

Desire in the Literary Field: Hagiography, History, and Anagrams in Kleist's *Der Findling*

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You need only go to Rome and look at Bernini's statue [of the Ecstasy of St. Teresa] to understand at once that she [Teresa of Avila] is experiencing *jouissance*, without a doubt.
— Jacques Lacan¹

The question immediately arises: How did Bernini know what Teresa experienced? Can we accept that the tools of a seventeenth-century sculptor could carve out the *jouissance* of a dead mystic? Taking Lacan's advice and suspending my disbelief, I went to Rome to see a sixteenth-century mystic experience *jouissance*. After discovering, thanks to a helpful local, that "the Teresa, she is in church of the Maria della Vittoria," my disappointment was great. Bernini's masterpiece was completely barred from view; she was being restored. Her *jouissance* needed polishing. I tried to peer through the boards—I believe I glimpsed a foot. Feeling somewhat perverse about my own desires, nevertheless, I bought postcards from the priest who assured me that "she will be very beautiful" when the restoration is complete. Rome had kept one of her mysteries a secret from me.

This paper carves out a space for reading Teresa's desire—and my own, in the field of literary studies—through one of Kleist's final works, the novella *Der Findling*, translated into English as *The Foundling*.² Simultaneously, it provides a forum for reading hagiography in the post-Kantian world that Kleist inhabited. The novella rearranges signifiers of all hagiography—not only those of Teresa—according to a new historical discourse, with God no longer able to act as its anchor. With God's disappearance from the scene, Kleist rearranges historical discourse in his romantic context through Teresa's desire. In such a reading of history, the signifiers remain the same, but their rearrangement and subsequent discovery of the anagrammatic principle behind gathering historical units into a space of simultaneity make recognizing history possible.

THERE'S "MORE" IN "ROME" THAN MEETS THE EYE

Rome is the setting for Kleist's *Der Findling*. A confusing condensation of enigmatic characters, the novella kills off six characters in varied and imaginative ways: plague (Paolo), childbirth (Constanza), fire (Colino), nervous fever (Elvire), execution (Piachi), and, perhaps most interesting, choking to death on legal papers (Nicolo). A nihilistic little tale, one might say.

Der Findling serves as the exception to Kleist's habit of specifically locating his novellas in regards to both time and place; it is the "foundling" amongst his narratives, so to speak. But the plethora of historical and literary-historical signifiers more than compensates for any lack of temporal specificity. Piecing these signifiers together, whether within the story itself or within a larger historical context, presents the reader with not only an impossibility but also an irresistible desire. Trying to make sense of *Der*

Findling in a unified reading is hopeless; the novella is in excess of sense. There is more sense than most readers want.³

The historical attributes of *Der Findling* are connected to Kleist's hagiographic references. The first letters of the narrative spell out the name of a character, "*Antonio Piachi*" (italicized by Kleist), a "trader of goods" (199), a "real estate broker" (201). The allusion is to Saint Antonius—born Antonio Pierozzi (1389–1459)—whose *Summa Moralis* dealt with "commercial ethics and the morality of banking [and] the effect the new economic changes were having on everyday life."⁴ Kleist's Piachi enters the narrative on the way to Regusa on "trading business" (198), during which he loses his son, Paolo, to the plague. Piachi, upon mounting his wagon to return home, however, is moved by the "sight of the place which remained empty next to him," and decides to take Nicolo, an orphan he meets during the trip, back with him to Rome "in the place of his son" (200). Kleist confronts his readers with the commercial ethics of exchange: Piachi cannot stand the prospect of lost goods and finds an immediate place-holder for his son. He adopts Nicolo "as his son after only a few weeks," and "employs Nicolo, in his stead, in the branch office" (201).

Piachi's wife, Elvire, is of a melancholic disposition as a result of a traumatic, personal history. The story, pieced together from Kleist's fragmentary narrative technique, reads as follows: The thirteen-year-old Elvire, trapped in her father's burning home, is saved by a patrician knight of Genoa named Colino. As the flames engulf the balcony, she contemplates throwing herself into the sea below. Suddenly, Colino appears and lowers them together into the sea, wrapped in a damp sheet he found hanging from the balcony, as Elvire's father is a cloth-dyer by trade. Colino, having suffered a bump on the head on his way through the house to save Elvire, dies after a three-year decline, during which time she never leaves his bedside. She marries Piachi in Rome two years later but suffers psychosomatic symptoms of her traumatic experience, falling periodically into fever at the slightest remembrance of Colino. Piachi is careful never to utter his name in her presence and "never, as long as she lived, did a word concerning that occurrence cross her lips" either (203). Twelve years later, her stepson, Nicolo, comes home late at night from Carnival dressed as a Genoan knight. Upon seeing the uncannily familiar figure, Elvire faints and suffers an intense fever, which lasts for several days.

One day, as Nicolo passes by Elvire's room, he hears someone speaking. Looking through the keyhole, he spies Elvire "in the position of ecstasy [*Verzückung*] at someone's feet," and he hears her whisper the name "Colino" (207). Thinking he would catch her with her lover, he waits until she leaves. After she exits alone with a piece of cloth under her arm, he storms into the room only to find it empty, save a life-size portrait of a young knight standing in the wall behind a red silk curtain, illuminated by a strange light. The picture bears an uncanny resemblance to Nicolo himself, and he uses this coincidence to seduce Elvire: He hides behind the red cloth and waits for her to enter and to perform "a silent and peaceful disrobing, as was her habit." She sees him, cries "Colino, my love!" (212) and loses consciousness. She dies a few days later.

The aesthetic rendering of this scene evokes key signifiers of her traumatic childhood rescue. The red curtain recalls both the image of the dyed linen of her father's balcony and the red of the fire. The niche where Elvire kept the painting spatially recreates the balcony scene— even the whip [*Peitsche*] that Piachi whisks from the wall when he walks in on Nicolo during the seduction scene (213) was present in the whipping of the wind on her father's balcony: “[B]ehind the burning gable, whose glow, whipped [*gepeitscht*] by the wind, had already begun to devour the balcony” (202).⁵ In this space, Nicolo experiences an exemplary feeling of the *unheimlich*, the uncanny: “Nicolo was frightened, he himself did not know why: [. . .] across from him the large eyes of the picture [. . .] looked at him frozenly” (207).⁶ Her room, in the space of the *unheimlich*, is a temple to *das Ding*, the Thing.

THE SPACE OF THE THING

Das Ding, as delineated by Lacan,⁷ is an impossible object of desire. It is impossible in that access to it is expressly denied to any subject.⁸ But as subjects, we all nevertheless want our Thing back. What is it, then, about this Thing that makes it so central to us, and yet so far outside us?

Lacan calls this *Ding* the “maternal Thing,”⁹ because it is the prohibition of incest: When the father says, “No!” the child is cut off from *das Ding*. This moment of prohibition—the “Nom-du-Père,” the “No,” or “Name of the Father”—causes an inseparable gulf between the subject and its basic desire: to access *das Ding*. The pun in French, *non* for *nom*, is only apparent in writing. Jacques-Alain Miller further emphasizes the importance of the written form in his claims that Lacan's reading of Freud's Oedipus myth was founded on the idea that “the father is speech itself.”¹⁰

Indeed, Lacan himself said that “the distance between the subject and *das Ding* [. . .] is precisely the condition of speech.”¹¹ Once inside the prisonhouse of language, the gates close, and the key is thrown away. That fact does not keep the subject behind bars from yearning for the outside. But this outside is not a spatial, but rather a temporal image—it, *das Ding*, has passed away; it is already in the subject's past. This is what Lacan means when he says, “[I]n reality, *das Ding* has to be posited as exterior, as the prehistoric Other that it is impossible to forget.”¹² Once the subject, with its inscription into language, begins its history, *das Ding* is barred from said subject. The passage into the symbolic order is, therefore, necessarily traumatic. One says goodbye to one's Thing forever: Getting one's Thing back is passed and out of reach.

Before *das Ding* was lost, Freud called this earlier phase Primary Narcissism: There is no differentiation between the infant and the world. The infant has an *Allmacht der Gedanken*, an omnipotence of thoughts, which, occurring after the subject's fall into language, is rather *unheimlich*, or uncanny, despite the attractiveness of the idea that reality conforms to one's wishes.¹³ In fact, with respect to *das Ding* as truly maternal and preexisting our linguistic capacities, we must think of the womb as the Real Thing. The uncanniest thing of all, Freud tells us, is the idea of being buried alive: “This horrifying fantasy is only a transformation of another which was originally nothing

horrible, but rather was carried by a certain pleasantness, namely that of the fantasy of the life in the womb.”¹⁴ There was “a certain pleasantness,” Freud tells us, swaddled in the womb, once upon a time.

To once again be in immediate contact with one’s Thing, says Lacan, is to have “access to the fundamental desire, to have jouissance.”¹⁵ But this once-upon-a-time pleasantness radically changes after the subject’s fall into the symbolic order: It becomes a traumatic thing. It is very much like the *Todestrieb*, the death drive, the other side of pleasure. The fact that Freud formulated the *Todestrieb* in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Beyond the Pleasure Principle), months after writing *Über das Unheimliche* only serves to reinforce this connection. The “field of das Ding” is in the “space beyond the pleasure principle.”¹⁶ Jouissance is buried, alive, beneath the signifier.

This immediate contact with one’s Thing, this access to jouissance, is evident in Kleist’s novella. Upon his keyhole discovery of Elvire “in the position of ecstasy,” Nicolo believes himself to have discovered Elvire as a “*Scheinheilige*,” a hypocrite (207), misreading her ecstasy as a product of a love affair. We will take Nicolo’s misinterpretation at the level of the letter: The word *Schein-Heilige*, beyond its meaning as hypocrite, signifies a “seeming saint.” Elvire’s ritual, in the “position of ecstasy” before the “deification” [*Vergötterung*] of her past “Savior,” the Genoan knight with “a staff in [his] hand” (212), seems saintly, recalling Bernini’s statue *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, an erotic depiction of the saint’s mystic experience with God’s spear strategically placed and poised to pierce her soul.¹⁷

The Carmelite monastery, which Teresa established in 1562, appears twice in *Der Findling* (201, 213) and reinforces my contention that Kleist fashioned Elvire as a secular reincarnation of Teresa. Elvire’s periodic fevers and loss of consciousness are reminiscent of Teresa’s fevers and fiery raptures.¹⁸ But it is in Elvire’s room, the space of her ecstasies, where Kleist most explicitly recaptures the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, with Elvire “in the position of ecstasy” before her staff-holding “deification.” This passage from Teresa’s “Life” delineates her own experience:

[The angel was] very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the higher types of angel who seem to be all afire. In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it [. . .]. It is not bodily pain, but spiritual, though the body has a share in it—indeed, a great share.¹⁹

The passage describes Teresa’s experience of “transverberation,”²⁰ or being “pierced by the words of God.”²¹ The phenomenon of transverberation served as the inspiration for Bernini’s sculpture of the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*.

ECSTASY AFTER GOD

A *symptom*, for Lacan, is a condensation of the signifier and jouissance: Teresa's symptom, for example, is her transverberation. Lucie Cantin bases her analysis of Teresa on the claim that, throughout her life, the mystic experienced jouissance that "disorganized her."²² Teresa's automatic defense mechanism of revealing everything she experienced during her raptures—even when those revelations flew in the face of Church doctrine—was nevertheless "not sufficient to free her from that capture of jouissance that disorganized her."²³ Her insistence on following the Church officials' orders to write down her experiences, thus submitting herself to their judgment, permitted Teresa a limitation, an "ethical rule," and connected her to the "Law of the symbolic" in her later years.²⁴

It is through "the use of the Letter," along with her cloistered life, that Teresa provides the limitations necessary to fashion a framework "within which she could travel and lose herself."²⁵ In her writings, she could continue her pursuit of God and the absolute and also could keep trying to "express the inexpressible, the limitless desire."²⁶ For this to occur, Teresa needs God. She needs his name to connect her unarticulatable experiences to the symbolic order. In Cantin's words: "God serves to name and give form to the jouissance that overcame her, transforming into grace, delight, favors, what otherwise could have simply been the working of the Thing in her."²⁷ Teresa's experience—an intense infusion of both sweetness and pain—is mystical and spiritual; it is, to use one of Teresa's common tropes, the "Kiss of God." Elvire's, on the other hand, is the kiss of death.

In Elvire's psychic reality, the name Colino condenses the signifier and jouissance. The two sides of jouissance—immense pleasure and overwhelming pain—are directly connected to Colino's name in *Der Findling*. Inside her temple to *das Ding*, where Elvire can *jouir* pleasantly, she is heard to whisper, "Colino!" (207), and her last words are "Colino, my love!" [*Colino, mein Geliebter!*] (212). These are Elvire's only words that Kleist provides in direct speech.²⁸ Outside her room, where jouissance wrecks havoc on her body, Kleist spells out her symptom, revealing "that it [Colino's name] moved to the most violent her beautiful and sensitive nature [*Gemüt*]" (203). Similarly, after Nicolo discovers the "logogryphic attribute" (210) of his name when playing with the ivory tiles which spell out both "Nicolo" and "Colino," Elvire looks at the letters that Nicolo left as "Colino" on the table and, "with a heaviness of heart [*Wehmut*] that one cannot describe," lets fall "one tear after another, under gentle blushing, onto her lap" (210). Inside the sanctioned space of her room, Elvire submits herself to the signifier and utters the name "Colino." Outside, the symptom overwhelms her.

The symptom serves to suppress certain knowledge in the subject's unconscious. For Elvire, this knowledge is that of the traumatic event of her childhood. This memory presents itself as a series of signifiers, which can be represented by a unifying signifier in the unconscious. Freud called this unifier the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, or the presentation of representation. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* is like a picture of an entire story that gathers up all the temporal moments of a narrative series into a single moment;

it is a container for all these elements. Elvire's room is literally just that: a depiction of many of the elements of her trauma drawn together at once. Kleist allows Elvire to step in and out of her unconscious by traversing the threshold to her room. Thus, the key to jouissance depends on which side of the threshold she is.

Although I call Elvire's room the temple of *das Ding*, it is perhaps a somewhat misleading term. Colino is not *das Ding*. Like God, Colino covers up the inherent lack that is *das Ding*.²⁹ The image of the room is, therefore, quite appropriate, because a room is essentially an empty space, to which walls, doors, and objects along its outer surface give structure. Elvire's room, in the locus of the Thing, represents a lost past, a "prehistoric Other," in Lacan's terms. To experience jouissance, then, the condition which separates Elvire from her Thing, the lost past event, must be annulled, cancelled, annihilated. And what is it that separates the present from the past but time, history? When Elvire is in "the position of ecstasy" before the portrait of Colino, she experiences jouissance, and this is because she is once again wrapped up inside the damp sheets with Colino, transported back into her traumatic scene: The condition of time has been annihilated. And the image of being swaddled in damp sheets is nothing but a reminder of the womb, the uncanniest phenomenon of all.

But if I, like Nicolo, misidentify Elvire as a "seeming saint" [*Scheinheilige*], a retrospective glance at Teresa's history surfaces. Teresa's writings employ the discourse of courtly love: "[T]he fondness shown by the mystics for the romances of chivalry has often been pointed out. Saint Teresa in her girlhood doted upon them."³⁰ This inaccessibility of the love object is something that Teresa, Elvire, and the discourse of courtly love have in common. The depiction of Colino in Kleist's reinvention of Teresa's ecstasy, however, replaces God with the chivalrous knight, the "Savior" who "suffered and died" (203) so that Elvire might live, returning Teresa's rhetoric to its origin. To be more explicit, Kleist connects chivalry and ecstasy and, in turn, returns the repressed signifiers of courtly love to the rhetoric of mysticism.

A reading of Elvire and Teresa within the same context must take into account a final parallel: their age at the eruption of the traumatic event. Elvire is thirteen years old when Colino rescues her and subsequently dies. At thirteen, Teresa lost her mother. Teresa's autobiography tells us little about this woman, but we do know that

[s]he [Teresa's mother] was fond of books of chivalry; [. . .] we were always trying to make time to read them [. . .]. [T]his annoyed my father so much that we had to be careful lest he should see us reading these books. For myself, I began to make a habit of it, and this little fault which I saw in my mother began to cool my good desires and lead me to other kinds of wrongdoing [. . .]. I had to hide it from my father.³¹

Teresa deems the pleasure of reading chivalrous romance a "little fault" in her mother and a transgressive pleasure that must be hidden from her father. Moreover, this final reference to Teresa's mother is made after the announcement of her death.³² The employment of chivalric romance rhetoric in Teresa's later writings is her retroactive

redemption of the little vice in both her mother and herself. That is, the superimposition of courtly-love discourse onto the Christian concepts of prayer and meditation undoes her implicit fear that Teresa's mother died a heretic as a result of the influences of the books of chivalry."³³ The parallel between Teresa and Elvire is complex. They both undergo a traumatic loss of a loved one at the same age, but Teresa's love for books of chivalry is sublimated into an act of chivalry in Colino's self-sacrificial rescue of the young Elvire. In both cases, however, we can say that "romance" is the Thing.

HAGIOGRAPHIC "CHARACTERS"

Elvire's chivalrous Savior, "Colino," endures a nominal catachresis in *Der Findling*. The name behind the portrait is explained as follows:= "Aloysius, Marquis of Montferrat, to whom an uncle in Paris, at whose house he had been raised, gave the surname Collin, later jokingly transformed in Italy to Colino, was the original of the picture" (211). Once again, we find a hagiographic reference: Saint Aloysius, patron saint of youth, was born Luigi Gonzago in 1568. Diethelm Brüggemann argues that Aloysius' Vita is the source, albeit well scattered, of *The Foundling*. Crucial signifiers of Aloysius' life are connected to various characters in the story. As a youth of thirteen years, soldiers saved Aloysius from a fire that had ignited his bed sheets. It is at this time that Aloysius' family visits their relatives in Montferrato, also known as "La Collina" in Italian, out of fear of the plague. At sixteen, he entered the Jesuit novitiate house in Rome. Six years later, in 1591, Aloysius was infected by the plague while caring for its victims. After recovering, he fell into a mild fever during which he experienced a vision informing him that he would die on the octave of Corpus Christi. When that day arrived, he seemed to be in good health; nevertheless, he insisted that he receive the Eucharist for a final time. He died before midnight that same day.³⁴

One portrait of Saint Aloysius survives: a depiction of him in a knight's costume that Brüggemann claims to be the source for the rendering of Colino in Kleist's tale.³⁵ Beyond the identification of Aloysius as the figure behind the portrait of Colino, many elements of his life are incorporated into the characters in *Der Findling*. For example, being saved from a fire equates Aloysius and Elvire; recovering from the plague equates Aloysius with Nicolo; eventually succumbing to the plague equates Aloysius with Paolo, Piachi's son; and his insistence on the viaticum and final absolution is the inverse of Piachi's refusal of the Host upon his sentence of execution.³⁶

But what do these numerous signifiers connecting Aloysius to *The Foundling* mean? If Brüggemann is correct in overlaying the Vita of Aloysius onto *The Foundling*, is it not tempting to come to the—albeit simplistic—conclusion that we have found the historical source of Kleist's tale?³⁷ However, it is clear that a rupture has occurred between the two texts, between Father and Son, so to speak, a rupture that inscribes itself within the symbolic order of the "foundling." This fissure is nowhere more apparent than in the desire for death that ends both stories; nevertheless, one is a death with absolution, and the other is a death without, both of which are intensely insisted upon. This divergence writes itself into Kleist's narrative in that the story begins with the death, of Piachi's son from the plague, reminiscent of Aloysius's own death and concludes with a death without

absolution—reversing that of Aloysius. We can, however perfunctorily, say that these two deaths generate the difference between a past world of hagiography and a present world without absolution. To articulate this relationship, we must look at the character Nicolo.

I have already shown how Nicolo finds himself in the place of Piachi's son, first in his empty seat, then in his clothes and his bed (203), then as Piachi's adoptive son, and finally as Piachi's replacement in his office. He takes the place of Piachi quite literally: In the seduction scene, during which Nicolo disguises himself as Colino to "satisfy the one craving as much as the other" (209)—his sexual and vengeful desires—he fills the void left by the husband Piachi.³⁸ Indeed, when Piachi enters the scene, asking Nicolo to leave his house, Nicolo says, "It is up to him, the old one, to vacate the house, since he [himself], inserted through completely valid documents, is the owner" (213). Jürgen Schröder quite aptly calls Nicolo "the born substitute and fill-in, an unperson."³⁹

In Irmgard Wagner's reading, Nicolo functions as an "erratic signifier," able to act as an "anti-repressive agent."⁴⁰ From the signifiers of "son," "lover," and "father," Nicolo seems capable of a Protean displacement of identity, best represented by his recognition of the "logogryphic attribute of his name" (210). While playing with the lettered tiles of his childhood—the only six remaining make up his name, Nicolo, "probably since the others were less looked after owing to their lesser connection to the young boy" (210)—he discovers that those same "ivory letters" (209) also build the name Colino. Nicolo believes he found the "key" [*Schlüssel*] to Elvire's whispering of "Colino!" during her ecstasy: "[S]he is only hiding his own name under this displacement [*Versetzung*] of letters" (210). His mistake is in not seeing the Other—Colino—in the anagram; he sees the Other's image narcissistically. Only when he learns the history of Colino is he able to continue the anagrammatic play—to move from Nicolo into the role of Colino, putting himself "fully in the position [*Stellung*] of the young Patrician" (212), inserting Nicolo in loco Colino.

LETTERS IN THE STEAD OF THE ABSOLUTE

We must look more closely at the status of the anagram, this central "logogryph" or word-riddle, in this enigmatic novel. I analyze the characters of the anagram like a rebus, the formative principle of the dream, of the unconscious, as Lacan says.⁴¹ In Freud's words:

The methodology of dream interpretation which I exercise [. . .] approaches [. . .] that of the "encoding method." It is [. . .] an interpretation en detail, not en masse; [. . .] it constitutes the dream from the very beginning as something pieced together, a conglomerate of psychic forms.⁴²

Despite critical discussion regarding the enigmatic anagram Nicolo–Colino, coupled with the recognition of characters as "placeholders" (Wagner) or "fill-ins" (Schröder), no one has played a little more with the six characters of NICOLO to arrive at, as Nicolo himself

does, IN LOCO. And, on the most basic level of plot, is not *The Foundling* about six dead “characters”?⁴³

The principle of *in loco* is written all over *The Foundling*, in place and location, in transfer and displacement everywhere.⁴⁴ The central anagram of the anagram defines not only the intercharacter relations in the novella, but also the relation of the novella to history, its historical “character.”⁴⁵ The signifiers of Elvire’s past—her trauma—can be thought of as “letters”: They are scrambled, shifted, and result in an anagram, whose decoding can only be accomplished through dream interpretation. Beyond this, Elvire herself is, in a way, an anagrammatic representation, a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, of the historical “character” Teresa of Avila. Avila then makes Elvira, Elvire becomes in loco Teresa.⁴⁶

The letter [*Buchstabe*] cannot yet be left to rest in peace, however. At the moment Nicolò puts himself in loco Colino, we discover the historical subject’s final attribute. The entire picture, which until now I have presented only in pieces, reads: “[He] waited, a staff [*Stab*] in his hand, fully in the position of the painted young Patrician, Elvire’s idolization [*Vergötterung*]” (212). The *Stab*—be it a “staff,” “crosier,” or “dagger”⁴⁷—resonates with the *Buchstabe*, the letter. Nicolò has taken the *Stab* into his own hands; he has the power of the letter. To be more explicit, the power of the *Stab* no longer resides in the picture of the past patrician [*Patrizier*], a signifier that reverberates with the pater, the father. This *Stab* is the angel in the Ecstasy of St. Teresa’s piercing spear, the Word of God in her transverberation. Wresting the *Stab* away from the father and from God, putting himself in loco brings about the repudiation of the absolute and the displacement [*Versetzung*] of the locus of power.

And for this act, Piachi kills him. He “presses his brain in against the wall” (214). And Piachi is caught in the act of stuffing the decree that declares Nicolò the rightful owner of Piachi’s former possessions into his mouth (214). But this payback is not enough; Piachi wants to pursue retribution beyond the grave. Sentenced to be executed for the murder, Piachi refuses absolution: “In the church state, a law exists [*ein Gesetz herrscht*], according to which no criminal can be brought to death before having received Absolution. Piachi, when he had been condemned [*als ihm der Stab gebrochen war*], stubbornly refused absolution” (214). His rationale is that he wants to go to Hell, find Nicolò, and “take up his revenge, which [he] can here only incompletely satisfy” (214–15). With threats of strangling the next priest who tries to give him the viaticum, he forces the Pope to repeal “the inhuman law [. . .] that will not allow him to go to Hell” (215). His obsession for retribution, a payback for his “stolen goods,” results in his execution, “fully in silence on the piazza del popolo” (215), without absolution.

The incredible violence that erupts at the end of the tale is directly associated with the letter, the “decree” [*Dekret*] Piachi stuffs into Nicolò’s mouth.⁴⁸ Piachi’s condemnation is the “breaking of the *Stab*,” which must now be recognized in all its phallic force or, in this case, impotency. Once the father’s *Stab* has been wrested from him, there can be no more “economy of the goods,” no more possibility of retribution. And suddenly, a new

“state” [*Staat*, which also is a *statt*, an “instead”] is created, an in-the-stead-of-the-church state where there is no more guarantee of absolution.

The principle of *in loco* reveals the reversal of Aloysius’s *Vita* in *The Foundling*. The “inhuman law” of the absolute—which makes absolution possible—has been stripped of its universal mastery over the subjects of the state. *Ein Gesetz herrscht*, “a law exists” or “masters,” and then suddenly, *es herrscht nicht mehr*, “it no longer exists” or “masters.” Its phallic power is cut off. Hagiography, as a result, becomes a “foundling” in this new historical context. It has been cut up and scattered into its constitutive signifiers, “characters” which have the power to rearrange themselves according to their own desire.

The final words of the story, the revelation of Piachi’s death—is it not a crucifixion?—“completely in silence, in the piazza del popolo” [*ganz in der Stille, auf dem Platz del popolo*] reverberates now with a literal force: Piachi dies an antisaint’s death “in the place of the people,” or *in loco populus*. The economy of hagiography is obsolete, the Stab of the absolute is broken, and the people are free to reject absolution. And we are now free to read the six dead “characters” of *The Foundling* as “dead letters” *in loco del popolo*, as beings “in lieu of people,” signifiers of the enigmatic anagram called *Der Findling*.

THE “VACATED FIELD” OF HISTORY

Carol Jacobs perceptively notes:

From the beginning of the story, the foundling marks the rupture between father and offspring: thus Nicolo’s response to Klara’s earlier announcement, “the image resembles me, just as you resemble the person who believes himself your father!”⁴⁹

The “earlier announcement” to which Jacobs refers is to Klara’s statement upon seeing the portrait of Colino: “My God! Who else is it but you, Signor Nicolo?”⁵⁰ What Klara actually says is “Gott, mein Vater! Signor Nicolo, wer ist das anders als Sie?” That is, “God, my Father! Signor Nicolo, who is it other than you?” (208). Once again, a literal reading is necessary. Nicolo refers to God when he speaks of “the person who believes himself your father.” God believes himself to be the Father, but just as we have learned that Klara’s supposition, that the voice *clara et distincta* is wrong—the picture is not of Nicolo—we also learn that the locus of God is vacant. God is quite simply mistaken in believing that he exists as anything other than a place-holder.⁵¹

This is not to say that God does not exist any more than Colino and Nicolo do not exist. It merely states the basic Lacanian principle that “a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier.”⁵² And signifiers may, and do, “disappear from the chain of what [they are].”⁵³ By allowing God’s signifier to be dislocated within *The Foundling*, Kleist reveals that signifiers of the past—I have concentrated on those of hagiography in this paper—are orphaned and must take on new relations, reasserting themselves in new positions.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, a new field has been created, in which the past, *Geschichte*—both narrative and history—can resignify and be resignified. The most fascinating way in which the past enters into the text of *The Foundling* is through the signifier of *Findling* itself. Irmgard Wagner delineates in a detailed account that “a *Findling* is an erratic block, an alien kind of mineral formation that does not belong where it is.”⁵⁵ They are “large chunks of the oldest known mineral formations,” which find themselves “on top of a much younger mineral layer” exemplified by the huge boulders on the plains of Northern Germany and in certain valleys of Switzerland, and in the Müllviertel of northeastern Austria.⁵⁶ Wagner claims that these huge boulders, inexplicable to scientists of Kleist’s time, represented “the rock on which geology’s exalted claims [that knowledge could replace theology] founders instantly.”⁵⁷

Rather than see this *Findling* principle as that which “dooms to failure any attempt to narrate either the history of nature (science) or the story of humans (fiction),”⁵⁸ I argue that the presence of the past, albeit not fully symbolized in the present, opens up a space in which the signifying world, the Symbolic Order, can be redrawn. And this field on which the *Findling* appears is open to desire: The word “field” [Feld] appears thrice in *The Foundling*, and each time it is associated with desire.⁵⁹ If we accept Wagner’s convincing argument about the significance of the *Findling*, we also should look at the landscape on which these boulders are found—that is, on the fields of desire.

I use “space” and “room,” “place” and “field” as loci in which past signifiers are cut up and reassembled in the future, leading *The Foundling* to its final historical locus: Kleist’s writing in the wake of his Kant crisis. In his description of the mathematical sublime, Kant describes the “violence that the imagination inflicts on the subject”: “Comprehending in one instant what is apprehended successively, is a regression that in turn cancels the condition of time in the imagination’s progression and makes simultaneity intuitable.”⁶⁰ We are presented with an act of gathering historical “units” into simultaneity; albeit in Kant’s formulation, these units are thoughts “apprehended” one after the other. No matter how great the temporal distance between the gathering space and the units, these individual moments have a historical character—indeed, I suggest defining these moments as historical characters, drawn together into a space and allowing for the possibility of simultaneity. This space is then ahistorical; it cancels the condition of time and, by necessity, does violence to the ordering of these characters. In Kant, this is a “violence to the inner sense [. . .] since temporal succession is a condition of inner sense.”⁶¹

In Kleist, the anagram is emblematic of this type of sublime violence in its rearrangement of successive signifying units. It is the space of Elvire’s room, where one finds the simultaneous presentation of elements signifying the narrative sequence of her traumatic event; it is the space of *The Foundling*, where the signifiers of Aloysius’ Vita and Teresa’s “Life” are rearranged according to the logic of the anagram. And it is the dream space of the rebus, the locus of the unconscious, that cancels out time: “The processes of the system Unconscious are timeless; i.e., they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all.”⁶²

Although the past can become an inaccessible object of desire in Elvire's temple to her Savior, the figure of *Der Findling*, the rock on the plains of desire, exemplifies even more strongly how the ancient dignity of history can call out to the present, demanding to find a locus in its future. These past Things are no longer in the realm of the absolute in the sense of the transcendent: they are real, the "absolute Other of the Subject," and they will not be forgotten.⁶³ They are radically historical, and coming to grips with these Things can be traumatic: "Oh, for a drop of forgetfulness and I would gladly become a Catholic!" wrote Kleist.⁶⁴ Meeting real history can be a frightening experience, to which the multitude of deaths in *The Foundling* testifies. Fear, however, may turn to pleasure when the letters of the past are pieced together. In the words of Immanuel Kant and Teresa of Avila, respectively: "The object is apprehended as sublime with a pleasure that is possible only by means of a displeasure,"⁶⁵ and "The greater my fear has been, the greater will be my reward, and the greater, too, will be my retroactive pleasure."⁶⁶

NOTES

1 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XX: Encore* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975) 70.

2 Heinrich von Kleist, "Der Findling," *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Helmut Sembdner, vol. 2 (München: dtv klassik, 1987). Translations and italics are mine, and all subsequent citations of Kleist's writings refer to volume 2, unless otherwise indicated.

3 Jürgen Schröder's albeit rhetorical question exemplifies this confrontation: "was hält [diese Novelle] zusammen, was gibtihr die atemberaubende Härte und Konzentration?" In Jürgen Schröder, "*Der Findling*: Ein Plädoyer für Nicolo," *Kleist-Jahrbuch* 1985, ed. Hans Joachim Kreutzer (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1985) 121.

4 "Saint Antonius," *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, ed. William H. Harris and Judith S. Levey (New York: Columbia UP, 1975): 322.

5 The "strange light" illuminating Colino's picture is the fire's original glow, but one could also think of the tradition of depicting memories in a strange light. For example, in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth's childhood memories have a "gleam" about them. Thomas Hardy also picks up that image in "The Self-Unseeing," redefining this "gleam" as something created retroactively by the adult's memory. In addition, the cinematographer of the film adaptation of Stephen King's *Dolores Claiborne* illuminates scenes from the past with such a strange, or gleaming, light.

6 Mladen Dolar ("I Shall Be With You on Your Wedding Night': Lacan and the Uncanny," October 58 [Fall 1991]: 6) lists uncanny characteristics of the Freudian *unheimlich* in *Frankenstein*, which also are shared by this scene in *The Foundling* as follows: "The paradoxical realm between the living and the dead [. . .]; the anxiety provoked by the double [. . .]; the 'evil eye' and dimension of the gaze; the series of coincidences that suddenly bear a fateful meaning."

7 Jacques Lacan develops the concept of *das Ding* from Freud's *Entwurf einer Psychologie* (Project for a Scientific Psychology) and Freud's letter 52 to Wilhelm Fliess (*Seminar, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1956–1960* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter [New York: Norton, 1992] 40–70).

8 “Freudian aesthetics, in the broadest meaning of the term—which means the analysis of the whole economy of signifiers—reveals that the Thing is inaccessible.” In Lacan, *Ethics* 159.

9 “[T]he whole development at the level of the mother/child interpsychology [. . .] is nothing more than an immense development of the essential character of the maternal thing, of the mother, insofar as she occupies the place of that thing, of *das Ding*.” In Lacan, *Ethics* 67.

10 Jacques-Alain Miller, “To Interpret the Cause: From Freud to Lacan,” *Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 3.1–2: 43.

11 Lacan, *Ethics* 69.

12 Lacan, *Ethics* 71.

13 Sigmund Freud, “Das Unheimliche,” *Gesammelte Werke, chronologisch geordnet*, hrsg. Anna Freud et al. (London: Imago, 1940–68) 263.

14 “[D]iese schreckende Phantasie [ist] nur eine Umwandlung einer anderen, die ursprünglich nichts Schreckendhaftes war, sondern von einer gewissen Lusternheit getragen wurde, nämlich der Phantasie vom Leben im Mutterleib.” In Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* 12: 266; my translation.

15 Lacan, *Ethics* 67.

16 Lacan, *Ethics* 104.

17 Although it cannot be shown that Kleist had seen Bernini's Teresa, it is almost certain that he would have been aware of it. The “Bernini School” is mentioned in the famous *Über das Marionettentheater*: “Her soul resides in the vertebrae of her spine; she bends as if she would break, like a Najada of the Bernini School” (342). It was a fairly common practice for Kleist to work a story around an original pictorial representation. *Der zerbrochene Krug* (The Broken Jug), for example, is based on a woodcut Kleist saw in Switzerland.

18 From Teresa d'Avila, “Life,” *The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Jesus*, trans. E. Allison Peers (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946) 6.

19 d'Avila 165.

20 With specific reference to mysticism, Michel de Certeau writes, “It is necessary for the body to be written by the Other, engraved, pierced, or, more precisely, transverberated. It is necessary for the unreadable signature to be traced in it.” In *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995) 165.

21 Lucie Cantin, “Femininity: From Passion to an Ethics of the Impossible,” *Topoi* 12 (1993): 135. Her article explicates the life of Teresa of Avila in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Driven by what Cantin calls a “passion for the Other” (127), Teresa was marked by her desire to transform and to conform: Her establishment of the Carmelite Order, her tireless social work, and her new mystical form of prayer were various attempts to channel her *jouissance*, to “give form to those ‘excesses’ which wrought havoc in her body” (132), but it was only through the writings that her superiors demanded of her that she established a “framework [. . .] which served to contain the experience she was living” (135).

22 Cantin 135. See also Teresa’s *Interior Castle* and *Conceptions of Love of God* in the *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, 343 and 359–82, respectively.

23 Cantin 130, 135.

24 Cantin 135.

25 Cantin 135, 138.

26 Cantin 135.

27 Cantin 134.

28 The role of indirect speech in Kleist’s oeuvre is a subject unto itself.

29 “*Das Ding* has to be posited as exterior, as the prehistoric Other that is impossible to forget, [. . .] something that on the level of the unconscious only a representation can represent [i.e., a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*].” In Lacan, *Ethics* 71.

30 Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) 161. De Rougemont, although invoking much evidence for the influence of courtly-love rhetoric on Spanish mysticism, argues vehemently against an analysis of this rhetoric that reduces their spirituality to a “‘deflexion’ of sexual instinct.”

31 d’Avila 13.

32 d’Avila 12.

33 Note that this analysis does not reduce Teresa's mysticism to the work of sexual "deflexion." It would be of interest to follow the parallels of Teresa's retroactive redemption of her mother's loss and "wrongdoing" with de Rougement's analysis of the way that Catholic mysticism uses the discourse of the Catharist heresy to "respiritualize" or "rechristianize" the tropes of courtly love, a project that is far too ambitious for this article.

34 Biographic data taken from Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, ed. Michael Walsch (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 187–89, and Brüggemann's *Drei Mystifikationen Heinrich von Kleists* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985) 175–211. See Brüggemann for more cross-references between Aloysius' Vita and Kleist's *Der Findling*.

35 Brüggemann 197–205.

36 This final point is not noted by Brüggemann.

37 It is not the intention to imply that such is Brüggemann's argument. See below.

38 It is apparent that the essential conjugal relation in marriage does not exist between Elvire and Piachi.

39 Schröder 113.

40 Irmgard Wagner, "Der Findling: Erratic Signifier in Kleist and Geology," *German Quarterly* 64.3 (1991) 284.

41 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 159.

42 "[D]ie von mir geübte Methode der Traumdeutung [. . .] nähert sich [. . .] der 'Chiffriermethode.' Sie ist [. . .] eine Deutung en detail, nicht en masse; [. . .] [sie faßt] den Traum von vornherein als etwas Zusammengesetztes, als ein Konglomerat von psychischen Bildungen auf." In Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1991) 118, my translation.

43 Carol Jacobs, in analyzing the logogryph, comes to the conclusion that "the solution to the riddle is always its dissolution. This is what Nicolo cannot grasp. The solution to the logogryph Nicolo is not and can never be identical with himself [. . .]. Moreover, while Colino may be the logogryphic answer to the enigma Nicolo, it offers no ultimate unriddling. That answer is in turn a question, [. . .] [w]hy the anagrammatic correlation of the two? Here the narrative remains silent." From Carol Jacobs, "The Style of Kleist," *Diacritics* 9 (1979): 51–52. My response to this contention is not to claim for the logogryph *in loco* an "ultimate unriddling," but rather to emphasize that if one considers the anagrammatic correlation of the two, according to the principle of *in loco*, one can better understand the relationship between the signifiers as a function of place-holding.

44 To name only a few: *entsetzen*, *einsetzen*, *versetzen*, *gesetzt*, *Gesetzt*, in der Stelle, in der Stellung, *einräumen*, *räumen*, *Feld* (rein und geräumt), *Platz*, *staat*, *Staat*, and so on.

45 This principle of place holding, or the *in loco* logic, saturates *The Foundling* and also comments on the literary-historical status of the novella as gothic fiction. Kleist turns the chivalric romance into a haunting and haunted tale replete with gothic attributes (e.g., moving portraits, mysterious niches, keyholes, murder, Oedipal conflict, and so on). The gothic in loco romance participates in “simulations of simulations of the already counterfeit,” a characteristic of the gothic that Jerrold E. Hogle traces back to its origin in Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, first published and misrepresented as a translation in 1764. Nicolo’s appropriation of Colino’s form, in Hogle’s terms, embodies the gothic “ghost of the counterfeit” in *The Undergrounds of The Phantom of the Opera: Sublimation and the Gothic in Leroux’s Play and Its Progeny* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 105, 107. See also Hogle’s “The Ghost of the Counterfeit in the Genesis of the Gothic,” in *Gothick Origins and Innovations*, ed. Allan Lloyd Smith and Victor Sage (Amsterdam–Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994) 23–33.

46 Although discussion of Xaviera Tartini, Nicolo’s lover residing at the Carmelite cloister, has been repressed, the anagrammatic possibilities of her name, from Tartini to trinita(s), are rife; the object of love has shifted from the Trinity (in the Aloysius Vita) to Tartini (in the Nicolo “Vita”), the concubine of the archbishop.

47 Brüggemann argues that the *Stab* must be a *Querstab*, or dagger, because this is what the historical portrait of Aloysius holds (206).

48 It should be noted that Elvire’s death, “the result of a severe fever” (214), is presented as an afterthought, a reason for Piachi’s feeling a “doubled pain” (214).

49 Jacobs 51.

50 Translation in Jacobs 50.

51 As Lacan states: “Religion in all its forms consists of avoiding this emptiness [. . .] which is the representation of the Thing.” In *Ethics* 129–30.

52 Lacan, *Écrits* 316.

53 Lacan, *Ethics* 295.

54 By concentrating on hagiographic signifiers, I do not mean to foreclose equally interesting points of reference on a wider historical plane. For example, characteristics of the most famous Italian “Nicolo,” Niccolò Machiavelli, have not yet been explored within the space of *The Foundling*, despite that William C. Reeve wrote an entire book on the similarities between Kleist and Machiavelli. See William C. Reeve, *Pursuit of Power: Heinrich von Kleist’s Machiavellian Protagonists* (Toronto: U of Toronto P,

1987). The relationship between Nicolo, Machiavelli, and the Popolo—the disenfranchised working class of Italy’s fourteenth century who are viciously suppressed, and who inspired Machiavelli’s *The Prince*—can only be schematically addressed here. Piachi’s death, in this allegory, would be read “in place of the People,” a crucifixion lifting the absolute rule of the patrician power base.

55 Wagner 281.

56 Wagner 285.

57 Wagner 291.

58 Wagner 291.

59 Its first appearance is directly associated with Nicolo’s sexual desires: Nicolo, under paternal stricture, had to promise to sever such relations, but “Elvire had many reasons to believe that his asceticism on this dangerous field was not exactly great” (201). The other two appearances of Feld are parallel: “As soon as Nicolo knew [. . .] the coast was clear” [kaum wußte Nicolo [. . .] das Feld rein], and “as soon as Piachi [. . .] had vacated the field to him” [kaum hatte ihm Piachi [. . .] das Feld geräumt], he set his desires into action (208, 210).

60 Immanuel Kant, “The Analytic of the Sublime,” Book II, in *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987) 116, §258–59.

61 Kant 116, §259.

62 Sigmund Freud, “The Unconscious,” *Standard Edition*, London: Hogarth, 1953—74 14 (1915): 187.

63 Lacan, *Ethics* 52.

64 Kleist, letter to Wilhemine von Zenge, 21 May, 1801 (651).

65 Kant 117, §260.

66 d’Avila 21.

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