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The Moving Author. Kleist's Journeys in Time

Departure: *Non est hic*

After spectacularly taking their lives on the afternoon of 21 November 1811 at the "Stolper Loch" (today's "kleiner Wannsee"), Heinrich von Kleist and his (willing or unwilling) companion in death, Henriette Vogel, underwent swift autopsy in a nearby building, and were buried the next day on the spot where they had died, as burial on consecrated ground was, at the time, not permitted in cases of suicide.[1] We neither know the precise location of their interment, nor do we have the earliest markers. From descriptions of initial visits, homage seems mainly to have been paid in the form of plants, wreaths, and other natural and perishable stuff.[2]

The first reference to a stone monument dates to the late 1840s, when author, Kleist-admirer and -scholar, Eduard von Bülow, mentions having at last succeeded in erecting a "Denkstein" to Kleist, "ein unbehauener Granitwürfel, mit Kleists Namen, Geburts- und Todestag […] neben der Eiche an seinem Grabe."[3] In fact, without his and Tieck's early efforts to pin the author down, both in biographical and geographical terms, we perhaps wouldn't have an afterlife at all. However, the location is problematic: the burial site to which Kleist's admirers pilgrimaged soon after his death would appear to have moved, shifting like the sandy Markish soil to which the bodies were committed. Von Bülow mentions this problem of the lost plot in a submission to the *Monatsblätter zur Allgemeinen Zeitung* of November 1846, in which he worries that the soil's dispersal will finally obliterate all traces of the exact spot: "Man hatte mir gesagt, daß sie kaum noch aufzufinden sei, indem

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1 "Beide sind auf der Stelle, wo der Mord und Selbstmord geschah, in zwei Särge und in ein Grab gelegt worden." Pfarrer Dreising: Stahnsdorf-Machower Kirchenbuch, November 1811. In: Helmut Sembdner: Heinrich von Kleists Lebensspuren. Dokumente und Berichte der Zeitgenossen. Munich: dtv, 1996, p. 479.

2 In a letter to his brothers dated May 1818, Ferdinand Grimm mentions that 20 poplar trees had been planted around the graves by way of a marker. But, sadly, all but one had died in the sandy soil. See Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 492.

3 Eduard von Bülow: Kleists Leben und Briefe, 1848. In: Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 496. This is, presumably, the gravestone as sketched by Hermann Schnee in 1856 and given as a gift to Theodor Storm.

der Sand der beiden kleinen Hügel von Jahr zu Jahr mehr verweht würde."[4] His concerns were not ill-founded, as it turns out. In an article of 1991 in which she attempts to put to rest rumours of his possible displacement, Erika Müller-Lauter notes a difference of some 170 metres between the location of the official grave and the site of the suicide and original interment.[5] In other words, the likelihood of their remains actually being where their grave is now located is small to none, assuming – as one must – that their bodies were at some point disinterred and reburied at the current site, a relocation for which there is neither reason nor evidence.

Wherever they really lie, by the 1860s the marker erected by von Bülow had in its turn fallen into disrepair and needed to be replaced. As reported by Herman Grimm in the *Vossische Zeitung* of 23 February 1862, "[d]er Stein, den vor Jahren zwei seiner Freunde dort niedererlegten, ist verwittert und genügt nicht mehr."[6] A committee was duly formed to address this state of dilapidation, which was considered particularly lamentable in light of the gradually rising currency of the dead and soon-to-be national Prussian author. It erected a new stone onto which were engraved for the first time the now famous verses by Max Ring, who was involved in this latest initiative: "Er lebte sang und litt / in trüber, schwerer Zeit; / er suchte hier den Tod / und fand Unsterblichkeit,"[7] followed by the cryptic scripture reference "Matth. 6. v. 12."

The grave as we now know it, situated on a narrow parcel of land between the Bismarckstrasse and the banks of the kleiner Wannsee, and flanked on either side by the buildings of two rowing clubs, the Berliner Ruderklub and the Schüler-Rudervereins,[8] and which we treat *as though it were* Kleist's burial place, is not therefore the original one, but of much more recent date. While the previous (itself not quite "original") commemorative marble stone with gold writing and Ring's

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4 Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 494.

5 Erika Müller-Lauter: Geschichte des Kleist-Grabes. In: Kleist-Jahrbuch (1991), p. 229–56, here p. 230.

6 Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 496.

7 On the inclusion of these no doubt well-intentioned but nonetheless undeniably doggerel lines, Reinhold Steig bitingly offers the following information: "Mir war erzählt worden, daß die gereimte Schrift auf Kleists Grabe von Max Ring herstamme, der unbeauftragt in einer Comité-Sitzung mit derselben hervorgekommen sei und weder die Zustimmung noch den Widerspruch der Anwesenden erfahren habe." Reinhold Steig: Neue Kunde zu Heinrich von Kleist. Berlin: Reimer, 1902, p. 126. It is quite possible that Steig's reputed anti-Semitism played a significant part in his disparagement. More innocently amusing is their mistranscription by Ohff as "er lebte lang und litt" due to an unfortunate misreading of the Fraktur typeface on this marble stone which uses the now obsolete "long s" or ſ at the start of words: "Er lebte ſang und litt." Heinz Ohff: Heinrich von Kleist. Ein preußisches Schicksal. Munich: Piper, 2004, p. 199.

8 The Berliner Ruderklub, an enormous villa designed by Martin Rönsch, was built in 1908–9, while the Schüler-Ruderverein was built in 1906.

verses still exists, though fragile, in the collection of the Stadtmuseum Berlin, the one *in situ* near the Wannsee (German granite, surrounded by a waist-high wrought iron fence) is a Nazi creation dating from 1936. It was erected as part of their preparations for the Olympic Games of that year, which were expected to bring record numbers of foreign tourists to Berlin who, the authorities assumed, would have an interest in such culturally significant sites. No doubt these much-needed grave repairs were also undertaken at this time because of Nazi admiration for Kleist whom they considered to be an author very much in their sense.[9] Whether or not tourists did flock to the site that year,[10] in *its* original form, this third Nazi stone bore Kleist's name, dates (now corrected – the birthdate had been incorrectly given on the 1862 stone as 10 October 1776, an error attributed to Tieck),[11] and the four lines by Ring taken from the second gravestone. Although their existence on the earlier stone is well-documented – Fontane mentions them, for example, in his description of a visit in 1889[12] – curiously, the Ring inscription is often mentioned only in the context of the 1936 stone, as though this were the first occasion of its engraving.[13] Of course, the deep irony of Nazis using Ring's verses without realizing that their author was Jewish makes for a good story, and, hence, is not misplaced here. The untidy and restless history of this unstable grave opens it up to all kinds of re-inscription. Indeed, when it was discovered that Ring was Jewish, the Nazi authorities in 1941 had his lines erased and overwritten with a line from

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9 Joseph Goebbels, for instance, noted enthusiastically in his diary entry of 19 March 1941, after a performance of Homburg, "Was für ein Kerl ist doch dieser Kleist gewesen!". Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Vol.1. Ed. by Elke Frölich. Munich: K. J. Saur, 1998, p. 195.

10 The 1903 English-language Baedeker on "Berlin and Its Environs", still in use at the time of the Olympics, for instance, does refer to the site, but devotes to it only a single line before moving on to the important question of nearby dining facilities: "¾ M. from the station, is the grave of the poet Heinrich von Kleist, who shot himself and his friend Henriette Vogel here in 1811. A walk may be taken round the W. side of the Wannsee to the Schwedische Pavillon Restaurant." Karl Baedeker: Berlin and Its Environs. Handbook for Travellers. London: Dulau, 1903, p. 178.

11 Of course, Kleist has two birthdates (three, if we count the 1776 error), both of which are now recorded on the stone, one on the Nazi back side, the other on the new front. The church register gives his birthday as 18 October 1777, while he himself preferred 10 October 1777. At any rate, in the gravestone's current iteration, we no longer need to choose.

12 Theodor Fontane: Fünf Schlösser. Altes und Neues aus Mark Brandenburg, 1889. In: Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 499.

13 See, for example, Felicitas Hoppe's assertion that "On his headstone in Berlin the Nazis engraved words by the Jewish poet Max Ring." Felicitas Hoppe: The German Tragic. Pied Pipers, Heroes and Saints. In: Stephen D. Dowden, Thomas P. Quinn (eds): Tragedy and the Tragic in German Literature, Art, and Thought. Rochester: Camden House, 2014, p. 325–36, here p. 334.

Kleist's final drama *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*: "Nun, o Unsterblichkeit, bist du ganz mein!".[14]

And thus it remained for some time, until the latter part of the twentieth century, when something long dormant seemed to stir once more. From 1987 onwards, the matter of Kleist's grave came up again, and various proposals for its preservation and reimagination were made, including Michael Seiler's plea for interventions into the surrounding landscape that would return to "dem Orte die landschaftliche Weite, die er in den Jahren nach 1904 verloren hatte."[15] In 2003 in a more modest move, a memorial plaque to Henriette Vogel, whose presence there (or, as we have seen, likely not) had long been ignored,[16] was placed on the ground beside Kleist's Nazi-era stone. But more needed to be done. It is likely that the embarrassing fact that Kleist's grave had spent 75 years marked by a Nazi stone played a part in stimulating discussion about the grave in the run-up to the bicentenary of his suicide in 2011. The original plan for the Kleist-Jahr overhaul was for the site to be completely remodelled, with the design to be determined by competition. However, proposals to alter the area were objected to so vehemently by locals that it was decided in the end that, instead of yet another new grave, the 1936 stone would simply be refurbished and reoriented and access to it improved.[17] During this process, Vogel's name finally migrated from the 2003 plaque onto the main headstone, and, while the Nazi re-engraving of 1941 was retained, it was now rotated 180 degrees. The names and dates of Kleist and Vogel were now inscribed onto what is the newly obverse side, together with Ring's restored verses and its accompanying reference to Matthew 6:12 on debts and debtors.

Returning to the "original" – that is to say pre-1936 – grave (or, at least, the official one, somewhere *near* the actual burial site, wherever that was, but certainly not on it), it had continued to give trouble even after von Bülow's attempt to fix the spot once and for all with a proper stone marker. An anecdote about Kaiser Wilhelm I, reported in several papers in the summer of 1872, but quite possibly apocryphal, reinforces the persistent and disturbing sense that Kleist was not quite where he

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14 Specifically, it was the then president of the Kleist Gesellschaft, Georg Minde-Pouet, who instigated this erasure and re-inscription. See Günter Blamberger: "nur was nicht aufhört, weh zu thun, bleibt im Gedächtniss". Zur Typogenese des Kleist-Bildes in der deutschen Literatur der Moderne. In: Kleist-Jahrbuch (1995), p. 25–43, here p. 42.

15 Michael Seiler: Das Kleist-Grab am kleinen Wannsee. Vorschlag zu einer angemessenen landschaftlichen Gestaltung seiner Umgebung. In: Kleist-Jahrbuch (1994), p. 177f., here p. 177. It is Seiler who dates this renewed attention to Kleist's grave to 1987.

16 A photograph from 1984 shows that some enterprising visitor had attempted to set things right by graffitiing her name onto the main tombstone. Her name had also been carved into the small wooden signpost for the grave on the Bismarckstrasse.

17 Rolf Lautenschläger: Tatort Kleiner Wannsee. In: Die Tageszeitung, 20.11.2011. Reprinted in Kleist-Jahrbuch (2012), p. 51–52, here p. 52

ought to be, and not easily to be pinned down: two women walking in the Park Babelsberg, at the far end of the Wannsee from where Kleist had actually killed himself and been interred, demanded that a park attendant show them to Kleist's grave, insisting it was just nearby, while the baffled attendant protested that he knew of no such monument in the vicinity. The Kaiser, who happened to be passing, intervened in the altercation, informing the woman that "Sie werden hier vergeblich nach dem Grabmal suchen," and ordering his coachman to drive the women to the Bismarckstrasse site, some distance away.[18] While the tale is at first sight trivial and commonplace enough, featuring lost tourists, ignorant park attendants and a helpful passer-by, the misplaced grave, although in many ways purely incidental to this portrait of a paternal German Kaiser, reflects something of the perpetual turbulence associated with that resting place from the very beginning.[19]

Not only had the sand of the two original burial mounds soon dissipated to the alarm of the early custodians of his legacy, and the first stone markers succumbed quickly to exposure to the elements, but from the early 1860s onwards, the plot was increasingly encroached upon by development. Approximately coinciding with the erection of the second stone memorial, the expansion of Berlin started to make itself felt in the quiet forested areas fringing the Wannsee, attention having been drawn to the idyllic setting amongst other things by Kleist's spectacular suicide. In 1863, Berlin banker Wilhelm Conrad started buying up parcels of land in the vicinity, including the very site on which stood Stimmings Krug, the inn in which Kleist and Vogel had spent their final night and near which they had died. Conrad wanted the land in order to establish a suburb of villas, the so-called Alsen Colony, in which the high society of Berlin could spend their summers. Within a decade, a dozen large homes had been built in the area, and the new development was connected to Berlin by railway. These tectonic shifts in the locality, especially the rail connection, brought Kleist's "wintereinsame[s] Waldgrab in Wannsee," as Rilke still called it in 1898,[20] into new proximity with the outside world, allowing even

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18 See "Kaiser Wilhelm als Fremdenführer." In: Salzburger Volksblatt, 09.07.1872, p. 3.

19 Not finding Kleist's grave is a scenario that was resurrected a century later by Wolfgang Koeppen. It was to have formed the plot of his unfinished novel "In Staub mit allen Feinden Brandenburgs", described in Suhrkamp's announcement of forthcoming publications for 1975 as centering on a returnee to Berlin after many years: "Allmählich scheint dem Gast in Berlin Grund, Zweck und Rechtfertigung seines Aufenthalts der Besuch von Kleists Grab zu werden. Dem Vorhaben stellen sich unerwartete Hindernisse entgegen. Zwei Versuche, das Grab zu finden, scheitern. Erst der dritte Anlauf gelingt." "Programmvorschau 1975/1". Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1974. Quoted in Matthias Kussmann: Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Ich. Wolfgang Koeppens Spätwerk. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001, p. 127.

20 In Helmut Sembdner: Heinrich von Kleists Nachruhm. Eine Wirkungsgeschichte in Dokumenten. Munich: dtv, 1996, p. 329.

more literary pilgrimages, albeit none of them quite to the right place because of the lost plot.

In the early years of the twentieth century, approaching the centenary of Kleist's death and coinciding with a first peak of posthumous fame for the author, there was a new threat: no longer troubled by the prospect of losing sight of the real burial site, which had exercised Kleist admirers in the first half of the previous century, now there was the even more awful prospect of its being dug up and the author (whose body was not quite there anyway, although that did not seem to be accorded any explicit importance) disinterred. The specific occasion for alarm in the early 1900s was news of the impending sale of the land by Prince Friedrich Leopold, and accompanying rumours that a canal was going to be built through it, "so daß eine Exhumierung der Leiche des Dichters notwendig werden wird."[21] While it was disputed at the time that a canal could be dug through such unsuitable hilly terrain, nonetheless, public outcry at the alleged exhumation was so fevered that the prince finally gifted the site to the German nation, and the grave – or at least the official grave – stayed put. It was remarked upon at the time that the idea of Kleist's disinterment seemed to elicit a disproportionate level of distress and outrage: "Man hat anderwärts mehr als einmal die sterblichen Reste menschlicher Größen exhumiert und an anderer Stelle würdig untergebracht, aber schließlich: in keinem Falle hat sich das Volksempfinden so wie in diesem der ursprünglichen Grabstätte bemächtigt, den Toten und seine Grabstätte zu einer Einheit zusammengeschmolzen."[22]

Ironically, by not digging it up for a canal, the emptiness of the grave, long rumoured and convincingly demonstrated by Müller-Lauter in the 1990s, could never fully come to light, and Kleist could remain – albeit only imaginarily – in place. And so, in memoires published in 1972, actor Rudolf Fernau would recall a 1945 visit to the grave as "[e]ine ans Unheimliche grenzende Situation. Drei Fuß tiefer lag das modernde Skelett des unglücklich durch Selbstmord geendeten Dichters mit durchschossener Schädeldecke und erloschenen, ins Nichts starrenden Augenhöhlen."[23] Disremembered was the fact that Kleist's remains remained elsewhere.

But perhaps it is precisely this submerged knowledge of his displacement that makes a visit to his grave such an "unheimliche" experience, someone's empty tomb being far more unsettling than a filled one, as Homburg might agree, having experienced the terrifying sight of his own as yet unoccupied grave "[d]as morgen [s]ein Gebein empfangen soll" (*Homburg* V, 983).[24] As such, obsessions with

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21 National-Zeitung Berlin, 09.03.1904. In: Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 501.

22 Karl Strecker: Tägliche Rundschau, 19.03.1904. In: Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 501.

23 Rudolf Fernau: Als Lied begann's, 1972. In: Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 505.

24 Heinrich von Kleist: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Vol. 1, Munich: dtv, 2011, p. 799. Hereafter *SWB*. Where there are absences in the Munich edition due to its at times patchy

Kleist's grave and its upkeep would seem to offer a good way of avoiding the far more troubling question of where he actually is, for, if not here, then where precisely do we locate Kleist?

If inside the grave, there is no body, similarly and also uncannily, the much reproduced deathmask – or, it has been mooted, lifemask – that is still widely claimed to be Kleist's,[25] is unlikely to be his, not least because he shot himself through the head and then had his jaw forcibly opened with a metal bar during autopsy,[26] whereas the mask bears no trace of any corresponding injuries. Nor do the protocols of his well-chronicled death, including the official statements recorded by Hoffiskal Felgentreu, make any mention of a mask having being made. And the timeline between discovery of the bodies, autopsy and interment offer little clue as to when a cast might have been taken. However, it is easy to see the fascination. A death mask, like a photograph, is, according to Sontag "a trace, something directly stencilled off the real,"[27] and therefore despite everything seems actually to give us Kleist rather than just represent him. Not only that, but this mask, so loosely but insistently associated with the author, records the moment of death, which in Kleist's case was the moment of his apotheosis from misunderstood, unsuccessful, friendless genius (or so his self-stylisation) to canonical author. However, even at this crucial point, just before burial – the moment the living and unsuccessful Kleist transforms into the prematurely and shockingly dead and hence fêted and lamented great author – his corpse, it seems, was intent upon giving us the slip.[28] As the negative impression of

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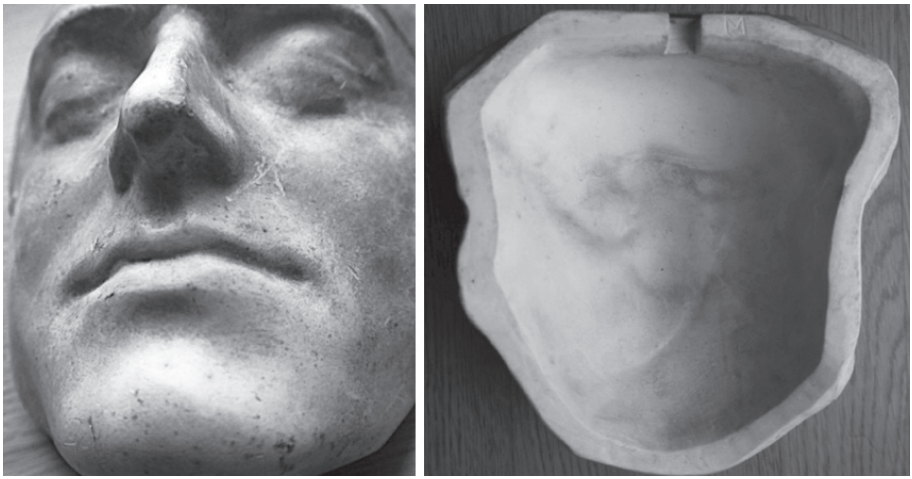
relationship to the definitive Berlin / Brandenburg edition (*BKA*), Heinrich von Kleist: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Ed. by Helmut Sembdner. 2 vols. Munich: dtv, 2001 will be cited instead as *WB*. The indispensable *BKA,* edited by Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle, will also be cited where omissions in the other editions demand it.

25 The mask was found in 1921 in the Düsseldorfer Kunstakademie, and its discovery led to a lively debate about its authenticity. See Heinrich von Kleist 1777–1811. Leben, Werk, Wirkung, Blickpunkte. Katalog der Dauerausstellung des Kleist-Museums. Ed. by Wolfgang Barthel, Hans-Jochen Marquardt, Barbara Wilk-Mincu. Frankfurt a. d. Oder: Kleist-Gedenk- und Forschungsstätte, 2000, p. 263.

26 Autopsy report of Dr. Sternemann and forensic surgeon Greif, 11 December 1811. In: Sembdner: Lebensspuren, p. 472.

27 Susan Sontag: On Photography. Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1978, p. 154.

28 Questions about authenticity of the death mask had already been raised in the early part of the twentieth century. See, for example, Hans Gruhle: Über die sogenannte Totenmaske Kleists and Ernst Benkard: Die sogenannte Totenmaske H. v. Kleists (mit 1 Tafel). In: Schriften der Kleist-Gesellschaft 9–10 (1927–28), p. 149–53 and p. 154–61. It has been claimed, amongst other things, that this is not a death mask at all, but rather a life mask taken in 1810. See, for example, Hans Helmut Jansen, Rosemarie Jansen: Tod und Maske. In: Hans Helmut Jansen (ed.): Der Tod in Dichtung, Philosophie und Kunst. Darmstadt: Steinkopff, 1978, p. 37–56, here p. 48. An alternative version suggests it may be a real death mask, but one belonging to someone else. See Robert Helbling: The Major Works of Heinrich von Kleist. New York: New Directions, 1975, p. 3.



Front and reverse, polished plaster copy of death or life mask of "Heinrich von Kleist" by Gebrüder Micheli, Berlin, circa 1900. A copy of the copy can be seen in UCC's German Department.

a corpse's face, the death mask doubly negates presence, while appearing to fix it in an act of immortalisation. And how re-doubly vacuous is a death mask that is not even one's own?

Yet while this particular empty shell seems thrice-over to have been vacated by our elusive Kleist, the mask, the *πρόσωπον* (*prosopon*), is also the very mechanism by which we can conjure the presence of the departed. The Greek theatre mask inspired a rhetorical device whereby the voiceless can speak: *prosopopeia* (literally 'face making'), the trope of giving voice to unspeaking things or to imaginary or absent speakers. Focusing on *prosopopeia's* absent speaker rather than on personification, Paul de Man defines it more specifically as a "voice-from-beyond-the-grave,"[29] as an effect that allows the dead to seem to speak to us. In de Man's version – which arguably confuses *eidolopeia* and *prosopopeia* – the simple *prosopon* is no longer just a mask or face, but a death mask, literally giving a mouth and therefore speech organs – albeit closed – to the deceased; it makes a face from which the posthumous voice can once again emerge. However, as de Man notes, there is a threat implicit in this kind of mask and the *prosopopeia* (or *eidolopeia*) it allows: "the latent threat that inhabits *prosopopeia* […] [is] that by making the dead speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, […] the living are struck dumb."[30] This figure has "a sinister connotation that is not only

[29] Paul de Man: The Rhetoric of Romanticism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, p.77.

[30] De Man: The Rhetoric of Romanticism, p.78.

the prefiguration of one's own mortality but our actual entry into the frozen world of the dead."[31] According to de Man's scheme, if Kleist seems to arise from the dead and speak through the death-mask, we should be rendered mute by this terrifying *prosopopeia*. However, if anything, posthumously Kleist has brought forth a seemingly inexhaustible torrent of words from the living, both about himself and his corpus of texts. Perhaps this is possible precisely because this is *not* his mask.

Arrivals

> daß er hoch jauchzend das Haupt
> Dränge durchs Grab, wenn die Posaune ihm ruft.
> (*Die Familie Schroffenstein* IV.3: 3–4)

Many interpretations of Kleist begin with the now stock if still much debated classification of Kleist as a modern or postmodern author *avant la lettre*, as someone who came before his time, precocious, visionary even, and who has only recently been properly recognized, having at last met up with his proper time in an ever-advancing present. This is also how he saw or styled himself, famously describing himself in a letter to Goethe as writing for a future and theatre that had not yet arrived. Perhaps spitefully, Goethe agreed with him, responding that such self-styled poets of the future dismayed him:

> [E]rlauben Sie mir zu sagen […] daß es mich immer betrübt und bekümmert, wenn ich junge Männer von Geist und Talent sehe, die auf ein Theater warten, welches da kommen soll. Ein Jude, der auf den Messias, ein Christ der aufs neue Jerusalem, und ein Portugise [sic] der auf den Don Sebastian wartet, machen mir kein größeres Misbehagen.[32]

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31 De Man: The Rhetoric of Romanticism, p.78.

32 Goethe had written to Kleist on 1 February 1808, acknowledging receipt of his letter and the first issue of Kleist's literary journal "Phöbus" with its "Penthesilea" fragment, of which he said: "Mit der Penthesilea kann ich mich noch nicht befreunden. Sie ist aus einem so wunderbaren Geschlecht und bewegt sich in einer so fremden Region, daß ich mir Zeit nehmen muß mich in beyde zu finden." *SWB* II, p. 899. In an equally spiteful rejoinder to this rejection and to Goethe's catastrophic Weimar staging of "Der zerbrochne Krug" in March 1808, Kleist used the sixth issue of the "Phöbus" journal of June 1808 to comment on the curious precocity that characterized Goethe's own (private) life: "Das frühreife Genie. Nun, das nenn' ich ein frühgereiftes Talent doch! Bei seiner Eltern Hochzeit bereits hat er den Carmen gemacht." *SWB* II, p. 496. This was a thinly veiled reference to the open secret that Goethe had just two years before, and seventeen years after the birth of their son, finally married Christiane Vulpius. We can imagine Goethe's reaction – his friendship with Herder had ended because of a similarly snide remark: "Am Ende ist mir aber doch Dein natürlicher Sohn lieber als Deine 'Natürliche Tochter.'" Quoted in Werner Völker: Der Sohn August von Goethe. Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1992, p. 108.

In this passage Goethe takes Kleist's declaration of his anachronism ("so muß ich doch in diesem Fall auf die Zukunft hinaussehen"),[33] and refashions it into an image of pointless messianic longing, in which Kleist, like the Jew, Christian and Portuguese, is waiting for some unlikely redemptive event. Goethe's reworking of the idea, although slight, is important in its suggestion that Kleist is a mere forerunner, a harbinger, a hopeful and naïve sentinel at best, keeping watch for the arrival of some true Messiah. He is cast as a progone (to coin an antonym for epigone), but not in any complimentary sense. Moreover, his waiting is, Goethe continues, completely unnecessary in the field of theatre, because Calderón is already there. Annulling Kleist's claim on the future (and possibly calming his own fears in this regard, including fear of his future eclipse by Kleist),[34] he wilfully misrepresents the nature of the futurity to which Kleist had referred. But Kleist is not preparing the way for another, as Goethe suggested; he is anticipating his own arrival, his *Parousia* or ephiphanic manifestation.[35] He was, he admitted to the publisher Cotta in that *annus horribilis* of 1808, not a success in his own time, describing himself as "ein Schriftsteller […], den die Zeit nicht tragen kann."[36] But, taking these words in another way: time appears to bear him all too well.

The twentieth century generally seems to have borne him particularly well. While "[m]anche Generationen […], namentlich im 19. Jahrhundert, an Kleist vorbeigegangen [sind], ohne von ihm sonderlich berührt zu werden,"[37] from the early 1900s on, his work began to resonate with other artists, writers and with critical readers in a particularly intense way, famously finding favour with the likes of Rilke, Kafka, Thomas Mann, Döblin, Ionesco, Walser, and Wulf to mention just a few, and inspiring seemingly endless acts of reception and adaptation. That century's new-found and insatiable appetite for him had a lot do with access. In 1867, copyright had run out,[38] inaugurating an age of affordable and industrially produced

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33 *SWB* II, p. 897.

34 As Nietzsche pithily put it in 1873: "Goethe über Kleist: fürchtet sich." In: Sembdner: Nachruhm, p. 317.

35 Certainly in the case of "Penthesila" which was the subject of Kleist's exchange with Goethe, that arrival is apparently still outstanding. At the time of its writing, Adam Müller, Kleist's some-time friend and collaborator, called it a victory for the future. See below. It has remained *en train* ever since, presenting a constant "Herausforderung für das heutige Theater" in Dirk Grathoff's words. Quoted in William C. Reeve: Kleist on Stage 1804–1987. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993, p. 111.

36 Heinrich von Kleist: Sämtliche Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. 2. Ed. Vol. IV. Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 2011, 418.

37 Wieland Schmidt: Vorwort. In: Helmut Arntzen et al. (eds): Die Gegenwärtigkeit Kleists. Reden zum Gedenkjahr 1977 im Schloß Charlottenburg zu Berlin. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1980, p. 7.

38 1867 was dubbed the "Klassikerjahr" because the copyright and right of publication for works by authors who had died before 9 November 1837 ran out. This broke the effective

Klassikerausgaben, usually one-volume selections of works, the presence and proliferation of which is a "wesentliches Zeugnis der bürgerlichen Kleistrezeption."[39] But it was the publication in 1904–5 of Erich Schmidt's edition of the full collected works and letters in the *Meyers Klassikerausgaben* series that was a real landmark, making a new era and kind of interaction with Kleist's *oeuvre* possible. As Fouquet-Plümacher points out, the Schmidt edition was unique inasmuch as it was "vollständig, nicht nur mit den Dramen und Erzählungen, sondern mit allen Kleist-Texten und den Briefen. Umfang und Qualität (Textgenauigkeit) übertrafen weit die bisherigen Klassikerausgaben."[40] However, more than the mere availability of his works seems necessary to explain the elective affinity that brought about Kleist's arrival in art, literature and scholarship a hundred years after his death. After all, the *Klassikerjahr* had liberated all the so-called Classics, not just Kleist.

Kleist and the "Time Cult"

One explanation of his apparent arrival a century later is that he has what has been described as his "filmischer Schreibstil."[41] As early as 1919, we have evidence of a planned film of his *Erdbeben in Chili*, and in the 1920s *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* was allegedly filmed, although no copy has ever been found,[42] and the filming of *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* had to be broken off in 1925 due to the sudden death of the director Arthur von Gerlach.[43] However, an adaptation of *Die Marquise von O…* directed by Paul Legband "unter Benutzung Heinrich v. Kleistischer Motive" was successfully completed and released in 1920.[44] Of course, many early films were adaptations of literary classics. Nevertheless, the claim that there is something inherently cinematic about Kleist has been made of his work several times and warrants further scrutiny. Leni Riefenstahl, for example, famously wanted to film *Penthesilea* upon her first encounter with it in the mid-1920s, convinced not only that she and the eponymous heroine were kindred spirits and that there had been

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monopoly that Cotta had enjoyed, and brought about a deluge of new editions including the relatively cheap Klassiker editions. This 'freeing of the Classics' meant that for the first time, large swathes of the population could encounter these works more easily.

39 Doris Fouquet-Plümacher: Kleist auf dem Büchermarkt. Klassikerausgaben für das Bürgertum. Hildesheim: Olms, 2014, p. 9.

40 Fouquet-Plümacher: Kleist auf dem Büchermarkt, p. 158.

41 Matthias Hurst: Erzählsituationen in Literatur und Film. Ein Modell zur vergleichenden Analyse von literarischen Texten und filmischen Adaptationen. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996, p. 86, footnote 8.

42 Klaus Kanzog (ed.): Erzählstrukturen – Filmstrukturen. Erzählungen Heinrich von Kleists und ihre filmische Realisation. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1981, p. 171.

43 Kanzog: Erzählstrukturen, p. 172.

44 Kanzog: Erzählstrukturen, p. 150.

some "transmigration of souls" between them,[45] but that the play "had been written for the screen and not for the stage," and that "Kleist was merely working under the limitations of his times."[46] But its futurity survived this planned instantiation intact: the film was never made, although a full screenplay does exist in her archive.[47] Ironically, Gottfried Benn claimed to the contrary that Kleist's *Penthesilea* would not have met with a warm welcome from the Nazis at all, writing in a letter from May 1936:

> Ich dachte neulich, was geschähe, wenn heute die Penthesilea erschiene. Eine Frau, die einen Mann liebt, Achill, ihn tötet und mit den Zähnen zerreißt! Zerfleischt! Sind wir denn Hunde, nein wir sind Germanen! Perverser Adeliger wagt seine vertierte Brunst Germanenfrauen vorzusetzen! Degenerierte Offiziers- und Junkerkaste besudelt mit schmutzigsten Orgasmen keusches deutsches Heldenweib! U.s.w. Kurz: Kleist lebte nicht lange.[48]

But this is to miss Riefenstahl's point. Gabriele Brandstetter too notices this strangely cinematic quality in her analysis of Meroe's famous narration of Penthesilea's attack on Achilles, "ihr Bericht evoziert geradezu filmisch, wie in Nahaufnahme, jene Szene der Zerreißung Achills."[49]

Riefenstahl was not the only film-maker to see a proto-filmic precocity in Kleist's work; 40 years later Éric Rohmer would claim more or less the same thing, describing Kleist's *Marquise von O....* as "ein echtes 'Drehbuch' […] auf das sich die Regiearbeit ohne Vermittlung einer sogenannten 'Bearbeitung' direkt stützen kann."[50] Of course, his claims notwithstanding, Rohmer's film finds itself having to make several interventions, if only because the camera fixes what a literary text may leave unfixed and obscure: "[w]hereas the dash in the novella at first leaves the reader clueless as to its meaning, the conventions of cinematic codes make explicit the point that a forbidden sexual act ensues."[51] However, we can forgive Rohmer's blind spot. It is understandable that readers in an age of cinema should suffer from this parallax and see the ghost of film in everything. But Rohmer is not altogether wrong either: the age of film is an important age for posthumous Kleist – screen has a unique relationship with the spectral and therefore with time. It offers us the

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45 Renata Berg-Pan: Leni Riefenstahl. Boston: Twayne, 1980, p. 183.

46 David Hinton: The Films of Leni Riefenstahl. Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000, p. 85.

47 Berg-Pan: Leni Riefenstahl, p. 183.

48 Gottfried Benn, cited in Sembdner: Nachruhm. Munich: dtv, 1997, p. 560.

49 Gabriele Brandstetter: "Eine Tragödie von der Brust heruntergehustet". Darstellung von Katharsis in Kleists *Penthesilea*. In: Tim Mehigan (ed.): Heinrich von Kleist und die Aufklärung. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2000, p. 186–210, here p. 191.

50 Quoted in Mary Rhiel: The Author-Function as Security in Rohmer's *Die Marquise von O...* In: The German Quarterly 64/1 (1991), p. 6–16, here p. 6.

51 Rhiel: The Author-Function, p. 11.

presence of absences, shadows of what is no longer there, projected insubstantially and fleetingly in darkened rooms. As a medium able to conjure up the past, it has the quality of a spirit medium; it is able to transect and disrupt and disjoint conventional chronology. For this reason, Derrida speaks of "the thoroughly spectral structure of the cinematic image." For Derrida, the "screening session" is always a kind of "séance" at which "ghosts appear and speak."[52] It is perhaps because of the transtemporal quality of Kleist's own body of work (his belated literary rebirth) that the *time-image*, to appropriate Deleuze's term for post-war cinema, seems to offer a particularly good fit for him. Klaus Kanzog's 1981 study of Kleist's literature on film suggests as much: noting the proliferation of Kleist films in the 1970s, he proposes that Kleist's success on screen is because "Kleistische Erzählstrukturen [sich] als geschichtsresistent erwiesen haben und […] in die Gegenwart transformiert werden konnten."[53] In other words, it is the relationship to time (a resistance to history and readiness for the present) that seems to be the crucial factor in Kleist's apparent anticipation of film. And yet the screenwriter and director Berthold Viertel, writing in 1911, suggests that the screen age is merely another age that an everlasting Kleist will outwait: "Er ist ausdauernd, er kann noch das goldene Zeitalter der Operette zu Ende warten. Und sollte nachher das Zeitalter des Kinos kommen – Kleist hat Geduld."[54] For Viertel, his work remains in a state of constant anticipation that will meet each coming age, including that of cinema, and, with interminable patience, out-endure each one.

At various different junctures since the texts' inception then, including in the screen and digital eras, this writing of the future has appeared at last to have reached its epoch. But the idea of a belated arrival by the untimely, timeless Kleist is, amongst other things, a symptom of a specifically modern way of thinking about time which Reinhart Koselleck dates to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The new temporalization (*Verzeitlichung*) that came into being at around that time was characterized, among other things, by a sense of the unevenness of time. As a consequence of voyages of discovery and exposure to new cultures which appeared to be less advanced although existing simultaneously in time, "[f]rom the eighteenth century on, […] it was possible to formulate the postulate of acceleration; or conversely from the point of view of those left behind, the postulate of drawing level or overtaking. This fundamental experience of progress […] around 1800, is rooted in the knowledge of noncontemporaneities which exist at a chronologically

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52 Antione de Baecque et al.: Cinema and Its Ghosts. An Interview with Jacques Derrida. In: Discourse 37/1–2 (2015), p. 22–39, here p. 26–27.

53 Kanzog: Erzählstrukturen, p. 9.

54 Berthold Viertel: Kleist der Überlebende. In: Der Merkur, 1911. In: Sembdner: Nachruhm, p. 348.

uniform time."[55] With this temporal shift, time becomes an on-going modern preoccupation – we find ourselves in what Wyndham Lewis called the period of the "time cult," which "asks us to see everything *sub specie temporis*."[56] Our sense of Kleist's untimeliness, his *Aktualität* or contemporaneity, his futurity, his timelessness, or transtemporal quality, is inevitably due in part to a kind of temporal parallax that is caused by our position inside the "time cult." Nevertheless, these texts were also written in and are expressions of the "time cult" and therefore have a modern time-quality in their own right; they also share in that new temporal sensitivity that invites time-tormented modernity to feel a certain kinship with them. It is a common relationship with time that allows Kleist to resonate with "the exasperated time-sense of the contemporary man of the industrial age."[57] Moreover, from our position within the "time cult," we, like Viertel, cannot envisage that these texts might ever run out of time, nor conceive of a future in which they might lose their resonance. Trying to conceive of such a Kleist-less future in his 2006 Kleist prize acceptance speech, Daniel Kehlmann suggested that "eine Epoche, der Kleist nichts mehr zu sagen hätte, müsste entweder dem unglücklichen Bewusstsein, dem Unbehagen an Entfremdung und Spaltung, in die Erleuchtung entwachsen oder aber zurückgefallen sein in die Barbarei einer nur mehr dem Konsum und der Unterhaltungskunst überantworteten Stumpfheit."[58]

In this version of the oft-told story of Kleist's precocity, Kleist's writing has both arrived many times over, but, as Viertel foresaw, still not yet finally, not because the hopelessly utopian or dystopian conditions imagined by Kehlmann do not yet prevail, but because his is a literary gesture that remains determinedly and imperishably of the future. Its futurity is an inbuilt orientation or a trajectory, a pathway, a movement (as *kairos* was imagined in the ancient world to be: an arrow shot from the bow)[59] that cannot be consummated by any single moment of arrival.

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55 Reinhart Koselleck: Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time. Translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

56 Wyndham Lewis: Time and Western Man. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957, p. xv.

57 Lewis: Time and Western Man, p. 84.

58 Günter Blamberger: Vom guten Ton. Rede zur Verleihung des Kleist-Preises an Max Goldt am 23. November 2008 in Berlin. In: Kleist-Jahrbuch (2008–9), p. 25–29, here p. 28.

59 In ancient Greek, there were two different words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. Heidegger translates them as Zeit (*chronos*) and Augenblick (*kairos*) respectively. *Chronos*, loosely speaking, refers to clock time, measurable, quantative, absolute, while *kairos* is time as experienced, the moment. While the etymological roots of *chronos* are unclear, *kairos* has a joint derivation. On the one hand "*kairos* denotes the moment in which an arrow may be fired with sufficient force to penetrate the target. The secondary root comes from the craft of weaving: here, *kairos* denotes the moment in which the shuttle could be passed through the threads on the loom." Hunter Stephenson: Forecasting Opportunity. Kairos, Production, and Writing. Lanham MD: University Press of America, 2005, p. 4. Clearly the passage of the shuttle and the flight of the arrow are similar in terms of

Its *Wanderlust* (if we use this term to express the opposite of backwards-glancing, retrospective nostalgia, and to indicate instead a compulsion to stray forth from the original *nostos*) is insatiable. In other words, he is read here as the very articulation of posterity, designed to arise from his grave to arrive time and time again, but never ultimately. While his works may be perceived by each passing generation of reader, adaptor, translator, as being of the moment, fresh, vital, uncannily undead even, it is in reality we who have arrived at Kleist, we who are fixed in time, while the undead phenomenon Kleist is still passing, moving on beyond us.

The Programmatic Letters

Already in his so-called 'pre-literary' phase, when he was experimenting artistically in letters and journal entries, in preparation for his artistic future, Kleist had conceived a writing that was to be deciphered from an uncertain and ever-receding point in that future. In a passage from one of the many cryptic letters written in autumn 1800 – sent during the mysterious Würzburg journey he undertook with his close friend Ludwig von Brockes – he explains to his fiancée why he keeps writing and at such great length and in so much detail when he is prepared to reveal so little of his (allegedly) top-secret mission, and when he is so adamant about the importance of revealing nothing. Why write so much and so often when his texts have to be filled with necessary omissions:

> Noch einen Gedanken – –. Warum, wirst Du sagen, warum spreche ich so geheimnißreiche Gedanken halb aus, die ich doch nicht ganz sagen will? Warum rede ich von Dingen, die Du nicht verstehn kannst u. sollst? Liebes Mädchen, ich will es Dir sagen. Wenn ich so etwas schreibe, so denke ich mich immer zwei Monate älter. Wenn wir dann einmal, in der Gartenlaube, einsam, diese Briefe durchblättern werden, und ich Dir solche dunkeln Äußerungen erklären werde, und Du mit dem Ausruf des Erstaunens: ja so, so war das gemeint – – Adieu. Der Postillion bläst.[60]

These enigmatic and programmatic letters from the so-called Würzburg period date from a time of radical change in Kleist's life: within a period of less than two years he had quit the army to his family's dismay and returned home to Frankfurt an der Oder where he began to study and got engaged, but then almost immediately left the university and his fiancée to travel with his close friend Brockes and without any discernible goal. The letters from this journey which took most of 1800, and the purpose of which remains unknown to this day, engage in a prolonged game of

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their metaphorical thrust. However, of the two, it is the image of time's arrow that has endured. The arrow itself, the *βέλος*, from which we get the word velocity, is also, crucially, a weapon.

60 Letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge, 5 September 1800. *SWB* II, p. 620.

reveal and conceal, always on the one hand emphasizing the secrecy of the voyage and deadly importance of the unmentionable undertaking, while on the other, unable to repress the writerly desire, simultaneously painting a surprisingly detailed and lively picture of the self-same journey and imagining future scenarios in which the journey is looked back on and understood in full. This sustained and delicately balanced tension suggests that, whatever the real purpose of the trip, whether just escape from Wilhelmine, university and family expectations, or medical, or espionage, Kleist delighted in having the opportunity to tell a story so suggestively and so partially that it never quite arrives. He takes obvious pleasure in the gesture of simultaneously promising and withholding, which he repeats in a great deal of the correspondence from this time both to Wilhelmine von Zenge and to his half-sister Ulrike.[61] And while he promises the only slightly postponed arrival of the as yet withheld truth, of course, in the end, it never arrives at all. He and Wilhelmine would never meet in the bower for the awaited moment of denouement;[62] nor will

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61 It should be noted that, for all its gaps and concealment, the correspondence with Wilhelmine has been credited with being some of the most revelatory material about Kleist that exists. Paul Hoffmann, writing in the early part of the twentieth century, claims that without it, we would have little insight into Kleist's inner life. "Ohne diese wüssten wir über die Zeit, in der er aus dunklem Fühlen und triebkräftigem Ahnen zu immer hellerer Erkenntnis seiner Bestimmung sich hindurchrang, kaum etwas. Der schriftliche Verkehr mit Ulrike könnte eine Lücke an dieser Stelle niemals ausfüllen. Die Art, wie Ulrike, durch die Geschwister und sonstige Verwandte voreingenommen, sich zu ihrem Bruder verhielt, war […] wenig geeignet, den von Natur schon verschlossenen, schweigsamen Mann zu rückhaltlosem Vertrauen, zu offener Aussprache der innersten Gedanken zu bewegen." Paul Hoffmann: Wilhelmine von Zenge und Heinrich von Kleist. In: The Journal of English and Germanic Philology 7/3 (1908), p. 99–118, here p. 99.

62 He would, however, return to the arbour in another sense. He comes back to it in his poem "Die beiden Tauben" which he wrote for her upon their reacquaintance in Königsberg during his 1805–6 stay, and which is a thinly-veiled account of their relationship in parable form, taking its plot from La Fontaine's fable of the same name. A male dove insists upon leaving his partner dove in order to travel, promising to return soon: "Ich kehre wieder, Liebchen, um ein Kleines, / Jedwedes Abentheuer, Zug vor Zug, / Das mir begegnete, dir mitzutheilen. / Es wird dich unterhalten, glaube mir! / Ach, wer nichts sieht, kann wenig auch erzählen. / Hier, wird es heißen, war ich; dies erlebt' ich; / Dort auch hat mich die Reise hingeführt; / Und du, im süßen Wahnsinn der Gedanken, / Ein Zeuge dessen wähnen wirst du dich." The male dove's promise of return is a slightly transposed version of Kleist's letter of promised revelation. In the fable, however, the dove in the end does return to the loved-one, unlike Kleist. The poet in the final strophe reveals that he too loved once: "Ich auch, das Herz einst eures Dichters, liebte: / Ich hätte nicht um Rom und seine Tempel, / Nicht um des Firmamentes Prachtgebäude / Des lieben Mädchens Laube hingetauscht!" *SWB* II, p, 490f. The "dear girl's arbour," as Ralph Manheim translates this phrase, deliberately suggestively, and to which Kleist returns here in poetry is not, however, the one in which he promised to provide future explanation for his Würzburg journey. Joachim Maass: Kleist. A Biography. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1983, p. 104.

his texts ever arrive at their future appointment with some final reader. This gesture of promise and withheld fulfilment which was the gesture of his engagement and of his correspondence from the Würzburg journey – a game of cat and mouse with the reader – is, it should be emphasized, just one explanation of his seeming future-proofness.

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