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Mistaken Identity as Gay Science

Kleist's Sister in an Article of Her Own

Queering the Scholar

It seems necessary that an article focusing on identity begin with an autobiographical note, not as vanity exercise, but rather as something demanded by the Queer lens of identity-scholarship. I came to this decades-old research project 'Kleist' through my then Head of Department, who told me in 1996 to buy Kleist's collected works because I would be beginning a doctorate on him. I have started to suspect for compelling reasons – including her insistence that I had been brought up in an Irish-speaking household (I hadn't) – that she mistook me for someone else, and that my subsequent career in literary scholarship began with a case of mistaken identity. Nevertheless, I duly purchased a discounted three-volume edition, which, it later transpired, was missing several crucial pages. Mistake upon mistake. When the identity of the scholar is in doubt, how can the subject of her scholarship not also be undermined?

By what method might such foundational wrongs be put right? What corrective device might be employed in the case of the mistaken scholar reading or misreading or not reading at all several crucial pages of Kleist? This question poses itself urgently as I sit in front of each new cohort of students to teach my Kleist module. How can I make him and myself right for them? It poses itself *a fortiori* when peer reviewers comment that the “major problem of the article is that it raises a number of potentially very interesting issues but never actually stops to explore any of them in sufficient depth to develop a compelling argument”, also remarking on a “self-conscious style in which aesthetic form seems to matter more than what is being actually argued.” Not the description of a proper Kleist scholar.

Where scholarly identity in crisis is foregrounded in this way, we find ourselves in the domain of Queer Theory, which, according to Eve Sedgwick:

hinges [...] radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which 'Queer' can signify only when attached to the first person. One possible corollary: that what it takes – all it takes – to make the description 'Queer' a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person.¹

¹ Eve Sedgwick: *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, p. 9.

Sedgwick's insistence on a Queer first person has interesting implications for literary criticism which has traditionally adopted a more depersonalized, anonymous third-person focalization that rejects the vagaries of the 'I' with which this study deliberately begins. This invitation to reinscribe the 'I' of the writing subject invites her to take other liberties too that a straighter approach would not. Queer here begins with a first-person transgression that changes the voice of the text and paves the way for other changes too.

Queering the Author

As Christoph Lorey and John Plews noted in *Queering the Canon* (1998), the act of Queering, though long associated with gender and sexuality, should be understood as a broader set of practices focusing on "identity-shaping elements and influences such as race, ethnicity, nationality, skin color, language, class, income bracket, legal status etc."² Interestingly, in their volume, which specifically focuses on German culture, while Kleist is cited briefly in the introduction, he is not the focus of any of the case studies, although he might be an obvious candidate for several reasons. They do refer to him and his posthumous rehabilitation in support of their claim that:

the canon is [...] a system that incorporates into its own shifting body those endeavors it initially excludes from the self-proclaimed sociocultural center. [...] [I]t seems to be the clandestine rule of the canon that the barred become the standard [...], the once excluded can become exclusive.

The list of insiders-to-outsiders they cite here includes Hölderlin, Kafka, Brecht, but also Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Lessing and the Mann brothers. In short, every "sacred cultural icon" of the German canon was

at some point in time, banned, burned, lost, suppressed or destroyed, considered blasphemous or heretical, politically irresponsible or dangerous, morally corrupt or lewd, intellectually pompous, irrelevant, difficult, inaccessible, elitist, nonsensical, unpublishable, unpopular, unread or unperformed, written and published only in exile.³

To Lorey and Plews "Queer[ing] the canon, then, means [...] reveal[ing] how the canon [...] is inherently, fundamentally Queer [to begin with], relying, as it does,

² To this very broadly understood 'Queering' along Sedgwickian lines, however, they do add the caveat that the practice in their case "looks at how these elements relate to human sexuality". See Christoph Lorey, John Plews: "Defying Sights in German Literature and Culture: An Introduction to Queering the Canon". In: Christoph Lorey, John Plews (eds): *Queering the Canon. Defying Sights in German Literature and Culture*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998, pp. xiii–xxiv, here p. xiv.

³ Lorey, Plews: *Queering the Canon*, p. xvi.

on the very distinctions from its own posited norm”.⁴ However, they also recognize the paradox of this dialectic approach to norm and deviance which risks reducing deviance to merely that which makes the norm the norm. A true Queering of the canon cannot, as they notice, involve only describing the centre’s margins, in a hopeless quest to determine whether the inside defines the outside or vice versa. Presumably, the step that Queer scholarship of German literature had yet to take was to leave the dualism of margins and centres behind entirely; not just to shift the margins and resituate the centre, but to reject that dualism altogether, and do something else. But what?

To return to the question of identity at the heart of the matter, the practice of *identifying as* or *misidentifying as* (depending on the point of view) may hold that radical Queer potential. I mean ‘identifying as’ as that set of identity practices that takes an avowedly constructivist approach to identity in the first place. The practice of ‘identifying as’ is thereby understood as a kind of non-identitarian or anti-identitarian approach where identity no longer means the fixed quality of x in its sameness to itself ($x = x$), but rather a practice or ‘Praxis’ designed to catalyse some social change ($x = y$). Identity, including that of the Author, therefore is something to be adopted, modified or cast off, according to circumstances. In other words, the literary-critical act of Queering would involve a sort of mobilization against fixed ideas of identity, including those of the scholar and canonical writer.

In Queering Kleist, one could, of course, have recourse to what is speculated about his own ambivalent sexuality, but this seems to conflate two different Kleists: Kleist the real and biological person, whoever that was, and Kleist the authorial phenomenon and curated creation of the literary industries. There is a long tradition of scholarship focusing on the former, dating back to the 1905 discovery of his so-called homosexual letter of January 1805 to Ernst von Pfuel, which offers various permutations on Fritz Wittels’ 1954 position that while “not necessarily [...] indulging in the sexual practice of homosexuality, [he was] undoubtedly [...] a homosexual who fought his own feminine component most of his life.”⁵

Robert Tobin’s *Warm Brothers. Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe* (2000) takes issue with such approaches, considering statements of any author’s possible, probable or definite homo- or heterosexuality irrelevant. He notes that “too often, the conviction that these eighteenth-century German writers could not be gay, has resulted in the default assumption that they must have been straight.” However, he continues “a cursory examination of their lives suggests that they cannot be called ‘straight’ either.”⁶ He explicitly rejects the notorious outing of Goethe in

⁴ Lorey, Plews: *Queering the Canon*, p. xix.

⁵ Fritz Wittels: “Heinrich von Kleist – Prussian Junker and Creative Genius. A Study in Bisexuality”. In: *American Image* 11/1 (1954), pp. 11–31, here p. 21.

⁶ Robert Deam Tobin: *Warm Brothers. Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, p. ix.

Karl Pruy's 1997 biography which proclaimed "daß Goethe zu mehr als nur einem homoerotischen Lippenbekenntnis bereit war."⁷ Yet Tobin sees Queering in another sense as urgently necessary, injecting new depth into the scholarship of the 'Age of Goethe', and "restor[ing] complexity to these texts and remov[ing] the oppressive burden of canonical saintliness from them."⁸ For Tobin, Queering is a *Quer-lesen*, a truly gay science in the Nietzschean sense of against the grain of orthodoxy,⁹ or a "VerQueere Wissenschaft" as Tobin punningly calls it.¹⁰

Tobin further notes that the process of outing a canonical male German author runs the risk of further obliterating that author's relationship to the influential women in his ambit who have co-inscribed the writing. Tobin reads Pruy's claims about Goethe's sexuality as relying "on misogynist arguments to diminish the role of women in Goethe's life."¹¹ By focusing on the hetero- or homosexuality of the male author, another blind spot is created, which Tobin's version of Queer reading wants to correct. It is a different kind of gay science that he proposes. If we understand Queering to involve a deeper focus on influential women in his life, Kleist has yet to be fully Queered. While unsuccessful during his lifetime, and driven, in apparent frustration, to murder-suicide, Kleist long has been a canonical Author and favourite German literary incel from the belle époque to the present. So, if his posthumous apotheosis and canonization mean Kleist is not really, despite his long-standing characterization as a misunderstood outsider, in himself a Queer phenomenon, his probable homosexuality notwithstanding, (just as all once excluded canonical outsiders finally become canonical insiders), how can we read him truly Queerly / *quer* if not by a fuller incorporation of these women into the scholarship?

In *Saint Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography*, David Halperin, like Tobin, sees heterosexuality and its attendant normativities as operating around a central blind spot:

The crucial, empowering incoherence at the core of heterosexuality and its definition never becomes visible because heterosexuality itself is never an object of knowledge, a target of scrutiny in its own right, so much as it is the condition for the supposedly objective, disinterested knowledge of other objects.¹²

⁷ Karl Hugo Pruy: *Die Liebkosungen des Tigers. Eine erotische Goethe-Biographie mit 20 Abbildungen*. Berlin: edition q, 1997, p. 57.

⁸ Tobin: *Warm Brothers*, p. x.

⁹ Randall Halle casts Nietzsche's 'gay science' explicitly as an act of Queering: "the queer knowing that Nietzsche produces". See Randall Halle: *Queer Social Philosophy. Critical Readings from Kant to Adorno*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004, p. 176.

¹⁰ Tobin: *Warm Brothers*, p. 2.

¹¹ Tobin: *Warm Brothers*, p. ix.

¹² David M. Halperin: *Saint Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 47.

Halperin's focus on knowing and objectivity rather than on sex and gender, centres and their margins, norms and deviance, provides a helpful supplement to Tobin's declaration that the Goethe Era urgently needs a Queer re-reading. Halperin's definition understands sex as a metaphor (or a metonymy) for being, and heterosexuality as metaphor for knowing (riffing on the double sense of 'to know'). Queering would therefore involve moving beyond a supposedly objective, disinterested knowledge with all the blind spots that implies. So, Queering Kleist in Halperin's sense necessitates departing from objective and disinterested scholarship to become personal and involved, and all the other things straight scholarship (*eine unfröhliche Literaturwissenschaft*) eschews.¹³

Nassim Taleb's *Black Swan* (2007) offers the term "antischolar"¹⁴ to describe that subversive agent who might pursue such non-science and resist the impulse to "take what we know [...] too seriously".¹⁵ Therefore, with Taleb, let us identify in this analysis as antischolars, focusing perhaps on mis- and half-read books and their missing pages. Such figures, Taleb suggests, might "walk around with anti-résumés telling you what they have not studied or experienced."¹⁶ They might have an anti-library of unread, and perhaps even of unpurchased or unwritten books. (Or, in my case, an accidentally abridged Kleist.) Such a person would be able to resist the very human and "compulsive tendency to fill in the gaps of our understanding with the concrete objects of 'knowledge'", as one reviewer of *Black Swan* put it.¹⁷ This embrace of the unknown is not an embrace of ignorance, but rather a rejection of absolutes and recognition of knowledge's limitations. For Taleb, to focus strictly on the known and knowing entails a dangerous bias. He valorizes instead what we do not know, which in every sense is far greater than

¹³ I am grateful to Siobhán Donovan for referring me to the satirical 1993 article by Ludger Lütkehaus which uses this riff on Nietzsche's *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) as its title. In it, Lütkehaus argues, provocatively but convincingly, that the Humanities need more humour. But, sadly, he concludes, in these often too-dry disciplines from which a great deal of the joy has been scientifically removed, we find rather "statt Selbstironie Präntation; statt der bedingten Hingabe an ihre Sujets ehrfurchtsheischender Gottesdienst". Ludger Lütkehaus: "Die Unfröhliche Wissenschaft". In: *Die Zeit*, 15.10.1993, at: <https://www.zeit.de/1993/42/unfroehliche-wissenschaft2> (accessed 02.08.2022).

¹⁴ This term has the advantage of a similarity to Kleist's "antigrav" which he uses in the essay "Über das Marionettentheater" (1810) to describe the improbable, gravity-defying movements of the marionette (SWB, II, 338–345, here p. 342). In Taleb's work and this article, the term "antischolar" is used to resist too gravitarian a literary science.

¹⁵ Nassim Taleb: *Black Swan. The Impact of the Improbable*. New York: Random House, 2nd ed., 2010, p. 2.

¹⁶ Taleb: *Black Swan*, p. 1.

¹⁷ Maria Popova: "Umberto Eco's Antilibrary. Why Unread Books Are More Valuable to Our Lives than Read Ones". In: *The Marginalian*, 24.03.2020, at: <https://www.themarginalian.org/2015/03/24/umberto-eco-antilibrary/> (accessed 18.07.2022).

what is known, suggesting that antischolars proceed by “standing knowledge itself on its head.”¹⁸

So, a in Queer approach to Kleist, it is into the unknown and unknowable that we must delve. Indeed, forays into the *terra incognita* of Kleist’s biography have a long history. The purpose of the infamous and secretive Würzburg journey of 1800 is a perennial favourite. While his performative secrecy was likely just a strategy to deflect awkward questions about his absconding immediately after his engagement, generations of scholars have peered earnestly into this gap.¹⁹ Similarly the so-called lost year from summer 1803 to summer 1804 has elicited attention, albeit not to the same extent. In the 1980s, Hilda Brown and Richard Samuel attempted to reconstruct this lengthier void in Kleist’s timeline.²⁰ However, as Sembdner subsequently pointed out, there is a significant problem with their work.²¹ They go to great lengths to account for a sighting of Kleist in Paris recorded in a Spring 1804 diary entry by author and journalist Karl Bertuch. At precisely the time when Bertuch saw him in Paris, however, Kleist was supposedly bed-bound in Mainz, recovering from a nervous collapse in the care of a Dr Wedekind. Unlike the correspondence-heavy Würzburg trip, no letters from Kleist exist for this period. No messages to his sister and mainstay Ulrike were sent from his sickbed, where he, as he later reports in a letter of 29 July 1804 to Henriette von Schlieben: “krank niedersank, und nahe an fünf Monaten abwechselnd das Bett oder das Zimmer gehütet [hat]”.²² Ulrike, who rushed to his side on every possible occasion, was exceptionally not with him. What kept her away, we do not know. In any case, it seems likelier to Sembdner that there was another, second Kleist in Paris in this period, than that Heinrich was secretly in Paris while claiming to be in Mainz, or that, as Brown and

¹⁸ Taleb: *Black Swan*, p. 1.

¹⁹ In 1899, Max Morris was already interrogating Kleist’s Würzburg trip, proffering a first medical reading, and noting several earlier attempts to discern its purpose, from August Koberstein’s 1860 *Kleists Briefe an seine Schwester*, proposing a political motive, to Raymond Bonafous’ *Henri de Kleist* (1894) suggesting industrial espionage. See Max Morris: *Heinrich von Kleists Reise nach Würzburg*. Berlin: Conrad Skopnik, 1899, pp. 2f. Nevertheless, Blamberger’s 2011 biography modestly refers to a mere decades-old obsession: “[D]ie Forschung [sucht] seit Jahrzehnten ebenso unermüdlich wie vergeblich Kleists Reiselust eine Gerichtetheit zu unterstellen.” Günter Blamberger: *Heinrich von Kleist. Biographie*. Frankfurt a.M., Fischer 2011, p. 118.

²⁰ Hilda Brown, Richard Samuel: *Kleist’s Lost Year and the Quest for Robert Guiskard*. Leamington Spa: James Hall, 1981.

²¹ Helmut Sembdner: “Die Doppelgänger des Herrn von Kleist: Funde und Irrtümer der Kleistforschung”. In: *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 35 (1991), pp. 180–195, esp. 191.

²² Heinrich von Kleist: *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* in 2 vols, ed. by Helmut Sembdner, vol. 2. Munich: dtv, 2nd ed., 2001, p. 745. Quotations from this edition hereafter referenced in the text in brackets as SWB, vol., page no.



Fig. 1: *Ulrike disguised as Heinrich von Kleist* by R. MagShamhráin ©

Samuel aver, his presence in Paris has been kept secret by a “conspiracy of silence”.²³ Of their undoubtedly thorough work, Sembdner notes dismissively that “[n]icht zum erstmal ist [...] die Kleistforschung, durch die Namensgleichheit eines Doppelgängers irreführt, einer falschen Fährte nachgegangen.”²⁴ For indeed, there were several Kleists in Europe simultaneously, not least Kleist’s sister, the strikingly similar-looking Ulrike.²⁵

Two Kleists

Convention sees Heinrich von Kleist as a single figure, an individual to whom all Kleist’s works can be attributed. But let us consider this a convenient fiction, for the author is always a plurality. Just as Nietzsche declared the ‘I’ to be a grammatical fiction,²⁶ the ‘I’ of the canon, the ‘I’ of Kleist, is a fiction too, and a recent one. So, this antischolar invites you to populate the shelves of your own anti-library with the collected works of a second Kleist, the unauthor, Ulrike von Kleist, who, if we grant historical fact any residual importance, certainly made his writing possible financially, and is indeed likely to have given him more than mere monetary support. Into the Mainz-Paris blank, where from a single Kleist, two emerge, I invite you to project her.

Astonishingly, an official biography of this remarkable female Maecenas has not yet been written, nor indeed has her patronage of her brother garnered her the literary critical attention she warrants. Born in April 1774 in Frankfurt an der Oder to the first wife of Kleist’s father, the well-endowried Caroline Luise von Wulffen, Ulrike’s mother died soon after her birth, probably from the after-effects of parturition. Caroline’s two daughters inherited their mother’s fortune, leaving them finan-

²³ Brown, Samuel: *Kleist’s Lost Year*, p. 100.

²⁴ Sembdner: “Die Doppelgänger des Herrn von Kleist, p. 191.

²⁵ One of the liberties opened up by declaring scholarship Queer is not just the insertion of the ‘I’ of the author back into the literary critical text, à la Sedgwick, but, by extension, the physical insertion of the ‘I’ of Ulrike into the iconography of the Author, Heinrich von Kleist.

²⁶ “Das ‘Subjekt’ ist ja nur eine Fiktion; es giebt das Ego gar nicht.” Friedrich Nietzsche, Fragment 9/108 (1887), *Posthumous Fragments*. In *Digital Critical Edition (eKGWB)* at: [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1887,9\[108\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1887,9[108]) (accessed 18.07.2022).

cially independent enough that a single life was thinkable for Ulrike. Heinrich, her problematic half-brother, just three years her junior, was less fortunate financially, both by birth and by action, quitting both army commission and university as well as the civil service, and failing at other projects like the *Berliner Abendblätter*. Ulrike compensated for this, spending a great deal of her fortune on him.²⁷ She not only funded his many journeys (once he left Frankfurt an der Oder for the last time, breaking off his short-lived university studies around 1800, he remained nowhere longer than two years), but often travelled with him, or to him when he got into difficulty. It was Ulrike who helped to fund his unsuccessful *Phoebus* project, a literary journal intended to launch his career, and helped secure his release from Fort de Joux when his peregrinations through war-torn Napoleonic Europe led to his arrest as a possible spy. It was she who rushed to his sick bed in Switzerland in 1802, travelling on foot through retreating armies in a period of serious unrest, the so-called *Stecklikrieg* which engulfed Switzerland after the Treaty of Lunéville. All these services to her genius brother are well-documented in his various biographies,²⁸ and yet we generally know her as a negative: only in terms of her brother's needs, the assistance she gave him, his shadow, an unperson, worthy indeed of the Queer attentions of the antischolar.

We do know Ulrike as the most frequent addressee of Kleist's letters: of the 235 that we have, 58 are to her. Hers to him, of course, are no longer extant. We know that she was his main confidante, and that he solipsistically treated her as a kind of equal, but more in the manner of a mirror than a counterpart. In one letter, he writes to and of her: "Du bist die einzige, oder überhaupt der einzige Mensch, von dem ich sagen kann, daß er mich ganz ohne ein eignes Interesse, ganz ohne eigne Absichten, kurz, daß er nur *mich selbst* liebt" (SWB, II, 625). As her presence to us is largely mediated by Kleist's attitude to her in the letters, the reader's Ulrike is reduced to an aspect of his all-consuming self-absorption. He remains the measure of her value, reinforcing our sense of her as the lesser Kleist, not just because of his characterizations in the correspondence, but because to posterity he is the genius, and she at most the shielder of that flame.

Forgotten here is the business acumen of Ulrike, who, having spent so much of her fortune on her brother's ego-projects – in a letter of 14 July 1807 he admits as

27 She was one of two women on whose purses he significantly relied. The other, Marie von Kleist, who funded him between 1806 and 1810, was a cousin by marriage. Her sense of delicacy made her claim to him that she was disbursing a stipend from Queen Luise. See Blamberger: *Heinrich von Kleist*, p. 121.

28 We can trace Ulrike's shadow existence in her brother's service through his many biographical treatments, most recently those of Rudolf Loch (2003), Jens Bisky (2007), Günter Blamberger (2011) and Gerhard Schulz (2016). However, as mentioned in this article, a fuller treatment and proper account of the achievements (direct and indirect) of Ulrike, in which she features as the "first person", to adapt Sedgwick's idea, remains a desideratum.

much, noting that without him as a financial albatross, she would have been freer (SWB, II, 786) – used the family home from 1817 as a school for young women. Twenty years later, she sold most of the house to the postal service, retaining the right to dwell on its third floor. When she died at the age of 78, she was a wealthy woman despite her brother's depredations on her purse. An enterprising woman, ideally positioned to be an educator of other young women, she had dressed as a man on several occasions in order to attend university lectures and to travel, both of which were made possible only by such disguise.²⁹ While suggesting a radical emancipated outliership, we should recall that crossdressing was not necessarily an outlandish practice. Queen Luise met the troupes of a Napoleon-vanquished Prussia in male uniform. It was a well-established practice which garnered many women access to spheres of male-only privilege such as education. In this sense, Ulrike is not as extraordinary as the outlandish terms her brother uses when he describes her in a letter to Adolfin von Werdeck, 28–29 July 1801: “Aber welchen Mißgriff hat die Natur begangen, als sie ein Wesen bildete, das weder Mann noch Weib ist, und gleichsam wie eine Amphibie zwischen zwei Gattungen schwankt?” (SWB, II, 676).

Kleist's letters are filled with well-documented reproaches about Ulrike's gender non-conformity: she was not feminine enough; she had, tragically, in his view, decided not to marry and have children (not hugely surprising, considering her mother's death), etc. I am not interested in re-covering this territory: Kleist's opinions about womanhood are known to be uninteresting and mainstream. A case in point are the excruciating thought exercises he designed for his fiancée to improve her mind, which are not just of their chauvinist times, but the writings of a crushing bore: what's more tragic, he asks her in one lesson, whether a husband predeceases his wife or vice versa?³⁰ Even the death of the eponymous Penthesilea in his 1808 drama is disappointingly conventional: that strange, one-breasted cannibalistic Amazon, though a soldier and a queen, cannot survive her lover, and promptly drops dead upon learning of his death. As Jost Hermand noted two decades ago, many readers have “[deconstructed] this tragedy and its Amazon protagonist as a product of male fantasy that affirms and promotes the patriarchal system.”³¹

²⁹ Writing to his fiancée, Wilhelmine von Zenge, on 3 June 1801, Kleist notes: “In Leipzig fand endlich Ulrike Gelegenheit zu einem Abendtheuer, und hörte verkleidet einer öffentlichen Vorlesung Plattners zu. Das geschah aber mit Vorwissen des Hofrats, indem er selbst wünschte, daß sie, Störung zu vermeiden, lieber in Mannskleidern kommen mögte, als in Weiberröcken. Alles lief glücklich ab, der Hofrat und ich, wir waren die einzigen in dem Saale, die um das Geheimniß wußten” (SWB, II, 656).

³⁰ It is worth looking at the letter of 30 May 1800 to Wilhelmine, with the appended “Verschiedene Denküben für Wilhelmine von Zenge” and to imagine oneself in the position of the recipient of such an exhaustive and exhausting document from one's absconded betrothed (SWB, II, 505–513).

³¹ Jost Hermand: “Penthesilea. Battleground of Gendered Discourses”. In: *A Companion to*

Kleist's conventional gender politics to one side, let us pursue a more interesting – and Queerer – line of thought: we know that Ulrike had access to her brother's manuscripts and that it was she who curated her brother's reputation after his scandalous murder-suicide. She was his trusted confidante with sole access to his top drawer where he kept his writings in the family home. He mentions to her their whereabouts in a letter of 27 October 1800: "Sollte Tante gern in mein Büro wöhlen, wegen der Wäsche, so sorge doch auf eine gute Art dafür, daß der obere Teil, worin die Schreibereien, *gar nicht* geöffnet werde" (SWB, II, 583). At this point a Queer, antischolarly reader might inject and suggest that Ulrike, made aware of her brother's writings, goes to his bureau, opens it, reads, and, finding the contents wanting, yet, acutely conscious of his need to be successful if she is to divest herself of her filial financial burdens, takes matters into her own hands, enterprising as she is. The antischolar in us speculates that it was he who gave her this very idea. On 12 November 1799, he had written to her about a case of forgery in which a wife (for more nefarious purposes than we are ascribing to Ulrike: namely, to frame her husband for a crime) tampered with a letter of his, changing the word *Geld* into the graphologically similar *Gift*. "Ein[e] unerhört[e], unmenschlich[e] Falschheit", as Kleist puts it (SWB, II, 499f.). Nevertheless, this is an archetypal case of a woman taking matters and a man's writing into her own hand.

We know from the short account of his life she dictated in 1828 as well as from his letters that she was more adventurous than her brother.³² We know how similar they looked from their portraits. We know of her cross-dressing. We know also of her own appetite for (posthumous) fame from that letter of 27–28 July 1801 from the siblings' Parisian journey, in which he had described her as a "Mißgriff" and "Amphibie". Let us read this lengthier account of her *quer*:

[E]s gibt wohl nichts Großes in der Welt, wozu Ulrike nicht fähig wäre, [...]. Sie ist ein Mädchen, das orthographisch schreibt und handelt, nach dem Takte spielt und denkt, ein Wesen, das von dem Weibe nichts hat, als die Hüften, und nie hat sie geföhlt, wie süß ein Händedruck ist – [...] Auffallend ist in diesem Geschöpf der Widerstreit zwischen Wille und Kraft. [...] – Mitten in einer großen Gefahr auf einem See bei *Fürstenwalde*, wo die ganze Familie im Nachen dem Sturme ausgesetzt war, und alles weinte und schrie, und selbst die Männer die Besinnung verloren, sagte sie: kommen wir doch in die Zeitungen – Mit

the Works of Heinrich von Kleist, ed. by Bernd Fisher. Rochester: Camden House, 2003, pp. 43–60, here p. 49f.

³² Anonymously published [the "mir" of the title is the sister of Kleist's fiancée Wilhelmine], the 12-page account appeared in 1903 under the title "Was mir Ulrike Kleist im Jahre 1828 in Schorin über Heinrich Kleist erzöhlte" within a longer article by Paul Hoffmann: "Ulrike von Kleist über ihren Bruder Heinrich". In: *Euphorion* 10 (1903), pp. 105–152. On the genesis of this anonymously published account, see Paul Hoffmann: "Wilhelmine von Zenge und Heinrich von Kleist". In: *The Journal of English and German Philology* 7/3 (1908), pp. 9–118, here p. 108.

Kälte und Besonnenheit geht sie jeder Gefahr entgegen [...] – Wo ein anderer überlegt, da entschließt sie sich, und wo er spricht, da handelt sie. Als wir auf der Ostsee zwischen Rügen und dem festen Lande im Sturme auf einem Bote mit Pferden und Wagen dem Untergange nahe waren, und der Schiffer schnell das Steuer verließ, die Segel zu fällen, sprang sie an seinen Platz und hielt das Ruder – Unerschütterte Ruhe scheint ihr das glücklichste Loos auf Erden. Von *Bahrden* hörte sie einst, er habe den Tod seiner geliebten Tochter am Spieltische erfahren, ohne aufzustehen. Der Mann schien ihr beneidens- und nachahmungswürdig. (SWB, II, 676f.)

While the text is predictably replete with stereotypes about men and women, another figure peeps through too from behind and despite Kleist's characterization: someone who, with quiet and calm calculus, and capable of anything, with a sense of the notoriety conferred by catastrophic ends, might spring into a man's place, might copy him. Perhaps she 'sprang [...] an Kleists Platz u. hielt die Feder'? Perhaps she thought him "nachahmungswürdig" too?

Her 1828 account describes just how intertwined their lives were, cataloguing their many journeys together, and her many acts of support and assistance, although not, importantly, during that tantalizing year-long Paris-Mainz period when he was in the care of Dr Wedekind. Here, I repeat, she, exceptionally, did not rush to his side. I invite you to imagine that she was not just elsewhere (possibly the Kleist in Paris) but otherwise engaged there too. Of her access to his private manuscripts in his linen drawer, which he had mentioned in his letter of 27 October 1800, Ulrike's dictated account says nothing either and we know little. Astonishingly few handwritten originals of his remain today: only two incomplete drama manuscripts, and nineteen poems and diary entries have survived. Not only must we consider the vast majority of the manuscripts of his dramatic, prose and journalistic work to be lost in their original form,³³ but also the vast majority of his letters are too. Of the 235 letters remaining, only 172 are originals. Into these manuscript gaps let us project our orthographically gifted Ulrike.

Of her general attitude to her brother's writing and genius, we have just one indication in the 1828 account. When appealing to the French General Clarke in Berlin to secure Kleist's release from French captivity in April 1807, she reportedly wrote that "mon frère n'est pas sans nom et sans réputation dans le monde littéraire en Allemagne, et qu'il est digne de quelque intérêt". The claim's double-negative phrasing and offhand mention of his literary talents beg to be read antiph-

³³ Attempts to restore what may have gone astray include a piece of *Amphitryon* in Kleist's hand, commissioned by me from artist and handwriting copyist Miriam Sachs, with minor emendations inspired by my decades-long reading of Kleist. See Rachel MagShamhráin: "Things You Can Do to an Author When He's Dead. Literary Prosthetics and the Example of Heinrich von Kleist". In: Bernadette Cronin, Rachel MagShamhráin, Nikolai Preuschoff (eds): *Process and Practice. Adaptation Considered as a Collaborative Art*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020, pp. 297–322, here p. 315f.

rastically. Yet perhaps this is what she thought of the writings she discovered in his top drawer, impelling her to intervene.

Put together, given the possibility that more than one Kleist was travelling Europe in this period, and supported by the similarity in the siblings' appearances, Ulrike's tendency to take over, her appetite for travel and adventure that outpaced her brother's, her cross-dressing, her orthographic correctness, her enterprising nature, his wilfulness, restlessness, inability to stick at anything, the absence of original manuscripts, her access to the bureau of papers, her interventions into every mishap that befalls him, and her curious absence from his Mainz bedside when a second Heinrich appeared in Paris – why might we not assume that she may occasionally have replaced him on the page, perhaps using the Paris sabbatical to write for and as him?

Who would be better placed to do this? Perhaps her hand can be discerned in the many instances of gendered confusion in Kleist's oeuvre (not just in *Penthesilea* in which a manly Amazon queen devours an emasculated Achilles, but throughout his works).³⁴ The gaps in Kleist's biography and extant manuscripts seduce one into such speculations: might Kleist, like Shakespeare, have had a “wonderfully gifted sister” who, unable to have a writing career of her own, fed him his?³⁵ Perhaps, like Woolf's Judith Shakespeare, her “genius was for fiction and [she] lusted to feed abundantly upon the lives of men and women and the study of their ways”.³⁶ Like Judith she was “oddly like [her brother] the poet in her face”, but unlike Judith she doesn't end up pregnant and dead having “killed herself one winter's night”.³⁷ Perhaps it did not stop at similarity of face. Perhaps, in Kleist's coat and boots, she took his place, even at the inkwell.

This begs a final question: (how) does such Queer speculation advance our understanding of the texts? In the 2020 “reclaim her name” campaign, the Women's Prize for Fiction republished the works of 25 women who had written under male pseudonyms, including Mary Ann Evans' *Middlemarch*. An important renaming initiative, but what of all those women whose authorship or co-authorship or other collaboration with well-known male authors must remain forever unknown, the anonymous female friends, the wives, the sisters, the mothers, the suggesters of plots, the proof-readers? We can assume that most of these disguised presences are lost to history.

³⁴ As Pahl has pointed out, there are many less obvious instances, which she carefully brings out in her readings, including an interpretation of “Katie and Kunigunde, the rivals for the knight's attention in *Katie of Heilbronn*, as lesbian lovers”. See Katrin Pahl: *Sex Changes with Kleist*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019, p. 17.

³⁵ Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press, 1935, p. 70.

³⁶ Woolf: *A Room of One's Own*, p. 72.

³⁷ Woolf: *A Room of One's Own*, p. 73.

If Barthes' Author is dead, and it follows from that that the name "Kleist" is but a convention holding together in one convenient person-shaped vessel the multiple intertextual influences that comprise his *œuvre*, and the name "Kleist" is just the moment of arrival and cohesion that occurs in the reader – if that Author is dead, then long live the author's sister. For surely nothing sounds more like our amphibian Ulrike than Katrin Pahl's description of Kleist: "his rage against identities [...] betrays a wound or trauma".³⁸ Perhaps Pahl needed to go further, and to ask whose wound or trauma this is. Whose is the real gap?

If we re-read a line such as *Penthesilea's* "Wie Manche, die am Hals des Freundes hängt, | Sagt wohl das Wort: sie lieb' ihn, o so sehr, | Daß sie vor Liebe gleich ihn essen könnte; | Und hinterher, das Wort beprüft, die Närrinn!" (SWB, I, 426) as having come from the pen of a woman, how much changes in their meaning. How infinitely richer it would be. What act of incorporation and replacement was Ulrike imagining, when she contrived for Penthesilea to eat Achilles? Whose life did she want to consume? "Beyond words she could eat him up for love."

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³⁸ Pahl: *Sex Changes*, p. 12.