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Title	Lost in the forest of Kleist's Hermannsschlacht: On German identity translation, and cultural exchange
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Publication date	2007
Original Citation	MagShamhráin, R. (2007) 'Lost in the Forest of Kleist's Hermannsschlacht: On German Identity Translation, and Cultural Exchange', in: Lorey, C., Plews, J. L. and Rieger, C. L. (eds.) Kompetenzen im Fremdsprachenunterricht, Intercultural Literacies and German in the Classroom, Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr, pp. 321-349. isbn: 978-3-8233-6369-9
Type of publication	Book chapter
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Download date	2026-11-07 05:39:45
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/13761



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Lost in the Forest of Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*: On German Identity, Translation, and Cultural Exchange

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> Reading is already translation, and translation is translation for the second time … The process of translating comprises in its essence the whole secret of human understanding of the world and of social communication.
> —Hans-Georg Gadamer[1]
>
> Perhaps we can make a domain of translation itself.
> —Octavio Armand[2]

Let us for the moment put to one side the bellicose plot of Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht* (1808), a play that in effect translates back and forth between Varus' defeat at the hands of the Germanic tribes under Arminius in the Teutoburg Forest in A.D. 9 and the German cultural arena at the start of Kleist's own century under the sway of the self-styled Roman, Napoleon Bonaparte. For the text is also a battlefield of another, more complex sort: one of interpretation, translated and retranslated by dramatically opposed types of reading, expressive of several ideological positions. It was read in 1923 by Arnold Zweig in his "Versuch über Kleist" as an "überreizte Loblied nationalen Hassens" (qtd. in Kleist 1995a: 693), and as late as 1970 by Sigurd Burkhardt as a "descent, unredeemed and unrevoked into bestiality" (1970: 129). For his part, Zweig was reacting against the

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1 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "To what extent does language prescribe thinking?" (qtd. in Biguenet & Schulte 1989: ix).

2 Octavio Armand, "Poetry as *Eruv*" (qtd. in Maier 2002: 184). *Eruv* is the Jewish concept of a fenced-off domain wherein items may be transported without breaking the Sabbath prohibition. An enclosure wherein things may be transported with immunity is an apt metaphor for the problem of translation.

Wilhelminian period's general appreciation of *Die Hermannsschlacht*, as reflected in Emil Mauerhof's praise of it in 1898 as a "dramatisches Kunstwerk ohne Fehl" (1898: 99). To be sure, Zweig (who had initially supported German nationalism at the start of the First World War before he recognized its dangers and suffered anti-Semitism) likely could not have foreseen a time and a politics in which the same play would be read in 1999 by a Togolese Germanist as a "Botschaft an alle unterdrückten Völker der Welt" (qtd. in Sossou 2003: 27). On the other hand, for the four decades after the end of the Second World War the play was more or less uncritically associated with the worst excesses of nationalism in Germany,[3] so much so that when Claus Peymann put it on the West German stage in 1982, the horrified reaction of Hans Joachim Kreutzer was "das tut doch niemand" (Peymann & Kreutzer 1984: 77). In any event, the interpretative divergence that *Die Hermannsschlacht* generates is especially striking for a play that has been called a *Tendenzstück* (Reske 1969: 75), a piece of "tendentious poetry."[4] It has proven to be eminently open to opposed readings—a characteristic hardly thought to be typical of propaganda.

In this essay, I will suggest that this paradox and therefore this play are particularly relevant to the problem of translation and vice versa. While obviously any text is read differently at different times, a drama that may be deliberately designed as a palimpsest—that is, one that encourages continuous re- and over-writings, and that lends itself not merely to different but to positively antinomic readings or performances—poses very specific problems to the reader and therefore, following the epigraph from Gadamer, a fortiori to the translator. This text's very ambiguity embodies and requires the act of translation, calling it into being both as an antidote to the original's indeterminacy (fixing its free-floating meaning by reading it in a certain way) and as its structural equivalent (matching its indeterminacy).[5] In other terms, the play casts translation both as the precondition

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3 A notable exception was the East German production in 1957, where it was recast as "Kleist's großes Befreiungsdrama" in a specifically socialist sense (see Reeve 1987: 267).

4 In its more neutral sense, tendentious poetry (*Tendenzpoesie*) means nothing more than poetry that is politically engaged. More pejoratively, particularly for those who think that art should be either apolitical or more subtly political, it means mere propaganda.

5 According to Quine's important theory of the indeterminacy of translation, the meaning of a word can never be translated completely from one language into another. Importantly, he also understands translation more broadly to include people speaking the same language and trying to understand one another. Here the same indeterminacy

of meaning (in the sense of any knowledge shared across divides) and yet, at the same time, as the emblem of its impossibility. I have been using "translation" in both its narrow and broad senses, including with Qiong Zhang as "the aspiration to approximate one set of ideas, concepts, and texts with another" (1999: 101) and with Maria Tymoczko as "the transmission of elements from one culture [by which we mean any signifying system] to another across a cultural and/or linguistic gap" (1999: 23).

Notwithstanding the fact that most dramas are altered for stage production, the modifications that Thomas Bischoff made when he directed the *Hermannschlacht* in Hanover in 2001 are particularly interesting in our context. He omitted certain passages (such as act II scene 4 in which Ventidius' ulterior motive for wooing Thusnelda is first revealed) and added others that had been omitted in previous productions.[6] However, the most important modification is that Arminius (as Hermann was called in Latin sources, the more suitably German version being a much later retranslation of his name, possibly by Luther) is made to greet Varus in Latin. Why this translation? At one level Bischoff's intervention may have been designed to emphasize Arminius' knowledge of and indebtedness to Roman culture (Arminius had served in the Roman army and become a Roman citizen, only returning home a couple of years before his defeat of Varus), perhaps in order to tone down what might otherwise be seen as the play's overwhelming "Germanic-ness." However, there is more to the translation than this. Unlike Bischoff's other two types of intervention (the additions and omissions), his translation from German into Latin inhabits a vague territory—it does not exactly remove anything, nor does it introduce new and foreign text that was not there to begin with. Rather, this type of alteration inhabits a no-man's land between sameness and difference, a territory as tricky and unnavigable as the dense forest in which *Die Hermannsschlacht* plays out. In short, there is in Bischoff's translation neither deficit nor surplus vis-à-vis Kleist's original. (Assuming here that it makes sense to call original Kleist's retelling of an event recorded and embellished variously by Tacitus, Florus, Paterculus, Ovid, Manilius, Strabo, and Cassius Dio, and retold in several earlier German plays, most famously by Ulrich von Hutten and Friedrich

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pertains, with one individual never fully grasping the other's meaning. Translation becomes the name given to all (necessarily imperfect) attempts at intersubjective understanding. See especially Quine's famous rabbit example (1969: 32).

6 For further details of the play's reception history, see Sossou (2003: 24–26).

Gottlieb Klopstock.)[7] While an omission speaks at least *ex negativo* of the absence it creates, this code-switching is trickier, and as such warrants closer scrutiny. It is important to consider whether Bischoff's decision to translate is, in fact, symptomatic of Kleist's text. His decision appears to be responding to some requirement inscribed in Kleist's play, but which one exactly?

Hoary issues of originality notwithstanding, it cannot be said that Bischoff's intervention is exactly alien to Kleist's work. Quite apart from the fact that no overt surplus or deficit is generated by the code-switch, his German-Latin transposition remains true to Kleist's play in another sense: this is, after all, a play that explicitly takes issue with translation between languages and, more generally, with cultural conversions and transpositions as such.[8] The author has both Romans and Germans speak German throughout. Although the most extreme degree of natural linguistic difference is disguised by the play's original monolingualism, the text treats and performs the various problems of translation forcefully and repeatedly.

When Varus is deliberately led astray in the Teutoburg Forest by his Cheruscan guides as part of Hermann's wily stratagem,[9] he summons them and asks why they have so flagrantly disobeyed his orders, leading to the following bizarre intercultural exchange:

> VARUS. Nach welchem Ort, sag' an, von mir benannt,
> Hast Du mich heut von Arkon führen sollen?
> DER ERSTE CHERUSKER. Nach Pfiffikon, mein hochverehrter Herr.
> VARUS. Was Pfiffikon! hab' ich nicht Iphi Dir
> Bestimmt, und wieder Iphikon genannt?
> DER ERSTE CHERUSKER. Vergieb, o Herr, Du nanntest Pfiffikon.
> Zwar sprachst Du, nach der Römermundart,
> Das läugn' ich nicht: "führt mich nach Iphikon;"
> Doch Herrmann hat bestimmt uns gestern,
> Als er uns unterrichtete, gesagt:
> "Des Varus Wille ist nach Pfiffikon zu kommen;

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7 On the history of the defeat of Varus and the various early transmissions and retellings of the historical data, see Wells (2004).

8 Whatever the reason, it alone among Kleist's major works had until recently never been translated into English. See MagShamhráin (2007).

9 For a discussion of the rich array of linguistic and military stratagems, and their intimate interrelationship, in classical Greek and Latin, see Wheeler (1988).

"Drum thut nach mir, wie er auch ausspricht,
"Und führt sein Heer auf Pfiffikon hinaus."
VARUS. Was!
DER ERSTE CHERUSKER. Ja, mein erlauchter Herr, so ist's.
VARUS. Woher kennt auch Dein Herrmann meine Mundart?
Den Namen hatt' ich: Iphikon,
Ja schriftlich ihm, mit dieser Hand gegeben?!
DER ERSTE CHERUSKER. Darüber wirst Du ihn zur Rede stellen;
Doch wir sind schuldlos, mein verehrter Herr.[10]

Varus' impotent fury is understandable and might indeed be shared by the reader. After all, the Germans/Cheruscans here are insisting upon an ineradicable cultural (in this case linguistic) difference, albeit one that operates on the basis of inappropriate, yet rigid equivalencies (viz. for Roman Iphi- always read German Pfiffi-). However, inappropriate equivalency is a practice of which Varus himself is also guilty. Upon first entering Cheruscan territory as an allegedly friendly force, Roman soldiers commit the cultural crime of felling sacred German oaks. Varus, appalled at behavior that might alienate the indigenous population, immediately takes it upon himself to instruct his soldiers in the intricacies of local cultural practice:

VARUS. Laß eine Schaar von Römern gleich
Sich in den Wald zerstreun, der diese Niederlassung,
Cheruskas Hauptplatz Teutoburg umgiebt.
Bei jeder Eiche grauen Alters,
In deren Wipfel Waffen aufgehängt,
Soll eine Wache von zwei Kriegern halten,
Und jeden, der vorübergeht, belehren,
Daß Wodan in der Nähe sei.
Denn Wodan ist, daß Ihr's nur wißt, Ihr Römer,
Der Zeus der Deutschen, Herr des Blitzes
Diesseits der Alpen, so wie jenseits der;
Er ist der Gott, dem sich mein Knie sogleich,
Beim ersten Eintritt in dies Land gebeugt;

[10] (Kleist 2001a: V/2.1906–24). Subsequent quotations from the play are to this edition and are cited with act, scene, and line numbers in the text in parentheses.

> Und kurz, Quintillius, Euer Feldherr, will
> Mit Ehrfurcht und mit Scheu, im Tempel dieser Wälder,
> Wie den Olympier selbst, geehrt ihn wissen.
>
> (III/5.1178–94)

Lest we think that the equivalencies (for Zeus read Wodan, and for Roman temple read sacred forest grove) offered here constitute anything approaching a viable Latin-German intercultural glossary, it should be noted that Wodan, or Wuotan, is not the German god of lightning, nor is he (for this reason, if not others) Zeus' counterpart. The Germanic god of thunder and lightning—which *mutatis mutandis* would arguably more closely correspond to the Roman thunder-god Jupiter/Zeus/Jove—was Donar (also Thunor or Thonar and Thor to the Scandinavians). The Donar-Zeus equivalence is not wholly satisfactory, either, and this for a variety of reasons, not least for those pointed out by Jakob Grimm in 1835. His *Deutsche Mythologie* notes that "[d]em Zeus vergleichbar ist unser Donar, doch nicht die oberste, die zweite Stelle nimmt er ein … Donners oder Thôrs zweiter rang verursacht auch dass ihm nicht die allväterliche eigenschaft des Zeus und Jupiter beiwohnt" (xii–xiii). Indeed, in the end Grimm is forced to concede that, despite remarkable similarities, "Zeus-Jupiter [erscheint] bei anderen völkern gespalten, in Wuotan, Donar, Zio, in Radegast, Perun, Svetovit, in Brahma, Wischnu und in Gwydion, Taranis" (Grimm 1854: xlvii). Because of this shattered cross-cultural identity, Varus' peculiar alignment could only ever be "corrected" to a degree. However, far more importantly, through Varus' botched Roman-German translation, Kleist can begin to demonstrate that cultural equivalencies are as much an impossibility as a necessity—the very principle informing Grimm's seminal text of mythological parallels.

However that may be, the case of mistaken cultural identity recurs slightly later in the play, albeit at a different poetological level, when Kleist has an old Cheruscan man speak the lines: "Wodan, den Blitz regierst Du, in den Wolken: / Und einen Gräul, entsetzensvoll, / Wie den, läßt Du auf Erden sich verüben" (IV/4.1528–30). Varus' misprision is entirely appropriate to his character; he is a foreigner, an ever-alien in Germania, whose losing battle for its control is mirrored in a loss of the power over translation. It is interesting that Kleist as German author of what can be seen as Germany's foundational narrative should repeat the cultural misalignment. In short, mistranslation occurs in the text at both the intra- and inter-cultural levels, deliberately or not. What is relevant is that both axes of (Quinean) indeterminacy of translation are simultaneously represented: interlingual and intralingual.

Notwithstanding Kleist's own curious equation of Greco-Roman and Germanic deities,[11] Varus' clumsy attempt at cultural rapprochement (similarity-in-difference, as it were) warrants further comment. Is Varus not one of the surrogates in *Die Hermannschlacht* for us, namely, the readers/spectators/interpreters/translators? We will encounter other instances of surrogacy in due course. In any event, Varus' fluency in translating between German and Latin religious practices, however inaccurate, seems jarring, preposterous even, in light of the fact that this seemingly insightful excursus on German-Latin cultural equivalency is immediately preceded by a claim that suggests total ignorance of the cultural significance of the very trees about which he seems so well instructed. Varus asks, perhaps disingenuously, but at any rate displaying ignorance at variance with his subsequent fluency on the subject, how the sacred oaks may be recognized (III/5.1174). Indeed, in Varus' initial report of the Roman sacrilege to Hermann, there was also an overt discrepancy between alleged ignorance and evident knowledge of German religious practice on the part of the culprit Romans. It is first claimed that the soldiers who chopped down the oaks were entirely unaware of their cultural importance. Yet, we are also told that they were repeatedly warned at the time to stop felling the trees by another Roman (a Hermes-like messenger or go-between and another textual surrogate for the reader/spectator/interpreter/translator) who knew very well that the trees were considered holy, at which point some stopped cutting down the oaks, but one continued regardless (the figure of a different kind of translator, perhaps).[12] It is not surprising that in an armed force of some 18,000 men, and as notoriously diverse culturally, ethnically, and linguistically as the Roman army, there would be radically different levels of cultural literacy**.** But this historical fact is not our concern. Our concern, as readers and *per necessarium* translators, is how the text in question problematizes (i.e., at once allows and disallows) the very idea of intercultural communication. If we see the (foreign) literary text as a gateway of

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[11] Kleist's version of a common Ur-Germanic past, which is ostensibly being harnessed in his play to provide a unifying foundational narrative for a future German nation, not only includes a lightning-casting Wodan, but also features Celtic bards and druids, and entirely fictitious Germanic feasts, such as the Day of the Norns. In other words, this vision of *Germania* is anything but culturally purist.

[12] By a deictic accident, Varus seems to say that the inter-cultural mediator in this case, the messenger, should be executed: "Der Herold hat es mehr denn zehnmal ausgerufen, / Daß diese Eichen heilig sind, / Und das Gesetz verurtheilt ihn des Kriegs." (II/5.1159–61). However, the "ihn" refers back to the Roman who persisted in his felling of the sacred trees. But the idea of a punished intercultural messenger is important in a play where inter- and intracultural noncommunication is so strategically important.

(inter)cultural literacy, what are we to make of a text that by design both invites such a transfer only to place various major stumbling blocks in its path? It is this overdetermined and contradictory attitude to cultural and linguistic transfer that is reflected in the mysterious fluctuation between cultural knowledge and ignorance on the part of the Romans.

The slippage between knowing and not knowing that we have seen in Varus and his soldiers—in their in-between state of half-knowledge[13] and the interrupted flow of information between the two cultures in question—has a three-fold cause. First, there is the treachery of language as such, which can turn a guest into an enemy with one and the same word (*hostis*), as Cicero had long demonstrated with regard to Latin (1991: 16).[14] Second, there is the lack of interest in other cultures, an accusation that Hermann levels at the Romans but that is equally necessary to his own nation-building. Third, there is the deliberate policy of dissemi-*Nation*, to borrow Homi Bhabha's (1990) evocative term, implemented most obviously and effectively, but by no means exclusively, by the rumor-mongering Hermann, but also by Kleist *qua* mythopoetical author of a German foundational narrative. In relation to this last point, critically and controversially nationhood positively requires dissemi-*Nation*; in other words, a nation requires a controlled or impeded flow of (cultural) information. The nation needs a state of half-knowledge, an ignorance that preserves a certain irreducible difference between cultural practices and a concomitantly incomplete cultural literacy. If members of the *Volk* were not educated in the "right" way, which is to say, educated in a cloistering fashion to be interpellated by the idea and ideal of *their* nation exclusively, what might come to pass would be the scenario depicted by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in his *Addresses to the German Nation* (written in 1807/08, around the same time as Kleist's play), namely, a much dreaded *confluence* with the foreign:

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13 Homi Bhabha describes translation as a "place of hybridity," where the final source of meaning is "*neither the one nor the other*" (original italics) and by extension is not only a *tertium quid*, but a half-thing (qtd. in Mitchell 1995: 80–84).

14 Cicero's *De Officiis*, in which he mentions this treachery of words, is one of the most important intertexts of Kleist's drama. Sossou (2003) analyzes the principle of doubling in the *Hermannsschlacht*, *inter alia* exploring the parallels between Cicero's *De Officiis* and Kleist's play and providing an inventory of the intertextual traces in the drama. The passage in *De Officiis* in which Cicero remarks on language's treachery explicitly concerns war and *jus belli*.

> Wir sind daher sogar durch die Not gedrungen, innerlich, und im Grunde gute Menschen bilden zu wollen, indem nur in solchen die deutsche Nation noch fortdauern kann, durch schlechte aber notwendig mit dem Auslande zusammenfließt. (1978: 30)

Coincidentally, in his "Eighth Address," Fichte had spoken about cultural interchange between Romans and Germans at the time of Arminius, listing the many advantages that the more advanced (as well as steadily advancing) Roman culture brought with it, including a highly developed legal system, but adding that, while the Germans could certainly have benefited from the Romans' eagerness to bestow the gifts of their civilization on foreign peoples, they chose instead to reject them, to rebel**.** Had the Germans accepted these cultural gifts, they would not have remained themselves, which is to say, purely German (Fichte 1978: 125ff.). Notoriously, the signifier "gift" reveals at its etymological root a link between present and poison. According to Marcel Mauss, far from being spontaneous acts of disinterested generosity, gifts are always obligatory and interested. The shared etymology—a connection still obvious in the German words *Gift* "poison" and *Mitgift* "dowry"—reveals the poisonous, fatal aspect of what Mauss calls "prestation" (1997: 28ff.).

Unsurprisingly in a play where Marbod demands a tribute of metal from Hermann, a gift that Ventidius threatens to deliver for him in the form of a very sharp spear end, presumably traveling at high speed in the direction of Marbod's heart (II/1.408), Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht* duly examines the dubious nature of the cultural gift (of which translation is just one manifestation), but it does so in an infinitely more complex way than we saw in Fichte's remark. Instead of seeing the Roman-German interchange purely in terms of poisonous Roman cultural gifts that obliterate the identity of the recipient (and both host and hostile) German culture, Kleist introduces into the admixture the idea of reciprocity.[15] The most obvious example of this is the cultural exchange involving Cicero's *De Officiis* (44 B.C.), a manual of (good) Roman cultural practice. Alongside its exploration of the philosophical concept of duty and its descriptions of Rome during the Republic, it offers a (prescriptive) guide to everyday life, or in Cicero's own words "advice by which one ought to be fortified for all areas of life" (1991: 3). Critically in the context of intercultural exchanges, the text was written as a piece of *intra*cultural instruction for Romans and works on the principle that virtue, like other cultural

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[15] Mauss (2002) identifies the rule of reciprocity as one of the important aspects of the gift economy.

practices, can be taught. Despite any intracultural intention, the text's import abroad for the next two millennia was enormous. Interest in the work was so sustained that it became the first classical text ever to be printed, appearing alongside the Gutenberg Bible in 1465 in an edition produced by Johannes Fust and Peter Schoeffer. In short, *De Officiis* is a text marked by extreme transcultural and transhistorical currency—in other words, by its capacity to translate. Notably in this context, King Frederick II (the Great) commissioned another German translation of *De Officiis* by Christian Garve in 1783, just two decades before Kleist wrote his *Hermannsschlacht*.

It should come as small surprise that in the *Hermannsschlacht* a reference is made to *De Officiis* by the Roman commander Septimus (V/13.2206–15). Left behind by Varus in the Cheruscan camp to instruct the Cheruscan allies in Roman warfare (another translative act), he, as the foreigner within, is one of the first to be captured when the Germans revolt. Under threat of execution, he invokes the *jus belli* famously expounded in *De Officiis*, according to which a prisoner's life must be spared unless he has behaved brutally: "[O]nce victory has been secured, those who were not cruel or savage in warfare should be spared … And while you must have concern for those whom you have conquered by force, you must also take in those who have laid down their arms and seek refuge in the faith of generals, although a battering ram may have crashed against their wall" (1991: 15). In other words, Septimus invokes the rule of hospitality toward (captured) enemies or the *ξενο-δοχέω* of the classical world, the juncture between *hostis* (guest) and *hostis* (enemy), the point of their translation. He refers (albeit indirectly) to Cicero's work precisely because it has a transnational authority that even the barbarian Germans must recognize and to which they must surely defer. The exchange is worth citing in full because it is an exchange in several senses of word: a dialogue, but also the handing back and forth of the intercultural artifact that is Cicero's *De Officiis*, a switching of meanings (one interpretation of the text preserving Septimus' life, the other condemning him to death), and, finally, an exchange of blame:

> HERRMANN (*indem er das Schwert wieder weggiebt*).
> Führt ihn hinweg,
> Und laßt sein Blut, das erste, gleich
> Des Vaterlandes dürren Boden trinken!
> (*Zwei Cherusker ergreifen ihn.*)
> SEPTIMUS. Wie, Du Barbar! Mein Blut? Das wirst Du nicht –!
> HERRMANN. Warum nicht?

SEPTIMUS (*mit Würde*). – Weil ich Dein Gefangner bin!
An Deine Siegerpflicht erinnr' ich Dich!
HERRMANN (*auf sein Schwerdt gestützt*).
An Pflicht und Recht! Sieh da, so wahr ich lebe!
Er hat das Buch vom Cicero gelesen.
Was müßt' ich thun, sag' an, nach diesem Werk?
SEPTIMUS. Nach diesem Werk? Armseel'ger Spötter, Du!
Mein Haupt, das wehrlos vor Dir steht,
Soll Deiner Rache heilig sein;
Also gebeut Dir das Gefühl des Rechts,
In Deines Busens Blättern aufgeschrieben!
HERRMANN (*indem er auf ihn einschreitet*).
Du weißt was Recht ist,
Du verfluchter Bube,
Und kamst nach Deutschland, unbeleidigt,
Um uns zu unterdrücken?
Nehmt eine Keule doppelten Gewichts,
Und schlagt ihn todt!

(V/13.2202–20)

Hermann knows at once, despite the fact that Septimus has not explicitly mentioned Cicero, to what author and work his erstwhile ally and prisoner is referring, thereby fulfilling Septimus' expectation that Cicero translates. However, Septimus presumes that, since the work is a common point of reference and in this sense does translate across cultures, Hermann will feel appropriately interpellated by it. Nor does Hermann, in his turn, feel it necessary to name the text at stake, another sign of its absolute cultural currency whereby, even unnamed, its identity is always clear. In other words, the work is as much part and parcel of the cultural capital of Hermann, notwithstanding his proto-German-ness, as it is part of Septimus' cultural heritage as Roman commander, or Kleist's as early nineteenth-century Prussian author, or ours as academic traders in cross-cultural capital.

In addition to his immediate recognition of the literary authority to which Septimus refers, Hermann, in his rebuttal, uses arguments from the same work, accusing Rome by means of Roman argument of lacking what Cicero had called "just grounds for war" (1991: 17). The only justification for war, Cicero had seminally argued, is to ensure "that we may live in peace, without injustice" (15), which he later extended to include "the fair and faithful defense of our provinces and of our allies" (72). Indeed, Septimus is truly hoisted on his own petard, because

the Romans have undeniably been making aggressive in-roads east of the Rhine that are difficult to construe as attempts to live in peace and without injustice. The Roman invasion of Sicambria under the pretext that war with the Friesians has made their military presence there a strategic necessity (I/1.30–35) and various oblique references to the planned construction of a fortress on Cheruscan territory to serve as a garrison in what will then effectively be occupied rather than allied territory, have left us in no doubt as to Roman intentions (III/6.1259–72).

Hermann's insistence that Septimus be executed using a cudgel of "double" weight, is simultaneously a reference to the double-edged sword of Roman cultural expansionism. Cicero is Rome's gift to foreign cultures and posterity, and stands metonymically for their other, more forceful bequests. By using a Ciceronian counterargument to Septimus' plea for clemency, Hermann returns to the Romans what was initially theirs with lethal intentions. He is thus in accordance with Mauss' analysis of the gift economy, whereby all gift-giving is involved in a vicious system of reciprocity. He turns the cultural gift of the Romans on its head.

Notwithstanding this trade in Ciceronian arguments, the cross-cultural currency of the work counts for nothing in the end: it does not resolve or elide the differences between Roman and German, despite the fact that it is a mutual reference point and suggests a common European cultural heritage. Septimus is executed anyway, because of that more fundamental elision centering on *hostis*, which allows the translation not only of enemy into guest, but of guest into enemy. Besides, this host-hostile translation is one that Septimus himself had invited, albeit in reverse, when he reminded Hermann of his duty of hospitality toward his captives, his duty to treat them as *hostes*. Hermann takes Septimus at his word, which coincidentally or not entails willfully misunderstanding him and shows him the hostility he has unwittingly demanded.

Nevertheless, Septimus would have been executed with or without Septimus' argument and Hermann's rebuttal, in other words, with or without the cross-cultural artifact of *De Officiis*. After all, the argument ends where it began, with Hermann's order that Septimus be killed, and as such *has gone nowhere*. By remaining unswayed by Cicero, Hermann in effect upholds that internal border promoted by Fichte. Rather than the founding father of Germany, Hermann is a *product* of German national *Erziehung* circa 1808 as opposed to the humanist curriculum of which Cicero is such an important element.

Conversely, a willingness to embrace and incorporate foreign culture can equally imply violence, the extreme metaphor for which is Penthesilea's loving cannibalism of Achilles (see Kleist 2001b: 425). Nietzsche later articulated the

cross-cultural trade in cultural capital explicitly to violence and, indeed, to translation, seeing in the Roman penchant for appropriations of whatever kind an explanation of the Roman attitude to texts of different cultural origins. Their translation of ancient Greek works was, he said, both violent and naïve, in a sense less a translation than a superimposition or even an obliteration of the original:

> These poet-translators did not know how to enjoy the historical disposition; anything past and alien was an irritant to them, and as Romans they considered it to be nothing but a stimulus for yet another Roman conquest. In those days, indeed, to translate meant to conquer—not merely in the sense that one would omit the historical dimension but also in the sense that one would add a hint of contemporaneousness to the material translated and, above all, in the sense that one would delete the name of the poet and insert the translator's name in its place. And all this was done with the very best conscience as a member of the Roman Empire without realizing that such action constituted theft. (Nietzsche 1992: 69)

To Kleist, the violence associated with cultural interface is Janus-faced. It threatens the culture embraced (as Fichte had claimed), but it also threatens the embracing culture. The image of the legate Ventidius mistakenly and fatally embracing not Thusnelda but the Cheruscan bear shows that there is an equal if opposite danger to the incorporating or colonial power. Ironically, this bear symbolism, although it stands for Cheruska (and, by translation, for nineteenth-century Germany), translates across cultures, too, thus linking Thusnelda, whom we meet at the play's start after a joint Roman-German hunt, to the Greek goddess Artemis, the huntress who changed Callisto into a bear, as well as to her Roman equivalent, the goddess Diana.

This constantly foregrounded translation of things into their Other and back again, makes of everything and everyone a changeling. On the one hand this is unavoidable, necessary even, in a *drame à clef*, written under the threat of censorship and therefore in a way that encourages readers to read the plot as always-something-else. But Kleist's unrelenting series of translations also deconstructs the notion of identity that is one of the lynchpins of any nationalistic philosophy and that indeed underpins certain theories of translation, namely those that operate on the notion that identity with the original is an ideal to which the translator should aspire.

Various text-internal transpositions (and transgressions), including Hermann's acceptance and subsequent (lethal) return of Cicero, and Thusnelda's shape-changing, indicate that conversion is built into the very structure of the play. Or, to

speak with Derrida (1985: 184), the wish to be translated is somehow in the structure of *Die Hermannsschlacht*.

Joachim Heinrich Campe, one of the leading educators in Germany of Kleist's period, introduced the first volume of his *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1807–12) by saying that the German language was, in that period of French *Überfremdung*, "das einzige letzte Band, welches uns noch völkerschaftlich zusammenhält" (1807: xxiii). It is only against the backdrop of this Herderian equation of language and nation or *Volk* that Kleist's emphasis on translation in his text for the German "nation" can be understood. Recalling the inherent ambiguity of the gift, the reader should note that Kleist described his drama as a gift to Germans: "ich *schenke* es den Deutschen" (1995a: 683). Also, whereas "German" and "Germania" are tribal designations, *Deutsch* is not. It is related to *deuten* (to interpret or translate to the assembled people) (cf. the expression *mit jemandem deutschreden* "to speak bluntly to somebody," something Hermann rarely does).[16] In effect, Kleist was giving a most duplicitous gift not only to a people, but also to interpretation and translation.

At the very least, Kleist's text strategically places traps and stumbling blocks in the path of any straightforward equation of language and nation in which a philosophy of national identity could use to ground itself. Indeed, in the German case there had been great insistance on the tenuous links between language and nation precisely because the nation was so geographically open to all sides and so politically fragmented.

Even the name of the as yet (in 1808 or A.D. 9) nonexistent German nation is subject to the play's endless conversions. The territory referred to as *Germania* by the Romans was unified in their eyes simply by virtue of the fact that all the different tribes were equally barbarian (and *βάρβαρος* or "babbling") and the territory was all the same in terms of its non-Roman-ness. It certainly had no equivalent internal cohesion. Moreover, this only outwardly existing Germania is translated within the play, linguistically, geographically, and (eventually) politically into something called *Deutschland*—a *kingdom*, to be precise, since the play ends with Arminius being hailed as the King of Germania (V/23.2585). Although the various German princes start out by calling the territory by the Roman name, throughout the rest of the play they use the terms Germania and Deutschland

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16 Furthermore, both *deutsch* and *deuten* are linked by OHG *diot*, signifying *Volk*. *Deuten*, in the sense of to interpret, originally meant to translate from a foreign language (e.g., Latin) into the *Volkssprache*, the local language or language of the common people.

interchangeably, as though both referred equally to a coherent and cohesive geopolitical and linguistic entity about which all—inside and outside—agreed. The to-and-fro between the Latin and German names is random. One cannot, for instance, attribute the use of the Latin term to contexts in which Romans are present. Nor is *Deutschland* used with a consistency that allows one to relate its occurrence to politico-territorial arguments made by the various characters. Otherwise stated, the term *Deutschland* (solecistic as the name of a geopolitical entity both in Kleist's and in Hermann's time) is simply abruptly introduced into play and then used erratically throughout. Only a lone voice questions its meaningfulness.

Aristan, Prince of the Ubii, asks: "Wo und wann Germanien gewesen? / Ob in dem Mond? Und zu der Riesen Zeiten?" (V/23.2613–14). Hermann responds to this doubt, presumably all the more dangerous for being proximate to the truth, by promptly having the doubter executed. Needless to say, this puts paid to any other questions about the existence of Germania-Deutschland. An invention reinforced by threat of execution is as real as any geopolitical entity needs to be.

Remarking on the similarly strange and sudden manifestation of a not-yet-existing *Deutsch*-ness at the time when the play was written, the period to which the play indirectly refers, Adrian Hastings asks:

> Why … was it Germanness which was activated by resentment against the French and not Prussianness or Austrianness or whatever? They, after all, were the states which the French had crushed so devastatingly. The Austrian and Prussian armies were defeated at Austerlitz and Jena but it was Germany which took affront, though it would be more than another fifty years before nationalism really took root among the large majority of ordinary people, and as a consequence rather than a cause of the Prussian "reunification" of the country (1997: 106).

So, when Kleist's Germanic princes begin by referring to their geographical location as *Germania* (I/1.16), the name given by Caesar to the territories east of the Rhine, and then, apparently out of the blue, start to refer to it interchangeably by the solecistic *Deutschland* (I/1.41), the materialization of the word *Deutschland*, which must be understood as a kind of performative speech act, can be seen to correspond to the ostensibly just as spontaneous *ex nihil* materialization of a German (rather than Prussian or Austrian) national consciousness in opposition to Napoleon's alien omnipresence.

Despite the adamancy and violence with which Hermann reinforces the performative "Deutschland," the binomial approach simultaneously also introduces

an element of instability to the very idea of Germany—*Germania* or *Deutschland*—as a place or politico-geographical unit, an instability that is fortified by what can only be described as extreme territorial disregard on Hermann's part, a disregard that is both at odds with and informs his fervent nationalism. Hermann perplexes his fellow princes by saying that he intends *not* to defend Germany. This would be, by dint of Roman military superiority, an impossibility, not to mention that it is also rendered impossible by the fact that there is no such geopolitical entity for the Germans to defend—neither at the time of writing nor 1800 years earlier. He declares instead that he intends to lose it inch by inch, presumably demonstrating a nationalism so pure and unshakeable that even the nation itself can be sacrificed to it (I/3.339–60).

Hermann's disregard for this territory, which his scorched earth policy demonstrates, is reiterated at play's end, when he is warned, after Varus' defeat, about a possible counterattack from across the river Lippe led by Pästus. To this warning of a potential future threat to Cheruska he replies memorably: "Kämpf' ich auch für den Sand, auf den ich trete, / Kämpf ich für meine Brust? / Cheruska schirmen! Was! Wo Herrmann steht, da siegt er, / Und mithin ist Cheruska da!" (IV/10.1852–55). (And of course Cheruska functions metonymically as a third name for Germany.) Hence, the play is simultaneously a call into being (an invention even) of a German nation and an erasure or negation of that same territory just as it seems to emerge. To use Kleist's own formula, it is both territorial *Anspruch* (assertion) and *Abbruch* (abruption).[17]

Not only are the *signifiants* "Germania" and "Deutschland" (the latter now understood though its relationship to "deuten" as interpretation or translation) used interchangeably to the point that they seem to break loose of any definite corresponding *signifié*. But, notwithstanding the clumsiness and failure of Varus' attempt at cultural rapprochement in the context of the sacred oaks,[18] the German

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[17] Kleist uses these terms in a contribution to his *Berliner Abendblätter* journal, "Empfindungen vor Friedrichs Seelandschaft," in which he describes Caspar David Friedrich's painting of a solitary figure facing the sea as both creating and deflating expectations (2001b: 327–328).

[18] Upon finishing his cultural edification of the Romans, Varus asks Hermann if he is satisfied with his instruction of his troops, to which Hermann ambivalently replies: "Du überfleugst, / Quintilius, die Wünsche Deines Knechts" (III/5.1195–96). In other words, he has completely overshot the cultural mark. The metaphor of hit-and-miss was introduced early in the play, with the joint German-Roman hunt, in which Thusnelda hits the pan-cultural aurochs target, but seems to the Romans to miss because her shot does not have immediate effect. Meanwhile Ventidius seems to hit the target, but,

tribes use Roman and German gods interchangeably in their oaths, some exclaiming "Bei Jupiter!" and others "Bei Wodan!" This particular code-switching casts Germany, in whatever sense it exists here, as something of a cultural, not to say linguistic, melting pot, and yet the very ease with which it is possible to switch between the cultural codes, their seeming correspondence, does nothing to defuse a building conflict based on a rhetoric of cultural difference. The implications for intercultural literacy as a philosophy and pedagogy are enormous: the inability of cultural exchange or equivalence to defuse intercultural conflict means that cultural literacy cannot be seen as a simple panacea in the clash of civilizations. If anything, the play would suggest that cultural exchange is always already implicated in the problem it is thought to solve.

In any event, in Kleist's play *qua inter*play of cultural intersection and divergence, codes are switched with great facility. The fact that the cultures spoke different languages—and that the various Germanic tribes spoke entirely different dialects—poses few impediments to communication—or so things seem on the surface. Despite this ease of code-switching, *misunderstanding* (the notorious Kleistian *ver-sprechen*)[19] plays a key role in the com-plot, for as always, Kleist's problem of translation exceeds that of simply finding the equivalency between natural languages. Misunderstanding is Hermann's intracultural strategy, whereby he, as Machiavellian politician, circulates among his too complacent fellow chieftains misinformation and rumor (not to mention bits of a raped German maiden's body) in order to fan the flames of their resentment toward the invaders. Misunderstanding is also Hermann's intercultural policy, for he speaks to the Romans in half-truths to lure them to the site of ambush. Misunderstanding so pervades the play that, on one occasion marked by particular confusion, Hermann cynically declares "How?" and What?" to be *the* German watchwords: "Wie! Was! Die deutschen Uhren!" (III/2.937). At a structural level, this guiding principle of misunderstanding makes itself felt, too, leading Clemens Brentano to comment, having attended informal readings of the play, that the entire dialogue consisted of questions and repetition, that Kleist seemed to have conceived his dialogue as

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through ignorance of the forest, does not realize that his shot was unnecessary. The aurochs was charging at Thusnelda, but, as the Germans were aware, the aurochs could only charge in the clearing, and could not have penetrated the trees from where she had shot her arrow (cf. I/2.108–113).

[19] One of Kleist's epigrams (1995b: 307) explores the dual meaning of the word *versprechen*, signifying both to promise and to mis-speak, an ambivalence that reveals the treachery of language.

though all the characters were slightly hard of hearing or perhaps dim-witted: "Was den Kleist besonders kurios macht, ist sein Rezept zum Dialog. Er denkt sich alle Personen halb taub und dämlich, so kömmt dann durch Fragen und Repetieren der Dialog heraus" (qtd. in Kleist 1995a: 687).

The corollary of misunderstanding *qua* nationalist policy is translation *qua* nation-threatening multiculturalism, opening the borders to something other and new, forcing the nation not only to play host to the foreign but also potentially to become one with it. In Lawrence Venuti's words:

> Translation can be described as an act of violence against a nation only because nationalist thinking tends to be premised on a metaphysical concept of identity as a homogenous essence, usually given a biological grounding in an ethnicity or race and seen as manifested in a particular language and culture. Since translation works on the linguistic and cultural differences of a foreign text, it can communicate those differences and thereby threaten the assumed integrity of the national language and culture, the essentialist homogeneity of the national identity … Nationalism, [Victor] Hugo suggests, goes hand in hand with a literary xenophobia, a fear that foreign literatures might contaminate native traditions, an attitude he tellingly phrases in biological terms: "Who could ever dare think of infusing the substance of another people into its own very life-blood?" (2005: 177–178)

While Hermann may pursue a policy of nationalistic misunderstanding that is at cross purposes with translation as interculturality, he is also perfectly aware of translation's simultaneous ability to build national identity by what Venuti calls a "specular process" whereby identity is formed by selectively becoming the Other (2005: 180).

The model of German independence and national unity that Hermann espouses owes more to Rome than it does to anything Ur-Deutsch, and as such is a copying, doubling, or translation. If Germany's national-mindedness draws on a Roman *Vorbild*, this means that, in its nationalistic mimicry of Rome, Germania truly becomes a colony, provided that we accept Homi Bhabha's theory that mimicry of the colonial power by the colonized "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (2001: 381). Bhabha points out that this mimicry as a mechanism of colonial power can never be perfect because it is in "its slippage, its excess, its difference" (381) that the mimicry first becomes effective as a colonial power function. Germany as a colony would be therefore a site of "almost the same but not quite" (384)—a place of otherness in sameness, a place of hybridity and translation. So precisely the mechanism by

which Germany would become a nation (i.e., copying the paradigm of statehood supplied by Rome and achieving it by Roman military tactics) is the same mechanism that would also make it a colony.

Yet the "specular process," accompanied by a partial becoming-the-other, undergoes a thorough exposition in Kleist's drama. This serves as further evidence supporting the thesis that the play is a precocious deconstruction of nationalist discourses *ante litteram*. The articulation of nation, identity, and mirroring is most evident in the subplot dealing with the rape of Thusnelda's Germanic flaxen lock. Thusnelda sings about a boy staring at a mirror image in a pool of water, when a lock of her hair is stolen by Ventidius, the Roman legate or cultural attaché. He had intended to send it to the Empress Livia as a sample, with the promise of a full head to come when Germania is conquered. Kleist is referring to the well-documented trade in *captivos crines*, captive locks, for use in the Roman wig industry (see Bartman 2001). Shortly after the theft (or symbolic rape), which Ventidius has excused in the name of romance, Hermann comes upon Thusnelda coiffed in Roman style in honor of the Roman army's entrance into Cheruska. Finding her thus happily translated into a Roman lady, he reveals to her, not without a certain malicious humor at her expense, the real reason for the theft of her lock, warning her that her tresses will be completely harvested, should the Romans be victorious. The passage is worth quoting in full as it simultaneously demonstrates the peculiarities of dialogue (highlighted in bold) that Brentano noted:

HERRMANN. Ja, was zum Henker, denkst Du?
– Die röm'schen Damen müssen doch,
Wenn sie sich schmücken, hübsche Haare haben?
THUSNELDA. Nun haben denn die röm'schen Damen keine?
HERRMANN. Nein, sag' ich! Schwarze! Schwarz und fett, wie Hexen!
Nicht hübsche, trockne, goldne, so wie Du!
THUSNELDA. Wohlan! So mögen sie! Der trifft'ge Grund!
Wenn sie mit hübschen nicht begabt,
So mögen sie mit schmutz'gen sich behelfen.
HERRMANN. So! In der That! Da sollen die Cohorten
Umsonst wohl übern Rhein gekommen sein?
THUSNELDA. Wer? Die Cohorten?
HERRMANN. Ja, die Varus führt.
THUSNELDA (*lacht*). Das muß ich sagen! Der wird doch
Um meiner Haare nicht gekommen sein?

HERRMANN.Was? Allerdings! Bei unsrer großen Hertha!
Hat Dir Ventidius das noch nicht gesagt?
THUSNELDA. Ach, geh! Du bist ein Affe.
HERRMANN. Nun, ich schwör's Dir. –
Wer war es schon, der jüngst beim Mahl erzählte,
Was einer Frau in Ubien begegnet?
THUSNELDA. Wem? Einer Ubierin?
HERRMANN: Das weißt Du nicht mehr?
THUSNELDA. **Nein, Lieber!** – Daß drei Römer sie, meinst Du,
In Staub gelegt urplötzlich und gebunden –?
HERRMANN. Nun ja! Und ihr nicht bloß, vom Haupt hinweg,
Das Haar, das goldene, die Zähne auch,
Die elfenbeinernen, mit einem Werkzeug,
Auf offner Straße, aus dem Mund genommen?
(III/3.1004–1029)

However, the specular process, at which the narcissistic mirroring in Thusnelda's song hints or *deutet* seems in this case to reverse Bhabha's assertion that it is the colony that takes on the appearance of the colonizing culture. For in Kleist's text the Romans literally take on the appearance of the conquered savages. They are cast as hair- and tooth-thieves, ready to farm the Germans' fine blond hair as they would any other resource: "Die schmutz'gen Haare schneiden sie sich ab, / Und hängen unsre trocknen um die Platte! / Die Zähne reißen sie, die schwarzen, aus, / Und stecken unsre weißen in die Lücken!" (III/3.1049–52). The stage directions indicate that Hermann is to speak these lines "mit Laune," humorously, arguably taking delight in the idea of Romans sporting blond German wigs and German dentures because, by the specular rule, such prosthetic transpositions make Rome a German colony. We have here a German cultural superimposition, albeit by proxy and at considerable expense to the donors. But the Romans too are made to feel the deadly side of the gift: the harvestable teeth and hair of Thusnelda turn into (yet another translation) the fangs and fur of the bear, which she has Ventidius meet in her stead and, in a deadly embrace, exact revenge on him for the stolen lock (V/18.2406–8). As for the teeth, the reader may recall those sown by Cadmus at Athena's instruction, from which there sprang the warrior Sparti (sown men).

This entire specular process, as Thusnelda indicates, is always only a partially successful translation between sides. Firstly, in her mirror song, the possibility of a true mirroring is deconstructed. The song tells of a boy, who, in a recasting of the

Narcissus Ur-scenario, sees in the water not his own reflection but that of the face-shaped moon. Moreover, he reaches out his hand to touch the image and the waters are muddied, reflecting nothing, at which moment the song is interrupted. Then, in a further disruption of the mirror process, in disbelief at Hermann's account of Roman tooth and hair robbery, Thusnelda, having only half understood Hermann, says: "Auf welche Art gebrauchen sie die Dinge? / Sie können doch die fremden Locken nicht / An ihre eignen knüpfen, nicht die Zähne / Aus ihrem eignen Schädel wachsen machen?" (III/3.1043–46). It is important that she cannot seem to grasp the fact that these commodities will be used prosthetically, because this does more than show her naïveté or demonstrate Brentano's claims about Kleistian dialogue. Her words also assert that what is part of the self (*principium individuationis*) can never fully be part of the other. There can be no complete translation between the two. The ludicrous image of Romans trying to coax German hair out of their own follicles and German teeth from their gums is the product of a firm conviction that the self is inviolable, that it is mirrored perfectly nowhere, that it is always set over and against the Other having no equivalent anywhere, and that no amount of transplanting, mirroring, or translation could eradicate this kernel of singular**,** irreducible difference. This firm idea of irreplaceable singularity has major consequences for translation—if it allows the concept at all.

For instance, there is Thusnelda's horror at the Romans' disrespect for the integrity of the self: "Ei, die verwünschte Menschenjägerei! / Ei, der Dämonenstolz! Der Hohn der Hölle!" (III/3.1076–77). Hermann points out that she is more distraught by the idea of Roman tooth and hair harvesting than she is by the immanent Roman invasion of Cheruska (III/3.1078). Juxtaposed with this, there is Hermann's blithe disjointing of Hally's body, wherein he mirrors the disregard for the body's individuality and integrity shown by the head-hunting Romans. Interestingly, Hally's body was a body-partial even prior to her dismemberment. Strangely, when this German virgin is led on stage after her alleged rape by Roman soldiers only her feet are visible, and the veil obscuring the rest of her body may not be lifted even to establish her identity, which is nevertheless treated as unequivocal (IV/5.1563). Hermann's involvement in this violation or eradication of (female) identity that does violence to the very notion of the inviolable self not only associates Hermann with the Romans. It also goes to the very heart of the play's politics, now quite literally its body politic. Importantly, this violence has serious repercussions for translation. If we agree with Legrand (2005) that "translation has sameness-resisting and difference-creating power" (42), then Hermann's disruption of the singularity of the human body, his conversion of its singularity into thirteen body-part-missives to the German tribes, would make of him an arch-translator.

Furthermore, if we understand the foundation of any nation to consist not only in sheer physical violence (such as Romulus' murder of Remus, or Hally's dismemberment) but also in foundational narratives and their attendant genealogical tracings that seek to establish a *singular* Ur-event underpinning all subsequent history of that nation and unifying it in one unique historical moment—if all that is the case, then Foucault's warning that all such genealogical tracings take us not to identity but to disunity, disparity, and difference provides a key to understanding the insistent resurfacing of division, difference, and translation in Kleist's foundational play. "What is found," in Foucault's words, "at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity" (1977: 142).

In this sense, Hally's always already violated identity begins to make sense, standing for the pseudo-identity of the nation as a whole as supported *inter alia* by the myth of a single coherent founding event. Hermann, as the play's canniest character, is none too concerned, as the more gullible Thusnelda is, with intact identity (the intact body), because he realizes—*qua* propaganda-maker and not its consumer, as the play's master puppeteer and author of this national plot—that at the heart of identity, so crucial to national narratives, is disunity or difference. Hermann is able to see the essential link between self and other, the predication of identity on difference, the paradox that "the categories of 'our' identity only make sense because there are categories that denote 'others'" (Billig 2003: xi). In my terms, translation as the key operation of the text draws attention to the predication of self on other, their inextricable inter-involvement. As such, while Hermann may be accused of a propagandistic and opportunistic manipulation of difference, Kleist, by his foregrounding of *translation*, the eminent convertibility of any thing into its Other, cannot properly be so accused. Unlike Hermann, Kleist is Machiavellian only in the sense that he *lays bare* the mechanisms of politics using the trope of translation.

Another crucial instance of translated and thus deconstructed identity picks up the motif of hair. When Hermann's plot is revealed to the Romans, Varus laments: "O Herrmann! Herrmann! / So kann man blondes Haar und blaue Augen haben, / Und doch so falsch sein, wie ein Punier?" (V/9.2096–98). Arminius or Hermann the German is now Hermann the Phoenician or Carthaginian. Just as Thusnelda was shocked that the Romans wanted to make false hair-pieces out of good *honest* German hair, so too do the Romans in the play associate German hair with honesty. However, this faith in hair does not translate across cultures. What works for a German such as Marbod, Prince of the Suevi and erstwhile enemy of Hermann,

does not work for Varus the Roman and erstwhile German ally. When Marbod is deciding whether to trust Hermann or not, he simply runs his fingers through the blond hair of Hermann's two sons, whereupon he is suddenly prompted to put his faith in Hermann and join in the pan-Germanic fight against Rome.[20] However, Varus' confidence that the blond and therefore honest Germans are as docile and trustworthy as bullocks grazing on the banks of the Tiber, transpires to be completely unfounded.[21] His confidence in the unequivocal relationship between Hermann's blond hair and honesty—a faith in the intertranslatability or equivalence of *soma* and *psyche*—does not translate into reality.

There is a further twist to the tangled hair metaphoric in the play. While hair does not seem to translate across cultures, as Thusnelda's suspicion of the prosthesis had suggested, she is in effect translated by her hair in Ventidius' eyes into a German Juno. Prior to his theft of a lock, he exclaims: "Gieb eine Locke, Abgott meiner Seelen, / Von diesem Haupthaar mir, das von der Juno Scheiteln / In üpp'gere Wogen nicht zur Ferse wallt!" (II/5.567–69). Her hair is simultaneously that which renders her German *and* into a Roman goddess. Ironically, Ventidius is also credited with translating her into a German again. When she learns of the real reason for his theft of her hair, she announces: "Er hat zur Bärin mich gemacht!" (V/15. 2321). But this reconversion is itself open to cultural retranslation. While the becoming-bear of Thusnelda can be seen as a reference to the ancient Germanic tradition of bear-warriors where warriors donned the pelt of a bear, the Romans imported this tradition from their northern neighbors, giving rise to a tradition of their soldiers wearing bear-hoods (see Seidel 2004).

Importantly, Thusnelda is translated back and forth between Roman and German culture by two men, one from each side of the cultural divide, Ventidius and Hermann. After Ventidius has helped her with her toilet, showing her how women wear their hair in Rome, Hermann is prompted to exclaim: "Schau, wie er göttlich Dir den Kopf besorgt! / Der Kopf, beim Styx, von einer Juno! / Bis auf das Diadem sogar, / Das Dir vom Scheitel blitzend niederstrahlt!" (III/3.987–90). To which Thusnelda replies: "Das ist das schöne Prachtgeschenk, / Das Du aus Rom mir jüngsthin mitgebracht" (III/3.991–92). Inasmuch as it was Hermann who

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[20] The stage direction reads "*indem er gedankenvoll in den Haaren der Knaben spielt*" (IV/1.1387–88). In the end, it is a moot point whether he was duped by Hermann or not; it is Hermann and not the once strategically better positioned Marbod who is crowned King of the new Germany.

[21] This bullock metaphor is used by Ventidius to persuade Varus of Hermann's loyalty (III/4.1251–53).

brought the jewel back from Rome, his Juno-comparison is not merely a comment on Ventidius' translation of Thusnelda into a Roman, because he is also, by his gift (*pharmakon*), the co-author of her transformation. Hermann also makes a Juno of her.

Once again, the conversion centers on Thusnelda's hair. In its infinite convertibility (its transplantability or translatability, for which the removable wig is a cipher), Thusnelda's hair is essentially rendered meaningless. An empty vessel (another sense of cipher) for any number of different meanings, it is a sort of McGuffin, to speak with Hitchcock, or a Lacanian *chose*. McGuffins, Mladen Dolar explains, "signify only that they signify, they signify the signification as such; the actual content is entirely insignificant. They are both at the core of the action and completely irrelevant; the highest degree of meaning—what everybody is after—coincides with an absence of meaning. The object itself is a vanishing point, an empty space" (2002: 45). Dolar distinguishes between two varieties of McGuffin, the immaterial that, although compelling, is vague enough never to appear, but can be conjured by a few words, and the "massive non-transparent presence" that is "endowed with … lethal materiality" (46). Thusnelda's hair belongs to the latter category. No more significant than the first sort, the second distinguishes itself by exhibiting a kind of vicious tyranny of the thing. While no one, not even Thusnelda, really believes that the Romans have come all this way just for her hair, it nonetheless provides the insubstantial grounds for feeding Ventidius to a bear. Crucially, her hair is the flimsy focus of a number of translations**,** many of which eventually contradict each other.

The absence that seems to underlie the hair/tooth motif in the play so central to its examination of translation, warrants scrutiny**,** if only briefly. Insignificant in themselves, the (castration) anxiety associated with their loss due in part to their eminent extractability, can only be the fear of absences or voids per se—not least those between and even within words. Consequently, the attention paid to these locks is talismanic, designed to ward off absence as such. Thus the hair is now a lock in a double sense, fore*closing* on the void that it also represents. In the case of the *Hermannsschlacht*, the absence in question is the lack of grounds, both in the literal sense of a territory and in the cultural sense of an *Ur-deutsch*-ness, which would serve to root the nationalistic ideology pursued in the play. However, the absence is also one in words *qua* signifiers (even more than *qua* signifieds), which both makes them so eminently translatable and dooms their translation to failure.

In fine, Kleist's deracination of this national drama by a curious admixture of infinite re-translatability and cross- and intracultural mis- and non-communication

has implications beyond the debate about whether or not this drama is purely a nationalistic *Tendenzstück*. It forces us to consider the readability and (with Gadamer) therefore the translatability of either the (ostensibly) foreign or the (ostensibly) familiar. The work both foreshadows and pre-empts its own translation. Perhaps it is for this strictly uncanny reason—rather than because of the uncritical association with National Socialism (see Reeve 1987)—that an English translation of the play is only now about to be published.

Articulating some of these issues to pedagogy, Lawrence Venuti has looked at the opposite phenomenon to that encountered in Kleist's *Hermannsschlacht*, namely, what he calls the repression of "the fact of translation," in the presentation and teaching of translated literature, primarily in North America. By this Venuti means that the status of translated texts *qua* translations is repressed in Anglo-Saxon education and that the texts are read more or less as texts originally written in English. He sees in this repression a deliberate failure to address "the remainder of domestic values inscribed in the foreign text during the translating process" (1999: 89), a failure that reflects and perpetuates the cultural hegemony of the English-speaking West.[22] Venuti argues that in an age when texts increasingly cannot be read in their original language, it becomes ever more essential to bring to the classroom an awareness of "how translation both loses linguistic and cultural features of the foreign text and adds others specific to the target-language culture" (91). I extend his thesis to point out that awareness of the erasures and superimpositions of translation brings with it an insight into the blind spots and erasures of all reading.

As a text in which the translative act is precisely *not* repressed but rather thrust into the open,[23] *Die Hermannsschlacht* forces all readers into a position of critical awareness vis-à-vis reading and (any) form of translation. By constantly foregrounding translation in the form of re-translation, mis-translation, or even non-translation, the play deals explicitly with the (insidious) inscription of the domestic in the foreign, and vice versa, which the translation process brings about, as does any cultural interface. This does not mean that the play is an argument for what might be described as a Fichtean cultural apartheid. For in Kleist all instances of

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22 For a detailed and extended critique of this linguistic hegemony of English today, see Lecercle (1990).

23 The dense *Teutoburger Wald* of Kleist's text undeniably has its openings, not least the one where the German aurochs was shot. In slightly different terms, it has its *Lichtungen* (forest clearings) in the Heideggerian sense, spaces fraught with and defined by the tension between openness and concealment.

pure German-ness are shown always already to contain their opposite: every truly German custom is converted, accurately or inaccurately, into a Roman equivalent. One example is Thusnelda's insight that the German custom of singing on the battlefield performs the same function as the Roman standard, both serving to keep the troops together in the fray, the *mêlée* of battle standing, of course, for other less violent cultural mixes. Her conclusion—"Wie jedes Land doch seine Sitte hat!" (III/6.1289)—is an anticlimactic shibboleth of cultural difference-cum-similarity.

For all its emphasis on translation, what *Die Hermannsschlacht* does not posit is good translation (or reading or interpretation, to take us back to the question of the text's interpretative openness) as a solution to intra- or intercultural dilemmas. The frequent failure of its translations (both the text's failure to translate into English, and the failure of various translative attempts within the text) testify to this. But the omnipresence of the problematic of translation at least forces us into a position of critical awareness of the infinitely convoluted processes of cultural contact from which it does not attempt either to extricate or absolve us. As Thusnelda's conspicuously banal and unhelpful summary informs us, this particular text is not going to give us a free pass out of the forest of symbols. It offers us little more than Heidegger's *Holzwege*, forest paths, "die meist verwachsen jäh im Unbegangenen aufhören" (1957: 3).

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