University of South Carolina

Scholar Commons

Spring 2020

Skepticism, Perfectionism, Romanticism – Cavell, Kant, Kleist

Maximilian Gindorf

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd

Part of the German Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

Skepticism, Perfectionism, Romanticism – Cavell, Kant, Kleist

by

Maximilian Gindorf

Bachelor of Arts
Ruhr University Bochum, 2016

Master of Arts
Ruhr University Bochum, 2018

_____

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

German

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2020

Accepted by:

Michael K. House, Director of Thesis

Yvonne Ivory, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Acknowledgements

While writing I suddenly realized that I had abandoned my mother tongue in order to write about texts in the language that I learned unconsciously elsewhere, and learned to love here, finding something Thoreau calls "our father tongue, a reserved and select expression, too significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in order to speak." This process is, without a doubt, reflected in the fact that I take the work of an American philosopher, Stanley Cavell, to read texts belonging to the German tradition of philosophy and literature. But even more it is reflected in the people I have encountered at this university, the remarkable conversations with them about my own language, that I thought I knew, and the impulses they have given to my thinking.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Michael House, who not only was so kind to be the director of this thesis, but who supported me endlessly in reviewing every draft I sent to him, and who generously endured my intricate and interminable prose. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Yvonne Ivory for showing the same endurance in reading and reviewing this thesis. Finally, I wish to pay my kindest regards to every professor at the University of South Carolina I had the honor to study, work and think with, and from whom I received countless impacts on my work, without which this thesis would not have been possible: Dr. Aria Dal Molin, Dr. Kurt Goblirsch, Dr. Jie Guo, Dr. John Muckelbauer, Dr. Agnes Mueller, and Dr. Nicholas Vazsonyi.

Abstract

Michael Fischer early commented that in "Cavell's work, literature is always bringing to mind philosophy, and philosophy is always opening itself to literature, generating a dialogue that transforms each one." (3) For Cavell, this dialogue unfolds around the philosophical problem of skepticism. Romanticism around 1800 was not only invested in questioning the differences between philosophy and literature, but also absorbed by the problem of skepticism. The specific combination of literature and skepticism, however, changes the appearance of the latter. In order to show how this takes place, the first chapter is dedicated to an interpretation of skepticism as philosophical problem in Stanley Cavell's work. The goal of this chapter is to show how skepticism as a moral problem is not caused by the failure of human knowledge but by its success. Hence, the fundamental emotion of skepticism is the disappointment in the human, which often appears as a suppression of the human voice. This motif will be followed in the second chapter, dedicated to the problem of skepticism in Kant's philosophy, as well as its transformation in romantic theory. Kant's attempt to make skepticism unintelligible involves his idea of the human as being of two worlds, and the recovery of its voice as intelligible being in following the moral law without interest. Romanticism follows Kant's image of two worlds but rejects the ideal of indifference. Their goal is to reawake an *interest* in one's humanness, which Novalis calls the "romanticization" of the everyday. They imagine this as a process of *Bildung*, invoking the idea of following an "image" (*Bild*), an ideal of one's perfectibility. The danger of such educational project, however, is to follow false images of perfection that wish to overcome

the human. The third and final chapter, therefore, is dedicated to the analysis of these images in Heinrich von Kleist's prose, with special focus on *Das Erdbeben in Chili* and *Die Marquise von O….* It will be shown how skepticism in Kleist circles around the suppression of the Other and how the overcoming of skepticism requires the acceptance of one's separateness to this Other, which Cavell calls acknowledgement.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

AA ....I. Kant, *Akademie-Ausgabe*

CHU ....S. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*

CR .... S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*

DK ....S. Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*

IQO .... S. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*

JGB .... F. Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*

KRV ....I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*

LA ....P. Lacoue-Labarthe, J. Nancy *The Literary Absolute*

MWM... S. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*

NYUA ....S. Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America*

PU ....L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*

SW... S. Cavell, *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition*

WHD .... M. Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?*

Introduction: Romanticism and Skepticism

In 1794, Karl Friedrich Stäudlin published one of the first works concerning the history of modern skepticism, which he began with the following words:

Der Skepticismus fängt an, eine Krankheit des Zeitalters zu werden […]. Die neueste Revolution in der Philosophie ist durch ihn veranlaßt worden und hat ihn wieder zum Gegenstande einer tiefen philosophischen Untersuchung gemacht. Jene Revolution sollte ihn stürzen, nach einer neuen Entdeckung soll sie ihm kein Haar gekrümmt oder gar ihn vielmehr befestigt haben. (Stäudlin iii)

This "newest revolution in philosophy" is, of course, a reference to Immanuel Kant, whose image decorates Stäudlin's text on the front page, next to David Hume's. Kant's philosophy aimed to bring skepticism to an end but, in the eyes of Stäudlin, seems to have failed in doing so. But this evaluation of Kant's work depends on what we take "bringing skepticism to an end" to mean and what we understood as Kant's accomplishment. Recently, Paul Franks (2014) tries to show how skepticism remains a problem *after* Kant and how a specific form of skepticism arises precisely *because of* Kant's philosophy in Jacobi and Maimon. In this way, skepticism remains a problem for philosophy, but 4 years after Stäudlin's text, in 1798, German (Jenaer) Romanticism is properly born through the publication of the *Athenäum*. And famously, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy claim that "Kant opens up the possibility of romanticism" (LA 29) and of what we know as literature. By connecting both thoughts, Stäudlin's as well as Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's, I claim that *skepticism* after Kant opens up the possibility of Romanticism. In other words, against Kant's

own conviction to have emptied skepticism of interest or pull, he showed skepticism's necessity and that Romantic authors write under this necessity. However, this does neither mean that these authors *are* skeptics, nor that they *doubt* the existence of the world. Instead, skepticism in romanticism changes its appearance from a mere intellectual ("philosophical") to a moral problem. The former is the problem of the existence of objects (the world) *outside* of us, the latter is the problem of the existence of other (minds) *besides* us. So, my idea is that Romanticism is the discovery of the problem of the Other and that literature seems to be the place of this problem, and philosophy the place of the avoidance of this problem. One could also say that Romanticism attempts to overcome this distinction of morality and knowledge in Aesthetics or literature, which also requires the overcoming of the distinction between philosophy and literature, and to realize that these distinctions are the effects of skepticism itself. In any case, skepticism's face must change if it should be identifiable in something we call "literature," which is Romanticism's favored form of expression.

This facet of skepticism in romanticism is best known as the "problem of self-consciousness." J. H. Van den Berg writes that the "factualization of our understanding – the impoverishment of things to a uniform substantiality – and the disposal of everything that is not identical with this substantiality into the "inner self" are both parts of one occurrence. The inner self became necessary when contacts were devaluated." (57) As causes for the invention of the inner self (it would not have been invented if it would not have been "necessary") Van den Berg lists the rise of Protestantism and Luther's distinction between the "inner" man and the outer, physical man in his *Über die Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (1520). This diremption of the self runs like a thread from Luther to Rousseau's estrangement by nature in his *Confessions*, foreshadowed by Petrach's climb of Mount Ventoux (1335), to Schleiermacher and finally to modern psychology and Freud's discovery of the unconscious,

which "became possible because of an interiorization of all human realities." (Van den Berg 63) Van den Berg's observations stand in one line with other renowned critics and their diagnosis that Romanticism's central problem is, as Bloom phrases it, "subjectivity or self-consciousness" (Bloom 1), i.e. that "the dominant form of Romantic tragedy [is] the tragedy of self-awareness, the sense of losing the spontaneity of one's relationship to nature and becoming an isolated and subjective consciousness." (Frye 40) Sometimes, this loss of innocence is imagined as a re-enactment or secularization of the Fall (Frye 26), or as the linkage between consciousness and self-consciousness as knowledge and guilt (see Hartman 49), so that Romanticism is either defined by "anti-self-consciousness" (Hartman) or as the quest to lose self-consciousness by enacting consciousness, a quest "downward and inward" (Frye 33).

If we, however, interpret the "problem of self-consciousness" as skepticism, the unbridgeable distance between two realms, the inner and outer, which, nonetheless remain intimately connected, the question arises whether this "problem" is the cause for skepticism or its effect. It seems that the setting up of this problem already implies skepticism's self-interpretation of the alienation of two distinct realms from one another, self-consciousness and nature, or the claims of knowledge and the world. The same is true if the matter is put in terms of objectivity and subjectivity, since one requires the former requires the latter. If we understand skepticism as the problem of subjectivity as opposed to objectivity as e.g. Isaiah Berlin sees it, by focusing on Hume's influence on Kant as the original birthstone of Romanticism, which he calls "Irrationalism" (see *The Roots of Romanticism*), we are captivated in the same problem. There is no way around it, what we understand skepticism to be *is* the problem of skepticism.

The first chapter, therefore, is dedicated to an interpretation of skepticism's interpretation. Stanley Cavell provides not only a new interpretation of skepticism in his *The Claim of Reason* (1979) but also connects skepticism to Romanticism.[1] In book 1 of *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell introduces his interpretation of skepticism in a reading of Wittgenstein's idea of a criterion, arguing that criteria do not provide certainty and are also not meant to do so, hence that they are not meant to refute skepticism. On the contrary, "criteria and skepticism are one another's possibility […]." (CHU 64) They are based on what Cavell calls "attunement" as a form of agreement *in* language, as opposed to agreement *to* something. The rejection of such "attunement" (skepticism) is, as possibility, already entailed in the acceptance of such attunement. And since this attunement depends on a form of consent, on the expression of one's voice, skepticism is the rejection of this voice.

Cavell takes any attempt to refute skepticism (any search for certainty) itself as a form of skepticism. Since criteria are merely human (established by our mutual agreements in human language), the rejection of criteria (skepticism) must always remain a possibility for human beings. Hence, skepticism is a human possibility given by the fact that humans have a language (at all). Additionally, that means that a refutation of skepticism would equal a refutation or suppression of the human and therefore have the same effect as skepticism itself. This leads to Cavell's idea that it is not so much the skeptic's claim, the impossibility of certainty in knowledge, that must be understood, but her motivation to make this claim in the first place. The motive for a rejection of criteria would be a tendency to see criteria as

---

[1] For a general discussion of Cavell's use of literature, see Rudrum 2013. Rudrum's book, however, focuses on texts which Cavell discusses himself. For an approach that takes Cavell's thinking about skepticism for a *reading* of texts, not essentially different from my approach to Kleist, and focusing on German poetry from Hölderlin to Celan, see Hannah Eldridge's book *Lyric Orientations*, 2015.

limitations rather than as *conditions* of language, something I will connect to Kant's idea of conditions as limitation, which he discovers in his first *Critique*. This means, that skepticism's rejection of criteria is a kind of "cover story" for a deeper problem. Skepticism presents itself as the discovery of a necessary insufficiency of human knowledge; but this cannot be a "discovery" since the notion of criteria already implied their refutability. The feeling that is covered by skepticism, by turning human finitude into an epistemological problem, is the *disappointment* in criteria, i.e. in language. And since this is a specific disappointment in *human* language, in the limits of *human* knowledge, it is the *disappointment in the human*, in oneself, in one's (lack of) voice.

How is this interpretation of skepticism related to Romanticism? What justifies drawing a connection between Cavell's interpretation of skepticism and the topic of skepticism in romanticism? First, Cavell himself dedicates book 4 of *The Claim of Reason* to an investigation of skepticism in Romantic texts and themes with a focus on the problem of "other minds." Here, the skeptic's object of doubt is not the existence of the world but the existence of other human beings, an action Cavell finds prominent in literature, from Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Blake, to E.T.A. Hoffmann. Skepticism interprets the fact that criteria do not provide certain knowledge about another being's inner state as a failure of knowledge. Romanticism plays out these fantasies as e.g. appropriating jealousy. The skeptic constructs the other's inner, and wishes to know this inner, and therefore "discovers" that it is blocked by the other's body. The claim to know the other's inner leads to the sense of failure of knowledge. Skepticism is the rejection of privacy governed by the wish for intimacy to and presence of another human being. Knowledge, in the skeptic's idea, should grant the appropriation of the other's inner. The skeptic is disappointed in knowledge because it does not provide the presence she craves for. Skepticism's antidote is, therefore, the acceptance of

privacy, or distance. For Cavell, this acceptance is an interpretation of knowledge, which he calls *acknowledgment*. The object of acknowledgement is human separateness, or privacy; a privacy that is *not* isolation. Skepticism is a failure of such acknowledgement, which ends, e.g. in the case of Othello, in the suffocation of a woman, whose humanness, as well as his own, was unbearable for Othello. Skepticism, literally, is the suffocation of (the other's) voice.

I will take this movement from the disappointment in the human as cause to the loss of voice as central element in Romantic texts. But to understand how this comes about, it is necessary to reconstruct Romanticism's origins, with which I mean how Kant functions as the accoucheur of Romanticism. Therefore, the second chapter is dedicated to the question of Kant's relation to and his bargain with skepticism. I call it a "bargain" because it is essential to notice that Kant does not attempt to refute skepticism although his philosophy is endlessly concerned about keeping skepticism in check. For Kant, as he says in his *Prolegomena*, skepticism is a way of thinking ("Denkungsart") in which *reason violently goes against itself* (AA IV 271), something he describes in the foreword to his first *Critique* as the burden of reason to be tormented with questions it can neither answer nor stop asking, since it is reason itself which poses them, and which cause metaphysical illusions. In one word, skepticism is human reason's dissatisfaction with itself. Kant's project of a limitation of knowledge aims at this disappointment of the human with itself.

His answer includes the discovery of a new mode of *asking*, Kant's transcendental method. Kant does not ask "how do we know "x"?" but "under which *conditions* do we reasonably speak of, know "x"?" The idea is to find a way of *seeing* the limitation of knowledge not as restriction about any possible human knowledge but as the condition of the possibility of knowledge. On the other hand, this requires for Kant the acknowledgement of the unknowability of metaphysical ideas, like the immortality of the soul, the existence of

God, one's own freedom. But at the same time, Kant does not give up on these ideas; he transposes them into the realm of intelligibility as *moral ideas*. The accessibility of these ideas, although not in knowledge, is guaranteed by Kant's vision of the human being as inhabitant of two worlds or standpoints, the sensual realm of experience (knowledge) and the intelligible realm of ideas (hope). The latter is expressed in the moral law, or duty, which the human being has to follow for the sake of it, that means without any interest, in order to enact one's humanness, to represent humanity in oneself, and to be citizen of the ideal realm of ends. So, Kant's vision requires the speaking with an objective voice, the voice of reason, as he sometimes calls it, to strip off any subjective interest in order to lead a moral life and to restore hope in the pursue of knowledge.

And this is where Romanticism will break with Kant. How could one possibly lead a moral life *without interest*? In fact, if skepticism is the disappointment of the human with the human, hence with the ordinary life of human beings, then the overcoming of skepticism requires the *reawakening of interest in the human*. The image of the two worlds can function as instance of skepticism, if these two worlds are seen as distinct worlds, or as attempt to overcome skepticism, if they are seen as *perspectives* on *one* world¸ a shift that equally requires a change of perspective. Romantic authors often imagine the former possibility as humanity's Fall (in the biblical sense) from nature which produces shame about our condition and disappointment with the current state of culture. The latter possibility, however, expresses the same disappointment with culture; yet, it sees its overcoming not in a reinstallation of nature but in a transformation of culture. Schiller imagines this transformation as aesthetical education, Schlegel calls it *Bildung*, Novalis the "romanticization" of the everyday. In both visions, the human is fragmented, but this fragmentation is inhabited differently. The romantic idea of fragment is, as Blanchot says, "a totally new mode of fulfillment

(*accomplissement*) […].” (Blanchot 172) Romanticism strives, like Kant, for an ideal but, opposed to Kant, this ideal is not fixed objectively. The romantic idea of *Bildung*, self-cultivation, transformation etc., entailing the word “Bild”, picture or image, attempts to find an idea or image of the self that is neither transcendental, nor objective. The task is, therefore, to distinguish between an image of perfection, conceived as the “end” of *Bildung*, and “false” images of completion. In other words, Romanticism searches for a new subjectivity or privacy, Cavell called acknowledgement, and that is deeper than the traditional sense of subjectivity; the latter remains in the opposition to objectivity, publicity, and therefore in the grip of skepticism. In my sense, Bloom points to that in saying that “Wordsworth’s Copernican revolution in poetry is marked by the evanescence of any subject but subjectivity, the loss of what a poem is “about.”” (Bloom 9)

I will connect this Romantic quest to what Stanley Cavell calls “moral perfectionism” (*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* 1988, *This New Yet Unapproachable America* 1989, *Cities of Words* 2005), a dimension of moral thinking that he finds present in texts from Emerson, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger (as well as Hollywood Comedies). This dimension begins in the disappointment with a current state of society, or culture; perfectionism’s favorite imaginings of the social, for example in Plato and Rousseau, are “terms of imprisonment, voicelessness.” (CHU xxxi) This is expressed as a form of “conformity” (Emerson) or “inauthenticity” (Heidegger), and its opposite is “self-reliance” or “authenticity.” Moral perfectionism presents these possibilities as different selves within the self. Cavell calls it “perfectionism” not because these thinkers strive for a “perfect” version of a self but because each state of the self is “final,” or complete, in that one *can* remain in each of them. So that the “conversion” towards another self requires a form of violence, which is imagined in the form of another human being exemplifying the life of a

higher self, e.g. a teacher or partner, to which I am attracted to. This perfectionist thinking, as I would claim, is itself a reanimation of romantic topics. Here, it is another human being who exemplifies my "ideal," my picture or image of my higher self. This functions as the secularization of the *Heilsgeschichte* into a *Bildungsgeschichte*. However, in doing so, the task is to differentiate between images of a higher "human" self and fantasies of such highness, false images, e.g. of purity, that transcends the human. Classicism shares with Romanticism the strive for a certain perfection but pursues it in an ideal of harmony that, after Kant, becomes impossible or naïve. I claim that Heinrich von Kleist's prose, between Classicism and Romanticism, is the place for these fantasies; the endless struggle and even dependence between disappointment, defeat, destruction, and the wish to escape the human.

The third chapter, therefore, is dedicated to the question of how Kleist's figures are subject to skepticism, which means subject to their own wishes or fantasies of transcending the human conditions to know. First, I will reconstruct Kleist's so-called *Kant-Krise* in order to place Kleist in the discourse of Romanticism after Kant, and to show not only how Kleist's crisis is a form of skepticism but that he sees its cure in an idea of *Bildung*. Further, Kleist shows how this principal of education depends on another human being, presented in Kleist's text as the struggle of a couple with its own images or fantasies of perfection. The human Other substitutes for the role of God as proof for my existence (Descartes). But since the other human being is merely human, dependent as anyone else, it "fails" to provide certainty, and therefore fails to authorize my own existence. So, the task Kleist presents in his prose is that to become human means to let others become human; that, in taking up the idea of autonomy, to be master and servant in one, freedom is not the absence of dependence, which is a false sense of autonomy, but the acknowledgement of one's own dependence, which is a task of finding one's voice in one's history.

I will focus on Kleist's *Das Erdbeben von Chili* and *Die Marquise von O…*, which both present to us a couple captivated by their own "divine" fantasies about themselves and the other, bearing the child of God, or being convinced of the other's moral purity. The former essentially is a story about interpretation. The story's characters try to make sense of the earthquake that struck the city, either interpreting it as divine judgement or as divine salvation, positioning themselves in these *Heilsgeschichten* as chosen by God. Kleist blends the discourse of the sublime with the question of interpretation, and reveals that it is not the lack of meaning but its catastrophic success that haunts the world, just like it was not the failure of knowledge that tormented the skeptic but its disappointing success. *Die Marquise von O…* describes more precisely how a couple's fantasy of each other holds them captive and how this is related to the question of knowledge. Knowledge is blurred with the idea of moral purity as the lack of knowledge, which is known as innocence. The Marquise's as well as the Count's fantasy is that *she does not know*, and that, likewise, *he is the one who knows* (about the rape), the one who has immediate access to her inner soul. Therefore, for him, she is morally pure, and he is, for her, the Angel of Annunciation. Kleist's story then presents the resolving of these images as an acknowledgment of the Other's humanness or ordinariness, which has been identified as the object of skepticism's denial in Cavell's sense. That means, the problem of skepticism, reintroduced to the philosophical discourse by Kant in 1781, ultimately shifts to the problem of the Other. Romanticism theorized about a response to this problem with their concept of *Bildung*, a transformation of Kant's idea of autonomy. Kleist brings the problem of the Other, the wish to escape the humanness of one's own existence, and the Romantic concept of *Bildung* into literature. His texts present to us the never-ending task to become human in the face of an uncertain world.

Chapter 1: Cavell on Skepticism and the Other

Skepticism is considered to be the name of a philosophical problem. Skepticism is the argument that human claims of knowledge fail to refer to the outside world. This form of skepticism is called "skepticism about the external world." Descartes formulates its classical verbalization in his first meditation in *Meditations on the First Philosophy* (1641), which states that, due to our reliance on sensual experience, there are no criteria to distinguish dream from reality (220-221). That means, the skeptical problem entails two arguments: A) The argument of failed senses: 1.) The prioritization of the senses (the eyes) as instruments of knowledge. 2.) The fact that the senses often deceive us. 3.) The conclusion that my senses are incapable of providing knowledge. B) The dream argument: Following from the sense-argument, 1.) I know that things appear in dreams as they do in reality. 2.) We can imagine having a dream that is, in every way, indistinguishable from our present experiences. 3.) We have no criteria to distinguish dream from reality. Conclusion: We cannot know whether we are dreaming or not.

Now, this does not mean that Descartes was a skeptic. Instead, he dedicated his work to find an argument *against* skepticism by inventing the skeptic *method*. This method, which requires to doubt everything that is not certain, led him to his "cogito-argument" and the proof of the existence of God as assurances of the immortality of his soul. But the skeptical argument above does not doubt the existence of the "dreamer." This is, in fact, true. Descartes' arguments should rather assure him of the existence of others. Skepticism about this is called "other minds skepticism." Again, Descartes provides the classical description of it. He doubts

that he sees human beings passing in front of his window, since he merely sees hats and coats which may cover automatic machines. In other words, given that I can only observe the behavior of others, how can I know that others have minds?

Both types of skepticism are specific modern. Ancient thinkers never doubted the existence of the external world or of other minds; yet, they also never saw the necessity to "proof" the existence of both.[2] The credibility of the new science of the external world in Descartes, which relies on the doubting subject, attempts to provide certainty as well as creates doubt about such certainty.[3] Descartes does not prove the senses to be correct, rather he requires God to assure himself of the certainty of our knowledge. This already implies that, as Cavell puts it, "true knowledge is beyond the human self […]." (DK 7) Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* also implies this concept, that human knowledge is incapable of grasping "things in themselves" and relies on the "appearances" of things instead. What we call human knowledge *is* of appearances. The Kantian solution was able to let the skeptic voice his doubts

---

[2] Heidegger makes the same point in his late lecture *Was heißt Denken?* and he remarks that the need for an affirmation or "proof" of the external world is, in fact, already a form of skepticism; a thought that resembles Cavell's thinking about skepticism. Skepticism is not a "problem" of philosophy, if that implies its independence of time, but arose from specific historical conditions. „In der Tat, Aristoteles ist nie auf den Gedanken verfallen, die Existenz der Außenwelt zu leugnen. Darauf verfiel aber auch Platon niemals und ebensowenig Heraklit oder Parmenides. Diese Denker haben Freilich die Anwesenheit der »Außenwelt« auch niemals erst noch eigens bejaht oder gar bewiesen." (WHD 47)

[3] Galilei, the true founder of the Natural Sciences, saw clearly that the certainty of this new science relies on its subjectification, what Husserl calls "dress of ideas," the mathematization of the lifeworld: "Und das „Ideenkleid macht es, dass wir für wahres Sein nehmen, was eine Methode ist […]." (Hua VI 52) However, for Galilei, philosophy is written "in the book of Nature" (Cassirer 1969 282). The subjectification and the metaphor of the book of nature guarantee the success of the new science. In this way, "mistakes" only appear if the "calculator," the human, made a mistake in its calculations. Science does not operate with "reality," Galilei does not need experimental verification, because he had proven his theorems already on paper (see Koyré 1969, 418f.). Therefore, Nietzsche calls Copernicus (and Galilei) the greatest "Gegner des Augenscheins", who convinced us to believe "wider alle Sinne, dass die Erde nicht feststeht […]." (JGB 26) One can see how the problem of skepticism can arise only in such an intellectual environment.

without giving up "knowledge" in total, and instead limit knowledge to the bounds of human existence. Yet, this limitation also implied Kant's criticism of any possible proof of God's existence, because God necessarily does not "appear" *in* the world. The weight that Descartes places on God has been transferred onto human reason; at least, this was the case with 18ᵗʰ century rationalism (Leibniz and Wolff). But Kant casts some doubts on this self-image of reason as well.

Kant's famous "Ich denke," "dass alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten muss" (B 135), his principle of apperception, announces the "I" as the logical center of reference of the multitude of representations. However, if that is the case, it is impossible for the "I" to have a representation of itself. The subject remains a mystery to itself.[4] Kant lets the epistemological subject in place of the center but removes its substance. Simon Critchley says: "Thus, Kant is methodologically, but not metaphysically, Cartesian. The Kantian subject is a *cogito* without an *ergo sum*." (103) A thought like this possibly opened up the possibility of Romanticism as well as the continuous presence of skepticism, because it not only entails the loss of God,[5] which was central for Descartes, but also the loss of the unified picture of reason. The latter would open the possibility of madness, a topic that is most prominent in Romantic texts. However, Romantic literature does not engage in any *argumentation* over skepticism; although, as I claim, the skeptical problematic is at full presence in texts of, e.g.

---

[4] One can see here, as I am inclined to do, something in Kant that precedes Nietzsche's and Freud's discoveries about the human unconscious; a thought that does appear in the aftermath of Kant in Romantic thinking, in Schelling as well as in Schopenhauer. And one could further ask how this discovery is related to the problem of skepticism.

[5] Cavell sometimes suggests that, e.g. in Shakespeare, the "Other" functions as a supplement for the problem of God (DK 11), hence that the other replaces God as the assurance of one's claims of knowledge and one's world. We will encounter the "other" in Romantic texts as e.g. a lover. Skepticism would then act out what happens if the Other cannot bear the weight of God, because the Other remains an ordinary human being. The overcoming of skepticism would, therefore, require the acknowledgement of one's own and the other's humanity.

Heinrich von Kleist. The lack of argumentation means that Romantic texts, like Kleist's, refuse to give any stable solutions to skepticism.[6] Therefore, Romanticism requires a new interpretation of the problem of skepticism, that it is not the failure of human knowledge but the disappointment in knowledge's success.

This relation between skepticism and Romanticism is, contemporarily, most famously represented in the work of Stanley Cavell. In this chapter, I will focus on Cavell's interpretation of skepticism as such a moral challenge, found in *The Claim of Reason*, and how this interpretation is relevant for a discussion of Romanticism. In fact, Cavell's own text features the movement from skepticism to Romanticism: Book 1 of Cavell's text exhibits the problem of skepticism in a discussion of Wittgenstein's idea of "criteria." The final book 4 ends in a discussion of skepticism and Romanticism in which Cavell refers to texts by, among others, William Blake, Shakespeare (*Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*). Yet, essential aspects of Cavell's turn to romantic texts must remain incomprehensible if we would exclude the path which led Cavell to Romanticism in the first place. A discussion of skepticism in Romanticism must begin with a discussion of "criteria," because, as Cavell says, "criteria and skepticism are one another's possibility […]." (CHU 64) And because both are each other's possibility, Cavell's main claim is that criteria are not meant to refute skepticism. On the contrary, Cavell takes any attempt to refute skepticism (any search for certainty) itself as a form of skepticism. The reason for that is the following: since criteria are merely human (established by our mutual agreements in human language), the rejection of criteria (skepticism) *must* always remain a possibility. Hence, skepticism is a human possibility given by the fact that humans have a language (at all). Additionally, that means that a refutation of

---

[6] One form of their "unstable solutions" would be the mode of "testing" (one's and other's credibility, conscience, knowledge etc.) in which Kleist's figures are entangled continuously.

skepticism would equal a refutation or suppression of the human and therefore would have the same effect as skepticism itself.

Further, the motive for such a rejection of criteria, performed by the skeptic, would be a tendency to see criteria as *limitations* rather than as *constitutions* or *conditions* of language. This means that skepticism's rejection of criteria is a form of "cover story" for a deeper problem. "Cover story" means here that skepticism presents itself to be a discovery of a necessary insufficiency of human knowledge; but this cannot be a "discovery" since the notion of criteria already implied their possible refutability. The feeling that is covered by skepticism, by "turning human finitude into a metaphysical problem," is, what Cavell calls, the disappointment in criteria, i.e. in language, in one's own humanness. What is at stake here is, therefore, a more original "attunement" in language and not in specific "propositions" (which is skepticism's self-interpretation), something Cavell refers to as "my voice in my history." Skepticism is then the suppression of the human voice. But, this possibility, to deny the human voice, must remain open because "the denial of the human is the human […]." (DK 11) An attempted refutation of skepticism would likewise deny this human possibility. Cavell's search for an alternative way to deal with skepticism leads him to Romantic texts and to, what he calls, Moral Perfectionism, which offers the counter-task of reclaiming the human voice (in philosophy).

In order to show the movement of Cavell's thinking from skepticism to Romanticism, I would like to propose the following line of argument: (1.) Cavell claims that Wittgenstein's idea is "that all our knowledge, everything we assert or question (or doubt or wonder about . . .) is governed not merely by what we understand as "evidence" or "truth conditions", but by criteria." (CR 14) That means, criteria govern our knowledge "as such," hence they are not identical with criteria in an ordinary sense (calling something under a category by appealing

to criteria). Criteria do not secure the existence of any objects. Therefore, criteria cannot and are not meant to refute skepticism. (2.) Wittgenstein's and J. L. Austin's appeal to "what we say when" ("what we call") are attempts of recovery of such criteria. The appeal to criteria, therefore, is caused by a crisis in which criteria are no longer in effect. The crisis is the skeptic's (or anyone's) rejection of criteria (not ordinary ones), that is of human knowledge as such. This shows itself as a disappointment over the limitation of human knowledge, which is a disappointment about one's or other's humanness. (3.) To deny one's or other's humanness can be voiced in different ways, for example to see oneself as exempt from the human condition. The feeling for extraordinariness or exemption from the human condition causes a sense of isolation. This isolation is captured in the traditional difference between mind and body, introduced by Descartes, representing the human body as the outside blockade of inner expressions of the mind (CR Part 4). Skepticism would then be the wish for privacy in oneself or to deny oneself or others this privacy (knowing the other completely). The rejection of the publicity of language or the denial of the intimacy (privacy) of language leads to the silencing of the human, the suppression of the human voice. Hence, a recovery of the human from skepticism lies in the possibility to reinterpret these pictures of privacy and publicity, to offer an intimacy that does not suppress separateness but also not absolutizes it.

What is a Wittgensteinian Criterion?

The Claim of Reason argues that a settlement with skepticism cannot mean to refute it. To act out the consequences of this claim is an appropriate description of Cavell's book, even of his work as a whole. To be more precise, Cavell argues that, as opposed to early literature on this topic (Malcolm 1954, Albittron 1959), Wittgenstein's idea of "criteria" is not meant

to refute skepticism, and yet that his *Philosophische Untersuchungen* is in conflict with skepticism endlessly.

Criteria, Malcolm says, can rebuke skepticism because they establish the existence of something with certainty. Cavell claims that they cannot do this and are not supposed to do. Criteria are not a restraint for skepticism but skepticism's release; criteria make skepticism possible in the first place. Skepticism as the repudiation of criteria is a possibility of the human because criteria are "merely" human. Skepticism takes this "merely" as a disappointment in human knowledge and concludes that knowledge fails to assure us of the existence of the world and other human beings in it. Wittgenstein, according to Cavell, accepts the fact that criteria (or human knowledge) cannot provide certainty regarding the existence of the world or others, yet he reinterprets the conclusion of the skeptic; human knowledge does not "fail," it was never meant to secure the existence of the world. Wittgenstein concludes, our relation to the world is closer or more intimate than (the modern image of) knowledge could convey; he provides a reinterpretation of what it means to know, which Cavell calls "acknowledgement."

The first following question would be whether what Wittgenstein calls "criteria" has any resemblance with what ordinary human beings would call "criteria." This also helps us to attain a definition of "criterion." In the ordinary sense, "criteria are specifications a given person or group sets up on the basis of which (by means of, in terms of which) to judge (assess, settle) whether something has a particular status or value." (CR 9) An example for the use of such criteria would be the decision process of whether a student is accepted as a PhD candidate or not. There are several criteria that must be fulfilled in order to be called into such a position. In Wittgenstein's case, however, criteria also govern what counts as thinking, knowledge, belief, opinion, whether someone is in pain or whether "this" table exists, whether

someone is expecting someone at a specific time, is sitting on a chair, whether someone was following a rule or not (anymore). At first, it seems as if both uses of criteria are similar: there are criteria (I can touch the table, I can see it etc., someone is looking at his watch continuously, looking to the door etc.) which must be fulfilled in order to say "This person is expecting someone." Yet, there are three main differences. (1.) Criteria in the ordinary sense (can) rely on standards which means that they are measured by degree; judges in a sports competition are not in disagreement about *criteria for a well performed execution* but about whether the performance *was well executed*. For Wittgenstein's cases, however, there are no such degrees. Is someone in pain? The criteria apply or do not. (2.) Criteria in ordinary cases are established in order to evaluate an object or take it to be of a specific kind: "Does this applicant fulfill the criteria to be a PhD student at our university?" But in Wittgenstein's case, his *objects* of investigations *are* ordinary ones. The traditional skeptic's questions circle around *generic* objects: "How do I know that *this table* exists?" The skeptic is not asking about the "escritoire of Louis XIV." but about "this table."

From this insight into what skepticism asks for, Cavell concludes: "If *these* concepts require special criteria for their application, then any concept we use in speaking about anything at all will call for criteria." (CR 14) We do not want to know whether this object is of a special kind, but whether this object is one *at all*: "Does it rain?" That means, Wittgenstein's investigation asks us to retell our criteria, to relearn what our concepts mean and to which objects they apply. To know that someone is in pain, that the concept of "having pain" applies to "this person," is being able to judge. Criteria remind us of our judgements.[7]

---

[7] Espen Hammer, in his informative introduction to Cavell's thinking (2002), claims that this reminding process precisely shows that criteria are not "necessary presuppositions of ordinary speech," which would fit to the skeptic's interpretation of them as either failing or imprisoning his mind, but that the rejection of criteria is a sign of "a crisis in our agreement"

It is in this sense that Wittgenstein's appeal to "what we say" does not teach us anything *new* but rather satisfies our quest to know "the basis on which we grant any concept to anything, why we call things as we do." (CR 39) But who is this "we"? Who has here the authority to decide "what we say"? This is the final difference between the Wittgensteinian and the ordinary criterion. The latter must be established by a social group of authority (e.g. the university committee, the association of sports judges etc.) whereas the former is established by this "we":

> It is, for him, always *we* who "establish" the criteria under investigation. The criteria Wittgenstein appeals to — those which are, for him, the data of philosophy — are always "ours", the "group" which forms his "authority" is always, apparently, the human group as such, the human being generally. When I voice them, I do so, or take myself to do so, as a member of that group, a representative human. (CR 18)

> It is at this point where Cavell asks what gives us the right to speak for the other or for everyone in what they say. How are criteria established by the human "as such," as Cavell calls it?

Who Speaks for Whom?

How is this even possible? What could be more obvious than the observation that languages always differs from other languages and even from itself according to social contexts, groups etc. How can *I* then refer to criteria as "human"? And yet, this is what Wittgenstein does, what skepticism does, what philosophy does. In his later autobiographical

---

(38). That criteria "lack" certainty is the reason why argumentation is necessary; if everything would be certain, there would be no need to argue. It is this instability in which the skeptic is disappointed. So, the rejection of such need for argumentation, is a crisis of voices, of "what we call," "what we judge" etc.

work *A Pitch of Philosophy*, Cavell describes this procedure as the "arrogance" of philosophy to arrogate the voice of humanity.[8] But, and this is Cavell's point, the claim to speak for all is philosophy's "necessary arrogance," it is internal to its language, what Cavell calls its autobiographical dimension:

> The autobiographical dimension of philosophy is internal to the claim that philosophy speaks for the human, for all; that is its necessary arrogance. The philosophical dimension of autobiography is that the human is representative, say, imitative, that each life is exemplary of all, a parable of each; that is humanity's commonness, which is internal to its endless denials of commonness. (PoP 10-11)

Humanity's commonness, that each human being is representative for humanity[9], marks the difference of how Cavell's whole approach towards language differs from certain fashions in philosophy and literary criticism that begin with the differences in language. For Cavell, and so for Wittgenstein, the remarkable fact about language is its "systematicity," what Wittgenstein calls "grammar." That means,

> that language is shared, that the forms I rely upon in making sense are human forms, that they impose human limits upon me, that when I say what we "can" and "cannot" say I am indeed voicing necessities which others recognize, i.e., obey (consciously or not); and that our uses of language are pervasively, almost unimaginably, *systematic*. (CR 29)

---

[8] E.g. in Nietzsche's *Ein Buch für alle und Keinen* and: "Innerhalb meiner Schriften steht für sich mein Zarathustra. Ich habe mit ihm der Menschheit das größte Geschenk gemacht, das ihr bisher gemacht worden ist." (*Ecce Homo*, Preface §4, 259) On the other side of the philosophical spectrum, in which there is no individual claiming to speak with subjective authority, there is the individual that speaks with objectivity. Kant's way of acclaiming this arrogance would be to speak with the authority of the *a priori*.

[9] I see this at work in Kant's idea of seeing humans as an End in themselves, that each human being represents the idea of humanity, pictured in the sublimity of the Moral Law.

It is the wonder about the ordinariness in which we recognize ourselves in the words of others which strikes Wittgenstein as philosophically provoking. Not "how *can* I speak for others" but "how can I *speak* for others," is the question. And ultimately, this appeal to "what we say" is not a normative claim to speak for everyone, but a provocation of a response from other members of this shared community: Do others see themselves in what I say? Language in this sense does not rely on a background of agreements *to* something (like a conclusion) but agreements *in* something; to be *in* agreement about the language we use, about the modes of discussion etc. Therefore, it is pointless to counterargue against Wittgenstein by saying "this is not what we say!", by giving empirical examples of what "people say," because Wittgenstein's procedure is not empirical (see MWM 1-41). To get that straight, skepticism cannot be refuted by appealing to "common sense" claims. What Wittgenstein calls "the ordinary" is *not* a realm of "common sense" to which we could point:

> The idea of agreement here is not that of coming to or arriving at an agreement on a given occasion, but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales, or columns of figures. That a group of human beings *stimmen* in their language *überein* says, so to speak, that they are mutually voiced with respect to it, mutually *attuned* top to bottom. (CR 32)

This mysteriously seeming attunement does not refer to a natural harmony between human beings. In fact, Wittgenstein's appeal to criteria shows the opposite: criteria are only called up when criteria seem to have failed. Criteria work if they are *not* recognized as such. But when the attunement between my claims and those of others seem out of tune, I wish for a mutual reconciliation of what counts for you as criteria. Austin's and Wittgenstein's appeals to ordinary language, to "what we say (call)" is such a reconciliation. It does not say "we

should say," although it does demand a response: do you, as the addressee, count yourself as member of this "we"?

The Problem of the Other – Bodies and Voices

In one of Wittgenstein's cases, the shattering of attunement can happen in the question whether someone is in pain. The criteria for judging that someone has a toothache are e.g. that she cries, or moans or points to her teeth in agony. But these criteria only work under certain circumstances. They do not work if the person crying is opening a letter from the IRS. That means, crying, groaning, moaning etc. are not "expressions" of pain, not part of pain-behavior. Pain behavior is not a criterion of pain. The circumstances must be right; that means, only if the behavior counts as pain-behavior, it will count as criterion of pain, hence, that all criteria for pain are fulfilled.

However, it seems that someone could successfully faint or pretend to be in pain; the criteria for "having pain" would be fulfilled, yet this person would not be in "pain." Then, how do we know? The answer seems to be "We just know." This insight into the function of criteria would directly contradict Malcolm's and Albittron's idea that criteria establish the existence of an object like "having pain" with certainty (Albittron 1959, Malcolm 1954). Criteria of pain are satisfied by the presence of pain-*behavior*, but they cannot guarantee the *presence of* pain:

> Criteria are "criteria for something's being so", not in the sense that they tell us of a thing's existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being* so, but of its being *so*. Criteria do not determine the certainty of statements, but the application of the concepts employed in statements. (CR 45)

It is this insight which leads to Cavell's claim that criteria can neither refute nor are meant to refute skepticism. Criteria do not express the "external world," they "merely" tell us what we normally do, what we normally count as pain behavior. That means, further, that skepticism as the refutation of criteria is no absurd claim but a natural possibility, made possible by having a language.

> If the fact that we share, or have established, criteria is the condition under which we can think and communicate in language, then skepticism is a *natural* possibility of that condition; it reveals most perfectly the standing threat to thought and communication, that they are only human, nothing more than natural to us. (CR 47)

This marks the point where the picture of skepticism ultimately shifts. The skeptic sees correctly that criteria do not provide any certainty about the existence of things. Criteria do not provide new information, rather remind us about our use of concepts: What do we count *as* "pain"? The limits of human knowledge are the limits of its concepts.[10] The important question is how to inhabit this condition of human knowledge. The problem is not that the skeptic moves too high and searches for knowledge that criteria cannot provide, but that the presence she seeks for is not one of knowledge at all. The problem is the way she inhabits

---

[10] I would like to connect this thought to Kant's insight that the conditions of the possibility of experience are, at the same time, the conditions of experience of objects ("die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Erfahrung überhaupt sind zugleich Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Gegenstände der Erfahrung […]." (KRV B 197)) In other words, human knowledge does not transcend its own concepts. Does this Kantian contention make the skeptic's claim about the unknowability of the external world ("things in themselves") pointless? Since, how could you possibly ask for knowledge of something (the external world) which must be closed off from your (human) knowledge forever? Or does this idea make skepticism possible in the first place? Since it is also Kant who discovers the illimitable human desire to transcend its own conditions as he famously states in his preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. So, skepticism's "truth" might be another form of Kant's revolutionary insight that reason dictates the world (see IQO 4), and the generation of Romantics after Kant acted out the consequences from this thought, that the world dies or lives according to our concepts.

this condition of human knowledge, taking its limitation as "limitation *to* something" as excluding us *from something*, the presence of the world, of objects in general. In consequence, she takes criteria's inability to provide knowledge of this kind as a failure. Cavell, on the other hand, claims that the fact that criteria do not provide certainty in our relation to the world or others shows that this relation is not determined by knowledge (interpreted as certainty). Cavell calls this knowledge "acknowledgement" (MWM 234). And he emphasizes that this is not an alternative to knowledge but an interpretation of what we mean by knowledge. The world's presence cannot be a function of knowledge, interpreted as certainty (CR 241).[11] If Cavell goes further and claims that this is no "discovery" of the limits of knowledge but our "normal" interpretation of what it means to know and that presence of the world is given as our presence *to it* (acknowledgment), the skeptic would want reasons for that. If we accept Cavell's standpoint, we must conclude that the skeptic's sense of "normality" is out of joint or that she denies it actively as defense mechanism against the acceptance of human separateness. I take this to be what Cavell calls "attunement in judgements."

An example might help. Supposing, we witness a person scream. We interpret her scream as expression of pain, maybe a cry for help. The skeptic voice in us asks: "How do you know that? Couldn't it be that she is calling her hamster? Or that she just enjoys screaming?" The

---

[11] It is important to point out that Cavell's idea of acknowledgement is not an abandonment of "knowledge" but an interpretation of what it means to "know" covered up by the traditional, epistemological image of "knowledge." Kant is, at the same time, a defender of the traditional image of knowledge and thinking in his first Critique, reserving knowledge for epistemology, and also challenging the totality of knowledge in limiting its range; freedom and the thinking subject cannot be known epistemologically, although practically. I take the idea that the presence of the world and others cannot be a function of this traditional knowledge to be a central concept in Romanticism: this idea provides the background for Schlegel's wish for a unification of poetry and philosophy in aesthetics, Novalis call for a "romanticization" of the world, Kleist's challenging of morality and the failure of knowledge, Hoffmann's visions of madness.

skeptic takes the "possibility" of such a reaction as a "normal" possibility. Well, of course, a person *can* feel joy in pain. But this does not change the criteria of pain. Yet, to repeat that the criteria for pain are fulfilled leaves us in an argumentative circle. Just as in the case of Kant's drawing of the limits of knowledge as the limits of our concepts, we feel isolated by our mind's power (and impotence). We reached the ground of a conversation with the skeptic. It seems that to be human depends on certain shared reactions which are presumed as "normal" and this discussion lets us glide into dangerous territory:

> Our ability to communicate with him depends upon his "natural understanding", his "natural reaction", to our directions and our gestures. It depends upon our mutual attunement in judgments. […] The anxiety lies not just in the fact that my understanding *has* limits, but that I must *draw* them, on apparently no more ground than my own. (CR 115)

But here, Cavell remarks that the skeptical problem does not lie in the "fact" that knowledge has its limits, rather that, if I decide to have reached the limit of my intelligibility with another person, it was my decision to do so. The question then is, what is the skeptic's motive for rejecting his attunement (criteria)? What makes her think she must do so? It must be a genuine desire for presence. "He [the skeptic] forgoes the world for just the reason that the world is important, that it is the scene and stage of connection with the present: he finds that it vanishes exactly with the effort to make it present. […] But the wish for genuine connection is there […]." (MWM 297-98)

The skeptic, as a representative of this language community, must repudiate criteria not because they fail to provide knowledge, but because they do; yet, it is not the knowledge she wishes for. The skeptic, therefore, suppresses her knowledge of the other and the world, in order to wish to assume that there cannot be any knowledge (in form of certainty); skepticism

is a form of suppression. Why does the skeptic interpret the limitation of human knowledge as a failure? Her motivation is a deep disappointment in human knowledge in general. For sure, this disappointment is nothing extraordinary in itself. In fact, it is one of the most common motives for philosophy. Out of some reason, it is the limitation of knowledge instead of its success that catches human interest. As Cavell says:

> Disappointment over the failure (or limitation) of knowledge has, after all, been as deep a motivation to the philosophical study of knowledge as wonder at the successes of knowledge has been. In Wittgenstein's work, as in skepticism, the human disappointment with human knowledge seems to take over the whole subject. (CR 44)

The disappointment with the insufficiency of human knowledge to provide an absolute connection to the other (knowing of his/her pain) must be a cover story because there is nothing *not* to know; to call upon the "failure" of criteria releases me from the responsibility of responding, or even receiving, the other's claim upon me (e.g. in the scream of pain). To let this be claimed upon oneself would, at the same time, present myself to the other; I must show myself as responsive, as being known. Skepticism would be this refusal to let oneself be known, to withdraw oneself (a wishful isolation). This refusal is either motivated by one's own fear to be known completely, combined with the wish to know or control, or by one's wish to be known completely by another human being, combined with the fear to know and control. The former describes Nathanael's self-image as "exceptional" poet and his love for the automaton Olimpia in Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, the latter describes the Marquise in Kleist's *Die Marquise von O…*, her refusal to know and her vision of an immaculate Conception.[12] In both cases, the disappointment in knowledge is a disappointment in one's

---

[12] Both images are combined with the idea of purity of the body, or its contamination.

own and the other's humanity: Nathanael's sense of exception from ordinary life, his madness as transcending human life, his rejection of Clara's ordinariness, his wish for Olimpia extraordinariness; the Marquise's vision of the Count as Angel of Annunciation, hence her judgement of him as Devil in the end of the novella, her self-image as impregnated by the Holy Ghost, an event that necessarily transcends human conditions of knowledge. Second, the fact that both images are combined with a sense of purity of the body, hence with a fantasy of its contamination, the Count's story of the Swan, Nathanael's craving for Olimpia's "purity" of marble. This poses the question of the fate of the human body in skepticism.

Criteria can show what kind of behavior counts as pain-behavior, but they cannot show whether this pain-behavior is showing us "real pain" or simulated one. The skeptic responses to this fact, that there are no criteria to assure of inner life, is a case of a failed acknowledgement.

My feeling is: What this "body" lacks is *privacy*. […] My problem is no longer that my words can't get past his body to *him*. There is nothing for them to get to; they can't even reach as far as *my* body; they are stuck behind the tongue, or at the back of the mind. The signs are dead […]. (CR 83-84)

As Cavell puts it, the matter of other mind skepticism is an issue of reading the other's body. The skeptic's wish for intimacy (the connection with the other's and her own inner) causes her disappointment in human knowledge; what she needs is not "more" knowledge but distance, acknowledging human separateness, accepting privacy.

Skepticism meant to find the other, search others out with certainty. Instead it closes them out. What happens to them? And what happens to me when I withhold my acceptance of privacy — anyway, of otherness — as the home of my concepts of the human soul and find my criteria to be dead, mere words, word-shells? I said a while ago

in passing that I withhold myself. What I withhold myself from is my attunement with others — with all others, not merely with the one I was to know. (CR 84-85)

Let us suppose that the skeptic's motivation lies in an inability to grant privacy to the other, a desire to know (and possess in knowing) the other's inner. Knowledge presents itself as an act of violence (the Count's rape of the Marquise). The skeptic takes the behavior to be a sign for something else hidden from "the outside," but with which the other is immediately acquainted. Hence, what underlies this idea is the distinction between mind and body; two worlds that are in some connection yet so distinct that their connection seems impossible. Wittgenstein's so-called private language argument (PU § 258) acts out this fantasy of the separation of mind and body, that the body is hiding the mind and that, in order to know another human being, I have to know what that other knows. The underlying picture to this fantasy is that our criteria relate behavior to something else that is not visible to those "on the outside" but with which the person is concerned immediately.

Wittgenstein's scenario plays out like this: I make a not "S" in my private diary whenever I have a particular sensation. In order to function, he says, I must establish a firm connection between "S" and the relevant sensation; I must impress the sign-sensation correlation upon myself. The question would then be, why shall I write it down in the first place? Since this diary is solely for myself, functioning like a private language, so that it is *not* a code of which I could tell anyone, "S" will have the same originality as the sensation. If we ask "What does "S" mean?", the only thing we can say is that "S" means the sensation we had every time we wrote "S" down; we can only refer to the practice of writing, so that the linking is only present in the fact of writing it down. To write it down *is* to express it; reference, the "pure" connection between sign and sensation, can never be enough. The desire for a private language, hence for a perfect linking, covers up that these connections are already in place; it

expresses the worry that merely natural expressive language is not enough to allow myself to give expression to myself in language, to make myself known (ensure, that these are *my* sensations). Or it expresses the worry that it makes me known regardless of any contribution on my part, that giving expression to myself is beyond my control; hence, denying that my expressive behavior already has the faces of sensations on it (see CR 351): "The wish underlying this fantasy covers a wish that underlies skepticism, a wish for the connection between my claims of knowledge and the objects upon which the claims are to fall to occur without my intervention, apart from my agreements." (CR 351-352)

Just like writing the note "S" *is* the expression of the sensation "S," so *is* the body of a person the expression of his/her pain.[13] Following this, Cavell takes skepticism regarding other minds to be a kind of illiteracy:

> The block to my vision of the other is not the other's body but my incapacity or unwillingness to interpret or to judge it accurately, to draw the right connections. The suggestion is: I suffer a kind of blindness, but I avoid the issue by projecting this darkness upon the other. (CR 368-69)

This avoidance of the other, therefore, cannot be motivated by a failure of knowing, because there is nothing to know: the body expresses the pain, it does not hide anything. On the contrary, skepticism must be motivated by knowledge's *success*:

> Now we may see more of what is expressed in the myth of the body as veiling or screening the mind. Something *is* veiled — the mind, by itself. But the idea of the body plays its role. In the fantasy of it as veiling, it is what comes between my mind and the

---

[13] The parallel between the human body and the act of writing is one of the striking images in Kleist's *Die Marquise von O.*

other's, it is the thing that separates us. The truth here is that we *are* separate, but not

necessarily *separated (by* something) […]. (CR 369)

The failure of the fantasy of a private language does not reveal that language is totally

public. Cavell's intuition about Wittgenstein is, contrary to many readers of Wittgenstein,

that he is not only contesting a false sense of privacy (as being hidden) and offering the view

of language as essentially shared, public, but that he tries to arrive at a deeper and more

intimate sense of privacy, as if privacy has been lost to us; Wittgenstein's private language

argument tries to protect privacy (see CR 369). The skeptic's image of privacy, her isolation,

covers up our privacy, our separateness; therefore, it prevents us from inhabiting this

separateness.

> The *Investigations* takes many ways of approaching ideas which construe the inner life
>
> as composed of objects (and if objects then for sure *private* ones). To combat such ideas
>
> is an obsession of the book as a whole. It is as though Wittgenstein felt human beings in
>
> jeopardy of losing touch with their inner lives altogether, with the very idea that each
>
> person is a center of one, that each *has* a life. (CR 91)

The fate of the human body in skepticism is to be struck silent, to be robbed from its

privacy, exchanging its privacy (separateness) through a false sense of privacy (isolation,

separated *by* something). The difference between separateness and isolation is that the former

is a condition. Cavell says, we are separated "for no reason." You cannot choose this

separateness. Isolation, on the other hand, implies an alternative; and this alternative is

imagined as a form of knowledge. In skepticism, the human body *fails* to *express* my "inner"

feelings or the feelings of others; the body is the border between inside and outside. I am

unable to voice my intentions in words; they stop at my tongue. However, it is this

interpretation of the human body which prevents me from expressing. It is a self-imposed

silence by interpreting separateness as isolation. Cavell said that the skeptic withholds herself, projecting the darkness upon the other's body. It does not do any good here to show how language is "public," since publicity or objectivity is the skeptic's interpretation of what she *lacks*. On the contrary, what is needed is a new interpretation of "privacy." My idea is that Romanticism attempts to find such a new interpretation of privacy, which is commonly known as "subjectivity." Romanticism's discontent with Kant is that he sees the solution of skepticism in finding a "universal" criterion, e.g. as the moral law.[14] Kant, in arguing *against* the skeptic's image of privacy as isolation, seeks the overcoming of subjectivity. Romanticism, on the other hand, seems to claim that fragility (Kleist) and fragmentariness (Schlegel, Novalis) must be the responses to skepticism. It is the way one inhabits this fragility that determines skepticism's power, that skepticism is one's disappointment in one's own humanity, one's ordinariness, and one's drive towards something extraordinary, something that transcends this human condition, say to speak outside of "language games," to speak with absoluteness, certainty, objectivity, to speak for all, once and for all. And, on the other hand, to see the fragility, fragmentariness, and subjectivity as *constitutive for* communication might require a new interpretation of subjectivity, of what it means to speak for oneself. Cavell sees something similar in Wittgenstein:

> […] it is felt that Wittgenstein's view makes language too public, that it cannot do justice to the control I have over what I say, to the innerness of my meaning. But my wonder, in the face of what I have recently been saying, is rather how he can arrive at the completed and unshakable edifice of shared language from within such apparently fragile and

---

[14] Of course, it is more complicated than that, since, in order to stay with the example, it is the moral law *within us*. That means, Kant does not look for a criterion against skepticism *outside of the human*. One could take this as an interpretation of Kant's Copernican Revolution. I will discuss Kant's relation to skepticism in the second chapter.

intimate moments — private moments — as our separate counts and out-calls of phenomena, which are after all hardly more than our interpretations of what occurs, and with no assurance of conventions to back them up. (CR 36)

It may not appear as such on the first view, but this conclusion follows Cavell's investigation of criteria. The question, as already mentioned before, is how it is possible that Wittgenstein can speak for us all in his "private moments," "with no assurance of conventions to back them up"? And it is crucial how this question is taken to be raised. For Cavell, it does not ask for a particular "reason" ("how is this even possible?") but it expresses the amazement about the fact that it *is* possible, that Wittgenstein *can*, apparently, do this, hence that we possibly can do this as well; that we can speak for each other in language. It is in this sense of amazement that Wittgenstein's search for criteria is a search for community, to discover the "who" of that community (CR 22).

That Cavell draws the connection between the political and philosophical (or linguistical) is significant in so far as it shows that Wittgenstein's apparent arrogation of other's voices in claiming to speak for them is a condition for speaking at all. The point of the failure of Wittgenstein's private language argument was that by refusing to speak for others and letting others speak for oneself, one does not speak privately, but not at all. This voicelessness is the conclusion of skepticism. How is a voice recovered? The idea be to find a way to inherent a life again, to attain privacy again, a privacy that is suppressed by objectivity or by isolation; an idea that Cavell calls "the idea of my voice in my history" (CHU 64).

I would like to take up this idea and connect it to Kant's idea of autonomy, essentially a figure of "speaking for oneself." And Kant presents the striving for autonomy as a struggle between voices, the voice of nature and the voice of reason, of which the former is identified with interests, feelings, desires, and the latter with an imperative or constraint of the moral

law. This constraint also insinuates Kant's ideas of condition or limitation concerning knowledge; that his limitation marks the space in which one can voice claims of knowledge sensibly, and beyond which reason strives but is incapable of knowing anything. Skepticism is therefore, for Kant, this struggle of reason against itself, this conflict of voices.

Timothy Gould remarks, in his study of Cavell and the theme of "voice," a very similar idea about Cavell's own journey from the beginning to end of *The Claim of Reason*: "By the end of *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell has begun to form the idea that the self is composed not of private objects but of private voices." (Gould 104) That the self incorporates selves or voices is at the heart of Cavell's *Moral Perfectionism*. The self is in struggle with its own images of itself, continually fighting or undermining the sense of a false ideal of completeness, dictated by one self over the other. Skepticism's self-interpretation as the discovery of a final limit of human knowledge, of our absolute separation from others (and from ourselves, our mind from our body) would be such a dictation of a false ideal of completeness. The skeptic's image of the self is one that is beyond change; it is complete, which means it is frozen, isolated. The perfectionist image of the self is one that incorporates selves that are, in themselves, complete yet in constant struggle over each other. Is Kant's vision of the human self a version of the former or the latter? Is Kant's identification of autonomy with the voice of reason satisfying in this regard? Romanticism will challenge this. Instead, Romantic writers offer us several voices within the human, the voice of madness, of the genius, of dreams, of monstrosity etc., which all appear to be attempts to escape from the human, from normality, ordinariness, everydayness. In fact, I would claim that Romantic writers after Kant follow him in his goal to come to terms with skepticism in the idea of autonomy, in the uncovering of the human voice. However, it is not so much a struggle between desire and duty, but between desires for exceptionality and normality.

Chapter 2: Kant, Romanticism and Perfectionism

The problem of the Other is the connecting element between Cavell's treatment of criteria in book 1 of *The Claim of Reason* and his investment in Romantic texts and ideas in book 4. The skeptic's rejection of *mere human* criteria entails the rebuke of language she speaks with others; and if language functions as the condition of having a voice, skepticism suppresses one's voice as well as the Other's. Cavell suggests that a fitting title for this history would be "Philosophy and the Rejection of the Human." (CR 207) And I would suggest that Romanticism earns a special position in this history by trying to recover the human *in (or through) literature* from skepticism, and that one could call this recovery the discovery of the Other. But why specifically Romanticism? I already mentioned Lacoue-Labarthe's and Nancy's claim that "Kant opens up the possibility of romanticism" (LA 29) and that this opening takes place, for them, around the concept of "Darstellung" (representation). For Kant, human reason is incapable of representing "transcendental ideas" which are, e.g., freedom, the subject's "I" and God. However, Kant claims that human reason also cannot help thinking about these ideas. Out of this incompletion of human reason, Romanticism develops the notion of the fragment. Nancy describes this opening in the following way:

> Thus, there comes a moment when, in a certain sense, philosophical autography can no longer certify itself, can no longer authorize or authenticate itself—but when philosophy designates itself, implies itself, exhibits itself, and disavows itself under the aegis of what

will rapidly become the modern notion—and thus a notion outside philosophy—of 'literature.' This is the moment of Kant. (Nancy 26-27)

Although Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy do not call it this way, I would say that it is skepticism (after Kant) that opens the possibility of Romanticism, which would be my interpretation of the problem of "Darstellung." I describe this as "skepticism after Kant" because of Kant's original "solution" to skepticism. Since skepticism entails either to deny certainty or to claim certainty, in either case the wish to speak *with* certainty, Kant's limitation of reason does neither of them. Because of the irrepresentability of transcendental ideas, one cannot speak with certainty anymore, hence one cannot deny it either. Kant describes this condition as the human ability to view oneself from two standpoints or worlds, the natural world of causality and the moral world of freedom.

Romanticism inherits the notion of Kant's two worlds, seeing the human as necessarily fragmented. The Romantic criticism of Kant lies in the idea of "completion" of the human in "autonomy." For Kant, this completion is performed in listening to the voice of reason, which speaks with objectivity. He also describes this as the "ought" of the categorical imperative that speaks to all. Romanticism, on the other hand, is disappointed in precisely *how* this completion is attempted. The romantic fragment is, as Blanchot says, "a totally new mode of fulfillment (*accomplissement*) […]." (Blanchot 172) Kant and Romanticism compete in their interpretations of "completion," in how a recovery from skepticism must look like. For Kant, such a recovery entails to speak with objectivity, the subjection to an objective voice, that nevertheless comes from *within*, for Romanticism, such a recovery is just another suppression of the human voice. For Kant, the highest good is a good will without subjective "Neigungen," and "Interessen," because the latter do not guarantee the fulfillment of the moral good. For

35

Kant, only the fulfillment of the mora law *without interest*, for its own sake, is to act autonomously. Likewise, the pleasure of beauty is "interesseloses Wohlgefallen." Whereas for Romanticism, skepticism precisely *is* our lack of interest in others, the world (its beauty); an expression of our disappointment with ourselves (the human). Romanticism's quest is to recover our interest, our individual voice, which is, however, not a "subjective voice." The subjective is only possible from the standpoint of objectivity; both are consequences of skepticism. If anything, Romanticism claims that we are *not subjective enough*. Romanticism presents this recovery of our subjectivity as a process of education or self-cultivation, *Bildung*. This concept, with its precedents in Herder and others, is developed by Schiller, Schlegel, Novalis and, finally, Kleist. Therefore, the dispute between Kant and Romanticism is not one of opposition. It is not about objectivity versus subjectivity, but about two different images of perfection or autonomy.

If this is true, then Romanticism would resemble what Cavell calls "Moral Perfectionism," a branch of moral thinking which he discovers in his interpretation of Emerson as well as countless other texts (e.g. Nietzsche) throughout the history of western thinking, and which he sometimes describes as "the rescue from a false perfectionism, call it a false autonomy." (CHU 121) This chapter will begin with a reading of Kant's settlement of skepticism, Romanticism's investments in this question, as well as Romanticism's twist of Kant's solution. It will end with a representation of Cavell's Moral Perfectionism in texts by Emerson and Nietzsche, reading both of them as inheritors of Kant's problems as well as critics of his solutions; this will connect them to the romantic criticism of Kant in the idea of education or *Bildung*.

Kant, Skepticism and Morality

As already addressed, Kant's project in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is, as he says, to limit knowledge "um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen" (AA B XXX), the faith to freedom. He accomplishes this by his famous "Copernican Revolution." Instead of looking for the conditions of knowledge of objects, orbiting objects with our senses, Kant investigates the conditions of knowledge at all, orbiting our capability of reason itself. The result of such investigation is that, since knowledge depends on experience, human knowledge can only work under certain conditions of experience, which Kant calls space and time. Only objects that fit these conditions can be known, which he calls "appearances." Whatever these appearances represent, however, cannot itself appear, hence cannot be experienced, be known. Kant calls these "things in themselves." These transcendental objects or "ideas" must be *assumed* because they "cause" the appearances, although they escape any human knowledge. Yet, these objects are the objects of metaphysics, e.g. God and freedom. At the end of the *Critique*, Kant shows how any proof of God's existence must remain improvable, and how freedom, although unknowable, is a *practical idea*. We are constantly confronted with two worlds, the world of sensual causation, or appearances, and the world of intelligible causes, or things in themselves, or freedom.[15]

If the modern epistemological discourse was determined by the *representation of objects*, the visuality of the world[16], knowledge after Kant is determined by the mind's *projection*

---

[15] Kant attempted to bridge this division between his *First* and *Second Critiques* in Aesthetics, in his Third Critique, in which the work of Art is an example of freedom. And the Romantics take Kant's Third Critique (Judgement, Genius, Sublime) and transform it into the idea of the autonomy of Art, hence as the realization of freedom. The Romantic debt to Kant's thinking about Aesthetics will come up later.

[16] Richard Rorty argues for this in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 17-69, claiming that Descartes marks the "invention of the mind" as *mirror* of the world.

onto "objects," which Kant calls the subjective conditions of the possibility of experience, space and time, as pure *a priori* concepts.[17] And further, Kant marks the shift from the mind's passive mirroring of an independent reality outside to an active structuring of the world. Knowledge in *pictures* is replaced by knowledge in *words* or concepts.

This Kantian revolution together with the already existing rationalistic (Leibniz, Wolff) as well as empiristic (Locke) doctrine of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign makes representation obsolete. The more surprising is the tendency of the "aesthetical" discourse of 18th century Classicism to focus on *mimesis* as the ideal of literature, e.g. in Gottsched's poetics.[18] Only Romantic literature[19] followed Kant in the turn towards the realm of subjectivity in words. Early Romanticism literally searches for a, as Schlegel says, *Transzendentalpoesie*, the subjective conditions[20] of the possibility of literature (language).[21] To be sure, the triumph of the word over the image, the intellectual over the sensual, is not without costs. The uncertainty about representation accompanies the *desire* for such visual experience, which is now impossible because of the subject's removal from the sensual world.

---

[17] Kant's famous Copernican Revolution is that, before him, philosophers have assumed that all knowledge must conform to objects whereas now all objects must conform to our knowledge.

[18] One exemption might be Lessing's *Laokoon* essay (1776) in which he distinguishes between the visual art's representation of figures and colors in space and the linguistic representation of actions in time. Yet, even this distinction remains governed by the idea of *mimesis*.

[19] Of course, Goethe's *Werther* would be an exception or predecessor of Romantic literature in its limitation to a novel in "letters."

[20] These Romantic subjective conditions are not the Kantian space and time. It is impossible to say what they are, since they remain purely "subjective."

[21] Novalis says that poetry is "no imitation of nature, poetry is precisely the opposite." And more poignantly he expresses this in his *Monolog*, that language is only concerned with itself.

Instead of compensating the failure of the "ocular proof," language intensifies the sense of lack or absence of the world (skepticism).

Certainly, the matter is more complicated than suggested here. What is Kant's relation to skepticism? First, the famous interruption of his dogmatic slumber in reading Hume, as he calls it in the *Prolegomena* (AA IV 260), did not motivate him to *refute* Hume's skepticism concerning cause and effect. He takes skepticism in a different tone: instead of asking "how could we possibly know that effect B is caused by A?", he asks "under which *conditions* can we reasonably speak of cause and effect?" Skepticism is not a specific claim but a mood in which a claim is made. In the *Prolegomena*, Kant calls skepticism a "Denkungsart, darin die Vernunft so gewaltthätig gegen sich selbst verfährt, daß diese niemals, als in völliger Verzweiflung an Befriedigung in Ansehung ihrer wichtigsten Absichten hätte entstehen können." (AA IV 271) Skepticism is a *way of thinking* in which *reason violently goes against itself*. Kant's treatment of skepticism, therefore, can only be to restore *hope*, to make room for faith, as he says, in the pursue of knowledge. For him, the limitation of absolute knowledge (representation) is the condition for knowledge.

This is not so far away from Freud's remark on the Judaic-Christian tradition of prohibition of the representation of God: "Es ist das Verbot, sich ein Bild von Gott zu machen, also der Zwang, einen Gott zu verehren, den man nicht sehen kann."[22] (*Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* 220) What else is Kant's proof of the improvability of God's

---

[22] Freud further remarks that this signifies the triumph of intellectuality over sensuality with all its consequences for the subject: "Denn es bedeutete eine Zurücksetzung der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung gegen eine abstrakt zu nennende Vorstellung, einen Triumph der Geistigkeit über die Sinnlichkeit, streng genommen einen Triebverzicht mit seinen psychologisch notwendigen Folgen." (*Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* 220)

existence than the intellect's triumph over the senses? Its price is the split of the human being as inhabitant of two worlds. The limitation of knowledge opens the possibility of freedom as transcendental *idea*, which is not an object of knowledge but of morality. Kant shows how skepticism cannot be refuted but must be undermined, changing *the way* humans think about their own capabilities. However, Kant is convinced to have brought an end to the possibility of despair human beings feel about their own constitution. His moral philosophy is the expression of this conviction. Romanticism, on the other hand, is the expression of the fact that the human desire to go against oneself is illimitable.

Kant's question is: "how we can be sure to follow the moral law for its own sake (its ideal) and not out of mere conformity (in appearance to it)? How can we connect these two worlds, which were introduced by Kant himself, and act freely? It is important to see that Kant's philosophy was invested in this question from the beginning of his "epistemological" first *Critique* and that his introduction of these two worlds or standpoints, as he calls it, is essential to his limitation of reason, hence to his rescue of knowledge, which is his settlement of skepticism. But how can such limitation not appear to be skepticism itself, since it "shuts us off" from our desired transcendental ideas and things in themselves? The direction of Kant's conclusion solely depends on our *standpoint*.[23] And taken this standpoint as crucial

---

[23] Kant's idea of a standpoint, that is an ideal to which we can strive, seems to be Kant's perfectionist side. Paul Guyer specifically does "understand Kant's own moral philosophy as a form of perfectionism, as long as we are clear about what it is that is supposed to be perfected." (2014, 196) It is interesting to see how Kant's moral philosophy, often described as dry, entails an element of transformation, almost utopian, in it. Guyer described it in the following way: "But even though the ideas of reason cannot give us theoretical cognition, Kant holds that they can give us *ideals*, that is unique conceptions of how reality *ought to be* rather than determinate cognition of how it *is*. Thus, Kant argues that while the theoretical use of pure reason can only lead to metaphysical illusion, the practical use of pure reason generates the ideals by which we ought to act in transforming the world." (205-206) This can already be found in the first *Critique*, where Kant says: "Die reine Vernunft enthält also, zwar

element throughout Kant's philosophy, we can agree with Paul Guyer in arguing against John Rawls, Thomas Hill and Karl Ameriks that far "from being indifferent to skepticism, then, Kant organized his entire philosophy as a response to the varieties of skepticism *as he understood them*," (Guyer 2008, 29) which refers to epistemological skepticism in his first *Critique* and to moral skepticism in his Practical Philosophy. And since all of Kant's *Critiques* end in an investigation of human freedom, the way Kant sees this freedom enacted must be a response to the threat of skepticism.

Therefore, we need to understand Kant's idea of autonomy as the expression of such freedom. Autonomy means to act in accordance to as well as function as the giver of the moral law. This entails some problems. E.g., actions can be "pflichtmäßig," in conformity with the moral law, without being acted "aus Pflicht," for the sake of the moral law. That means, there are actions that are "pflichtmäßig" and to which the subject has "unmittelbare Neigung," in which case it is impossible to know whether the subject acted for the sake of the law or in mere conformity to it.[24] And Kant famously, scandalously claims that there is no *moral* worth of an action out of compassion. He claims that the principle of morality cannot follow from any form of "interest"[25] or subjective "Triebfeder" ("incitement"), which would

---

nicht in ihrem spekulativen, aber doch in einem gewissen praktischen, nämlich dem moralischen Gebrauche, Prinzipien der Möglichkeit der Erfahrung, nämlich solcher Handlungen, die den sittlichen Vorschriften gemäß in der Geschichte des Menschen anzutreffen sein könnten." (AA B835)

[24] Kant's example is a salesman who does not overprice his goods. He does so in accordance with the law, but he also has a direct motivation ("unmittelbare Neigung") to do so. And there is no way to know whether he acts for the sake of the law or merely in conformity.

[25] A crucial point is Kant's distinction between two forms of interest. To have interest in acting according to the moral law, because it provides benefits, is an incitement, to take interest in the moral law is to follow the idea of the realm of Ends. Kant's idea is that morality is something ordinary human beings cannot fail to take an interest in. „Ich will einräumen, daß mich hiezu kein Interesse *treibt*, denn das würde keinen categorischen Imperativ geben; aber ich muß doch hieran nothwendig ein Interesse *nehmen* […]." (AA IV 449)

be a heteronomy, but from the respect towards oneself as person (AA IV 427, 432). To fail

to act for the sake of the law is to fail to recognize oneself as "Person," as "Zweck an sich,"

opposed to a thing, "Sache" or "Mittel" (AA IV 427-428). And he then ends with one famous

description of the categorical imperative: „*Handle so, daß du die Menschheit, sowohl in*

deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden andern, jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals

bloß als Mittel brauchest." (AA IV 429) So, autonomy is directly connected to the state of

myself as a human being; to fail to enact my autonomy is to fail my humanity. The fulfillment

of the unconditioned moral imperative, however, is the realization of the "Realm of Ends" in

which any rational being gives the law *and* obeys it (AA IV 432-433).

That I cannot have any interest in fulfilling the moral law, but that I need to *take* interest

in it, means, as Kant puts it, seeing myself from a different standpoint. The moral law does

only apply to mixed beings that are *object of temptations* ("Neigungen"). The condition of

the possibility of autonomy is that the human being *can* perceive itself from two standpoints.

Without this double nature, there won't be any need for the call for autonomy. The "ought"

of the categorical imperative would be pointless, if we would already act in conformity to it

(see AA IV 454). Human beings can only be autonomous if they can fail to do so. But *how*

can we fail here? Kant acknowledges above all that philosophy cannot provide any

explanation for the freedom of will, because this would transcend reason, and that this

incapability equals the impossibility to provide any "interest" as motivation to follow the

moral law. Yet, he remarks, "[…] und gleichwohl nimmt er wirklich daran ein Interesse

[…]." (AA IV 460) The moral law is not incentive *because* it interests us (which is

heteronomy) but because *it cannot fail* to interest us *as human beings*: "sondern daß es

interessirt, weil es für uns als Menschen gilt, da es aus unserem Willen als Intelligenz, mithin aus unserem eigentlichen Selbst, entsprungen ist" […]." (AA IV 461)

If we consider Kant's word "Interesse" from its Latin root,[26] we will get an interesting picture. "Interesse" is the present active infinitive of "intersum" which means, literally, "to lie between," "to be apart," "to differ", "to take part in." Failing to take an interest in the moral law, in the intelligible world, which is part of ourselves, is failing to recognize oneself as human being, since, for Kant, the human being is the one "in between" these two worlds. In other words, to take an interest in oneself requires the acknowledgement of the incomprehensibility[27] of the moral law (the fact of freedom), whose alternative is "kraftlos ihre Flügel [zu] schwinge[n], ohne von der Stelle zu kommen, und sich unter Hirngespinsten [zu] verliere[n]." (AA IV 462)

However, while Kant sees this as the end of our moral conversation, it should be the beginning. At any point of Kant's investigation, he must assume that we already "know" about our "ought" that constraints us in our vision of the moral world. Yet, such ideal creates the precondition of our morality in the first place, without which, as Cavell says, "we [would] exist otherwise in a premoral state, morally voiceless." (CHU 62) This premoral state is the object of concern for Moral Perfectionism; the realization that we are, out of some reason,

---

[26] Here, I would merely like to draw attention to the fact that in Kant's days, it was still quite recent that professors of philosophy wrote in German than in Latin. But then we also need to notice that Kant was one of the first actual "professors" of philosophy. Descartes, Locke, Hume, Leibniz were not "professors."

[27] As Kant says: "Und so begreifen wir zwar nicht die practische unbedingte Nothwendigkeit des moralischen Imperativs, wir begreifen aber doch seine *Unbegreiflichkeit*, welches alles ist, was billigermaßen von einer Philosophie, die bis zur Grenze der menschlichen Vernunft in Principien strebt, gefordert werden kann." (AA IV 463)

incapable of expressing our moral needs. Kant always needs to presume that we *have a voice*, that we *have the ability to decide* between duty and incentive, and hence must choose what we *ought to do*. Moral Perfectionism, on the other hand, acknowledges that there is no "ought," but either we are drawn to e.g. "morality" or we are not. Emerson contests Kant's idea because "of its present failure, or parody, its reduction to conformity." (CHU 58) Instead, what we lack is not the law but *interest*, to take an interest in one's life. The opposite to a moral life, envisioned by Kant, is not an immoral (or evil) one, but one of indifference.

Romanticism: The Difference of Indifference

John Rawls interprets Kant's "main aim as deepening and justifying Rousseau's idea that liberty is acting in accordance with a law that we give to ourselves" which "leads not to a morality of austere command but to an ethic of mutual respect and self-esteem" and that "Kant speaks of the failure to act on the moral law as giving rise to shame and not to feelings of guilt" (Rawls 225) This is interesting, because it seems to connect Kant's thinking about morality with Emerson and Nietzsche and their interest in the loss of our uprightness. Further, Kant's idea of shame rises precisely if we fail to see us as rational beings, as humans, and instead remain in a state of nature. In his text *Muthmasslicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, Kant describes how the first development of freedom in the human being takes place as the disobedience towards the instinct, "diese Stimme Gottes" (AA VIII 111). Despite the convenience to follow the voice of nature, the human listens to the voice of reason and is free, standing "am Rande eines Abgrundes […]." (AA VIII 112). Although Kant takes the biblical account as holy "Urkunde" (AA VIII 109) of the Fall of man, he does replace the sense of shame, which stands at the beginning of man's discovery of himself, with a sense of fright, so that the beginning of humanity requires courage. This beginning, indeed,

is a "*Muth*masslicher Anfang," which repeats itself in the beginning of *Aufklärung* and Kant's famous diction "*sapere aude*! Habe Muth dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen!" (AA VIII 35)

Failing to enact such courage, however, does produce shame about the human as being removed from nature, as having experienced an irretrievable loss. Romanticism takes this sometimes to be the problem of self-consciousness. And the two ways of solving this problem is either to maximize our self-consciousness (Idealism) or to minimize it. But the question whether we have too much self-consciousness or too little already is an instance of our shame and not the attempt to overcome it, because it implies that this loss has actually taken place. Instead of seeing the "loss" (of nature, of immediacy, of innocence) as a metaphysical part of our condition, it is *merely* our *perspective* onto ourselves, our standing to ourselves, something Romantic writers address as melancholy.

Still before Romanticism, however, this theme is set up in Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* and *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*. In the former, he describes the human condition not metaphysically but historically as the loss of humanity's wholeness:

Ewig nur an ein einzelnes kleines Bruchstück des Ganzen gefesselt, bildet sich der Mensch selbst nur als Bruchstück aus, ewig nur das eintönige Geräusch des Rades, das er umtreibt, im Ohre, entwickelt er nie die Harmonie seines Wesens, und anstatt die Menschheit in seiner Natur auszuprägen, wird er bloß zu einem Abdruck seines Geschäfts, seiner Wissenschaft. (Schiller 1962a, 583)

45

Schiller contrasts the idea of "humanity in oneself" as a process of "Ausprägung" (forming) or "Bildung" with an absorption into the everyday, imagined as "Abdruck." Schiller's metaphor already points to his diagnosis of this loss and its overcoming. His diagnosis is that *culture* has turned man into a copy.[28] Like Nietzsche, Schiller remarks that "Kultur selbst war es, welche der neuern Menschheit diese Wunde schlug." (*Sixth Letter*) And as in the case of Nietzsche, Schiller sees the redemption of man's wholeness in a redemption of culture: "so muß es bei uns stehen, diese Totalität in unsrer Natur, welche die Kunst zerstört hat, durch eine höhere Kunst wiederherzustellen." (Schiller 1962a, 587) The point here is that culture is not something to be overcome, say in a state of nature, but disobeyed. That Romanticism *is taken to* strive for the former tells us more about our own reluctance to do the latter and our will to be imprisoned by our own categories (culture/nature). Of course, Schiller's trust in the powers of Art is dangerously close to the attempt to escape the unstable conditions of the human. But this is no bad motivation; in fact, it is human to do so. However, in his *Über Naïve und Sentimentalische Dichtung*, we find a different picture. The ultimate goal of Art as the reconciliation of all opposition between the real and the ideal remains unachievable:

Die Natur macht ihn mit sich eins, die Kunst trennt und entzweit ihn, durch das Ideal kehrt er zur Einheit zurück. Weil aber das Ideal ein Unendliches ist, das er niemals erreicht, so kann der kultivierte Mensch in *seiner* Art niemals vollkommen werden, wie doch der natürliche Mensch es in der seinigen zu werden vermag. (Schiller 1962b, 717)

---

[28] This diagnosis can be found in Rousseau and later in Nietzsche and Heidegger. Zarathustra e.g. says: "No shepherd and One herd! Everyone wants the same, Everyone is the same: whoever feels differently commits himself to the madhouse." (*Preface* 14)

Different than in his *Aesthetical Letters*, the Aesthetic state can never be created, no culture can be perfected. The sentimental "poet lives in this world of antagonisms […]," (1997, 78) as Richard Eldridge puts it. Although the ideal does not lose its attraction to the sentimental poet, he realizes that he will fail to fulfill his task, that "die Aufgabe ist ein Unendliches." That is why the sentimental poet chooses (although there is no real choice here) the elegy as textual genre:

> Entweder ist die Natur und das Ideal ein Gegenstand der Trauer, wenn jene als verloren, dieses als unerreicht dargestellt wird. Oder beide sind ein Gegenstand der Freude, indem sie als wirklich vorgestellt werden. Das erste gibt die *Elegie* in engerer, das andere die *Idylle* in weitester Bedeutung. (Schiller 1962b, 727)

The figure of this struggle is the child. At once, the image of an undisfigured nature in civilization, a pure innocence, *and* the source of an experienced loss. If Rousseau has discovered childhood, Schiller has discovered the loss of childhood, adolescence; that maturity or autonomy is not given but must be achieved.[29] Instead of the elegy as textual genre, Schlegel and Novalis choose the fragment. In his famous fragment no. 116, Schlegel says:

> Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie. Ihre Bestimmung ist nicht bloß, alle getrennte Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen, und die Poesie mit der

---

[29] Richard Eldridge remarks on this point: "The child now becomes an uncanny figure of both the ideal possibility, in its unselfconscious naturalness, and horror, insofar as in its spontaneity it is already one the way into competitive antagonisms." (1997, 81) The horror Eldridge describes here would then count as the horror of stasis or becoming; and both seem to offer no alternative.

Philosophie und Rhetorik in Berührung zu setzen. Sie will, und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig, und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen […] Andre Dichtarten sind fertig, und können nun vollständig zergliedert werden. Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann. (Schlegel 182)

The paradoxical nature of romantic poetry is that it attempts to unify all genres and philosophy with literature, but that it continuously remains "to become." The fragment is the genre of choice to "realize" such vision of art because it expresses this paradox in its form. Rodolphe Gasché claims that the fragment is not opposed to "system" (xi). And Peter Szondi remarks that "the fragment is conceived as 'the subjective embryo of a developing object,' i.e. as preparation of the longed-for synthesis. Rather than the not-yet-achieved, or what has remained a detached piece, the fragment is perceived as anticipation, promise." (Szondi 20)

In Gasché's claim, however, all depends on what one takes "system" to mean and why the fragment is not opposed to such "system." Szondi's idea that the latter is not a detached piece of something bigger helps to grasp Schlegel's concept of the fragment. In fragment no. 206, Schlegel says: "Ein Fragment muß gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel." (Schlegel 197) We can ask the question again: How can a fragment be "vollendet" in itself? It seems that, whether fragments are opposed to any form of "system" or not, Schlegel attempts to overcome such a distinction in establishing the genre of the fragment. That means, he does not try to overcome "objectivity" (system) through "subjectivity" (fragment), by showing how any system remains fragmented. Instead, he proposes a different idea of "Vollendung,"

that does not mean "completion" but "perfection." This distinction is crucial for evaluating Schlegel's argument with Kantian philosophy, or Romanticism's investment in Kant's discoveries, circling around the threat of skepticism, which is either to state that there can be no completion or that there must be a completion.

For example, Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert claims that Schlegel's goes deeper than Jacobi and Fichte in his critique of Kant's thing in itself "by not only criticizing the notion of a thing in itself but also to reject the accompanying ontology based on permanent substance," in which "thing" signifies "some static, lifeless, ahistorical bearer of properties" (Millán-Zaibert 142). But since this criticism must entail a rejection of Kant's noumenal realm, and hence of Kant's whole idea of freedom, Schlegel's project seems to be the harmonization of Kant's two worlds in a combination of subjective Idealism and objective Realism (see Beiser 150).

> If philosophers are guilty of freezing living reality in their move to subsume changing, living reality under fixed, final causes, then the adjective philosophical will indeed suggest a move away from change and life to the fixed, stable, or dead categories used to capture reality. The ideal of such philosophical methods is "some state of perfection," which, as we saw earlier, was disavowed in Schlegel's emphasis on infinite becoming. (Millán-Zaibert 146)

For Millán-Zaibert, Schlegel's problem circles around the question how to prevent his relativism "from collapsing into a self-refuting claim" (Millán-Zaibert 146) and she sees the solution in the idea of the Absolute as "orientation point in our search for knowledge." (Millán-Zaibert 146)[30] But how can this be a satisfying solution? It rather seems like an

---

[30] She refers here to Manfred Frank's article "Alle Wahrheit ist relative, alles Wissen symbolisch" (1996)

instance of skepticism itself. The main point here is to distinguish between what Millán-Zaibert calls "some state of perfection" and "completion." One is this fixed and frozen state, the other is not. Moral Perfectionism is all about the endless struggle between these two images of perfection. In other words, to claim that there is always a "degree of uncertainty" left and that the Absolute functions "as an orientation point in our search for knowledge" remains in the picture of a "possible" completion of all knowledge.

As I tried to show with Cavell, the discussion should not focus on the path of denying the existence of a mind-independent reality but on the *tone of denying*. It just does not make any sense to talk of "denial" here, if that means "rejecting an opinion," because the existence of the world is not an "opinion." It is not a claim of knowledge at all and that includes a claim of "approximate knowledge", or "approximate truth," (Millán-Zaibert 148) I even agree that Schlegel's irony is "the result of a deep respect for and commitment to *understanding* reality" (Millán-Zaibert 167) But this attitude can be attributed to the skeptic as well. It just means that the skeptic is not a fool. As Stanley Cavell said, the skeptic forgoes the world solely because of its importance to her, because it fails to provide her the closeness that she craves for. A more fruitful way of seeing Schlegel as inheriting Kant's two worlds.[31] The Romantic quest precisely searches for a way to inhabit this double nature of human beings. At least, Cavell sees this in Romanticism:

I might describe my philosophical task as one of outlining the necessity, and the lack of necessity, in the sense of the human as inherently strange, say unstable, its quotidian as

---

[31] Eldridge remarks: "Kantian antidogmatism begins by pointing us toward a sense of ourselves both as free and rational inquirers and agents […] and as beings bound up in a causally determined course of nature. But it then fails to show us how quite to live out these two senses with or against one another." (1997, 61)

forever fantastic. […] The everyday is ordinary because, after all, it is our habit, or habitat; but since that very habitation is from time to time perceptible to us – we who have constructed it – as extraordinary, we conceive that some place elsewhere, or this place otherwise constructed, must be what is ordinary to us, must be what romantics […] call 'home.' […] Romantics are brave in noting the possibility of life-in-death and what you might call death-in-life. My favorite romantics are the ones (I think the bravest ones) who do not attempt to escape these conditions by taking revenge on existence. But this means willing to continue to be born, to be natal, hence mortal. (IQO 154)

I guess, a sense of this Romanticism lies in Novalis' fragments in which he calls for a "Romanticization of the everyday", to make the ordinary extraordinary, and the extraordinary ordinary, so that the beginning achievement of Romanticism would be *estrangement*. Estrangement implies a loss of orientation, to not know one's way about. And if that loss of orientation happens in the midst of what appeared to be familiar and ordinary, Romanticism is itself uncanny. One could say that Romanticism keeps skepticism's possibility open by warning for too much knowledge. Schlegel makes this point in his short and extraordinary text *Über Unverständlichkeit*: "Wahrlich, es würde euch bange werden, wenn die ganze Welt, wie ihr es fordert, einmal im Ernst durchaus verständlich würde. Und ist sie selbst diese unendliche Welt nicht durch den Verstand aus der Unverständlichkeit oder dem Chaos gebilde?" (Schlegel 370)

It all depends on how we inhabit this incomprehensibility. Eldridge calls this "Schlegelian nihilism" (1997, 85). Yet if anything, Schlegel's claim of the horror of absolute comprehensibility is the opposite of nihilism. Likewise, a world in which nothing is comprehensible would cease to be a world at all. But Schlegel merely claims that the

inner Zufriedenheit selbst hängt, wie jeder leicht wissen kann, irgendwo zuletzt an einem solchen Punkte, der im Dunkeln gelassen werden muß, dafür aber auch das Ganze trägt und hält, und diese Kraft in demselben Augenblicke verlieren würde, wo man ihn in Verstand auflösen wollte. (Schlegel 370)

Schlegel does not propose a form of "undecidability," as Eldridge claims (83), but a limitation of knowledge and the inhabitation of such limitation, on which depends inner happiness, which classically is the highest good of humanity (Aristotle). [32] Schlegel announced in 1799 in one of his *Ideen* fragments the following: "Das höchste Gut und das allein Nützliche ist die Bildung." (no. 37, 259) *Bildung* as the education of humanity was the central goal of early Romanticism, including Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schelling, Tieck, Wackenroder, Schiller. And the emphasis of *Bildung* certainly was due to the social and political climate of these thinkers. The catastrophe in which the French Revolution ended in 1793, and all early Romantics were enthusiastic about the Revolution, raised the question of how to attain political change including free, modern citizens without falling into terror and chaos. Even before this cataclysmic event, thinkers thought about the idea that *Aufklärung* alone fails to provide the means to guide people to fulfill the ideas of *Aufklärung*; it lacked education. Rousseau, Herder and Hamann tried to provide this concept of education or perfection, as well as Goethe, Leibniz, Mendelssohn etc. Especially in the former two, education was configured as the perfection of one's sentiments and feelings, along reason, whereas for Leibniz education was a matter of cultivating one's intellect. In which does the Romantic idea of education differ from these? All these ideas think of education in terms of

---

[32] A different point is that Schlegel discusses the incomprehensibility with direct reference to his own writings, the Athenäum fragments, and he connects this to a call for readers of the future: "Dann wird es Leser geben die lesen können." (370)

perfection, excellence, self-cultivation, but only Romanticism thinks of it as aesthetic education (Schiller in 1795), and only Romanticism develops this perfectionism in a direct argument with Kant. The latter sees the highest good in a good will alone, that means aside of any "Neigungen," "Interessen" etc. Similarly, he defines the pleasure of beauty as the "interesseloses Wohlgefallen." Schlegel directly contests Kant's idea by calling *Bildung* the highest good *and* the only thing that is useful. The affront for Kant lies here in both categories: 1. The highest good is the final end (all means lead to this end) and the complete end (nothing can be added to it), although *Bildung* describes a process. 2. The highest good has this status because it is *not* useful, for Kant.

Further, Kant's problem is that he is necessarily unable to provide any motivation for following the moral law, since it must deprive any such incitements, so that the moral law will only be followed by already morally acting people. Hence, what is needed is precisely the process of becoming a moral being, which is becoming a human being. The Romantic idea here is that we *must* take an interest in our moral life in order to be willing to act morally. To define the experience of beauty as "interesselos" seems to be as scandalous as describing the compassionate act of a mother for her child as without moral worth. Hence, the task is to awaken this "interest" in our life, in ourselves, and *not* in a specific topic.[33] Novalis calls this the "Romanticization" of everyday life as well as the "logarithmization" of the sacred. To romanticize the world is to see the ordinary as extraordinary, the familiar as strange, the

---

[33] If Wordworth's poetry demarcates the point when a poem loses its subject, and hence becomes "modern," then this either is the effect or the cause of a loss of interest in "subject," "things," "the world." Wordsworth e.g. says in his *Prelude*: "all things were to me / Loose and disjointed, and the affections left / Without a vital interest." (147)

mundane as sacred, the finites as infinite (see Beiser 101). Novalis asks for nothing less than a transformation of the world.

Novalis' "operation" creates distance between us and the ordinary life by showing the latter as unfamiliar; we lack interest in our everyday life *because* it is too close to us.[34] The unknown, mystical, call this Kant's transcendental ideas, become familiar. The claim to know these ideas caused skepticism. Novalis' cure for skepticism is to discover the sublimity of everyday life. To be sure, however, this "operation" does not have an end, although it can come to an end at any point. This is the typical paradoxical attitude of all of Novalis' fragments; the fragmentary structure itself. Novalis' circumscription of this operation, the identification of a lower self with a better self, expresses this potentially never-ending process; there is always a "better" self. He writes in fragment no. 22: "Der Mensch vermag in jedem Augenblicke ein übersinnliches Wesen zu seyn." (Novalis 433) And later he writes: "Die höchste Aufgabe der Bildung ist, sich seines transzendentalen Selbsts zu bemächtigen, das Ich seines Ich's zugleich zu sein." (Novalis 437) Novalis combines this transcendental perspective, one might call it "sane madness," with the question of interest: "Der transcendentale Gesichstspunct für dieses Leben erwartet uns – dort wir es uns erst recht

---

[34] Wittgenstein famously says: "Wir wollen etwas *verstehen*, was schon offen vor unseren Augen liegt. Denn *das* scheinen wir, in irgend einem Sinne nicht zu verstehen." (§ 89) And in context of this remark, he claims that his investigation does not look for "appearances" but for the "possibilities of appearances" (§ 90), and therefore does not want to learn anything "new." Wittgenstein, obviously, takes up Kant's transcendental inquiry to look for the conditions of possibility of experience. It is true, since Kant "merely" coasts the island of pure reason, which conditions all experience, he does not make any "new" experiences. In limiting our use of reason, Kant does not teach us anything new. But he also does not just *remind* us of the limits of reason. His mode of informing us about such a condition is *new*. How does Novalis takes up this new mode?

interessant werden." (Novalis 444) [35] This transcendental viewpoint is, of course, not transcendent; it is a perspective on *this* life. At this point, it is remarkable that Emerson, almost in the same words, describes this as a "conversion," or "turning around," the striving for an unattained yet attainable self, or "over-soul."[36]

The question of "distance" and "interest," likewise, is a prominent one in Cavell's writing on American Transcendentalism, especially in his book on Thoreau's *Walden*, *The Senses of Walden* (1972). He says that it would be "a fair summary of the book's motive to say that it invites us to take an interest in our lives, and teaches us how" (SW 67) and that it does so in its special mode of reading:

Does it matter whether I read, say, *Walden,* or go, say, to Walden? And then I realize that I am in no position to answer that question; yet I cannot shake it. The choice to go on reading or not is left absolutely up to me-whether I am to invest interest here or not. Nothing *holds* my interest, no suspense of plot or development of character; the words seem continuously at an end. […] It seems all but an accident that we should discover what they mean. This becomes a mood of our acts of reading altogether: it is an accident, utterly contingent, that we should be present at these words at all. We feel this as the writer's withdrawal from the words on which he had staked his presence; and we feel this as the words' indifference to us, their disinterest in whether we choose to stay with them

---

[35] Here is another fragment concerning "interest": "Das Individuum interessiert nur, daher ist alles Klassische nicht individuell." (447) What does that mean? That Classicism is not "interesting"? Or incapable of creating interest, because it lacks individuality? But Novalis says, Classicism is not individual *because* it lacks interest, which is the opposite of what we would expect. But that can only mean that the individual is the goal and interest is the means to achieve such goal. Individuality, or subjectivity, is not the starting point.

[36] It is possible to see here an influence on Nietzsche's "Über-Mensch," a literal translation of Emerson's.

or not. […] This feeling may begin our almost unbearable sense of his isolation. Did [50] he not feel lonesome? We are asking now. And then we find ourselves, perhaps, alone with a book in our hands, words on a page, at a distance. (SW 49-50)[37]

So, Thoreau's strategy to awaken an interest in our lives is to create a distance or estrangement to what we are doing, namely reading, which consequently means to create a distance between us and our words, what we say. Walden's author says: "Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." (Thoreau 162)[38] We begin to realize that there is nothing in words themselves that has "meaning" but that it is our interest or investment, which can be positive or negative, that brings them to life. In case of Novalis, it is our ordinary life that is the object of such a transformation. The possibility of such a transformation is given by Kant's discovery, "daß die Vernunft nur das einsieht, was sie selbst nach ihrem Entwurfe hervorbringt, […] und die Natur nötigen müsse auf ihre Fragen zu antworten […]." (AA B XIII) The uncanny alignment of mind and nature, also prominent in Wordsworth, might be taken for disappearance of the world as independent from us, or it is taken as *the task* to let the world be independent from us, which is also described by Freud as the work of mourning, or the overcoming of melancholy. The point here is that there cannot be an objective ground provided to overcome such a state of the mind but, as Cavell says, "to

---

[37] Later, I would like to suggest that Kleist's fiction precisely teaches us this distance, although in a different way than Thoreau.
[38] The complete quote goes like that: "[…] and not till we are completely lost, or turned round,—for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost,—do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of Nature. Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." (Thoreau 162)

get us to assess our orientation or position toward what we say." (SW 67) To acclaim such a reassessment of our orientation is the project of Romanticism as wells as that of Moral Perfectionism.

Representations of Perfection: *Bildung* after Romanticism

For Kant, we are ashamed in our failing to act for the sake of the law, because we fail to become human beings in doing so; we fail to become who we are. For the Romantics, we are ashamed of our condition dispersed from nature or innocence, or childhood etc. The Romantics, therefore, feel a disdain for contemporary culture, since it is the cause for our distance to nature. Schiller called that our absorption in business. Yet, our redemption takes place in an establishment of a new or higher culture, which they call Art or education through Art. In this chapter, I would like to intensify the parallels between Romanticism, Kant and what Cavell calls Moral Perfectionism, especially in Emerson and Nietzsche, to see how to take up these Romantic tropes and transform them into a response to skepticism and, finally, to see how Kleist does something comparable in his prose.

At first, what is Cavell's Moral Perfectionism? Moral Perfectionism, or Emersonian Perfectionism, is not "a competing moral theory but a dimension of any moral thinking" (CHU 62) which "any theory of it may wish to accommodate." (CHU xxxi) Instead of challenging the contemporary predominant moral theories, Deontology (Kantianism) and Utilitarianism, Perfectionism is concerned with the underlying condition of these theories, namely the ability to express one's own morality in the first place. Emersonian Perfectionism is an interpretation of Rousseau's and Kant's idea of freedom as autonomy, "questioning what or who the self is that commands and obeys itself and what an obedience consists in that is inseparable from mastery." (CHU 31) Cavell refers here, of course, to Kant's idea that

morality is at the same time the giving of law to oneself and obeying this law, so that the human being is master and servant in one. Emersonian Perfectionism, in the following, takes this as the fundamental image of the self as being several selves, not unfamiliar to Kant. Cavell recognizes this image in thinkers from a great range of perspectives.

Beginning with Plato's distinction between the sensible and intelligible realms (of which Kant is a different version) and his idea of the self as constituted by three different selves (appetite, will and reason), Cavell identifies several versions of this image of the human self. For example, Freud distinguish between the "Es," "Ich," and "Über-Ich," or between conscious, pre- and unconscious. Heidegger situates the human self between its everydayness, and the wish to remain in this everydayness, and its authenticity (*Sein und Zeit* § 25 ff.). It is clear, that one (e.g. Cavell) has to announce these parallels with caution; but it should also be clear, that it would be foolish to announce that Plato, Freud and Heidegger thought *the same*. Likewise, it is rather futile to claim that they thought *differently*. We should not waste our breath for this. And in fact, Cavell never attempts to list a sort of "family resemblances" between these versions of Perfectionism that would tell us what Perfectionism "really" is about. Instead, Perfectionism would count as a *moral outlook* in texts ranging throughout the Western tradition of thought. For our purpose, it is important to mention the texts Cavell drops with a direct influence on Romanticism: Kant's *Grundlegung*, Schiller's *Briefe über ästhetische Erziehung* (to which Cavell seems to refer in his subtitle to *Cities of Words* as *Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*), Schlegel's *Athenaeum Fragments*, Kleist's *Die Marquise von O.*, Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer als Erzieher*, Goethe's *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (see CHU 5).

Then, what are the characteristics ranging through these texts that are called "perfectionist"? One of these structural parallels is the disappointment of human beings in the ordinary, in their everyday business, in conformity, and the insistence on the moral calling of philosophy towards the overcoming of this state of the world (or its transformation). This disappointment is the underlying motive of skepticism and its attempt to overcome the human, its limitations of knowledge. Seeing the issue of moral perfectionism in this way, it seems that it is just another version of skepticism itself. The difference would be, that skepticism imagines an absolute stage of overcoming this human condition (or despairs about its impossibility), whereas perfectionism rejects any possibility of completion or absoluteness. In other words, skepticism either presents us with an endless war or with a false peace, both represented in a form of certainty that transcends human knowledge, either as unattainable or as attained once and for all. Perfectionism does not look for a "beyond," hence its disappointment with the ordinary, that "every word they say chagrins us," as Emerson says (*Self-Reliance* 48). But it wishes for a transformation of this ordinary, imagined as the journey of the self in a turn or return to, of and from the self; Emerson imagines this journey as the return of our thoughts to us by a "stranger." Plato describes this journey as the ascent of the soul out of the cave and the return to it. Northrop Frye claims that, opposed to the Christian ascent towards Heaven, in "Romanticism the main direction of the quest of identity tends increasingly to be downward and inward, toward a hidden basis or ground of identity between man and nature." (Frye 33) In this way, Romanticism presents itself as a journey of the self.

The goal of such journey is an unexamined life (see CHU 62), which Emerson calls an unattained self. "It is Perfectionism's question, its reading of the cry of freedom, for a life of one's own, of one's choice, that one consents to with one's own voice." (CHU 63)

59

Perfectionism's favorite imaginings of the social are "terms of imprisonment, voicelessness." (CHU xxxi) The awakening of the awareness of such conditions presents itself as an act of violence, the violence of change, e.g. in Plato's chains, or Rousseau's chains, forced onto oneself by an exemplary other, a teacher or friend. This "turn" requires that a moral creature must demand and acknowledge the intelligibility of others to herself as well as her intelligibility to others. The perfectionist desire for the "necessity of making oneself intelligible" (CHU xxxi). The skeptic's environment was none in which she lacked "reasons" (knowledge), but one of chaos, in which one has lost one's orientation or interest.

Imagined as such, the journey of the self towards its own intelligibility towards itself is not, as the somehow misleading title "perfectionism" seems to imply, striving for an idea of "perfection." Rather, on the contrary, Cavell wants to emphasize that every state of the self is *final* (see CHU 3), that each constitutes a world in itself, desirable and "perfect;" that means, that the self is always in danger of remaining in a world, Heidegger's absorption into averageness, Kant's into the realm of incentives or conformity.[39] The realization of one's own conformity is caused by an external source representing a more authentic form of existence. For Cavell, this can be a friend, a teacher, or even a text that incites the human strive for an unattained self. The journey, therefore, presents itself as a conversation between two friends, one older than the other, one leading a life "exemplary or representative of a life the other(s) are attracted to, and in the attraction of which the self recognizes itself as enchained, fixated,

---

[39]Espen Hammer brings this tension into a good expression: "Corresponding to the two parts of the self, the attained and the unattained, there is an actual and an eventual everyday, the one a bad iteration of voiceless denial of responsibility, the other a good iteration […]." (Hammer 136)

and feels itself from reality." (CHU 6).[40] But how does this lead to an autonomous life, which Kant and the Romantics try to achieve? Isn't this another form of shame, that another human being resembles the exemplary life that I failed to live? This requires a more detailed account.

How does shame take a place in Cavell's writing on skepticism? It first appears in Cavell's essay on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, entitled *The Avoidance of Love*.[41] Cavell's essay explains how shame is one of the fundamental emotions of skepticism, as the shame about our humanness. He remarks:

> It [shame] is the most isolating of feelings, the most comprehensible perhaps in idea, but the most incomprehensible or incommunicable in fact. Shame, I've said, is the most primitive, the most private, of emotions; but it is also the most primitive of social responses. With the discovery of the individual, whether in Paradise or in the Renaissance, there is the simultaneous discovery of the isolation of the individual; his presence to himself, but simultaneously to others. (MWM 263)

It is by this feeling of shame that the skeptic desired to speak "outside of language games," craving for an absolute connection between words and meaning, taking a fixed, therefore dead position to see the world vanish. It is the path of the smaller resistance to let the world

---

[40] Kleist's *Marquise von O...* will follow this pattern in a twisted way. The Marquise feels imprisoned by the inexplicable arrangement of the word. Her "higher" self, the Count, reveals to be a false image of such exemplarity.

[41] Another appearance of shame takes place in Richard Rorty's review of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*.He says that Cavell's text "promises to relieve us philosophy professors from the shame we have felt ever since we began to suspect that our epistemology courses merely kicked up clouds of dust around our students […]." (1981, 759) What is the Rorty's and the professor's "shame we have felt ever"? Rorty's description reminds us readers of Hume's treatment of skepticism, treating it as an uncurable disease from which only distraction, playing a game of backgammon, can provide relief.

vanish before our eyes instead of acknowledging human separateness to the world, in which my distance, my interest or disinterest, must be carried as my responsibility. In this light, skepticism would be the desire for the impossibility of such a connection (where there is no possibility, there can be no disappointment), anti-skepticism would equal this desire by establishing an objective, certain connection. In both cases, the history of skepticism and its "refutations" would be incented by the wish to overcome or avoid the human in the human.

Shame also is a continuous theme in Emerson's writing, mostly known from his essay *Self-Reliance.* It is Emerson's project to release us from our shameful condition, that "we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another." (*Self-Reliance* 40) So, Emerson's cure for our shame is to make us ashamed of this shame, hence that we should become self-reliant. But what does that mean? What does ensure us that we not merely imitate the exemplary other (the friend or text)? Something that, on a textual basis, would count as "quoting." Schiller takes this as the life of his contemporaries. And Cavell discusses this topic in his reading of Emerson's line that "Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage." (*Self-Reliance* 59) Emerson here obviously quotes Descartes who writes in his second Meditation "[…] that this proposition I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind." (Descartes 226)

There are several thoughts included in this pairing by Cavell that need to be disentangled. (1.) Cavell takes Emerson's words here to be "inaudibly familiar," something that he connects elsewhere (see CHU 57) to Freud's idea of the uncanny as the familiar invaded by another familiar (describing the psychoanalytical process in general), and which describes Emerson's

text as a whole, presenting to us its own theory of reading.[42] Emerson's words are too familiar to be heard, and so is the echo of Descartes' words in Emerson, since the latter's famous argument is conventionally remembered falsely as "I think, *therefore* I am."[43] (2.) This inaudibility is intensified by Emerson's "quotation" itself, that he is (a.) unable to name Descartes and that he is (b.) unable to claim his existence by *not* saying "I think," "I am," but by quoting; a condition which he transfers onto his readers ("Man is…"). And finally, (3.) both, Emerson and Descartes, emphasize that (a.) the human being is in need of a proof of his/her existence (the idea of authorizing one's self), (b.) that this proof cannot be a logical "inference" but must be an act of "saying," or claiming or thinking.

What does prevent me from quoting? Emerson does not openly quote Descartes but states that "man […] does not *say* 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes," as if Emerson himself is either unaware of quoting (which is highly unlikely) or "does not dare" to quote. Emerson turns the ideas of "saying" and "quoting" around, now showing the latter as an achievement. The problem would then not be to "make words my own," to make them private, but to make language public again, which, however, requires a new sense of privacy, a new sense of inheriting words. Emerson calls the reunification of the private and the public "genius": "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius." (*Self-Reliance* 40)

But why this connection of my existence and language? Descartes sees the human being as metaphysically dependent or incomplete or unfinished. Descartes requires a proof of God's

---

[42] "I READ the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional." (*Self-Reliance* 39)
[43] This will lead to Cavell's idea that America is unable to inherit philosophy, unable to find its own voice or language (see CW 28).

existence which finally authorizes my existence; the human is *ens creatum*. Emerson, on the other hand, thinks that I do not need to imagine God as my author, if I see my existence as "a continuing task, not a property" (IQO 111). To load the burden of claiming one's existence onto the individual, further, manifests itself as the individual's failure to enact his/her existence. So, if Emerson calls man "timid and apologetic" and "shameful," he declares this to be our self-imposed condition, a state he calls "conformity." This is not a metaphysical state but a perspective. And the specific reliance on the individual's power of self-creation takes place at a specific time in the history of Western thought; a stage which Nietzsche famously addressed as "God's death," and which the Romantics (and Kant) interpreted as the loss of innocence, the removal of man from nature, the Fall of Man. Yet, in Emerson's case (as well as in Nietzsche's) it is the human who posed the sense of loss onto herself. "The Fall" is not an irrecoverable loss but an attachment of the human mind.

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. (*Self-Reliance* 40)

That this return of our thoughts (or words) is uncanny and is our shame is confirmed by Emerson's following line: "Else to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another." (*Self-Reliance* 40) And that this shame is a shame about our shame is evident because it was the shame about our own words (or thoughts) that let us reject them in the first place. To feel ashamed, therefore, of our shame, at first, isolates

us even more. But it also is the sign of our presence to ourselves and others, so that the utmost privacy entails the public life. And that is, I take to be, Emerson's fantasy about the reunification of the private and public realm and which is related to the idea that words return to us, not as our private thoughts, but as public words. Something Cavell mentioned in case of "criteria," that they cannot be established alone but that I am unaware of participating in their establishment; the inheritance of words is not something given.

> Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us and we know not where to begin to set them right. (*Self-Reliance* 48)

Mentioning earlier that this is embodied by Emerson's text as a whole in form of a theory of (its own) reading, Cavell goes even further and transfers this onto the dimension of any text:

> Think of it this way: If the thoughts of a text such as Emerson's […] are yours, then you do not need them. If its thoughts are not yours, they will not do you good. The problem is that the text's thoughts are neither exactly mine nor not mine. In their sublimity as my rejected – say repressed – thoughts, they represent my further, next, unattained but attainable, self. To think otherwise, to attribute the origin of my thoughts simply to the other, thoughts which are then, as it were, implanted in me – some would say caused – by let us say some Emerson, is idolatry. (CHU 57)

65

This is the problem of autonomy and how it has been developed by Rousseau and Kant. Kant's moral law must not be followed but internalized.[44] The Kantian focus on "action" is transferred in Emerson to that of language or "speech," hence the focus on quotation and on the work of Art and reading.[45]

The perfectionist reformulation would then be to avoid letting oneself be attracted to another whose life is exemplary of an untaken path of one's self, staying fixated without recognizing one's own fixation. This exemplariness, however, sounds problematic. Isn't this way of speaking just a disguised way of calling for "elitism" or "aristocracy"? This is a common critique of Nietzsche.[46] For sure, Nietzsche's choice of words does not help defending him against this charge, e.g. in his use of the word "Exemplar":

> Gewiß nur dadurch, daß du zum Vorteile der seltensten und wertvollsten Exemplare lebst, nicht aber zum Vorteile der meisten, das heißt der, einzeln genommen, wertlosesten Exemplare. Und gerade diese Gesinnung sollte in einem jungen Menschen gepflanzt und angebaut werden, daß er sich selbst gleichsam als ein mißlungenes Werk der Natur versteht, aber zugleich als ein Zeugnis der größten und wunderbarsten Absichten dieser Künstlerin: es geriet ihr schlecht, soll er sich sagen; aber ich will ihre große Absicht

---

[44] See Mulhall (1994 280) on this point in detail.

[45] However, it is the way of reading, the mood, that makes the difference, as it was *the mood* in which human separateness is inhabited that marked the difference between skepticism and its overcoming. And so is the talk of "autonomy" object of this difference: "To talk of reliance is a poor external way of speaking. Speak rather of that which relies because it works and is. Who has more obedience than I masters me, though he should not raise his finger." (*Self-Reliance* 61)

[46] See John Rawls reading of Nietzsche's Schopenhauer als Erzieher in his A Theory of Justice (pp. 285-292) in which he claims that the perfectionist principle is based on a certain redistribution of resources, to "give value to our lives by working for the good of the highest specimens," (ibd. 268), hence a necessary elitist enterprise. Cavell challenges this reading in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* pp. 101ff.

dadurch ehren, daß ich ihr zu Diensten bin, damit es ihr einmal besser gelinge. (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher* 327)

However, Nietzsche's word for "specimen" is "Exemplare," something that he relates to perfect instances of a plant or animal, hence to the idea of "evolution." The idea of an "Exemplar" does not emphasize the superiority of it over myself, rather that the exemplarity is an ideal that should guide my life. And Nietzsche says it quite openly that this exemplarity is *not* another person. Of course, this does not mean that the "example" could not be another human being, since Nietzsche sees something like that in Schopenhauer or Schopenhauer's texts. But it must be clear that the idea of guidance for one's life cannot be one of *following* another human being. Zarathustra makes this clear: „Man vergilt einem Lehrer schlecht, wenn man immer nur der Schüler bleibt. […] Nun heisse ich euch, mich verlieren und euch finden; und erst, wenn ihr mich Alle verleugnet habt, will ich euch wiederkehren." (*Zarathustra* 338-339) And Nietzsche says in one of his last letters to his friend Georg Brandes: "Nachdem Du mich entdeckt hast, war es kein Kunststück mich zu finden: die Schwierigkeit ist jetzt die, mich zu verlieren ... Der Gekreuzigte." (cited after Heidegger, WHD 56)

This just repeats the already discussed problem of imitation. To live merely "for" another human being (to "follow") is the false picture of "exemplarity." To live for the example is to live for and strive for a higher self of my own self. And Nietzsche sees this process as a development of culture, which Rawls sees correctly as the "achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture." (Rawls 268) Yet, Rawls takes this idea of culture as too external to the individual, as if culture is merely a question of institutions. Nietzsche says:

Jeder, der sich zu ihr [Kultur] bekennt, spricht damit aus: »ich sehe etwas Höheres und Menschlicheres über mir, als ich selber bin; helft mir alle, es zu erreichen, wie ich jedem

helfen will, der Gleiches erkennt und am gleichen leidet: damit endlich wieder der Mensch entstehe, welcher sich voll und unendlich fühlt im Erkennen und Lieben, im Schauen und Können, und mit aller seiner Ganzheit an und in der Natur hängt, als Richter und Wertmesser der Dinge. (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher* 327)

Nietzsche's calling for a "whole" human being recounts the idea of fragmentariness, that the human being's constitution is not complete. Emerson says the following in *The American Scholar*: "This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Here are the materials strewn along the ground." (*The American Scholar* 40) Nietzsche almost literally renounces this idea:

Also nur der, welcher sein Herz an irgendeinen großen Menschen gehängt hat, empfängt damit die *erste Weihe der Kultur*; ihr Zeichen ist Selbstbeschämung ohne Verdrossenheit, Haß gegen die eigne Enge und Verschrumpftheit, Mitleiden mit dem Genius, der aus dieser unsrer Dumpf- und Trockenheit immer wieder sich emporriß, Vorgefühl für alle Werdenden und Kämpfenden und die innerste Überzeugung, fast überall der Natur in ihrer Not zu begegnen, wie sie sich zum Menschen hindrängt, wie sie schmerzlich das Werk wieder mißraten fühlt, wie ihr dennoch überall die wundervollsten Ansätze, Züge und Formen gelingen: so daß die Menschen, mit denen wir leben, einem Trümmerfelde der kostbarsten bildnerischen Entwürfe gleichen, wo alles uns entgegenruft: kommt, helft, vollendet, bringt zusammen, was zusammengehört, wir sehnen uns unermeßlich, ganz zu werden. (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher* 328)

"Upbuilding" in Emerson's text echoes the German *Bildung* as standing for education and culture or cultivation. Nietzsche also takes up Emerson's idea of the genius and shame. And the idea of "building" takes a literal connotation with "building a house" in Emerson's "materials are strewn along the ground," which Nietzsche takes to be an Aesthetical project, "Trümmerfelde der kostbarsten bildnerischen Entwürfe." And for all the differences between Nietzsche as the author of *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* and of a work like *Zarathustra*, where the idea of a higher culture of man turns into the overcoming of man and an image of the future, the initial position of both texts seems almost identical: "Wahrlich, meine Freunde, ich wandle unter den Menschen wie unter den Bruchstücken und Gliedmaassen von Menschen!" (*Zarathustra* 392) And this sense of culture is connected to the image of the human as fragmented and not to institutions (although institutions are the product of human beings). Emerson wrote that man "is no longer upright," which is he/she walks bent over, ashamed, or that he/she is not trustworthy, not honorable. In any case, that man is not standing. Cavell reads it this way:

> we know uprightness names the posture of the human being standing on hind legs, eyes toward heaven (as in a famous outburst of Kant's praise of our moral capacity), namely as having just evolved out of the trees and come to earth. So the resultant force of "man is no longer upright" becomes: man has as it were suffered a setback (another fall, one could say), which has left him everywhere less than human (Mill will say: distorted, crippled; Nietzsche will say: degenerated), and in such a way that he is incapable of the necessary condition of morality (according to Kant, the capacity to stand on his own, that he be autonomous). (*Cities of Words* 217)

This does not only refer to Nietzsche's idea of "evolution," but to perfectionism offering a temporal cure for skepticism as a transformation of the human. This will be temporal because it must acknowledge the possibility of a "fall" at any time in the development of culture; if the attainment of a higher self is possible, so is the "fall." And further, the present "culture" is not opposed to "nature" because it reveals itself to be the opposite of what Nietzsche calls "culture." Nietzsche's critique of the culture of his days is that it has not even attained "culture;" *the* fall has never taken place, or it takes place every day. Emerson calls this constitution "conformity": "The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion." (*Self-Reliance* 44) And this is to say, in Kantian terms, that to act in conformity with the law is the opposite of acting for the sake of the law. Without the latter, human beings are not autonomous but heteronomous and therefore unable to reclaim their own humanity. So, Emerson, quite arrogantly, claims that "I will stand here for humanity […]" (*Self-Reliance* 53) and Nietzsche connects a claim to humanity to the question of his identity or existence in *Ecce Homo*:

> In Voraussicht, dass ich über Kurzem mit der schwersten Forderung an die Menschheit herantreten muss, die je an sie gestellt wurde, scheint es mir unerlässlich, zu sagen, wer ich bin. […] Ich lebe auf meinen eignen Credit hin, es ist vielleicht bloss ein Vorurtheil, dass ich lebe? (*Ecce Homo* 257)

And if we take Nietzsche's idea of his own voice as a writer as a further contribution to the task of *Bildung* as aesthetical achievement and acknowledgement of the fragmented human constitution or condition, we could see here Nietzsche's inheritance of the Romantic

quest to "become who you are" (the subtitle to his *Ecce Homo*). Further, the idea of *Bildung*[47] is a secularization of the theological image of the human as *ens creatum*, creating by God in his image (*imago dei* – Meister Eckhart); man replaces God as the author of his/her existence.[48] Or as Abrams has called it: "the course of human life […] is no longer a *Heilsgeschichte* but a *Bildungsgeschichte*; or more precisely, it is a *Heilsgeschichte* translated into the secular mode of a *Bildungsgeschichte*." (Abrams 188) This transformation shifts the image of the human as *ens creatum* to *opus artis*. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy remark, "programmatically, the philosophical *organon* is thought as the product or effect of a *poiesis*, as work (*Werk*) or as poetical opus […]. Philosophy must effectuate itself – complete, fulfill, and realize itself – as poetry." (LA 36) Schlegel's and Novalis' writing about *Bildung*, and their theory of the fragment emerges in this discourse, so that *Bildung* can never be an actual goal *in itself*. This is the paradoxical idea of *Bildung*; it cannot be *completed*. Romanticism imagines this aesthetical project as a project of cultivation in and through literature. In this sense, moral perfectionism must include the question of philosophy's expression; the question of how to articulate and realize the powers of freedom within ourselves. As Richard Eldridge calls it, the "movement toward *poiesis* as the site and inconclusive vehicle of philosophical thinking about our powers, is the central thematic thread of post-Kantian German romanticism." (1997, 71) We will now take up this thread in Kleist's prose.

---

[47] Gadamer delivers a thorough description of the the history of *Bildung* as one of the "guiding humanistic principles" in his *magnum opus Wahrheit und Methode* (7-16). However, notably, he goes from Herder's idea of an "Emporbildung zur Humanität" directly to Hegel's idea of the human as no natural being, because it is not what it should be, and therefore in need of *Bildung*. But that also means that Gadamer ignores all of Romanticism's writings and Hegel's own influence by these writings.

[48] See Lichtenstein, Ernst. "Bildung." *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Band 1: A–C*, edited by Joachim Ritter et al., Schwabe, 1971, pp. 921–927.

Chapter 3: Crises of Knowledge – Kleist and Skepticism

Do Kleist's texts belong to Romanticism? Or to Classicism? Or do these categories confuse more than they clarify? But Nietzsche or Emerson are not romantic authors either; yet their writings belong to this discourse. What then is the status of Kleist's writing in between Kant, Romanticism, (Hegel), Nietzsche? I suggested that Kant's idea of the human being living in between two worlds, his theory of morality as absolutely separated from nature, is his way of satisfying skepticism. The reanimation of skepticism in Kant makes Romanticism possible. Kant neither closes off the possibility of skepticism, nor does he leave it open. The history of philosophy after Kant is determined by an interpretation of what this means. In this history, Romanticism does not reject Kant's answer, but questions whether the difference between our two worlds is a solution or another instance of skepticism, since it is the disparity between two worlds (mind – body), together with their sensed intimacy, that creates the skeptic's shock. So, the Romantic's craving for the unification of these two realms, which can be accomplished in the realization that there never has been a disparity in the first place, no absolute one at least. But this realization cannot be absolute either; it remains a movement.

Further, skepticism arises in the moment of western history in which the natural sciences claim knowledge over the natural world as well as Protestantism abolishes the representation of God on earth for an immediate connection to God in the inner of the individual. Descartes can only *look* for a *proof* of the immortality of the soul if its immortality is put to doubt etc.

The certainty of a *Heilsgeschichte* is secularized into a *Bildungsgeschichte*, in which nothing is certain, and in which history is made by man (Vico, Voltaire). But as such secularization or compensation, doesn't it merely reproduce the same mechanism of a *Heilsgeschichte*, of progress? Hegel is the most poignant example of that sort. Goethe would be another example, although very much different from Hegel's. Goethe's idea of *Bildung*, e.g. in *Wilhelm Meister*, is more individualistic, but also more ironic, hence more in control, a standpoint from above. Both, Hegel and Goethe, think vertically. Kleist, on the other hand, writes horizontally. Deleuze and Guattari describe Kleist's writing in the following way: "The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations. Kleist invented a writing of this type […]." (ATP 9)

It is not that Kleist's writing lacks movement, quite the opposite. And it is not that Hegel and Goethe lack movement, quite the opposite. Their difference is the *how* of the movement: Kleist's writing goes "through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing […]." (ATP 25) Kleist never presents a "harmonious development of Form and a regulated formation of the Subject, personage, or character […]" (ATP 268), instead all "actions and emotions are desubjectified" and "no subjective interiority remains." (ATP 356) Therefore, Kleist does not merely write against theological motivated (secularized) images of static certainty, but even more against a false image of movement as harmonious development of Form. The destruction of subjective interiority, which Deleuze and Guattari see as characteristic in Kleist's writing, however, is not Kleist's rejection of interiority but his *desire for it*. As it was skepticism's motivation to deny the functionality of criteria, that these do not provide certainty, because the skeptic craved for intimacy with the world that transcends the

idea of knowledge; so is Kleist's refusal of subjectivity or interiority, or knowledge, motivated by his desire for a deeper connection with the world and others. Kleist's figures are exposed in their imaginations of themselves, others and the world as constantly driven beyond what is considered human. Their fantasies of perfection are e.g. the realization of God's kingdom or sublimity (*Das Erdbeben in Chili*), or of the realm of Nature (*Das Erdbeben in Chili*), or the realm of Justice (*Michael Kohlhaas*), the idea of bearing the child of God (*Das Erdbeben von Chili*, *Die Marquise von O.*), immediacy between two partners (*Die Verlobung von St. Domingo*, *Die Marquise von O.*). Kleist's contribution to the problem of skepticism is that he acknowledges its irrefutability as well as the human wish to transcend human knowledge, and that his idea of *Bildung* strives for the achievement of the human.

In order to show this, I will interpret Kleist's so-called *Kant-Krise* as a crisis of *Bildung* that has abandoned any transcendental truth, which is the situation after Kant, and now attempts to find a way to live in an uncertain world; this will connect Kleist to the discourse of his time, to Romanticism and also to Nietzsche. This means that it is not the *lack of* transcendental truth that causes Kleist's crisis, but, as I called it, the disappointment in the success of knowledge, in the ordinariness of the human. In the secularization of salvation into education, God as guarantee of salvation, is replaced through another human being as guarantee of education, elevating her into something beyond the human. This theme of false hope, of false representation, one could call it a fantasy, occupies a main place in Kleist's writing, which I will demonstrate in a reading of *Das Erdbeben in Chili* and *Die Marquise von O…*, with occasional references to Kleist's other works.

A Crisis of *Bildung*

Thus inevitably does the universe wear our color, and

every object fall successively into the subject itself.

Emerson, *Experience*

Kleist's so called "Kant-Krise" appears in between letters from October 10th and 11th 1800 and February 5th, March 22nd as well as 23rd 1801. It is in the latter, where Kleist announces his acquaintance with Kant's philosophy. In order to comprehend what Kleist's crisis is about, it is necessary to compare two passages from both periods directly. Kleist writes on October 10th and 11th to his fiancée Wilhelmine von Zenge:

Liebe und Bildung, das ist alles, was ich begehre, und wie froh bin ich, daß die Erfüllung dieser beiden unerlaßlichen Bedürfnisse, ohne die ich *jetzt* nicht mehr glücklich sein könnte, nicht von dem Himmel abhangt, der, wie bekannt, die Wünsche der armen Menschen so oft unerfüllt läßt, sondern *einzig und allein von Dir*. (16-21)[49]

A few months later, on March 23rd, he will conclude: "Mein einziges, mein höchstes Ziel ist gesunken, und ich habe nun keines mehr […]." (14-15) This goal was, as he writes on March 22nd,"nie auf einen Augenblick hienieden still zu stehen, und immer unaufhörlich einem höhern Grade von Bildung entgegenzuschreiten […]." (125-127)

Where does the shift come from? First, Kleist's loss of his highest goal is *not* the loss of any transcendental truth.[50] In the former letter from October 1800, Kleist already expresses

---

[49] All quotations of Kleist's letters refer to the digital critical edition of his complete works, based on Kleist's manuscripts and the first edition, edited by Günter Dunz-Wolff, 2013. The numbers in parentheses refer to the lines of the letter.

[50] Ernst Cassirer in his early yet still insightful study of Kleist's relation to Kant's philosophy makes this point more than clear: „Der Gedanke des reinen moralischen Vernunftglaubens, wie Kant ihn entwickelt und wie er ihn allem religiösen Afterdienst entgegengesetzt hatte,

that his desire for love and education is *not* dependent on "Heaven." Instead, Kleist places

the fulfillment of these desires in a relation to another human being ("*einzig und allein von*

Dir"). And it is arguably, that such a conviction has not changed in between these letters. He

even describes his idea of "Bildung" as "eine eigene Religion" (March 22nd, 124) Kleist

clearly was not shocked by Kant's proof of the improvability of God's existence.[51] Instead,

he welcomed it, sometimes sounding more Kantian than Kant himself.[52] Kleist already has

abandoned any sense of transcendental realm and confidently follows the idea of "Pflicht."

So, it appears at least less convincing to argue that Kleist goes "beyond Kant to Hume"

(Mehigan 38). Mehigan initially argues that Kleist's "skepticism" is Humean. Skepticism in

Hume's variant means that truth is "what we take to be true at a given moment, or it is belief,

[…] an act of the mind arising from custom" (quote by Hume after Mehigan 38). Hume

---

war in Kleist völlig lebendig geworden. Auf Grund dieses Gedankens schiebt er auch die Frage nach der individuellen Fortdauer des Individuums als bloße spekulative Grübelei beiseite. Weder in transzendenten Glaubensvorstellungen über einen Gott und ein Jenseits, noch in der Erfüllung äußerlicher religiöser Gebräuche - - so erklärt er — kann der eigentliche Kern der Religion bestehen; denn sonst würde die Religion selbst zu einem zweideutigen und wandelbaren Dinge, das in jedem Augenblick und an allen Orten der Erde verschieden wäre. (Cassirer 1919, 7)

[51] It rather seems that Kleist has found a supplement for God in another human being. How can another dependent human being fulfill this role and bear the weight of God? If the existence of the other is put into question, so is one's own existence. This is the problem in *Die Marquise von O...*

[52] Kleist is a true defender of „Pflicht": "Aber in uns flammt eine Vorschrift — und die muß göttlich sein, weil sie ewig und allgemein ist, sie heißt: erfülle Deine Pflicht; und dieser Satz enthält die Lehren aller Religionen. […] Daß ein Gott sei, daß es ein ewiges Leben, einen Lohn für die Tugend, eine Strafe für das Laster gebe, das alles sind Sätze, die in jenem nicht gegründet sind, und die wir also entbehren können. […] Ich erfülle für dieses Leben meine Pflicht, und wenn Du mich fragst, wa r u m ?, so ist die Antwort leicht: eben weil es meine Pflicht ist. Ich schränke mich daher mit meiner Tätigkeit ganz für dies Erdenleben ein." (Kleist, Brief vom 22. März 1801)

proposes that in "all incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism." (Hume 270) Hume finds a way to "live his skepticism" by distracting his mind:

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, Nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium […]. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find my heart to enter into them any further. (Hume 269)

Now, compare this to Kleist's remark about his experience of skepticism, expressed in the letter from March 22nd:

> Seit diese Überzeugung, nämlich, daß hienieden keine Wahrheit zu finden ist, vor meine Seele trat, habe ich nicht wieder ein Buch angerührt. Ich bin untätig in meinem Zimmer umhergegangen, ich habe mich an das offne Fenster gesetzt, ich bin hinausgelaufen ins Freie, eine innerliche Unruhe trieb mich zuletzt in Tabagien und Kaffeehäuser, ich habe Schauspiele und Konzerte, um mich zu zerstreuen […]; und dennoch war der einzige Gedanke, den meine Seele in diesem äußeren Tumulte mit glühender Angst bearbeitete, immer nur dieser: dein einziges, dein höchstes Ziel ist gesunken. (159-169)

Kleist is *not* able to suppress his skepticism, he cannot find "Zerstreuung," presumably because "Zerstreuung"[53] is omnipresent. Even more, one could argue that Hume's "treatment"

---

[53] A word which appears with more significance in Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*. "Zerstreuung" bears the double meaning of "distraction" and "dispersion." Hume sees the suppression of skepticism in distraction, something, however, only displaces skepticism; it clouds Hume's mind again in returning to the isolation of this study. But as such, distraction

of skepticism is only a displacement of skepticism. Kleist does not conclude that truth is equivalent to habit and customs, as Hume does. Kleist never identifies morality with a "sentiment." Kleist remains to the end an "Idealist" and, therefore, maintains the disruption between these two worlds, and feels their disparity even stronger.[54] The unity of the subject in its "sentiments" is given up after Kant. Robert Pippin writes:

> Kantian and post-Kantian denial of any immediate presence to the mind of, or possible direct reliance on, the world (even "the world" of one's own impulses and inclinations), the denial of the "myth" of the given […] raised the issue of how rightly to acknowledge the subjective character of such experience and the many unique, elusive characteristics of self-knowledge. (Pippin 2)

All depends here on the "how" of such acknowledgement. The skeptic *does* acknowledge the subjective character of experience and the mediated presence of the mind of the world; but she *interprets* this separateness as our isolation. The meaning of Emerson's phrase that "inevitably the universe does wear our color" solely depends on the tone of "inevitably." Now, Kleist uses a similar, infamous metaphor to describe this condition of the human mind:

---

is not the solution but an instance of skepticism, called up by skepticism's arguments. This fits to Emerson's, Nietzsche's and Heidegger's conviction that distraction signifies our sense of absorption into the everyday. On the other hand, "dispersion" fits to their idea of the human being as being "fragmented." If Kleist shares these convictions, he might portray that we distract ourselves in order to avoid our own dispersion.

[54] Cassirer sees here Kleist's difference to the early Romantics: "Er [Kleist] sucht nicht die mystischen Schauer des Unbegreiflichen, nicht das Ineinanderspielen und das Verschwimmen aller Formen der äußeren un inneren Welt: sondern er stellt beide Welten in klarem und scharfen Umriß gegeneinander, um darin freilich ihre Unvereinbarkeit und Unversöhnlichkeit um so tiefer und leidvoller zu empfinden. In diesem Verhältnis des Innern und Aeußern, in dieser Stellung von „Seele" und „Welt", liegt erst der abschließende Zug von Kleists gedanklicher und dichterischer Gesamtansicht." (Cassirer 1919, 33-34)

Vor kurzem ward ich mit der neueren sogenannten Kantischen Philosophie bekannt –[…]
Wenn alle Menschen statt der Augen grüne Gläser hätten, so würden sie urteilen müssen,
die Gegenstände, welche sie dadurch erblicken, *sind* grün - und nie würden sie
entscheiden können, ob ihr Auge ihnen die Dinge zeigt, wie sie sind, oder ob es nicht
etwas zu ihnen hinzutut, was nicht ihnen, sondern dem Auge gehört. So ist es mit dem
Verstande. Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft
Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint. Ist das letzte, so *ist* die Wahrheit, die wir hier
sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr - und alles Bestreben, ein Eigentum sich zu
erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich – […]. (March 22nd, 137-153)

I would like to emphasize two ideas in this passage: (1.) Kleist, as seen before, connects
the collection of truth(s) to a continuing life beyond death, which is conveyed in ideas of
fertility and inheritance. As mentioned, Kleist's problem is not whether these collections are
"eternal" truths but whether they can transcend one's personal, individual death. (2.) In the
description of the green glasses, Kleist precisely includes *all humanity*, "wir," in this
condition. Hence, for him, it is not a fight between objectivity and subjectivity ("solipsism").
It is the "inevitability" of such a condition that protects the human from skepticism, because
if the universe inevitably wears our color, there cannot be any possible alternative to this. It
would be senseless to conclude that we can never *experience* things in themselves.[55] That

---

[55] Nietzsche outlines this argument exceptionally in a history of how the world became a fable:
The ideal world of the sage turned into the Christian Heaven, and then into the unattainable
world of "duty" in Kant, "gedacht [als] ein Trost, eine Verpflichtung, ein Imperativ. […]
königsbergisch." (*Götzen-Dämmerung* 80) The next step is positivism, the destruction of the
ideal: "Die wahre Welt – unerreichbar? Jedenfalls unerreicht. Und als unerreicht auch
unbekannt." (ibid. 80) And finally, it is Nietzsche's own addition: "Die wahre Welt haben
wir abgeschafft: welche Welt blieb übrig? die scheinbare vielleicht?... Aber nein! *mit der
wahren Welt haben wir auch die scheinbare abgeschafft!*" (ibid. 81) Why is the last step
necessary? Because the destruction of the ideal causes disappointment in the "unattainability"

means, as Pippin said, that after Kant formulated the subjective character of all experience the task is to rightly acknowledge this subjectivity. Subjectivity is not a *lack* of objectivity. The inseparability of mind and world leaves all ways open for an inhabitation of such a condition. If Kleist's account of reason is true for all humanity, the skeptic doubt arises in its wish to be exempt from this humanity, either above it or below it, being an Angel or a Devil, as the Marquise puts it. In any case, it is the wish for extraordinariness or the despaired wish for ordinariness. And this wish for extraordinariness/ordinariness is imagined either as a craving for privacy (exemption) or as fear of isolation.

Nietzsche depicts this Janus-faced aspect as one effect of philosophy, the "Höhle des Innerlichen" as shelter as well as danger.[56] Is it a coincidence that, in a text that emphasizes the importance of self-cultivation in reading texts, Nietzsche quotes Kleist's famous description of his crisis in the letter from March 22rd, 1801? If we accept that Kleist never gave up his ideal of *Bildung*, and that this idea requires the influence from another human being (Schopenhauer's influence on Nietzsche), the destruction of this highest goal is caused

---

of such ideal, or in the reality of the "false" appearances, knowledge. The former versions of the ideal already entailed this disappointment in the "real," so that the abolishment of the ideal continues this disappointment.

[56] "Sie kommen aus ihrer Höhle heraus, mit schrecklichen Mienen; ihre Worte und Taten sind dann Explosionen, und es ist möglich, daß sie an sich selbst zugrunde gehen. So gefährlich lebte Schopenhauer. Gerade solche Einsame bedürfen Liebe, brauchen Genossen, vor denen sie wie vor sich selbst offen und einfach sein dürfen, in deren Gegenwart der Krampf des Verschweigens und der Verstellung aufhört. Nehmt diese Genossen hinweg und ihr erzeugt eine wachsende Gefahr; Heinrich von Kleist ging an dieser Ungeliebtheit zugrunde, und es ist das schrecklichste Gegenmittel gegen ungewöhnliche Menschen, sie dergestalt tief in sich hinein zu treiben, daß ihr Wiederherauskommen jedesmal ein vulkanischer Ausbruch wird." (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher* 301)

by isolation, or at least felt isolation, a loss of intelligibility. Nietzsche calls this the "despair of the truth," that there is no "truth," which he identifies as skepticism after Kant:

Das war die erste Gefahr, in deren Schatten Schopenhauer heranwuchs: Vereinsamung. Die zweite heißt: Verzweiflung an der Wahrheit. Diese Gefahr begleitet jeden Denker, welcher von der Kantischen Philosophie aus seinen Weg nimmt, vorausgesetzt, daß er ein kräftiger und ganzer Mensch in Leiden und Begehren sei und nicht nur eine klappernde Denk- und Rechenmaschine. […] Sobald aber Kant anfangen sollte eine populäre Wirkung auszuüben, so werden wir diese in der Form eines zernagenden und zerbröckelnden Skeptizismus und Relativismus gewahr werden; und nur bei den tätigsten und edelsten Geistern, die es niemals im Zweifel ausgehalten haben, würde an seiner Stelle jene Erschütterung und Verzweiflung an aller Wahrheit eintreten, wie sie zum Beispiel Heinrich von Kleist als Wirkung der Kantischen Philosophie erlebte. […] Ja, wann werden wieder die Menschen dergestalt Kleistisch-natürlich empfinden, wann lernen sie den Sinn einer Philosophie erst wieder an ihrem »heiligsten Innern« messen? (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher* 301-302)

Nietzsche identifies two ways of skepticism: First, a crumbling variant, which implies that one is no "kräftiger und ganzer Mensch," hence a fragment, or an "objective" calculator. Objectivity is not wholeness but the illusion of wholeness, for Nietzsche. Instead, only "whole" people who suffer and desire uncompromisingly, who experience "Kleistisch-natürlich," feel the despair of truth's non-truth. Nietzsche opposes both, the image of objectivity and privacy, with the "Kleistisch-natürlich" "Empfindung" as the "holy inner." "Empfindung" is not "subjective feeling" but "affect." The former refers to an intact interiority, the latter to a pure exteriority. "Feeling" still imagines "truth," but transposed into the subject's interiority.

Objectivity, which is opposed to "feeling" refers to the exterior. And since both representations require the other, they create the image of the human as enclosed in the private, which must appear as "untrue." Objectivity and subjectivity are creations of skepticism; the wish for isolation as well as for the abolishment of privacy. "Feeling" does not reach deep enough into the "holy inner," it creates a fake privacy. The exteriority of affect, on the other hand, is neither objectivity nor subjectivity but it describes the condition under which both are possible: There are only expressions, but expressions of *nothing* besides the body itself. In Kleist, there is no room left for the subject's intentional speech, expression of her thoughts; speech will be a »Donnerkeil« (*Über die almähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden* 453).[57] Skepticism takes these expressions either as objective, leaving no room for the other's privacy, or as subjective, hiding the other's privacy behind a "body;" either way, we find ourselves isolated. As in *Über das Marionettentheater*, in which the fencing bear can see through all appearances to the true "soul of movement" because they are lying *bare* on the outside, whereas the fencing human thinks the bear *reads* his inside, has secret access to this hidden realm. But the outside *is* the inside, as Wittgenstein tried to show in his Private-Language-Argument. This might be what Nietzsche sees as the "despair of truth." The point, however, is that Kleist writes *against* the subject's interiority *because* he desires it. In faithfulness to this desire of "Empfindung," expression of subjectivity, he must write against the classical image of interiority, against the skeptical image of hidden privacy. The philosopher's isolation, in Nietzsche, ultimately leads to a new community; the idea of

---

[57] An essay, as Deleuze and Guattari notice, "[…] in which Kleist denounces the central interiority of the concept as a means of control – the control of speech, of language, but also of affects, circumstances and even chance." (ATP 378)

humanity represented in the individual. Kleist expresses this early in his *Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden*:

> Denn Bildung muß der Zweck unsrer Reise sein und wir müssen ihn erreichen, oder der Entwurf ist so unsinnig wie die Ausführung ungeschickt. Dann, mein Freund, wird die Erde unser Vaterland, und alle Menschen unsre Landsleute sein. Wir werden uns stellen und wenden können wohin wir wollen, und immer glücklich sein. Ja wir werden unser Glück zum Teil in der Gründung des Glücks anderer finden, und andere bilden, wie wir bisher selbst gebildet worden sind. (*Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden* 442)

Of course, the enthusiastic and optimistic outlook about the power of Enlightenment is absent in any of Kleist's later writings. For example, his story *Der Findling* turns the project of Enlightenment, imagined as a process of education (!), into its opposite. Piachi, who finds Nicolo abandoned, adopts and educates him, yet he, Nicolo, transforms into a Machiavellian strategist and expropriates Piachi without hesitance; rational education does not guarantee a moral life. But is this Kleist's commentary on the "immorality" of life and the failure of reason to reflect "the way human beings really live their lives" (Mehigan 49)? There is no need in writing a story about "the way human beings *really* live their lives" because Kant and any project of *Bildung* after Kant is aware of this fact. Otherwise, Kant would not have to describe human as being of *two* worlds. Instead, the question is how human beings *can* reject the moral law in its "majesty," as Kant puts it, and that autonomy cannot be taught *completely*. Every time I need to face a decision, I need to perform the categorical imperative; every time I am torn between two worlds and I must proof my humanity. The desire to show the uncertainty of teaching's success is an empty claim since otherwise, teaching would not be needed at all. The only thing Kleist shows in *Der Findling*, as a tale on instruction like *Über*

das Marionettentheater, is that morality does not constrain knowledge, that there cannot be any necessity, that the moral law either attracts me or not. As I will demonstrate in *Das Erdbeben von Chili*, Kleist shows how the human has the illimitable desire to surpass this condition or limit of human knowledge, the irrepresentability of the ideal. His novella *Die Marquise von O…* has the same purpose, but also will present Kleist's "solution" to this desire; a solution that will remain disappointing.

The Desire for Interpretation – *Das Erdbeben in Chili*

Werner Hamacher places Kleist's novella *Das Erdbeben von Chili* in the greater history of the rationalistic project to find a foundation for human knowledge (Descartes) and the collapse of such a program with the earthquake from Lisbon in 1755. The latter motivates Leibniz to write his famous *Theodicée* in which he presents the argument that this world is the best possible one, and Voltaire to respond to such *Optimisme* in his satirical *Candide*. Hamacher intriguingly argues that the intersection of rationalistic discourse and theodicy in the metaphor of "ground" as foundation, and as "shaking" leads to the undermining of such a metaphor, and hence to an undermining of philosophy itself. The intelligible center of reason already is "empirisch affiziert." (Hamacher) What Kleist shows in his story is the movement of the metaphor of "ground" and its erosion: "Aus einer Metapher der Repräsentation […] ist eine Figur der Undurchschaubarkeit der Welt und der Unübersetzbarkeit ihrer Erscheinung in einen ihr transzendenten Sinn geworden." (Hamacher 152) Kleist's novella, therefore, is about the problem of representation in language and, consequently, interpretation.[58]

---

[58] Kleist's emphasis on historical accuracy at the exposition of the story, not at all uncommon for Kleist's writing, accentuates even more the disparity between representation and what is

The structure of the story describes this problem in a movement of disparity between representation and what is represented: Jeronimo is locked up in a jail while his lover, Josephe, awaits her public execution. Both are saved by the occurrence of an earthquake which opens Jeronimo's cell "durch eine zufällige Wölbung" (Kleist 159) and prevents Josephe's execution because of the overall destruction of the city, a story she will tell later to Jeronimo in their temporal happy reunification. They interpret the earthquake as divine salvation, "als ob alle Engel des Himmels sie umschirmten […]" (Kleist 162). The image for this interpretation is the paradisiac episode of the unification of all humanity, "als ob das allgemeine Unglück alles […] zu einer Familie gemacht hätte." (Kleist 166) The disparity of interpretation and object of interpretation is the "als ob" (as if) under which all representations fall. The harmonic condition of humanity, opposed to the destruction and death of the first part, again contradicts the final outcome of the story: The Christian population interprets the earthquake as divine judgement for "das Sittenverderbnis der Stadt" (Kleist 169), for which Jeronimo and Josephe function as scapegoats. Jeronimo's and Josephe's return to the city ends in their and Don Fernando's son's brutal killing; their own son, Philip, escapes due to the confusion with Don Fernando's son.

---

represented. "In St. Jago, der Hauptstadt des Königreichs Chili, stand gerade in dem Augenblicke der großen Erderschütterung vom Jahre 1647, bei welcher viele tausend Menschen ihren Untergang fanden, ein junger, auf ein Verbrechen angeklagter Spanier, namens Jeronimo Rugera, an einem Pfeiler des Gefängnisses, in welches man ihn eingesperrt hatte, und wollte sich erhenken." (158) Throughout the story, the factual event of the earthquake is object of transcendental interpretations which annul each other (the earthquake as divine punishment or divine salvation). The structure of the story is a movement of alternation in interpretation, and it seems that, in the end, no interpretation holds. However, I would not go that far to claim that Kleist wants to show the failure of all interpretation. Instead, he points to the *totalizing aspect* of all interpretation. This transcendental perspective describes the moment in which the human transgresses the human (knowledge). The story shows that human beings cannot not interpret, cannot stop wanting to avoid the ordinary, and that the reader finds herself in this position.

Hamacher sees Kleist's emphasis on the irrepresentability of this historical "Zufall" as instance of Kant's description of the sublime ("das Erhabene"). Kant shows the same dynamic of fall and elevation as Kleist does in the novella's structure. In the latter, Jeronimo's escape from his prison cell is phrased in the following way:

Jeronimo Rugera war starr vor Entsetzen; und gleich als ob sein ganzes Bewußtsein zerschmettert worden wäre, hielt er sich jetzt an dem Pfeiler, an welchem er hatte sterben wollen, um nicht umzufallen. Der Boden wankte unter seinen Füßen, alle Wände des Gefängnisses rissen, der ganze Bau neigte sich, nach der Straße zu einzustürzen, und nur der, seinem langsamen Fall begegnende, Fall des gegenüberstehenden Gebäudes verhinderte, durch eine zufällige Wölbung, die gänzliche Zubodenstreckung desselben. Zitternd, mit sträubenden Haaren, und Knien, die unter ihm brechen wollten, glitt Jeronimo über den schiefgesenkten Fußboden hinweg, der Öffnung zu, die der Zusammenschlag beider Häuser in die vordere Wand des Gefängnisses eingerissen hatte. (Kleist 159)

The coincidental ("zufällig") saving is caused by a collapse ("Zusammenfall"). The destruction of the prison cell, emblematic for the destruction of the public order, creates for Jeronimo the possibility of his elevation from the rubble. Just as his imprisonment and Josephe's announced decapitation were signs of the social order, of the law, so is the destruction of *this* order a sign of the *divine* order. "Er senkte sich so tief, daß seine Stirn den Boden berührte, Gott für seine wunderbare Errettung zu danken […] Mit welcher Seligkeit umarmten sie sich, die Unglücklichen, die ein Wunder des Himmels gerettet hatte!" (Kleist

161) Fall is replaced trough elevation; Jeronimo's fall on his knees is the expression of his gratefulness towards God; the expression of his gratitude requires his fall.[59]

In § 29, "Von der Natur als einer Macht," Kant describes how the sensual experience of natural phenomena or disaster, e.g. an earthquake, „[…]ein Vermögen zu widerstehen von ganz anderer Art in uns entdecken lassen, welches uns Mut macht, uns mit der scheinbaren Allgewalt der Natur messen zu können." (AA V 261) The experienced powerlessness ("Ohnmacht") of man as sensual being facing nature's power is, at the same time, the discovery of man's superiority over nature as intelligible being, which Kant describes as "die Menschheit in unserer Person."[60] Therefore, for Kant, the sublime does not lie *in* nature, but *in us* as the respect ("Achtung") for the dignity of humanity *represented by us*. The act of representation of the natural sublime fails because sensual experience *must* fail to *represent* the "idea" of humanity *represented* in oneself, because the former remains in the realm of sensibility whereas the latter precisely is its antipode. As Hamacher phrases it, "Die der Natur inkommensurable Darstellung wird zur Darstellung der Inkommensurabilität jeder Darstellung an die Idee." (158) The destruction of the physical human body elevates the

---

[59] The same alternation of destruction and elevation is also found in the narrator's description of the city: „Hier stürzte noch ein Haus zusammen, und jagte ihn [Jeronimo], die Trümmer weit umherschleudernd, in eine Nebenstraße; hier leckte die Flamme schon, […] hier stand ein anderer, bleich wie der Tod, und streckte sprachlos zitternde Hände zum Himmel." (159) The earthquake as the shaking of the ground is followed by the "speechless trembling" towards or in front of Heaven.

[60]The Kantian sublime demands or requires Kant's split of the human as being of two worlds: "so gibt auch die Unwiderstehlichkeit ihrer Macht uns, als Naturwesen betrachtet, zwar unsere physische Ohnmacht zu erkennen, aber entdeckt zugleich ein Vermögen, uns als von ihr unabhängig zu beurteilen, und eine Überlegenheit über die Natur, worauf sich eine Selbsterhaltung von ganz andrer Art gründet, als diejenige ist, die von der Natur außer uns angefochten und in Gefahr gebracht werden kann, wobei die Menschheit in unserer Person unerniedrigt bleibt, obgleich der Mensch jener Gewalt unterliegen müßte." (AA V 261-262)

human in its dignity: "gleich als ob sein ganzes Bewußtsein zerschmettert worden wäre […]" (Kleist 159)

However, and this escapes Hamacher's analysis, the irrepresentability of the idea is the whole point of Kant's philosophy. The representation of humanity in oneself precisely escapes any conditions of knowledge, which means that *this mode of representation cannot be one of knowledge*. Hence, we have two different modes of representation. It is the confusion of these two modes of representation that causes the illusion of Kleist's characters. But it is even more complicated, since the story's characters do not fail to see that the signifying event, the earthquake, transcends human knowledge, since this is the function of the sign, to stand in for something else that does not and cannot appear in itself (God). But then the problem is not the lack of meaning (or knowledge), but the inability *not* to produce meaning. It is the desire, born out of disappointment, to transcend the ordinary. Kleist's strategy here, as well as in his other novellas, is to show an event, like this earthquake, in its extraordinariness ("Unerhörtheit") and in its ordinariness, *vice versa*; Kleist's world portrays how death and destruction are ordinary (reinforced through his sober narration) and extraordinary at the same time and how they are caused by our wishes for both, ordinariness (Josephe and Jeronimo's family idyll, the priest's reinstitution of order) and extraordinariness (their wishes of God's advent). It seems that sublimity and skepticism are the two sides of the disappointment in the ordinary.

The irrepresentability of the sublime as the representation of humanity in oneself is *not* identical with the representation of God (or any religious idol) in the sublime. Kant makes it more than clear that the feeling of the sublime as "Achtung" (respect) for the moral law in us is not a subjection to something other than ourselves; the feeling of the sublime is not *about*

any object, but *concerning* us. This, of course, entails that any event, e.g. an earthquake, can never "represent" the effect of a higher being (see AA V 263).

In fact, the omnipresence of replacements or supplements in Kleist's text are instances of this confusion. E.g., Jeronimo's subjection "vor dem *Bildnisse* der heiligen Mutter Gotter" (Kleist 158, MG), the identification of Philipp as the reinacarnation of Christ etc. In one word, Kleist presents in this text a collection of false "Bildnisse," false representations of the representation of humanity in oneself; I would call these images false perfectionisms, which include the city's image of moral purity as well as Jeronimo's and Josephe's vision of a perfected human society. Kleist does not offer a critique of Kant, rather he presents the same awareness about the almost indistinguishable resemblance between heteronomy and autonomy, that the one can *appear,* can *present* itself as the other.

I would like to suggest here that Kant's idea of the sublime functions parallel to skepticism as a transfiguration of the ordinary. One could see the latter as a transfiguration downward, whereas the former presents a transfiguration upward, creating awe in the comprehension of the incomprehensible. The experience of the sublime, however, creates a disappointment in the ordinary (one's humanness) if, as it has happened in Kleist's stories, the sublime is taken for something outside of oneself. Structural, Kant's argument with skepticism is the same as his argument with the sublime: In showing the limitation of reason, reason proves its agency. To go beyond these limits creates either dogmatism or skepticism, inhuman conditions to know; to remain within these limits, however, creates inhuman humans, as Kant famously proclaims in the preface to the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

> Die menschliche Vernunft hat das besondere Schicksals […] daß sie durch Fragen
> belästigt wird, die sie nicht abweisen kann; denn sie sind ihr durch die Natur der Vernunft

selbst aufgegeben, die sie aber auch nicht beantworten kann; denn sie übersteigen alles

Vermögen der menschlichen Vernunft. (AA A VII)

Therefore, it is Kant's task to distinguish his idea of autonomy (or freedom) from "false" images of such, which always entails a distinction of his philosophy from "false" images of philosophy that adopt the idea of incomprehensibility. In his text *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen Ton in der Philosophie*, he attempts to dismantle the "Schwärmer" and his idea of "einer mißverstandenen Freiheit" (AA VIII 390) as idiosyncrasy. He defends his philosophy against the idea of replacing the "work" of the philosopher through "Anschauung" (intuition) or "feeling", which is for Kant to turn philosophy into poetry.

In solchen bildlichen Ausdrücken, die jenes Ahnen verständlich machen sollen, ist nun der platonisirende Gefühlsphilosoph unerschöpflich: z. B. „der Göttin Weisheit so nahe zu kommen, daß man das Rauschen ihres Gewandes vernehmen kann;" aber auch in Preisung der Kunst des Afterplato, "da er den Schleier der Isis nicht aufheben kann, ihn doch so dünne zu machen, daß man unter ihm die Göttin ahnen kann." Wie dünne, wird hiebei nicht gesagt; vermuthlich doch noch so dicht, daß man aus dem Gespenst machen kann, was man will: denn sonst wäre es ein Sehen, welches ja vermieden werden sollte. (AA VIII 399)

But isn't it Kant himself who compares the sublimity of the moral law to the goddess Isis, hence uses (and must use) a metaphor because of the irrepresentability of the moral law?[61] And yet, it is Kant who defends philosophy against its poeticizing which would be the

---

[61]He does so in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*: "Vielleicht ist nie etwas Erhabneres gesagt, oder ein Gedanke erhabener ausgedrückt worden, als in jener Aufschrift über dem Tempel der *Isis* (der Mutter *Natur*): »Ich bin alles, was da ist, was da war, und was da sein wird, und meinen Schleier hat kein Sterblicher aufgedeckt.«" (AA V 316)

"Tod aller Philosophie" (AA VIII 398), something Hamacher announces in the loss of the "ground" metaphor and the problem of representation. In fact, for Kant, the representability is not alone the problem, it is the "how" of representation, including the "mode" of representation and the moment where to *stop* a representation, in order not to exceed human limitation.[62] In Kleist's text, The people in the church as well as Jeronimo and Josephe attempt to transgress human limitation, and therefore fail to acknowledge their own, and other's humanity. For Kant as well as for Kleist, it is the idea of duty and its voice which makes us tremble, like an earthquake: „Nun findet jeder Mensch in seiner Vernunft die Idee der Pflicht und zittert beim Anhören ihrer ehernen Stimme […]." (AA VIII 402) And the origin of this voice remains a mystery (see AA VIII 405).

But then, how do we explain Kleist's "vision" of a harmonic society of all humanity? The narrator describes the reunification of humanity, the absolishment of all classes and differences; the dream of the French Revolutionists:

Und in der Tat schien, mitten in diesen gräßlichen Augenblicken, in welchen alle irdischen Güter der Menschen zugrunde gingen, und die ganze Natur verschüttet zu werden drohte, der menschliche Geist selbst, wie eine schöne Blume, aufzugehn. Auf den Feldern, so weit das Auge reichte, sah man Menschen von allen Ständen durcheinander liegen, Fürsten und Bettler, Matronen und Bäuerinnen, Staatsbeamte und Tagelöhner, Klosterherren und Klosterfrauen: einander bemitleiden, sich wechselseitig Hülfe reichen, von dem, was sie zur Erhaltung ihres Lebens gerettet haben mochten,

---

[62] In his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant chastises novels, plays and sermons if they make us soft and deaf for strict duty (see AA V 273).

freudig mitteilen, als ob das allgemeine Unglück alles, was ihm entronnen war, zu *einer*

Familie gemacht hätte. (Kleist 166)

The whole passage remains in the realm of "appearance," under the, as Hamacher says,

"Vorbehalt der Unentscheidbarkeit, des möglichen Scheins, des *Als ob*" (Hamacher 161-162).

This is, to think Kantian, true, because the idea of "humanity" cannot realize itself in the

sensual realm. Yet, if *everything is* appearance, "so weit das Auge reichte," then it is not

"appearance." The problem is not undecidability but temporality. Donna Elisabeth "ruhte

zuweilen mit träumerischem Blicke auf Josephe; doch der Bericht, der über irgendein neues

gräßliches Unglück erstattet ward, riß ihre, der Gegenwart kaum entflohene Seele schon

wieder in dieselbe zurück." (Kleist 165) The undecidability between dream and reality is not

the issue here but their *wish for* this undecidability. Josephe and Jeronimo do not "wake

up," they take the reconciliation of reality and ideality for an eternal event. They see a

meaning in the earthquake that, however, must transcend their human abilities to know, which

are, as we know from Kant, conditioned by time:

> In Jeronimos und Josephens Brust regten sich Gedanken von seltsamer Art. Wenn sie
>
> sich mit so vieler Vertraulichkeit und Güte behandelt sahen, so wußten sie nicht, was sie
>
> von der Vergangenheit denken sollten, vom Richtplatze, von dem Gefängnisse, und der
>
> Glocke; und ob sie bloß davon geträumt hätten? Es war, als ob die Gemüter, seit dem
>
> fürchterlichen Schlage, der sie durchdröhnt hatte, alle versöhnt wären. Sie konnten in der
>
> Erinnerung gar nicht weiter, als bis auf ihn, zurückgehen. (Kleist 165)

In fact, they resemble the monks who "mit dem Kruzifix in der Hand, umhergelaufen

wären, und geschrien hätten: das Ende der Welt sei da!" (Kleist 126) Both parties wish for

the end of time. Kleist shows how both create their own image of a false peace. Jeronimo and

Josephe believe in the "Umsturz aller Verhältnisse" (Kleist 167); yet, Jeronimo plans to ask for pardon from the Vice King with a "Fußfall" (Kleist 167), and Josephe "äußerte, indem sie mit Begeisterung sogleich aufstand, daß sie den Drang, ihr Antlitz vor dem Schöpfer in den Staub zu legen, niemals lebhafter empfunden habe, als eben jetzt, wo er seine unbegreifliche und erhabene Macht so entwickle." (Kleist 168) The following prelate's sermon presents a parallel praisal: ,Er begann gleich mit Lob, Preis und Dank, seine zitternden, vom Chorhemde weit umflossenen Hände hoch gen Himmel erhebend, daß noch Menschen seien, auf diesem, in Trümmer zerfallenden Teile der Welt, fähig, zu Gott empor zu stammeln." (Kleist 169) The trembling hands and the stuttering voice correspond to the "fall" of the city, the „Sittenverderbnis der Stadt," hence to the wish for redemption and reinstallation of "wholeness" and "unity," the unity that was created structurally and temporarily outside of the city.

Both parties of the novella interpret the earthquake as expression of God's power, either as creating Heaven on Earth or Hell on Earth;[63] and they see themselves as part of this interpretation. Jeronimo and Josephe see themselves as the holy couple; Josephe is "Mutter Gottes, du Heilige!" (Kleist 158), Jeronimo is Joseph, the stepfather,[64] their son Philip is born at the day of the Feast of Corpus Christi, hence the Son of God, Christ. The re-revelation of God in the earthquake, the *Chiliasm*, disrupts the natural and social order and creates "das Tal von Eden" which coincides with the apocalypse.[65] The unity of the family, however, is

---

[63] Meister Pedrillo, who finally kills Juan, Don Fernando's son, is "der Fürst der satanischen Rotte" (Kleist 173) after the prelate gave "die Seelen der Täter, wörtlich genannt, allen Fürsten der Hölle […]." (Kleist 170)
[64] Philipp is called a "Bastard" (Kleist 172).
[65] The "Granatapfelbaum" under which Jeronimo and Josephe lie, refers to the Greek Underworld and the famous pomegranate next to Persephone.

never fully realized; it follows, as Hamacher, says, the logic of supplementarity. Because Juan's mother cannot breast feed Juan, Don Fernando asks, "ob sie [Josephe] diesem armen Wurme, dessen Mutter dort unter den Bäumen beschädigt liege, nicht auf kurze Zeit ihre Brust reichen wolle?" (Kleist 164)

The state of perfection already is a mere compensation. The mother's breast is substituted, Josephe's and Jeronimo's reputation is partially restored, Phillip is replaced through Juan; whatever is missing, will be substituted. This is only logical if all humanity is *one* family, since this would describe the condition under which anyone can replace anyone else, an absolute state of equality. But here we encounter a paradox: If this state of perfection is created in the moment of substitution (of the mother's breast), it is determined by a lack; yet, at the same time, it was the state of unity that makes the substitution possible in the first place: "Ich schwieg – aus einem andern Grunde, Don Fernando; in diesen schrecklichen Zeiten weigert sich niemand, von dem, was er besitzen mag, mitzuteilen […] " (Kleist 164) The word "mitzuteilen" and Josephe's "Ich schwieg" refer to language under these conditions. If this state would be a perfect unity, language would not be needed; but, Don Fernando "misinterprets" Josephes' silence. Language is the necessary substitute for immediate understanding, it is "Mitteilung." Language is already "broken," the humans "stammeln" upward to God. In other words, Kleist describes here the movement of humanity from "nature" to "culture" as a movement of supplements.

This whole episode fits to Derrida's reading of Rousseau's text in the history of "Logocentrism," which describes the suppression of *différance* as exterior to language and the favoring of the voice as "auto-affection," "self-presence," "self-consciousness,"" (Derrida 98) apparent in Descartes and Hegel. Rousseau, however, turns this suppression of writing

into a "theme" in which he introduces a new variation of presence: "subject's self-presence within consciousness or feeling." (Derrida 98) Presence for Rousseau is Nature. Speech is "the natural expression of thought […], writing is added to it […] as an image of representation. In this sense, it is not natural. It diverts the immediate presence of thought to speech into representation and the imagination." (Derrida 144) But writing is necessary in order to compensate for speech's failure. Speech, Nature, all that is natural "should" be self-sufficient (see Derrida 145). The supplement, on the other hand, is the sign, it is representation, because, as supplement, it *stands in for* something else, it is exterior to the thing it represents. The supplement is imagined as exteriority. Additionally, the supplement shows that the thing, which is supplemented, is not self-sufficient, otherwise it would not need a supplement. It leaves a "mark of emptiness" (Derrida 145). This happens in the substitution of Nature through Culture, which is, in Derrida's reading of Rousseau, "education." Education is the necessary compensation for human's lack of nature. However, the fact that such a compensation is necessary in the first place, exposes the lack of nature that remains irretrievable:

> Yet all education, the keystone of Rousseauist thought, will be described or presented as a system of substitution [*suppléance*] destined to reconstitute Nature's edifice in the most natural way possible. […] All the organization of, and all the time spent in, education will be regulated by this necessary evil : "supply [*suppleer*] . . . [what] . . . is lacking" [147] and to replace Nature. (Derrida 146-47)

The identity of the supplement "education" with a form of "representation" is the core idea of Rousseau's idea that education entails the health *and* the destruction of humanity. Plants are fashioned by cultivation, and men by education. The weakness of the child is both,

95

reason for its dependence as well as reason for its mastery over others.[66] The story's representation of the Garden Eden should unite Heaven and Earth, individual and society, Nature and Culture, Outside and Inside etc. But it remains a "representation," and all unifications rely on such "representations" as supplements; the realization of Eden would create silence, the overcoming of representation or language. Yet, it is "Mitteilung" that makes the unity possible. "Schweigen" is misinterpreted just like the earthquake as representation of God. These representations or replacements are: Josephe as mother[67] for Donna Elvire, Juan for Philipp, Philip as Son of God, Josephe as God's Mother, Don Fernando for Jeronimo, the earthquake as salvation, the earthquake as divine judgement, Jeronimo and Josephe as representatives of "das Sittenverderbnis der Stadt", as divine sacrifice. If anything, Kleist shows in this novella that such a place without interpretation cannot be realized, that is, there cannot be a place free of representation. As Derrida says: "Immediacy is here the myth of consciousness. Speech and the consciousness of speech that is to say consciousness simply as self-presence-are the phenomenon of an auto-affection lived as suppression of *différance*." (Derrida 166)

This myth of immediacy was also the object of Wittgenstein's and Cavell's private language argument. Immediacy is the fantasy of skepticism; a fantasy of hidden knowledge in the other's consciousness, to which *I have no access*. However, Cavell claimed that the act of writing, as the form of representation of an experience, *is* the act of expressing the

---

[66] Rousseau connects this further to the idea of representation and language: "This is how they become difficult, tyrannical, imperious, wicked, unmanageable – […] for it does not require long experience to sense how pleasant it is to act with the hands of others and to need only to stir one's tongue to make the universe move." (68)
[67] "As Emile says, all evil comes from the fact that "women have ceased to be mothers, they do not and will not return to their duty" […]." (Derrida 151-152)

experience. It seems that Derrida's myth of immediacy as the suppression of *différance* is still governed by this myth. The "deconstruction" of this myth, the very *method* of "deconstruction," lets its user feel comfortable with instability, undecidability, and ceaselessness; it is its methodical, even mechanical character that guarantees its success and provides us with "answers," but also leaves us fairly unsatisfied in its outcomes. It is unable to take the myth of presence seriously; it never asks: What is the motivation to follow this myth? The wish for presence, in this case the presence of God, governs Jeronimo's and Josephe's actions as well as the actions of the collective "Christenheit" (Kleist 171), and their interpretation of the earthquake as the expression of this presence. They need to make sense of it; the wish for interpretation is undeniable and unsatisfiable. The claiming of this knowledge, that necessarily transcends human conditions to know, expresses their wish to transcend the human condition which Kleist presents as broken, "stuttering," fragmented (in need of substitutes, compensations). One could say that Jeronimo's and Josephe's self-interpretation as the Holy couple is their way to escape this condition. They are the protagonists of their private salvific history. But so are the Christians in the church. And in both cases, Kleist presents this escape as dream, illusion or madness, conditions of skepticism. The Eden episode takes place in the moment Josephe and Jeronimo *awake* from sleep (164), so that their identification with the Holy couple is designated as their fantasy. The people in the church are caught up in madness: "Seid ihr wahnsinnig?" rief der Jüngling [Don Fernando] […]." (170) Both parties are "united" in the fantasized alignement of exterior description and interior feeling: "Niemals schlug aus einem christlichen Dom eine solche Flamme der Inbrunst gen Himmel, wie heute aus dem Dominikanerdom zu St. Jago; und keine menschliche Brust gab wärmere Glut dazu her, als Jeronimos und Josephens!" (Kleist 169)

Happiness for the former is "unaussprechlich" (166 Kleist), defeat is "namenlos" (173 Kleist): „Hierauf ward es still, und alles entfernte sich. Don Fernando, als er seinen kleinen Juan vor sich liegen sah, mit aus dem Hirne vorquellenden Mark, hob, voll namenlosen Schmerzes, seine Augen gen Himmel." (Kleist 173) At both ends of the scale, language (representation) is defeated. It seems significant that the beginning of the horrific murder is the question for the identity of a father: "Wer ist der Vater zu diesem Kinde?" (Kleist 170)[68] And that the identification in an emphatic "ist" is a false one, by taking Don Fernando for Jeronimo, because Juan has been taken to be Philipp; Juan walks over to Don Fernando as his *natural* father. The son identifies the father, but later Jeronimo is identified by *his father* (Kleist 171). The identification of the child through the mother is taken to be certain although it turns out to be not. The identification of the father through the *natural expression* of the child is taken to be true, yet object of doubt in Jeronimo's *spoken* announcement of his identity, which causes a state of "confusion" among the people. The identity of the father is necessarily object of doubt. Don Fernando remarks that Jeronimo "[hätte sich] für Jeronimo Rugera ausgegeben" (Kleist 171), in order to protect Jeronimo. But then, Jeronimo's father identifies him as his son, "denn ich bin sein eigner Vater!" (Kleist 171), so that the act of identification restores the *natural* unity of the family. However, in the end, Juan is murdered in the place of Philipp, so that this natural unity is shattered. Whatever is taken to be natural, the figures in the story take it to provide certainty or presence, although it does not do so. But for whom is this news? None other than Don Fernando. He did not take the paradisiac scenery for predetermined fate. He asks if Josephe would play the mother "nicht auf kurze Zeit," "nur auf wenige Augenblicke" (Kleist 164); and he willfully uses language to deceive the people

---

[68] It is the same question that stands at the beginning of *Die Marquise von O…*

in the church, as if he fully acknowledges the "broken nature" of human language and culture. But this can only mean that he does not see this "brokenness" *as a lack*. He appears as "dieser göttliche Held" because the narrative presents him in the opposition to the "satanischen Rotte," although he is merely human and has no access to "divine knowledge," so that he, finally, looks towards heaven in nameless pain. The novella moves between all these images of false perfection or presence and seems to leave the reader, and Don Fernando and Donna Elvire, with the absence of a dead child. The lack/death of the child is the actual absence compared to which the lack of representation or interpretation or meaning must be a *false absence*, constructed in the fantasy for a *false presence* (wanting to have a reason for the death of a child). The absence of the child was a direct consequence of the construction of Philipp as the (false) presence of God or as representative of the Evil.

However, what remains, and this is easily overlooked or underestimated, *is the presence of the other child*, Philipp, and the acknowledgement of him as their son: "Don Fernando und Donna Elvire nahmen hierauf den kleinen Fremdling zum Pflegesohn an; und wenn Don Fernando Philippen mit Juan verglich, und wie er beide erworben hatte, so war es ihm fast, als müßte er sich freuen." (Kleist 173) The word "annehmen" means "to accept," "to receive," as well as "to suppose." The acceptance of Philipp as their son requires them to see him as the creature in need of support, which is to see him *as a child*, something Josephe as well as the mob precisely were unable to do. Skepticism for the latter is a form of melancholy or grief over a lost presence; the wish for this presence, however, denies the presence of the child as child, the human as human. It is an example of a failed acknowledgement by wishing that the child, oneself, earthquake, the other, would represent something that it is *not*. Hamacher sees this wish for replacement to be intact till the end:

Der Verlust des eigenen Kindes und der Hoffnung, in diesem fortzuleben, soll durch die moralische Vaterschaft an Philippe aufgewogen sein – aber kann es doch nur fast. Denn die Freude über das adoptierte Kind müßte die Freude über den Mord am eigenen einschließen. (Hamacher 173)

But is this the case? Must the joy over the adopted child include the joy over the murder of one's former child? It rather seems that this logic of entailment itself is perverse and governed by the logic of the supplement as designating an irretrievable presence. Of course, a child's death is without supplement. But is it *the function* of the adoption to "outweigh" Juan's death? Instead, skepticism's overcoming precisely would require us to stop seeing this exchange *as* an exchange, *as* outweighing, *as* a comparison. Phillip is forced to represent Christ by the narrative, and so is Juan by taking the former's place, now becoming an eternal idol. The overcoming of skepticism is the overcoming of the wish for interpretation. The joy over the adoption does not entail any joy over the murder, but the acceptance of this loss. That the narrator expresses this in the *irrealis* ("müßte") says that this acceptance is not yet achieved and cannot be achieved once and for all. Indeed, it is the myth of the given, of the ordinary, that is undermined in Kleist's narrative. But to take the *irreality* of it, the ordinary, as *necessary* because of the incongruency between adoption and death, is to fall for the same logic that captured Jeronimo and Josephine from the beginning: the denial of time, the unwillingness to change, which, as its opposite, precisely is captured in the idea of *Bildung* or education with which the text ends.[69] The question of the identity of the father turns into

---

[69] *Das Erdbeben von Chili* ends where *Der Findling* begins, with the adoption of a child, as if the latter acts out the conditions under which the former ends. The fact that *Der Findling* essentially presents to us a story of failed education, an "Anti-Bildungsgeschichte," is very interesting. Also that the story unfolds around the confusion of Nicolo with Colino, their "logogriphische Eigenschaft," which plays out as the resurrection of the dead Colino, and the

the idea that fatherhood must be acknowledged. Something Jeronimo's father ironically did, and which Jeronimo himself could not do, seeing Philipp as God's son.

The End of Contracts – *Die Marquise von O…*

> Man is neither angel nor brute, and the unfortunate thing is that
> he who would act the angel acts the brute.
> - Pascal, *Pensées*

The problem of representation in *Das Erdbeben in Chili* fits to Kleist's overall conviction about the fragility of language. Kleist coined the phrase of the "gebrechliche Einrichtung der Welt," which appears in *Michael Kohlhaas*, as well as in *Die Marquise von O…*, to convey this sense of fragility, a feeling that is comparable to skepticism, as Cavell describes it: "We begin to feel, or ought to, terrified that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rests upon very shaky foundations — a thin net over an abyss." (CR 178) "Einrichtung," further, refers to the act of construction, *Bildung*, as well as to "judgement" ("richten") in the judicial, aesthetical or religious sense, as if the status of the world is our construction, based on our judgements. Tim Mehigan argues that the idea of "contracts," the question of written language in its relation to speech, governs Kleist's prose, "that written language represents an attempt either to hold fast to the terms of an implicit contract between two parties or to achieve a position of strength or certainty denied the characters in view of the demonstrable inefficacy of spoken language." (Mehigan 105) In reference to Derrida, Mehigan sees these written contracts "predestined to failure, since written language tells of the substitution of an original presence – that of the vitality of spoken language – that can never be recovered […]."

---

death of the father who seeks for revenge in Hell, waiting for Nicolo there, as the fulfillment of justice.

(Mehigan 105-106) It is the incapacity to present "die anwesende Stimme" (Derrida 538),

that is "the fate of words themselves." (Mehigan 107)

This seems to parallel the skeptic's judgement of criteria as "failing" to provide certainty,

or presence, which, as in the case of contracts, is taken to be a failure of language. In its denial

of the powers of language, skepticism suppresses the human voice, since language functions

as the condition of this voice. Now, I do not take Mehigan or Derrida to be skeptics.[70] Instead,

"die anwesende Stimme," which they deconstruct, is already a "false" voice constructed by

metaphysics, a false idea of "presence." This false voice, raised by skepticism, has already

suppressed the human voice. In showing that this "presence" can never be totally "present,"

they replace a false sense of presence with a false sense of absence. In this sense, Mehigan's

arguments (and respectively Derrida's) presents a suppression of the *human voice*. And I

argue that Kleist's topic in this text precisely is this false sense of presence. The movement

of *Die Marquise von O…* describes the (attempt of) recovery of the Marquise's voice. The

text shows how the suppression takes place in the characters' fantasies of interpretation (of

themselves and others), in constructing false perfectionist images of each other; the

overcoming of skepticism is deferred *outside* of the text in the narrator's outlook into the

future.[71] In other words, the overcoming of skepticism is not found *inside* the text, not in

---

[70] I disagree on this behalf with Michael Fischer's attempts to read Deconstruction as an instance of external-world skepticism (see Fischer 1976).

[71] We find this outlook at the end of *Michael Kohlhaas*: "Vom Kohlhaas aber haben noch im vergangenen Jahrhundert, im Mecklenburgischen, einige frohe und rüstige Nachkommen gelebt." And at the end of *Die Marquise von O.*: "Eine ganze Reihe von jungen Russen folgte hetzt noch dem ersten […]." The image of fertility at the end contrasts skepticism's isolating and self-destructing power (Kohlhaas), hence signifies the overcoming of skepticism. A very similar "trick" is presented at the end of Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, yet maintaining the uncertainty: "Nach mehreren Jahren will man in einer entfernten Gegend Clara gesehen haben, wie sie mit einem freundlichen Mann, Hand in Hand vor der Türe eines schönen Landhauses saß und vor ihr zwei muntre Knaben spielten. Es wäre daraus zu schließen, daß Clara das

contracts, but in the standing towards them and their fragility. If there is something the Marquise and the Count need, it is distance, granted by written communication. But speech does not deny such distance, as Mehigan and Derrida suppose. In discovering who speaks, how and what, it is the other's presence that is acknowledged, and this requires the acknowledgment of our separateness, the condition for having distance as well as closeness to each other. As we will see, this takes place as a recovery of the ordinary, the overcoming of their fantasies of themselves as extraterrestrial beings, of possessing absolute divine knowledge (the Count) or being known absolutely by a divine creature (the Marquise). And this process entails the acceptance of oneself and the other as ordinary human being.

The play between the ordinariness of the daily life and the mystical is a common device in Kleist's writing. Shahar Galili finds this element prominent in Kleist's anecdotes:

> They seem like rumors about the common man and yet have the character of miracles and wonders. Kleist uses techniques of estrangement, irony, and double meaning to create mysterious scenes or myths of daily life. The anecdotes, to use the title of one of his texts, are Fabel[n] ohne Moral. In the realm of logic the anecdotes are paradoxes; in the realm of cognition they are like shocks. Like Kleist's novellas, the anecdotes challenge the conventions of reading and the logic of perception and undermine the possibility of knowledge. (Shahar 451)

How is it possible that Kleist can "create mysterious scenes of myths of daily life" which are, however, based on the most ordinary men and events? Shahar does not ask this question. Reading Kleist has the same effect as reading Wittgenstein. Both have the uncanny ability to

---

ruhige häusliche Glück noch fand, das ihrem heitern lebenslustigen Sinn zusagte und das ihr der in Innern zerrissene Nathanael niemals hätte gewähren können." (363)

make us wonder about the most ordinary events, or wonder about the ordinariness of extraordinary events, which is the formula of the novella. Whether we can say that we *know* we are in pain, or what it means to give instructions etc. gives us such an impression. That we, as the reader, do apparently not know or are unable to sense the extraordinariness of the ordinary is the foundation of such writing. In a more Kleistian way, it is to experience that in a system of (in-)justice, something can happen that will appear to be impossible, horrific or miraculous, but merely human, e.g. the Marquise's forgiveness for the Count. The possibility of such a wounding, makes its recovery seem impossible.

Shahar takes the "fragment" as corresponding to wounded bodies, "the fragment being a form of a wound in the realm of the text. Fragments, like wounds, have the texture of a cut. […] Like the wounded body, the fragment bears the form of a rupture and stands as evidence of deficiency and pain." (Shahar 449-450) I would suggest that this violence of the text is experienced by the Marquise and by us as the readers, who are put into her perspective.[72] This violence happens in the Marquise's rape; and since the text unfolds around the question of knowledge about this event, Kleist presents to us knowledge as a form of violence.[73] As Dorit Cohn argues, the whole story unfolds around the famous "dash", the blanked-out scene, and around the Marquise's attempt to retrieve the knowledge from this event, to recover it from her own suppression. If skepticism is the suppression of knowledge as reaction to the

---

[72] Cohn makes this point (130) as well as Barton: "To construct an explanation for the story the reader needs to refer back to the "dash" as the source from which the truth of the text seems to emerge — and so is fixed at the same level of perpetual interrogation and disavowal as the Marquise herself." (218). Barton also asks whether this parallel between the Marquise and the reader is maintained in the novella's resolution, its "happy ending," (218) something I would deny. The narrator clearly takes us, the readers, out of the life of the wedding couple. We should mind our own business.

[73] Krüger-Fürhoff claims that "rape and incest represent sexual taboos as transgressions of the limits of (un)knowability." (82)

104

disappointment in knowledge, the Marquise presents to us a case of skepticism. And since, in the end, the Marquise successfully retrieves her knowledge, accepts it, the story offers us the possibility of overcoming skepticism in the form of a forgiveness and not in the gaining of knowledge. Kleist presents this image of skepticism to us in the states of unconsciousness of his characters. Josephe's and Jeronimo's fantasy enters the text in a moment of sleeping. The same happens to Toni and Gustav in *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*; the former in the moment in which she decides to help Gustav, "das Auge zu Boden geschlagen, stand sie, indem sie sich den Kopf hielt, und berief sich auf einen Traum." (Kleist 195) And it is Toni who binds Gustav during his sleep, first calling his name and then hearing his "response:"

> Sie [Toni] neigte sich sanft über ihn und rief ihn, seinen süßen Atem einsaugend, beim Namen; aber ein tiefer Traum, von dem sie der Gegenstand zu sein schien, beschäftigte ihn: wenigstens hörte sie, zu wiederholten Malen, von seinen glühenden, zitternden Lippen das geflüsterte Wort: Toni! Wehmut, die nicht zu beschreiben ist, ergriff sie; sie konnte sich nicht entschließen, ihn aus den Himmeln lieblicher Einbildung in die Tiefe einer gemeinen und elenden Wirklichkeit herabzureißen; und in der Gewißheit, daß er ja früh oder spät von selbst erwachen müsse, kniete sie an seinem Bette nieder und überdeckte seine teure Hand mit Küssen. (Kleist 200)

She imagines the immediate connection between each other as her access to his dream, which is, however, her interpretation of his calling of her name in his sleep. On the other hand, Gustav's dream might represent the opposite, namely the fear of her betraying him, which then seems to be realized in the fact that she binds him. She takes for granted that he will understand her trick to save him. He, however, takes it as her betrayal. Her fantasy is

105

immediate connection, trust, his is its impossibility: "dies waren ihre letzten Worte: »du hättest mir nicht mißtrauen sollen!«" (Kleist 211)

Going back to the Marquise – What is the object of her acceptance? She accepts the Count's humanness, his ordinariness, that he is neither devil, nor angel, which implies the acceptance of her own ordinariness. Her disappointment in knowledge is the disappointment in the ordinariness of the human, hence her transformation of her rape into the Immaculate Conception. But then, the recovery from skepticism appears as a miracle *in* the ordinary. How *could* she forgive him? Yet, she does. How? And what about the fact that this miracle is anything but a religious act? In fact, as we have seen in Kleist's letters, this miraculous event *is* completely human.[74] We could say that, in the case of the Marquise, the forgiveness requires her acceptance of his and her humanness, or rather the chance of becoming human. Kleist called this quest *Bildung*, education, the attainment of one's autonomy. Autonomy imagined as a process of *Bildung* is the goal of speaking for oneself, redeeming one's voice from suppression (the Marquise's from her father, her husband, herself). Let us propose that for Kleist, this process requires the following of someone else, an ideal or *Bild*, to educate others as well as letting others educate yourself. The danger then is to follow a false ideal or *Bild*, a fantasy, and being captured by it, which happened to Jeronimo and Josephe as well as to the Marquise and the Count.

---

[74] But why is it the woman that needs to forgive? Cavell sometimes suggests that skepticism is a "male business." At least, in its classical instances in Shakespeare. But so, it is in Romanticism. It is the male wish for knowledge of the other, Werther's of Lotte as well as Nathanael's of Clara's/Olimpia's in *Der Sandmann*. For an interesting inquiry into the relation between gender and skepticism, see Viefhues-Bailey, 2007.

At first, it is easy to see that the structure of the novella, as in the case of *Das Erdbeben von Chili*, is given in three parts: the Marquise's pregnancy, including the rape, the proposal of marriage by Graf F., and the following conflict within the Marquise's family, her exile and return, all of which are told retrospectively. All these stages are linked together in the Marquise's written announcement in the newspaper, that she is looking for the father of her child. The events of the text unfold around the question of knowledge, the knowledge of a father's identity.

The relation between *bewusst* and *wissen* plays a crucial role in the story. Cohn remarks that "while the word *bewußtlos* is common in German, it is uncommon in Kleist: with some rare exceptions, *Ohnmacht* is the word he uses for the perennial faints of his characters […]." (Cohn 130) Indeed, it appears odd that *Bewußtsein* occurs several times in the story at places where the reader would expect *Gewissen*. After the Marquise consulted a doctor to receive clarification about her "condition," and after which she refuses to believe his diagnosis, her mother asks: „Wenn dein Bewußtsein dich rein spricht: wie kann dich ein Urteil, und wäre es das einer ganzen Consulta von Ärzten, nur kümmern?" (Kleist 131) To which the Marquise replies that "mein Bewußtsein, gleich dem meiner Kinder ist; nicht reiner, Verehrungswürdigste, kann das Ihrige sein." (Kleist 131) The relation between *Bewußtsein* and purity ("Reinheit") is made obvious in the following outcry of the Marquise, "Ein reines Bewußtsein, und eine Hebamme!" (Kleist 131), which is further connected to a lack of language ("Und die Sprache ging ihr aus.") and the threat of madness, "und das augenblicklich, wenn ich nicht wahnsinnig werden soll." (Kleist 131)

Gewissen refers to the moral conscience, whereas *Bewußtsein* to the cognitive consciousness. How does it come, therefore, that the purity of cognitive consciousness

replaces the purity of moral conscience? What is a "pure consciousness"? Is it the ability to know with certainty? And why does this type of knowledge equal moral integrity? In fact, the first instance of *wissen* already hints at this connection. It is the newspaper announcement, in which the Marquise writes "daß sie, ohne ihr Wissen, in andre Umstände gekommen sei" (Kleist 113), hence that she is without guilt, „eine Dame von vortrefflichem Ruf […]." (Kleist 113)

The connection of moral integrity and not knowing is affirmed in the parents' reaction to this announcement: "Oh! Sie ist unschuldig. […] Sie hat es im Schlaf getan […]."[75] Her innocence relies on the fact of her unconsciousness. At this point, it seems significant that the call for knowledge in the newspaper announcement does contradict the Marquise's later refusal to know. The Count, after reading the newspaper announcement, slips into the Marquise's garden to tell her that he is

von Ihrer Unschuld völlig überzeugt […] So überzeugt, […] als ob ich allwissend wäre, als ob meine Seele in deiner Brust wohnte – […] Ein einziges, heimliches Geflüstertes - !" sagte der Graf, und griff hastig nach ihrem glatten, ihm entschlüpfenden Arm. – „Ich *will nichts* wissen", versetzte die Marquise […]. (Kleist 140)

The count's omniscience that penetrates into the Marquise's inside, parallel to his illegitimate entrance into the garden and the rape, together with the intimacy of such knowledge as a whisper, as the privacy of knowledge, feeds onto his and her imagination of him as the one *who knows*, the savior. Her refusal to know, together with the desire to know

---

[75] A reaction that is turned into its opposite in the moment the "Kommandant" has read the Count's reply in the newspaper on the following day, because it leads to his suspicion that she planned this whole incident, hence that she knows.

expressed in the newspaper announcement, can only mean that she does not want *him* to be the father; "him" as in his ordinariness, of course. He would lose the status of angel or savior in the moment he reveals his knowledge to her.

But one can only *refuse to know* what one already knows. "Kleist had endowed her with an unconscious form of knowledge unacknowledged by her conscious self." (Cohn 132) In fact, this fits the moment of her falling into unconsciousness. First, after the count has saved her from the group of soldiers. "Der Marquise schien er ein Engel des Himmels zu sein." (Kleist 114) She falls unconscious *after* she is saved. This convenient delay seems to protect her imagination of him as angelic nature. The second time she falls unconscious is when the midwife assures her "daß sich der muntere Korsar, der zur Nachtzeit gelandet, schon finden würde. Bei diesen Worten fiel die Marquise in Ohnmacht." (Kleist 134) Her fainting is triggered "bei diesen Worten," that her impregnator is just this ordinary human being. Interchange between the Marquise and the midwife preceding this scene confirms this interpretation:

Die Marquise, der das Tageslicht von neuem schwinden wollte, zog die Geburtshelferin vor sich nieder, und legte ihr Haupt heftig zitternd an ihre Brust. Sie fragte, mit gebrochener Stimme, wie denn die Natur auf ihren Wegen walte? Und ob die Möglichkeit einer unwissentlichen Empfängnis sei? – Die Hebamme lächelte, machte ihr das Tuch los, und sagte, das würde ja doch der Frau Marquise Fall nicht sein. Nein, nein, antwortete die Marquise, sie habe wissentlich empfangen, sie wolle nur im allgemeinen wissen, ob diese Erscheinung im Reiche der Natur sei? Die Hebamme versetzte, daß dies, außer der heiligen Jungfrau, noch keinem Weibe auf Erden zugestoßen wäre. Die Marquise zitterte immer heftiger. (Kleist 134)

The Marquise's idea of an unknowledgeable impregnation refers to the Christian concept of the Immaculate Conception; her question whether this "Erscheinung im Reiche der Natur" would be possible assures us in the suspicion that she is convinced of having been impregnated by the Holy Ghost.[76] Her trembling in imagining this condition shows her fear about being exceptional; her fear of as well as her wish for exception. Recurring to Greek mythology, Jupiter or Zeus constantly disguises himself as human in order to seduce and impregnate human females, e.g. in Kleist's *Amphitryon*. And the count appears "schön, wie ein junger Gott" (Kleist 118). The mixture of Christian and mythological imagery highlights the "otherworldly" aspect of the Marquise's impregnation; it expresses her wish that the realm of Nature and the realm of Intelligibility, which here appears as the realm of God(s), should coincide. The wish for this interference not only implies that both realms are disparate, which explains the disbelief of the Marquise's family in her "story," but also her rebuke of this social realm:

> Nur der Gedanke war ihr unerträglich, daß dem jungen Wesen, das sie in der größten Unschuld und Reinheit empfangen hatte, und dessen Ursprung, eben weil er geheimnisvoller war, auch göttlicher zu sein schien, als der anderer Menschen, ein Schandfleck in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft ankleben sollte. (Kleist 137)

This marks the beginning of her exile from the parent's home in which the text explicitly says that "durch die Kraft ihres schuldfreien Bewußtseins" (Kleist 136) her mind does not disrupt and that she gives herself „ganz unter der großen, heiligen und unerklärlichen

---

[76] Luther uses the same word "wissen" to describe Mary's condition: „Da sprach Maria zu dem Engel: Wie soll das zugehen, da ich doch von keinem Manne weiß?" (Lukas I, 34)

Einrichtung der Welt gefangen." (Kleist 136) Her sense of imprisonment is caused by the impossibility to convince her family as well as the doctor and the midwife, who laughs at her, about her innocence, which is her loss of intelligibility to the world. In this way, the story presents to us the suppression of her voice. She has lost her language – except regarding the man who raped her, since he is the one who knows. She is expelled from human society, living on the outskirts of the city on the estate of her former husband, where the Count will find her in a garden (invoking the image of the Holy Virgin). Her rejection of the social, or her rejection *by* the social, forces her into a state of nature; Kleist's reader is not unfamiliar with this dynamic: Michael Kohlhaas complains in his conversation with Luther that, whoever denies him the security by law, "der stößt mich zu den Wilden der Einöde hinaus; er gibt mir, wie wollt Ihr das leugnen, die Keule, die mich selbst schützt, in die Hand." (Kleist 46) Likewise, Jeronimo and Josephe find themselves in a state of nature after the "Umsturz der Verhältnisse." However, this is not Kleist's teleological scheme of the history of humanity, but the concrete fantasies of his characters. If anything, Kleist demonstrates the seductiveness of such explanatory patterns. This is the whole point of Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* in which a teacher figure seduces his conversant about the redemption of humanity into a state of nature. The rejection of or by the current social realm, in any case a dissatisfaction with the social, forces Kleist's characters into a state *before* the law; yet, this does not call for a renewal of the state of nature but for a transformation of the social. This is the idea of Kleist's project of *Bildung* as the overcoming of skepticism; the dissatisfaction with one's culture (the false presence of culture) cannot be overcome in its replacement through a state of nature (the absence of culture), but in a conversion of culture. It is Jeronimo's and Josephe's tragedy that they see this transformation as completed in their fantastic scene of absolute unity; it is Michael Kohlhaas' tragedy that he sees this transformation as the

111

realization of absolute justice, executed as a form of revenge. It is their disappointment about the ordinary which pushes them into the wish for the extraordinary, the overcoming of the human. But it must be clear that the wish for the extraordinary is a wish for the ordinary, since it is motivated by the disappointment *in* the ordinary. Michael Kohlhaas does not *want to* be "the knight of revenge," executing God's justice, but his wish for an ordinary existence ("ein Gewerbe," as he calls it) takes him there; Jeronimo and Josephe do not *want to* be the Holy Family, but it is their escape from the conditions under which they cannot be a family. The point of being chosen to be the Mother of God is that you are not in control of wanting it. It is not the perverse condition of man that keeps Kleist's characters in check, it is their (and our) fantasy about such a condition, a fantasy that is called skepticism.

It is important to notice that the Marquise's isolation is enforced by the continuance of her fantasy of herself as the Mother of God as well as of the Count as Angel of Annunciation, which, nonetheless, protects her from madness. Her refusal to know in the garden scene protects her mind from being disrupted, since „er würde ihr damals nicht wie ein Teufel erschienen sein, wenn er ihr nicht, bei seiner ersten Erscheinung, wie ein Engel vorgekommen wäre." (Kleist 156) She rejects him, when he appears according to her newspaper announcement in the garden, because he is not an angel but another human being, asking for forgiveness, being dependent the way she is. She later accepts him because he has acknowledged his fatherhood publicly, humiliating himself in the act of confession. Thus, the acceptance of him requires his own renunciation of his own image as savior, which could be phrased as his asking her for rescue from himself (from his image of perfection), as well as her asking him for rescue from herself (from her image of his perfection). Just like in *Das Erdbeben von Chili*, Kleist presents to us the reunification of this couple as the overcoming

112

of a false, "missverstandenen"[77] autonomy (Angel/Devil). Out of these reasons, Kleist's writing fits the description of Moral Perfectionism. Cavell once characterizes the movement in perfectionism in the following way:

> In Plato's Republic there is a journey from one to the other beginning with a move from a sense of imprisonment and irreality (in the Cave) to a turning around of direction, that is, a reorientation, which takes one on an upward path of education under the guidance of a figure who has descended from a world of light, and so on. (PoP 143)

The Count appears to "descend from a world of light" to the Marquise, as well as the Marquise for the Count. But these are "false" images of such purity. Their quest is to see the falsity behind these fantasies of each other. The word *Bildung*, as mentioned earlier, contains the word *Bild* for "picture." The process of education is configured as a path upwards according to such a *Bild*. For Emerson, this is a next, attainable, but unattained self, which can appear as a teacher, friend or lover. But the idea of a *Bild* also entails that it can be a wrong picture, by showing a false sense of purity, perfection, ideal.[78] Wittgenstein remarks that "ein Bild hielt uns gefangen," we are in grip of a picture. Let us suppose that Kleist

---

[77] I am referencing Kant here who tries to distinguish his idea of autonomy from a "missverstandenen" form of freedom in his earlier mentioned text *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*. For Kant, a misunderstood freedom is the absence of duty, and so the failed achievement of the human. But here in Kleist's text, a misunderstood freedom is the absence of dependency, although it also is the Marquise's dependency that is her curse. That is what makes every relationship in Kleist's writing ambiguous, but also makes the alternative between presence and absence so unsatisfying. In the end, the acknowledgement of dependency is the acknowledgement of one's humanness.
[78] Is not this the whole idea behind Plato's rebuke of literary mimesis, that it produces false pictures of human perfection? And that he sees the necessity to distinguish these pictures from his concept of "idea"? The word ἰδέα in Ancient Greek comes from the verb ἰδεῖν, "to see", and literally means "pattern," "picture."

presents to us the same idea in his prose. What then is the "picture" of the count? At the dinner table, he tells us

> wie er die Vorstellung von ihr [the Marquise], in der Hitze des Wundfiebers, immer mit der Vorstellung eines Schwans verwechselt hätte, den er, als Knabe, auf seines Onkels Gütern gesehen; daß ihm besonders eine Erinnerung rührend gewesen wäre, da er diesen Schwan einst mit Kot beworfen, worauf dieser still untergetaucht, und rein aus der Flut wieder emporgekommen sei; daß sie immer auf feurigen Fluten umhergeschwommen wäre, und er Thinka gerufen hätte, welches der Name jenes Schwans gewesen, daß er aber nicht imstande gewesen wäre, sie an sich zu locken, indem sie ihre Freude gehabt hätte, bloß am Rudern und In-die-Brust-sich-werfen; versicherte plötzlich, blutrot im Gesicht, daß er sie außerordentlich liebe: sah wieder auf seinen Teller nieder, und schwieg. (Kleist 126)

He confused the "Vorstellung" (representation or picture) of her with the representation of a swan which he contaminates with his excrement but who then retrieves her purity by diving under and finally ascending from the water. It is significant to notice that the image of purity is supported by the general opinion about the Marquise; her mother calls her "o du Reinere als Engel" (Kleist 147) and in the beginning, we learn that she is "eine Dame von vortrefflichem Ruf […]." (Kleist 113) And further, his fantasy of her is also her own, because it is the reason why she falls unconscious before the sexual "incident," in order to keep the image of her purity intact. This incident, of course, stands for his contamination of her purity. That he was unable to lure her (the swan) near to him and that, from his perspective, she happily denies him this closeness, reveals the rape as an act of revenge for her distance to him. Seen in this light, the garden scene, where the Count describes his condition as "als ob

114

ich allwissend wäre, als ob meine Seele in deiner Brust wohnte" (Kleist 140), would be a description of his male appropriation of her, configured in his intimate knowledge about her sexual desires. Therefore, her rejection of him in this scene is her expression of her desire for privacy, which he wishes to deny her. In the end, she must realize that this isolation is not the achievement of privacy, hence her letter in the newspaper. He must realize that her forgiveness depends on his ability to grant privacy to her, hence his written response to her announcement. The act of writing signifies the granting of separateness. Kleist presents this in the course of a not yet performed marriage. The classical, Christian image of marriage is that man and woman become one flesh: "[…] und sie werden sein ein Fleisch." (Gen II, 24) We can take this to correspond to the skeptic's fantasy of absolute knowledge of the other; the denial of privacy (the Count) or the feeling of being condemned to isolation (the Marquise). What if it is her fantasy not to know, but to know that the Count must know (about their intercourse)? Cavell sometimes calls skepticism "a male's business," as the wish to know and control the other, unable to accept the other's privacy, independency, separateness (the male's fear *is* to be known). The Count would fulfill this description in knowing "alone." The Marquise, however, exalts skepticism in her fantasy not to know but to be known; her fear *is* to know (of her desires, of his desires as a human being). Hence, she turns her pregnancy into the impregnation by the Angel of Annunciation (which is also a form of madness). And she rejects him in his attempt to tell her of his knowledge: "Ich *will nichts* wissen!" (Kleist 140) The task of their relation is to overcome each other's fantasies of knowledge, to know completely or to be known completely, to grant the other privacy that is not isolation, to grant her a voice in her history, and to grant him his desires. This is the achievement of the human, an achievement configured in the act of writing.

The writing pieces in the story are, in chronological order, the father's dictated letter to expel the Marquise from his estate, the Marquise's newspaper announcement of her pregnancy and the search for the father, the Count's public response to this announcement, and finally the marriage contract. The father's expulsion of his daughter follows the parents' opinion of the Marquise's illegitimate pregnancy. The letter he sends to her through her mother "war inzwischen von Tränen benetzt; und in einem Winkel stand ein verwischtes Wort: diktiert." (Kleist 135) Why does the father choose to write and, even more, to *dictate* this message? And why does this scene find its repetition in the marriage contract but now as if the Count has switched the position with the father? Both written forms parallel each other, as well as the Marquise's newspaper ad and the Count's response. Mehigan claims that these writings "are both the sign of the process of testing all relationships are subjected to, and the symptom of the failure of these relationships to come to terms with the fragile constitution of the world of which they are a part." (Mehigan 127-128) And he further connects the character's form of writing to the human condition after the Fall: "After the Fall, communication is no longer natural, assured, and trouble-free but must be undertaken via the indirect means of written language." (Mehigan 128) As we have seen earlier, Mehigan connects this to the general claim that writing fails to provide a sense of pure presence for Kleist's characters, and that this is the condition of language after the Fall.

I do not deny that Kleist's stories present to us images of the Fall. Instead, I would like to question the interpretation of such a Fall. The "condemnation" to the written word, to indirect communication, is ambiguous. The Marquise's newspaper ad *is* her means to redeem herself for society and it does not fail. Likewise, the Count chooses to reply to the Marquise's ad because she fears presence; he needs to express his willingness to grant distance to her.

The writing creates the necessary distance the couple needed; it allows the Marquise to retrieve her privacy again and allows the Count to accept the Marquise's privacy. Yet, on the other hand, both writings are essentially public (newspaper announcements), which means that the only place to retrieve privacy is in the public (the public announcement of motherhood and fatherhood).

But then, what about the other two major writings? The father's letter creates a form of distance between him and the Marquise. The act of dictation enforces this distance even more, since it bears the idea of a command which the Marquise must follow. Yet, her act of resistance is to keep her children, which goes against her father's plans. The distance that is guaranteed by the piece of writing makes the separation between father and daughter possible and violent. That this separation is necessary, is hinted at in the incestuous relation between the two, which is not overcome in the Marquise's return to the estates. That means, Kleist presents to us two different ideas of separation or distance or absence: one that is the condition for presence to each other, one that is isolating.

After she receives the letter, she follows her father into his bed chamber where he accidentally fires his pistol. The sexual overtones are more than clear. Especially, that the motivation for his rejection of her is the fact that she presumably had an affair with another man. This incestuous relationship is still in place when the Marquise returns. The reunification scene, on which the mother eavesdrops through the keyhole, is disturbingly clear in that regard (see Kleist 150). Now, this relation finds its expression in the marriage contract which is also dictated by the father against his daughter's will.

> Der Vater, der sie [the Marquise] offenbar in einem überreizten Gemütszustande sah,
> erklärte, daß sie ihr Wort halten müsse; verließ sie, und ordnete alles, nach gehöriger

schriftlicher Rücksprache mit dem Grafen, zur Vermählung an. Er legte demselben [the Count] einen Heiratskontrakt vor, in welchem dieser auf alle Rechte eines Gemahls Verzicht tat, dagegen sich zu allen Pflichten, die man von ihm fordern würde, verstehen sollte. Der Graf sandte das Blatt, ganz von Tränen durchfeuchtet, mit seiner Unterschrift zurück. (Kleist 154)

This is a marriage contract *for* a father. It should reunite the Marquise with her family again, since it a) redeems the Marquise's reputation, and b) lets the Marquise continue to live in her father's house because the Count will not visit her until their son is born. What is the status of such a contract? Sure, the Marquise consented to it through her newspaper announcement, and so did the Count. Yet, their relation does hardly count as marriage. What about the second marriage?

Er [the Count] fing, da sein Gefühl ihm sagte, daß ihm von allen Seiten, um der gebrechlichen Einrichtung der Welt willen, verziehen sei, seine Bewerbung um die Gräfin, seine Gemahlin, von neuem an, erhielt, nach Verlauf eines Jahres, ein zweites Jawort von ihr, und auch eine zweite Hochzeit ward gefeiert, froher, als die erste, nach deren Abschluß die ganze Familie nach V... hinauszog. (Kleist 155-156)

This second marriage seems to overcome the contract of the first, because only this one includes the forgiveness "um der gebrechlichen Einrichtung der Welt willen […]" which the Count asked for and which the Marquise must grant him in order to have an actual marriage. Only after this second "Yes," the relation between the Count, the Marquise and their child is called a "ganze Familie." So, let us suppose that the second marriage establishes the family, something that remained unaccounted for in the original contract. One could see here the father in between the Count and the Marquise so that the second marriage announces the

118

leaving of the father. Freud and Lévi-Strauss have pointed out that the beginning of the social requires the overcoming of incest, the former in *Totem und Tabu*, the latter in e.g. *The Savage Mind*, *The Raw and the Cooked*. The transition from the natural to the social *vice versa* is a topic for Kleist in all of his prose. And if the second marriage demarcates such a transition, then that means that the social cannot rely on a contractual basis (alone), but also on the overcoming of desire ("Triebverzicht").

This last point might bear a connection to Peter Horn's question "ob nämlich diese Prüfungen überhaupt sicher stellen können, was niemals sicher sein kann." (Horn 89). And he says that "der Zweifel wird der konstitutive Faktor der Gesellschaft. Alle Bindungen, die letztlich auf Vertrauen beruhen, zerbröckeln." (Horn 90) Horn obviously points here to the idea that the Marquise has been tested and redeemed from her sins, which again hints at the idea of the story as allegorizing the Fall.[79] The answer to this question is, of course, "no." The real question, however, would be whether this is the function of marriage in this story? What has been overcome in the end of the story? It never was a point of uncertainty or ignorance etc., something which is overcome by a correct representation. The story's dynamic described the overcoming of a state of denial, the denial of one's own humanness and that of another human being. And a denial is not overcome by "additional information," but by a remembrance, since it is caused by some sort of forced forgetting. The act of remembering takes place in the Count's reappearance as the future husband and former criminal, "in genau demselben Kriegsrock, mit Orden und Waffen, wie er sie bei der Eroberung des Forts

---

[79] He further notices: "Wenn ihr (der Marquise) vorheriges Leben als 'Prüfung' für ihr zukünfitges Verhalten angesehen werden kann […], wie kann nun diese zweite (sicherlich strengere) Prüfung sicherstellen, daß eine Wiederholung des Sündenfalls nicht mehr vorkommt?" (Horn 89-90)

getragen hatte […]." (Kleist 152) The Marquise's reaction in this scene informs us about the violence of such remembrance in itself; but the mother's reactions confirms this to be a remembrance:

Wen sonst, rief die Obristin mit beklemmter Stimme, wen sonst, wir Sinnberaubten, als ihn –? Die Marquise stand starr über ihm, und sagte: ich werde wahnsinnig werden, meine Mutter! Du Törin, erwiderte die Mutter, zog sie zu sich, und flüsterte ihr etwas in das Ohr. Die Marquise wandte sich, und stürzte, beide Hände vor das Gesicht, auf den Sofa nieder. Die Mutter rief: Unglückliche! Was fehlt dir? Was ist geschehn, worauf du nicht vorbereitet warst? (Kleist 152-153)

The achievement in the second marriage, which is the achievement of the story in total, is not a state of certainty about the impossibility of another "Fall." Quite the opposite, the Marquise consents to the marriage "um der gebrechlichen Einrichtung der Welt willen" which contrasts with her feeling earlier about the imprisoning aspect of "der großen, heiligen und unerklärlichen Einrichtung der Welt" (Kleist 136). This is not her consent to the "myth of the given" but the acknowledgement of the instability of a communal life, its discovery and its maintenance. The reappearance of the traumatic experience may begin again and lead to the disappointment in such a life and in the human, who creates it. The achievement of the ordinary, as Cavell said, is the quest of Romanticism. Cohn finds something comparable at the end of Kleist's novella, that the "final paragraph reduces the supernatural to the ordinary, even as it evokes the happy ending of a fairy tale." (Cohn 138-139) The fact that "[e]ine ganze Reihe von jungen Russen folgte jetzt noch dem ersten" (Kleist 156) humanizes the first child and takes away its supposedly divine origin. "As indicated in the story's coda, what eventually takes the place of the abandoned myth is a realistic view of self and world, and a

very real marriage." (Cohn 138) The abandoned myth is the human wish for the extraordinary, something that transcends the human and its limitations (in knowledge, in morality). The overcoming of this myth cannot be stable since a stable solution would overcome the human itself and its wishes, and hence be an instance of that same wish. This surely is one of Kleist's greatest and truest insights that the only place for the human to find happiness is to happily acknowledge the human as being in between two worlds; so that the wish to overcome the human from above appears inseparable from its version below and that literature might be the expression of keeping human life open to skepticism: "[Die Marquise] antwortete […], indem sie ihm um den Hals fiel: er würde ihr damals nicht wie ein Teufel erschienen sein, wenn er ihr nicht, bei seiner ersten Erscheinung, wie ein Engel vorgekommen wäre." (Kleist 156)

Chapter 4: Conclusion

What this thesis tried to offer was a new perspective on texts and problems already well known. If it was successful in doing so, it might even reawake an interest in these texts and problems, that is not exclusively historical. One of these problems is skepticism, and it is the accomplishment of Stanley Cavell's work to have shown how the question of skepticism, although born in and inseparably connected to the modern era and its concept of knowledge, does not cease to be a problem after this era; on the contrary, it might appear in different disguises than the expected doubting philosopher in front of a fireplace. A turning point in this history is, as I tried to show, the philosophical work of Immanuel Kant and the intimate connection to as well as Romanticism's repulsion of this thinking. This turning point is the thought that, expressed for the first time in modern Western philosophy with Kant, a successful response to the threat of skepticism cannot depend on its refutation. That is, it cannot depend on an extension of knowledge, but must rely on an interpretation of knowledge, of what it means to know. Kant gives this interpretation in form of, what he calls, a limitation. He traverses and maps the land of pure reason, if I may borrow his famous metaphor, whose boundaries are reason's limits, and beyond which lies the infinite sea of metaphysical illusion. In order to conduct his investigation, he had to divide the world into the realm of sensual appearance, things as they appear, and the intelligible things in themselves. The former is the realm of possible knowledge, since only here space and time, the subjective conditions of any possible experience, apply, the latter is the realm of questions human beings cannot stop asking, but also cannot answer satisfactorily. And it seems that this compulsion is what Kant

describes as skepticism, that reason violently goes against itself; but if that is the case, then skepticism remains, and must remain, a possibility of the human: the disappointment of humans with themselves as human beings. This also was the fundamental motive that Cavell identifies at the heart of skepticism.

Kant's strategy was to change the way we understand ourselves *as human beings*, how we stand towards our condition. Hence, he introduces the idea of the human capable of seeing herself from two standpoints or worlds and that to grasp one's humanness requires an intelligible standpoint, to have the courage to see oneself as autonomous. The point was that the possibility of this standpoint, of freedom, is beyond demonstrability, although it can be exemplified in Aesthetics, e.g. in the experience of the sublime, so that Aesthetics can reconnect the two realms of Epistemology and Ethics. Therefore, Kant presents the idea that the human is an achievement, which means on the opposite, that one can *fail* to enact one's humanness. To follow the moral law *without interest* expresses one's autonomy or humanness; the moral imperative functions as constraint, condition or limitation of one's own interests, invoking all these senses at once.

There is no metaphor as seductive and powerful than the diremption between two worlds, one poor but unavoidable, the other ideal but unreachable, in Romanticism. Additionally, and this was essential for Kant's moral philosophy, this diremption takes place in the human itself. It is the image of skepticism going back to Descartes' distinction between the world of the mind and the world of the body. These two worlds are thought of as distinct yet strangely intimate, connected in Descartes' pineal gland, in Kant's Aesthetics, or in Romanticism's appraisal of the powers of Art. And at no point it is clear whether these two worlds are the solution of skepticism or its cause. Is Kant's conclusion, that the "I think" must remain

irrepresentable, the solution of skepticism or an instance of it? The answer is "it depends." It depends on how Kant's reader interprets this "limitation," whether she takes it as defeat or relief. Schlegel, one of Kant's readers, says, ironically, that "incomprehensibility" remains the condition of comprehensibility, which sounds partially defeating, partially relieving. The Romantic fragment is one effects of this incompletion of knowledge. And it is key to this genre to see it not as incomplete form of its opposite, the system, but to see it as a different kind of completion. It can be disappointing to read fragments, although this disappointment does not lie *in* the fragments. It is the repulsive dimension of this genre, the rejection of its reader, that might awake the reader's *interest* in *themselves and their lives*. Kant sees our interests as part of our skepticism, hence that an overcoming of these interests in the name of the moral law is the overcoming of skepticism. Romanticism, on the other hand, does not deny that these interests are instances of our skepticism. However, a solution cannot be the rejection of *any interest* in favor of the moral law. The absorption in our particular interests is, on the contrary, the sign of our lack of genuine interest in ourselves. Probably, this is the reason why Nietzsche says that, fortunately, no one is *interested* in morality. Skepticism is our indifference towards ourselves and our humanness. Novalis, hence, called the recovery of this interest the "romanticization" of the everyday, of the common life, as well as the "logarithmization" of the sublime. And this project, conducted in literature, includes a process of *Bildung*, which I took literally, coming from the Christian *imago dei*, as taking a "picture" or "ideal" of one's self, and striving for this "image." And I connected this idea of *Bildung* to Emerson's and Nietzsche's "perfectionist" thinking, the question of inheritance and quotation. Emerson and Nietzsche then turn Kant's concept of autonomy, the problem of being author of the law and subject to it, into the problem of independence from a teaching figure. The accomplishment of freedom does not require the rejection of this teacher but a form of

124

independence, which entails the acknowledgement of one's dependence to this figure. Emerson played with these ideas around the problem of "quotation," and that we quote some sage because of our shameful condition. But this "condition," which is e.g. the sense of being expelled from the realm of nature, of immediacy etc., is itself our "standpoint" towards ourselves; we are captivated by our own construction. This standpoint is that we are no longer "standing upright," we are not human; yet, instead of having lost it, we have rejected it. So, perfectionism is the constant struggle with false images of perfection (the realm of nature, innocence, immediacy, certainty etc.). And if skepticism is based on these false images, as wish of the human to transcend the human, *Bildung* or perfectionism makes skepticism possible as well as offering an alternative to it. That is why, for example Nietzsche's *Übermensch* can appear as Nietzsche's disappointment in the human as well as an affirmation of change and transformation; both possibilities are uncannily close since both are wishes for overcoming.

Finally, I took Heinrich von Kleist's prose to contain these struggles in some sort or another because his figures are the purest expressions of the wish to overcome the human. It almost seems as if the relation between Kant and Romanticism, their intimacy as well as their opposition, reaches its peak in Kleist's writing, not as its last instance but in its most uncompromising form. Kleist's letters are the clearest expression of this sentiment. The rejection of any "transcendence" beyond "this" world, the despair about the "loss" of truth, the compensating sense of all consuming duty, and love, and education, as part of this world. But how can the latter, love and education, which will always remain an expression of dependence, compensate the loss of the former, of the absolute? How can, in other words, another human being, as dependent as I am, authorize my existence? It cannot, if authorization

means a completion of my existence as human being, as free. This, of course depends on the interpretation of "completion" or one's disappointment in it. That it is not "absolute," but also not in "lack of something," which I identified as the Romantic idea of the fragment. In other words, this means that freedom is not the absence of dependence, which is a false sense of autonomy, but the acknowledgement of one's own dependence, which one can call the discovery of one's humanness.

Kleist's figures, not only the couple in *Die Marquise von O…* and Jeronimo and Josephe in *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, but also Michael Kohlhaas, are expressions of the rejection of the human, in their fantasy of a realm of purity or ideality. However, I focused on the former two because both present to us a couple's struggle, and therefore a scene of education, captivated by their own "divine" fantasies about themselves and the other, imagining to bear the child of God. They gave space to these interpretations of absoluteness in order to protect themselves from the chaos of the world surrounding them. One could say that both stories are about the question of how to live in a world without certainty. *Die Marquise von O…* directly relates this problem to the question of knowledge; the lack of knowledge (innocence) signifies moral purity. Their fantasy is that she, the Marquise, *does not know* and that he, the Count, *is the one who knows*, the one who has immediate access to her inner soul. Therefore, for him, she is morally pure, and he is, for her, the Angel of Annunciation. The story presents itself as the overcoming of these false images of perfection but in the form of an acceptance of the other's and one's own humanness, or separateness, which entails the other's and one's own privacy.

The regain of each other's privacy is the acknowledgement of my separateness to the other, that my knowledge is not of the other's inner, but that it also *does not fail to* provide knowledge of the Other. Kleist presented this acknowledgement in several acts of writing, as

a form of learning distance. And if the remarriage of the couple is a recovery from skepticism, from the desire to possess the other's inner, or being possessed by another's knowledge, how can this solution be stable? The point of the story is to show that there cannot be any stable solution. But that does *not* mean that there is no solution whatsoever; it is a temporary peace. The disappointment in the ordinary can break loose at any moment; hence, Kleist's narrator retreats from the narrative in the last paragraph, and so does the reader, glancing with uncertainty, but not without hope, into the future.

In my thoughts on Kleist, I was referring occasionally to other writings of his', e.g. *Michael Kohlhaas*, *Der Findling*, *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*, as well as essays like *Die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden* and *Über das Marionettentheater*. What about his plays? Prinz Friedrich's somnambulistic actions, Penthesilea's madness and her confusion of "Kuss" and "Biss," Adam's representation of humanity as judge and defendant in one person in *Der zerbrochene Krug* – all these would be fabulous case studies of skepticism. Yet, I chose his prose, because of my feeling that Romanticism, at least in the early 19th century, never fully expressed itself in drama. The reason, as I would speculate, is the weight of the Classicist theater (Lessing, Goethe[80], Schiller), as well as Shakespeare's, which Schlegel and Tieck translated and which they judged as Romantic theater, and Romanticism's strive for new forms of expression. The short story, the novella and the novel are representational, and as such problematizing representation. This is one major topic in Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (the question of dreams), Ludwig Tieck's works (the question of madness), Joseph von Eichendorff's (melancholia), E.T.A. Hoffmann's descents

---

[80] Goethe, of course, remains exceptional, since he went through all literary "movements" of his time. *Faust* is, for sure, no Classicist drama.

into the darkness of the mind (*Der Sandmann*). And all these literary explorations of the dark side of the mind cannot be understood without a proper understanding of the philosophy of the beginning 19th century: Schelling's ideas on the unifying powers of Art, his theories about the unconscious, Schopenhauer's conception of the hidden strings of the will etc. Originally, I planned a reading of Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* because it displays more than any other text of this era the problem of the Other, in Nathaniel's avoidance of Clara and his devotion to the automaton Olimpia. And the text's focus on the power of visuality seems to connect it to the problem of skepticism. Furthermore, but this must remain an outlook, a discussion of *Der Sandmann* cannot ignore its infamous reception by Freud in his text *Das Unheimliche,* and therefore, would pave the way of a general discussion of the problem of skepticism in Freud. I think here of Freud's competitive relationship to philosophy, but also about remarks he made about uncertainty as the human fear for whatever lies behind one's back because it is the region that we never *see*. In any case, Freud is one path of how Romanticism continues in the 20th century.[81]

At this point, however, the goal of this thesis was to show the significance of the problem of skepticism in between 1781 and, approximately, 1811, arising in the work of Kant and culminating in Romanticism, respectively in the prose of Kleist. I hope to have succeeded in showing how the problem of knowledge regarding others occupies the minds of this generation who stand in between philosophy and literature but at the beginning of our modern times.

---

[81] Heidegger, a name seemingly far away from these writers and yet uncannily intimate with their thoughts, might be another one of these paths: Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin, his reception of Nietzsche, Nietzsche's reception of Emerson, Emerson's reception of Kant (Wordsworth) etc.

Works Cited

Abrams, M.H. *Natural Supernaturalism. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1973.

Albritton, Rogers. "On Wittgenstein's use of the term "criterion"." *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 56, no. 22, 1959, pp. 845-857.

Barton, Peter. "The Problem of Knowledge and the Discourse of the Hysteric: Exploring a Lacanian Interpretation of "Die Marquise von O. . .".". *Heinrich von Kleist and Modernity*, edited by Bernd Fischer and Tim Mehigan, Boydell & Brewer, Camden House, 2011, pp. 217-231.

Beiser, Frederick. *The Romantic Imperative. The Concept of Early German Romanticism*. Harvard UP, 2003.

Berlin, Isaiah. *The Roots of Romanticism. The A. W. Mellon Lectures*. Princeton UP, 1999.

Blanchot, Maurice, Deborah Esch and Ian Balfour. "The Athenaeum." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 22, no. 2, *Des Allemagnes: Aspects of Romanticism in France*, 1983, pp. 163-172.

Bloom Harold. "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," *Romanticism and Consciousness. Essays in Criticism*, edited by Harold Bloom, W. W. Norton, 1970, pp. 3-23

Cassirer, Ernst. "Galileo's Platonism." *Studies and essays in the history of science and learning: offered in homage to George Sarton on the occasion of his 60. Birthday, 31. August 1944*, Kraus Repr., 1969, pp. 277-297.

---. *Heinrich von Kleist und die Kantische Philosophie*. Reuther & Reuther, Berlin, 1919.

Cavell, Stanley. *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises*. Harvard Univ. Press, 1994.

---. *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*. Harvard Univ. Press, 2005.

---. *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990.

---. *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987.

---. *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism*. Chicago Univ. Press, 1988.

---. *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*. Updated version, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002.

---. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. Reprinted ed., Oxford Univ. Press, 1982)

---. *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992.

---. *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989.

Cohn, Dorrit. "Kleist's "Marquise von O...": The Problem of Knowledge." *Monatshefte*, vol. 67, no. 2, 1975, pp. 129-144.

Critchley, Simon. *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing. Death, Philosophy, Literature*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2004.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. *Grammatology*, corrected ed., translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

Descartes, Réne. "Meditations on the First Philosophy," *The Method, Meditations and Philosophy of Descartes*, translated by John Veitch, Tudor Publishing Co., 1901, pp. 206-282.

Eldridge, Hannah. *Lyric Orientations. Hölderlin, Rilke, and the Poetics of Community*. Cornell UP, Ithaca NY, 2015.

Eldridge, Richard. *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism*. UP Chicago, 1997.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Experience." *Essays – Second Series*, Floating Press, 2009, pp. 40-76.

---. "Self-Reliance." *Essays – First Series*, Floating Press, 2009, pp. 39-79.

---. "The American Scholar." *The American Scholar, Self-Reliance, Compensation*, edited by Orren Henry Smith, American Book Company, 1893, pp. 21-46.

Fischer, Michael. *Stanley Cavell and Literary Skepticism*, UP Chicago, 1989.

Frank, Manfred. "Alle Wahrheit ist relative, alles Wissen symbolisch." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, vol. 50, 1996, pp. 403-436.

Franks, Paul. "Skepticism after Kant." *Varieties of Skepticism. Essays after Kant, Wittgenstein, and Cavell*, edited by James Conant and Andrea Kern, De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 19-58.

Freud, Sigmund. *Totem und Tabu*. Gesammelte Werke, Band 9, 3rd ed., Fischer, 1961.

---. "Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion." *Gesammelte Werke, Band 16*, 2nd ed., Fischer, 1961, pp. 101-258.

Frye, Northrop. *A Study of English Romanticism*. Random House, 1968.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 3rd ed., J. C. B. Mohr, 1972.

Gasché, Rodolphe. "Foreword. Ideality in Fragmentation." *Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Peter Firchow, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pp. vii-xxxii.

Gould, Timothy. *Hearing Things: Voice and Method in the Writing of Stanley Cavell*. UP Chicago, 1998.

Guyer, Paul. "Examples of Perfectionism." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2014, pp. 5-27.

---. *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*. Princeton UP, 2008.

Hamacher, Werner. "Das Beben der Darstellung." *Positionen der Literaturwissenschaft. Acht Modellanalysen am Beispiel von Kleists Das Erdbeben in Chili*, edited by David E. Wellbery, C. H. Beck, 1984, pp. 149-173.

Hammer, Espen. *Stanley Cavell. Skepticism, Subjectivity and the Ordinary*. Polity Press, 2002.

Heidegger, Martin. *Sein und Zeit*. Gesamtausgabe 2, Klostermann, 1977.

---. *Was heißt Denken*?. Gesamtausgabe 8, Klostermann, 2002.

Hoffmann, E.T.A. "Der Sandmann." *Sämtliche Werke. Fantasie- und Nachtstücke*. Winkler, 1960, pp. 331-363.

Horn, Peter. *Heinrich von Kleists Erzählungen*. Scriptor, 1978.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature.* Reprinted from the original edition in three volumes, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, Clarendon Press, 1896.

Husserl, Edmund. *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*. Husserliana VI, edited by Walter Biemel, Nijhoff, 1976.

Kant, Immanuel. Beantwortung der Frage: *Was ist Aufklärung?*, Akademie Ausgabe, Band VII *Abhandlungen nach 1781*, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff.

---. Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten, Akademie Ausgabe, Band III, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff.

---. *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Band V, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff.

---. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Band III, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff.

---. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Akademie Ausgabe, Band V, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff.

---. *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, Akademie Ausgabe, Band VII *Abhandlungen nach 1781*, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff.

---. *Prolegomena*, Akademie Ausgabe, Band III, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1900ff.

---. *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*, Akademie Ausgabe, Band VII *Abhandlungen nach 1781*, Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900ff.

Kleist, Heinrich von. *Briefe*. Edited by Günter Dunz-Wolff, 2012, http://kleist-digital.de/briefe

---. "Das Erdbeben in Chili." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 158-175.

---. "Der Findling." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 219-238.

---. "Die Marquise von O…." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 113-158.

---. "Die Verlobung von St. Domingo." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 175-215.

---. "Michael Kohlhaas." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 7-113.

---. "Über das Marionettentheater." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 473-481.

---. "Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 433-449.

---. "Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden." *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden. Band 3*, Aufbau, 1978, pp. 453-459.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Literary Absolute. Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, translated by Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, State University of New York Press, 1988.

Lichtenstein, Ernst. "Bildung." *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Band 1: A–C*, edited by Joachim Ritter et al., Schwabe, 1971, pp. 921–927.

Malcolm, Norman. "Wittgenstein's philosophical investigations." *Philosophical Review*, vol. 63, no. 4, 1954, pp. 530-59.

Millán, Elizabeth, *Friedrich Schlegel and the emergence of romantic philosophy*. State University of New York Press, 2007.

Mehigan, Tim. *Heinrich von Kleist: Writing after Kant*. Boydell and Brewer, 2011.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Le Discours de la syncope, I.: Logodaedalus*. Aubier-Flammarion, 1976.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Also sprach Zarathustra." *Werke in drei Bänden, Band 2*, Carl Hanser, 1954, pp. 274-561.

---. "Ecce Homo." *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 6th vol., de Gruyter, 1980, pp. 255-374.

---. "Götzen-Dämmerung." *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 6th vol., de Gruyter, 1980, pp. 55-162.

---. "Jenseits von Gut und Böse." *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 5th vol., de Gruyter, 1980, pp. 9-244.

---. "Schopenhauer als Erzieher." *Werke in drei Bänden, Band 1*, Carl Hanser, 1954, pp. 287-36.

Novalis. *Werke in einem Band*, edited by Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel, Carl Hanser, 1981.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice. Revised Edition*. Revised ed., Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1999.

Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton University Press, 1980.

---. "From Epistemology to Romance: Cavell on Skepticism." *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1981, pp. 759-774.

Rudrum, David. *Stanley Cavell and the Claim of Literature*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2013.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile or On Education*. Translated by Allan Bloom, Basic Books, 1979.

Schiller, Friedrich. "Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen." *Sämtliche Werke, Band 5*, Hanser, 1962, pp. 570-668.

---. "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung." *Sämtliche Werke, Band 5*, Hanser, 1962, pp. 693-778.

Schlegel, Friedrich. *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796-1801), Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe,* edited by Hans Eichner, Schöningh, 1967.

Shahar, Galili. "Fragments and Wounded Bodies: Kafka after Kleist." *The German Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2007, pp. 449-467.

Stäudlin, Karl Friedrich. *Geschichte und Geist des Skeptizismus vorzüglich in Rücksicht auf Moral und Religion*. Leipzig, 1794.

Szondi, Peter, "Friedrich Schlegel und die romantische Ironie," *Schriften*, Suhrkamp, vol. 2., 1978.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Beacon Press, 1997.

Van den Berg, J. H. The Subject and his Landscape," *Romanticism and Consciousness. Essays in Criticism*, edited by Harold Bloom, W. W. Norton, 1970, pp. 57-64.

Viefhues-Bailey, Ludger. *Beyond the Philosopher's Fear. A Cavellian Reading of Gender, Origin and Religion in Modern Skepticism*, Ashgate, 2007.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. 2nd ed., Blackwell, 1958.

Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind; an Autobiographical Poem* (1805, 1850). Global Language Resources, 2001.