

World wide reading 21th of November 2011

Heinrich von Kleist, selection of the texts

Useful Inventions: Project for a Cannonball Postal System

They have recently invented, in order to expedite communications from the four corners of the globe, an electrical telegraph; a telegraph that by means of an electrophorus and a metal wire can transmit messages with the speed of thought, or, better said, in less time than chronometrical instruments could measure, so that if anyone, assuming the necessary apparatus were generally available, wished to inquire of an old friend, who lived in Antipodes, "How are you?" this man, before you could turn a stone, and just as though he were standing in the very same room, could answer: "Very well, thank you." Happy as we would be to award the crown of praise to the inventor of this postal system, which in a quite literal sense travels on wings of lightning, even this advancement in the art of long-distance communication remains imperfect, being of small use to commercial interests, and good for dispatching only very short and laconic messages, not however for delivery of letters, reports, enclosures and parcel post. Therefore, in order that such needs also be fulfilled, and that business communications be accelerated and multiplied at least within the boundaries of the civilized world, we propose a *projectile* or *cannonball* express: an institution that, with suitably situated artillery stations spaced within firing range of each other, would discharge, from mortars or howitzers, hollow shells, which have been stuffed full not of powder but letters and packages, and which could be very easily be observed in flight, and whenever they might fall, short of some morass, be retrieved; so that these shells, opened at each station, their respective letters for each locality removed and new ones packed in, could than be resealed, loaded into a new mortar, and dispatched to the next station. We withhold for now a complete prospectus, and description and itemization of equipment and cost, pending a more detailed and extensive report. Since in this manner, as a little arithmetic will show, one could write or reply from Berlin to Stettin or Breslau with half a day's time, and at very small cost, and since consequently, compared with our equestrian mail, there is a tenfold gain in time and rather the same effect as if a magic wand were to move that place ten times closer to the city of Berlin, we believe that, for businessmen as well as the public at large, an invention of the first and most decisive importance, capable of

propelling commerce to the highest peak of perfection, has been brought by us to the light of day.

Berlin

October 10, 1810

[Der höhere Frieden (1792 oder 1793)]

The Marquise of O-

(Based on a true incident, the setting of which has been transposed from the north to the south)

In M-, an important town in northern Italy, the widowed Marquise of O-, a lady of unblemished reputation and the mother of several well-brought-up children, inserted the following announcement in the newspapers: that she had, without knowledge of the cause, come to find herself in a certain situation; that she would like the father of the child she was expecting to disclose his identity to her; and that she was resolved, out of consideration for her family, to marry him. The lady who, under the constraint of unalterable circumstances, had with such boldness taken so strange a step and thus exposed herself to the derision of society, was the daughter of Colonel G-, the Commandant of the citadel at M-. About three years earlier her husband, the Marquis of O-, to whom she was most deeply and tenderly attached, had lost his life in the course of a journey to Paris on family business. At the request of her excellent mother she had, after his death, left the country estate at V- where she had lived hitherto, and had returned with her two children to the house of her father the Commandant. Here she had for the next few years lived a very secluded life, devoted to art and reading, the education of her children and the care of her parents, until the - War suddenly filled the neighbourhood with the armed forces of almost all the powerful European states, including those of Russia. Colonel G-, who had orders to defend the citadel, told his wife and daughter to withdraw either to the latter's country estate or to that of his son, which was near V-. But before the ladies had even concluded their deliberations, weighing up the hardships to which they would be subject in the fortress against the horrors to which they would be exposed in the open country, the Russian troops were already besieging the citadel and calling upon it to surrender. The Colonel announced to his family that he would now simply act as if

they were not present, and answered the Russians with bullets and grenades. The enemy replied by shelling the citadel. They set fire to the magazine, occupied an outwork, and when after a further call to surrender the Commandant still hesitated to do so, an attack was mounted during the night and the fortress taken by storm.

Just as the Russian troops, covered by heavy artillery fire, were forcing their way into the castle, the left wing of the Commandant's residence was set ablaze and the women were forced to leave. The Colonel's wife, hurrying after her daughter who was fleeing downstairs with her children, called out to her that they should all stay together and take refuge in the cellars below; but at that very moment a grenade exploding inside the house threw everything into complete confusion. The Marquise found herself, with her two children, in the outer precincts of the castle where fierce fighting was already in progress and shots flashed through the darkness, driving her back again into the burning building, panic-stricken and with no idea where to turn. Here, just as she was trying to escape through the back door, she had the misfortune to encounter a troop of enemy riflemen, who as soon as they saw her suddenly fell silent, slung their guns over their shoulders and, with obscene gestures, seized her and carried her off. In vain she screamed for help to her terrified women, who went fleeing back through the gate, as the dreadful rabble tugged her hither and thither, fighting among themselves. Dragging her into the innermost courtyard they began to assault her in the most shameful way, and she was just about to sink to the ground when a Russian officer, hearing her piercing screams, appeared on the scene and with furious blows of his sword drove the dogs back from the prey for which they lusted. To the Marquise he seemed an angel sent from heaven. He smashed the hilt of his sword into the face of one of the murderous brutes, who still had his arms round her slender waist, and the man reeled back with blood pouring from his mouth; he then addressed the lady politely in French, offered her his arm and led her into the other wing of the palace which the flames had not yet reached and where, having already been stricken speechless by her ordeal, she now collapsed in a dead faint. Then - the officer instructed the Marquise's frightened servants, who presently arrived, to send for a doctor; he assured them that she would soon recover, replaced his hat and returned to the fighting.

[...]

(Quelle: Heinrich von Kleist. The Marquise of O- An other Stories. Translated and with an introduction by David Luke and Nigel Reeves. Penguin Books, 1978.)

The embarrassed magistrate (Der verlegene Magistrat)

It recently happened that a soldier in the town of H. abandoned his guard-post without the permission of his officers. According to an ancient law such a crime, which due to the continuous squabbles of the nobility had been of no small importance, must demand the death penalty. Nevertheless, without the law ever having been expressly revoked, it has not been enforced for many hundreds of years, with the result that rather than that the offender should face execution, he is, in accordance with longstanding custom, sentenced to a simple fine, to be paid into the town treasury. The man in question however, who seemed to have no desire to pay the fine, explained, to the mighty consternation of the magistrate, that he, as was his right according to the law, chose to die. The magistrate, who suspected that a misunderstanding had occurred, sent a representative to the man, to make it clear to him how much more advantageous it would be to part with a few gulden than to be fusilladed. But the man insisted that he was tired of life, and that he wanted to die, with the result that nothing was left the magistrate, who did not want to see blood shed, but to strike off the fine that stood against the fellow, and was even glad when this latter declared that, given such changed circumstances, he chose to remain living awhile.

(Quelle:

<http://translationsfromfrenchandgerman.blogspot.com/2010/04/heinrich-von-kleist-embarrassed.html>)

The Foundling

Antonio Piachi, a wealthy Roman dealer in property, was sometimes obliged to make long journeys on business. He would then usually leave his young wife Elvira behind in Rome in the care of her relatives. On one of these occasions he travelled with his eleven-year-old son Paolo, the child of an earlier marriage, to Ragusa. It so happened that a plague-like disease had here recently broken out and was spreading panic through the city and the surrounding districts. Piachi, who had not heard this news till he was on his way, stopped on the outskirts to inquire about it. But when he was told that the epidemic was growing daily more serious and that the authorities were talking about closing the town, anxiety on his son's behalf made him abandon all his business plans, and taking horses he set off again the way he had come.

When he was in the open he noticed beside his carriage a young boy who held out his hand towards him beseechingly and appeared to be in great distress. Piachi told the driver to stop, and the boy on being asked what he wanted replied in his innocence that he had caught the plague; that the sheriff's officers were pursuing him to take him to the hospital where his father and mother had already died; and he begged Piachi in the name of all the saints to let him come with him and not leave him behind to perish in the town. As he spoke he clasped the old man's hand,

pressed it and kissed it and covered it with tears. Piachi, in his first impulse of horror, was about to push the boy violently away, but the latter at that very moment turned pale and fell fainting to the ground. The good old man's pity was stirred; with his son he got out of his carriage, lifted the boy into it, and drove off, though he had not the least idea what to do with him.

At his first stop he was still negotiating with the people at the inn how he might best get rid of him again when on the orders of the police, who had got wind of the affair, he was arrested; and he and his son and the sick boy, whose name was Nicolo, were transported under guard back to Ragusa. All Piachi's remonstrances against the cruelty of this procedure were in vain; arriving at Ragusa, all three of them were taken in a bailiff's charge to the hospital; and here, although he himself remained well and the boy Nicolo recovered his health, Piachi's son, the eleven-year-old Paolo, became infected and died three days later.
[...]

(Quelle: Heinrich von Kleist. The Marquise of O- An other Stories. Translated and with an introduction by David Luke and Nigel Reeves. Penguin Books, 1978.)

"On the Puppet Theater" (1811)

[...] "About three years ago," I related, "I was swimming with a young man over whose physical form a marvelous grace seemed to shine. He must have been just sixteen or so, and only the first signs of vanity, induced by the favors of women, could be seen, as it were, in the farthest distance. It so happened that shortly before, in Paris, we had seen the famous statue called the Spinario, the youth removing a thorn from his foot – copies of it are familiar and to be found in most German collections. A glance in a large mirror recalled it to him at a moment when, in drying himself, he happened to raise his foot to a stool – he smiled and mentioned the discovery he had made. I indeed had noticed it too in the very same instant, but either to test the self-assurance of the grace with which he was endowed, or to challenge his vanity in a salutary way, I laughed and said he was seeing phantoms. He blushed and raised his foot a second time to prove it to me, but the attempt, as might easily have been foreseen, did not succeed. Confused, he raised his foot a third and fourth time; he must have raised it ten times more: in vain! He was unable to produce the same movement again. And the movements that he did make had so comical an effect that I could hardly suppress my laughter.

"From that day, as though from that very moment, an inconceivable transformation began in that young man. He would stand whole days before the mirror; one charm after the other fell from him. An invisible and incomprehensible force like an iron net, seemed to spread over the free play of his gestures, and when one year had passed not a trace could be detected of that sweetness which had once so delighted the sight of all who surrounded him. There is still a person living who

was witness to this strange and unfortunate event and who can confirm it word for word as I have told it. "[...]"

(An Abyss Deep Enough: Letters of Heinrich von Kleist with a Selection of Essays and Anecdotes. Edited, Translated, and Introduced by Philip B. Miller. EP Dutton)

Michael Kohlhaas

(From an old chronicle)

About the middle of the sixteenth century there lived beside the banks of the River Havel a horse-dealer called Michael Kohlhaas, the son of a schoolmaster, who was one of the most honourable as well as one of the most terrible men of his age. Until his thirtieth year this extraordinary man could have been considered a paragon of civil virtues. In a village that still bears his name he owned a farm where he peacefully earned a living by his trade; his wife bore him children whom he brought up in the fear of God to be hard-working and honest; he had not one neighbour who was not indebted to his generosity or his fair-mindedness; in short, the world would have had cause to revere his memory had he not pursued one of his virtues to excess. But his sense of justice made him a robber and a murderer.
[...]

(Quelle: Heinrich von Kleist. The Marquise of O- An other Stories. Translated and with an introduction by David Luke and Nigel Reeves. Penguin Books, 1978.)

Penthesilea

(Scene 24)

PENTHESILEA *(to the Amazons carrying the body)*

Stop

right there! What's that you've got? I want to know. Now stop!

(Pushes through the women and discovers the corpse.)

PROTHOE My Queen, I beg you, don't look further, don't!

PENTHESILEA That's him there, women, is it him?

ONE OF THE BEARERS *(as the corpse is set down).*
That's who?

PENTHESILEA It's not impossible,
I know it very well: to hit
a swallow on the wing and then to make
that wing whole, it is nothing for
me, really, or coax the stag with arrows to the park.
But the bowman's skill-don't you rely on it!
For when it is a case of getting off
a master shot plump into the heart
of happiness, the spiteful gods direct
our hand. Did I hit too close? Speak, is
it him?

PROTHOE By all Olympus' grim gods,
don't ask me that-

PENTHESILEA Out of my way! Even
if his wound gapes open at me like
the jaws of Hell, I'll look at him!

(Lifts the carpet.)

Who did
this, tell me - *monsters!*

PROTHOE Must *you* ask that?

PENTHESILEA Sacred Artemis, your daughter's done
for, finished, now!

HIGH PRIESTESS She's falling!

PROTHOE By the deathless
gods, you women should have followed my
advice! Unlucky girl, how much better
off you would have been, stumbling around
in darkness with a mind eclipsed eternally,
than wake to see this dreadful day again!
- Hear me, dearest, do!

HIGH PRIESTESS Our Queen!

MEROE Ten thousand
hearts are ready to divide your pain!

HIGH PRIESTESS You must
get up!

PENTHESILEA *(raising herself part way)*.
What bloody roses these are! What
a wreath of wounds around his head! And smell
these buds which, scattering around their fresh

scent of the grave, make a feast at last-
for worms.

PROTHOE (*softly*)

And yet in spite of all-Love twined
these wreaths around him, didn't he?

MEROE Twined
them around too tight!

PROTHOE With all their thorns unstripped,
in his rush to bind him for eternity!

HIGH PRIESTESS Don't stand
there, go away!

PENTHESILEA But there is one thing I must know:
who was it took my place, sacrilegiously,
and paramoured with him? I don't want to know
who slew the living man; she's free as birds
to go which way she wants. Who killed the man
already killed, is what I ask-now tell
me who it was.

PROTHOE What, my Sovereign?

PENTHESILEA Please understand me. I don't want to know
who stole the Promethean spark out of his breast.
I don't because I don't. For so I feel:
she is forgiven, let her go. But the thief
who wickedly slunk past the open gate
so as to smash her way through snowwhite
alabaster walls into the temple; who
mangled the young man who was the very image
of the gods, so horribly, that life and rot
will not dispute possession of him; who
hewed and hacked him so that pity has
no tears for him, and love, undying love,
like a whore must turn away now he
is dead-I'll be revenged on her! Now speak!

PROTHOE (*to the High Priestess*)

What I am to tell the poor distracted creature?

PENTHESILEA I am waiting for your answer.

MEROE. Our Queen,
if it helps to ease the pain you feel, then choose
whichever one of us you please to be
revenged on. All of us stand ready here,
offering ourselves.

PENTHESILEA. Watch out-or next
I'll hear you say I was the one.

HIGH PRIESTESS (*muttenuing*)
Who else,
poor wretch, but you-?

PENTHESILEA Damned princess of the dark not light,
how dare you-?

HIGH PRIESTESS Bright Diana, be my witness!
All our people gathered around you here
will back up what I say! Your arrow was
the one that struck him down-and would to god
that it had been no more than that, your arrow!
But as he fell you threw yourself on him,
you and all your dogs, in the confusion
of your maddened senses sank-but my lips, for trembling,
can't shape the words to say it. Never ask me!
Come, let's go,

PENTHESILEA First I must hear what happened
from Prothoe.

PROTHOE Please don't ask me that,
my Queen!

PENTHESILEA. You mean that I-? You claim I-him-
My dogs and I together-? You say hands as small
as these-? And a mouth like this, with love-swelled
lips-? Shaped for such a different service
than to-! Helping each other to go at
it, avidly, the mouth and then the hand,
the hand and then the mouth-?

PROTHOE Oh Queen!

HIGH PRIESTESS Alas
for you!

PENTHESILEA. No, hear me, I will never be
persuaded by you, no! If it was spelled
in lightning on the night and the thunder told
me it, still I would tell it back: you lie!

MEROE This faith that she's so stubborn in upholding,
let her, do, it isn't we will try
to shake her in it, ever.

PENTHESILEA Then how was it
that he did nothing to defend himself?

HIGH PRIESTESS He *loved* you, poor unhappy wretch! He wanted you to take him prisoner, and that was why he came to meet you, why he challenged you! With a heart that overflowed with peace and sweetness he came on, so as to follow you to Artemis's shrine. But you-

PENTHESILEA But I-

HIGH PRIESTESS. You shot him-

PENTHESILEA [*tonelessly*].

Tore his flesh to shreds.

PROTHOE Poor Queen!

PENTHESILEA Or did it happen otherwise?

MEROE Horrors!

PENTHESILEA *Kissed* him dead, did I?

FIRST PRIESTESS. Good heavens!

PENTHESILEA. Didn't kiss him, no? Really tore his flesh to shreds? Please say!

HIGH PRIESTESS Alas, alas, for you! Hide yourself away! Be swallowed up in everlasting night!

PENTHESILEA -An error, then, I see. A kiss, a bite-how cheek by jowl they are, and when you love straight from the heart the greedy mouth so easily mistakes one for the other.

MEROE Gods eternal, help her!

PROTHOE (*seizing hold of her*).
Come away!

PENTHESILEA No, stop!
(*Wrenches herself free and kneels before the corpse.*)

Unhappiest
of men, forgive me, please! It was a slip-
I swear it, by Diana-of the tongue, no more,
because I am remiss and fail to stand

guard over my rash mouth the way
I should. But now I say it to you as
I meant it, unmistakably.

(Kisses him.)

Just so,
beloved, that and nothing more.

HIGH PRIESTESS Remove
her now, will you!

MEROE Why should she stay here any
longer?

PENTHESILEA Think how often it's the case,
with her arms wound around her darling's neck, a woman
says she loves him, oh, so much she's ready
to *devour* him for love. But then when it
comes down to it, the poor fool finds
she's had a bellyful of him already.
Well, my darling, that was not my way.
You see: when I wound *my* arms around your neck
I did exactly that, devour you.
I wasn't such a mad one as might seem.

MEROE Did you hear that? Oh, she's a monster!

HIGH PRIESTESS Seize her, take her off!

PROTHOE Queen, come along!

PENTHESILEA *(letting herself be lifted up)*.
All right, all right, I'm ready.

HIGH PRIESTESS You agree
to come along with us?

PENTHESILEA With you-oh no!-
Go back to Themiscyra and be happy,
if you can-
and you especially, dear Prothoe-
all of you-
And-something I will whisper to you privately,
the others must not hear: the ashes of
Queen Tanaïs, scatter them
to the winds!

PROTHOE And you, dear sister heart?

PENTHESILEA And I?

PROTHOE Yes, you!

PENTHESILEA I'll tell you, then. I
abjure the law of our women, I
will follow the young man who's lying here.

PROTHOE What's that, my Queen!

HIGH PRIESTESS Oh poor thing, poor thing!

PROTHOE You mean-?

HIGH PRIESTESS Intend-?

PENTHESILEA What? Yes, I do,
oh yes!

MEROE Good heavens!

PROTHOE One thing, sister, only
let me say-*(Reaches for Penthesilea's dagger.)*

PENTHESILEA Very well, what is it?- You
are fumbling at my belt, whatever for?-
Oh, I see. Then just a minute, please. I didn't
understand.-Here, take the dagger.

(Pulls the dagger from her belt: and gives it to Prothoe.)

Do
you want the arrows too? *(Unslings her quiver.)*
I'll empty
the whole quiver for you-there!

(Dumps the arrows on the ground.)

In one
way, though, it's tempting-

(Picks up several arrows.)

For it was
this one, wasn't it-or not? Or this one here-?
Yes, this one, right!- What difference does it make!
Here, take them, they are yours, take all of them!

(Sweeps them all together in a bundle and hands them to Prothoe.)

PROTHOE Give them here.

PENTHESILEA. For now I will descend
into myself, as if into a mine,

to dig a killing feeling out as cold
as iron ore. This ore, I will refine it, in the burning
fire of my misery, into hard
steel; then in the hot corrosive poison
of remorse, steep it through and through; to hope's
eternal anvil next I'll carry it,
to hone and point it dagger sharp; and to
this dagger now I offer up my breast:
like so! and so! and so! And once
again!-And now all's well.

(Topples and dies.)

PROTHOE *(catching the Queen).*

She's dead!

MEROE She's followed
him in fact!

PROTHOE And better so. For there
was no more going on here for her any
more.

(Lays her on the ground.)

HIGH PRIESTESS Oh how infirm man is, you gods!
The snapped and broken blossom lying here,
how mightily she thundered, high upon
the peaks of life, a little while ago!

PROTHOE She fell because she bloomed too proud and strong!
The dead oak stands, defying wind and weather,
the gale pulls down the good wood with a crash,
for with his fingers he can fasten in its crown.

(Quelle: Heinrich von Kleist. Five Plays. Translated from the German with an introduction, by Martin Greenberg. Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1988.)

The very last word in modern educational theory

Physical science, in one of its newest chapters on the nature of electrical bodies, teaches us that when we bring an electrically neutral body into proximity with, or, to put it more technically, into the „atmosphere“ of an electrically active body, the neutral one is suddenly activated too, and in fact assumes the opposite charge. It is though nature had horror of excessive and disproportionate quantity, and when any two bodies come into contact there seems to be an ordained tendency to correct for the unbalance that has been caused by their new relation. When the electrically active body is positive, all the latent electricity in the inactive body rushes away to its farthest extremity, and at the same time kind of vacuum is

constituted in its nearer part, whereby it shows itself ready to assume some of electrical excess with which the positively charged body is, so to speak, diseased. When the electrically active body is negative, all the latent charge of the other collects in its nearest part, and waits there for the moment when it can supply the electrical deficiencies that discomfort the first. When you move the electrically neutral body within striking distance of the electrically active body, immediately from this to that, or from that to this, the sparks fly. Once this has occurred, both bodies are completely similar electrically, and balance has been restored.

This remarkable law can be observed to operate in the moral as well as the physical realm, although, as far as we know, it has hardly received attention until now. A man in the condition of total indifference, for example, as to some issue or other, does not only instantly cease to be so upon contact with someone firmly opinioned in the matter, but his entire being (if we may so express it) modulates into polar opposition: he assumes the term + when the other is -, and - when the other is +.

[...] Or a certain lady has arranged a rendezvous with her lover. Her husband, as a rule, goes out in the evening for a game of backgammon at the tavern. Nevertheless she wishes to be sure, and, slipping her arm around his waist, says: "My dear, I've asked the cook to heat up today's leg of mutton. I expect no visitors, we are quite alone, let us spend a quiet evening together in happy and undisturbed seclusion." The husband, having lost heavily at backgammon yesterday, had in fact resolved, out of respect for his wallet, to remain at home for once, but now suddenly the boring prospect becomes terrifyingly clear. He answers: "My sweet, I have promised a friend the opportunity to recover some of his losses of last night. Allow me, if it is at all possible, an hour or two at the tavern. Tomorrow, your every whim commands me. [...]"

Whoever comprehends this law correctly will never again regard as a mystery one phenomenon that has kept philosophers very busy: namely, that great men as a rule descend from obscure and inconsequential parentage, and in turn raise children who are in every respect inferior and mediocre. As a matter of fact, it would be very easy to conduct an experiment clearly demonstrating the influence of "moral atmosphere." Just collect everything the city has to offer in the way of philosophers, aesthetes, poets and artists, and put them all in a room, and believe it or not, some of their number will be struck dumb on the spot, an effect that just about everyone, we are convinced, has witnessed for himself if he has ever attended one of our fashionable punches or tea parties. [...]

In consideration, therefore, of the fact that

1. all schools of moral instructions have hitherto depended on the mimetic instinct, instead of deriving the principle of the Good from the inherent character of the human heart itself, and have sought to work only by the display of so-called good example; and that

2. such schools have yielded little or nothing meaningful or substantial in the way of human progress; and that
3. the little good that such schools might have managed to achieve appears to derive only from their mistakes, which is to say those instances when, contrary to the general intention, a few bad examples have managed to creep in after all –

In consideration, we say, of all these circumstances, we are of a mind to establish a sort of School of Vice, or better said, a School of Contrariness, of Virtue through the Vices.

In accordance, therefore, teachers will be hired for all pairs of mutually counteractive vices, and will offer instruction at certain fixed hours of the day, in definite sequence, and according to a strict plan. One will learn Sacrilege as well as *Bigotry*; Insolence as well as Self-Contempt and Servility; Avarice and Cowardice as well as Temerity and Extravagance.

The teachers will seek to effect their ends not simply through exhortation but by living example; by direct, practical social intercourse.

For egoism, Boorishness, Inconsiderateness-of-All-That-is Great-and-Exalted, as well as for a few other Unvirtues that can be picked in the street, it will not be necessary to hire teachers.

For Swinishness and Messiness, Quarrelsomeness and Bickering and Slander, my wife will serve as instructress.

Profligacy, gambling, Drunkenness, Sloth and Gluttony I shall account for myself.

Tuition will be a very reasonable 300 Reichsthaler. [...]

Berliner Abendblätter

Rechtenfleck in Holstein

October 15, 1810

Two famous English boxers, one of them from Portsmouth, the other from Plymouth, had for many years heard of but had never seen each other, and agreed, when they finally met in London, to stage a public bout to decide once and for all which of them deserved the title of champion. With clenched fists they took their stand opposite each other in a tavern garden, in view of a crowd of people, and when the Plymouther, within a few months, had struck the Portsmouther such a blow on the breast that he spat blood, the latter, wiping his mouth, called „Bravo“. But shortly thereafter, when they had squared off again, the Portsmouther such a right-handed punch to the body that his eyes went blank as he sank to the ground, saying „Not so bad yourself!“ Thereupon the crowd, standing around them in a circle cheered loudly, and while the Plymouther was carried away dead of stomach wounds, they awarded the victory to the Portsmouther. The the Portsmouther too, however, was said to have died some days later of a severe hemorrhage.

One thinking things over: A paradox

The virtues of reflection are proclaimed to the four corners of the globe, especially the dispassionate and protracted sort that precedes an action. If I were a Spaniard, an Italian or a Frenchman, the matter could rest there. But because I am German, I will speak to my son as follows, particularly if he decides on a military career.

„Reflection, or thinking something over, finds its proper moment after rather than before an act. If it comes into play prior to it, or in the very moment of decision, it seems only to confuse, to obstruct and to repress the power to act, which flows from the glorious wellspring of our feelings; contrariwise, it is afterwards, when the action is already performed, that the end for which reflection was intended is best attained:

namely, to make us aware of what was faulty and weak in the action, so that we may adjust our feeling for similar cases in future. Life itself is a contest with fate, and the same is true for ordinary action as for wrestling.

The athlete, at the moment when he is holding his opponent in his grip, simply has no recourse but to act spontaneously, on inspiration, and if he begins to calculate which muscles to contract and which limbs to move in order to throw him, he will always draw the short straw and be thrown himself. But afterwards, when he has either won or found himself flat on the floor, that would be the proper time and place to think it over, and decide which pressure threw his opponent, or with which foot he ought to have tripped him in order to remain standing himself. Whoever does not hold tightly to life like that wrestler, and, at every turn of contest, in the face of whatever oppositions, pressures, retreats and responses, does not feel and act with every fiber of his being, such a man, try as he might, will never make his mark in a conversation, still less on a field of battle.“

TO MARIE VON KLEIST, Berlin, August 1811

The life I now lead, since yours and Adam Müller's departure, is all too barren and sad. Also, I have rather lost touch with even those two or three houses that I visited here, and I am in my room almost every day from morning to night without seeing a single soul who might tell me what is happening in the world. You may rely on your own imagination and summon to your own home from any corner of the globe anything that might be of value or interest to you. But this consolation, you see, I, inconceivably unhappy man that I am, must forgo. Really, it is likely that no other writer has ever found himself in such a strange condition. Active as my imagination is when I confront a blank page, and defined as are the figures, in outline and color, which I then bring forth, just so difficult, I might even say painful, is it for me to imagine what is real. It is though the fixed order of all external circumstances applied chains to my imagination at the very moment of actuality. Confused by too many forms; I can arrive at no clarity of inner vision; the object; I continually feel, is not an object of the imagination: I might penetrate and grasp it with my senses in the genuine living present. Life, with its pressing and ever recurrent demands, so often tears two minds asunder at the very moment of contact, how much the more readily in separation. To move closer is out of question; and all one can hope to gain is to remain in the place where one is. And then too, consolation, in the discordant and melancholy moments of which there are so many nowadays, must come to naught. In short, it seems to me that Müller, now that he has gone away, is dead, and I feel quite the same grief over him, and if I were not sure of your return, I would have the very same feelings over you. [...]

To ULRIKE VON KLEIST, Stimmings Inn, near Potsdam, 21. November 1811

I cannot die, serene and happy as I am, without first making peace with the whole world, and so too, and above all others, my dearest Ulrike, with you. Let me call back those strong words in my letter to the family: really, all that was possible, not only for a sister, but for any human being, you in hopes of saving me have done: the truth is, there was no help for me on earth. And now good-bye. If Heaven would grant you a death half as full of joy and inexpressible serenity as my own, it would fulfill my most heartfelt and sincere wishes for you.

Yours,

Heinrich

To Henriette Vogel, Berlin November 1811

My Jettchen, my dear heart, my beloved, my dove, my life, my dear sweet life, light of my life, my all, my estate and effects, my castles, acres, meadows and vineyards, O sun of my life, sun, moon and stars, heaven and earth, my past and my future, my bride, my girl, my dear friend, my innermost being, my heart's blood, my viscera, apple of my eye, O, dearest, how shall I name you? My golden child, my pearl, my gem, my crown, my queen and empress. Dearly beloved of my heart, my highest and most cherished, my each and all, my wife, my wedding,

christening of my children, my tragic drama, my posthumous fame! Ah, you are my other, better self, my virtues, my merits, my hope, the forgiveness of my sins, my future and blessedness, O, dear daughter of Heaven, my child of God, my interceder, my spokesman and pleader, my guardian angel, my Cherubim and Seraph, how I love you!

HENRIETTE VOGEL AN KLEIST