preconceived notions of Rupert and his followers were apparently confirmed by the confession of the surviving emissary just prior to his execution. Pressed by Jeronimus for the exact content of the confession, the Kirchenvogt concedes that, because of the tumult of the crowd, only one word of the "confession" was audible: "Das eine Wort, Herr, war: Sylvester" (I, 59). It was, however, this one word which provided Rupert with the justification for his plotted course of revenge.

The ultimate cause was, as the Kirchenvogt reveals, the existence of a document of succession: an agreement between the House of Warwand and the House of Rossitz whereby, in the event of the complete extermination of one of the households, the possessions and the sovereignty of the one would automatically pass over to the other.

This document, originally drafted, no doubt, in good faith at a point in the distant past as a testimony to the harmonious, mutually trusting relationship between the two branches of the Familie Schroffenstein, soon precipitated the birth of feelings of mistrust and suspicion which grew in intensity with the passage of time. Instead of strengthening the relationship between the two branches, it drove them apart, each group living in the constant fear of being exterminated by the other.

Although it is established in subsequent developments that Peter was in fact not killed by Sylvester's men but was rather the victim of an accidental drowning, Rupert's desire to avenge his son's alleged murder is the primary driving force in the dramatic action until the point at which all the protagonists are confronted with the truth. Rupert's hastily drawn conclusions at the scene of the accident, his acceptance of the one word of the confession at face value, and his instinctively violent, unpremeditated decision to pursue a course of murder and revenge are truly indicative of the extent to which his state of consciousness and his mode of thinking have been molded by the fears and suspicions inherent in the document of succession.

It is not to be assumed, however, that the outbreak of overt accusations was triggered by the apparently incriminating circumstances surrounding Peter's death

alone. Unconfirmed rumors and suspicions had long undermined the relationship between the two families.

In the second scene of the first act we learn that rumors and suspicions abound in the House of Warwand as well. The sudden, inexplicable death of Sylvester's young son Phillip has given rise to accusations against Rupert and his followers. Agnes, responding to her grandfather's statements concerning the bond of friendship existing between the two families, states: "Wie du nur sprichst! Sie haben dir den Enkel,/ Den Bruder mir vergiftet, und das sollen/ Nicht Feinde sein!" (I, 67). In the following lines it becomes apparent that Agnes' suspicions have been aroused by the suggestion implicit in remarks made by her mother, Gertrude, who states: "Was hätt ich öffentlich gesagt? Dir hab/ Ich heimlich anvertraut, es könnte sein,/ Wär möglich, hab den Anschein fast--" (I, 67).

Again in this instance, the precipitous allegations made in response to an unfortunate tragedy in the very recent past are the ultimate result of both the mistrust engendered by the age-old family agreement and unconfirmed suspicions which were awakened in connection with certain events in the more distant past. Hostilities are not, however, initiated by the House of Warwand. This is due primarily to the wise leadership of Graf Sylvester, whose insistence upon restraint and caution is a reflection of

his full awareness of the potential dangers inherent in rumor and mistrust:

Das Misstraun ist die schwarze Sucht der Seele,
Und alles, auch das Schuldlos-Reine, zieht
Fürs kranke Aug die Tracht der Hölle an.
Das Nichtsbedeutende, Gemeine, ganz
Alltägliche, spitzfündig, wie zerstreute
Zwirnfäden, wirds zu einem Bild geknüpft,
Das uns mit grässlichen Gestalten schreckt (I, 69).

This stance of restraint and caution is maintained by Sylvester, even in the face of the most adverse circumstances. This is especially evident in his refusal to take seriously the message delivered by Aldöbern, Rupert's emissary. He cannot rely upon the veracity of second hand reports, but feels he must confront his accuser directly: "Franz, saddle mir mein Pferd.--Verzeih mein Freund,/ Wer kann das Unbegreifliche begreifen?/ --Wo ist mein Helm, mein Schwert?--Denn hören muss/ Ichs doch aus seinem Munde, eh ichs glaube" (I, 73). Before he can respond to the accusations made against him, he must take all necessary measures to attempt to clarify rationally the issues at stake: "--Ich muss mir Licht verschaffen,/ Und sollt ichs mir aus der Hölle holen" (I, 74).

In the final analysis, the willful course of action undertaken by Rupert and Sylvester respectively in the initial stages of the drama must be regarded as the direct expression and consequence of their divergent modes of thinking. Rupert wants to interpret the death of Peter as an overt act of cold-blooded, premeditated murder because

this interpretation coincides with his preconceived notions concerning the evil intent and desires of the House of Warwand. Sylvester, on the other hand, being more acutely aware of the unreliability of and the potential dangers inherent in judgments which are based upon rumor, suspicion, and appearance, refuses even to speculate on the possible cause of his own son's death. Responding in the second act to Gertrude's repeated attempts to cast a cloud of suspicion over the House of Warwand, he states: "Ich will mit Ernst, dass du von Philipp schweigst./ Er sei vergiftet oder nicht, er soll/ Gestorben sein und weiter nichts. Ich wills" (I, 92). In like manner, having heard the message delivered by Aldöbern, he resolutely determines to attempt to demonstrate to Rupert in a rational and reasonable fashion that he was in no way responsible for the death of Peter.

The death of Aldöbern, who becomes the defenseless victim of the wrath of Sylvester's subjects, represents the first actual occurrence of death in the work proper. Although the repercussions of his death are not as dramatic or far reaching as those following the alleged murder of Peter, its inclusion is nevertheless essential to the thematic structure and also to the forward movement of the dramatic action as well. The death of Jeronimus in the third act is essentially an act of retaliation on the part of Rupert for the mass murder of Aldöbern. Thus, on

the level of the dramatic action, there is established, as will be shown later, a direct causal link between the conclusions drawn from the death of Peter, the death of Aldöbern, the death of Jeronimus, and the death of Agnes and Ottokar in the final act. The death of Aldöbern functions primarily as a concrete example of the potential consequences of drastic measures undertaken solely upon the basis of unfounded suspicions and preconceived notions which have been contrived for the enhancement of one's personal advantage.

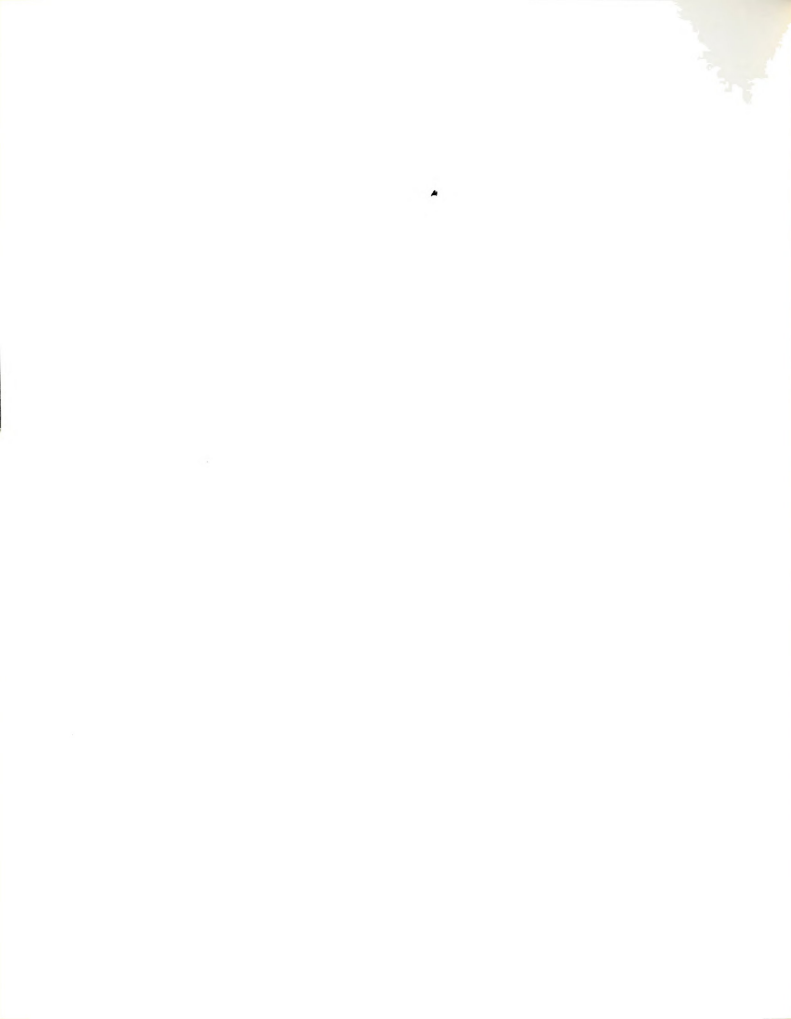
This notion is reflected in statements made by Sylvester immediately after having been informed of the nature of Aldöbern's death. His initial reaction, although it may appear to be somewhat idealistic in view of the circumstances, is nevertheless in keeping with the dignity and the humanitarian direction of his mode of thinking: "Unrecht ists,/ Theistin, mit deinem Haupt hättst du das seine,/ Das heilige, des Herolds, schützen sollen" (I, 83). After a moment of reflection, he is able to evaluate the recent sequence of events from the proper perspective, and he realizes that he has no reason to fault either Theistiner or his subjects for their involvement or lack of involvement in the death of Aldöbern: "Ei nun, sie mögens niederschlucken. Das/ Geschehne muss stets gut sein, wie es kann./ Ganz rein, seh ich wohl ein, kanns fast nicht abgehn,/ Denn wer das Schmutzge anfasst, den besudelts" (I, 83).

The last statement in the above quotation applies to all parties involved. For Rupert and his followers, the death of Aldöbern is an unfortunate, yet inevitable result of the course of hatred and revenge which they have chosen to follow. At the same time, Sylvester is now fully aware that he and his followers can no longer hope to avoid or forestall a confrontation with Rupert's forces.

2. Michael Kohlhaas: Elisabeth

The death of Michael Kohlhaas' wife, Elisabeth, can be viewed from several different perspectives. Her death is not to be construed, however, as the result of a deliberate act of malicious intent. Although Kohlhaas' servant was not himself present at the time that the blow, which eventually proved to be fatal, was struck, his account of the circumstances leading to the incident indicates clearly that her death was, at the most, an unfortunate accident: "Es schien, sie hatte sich zu dreist an die Person des Landesherrn vorgedrängt, und, ohne Verschulden desselben, von dem blossen rohen Eifer einer Wache, die ihn umringte, einen Stoss, mit dem Schaft einer Lanze, vor die Brust erhalten" (II, 29). Seen from within the context of the development of the plot up to this point, Elisabeth, although she was of course aligned with her husband's cause, did not die specifically either in the defense of or in the execution of actions designed to support that cause.

In the early stages Elisabeth supports and encourages Kohlhaas to seek recompensation for the damages done to him and also to his servant, Herse, by Junker Wenzel von Tronka. The following passage indicates that she conceives of it as a necessary, even holy cause--one for which she is prepared to sacrifice: "Denn sie sagte, dass noch mancher andre Reisende, vielleicht minder duldsam, als er, über jene Burg ziehen würde; dass es ein Werk Gottes wäre, Unordnungen, gleich diesen, Einhalt zu tun; und dass sie die Kosten, die ihm die Führung des Prozesses verursachen würde, schon beitreiben wolle" (II, 20-21). It soon becomes apparent, however, that she has not comprehended completely the full breadth and scope of the mission which her husband has been called to fulfill. The failure of all his attempts to obtain an impartial hearing of his charges against Wenzel von Tronka has made Kohlhaas aware of the fact that he has taken upon himself the responsibility of defending a cause which is of such vital importance both for himself and also for his fellow man that it transcends even his responsibilities as a husband and father. This is indicated in the explanation he offers to his neighbor, the Amtmann, for his unexpected decision to sell his property: ". . . Kohlhaasenbrück sei ja nicht die Welt; es könne Zwecke geben, in Vergleich mit welchen, seinem Hauswesen, als ein ordentlicher Vater, vorzustehen, untergeordnet und nichtswürdig sei; und kurz, seine Seele,



müsse er ihm sagen, sei auf grosse Dinge gestellt, von welchen er vielleicht bald hören werde" (II, 25). After the completion of the transactions, he attempts to explain to Elizabeth that the decision to sell his property is a precautionary measure necessitated by his unwillingness to reside in a country which violated his dignity and rights as a human being by capriciously denying him the right to due process of law: "Der Rosskamm, indem er sie sanft an seine Brust drückte, erwiderte: weil ich in einem Lande, liebste Lisbeth, in welchem man mich, in meinen Rechten, nicht schützen will, nicht bleiben mag. Lieber ein Hund sein, wenn ich von Füßen getreten werden soll, als ein Mensch!" (II, 27).

It is in the aftermath of these developments that Elisabeth proposes that she go to Berlin in Kohlhaas' stead and attempt to use her influence with the Kastellan at the castle, her former lover, to good advantage. The noble intent of this gesture cannot be denied. Nevertheless, it is essential that we be aware that this mission was not undertaken as a selfless act of total commitment to the cause of justice. Her emotional behavior and sporadic outbursts both during and after Kohlhaas' transactions with the Amtmann indicate clearly that, above all else, she was, at the time, motivated primarily by her maternal, womanly instincts and was not yet prepared to commit herself totally. This lack of total commitment and the subsequent

lack of understanding for and insight into the course of action about to be undertaken by her husband is especially evident in her reaction to the suggestion that she take the children and visit in Schwerin for the time being. Even at the moment of her death she has not yet come to a complete understanding of the necessity and urgency of Kohlhaas' course of action, for in a dying gesture she points out to Kohlhaas the verse in the Bible which reads: "'Vergib deinen Feinden; tue wohl auch denen, die dich hassen'" (II, 30).

There is every reason to believe that Kohlhaas himself was fully aware that Elisabeth had become the innocent victim of circumstances which had developed in connection with the forces set in motion both by himself and also by various governmental officials as a result of the original injustice done to him by Junker Wenzel von Tronka and his cohorts. The above does not imply, however, that her death was essentially meaningless. Viewed from the perspective of the thematic structure and the dynamic progression of the plot, it becomes evident that Kleist has employed her death to fulfill a function which is vital to the projection of his artistic intent in this work.

The meaning and purpose of her death is to be found primarily in its effect upon Kohlhaas. It must be recognized, first of all, that Kohlhaas does not at any time attempt to

establish a connection between his mission of revenge and judgment and her death.⁴³ No mention of her death is made in any of his proclamations or in the several placards which he and his men posted. It almost seems as if he has undertaken his gruesome task in ruthless disregard of her memory. It is not until his meeting with Martin Luther that we become aware of the significance which her death has assumed in Kohlhaas' eyes. Luther questions the legitimacy or necessity of his extreme measures: "Nachdem dein Schwert sich, an dem Junker, Rache, die grimmigste, genommen, die sich erdenken lässt: was treibt dich, auf ein Erkenntnis gegen ihn zu bestehen, dessen Schärfe, wenn es zuletzt fällt, ihn mit einem Gewicht von so geringer Erheblichkeit nur trifft?" (II, 46). To this Kohlhaas responds tearfully: ". . . hochwürdiger Herr! es hat mich meine Frau gekostet; Kohlhaas will der Welt zeigen, dass sie in keinem ungerechten Handel umgekommen ist" (II, 47).⁴⁴ Kohlhaas acknowledges here that the knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the death of his wife has lent his cause a sense of urgency and has made it imperative that he carry his course of action to its successful conclusion.

The death of Elisabeth also performs an important function within the Novelle. It has already been shown that, even at the time of her death, she did not completely comprehend or support Kohlhaas' mission. Insight is given

to her, however, after her death, and thus, although Kohlhaas is unaware of her identity, she appears to him in the guise of a gypsy woman at the fair in Jüterbock on the day following her burial and, calling him by name, entrusts him with a capsule containing information of vital importance to the Kurfürst von Sachsen: ". . . 'ein Amulett, Kohlhaas, der Rosshändler; verwahr es wohl, es wird dir dereinst das Leben retten!'" (II, 83). Kohlhaas does not learn of the contents of the capsule until shortly before his death when the gypsy woman visits him in prison. At this occasion, however, he observes a striking similarity between her and his deceased wife. The true function and intent of her reincarnation is revealed in her response to the reasons given by Kohlhaas for his unwillingness to deliver the capsule to the Kurfürst von Sachsen: "Die Frau, indem sie das Kind auf den Boden setzte, sagte: dass er in mancherlei Hinsicht recht hätte, und dass er tun und lassen könnte, was er wollte!" (II, 98). She has, in effect, returned from the realm of the dead and given supernatural, transcendental sanction to his course of action, both past and future. This is underscored by her final action. Just moments prior to Kohlhaas' execution, she sends him the following message: "'Kohlhaas, der Kurfürst von Sachsen ist in Berlin; auf den Richtplatz schon ist er vorangegangen, und wird, wenn dir daran liegt, an einem Hut, mit blauen

und weissen Federbüschen kenntlich sein. Die Absicht, in der er kommt, brauche ich dir nicht zu sagen; er will die Kapsel, sobald du verscharrt bist, ausgraben, und den Zettel, der darin befindlich is, eröffnen lassen. --Deine Elisabeth'" (II, 100-101). It is only when armed with this knowledge that Kohlhaas is able to fulfill completely his destiny in this life.

3. Die Hermannsschlacht: Hally

Kleist's grand patriotic drama Die Hermannsschlacht is generally relegated to a position of minor significance within the complex of Kleist's total literary production.⁴⁵ This is due, in part, to the tendentiousness of the content and also to the obvious parallels which can be drawn between characters in the drama and contemporary personages in Germany, Austria, and France. Also contributing to critics' aversion to this drama is the belief that Kleist was advocating that his countrymen also resort to extreme, brutal, inhumane tactics similar to those employed by Hermann in his quest to free the Germans from the tyranny of the Romans. Especially appalling to modern day sensitivities are the acts of violence and destruction which were committed at Hermann's command by German subjects who were disguised as Roman soldiers. One of the more barbarous of these acts was the unprovoked rape and subsequent death of the young maiden, Hally. It is

not necessary that we either condemn or attempt to justify Hermann's involvement in this brutal act. Let us rather attempt to determine the function which her death fulfills in this work.

Seen from within the context of Hermann's conception of his responsibilities as the leader of the Germanic forces, the event leading to the tragic death of Hally was a necessary, last resort measure designed to unite the German people in a common cause against the Romans. In the opening scene of the play, several of the German princes have come together to join their forces in a united effort to halt the ever growing threat posed by the presence of the Roman army on German land. It soon becomes apparent, however, that some of the princes are more concerned with furthering their own selfish interests than with the greater cause of freedom and autonomy.⁴⁶ The situation is assessed most poignantly at the end of the scene in the words of Wolf: "Es bricht der Wolf, o Deutschland,/ In deine Hürde ein, und deine Hirten streiten/ Um eine Handvoll Wolle sich" (I, 537). Hermann's awareness both of the urgent need for immediate action against the Roman forces and also of the existence of petty feuds and rivalries as well as purely selfish interests among his fellow princes is the reason for his apparent reluctance at the end of the third scene to assume outrightly a position of leadership in the struggle against the Roman forces. Throughout the

scene, Hermann attempts to make the princes aware of the real, grander, more universal issues which by far outweigh their personal interests and grievances. He does so, first of all, by questioning the genuineness of their commitment and by pointing out their vulnerability to the deceitful intrigues of the Romans. He furthermore proceeds to confuse and perplex them with ambiguous statements concerning his personal goals and intent:

Wollt ich auf Erden irgend was erringen,
 Ich würde glücklich sein, könnt ich mit Männern mich,
 Wie hier um mich versammelt sind, verbinden;
 Jedoch, weil alles zu verlieren bloss
 Die Absicht ist--so lässt, begreift ihr,
 Solch ein Entschluss nicht wohl ein Bündnis zu:
 Allein muss ich, in solchem Kriege, stehn,
 Verknüpft mit niemand, als nur meinem Gott (I, 543).

The purpose of these and similarly perplexing statements is to make the princes aware that he himself is prepared to commit himself totally and to sacrifice all, even his life if it should be necessary, in the attempt to free his people from the burden of Roman oppression. He demands an equal sense of commitment, a willingness to sacrifice all on the part of the princes if he is to become their leader. The princes, however, do not fully grasp the implications of his demands.

It is precisely this lack of total commitment and this lack of insight into the gravity of the current situation which necessitates the death of Hally. Realizing that he cannot yet depend completely upon the undivided

allegiance of either his fellow princes or the German people, he determines to pursue a course of action which is equal in every respect to the deceit and intrigue of the tactics employed by the invading Romans. Already at the time of their approach, he sent his own soldiers, disguised as Roman soldiers, to instigate acts of violence and plunder which would be attributed to the invaders. These measures were frustrated, however both by the apparent apathy of the German people and also, more importantly, by the unexpected discipline of the Roman troops. He realizes that hatred for the Romans and a thirst for revenge on the part of his people will be awakened only by a deed more dastardly than those already committed, and thus he sets out to see what can be accomplished: "Komm, lass uns heimlich durch die Gassen schleichen,/ Und sehn ob uns der Zufall etwas beut" (I, 586).

It is in the aftermath of these developments that Hally is assaulted, presumably by Roman soldiers, and subsequently stabbed to death by her own father. Her death is necessary, however, for the development of both the dramatic action of the play. Upon his arrival at the scene of the occurrence, Hermann recognizes immediately that it is the knowledge of this act of violence, allegedly committed by the Romans, which will irrevocably unite his people in their struggle against the Romans. Thus he has

her body cut up into fifteen pieces and has one part sent immediately by messenger to each of the fifteen Germanic tribes. The effectiveness of this gruesome tactic is pronounced by Wolf at the scene of the final victory:

Hally, die Jungfrau, die geschändete,
Die du, des Vaterlandes grauses Sinnbild,
Zerstückt in alle Stämme hast geschickt,
Hat unser Völker Langmut aufgezehrt.
In Waffen siehst du ganz Germanien lodern,
Den Greul zu strafen, der sich ihr verübt (I, 625).

Considered from the standpoint of the thematic structure, the death of Hally was also a necessary, last resort measure. For, it was not until they were confronted with an atrocity such as the one committed against Hally that the German princes were able to come to the realization that further deeds of that nature could be avoided only if they would abandon now their personal, egocentric interests and ambitions and commit themselves totally to the preservation of their national freedom and autonomy.

4. Das Bettelweib von Locarno: das Bettelweib

The death of the old beggar woman in the short story Das Bettelweib von Locarno is related in just a few compact sentences in the opening paragraph:

Der Marchese, der, bei der Rückkehr von der Jagd, zufällig in das Zimmer trat, wo er seine Büchse abzusetzen pflegte, befahl der Frau unwillig, aus dem Winkel, in welchem sie lag, aufzustehen, und sich hinter den Ofen zu verfügen. Die Frau, da sie sich erhob, glitschte mit der Krücke auf dem glatten Boden aus, und beschädigte sich, auf eine gefährliche Weise das Kreuz; dergestalt, dass sie zwar noch mit unsäglicher Mühe aufstand, und quer,

wie es vorgeschrieben war, über das Zimmer ging,
hinter den Ofen aber, unter Stöhnen und Achzen,
niedersank und verschied (II, 196).

It is obvious from the description in the above excerpt that her death was not the tragic result of a deliberate, malicious act of violence. By all appearances, her death was, simply stated, a most unfortunate accident--one for which no one could, by the farthest stretch of the imagination, be held responsible. One might thus legitimately question the purpose and the function of her three posthumous ghostly appearances which ultimately resulted in the death of the Marchese.

If we evaluate this story, however, from the standpoint of Kleist's artistic intent and the prevailing thematic structure of his works, it becomes evident that he was concerned with more than the mere creation or presentation of a gripping "Gespenstergeschichte." Although by all conventional standards her death was, an unfortunate accident, within the larger framework it must be regarded as the result of his having neglected to treat her with the dignity and respect to which she as a human being was entitled. After her death, supernatural means must be employed in order to avenge the injustice done to her.

5. Der Findling: Elvire

The death of Elvire differs from the death of the individuals already discussed in that it is the direct

consequence of a course of action undertaken by an individual, Nicolo, for the express purpose of doing her harm. In the opening pages, it is revealed that, after his adoption by Piachi and Elvire, Nicolo proved to be an exemplary son, with the exception, however, of two potentially dangerous traits: "Nichts hatte der Vater, der ein geschworne Feind aller Bigotterie war, an ihm auszusetzen, als den Umgang mit den Mönchen des Karmeliterklosters, die dem jungen Mann, wegen des beträchtlichen Vermögens, das ihm einst, aus der Hinterlassenschaft des Alten zufallen sollte, mit grosser Gunst zugetan waren; und nichts ihrerseits die Mutter, als einen früh, wie es ihr schien, in der Brust desselben sich regenden Hang für das weibliche Geschlecht" (II, 201). The intensification of the latter trait into a ruthless, uncontrollable passion gives rise to the circumstances ultimately precipitating Elvire's death after Nicolo, having accidentally discovered her enduring passion for the young nobleman who had sacrificed his life for her, determines to gain personal advantage from this knowledge.

Falsely believing Elvire to be responsible for publicly humiliating him at the funeral of his wife, Nicolo is obsessed by a deep hatred and a desire for revenge. Equally significant, however, is the evidence of his growing sexual attraction for her. Struck by her

youthful beauty, he, projecting his own illicit feelings onto her, hopes both to satisfy his personal desires and also to expose her as a hypocrite: ". . . es schien ihm unglaublich, dass sie, bei soviel Lockungen dazu, nicht selbst zuweilen auf dem Wege wandern sollte, dessen Blumen zu brechen er eben so schmäählich von ihr gestraft worden war" (II, 206). Both emotions, hatred, with the resultant thirst for revenge, and passion, are intensified as a result of subsequent developments which lead Nicolo to believe that he himself is the object of Elvire's secret adoration.

This illusion is shattered, however, when his mistress Xaviera Tartini, who had used her influence with the bishop as a means to obtain confidential information about Elvire, informs him of the true identity of the nobleman in the portrait. Frustrated and humiliated once again, he sets out with an even greater vengeance in an effort to achieve his pernicious goals: "Beschämung, Wollust und Rache vereinigten sich jetzt, um die abscheulichste Tat, die je verübt worden ist, auszubrüten" (II, 212). Securing again the costume which he had worn to the carnival, he steals into Elvire's room and conceals himself behind the curtain which he had draped over the portrait of the young nobleman. Her arrival produces the results which he anticipated: ". . . kaum hatte Elvire, die bald darauf eintrat, nach einer stillen und ruhigen Entkleidung, wie sie gewöhnlich zu tun pflegte, den seidnen Vorhang, der

die Nische bedeckte, eröffnet und ihn erblickt: als sie schon Colino! Mein Geliebter! rief und ohnmächtig auf das Getäfel des Bodens niedersank" (II, 212).

Although the unexpected return of Piachi prevents Nicolo from completing the intended desecration of Elvire's character as well as her body, her death shortly thereafter is a direct result of this devastating experience. Relating her death to the thematic structure of the work, it can be stated that Elvire dies, an innocent victim of the vicious, unbridled passions of an irreconcilably evil individual. Furthermore, it is in response to her death but even more to Nicolo's unconscionable actions immediately following the incident that Piachi becomes aware of the need for him to take the matter of revenge and punishment into his own hands.

B. The Anticipatory Experience of Death

In several of his works, Kleist places his leading protagonists into a situation where they experience in varying degrees of intensity, the torments, doubts and fears which conventional modes of thinking have customarily associated with the idea of death. This situation generally occurs at a crucial juncture in the development of the plot and it is of special significance for the thematic structure of these works. Although in certain instances some of the characters (Prinz Friedrich, Littegarde) are actually

confronted with the very real prospect of their own death, none of them dies as a direct result of this experience. Nevertheless, it is a necessary experience for each of these characters for it is in this confrontation with the spectre of death that he is confronted with the stark reality of truth and consequently becomes aware of the need for a shift of emphasis, a change of direction in his mode of thinking.

1. Prinz Friedrich von Homburg: Prinz Friedrich

The celebrated "Todesfurchtszene" of the drama Prinz Friedrich von Homburg is probably one of the best known individual scenes in all of German literature. Within the context of the traditional, classical structure of the drama, this scene, since it occurs in the third act, could be regarded as the high point, the climax of the dramatic action. In Kleist's dramas, however, the dramatic climax does not occur until the very end. Homburg's initial reactions to the sight of his open grave indicate that for him his imminent death represented the complete destruction of all his aspirations for both present and future fame and fortune. Moreover, from the standpoint of his moral development and character, it was the point at which he sank to rock bottom.

The stage for the ensuing dramatic action is set by Homburg's somnambulistic activities in the first scene. When Homburg failed to appear at the appointed time to

lead the scheduled departure of his troops, Graf Hohenzollern instituted a search and found him, as he explains to the Kurfürst:

Als ein Nachtwandler, schau, auf jener Bank,
Wohin im Schlaf, wie du nie glauben wolltest,
Der Mondschein ihn gelockt, beschäftigt,
Sich träumend, seiner eignen Nachwelt gleich,
Den prächtigen Kranz des Ruhmes einzuwenden (I, 632).

At the present time, none of the spectators to the spectacle can attach any great significance to Homburg's actions other than the possibility that they were an expression of his anticipation of a resounding victory in the battle to be fought on the following day. The Kurfürst, who had been amused but also perplexed by Homburg's behavior, closes the scene with the stern reminder that victory on the battlefield is achieved at a cost and cannot be the product of one's subjective, subconscious experiences:

Ins Nichts mit dir zurück, Herr Prinz von Homburg,
Ins Nichts, ins Nichts! In dem Gefilde der Schlacht,
Sehn wir, wenns dir gefällig ist, uns wieder!
Im Traum erringt man solche Dinge nicht! (I, 634).

The fact that Homburg's somnambulistic activities in the first scene are indicative of more than subconscious thoughts and desires begins to become more apparent soon after he is awakened by Hohenzollern. When reminded of his having failed to lead the scheduled departure of his regiment, he reacts with indifference:

Es ist gleichviel! Der alte Kottwitz führt sie,
 Der jede Absicht dieses Marsches kennt.
 Zudem hätt ich zurück ins Hauptquartier
 Um zwei Uhr morgens wiederkehren müssen,
 Weil hier Parole noch soll empfangen werden:
 So bleib ich besser gleich im Ort zurück (I, 637).

Of more immediate concern for him is that, at the time that he was awakened, he inexplicably found himself in the possession of a lady's glove. Although he can recall vividly all the other characters and events in his dream experience, he cannot remember the identity of the person to whom the glove belongs. On the following morning, when he is to receive his instructions for what is to be the decisive battle of the Kurfürst's campaign, he is still preoccupied with the events of the previous evening. Throughout the fifth scene he is visibly distracted and appears to be completely oblivious, even when spoken to directly, to the significance of the proceedings.

The only instance at which he exhibits any sign whatsoever of mental alertness is when Natalie notices the absence of one of her gloves. The Kurfürst, who had once again been a witness to Homburg's strange, irrational behavior, closes the proceedings with a direct appeal to the Prince to practice restraint. This request serves, basically, two important functions. In the first place, we are made aware that Homburg's irresponsible actions in the past have already cost the Kurfürst two victories. Second, and of even greater significance, the Kurfürst is

attempting to make Homburg aware of the actual issues at stake in the impending battle: freedom, autonomy, and the right of the people of Brandenburg to self-determination.

Standing in direct opposition to the above quotation is Homburg's first monologue of the play at the end of the first act:

Nun denn, auf deiner Kugel, Ungeheures,
Du, der der Windeshauch den Schleier heut,
Gleich einem Segel lüftet, roll heran!
Du hast mir, Glück, die Locken schon gestreift:
Ein Pfand schon warfst du, im Vorüberschweben,
Aus deinem Füllhorn lächelnd mir herab:
Heut, Kind der Götter, such ich, flüchtiges,
Ich hasche dich im Feld der Schlacht und stürze
Ganz deinen Segen mir zu Füßen um:
Wärest du auch siebenfach, mit Eisenketten,
Am schwedschen Siegeswagen festgebunden! (I, 648).

It is obvious that Homburg's sights are set solely upon the attainment of his personal goals and ambitions. The upcoming battle has no other relevance than that it will provide him with the opportunity to acquire that level of personal fame and fortune which until now has eluded him. Müller-Seidel (p. 134) has observed that this monologue is a true reflection of Homburg's inner wishes and desires. The nouns "Windeshauch," "Schleier," "Segel," "Locken" and also the verbal forms "lüften," "streifen," "vorüberschweben," "lächeln," and "haschen" are indicative of the fact that Homburg is striving after that which is temporary and transitory and is consequently not fully aware of the more permanent, universal implications of the battle.

It is this state of consciousness, this limited perspective, which sets the stage for Homburg's precipitous rush into battle in the second scene of the second act. When it becomes apparent that victory is being won, he, anxious to obtain personal fame and glory by performing deeds of valor on the battlefield, can restrain himself no longer and orders his troops to prepare to engage in combat immediately. When he is reminded by Kottwitz of the Kurfürst's order to wait for a signal before entering the battle, he, motivated only by his personal ambitions, replies: "Auf Ord'r! Ei Kottwitz! Reitest du so langsam?/ Hast du sie noch vom Herzen nicht empfangen?" (I, 653).

The victory celebration in the ninth scene of the second act is dampened considerably by the Kurfürst's opening remarks:

Wer immer auch die Reuterei geführt
 Am Tag der Schlacht, und, eh der Obrist Hennings
 Des Feindes Brücken hat zerstören können,
 Damit ist aufgebrochen, eigenmächtig,
 Zur Flucht, bevor ich Order gab, ihn zwingend,
 Der ist des Todes schuldig, das erklär ich,
 Und vor ein Kriegsgericht bestell ich ihn (I, 663).

Initially, Homburg is embittered by his imprisonment. He perceives it as a personal affront committed against him by the Kurfürst. In the opening scene of the third act it is evident that Homburg is not yet fully aware of the deeper implications of the charges which the Kurfürst has made against him. He has not yet come to the recognition

that these charges do not question his repute as a brave, effective warrior; they are rather concerned with the right of an individual to willfully, capriciously violate the law of the land for the express purpose of furthering his personal interests and ambitions. It is partially because of this complete lack of insight into the issues at stake that Homburg, regarding his imprisonment as a necessary formality on the part of the Kurfürst, is confident of an imminent pardon. Furthermore, and this again underscores his failure to comprehend completely the full import of the current state of affairs, his expectations for pardon are based upon his subjective knowledge of his value and worth to the Kurfürst.

We can detect a weakening of the Prince's composure and self-assurance at the moment that he is informed of the Kurfürst's intent to sign the document ordering his death sentence. Suddenly he, who had often faced death fearlessly in battle, is confronted with the prospect of having to die as the result of an indiscretion whose significance he does not even acknowledge:

Er könnte--nein! so ungeheure
Entschliessungen in seinem Busen wälzen?
Um eines Fehls, der Brille kaum bemerkbar,
In dem Demanten, den er jüngst empfing,
In Staub den Geber treten? (I, 671)

Having come to the conclusion, with the aid of Hohenzollern, that his engagement to Natalie is the reason for the Kurfürst's failure to grant him pardon, he determines to

request the Kurfürstin to intervene in his behalf. It is while he is enroute to the castle that Homburg sees his open grave.

The meaning and the function of the "Todesfurchtszene" can be best understood if it be considered in conjunction with the Prince's monologue at the end of the first act. Having been confronted with the reality of his imminent death, he now wants only to live and is prepared to abandon all his former ambitions for material gain and military success. He is even willing to relinquish his claims to Natalie, whose hand he hoped to win as a crowning achievement to all his successes:

Ich gebe jeden Anspruch auf an Glück.
Nataliens, das vergiss nicht, ihm zu melden,
Begehr ich gar nicht mehr, in meinem Busen
Ist alle Zärtlichkeit für sie verlöscht (I, 676).

With the abandonment of all his former goals and ambitions, he no longer has any meaningful purpose in life. Concerned only with the preservation of his physical existence, he is prepared to spend the rest of his days in meaningless activity.

In his excessive preoccupation with the fact of mere physical existence, Homburg has reached the point where he is already, within the context of Kleist's conception of death, "moralisch tot."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this scene performs an important function within the work. For Homburg himself, the anticipatory experience of death at the site of his open

grave represents, using the metaphors of the essay "Über das Marionettentheater," the beginning of his "Durchgang durch das Unendliche" (II, 345). It was not until he had experienced the nothingness, the emptiness of a meaningless death, not until his mind had been purged of all hopes for attaining his egocentric, self-serving goals that he was able to become aware of both the egocentricity of his mode of thinking and also the need for a reorientation in his system of values. In essence, Homburg's experience of death represents, from the standpoint of his moral character, his deepest plunge, but it is at the same time the first, necessary step toward his total rehabilitation at the end.

2. Der Zweikampf: Littegarde

The sequence of events in the Novelle Der Zweikampf is, in many respects, highly reminiscent of the drama Die Familie Schroffenstein. The impetus for the ensuing action is provided when Herzog Wilhelm von Breysach is murdered while returning home from a meeting with the Kaiser in Worms. The purpose of this meeting had been to arrange that he be succeeded to the throne by his illegitimate son, Graf Philipp von Hünningen. The Herzog had undertaken this action, first of all, because he had no other legitimate heirs and, second, because he wished to prevent his half-brother Jakob der Rotbart, who had long been hostile toward him, from inheriting his domain. Rotbart's unexpected and

gracious acceptance of these measures served to alleviate the suspicions which many had harbored against him. Nevertheless, the investigation of the murder, which the Herzogin was duty-bound to conduct, revealed both that the arrow which killed the Herzog had been made for Rotbart and also that Rotbart was absent from his castle on the night of the murder. The Herzogin, who is convinced of his innocence, informs him by letter of these findings for the sole purpose of preventing the spread of vicious, unfounded rumors and suspicions.

Rotbart, on the other hand, seizes upon this opportunity to further his pernicious ambitions: "Brüder, seht! welch eine schändliche Anklage, auf den Mord meines Bruders, wider mich zusammengeschiedet worden ist!" (II, 232). After a few moments of reflection, however, he voluntarily places himself under the arrest of the Herzogin's messenger and declares his intent of clearing himself of all charges before the tribunal. It is at this point that Littegarde is drawn into the action. As evidence of his innocence of any complicity in the death of the Herzog, Rotbart reveals the following: "' . . . weil ihr denn wissen wollt, warum es weder wahrscheinlich, noch auch selbst möglich sei, dass ich an dem Mord meines Bruders, es sei nun persönlich oder mittelbar, Teil genommen, so vernehmt, dass ich in der Nacht des heiligen Remigius, also zur Zeit, da er verübt worden, heimlich bei der schönen,

in Liebe mir ergebenen Tochter des Landdrosts Winfried von Breda, Frau Wittib Littegarde von Auerstein war'" (II, 235).

For Littegarde, who is described as being, "so wie die schönste, so auch, bis auf den Augenblick dieser schmählichen Anklage, die unbescholtene und makelloste Frau des Landes" (II, 235), the results are immediate and catastrophic. After the death of her father, which was caused as a direct result of the scandal in which she had become implicated, she is forcibly driven from the family castle by her brothers. Determined to prove her innocence, Littegarde summons the aid of Friedrich von Trota, who at one time had requested her hand in marriage. Despite the overwhelming evidence against her, Friedrich, fully convinced of her innocence, agrees to represent her before the tribunal. Appearing before the court at the time when the document which absolved Rotbart of any complicity in the death of the Herzog is about to be read formally, Friedrich tears up the document and makes the following pronouncement to Rotbart: ". . . dass er ein schändlicher und niederträchtiger Verleumder, und er entschlossen sei, die Schuldlosigkeit Frau Littegardens an dem Frevel, dem er ihr vorgeworfen, auf Tod und Leben, vor aller Welt, im Gottesurteil zu beweisen!" (II, 242).

Friedrich's resort to the trial by combat gives rise to the central conflict of the Novelle. The medieval practice of the trial by combat was institutionally

sanctioned, i.e., it had become an integral part of the legal-political as well as the religious corpus juris. It was predicated upon the belief that, in the course of the combat, God would make his will manifest by allowing the innocent party to conquer his opponent. It was not, however, a matter to be undertaken frivolously for they who "falsely" called for the intervention of God in this manner were condemned to die. Littegarde's composure and confidence just prior to the struggle are based, above all else, upon her knowledge of her innocence but also upon her complete trust that God would favorably direct the events to her advantage. Attempting to assuage the doubts and fears of Friedrich's mother and sisters, she states: "Keine Schuld befleckt mein Gewissen; und ginge er ohne Helm und Harnisch in den Kampf, Gott und alle seine Engel beschirmen ihn!" (II, 245).

This illusion is shattered suddenly, however, when Friedrich falls accidentally and immediately receives what appear to be several mortal wounds from the sword of Jakob der Rotbart. To all the spectators it appears as if God has spoken in favor of Rotbart, and Friedrich and Littegarde are imprisoned to await the compulsory death sentence. Friedrich, however recovers miraculously from his wounds, and, as a result, he becomes aware of the invalidity, the arbitrary, capricious nature of the institution of the trial by combat. Responding to this mother's reproaches

of Littegarde, he states: ". . . wo ist der Sterbliche, und wäre die Weisheit aller Zeiten sein, der es wagen darf, den geheimnisvollen Spruch, den Gott in diesem Zusammenhang getan hat, auszulegen?" (II, 248).

The gaining of this awareness involves a more lengthy, arduous process in the case of Littegarde. She, who is more aware than anyone else, even Rotbart, of her innocence, is also convinced of the absolute validity of the "Gottesurteil." As was the case with Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, Kleist brings her to the recognition of the invalidity of her mode of thinking by placing her in the very presence of death. The vicarious experience of death in Kleist's works is, above all else, an intensely personal experience. For Littegarde, this experience brings about a complete disintegration of her personality and an extreme fragmentation of consciousness or disassociation from the self.

After Friedrich has recovered sufficiently from his wounds to visit her in her prison cell, he finds her bordering on insanity, in a state of complete mental and physical anguish. Attempting to comfort her, he is rejected vociferously and cruelly: "'Hinweg!' rief sie, mehrere Schritt weit auf Knien vor ihm auf dem Stroh zurückbeugend: 'wenn ich nicht wahnsinnig werden soll, so berühre mich nicht! Du bist mir ein Greuel; lodernes Feuer ist mir minder schrecklich, als du!'" (II, 250).

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Completely bewildered and perplexed, Friedrich, coming to the only conclusion possible under the circumstances, asks whether she was perhaps guilty of the charges brought against her. Littegarde's response is demonstrative of both the nature and also the extreme intensity of her inner conflicts--the conflict between her inner certainty and knowledge and her blind, absolute acceptance of the arbitrary, humanly contrived precepts propagated by the prevailing social structure: "'Schuldig, überwiesen, verworfen, in Zeitlichkeit und Ewigkeit verdammt und verurteilt!' rief Littegarde, indem sie sich den Busen, wie eine Rasende zerschlug: 'Gott ist wahrhaftig und untrüglich; geh, meine Sinne reißen, und meine Kraft bricht. Lass mich mit meinem Jammer und meiner Verzweiflung allein!'" (II, 251).

After reaching this depth of despair and mental anguish, she begins to regain her composure and awareness and is able to relate in detail the exact nature of her relationship to Jakob der Rotbart, thereby substantiating Friedrich's conviction of her innocence. What is even more significant, however, is that she now defends her innocence in most emphatic terms: "Wie die Brust eines neugeborenen Kindes, wie das Gewissen eines aus der Beichte kommenden Menschen, wie die Leiche einer, in der Sakristei, unter der Einkleidung, verschiedenen Nonne!" (II, 253). Although she is herself cognizant of her complete innocence,

she is nevertheless still troubled by the ambiguous, damning results of the trial: ". . . hat das geheiligte Urteil Gottes nicht gegen mich entschieden? Hast du dem Grafen nicht in jenem verhängnisvollen Zweikampf unterlegen, und er nicht die Wahrhaftigkeit dessen, was er vor Gericht gegen mich angebracht, ausgekämpft?" (II, 253). In the course of his response, Friedrich, giving expression to the central theme of the Novelle, removes this final obstacle by stating: "Wo liegt die Verpflichtung der höchsten göttlichen Weisheit, die Wahrheit im Augenblick der höchsten göttlichen Weisheit, die Wahrheit im Augenblick der glaubensvollen Anrufung selbst, anzuzeigen und auszusprechen?" (II, 254).

Littegarde was able to come to an acceptance of this truth only because she, in the face of death, had regained her awareness both of her innocence and also of her personal worth.

3. Die Verlobung in St. Domingo: Toni

It is, of course, only in a very limited sense that we can speak of an "anticipatory experience of death" in Die Verlobung in St. Domingo. Unlike Prinz Friedrich and Littegarde, Toni is not confronted directly with the very real prospect of an imminent death, nor is she subjected to the mental and spiritual anguish which results from the knowledge that one is about to die an essentially meaningless,

purposeless death. A change in Toni's mode of thinking, a reorientation in her system of values is rather effected as a result of her response to the two death-related episodes related to her by the fugitive, Gustav von der Ried.

Providing the setting for the Novelle is the insurrection of the black inhabitants of the island against their white, French overlords. One of the most violent and fearful leaders of the revolution was the old Negro, Congo Hoango. Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, Hoango embarked upon a ruthless, relentless course of blind revenge, murder, and destruction. As an initial act of terror, he killed Villeneuve, his former master who had not only given him his freedom but had also treated him consistently with generosity and respect, killed his family and devastated completely the Villeneuve estate. Obsessed with the lust for the total annihilation of all the white inhabitants of the island, he also resorted to deceit and intrigue, lest anyone should escape his grasp: "Ja, er forderte in seiner unmenschlichen Rachsucht, sogar die alte Babekan mit ihrer Tochter, einer jungen, funfzehnjährigen Mestize, namens Toni, auf, an diesem grimmigen Kriege, bei dem er sich ganz verjüngte, Anteil zu nehmen; und weil das Hauptgebäude der Pflanzung, das er jetzt bewohnte, einsam an der Hauptstrasse lag und sich häufig, während seiner Abwesenheit, weisse oder kreolische Flüchtlinge einfanden,

welche darin Nahrung oder ein Unterkommen suchten, so unterrichtete er die Weiber, diese weissen Hunde, wie er sie nannte, mit Unterstutzungen und Gefälligkeiten bis zu seiner Wiederkehr hinzuhalten" (II, 161). Toni was especially wellsuited for this deceitful task, not only because of her youthful figure and appearance, but above all because of the light color of her skin. In the event of the arrival of a fugitive, she was instructed to adorn herself in her most attractive clothing, and she was encouraged, ". . . den Fremden keine Liebkosung zu versagen, bis auf die letzte, die ihr bei Todesstrafe verboten war" (II, 161). The unsuspecting stranger was doomed to die, however, upon the return of Congo Hoango.

This practiced ritual is repeated on the night that Gustav von der Ried arrives. Fleeing through the mountains to Port au Prince, the last white stronghold on the island, in the company of his uncle and aunt as well as their children and domestic servants, Gustav had set out alone in an attempt to procure vital food supplies. Upon hearing that he had arrived at an estate which was now possession of the infamous Congo Hoango, Gustav is about to flee when Toni, holding a lantern in a position which best revealed the lightness of her skin, appears. He is taken aback momentarily: "Wer bist du? rief der Fremde sträubend, indem er, um mehr als einer Ursache willen betroffen, ihre junge, liebliche Gestalt

betrachtete" (II, 163). Although he does not become aware of the reason for his inexplicable attraction to Toni until somewhat later, Gustav gives in to her assurances of his safety and agrees to enter the house.

While Toni is in the kitchen preparing a meal for him, her mother, Babekan, attempts to bolster his false sense of security by engaging him in conversation and feigning sympathy for the plight of the white inhabitants of the island: "'Ja, diese rasende Erbitterung,' heuchelte die Alte. 'Ist es nicht, als ob die Hände eines Körpers, oder die Zähne eines Mundes gegen einander wüten wollten, weil das eine Glied nicht geschaffen ist, wie das andere?'"

(II, 165). In addition, she attempts to divert him from his preoccupation with the fear for his safety and to awaken in him a feeling of affinity with herself and her daughter by revealing that they too, because they each had one white parent, are potential victims of the ruthless revenge of the rampaging blacks: "'Was kann ich, deren Vater aus St. Jago, von der Insel Cuba war, für den Schimmer von Licht, der auf meinem Antlitz, wenn es Tag wird, erdämmert? Und was kann meine Tochter, die in Europa empfangen und geboren ist, dass der volle Tag jenes Weltteils von dem ihrigen widerscheint?'" (II, 165).

Having evoked a sympathetic response from him, Babekan feels confident of the success of her deceitful scheme, and she is certain that he can soon be persuaded to entrust her with the safety of his retinue.

When Toni returns, she too joins the conversation, and it is in her response to an episode related by Gustav that we can detect the first signs of a developing inner conflict. Responding to Toni's question concerning the reason for the blacks' hatred for the whites, Gustav states that, whereas he can well understand the blacks' desire to free themselves from the tyranny of their white overlords, he cannot condone the ruthless, indiscriminate nature of their tactics. As an example he cites the case of the young Negro girl who had fallen victim to the yellow fever epidemic which had broken out shortly after the start of the revolution. When her former master, who had once punished her brutally after she had rejected his advances, was forced to seek refuge from the wrath of the Negroes, she sent her brother to him and invited him to spend the night with her. Unaware that she was afflicted with a fatal disease, he was filled with gratitude and regarded her as his savior. Hardly had he spent a few intimate moments with her, however, when she arose suddenly and burst out: ". . . eine Pestkranke, die den Tod in der Brust trägt, hast du geküsst: geh und gib das gelbe Fieber allen denen, die dir gleichen!" (II, 170). At this significant moment, Gustav turns to Toni and asks her directly, whether she would be capable of such a deed (II, 170).

It is after she was confronted directly and personally with this question that Toni, who had previously been an accomplice to equally deceitful intrigues and is well aware of the fate awaiting Gustav and his associates upon the return of Congo Hoango, begins to gain insight into and to question the motives underlying her actions. Kleist presents her response in but one short, nevertheless pregnant sentence: "Nein! sagte Toni, indem sie verwirrt vor sich niedersah" (II, 170). Relating this event to the thematic structure of Kleist's works, Toni has reached the stage where she has become aware for the first time of the lack of unity between her conscious and her unconscious behavior. Kleist brings her from this point of momentary confusion and internal disarray to the point at which she comes to the recognition of the need for a shift of emphasis in her mode of thinking and the need for a reorientation of her scale of values. The opportunity is provided by a second episode related by Gustav.

Alone with her in his room, Gustav suddenly becomes aware of her striking resemblance to his former fiancée, Mariane Congreve. Relating the circumstances surrounding her death, Gustav explains that she died as a result of his having had the impertinence to publicly declare his reservations concerning the activities of the newly established French revolutionary tribunal. When the officers of the court came to arrest him, he was not to

be found, and they took Mariane in his stead. Informed of her arrest, he rushed to the execution place and identified himself as the one who should be executed. She however, when questioned, denied any knowledge of him and was beheaded in his stead. Again in this instance, Toni's response is recorded without elaboration: "Bei diesen Worten trat der Fremde, indem er das Mädchen losliess, an das Fenster; und da diese sah, dass er sein Gesicht sehr gerührt in ein Tuch drückte: so übernahm sie, von manchen Seiten geweckt, ein menschliches Gefühl; sie folgte ihm mit einer plötzlichen Bewegung, fiel ihm um den Hals, und mischte ihre Tränen mit den seinigen" (II, 174-175). It is this "menschliches Gefühl," indicative of the change which has taken place within her, which determines, as we shall see in our subsequent discussion of this work, her future course of action.

4. Das Käthchen von Heilbronn: Graf Wetter vom Strahl

It has been shown that, in the works which have been discussed thus far in this section, the anticipatory experience of death is a decisive, instrumental factor in bringing about a change of direction in the mode of thinking and, consequently, a reorientation of the scale of values of an individual. It represents, so to speak, the moment of the first, albeit incomplete, recognition--the point at which the individual begins to become aware of his

inner dichotomy and of the invalidity of his mode of thinking. In the drama Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, Graf Wetter vom Strahl's experience of death occurs in connection with a supernatural dream experience, and it does not appear to be as intricately related to or responsible for the process of recognition and change to which he, in the course of his development, must submit.

Although the actual experience itself took place at a time prior to the events portrayed in the drama, it is not related until the ninth scene of the second act. Nevertheless, the revelation of this experience occurs at a crucial juncture in the development of the plot for it not only elucidates, to a certain extent, the events of the preceding scenes, but it also provides the impetus for the ensuing dramatic action.

There are, as Hermann Weigand has observed, essentially two basic determinative factors underlying the dynamic forward progression of the dramatic action in the drama. In the first place, there is the medieval notion of the permanent, distinctive division of the various social classes. These divisions were adhered to by all with respect, and they were considered to be divinely instituted and approved. The second factor is related to the above, and it concerns the Graf's dream experience in which it was revealed to him that he was destined to marry the daughter of the Kaiser.⁴⁸

The Graf's monologue in the first scene of the second act is similar in function to the Prince's monologue at the end of the first act of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg in that it reveals his innermost thoughts and wishes. Whereas Homburg's actions were motivated by his hopes to attain personal fame and glory on the battlefield, the Graf's perspective has been distorted by his adherence to and unquestioning acceptance of the traditional, arbitrary categories of social distinction propagated by contemporary society. As a consequence, his monologue reveals that he is torn between what appear to be two diametrically opposed forces. He has, on the one hand, fallen deeply in love with Käthchen. Prohibiting the development and the expression of this love at the time, however, are the Graf's awareness of and also his acceptance of his obligation and responsibility to submit to and support the currently prescribed social distinctions. Addressing himself to his remote ancestors, he declares:

"Warum verlasst ihr eure goldnen Rahmen, ihr Bilder meiner geharnischten Väter, die meinen Rüstsaal bevölkern, und tretet, in unruhiger Versammlung, hier um mich herum, eure ehrwürdigen Locken schüttelnd? Nein, nein, nein! Zum Weibe, wenn ich sie gleich liebe, begehrt ich sie nicht; eurem stolzen Reigen will ich mich anschliessen: das war beschlossene Sache, noch ehe ihr kamt" (I, 454).

The thoughts expressed in this monologue indicate that

the Graf has attempted to reconcile these opposing forces by drawing a distinction between love and marriage. He regards marriage strictly as an institution, as a means to fulfill his social obligations and responsibilities.

The Graf's unquestioning allegiance to this arbitrary, artificial code of behavior assumes an added significance and his attempts to conceal, even suppress, his feelings for her seem somewhat more plausible when the content of his dream experience is revealed. For this present discussion it is especially noteworthy that the dream experience and the revelation of the angel occurred at a time when the Graf was in the very presence of death. Following a period of severe depression, the cause of which he revealed to no one, he became ill suddenly, and all efforts to cure him appeared to be futile. In a state of delirium, which was the result of a persistent fever, he revealed, however, both the cause of his depression and also his will to die: ". . . er scheide gern, sprach er, von hinnen; das Mädchen, das fähig wäre, ihn zu lieben, sei nicht vorhanden; Leben aber ohne Liebe sei Tod; die Welt nennt er ein Grab, und das Grab eine Wiege, und meinte, er würde nun erst geboren werden" (I, 469). After he had lain in this state for three days, the angel appeared to him and revealed to him that on the eve of the new year he would be led to the maiden who would bring him happiness.

When the angel reappeared at the appointed time and led him in spirit to Kathchen, it appeared to all bystanders that he had died: "Eine Feder ward ihm vorgehalten, seinen Atem zu prüfen: sie rührte sich nicht. Der Arzt meinte in der Tat, sein Geist habe ihn verlassen; rief ihn ängstlich seinen Namen ins Ohr; reizt' ihn, um ihn zu erwecken, mit Gerüchen; reizt' ihn mit Stiften und Nadeln; riss ihm ein Haar aus, dass sich das Blut zeigte; vergebens: er bewegte kein Glied und lag, wie tot" (I, 470). Immediately upon regaining full consciousness, he, having been given a new, meaningful purpose in life, stated his desire to continue living: "'Geh, Mutter geh, und lass in allen Kirchen für mich beten: denn nun wünsch ich zu leben'" (I, 471). The one aspect of the entire experience which had made the greatest impact upon him, however, was the angel's revelation that his bride-to-be was the daughter of a Kaiser. Blinded by his preconceived notions of nobility and social standings, he failed to heed the angels initial admonishment, which was simply: "Vertraue, vertraue, vertraue!" (I, 470). Thus, even though he had been brought into Käthchen's presence and had gazed into her eyes, he failed to recognize her on the day that he entered her father's place of business, for he was as yet unable to separate her from her current social standing.

The incorporation of the supernatural dream experience into this work distinguishes the Graf's

"anticipatory experience of death" from that experienced by the other individuals discussed. The fact that he, at the time of his visit to Käthchen, failed to exhibit any signs whatsoever of life must be seen as the result of his spirit having been disassociated temporarily from his body by transcendental means. What is of significance for our investigation is that the intrusion of the transcendental forces into his life occurred at a time when the Graf had despaired completely of life and was, because of his failure to respond to any medical treatment, on the threshold of death. Furthermore, the dream experience and the revelation of the angel took place when he was in a state of delirium and was not fully conscious. In this respect, the Graf's experience in the face of death is similar to Littegarde's. Speaking in terms of the thematic structure, this experience represents the first step toward his rehabilitation, his total enlightenment, at the end. It was only after he had suffered for an extended period of time and had in turn caused Käthchen to suffer by repeatedly rejecting her unkindly that he was enabled to gain insight into the meaning of the dream.

C. The Sacrificial Death

Kleist employs the sacrificial death to perform a function which is vital to the thematic structure and

the projection of his artistic intent in his works. It will be recalled that, as a result of the insights gained during the time of the Kant crisis, Kleist came to a new understanding of the meaning and purpose of life. An integral component of this understanding was the conviction that being ever prepared to sacrifice one's life for a noble, meaningful cause is an ingredient which is essential for a meaningful, purposeful existence. It is this notion which is the basis for the potential or actual acts of sacrifice of the individuals to be discussed.

It is essential that we be aware that these individuals are also, like the individuals discussed in the first section of this chapter, real or potential victims of circumstances in the infirm world. What distinguishes these individuals, however, is that they knowingly and willfully risk their lives because they are aware of or have just become aware of values which are so essential to human existence that they must be preserved and upheld at all costs.

1. The Potential Death of Sacrifice

a. Das Kathchen von Heilbronn: Kathchen.--Of all the characters Kleist created in his works, the character of the young maiden, Käthchen von Heilbronn, corresponds most closely to his conception of man's potential. Her father, Theobald, characterizes her before the vehmic court

as one who is "gesund an Leib und Seele, wie die ersten Menschen, die geboren worden sein mögen; ein Kind recht nach der Lust Gottes . . ." (I, 432-433). Like the marionette in the essay "Über das Marionettentheater," she is manipulated by a force outside of herself, and, consequently, all her actions are free from the possible interference of any personal, egocentric motives or inhibitions. She exists in a state of complete harmony with herself, with nature, and with God--her relationship with the transcendental realm has not been distorted or disrupted by the intervention of conventional modes of thinking or by arbitrary, traditional categories of belief and behavior. Thus, when she first saw the Graf, she recognizes him immediately as the one whom the angel had brought to her in her dream. Placing her complete, unquestioning trust in the message of the angel, she dedicated herself completely to him as a gesture of her love. In contrast to the Graf's love for her, Käthchen's love was unrestricted, unconditional, and absolute. It was a form of divine love, one which emanated out of her inner being and concentrated directly and completely upon the object, the person. A love of this nature is incomprehensible to the mortal man who has embraced a conventional mode of thinking and has accepted traditional categories of belief and behavior. Furthermore, it was the intrusion of this divine, absolute love into

the lives of Theobald and Graf Wetter vom Strahl which set the dramatic forces into motion.

What is of particular interest for this investigation is the manner in which this love manifested itself in potential acts of selfless sacrifice on Käthchen's part and how her willingness to sacrifice herself was instrumental in effecting a change in the Graf's mode of thinking. Extending the analogy to the figure of the marionette, Käthchen undertakes these selfless sacrificial acts because she is responsive only to the dictates of her soul, her inner driving force. The driving force within her is, as her actions demonstrate clearly, the virtue which Kleist designates in his letters as the most womanly of all virtues: "Sorge für das Wohl anderer" (II, 572). Thus, when she happened to be in the cell of Prior Hatto at the time that he by accident received the letter which revealed the plan of Graf vom Stein to attack the castle of Thurneck, she, reacting instinctively, i.e., responding to the impulses of her inner driving force, and taking no consideration for her own safety, snatched the letter from his hands and fled with it in order to warn the Graf of the impending danger. It must be remembered that this action was undertaken after the Graf had forbidden her to come into his presence again. In addition, she was well aware of his betrothal to Kunigunde and of their

imminent marriage. Nevertheless, her only concern is for their welfare. Handing the letter to Gottschalk, she states:

Der Brief hier ist vom Graf vom Stein, verstehst du?
Ein Anschlag, der noch heut vollführt soll werden,
Auf Thurneck, diese Burg, darin enthalten,
Und auf das schöne Fräulein Kunigunde,
Des Grafen, meines hohen Herren, Braut (I, 487).

This scene represents a crucial juncture not only in the development of the plot, but also in the thematic structure of the work for it is as a result of this selfless gesture on the part of Käthchen that he began to become aware of her innate value and worth as a human being and also of the less than humane manner in which he had treated her. The unexpected arrival of Käthchen marks the point at which a change in his attitude toward her is initiated. Initially, he becomes the temporary victim of his own ruthless rage and uncontrollable passions and sinks to the lowest point of moral degradation. This can be observed in both his words and also his actions after her arrival. Also of importance in this connection are the stage directions, which give an indication of his state of mind and of the forces operative within him. Immediately upon her entry into the room, not even knowing the purpose of her visit, he orders Gottschalk: "Schmeiss sie hinaus. Ich will nichts von ihr wissen" (I, 485). When she does not leave immediately, he repeats the order, but, as the punctuation indicates, more emphatically:

"Schmeiss sie hinaus! Ich will nichts von ihr wissen!"

(I, 485). Käthchen, attempting to draw his attention to the letter, is interrupted rudely: "Ich will ihn nicht!-- Was ist dies für ein Brief?/ Wo kommt er her? Und was enthält er mir?" (I, 486). Her attempts to explain are again cut short. Suddenly he, completely beside himself with rage, no longer in full control of himself, bursts out, as the stage directions indicate, wildly:

Die Dirne, die landstreichend unverschämte!
Ich will nichts von ihr wissen! Hinweg, sag ich!
Zurück nach Heilbronn, wo du hingehörst! (I, 486)

When she attempts once again to make him aware of the vital importance of the letter, he can control himself no longer and reaches for the whip on the wall:

Die Peitsche her! An welchem Nagel hängt sie?
Ich will doch sehn, ob ich, vor losen Mädchen,
In meinem Haus nicht Ruh mir kann verschaffen
(I, 486).

Aware of the Graf's state of mind, Käthchen retains her composure throughout and entrusts Gottschalk with the letter. After the Graf has himself read the letter, however, we can observe a change taking place within him. He suddenly begins to display a measure of concern for her welfare:

Dein Antlitz speit ja Flammen!--
Du nimmst dir gleich ein Tuch um, Katharina,
Und trinkst nicht ehr, bis du dich abgekühlt (I, 489).

As he is about to place his own scarf around her, he becomes aware of the whip and asks: "Was macht die

Peitsche hier?" (I, 490). Reminded that he had himself taken the whip down, he replies, "ergrimmt": "Hab ich hier Hunde, die zu schmeissen sind?" (I, 490). This statement is, above all else, a personal commentary on and a sincere expression of remorse for the brutal, inhumane fashion in which he had treated Käthchen, who had placed herself in jeopardy for his sake.

It was yet another potential act of sacrifice by Käthchen on that very same night which was an instrumental factor in bringing about the total enlightenment and awareness of the Graf. He was, in the first place, made aware of the deceitfulness and the avariciousness of Kunigunde, and, second, he was given deeper insight into and simultaneously gained a deeper respect for the person and nature of Käthchen. In the twelfth scene of the third act, Kunigunde has just been rescued from the burning castle. Her only concern at the moment, however, is that she left behind a portrait of the Graf and, unbeknownst to him at the time, a case containing the official documents which granted certain areas of the Graf's possessions to her. Despite the Graf's protestations, she insists that these items be retrieved and unhesitatingly sends Käthchen into the raging fire. It is at this point that the drastic contrast between the figures of Käthchen and Kunigunde becomes especially evident, not only for the viewer or reader of the drama, but also for the Graf. Whereas

Käthchen acted without taking her own safety into consideration and solely out of her concern for others, Kunigunde was willing to endanger the life of another in order to further her personal interests and ambitions. Completely unsympathetic with the Graf's expressions of concern for Käthchen's safety, she exclaims:

Bei Gott, und wenns des Kaisers Tochter wäre!--
 Was fürchtet Ihr? Das Haus, wenn es gleich brennt,
 Steht, wie ein Fels, auf dem Gebälke noch;
 Die Treppe war noch unberührt vom Strahl;
 Rauch ist das einzige Ubel, das sie findet (I, 494).

This contrast and the Graf's growing awareness of it is brought out even more distinctly after Käthchen is led safely from the collapsing building by the angel. Believing her to be dead, the Graf is stricken with grief and reveals in his words that he has come to a complete recognition of the nobility of her deeds and of her value and worth as an individual: "Trostlos mir!/ Die Erd hat nichts mehr Schönes. Lasst mich sein" (I, 497). It is when he learns that Käthchen has escaped unharmed from the fire that the Graf arrives at another crucial juncture in his development. Although he had not seen the angel standing behind her when she escaped from the castle, he approaches her, observes her, and states: "Nun über dich schwebt Gott mit seinen Scharen!" (I, 498). This recognition is crucial for it indicates that the Graf has recognized for the first time that he has been judging her by standards which do not apply to her. His perception has been blurred

by his adherence to the precepts, the arbitrary categories of behavior and belief propagated by contemporary society. It is for this reason that he determines, in the second scene of the fourth act, to interview her in her sleep, knowing that it is only in this subconscious state that she can reveal the source of the forces operative within her: "Ich kann diesem Jammer nicht mehr zusehen. Dies Mädchen, bestimmt, den herrlichsten Bürger von Schwaben zu beglücken, wissen will ich, warum ich verdammt bin, sie einer Metze gleich, mit mir herum zu führen; wissen warum sie hinter mir herschreitet, einem Hunde gleich, durch Feuer und Wasser, mir Elenden, der nichts für sich hat, als das Wappen auf seinem Schild.--Es ist mehr, als der blosse sympathetische Zug des Herzens; es ist irgend von der Hölle angefacht, ein Wahn, der in ihrem Busen sein Spiel treibt" (I, 503-504).

As the ensuing events reveal, it was after this hearing, during which Käthchen recounted in detail the events of their simultaneous dream experiences, that the Graf abandoned completely his conventional mode of thinking. No longer hampered by his earlier considerations for rank and social standing, he set out to determine the rational basis for the dream experience. When it was determined, as a result of the investigation conducted by the Graf, that Käthchen was indeed the daughter of the Kaiser, a

general reconciliation of all the opposing parties, with the exception of Kunigunde, was effected at the end.

b. Der Zweikampf: Friedrich von Trota.--In the Novelle Der Zweikampf, once again, the death of an individual who has willfully endangered his own life as a selfless expression of concern for the welfare of a fellow human being is averted as a result of an act of divine or supernatural intervention. In addition, the ultimate result of this potential act of sacrifice is a change in the structure of contemporary society.

In the previous discussion of this work, the act itself, the ill-fated trial by combat, and the circumstances leading up to it were discussed. It was also shown that Friedrich von Trota agreed to assist Littegarde in her attempt to prove her innocence of the allegations made against her by Jakob der Rotbart, inspite of the overwhelming evidence against her. In this section we shall concentrate more specifically upon the reason, the basis, for Friedrich's unhesitating affirmative response to Littegarde's request for his assistance. In essence, the Friedrich-Littegarde episode in this Novelle develops as a consequence of an act of mutual trust. Littegarde, although fully cognizant of her own innocence, is unable to provide any concrete evidence which can contradict the devastating testimony of Rotbart. Her only immediate recourse is a personal

appeal to the trust and confidence of the individuals who are closest to her. After the funeral of her father, she appeals directly to her brother Rudolf, but, when he demands that she produce a witness to her innocence, she can only reply: "dass sie sich leider auf nichts, als die Unsträfllichkeit ihres Lebenswandels berufen könne, indem ihre Zofe gerade wegen eines Besuchs, den sie in der bewussten Nacht bei ihren Eltern abgestattet, abwesend gewesen sei" (II, 237). Hereupon she is beaten unmercifully and driven from the castle by Rudolf.

It is after her recovery from her wounds that she turns to Friedrich, knowing him to be a person worthy of her complete trust. Her trust is not misplaced. Friedrich's response is immediate and decisive: "'verliert kein Wort zur Verteidigung und Rechtfertigung Eurer Unschuld! In meiner Brust spricht eine Stimme für Euch, weit lebhafter und überzeugender, als alle Versicherungen, ja selbst als alle Rechtsgründe und Beweise, die Ihr vielleicht aus der Verbindung der Umstände und Begebenheiten vor dem Gericht zu Basel für Euch aufzubringen vermögt'" (II, 240).

It is Friedrich's respect and concern for the dignity and worth of Littegarde as well as his complete, unquestioning trust in her goodness, her innocence and reliability which prompt him to challenge Rotbart to the trial by combat. His trust in her is so complete, so deeply engrained, that he feels that God alone should be

her judge.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it is this trust, in conjunction with his unexpected recovery from his apparently mortal wounds "durch eine besondere Fügung des Himmels" (II, 248), which enable him to perceive that the outcome of his struggle with Rotbart was, at the most, ambiguous and that the format of the trial by combat, with all its restrictions, was a humanly contrived institution: "Was kümmern mich diese willkürlichen Gesetze der Menschen? Kann ein Kampf, der nicht bis an den Tod eines der beiden Kämpfer fortgeführt worden ist, nach jeder vernünftigen Schätzung der Verhältnisse für abgeschlossen gehalten werden? und dürfte ich nicht, falls mir ihn wieder aufzunehmen gestattet wäre, hoffen, den Unfall, der mich betroffen, wieder herzustellen, und mir mit dem Schwert einen ganz andern Spruch Gottes zu erkämpfen, als den, der jetzt beschränkter und kurzsichtiger Weise dafür angenommen wird?" (II, 249). His sole concern is that, whereas he had undertaken his actions in the false belief that her innocence would become manifest, he had not only made it appear to the world that she was in fact guilty, but he had also, because of an accidental stumble, caused her to be sentenced to death.

As we have seen, this confidence and trust is interrupted momentarily when Littegarde professes her acceptance of the verdict of the "Gottesurteil." At this crucial point, Kleist has Friedrich lapse into unconsciousness.

Here, as in other works, the individual is enabled to withdraw momentarily from the conflicts and the apparent contradictions and ambiguities existent in the realm of his conscious experience, only to return to face reality with renewed vigor and a renewed sense of confidence and determination.⁵⁰ Thus, after hearing Littegarde's affirmation of her innocence, he reaffirms his complete trust in her and expresses the confidence that her honor will be upheld: "'O Littegarde,' beschloss er, indem er ihre Hand zwischen die seinigen drückte: 'im Leben lass uns auf den Tod, und im Tode auf die Ewigkeit hinaus sehen, und des festen, unerschütterlichen Glaubens sein: deine Unschuld wird, und wird durch den Zweikampf, den ich für dich gefochten, zum heitern, hellen Licht der Sonne gebracht werden!'" (II, 254). Since it appears at the time inevitable that he and Littegarde will be executed in accordance with contemporary laws, Friedrich expects that Littegarde's exoneration will occur in eternity. It is realized, however, in this life when it is revealed that she was indeed innocent of the allegations made against her by Jakob der Rotbart. Not only are they rescued from a death at the stake, but the Kaiser, upon his return to Worms, "liess . . . in die Statuten des geheiligten göttlichen Zweikampfs, überall wo vorausgesetzt wird, dass die Schuld dadurch unmittelbar ans Tageslicht komme, die Worte einrücken: 'wenn es Gottes Wille ist'" (II, 261).

2. Actual Sacrificial Deaths

a. Die Familie Schroffenstein: Jeronimus, Ottokar.--

In the second scene of the third act of Die Familie Schroffenstein, Jeronimus is slain by Rupert's subjects as an act of retaliation for the death of Aldöbern and the rumored death of Johann, Rupert's illegitimate son. Since Rupert stood by passively while he was being slaughtered by the angry mob which had been enflamed by Santing at Rupert's behest, it is evident that Jeronimus died, the innocent victim of an evil mind hopelessly bent on blind revenge and destruction.

There are, however, other dimensions of Jeronimus' death which are perhaps of an even greater significance for both the external structure and also the internal thematic structure of the work. His death is essentially a sacrificial death. Evidence is provided in the final scene of the first act. Arriving in Warwand on his way from Rossitz, where he had been a witness to the ceremony of revenge and had been told of the incriminating evidence against Sylvester, he overhears Sylvester's stated intent to travel to Rossitz.⁵¹ In response he queries: "Lieferst du/ Wie ein bekehrter Sünder selbst dich aus?" (I, 74). Seizing upon Sylvester's lack of response, he continues in "righteous indignation":



Ei nun, ein schlechtes Leben
 Ist kaum der Mühe wert, es zu verlängern.
 Drum geh nur hin, und leg dein sündig Haupt
 In christlicher Ergebung auf den Block (I, 74).

Sylvester appeals to Jeronimus' knowledge of and respect for him as a person. He, however, remains firmly convinced of the truth of his allegations and his slanderous response is filled with contempt for the person and character of Sylvester. In the dramatically decisive concluding lines he states:

--Doch nicht so vielen Atem bist du wert,
 Als nur dies einzge Wort mir kostet: Schurke!
 Ich will dich meiden, das ist wohl das Beste.
 Denn hier in deiner Nähe stinkt es, wie
 Bei Mördern (I, 74).

As was the case in Der Zweikampf, it is at this critical juncture that Kleist has Sylvester collapse, unconscious.

As we have seen, it is after his return to consciousness that Sylvester learns of the death of Aldöbern and begins to realize that a direct confrontation with Rupert's forces can no longer be avoided. Thus he orders Theistiner to summon his vassals, and he prepares to organize a force to counter the impending attack of Rupert. Especially noteworthy in this connection is that his actions are completely devoid of the hostility, the thirst for revenge which were so prominent in the opening scene of this drama. His actions are rather motivated by an awareness of the human, existential values which are being endangered:

In seiner Höhle suchen wir den Wolf,
 Es kann nicht fehlen, glaube mirs, es geht
 Für alles ja, was heilig ist und hehr,
 Für Tugend, Ehre, Weib und Kind und Leben (I, 84).

Jeronimus, who has remained silent throughout this scene, has become aware of the injustice of his accusations against Sylvester. When he is advised to return to Rossitz for his own safety, he states:

--Hast recht, hast recht--bins nicht viel besser wert.
 Als dass du mir die Türe zeigst.--Bin ich
 Ein Schuft in meinen Augen doch, um wie
 Viel mehr in deinen (I, 85).

In addition, his respect for the person and character of Sylvester and for the purity and the nobility of his goals has been restored. He himself wishes to be identified with this cause.

This opportunity is provided in the third scene of the second act. After the rescue of Agnes from the mad clutches of Johann, Sylvester is more convinced than ever of the need for a rational, logical discussion of the controversy: "Das beste wär/ Noch immer, wenn ich Rupert sprechen könnte" (I, 93). Jeronimus warns him, however, of the dangers involved:

--'s ist ein gewagter Schritt. Bei seiner Rede
 Am Sarge Peters schien kein menschliches,
 Kein göttliches Gesetz ihm heilig, das
 Dich schützt (I, 93).

After his arrival in Rossitz as Sylvester's messenger, it appears initially that Jeronimus may have found the Rossitzer in a conciliatory mood. While speaking with

Eustache, Rupert's wife, he becomes aware of her dissatisfaction with the longstanding state of enmity existing between the two branches of the family and of her desire for a reconciliation. In the course of their conversation, he informs her of the relationship between Ottokar and Agnes. His next statements indicate that he has perceived fully the urgency of the mission he has undertaken. Responding to Eustache's query concerning the rumors of his personal feelings for Agnes, he states:

Ja, 's ist wahr. Doch untersucht
Es nicht, ob es viel Edelmut, ob wenig
Beweise, dass ich deinem Sohn sie gönne
--Denn kurz, das Mädel liebt ihn (I, 111).

Encouraged by Eustache's pledge of support, his enthusiasm is heightened when it appears that Rupert is receptive to Sylvester's proposal that they meet together in an attempt to clarify reasonably the recent sequence of events.

Just moments prior to his departure, however, Jeronimus begins to become aware of Rupert's evil designs. Told that Sylvester was unconscious at the time of the death of Aldöbern but is nevertheless willing to make recompensation, Rupert states simply: "Hat nichts zu sagen" (I, 115). He then adds indifferently: "Was ist ein Herold?" (I, 115). Jeronimus, appalled by this blatant disrespect for human life, declares: "Du bist entsetzlich" (I, 115). To this Rupert replies with a hint of suggestion: "Bist du denn ein Herold?--?" (I, 115). Jeronimus appeals to his sense of decency and justice:

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Dein Gast bin ich, ich wiederhols.--Und wenn
 Der Herold dir nicht heilig ist, so wirds
 Der Gast dir sein (I, 115).

This appeal is met by sarcasm and scorn: "Mir heilig? Ja. Doch fall/ Ich leicht in Ohnmacht" (I, 115). A few moments later, Jeronimus becomes the victim of the merciless mob.

The impact made by his death on both Rupert and Sylvester is of crucial significance for the further development of the plot. It is a particularly shattering experience for Rupert when, shortly after the death of Jeronimus, Santing announces, in the presence of Eustache, the completion of his assigned task. Although Rupert's subsequent words and actions are clearly motivated by the desire to attempt to conceal his own complicity, we are given an indication that his own confidence in the legitimacy of his undertakings has been shaken. This is especially evident in the first scene of the fourth act. Speaking alone with Santing, he states:

Das ist eben der Fluch der Macht, dass sich
 Dem Willen, dem leicht widerruflichen,
 Ein Arm gleich beut, der fest unwiderruflich
 Die Tat ankettet (I, 117).

Although the ensuing developments demonstrate sufficiently that Rupert's remorse is by no means genuine, it is nevertheless significant that Rupert is troubled when confronted with the actual consequences of his plotted course of action. This dissatisfaction and disgust with his own actions come to a climax in the final act, after he learns that, in his blind revenge, he has murdered his own child.



The news of Jeronimus' death has an equally significant effect upon Sylvester and his followers. In the first place, Sylvester recognizes that Jeronimus' willingness to go to Rossitz in his stead was a selfless, sacrificial gesture:

Ihn hab ich verkannt,
Jeronimus--hab ihn der Mitschuld heute
Geziehen, der sich heut für mich geopfert.
Denn wohl geahndet hat es ihm--mich hielt
Er ab, und ging doch selbst nach Rossitz, der
Nicht sichrer war, als ich (I, 125).

Furthermore, in the remembrance of this sacrificial act, he recognizes that he can no longer exercise restraint but must counter the evil forces of Rupert with force. Thus, the stage is set for the tragic events of the final act.

The death of Agnes and Ottokar at the beginning of the fifth act represents, first of all, the ultimate tragic consequence of all the events which have taken place up to this time. Treating each character separately, it is essential to note that the death of Ottokar, is, in every respect, a sacrificial death. He was fully aware of the identity of the two "mysterious knights" who were hovering about the entrance to the cave, and he exchanged clothing with Agnes in the hope that his father would kill him in her stead and that she might make her way to safety.

If we examine closely the development and deepening of the relationship between Ottokar and Agnes as it is



presented in various scenes up to the time of their death, it becomes apparent that this willful act of sacrifice was in many respects a spontaneous expression of his complete love for and total commitment to her. In the first scene of the drama, Ottokar too takes part in the foreboding ceremony of revenge and swears: "Rache! schwör ich, Rache!/ Dem Mörderhaus Sylvesters" (I, 52). Any possible doubts concerning the sincerity of his pledge or the strength of his commitment are removed at the time of his conversation with Jeronimus. Responding to the latter's expressions of concern and attempting to justify his father's extreme measures, Ottokar states:

Es gab uns Gott das seltne Glück, dass wir
Der Feinde Schar leichtfasslich, unzweideutig,
Wie eine runde Zahl erkennen (I, 55).

In response to Jeronimus' expression of complete confidence and trust in the innocence of Sylvester, he in turn reveals the extent to which he is convinced of the validity and necessity of his father's actions.

Already by the end of the first scene, however, the first indications of a weakening of this resolve and of his conviction of the validity of his planned actions are given. Having learned that both he and Johann had become captivated or infatuated by the natural beauty, charm and innocence of the same anonymous young maiden, Ottokar proposes that they honor her request and desist from attempting to determine her identity and that they, for the time being,



rather concentrate upon taking revenge against the House of Warwand. Johann, however is completely distraught for he has already learned the identity of the young maiden. Unable or unwilling to bring her name across his lips, he merely informs Ottokar: "Du hasts geahndet" (I, 63). Ottokar, fearful of the truth, replies:

Was
 Hab ich geahndet? Sagt ich denn ein Wort?
 Kann ein Vermuten denn nicht trügen? Mienen
 Sind schlechte Rätsel, die auf vieles passen,
 Und übereilt hast du die Auflösung.
 Nicht wahr, das Mädchen, dessen Schleier hier,
 Ist Agnes nicht, nicht Agnes Schroffenstein? (I, 63)

There are two important factors which come into consideration at this point. In the first place, concerning the nature of the relationship between Ottokar and Agnes, we note that it has been shrouded under the veil of mystery and anonymity. He has elevated her, has idealized her and has made her the object of his adoration. In the second place, Johann's confirmation of his worst fears and suspicions has suddenly placed her into the midst of the conflicts and the controversies of the real, mundane world. This gives rise to a deep, inner conflict within Ottokar. When Jeronimus, who has in the meantime, as we have seen, become convinced of Sylvester's complicity in the death of Peter, arrives and offers an apology for his earlier accusations. Ottokar is completely distracted and does not hear what is being spoken. Simultaneously offended and perplexed by Ottokar's lack of response,



Jeronimus renounces his claims to Agnes. At this point Ottokar suddenly embraces him, forgives him, and, bursting into tears, exclaims: "Lass mich, ich muss hinaus ins Freie" (I, 64).

Torn between his commitment to take revenge against Sylvester and his household and his love for Agnes, Ottokar approaches her in the first scene of the second act with a twofold purpose. The most immediate concern is to determine the necessity of his fulfilling his commitment. Thus he confronts Agnes directly and asks:

Nun sage mir, wie konntest du es wagen,
So einsam dies Gebirg zu betreten,
Da doch ein mächtger Nachbar all die Deinen
In blutger Rachefeld verfolgt? (I, 77).

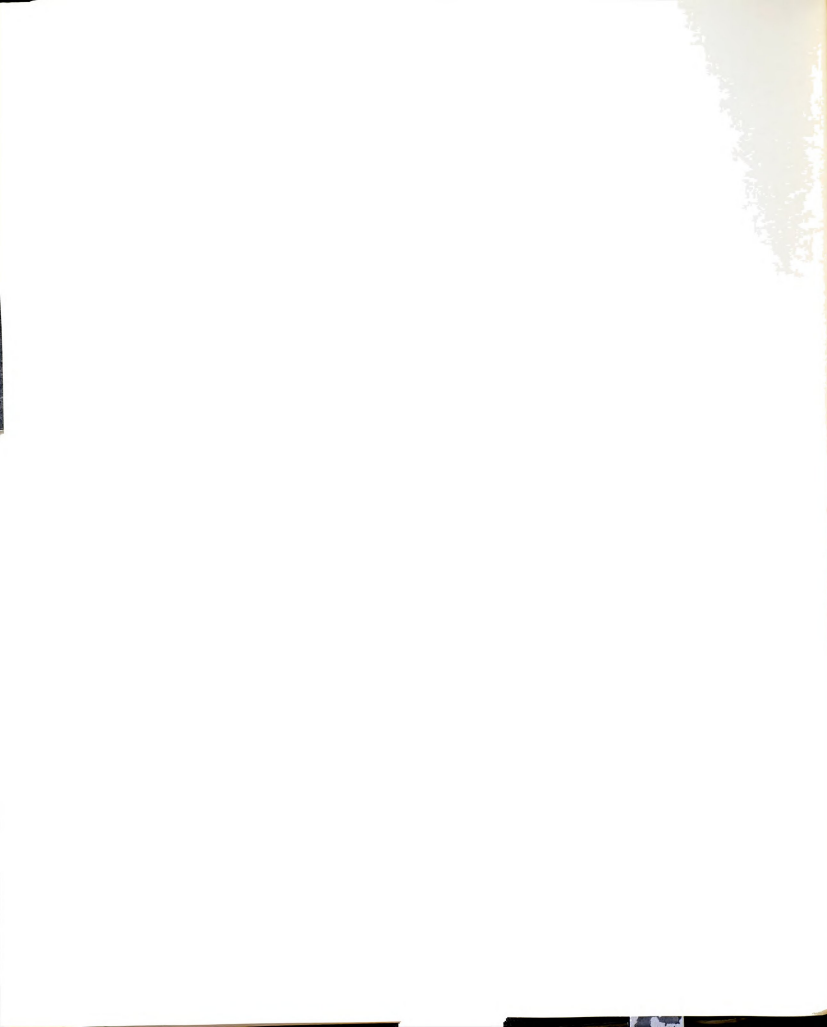
She, as yet completely unaware of Rupert's proclamation of revenge, responds:

In meines Vaters Sälen liegt der Staub
Auf allen Rüstungen, und niemand ist
Uns feindlich, als der Marder höchstens, der
In unsre Hühnerställe bricht (I, 77).

Placing his complete trust in the veracity of her statements, Ottokar exclaims:

O Gott! Ich danke dir mein Leben nur
Um dieser Kunde!--Mädchen! Mädchen! O
Mein Gott, so brauch ich dich ja nicht zu morden!
(I, 77).

Having cleared away this obstacle, Ottokar has come to the recognition that their relationship can no longer be continued on a purely platonic, idealistic basis; it must rather become an effective, working force within



thier lives. Thus he proposes that they shed the veil of secrecy and anonymity and become completely frank with each other. He suggests that as a preliminary gesture they reveal their respective names and place their complete trust in each other. Their conversation is interrupted, however, when Johann appears suddenly.

The next encounter between the two occurs in the first scene of the third act. In the meantime, however, two important developments have taken place. First of all, Agnes has learned of the course of revenge undertaken by the House of Rossitz, including Ottokar, against her family. Second, she was just rescued in the preceding scene from the mad clutches of Johann. Thus, when Ottokar arrives, she is startled and appears to be frightened. Her responses to his statements and questions are brief and abrupt. When Ottokar leaves to fetch her a drink of water, her deepest suspicions appear to be confirmed:

Nun ists gut.
 Jetzt bin ich stark. Die Krone sank ins Meer,
 Gleich einem nackten Fürsten werf ich ihr
 Das Leben nach. Er bringe Wasser, bringe
 Mir Gift, gleichviel, ich trink es aus, er soll
 Das Ungeheuerste an mir vollenden (I, 96-97).

It is only after she becomes aware that she has falsely suspected Ottokar that Agnes is enabled to fulfill the first requirement for a genuine love relationship and give him her complete, unhesitating trust. As they confide in each other and essentially reiterate the

rumors and suspicions which are predominate in each household respectively, they begin to realize that their personal feelings have been based upon these rumors and suspicions and not upon facts. Ottokar charges Sylvester with the death of Peter. Agnes on the other hand accuses Rupert of having delegated Johann to take her life. In the final analysis, each one of them is convinced of the integrity of his respective father. A crucial juncture is attained, however, in the following exchange of statements:

Ottokar. Hätte nur
 Jeronimus in seiner Hitze nicht
 Den Menschen mit dem Schwerte gleich verwundet
 Es hätte sich vielleicht das Rätsel gleich
 Gelöst.

Agnes. Vielleicht--so gut, wie wenn dein Vater
 Die Leute nicht erschlagen hätte, die
 Er bei der Leiche deines Bruders fand (I, 101).

After a moment of reflection, Ottokar reminds her of the "confession" of Peter's alleged slayers. Agnes counters by saying that her father too is now in a position to receive an equally incriminating confession.

At this point Ottokar recognizes not only that he has misjudged Sylvester, but also that a reconciliation could be effected between their fathers if they too could discuss their differences in a reasonable and frank manner:

--O Gott, welch eine Sonne geht mir auf!
 Wenns möglich wäre, wenn die Väter sich
 So gern, so leicht, wie wir, verstehen wollten!
 --Ja könnte man sie nur zusammenführen!
 Denn einzeln denkt nur jeder seinen einen
 Gedanken, käm der andere hinzu,
 Gleich gäbs den dritten, der uns fehlt (I, 102).

Completely aware of the intensity of Rupert's blind thirst for revenge, Ottokar realizes, however, that he will not be able to bring him into a conciliatory mood until the full truth is brought to light:

Ich mildern? Meinen Vater? Gute Agnes,
 Er trägt uns, wie die See das Schiff, wir müssen
 Mit seiner Woge fort, sie ist nicht zu
 Beschwören.--Nein, ich wüsste wohl was Bessers.
 Denn fruchtlos ist doch alles, kommt der Irrtum
 Ans Licht nicht, der uns neckt (I, 103).

Recalling that the small finger on each of Peter's hands was missing and deeming this to be less than the mark of a murderer, he is convinced that the actual circumstances of Peter's death can be determined only at the place where it occurred.

In the third scene of the fourth act, he learns that Peter had not in fact been murdered but had drowned. Furthermore, the finger on the left hand had been cut off by the undertaker's widow and her daughter, Barnabe, and the one on the right by the presumed murderers. Hopeful both for his personal happiness and also for a reconciliation between Rupert and Sylvester, he returns to Rossitz, only to learn that Rupert is absent and has left orders that he be imprisoned in the castle tower. When Eustache reveals that Rupert, aware of the relationship between him and Agnes, has gone off with Santing into the mountains in search of her, Ottokar realizes that he will not be able to approach his father with facts and reason. Abandoning

all hopes for the actual consummation of his love for Agnes, he has only one purpose left in life: to sacrifice himself in order to save her from the ruthless wrath of his father. As he is about to leap to freedom from the castle tower, he exclaims: "Das Leben ist viel wert, wenn mans verachtet./ Ich brauchs" (I, 137). After receiving the mortal wound from the sword of his unsuspecting father, he reiterates his intent to Agnes in his dying gasps: "Es ist--/ Gelungen. --Flieh!" (I, 145).

Before the discussion of the death of Ottokar can be concluded, it is essential to note the manner in which Kleist has integrated this event into the broader thematic structure of the work. On the one hand, it represents the ultimate tragic consequence of the evil will of Rupert. On the other hand, it represents a crucial step in the process of his rehabilitation and enlightenment--the actual ultimate goal of the dramatic process of this drama. Even though he is not aware at the time that he has killed his own son, Rupert's words and actions immediately after the act itself indicate clearly that he is no longer at one with himself. He can no longer justify his actions and consequently seeks the approval of his accomplice, Santing. Standing before the body, he asks: "Warum denn tat ichs, Santing? Kann ich es/ Doch gar nicht finden im Gedächtnis" (I, 144). Reminded

that it is Agnes, he states: "Die tat mir Böses, o/ Ich weiss es wohl.--Was war es schon?" (I, 144). He leaves the scene with the consolation that she is the daughter of his mortal enemy, Sylvester. This scene is crucial for it is only after he himself has questioned the validity of the basis for his actions that he is prepared to accept the truth when it is revealed, thereby making possible the reconciliation at the end.

b. Die Verlobung in St. Domingo: Toni.--In the previous discussion of this work it was observed that it was after she had heard the report of Mariane Congreve's selfless act of sacrifice for Gustav that Toni, having been made aware previously of the treachery implicit in her own actions, was overcome by a "menschliches Gefühl" (II, 175). Although Toni gives herself completely to Gustav in love as an initial, almost instinctive response to this change in her thinking, this "menschliches Gefühl" becomes manifest on the following morning in a manner more directly related to the current state of affairs. In response to Babaekan's solicitation of her assistance in the plot to detain Gustav in the house and his associates in their hiding place in the mountains until the return of Congo Hoango, she exclaims, "Ist das es schändlich und niederträchtig wäre, das Gastrecht an Personen, die man in das Haus gelockt, also zu verletzen. Sie meinte, dass

ein Verfolgter, der sich ihrem Schutz anvertraut, doppelt sicher bei ihnen sein sollte . . ." (II, 176-177). In addition, she no longer sees Gustav solely as a member of the white race but rather as an individual who is to be judged on the basis of his own merit and worth: "Was hat uns dieser Jüngling, der von Geburt gar nicht einmal ein Franzose, sondern, wie wir gesehen haben, ein Schweizer ist, zu Leide getan, dass wir, nach Art der Räuber, über ihn herfallen, ihn töten und ausplündern wollen? Gelten die Beschwerden, die man hier gegen die Pflanzer führt, auch in der Gegend der Insel, aus welcher er herkömmt? Zeigt nicht vielmehr alles, dass er der edelste und vortrefflichste Mensch ist, und gewiss das Unrecht, das die Schwarzen seiner Gattung vorwerfen mögen, auf keine Weise teilt?" (II, 177).

In her emphatic reply to Babekan's reminder that she, in the recent past, had been a willful participant in several similar intrigues, Toni demonstrates unequivocally that she has broken completely with the past and has determined to pursue a course of action which conforms to her inner feelings and convictions. Arising in anger, she states: "'du hast sehr Unrecht, mich an diese Greuelthaten zu erinnern! Die Unmenschlichkeiten, an denen ihr mich Teil zu nehmen zwingt, empörten längst mein innerstes Gefühl; und um mir Gottes Rache wegen alles, was vorgefallen, zu versöhnen, so schwöre ich dir,

dass ich eher zehnfachen Todes sterben, als zugeben werde, dass diesem Jüngling, so lange er sich in unserm Hause befindet, auch nur ein Haar gekrümmt werde'" (II, 177). Although Babekan agrees unexpectedly at this point to allow Gustav to escape, Toni, after she has reflected upon the intensity of her mother's hatred for the white race, suspects treachery. Engineering a counter intrigue of her own,⁵² she falls down suddenly at her mother's feet and feigns remorse for the rash expressions of sympathy for the plight of Gustav and declares, "dass sie ihn ganz und gar der Rache der bestehenden Landesgesetze, die seine Vernichtung einmal beschlossen, preis gäbe" (II, 178).

When Gustav appears, Toni remains in troubled silence as Babekan, using her well-trained powers of deceit, informs him that the presence of roving bands of Negro troops in the area will require that he remain in concealment in his room and that his associates remain in the mountains until a more favorable time. Assuring him of her noble intent, she sends Nanky, Hoango's illegitimate son, into the mountains to bring provisions and the message of Gustav's safety to Herr Strömli and his retinue. At the first opportunity, Toni slips from the house, and, intercepting Nanky, informs him that Babekan has changed her plans. Entrusting him with the note in which Gustav had instructed Herr Strömli to bring

his family to the house of Babekan, she further instructs him to take care that the family will arrive before dawn. To be noted in this connection is that Toni's concern for the welfare of Gustav has taken on a personal dimension and has hence assumed an even greater sense of urgency and necessity. Having placed her complete trust in the sincerity of his expressions of love and his stated intent to make her his bride, she ventures forth on this course of action as an expression of her love: "Denn sie sah den Jüngling, vor Gott und ihrem Herzen, nicht mehr als einen blossen Gast, dem sie Schutz und Obdach gegeben, sondern als ihren Verlobten und Gemahl an, und war willens, sobald nur seine Partei im Hause stark genug sein würde, dies der Mutter, auf deren Bestürzung sie unter diesen Umständen rechnete, ohne Rückhalt zu erklären" (II, 181).

Although she has instituted these measures as a means to facilitate the consummation of her relationship to Gustav, she is nevertheless still troubled by the deceitful manner in which she originally enticed Gustav to entrust her with his safety. Determined to confide in him completely, she hopes that he will be able to forgive her on the basis of the efforts she has made to rescue him from a certain death. When she comes into his room, however, she finds him in a deep sleep, and, not wishing to disturb him, she decides to await his

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awakening. Precisely at this moment, however, Congo Hoango arrives unexpectedly. Fearful of Gustav's response if he should be awakened at this moment, she recognizes the need for decisive action. Seizing the rope which by chance was hanging on the wall, she binds his hands and feet and fastens the rope to the bed. When Hoango, who had been alerted by Babekan to the possibility of an intrigue, arrives, she, feigning complete innocence, brings him to the captive Gustav.

The postponement of Gustav's execution until the following morning provides Toni with a final opportunity to attempt to effect his rescue. Slipping away from the house in order to warn the approaching retinue of Herr Strömli of the presence of Congo Hoango and also to devise with their assistance a plot to free Gustav, she no longer thinks in terms of the consummation of her relationship with him. Fully aware that he has comprehended neither the necessity nor the intent of her actions and suspects her of having betrayed him, she, who had regained the confidence of both Babekan and Congo Hoango, determines to risk her own life in order to prove to him that she is worthy of his love: "Denn die Blicke voll Verachtung, die der Fremde von seinem Bette aus auf sie geworfen hatte, waren ihr empfindlich, wie Messerstiche, durchs Herz gegangen; es mischte sich ein Gefühl heisser Bitterkeit in ihre Liebe zu

ihm, und sie frohlockte bei dem Gedanken, in dieser zu seiner Rettung angeordneten Unternehmung zu sterben" (II, 187).

With Toni's assistance, the Strömlis, although greatly outnumbered, are enabled to take the slumbering Negroes by surprise and to free Gustav from his captors. Upon seeing Toni, however, he is filled with rage and, seizing a pistol from the hands of his rescuers, wounds her mortally. In her dying breath, Toni turns to Gustav, who has in the intervening moments been informed of her heroic deeds and noble intentions, and exclaims: "'Ach . . . du hättest mir nicht misstrauen sollen!'" (II, 193). Herr Strömli and his associates, using Seppy and Nanky, whom they had seized upon Toni's advice, as hostages, make their way safely to Port au Prince. After his return to Switzerland, Herr Strömli has a monument erected on his property in memory of Gustav and the selfless sacrifice of Toni.

D. The Death of Atonement

In the first scene of the third act of Die Familie Schroffenstein, Agnes, realizing that she has falsely suspected Ottokar of having poisoned the water which he had given her to drink, exclaims:

O wär es Gift, und könnt ich mit dir sterben!
Denn ist es keins, mit dir zu leben darf
Ich dann nicht hoffen, da ich so unwürdig
An deiner Seele mich vergangen habe (I, 98).

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Although she does not, of course, take her own life or willfully submit to death at this point, the sentiments expressed are nevertheless indicative of the meaning and the function of the death of atonement in Kleist's works. Kleist employs the death of atonement primarily as a means to underscore the notion that the expression and preservation of basic, inalienable human rights and values is essential for human existence.

The death of atonement is, first of all, a voluntary, individual act. With the exception of Prinz Friedrich, the individuals to be discussed in this section offer their own lives as an atonement for having willfully violated the dignity and worth, the rights and values of a fellow human being. Gustav, the Marchese, and Penthesilea all take their own lives after they have caused the death of another individual. However, seen from a strictly legalistic point of view and taking into consideration the circumstances surrounding the death of these individuals, there is, by all conventional standards, no immediate need for them to make atonement. Operating from within the thematic structure of the individual works, Kleist brings these characters to the point at which they become aware that it was because of their willful disregard for the rights and values of their victims that they caused their death. It is for this reason that they must make atonement.



1. Prinz Friedrich von Homburg: Prinz Friedrich

In the final act of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, the Prince appears before the Kurfürst and the officers of the army and, acknowledging the validity and the justice of the sentence which had been proclaimed against him, announces his intent and desire to make atonement for his transgression against the law of the land:

Ich will das heilige Gesetz des Kriegs,
Das ich verletzt', im Angesicht des Heers,
Durch einen freien Tod verherrlichen! (I, 704).

In the previous discussion of this work, it was observed that, after he had seen his open grave, Homburg, wishing only to remain alive, renounced all his earlier ambitions for personal fame and fortune. This was, however, only the initial step toward his total rehabilitation and his full awareness of the broader implications of his willful, personally motivated violation of the Kurfürst's orders.

The decisive moment for the Prince arrives in the fourth scene of the fourth act when Natalie delivers the Kurfürst's letter. The letter does not, however, grant pardon outrightly; the Kurfürst rather makes a direct appeal for Homburg to determine his own fate:

'Mein Prinz von Homburg, als ich Euch gefangen setzte,
Um Eures Angriffs, allzufrüh vollbracht,
Da glaubt ich nichts, als meine Pflicht zu tun;
Auf Euren eignen Beifall rechnet ich.
Meint Ihr, ein Unrecht sei Euch widerfahren,
So bitt ich, sagts mir mit zwei Worten--
Und gleich den Degen schick ich Euch zurück' (I, 687).

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It is this personal appeal for him to make a rational judgment concerning both his own actions and also the validity of the laws under which he has been judged which is directly responsible for the resultant change in the Prince's mode of thinking.

It is apparent from the outset that the Kurfürst's appeal has made an immediate and decisive impact upon the Prince. Seemingly oblivious to Natalie's exuberance and expressions of joy, he, lost in reflection, queries: "Er sagt, wenn ich der Meinung wäre--?" (I, 687). Resisting her efforts to hasten him, he states: "--Ich will den Brief noch einmal überlesen" (I, 687). At her urging, however, he does seat himself and begins to write, only to discard the letter shortly thereafter in disgust. His response to Natalie's praise of the discarded letter is indicative of his growing awareness: "Pah!--Eines Schuftes Fassung, keines Prinzen.--/ Ich denk mir eine andre Wendung aus" (I, 688). These lines are at once an indictment of his earlier course of action and also a recognition of the need for him to conduct himself in a manner consistent with the dignity and responsibilities implicit in his position as a prince. It is after he reads the letter for a second time that he becomes fully aware of the nature and intent of the Kurfürst's appeal. Deeply moved, he exclaims: "Mich selber ruft er zur Entscheidung auf!" (I, 688).



After several moments of introspection and deliberate, thoughtful reflection, the Prince is able to decide upon a proper course of action. Warned by Natalie that failure to comply with the Kurfürst's request will ensure his execution on the following day, he replies, unconcerned: "Er handle, wie er darf;/ Mir ziemts hier zu verfahren, wie ich soll!" (I, 690). Awakened from his self-pity by the direct appeal of the Kurfürst, he, having had the opportunity to reflect upon and to examine his own motives and actions, has come to the recognition that there is only one possible course of action for him to follow. Earlier, caring only for the furtherance of his personal interests, he had set an example of anarchy and capriciousness. His future actions, however, must be dictated by an awareness of his responsibilities as a prince and as a commanding officer. In addition, he has gained insight into the dignity and the nobility of the character of the Kurfürst, and thus he has no other alternative but to acknowledge his guilt and to make atonement for it. After finishing his letter to the Kurfürst, he confirms his position to Natalie:

Ich will ihm, der so würdig vor mir steht,
 Nicht, ein Unwürdger, gegenüberstehn!
 Schuld ruht, bedeutende, mir auf der Brust,
 Wie ich es wohl erkenne; kann er mir
 Vergeben nur, wenn ich mit ihm drum streite,
 So mag ich nichts von seiner Gnade wissen (I, 690).

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It is essential to note, however, that the Prince's acceptance of the death sentence and his desire to atone for his precipitous, personally motivated rush into battle, represent more than an act of submission to or a recognition of the absolute pre-eminence of the law of the land. As he indicates in the presence of the Kurfürst and the officers of the army, he has come to a recognition of the necessity of "das heilige Gesetz des Kriegs" under which he has been judged. Earlier, when he was concerned only with saving his own life, he had considered only the negative aspects and the personal implications of the law. He now recognizes that in his acts of willful defiance he has endangered the existence of the state itself for these laws were established in order to ensure the right of the individual to enjoy his inalienable right to freedom and fatherland:⁵³

Was kann der Sieg euch, meine Brüder, gelten,
 Der eine, dürftige, den ich vielleicht
 Dem Wrangel noch entreisse, dem Triumph
 Verglichen, über den verderblichsten
 Der Feind' in uns, den Trotz, den Übermut,
 Errungen glorreich morgen? Es erliege
 Der Fremdling, der uns unterjochen will,
 Und frei, auf mütterlichem Grund, behaupte
 Der Brandenburger sich; denn sein ist er,
 Und seiner Fluren Pracht nur ihm erbaut! (I, 704).

Furthermore, fully aware that he had failed to fulfill his responsibility both as a prince and also as a commanding officer of the army to preserve and protect these inalienable rights, he is now prepared to give up his life as an atonement.

At the same time, this demonstration of the change in his mode of thinking and the reorientation of his scale of values makes it possible for the Kurfürst to grant him pardon.

2. Das Bettelweib von Locarno: der Marchese

The individual components of the thematic structure of Kleist's works are not as readily discernible nor are they developed as extensively in this short short story as they are in the other works which have been discussed up to this point. Nevertheless, the extraordinary events in the story as well as the Marchese's suicide at the end must be considered from within the framework of the thematic structure and Kleist's poetic intent in his works.

It was noted in the discussion of the death of the old beggar woman that the Marchese became guilty of her death because he, by capriciously ordering her to move to the opposite side of the room, failed to treat her with the dignity and respect to which she as a human being was entitled. In addition, because an offense of this nature is not recognized by conventional or traditional codes of justice and, more significantly, because the Marchese himself does not recognize either the nature or the seriousness of the offense which he had committed, it becomes necessary that supernatural forces intervene.

The bulk of the story is in actuality a presentation of the relentless pursuit of the Marchese by these

supernatural forces until he at the end is compelled to make atonement. The first incident occurs several years after the original tragedy. A Florentine knight who had shown an interest in purchasing the property is accommodated for the night in the room where the old woman had died. Shortly after midnight, however, he, deeply disturbed, awakens the Marchese and his wife and relates the following: ". . . dass es in dem Zimmer spuke, indem etwas, das dem blick unsichtbar gewesen, mit einem Geräusch, als ob es auf Stroh gelegen, im Zimmerwinkel aufgestanden, mit vernehmlichen Schritten, langsam und gebrechlich, quer über das Zimmer gegangen, und hinter dem Ofen, unter Stöhnen und Ächzen niedersunken sei" (II, 196). Not without significance is the Marchese's reaction to this report: "Der Marchese erschrocken, er wusste selbst nicht recht warum, lachte den Ritter mit erkünstelter Heiterkeit aus, und sagte, er wolle sogleich aufstehen und die Nacht zu seiner Beruhigung mit ihn in dem Zimmer zubringen" (II, 197).

The consequences of this incident are most unfortunate for the Marchese for not only are several prospective buyers of the castle frightened away, but rumors begin to spread among his domestic servants. Determined to put an end to these developments, he spends the following night in the allegedly haunted room. At the stroke of midnight, the entire inexplicable



occurrence is repeated. On the following evening he again goes up to the room, accompanied this time by his wife and one of their faithful servants. Again at the stroke of midnight, the three hear the mysterious sounds but are able to see no one. On the third night, the Marchese and his wife, determined to find out the source of these mysterious, frightening occurrences, go up to the room again and, for no specific reason, take with them the household dog, who by chance happened to be before the door to the room. Their deepest fears are confirmed by the reactions of the dog at the arrival of the midnight hour: "Drauf, in dem Augenblick der Mitternacht, lässt sich das entsetzliche Geräusch wieder hören; jemand, den kein Mensch mit Augen sehen kann, hebt sich, auf Krücken, im Zimmerwinkel empor; man hört das Stroh, das unter ihm rauscht; und mit dem ersten Schritt: tapp! tapp! erwacht der Hund, hebt sich plötzlich, die Ohren spitzend, vom Boden empor, und knurrend und bellend, grad als ob ein Mensch auf ihn eingeschritten käme, rückwärts gegen den Ofen weicht er aus" (II, 198). At this moment, the Marquise, filled with fear, flees from the castle, and the Marchese, completely beside himself, thrashes about in the air with his dagger. Moments later, he placates the supernatural power which had been hounding him and takes his own life as an atonement: "Der Marchese, von Entsetzen überreizt, hatte eine Kerze genommen, und dasselbe [das Zimmer],



überall mit Holz getäfelt wie es war, an allen vier Ecken, müde seines Lebens, angesteckt" (II, 198).

The final lines of the story reveal an additional dimension of the Marchese's death of atonement: ". . . noch jetzt liegen, von den Landleuten zusammengetragen, seine weissen Gebeine in dem Winkel des Zimmers, von welchem er das Bettelweib von Locarno hatte aufstehen heissen" (II, 198). Just as the monument, which Herr Stromli had erected to the memory of Gustav and Toni, served as a reminder of Toni's selfless act of sacrifice, so also the presence of the Marchese's bones in the room where he had caused the death of the old beggar woman serve as a reminder to the people of the community of the offense which he had committed and of the price which he was forced to pay.

3. Die Verlobung in St. Domingo: Gustav

By all conventional standards, Gustav's shooting of Toni was, at the most, a most tragic error on his part and, if not completely justifiable, then it was at the very least defensible or understandable in view of the fact that he had no certain knowledge whatsoever that her inexplicable maneuvers at the time of the unexpected arrival of Congo Hoango were actually designed to help him win his freedom. Thus there would appear to be no overwhelming need for him to take his own life at the end. The fact remains, however, that he himself does become

aware of the need for him to atone for her death. This awareness develops as a result of his having come to the recognition that, whereas Toni's actions were motivated by her love for him and by her genuine concern for his welfare, he had acted impulsively, in response to his deepest fears and prejudices.

If the development of his brief relationship with Toni is examined, it cannot be denied, of course, that he is strongly attracted to her. At the same time, however, it is also true that he personally cultivates her feelings for him and encourages her to express these feelings in order to ensure his own safety.⁵⁴ Both factors, his attraction to her and also his attempts to awaken her feelings in order to ensure his own safety, are evinced in the actions which he undertakes when they are alone together in his room on the night of his arrival.

Observing her as she is preparing a foot bath for him, he is taken in completely by her beauty and charm:

". . . er hätte, bis auf die Farbe, die ihm anstössig war, schwören mögen, dass er nie etwas Schöneres gesehen. Dabei fiel ihm eine entfernte Ähnlichkeit, er wusste noch selbst nicht recht mit wem, auf, die er schon bei seinem Eintritt in das Haus bemerkt hatte, und seine ganze Seele für sie in Anspruch nahm. Er ergriff sie, als sie in den Geschäften, die sie betrieb, aufstand, bei der Hand, und da er gar richtig schloss, dass es nur ein

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Mittel gab, zu erprüfen, ob das Mädchen ein Herz habe oder nicht, so zog er sie auf sein Schoss nieder und fragte sie: 'ob sie schon einem Bräutigam verlobt wäre?'" (II, 172). After learning that she has just recently rejected the proposal of a wealthy young Negro, he, seizing the opportunity to probe her heart further, asks "ob es vielleicht ein Weisser sein müsse, der ihre Gunst davon tragen solle?" (II, 173), and we read that she, "legte sich plötzlich nach einem flüchtigen, träumerischen Bedenken, unter einem überaus reizenden Erröten, das über ihr verbranntes Gesicht aufloderte, an seine Brust" (II, 173). Equally significant is his response to this development, which again reveals the dual nature of his intent with respect to her: "Der Fremde, von ihrer Anmut und Lieblichkeit gerührt, nannte sie sein liebes Mädchen, und schloss sie, wie durch göttliche Hand von jeder Sorge erlöst, in seine Arme. Es war ihm unmöglich zu glauben, dass alle diese Bewegungen, die er an ihr wahrnahm, der blosse elende Ausdruck einer kalten und grässlichen Verrätereie sein sollten" (II, 173).

As we have seen, the decisive moment in their relationship arrives when Toni, deeply moved by Mariane Congreve's act of sacrifice for Gustav, gives herself to him completely in love. Gustav now feels completely assured of his safety: "Der Fremde, als er sich wieder

gesammelt hatte, wusste nicht, wohin ihn die Tat, die er begangen, führen würde; inzwischen sah er so viel ein, dass er gerettet, und in dem Hause, in welchem er sich befand, für ihn nichts von dem Mädchen zu befürchten war" (II, 175). Deeply distressed, however, by her endless weeping and also by his own feelings of guilt for having violated her virginity, he attempts to placate her and in the process commits himself irrevocably to her: "Er nahm sich das kleine goldene Kreuz, ein Geschenk der treuen Mariane, seiner abgeschiedenen Braut, von der Brust; und indem er sich unter unendlichen Liebkosungen über sie neigte, hing er es ihr als ein Brautgeschenk, wie er es nannte, um den Hals" (II, 175). His impulsive reactions when he first sees her after having been freed from his captors clearly attest to the fact that he has not, however, overcome completely his earlier fears and prejudices and also that he has not fulfilled the first requirement for a genuine love relationship by placing his complete, unconditional trust in her. After he is informed of her heroic deeds and noble intent, he gains insight into the great injustice he has committed against her. This awareness is reflected in his response to her dying words: "Gewiss! sagte er, da ihn die Vettern von der Leiche wegrissen: ich hätte dir nicht misstrauen sollen; denn du warst mir durch einen Eidschwur verlobt, obschon wir keine Worte darüber gewechselt hatten!" (II, 193).



Furthermore, having come to this recognition, there is no other recourse for him but to take his own life as an atonement.

4. Penthesilea: Penthesilea

The suicide of Penthesilea in the final scene of this drama is subject to a myriad of interpretations. Complicating the issue considerably is, first of all, the fact that throughout the drama the motif of death appears to be inextricably linked with the motif of love.⁵⁵ In the fifth scene, for example, Achilles, having just returned from his initial round of combat with Penthesilea, the queen of the Amazons, and declaring his intent to seek renewed combat with her, states:

Was mir die Göttliche begehrt, das weiss ich;
Brautwerber schickt sie mir, gefiederte,
Genug in Lüften zu, die ihre Wünsche
Mit Todgeflüster in das Ohr mir raunen (I, 342).

The same interrelationship can be observed in Penthesilea's words in the final scene. Having verified that it was indeed she who had mutilated the body of Achilles, she, standing before his corpse, states:

So war es ein Versehen. Küsse, Bisse,
Das reimt sich, und wer recht von Herzen liebt,
Kann schon das eine für das andre greifen (I, 425).

It must be recognized, however, that this apparent correlation between love and death in this work arises out of the central conflict which Penthesilea must



overcome in the course of her development. In addition, it is precisely because of the manner in which her love resulted in the death of Achilles that she must take her own life at the end. The basic driving force in the dramatic action until the last scene is Penthesilea's attempt to fulfill two mutually exclusive commitments, both of which she regards as being absolute.⁵⁶ On the one hand, as she relates to Achilles in the fifteenth scene, she, as the queen of the Amazons, is bound to uphold the sacred law which decrees that the Amazons must win love on the field of conquest. The correlation between love and violence is, in other words, implicit in the Amazonian way of life and it is projected to its ultimate extreme in Penthesilea's brutal, barbarous slaying of Achilles. On the other hand, she has committed herself absolutely toward the fulfillment of the prophecy which her mother, Otrere, had made, contrary to the laws and customs of the Amazons, on her death bed:

Sie sagte: 'geh, mein süßes Kind! Mars ruft dich!
Du wirst den Peliden dir bekränzen:
Werd eine Mutter, stolz und froh, wie ich--' (I, 394).

Although the increasing tensions between these two absolute drives does ultimately provide the dramatic impetus for the brutal slaying of Achilles, it does not, however, adequately explain the reason for Penthesilea's suicide.

There are, in addition, other factors which must also be taken into consideration while dealing with

Penthesilea's death. There is, first of all, the fact that she had once previously seriously contemplated suicide. In the ninth scene, she, in deep despair because of her defeat in battle by Achilles, was about to allow herself to sink into the river but was prevented from doing so by Meroe and the faithful Prothoe. Furthermore, at two significant junctures in the dramatic action, she, echoing sentiments expressed by Kleist shortly before his own death, declares herself ripe for death. The first instance occurs in the fourteenth scene after she is deluded by both Achilles and Prothoe into believing that she was in fact the victor in the battle. Arising from the depth of despair to which she had sunk in the ninth scene, she exults:

Die Eumeniden fliehn, die schrecklichen,
 Es weht, wie Nahn der Götter um mich her,
 Ich möchte gleich in ihren Chor mich mischen,
 Zum Tode war ich nie so reif als jetzt (I, 380).

The second instance occurs in the final scene of the drama. Slowly regaining full consciousness and an awareness of her surroundings after the brutal slaying of Achilles, she states:

Ich bin so selig, Schwester! Überselig!
 Ganz reif zum Tod o Diana, fühl ich mich!
 Zwar weiss ich nicht, was hier mit mir geschehn,
 Doch gleich des festen Glaubens könnt ich sterben,
 Dass ich mir den Peliden überwand (I, 421).

In a certain sense, one can establish, on the level of the dramatic action and motivation, a direct causal link between



these incidents and her final act of suicide. Her death can then be considered as the fulfillment of a long-nurtured desire to die or also as her inevitable end.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, it is essential that we be aware of the obvious--that Kleist, the ultimate manipulator of all characters and events, does not allow her to die after any of these instances. To have done so would have meant to allow her to die an essentially meaningless, purposeless death. Certain parallels can be drawn at this juncture to the "Todesfurchtszene" in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg. If the Prince had died at this point, it would have been meaningless for he had not yet perceived fully the necessity of his death sentence. It was only after he had gained a complete awareness of the severity and the broader implications of the offense which he had committed that he was prepared to give up his life as an atonement. Penthesilea too must undergo this process of recognition, and it is after she becomes fully aware of the nature of the crime which she has committed and of the reason for it that she can and must die. For Penthesilea, this process begins after she in a state of insanity has slain and has maimed the corpse of the unarmed, unsuspecting Achilles. It is culminated when she at the end, in full awareness and completely sane, literally wills herself to death.

At the beginning of the final scene, Penthesilea returns in victory to the camp of the Amazons with the



body of Achilles. Although her actions do indicate that she is aware of her surroundings, she appears to be in a trance and is completely incommunicative. Because she does not speak, the reader or viewer of the drama and also the remaining characters have no insight momentarily into her inner thoughts. The dramatic action in the early part of the scene is carried by her pantomimic actions and by the descriptions of or reactions to these actions by the other protagonists. What she performs in pantomime, however, sets the stage for the ensuing developments in this scene. The placement of the body of Achilles at the feet of the high priestess of Diana, misinterpreted by the latter as an accusation of guilt, represents for Penthesilea, who in the nineteenth scene had been severed from the community of the Amazons for her refusal to abandon her unrelenting pursuit of Achilles, the ultimate and final act of compliance with and fulfillment of the sacred law of Tanais, the founder of the state. Moments later, the sacred bow of Tanais, which had miraculously come to life at the time of the inception of the Amazonian state, falls from her hands and "dies." This occurrence has a twofold significance. On the one hand, it foreshadows the ultimate collapse of the Amazonian state and way of life, On the other hand, it signifies the complete and final disassociation of Penthesilea from the Amazonian state.⁵⁸ This she affirms verbally at the end of the



scene. She must now face her fate alone, as a completely autonomous individual.

The next crucial stage in the scene develops when Penthesilea regains consciousness. Initially she is unaware of her surroundings and believes that she has died. Addressing Prothoe, she states:

O sagt mir!--Bin ich in Elysium?
Bist du der ewig jungen Nymphen eine,
Die unsre hehre Königin bedienen,
Wenn sie von Eichenwipfeln still umrauscht,
In die kristallne Grotte niedersteigt? (I, 420).

Prothoe's reminder that ". . . was du hier erblickst,/ Es ist die Welt noch, die gebrechliche" (I, 421) does not affect her significantly for, although she does not recall what has happened, she believes that she has conquered Achilles:

Zwar weiss ich nicht, was hier mit mir geschehn,
Doch gleich des festen Glaubens könnt ich sterben,
Dass ich mir den Peliden überwand (I, 421).

In order to confirm this belief, she, despite the protestations of those surrounding her, insists that she be shown the body of Achilles:

Hinweg! Und wenn mir seine Wunde,
Ein Höllenrachen, gleich entgegen gähnte:
Ich will ihn sehn! (I, 422).

The decisive moment of recognition for Penthesilea arrives when she uncovers the maimed, mutilated body of Achilles. As yet unaware that this is her own handiwork, she declares: "Wer von euch tat das, ihr Entsetzlichen!" (I, 422).



From this point on, she is compelled by an inner force to uncover the truth. It is important to notice, however, that the intent of her "investigation" extends beyond the determination of the killer of Achilles; she must know who is responsible for the desecration of his body. In her eyes, the actual slaying of Achilles has been superseded by an even more serious offense. She perceives, as the following passage indicates, the desecration of his corpse as a crime against the sanctity of his person, as the ultimate violation of his human dignity and worth:

Doch wer, o Prothoe, bei diesem Raube
 Die offne Pforte ruchlos mied, durch alle
 Schneeweissen Alabasterwände mir
 In diesen Tempel brach; wer diesen Jüngling,
 Das Ebenbild der Götter, so entstellt,
 Dass Leben und Verwesung sich nicht streiten,
 Wem er gehört, wer ihn so zugerichtet,
 Dass ihn das Mitleid nicht beweint, die Liebe
 Sich, die unsterbliche, gleich einer Metze.
 Im Tod noch untreu, von ihm wenden muss:
 Den will ich meiner Rache opfern. Sprich! (I, 424).

After ascertaining and accepting the truth, she, having regained full consciousness of the deed she has committed, declares herself free from the laws of the Amazons. For, she has recognized that it was in an attempt to fulfill her commitment to these laws--laws which denied her her inalienable right as a woman to seek and express love--that she was driven to her inhuman, brutal actions.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, she at the same time recognizes that the ultimate responsibility for her actions lies within



herself, and thus she offers her own life as an atonement.

This recognition is echoed in her final words:

Denn jetzt steig ich in meinen Busen nieder,
Gleich einem Schacht, und grabe, kalt wie Erz,
Mir ein vernichtendes Gefühl hervor.
Dies Erz, dies läutr' ich in der Glut des Jammers
Hart mir zu Stahl; tränk es mit Gift sodann,
Heissätzendem, der Reue, durch und durch;
Trag es der Hoffnung ewgem Amboss zu,
Und schärf und spitz es mir zu einem Dolch;
Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich ich meine Brust:
So! So! So! So! Und wieder!--Nun ists gut (I, 427).

E. Death by Judgment

The death by judgment serves essentially the same function in Kleist's works as the death of atonement. The individuals who were discussed in the previous section, with the possible exception of the Marchese, chose individually and voluntarily to offer their own lives as an atonement after they had been brought to the recognition that they in their actions had violated basic, inalienable human rights and values of their fellow human beings. In other words, they themselves passed judgment on their own actions. The individuals to be discussed in this section are those who cannot or will not of themselves atone for the wrongs which they have committed and hence their judgment must come from without. In Michael Kohlhaas, Der Findling, and Die Hermannsschlacht, Kleist invests the leading protagonists (Kohlhaas, Piachi, Hermann) with the authority to pass judgment. In Das



Erdbeben in Chili and Der Zweikampf, judgment is passed by supernatural forces.

1. Michael Kohlhaas: der Kurfürst von Sachsen

At the end of the previous discussion of this work, it was observed that Elisabeth, who returned from the realm of the dead in the guise of the old gypsy woman to give transcendental sanction to Kohlhaas' course of action, provided him with information concerning the Kurfürst von Sachsen which enabled him to fulfill completely his destiny, his mission in this life. The moment for the final completion of his mission arrives on the day of his execution. His complaints against Junker Wenzel von Tronka have been settled to his complete satisfaction, and he has accepted unquestioningly the death sentence passed by the imperial court. Just moments prior to his execution, he, spotting the Kurfürst in the crowd, opens the capsule, reads the note which is of such vital importance for the Kurfürst, and then swallows it. Upon seeing this, the Kurfürst collapses, unconscious. Although he does not actually die at this point, his imminent death is strongly suggested at the end of the story: "Der Kurfürst von Sachsen kam bald darauf, zerrissen an Leib und Seele, nach Dresden zurück, wo man das Weitere in der Geschichte nachlesen muss" (II, 103).

The final action on the part of Kohlhaas is, first of all, an act of personal revenge against the Kurfürst



for having willfully and deceitfully retracted the amnesty which he had granted him. It is, in addition, an act of judgment performed in accordance with the role which Kleist has delegated to him in this work.

Kohlhaas' initial course of revenge and destruction is undertaken, "kraft der ihm angeborenen Macht" (II, 31), after he, having failed in every attempt to obtain even a hearing for his charges against Wenzel von Tronka, determines to withdraw himself from the established social order and to obtain justice on his own. The ultimate source of this course of action is, first of all, his inborn sense of and respect for justice, his "Rechtgefühl, das einer Goldwaage glich" (II, 14) and also his awareness of his responsibilities to his fellow man. The justification for the manner in which he seeks to obtain justice is, as is revealed in his conversation with Martin Luther, the conviction that the individual who has been deprived by the state of his inalienable right to the protection of the law has, in effect, been cast out of the community and hence is no longer subject to the laws of the community: "Verstossen . . . nenne ich den, dem der Schutz der Gesetze versagt ist! Denn dieses Schutzes, zum Gedeihen meines friedlichen Gewerbes, bedarf ich; ja er ist es, dessenhalb ich mich, mit dem Kreis dessen, was ich erworben, in dieser Gemeinschaft flüchte; und wer mir ihn versagt, der stösst mich zu den Wilden der Einöde hinaus; er gibt mir,

wie wollt Ihr das leugnen, die Keule, die mich selbst schützt, in die Hand" (II, 45). It is on the basis of this inner conviction, which, incidentally, is not repudiated effectively at any point but is rather confirmed,⁶⁰ that Kohlhaas takes upon himself the responsibility of taking revenge upon those who have willfully suppressed and perverted the exercise of justice for their own advantage. At the same time, however, it must also be recognized that his sense of justice requires that he return to the confines of the established order if there should be any evidence pointing to the administration and practice of justice within it. Responding to Luther's assurances that the Kurfürst had not been informed of his proceedings against Wenzel von Tronka, he affirms this, stating: "Wohlan . . . wenn mich der Landesherr nicht verstösst, so kehre ich auch wieder in die Gemeinschaft, die er beschirmt, zurück" (II, 46). Thus, when Kohlhaas receives the ambiguously worded placard in which the Kurfürst guarantees him safe conduct to Dresden, declares his intent to conduct an investigation of his charges, and pledges to grant him and his followers amnesty unless his case is rejected or dismissed unexpectedly, he abandons his course of revenge and, after settling his affairs, goes to Dresden to obtain justice.

In the final analysis, it is the Kurfürst's pledge of amnesty which causes his downfall. It is important to

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notice, first of all, that the pledge was not granted out of a concern for the administration of justice, but rather in order to create the semblance of justice. Concerned about the growing strength of Kohlhaas' forces and about the evidence of increasing public support for his cause, the Kurfürst determines to accept Luther's strongly worded proposal that he grant Kohlhaas amnesty, seeing it as a means to put an end to the ugly affair. Furthermore, it is by virtue of his position as the supreme sovereign of the state that he is able to and does grant amnesty. The excesses which Kohlhaas has been compelled to resort to in his pursuit of justice, however, represent, as Blöcker states, a violation of justice "in seiner letzten, seiner metaphysischen Wirklichkeit."⁶¹ Consequently the Kurfürst, having pledged amnesty, becomes involved in what Blöcker terms "ein unlösbares Rechtsdilemma" for: "Gnade kann es nur geben, wo sie Recht krönt, nicht aber, wo sie es ausser Kraft setzt."⁶² Thus he himself has violated the principles of a justice of a higher level which demand that Kohlhaas be condemned, but he is at the same time obligated to honor and uphold the amnesty which he, by virtue of his invested authority as the sovereign ruler, has granted. Having themselves nullified any legal basis for the prosecution of Kohlhaas for the acts of violence which he has perpetrated on Saxon soil, the Saxons are placed, as Silz states, "under the compulsion to devise



feints and evasions to maintain the semblance of a legality that was from the first an illegality."⁶³ Although it is necessary that Kohlhaas be condemned, they must now construct a pretext in order to bring him to justice for crimes other than those of which he is actually guilty.

The opportunity to construct such a pretext is provided when Johann Nagelschmidt, together with other members of Kohlhaas' dismantled band, undertakes, desirous of the booty of war, to resume the acts of violence. Calling himself "einen Statthalter des Kohlhaas" (II, 65), he attempts to gain support for his actions with the devious contention, "dass die Amnestie an mehreren, in ihre Heimat ruhig zurückgekehrten Knechten nicht gehalten, ja der Kohlhaas selbst mit himmelschreiender Wortbrüchigkeit, bei seiner Ankunft in Dresden eingesteckt, und einer Wache übergeben worden sei . . ." (II, 65066). The Tronkas, who up to this point have been forced to work toward the satisfaction of Kohlhaas' demands, determine to exploit fully this opportunity, and they begin immediately to lay the groundwork for bringing Kohlhaas to justice. Furthermore, it is a relative of the Tronkas, the police chief Freiherr von Wenk, who, using the absence of the Prinz von Meissen to his advantage, takes it upon himself to in effect place Kohlhaas under house arrest. When Kohlhaas is able to force him to admit, "dass die ihm feierlich, vor den Augen der ganzen Welt angelobte Amnestie gebrochen sei" (II, 73),

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he feels that he too has been relieved of his obligations and responsibilities: ". . . ob er schon einsah, dass er sich das einzige Rettungsmittel, das ihm übrig blieb, die Flucht, durch die Schritte, die er getan, sehr erschwert hatte, so lobte er sein Verfahren gleichwohl, weil er sich nunmehr und seinerseits von der Verbindlichkeit den Artikeln der Amnestie nachzukommen, befreit sah" (II, 73-74). Thus, unaware that the messenger had not only been apprehended but had also been bribed subsequently by the Kurfürst and his advisors to deliver the letter from Nagelschmidt, he, seeing this as an opportunity to gain his freedom, accepts Nagelschmidt's offer of assistance and thereby provided his adversaries with the pretext they needed. After a hastily called trial, he is condemned, "mit glühenden Zangen von Schinderknechten gekniffen, gevierteilt, und sein Körper, zwischen Rad und Galgen verbrannt zu werden" (II, 77).

The execution is averted, however, when the Kurfürst von Brandenburg intervenes and reclaims Kohlhaas as a citizen of Brandenburg. Requested to present the charges against Kohlhaas before the court in Berlin, the Kurfürst von Sachsen is cognizant of the dubious circumstances under which Kohlhaas has been condemned and also of the fact that the amnesty had granted him pardon for the acts of violence which he had committed in Saxony. Desirous to relieve himself of all responsibilities, he turns the matter over



to the imperial court: "so beschloss der Kurfürst, der Majestät des Kaisers zu Wien einen Bericht über den bewaffneten Einfall des Kohlhaas in Sachsen vorzulegen, sich über den Bruch des von ihm eingesetzten öffentlichen Landfriedens zu beschweren, und sie, die allerdings durch keine Amnestie gebunden war, anzuliegen . . ." (II, 79). It is in the course of the ensuing events that Kohlhaas is reinstated into his role as the executor of revenge and judgment.

The first event of major significance occurs at the time that the Kurfürst, dressed in the costume of a hunter, breaks away from the hunting party which he is attending at the instigation of a female companion and goes, to satisfy her curiosity, to the house where Kohlhaas, who is being escorted to Berlin, is staying for the night. Noticing the small lead capsule which Kohlhaas is wearing around his neck, he, quite innocently inquires about it and discovers to his complete devastation and consternation, that it is Kohlhaas to whom the old gypsy woman in Jüterbock had given the capsule which contained information concerning the future of his household. After recovering from the illness which overcame him at the time of this discovery, the Kurfürst concentrates solely upon gaining possession of the capsule.

Kohlhaas, having learned of the identity of his visitor in the meantime and aware of the significance



which the latter attaches to the capsule, recognizes that he has been given the means to take revenge on the Kurfürst. Thus, when the Jagdjunker von Stein arrives and, on behalf of the Kurfürst, offers him his freedom in return for the capsule, Kohlhaas rejects the offer emphatically: "Edler Herr! Wenn Euer Landesherr käme, und spräche, ich will mich, mit dem ganzen Tross derer, die mir das Szepter fuhren helfen, vernichten--vernichten, versteht Ihr, welches allerdings der grösseste Wunsch ist, den meine Seele hegt: so würde ich ihm doch den Zettel nicht, der ihm mehr wert ist, als das Dasein, verweigern und sprechen: du kannst mich auf den Schafott bringen, ich aber kann dir weh tun, und ich wills!" (II, 86). To be noted in connection with the above passage is, first of all, that an acceptance of this offer would have meant for Kohlhaas a compromise of his "Rechtgefühl" which demands that the Kurfürst be brought to judgment because of the nature of the offenses which he has committed. In addition, it must be recognized that Kohlhaas is in custody and is thereby restricted in the actions which he could undertake on his own. The possession of the capsule has empowered him, has given him the means to take revenge upon or to pass judgment on the Kurfürst for the injustice which had been committed against his person, i.e., against his inalienable right as a human being and as an individual citizen to the due process of law, when the amnesty was capriciously revoked.



The reappearance or "reincarnation" of Elisabeth at the end of the Novelle in the guise of the old gypsy woman, i.e., her return from the transcendental realm of the dead, empowers Kohlhaas, on the other hand, to pass judgment upon the Kurfürst for the manner in which he, first, by having illegally granted the amnesty and second by having failed to fulfill his responsibility to uphold and respect the amnesty, violated the sanctity of his office. Furthermore, the Kurfürst's pre-eminent position of authority and sovereignty in earthly spheres necessitates the intervention of higher powers.⁶⁴ In his meeting with Kohlhaas, Martin Luther, although he is referring specifically, of course, to the Kurfürst's lack of knowledge concerning the proceedings against Wenzel von Tronka, challenges Kohlhaas' right or authority to personally cast judgment upon a sovereign earthly ruler: "Wenn Staatsdiener hinter seinem Rücken Prozesse unterschlagen, oder sonst seines geheiligten Namens, in seiner Unwissenheit spotten; wer anders als Gott darf ihn wegen der Wahl solcher Diener zur Rechenschaft ziehen, und bist du, gottverdammter und entsetzlicher Mensch, befugt, ihn deshalb zu richten?" (II, 45-46). With the aid of Elisabeth, Kohlhaas is provided with the means and with her sanction he is invested with the authority to pronounce this judgment, and he is thereby enabled to ensure the complete victory of the cause of justice.

2. Der Findling: Nicolo

Commenting upon the unfortunate death in childbirth of Constanze, Nicolo's wife, the narrator states: "Dieser Vorfall, bedauernswürdig an sich, weil ein tugendhaftes und wohlerzogenes Wesen verloren ging, war es doppelt, weil er den beiden Leidenschaften Nicolos, seiner Bigotterie und seinem Hange zu den Weibern, wieder Tor und Tür öffnete" (II, 205). We have already seen how the intensification of the latter into a psychopathic, sexual passion for Elvire in combination with the pernicious desire to take revenge against the woman who in her chasteness and innocence had unknowingly humiliated him so deeply had caused Nicolo to devise "die abscheulichste Tat, die je verübt worden ist" (II, 212). It is, however, the former passion, his hypocrisy as well as his associations with the supreme hypocrites of the church-state of Rome, the Carmelite monks, which, in the final analysis make it necessary for Piachi to take upon himself the responsibility of condemning him for the unconscionable, unpardonable manner in which he purposely and willfully contrived to violate the human dignity and worth of his adoptive parents.

The disastrous flow of events, which results in the murder of Nicolo by Piachi and ultimately in the execution of Piachi, is set in motion the moment that Nicolo is apprehended while attempting to carry out his plan to take revenge upon and to desecrate the person and character

of Elvire. He, realizing that he cannot possibly hope to exonerate himself, throws himself down at the feet of Piachi, "und bat ihn, unter der Beteuerung, den Blick nie wieder zu seiner Frau zu erheben, um Vergebung" (II, 213). Though deeply distressed and angered, Piachi is desirous of putting an end to the matter quickly and quietly, and, exercising the greatest of restraint, banishes Nicolo from the house.

Before we can proceed with our discussion of the course of revenge undertaken by Piachi, it is essential that we examine briefly his character as it is presented in the earlier part of the Novelle. All his actions are governed by his concern for the well-being of others. This is made manifest not only in the gentleness and thoughtfulness with which he treated Elvire, but even more so in his treatment of Nicolo. Not only had he rescued the orphan Nicolo, who was infected with the plague, from the streets, but, after his own son, Paolo, died after having become infected with the plague as a result of his contact with Nicolo, he took him into his home and adopted him shortly thereafter. As a supreme gesture of his generosity, Piachi, after several years, ceded his entire estate to his adopted son: "Kurz, als Piachi sein sechzigstes Jahr erreicht hatte, tat er das Letzte und das Äusserste, was er für ihn tun konnte: er überliess ihn, auf gerichtliche Weise, mit Ausnahme eines kleinen

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Kapitals, das er sich vorbehielt, das ganze Vermögen, das seiner Güterhandel zum Grunde lag, und zog sich, mit seiner treuen trefflichen Elvire, die wenige Wünsche in der Welt hatte, in den Ruhestand zurück" (II, 202).

Within this unlikely setting, the perversity of Nicolo grew and flourished.

It is in his response to Piachi's order that he leave the house that Nicolo reveals fully his hypocrisy and his absolute moral degradation and depravity. Arising suddenly from the floor, he declares: "an ihm, dem Alten, sei es, das Haus zu räumen, denn er durch vollgültige Dokumente eingesetzt, sei der Besitzer und werde sein Recht, gegen wen immer auf der Welt es sei, zu behaupten wissen!" (II, 213). He, who just moments before had declared his remorse and had begged for forgiveness, now, in complete disregard for the atrocities which he had committed and for his moral responsibility, obstinately asserts his legal rights. Hereupon, Piachi determines to take legal measures to relieve Nicolo of his rights to the estate; these efforts, however, are thwarted. Enlisting the aid of his friends, the Carmelite monks, Nicolo, after making certain concessions, is able to obtain a legal writ which confirms his ownership of the property: "Kurz, da er Xavieren, welche der Bischof los zu sein wünschte, zu heiraten willigte, siegte die Bosheit, und die Regierung erliess, auf Vermittelung dieses geistlichen Herrn, ein

Dekret, in welchem Nicolo in den Besitz bestätigt und dem Piachi aufgegeben ward, ihn nicht darin zu belästigen" (II, 214). Already grieved deeply by the death of Elvire on the preceding day, Piachi, upon receiving the decree, performs his gruesome task of revenge: "Durch diesen doppelten Schmerz gereizt, ging er, das Dekret in der Tasche, in das Haus, und stark, wie die Wut ihn machte, warf er den von Natur schwächeren Nicolo nieder und drückte ihm das Gehirn an der Wand ein" (II, 214).

A gentle, compassionate man is thus transformed by an irreconcilably evil force into a merciless executor of judgment and revenge.

3. Der Zweikampf: Jakob der Rotbart

In the introductory paragraphs, it was stated that, in this work, the execution of justice is performed by supernatural forces. It would be more accurate to state, however, that Jakob der Rotbart is actually subjected to a twofold judgment: divine judgment and, posthumously, the judgment of man. As we have seen, the trial by combat between Friedrich von Trota and Rotbart developed as a result of Rotbart's having attempted to clear himself of all suspicions concerning his complicity in the murder of his half-brother, Herzog Wilhelm von Breysach, by revealing publicly that he had been in the company of Littegarde on the night of the murder. It was an act of divine intervention,

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"eine sonderbare Schickung des Himmels" (II, 249), which effected Friedrich's miraculous recovery from the mortal wounds which he had sustained in combat and which enabled him and eventually Littegarde to recognize the ambiguity of the verdict delivered and also to become aware of the invalidity, the capriciousness of the institution itself. It is an act of divine judgment upon Jakob der Rotbart, however, which ultimately effects this insight on the part of the larger community. The seemingly insignificant surface wound which Rotbart sustained in the early stages of the conflict fails, incredibly, to respond to treatment: "Ja, ein ätzender der ganzen damaligen Heilkunst unbekannter Eiter, frass auf eine krebsartige Weise, bis auf den Knochen herab im ganzen System seiner Hand um sich, dergestalt, dass man zum Entsetzen aller seiner Freunde genötigt gewesen war, ihm die ganze schadhafte Hand, und späterhin, da auch hierdurch dem Eiterfrass kein Ziel gesetzt ward, den Arm selbst abzunehmen" (II, 255). With the failure of even these radical, extreme measures, it was predicted that Rotbart would die within a week.

It must be reemphasized at this juncture that the issue at stake in the trial by combat was not directly concerned with the question of Rotbart's complicity in the death of the Herzog; it was rather concerned with the veracity of his alibi. Contributing further to the ambiguity of the "verdict" proclaimed by the "Gottesurteil" is the

fact that, at the time of Friedrich's challenge to combat, Rotbart was himself convinced of the truth of his allegations, and it was for this reason that he, also believing in the validity of the institution, accepted the challenge emphatically and without hesitation: "'so gewiss als Gott gerecht, im Urteil der Waffen, entscheidet, so gewiss werde ich dir die Wahrhaftigkeit dessen, was ich, Frau Littegarden betreffend, notgedrungen verlautbart, im ehrlichen Ritterlichen Zweikampf beweisen!'" (II, 242). Even in the face of an imminent death, implored by the prior to confess, Rotbart steadfastly maintains the veracity of his allegations: "der Graf nahm, durch und durch erschüttert, noch einmal das heilige Sakrament auf die Wahrhaftigkeit seiner Aussagen, und gab, unter allen Zeichen der entsetzlichsten Angst, falls er Frau Littegarden verleumdischer Weise angeklagt hätte, seine Seele der ewigen Verdammnis preis" (II, 255).

In the aftermath of these developments, it is made known to Rotbart that he had in actuality been the unwitting victim of a vengeful scheme carefully contrived by Littegarde's maid Rosalie, with whom he had carried on a long-standing illicit affair. It is at this point that he became aware that the judgment of God had indeed been delivered, not in the manner, however, in which he expected. Overwhelmed with his own guilt and by an awareness of the judgment which had befallen him, he asks to be brought to

the place of execution, where Friedrich and Littegarde are about to be executed, declaring: "'ich will nicht, ohne eine Tat der Gerechtigkeit verübt zu haben, sterben!'" (II, 258). In the presence of all the spectators to the scheduled execution, he attests to the innocence of Littegarde and in his dying words, believing that he has escaped the reaches of earthly justice, confesses that the Herzog had been murdered at his behest. His judgment is completed when the Kaiser, exercising his authority and responsibility as the sovereign ruler, orders that Rotbart's corpse be burned as a judgment for his having willfully jeopardized the lives of two innocent individuals by attempting to conceal his complicity in the death of his brother. It is the realization that he, by enforcing the provisions of the "Gottesurteil," would have borne the ultimate responsibility for the death of Friedrich and Littegarde which compels him to change the wording of and thereby essentially invalidate the statutes governing the institution of trial by combat.

4. Die Hermannsschlacht: the annihilation of the Romans

In his discussion of the motif of revenge in Kleist's works, Müller-Seidel maintains: ". . . dass die Häufigkeit des Rachemotivs mit der zentralen Bedeutung des Gefühls zusammenhängt, ist evident. Sie hängt, um es genauer zu sagen, mit der Verwirrung des Gefühls zusammen

oder ist . . . nur die äusserste Steigerung der Verwirrung" (p. 147). What could be considered as perhaps the most concrete manifestation of the existence of a "Verwirrung des Gefühls" within Hermann occurs in the ninth scene of the fourth act. At the beginning of the scene, Hermann, informing Thusnelda that the battle which will be fought on the following day is designed to exterminate completely the Roman forces, states:

Die ganze Brut, die in den Leib Germaniens
Sich eingefilzt, wie ein Insektenschwarm,
Muss durch das Schwert der Rache jetzt sterben
(I, 593).

Appalled by the ruthlessness and the indiscriminate nature of the plotted course of revenge and judgment, Thusnelda pleads that the "good Romans" be spared, reminding him of individuals to whom he owes a debt of gratitude:

Der junge Held, der, mit der Gefahr des Lebens,
Das Kind, auf seiner Mutter Ruf,
Dem Tod der Flammen mutig jüngst entrissen?--
Er hätte kein Gefühl der Liebe dir entlockt? (I, 594).

Richard Samuel considers Hermann's response as an expression of the "Konflikt zwischen 'Amt' und Gewissen"⁶⁶ which he is experiencing. It is true that if we consider the following lines within their immediate context, they could be considered as a conscious, deliberate attempt on the part of Hermann to reconcile the nature of his mission of revenge and judgment with the conflicting dictates of his inner conscience:



Er sei verflucht, wenn er mir das getan!
 Er hat, auf einen Augenblick,
 Mein Herz veruntreut, zum Verräter
 An Deutschlands grosser Sache mich gemacht!
 Warum setzt' er Thuiskon mir in Brand?
 Ich will die höhnische Dämonenbrut nicht lieben!
 So lange sie in Germanien trotzt,
 Ist Hass mein Amt und meine Tugend Rache! (I, 594).

If, however, we consider these lines from the perspective of the role, the function, which the author Kleist has projected onto Hermann in this work, then it becomes apparent that they are, first of all, an expression of his complete awareness of the necessity of the nature of the mission which he has assumed and, second, an expression of his awareness of his mandate to commit himself totally and absolutely toward the fulfillment of that mission. Hence he cannot and does not allow his personal feelings and inclinations to interfere. This full awareness and total commitment to his mission is emphasized once again at the end of the fourteenth scene of the fifth act. Just prior to the beginning of the decisive battle, questioned concerning the fate of the traitorous Germans who have aligned themselves with the Romans, he declares:

Vergebt! Vergesst! Versöhnt, umarmt und liebt euch!
 Das sind die Wackersten und Besten,
 Wenn es nunmehr die Römerrache gilt!--
 Hinweg!--Verwirre das Gefühl mir nicht!
 Varus und die Kohorten, sag ich dir;
 Das ist der Feind, dem dieser Busen schwillt!
 (I, 615).



Aware of the responsibility which he has assumed, he must concentrate solely upon and commit himself completely to the eradication of those forces who have not only set out to deprive the Germanic people of their autonomy but have also conspired to cause the Germans to become traitors to their own country. A parallel can be drawn at this point to Michael Kohlhaas. Offering an explanation for his decision to sell his property, he stated that he had assumed a responsibility, a mission, which was of greater importance than even his responsibilities and obligations as a husband and father. In order to fulfill this commitment, it became necessary for him to step outside of his established role in the established order and to resort to violent means in his pursuit of justice. In the work under discussion, the sword of judgment is placed into the hands of Hermann, who himself characterizes his goal in life as being: "Dem Weib, das mir vermählt, der Gatte,/ Ein Vater meinen süßen Kindern,/ Und meinem Volk ein guter Fürst zu sein" (I, 548), and it is his responsibility to exterminate completely the Roman army.

All the major themes of the work are expressed in the two stanzas of the chorus of the bards, intoned just prior to the commencement of the battle. The first stanza is concerned with the necessity of the battle, with the need for the German people to free themselves from the burden of their foreign oppressors:



Wir litten menschlich seit dem Tage,
 Da jener Fremdling eingerückt;
 Wir rächten nicht die erste Plage,
 Mit Hohn auf uns herabgeschickt;
 Wir übten nach der Götter Lehre,
 Uns durch viel Jahre im Verzeihn:
 Doch endlich drückt des Joches Schwere,
 Und abgeschüttelt will es sein! (I, 613).

The second stanza concerns more specifically Hermann's function as the leader of the Germanic forces and his obligations to the Germanic people; it stresses the notions of endurance and total commitment to the cause of freedom:

Du wirst nicht wanken und nicht weichen,
 Vom Amt das du dir kühn erhöht,
 Die Regung wird dich nicht beschleichen,
 Die dein getreues Volk verrät;
 Du bist so mild, o Sohn der Götter,
 Der Frühling kann nicht milder sein:
 Sei schrecklich heut, ein Schlossenwetter,
 Und Blitze lass dein Antlitz spein! (I, 614).

Although the methods employed by Hermann in his extermination of the Roman army may well offend or insult our sensitivities, the death of judgment itself performs, as we have seen, a function which is vital to the projection of Kleist's artistic intent in his works. His concern is to make man aware of the level of existence which he has the inherent potential to attain. They who willfully suppress the inalienable human rights of others, who trounce upon the human dignity and worth of others and thereby prevent them from realizing their potential, essentially deprive them of the right to a meaningful existence and must therefore be eradicated. It is this



concept which provides the basis for the necessity of the extreme measures taken against the Romans by Hermann and his people. Furthermore, the extreme, inhumane manner in which Kleist has Hermann fulfill his role may well be a reflection of his personal hatred for the Napoleonic army and an indication of the urgency with which he perceived the need for national unification.

5. Das Erdbeben in Chili: civic and church leaders

To designate the natural catastrophe, the great earthquake which befell the city of St. Jago as an act of divine judgment is, of course, highly subject to debate. Walter Silz, who perceives the meaning of the earthquake from the standpoint of its function as an "unerhörte Begebenheit" within the structure of the *Novelle*,⁶⁷ maintains, for example: "In the present story, the evidence as to God and his ways is inconclusive. Much of it is couched in accepted, conventional terms, without thereby becoming more reassuring."⁶⁸ If, however, we examine the meaning and function of the earthquake within the structure of the story, keeping in mind that it takes place within a seventeenth century setting, strong evidence can be found which indicates that it was Kleist's intent that the earthquake be understood as an act of God, an act of divine intervention.

The first, yet admittedly inconclusive, indications of the possibility of the earthquake being an act of divine intervention are the timing and the immediate results of the natural catastrophe. The opening paragraphs inform the reader that Josephe was sent to a convent by her father after it was brought to his attention that she, despite his prohibitions, had continued her relationship with Jeronimo, whom he had dismissed from his position as tutor in the household during the previous year. Despite this apparently overwhelming obstacle, Jeronimo managed to resume the affair, and it was the garden of the convent which he made "zum Schauplatz seines vollen Glücks" (II, 144). It was during the sacred procession of the Corpus Christi that Josephe was taken with labor. In the resultant furor, she, after having given birth to her child, was condemned to die and Jeronimo was also imprisoned. The earthquake takes place precisely at the moment that Josephe is being led to the place of execution and Jeronimo, having failed in all attempts to free himself from his imprisonment and having subsequently despaired of life completely, is about to hang himself in his prison cell. Despite the immensity of the quake and the great devastation which followed, the alleged sinners are enabled to escape unharmed with their child, the product of their "sin."

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Also supporting the notion that the earthquake was an act of divine intervention into human affairs is the fact that it is unilaterally interpreted as such by all figures involved. The crucial factor, however, is the manner in which, the perspective from which this interpretation is made on the part of the opposing forces. Jeronimo and Josephe perceive it as an act of divine intervention designed to effect their rescue. After their reunion, they are deeply moved when they reflect upon the thought of "wie viel Elend über die Welt kommen musste, damit sie glücklich würden!" (II, 150). On the day after the catastrophe, Josephe cannot refrain from expressing openly her gratitude: "Ein Gefühl, das sie nicht unterdrücken konnte, nannte den verflossnen Tag, so viel Elend er auch über die Welt gebracht hatte, eine Wohltat, wie der Himmel noch keine über sie verhängt hatte" (II, 152). Furthermore, it is in order to express her gratitude to God that Josephe desires to attend the special mass to be held on the following day: "Josephe äusserte, indem sie mit einiger Begeisterung sogleich aufstand, dass sie den Drang, ihr Antlitz vor dem Schöpfer in den Staub zu legen, niemals lebhafter empfunden habe, als eben jetzt, wo er seine unbegreifliche Macht so entwickle" (II, 154). The members of the community, however, swayed by the forceful sermon of the priest, perceive the earthquake as God's judgment upon the community for the general



state of immorality prevalent in the city and, more specifically, for their having tolerated the transgression which had been committed in the garden of the convent. Thus, considered within the context and the historical, cultural setting of the Novelle, the question is not whether the earthquake was in fact an act of divine intervention, but rather, the interpretation of the meaning, the purpose of this action.

That Kleist himself intended the earthquake to be construed as the judgment of a divine power becomes evident if we consider the narrative stance which he assumes in certain segments of the work. Müller-Seidel (p. 95) has observed that, in his depiction of Josephe's flight through the ruins of the devastated city, Kleist, in his choice of words, reveals that he as an author is not completely detached and makes, in essence, value judgments (Wertungen) of characters and events. The abbess and almost all the nuns of the convent are slain "auf eine schmähliche Art" (II, 148). A few steps away, Josephe passes by the corpse of the archbishop, "die man soeben zerschmettert aus dem Schutt der Kathedrale hervorgezogen hatte" (II, 148-149).⁶⁹ In successive stages of her journey, she encounters the following: "Der Palast des Vizekönigs war versunken, der Gerichtshof, in welchem ihr das Urteil gesprochen worden war, stand in Flammen, und an die Stelle, wo sich ihr väterliches Haus befunden hatte, war ein See getreten,

und kochte rötliche Dämpfe aus" (II, 149). Speaking in terms of the thematic structure and the artistic intent in Kleist's works, it can be observed that the individuals and the representatives of the civic and religious institutions which were responsible for the perpetuation of arbitrary categories of social distinction and for the imposition of humanly contrived, institutionalized standards of behavior upon Jeronimo and Josephe, having thereby deprived them of their inalienable right to develop their relationship in a normal fashion, were subjected to the judgment of God. In the work, Jeronimo and Josephe, reflecting the insights which Kleist gained during the time of the Kant crisis, assume an uncommitted stance toward God; their interpretation of the earthquake as an act of divine intervention designed to effect their rescue from death and to enable them to consummate their love relationship is based upon their, individual, personal trust in God. They are forced to succumb, however, to the predominating force in their environment which bases its interpretation of the event upon the humanly contrived, preconceived notions of the institutionalized church.

F. The Death of Fulfillment

If one can speak of a "relationship" between an author and the characters he has created in his works, then it can be said, with certain limitations of course,

that for the individuals to be discussed here Kleist provides death as a form of release. It is a release from the threatening, unconquerable, often incomprehensible forces in their environment; it is a release from the insoluble enigmas, the inescapable paradoxes, and the injustices inherent in existence itself. These individuals succumb to or, in a sense, become the helpless victims of prevailing circumstances in the infirm world, i.e., they die as a result of having asserted themselves in opposition to the predominate forces of contemporary, historical reality. What distinguishes them, however, and what gives dignity and meaning to the death they must suffer are the circumstances under which they die and the reasons for which they are prepared to risk or accept death. The act or event of death, the phenomenon of death, does not in itself represent for them an act or event of fulfillment. They do not find fulfillment in death; they rather find death in the knowledge of having attained or striven for fulfillment. They die after having committed themselves totally toward the fulfillment of their destinies in life (Kohlhaas, Piachi, Achilles), or they willfully accept death after they have attained personal fulfillment by having experienced the true potential of life (Agnes, Jeronimo, Josephe).



1. Die Familie Schroffenstein: Agnes

The death of Agnes, which occurs just moments after the death of Ottokar at the beginning of the fifth act, can be viewed from several perspectives. Considered within its immediate context, her death is the unfortunate consequence of an unwitting, most tragic error on the part of her own father. Searching for his daughter, he arrives at the scene of the cave and sees her, dressed as Ottokar, beside the body of Ottokar, who is dressed in her clothing. Unaware of the relationship which has developed between them and also of the knowledge which they have gained concerning the death of Peter, he takes her life as an act of just revenge for what he believes to be the murder of his daughter. In addition, her death represents the climax of a series of murders which were perpetrated in the wake of Rupert's proclamation of revenge in the first scene against the House of Warwand for the alleged murder of his young son Peter: the death of Aldöbern at the hands of Sylvester's aroused subjects, the retaliatory slaying of Jeronimus at the behest of Rupert, and the sacrificial death of Ottokar. In the final analysis, of course, her death, like the death of the other individuals in the work, is the result of the predominating state of mistrust, of the rumors and unfounded suspicions which have prevailed between the two branches of the Familie Schroffenstein since the inception of the "Erbvertrag."



If we consider her death, however, from her personal perspective and from the perspective of the development of her relationship with Ottokar, then it will become apparent that it occurs at a time when she no longer has any reason or desire to continue living. As we have seen, it is in the first scene of the third act that the decisive moment in the relationship between the young couple arrives. It is noteworthy to recall the words spoken by Agnes in the belief that she is about to be poisoned by Ottokar:

Nun ists gut.
 Jetzt bin ich stark. Die Krone sank ins Meer,
 Gleich einem nackten Fürsten werf ich ihr
 Das Leben nach. Er bringe Wasser, bringe
 Mir Gift, gleichviel, ich trink es aus, er soll
 Das Ungeheuerste an mir vollenden (I, 96-97).

These lines can be regarded, to a certain extent, as a prefiguration, a presentiment of her death in the final act. A life without love has no meaning, is not worth living for her, but to have died at this point would have meant dying for an incomplete love. It would have meant dying for a love shrouded in mystery and anonymity and furthermore tainted by the mistrust and the suspicions secretly harbored by each of the individuals involved. It is only after she realizes how terribly she has misjudged Ottokar and, at his urging, declares herself to be "Ganz deine, in der grenzenlosesten/ Bedeutung" (I, 99) that an effective, meaningful mutual relationship of love based upon complete



trust and confidence in the integrity of the other individual is established.⁷⁰ Furthermore, when they in this atmosphere of complete trust gain insight into the invalidity of their respective suspicions, thereby causing Ottokar to determine to ascertain the truth, they simultaneously make possible the eventual reconciliation of their families and also create the possibility for the consummation of their relationship.

Although the actual consummation of this relationship is averted when each of the children is killed by his respective father, Agnes does not die, however, until she has experienced the fulfillment of her love in Ottokar's vivid portrayal of the bliss of the wedding night.

Diverting her attention during the exchange of clothing, he begins with a description of the wedding festivities--

"Erst/ Im schwarm der Gäste, die mit Blicken uns/ Wie
Wespen folgen . . ." (I, 141)--and concludes with an
allusion to the consummation of the act of love:

Nun entwallt
Gleich einem frühling-angeswellten Strom
Die Regung ohne Mass und Ordnung--schnell
Lös ich die Schleife, schnell noch eine . . .
streife dann
Die fremde Hülle leicht dir ab (I, 142).

Moments later he is killed by his own father. Kneeling beside his body, Agnes has no reason to attempt to flee. In a sense, death is a release from a cruel, unjust existence, but at the same time she, confronted with the

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cruel harshness of an enigmatic reality, has no reason to continue living, for she has experienced the fulfillment of her love.

2. Das Erdbeben in Chili: Jeronimo and Josephe

Stated in the simplest of terms, Jeronimo and Josephe become the victims of a violent mob attempting to save itself from further expressions of the wrath of God. Already aroused by the sermon of the priest, who in his condemnation of the moral depravity of the city had singled out the transgression committed in the garden of the convent and had committed the souls of the transgressors to "allen Fürsten der Hölle" (II, 156), the members of the congregation are incited to action when Meister Pedrillo, significantly depicted at a later juncture as "der Fürst der satanischen Rotte" (II, 158), loudly proclaims the presence of the sinners in their midst. Momentarily deterred when Don Fernando, whom the cobbler mistakenly identified as Jeronimo, identifies himself, the wrath of the crowd is restored when Don Fernando's infant son, who is being held by Josephe, reaches out for him: "Er ist der Vater! schrie eine Stimme; und er ist Jeronimo Rugera! eine andere; und: sie sind die gotteslästerlichen Menschen! eine dritte; und: steinigt sie! steinigt sie! die ganze im Tempel Jesu versammelte Christenheit!" (II, 157). There is again



a momentary lull in the action when Jeronimo steps forward and, identifying himself, asks that Don Fernando be released. The arrival of a naval officer at that same moment appears to ensure a safe retreat. When the passions of the crowd are rekindled once again, Josephe, reconciled to her fate, entrusts the children to Fernando: "gehn Sie, Don Fernando, retten Sie Ihre beiden Kinder, und überlassen Sie uns unserm Schicksale!" (II, 157). Rejecting the request, Don Fernando leads his retinue out of the church safely, but it is then that the full fury of the mob is unleashed: "Doch kaum waren sie auf den von Menschen gleichfalls erfüllten Vorplatz derselben getreten, als eine Stimme aus dem rasenden Haufen, der sie verfolgt hatte, rief: dies ist Jeronimo Rugera, ihr Bürger, denn ich bin sein eigner Vater! und ihn an Donna Constanzens Seite mit einem ungeheueren Keulenschlage zu Boden streckte" (II, 157-158). After Donna Constanze too is killed and it appears that Don Fernando will soon be overcome, Josephe places herself into the hands of the merciless mob: "hier mordet mich, ihr blutdürstenden Tiger! und stürzte sich freiwillig unter sie, um dem Kampf ein Ende zu machen. Meister Pedrillo schlug sie mit der Keule nieder" (II, 158).

If we consider the problem from a slightly broader perspective, Jeronimo and Josephe are forced to succumb to the prevailing forces, the predominate mode of thinking of historical reality. Both rescued miraculously from death



by the earthquake, they are reunited in a valley which appears to them, "als ob es das Tal von Eden gewesen wäre" (II, 149). Withdrawing by themselves, they rest in the serene tranquility of nature and make plans to settle in Europe. These plans are altered, however, as a result of the events which take place on the following morning. They are treated with kindness and respect by the same individuals who had gathered in a festive mood on the previous day to witness Josephe's execution. A spirit of general reconciliation seems to have come over the populace, and Jeronimo and Josephe perceive that the earthquake--"Sie konnten in der Erinnerung gar nicht weiter, als bis auf ihn, zurückgehen" (II, 151)--has effected a complete change in the social structure and a new beginning in human relations: "Und in der Tat schien, mitten in diesen grässlichen Augenblicken, in welchen alle irdischen Güter der Menschen zu Grunde gingen, . . . der menschliche Geist selbst, wie eine schöne Blume, aufzugehn" (II, 152). Social barriers and distinctions are lifted--"Auf den Feldern, so weit das Auge reichte, sah man Menschen von allen Ständen durcheinander liegen, Fürsten und Bettler, Matronen und Bäuerinnen, Staatsbeamte und Tagelöhner, Klosterherren und Klosterfrauen . . ." (II, 152)--and they who managed to salvage vital provisions share them generously with those who have less or none.

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Their trust in the goodness of human society restored, Jeronimo and Josephe abandon their plan to immigrate to Spain. It is in their decision to attend the services in the church, however, that they, desirous of expressing their gratitude, commit a most tragic error. Overwhelmed by the spirit of humanitarianism which seemed to have overcome their fellow man, they failed to reckon with the natural frailty, the capricious nature of man and human society and its institutions. They err, tragically, in believing that the changes which they have observed in man and in the social structure are permanent and complete.⁷¹ In the church they are once again confronted with and are forced to succumb to the capriciousness of man and his institutions.

If the idyllic scene of the Novelle is considered within the context of Kleist's artistic intent, then it becomes apparent that, despite the tragic outcome, Kleist intended it to be more than an "illusory and baseless" "Wunschbild of a new Paradise";⁷² it is rather an artistic projection of the potential level of existence which man has the inherent potential to enjoy. Although Jeronimo and Josephe become the victims of the misdirected, passionate mob, their death is given meaning, it is given an added dimension because they have witnessed and experienced the potential of life. Hence there is no reason for them to attempt to save their lives.

3. Penthesilea: Achilles

The fate suffered by Achilles is similar, to a certain extent to the fate of Jeronimo and Josephe in that he too, because of a tragic error of judgment on his part, becomes the victim of historical reality. It is the intrusion of Penthesilea and the Amazonian culture into Greek civilization--more specifically, of course, the intrusion into the battle between the Greeks and the Trojans--which determines the events of the drama. Furthermore, it is because of the manner in which Achilles attempts to cope with and to comprehend this totally alien force that he must succumb to it. The death of both Achilles and also Penthesilea is ultimately the result of the clash of the conflicting values and life styles of their respective cultures. However, death occurs, i.e., it becomes dramatically necessary, after Achilles, who by the assertion of his individuality and by the strength of his inner feelings had distanced himself, although not completely, from the tactics and the mode of thinking of his society, resorts at the decisive moment to a tactic typical of the mode of thinking of his society. Recent critics have emphasized repeatedly that Kleist has created in Achilles a character who is in every respect equal in rank and stature to Penthesilea.⁷³ The qualities which give him stature in life also lend meaning and stature to his death.



For the Greek kings, the intrusion of Penthesilea and the Amozons represents a complete enigma, one which lies beyond the reaches of their comprehension of the conduct and strategy of warfare. Their conception of warfare is based upon reason; their conduct of warfare is determined by thoughtfully conceived plans and strategy. Warfare represents for them, as Odysseus indicates, the conflict between two sharply delineated, opposing forces: "So viel ich weiss, gibt es in der Natur/ Kraft bloss und ihren Widerstand, nichts Drittes" (I, 326). In Penthesilea they are confronted with this third force. She appears on the scene, by all appearances in support of the Greek forces, pursuing the Trogan forces "Wie Sturmwind ein zerrissenes Gewölk" (I, 324) as if intending to blast them off of the face of the earth. From the perspective of conventional logic of warfare, there is only one conclusion to be drawn: "Und uns die Freundin müssen wir sie glauben,/ Da sie sich Teukrischen die Feindin zeigt" (I, 324). Thus the Greeks propose that the Amazons form an alliance with them against the Trojans. This proposal is met with scorn, however, and, in the next onslaught, they themselves, together with the Trojans, fall prey to the fury of the Amazons. Lacking any other rational explanation, the Greeks can only conclude that Penthesilea is driven by a personal hatred for Achilles:



So folgt, so hungerheiss, die Wölfin nicht,
 Durch Wälder, die der Schnee bedeckt, der Beute,
 Die sich ihr Auge grimmig auserkor,
 Als sie, durch unsre Schlachtreihn, dem Achill (I, 327).

But, when Achilles was placed at her mercy, she spared his life. Unable to comprehend Penthesilea's motives or methods, unable to combat her by conventional means, they must fall back upon their ultimate resource, their adroitness and cleverness in devising plans and strategy for warfare, in an attempt to overcome her with cunning.

Achilles is part of this Greek culture, but, although he himself does not appear in the first scene, the reports of his actions indicate that his response to the intrusion of Penthesilea and the Amazons differs considerably from the tactics employed by his countrymen. Odysseus considers his actions a matter of concern and a potential threat to the strategy to be undertaken:

Schafft den Peliden weg von diesem Platze!

 Durchbohrt mit einem Pfeilschuss, ihn zu fesseln,
 Die Schenkel ihm: er weicht, so schwört er, eher
 Von dieser Amazone Ferse nicht,
 Bis er bei ihren seidnen Haaren sie
 Von dem gefleckten Tigerpferd gerissen (I, 328-329).

The extent to which Achilles has distanced himself from and has asserted his individuality against the tactics, the prevailing mode of thinking of his environment is revealed completely in the fourth scene. Upon his victorious return from his first round of combat with Penthesilea, in which he proved himself to be her equal

in every respect, he is informed by Odysseus of the strategy which has been devised against Penthesilea:

Wir werden mit verstelltem Rückzug sie
In das Skamandrostal zu locken suchen,
Wo Agamemnon aus dem Hinterhalt
In einer Hauptschlacht sie empfangen wird (I, 339).

Throughout the beginning of the scene, Achilles is mentally withdrawn. Oblivious to the words directed toward him, he, noticing his horses, remarks laconically: "Sie schwitzen" (I, 339). In response to Diomedes' arguments against continuing combat with the Amazons, he, looking off into the distance, queries: "Steht sie noch da?" (I, 340). When asked whether he has heard the plans, he replies: "Nein, nichts. Was wars? Was wollt ihr?" (I, 341). Odysseus, in repeating the plans, reveals that the Greeks can and will only engage in combat with the Amazons on their own terms:⁷⁴

Denn Wahnsinn wärs, bei den Olympischen,
Da dringend uns der Krieg nach Troja ruft,
Mit diesen Jungfraun hier uns einzulassen,
Bevor wir wissen, was sie von uns wollen,
Noch überhaupt nur, ob sie uns was wollen? (I, 391).

At this juncture, Achilles does not need nor is he concerned with the advice or strategy of his compatriots. His desire to seek renewed combat is determined by the strength of his inner feelings of the need to assert his individuality as a man against the Amazons:

Kämpft ihr, wie die Verschnittnen, wenn ihr wollt;
Mich einen Mann fühl ich, und diesen Weibern,
Wenn keiner sonst im Heere, will ich stehn! (I, 341).



Furthermore, he is aware of the personal challenge which Penthesilea has presented him:

Was mir die Göttliche begehrt, das weiss ich;
Brautwerber schickt sie mir, gefiederte,
Genung in Lüften zu, die ihre Wünsche
Mit Todgeflüster in das Ohr mir raunen (I, 342).

Not restricted by an adherence to conventional standards and tactics of warfare, he is determined to respond to her challenge on her own terms. At this stage, he too, like Penthesilea, identifies or interchanges the concept of conquest on the battlefield with the concept of love. The intensity of his determination to fulfill his personal commitment to respond to this challenge requires that all other commitments become subordinate:

Doch müsst ich auch durch ganze Monden noch,
Und Jahre, um sie frein: den Wagen dort
Nicht ehr zu meinen Freunden will ich lenken,
Ich schwörs, und Pergamos nicht wiedersehn,
Als bis ich sie zu meiner Braut gemacht,
Und sie, die Stirn bekränzt mit Todeswunden,
Kann durch die Strassen häuptlings mit mir schleifen
(I, 342).

In his initial round of combat with Penthesilea, the vivid details of which are reported in an elaborate manner in the second and third scenes, Achilles was able to defeat her, not, however, in direct combat, but rather because of a skillful maneuver on his part. During the seventh scene, the two protagonists become engaged in direct combat. It is important to notice, however, that the events of the conflict itself are not recounted in as vivid or specific detail as were those of the first round of combat.



Of greater significance than the strategic maneuvers executed or the prowess displayed by each of the respective combatants are the consequences of the battle. Achilles inflicts a serious wound upon Penthesilea but refrains from killing her:

Doch bleich steht der Unbegreifliche,
Ein Todesschatten da, ihr Götter! ruft er,
Was für ein Blick der Sterbenden traf mich! (I, 359).

Until this moment, the course of action undertaken by both Achilles and also Penthesilea has been motivated by the mutual determination to combine the quest for love with conquest on the battlefield, the latter being a prerequisite for the former. Achilles has accomplished this goal. However, just as the Greek strategy for the campaign against the Trojans was rendered useless by the intrusion of an alien force, so also the conflict between Achilles and Penthesilea has been intruded upon by a third force: Achilles' love for Penthesilea as a woman: "Ein Gott hat, in der erzgekeilten Brust,/ Das Herz in Liebe plötzlich ihm geschmelzt--" (I, 360). The ensuing action in the drama is determined by Achilles' attempts to effect a mutual realization of this love.

A recession of the militancy in Achilles' love for Penthesilea becomes apparent in the thirteenth scene. Critics have drawn attention to the apparently contradictory motives expressed by Achilles in this scene. On the one hand, he expresses to Prothoe his intent to subject

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Penthesilea to a fate similar to that suffered by Hector: "Mein Will ist, ihr zu tun, muss ich dir sagen,/ Wie ich dem stolzen Sohn des Priam tat" (I, 374). A moment later he declares: "Sag ihr, dass ich sie liebe" (I, 374). From this Blöcker concludes: "Lieben und Durch-den-Staub-Schleifen ist ein und dasselbe."⁷⁵ While this may be a reflection of Achilles' attitude at an early stage in the drama, a more accurate picture of his present intent is revealed in the clarification he offers the bewildered Prothoe of the latter statement:

Beim Himmel, wie! Wie Männer Weiber lieben;
 Keusch und das Herz voll Sehnsucht doch, in Unschuld,
 Und mit der Lust doch, sie darum zu bringen.
 Ich will zu meiner Königin sie machen (I, 375).

The fifteenth scene is most crucial in the drama. Under the illusion that she has conquered Achilles in combat, Penthesilea believes that she has fulfilled her responsibility as queen of the Amazons and also her personal inner commitment toward the fulfillment of the prophecy of her mother. It is now, in the belief that she has fulfilled completely her destiny in life, that she can bare her soul before Achilles and reveal to him both the origins and customs of the Amazonian state and also the reason for her relentless pursuit of him. It is in the revelation of this information, however, that the tragedy is precipitated, for Achilles is incapable, by virtue of his historical, cultural heritage, of perceiving that the Amazonian practice



of gaining love by conquest is more than a formality, a practiced ritual, but that it is in fact the very basis for the existence of the Amazonian state as a religious, political institution and also for the existence of the individual Amazon as well.

Separated from Penthesilea because of the sudden attack of the Amazons against the Greeks, Achilles, falling back upon tactics typical of his environment, deploys a ruse and challenges her once again to combat, intending to allow himself to be captured by her:

So fordert er zum Kampf, auf Tod und Leben,
Noch einmal dich ins Feld hinaus, auf dass
Das Schwert, des Schicksals ehrne Zung entscheide,
In der gerechten Götter Angesicht,
Wer würdig sei, du oder er, von beiden,
Den Staub nach ihrem heiligen Beschluss,
Zu seines Gegners Füßen aufzulecken (I, 402-403).

The messenger delivering this challenge arrives at a time when Penthesilea has just sunk from the heights of the illusory bliss which she experienced in the belief of having conquered Achilles to the depths of despair and humiliation. Defeated by Achilles, responsible for the loss of the captured Greeks, banished from the society of her people, the strength of her inner feelings for and personal commitment to Achilles is her ultimate, final source of strength.⁷⁶ With the arrival of the challenge, the validity or veracity of this commitment has been called into question:

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Was ich ihm zugeflüstert, hat sein Ohr
 Mit dem Musik der Rede bloss getroffen?
 Des Tempels unter Wipfeln denkt er nicht,
 Ein steinern Bild hat meine Hand bekränzt? (I, 403).

Her commitment to Achilles having apparently been exposed as a fanciful illusion, her only recourse, indeed her obligation as titular queen of the Amazons, at the time is to uphold and to restore the honor of the sacred law of Tanais which she had willfully violated in her pursuit of him. Turning to the high priestess, she declares: "Du sollst mir nicht umsonst gesprochen haben" (I, 404). Demonstrating in her outward behavior all signs of insanity, she goes out into the field accompanied by her wild beasts and together with them destroys Achilles.

Despite the ignoble, brutal fashion in which Achilles is slain, Kleist lends him dignity in death. It is not without significance that the scene in which the vicious attack is described is not preceded directly by Penthesilea's acceptance of the challenge, but rather by the scene in which Achilles intent is revealed. If his motives are examined, it can be observed, first of all, that they are determined by his misconception of the meaning of the laws of the Amazons:

. . . eine Grille, die ihr heilig,
 Will dass ich ihrem Schwert im Kampf erliege;
 Eh nicht in Liebe kann sie mich umfassen (I, 406).

In addition, he has misjudged the character, the nature of Penthesilea. He is aware neither of the strength of



the passions which he has unleashed in her nor of the fact that she as an individual can find meaning or fulfillment only in her existence as an Amazon:

Sie tut mir nichts, sag ich! Eh wird ihr Arm,
Im Zweikampf gegen ihren Busen wüten,
Und rufen 'Sieg!' wenn er von Herzblut trieft,
Als wider mich! (I, 407).

Despite the tragic errors of judgment on his part, his death is not a death of weakness, but rather one of strength. His perception limited by his particular cultural, historical heritage, he cannot begin to comprehend or to probe her inner being. Nevertheless, he is compelled by an inner need to win her love, and he is prepared to sacrifice his personal interests and also the goals and interests of his compatriots in order to commit himself totally toward obtaining this goal:

Beim Styx! Bei dem Lernäersumpf! Beim Hades!
Der ganzen Oberwelt und Unterwelt,
Und jedem dritten Ort: es ist mein Ernst;
Ich will den Tempel der Diana sehn! (I, 409).

It is this sense of total commitment which lends meaning and stature to his death.

4. Michael Kohlhaas: Michael Kohlhaas

Considering the issue of the death of Michael Kohlhaas within the context of its historical, political-social setting, it must be observed, first of all, that Kohlhaas is condemned to die by the highest court of the land, the imperial tribunal, and, in addition, that he is not convicted for the specific acts of violence which he

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had committed on Saxon soil but rather for the more general, though no less serious, charge for having willfully disrupted the imperially proclaimed, general state of public peace in the empire. Within the medieval setting, the emperor was considered to be the representative of God, the executor of divine judgment in earthly affairs. It was ultimately his responsibility to preserve justice and order in the empire, and, in this instance, it became necessary for him to intervene because of the manner in which the exercise and the administration of justice had been perverted by the Saxons. Kohlhaas' unequivocal acceptance of this judgment is, first of all, consistent with his personal sense of and respect for justice. Moreover, his sense of justice, his respect for justice, requires that he accept the judgment, for to have contested or rejected the verdict would have meant questioning the very principles of justice which he in his course of action had sought to have implemented.⁷⁷ In this respect then, his acceptance of the imperial verdict can be construed as an awareness on his part of the need to atone for the violations of the law of the land which he had been forced to commit because the state had failed in its function to preserve and administer justice.

Despite the presence of various prestigious representatives of governmental agencies, the atmosphere which pervades the day of Kohlhaas' execution is not one



of judgment or atonement, but rather one of fulfillment and accomplishment. The meaning, the inner significance of Kohlhaas' death lies in his awareness of having fulfilled completely the conditions of the mission which he had been called upon to perform. This becomes evident, first of all, if we consider the nature of his mission. Returning to Kohlhaasenbrück after having observed personally the results of the mistreatment to which his horses had been subjected by the Tronkas, Kohlhaas, considering all the alternatives, determines to accept the loss if it should appear in any way that Herse had not conducted himself properly. At the same time, however, he is aware, after having heard of similar injustices committed against others, that the event of Herse's innocence will obligate him to seek recompensation: "Dagegen sagte ihm ein ebenso vortreffliches Gefühl, und dies Gefühl fasste tiefere und tiefere Wurzeln, . . . dass wenn der ganze Vorfall, wie es allen Anschein habe, bloss abgekartet sein sollte, er mit seinen Kräften der Welt in der Pflicht verfallen wei, sich Genugtuung für die erlittene Kränkung, und Sicherheit für zukünftige seinen Mitbürgern zu verschaffen" (II, 16). After he experienced failure in his every attempt to obtain even a hearing for his charges against Wenzel von Tronka, the scope of his mission is expanded considerably. In a placard issued from the site of the "provisorischen Weltregierung" at

Lützen, he calls upon his compatriots, "sich zur Errichtung einer besseren Ordnung der Dinge, an ihn anzuschliessen" (II, 41).

The changes effected in the social-political realm are evinced first of all in that it is the Kurfürst von Brandenburg who steps forward after Kohlhaas was condemned by the Saxons to rescue him "aus den Händen der Übermacht und Willkür" (II, 77). After being informed by Herr Heinrich von Geusau of the complicity of his Erzkanzler, Graf Siegfried von Kallheim, in the suppression of Kohlhaas' charges against Wenzel von Tronka, the Kurfürst relieved the Graf of his position and intervened on behalf of Kohlhaas before the imperial tribunal. Furthermore, it was with the aid and sanction of Elisabeth, as we have seen, that Kohlhaas was provided with both the information and the authority to pronounce judgment upon the Kurfürst von Sachsen, who was ultimately responsible for the suppression of justice in Saxony. In this connection it must also be observed that Martin Luther himself places his sanction upon Kohlhaas' course of action shortly before his execution. Although he refused to administer the sacrament of communion to Kohlhaas at the time of their meeting, he dispatches Jakob Freising to administer the sacrament to him in his prison cell.

On the day of his execution, Kohlhaas receives complete restitution for the offenses which were committed



against him by Wenzel von Tronka: the horses were restored to their original condition, the Junker is imprisoned, and he also receives recompensation for both his material losses and also for the costs which were incurred because of the mistreatment of Herse. Informing Kohlhaas of these developments, the Kurfürst inquires: "Bist du mit mir zufrieden?" (II, 102). After examining the official documents, Kohlhaas declares, "dass sein höchster Wunsch auf Erden erfüllt sei" (II, 102). With the exception of the final act of judgment yet to be performed, Kohlhaas is prepared to accept the judgment which has been passed against him. Having attained his goals, having fulfilled completely the conditions of his mission on earth, he has thereby fulfilled the conditions for a meaningful existence.

5. Der Findling: Piachi

Kohlhaas accepted his death sentence without regret, knowing that he had fulfilled completely his destiny in life. Piachi, sentenced to death by hanging for the murder of Nicolo, accepts his sentence in order to complete after death the mission which he had undertaken in life.

As we have seen, it was when the complete, absolute moral depravity of Nicolo was made manifest that Piachi gained an awareness of his obligation and responsibility to eradicate completely this evil force. In life



he was able to destroy Nicolo physically. The annihilation of Nicolo's irreparably evil soul can only be completed, however, after death, and it is in order to accomplish this goal that Piachi is prepared to sacrifice even his prospects for eternal bliss. The laws of the church state require that a convicted criminal be granted absolution and the sacrament of communion prior to his execution. Piachi, however, refuses obstinately to receive absolution, and when he is brought to the scene of the gallows and is confronted with the stark contrast between the horrors of hell and heavenly bliss, declares: "Ich will nicht selig sein. Ich will in den untersten Grunde der Hölle hinabfahren. Ich will den Nicolo, der nicht im Himmel sein wird, wiederfinden, und meine Rache, die ich hier nur unvollständig befriedigen konnte, wieder aufnehmen!" (II, 214-215). After he maintains his refusal on the three succeeding days, he is executed without receiving absolution by permission of the Pope.

Piachi's refusal to accept the absolution offered by the church is more than a misguided expression of a fanatic bent upon pursuing the object of his revenge into the deepest recesses of hell. An acceptance of the offer of absolution would have represented, first of all, an abdication of his responsibility to complete the mission which he is destined to fulfill. Furthermore, it would

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have signified an acceptance, a verification of the validity of the arbitrary, manmade laws and regulations perpetuated by an institution whose representatives have contrived with Nicolo to deprive him of both his legal rights as a citizen and also of his human dignity and worth as an individual.



IV. CONCLUSION

Evidence of the prominent position occupied by the thought of death in Kleist's thinking can be found in the details of his personal biography and especially in his letters. An analysis of excerpts taken from letters written at various stages in his development shows that, as a result of the insights gained during the time of the Kant crisis, Kleist's conception of death was inextricably linked with his perception of his role and his goals in and for this life. With the recognition of the invalidity of the abstract premises supporting his teleologically directed mode of thinking and the subsequent adoption of an open-minded stance toward God, Kleist became increasingly more aware of the need for meaningful, purposeful accomplishments in and for this life. At the same time, the idea of death began to occupy a more prominent position in his thinking. He was no longer concerned primarily with the nature of or the possibility of life after death, but rather with the manner in which the individual faced the prospect of death. Just as he perceived the need for a meaningful, purposeful existence, he also sought to establish a meaningful, purposeful basis for death. Thus there emerged the notion that willingness



and readiness to sacrifice one's life for a higher, nobler purpose is an essential ingredient for a meaningful existence. In the final letters, another, yet related dimension of his conception of death was revealed. Primarily as a result of the personal and professional frustrations and defeats which he had experienced throughout his mature years, he came to regard death as a fitting, legitimate conclusion for the life of an individual who had committed himself totally toward the fulfillment of his role and the attainment of his goals in this life.

These basic elements of Kleist's conception of death provide the conceptual basis for the employment of the death motif in his works. The characters in his works who actively seek death as a result of their inability to cope with their personal frustrations and with the frustrations and inequities inherent in existence are not permitted to die. In Die Familie Schroffenstein, for example, Johann, frustrated in his attempts to possess Agnes, pleads with her to take his life:

Es hat das Leben mich, wie eine Schlange,
Mit Gliedern, zahnlos, ekelhaft, umwunden.
Es schauert mich, es zu berühren.--Da,
Nimm diesen Dolch (I, 87).

Kleist does not permit him to die but rather reduces him to a state of permanent insanity. His leading characters do not surrender passively to death. Like the wrestler in the essay, "Von der Überlegung" (II, 337-338), they

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have become involved in the struggle for and with existence. As a result of this confrontation, they must succumb. They do not die or face the very real prospect of death, however, for the sake of the preservation of an ideal, but rather for the sake of, or because they have violated basic, inalienable human rights and values. By incorporating the basic elements of his conception of death into his works, Kleist endows the death of his leading protagonists with a concrete, existential significance.

On the most basic level, death is the result of prevailing circumstances in an imperfect world. The death of an individual who becomes the innocent victim of these circumstances functions primarily as a catalyst. It provides the impetus for the ensuing action, and it also evokes responses from the individuals who are responsible for or affected by this death which are indicative of their modes of thinking at the time.

The majority of the instances of death in Kleist's works, however, occur in conjunction with either the acceptance and awareness of or the denial on the part of an individual or social institution of basic, inalienable human rights and values. Kleist employs the anticipatory experience of death as a means to bring certain characters to an awareness of either their own inadequacies or of the inadequacies or inequities of a predominating social institution. As a result of this

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experience, they begin to gain insight into the actual meaning and purpose of life. The sacrificial death is a value-related expression on the part of those individuals who selflessly risk their lives for others because they are aware of or have just become aware of the need to preserve and uphold those inalienable human rights and values which are essential for human existence. The death of atonement is a voluntary act on the part of those individuals who have come to the recognition that they in their willful actions have violated the rights and values of their fellow man. They must die, for, by depriving their fellow man of these rights and values, have deprived him of the right to, the basis for, a meaningful existence. Those individuals, however, who are unwilling or unable to perceive the need to atone for the offenses which they have committed must suffer death by judgment. The final section of this study treated those individuals who are forced to succumb because they have asserted themselves against a predominating force or the prevailing mode of thinking in their historical environment. The death of these individuals gains meaning and stature, however, in that they, in accordance with the conditions which the author established for his own death, have either experienced fulfillment in life or have selflessly committed themselves totally toward the attainment of a meaningful goal in life.



FOOTNOTES

1. Since it is not within the scope of this investigation to deal in great detail with biographical data, the reader is referred to the biography I consulted: Joachim Maass, Kleist, die Fackel Preussens: Eine Lebensgeschichte (Wien, München, Basel, 1957).

2. Heinz Ide, Der junge Kleist ". . . in dieser wandelbaren Zeit . . ." (Würzburg, 1961), p. 138).

3. All references to Kleist's works, both in the text and also in the footnotes, are to Heinrich von Kleist: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. by Helmut Sembdner (4th ed., 2 vols.; München, 1965). In May of 1802, Kleist writes to Ulrike von Kleist: "So habe ich zum Beispiel jetzt eine seltsame Furcht, ich möchte sterben, ehe ich meine Arbeit vollendet habe" (II, 724).

4. "O wenn Gott diesmal mein krankhaftes Gefühl nicht betrügen wollte, wenn er mich sterben liesse" (II, 710).

5. After the complete collapse of his plans for the "Guiskard" tragedy, Kleist, informing Ulrike of his plans to join the French army, exclaims: ". . . ich frohlocke bei der Aussicht auf das unendlich-prächtige Grab" (II, 737).

6. A passage often cited as an example of his metaphysical speculations is the following: "Komm lass uns etwas Gutes tun und dabei sterben! Einen der Millionen Tode, die wir schon gestorben sind und noch sterben werden. Es ist, als ob wir aus einem Zimmer in das andere gehen. Sieh, die Welt kommt mir vor wie eingeschachtelt; das kleine ist dem grossen ähnlich. So wie der Schlaf, in dem wir uns erholen, etwa ein Viertel oder Drittel der Zeit dauert, da wir uns, im Wachen, ermüden, so wird, denke ich, der Tod, und aus einem ähnlichen Grunde, ein Viertel oder Drittel des Lebens dauern. Und gerade so lange braucht ein menschlicher Körper, zu verwesen. Und vielleicht gibt es für eine ganze Gruppe von Leben noch einen eignen Tod, wie hier für eine Gruppe von Durchwachungen (Tagen) einen" (II, 768-769).

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7. Of interest here is the letter of February 22, 1811, to Friedrich von Raumer. Kleist, seeking to salvage something from the aborted "Abendblätter" venture, pleads for justice and also for recompensation for his personal losses. He also bemoans the loss of honor which he has suffered as a result of the proceedings and the fact that he is made to appear as a liar. The similarity to Michael Kohlhaas' case are readily apparent.

8. A most obvious parallel is Gustav in Die Verlobung in St. Domingo. He too committed suicide with a loaded revolver.

9. One can point to such expressions as Penthesilea's "Ganz reif zum Tode o Diana, fühl ich mich" (I, 421), which parallel sentiments expressed by Kleist in his final days (cf. II, 885). One can also compare Kleist's "Heiterkeit" and "Freude" (II, 887) in the face of death to that of Prinz Friedrich von Homburg (I, 708) and Kohlhaas (II, 100).

10. Rudolf Unger, Herder, Novalis und Kleist: Studien über die Entwicklung des Todesproblems in Denken und Dichten vom Sturm und Drang zur Romantik, reprint of the edition published in Frankfurt am Main, 1922 (Darmstadt, 1968).

11. Josef Collin, "Heinrich von Kleist, der Dichter des Todes," Euph Orion, XXVII (1926), 69-112.

12. Anneliese Bodensohn, Heinrich von Kleists Begegnung mit dem Tode (Frankfurt am Main and Bonn, 1951).

13. Martin Lintzel, "Liebe und Tod bei Heinrich von Kleist," Ausgewählte Schriften, Vol. II (Berlin, 1961), 533-580.

14. Benno von Wiese, "Tragödie, Tod und Geschichte bei H. von Kleist," Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel, 6th ed. (Hamburg, 1964), 327-344.

15. René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, 3rd ed. (New York, 1956), p. 78.

16. Ibid., p. 78.

17. Walter Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen: Eine Studie über Heinrich von Kleist (Köln, Graz, 1961), p. 4.

18. Walter Silz, Heinrich von Kleist: Studies in his Works and Literary Character (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 281.

19. Das sprachliche Kunstwerk: Eine Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft, 11th ed. (Bern und München, 1956), p. 60.

20. Ibid., p. 62.

21. Müller-Seidel, op. cit., 176-177.

22. Cf. John Geary, Heinrich von Kleist: A Study in Tragedy and Anxiety (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 12. Also see Josef Collin, op. cit., p. 72.

23. Rolf Dürst, Heinrich von Kleist Dichter zwischen Ursprung und Endzeit: Kleists Werk im Licht idealistischer Eschatologie (Bern, 1965), p. 15.

24. Hans Joachim Kreutzer, Die dichterische Entwicklung Heinrichs von Kleist: Untersuchungen zu seinen Briefen und zu Chronologie und Aufbau seiner Werke, in Philologische Studien und Quellen, ed. by Wolfgang Binder, Hugo Moser, Karl Stackmann, No. 41 (Berlin, 1968), p. 59.

25. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

26. Ibid., p. 52.

27. Unger, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

28. Ide, op. cit., p. 112.

29. Ludwig Muth, Kleist und Kant: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation, in Kantstudien, Ergänzungshefte 68 (Köln, 1954), p. 34.

30. One can, of course, detect here the strong influence of Enlightenment philosophy and thought, especially Leibniz' Monadic theory. Unger also discusses this quotation in the light of Herder's theory of Palingenesis, pp. 109-111.

31. Cf. Muth, pp. 49-50: ". . . Kleists Wissenschaftsideal wurde bestimmt durch die teleologische Naturlehre der deutschen Aufklärung. Das bedeutet im Hinblick auf die Auffassung von Wahrheit, dass man dem Wissenschaftler zutraut, er fasse in dem Zweckgefüge des Kosmos die Absichten des weisesten und vollkommensten Wesens. Die Erkenntnisse der Naturforschung erreichen

die Gedanken Gottes, darum sind sie von ewiger Dauer und Gültigkeit; in Kleists Grundvorstellung übersetzt: sie gelten nicht nur im irdischen Bereich, sondern auch nach dem Tode, auf den höheren Vollkommenheitsstufen."

32. Ibid., p. 19.

33. Cf. Kreutzer, op. cit., p. 55: Die Aufgabe des Glaubens an die durchgehende Verstehbarkeit des Ordnungsgefüges der Welt (bei gleichzeitiger Anerkenntnis des Vorhandenseins einer Ordnung) ist eine fundamentale Voraussetzung für die Dichtung Kleists."

34. Ibid., p. 89.

35. Cf. footnote 32.

36. E. L. Stahl, Heinrich von Kleist's Dramas (Oxford, 1961), p. 1. Also see Collin, op. cit., p. 77.

37. Geary, op. cit., p. 12.

38. Cf. II, pp. 641, 655, 710, 724, 737, 763, 768.

39. The retention of this attitude toward life can be observed in the following passage: "Dieses rätselhaftes Ding, das wir besitzen, wir wissen nicht von wem, das uns fortführt, wir wissen nicht wohin, das unser Eigentum ist, wir wissen nicht ob wir darüber schalten dürfen, eine Habe, die nichts wert ist, wenn sie uns etwas wert ist, ein Ding wie ein Widerspruch, flach und tief, öde und reich, würdig und verächtlich, vieldeutig und unergründlich, ein Ding, das jeder wegwerfen möchte, wie ein unverständliches Buch, sind wir nicht durch ein Naturgesetz gezwungen, es zu lieben?" (II, 670).

40. This positive approach to the Kant crisis is based upon the interpretation presented by Professor Belgardt in the Kleist Seminar of Spring, 1971. I am deeply grateful for his having permitted me to base my investigation of the death motif upon this interpretation. I should also like to express my appreciation to him for having made available the unpublished manuscript of a paper, "Das Erfahrungssubstrat der Kantkrise in der Fabelkonzeption bei Heinrich von Kleist," which was read at the 84th Annual Meeting of the MLA of America, German sec. 4, Denver, Colorado, December, 1969.

41. In the opening lines of the essay, Kleist presents a picture of the level of existence which man could attain if he were to develop the potential with

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which he has been endowed: "Gott, mein Vater im Himmel! Du hast dem Menschen ein so freies, herrliches und üppiges Leben bestimmt. Kräfte unendlicher Art spielen in seiner Brust zusammen, um ihn zum König der Erde zu machen" (II, 325). Despite his noble calling, man has succumbed to various forces in his environment and finds himself, "auf verwundernswürdige und unbegreifliche Weise, in Ketten und Banden" (II, 325). Blinded by the error of his own ways, man has lost sight of the highest and noblest things in life. He gropes about, "wie mit Blindheit geschlagen, unter Jämmerlichkeiten und Nichtigkeiten umher" (II, 325). It is the mission of the artist to use his talents to awaken his fellow man from his slumber and to reinstate in him an awareness of his potential destiny: ". . . ihn rüstest du mit dem Köcher der Rede, dass er, furchtlos und liebevoll, mitten unter sie trete, und sie mit Pfeilen, bald schärfer, bald leiser, aus der wunderlichen Schlafsucht, in welcher sie befangen liegen, wecke" (II, 326).

42. Walther Rehm, Der Todesgedanke in der deutschen Dichtung vom Mittelalter bis zur Romantik, in DVLG, Buchreihe, Vol. XIV (Halle, Salle, 1928), p. 443.

43. Müller-Seidel, op. cit., p. 83, relates the death of Elisabeth to Kohlhaas' decision to undertake his course of revenge. He had already made plans to take up arms, however, prior to her death. It was the anticipated rejection of his final appeal which arrived on the day of Elisabeth's funeral which provided the immediate impetus for his actions.

44. Heinz Ide, "Kleist im Niemandsland?," Kleist und die Gesellschaft: Eine Diskussion, ed. by Walter Müller-Seidel (Berlin, 1965), p. 33, interprets this passage as follows: "Kohlhaas sagt nicht, er wolle verhindern, dass die Welt in einem ungerechten Handel umkomme, er sagt vielmehr, er wolle zeigen, dass sie in einem solchen nicht umgekommen s e i." From the context of the entire sentence, it is clear, however, that the pronoun "sie" refers to "meine Frau" not to "die Welt."

45. Cf. Müller-Seidel, op. cit., p. 53: "Nur mit immer erneut auszusprechenden Vorbehalten wird man dieses Stück in das dichterische Werk Kleists einbeziehen dürfen."

46. Richard Samuel, "Kleists 'Hermannsschlacht' und der Freiherr vom Stein," Heinrich von Kleist: Aufsätze und Essays, ed. by Walter Müller-Seidel (Darmstadt, 1967), p. 413.

47. The reference is to the letter of July 21, 1801, to Wilhelmine: "Wer es [das Leben] mit Sorgfalt liebt, moralisch tot ist er schon, denn seine höchste Lebenskraft, nämlich es opfern zu können, modert, indessen er es pflegt" (II, 670).

48. "Zu Kleists 'Käthchen von Heilbronn,'" Heinrich von Kleist: Aufsätze und Essays, ed. by Walter Müller-Seidel (Darmstadt, 1967), pp. 327-328.

49. In his selfless devotion to Littegarde, Friedrich gives expression to one of the values ranking high on Kleist's scale: complete, unquestioning trust. In a letter written in the beginning of the year 1800 to Wilhelmine, he states: "Lassen Sie uns bald recht innig vertraut werden, damit wir uns ganz kennen lernen. Ich weiss nichts, Wilhelmine, in meiner Seele regt sich kein Gedanke, kein Gefühl in meinem Busen, das ich mich scheuen dürfte Ihnen mitzuteilen. Und was könnte Sie wohl bewegen, die erste Bedingung der Liebe, das Vertrauen zu verletzen?" (II, 503-503).

50. Cf. Sylvester's statements in Die Familie Schroffenstein upon his return from unconsciousness:

Was mich freut
Ist dass der Geist doch mehr ist, als ich glaubte,
Denn flieht er gleich auf einen Augenblick,
An seinen Urquell geht er nur, zu Gott,
Und mit Heroenkraft kehrt er zurück (I, 82).

51. Cf. V. C. Hubbs, "The Concept of Fate in Kleist's 'Schroffenstein,'" Monatshefte, LVI (December, 1964), 340, who asserts that Jeronimus is the only character who "employs reason almost exclusively as a means of solving the problem of Sylvester's guilt or innocence." Jeronimus' ready acceptance of the "evidence" presented to him at Rossitz indicates, however, that he too is susceptible to appearances and circumstantial evidence.

52. Cf. Müller-Seidel, op. cit., pp. 40-42.

53. Cf. Durst, op. cit., p. 159.

54. Cf. Friedrich Koch, Heinrich von Kleist: Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit (Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 78-80.

55. Cf. Lintzel, op. cit., pp. 547-548.

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56. Gerhard Fricke, "'Penthesilea,'" Das deutsche Drama, ed. by Benno von Wiese, Vol. I (Düsseldorf, 1964), p. 377.

57. Cf. Geary, op. cit., pp. 141-142.

58. Fricke, op. cit., p. 383.

59. Cf. the letter of October 27, 1801 to Wilhelmine: "Welche ist das höchste Bedürfnis des Weibes? Ich müsste mich nicht irren, wenn Du anders antworten könntest, als: die Liebe ihres Mannes" (II, 697).

60. It is confirmed by Kohlhaas' letter to the Kurfürst von Sachsen, and confirmation is implicit in the Kurfürst von Brandenburg's intervention into Kohlhaas' case.

61. Blöcker, op. cit., p. 218.

62. Ibid.

63. Silz, op. cit., p. 196.

64. Blöcker, op. cit., p. 222.

65. Because of the singular nature and purpose of the course of revenge and judgment undertaken and instigated by Hermann, I have chosen not to concentrate upon the individual victims of his revenge but rather upon his role as an executor of revenge and judgment.

66. "Kleists 'Hermannsschlacht' und der Frieheerr vom Stein," op. cit., p. 440.

67. Heinrich von Kleist, op. cit., p. 13.

68. Ibid., p. 26.

69. Italics mine.

70. Cf. footnote 51.

71. Müller-Seidel, op. cit., p. 139.

72. Silz, op. cit., p. 21.

73. Cf. Blöcker, op. cit., p. 184; Fricke, op. cit., p. 381; Müller-Seidel, op. cit., p. 98.

74. For the ideas in the above paragraphs I am indebted to Müller-Seidel, Versehen und Erkennen, pp. 38-40.

75. Blöcker, op. cit., p. 185.

76. Cf. Fricke, op. cit., pp. 380-381.

77. This notion is reflected by Blöcker, op. cit., p. 282: "Er stirbt, weil er von der Welt nicht etwas verlangen kann, was er selbst nicht zu geben bereit ist. Indessen er sie bei ihren eigenen Forderungen nimmt, zwingt er sie, auch ihrerseits diesen Forderungen zu gehorchen."



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