

# Romantic Subjectivity and Kleist's *Prince of Homburg*

Detlev Steffen

Kleist criticism begins with an essay which Heinrich Gustav Hotho published in 1827 in the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*.<sup>1</sup> The history of Kleist criticism, it appears, is peculiar in that it advances interpretations of the life and works of Kleist all of which fall within the categories of Hotho's essay without, however, fully realizing its logic. The interpretations which dominate Kleist criticism offer each but a partial view of the Kleistian world. The difficulties present in Kleist criticism, however, are but an instance of the difficulties presented by studies in Romanticism. In his recent view of the history of studies in Romanticism Richard Brinkmann describes the course of scholarship as inconsistent, arbitrary, confused and contradictory. Rather than calling for new interpretations, he argues, attempts ought to be made to comprehend the contradictions which seem to be irreconcilable.<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to understand why the history of studies in Romanticism should prove to be unsatisfactory. For the subject which Brinkmann reviews is but one — romantic subjectivism, or "subjectivity"<sup>3</sup>. If the judgements on Romanticism are various and varying, if there is confusion and contradiction, it is because scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries are affected by this romantic subjectivism. A post-romantic subjectivity, it appears, reflects itself in ever new forms in its interpretations of romantic subjectivism. While changes in the "political situation" may help to explain the "contradictions, which seem to be irreconcilable"<sup>4</sup>, as Brinkmann suggests, the spirit that informs politicians and scholars alike is the spirit of subjectivism. Brinkmann's review of scholars and

---

1. Berlin 1827, 685-724. — A brief summary, including a superficial judgement on Hotho's argument, can be found in H. J. Kreutzer, "Die dichterische Entwicklung Heinrichs von Kleist", *Philologische Studien und Quellen*, 41 (1968), p. 12-14.

2. Richard Brinkmann, "Romantik als Herausforderung. Zu ihrer wissenschaftsgeschichtlichen Rezeption", *Romantik in Deutschland*, Sonderband der DVj, (1978), p. 10.

3. l.c., p. 17ff.

4. l.c., p. 10.

philosophers of the last two centuries does not only offer a survey of modern subjectivity — in the context, of course, of studies in Romanticism — it also becomes evident that contradictions in the course of scholarship are not accidental. Rather, the contradictions — not to mention confusion and inconsistencies — reflect an opposition present within romantic subjectivism itself.

## I

Hotho's essay is remarkable for, like his teacher Hegel, he discusses the life and works of Kleist as an instance of a spirit that informs Protestant Germany in the second half of the 18th century.<sup>5</sup> In his early essay on "Glauben und Wissen" Hegel represents the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte as the three essential forms of the "*Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität*", i.e. the form of spirit that grasps itself as subject but is as yet a spirit of disruption, or reflexion.<sup>6</sup> The great form of the world spirit which has come to know itself in these philosophies, Hegel argues<sup>7</sup>, is subjectivity or, in religious regards, Protestantism. This subjectivity is caught between faith and knowledge. Faith takes the form of an inner certainty, a religion of the heart and of yearning that denies itself the intuition of its God. For understanding turns whatever is intuited into a thing. And yet, inwardness must externalize itself — intention must become action, religious sentiment must express itself, faith must become objective to itself in words and thoughts. While understanding distinguishes this objectivity from the subjective, subjectivity guards itself against a necessity that renders it objective and finite by taking a flight beyond finitude. Understanding, however, is as necessarily opposed to the subjective certainty of religious sentiment as this certainty is opposed to the finitude of understanding.

In eudaemonism, or the Enlightenment, Hegel argues, subjectivity has reconciled its infinite yearning with objective reality. This reality, however, which subjectivity recognizes, is empirical reality, so that this reconciliation has not overcome the absolute opposition present in infinite yearning. In eudaemonism, subjectivity has only adopted the other side of the opposition. Although subjectivity is immediately certain of the ground of its reconciliation, it nevertheless needs to give it an objective form that justifies its reconciliation with empirical reality and provides it with a good

5. Historians of Romanticism, Brinkmann points out (l.c., p. 12), have not succeeded in accounting for the writings of Kleist and Hölderlin.

6. G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, Hamburg, vol. 4 (1968), p. 135.

7. l.c., p. 316ff.

conscience. This justification is afforded by eudaemonism and its doctrine of happiness which begins with the empirical subject and reconciles it with empirical reality. Justification and good conscience realize objectivity only in the form of understanding because empirical reality reigns absolute. As a result, the diversity of everything finite and individual is opposed by a concept of happiness which gives empirical reality an infinite form, dissolving and affirming it at the same time. As the infinite yearning saved subjectivity from the finitude of its expressions — and the work of understanding — by taking its flight beyond empirical reality, eudaemonism of the Enlightenment resolves its opposition between finite individuality and the concept of happiness, between the finite and the infinite by the thought of an unintelligible God, a void that is the opposite of the only content there is, empirical reality.

In Hegel's view, Kant, Jacobi and Fichte perfect the principle of eudaemonism, the principle of an absolute finitude adopted by a subjectivity that recognizes empirical reality as its objective Self. The concept of happiness does not fully realize this principle; the opposite side, infinitude, is still given a content which establishes a positive connection with finitude. For, in the concept of happiness, reality is stated in the form of a concept, in such a way, however, that its content is the plurality of everything finite and individual. Consequently, there is no reflexion on the opposition itself as long as subjectivity confuses an immediate empirical happiness with the concept of happiness. Such a subjectivity has not perfected the abstraction which is implicit in it; it has not thought the absolute finitude it recognizes and, as can be seen in Kleist, it will only experience this absolute finitude in the form of an opposition between the immediate certainty of happiness and the finitude of empirical reality. Reflexion will be forced upon it through experience. Kant, Jacobi and Fichte, Hegel argues, perfect the abstraction of this subjectivity; theirs is the reflexion which renders the opposition between concept and empirical reality objective. Each side is what the other is not, unity and plurality oppose one another's abstractions, and, for the concept, empirical reality is at once an absolute something and an absolute nothing.

What Kant, Jacobi and Fichte advance, Hegel concludes, is an absolute finitude with its subsequent absolute opposition between finitude and infinitude, reality and ideality, and an absolute reality which is beyond such opposition. Although they intend to rise above the subjective and empirical, and to give reason its absolute nature and independence of empirical reality, they complete modern culture of reflexion without resolving its opposition. The

reflexion of subjectivity turns against eudaemonism, but it realizes only what is implicit in it, or, as Hegel puts it, this reflexion realizes a concept of the ideal which does not affect the common principle, absolute finitude and its implicit absolute opposition. The "*Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität*" remains caught in a spirit of disruption which Hegel also discovers in the work of the Romantics.

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, following the chapter on Kantian Morality, Hegel deals specifically with the Romantics without referring directly to any of them<sup>8</sup>. He had already turned to literature in his discussion of Jacobi in "Glauben und Wissen"<sup>9</sup> For the logic of Jacobi's philosophy is such that it seeks completion in the form of a poetic representation of individuality. Subjectivity, as it appears in Jacobi, affirms itself immediately against the finitude of knowledge. As immediate, this subjectivity is an empirical individuality; as posited against finitude it is also affected by reflexion. It is in his novels that Jacobi seeks to realize the life of an individuality that is moved by an infinite yearning without falling into the finitude of reflexion. While Jacobi's literary works complete his practical philosophy, the Romantics establish poetic art as the medium that is intended to resolve the opposition between subjectivity and the finitude in which it is caught and which reduces it to an infinite yearning.

This explains Friedrich Schlegel's and Novalis' various and extensive studies of nature and history. It explains why Hölderlin reflects on "*Urteil und Sein*"<sup>10</sup>. And it explains Kleist's effort to realize happiness within the bounds of empirical reality. And yet, Hegel can discuss the works of the Romantics as forms of the "*Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität*" because the principle of their reflexion is a finite subjectivity. As Hotho says of Novalis and Kleist, it is a subjectivity which is "*statt mit der Wirklichkeit und Wahrheit der Gegenstände innig vereint zu sein, nur aufs Härteste mit ihnen und dadurch mit sich selber zerfallen*".<sup>11</sup>

8. For a comment on this section of the *Phenomenology* cf. Emanuel Hirsch, "Die Beisetzung der Romantiker in Hegels *Phenomenologie*", DVj, II (1924), p. 510ff. On Hegel and the Romantics cf. O. Poeggeler, "Hegels Kritik der Romantik", *Abhandlungen zur Philosophie, Psychologie und Pädagogik*, vol. 4 (1956). A criticism of Hegel's judgement on Friedrich Schlegel is offered by Ernst Behler, "Friedrich Schlegel und Hegel", *Hegel-Studien*, 2 (1963), p. 203ff. Cf. also Wilfried Malsch, *Europa, Poetische Rede des Novalis*, (Stuttgart 1965), p. 78f (footnote 139).

9. l.c., p. 380ff.

10. c.f. Dieter Henrich, "Hölderlin über Urteil und Sein", *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* (1965/66), p. 73ff.

11. l.c., p. 687.

Hegel has repeatedly associated the writings of the Romantics with the course of their life: there is the madness of Hölderlin<sup>12</sup>, Novalis' death of consumption and Kleist's suicide<sup>13</sup>. The spirit of disruption, however, also dwells in their works. Jacobi moved from philosophical reflexion to literature to represent infinite subjectivity in an empirical individuality. The Romantics move from philosophical reflexion to poetic imagination as the form of knowledge that promises to realize a spirit that is at once subject and substance. If Jacobi's characters display a painful confusion of infinite spirit and empirical individuality, the Romantics establish a poetic world and a poetic subjectivity which are immediately opposed by a prosaic world and a prosaic understanding, the "Reflexions-Cultur", as Hegel calls it.

The treatment of the Romantics in the *Phenomenology* is not intended to offer an exhaustive and complete discussion of the literature and thought of the Romantics. It suggests, however, that the different forms of Romanticism constitute but different attempts of a finite subjectivity to realize its implicit infinity in relation to an empirical reality. These attempts, it may well be argued, are exhausted in romantic literature and thought. Schlegel's early passages on a spirit moving in between irony and enthusiasm<sup>14</sup>, Hölderlin's early reflexions on "Urteil und Sein", and Novalis' early reflexions on reflexion<sup>15</sup> give rise to forms which, if Kleist is added, exhaust the romantic spirit. Schlegel's conversion to Catholicism solves the opposition by immediately transcending it, — a solution that confirms what it seeks to resolve. Schlegel's works after his lecturing at Jena are but a shadow of his spirited earlier studies. Hölderlin's reflexions on "Sein" reduce reality to an abstraction. The poet becomes a prophet promising a divine presence whose absence remains unintelligible. Novalis' reflexions on reflexion are resolved into an endless reflexion which mediates past, present and future, which progresses as it regresses, and vice versa, and which, in its poetic form, "romanticizes" reality by transforming it into an image of Self and the Self into an image of reality. Kleist, finally, represents an opposition between soul and world which he tried to resolve in some of his poetic productions. But Kleist did not achieve a reconciliation that could have

12. cf. Hirsch's comment, l.c., p. 524.

13. cf. Hegel, "Solgers nachgelassene Schriften", *Berliner Schriften* (Hamburg 1956), p. 124.

14. cf. F. Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*, esp. the "Rede über die Mythologie".

15. cf. Novalis, *Schriften*, (Darmstadt 1965), vol. 2, section 2 (Fichte-Studien), p. 104ff.

prevented the logic of this opposition to conclude with his untimely death through suicide.

There are, of course, still other forms of romantic subjectivism. What matters, however, is that Hegel's — and Hotho's — distinctions are not imposed upon the Romantics. Subjectivity and reflexion are the principle of Romanticism; its various forms constitute but different relations between subjectivity and what might be called the medium in and through which it reflects itself.

## II

The contradictions which Brinkmann observes in the history of studies in Romanticism correspond with the opposition present in Romantic subjectivism. Subjectivity, as the Romantics realized it, may be judged in two ways. It may be said to be deficient in so far as it fails to preserve subjectivity in the midst of reflexion. And it may be said to be deficient in so far as it advances a subjectivity that returns upon itself by dissolving the medium in and through which it reflects upon itself. Of course, Romanticism may also be praised for the same reasons.

Literary historians and philosophers who deal with Romanticism tend to adopt one of the two positions. While each side is opposed to the other, each side has its own history, a history furthermore that has also produced contrary judgements. The existentialist tradition — if such there is — is generally inclined to favour subjectivity, but not without transforming romantic subjectivism. While romantic subjectivism is marked by reflexion, the existentialist tradition tends to forsake all mediation and to advance a pure subjectivity which is either irreconcilably opposed to, or inspired by, an unintelligible unity with reality. Accordingly, romantic subjectivism is criticized for its insistence on reflexion, or the moment of reflexion and mediation is dissolved into the reign of immediacy. The latter, for instance, can be observed in Gerhard Fricke's study of Kleist which has been the most influential study of Kleist to date<sup>16</sup>. Fricke deprives the Kleistian world of reflexion by advancing the concept of an infinite feeling<sup>17</sup>. This feeling fails itself, so for instance in the *Prince of Homburg*, because it is caught in reflexivity and attached to itself as a finite subjectivity<sup>18</sup>. As reflexion is present in the immediacy of feeling and not given the form of consciousness, the feeling which is reduced to the

16. *Gefühl und Schicksal bei Heinrich von Kleist* (Berlin 1939, Darmstadt 21963, Darmstadt 31975).

17. *I.c.*, 2p. 152.

18. *I.c.*, p. 178.

experience of finitude regains its lost infinitude equally immediately. The Prince, Fricke argues, reconciles himself with the "unmittelbaren, heiligen und lebendigen Erscheinung der Nation" which follows the "Bestimmung des Ganzen" and "heiliger Vollmacht"<sup>19</sup>. There being no ground for such a coincidence between the infinitude of feeling and the historical moment of a nation, both the historical nation and the infinitude of feeling follow the rule of immediacy. With Fricke the existentialist tradition resolves into the immediacy it has always sought.<sup>20</sup>

There is the other side, the historical school. Romantic subjectivism has been rejected as the principle of a world without truth and reality. Various forms of reality have been held up against Romanticism: in the 19th century the course of the nation, of history, of natural science; in the 20th century there is a variety of Marxist positions. In this context, romantic subjectivism can be regarded in two ways: as the principle of an imaginary world realized amidst adverse historical circumstances, or as the principle of an ideology that reacts against enlightenment and revolution.<sup>21</sup> In both cases, romantic subjectivism is deprived of reflexion and rendered arbitrary. This explains why romantic subjectivism has also been represented as a form of anarchism which is to be met with an equally abstract order of the state, *i.e.*, an order that is right simply because it is necessary to have an order.<sup>22</sup>

---

19. *l.c.*, p. 176.

20. Fricke has often been criticized for his emphasis upon feeling as the central category of the Kleistian world. Cf., for instance, Arthur Henkel, "Traum und Gesetz im Prinzen von Homburg", *Heinrich von Kleist*, ed. by W. Müller-Seidel, (Darmstadt 1967), p. 581f; Jochen Schmidt, *Heinrich von Kleist*, (Tübingen 1974), p. 12ff; Hans Joachim Kreutzer, "Die dichterische Entwicklung Heinrichs von Kleist", *Philologische Studien und Quellen*, 41 (1968), p. 33f. The point of the criticism, however, is not that Fricke advanced feeling as a central category of the Kleistian world, the point is that he deprived the Kleistian world of reflexion. Cf. H. J. Kreutzer's comments, *l.c.*, p. 15f.

21. Cf., for instance G. G. Gervinus, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* (Leipzig 1874), vol. 5, p. 651 ff; Gervinus, *Handbuch der Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen*, (Leipzig 1842), Nr. 546 (p. 298ff); cf. also Brinkmann's comments on this tradition, *l.c.*, p. 27ff. The Marxist position has long been represented by the Austro-Hungarian Georg Lukacs, cf. his *Fortschritt und Reaktion in der deutschen Literatur*, (Berlin 1950); *Skizze einer Geschichte der neueren deutschen Literatur* (Berlin 1955). Compare, however, G.L.'s comments on the "Sieg des Realismus" in Kleist's later works, "Die Tragödie Heinrich von Kleists" (1936), *Deutsche Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1952), p. 47.

22. Cf. R. Brinkmann, *l.c.*, p. 25f, on Carl Schmitt's "Politische Romantik". Cf. Wilfried Malsch, *l.c.*, footnote 15 (p. 8f).

The existentialist tradition resolves romantic subjectivism into a pure, or immediate, subjectivity. In Gerhard Fricke's interpretation of Kleist this immediacy has discovered its historical moment. The historical school resolves romantic subjectivism into the abstract opposition between a finite subjectivity and an equally finite historical reality. It is obvious that each school advances one of the elements present in the spirit of the "*Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität*". The existentialist tradition forsakes reflexion, and with it the concrete determinations of reality. The historical school preserves a historical reality — be it that of nations, of a struggle for revolution, or be it a fascist order — and reduces spiritual subjectivity to its finite determinations while spiritualizing finite reality. As a result, there is a subjectivity and a world without spirit.

The more recent tradition of scholarship seems to be unaffected by the fortunes of either school. Conceptions of romantic subjectivism which prevailed in the past have been replaced by conceptions of the individualities of the Romantics. This explains why such studies often become the basis for a criticism of Hegel's judgement on the Romantics and the principles on which they depend.<sup>23</sup> It also explains why Hegel — and Goethe — are sometimes regarded as advancing but a particular form of romantic subjectivism. They were the first, Richard Brinkmann argues, to criticize the "*schrankselosen und schlechten Subjektivismus der Romantik*", but their criticism also reveals "*eine nicht beiläufige Affinität*"<sup>24</sup>: it is their authority — the "*Tradition der Denkmodelle Hegels und Goethes*" — which furthered "*das Konzept einer Totalität und der Rolle des Subjektes, des Subjektiven in deren Zusammenhang*"<sup>25</sup>.

Recent scholarship presents a pluralistic concept of romantic subjectivism. The "*Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität*" has itself been absorbed by the all-pervasive "*Reflexions-Cultur*". This development is also present in the history of Kleist criticism. In his

---

23. Cf. W. Malsch, l.c., footnote 11 (p. 10). Malsch turns Walter Benjamin's concept of the "*Reflexionsmedium*", which is based upon Novalis' early reflexions on reflexion, against Hegel's concept of "*Reflexionsphilosophie*". Cf. also footnote 175 (p. 105f) where Malsch, following the logic of the "*typologisch sich verdeutlichenden Selbstbewegung des Absoluten*" in the "*Reflexionsmedium*" (note 175), speaks of the "*Entwurfscharakter jeder Versöhnung*". It cannot surprise that Malsch recognizes Hegel's philosophy as the "*bisher vollständigste Hypothese Katholou . . . im Sinne der emanzipierten biblisch-theologischen Denkform*" (cf. footnote 149, p. 86). Cf. also Ernst Behler "*Friedrich Schlegel und Hegel*", l.c.

24. R. Brinkmann, l.c., p. 18.

25. R. Brinkmann, l.c., p. 19.



article on the "Prince of Homburg" Wolfgang Wittkowski adopts the two interpretations which Gerhard Fricke was the first to oppose<sup>26</sup>: on the one side, the Prince is said to surrender to the law of the state, on the other side, the Prince is said to preserve his radical subjectivity. Wittkowski argues that Kleist tried to force "zwei real — existentiell unvereinbare Gegensätze zu einer Harmonie"<sup>27</sup>. The argument in support of this thesis is as provocative as it is predictable. The Prince is moved by an absolute feeling. His narcissism leads him to seek glory. When the state offers him death he capriciously turns around and celebrates his Self in a vision of immortality. The Prince becomes the perfect manager of his feeling with but one aim: to enjoy his feeling<sup>28</sup>. He behaves "hemmunglos gegen Mitmenschen, Sitte und Gesetz"<sup>29</sup>, and, like Kleist, he loses reality by forcing his absolutely arbitrary images upon the world. The poetic world of Kleist is born out of a "perspektivischer Verengung und Verfälschung des Bewusstseins"<sup>30</sup>, is "absolute Kunst und absolutes Gefühl".

Wittkowski's argument is of interest because he asks that the conceptions which have been traditionally opposed be understood as each representing one side of the drama. Wittkowski himself, however, fails to grasp the spirit that holds them together. Common sense enables him to recognize that the Kleistian world is built on the precarious relation between subjectivity and empirical reality; the spirit, however, that put Kleist in his place appears in Wittkowski's argument in the form of a moral criticism of

26. Cf. Wolfgang Wittkowski, "Absolutes Gefühl und absolute Kunst in Kleists Prinz von Homburg", *Der Deutschunterricht*, 13, 2 (1961), p. 27ff. The question "wie Homburgs Schuldbekennnis zu vereinbaren sei mit der eigentümlichen Gewissenlosigkeit Kleistischer Gestalten" (p. 27), is in the centre of the article. W.'s answer is contained in the title: Prince and Kleist are moved by an absolute feeling which, as absolute, is without conscience. They do not avoid guilt, they avoid the feeling of guilt, or the "Bewusstsein des Konflikts . . . der Pflichten" footnote 30, p. 62. Hotho was the first to observe that Kleistian heroes never reflect on the content of their ends, but act according to an immediate feeling (l.c., p. 692f); Hotho did not speak of "Gewissenlosigkeit". Hotho also answered the question; in his last works Kleist tried "dem wachen Bewusstsein wiederum Gültigkeit zu erstreiten" (p. 710), the Prince has finally "auch die Form des wachen Selbstbewusstseins dazu erhalten" (p. 722) and recognizes his guilt.

27. l.c., p. 29. Jochen Schmidt, *Heinrich von Kleist*, (Tübingen 1974), p. 95, footnote 58, argues that the opposites are not irreconcilable; in his view they are "Gegensätze, die sich im nun alles relativierenden Bewusstsein des Prinzen aufgehoben haben und sich insofern versöhnen".

28. l.c., p. 62.

29. l.c., p. 66.

30. l.c., p. 60.

narcissism. He fails to realize what emerges from an excellent comment of his: "*Die Werke (Kleist's) stellen beides dar: Realität, die verfehlt wird, und das Ich, das sie verfehlt. Kleist wusste um sein Problem. Doch er dichtete kaum kritisch, etwa um das Übel zu beheben*".<sup>31</sup> Kleist did not only know his problem, he tried not more and not less than to realize romantic subjectivity. If he failed, he failed because he did not know how to remove "*das Übel*".

Hotho's argument has not made history. And yet, it may be asked what the history of Kleist criticism actually added to his argument. Hotho sees the Kleistian world as a representation of "*der mehr oder minder inhaltlosen Verhältnisse des inneren Selbstbewusstseins und des Wissens von der äussern Welt*"<sup>32</sup>. Unlike Hölderlin and Novalis, Kleist does indeed contract subjectivity to the point where its implicit reflexion becomes, as Hegel says, an "*Energie der Zerrissenheit*", an opposition without any content or form. Hotho distinguishes three forms of Kleist's poetic productions, with the biographical order corresponding with the logic of the subject. First there is a conflict between Self and world resulting in the dissolution of the inner certainty of Self. Next there is a pre-established and miraculous harmony between inner certainty and the course of the world, and finally there is Kleist's attempt to bring about a reconciliation between the "*wachen Bewusstsein*", the "*wirklich vorhandene Welt*" and the world that dwells "*in seiner Brust*"<sup>33</sup>. Kleist realized this reconciliation, Hotho argues, in the Prince of Homburg.

### III

Kleist was twenty-one years of age when, in the spring of 1799 and following seven years of service, he broke with family tradition. He requested — and was granted — permission to leave the King's army. At the time of his resignation he wrote an essay on "How to find the certain Path to Happiness and how to enjoy Happiness even under the greatest pressures of life."<sup>34</sup> Kleist's

31. *l.c.*, p. 67.

32. *l.c.*, p. 724. — Wittkowski is one of the few scholars ever to quote Hotho. However, to serve his purposes, he omits from the second half of the quotation above: ". . . und des Wissens von der äusseren Welt". Cf. Wittkowski's quote, *l.c.*, p. 70.

33. *l.c.*, p. 710. — Cf. Roger Ayrault's reflexions on Kleist's essay on the "Marionettentheater" and the logic of Kleist's writings, in *Heinrich von Kleist* (Paris 1934, 21966) p. 337f. Hans Joachim Kreuzer, *l.c.*, p. 14, suspects Hotho of having followed "*einem dreistufigen Denkschema, das seine Hegelianische Provenienz deutlich verrät*".

34. "Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glückes zu finden und ungestört —

reasoning is rather loose, the argument somewhat erratic. And yet, Kleist presents the principle of both his life and works. There is the soul longing for happiness, there is an empirical reality which is experienced in the form of chance, fortune, or fate, and there is Kleist's reflexion on the relation between the soul and the world of chance. Kleist's reflexions and, later on, his poetic works attempt to resolve this opposition.

Kleist distinguishes first of all an "external happiness" from "true happiness". External happiness, i.e., happiness that depends on earthly goods, offers but an illusion of true happiness and lets man only forget his unhappiness. Having severed happiness from what seems to be external to the soul, Kleist seeks the safe and unchangeable ground for happiness within the soul. This is the beginning of his difficulties and a suffering which, not unlike Goethe in his *Werther*, he repeatedly related to that of Christ. For, as reality appears in the form of chance, fortune, or fate, Kleist is left with a soul longing for happiness and opposed by a reality without soul.

Driven back into himself Kleist tries to save his soul from despair by affirming the reality of the soul and its longing for happiness: there *must* be a ground for happiness in Creation, he argues, the essence of *all* things *must* include the causes and elements of happiness, for the Godhead (*Gottheit*) will not deceive the longing for happiness which it has ineradicably impressed upon our soul.<sup>35</sup>

---

auch unter den größten Drangsalen des Lebens — ihn zu genießen!", *Heinrich von Kleist*, Gesamtausgabe (München 1964), vol. 5, pp. 37-50. — G. Fricke, l.c., p. 7ff, examines Kleist's early writings and letters arguing that Kleist began in the Enlightenment, moved through Idealism and arrived at his truth, the "*Urwirklichkeit des Ich*" (l.c., p. 14); cf. also p. 23. — It should be mentioned that "Idealism" in Fricke's argument means Kant, esp. the "*transzendente Ich*" over against which, Fricke argues, Kleist advances "*die metapsychologische und metaphysische Wirklichkeit des Ich als den letzten, unbedingten Grund der Existenz*" (23). Fricke's argument has often been repeated, not, however, without being changed considerably. Cf. for instance Bernhard Blume, "Kleist and Goethe" originally published in the U.S., in 1946, now reprinted in *Heinrich von Kleist* (Darmstadt 1967), p. 130ff. According to Blume, Kleist did not only move far beyond German Idealism, he also plunged into the Nihilism of a later epoch and, anticipating the course of a secular world, subjected modern man to the absolute authority of the State (p. 135). Cf. also Robert E. Helbling, *The major works of Heinrich von Kleist*, (New York 1975), p. VIII. Helbling sums up the various interpretations of Kleist, stating that "the problem of human subjectivity" and an "uncompromising, almost cruel perception of the inescapable realities of the empirical world" constitute the Kleistian world.

35. l.c., p. 37.

To realize this concept of happiness Kleist turns to the study of science, the study of the "secrets of the physical as well as of the moral world".<sup>36</sup> However, he soon discovers that the science of nature does not serve his concept of happiness.<sup>37</sup> Fate, "*das allgewaltige Rad*" and the "*grosse Kreislauf der Dinge*" — moral as well as natural<sup>38</sup> — pervades everything and requires a moral response. "*Liebe und Bildung*", the conditions of his happiness<sup>39</sup>, are separated. The concept of happiness is thus reduced to the infinite certainty of the soul which, as Kleist says, turns from the pursuit of knowledge to "*Handeln*"<sup>40</sup>, or the pursuit of happiness by the soul.<sup>41</sup>

In his early essay Kleist proceeds to establish the soul as the true reality by introducing the concept of — moral — virtue. He employs the relation between virtue and happiness, i.e. happiness as a reward for virtue. The opposition between self-denial and selfishness, however, does not escape him. Virtue, if reduced to a means, is no longer what it is, he argues, adding that he does not know how to change it. Beautiful souls, he says, may well be able to love virtue for the sake of virtue; my heart, however, tells me that it is not criminal to expect and hope for a "human happiness" — if it is selfish, it is the "selfishness of virtue" herself.<sup>42</sup> Virtue and happiness, Kleist adds, should be thought "*nebeneinander und ineinander*" and yet, while he is striving to grasp such a unity of virtue and happiness with his "*innigste Innigkeit*", he has no more than "*unvollkommene Vorstellungen*". He has a feeling of something sublime that he can neither express nor form.<sup>43</sup>

These conceptions are as imperfect as the "*Eigennutz der Tugend*" is contradictory. Yet, with his "*innigste Innigkeit*" Kleist holds to

36. I.c., p. 45. There is the metaphor of the comets which "*in regellosen Kreisen das Weltall durchschweifen, bis sie endlich eine Bahn und ein Gesetz der Bewegung finden*", I.c., p. 44.

37. Cf. his letter to Ulrike von Kleist, Feb. 5, 1801, in: vol. 6, p. 158: "*Selbst die Säule, an welcher ich mich sonst im Strudel des Lebens hielt, wankt . . . Ich meine, die Liebe zu den Wissenschaften . . . Wissen kann unmöglich das Höchste sein — handeln ist besser als wissen.*"

38. I.c., vol. 5, p. 45. — Cf. Kleist's short story "*Das Erdbeben in Chili*".

39. I.c., p. 118 (letter of Nov. 13, 1800).

40. Kleist has often been called the "*Dichter der Tat*", especially in the 19th century. Cf. Alfred Dulk, *Die deutsche Schaubühne*, (Hamburg 1861), vol. 4, p. 20.

41. Kleist becomes a dramatist. As this acting soul is confronted by a world of chance and fate, Kleist becomes also a writer of what the Germans call "*Novelle*", i.e., stories concentrating on a particular, important event.

42. I.c., p. 38.

43. I.c., p. 39.

such imperfection and contradiction. He follows the logic of a soul that seeks itself by acting in an external world. The soul is immediately certain of happiness; it is also immediately virtuous, ready to act in a world of chance; but it is immediately contradicted by its action. If this soul is said to be infinite, it is, like the "I" of reflexion, finite at the same time. If the soul is to preserve itself, it must enter finitude and, having negated its immediate infinity, recognize that the immediate infinity is borne out of reflexion.<sup>44</sup> Kleist will not come to recognize that the concept of this soul is the subjectivity caught in reflexion or, as Hegel says, "*die in der Entzweiung stehende bleibende Reflexion der Kleistschen Produktionen*"<sup>45</sup> is present even in the *Prince of Homburg*. However, Kleist will represent the immediate certainty of the soul as an imperfect state.

In his early essay Kleist follows the logic of the opposition between the virtuous soul and the world of chance and fate. Virtue becomes a "heavenly power of the soul"<sup>46</sup>, a "mysterious divine power" which elevates man "beyond his fate". The tears of virtue lead to higher joys, her sorrows are the beginning of a new happiness. Kleist points at the "best and noblest of all men", Christ, whose soul was so full of consolation that he "*vergab sterbend seinen Feinden, er lächelte liebevoll seinen Henker an, er sah dem furchtbar schrecklichen Tode ruhig entgegen, — ach die Unschuld wandelt ja heiter über sinkende Welten*".<sup>47</sup> The *Prince* will repeat this image of death, but he will do so after having recognized his guilt.

44. G. Fricke speaks of "*Gefühlsverwirrung*". Feeling, "*die Unendlichkeit des ewigen Gefühls*" (l.c., p. 179), is confused because, in the *Prince*, it is ruled from the beginning by "*Reflexion*". The truth of the matter is that immediacy as such is already mediated; the immediate certainty of the soul is an immediacy only within the categories of the "*Reflexionsphilosophie*". Also, it is not the feeling of the *Prince*, it is feeling as such that confuses soul and world. As Fricke posits a soul that, in the form of feeling, is immediate, he treats "*Reflexion*", "*Bewusstsein*" as forms of an "*endlichen Bewusstesein(s)*" (l.c., p. 179) which is to be overcome by the truth of feeling. The confusion which Fricke caused among scholars has been recorded by Walter Müller-Seidel, "*Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*" in: *Das deutsche Drama*, ed. by B. von Wiese, (Düsseldorf 21960), vol. I, p. 388: as the *Prince* is caught in "*Gefühlsverwirrung*", the question of his guilt turns into the question, whether it is a "*Schuld der Willkür*" or the "*Schuldlosigkeit des Unwillkürlichen*". Alfred Dulk (l.c., p. 23), like Kleist, refers this innocent guilt to the concept of original sin.

45. Hegel, *Solgers nachgelassene Schriften*, l.c., p. 124.

46. l.c., p. 40.

47. l.c., p. 41. He returns to the image of this joyfully suffering Christ in a letter written a year later. Who knows, he writes, whether Christ would have done as he did on the Cross "*wenn nicht aus dem Kreise wütender Verfolger seine Mutter und seine Jünger feuchte Blicke des Entzückens auf ihn geworfen hätten*" (l.c., p. 84). The soul, Kleist's soul, cannot be certain of

Kleist, in whatever he did in his short life, follows the logic of this essay. The Kleistian soul is driven back into itself. Kleist is caught within himself. He shuns society. Whatever word is spoken, whatever relation is established, it is but a deceitful enterprise. Whatever reality there is, it is but an image of the soul, or it is an *"Alltagsgesicht"* that dissolves all dreams.<sup>48</sup> As the soul cannot appear in the language of this world, it is also deceived by the world. And yet, the soul must seek to find itself. The language, however, in which the soul can speak of itself, is a language that eloquently speaks of its *"Sprachlosigkeit"*<sup>49</sup>. Kleist seeks an engagement and he seeks an office, but, as there is no language, he breaks the engagement and leaves the office almost as soon as he obtained it. His letters give ample evidence of a life that is restless, caught in the opposition of soul and world, touched by moments of joy and eager dedication, and overshadowed by a despair that leads to Kleist's death, an end that realizes the logic of his early essay. Even the form of his suicide — Kleist died in a double-suicide — is the form of a soul that is immediately certain of itself and, because of this immediacy, must seek to find itself in this world, — and be it only in the moment of death.<sup>50</sup> As Kleist takes leave from this world he voluptuously embraces death. He is full of *"nie empfundener Seligkeit"* and thanks God that he takes him from a *"Leben, das allerqualvollste Leben, das je ein Mensch geführt hat"*, by offering him *"den herrlichsten und wollüstigsten aller Tode"*. The grave of the woman with whom he dies, he adds, is *"(mir) lieber als die Betten aller Kaiserinnen der Welt."*<sup>51</sup>

itself as long as it does not find itself in the world. There is, for the subjectivity of the *"Reflexionsphilosophie"*, only a Christ who is the noblest of all men. Such a Christ cannot find his God except in the offerings of other men. The Kleistian soul is real only as it is recognized by other men.  
48. l.c., p. 48.

49. Max Kommerell entitled his essay on Kleist *"Die Sprache und das Unaussprechliche"*, reprinted in: *Deutsche Dramen von Gryphius bis Brecht*, ed. by J. Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main 1965) p. 185. Kommerell's argument differs from Gerhard Fricke's in that he speaks of *"das Unaussprechliche"* where Fricke speaks of feeling. Although Kommerell never tries to understand why, in dealing with Kleist, he must deal with the *"Unaussprechliche"*, he offers nevertheless an adequate description of its consequences on Kleist's drama. He mentions the importance of such things as pantomime, stage requisits, etc. Cf. also H. G. Schwarz, *Das stumme Zeichen* (Bonn 1974), p. 98. Schwarz sees Kleist's *"Verlust der Sprache"* as an instance of a *"Sprachkrise"* that characterizes many aspects of modern literature.

50. Cf. letter to Marie von Kleist, Nov. 21, 1811 (written a few hours before his death), in which he reminds Marie von Kleist that he had asked her also to die with him.

51. l.c., letter to Marie von Kleist

Kleist's letters — and life —, it cannot surprise, repeat in many passages and reflexions the "Sufferings of Young Werther". There is, however, one thought that Werther would never have thought. In one and the same letter, Kleist advances two kinds of guilt.<sup>52</sup> Nature, he is confident, will offer him the happiness which "*sie allen ihren Wesen schuldig ist*". But he continues to add: "*Es liegt eine Schuld auf dem Menschen, die, wie eine Ehrenschild, jeden, der Ehrgefühl hat, unaufhörlich mahnt. . . ich will diese Schuld abtragen*".<sup>53</sup> In his "Prince of Homburg" Kleist argues that the guilt that rests on man is the thought that Nature owes him happiness.

#### IV

When Kleist sent Goethe a copy of the new journal *Phoebus* he commented briefly on the "Fragment" of "*Penthesilea*" which he had included in the first issue. "*So, wie es hier steht, wird man vielleicht die Prämissen, als möglich, zugeben müssen, und nachher nicht erschrecken, wenn die Folgerung gezogen wird*".<sup>54</sup> It is not accidental that Kleist should refer to a syllogism. His poetic productions are experiments in which the conditions, or premises, constitute variations of the relation between the three elements that first appeared in his essay on happiness: the soul in its immediacy, the world as chance, fortune, fate, and consciousness of the opposition.

The argument of Kleist's last dramatic experiment, "*Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*", appears to be quite simple. The Prince is court-marshalled and sentenced to be executed for insubordination. He despairs of his death and begs that his life be spared. When the Elector learns of the Prince's despair and humiliation, he offers to return the sword to the Prince — if the Prince thinks injustice has been done. The Prince recognizes his guilt, accepts the sentence and, instead of being executed, he is pardoned and called upon to join in further battles.

The relation between insubordination and sentence, recognition of guilt before the law and pardon suggests that Kleist decided to represent a conflict between an individual and the law. This interpretation has been advanced and rejected by many scholars. Its limitations are obvious: while the Prince may well admit that he

52. Cf. letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge, Oct. 10, 1801. Cf. also letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge, Aug. 15, 1801.

53. Franz Kafka also turns to the thought of guilt and an eagerly accepted punishment, — and be it a guilt before an unknown law —, to render the life of man intelligible.

54. Cf. Kleist's letter of Jan. 24, 1808.

acted arbitrarily, his recognition of guilt before the law does not free him from the fear of death. Indeed, as he comes to realize that he is to be shot, law, state, and battle represent but an external order with no inner truth. Also, the Elector, it appears, is prepared to sign the sentence. He decides to let the Prince judge himself only when he learns of the humiliation of the Prince. There is no reason to expect that the Prince will recognize his guilt: first the Prince disobeyed his orders, then he begs for his life. He acts in such a cowardly manner that even Princess Natalie, his lover, cannot comprehend him. The decision of the Elector, it seems, puts the law into the hands of a willful officer and a coward. That he should also offer to re-instate the Prince does not make his decision more rational, but shows it to be arbitrary. It has been argued that the Elector lets the Prince judge himself because, in his view, the law honours only those with trial and punishment who honour the law. Such a reading of Hegel would empty any prison and fill the ranks of armies with officers like the Prince. As it stands, the best the Elector can hope for is that the Prince might recognize the law, but then, he might not.

The Elector, however, is certain of the Prince: "As you well know", he says to Princess Natalie, "I — in my innermost Self — bear the highest esteem for his feeling".<sup>55</sup> He is surprised by Natalie's account of the state of the Prince who, after all, is the hero of the battle of Fehrbellin.<sup>56</sup> He also comes to understand why the

55. V. 1183f. Fricke also refers to this statement by the Elector, l.c., p. 179. His interpretation of it is correct. The Elector realizes that the Prince is still caught in a state of confusion, that the Prince is not yet what he is. However, Fricke fails to distinguish between the dream of the Prince and the Prince's immediate translation of his dream into reality. As a result, the guilt of the Prince is one of confused feeling, i.e., a feeling that is reflexive, finite, willful and not the "*Unendlichkeit des ewigen Gefühls*" (c., p. 1979). As this confused feeling — this unity of feeling and reflexion — is immediate, it can only be immediately replaced by an "awakening to a feeling of one's eternal Self" (l.c., p. 185, cf. also p. 196f). It cannot surprise that Fricke does not refer to the Prince's recognition of guilt, for reflexion and consciousness are, in Fricke's interpretation, the very principle of a feeling that is confused with finitude.

56. Cf. stage directions V. 1146, V. 1155, V. 1174. The Elector is said to be extremely astonished and confused. His reaction to Natalie's account is explained by his subsequent reference to the Prince's feeling. He did not expect the Prince to beg for his life. Fricke must misinterpret the reaction of the Elector; he must argue that the Elector no longer trusts the Prince's feeling (l.c., p. 189), and he must interpret the decision of the Elector to let the Prince judge himself as an "*Inkonsequenz*" of which he, the Elector, is not aware. For otherwise he would have to admit that the Elector esteems the Prince's feeling without, however, regarding feeling as the proper principle of human action.



Prince disobeyed orders and begs for his life: his feeling is good, his judgement is not, or rather: his feeling is good, but he has no judgement as yet. The decision of the Elector to let the Prince judge himself is neither arbitrary, nor is it irresponsible. On the contrary, he does justice to the Prince who is not yet what he is. The question is not what the Elector thought it to be — whether willfulness or law rules the fatherland.<sup>57</sup> The question is whether the Prince can be brought to recognize that he failed himself.<sup>58</sup> This also changes the question of guilt. It is no longer a question of guilt before the law. Rather, the question of guilt is now related to the state of the Prince, the feeling that moves him to both, noble action and insubordination.

Beginning with Gerhard Fricke, various interpretations have been advanced that regard the Prince of Homburg as a "*Drama der Existenz, die ihre konkrete Bestimmung findet*".<sup>59</sup> Regardless of the particularities of these interpretations, the logic of their argument does not permit them to admit that the recognition of guilt is also the recognition of law. Rather, drawing on Kleist's restless search for his "*Bestimmung*", his personal destiny on earth, recognition of the law is replaced by the recognition of his "*Bestimmung*". "*Bestimmung*" means not only the end the individual serves on earth, it also means that the individual, in finding his end on earth, is — somehow — given both, the end and his certainty of it. As the individual is immediately certain of this particular end, and as he is at the same time no more than a mediating agent, the individuality of such an individual is that of a sufferer who serves an end beyond his Self. It cannot surprise that Gerhard Fricke discusses the death of Kleist as if he were Christ.<sup>60</sup> This is, however, a Christ in whom a particular historical end and the end of all history are immediately one.<sup>61</sup> Kleist found his "*Bestimmung*" when he became a poet, and, after many attempts to resolve the opposition between soul and fate, led the Prince to recognize guilt and law

57. Cf. V. 1143f.

58. Hotho, l.c., p. 718

59. Cf. Arthur Henkel, "Traum und Gesetz in Kleists Prinz von Homburg", in: *Heinrich von Kleist, Aufsätze und Essays* (Darmstadt 1967) p. 581.

60. l.c., p. 205. Fricke speaks of "*das Heiligtum seines (Kleist's) Sterbens*", which was "*ein einziges reines Opfer, das . . . die Wirklichkeit offenbarte*", cf. p. 207. On page 207 Fricke paraphrases Friedrich Braig, *Heinrich von Kleist* (München 1925); he ridicules Braig's argument without mentioning him. Braig sees in Kleist a victim of a secularized world who fails to escape the demons and forces of hell which he fights, l.c., p. 579.

61. A. Henkel, l.c., p. 602, writes that "*in Kleists Selbstbehauptung Heilsgeschichte und Geschichte zusammenfallen*".

alike. If the former interpretation — the simple opposition between a willful individual and the law — fails to account for the reason that leads the Prince into insubordination, the existentialist interpretation fails to account for the recognition of guilt and law.<sup>62</sup>

Both sides constitute the drama. First there is the state of the Prince. In the first scene, the state of the Prince is represented as that of a somnambulist and dreamer. This dreamer comes into conflict with the law. The dream from which he awakens brings death rather than glory and love. Dream and law are the premisses of the drama. The conclusion, however, is not the death of the Prince after a bout of anarchism. As the Prince has actually served the Elector in battle, the Elector serves the Prince, not by lifting the sentence, but by asking him to be his own judge. The conclusion that follows from the opposition of dream and law is thus mediated by reflexion. This reflexion does not leave the premisses unchanged. Dream and law are still recognized as distinct and as opposed if taken immediately. Reflexion, however, reconciles dream and law by recognizing law as a form of the dream itself, *i.e.*, the dream under conditions of the world. Consequently, neither dream nor law can claim to be true. As immediate, the dream is opposed by the world and the law alike. The law, if taken immediately, is simply tyrannical — the Prince will experience it as such —, or it is without reason. However, once the law is recognized as a necessary form through which the dream becomes real in the world, the law is the truth of the dream in the world. That is why the Prince turns his dream of glory and love into a vision of immortality after his recognition of the law. Immortality has replaced the death of which he despaired. The vision of immortality, however, is not the end of the drama. Rather, the drama concludes that the Prince shall live under the law; he can be pardoned because his knowledge of immortality is also knowledge of the law. There is no difficulty, no ambiguity in the brief exchange between the Prince and Kottwitz. The Prince: "No, tell me! Is it a dream?" Kottwitz: "A dream, what else?" That the Prince is pardoned is indeed a dream, but it is a dream come true. That is to say: the dream such as the Prince dreams in the beginning perishes when he is sentenced to death; when he learns to understand the law he knows the dream to be true, as the law that rules and as an immortal life.<sup>63</sup>

62. Cf. Friedrich Koch, *H.v.K., Bewusstsein und Wirklichkeit*, (Stuttgart 1958), p. 201: "Fricke übersieht die Schuld des Prinzen ebenso wie seine Wandlung". Cf. also p. 341f (footnote 91).

63. There are many comments on the last verses of the drama. A. Henkel, *l.c.*, p. 604, speaks of a "Versöhnung dessen, was sich zutiefst ausschliesst:

The argument, as it has been stated, is not fully developed. Also, it must be stated in the language of the drama. First of all, the argument of the drama rests on a subjective certainty. The Elector speaks of the feeling of the Prince. This feeling takes the form of sleep-walking and dream in the beginning of the drama. As subjective, or immediate, feeling is destined to suffer certain death in a world that opposes it. However, the Elector — in his innermost Self — is moved by the same feeling. It is his knowledge of feeling that saves the Prince. Prince and Elector, like father and son, are the only figures in the drama to fully realize the truth. The difficulty that arises for Kleist is this: his argument rests on the immediate certainty of feeling; to have it come true he has to introduce the Elector who not only feels, but also knows the feeling to be at once true and false. However, as feeling and dream perish, as they encounter the world, the knowledge of the Elector is inexplicable in terms of feeling. That is why the Elector has often been said to be, and to act like, God.<sup>64</sup>

---

*Traum und Gesetz*" so that the ending of the drama becomes "*eine sehr vergängliche Sternstunde der Geschichte*". Accordingly, Henkel sees the Prince as a "*tragisches Ich*", cf. p. 59; also, his treatment of the Prince's recognition of guilt (p. 597-599) excludes reflexion so that there can be no mediation between dream and law. — The same applies to Jochen Schmidt, *Heinrich von Kleist, Studien zu seiner poetischen Verfahrensweise* (Tübingen 1974). As Jochen Schmidt discovers a "dialectical" relationship between dream and reality — life must become a dream so that the dream can become real — (cf. p. 94), the reconciliation at the end is a matter of "Glück" (cf. p. 145-147), and the "*Dialektik zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit*" ends with the "*Integrationskraft eines zum 'Traum' entwirklichenden Bewusstseinsprozesses*" (l.c., p. 250). Jochen Schmidt does not establish a dialectical relation between dream and reality; he rejects a simple development from dream to reality, but he replaces it by an equally simple combination of the two sides. There is no word about guilt, the Prince is only said to surrender to the law, l.c., p. 146. — Roger Ayrault, *Heinrich von Kleist*, l.c., points out that the Prince is the only Kleistian character to "*retourner ce mot (faute) contre soi*" (p. 262). Ayrault also emphasizes the role of reflexion in the drama (p. 352f). Yet he writes: ". . . *quelles sont les réalités et les apparences, dans un monde où le rêve peut se transposer en vérité quotidienne? Le poète se refuse à conclure: il se libère d'un dualisme irréductible*" (p. 262). However, Ayrault also argues that the "*sentiment du Prince*" and the "*l'ordre de la raison*" (p. 354) recognize one another in the drama and establish a "*l'unité profonde*" (p. 349).

64. Walter Müller-Seidel, l.c., p. 402, defends this tradition against many who reduce the Elector to the level of the Prince, or who turn him into a politician, or who discern a kind of vain-glorious competition between him and the Prince. Müller-Seidel also points out that Kleist calls his "*Prince of Homburg*" a "*Schauspiel*" because this form of drama implies the spirit of reconciliation. As he says: "*Die Versöhnung ist schon vollzogen, ehe das Drama beginnt.*", l.c., p. 403 — Cf. Friedrich Koch, l.c., p. 237: the Elector is "*die*

The drama begins with a review of the Prince. Hohenzollern leads the Elector and his entourage into the garden at Fehrbellin to prove that the Prince is indeed a sleep-walker engaged in winding a laurel wreath for himself. Various judgements are passed on the Prince. Hohenzollern, in a tone of civil mockery, ridicules the vanity of the Prince. The Electress and Princess Natalie suggest that a doctor be called. The Elector is surprised and puts the Prince to a test. He has Princess Natalie offer the Prince the laurel wreath and his neckless. The prince reaches out for them, calls Natalie his bride, Elector and Electress his father and mother. The Elector orders everybody to withdraw and passes a severe judgement on the Prince:

"Ins Nichts mit dir zurück, Herr Prinz von Homburg,  
 Ins Nichts, ins Nichts! In dem Gefild der Schlacht,  
 Sehn wir, wenns dir gefällig ist, uns wieder!  
 Im Traum erringt man solche Dinge nicht!"<sup>65</sup>

The test ends like the trial that passes the death-sentence on the Prince. The Elector, it is obvious, understands the precarious state of the Prince and its consequences. Hohenzollern, too, seems to realize that what he had called "a mere aberration of his mind"<sup>66</sup> is truly a matter of "Hell and Devil", "Heaven and Earth".<sup>67</sup> The judgement of the Elector cannot be mistaken; there is no indication that he disapproves of the Prince's dream. That the Prince should dream of glory and love, that he should be moved by a soul desiring happiness, is endorsed by the Elector.<sup>68</sup> no matter how strange the events in the midsummer-night, he knows "what moves the heart of this young fool".<sup>69</sup> And yet, he returns the Prince to "Nothingness" because, if happiness were thought to be immediately real, the world of chance, fate, and fortune would turn it into Nothing. The Prince will experience the Nothing in his despair of death. The opposition between soul and fate which Kleist thought of resolving by virtue — with virtue being the innocent victim of fate — is now, in the Prince of Homburg, resolved through battle, with glory and love as its prize. This is misunderstood if guilt is attached to the dream as such. Such an

---

*Verkörperung der Wirklichkeit*". — Robert Helbling, l.c., p. 217 f., repeated recently the thesis of a "tension perhaps even rivalry, between himself (the Elector) and Homburg".

65. V. 74-77.

66. V. 39.

67. V. 67 and 71.

68. Cf. Wittkowski, l.c., p. 32.

69. V. 54f.

interpretation implies that the Prince will eventually learn to sacrifice his Self to the state without preserving his Self, his dream of glory and love. If this were so, the Prince's vision of immortality would make no sense, or it would have to be interpreted as a relapse into selfish dreams.<sup>70</sup> The Prince will be quite selfish in his further course of action, but he will be so because he confuses dream and reality. He will also accept his sentence in order to "[glorify] the sacred law of battle",<sup>71</sup> but he will do so because he knows the law of battle to be "sacred", to be the very medium through which dreams come true.

The Prince "falls" twice in the drama. His fall into a state of unconsciousness comes when, in the final scene, he is pardoned and given another life. His first fall is a fall from his dream into the state of consciousness. As Hohenzollern says, when called by his name, he will fall.<sup>72</sup> When called by his name, he falls — "a bullet could not hit him better".<sup>73</sup> His recollections of the dream show that he will face the bullet. Although the Prince feels shame when he learns of his sleep-walking, he is entirely intrigued by the images of the garden, the images of union with bride, Elector and Electress. To emphasize the power the dream holds on his soul, Kleist lets the Prince not remember the name of Princess Natalie, even though, says the Prince, "A man born deaf would be able to name her".<sup>74</sup> The dream is not only a dream of glory and love, it is also a revelation to the Prince; he has met his bride; his love seems to come true when he discovers that he holds Natalie's glove in his hands.

It has often been observed that the Elector interfered with the dream of the Prince. Indeed, the Prince remembers only the scene with Natalie, the Elector and his entourage. It has also been pointed out that he asks Hohenzollern not to mention their play to the Prince. That the Elector does not want the Prince to know of the "jest" is certainly not an admission of guilt on his part.<sup>75</sup> That he interfered in the dream does not make him guilty either.<sup>76</sup> The dream, as it is remembered by the Prince, ends with the "gate of Heaven" closing before him, leaving him little more than a glove. If anything, the Elector may be said to have left the Prince with the image of the heavenly gate closed before him. Such considerations

70. Cf. Wittkowski, l.c., p. 55ff.

71. V. 1750.

72. V. 31.

73. V. 88.

74. V. 148.

75. V. 81ff.

76. Cf. the Elector's reply to Hohenzollern, V. 1714ff.

loose sight of the confusion of the Prince. He turns the dream into what it has not been, and he takes the glove to be what it is not. He fails his dream, and he fails to take the glove for what it is. Confusing dream and reality he does justice to neither dream nor reality. What is brought out in this scene is that the Prince actually lives a life dominated by immediacy. When Hohenzollern presents the dreaming Prince to the Elector he says, the Prince fell asleep, "exhausted, like a winding hunting dog".<sup>77</sup> The Prince, like many other Kleistian heroes, is associated with animal life because his soul is yet an animal soul.<sup>78</sup>

The animal life, the immediacy of feeling, gives the Prince the strength of an untiring soldier,<sup>79</sup> it also leads him to spoil the victory in the two previous battles.<sup>80</sup> Caught in the immediacy of feeling, the Prince does not distinguish between his Self and his King. He is neither selfish nor is he a servant of the King, or, to say the same, he is both at once. And yet, the Prince is caught in a

77. V. 14.

78. Much has been said about Kleist's relation to Rousseau. This comment must suffice: If the happiness of a life of feeling is opposed to the life of reflexion both Rousseau and Kleist are misunderstood. Oskar Ritter von Xylander, *Heinrich von Kleist und J. J. Rousseau* (Berlin 1937), p. 363, quotes the following passages to oppose feeling and reflexion in Rousseau and Kleist: "*Si elle (la Nature) nous a destinés à l'être sains j'ose presque assurer, que l'état de réflexion est un état contre Nature, et que l'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé*". (cf. J. J. Rousseau, *Oeuvre Complètes*, III, 1964, Edition Gallimard, in: *Sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, p. 138). The editors offer the explanatory note (p. 1311, note 3). "*Il n'est question, dans ce tableau, que du physique de l'homme de la nature . . . Sous le rapport de la santé, l'animal est plus favorisé que l'homme social. Cela ne veut dire que la condition de l'animal soit préférable en valeur absolue.*" Of course, Kleist associates the Prince with animal-life to represent his state, a state without reflexion. Like Rousseau, Kleist also treats the state of reflexion as the state of the duality of soul and world. In his essay on "Das Marionettentheater" the state of reflexion is the state after the fall of man. Also, in his "Käthchen von Heilbronn", Kleist presents an immediate reconciliation of soul and world which proves all reflexion wrong. In the Prince, however, the premisses are quite different: the Prince, when forced to reflect upon his action and the judgement of the world, will recognize his guilt and its origin. In this context, reflexion signifies no more than the difference between consciousness of an empirical Self and consciousness of an empirical world. The concept of Nature in Rousseau, of feeling in Kleist, on the other hand, is a concept of the "*Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität*": it is the Infinite, as opposed to the finite and as immediate.

79. Cf. Roger Ayrault, l.c. p. 334f. That the moment of reflexion is a weakening of the power of natural immediacy is also implied in the argument of "Das Marionettentheater". This thought, however, represents but one form of the many Kleistian experiments.

80. V. 350.

contradiction: the immediacy of feeling is also immediately involved in battle, fighting an opposition that is utterly beyond it, risking his life without knowing of death.

The dream, however, brings about a change. Remembering his dream the Prince comes to be conscious of himself: what has dominated him becomes an end consciously pursued. He finds the glove and the Princess, and what lived in him as an image of his soul, is now a real object that is to be his immediately as well as through battle. The Prince has fallen from his dream into the real world; he will have to fall again before he learns not to take his dream to be immediately real.

The early Kleist opposed the soul and its longing for happiness to the world of chance, fortune, and fate. The Prince, engaged in battle and certain of happiness, discovers Fortuna as his mistress and that of the world. The monologue at the end of the first act<sup>81</sup> reflects perfectly the world the Prince has decided to adopt. Fortuna — rolling on her globe — is welcomed.<sup>82</sup> She graciously gave him a sign of imminent good fortune; he will, as she floats by, force her to offer him her plentiful blessings, be she chained seven-fold to her wagon. What is a gift, the Prince promises to force upon himself. It is not difficult to discover the logic of so strange a rule of Fortuna: Natalie is his, but also: she — and glory — will be his through battle.

The drama develops the contradiction, in which the Prince is caught, in terms of an opposition between chance and law.<sup>83</sup> Disobeying his orders the Prince becomes the victor of the battle. The Elector accepts the victory as a gift of chance, but he insists that the law must prevail. What follows appears to be a contest between the law of the heart<sup>84</sup> and the law of the state<sup>85</sup>. It also appears to be a contest between the Elector and the Prince. But it is neither the heart, nor the law that rules the scenes following upon the battle. Nor is it a game of politics. The Elector establishes the authority of the law, has the Prince sentenced, and by reason of dramatic development, is withdrawn from the scene. The Prince dominates the scenes and, confronted with the verdict of the court, is reduced — and reduces himself — to what he has decided to live: the life of an animal-creature.

First he places his "German heart", his "noble spirit and love" against the spirit of Roman Antiquity, a law that, in Brutus,

81. V. 355ff.

82. in German: "Kugel" — the same word as for bullet!

83. V. 729ff.

84. V. 475.

85. V.1142f.

executed its own children.<sup>86</sup> Next he believes the Elector to be caught in a dream of vanity, intent upon offering pardon in order to please himself as if he were a god. The law despised, the divine vanity of the Elector posited, the Prince finally speaks of the law that calls for his execution, adding, however, that his "feeling of the Elector"<sup>87</sup> tells him the Elector will not destroy the heart that loves him<sup>88</sup>.

The Prince, having granted the Elector a heart, compares him to an oriental despot, a ruler who acts as he pleases. Finally, following Hohenzollern's politic advice, the Prince considers himself a victim of politics: his love for Princess Natalie seems to be the cause for his demise. Natalie<sup>89</sup>, it appears, is a prize the Elector might be ready to offer the Swedes in return for peace. It is ironic that Hohenzollern, the noble and witty courtier and friend of the Prince, should explain the sentence of death by referring to a political manoeuvre actually considered by the Elector.<sup>90</sup> Fate and chance, or politics, seem to dominate the world. The Prince is ready to beg for his life; he is ready to labour in the sweat of his brow, to hunt for life until death will take him.<sup>91</sup>

The logic that is at work in these scenes is that of the contradiction in which the Prince is caught; it is set to work by the law and its judgement which contradicts the Prince's confusion of dream and battle. The rule of immediacy and the rule of conquest, the Prince is forced to realize, fall apart and take the form of a life of nature, with man ceaselessly chasing his life and with nature ruling immediately and undisturbed by the chase. The "grave", the Prince concludes, is all the happiness you can expect.<sup>92</sup>

The Prince arrives at this conclusion only after his various efforts to preserve his conception of the world. What he grasps of the law is but an image of himself projected into the Elector. And the images of the Elector reflect the opposition present in the Prince. The Elector appears as the representative of the law of Antiquity which knows not of heart and love, and he appears as the divine lord of the world, a weakness the Prince readily concedes him. Then the Elector is seen as combining within himself the law of law and the law of the heart which, in the final stage, fall apart into an arbitrary, despotic heart and a world governed by the chances of

---

86. V. 777ff.

87. V. 968.

88. V. 870.

89. V. 916ff.

90. Cf. Hohenzollern's reasoning with the Elector, V. 1628ff.

91. V. 1030ff.

92. V. 1050.



politics. Confronted by the law and its sentence upon him, the Prince finds his world reduced to the certainty of death.

When the Elector insisted on the rule of law, the law appears to be little more than an instrument to insure victory.<sup>93</sup> When Princess Natalie pleads with the Elector for the life of the Prince, the Elector presents the case of the law. Natalie appeals to his generous heart; the Elector concedes that his heart is moved, adding that, if he were to follow it, he would be a tyrant. Then she suggests that the Elector refuses to "suppress the sentence"<sup>94</sup> because he fears such action might affect his position. Natalie apparently thinks that the Elector refuses to pardon the Prince because he has stated publicly that, whoever led the cavalry into battle, was to be court-marshalled.<sup>95</sup>

The Elector was "betroffen"<sup>96</sup> when he learned the Prince whom he believed wounded was actually responsible. It has been argued that the Elector would not have called for punishment, had he known the Prince to be responsible. Such an interpretation of the Elector implies, of course, that his subsequent action is but a deliberate plot to resolve a difficult political situation which he had caused and in which he is caught,<sup>97</sup> *i.e.*, to defend his original decision, to appease the opposition of his generals, and to follow his own inclination by finding a way to free the Prince.

Natalie does not follow such an argument. The Elector, in replying to her suggestion, points at the "sacred thing" which the "camp calls Fatherland"; it is not him, it is the fatherland that demands, and is constituted by, the rule of law. Natalie presents her last argument: the fatherland, "*ein feste Burg*";<sup>98</sup> will not perish if the Prince is pardoned; indeed, she argues, there is an order more beautiful than that of the camp, of the court and of battle: "The law of war, as I well know, must rule / But sweet feelings must rule as well".<sup>99</sup> The Elector brings Natalie's pleading to an end by asking if Cousin Homburg holds the view that it is a matter of indifference whether the fatherland is ruled by law or by arbitrary will.<sup>100</sup> Natalie's pleading does indeed repeat the views the Prince expressed earlier. The Elector, in the manner of a father and a teacher, gives his replies in the form of questions. In this

93. V. 729ff.

94. V. 1115f.

95. V. 735f.

96. V. 742.

97. Cf. for instance Max Kommerell, *l.c.*, p. 207.

98. V. 1132.

99. V. 1129f.

100. V. 1142f.

scene, as well as in later scenes with Hohenzollern and Kottwitz, his statements are as brief as his judgement at the end of the first scene. There he returned the Prince to Nothingness, here and in the following his statements are confined to affirming that the land is governed by law. It will be the rôle of the Prince to state the reason of law. It would be wrong, however, to argue — as has often been argued — that the Prince moves beyond the Elector, that he comes to a deeper understanding of the law. The Elector is the educator of the Prince. As he gives his replies to Natalie in the form of questions, so will he ask the Prince to decide whether the judgement is just. He can do so because he — in his innermost Self — trusts the feeling of the Prince. When the Prince speaks he will speak like a true son of the Elector.

There is another reason why the Elector asks Natalie questions, why he asks the Prince to judge himself. His case and the case of the law are not only questioned by the Prince and Natalie, the Elector is also faced with what appears to be a rebellion. Natalie orders Kottwitz and his dragoons to Fehrbellin. The Elector, in his only monologue, reflects briefly on Kottwitz' presence: if he were the Dey of Tunis he would suspect rebellion and prepare for a fight. As it is Kottwitz who moved his troops arbitrarily to town, he will hold him — by one of the three tufts of silver hair which can be seen shining on his head — and he will lead him back to Arnstein, without waking the town from its sleep.<sup>101</sup> The passage is as simple as it is beautiful; the reasoning of the Elector is given a striking form: "As I am not a tyrant, and as it is Kottwitz, I will . . .". Appearances notwithstanding, the law governs as it is recognized by all, or, in this case, known to be recognized by Kottwitz. The recognition of the law in the Kleistian world, however, depends on the subjective certainty of the soul, the feeling of happiness as an end beyond all things. That is why the Elector acts as an educator rather than a judge, that is why he depends on the Prince as well as on his officers whom he finally invites to judge for themselves whether the Prince should be pardoned.<sup>102</sup>

Kottwitz, speaking for the entire army, is the first to present his argument on behalf of the Prince. The arguments of both, the Elector and Kottwitz, repeat what has been said before: there is the fatherland, and there is the question of chance and law. Kottwitz, however, reduces the law to letters and — in a fashion not altogether un-Kleistian — proposes that, in certain situations,

---

101. V. 1412ff.

102. V. 1818.

feeling brings about a victory. Kottwitz even states he might do as the Prince did. Unlike the Prince, however, he is ready to accept responsibility in such cases. The Elector calls Kottwitz' reasoning "a subtle doctrine of freedom"<sup>103</sup> put forward by a child. It is not — or no longer — immediately evident that Kottwitz argues like a child. Kleist and we know that Kottwitz objected to the action of the Prince and reminded the Prince of his orders. Consequently, had he acted like the Prince, he would have accepted responsibility, skin and hair included.<sup>104</sup> Yet his argument is a defence of "feeling", not of judgement, in a situation of battle. Kottwitz defends the rule of feeling while advancing the rule of law.

Hohenzollern's argument is historical. His story tells the Elector that, by interfering with the dream of the Prince, he caused the Prince to fight for his bride. The Elector becomes thoughtful<sup>105</sup> in the course of the account, — he has always respected the feeling of the Prince. Yet his judgement on such historical reasoning could not be clearer. He calls Hohenzollern a fool, a blockhead. For it was Hohenzollern who led the Elector into the garden. Hohenzollern's is a "delphic wisdom"<sup>106</sup> that knows not of causes and cause, and little of freedom. The Elector asks for the Prince whom he had asked to judge himself.

If the Prince thinks injustice has been done, the Elector will free him.<sup>107</sup> The statement is surprising. How can the Prince be freed and his sword be returned to him when, as the Elector learns from Natalie, the Prince is trembling with fear of death that will haunt him to the end of his day? The decision of the Elector appears to be as irresponsible as the conversion of the Prince appears to be unlikely. And yet, the logic of the action of both Elector and Prince is that of the Kleistian world. It is not accidental that Elector and Prince do not meet in person until after the conversion of the Prince, nor is it accidental that Natalie should act as a go-between. Elector and Prince do not reason with one another, and Natalie, tied to both through love, establishes a relation between Elector and Prince outside the question of law and battle. Through Natalie's intervention, Elector and Prince can each appear to the other — to speak with the Elector — in their innermost self.<sup>108</sup> What seems to be irresponsible on the part of the Elector, and unlikely in the case of the Prince, changes its appearance as soon as

---

103. V. 1618.

104. V. 1608.

105. V. 1692.

106. V. 1720.

107. V. 1185f and V. 1311f.

108. V. 1184.

their dialogue is understood as a dialogue of two souls. There is no argument that can save the Prince from his despair of death for, after all, death *is* as long as his soul is immediately certain of its happiness and seeks it within the immediacy of nature. His despair of death is the truth of such an immediacy, but it also reflects on his soul. That is why the Elector is stunned, extremely surprised, and confused,<sup>109</sup> and that is why he has the highest respect for Homburg's "feeling". Of course, the despair of the Prince is the despair of a "young hero" who, as Natalie says, has met with death in battle a thousand times,<sup>110</sup> even though he did not realize it. When the Elector asks the Prince to judge himself, he asks the Prince to recognize himself, *i.e.*, to affirm his soul in the face of death, as he did in battle. By appealing to the Prince, the Elector establishes at the same time a common soul — a spirit — that is effective in the midst of nature and battle.

When the Prince receives the letter from the Elector through Natalie he has already overcome the despair which, at the sight of the open grave, overwhelmed him on his way to the Electress and Natalie. The despair has given way to resignation, an acceptance of the vanity of all human life.<sup>111</sup> And yet, in his last monologue which concludes his fall from the vision of a beneficial Fortuna,<sup>112</sup> he states that it is a pity that the eye must moulder before it sees the splendour of a life more beautiful.

It is obvious, Kleist had to introduce the Prince in a state of mind other than that of a complete dissolution in the face of death before letting him read the letter of the Elector. The change is brought about by reflexion. The death of the Prince takes the form of the death of all human life. Having thus become free from the immediate fear, there is, in this mood of resignation, regret that things should be as they are, even a thought of another life, — but there is no fundamental change as yet. Indeed, he has only lost what he once held: Fortuna has become Vanitas, his eagerness to force his happiness from Fortuna has become a passive sigh of regret. What immediately ruled him has been lost through experience. Reflexion which formerly translated his dream into a promise of Fortuna, now offers universal death and, maintaining its thought in the midst of such vanity, conceives of another life.

When the Prince learns that he is to be his own judge,<sup>113</sup> he hesitates, tries various replies, and, all of a sudden, he is certain of

109. V. 1147, 1155, 1175.

110. V. 1053ff.

111. V. 1171ff.

112. IV, 3; cf. I, 6.

113. cf. IV, 4, esp. V. 1307ff. V. 1342.

his decision. There is no reasoning — he simply acts “as he should”.<sup>114</sup> The Prince speaks of the great and noble heart of the Elector,<sup>115</sup> he mentions his worthy and dignified conduct, — what is important, however, is his recognition of guilt: “Guilt weighs, important guilt weighs, upon my heart / As I well realize . . .”.<sup>116</sup>

The guilt of the Prince, Hotho rightly argued, is not to be sought in his insubordination: the Prince did win the battle. His guilt, Hotho states, rests in the “form of consciousness according to which he acted”. One may call it, with Hotho, a “dreamlike acting” that disregards reality.<sup>117</sup> The Prince surrenders his consciousness of the law of battle to his dream, thus willfully confusing dream and reality. In such a way, however, that his dream is to come true through Fortuna as well as his own action. His victory does not extinguish his guilt. The Prince reduces reality, law and battle to the glory of Self, and, when the law of battle is enforced, he is left with no more than the certainty of an equally immediate reality, that of nature and death. The Elector, calling on him to judge his action, brings him to realize that he

---

114. V. 1375.

115. V.1344.

116. V. 1382f.

117. Cf. Hotho, l.c., p. 723 and p. 720. Writing in Hamburg, in 1861, Alfred Dulk states: “Kleist hat es gewagt . . . , die Schuld . . . als Gefangensein des Ich's in Naturmächten, dieses Befangensein aber wiederum als Schuld im Menschen zu offenbaren; die Selbsterkenntnis und Selbstbeherrschung dagegen als Genesung vom Übel . . .”, cf. A. Dulk, “Dramaturgische Studie über Kleists Prinz von Homburg”, in: *Die deutsche Schaubühne*, Nov. 4, 1861, p. 23. Fricke appears to say the same, yet he deprives the Prince of the recognition of guilt, replacing natural — finite — feeling by a feeling that is infinitely inspired to advance the particular cause of his people; l.c., p. 178ff. Wittkowski observes that Kleistian characters desire the “*Einheit des Gefühls*” and avoid the “*Schuldgefühl*” without ever recognizing guilt. Consequently, he argues, there is no moral judgement and no conflict of duties, there is but an attempt to reconcile the “*Seelenkräfte*”, l.c., p. 61, footnote 30. If Fricke exchanges natural immediacy for a historical-providential immediacy, Wittkowski advances a preromantic morality which he holds up against the existentialist interpretation of Kleist. Alfred Dulk is, of course, closer to the Kleistian spirit. Like Kafka, Kleist turns to the thought of guilt to comprehend the experience that the soul should be incarcerated in a world of chance, fate, and fortune. What Alfred Dulk does not realize is that Kleist's recognition of guilt is not also a recognition of God. Kleist begins with the subjective certainty of the soul, sees it reduced to a dream, proceeds to establish a law of battle which is a battle against both, immediate certainty and the world of fate, and Kleist ends with a recognition of guilt that demands battle against the natural Self, and a permanent battle against a worldly enemy, Napoleon or — in the eyes of Kleist — Evil itself (cf. Fricke l.c., p. 203). Kleist does not come to recognize original sin.

offended both, the law of battle as well as himself. The Prince wins, as he says, a victory "over the most destructive enemy within us, Pride, Arrogance"<sup>118</sup>, a victory more important than that of any battle.<sup>119</sup> The Prince is thus ready to join in a battle that demands his Self, the same Self that he threw into battle without knowing what he was doing. As he surrenders to the law of battle he wins a victory, not only over the enemy within, but also over the enemy in the world. The law of battle becomes "the sacred law of battle", for it is a battle fought by a soul that, in joining the battle, realizes itself.

There are two ends to the argument of the drama.<sup>120</sup> The first is offered in the drama. By consciously accepting the law of battle the Prince has gained certainty of immortality.<sup>121</sup> The sacred law of battle which he is now prepared to "glorify through a free death", sets him free. Kleist has given this its proper dramatic form. The scene of execution is also the scene that offers the Prince another life, the life he always led, the life of battle. If this is considered to be cruelty<sup>122</sup> on the part of the Elector, neither the dramatic logic, nor the truth of the Prince are understood. That the Elector should follow Kleist and turn the garden of the Prince's mid-summer-night's-dream into the scene of his execution and restoration to life is quite appropriate: the old Prince is dead, he loses his consciousness again, and he returns to a world, a dream, but a dream come true in the midst of thundering cannons.<sup>123</sup>

The other ending — an ending that, a few months after the completion of the drama, led to Kleist's suicide — is also present in the drama. The Prince recognizes his guilt and decides "to suffer the death he is destined for";<sup>124</sup> when, in his view, he is to be shot, he asks: "Is this the last hour of my sufferings?" There are many

118. V. 1756f.

119. V. 1753f.

120. Max Kommerell, l.c., p. 208f, has come to the same conclusion. Yet where Kommerell sees an "*Einweihung des Prinzen in das Todesmysterium*", I discover his return to battle. And where Kommerell sees "*die Steigerung seines (des Prinzen) Wesens ins Dämonische*", I discover Kleist's suicide.

121. V. 1830ff.

122. Roger Ayrault, l.c., p. 382.

123. Jochen Schmidt, l.c., p. 95, argues that the Prince is offered an immortality which dissolves into "*Poesie, wo sich Wirklichkeit und Nichts als identisch erwiesen haben.*" Accordingly, he holds that "*alles vaterländische und sonstige Getöse der Welt . . . wie am Ohr des Ohnmächtigen (vorbeirauschen).*" That this should be the "*Wahrheit des Schlussbildes*" corresponds with J.S.'s view that the Prince resolves the opposition of dream and law by an "*alles relativierenden Bewusstsein des Prinzen*".

124. V. 1745.

references to biblical stories in this drama. Goethe's Werther compares himself with the suffering Christ. Kleist's Prince, it appears, speaks the same language.

The argument of the drama reconciles the Prince with himself, and the world with him, on the basis of a law of battle. The battle is the middle through which the soul realizes itself in a world of chance, fate, or fortune, and it is real in the law of battle. However, while the inner enemy has been conquered and the law of battle recognized, the battle against the outer enemy continues. It continues because it is a battle with the world of chance, a battle that is permanent and a battle that cannot be won, — except, of course, in the form of sacrificial death. When Kleist speaks of the enemies of Brandenburg, the "Fremdling",<sup>125</sup> he means to speak of Napoleon.<sup>126</sup> But he also speaks of the "Weltkreis" that opposes the Elector: "Go and fight, o Lord, and overcome" the world that takes pride against you.<sup>127</sup> The battle which the Prince is asked to join is not a battle against the Swedes of Fehrbellin, or the Napoleon of 1810, rather it is a battle against a "böser Geist".<sup>128</sup> Kleist, it is obvious, does not represent an historical battle, or that of a nation.<sup>129</sup> The battle is no more and not less than the battle of all history, or it is a battle against the spirit of Evil that is to be thrown into the dust, and be it the dust of Brandenburg. The Elector is indeed turned into God, the Prince into Christ, the enemy into an incarnation of Evil, and the thundering cannons at the end sound no more than the day of Judgement. The enemy within having been conquered, there still is another enemy, an evil spirit that rules the world outside.<sup>130</sup>

125. V. 1758.

126. Cf. his "Katechismus der Deutschen" in: *Gesamtausgabe*, I.c., vol. 5, p. 82ff.

127. V. 1792ff.

128. Cf. "Katechismus der Deutschen", I.c., p. 83. There are many references to Luther in the drama; I have quoted only Natalie's "ein feste Burg", cf. above. It is clear that "böser Geist" also refers to Luther's battle hymn of the Reformation "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott". That Kleist guides Natalie to speak of the fatherland, and not of God, as the "feste Burg", has thus far escaped the attention of those who are self-righteous enough to misunderstand the last verse of the drama: "Into the dust with all the enemies of Brandenburg!"

129. Cf. Hotho, I.c., p. 711.

130. The logic that moves Kleist's imagination has found its corresponding philosophical expression in Kant's treatise on *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*. This is not the time to introduce Kant; suffice it to say that there is a famous and controversial Kant-crisis in the life of Kleist. Cf. Kleist, *Gesamtausgabe*, I.c., vol. 6, p. 163ff (letters of March 22, 1801, and March 23, 1801).

The logic that leads Kleist to speak of two enemies, that leads him to conquer the pride within man and to deliver the good man to a battle against an evil spirit in the world, — this logic represents the logic of the *“Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität”* in the form of drama. As Hegel argues, subjectivity has perfected the abstraction present within eudaemonism; its reflexion, however, posits a Subject that is at once absolute, and, as opposed to the abstractions of infinitude and finitude, — the Kleistian soul and the world of chance —, absolutely finite. As the Prince is restored to life, it is a dream come true: glory and love will be his. Yet it is also a dream that has yet to understand glory and love, or, to say the same, the dream of immortality is but an abstraction from mortality. This is the truth of the last verse: *“In den Staub mit allen Feinden Brandenburgs!”*

*University of King’s College,  
Halifax, N.S.*